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JANUARY 1923

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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A Fascinating Novelette

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Slim Hand was a thoroughly competent pickpocket, but it sometimes seemed that the world was against him; Mr. Buckley tells his story most attractively.

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36 South State Street, Chicago, Ill.

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Office of the Advertising Director, 33 West Forty-second Street, New York

R. M. PURVES, New England Representative, 80 Boylston St., Boston. LONDON OFFICES, 6 Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C.

Entered as second-class matter July 24, 1906, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

MAGAZINE

JANUARY
1923

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Icebound By Frank Richardson Pierce 88

Mutiny on a whaler frozen fast in the Arctic ice forms the basis of this fine story by a well-liked Blue Book Magazine writer.

Every Mountain By Charles Alexander 128

A specially engaging story of wilderness life, and of Black Buck, the dog who lost his sense of smell and learned to reason.

Poetic Injustice By George L. Knapp 133

The man who wrote "The Spider and the Fly," "The Strange Case of Alan Corwin" and many other notable fictions is at his best in this story of Young America in the melting-pot.

Blinky By Gene Markey 140

Here we have the story of a young cavalry officer and his adventures on the Border, narrated in most engaging fashion.

Easy Street Experts By Bertram Atkey 150

"The Daffodil Dame" is one of the most interesting of these quaint adventures of two amiable practitioners in rascality.

Harper Wins a Game By William F. Sturm 159

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Two Memorable Serials

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A splendid new novel of the Southwest by the author of the famous Captain Titus stories, "The Hand of Esau" and "The Chinese Label."

Black Money By J. S. Fletcher 94

The dénouement of this absorbing mystery novel by the master-hand that wrote "The Inner Temple Mystery," "Ravensdene Court" and "The Middle of Things" is conspicuously engrossing. Don't miss it.

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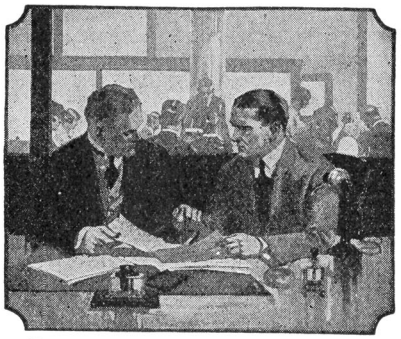

The LaSalle Problem Method gives you self-confidence—practical, usable knowledge—because it makes you an experienced man.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 36 JANUARY 1923 No. 3

Greene of the Gran Quivera

This fine novel of romance and adventure in the Southwest is by the gifted author of "Harmony and High Water," "The Hand of Esau," the Captain Titus stories and others that will be remembered with pleasure.

By J. FRANK DAVIS

CHAPTER I

"SHIPS THAT PASS"

THE busiest crossroads in America is not the place I should select to make a daylight holdup; nevertheless right there is where it took place—not ten yards from the corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street, at half-past two in the afternoon. I don't suppose the little Swede had definitely planned to do it there, or at any other particular spot, but he saw his prospects of getting his hands on the map speedily vanishing and became desperate. Then the automobile accident happened to divert the eyes of the multitude—and he was an opportunist.

My presence there was pure chance, if there is such a thing as chance. If I had taken a second cup of coffee with my luncheon, as I remember I had half a mind to do, or if I hadn't loitered there by the coat-checking room to gossip a moment with Big Bill Yawtry, who was Varsity halfback in my class, I should have been a few minutes earlier or a few minutes later getting out to the street: and thirty seconds either way might as well have been an hour. There is small probability, in that case, that I ever would have got tangled up with old Sepulveda's cached chests of gold-pieces or the competent crooked gentry of the Gran Quivera who wanted it, because Anne would have lost the map then and there, and without it there would have been no use in her going to Texas.

Even if the police had succeeded in recovering it, she would have been delayed in New York, would have taken a later train South, and whatever happened thereafter, I shouldn't have been in it. As it

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was, Fate picked me up that day and tossed me into the center of a whirlpool of considerable excitement with more thrills and danger, first and last, than were comfortable to a chap of my naturally quiet and peaceful disposition.

I was lunching alone at the Harvard Club when Tommy Durant called me to the phone. I hadn't seen him or heard his voice for two years and a half, and I hadn't known he was a passenger on the *Brittauric,* which he told me had docked at eleven o'clock. Of course I wanted to foregather with him at the earliest possible minute, and we fixed it that I should show up at his house at three or four o'clock, and we would have a good gabfest, followed by a trip uptown, dinner and a show.

So I came out of the club with nothing to do between then and my call on Tommy, hesitated there on the sidewalk a minute, took a liking to the glitter of the sunshine and the smell of the air, and decided to walk downtown. Tommy lives in one of those old houses on the north side of Washington Square, and I don't know that I expected to foot it the entire distance; it was in my mind to swing over onto Broadway and keep going until I began to get tired of it and then take a taxi, or if I got down as far as the Flatiron Building, a Fifth Avenue bus. It was one of those March days that proves, by way of being the exception, that the month isn't all chill and wind and bluster; one of those days that reminds you that spring really is on the way, even though it still may be a tedious time arriving—just the sort of afternoon for a brisk walk.

A GIRL came out of one of those small hotels between the club and Sixth Avenue and went westward, just ahead of me. I couldn't have said at the moment how she was different. She was rather tall, and attractive, and quite stylishly dressed in a quiet sort of way, and she clearly possessed class; but there was something more to it than that. It was face and figure and clothes and manner all combined — and then something. Tommy Durant could describe her, perhaps, because he writes books and magazine-stories for a living, while I have been assured on excellent authority that I shall never be a finished writer if I live to be a hundred. So I am not going to try—except to say that since then I have come to the conclusion, having had much opportunity to study her, that the foundation of her difference from the scores of other well-groomed young women who were passing through Forty-fourth Street at that moment was that she combined the peculiarly well-bred look that you so often see in Englishwomen of the outdoor sort with what I might call that American-girl air.

She turned downtown, still a little ahead of me, at Seventh Avenue, and swung along in a businesslike way, as people do when they know where they are going and have no reason for dawdling, across Forty-third and Forty-second streets. I can't say I was thinking very much about her, but I certainly wasn't paying much attention to anybody else, because the little Swede must have been right beside me, and I didn't even see him until he made his dash.

There were policemen in the middle of the street there at Forty-second and Broadway, of course, directing the traffic, and usually there is another on the sidewalk at the southeast corner; but just as the girl and I reached there, something happened to take him away from his place.

The officer in charge of the moving vehicles blew his whistle and signaled the up-and-down traffic to stop, the driver of a heavy motorcar headed uptown, who thought he could get across with the last lot, had to jam his brakes on hard. A taxi close behind him couldn't stop quite quickly enough; there was a little jingle of glass as one of the taxi's headlights broke. The driver of the taxi thought of quite a few things to say to the other chauffeur, and said them. The other got down from his seat, went back, and expressed his own opinion on the subject, which he enlarged to include his ideas as to the driving ability of taxi-drivers as a class and the carelessness of the licensing powers. The crowd of pedestrians stopped to listen, and instantly there was a jam. The policeman on our sidewalk pushed his way to the curb to stop the bickering and start people moving. And—the Swede saw his chance.

He sprang forward past me, grabbed the girl's wristbag, and dived into the thickening crowd.

OTHERS must have heard her stifled scream and turned to make out what it was about, but obviously every eye had been in the direction of the quarreling chauffeurs, and not one of them had seen the robbery, because somebody yelled "Stop thief!" and grabbed me just as the

real thief wriggled loose from my grip. While I sputtered and struggled and tried to make the thing clear, he slipped into the swarm and was gone. Then the policeman, who had heard the shout and left the chauffeurs to continue their debate under the direction of one of the traffic officers, had me with a strong grip about the biceps and swung me violently around, at the same time grabbing the wristbag, which I had in my left hand.

"All right, lady," he was saying. "I have him. And here's the bag. Did he have a chance to open it?"

"But he isn't the man, constable!" she cried. "He had the thief—"

It naturally took a minute or two to convince him. He became businesslike enough, then, and asked if I could describe the man. I couldn't, except that he was under medium size and apparently youngish.

"He has two scars that ought to help you to identify him," the girl said coolly. "The tip of his left ear is gone, and there is a deep scar that cuts off about half his left eyebrow. He is smooth-shaven, very light complexioned indeed—a Swede, I'd think."

The policeman looked at her sharply. "How could you tell he is a Swede?" he asked. "Did he speak?"

She frowned a trifle, and hesitated. "No, he didn't say a word, but only took my bag and ran. I meant to say that he looked like a Swede, or one of Swedish descent."

"But you saw enough of him to be sure of that bad ear and the scar on the eyebrow."

"Yes. He swung around toward me as he and this gentleman went down."

I was a little puzzled, because I felt certain that when I clinched with him and we both went tumbling, it was his right side that had swung into such view as anybody could have had over my shoulder, and I was pretty sure that my much larger bulk must have completely hidden him from the girl.

"What is your name, and where do you live?" the policeman asked me.

"Theodore Sheldon," I told him, and gave him our town address. The location made him look less suspicious.

"And your name, miss?"

"Loring," she said, and again I thought there was hesitation before she said it. "Miss Anne Loring."

"Your address?"

"The Hotel Biltbocker."

While he entered memoranda in his book, she opened the wristbag sufficiently to assure herself its contents had not been disturbed, a fact I felt certain of, seeing the thief hadn't had three seconds to spare between the time he grabbed it and the time I grabbed him.

THE policeman snapped his little book shut and dismissed us. "We'll prob'ly get him," he said. "You'll both be notified when we do." He went about his business. The crowd, which had edged close about us, as interested in our story as previously it had been in the recriminating chauffeurs disintegrated with the suddenness that almost always marks the breaking up of a New York street-crowd, each member of which remembers he was hurrying like blazes at the moment his attention was attracted, reproaches himself for loitering and resumes his breathless rush.

"Thank you very much," the girl said to me. "You did it very promptly."

"Thank you for not letting the policeman arrest me," I said. "Can I be of any further service?"

"Thanks; no," she smiled, and then amended this. "The Van Amster Trust Company—it is about eight blocks farther down, isn't it? I need to get there before they close. Perhaps I would better give up the idea of walking. Can you tell me where I can find a public cab?"

I went with her just around the corner, showed her into a taxi, and gave the driver the Van Amster address. She thanked me again. Her cab went bumping away.

It really wasn't worth doing much puzzling about, I thought, because I should never see her or hear of her again, but I wondered if her name was really Anne Loring, and if she were really stopping at the Biltbocker. Famed all over the world, that would quite likely be the first name of a big New York hotel to come into the mind of a stranger who didn't know Manhattan very well and wanted to deceive. That I had seen her coming out of a small hotel five or six blocks distant from the Biltbocker did not necessarily have any bearing, of course; she might have merely dropped in there for luncheon or to make a call. Still, she hadn't named the Biltbocker convincingly.

I wondered, too, about that accurate description of the thief. "And she didn't guess he was a Swede," I declared to myself. "She knew it."

But Sherlocking was out of my line, and I dismissed the whole thing as one of those ships-that-pass-in-the-night incidents that occur so often in the Big Town. I looked at my watch and decided not to walk any farther, annoyed a taxi-driver by breaking in upon his grinning contemplation of a strip of comic pictures in an afternoon paper, climbed into his chariot while he set the clock to ticking, and rode down to Washington Square.

CHAPTER II

An Adventurer's Tale

IT was good to see Tommy Durant. He and I had been pals at college and kept up the David-and-Jonathan business afterward rather more than most school friends do, until the European unpleasantness came along.

We went in widely different directions then, but by one of those coincidences which from time to time astonished war participants and made them perpetrate the bromide that even the West Front wasn't such a big place, we came together for a few brief moments one afternoon during a nasty little brawl that had plenty of casualties without being important enough even to get mentioned in the communiqué; at the risk of being accused of indulging in a low form of humor, I might truthfully say I fell in with him, seeing that I crashed fair in the middle of his company —he was a first lieutenant in the Twenty-seventh—after one of the wildest succession of spins, side-slips and volplanes I ever had the good luck to come out of right side up. As it promptly became my duty to get back to a telephone somewhere and report that one aviator was scared and safe, although his bus was pretty much a total liability, and as Fritz was hating Tommy's regiment with high explosive, we had little time for gossip.

When the Armistice came, Tommy was in a hospital at St. Denis, and they started him for home soon after. My bow to the Statue of Liberty was considerably delayed; before I arrived in America he had recovered, been engaged by a magazine to do a string of reconstruction articles, and returned to Europe. So it had come about that although more than thirty months had passed since that afternoon of my sudden arrival in his company's midst, we hadn't set eyes on each other until this day.

"What is this talk you gave me over the phone about your beating it out of town as soon as I arrive?" he demanded, as soon as I had welcomed him to our fair city and assured him that prohibition was still so.

"Where are you going, and why?"

"San Antonio," I told him. "I wouldn't have planned it for now if I had known you were coming, but I've got my accomodations through, leaving tomorrow afternoon. I made some friends down there when I was training at Kelly—and they have a climate there in South Texas in March and April that makes you think of New York and thank heaven you aren't home. Say! You haven't got to keep your nose to the grindstone right now, have you? Why not come along with me?"

TOMMY laughed scornfully. "Leave little old New York!" he cried. "After being absent all this time? The way I feel now, I'm going to stick to this village until death do us part. How is it you are free to go traipsing over the country? Aren't you working, or is it a vacation?"

"I am one of the army of the unemployed. The Evening *Star* recently engaged a new city editor."

"I see," said Tommy, who himself used to be a newspaper man. "And he disagreed with your theory as to the proper way to comb your hair."

"There was a matter of a young woman who is about to be divorced. The questions he suggested I ask her were quite personal."

"Pertinent and impertinent, eh? Thereupon our young hero, drawing himself to his full height, cried that perchance Fate might will that he should go out upon the streets and beg his bread from door to door, but that never, never would he insult a lady!"

"I am quite sure she isn't," I told him. "Still, interviews of that sort are a little out of my line, and he and I agreed, in a few well-chosen words, that I had worked on the *Star* long enough, anyway. When I get back from Texas, Tim Evans of the *Republic* is going to give me a rewrite job."

"I rather thought by now you'd be out of the newspaper game and working for Father."

"That will come in time, I suppose. In the meantime, he has never made much fuss; figures it is good general training in getting acquainted with men, and all that. He isn't long on interfering with what we

boys want to do, so long as we try to do it fairly well."

Tommy nodded positively. "Good old scout, your father," he said.

"As good as there is," I agreed.

We fell to talking of the men we both knew, where they were and what they were doing, and it was some time later that he asked, suddenly:

"Girl down there in Texas?"

"Lots of them," I assured him. "Nice ones." Then, knowing Tommy's susceptibility to feminine charms, I queried: "How many fiancées did you leave behind you in Europe?"

"Couldn't stay in one place long enough," he grinned. "Oh, boy, but there was a girl on the boat coming across that was a pippin! English girl. Very exclusive. Traveling alone, and hence had to be watchful of the conventions. Didn't make any new friends, at all. And little Tommy knew her. How was that for a piece of luck on a slow boat? She was a nurse during the big show, and I was one of her nursees."

"So you reminded her of the days and nights when she held your hand and bathed your fevered brow, and she recollected them, and you took walks on the promenade-deck in the moonlight."

"What do you mean, promenade-deck in the moonlight? Even if there had been any moon, which there wasn't, this was a winter passage. And I have to admit, Teddy, that she didn't remember me at all. But she sized up my frank and open countenance, decided I was probably telling the truth, and said she did, God bless her! As a matter of fact, I was in her hospital ward just four days, and there were quite a few of us. They were a pretty rotten four days for me, too, and you can believe me or not, but I wasn't especially interested in whether the nurses were good-looking or scarecrows. I don't believe I'd have remembered her, either, if it hadn't been for a queer line of talk that a chap in the next bed to me gave her, one night, and the way it came out. He was going fast, and he knew it—the finish came the next forenoon; and he made a will and left her all his property—if he had any. I have sure wondered whether it was real or nothing but delirium, especially since I saw her again."

"Didn't you ask her?"

"That's a funny thing about it. She doesn't know yet. I suspect that is why she has come to America—to find out. It was the wildest yarn. Bribe-money, and Mexican bandits, and buried gold, and an old fellow tortured to death, and a hidden map of the treasure, which belongs to whoever gets it. A thriller? Beadle and Adams, in their best and brightest days, never turned out one to beat it. All the time he was talking, I kept saying to myself that I wasn't really hearing straight; I felt clear-headed enough, and the chart didn't say I was running any temperature to speak of, but the thing was too darned unplausible. But when he got out the safe-deposit key, and insisted on making his will and having a couple of doctors in to witness it, I knew it was so. And the safe-deposit key was real, anyway. I could be sure of that, because the crook in the next bed to Keenan tried to steal it."

"And editors pay you real money, under the impression that you are able to present facts in an intelligent and coherent manner!" I marveled.

"I can't be expected to make the plot of a regular adventure story clear in half a dozen sentences."

"You haven't," I assured him. "Is it the map or the treasure that belongs to whoever gets it?"

A CALLER arrived, a chap from one of the magazines who had heard Tommy was back and wanted to sound him out on what kind of fiction yarns he had in his system.

"I'll tell you the story later," Tommy promised. "We'll be alone at dinner if we have luck."

I reminded him of it when our waiter, at a quiet little eating-place we had always favored, brought the toasted crackers and cheese and coffee.

"This Larry Keenan," he said, "was a soldier of fortune, an American who had been wandering up and down the world for years, looking for public quarrels and getting into them. Filibustering, South American revolutions, all that sort of thing! He had been there in the hospital some time when I arrived—was too badly hurt to be moved on. I was just passing through. We happened to be in adjoining beds."

"In a ward where the English girl was a nurse," I supplied. "It wasn't at St. Denis, then; that hospital at St. Denis, as I recall it, was all-American."

"Correct," agreed Tommy. "I got mine at Le Catelet, you know; English, Amer-

icans, Canadians and Australians were all mixed up together in that last smash through the Hindenburg line. This was up north, there, at a little place where they sorted us out. It was in the British zone, of course; hence the English nurses. Well, as I told you this afternoon, Keenan was getting along toward the end of things, and knew it perfectly. This nurse had been good to him,—her name is Fessenden, by the way, although naturally I didn't know that until I met her on the boat,—and he took a notion to make her his heir. He said he didn't have a relative in the world. I wasn't doing a very good job at sleeping, that night, and there isn't any privacy, of course, between adjacent beds in a military hospital. So I heard his story as well as she did."

TOMMY sipped his coffee, interrupted himself to make comment on the fact that liqueurs may no longer be part of a postprandial program in the land of the free and the home of the brave, was silent a moment, arranging his facts so as to boil the yarn down to its essentials, and continued:

"It seems, sometime before we got into the war, that he had been fighting in Mexico—with Villa. His direct superior was a general or colonel or something named Davalos. Keenan, I gather, wasn't squeamish about what side he fought on in any foreign quarrel, but he and the Mexicans came to the parting of the ways when the Columbus raid took place and Pershing was sent across the border. He drew the line at fighting against the United States. So he decided to quit.

"This wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do. Davalos was suspicious of him, hating all Yankees anyway, and being especially sore with us at that particular minute, and if Keenan had resigned, he said, the Mexican would have accepted his resignation with politeness and had him killed promptly and secretly. His chance to get away without formality came when an errand took the Davalos band close to the border.

"Everybody knows now, of course, about the German money that was spent in Mexico, the idea being to distribute it where it would do the most good in stirring up trouble between Northern Mexico and the United States, in the hope that we would be kept so busy on our own border that we wouldn't have time to mix into the big show in Europe. There was an old fellow in Coahuila named Sepulveda. He had a hacienda not far from Loma Negra. Know where that is?"

"On the Rio Grande, across from Romano," I said.

"That's it. I had forgotten that name Romano. I remember, now, that is the American town Keenan said he came to, after he had swum the river. Well, there was a good-sized piece of money coming north from Mexico City to be handled by Sepulveda—somewhere around a hundred thousand dollars in United States currency, Keenan heard. Some of it was to go to bandits who called themselves Carranzistas, and some to Villa; Kaiser Bill's hired men played no favorites between Mexican factions so long as both sides were willing and anxious to raise Cain with the United States.

"But Sepulveda was a canny old chap. Villa, at that moment, was up in the Chihuahua hills, said to be wounded, and with Yankee soldiers hot-footing in his direction. The old man saw no sense in paying out good money to losers. He decided to wait to se how the cat would jump. He didn't send any word about the money to Villa at all.

"VILLA, though," Tommy went on, "always had plenty of friends who were nominally attached to Carranza, and there was mighty little of importance decided upon down at Mexico City having to do with things in Coahuila or Chihuahua that he didn't hear. So he knew about this chunk of Sepulveda money, and just when it would be delivered; and when no message came from Sepulveda and he saw the old man was holding out on him, he got peeved. And when Pancho Villa is peeved, he has the reputation of being impetuous. So he got word to Davalos, who was over in northern Coahuila, and Davalos and his gang went after it—Keenan with them.

"If Davalos had been aware that Keenan knew anything about just what they were after, that camp wouldn't have been as safe for the American as it was—and right at that moment he was a rotten insurance-risk at the best. But he did know; he spoke Spanish like a native and the thing got mentioned where he overheard it. He kept his mouth shut and attended strictly to his own knitting until the band reached the neighborhood of the Sepulveda haci-

enda, which, of course, was also the neighborhood of the American boundary. Then, on the evening when the Mexicans planned to pull their raid, he succeeded in slipping out of the Davalos camp at twilight.

"Telling it, Keenan didn't make any pretense that he cared what happened to Sepulveda. The old man was as bad an egg as any of them, he said, and what might be coming to him didn't interest Keenan at all. His principal idea was to get safely into the United States, that night. On his way he would stop and look things over at the Sepulveda place; there might be some small chance of his gathering in a little bit of wealth to take along with him. Not a very moral person, Keenan. No hypocrite, either! He told it in the most matter-of-fact way. Sepulveda was trying to steal Villa's share, and Villa was planning to steal Sepulveda's share, and Keenan was perfectly willing, if the chance came, to loot the looters.

"He got to the hacienda just as some men went riding away. These, he supposed, were the ones who had brought the money. Then he hung around, spying. It was an isolated place. He told, there in the hospital, the details of where he hid, and how he avoided discovery, but they had no bearing on the main story. And by and by, out of the house, all alone, came old man Sepulveda, staggering under the weight of a heavy box. It was all he could do to carry it, Keenan said, and he estimated it must weigh over a hundred pounds. That would just about account for the amount he was supposed to have; Keenan said he had figured it out roughly afterward, and that thirty-three thousand dollars in American gold would weigh something over a hundred pounds.

"Well, the old man went quite a way from the house and buried it, in a field that had been plowed, so that fresh digging wasn't noticeable. Then he went back and got another similar box, and after that a third one. There wasn't another soul in sight. Keenan took it for granted, and later events proved he was right, that Sepulveda had sent all his people away from the place, so he would have a clear field to get the money hidden secretly. Then he carefully paced off the distance from prominent landmarks—an outcropping rock, the corner of a corral, and a tree that had been struck by lightning; and Keenan, lying doggo where he could see it all, made a mental note of the distances. He intended to wait until the old man was asleep and then dig up the boxes and try to get away with one of them, reburying the others in a different spot and coming back for them some other time.

"Sepulveda, after having taken all sorts of precautions to conceal his tracks, went into the house; and almost immediately Mr. Bandit Davalos arrived, accompanied by three or four of his most trusted cutthroats, and they lost no time telling Sepulveda what they had come for and what they proposed to do if they didn't get it. Probably the old man, knowing them, expected they would do the same thing if they did get it, and he was stubborn; so they started in to persuade him by various little expedients that savages are familiar with. Keenan mentioned a hot poker. Sooner or later they would have made him disclose what he had done with the money, no doubt—but to their astonishment, Sepulveda suddenly died. Getting along in years, lifting and carrying those heavy chests had probably overstrained his heart, and the shock of the torture proved more than it could stand.

"So there were the bandits with a dead man on their hands, which wasn't uncommon enough to be even interesting, but with no clue as to where he had cached the money. Whereupon they ransacked every nook and corner of the house and the outbuildings, and searched unsuccessfully for traces of its having been buried, and finally they lost their barbarian tempers and set fire to the hacienda. The body of Sepulveda was destroyed in it. And right here Keenan put in that the old man left no heirs."

TOMMY got a fresh cigarette to going.

"That is about all," he said. "Of course, with the Davalos outfit rampaging up and down the place, searching for the loot and getting madder and madder as it became evident they wern't going to find it, there was no chance for him to carry out his plan of hanging around and resurrecting it; in fact, there was no wisdom in his hanging around there at all. So he made for the river and got across into this country. He drew a map of the place as soon as he got a chance, while the figures of the distances were still fresh in his mind, and figured on going back some day, after it got safe, to see if the boxes were still

there, and if they contained what he thought they did. Then he drifted up to El Paso, and found a letter there from an adventurer friend of his who had signed up with a reckless crew of roughneck strike-breakers and spoke highly of the pay, and Keenan came north and joined that outfit. When we got into the war, he enlisted. So now, he said, he was going to die—and he would tell the world that he had lived. And then he asked the nurse to get the safe-deposit key, where it was hanging around his neck with his identification tag.

"It was a key to a box in the Old Trinity Trust Company, here in New York. He had hired the box before coming abroad, paid the rent for three years, and left the map in it. And he told Miss Fessenden it was hers, and after the war was over and it got safe to go prowling around in Mexico, she could send somebody down to Loma Negra to see if they could find the gold. 'It sure belongs to me as much as it does to anybody,' he said. 'Findings is keepings on money like that, everywhere except under the British flag. So I'm giving it to you, sister, because you're a regular feller. Get some paper, and we'll put it in writing. A will.'

"I don't think she put much more stock in the story than I did, at the minute. It certainly was wild, and just such a dream as an adventurer such as he was would be likely to have when he was going out, and she talked soothingly and told him they would talk it over again tomorrow, but he wouldn't stand for any postponement, and when he began to get excited, she did what he said—probably to humor him as much as anything. He knew pretty well what needed to be done to protect her under American law, and first he insisted that she get somebody else to draw up the papers, so they wouldn't be in her writing, and an orderly did it.

"Very simple, the will was—merely a statement that he left her everything of which he died possessed and all the interest that might later come to him in any property whatever. No special mention of buried money. And then he had an order written on the Old Trinity Trust Company authorizing her to have access to his safe-deposit box, and had her write her signature on it, so she could identify herself easily by it with the bank people. And then he said there must be two witnesses to their signatures, and that both of them ought to be doctors, so as to give weight to the thing, and he fussed so much about it that she got word to a doctor, and when he came, he called in another one who was handy, and the thing was done.

"After all the excitement was over, Keenan slumped, and didn't speak many more times. Along toward morning, just before Miss Fessenden was going off duty, he said: 'You there, sister?' 'Yes,' she told him, 'I'm right here.' 'Look out for Juan Davalos,' he said. 'He knows that money is somewhere on the place.' 'All right,' she told him. 'Go to sleep, now.' 'Yes ma'am,' said Keenan. Then, a minute later, he muttered: 'Juan Davalos is a double-crossing Mex. Don't trust any double-crossing Mex. Don't trust anybody that does business with any double-crossing Mex.' And that was about the last thing he said. He went out, very quietly, about the middle of the next forenoon."

TOMMY beckoned to the waiter and laid down the money for the check. "How is that for a Western thriller?" he asked. "Isn't it up to specifications?"

"It would make the foundations for a four-reeler," I agreed with him. "How does it happen she has never done anything before to find out what there was to his story? You said she was just now coming over to look into it, didn't you?"

"I said I thought so. She didn't take me into her confidence. When I mentioned Keenan's death,—I did it to help identify myself when I saw she was willing to take my word for it that I had been one of her patients though she really didn't have the slightest recollection of me,—she froze a trifle. Didn't snub me, you understand, but withdrew, as you might say. Said she had never had time or opportunity to investigate it,—that it was probably delirium, anyway, or if it wasn't, that there was very small chance the money hadn't been dug up long since,—but that she would probably look into the contents of that safe-deposit box while in New York. Then she very tactfully shifted the subject. It isn't an English characteristic to discuss private business very freely with chance acquaintances.

"As to why she had never done anything about it before—well, she has only recently quit nursing. After the Armistice, she tackled relief work in Poland. She got clear of that only a month or two ago, and is joining her father, who is over here on business. He, I take it, is one of those half-

geologists, half-promoters, who travel all over the world investigating mineral propositions and helping to connect their owners with the necessary capital for development. He is out West somewhere. She expects to join him in San Francisco."

"I wonder why she didn't have him look into the box when he came through," I said.

"Search me! For a guess, I'd say because it would mean so much red tape that they didn't think it wise. She, with her order and her signature, and a simple identification, wouldn't have much trouble, if any, getting at the box. If she passed on an order to somebody else, it would mean all kinds of formalities and perhaps legal difficulties. . . . . Say, but she is a peach, that girl! I didn't hesitate, only last evening, to intimate to her that I was one of the best little guides that ever showed a visitor about New York, but there was nothing doing. She is only staying here a day or two, and some friends of the family who live here at a family hotel—she refrained from naming it—will do all the necessary entertaining. They met her at the dock." He sighed exaggeratedly; clearly his heart had not really been affected at all. "And so passed another chance for happiness out of my life forever."

IT was after the theater that I recalled an unfinished angle to his tale.

"Who tried to steal the safe-deposit key?" I asked. "And how?"

"Oh, yes! I forgot that. It was a fellow in the next bed—a little chap with his head all bandaged, so he didn't have but one eye in use. I'll say it was a bright eye, though. It fairly glistened with excitement. He hadn't been able to get to sleep that night any more than I had, and he was sitting propped up in bed while Keenan was telling the story, with his head cocked on one side like a bird, because the bandage covered one ear, holding his breath so as not to miss any of the details. It was later, while Keenan was signing the papers, with the doctors there as witnesses, that he tried to snitch the key. Foolish thing to do, because he couldn't hope to get away with it. Miss Fessenden had lifted Keenan up a little, so he could sign, and for the moment laid the key on the next bed. And Mr. Bright-eye slid his hand over it and slipped it under the blanket. One of the doctors saw him—cussed him out some and asked him what he was trying to do. The fellow said he had never seen a safe-deposit key and just picked it up to see what it looked like. A natural crook, I suppose,—the draft didn't discriminate between the godly and the ungodly,—with the idea that if he could get away with the key he might be able to work out some scheme to land the map after he got home."

We separated not long after midnight, Tommy saying he would be at the Pennsylvania Station the next afternoon to see me off. We met there at three, and stood in the concourse talking until my train was announced. As I gave my bags to a red-cap and we turned to move toward the gate, Tommy exclaimed:

"There she is now!"

"Always and forever!" I chuckled. "When you stand at the portal of heaven trying to put up an argument that will get you through, you'll look past St. Peter and recognize some old sweetheart of yours."

"It is the girl I was telling you about—Miss Fessenden. I'll bet she is going on your train. The tall girl, in brown, with the two middle-aged parties. Before they get here, was I right or was I wrong when I said she was a pippin?"

"Right," I told him, as I turned to look in the direction of his gaze, but the reply was mechanical. Approaching was a precise, carefully dressed man of fifty, an unobtrusive, colorless woman of something less than that—and the girl who had described the little Swede too well and assured the policeman that she was Miss Anne Loring, resident at the Biltbocker.

CHAPTER III

A Ring That Slipped

SHE recognized Tommy, spoke a word in an undertone to her companions, and smiled a greeting as he stepped eagerly forward. Then she saw me, and unless I am mistaken, the sight did not give her unalloyed pleasure. She maintained her composure, however, and proceeded to introduce Mr. Durant to Mr. and Mrs. Postlethwaite. Tommy thereupon presented me.

Her eyes met mine, and there was a warning in them. I murmured the usual phrases and left it to her to say that she had met me, if she wanted to. She did not. Her acknowledgment of the intro-

duction was exactly what it would have been if she had never seen me or heard of me before.

"Are you getting started for the West?" Tommy asked her. "You didn't get a chance to see much of New York."

"I have been here once before," she said, "—some years ago. But the West is quite strange to me."

"What train are you taking?"

"It leaves at three thirty-eight," she said; and Mr. Postlethwaite amplified her reply by saying: "The New Orleans Limited. There isn't but ten minutes or so; I'm afraid we shall have to be moving along."

"We'll all move along together. Sheldon is going on the New Orleans Limited," Tommy told them—adding, for Miss Fessenden's benefit: "I wish I had planned to go along with him."

"I say, but that is gratifying," declared Mr. Postlethwaite, and Mrs. Postlethwaite's expression indicated that she too was pleased. "We disliked very much having Anne take so long a journey quite alone. How far are you going, Mr. Sheldon?"

"To New Orleans," I replied. "From there to San Antonio."

"Isn't that extraordinary!" Mrs. Postlethwaite exclaimed. "Anne is going to San Antonio too."

Tommy raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Not going straight through to the coast?"

"A brief stop-over, merely," she told him.

"And we didn't want her to do it," Mr. Postlethwaite fussed. "A strange city in Texas, quite out on the frontier, you know!"

"I have been taking care of myself on worse frontiers than any you have in America," the girl said quietly. "Really, there is nothing to be alarmed about."

"And San Antonio is not exactly wild and woolly," I reassured her friends.

"You have been there before?"

"Yes—during the war, and since. I lived within a few miles of the Alamo for a number of months."

"He trained at Kelly," Tommy supplied, but I doubt if any of them understood what he meant. We were moving toward the gate, and the Postlethwaites, whom I took to be English people who had lived in New York a great deal without ever learning much about the remainder of the United States, were filled with their emotion of relief that Miss Fessenden need not travel entirely alone and unprotected. They were almost cordial about it.

"We can't go any farther," Mr. Postlethwaite told her, as we came to the barrier at the top of the stairs. "Mr. Sheldon will help you find your car. Have you your tickets ready? What car are you in?"

He took her Pullman slip and read the number. "Car 378. Upper Seven. It is too bad we couldn't get a lower, but in these times they say one has to apply several days in advance. I fancy we were fortunate to get any berth at all as late as yesterday afternoon. Out of New Orleans we couldn't get any accomodations at all on the first connecting train, or the second. She has a lower engaged on a train that leaves for San Antonio at eleven-thirty Thursday night.

"That is rather odd; so have I," I said, "—although I bought my Pullmans several days ago and took that train by choice. We are due in New Orleans early in the forenoon, and I planned to spend the day and evening there."

"Then you will still be able to look after Anne all the way to San Antonio," said Mrs. Postlewaite. "Anne, my dear, Mr. Sheldon's booking from New Orleans to San Antonio is on the same train as yours."

MISS FESSENDEN, who had been talking to Tommy about the beauty of the vast station, murmured something polite.

"Not an acquaintance in the city!" Mr. Postlethwaite told me, shaking his head. His voice conveyed the impression that he had not got over the shock of her decision to make such a journey alone, and perhaps never would. "We wanted her to go right through to San Francisco; she could stop and see San Antonio, we told her, on the way back with her father. But she wouldn't." Both his tone and facial expression implied that if she were his daughter such goings-on would never be allowed. "The best we could get her to do was to telegraph her father what she was planning. She had a telegram from him this morning that he is asking an acquaintance who lives near San Antonio to meet her there."

"It really wasn't necessary," Miss Fessenden said. Plainly she had wired her father merely because she had to if she wanted to remain at peace with the Postle-

thwaite family. "I am quite used to taking care of myself. Besides, I have a letter to a San Antonian, who has also been notified that I am probably coming."

"But my dear! You don't know who he is," Mrs. Postlethwaite protested. "A person whom the writer of the letter only knows professionally," she explained to Tommy and me.

"Mr. Sheldon may know him, having lived there," said the girl. "Did you ever meet a solicitor in San Antonio named Groves? Mr. Peter Groves?"

I had to admit that I had never heard of the gentleman, although I hastened to add that San Antonio is a fairly good-sized city, and my business there had not been such as to throw me into contact with lawyers, except one or two of the younger ones whom I had met socially.

"Mr. Groves would not be a young man," she said, "—at least, not very young. Mr. Holton's business with him was several years ago, and Mr. Holton said he must have been a man of considerable affairs at that time. Mr. Holton," she explained, "is a London solicitor. Knowing that I planned to visit San Antonio, he gave me the letter."

"And all he knows about this Groves is that he is an attorney-at-law, and that he lives in San Antonio," Mr. Postlethwaite grumbled. "He doesn't even know that; the man might be dead by this time."

"And as to who and what he is socially," said Mrs. Postlethwaite, "we do not know a thing."

Miss Fessenden looked a bit wearied; I imagine she had heard this argument a number of times during the preceding twenty-four hours. "Mr. Holton said he represented a rather large Texas oil company that had business with a British syndicate he represented," she said, for my advantage and Tommy's. "He thought it unlikely he would have been retained by so large a company unless he was a man of standing."

"I tell her that doesn't follow at all," Mr. Postlethwaite maintained. It might follow here in New York, but away out there in Texas where standards are different—er—primitive—"

I INTERRUPTED him again to say that San Antonio was not exactly on the edge of civilization, and to suggest as politely as possible that if Miss Fessenden and I were to arrive there on our schedule, we had better be getting to our train; apparently he had no realization of how far from the foot of the stairs one's Pullman sometimes turns out to be.

We said hasty farewells and the girl and I passed through the gate. There ensued the hurry and bustle of finding our places,—I also was in Car 378, which was to be expected, considering we both were going clear through,—and of assuring ourselves that the porters had delivered our hand-baggage properly and slipping them their tips; and before we were fairly settled the train moved.

When we had passed under the river and come up into daylight again, I went over to her seat to ask the conventional perfunctory questions regarding her comfort. She motioned me to sit beside her, and without preliminary went at the subject that was bound to prove a source of embarrassment between us until it was cleared up.

"Thank you for not mentioning my experience with that thief," she said. "I hadn't told the Postlethwaites. They were finding enough things to be concerned about without that. And what I told the officer was partly the truth. My name is Anne Loring—Anne Lorring Fessenden. I admit I have never seen the inside of the Hotel Biltbocker, but I didn't know what the official routine of the police might be, and I didn't want them coming to see me or telephoning me, and perhaps forcing me to stay over in New York as a witness and delaying my journey." Her expression became a bit whimsical. "Having met the Postlethwaites, you can imagine the discussions we would have had over my ability to cross the country alone if the news had ever reached them that I couldn't walk six blocks from their hotel in the middle of the day without getting into trouble."

There flashed into my mind recollection of an occasion in my senior year when I had not been absolutely frank with policemen who sought the names of witnesses to a certain football-night disturbance in the Boylston Café, and my reply was entirely sympathetic.

"If he had succeeded in stealing my bag, that would have been quite different," she said. "As it was, there was no harm done, except perhaps a little physical damage to him. I fancy he will be lame for a number of days; I never saw a man thrown so quickly or harder."

"He wasn't very big," I reminded her. "It didn't take much of a tackle to tip him over. Did you get to the Van Amster Trust Company in time?"

"Quite," she said, and made comment on the advertising signs that cluttered the landscape. She did not again return to the subject of our Broadway experience.

AFTER a while I went into the smoking compartment. It was crowded with a characteristic company. There were two salesmen who sat back in the corner and debated some commercial topic with gesturings and loud contradictions. A prosperous-appearing elderly gentleman with intolerant features and extremely well-fitting clothes held forth to a chance acquaintance who sympathized with him on what was the matter at Washington and how he would fix it if he were Congress. A pale, middle-aged, small-mustached man of quite obvious Spanish blood, whose somewhat loosely fitting although well-made garments indicated he had lost considerable weight recently, sat in one of the armchairs, smoking many cigarettes and constantly, as a matter of nervous habit, slipping up and down one of the fingers of his left hand a heavy gold ring so loose that it cleared the knuckle freely even when the finger was bent; he listened to the talk about him but took no part in it. A pasty-faced youth was immersed in the sporting page of an afternoon newspaper. A collarless fat man with a safety razor, who informed the world he had overslept that morning and had been too busy all day to visit a barber-shop, swayed clumsily in a wash-bowl corner while he made his face presentable for dinner.

The air was thick with nearly all the varieties of tobacco smoke there are, and I escaped after two cigarettes, and returned to Miss Fessenden. By dinner-time we were quite pleasantly acquainted. She spoke, in passing, of the Polish relief work that she had been engaged in, and mentioned that she had done nursing during the war, but her comment on these things was brief and impersonal. I couldn't very well lead her to the subject of her first meeting with Tommy without letting her know he had told me about Larry Keenan and his map, and to mention that would distinctly seem like intruding on her private affairs; so I seemed to take it for granted, without saying so, that she was a ship-acquaintance of his, and our conversation moved in a safe and conventional groove.

It came out, during dinner, that she had never been in Washington; on her earlier visit with her father to America, she had seen only New York, Boston and a bit of the Massachusetts coast. I suggested, then, provided the train gave us anything like the wait the time-table promised, that we make an abridged "Seeing Washington" tour, points of interest included in it to be the station entrance and the illuminated dome of the Capitol. The idea appealed to her, and when we came to a standstill, not a minute late, she and I were on our car platform, ready for the excursion.

NO sight in the world is to me more beautiful than the dome of our National Capitol at night, white-glowing in the radiance of its hidden lamps, its base a vague, shadowy blur that is the wide-flung hall of legislation on the hill, its graceful apex standing softly clear against the clouds or stars.

I have no illusions, I think, as to our doing some things that we ought not to do and leaving undone some things that we ought to do, governmentally speaking, but there is something about that illuminated dome, hanging in glorious suspension between earth and sky, that always makes me stop worrying as to the ultimate outcome of America. It makes young men see visions and old men dream dreams. I do not talk much when I stand before the Capitol dome at night. If Miss Fessenden had chattered, our friendship would have ended, I fear, before it was fairly begun. She had almost nothing to say, however. After an eloquent one-syllabled exclamation, as I led her out through the station entrance to a place I knew, of old, to be a vantage-point for viewing the picture, she stood silent, absorbing it. "How beautiful!" she said, after awhile, and that was all. So I was well rewarded.

We were not the only passengers who had left the warmth of our car to view the Capitol. As we turned to retrace our steps to the train, I observed, standing in a shadow of the entrance, a familiar figure. His eyes were fixed on the gleaming dome; he, as we had been, was immersed in thought; absent-mindedly, as we approached, I saw that the fingers of his right hand were slipping backward and

forward over a knuckle of his left a big loose ring. Just as we passed him, he came out of his abstraction, glanced at his watch, and also turned to go back to the train. I noticed him once more that night, when he was among the first of our carful to be told by the porter that his berth was ready.

It was on our way back to the train that Miss Fessenden consented to allow me to change berths with her. I had broached the subject, earlier, insisting that I slept as well in an upper berth as a lower and that she, unfamiliar with American sleeping cars, would find her upper extremely inconvenient; but she would not consider it. Now, although still with reluctance, she gave in to my argument. Our quiet moments together in front of the dome had developed a sympathy that altered bare acquaintance to something enough like friendship to make her willing to accept so slight a favor.

IN what I had said about being able to find comfort in an upper berth I had approximated the truth, and I dropped off quickly and slept as well as anybody is likely to sleep the first night out, which is to say that I awoke more or less whenever the train came to a standstill, and was partly conscious of airbrake applications and sharp curves. In between these I slept soundly, and it was from the depths of profound slumber that I came abruptly to a realization of something disturbing my pillow.

Half automatically I reached up and touched a wrist—touched it and clutched it, and hung on as the hand came out from under the pillow and jerked away. I came up into a sitting position, pretty much awake now, aware that a sneak-thief was at work and determined to grapple with him—and muffled a yelp of pain as my head crashed violently against the top or side of the car. For a split second I was dazed, and in that split second the hand wrenched itself clear.

I dragged aside the curtains, surprised that they were not already parted, and leaned out into the aisle. There was no one in sight but the porter, who was just appearing at the end of the car. I think he had heard my cry.

"Quick porter!" I called, keeping my voice down. "There was somebody reaching into this berth."

He came directly under me, speaking in the low, soothing voice car-porters use after most of their passengers are asleep:

"Yassuh. Isn't nobody in sight, suh. *Wasn't* nobody in sight. You don't suppose you might 'a' had a dream, do you, suh?"

I KNEW I hadn't, but the emptiness of the aisle contradicted me; the quickest human being that ever lived could never have got down from my berth, traversed the distance even to a berth across the aisle or to either side of mine, and disappeared, in the time that had elapsed before I got my head through the curtains. The porter, polite but utterly incredulous, assured me he had only stepped into the smoking-room for one moment, and that for more than two hours not a passenger had been out of his berth. There was nothing for me to do but accept his nightmare theory, or seem to, and try to appear no more foolish than necessary.

I lay back, with an aching realization that the bump on my head was certainly no dream, and reviewed the experience. How could a thief have got at my head without parting the curtains? There was only one answer, and it came almost instantly. His hand had come from behind my pillow. That, in turn, would explain the empty aisle. He wasn't in the aisle, but in one of the berths next me toward the engine—either Lower or Upper Five. Visualizing the construction of the berths, it seemed to me he must be in the lower; I thought it might be fairly easy for a man in the lower berth to reach up behind the curtains, but that from one upper to the next would be much more difficult. With the intention of partly testing this, I moved a hand up under my pillow toward the partition at my head. My fingers came in contact with a metallic object—a ring. A second later I was sitting up,—I did it with caution and without casualty, this time,—with the curtains open a crack and a ray of light falling on the souvenir my caller had left behind.

It was a stoneless heavy band of plain gold. I believed I recognized it. I could not have taken oath to it, of course, but I had no doubt I had seen the ring that afternoon and again that evening. Morning would make me sure. I found my folded waistcoat, put the ring safely away in a pocket of it, and stowed the garment under others at my feet. I was the first passenger in the car to be up.

AN hour and more after I had dressed, the draperies of Lower Nine opened and its occupant made his way to the smoking-room. It was the pale, middle-aged, thin man of obviously Spanish blood. Seemingly he paid no attention to me, and I did not stare at him, but it took no more than a cursory, fleeting glance to assure me there was no ring on any finger of his left hand.

Another bit of information I gathered at the same moment. Through the now open curtains of the berth from which he had come, I saw that the upper had not been occupied.

Making of myself one of those morning Pullman nuisances who, although themselves already dressed, insist on getting under foot in the smoking-compartment while others need all the room for making their toilets, I got out a cigarette and followed him there. He was awaiting his turn at the bowls, idly watching the passing landscape. Quite absent-mindedly the forefinger and thumb of his right hand was massaging the third finger of his left, going through the motions of slipping a ring up and down over the knuckle.

It seemed almost incredible that he would do this directly under my eye, when he knew he had lost the ring beneath my pillow. Absent-mindedness would not reasonably account for it; no man under such circumstances would be absent-minded in just that way.

The explanation came to me suddenly.

He did not know he had lost it beneath my pillow. He did not place me as having been in Upper Seven at all. When he went to bed, not even the porter knew that Anne Fessenden and I were going to exchange berths.

CHAPTER IV

After Phillippe's

BEFORE Miss Fessenden was ready to go to breakfast, I had decided not to say anything whatever to her about the experience. It would not mark the beginning of a perfect day for a young woman, to learn that a strange hand, at three o'clock in the morning, had been pawing about underneath what, but for her eleventh-hour willingness to trade berths with me, would have been her pillow Telling her didn't seem necessary; the thing was over, with no harm done, and it would only tend to make her nervous—although I admitted she did not seem to be a person whose nerves would often get the better of her. I think, too, that there was a little jealousy for the reputation of America back of my decision; Europeans, encouraged by popular cinema pictures, sometimes have weird ideas of the state of public safety in the States, and two attempts at robbery within three days, one in the heart of the metropolis and the other on a popular limited train, might well have a tendency to convince Miss Fessenden that she had indeed come to a wild and woolly land.

If I had felt at all sure that the exploring hand under my pillow had been stretched toward her berth, that it was a deliberate and planned attempt to get possession of some special thing of value,—which presumably would be Keenan's map, —I should have spoken promptly and frankly to her about it; but the more I considered this thought, the more far-fetched it seemed.

I chanced, by the veriest accident, to know that she was entitled to the ownership of a map of problematic value, dealing with the location of buried boxes which might or might not have contained money when they were hidden, and which might or might not be there now, with the odds in favor of their having been discovered and dug up by the Davalos crew before Keenan had been gone from there twenty-four hours. I did not know whether she had secured access to the safe-deposit box or not; in this connection I couldn't but remember that when I first saw her she had been on her way to a trust company, and that the trust company was not the Old Trinity. If she had gone to the Old Trinity, and if she had got hold of the map, it was reasonable to suppose she might have it with her now—but how could the pale Latin person with the sliding ring know that—or, for that matter, anything about the map at all? True, the boxes of gold, if that was what they contained, had been buried in Mexico, and our fellow-passenger might be a Mexican; but it was at least equally probable that he was a South American or a Cuban, more probable, in fact, for Cubans returning home from New York often go via New Orleans, while Mexicans are much more likely to travel by way of St. Louis, where they can get a train straight through to Mexico.

But two attempts to filch her property in three days! Could that be mere coincidence?

What if the proximity of the Spaniard's berth to Miss Fessenden's was not due to chance? What if he had been able to learn the number of her berth and afterward had deliberately bought the adjoining one? And then I remembered he was in *Lower* Five, and that all the lowers were gone when she or her friends the Postlethwaites went to get Pullman accomodations, so that she was forced to take an upper.

"Son," said I to myself. "You are thinking in terms of *Old Cap Collier*. Come out of it!"

I HAD a good look at the ring. There was a worn inscription inside, four letters in pairs with a dash separating them: *"L. T.—B. T."* Exactly such an inscription as any wedding-ring might be expected to have! Conan Doyle's Wizard of Baker Street might have been able to deduce something significant from it, but I certainly wasn't.

All the forenoon I watched out of the corner of my eye to see if the pale, thin gentleman would report the loss of the ring to the porter, which he might do if he wasn't sure whether he had left it under my pillow or had flipped it off to the floor when he yanked his hand away. He did not. It was possible, of course, that he had spoken to the darky about it while we were at breakfast, but I didn't think so; the porter, if such had been the case, would have been around two or three times to make renewed and ostentatious search on the floor beneath the seats. From time to time habit made him massage that now unencircled third finger, but he neither did nor said anything that would even indirectly intimate he had lost a piece of property. He spent a good deal of the day in the smoking-room; when he was in his section, he read a magazine or observed the scenery. He gave no sign of being conscious of Miss Fessenden's presence or mine.

It was late in the afternoon when I first heard him speak. He had been scanning a time-table, and, as the porter came down the aisle, he stopped him.

"Will I have time, at Atlanta, to go and file a telegram?" he asked. His voice was soft and well-modulated, and his English was a trifle more correct than that of most men who have been born to speak it.

"Nossuh. I don't ha'dly think so; we're a little late," the porter replied. "I can get it sent foh you, suh."

"I wish you would. Have you some telegraph blanks?"

The porter brought them, and after making a number of unsatisfactory drafts, the passenger completed a dispatch that suited him. As we were coming into Atlanta, he handed it over to the negro, with money.

"Day message—it is so marked," he said. "Tell them to rush it, will you? I want it surely delivered in New Orleans tonight."

His smooth, cultured accent rather surprised me. The man had education and breeding. A would-be thief he clearly was, but hardly the kind of man of which common sneak-thieves are made. And when he gave the porter a bill to prepay the telegram, he took it from a billfold that looked to be comfortably lined. The incident brought back my problem of the morning. It was somehow out of character that a person of his appearance and seeming prosperity should take the tremendous attendant risk just for the sake of annexing such jewelry or cash as a strange fellow-passenger might chance to have under his—or her—pillow. I decided to warn her.

OPPORTUNITY came, without danger of overhearing ears, after dinner. We were sitting in Section Seven. My suspect had gone to the smoking compartment, and his seat was unoccupied. The people in the section behind us had awaited the last call and were still in the diner.

I spoke of the peculiar public privacy of the American sleeping car, and of the fact, well known to all experienced travelers, that when the window at the foot of one's berth is wide-raised at night—as it never will be if the heat-loving Afro-American servitor can have his way—valuables ought never to be left in the little hammock that swings in a lower berth, because thieves have been known to cut the screen and steal, without awakening the occupant. I also said I did not put things under my pillow; they could be reached from outside the berth or from the next adjacent one.

She seemed only as casually interested as any stranger to the country and its

customs might be at gaining information. If she had possessions with her that she esteemed of great value, her response gave no indication of it. I became more definite.

"Somebody tried to get under my pillow, last night," I said. "He wasn't successful. I happened to be awake and scared him off."

"But isn't the porter about the car all night? And aren't conductors and train officials passing through every little while?" she asked.

"Yes, with the added risk that from any berth a wakeful passenger might look out. A thief who dared stand in the aisle and try to steal from a berth would have the odds all against his getting away with it. But if one could work entirely behind the draperies— I cannot prove it, so I have not made any complaint to the conductor, but unless I am mistaken, the hand that tried to find out what was under my pillow came from the next berth."

I nodded toward the section ahead of us. "I strongly suspect the foreign-looking gentleman with the little mustache," I said. "Perhaps you haven't especially noticed him."

"I have. He caught what you might call my professional eye. He has quite recently been discharged from a hospital, I think—a not very serious surgical case, probably—and his convalescence has progressed far enough to give him most of his strength back, but not his weight. I noticed that about him the first time I saw him. It was when we were making our bookings."

"When you were buying your tickets for this train?"

"Yes. Mr. Postlethwaite went with me to get them. This man happened to stand beside me. He was directly behind us in the line."

BEHIND them! "You tried to get a lower berth, I think Mr. Postlethwaite said, yesterday?" I inquired.

"Yes. They were all engaged."

"Sold and paid for, that means in these days," I said, half to myself.

"All but one," she amended. "There was a chance of getting one, but Mr. Postlethwaite advised against taking the risk." As she saw that I was interested, she amplified:

"The clerk said there was one lower berth which had been reserved by telegraph, which he was obliged to hold until the next morning—yesterday morning—at eleven. It was not usual, he told Mr. Postlethwaite, who was quite curious about it, to allow bookings to be engaged like that, but there was some reason why it was an exceptional case; the one reserving it, I gathered, was some personage. He said if we wanted to come back at eleven yesterday, and if there was no one else ahead of us, we might be able to get it if the personage didn't claim it; but he added, not at all amiably, that in the meantime we probably should have lost the chance to get an upper."

It was pretty clear to my mind that the personage had not claimed his berth, and that our Latin companion, who had heard the clerk's statement, had been there the next morning at eleven sharp.

"You will forgive me, I hope, if I seem to be advising you too much or taking too great an interest in your affairs," I said. "I don't want to be officious, really. But if by any chance you are carrying any unusual amount of cash, or any article of considerable value—"

She smiled without a trace of apprehension, and shook her head. "I am not," she said. "Thieves would get very little satisfaction from robbing me. I appreciate your advice, however; it is very kind, and I shall follow it. My tickets and very modest supply of money shall be put neither in the hammock nor under my pillow."

Strange to say, she did not seem to be impressed, as I thought she would be, with the prevalence of robberies in America. And yet perhaps it was not strange. She had just come from Europe, where, since the war, crimes of violence have increased, and he who would retain his property often needs to defend it; she was taking it for granted that post-war unrest had produced similar reactions over here.

That the thief, in his adventure under my pillow, might have had in mind her pillow, plainly did not occur to her at all. For the sake of her peace of mind, I was quite willing it should not, and was glad that the approach of the Latin person from the smoking-room, at this moment, justified a complete change of subject.

"Have you planned your day, tomorrow?" I asked her. Earlier, she had said she knew no one in New Orleans and had it in her mind to see something of the city.

"I shall purchase a guidebook, if they have one in the railroad station—"

"In New Orleans, they have one everywhere," I assured her.

"Then I shall sit there in the station and read it, to learn what I want to see, and after that I shall go out and probably get delightfully lost trying to find the places it describes."

"Wont you let me go with you? Sightseeing with a guidebook is terribly hard on the neck muscles. We can take turns reading aloud from it while the other one looks."

"That is good of you, but I would be imposing. Your plans—"

"I haven't a single, solitary plan that doesn't exactly fit in with your program," I protested truthfully. "I had intended to put in the day sight-seeing, myself, and bought my Pullman on the eleven-thirty for San Antonio with that in view; I was early enough to have gotten a lower on the noon train or the eight o'clock if I had wanted to. I have been through New Orleans three times, always in a hurry, and my knowledge of the city is confined to a general idea of its geography, a glimpse of the old French quarter that was too brief to include most of the places I wanted to see, and a ravishing memory of good food. I have been assured on the authority of one of the best trenchermen I know," I told her, "that one couldn't satisfactorily eat his way across New Orleans in less than three months."

"How Sir Oliver Buttesthorn would have loved it!"

"He would have fought to defend it to the last drop of his blood. I have never heard that they specialize on his stewed spiced pullets, but Sir Oliver had much to learn; if he ever ate an oyster, we are not informed of it. There is a restaurant I have always wanted to visit and never been able to—Phillippe's. It has been running three or four generations; the original Phillippe studied under the chef of one of the French kings, and the food and service there are a tradition. We will plan to wind up our day there and have a leisurely dinner."

"If I were sure you were not inconveniencing yourself through a desire to be hospitable—"

"I am not. For me, seeing sights with nobody to enjoy them with or criticize them with, as the case may be, is a bore. I appreciate, of course, that some people prefer to go about old places alone. If you do, please don't hesitate to say so."

"Oh, but I don't," she said. "Two will be much pleasanter."

"Then I suggest we go across town to the Union Station as soon as we get in, and check our hand-baggage there. That will leave us nothing to worry about until train-time at night. Then—what ho for the cheerful rubberneck wagon and the thrilling guidebook! And we must rise and have breakfast early, so that we will have ample appetite for an early luncheon, so that we will have ample appetite for dinner."

She had on a number of occasions evidenced an appreciation of extravagant American forms of humor. "We are not going to try to eat our way across the city in one day, are we?" she demanded, with wholly satisfactory seriousness.

THE following day, except that we did not rise especially early, we carried out the program quite as I had outlined it. The night had proved wholly uneventful. No hands, ringed or otherwise, had been thrust into my berth; and nothing, Miss Fessenden assured me when we met at breakfast, had disturbed her rest.

It was an ideal day for touristing, cloudless, dry underfoot, warm with the gentleness of subtropical spring. We rid ourselves of our luggage and proceeded to see everything that one day allows to be seen. Comfortably weary and hungry, we came, at seven-thirty in the evening, to the little, old-fashioned, unimpressive place on a poorly lighted, cobbled street, above the door of which a modest sign, illuminated, to be sure, but not brightly, bore the one word: *"Phillippe's."*

All the things everybody had said about the restaurant were true.

A waiter who gave the impression that he was very glad indeed to see us, and that he personally appreciated the honor we had bestowed upon the restaurant by our visiting it, asked if M'sieu would like to have him select a little dinner, and of how many courses? M'sieu looked about for a menu card, saw none, and asked him what he would do if he were advised to go as far as he liked. He shrugged pleasantly and mentioned four or five things whose qualifying adjectives made them quite unfamiliar. M'sieu promptly threw himself on his mercy.

The result was oysters that were hot on the outside and ice-cold within; a fish course—pompano, I guessed—such as

never was before on land or sea; a bird, tender and deliciously seasoned; a salad wholly unique; an ice; black coffee such as one thinks of when coffee is mentioned, but almost never tastes—plenty of it, in a big pot, François—that ought to be his name, if it wasn't—was at our elbows neither too soon nor too late, afterward, to ask deprecatingly if the little dinner had given satisfaction and to invite us, neither too humbly nor too proudly, to come again.

Nearly two hours had elapsed when we came out into the gloomy street, rested, enthusiastic—and unsuspicious. We looked about for a taxicab.

None of the usual metered variety was in sight, but a few steps away, standing at the curb, were two large covered automobiles. Both looked like private cars, and a chauffeur lolling back from the wheel of the rearmost one paid no attention to us. The driver of the other car, as we came up to it, leaned out and said: "Cab, sir? Public auto."

I NODDED, and he reached back and opened the door. Miss Fessenden had her foot on the step when three men who had been sauntering close behind us, having passed the restaurant entrance just after we came out, quickened their pace, and one of them let his hand fall heavily on my shoulder.

"You'll have to come to headquarters," he said gruffly.

"What's that?" I asked. "Headquarters? What headquarters?"

"You know well enough. Federal. We're revenue officers. There's no sense making a fuss. We'll take this auto." He indicated the car we had passed, whose chauffeur had come to life and was throwing on the self-starter.

"Who do you think I am?" I demanded. "Whoever it is, you are making a mistake."

"That's what they all say," he retorted, heavily. The other two had closed in, one on either side of me, but neither of them had spoken. "You can do whatever talking you have to do at headquarters." A pressure of his hand, not rough but insistent, directed me toward the other automobile.

"Are you arresting the lady also?" I asked.

"No. She can go about her business."

"This is annoying," I told her, "but it wont take any time at all to convince them at headquarters there has been a mistake made. You had better go directly to the railroad station, and I will be there before train-time. She wishes to go to the Union Station, driver." Fully appreciating the futility of arguing with law officers who believe they are right, I moved with the three toward their car. Then, suddenly, from Miss Fessenden, came a startled exclamation:

"There is somebody in this motor! *Oh!*"

Whirling, I saw hands from within the car seize her, one of them clapped violently over her mouth. She disappeared. Muffled sounds indicated a struggle.

An arm had come around my neck from behind, effectually garroting me. In that moment I realized that I had seen no warrant and no official badges. I got in a good kick on the shin of the man who had done the talking, and fought to break that paralyzing strangle-hold. The car with Miss Fessenden in it rolled away; the second one drew up beside where we wrestled at the curb.

"Drag him in! Hurry!" a voice ordered. "Somebody is likely to come around the corner any minute!"

I set out not to be dragged in, with some temporary degree of success. There were four of them, now, the chauffeur having leaned out to help. If I could get my throat clear long enough to shout! I tore with both hands at the throttling arm. Its owner cursed volubly into my ear as I twisted his wrist, then commanded, in response to a question I did not hear—perhaps a gesture:

"Yes. Quick! Let him have it!"

Somebody did. "It" was a slungshot. The only comfort remaining for me as, limply, I felt them drag me backward into the tonneau of the car while the world went spinning around in a marvelous exhibition of red stars and then faded to Stygian blackness, was a realization that just as consciousness began to disappear I had landed in somebody's face with an everlasting good wallop.

CHAPTER V

"It Is Up to Greene"

"THERE is every blame thing in his pockets, boss, and some things that weren't. This two hundred dollars in big bills was fastened inside his clothes. Nothing there that looks like it, as far as I can see."

The voice, which was the voice of the man who had said they were revenue officers, seemed, at the beginning of this speech, to be a long way off. It came nearer with a surprising swell of tone. The last sentence was close to my ear; and I realized, then, that all of them had been. The crown of my head ached, and my mind was confused. I wanted to groan—got a glimmer of understanding as to what was going on—and stifled it.

I was half sitting, half reclining, and there was a light, but it didn't seem to be striking me in the face. Cautiously, I opened my eyes. Men's heads were in my line of vision, several of them. Somebody had a flash-lamp, its rays not directed in my direction. I made out that I was in a covered automobile, the one I was being put into when I lost consciousness, no doubt. It was standing still.

A moment or two elapsed. Then another voice spoke, and this time I knew the speaker, although I could not see his face. He spoke very softly and correctly, just as I had heard him speak when he asked the Pullman porter for telegraph-blanks.

"I hardly expected he would have it," he said, "but it was just as well not to take any chances. All right. Put everything back in his pockets."

"Aw, say! Not the two hundred!" a third speaker protested.

"Every cent," my Latin friend declared with the positiveness of authority. "With nothing missing, he will not be disposed to waste time bothering the police."

"What if he did? There aint no chance of tracing this car. Hell! I want something more than excitement to pay me for this punch I got in the eye. I can feel it swelling every minute. When we dump him out, I'm going to take a couple o' good kicks at his face for that."

"You are not," the person of Spanish blood said coldly. "You men have taken more chances now than you had any business to. He will probably be over that crack on the head in half an hour, but for all you knew, you might have killed him. When you are expected to croak a man, you will get orders to. When you get orders not to hurt one, you are supposed to do what you are told. Four men to one, and the one man caught off his guard, and you have to knock him out!"

"You didn't see the scrap he put up," defended the fellow who had said they were officers. "I'm going to limp for a week. If that kick he hoisted into my leg had been two inches higher, my kneecap would have gone sailing plumb over the top of the automobile."

If he had hoped to make their superior more good-natured by this attempt at humor, there was no indication in the other's voice that he had succeeded, as he replied:

"All right! We will admit you tackled him skillfully, and that four of you couldn't handle him without tapping him. And you got what you got. So that is over. Now as to what happens next: We wont do any kicking in the face, and we wont take his money. We will put everything back in his pockets, and roll him out here, and when he comes to, he will find he has his cash and his tickets, and get out of town—probably. If he doesn't, his story will be so unreasonable that the cops will give him the laugh."

"You was willing enough to pinch his ring for yourself," the fellow who had cultivated the black eye grumbled.

A DISTINCT period of silence followed. I imagined that the pale, thin man had fixed his eyes coldly on the speaker. I was sure of it when, after fully thirty seconds, the latter muttered, uneasily:

"Oh, I wasn't criticizin'. I can take orders as well as anybody else in the gang."

"That is good. Taking chances you aren't supposed to take, or not taking orders you are supposed to take, might get you sent back to the pen some day—or worse . . . . . This man wont make any complaint over that ring. He wont know that it didn't fall out of his pocket in the scrimmage; he will have no reason to think that it might be taken and everything else left. It has no particular value to him, anyway, and it has to me. As a matter of fact, it is my ring."

"Then wont he suspect—" began the fellow who had impersonated an officer, but the owner of the ring interrupted him:

"He doesn't know it is mine. I lost it, and he found it. . . . . It is half-past ten. Get that stuff back into his clothes and lift him out."

I continued to recline limply while one of them restored my belongings. There was nothing else to do; I wasn't fool enough to start a fight with five.

A man who had not participated in the previous discussions got out of the car and went around it, and the Latin-American

person stepped back to his side. They spoke with lowered voices, but from my corner I could overhear. "How about the girl?" the speaker asked. "Isn't there a chance she'll complain to the bulls?"

"I don't believe so. She isn't hurt; she hasn't lost anything; and Anatole's wife told her it was all a mistake—that she had been taken for somebody else. She doesn't know anybody in New Orleans—I heard her say so, last night, when they were slipping me the information as to where we could find them right after dinner this evening—and she wants to get to San Antonio, anyway. By now I will wager she is sitting down there in the railroad station, waiting for him to join her."

"It seems to me more likely she would go to the police, to ask them to locate him. Why should she expect he could keep his word to meet her at the station?"

"Anatole's wife told her he would."

"But you didn't know."

"I knew there would be plenty of time. I couldn't anticipate you men were going to half fracture his skull. I didn't really expect he would have it on him, anyway. She doesn't act as if she knew him well enough to trust him with it; I had you pick him up and go through him merely on the chance she might have asked him to take care of it—and to get him out of the way while she was searched. I figured he would be turned loose in time to get the train . . . . . You are sure she didn't slip it to anyone here in town during the day?"

"Just like I told you. They never met a soul they knew. Just blew around looking at sights."

"I wish he would come to. Who hit him?"

THE other hesitated. "I did," he confessed. "But believe me, I had to. He's a box of bearcats, that boy; one more second, and he'd have broken Joe's wrist. And then he'd have yelled for help, and—blooie!"

"If you had to, you had to, I suppose. Have you any marks of the fight on you?"

"Not any. I'm the only one that didn't get bruised up more or less."

"If you had, it would be better to send some one else to San Antonio. She or he—if he makes the train—would be likely to notice anybody who looked as though he had been in a fight. When we drop you, downtown, you will go straight to the station, of course. If she doesn't take the train, you don't. In that case, keep her in sight."

"Suppose she isn't there."

"Find out if she is in her berth on the train. It is Lower Ten, Car 67. Anatole's wife made a note of it when she was handling the tickets. You had better write it down."

I heard him obey orders, and glimpsed a momentary use of the flash-lamp. He stepped back to his superior's side.

"Car 67, Lower Ten," he said. "And if she isn't there, or in the station?"

"Wait until the train has gone. I think you'll find her in the waiting-room, and that she will go aboard at the last minute, unless he comes before."

"When she does, I trail along, of course. How about after we get to San Antonio?"

"Keep track of her and use your own judgment—until you get different orders. After she gets there, it will be up to Greene."

"He knows she is coming, does he?"

"He knows all about her. I received my orders from him, by mail, the day I left the hospital. It was pure luck I happened to be in New York; I had been putting off that operation for six months. If I hadn't been there, we would have lost her; this Nelson never would have dared try to follow her again after attempting to lift her bag and bungling it. As it was, we had no track of her from the time he made his grab until I picked her up when she got back to her hotel."

"What made Nelson so sure she had it in that bag?"

"He saw it. She stopped at the Old Trinity Trust on her way uptown from the boat—left the people who were with her outside in the taxi. Then they all drove to the hotel. After lunch she started out alone, walking. Coming through the hotel lobby she went into her bag to get something or other, and the map dropped to the floor. She picked it up and put it back; and naturally, he laid for the first chance after that."

"And she may have got rid of it before she went back to the hotel."

"Perhaps, but why? She wouldn't go to San Antonio without it. It must be somewhere in her luggage."

"She could have asked Uncle Sam to get it there safely for her."

A brief silence ensued, while the Latin person considered this. "I half believe

you have hit it," he said, with conviction. "She could have mailed it to herself at San Antonio. I must get word of that to Greene. ....He will meet her very soon after she gets there; he has the arrangements all made. After that, you look to him for instructions."

"Say," asked the other, in a still lower voice, "I've been away from San Antonio most a month, you know, handling this end of that ammunition job. I haven't seen Greene in that time, and I'm shy information about this buried coin thing. I remember its being talked about when Nelson first tipped us, but that must have been two years ago or more. It's supposed to be ninety or a hundred thousand dollars, isn't it?"

"That's what the fellow said that told her about it."

"We're working in a lot of small-fry on the deal. That doesn't affect the usual split, does it?"

"I don't see why it should; they don't know what it is all about. The Swede will come in for a larger bit than he used to get on jobs he was on before he went across, of course. These others get a few hundred apiece, and the balance divides in the usual proportion between us five of the—"

TWO men picked me up by the head and the legs at just that moment, and the remainder of the sentence was indistinct. It sounded like "us five of the G. Q.," or it could have been a name—"Jeekyou" or "Theecue" or something like that. Spanish, perhaps—and presumably the name of a society or gang.

I paid strict attention, for the next two or three minutes, to what they were going to do to Teddy, not having forgotten the presence of a gentleman with his eye in mourning who craved the vindictive pleasure of kicking me in the face. If he tried anything of the sort, I had it in mind to go to work on his other eye if they assassinated me for it. But he was kind enough, or sufficiently in awe of his superior, to practice repression. It wouldn't be exactly true to say they handled me gently, but on the other hand they didn't treat me especially rough.

They laid me on the ground beside the road, and just as they did so, another sentence came to my ears from the Spanish-American leader: "I will telegraph Greene as soon as I know she has left, and be over there myself on a train or two later."

I groaned, and moved to sit up. It struck me that would have a tendency to make them all hasten their departure.

THE light flashed into my face. I stared into it, wrinkling my features with pain—which called for no histrionic ability whatever—and muttering as I thought they might expect me to mutter if I were just beginning to regain consciousness.

"He's coming out of it!" the man behind the flash-lamp cried.

There was a murmured colloquy. Then the fellow who had claimed to be a revenue officer came and spoke to me, while the flash-lamp was shut off. He took no chance of my getting a look at his face.

"Say, friend," he said soothingly. "You're all right now, aint you? You're coming around all right."

I intimated that I seemed to be.

"Say! It was an accident, and we're damn sorry. That don't make your head feel any better, as I know of, but we are, honest! We took you for somebody else—a man we had it in for. You understand me all right, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You stay right where you are a few minutes, and then you get up and walk a hundred yards or so, this way, and you'll come to another road, and after a little a trolley car will come along and you can take it to the city. That way, the city is; you can see the lights on the sky. Barring that crack on the bean—and we're sorry about that, honest!—you're all right. Not hurt, and not a thing missing. It was just a mistake. We'd take you to town ourselves, only that wouldn't do at all, would it?"

I sat up and patted my pockets, as though to see if my watch and money were safe. It seemed to me that might be what a man would be expected to do.

"You'll find everything all right," the spokesman assured me. Behind them their automobile began to purr, and a little way up the road another one tuned up — the car, evidently, in which the Latin-American had come to join them. "If you're looking for those four fifties, they're in your left vest pocket. Find 'em all right?"

"All right," I said groggily.

"The trolley will come along right there at the corner—in about ten minutes. The

young lady is waiting for you at the railroad station."

The others had got into the cars. "Well, so long," the cheerful spokesman said. "It was just a mistake. We're sorry."

"So am I," I grumbled, with my hand on the top of my head. "What did you hit me with—the office safe?"

"He's coming back fast; be clear-headed as a judge in five minutes," the fellow called to the farther car, and jumped up beside the chauffeur in the nearer one. They both rolled rapidly away, in the opposite direction from the road with the trolley tracks, showing neither head- nor tail-lights until they had gone several hundred yards. I couldn't have made out their numbers by that time if I had had a telescope.

CHAPTER VI

"Findings Is Keepings"

DOWNTOWN I wasted not a minute substituting a taxicab for the trolley, but the clocks said eleven-fifteen when it slipped up to the curb in front of the Union Station. Miss Fessenden was there, on the sidewalk outside the entrance, scanning each approaching vehicle. As I alighted and paid the driver, she turned to a companion and spoke a word or two —plainly, from the expression of her face, words of pleasure and relief. Her speech to me, as I hastened to her side, was conventional and insignificant, with no reference to our sensational separation or what had followed it; this, I appreciated, due to the presence of a third person.

"I was afraid you weren't going to get here in time," she said. "Miss Hoskins, Mr. Sheldon. Miss Hoskins also has a missing traveling companion—her brother. We have been keeping each other anxious company."

"Very pleased to meetcha indeed, Mr. Sheldon," declared Miss Hoskins. "You men are always talking about how us ladies are never on time but for sheer dawdling, I'll say we haven't got anything on you." To Miss Fessenden she added: "You better go and get your bags at the check-room, you and Mr. Sheldon, and make the train. I'll give him another five minutes."

Miss Hoskins was a not very tall, slightly plump woman in her thirties, I should say, of somewhat arresting appearance. One noticed first that her hair was red, of a vivid shade quite fashionable at the moment with those who never let the price of a little touching up stand between them and the latest shade in coiffures. Next one observed her clothes, which were stylish, expensive, and yet a trifle more noticeable than perfect taste would have prescribed. After these details, a survey of her face proved rather surprising. I expected to find it brilliantly tinted, and it was not artificially tinted at all. In its expression was a curious commingling of easy good nature and intense sophistication, without a particle of boldness. Hard, disillusioned eyes would not have been astonishing, but the blue orbs that looked up into mine were clear and frank and innocent, with just the beginning around them of the kind of wrinkles that come to those who laugh much.

Five years in hospital and relief work had no doubt ground off much of Miss Fessenden's normal British reserve; yet in my first cursory glance at her companion—while I was skipping from the hair to the clothes—I had wondered how she had ever come to make such an acquaintance. When I got back to the face, the question was answered; she couldn't have helped it if the other woman had offered acquaintanceship; one in trouble would no more think of repulsing friendly advances from the owner of those eyes than of slapping a trustful child.

"If you will let me have your checks, I'll get the luggage and a couple of redcaps," I told Miss Fessenden. Before she could reply, an exclamation of relief came from Miss Hoskins:

"Here he is."

A TAXI was decanting a square-shouldered man of forty, whose movements seemed leisurely and were not. He wore custom-made clothes in a manner that made them look ready-to-wear, and a considerable diamond glistened in a carelessly tied scarf. As he came toward us, briskly enough but yet with that odd appearance of moderation, there was no doubting his relationship to Miss Hoskins. His eyes, as blue as hers, had the same amiable outlook upon the world, albeit a good many more wrinkles about them. His features, grave but not stern, were similar. As he removed his hat in polite salutation, I changed my mind about his sister's hair and mentally offered her my apologies.

His, beginning to thin a bit at the temples, was of almost identically the same shade.

"Sorry I was late, Lizzie," he murmured, "but I just couldn't seem to fix to get away. Those fellers I was with wanted to start a little game o' draw, and when it come ten o'clock I was pretty bad in the hole, so I stuck along, hoping my luck would change." He smiled pleasantly and added: "It did."

Miss Hoskins ignored his explanation. "This is Miss Fessenden and Mr. Sheldon," she informed him, and interrupted his acknowledgment of the introduction to demand, accusingly:

"Did you feed Hindenburg today?"

A comical expression of blankness crossed his face. "Why—no," he said. "This *is* Thursday, isn't it? I plumb forgot it."

She nodded abruptly.

"I thought so. He's raising a ruckus, and got all the rest of 'em singing to beat the band. And there's a corner of the box loose, where some roughneck of a baggage-smasher slammed trunks on it, and these men in the baggage-room say they wont handle it. It can go on the car, if I'll put it aboard, but no touching it for them. And I ask them do they think I look like an athalete, to juggle a box that weighs close to a hundred and fifty pounds, and they say they should worry. Our hand stuff is right here inside the door."

"Golly!" said Mr. Hoskins, without seeming to be much excited about it. "You did have your troubles waiting, didn't you? All right. Ten minutes is as good as an hour. Let's go!"

"See you later," his sister told us, and he said, "Good night, ma'am; good night, suh." She went bustling into the waiting-room with him at her elbow. They were moving at equal speed; yet she seemed to be almost running and he to be strolling. I have seen a good deal of Ed Hoskins since that night, and watching him do things is a perpetual delight; he has never, under my eye, at least, made a single waste motion. A stranger always thinks of him at first as a slow-moving man. He is as quick as a cat.

Miss Fessenden was looking me over from head to foot with quick, feminine inclusiveness. Her immediate question was sympathetic and solicitous:

"What *did* they do to you?"

"Nothing to speak of," I assured her. "I just haven't had time to get brushed up. Do I look disreputable?"

"You had to fight. Did they hurt you?"

Her eyes lingered longest on my collar. "What is it? Mud?" I asked. "I haven't been near a mirror."

"Mud, and a button off your coat, and dirt on your shoulders. Did they hurt you,"

"Not a bit. And you?"

"They searched me—a woman did it—and returned everything. She told me they took me for somebody else. She said you would be here; if she hadn't, I should have gone to the police. I should have let the train go and hunted up a station-house if you hadn't come. Ought we to, anyway? Or perhaps you already have."

"No," I told her. "I am direct from a little searching-party of my own, a few miles outside of town. They gave me all my possessions back, too, and said it was a mistake."

It was plain to see, as she said and as the men who kidnaped me had led me to expect, that she really was quite unharmed. She was somewhat breathless from excitement, and the strain of her long wait for me to appear, but not a bit hysterical.

"As long as we aren't hurt and haven't lost anything," I said, "reporting the thing to the police would mean only that we would have to stay over here a day or two, be put to a lot of inconvenience, and perhaps get some unpleasant newspaper notoriety. I don't believe there is the ghost of a chance the police could get track of them—unless they mentioned names in your hearing. Did they?"

"Only one. The chauffeur of the car was named Anatole."

"Did you get a good look at any of their faces? Could you identify them?"

She shook her head. "Only the woman was in a lighted room with me. She had a scarf—a sort of veil—around her face below the eyes, like a Turkish yashmak. She spoke good English, but with a decided French accent."

"She was Anatole's wife," I said. "And there must be hundreds of Anatoles in New Orleans, and at least half the wives of the married ones speak English with a French accent. Let's get our luggage."

WITH our bags, we were hastening toward our car before there was opportunity to speak outside the hearing of others, and then it was but momentary.

"We will have to put off comparing

notes until morning," I told her. "The berths are made up, and there is no place where we could talk tonight. Try to get a good night's sleep. I'll see you at breakfast-time—and I hope to be looking fairly respectable. Thank goodness, I have some other clothes in my suitcase."

The amiable gentleman who had swung the slungshot and been the only member of my abduction party not to get a particle hurt—I suspected he was the kind that usually escapes injury when a scrimmage is in progress by not getting too near the center of the difficulty—must be somewhere behind us, and with the train due to leave in two minutes, there could not be many passengers not yet aboard. I looked back, hoping only one or two men had followed us through the gate—and saw at least a dozen. A belated express from the North had arrived on the other side of the city barely in time to allow its passengers to make the connection, and fully twenty people, more than half of them men, were now pouring through the opening. Somewhere among them, no doubt, would be our friend who was to keep an eye on Miss Fessenden until Greene gave him orders to the contrary, but I didn't know whether he was light or dark, tall or short. His voice had given me the impression that he was moderately young. Fully seven of these newly arrived men were moderately young.

I saw to it that the porter settled Miss Fessenden properly, and said good night. Then I changed my collar and got dusted off a bit, smoked excessively, and thought more or less in circles. The only certain conclusion I reached was that the time had come to speak frankly about the Sepulveda treasure. I did not turn in until after we had been ferried across the Mississippi and the train had been put together again and set out upon its long westward run.

AT breakfast we said nothing the world might not have heard; voices carry far in a diner. Afterward, however, we found a seat together in our Pullman with no one within hearing.

Her professional eye had been sharp. She said reproachfully:

"You told me you were not hurt. That must have been a terrific blow, to leave a contusion like that."

"It does loom up a little this morning, doesn't it?" I agreed. "A phrenologist would discover I had all sorts of qualities heretofore unsuspected. As a matter of fact, though, it isn't as sore as it was entitled to be. The skin wasn't broken. My hat saved my skin, and the fact that it was a soft hat saved the hat."

"Could you sleep?"

"Beautifully, with the pillow under my neck, Japanese fashion."

"When did they do it? Why?"

"It was at the very beginning of things, just as your motor was starting. I was trying to register a protest against the program, and they thought it would be more convenient to have me quiet. I came to, quite unharmed, out in the country."

I declined to let her discuss a small bump on my crown any further. "Somebody may come or something occur so we cannot talk freely," I said. "If you don't mind, before we go into what happened, I think we ought to consider why it happened. Prying into the private business of others isn't a habit of mine, but in this case—Is it impertinent for me to ask if you are willing to tell me something about a map? A map of a location in Mexico?"

"I knew that was what they were after!" she exclaimed. "But how did you know? Didn't you say they told you the same thing they did me—that it was a case of mistaken identity?"

"Yes. But I recovered consciousness before they knew I did, and overheard some conversation. Before I speak of that, I think I ought to be perfectly frank with you and tell you that I had heard—quite accidentally—of the map before, and of how you came to own it. Tommy Durant told me the story of Keenan's death in the hospital, just as an interesting story which came into his mind because he had met you on the boat. He never expected to see you again, and of course there was no reason to suppose I would ever meet you. I naturally made no connection between the young woman he was telling me about and the one I had seen a little Swede try to rob on Broadway."

"I had decided to tell you the whole story today," she said. "You are surely entitled to it. I feel shockingly responsible for the danger I got you into—and your injury."

"That is absurd. Seeing that I knew about the map and already suspected they were after it, the responsibility is more mine than yours. I should have suspected, when that man told me I was under arrest, that it was a scheme to separate us."

I WAVED aside further discussion of whether she or I ought to have protected the other, which under the circumstances was purely academic, and asked a question that had been in my mind since the night before:

"Was Nelson the patient in the next bed—the one who tried to steal the safe-deposit key?"

"Nelson," she repeated blankly.

"The Swede. You recognized him and remembered his scars."

"Yes," she said, "he was the man. But if I ever knew his name, I had forgotten it. Thousands went through that hospital."

"I heard it, last night," I explained. "He used to belong to a gang of crooks, operating in Texas, I suppose, and when he learned about the buried money, he got word of it to his associates. What happened afterward I can only surmise, but my guess is that he remained in England after the war, in some place where he would know when you returned from Poland. Got work there, probably, in your own town. When you came home from your relief work, he kept track of you until you started for America, and then came along on the same boat, first advising his principals here that you were on the way. The convalescent Mexican—I think he is Mexican, the thin man who was just behind you in the line when you bought your Pullman tickets—is a member of the gang who happened to be in New York."

She turned startled eyes on me. "Then when he tried to rob you—"

I nodded. "We had changed berths, you remember, and he didn't know it." I sketched the incident of the loose ring. "He recovered it, last night," I said. "It is probably his wedding-ring. If so, his initials are 'B. T.'"

"You saw him last night?"

"I heard him. Suppose we try to get our experiences straightened out. Will you tell me what happened to you between the time they dragged you into their car and your arrival at the railroad station?"

"They took me to a house," she said. "It wasn't far—some house right there in the French quarter, I should think. I couldn't make any outcry, because they had gagged me." She smiled. "But I ought to be thankful for their consideration even in that. It was a clean gag. And the woman spoke quite pleasantly and assured me I wouldn't be harmed. Her voice sounded sincere, and somehow, I believed her from the beginning."

"She was in the car?"

"Yes. When we came to the house and they led me in, she said she would have to search me. She was thorough, but not disagreeable. She looked through my purse, and put the money and tickets back, and restored everything to my bag. Then she went out of the room for a few minutes, came back and apologized for the mistake, and said if I would go to the railroad station as soon as I was free, you would be there a little later. She said if I went to the police, they wouldn't be able to do anything, but that my name would certainly be given to the press and what the newspapers would say might not please me at all. Then we went out into the motor again, and finally came to a lonely place where a tramcar was due to pass soon, bound for the city, and they removed the gag and left me there."

"Meantime 'B. T.,' who was superintending the job, left them and came to see what had happened to me," I supplied. "Before I tell you about that, wont you answer one question? Is the map in your luggage?"

She shook her head, smiling.

"It is in the post," she said. "I had the Van Amster Trust people send it to me at San Antonio."

"That trip to the Van Amster confused me a bit," I admitted. "I had heard, you know, that it was at the Old Trinity."

"My father does New York business with the Van Amster. I had been to the Old Trinity in the forenoon and opened the box and found the map there and some other papers—nothing of much value, apparently, principally old letters. I didn't feel like asking that bank to put itself to inconvenience for one who wasn't a customer; so I merely took the things away from there. I was on my way to the Van Amster to ask them to take charge of getting the map and papers to me at San Antonio—and to secure funds—when Nelson, if that is his name, tried to steal my bag. Isn't it extraordinary that he knew where I was carrying the map?"

BEING careful to let no note of reproach for her carelessness creep into my voice, I recounted the explanation of this that "B. T." had given the previous evening.

"From now on," I said earnestly, "you mustn't let a soul see that map—not your best friend, not anybody. A tracing might be made of it. Or perhaps whoever saw it might be able to remember the distances and directions on it, and go there—"

"Do you really believe those boxes could by any possibility still be there?" she asked. "And that they contained gold?"

"What seems to be an extremely able and well-organized gang of crooks is spending a good deal of time and money to get the map," I said. "I would be willing to make a decent wager that when they first got their report from Nelson, they took steps to learn whether or not Keenan's story was probably true, and that they have done some digging around the Sepulveda place since then in an attempt to locate them. They certainly believe it, and they have been close to the ground, and probably on it."

"Oh, I hope so!" she breathed. "It would mean more than five thousand children."

I MUST have looked considerably puzzled.

"At first I didn't really give much credence to the soldier's story—Keenan's," she said. "I don't mean I thought he wasn't telling the truth, but he didn't personally know what was in the boxes he saw buried, and if there was gold in them there had been so much time for some one else to find it. And I didn't see that it would belong to me, anyway. He was a dear to want to give it to me but, after all, he was a rather disreputable adventurer, I am afraid. 'Thine and mine' didn't have much meaning to him. And I had other things to attend to . . . . . Have you any idea what ninety or a hundred thousand dollars would do for Polish babies?"

"I can't say I have. Do you mean—"

"I don't especially need the money," she said, a little embarrassed, as one is when confessing that one isn't exactly poor. "My father is not an extremely wealthy man, but he has had some success. And going secretly to search for buried money that wouldn't properly be mine even if I found it—"

"Wait a minute. Whose would it be?"

"Well, I didn't go into that, at first," she said. "I merely felt my title to it, even if I found it, wouldn't be very clear. And then I saw those babies. Thousands and thousands and thousands of them! Relief money coming in to help them, but never enough. Enough to keep thousands of them from actual starvation, to be sure, but there are other thousands. Ill-nourished, vacant-eyed, hopeless little things, who had nothing to do with the war but to suffer for it. Rickets—tubercular lungs and bones. No resistance to the first disease that comes along, in a country where diseases are always coming along and you can hardly get the grown-ups to take ordinary preventive measures even against plagues like typhus."

SHE spread her hands in an inclusive gesture. "Who wouldn't be keen to help?" she said. "And I couldn't—except by one's work, which is so little. We are not wealthy enough to be able to contribute more than the smallest bit to a task like that. So then it came to me that if this buried money is really there, and if I could find it— Back in England I talked it over with a good solicitor. I asked him who that money really belongs to, in law."

"He told you, if he knows anything whatever about conditions in the distracted republic," I said, "that under Mexican ethics—whatever the law of the country may be—it belongs to the first official, bandit or other person who can find it, or to whoever afterward has the power to take it away from him."

"Legally, he said it doesn't belong to the Mexican government, unless they have some law with which he is unfamiliar that all the property of a person who leaves no heirs goes to the state. In any of the British possessions, it would be treasure-trove and would belong to the Crown, but he knew of no other countries that have such a law. In the United States, buried treasure to which no one else can prove title is the property of the finder."

I nodded. " 'Findings is keepings.' "

"That is the phrase Keenan used. Well, this money was once German property—German government property. Germany used it to buy Mexican aid in trying to keep the United States out of the war against her. If it weren't for Germany, those babies in Poland wouldn't be the pathetic things they are. Spending it for their benefit would be not only honest, but—" She sought the exact word. "I think I want to say retributive," she concluded.

I agreed with her cordially.

"My enthusiasm made me run away from our subject — selfishly, I'm afraid," she said. "You haven't told me what happened to you."

I recounted the high spots of my experience, with special emphasis on the few things that had been said from which we might derive some clew as to the identity of those who had set their hearts on getting possession of the map.

"Mighty little to go upon," I summed up. "Anatole and his wife and Joe are pretty obviously mere subordinates, and it is likely they work only in New Orleans. Nelson is the Swede, and we would know him if we saw him, but he is another subordinate. There remain three others of whom we have some warning—'B. T.,' whom we know by sight, the fellow who is somewhere on this train but of whom we haven't the slightest description and whose voice I might be able to recognize but more likely wouldn't, and Greene, who seems to be the chief of the outfit."

"And who has already made arrangements to meet me," she mused. "I wonder how. That is one thing I can be on my guard against, anyway. And there are two others. 'We five of the—' Was it 'T. Q?' "

"It sounded more like 'G. Q.," but it could easily have been some Spanish word. My knowledge of Spanish is just about sufficient to enable me to read the menu in a Mexican restaurant, if there aren't too many items on it."

"I don't see anything to do but go on about my own affairs and wait for Greene to appear."

"And in the meantime, be suspicious of everybody—without exception. I must say I don't like the situation. They have no malice toward you, personally, but they have already demonstrated that they wont stop at much of anything to get hold of the map. As long as you don't have it in your possession, you aren't in danger, but after you get it— Does your father know the Mexican border at all well?"

"He doesn't know it at all. He has never been in Texas."

"You wont think I am criticizing him, I hope,—I suppose the very fact that he dosn't know this section of the country explains it,—but I am a little surprised that he let you go at this thing alone."

"Oh, he didn't," she hastened to defend. "He doesn't know anything about it."

I imagine my eyebrows lifted questioningly, for she went into greater detail:

"I merely wrote him that I had finished my Polish work, for the time being, at least, and that I wanted the rest that an ocean voyage and a journey across the States would give me. I told him I intended to stop off at San Antonio, but I didn't say why. He would have objected, and that would have made it difficult and perhaps unpleasant for me to do it."

"Spoken quite like an American girl," I commented.

"English girls, a good many of them, are having their own way more than they did before 1914. And really, I have been taking care of myself for some time under conditions that haven't always been entirely safe, although my father would undoubtedly say that was all the greater reason why I should avoid excitement now and let some one else investigate this thing. That might be well enough if he would be the somebody else, but he has important business on the West coast that will keep him there for months, perhaps a year. He would either suggest postponing it, or want to put it in the hands of some trustworthy outsider." She added frankly: "I do not want any outsider to have a share in it. He or they would have to be paid, and well paid—and every twenty-dollar gold-piece in those boxes, if they can be found, means life for at least one child."

Voice and expression evidenced a serious appreciation of what difficulties might arise, as she concluded: "But I shall be very cautious. How is it you Americans say it? I shall 'play safe.' . . . . Here are Miss Hoskins and her brother. She was exceedingly nice to me last night, when I was so disturbed. She didn't ask a single question, or even seem to observe how anxious I was—merely came up and said she supposed I was waiting for somebody, as she was, and made general conversation about how tedious it is to wait for people in railroad stations, and how one always finds worrying was unjustified. She bucked me up tremendously. I like her."

MR. AND MISS HOSKINS were coming up the aisle, returning from a last-minute breakfast.

"Is she an actress?" I asked. "He doesn't look theatrical."

"In the music-halls, I think. I mean vaudeville. She mentioned it in just a word. They are getting home from a tour."

Miss Hoskins hailed us brightly:

"Good morning, folks. This is the kind of weather we have in South Texas in March, exactly as advertised."

Her eyes flashed over me from head to foot. I knew she was noting that my collar was clean, that there were no buttons missing from my coat, and that mud- and grass-stains were absent from my shoulders —in fine, that by the dawn's early light I looked moderately respectable. Neither she nor her brother, the night before, had by the slightest flicker of an eyelash intimated that they observed my frayed and bedraggled condition, and I had realized, when I came to get a good look at my clothes, that no one could have failed to observe it at a glance. Mr. and Miss Hoskins were tactful persons. I began to like them myself.

CHAPTER VII

Rattler People

SOFT spring sunshine bathed the landscape; not a cloud flecked the soft blue of the sky; our car-windows were open and a tepid south wind drifted softly and languidly in through the screens. We breathed it deeply, gratefully. After the recent chill of the North, there was a sense of delighted relaxation of muscle and nerves and mind.

"It is a beautiful climate," Miss Fessenden said.

"The best in the world," asserted Mr. Hoskins, with the positiveness of the Native Son touching on the things his section is entitled to be proud of. "All winter it's like this. Every day—almost."

"You are an honest man," I grinned at him. "Not every Texan would have said 'almost.' At that, your northers are just frequent enough to make visitors appreciate the other nine-tenths of your winter weather."

"Lizzie," declared Mr. Hoskins solemnly, "something tells me this isn't Mr. Sheldon's first visit into our midst. He has happened up against a li'le thirty- or forty-degree drop in temperature when he was shy either bedclothes or an oil-stove."

"I was located at Kelly Field for a while," I told him. "We were all right when a norther arrived in the daytime, but in the night— The army didn't have any arrangements whereby you could ring for extra blankets."

Mr. Hoskins was obviously aware that, while Kelly was exclusively an aviation field, a vast majority of the air-service members never get higher above the earth than stairs or sky-scraper elevators will take them, for he asked:

"Flyer?"

"A little," I told him. "Is your home in San Antonio?"

"We live there some," he said, "but we were bawn an' raised down in Calderon County. We've got a little farm down there."

"Where, believe you me, I don't live any more weeks out of the year than I have to!" Miss Hopkins exclaimed. "Our next neighbor is three miles, and beyond him it's eight to the next. It's an excitin' life, mates! Now in San 'Ntonio—"

WHAT comparison she was about to make was interrupted by the approach of the Pullman porter, who addressed Hoskins:

"You're de gen'leman what put 'at big box abo'd de baggage-cyah jes' befo' we leave, las' night, aint you, suh?"

"Correct."

"De baggageman done sen' word he'd lak to see you up theah in de baggage-cyah right away, please suh, ef'n you don' min'."

Mr. Hoskins rose and departed, without comment. His sister, who at the moment was looking out the window, paid no attention other than to turn and cast upon him, as he left, a glance which might have been mildly reproachful, or might only have expressed the sentiment, "I told you so." She at once looked back out the window and indicated a distant speck, floating motionless in the air, marking the sentry-like vigil of the scavenger of the subtropics.

"Ol' turkey buzzard," she commented. "When I see 'em, I begin to feel like I'm really getting toward home."

Miss Fessenden confessed that she had been wondering if the occasional birds were eagles. Followed some desultory conversation as to their wonderful powers of flight without the apparent movement of a wing, and before the subject was exhausted, Mr. Hoskins returned.

"Hindenburg," he remarked laconically to his sister as he dropped into the seat beside her. "Thrashing round and singing. Got the baggagemen all haired up. That corner of the box that got busted needed nailing up a little, and they were scared to

do it." His voice struck a plaintive note: "You'd think, much as that feller charged us to make that box, it'd hold out through one trip."

"Not such," said Miss Hoskins. "Nothing will hold out a whole trip against the Amalgamated Baggage-Wreckers' Association."

"Hindenburg was slamming up against the place where it was busted. Saw the light, I reckon. He shore was making a racket."

"He throws a mean leap," Miss Hoskins agreed. It seemed to occur to her that we were unacquainted with Hindenburg. "He's the biggest of our little pets," she confided, with something of pride in her voice. "Five feet four, with nine rattles and a button."

"A rattlesnake!" I exclaimed.

"Didn't I mention, last night, what line of work I was in?" she asked. "Come to think about it, I don't believe I did, except to say I was in the profession. I don't make a pactice of telling strangers; it sounds kinda boastful."

She opened the bag that swung from her wrist and presented a card each to Miss Fessenden and me. It was a rather striking card, the matter at the top and bottom being in normal decent black, but the name and title in the middle standing out in violent vermilion. I read:

THE POISON DANCE OF DEATH

HIGHEST TOP-LINER OF SENSATIONAL VAUDEVILLE

DOLORES

QUEEN OF THE RATTLERS

$500 REWARD IF A SINGLE FANG IS MISSING

ON THE BIG TIME ONLY

ONLY that winter I had seen the performance of Dolores, Queen of the Rattlers, at one of the largest New York vaudeville houses. The picture came back clearly:

A stage set as a forest scene, with tree-stumps here and there, five or six of them. A swarthy Mexican girl, in yellow and red, with a lace mantilla over her jet-black hair, castanets clicking at the end of graceful rounded arms, lithe body swaying, feet stamping to the music of "La Paloma." A sudden working of concealed traps in the tree-stumps, and out of each of them a gliding, writhing, coiling, flat-headed rattlesnake, tongue flickering, tail vibrating. A sudden stopping of the music, an abrupt cessation of the dance, and carrying sibilantly across the big audience, the rasping buzz that is perhaps the most sinister sound that ever falls on human ears, never to be mistaken, never to fail of identification for exactly what it is, even though the hearer has never before been within eyesight or earshot of a rattler.

Then the music again, and a dashing, breathless dance, with the Mexican girl winding in and out among the vicious reptiles, leaning down to them, taunting them with gesture of foot and hand until, one after another, they struck, and swiftly coiled and struck, again and again, lashing their lengths toward her in a venomous rage that was futile because always they missed—always, although many times they failed only by a scant inch or two to strike her, her marvelous speed and agility, ever wholly graceful, placed her just beyond their reach.

She saw what my face could not help expressing as my eyes raised from the card to her piquant face with its surmounting aura of ruddy hair.

"Seen the turn, eh, and can't seem to make me fit," she smiled. "That's always thus. Nobody ever identifies me off-stage. An umber make-up and a black wig makes a lot of difference. But I have to have 'em in my business; working with snakes, you've got to be either Indian or Mex. I chose Mex because I've always known Mexicans pretty well, and I took to their style of dancing. When did you see it?"

"A couple of months ago, in New York."

"You might remember Hindenburg, then. He is the big one that strikes at me and almost gets me just before the curtain—the one that comes out of the set stump in the middle of the stage, after the others are all loose. If you'd seen us two or three years ago, you'd have recognized his name. During the war I used to announce it to the house—in broken English, you know. It was a sure-fire hit."

Miss Fessenden again scanned her card.

" 'Dolores,' " she murmured.

"Could you imagine a pure-blooded Mexican snake-handler named Lizzie?" Miss Hoskins demanded.

THE English girl couldn't help looking a little horrified. "And you like them," she said.

"Whatta y' mean, like 'em?" cried the Rattler Queen. "I hate 'em—same as everybody else. But I *know* 'em. That's why they don't get me. I can't outspeed 'em, but I can outguess 'em. I know where to make 'em strike every time, and then I aint there. Not that sometimes I don't have close calls." She glanced down regretfully at her rounded figure. "Nobody knows how hard I have to work and how much dieting I have to do to keep myself as quick as I used to be. You can believe me or not, but I haven't had a lunch that was worth mentioning for most three years, and I always was a strong three-mealer. With me it aint like these small-time people that work with fangless snakes. They get struck and no harm done. But not me. That five-hundred-dollars-reward thing that you see on my card is the real stuff. My public pays to see me take a chance of getting fatally snake-bit, and I give 'em their honest money's worth."

"And you?" I said to Mr. Hoskins. "You don't appear in the act. At least, you didn't when I saw it."

"I'm off-stage, springing the traps," he said, — "and sort of ready to herd 'em back, if they should take a notion to get into the wings. Not that they're ever likely to—Lizzie keeps 'em too busy watching her. Then I handle 'em in between-times—pack 'em and unpack 'em, and get 'em into those boxes that look like tree-stumps."

"We've both been snake people most of our lives," Miss Hoskins said, and her brother added, in the not uncommon Texas colloquialism in the mouths of grown men: "Papa was a snake-catcher by trade. We've handled 'em ever since we were big enough. Since Papa died, I've had his business. We furnish rattlers for half the big zoos in America, either with or without teeth, as wanted. That's why we break our vaudeville season so early. I'm getting back to catch some. We've got orders for two-three hundred, and we like to have a good stock always on hand, besides. They're selling at a dollar a pound, this year."

"You catch them in South Texas?"

"Just over the border in Mexico, mostly, but some in South Texas. There's a right smart of 'em in Calderon County, some years." He smiled amiably. "You might hear me mentioned quite some down here, without hearing anybody call me 'Ed,' any more than vaudeville managers call Dolores 'Lizzie.' Down in Calderon County and, mostly, in San 'Ntonio, they call me 'Snake Hoskins.' "

"And there isn't a man in the Southwest can figure exactly when a snake will strike, make it strike right to the toe of his boot, and then jam the forked stick down on its neck quick and sure, to touch him," Miss Hoskins boasted with sisterly pride. "Anybody in San 'Ntonio will tell you that. You people going to stay in San 'Ntonio long? Going to visit with friends, or are you tourists?"

A WORD made clear our relationship as traveling companions, and I said that I had a number of friends in San Antonio but expected, for the present at least, to be at the St. Francis Hotel. In response to Mr. Hoskins' inquiry, I mentioned two or three people whom I knew quite well. One of the names aroused warm comment:

"Steve Wheelock, eh? Say, there's a regular man! Wouldn't think, to see him sitting there in his office, or dropping in to a directors' meeting of the Traders' National, talking soft-voiced and mild, that in his day he was figured to be one of the quickest two-gun men in the State of Texas."

"That was when he was a Ranger, I suppose. I've never been able to get him to tell me much about it."

"No. That kind wont. He was a Ranger, and later a sheriff. Good many years ago, of course. Papa knew him in those days, before he made half a million in cows and settled down to be a capitalist. Ask him to tell you some time about how he arrested Jim Culley without having to shoot him or even pull his gun—and Jim one of the worst desperadoes west of the Pecos who had bragged there wa'n't an officer living could take him without a killing."

"I have," I said. "Everybody that knows him always mentions that arrest. But he insists there isn't anything to tell. It was just good luck, he says. He met Jim Culley and told him he was under arrest, and Culley went along without making any trouble at all."

"Exactly!" agreed Hoskins. "Culley looks quick and sees that Steve Wheelock's right hand is about a foot nearer a gun than his own hand is, and he knows Steve is natchully fully as quick on the draw as he is, and maybe a shade quicker—and

that foot of handicap is too much. So, not being ready to commit suicide that day, he lets Steve take him. But back of that is a story of how come Wheelock engineered it so as to have that little advantage. Culley used to tell it after he got out of the pen', but, so far's I've ever heard, Steve aint never gone into any details about it yet, and that must be thirty years ago. Plumb tongue-tied about what he done himself, Steve is . . . . . You got friends in San 'Ntonio, too, Miss Fessenden?"

"No, but my father has asked a friend of his who lives near there to meet me. I had a telegram the day we left New York saying he was writing him. Perhaps you know him; he is Mr. Philip Ordway, an engineer."

"I don't seem to. Whereabouts, near San 'Ntonio, does he live?"

"In El Paso."

My own expression may have been as amused as Hoskins'. Miss Fessenden observed our faces and asked: "What is there odd about it?"

"Lots of folks think San 'Ntonio and El Paso are right alongside of each other, dearie, and most of them don't live half as far from Texas as England is," Miss Hoskins said. "But six hundred miles away doesn't make El Paso exactly a San 'Ntonio suburb."

MISS FESSENDEN laughed, not disconcerted at all; I recalled she had said there in the Pennsylvania Station, that she would have been as well pleased if her father had left her to find her way about alone. "Then he probably wont be there," she said, "—in which case I shall go to a hotel. There will be no harm done at all. I have a letter of introduction to present—to Mr. Peter Groves. Perhaps you know him. A solicitor."

"Yes ma'am," said Hoskins. "I know him—a little."

The animation that had illuminated his face when we talked of Steve Wheelock did not repeat itself; in fact, I got the impression that he was masking thought behind a curtain of impassiveness.

"He is a prominent man there, is he not?"

"I reckon he has a right smart of law practice," Mr. Hoskins replied. "Considerable successful, he's been. I've just got a sort of bowing acquaintance with him."

Here Miss Hoskins put in that it would be several days before her brother departed on his snake-catching expedition down to the border and beyond it, and that in the meantime she hoped she could help make Miss Fessenden's stay in the city agreeable. Talk turned on the sights beloved of tourists to be seen in the city, and the best way of seeing them; Attorney Groves did not again become a subject of conversation.

VERY late in the afternoon I found myself alone with Hoskins in the smoking compartment. I put a question to him direct:

"What is the matter with this Peter Groves?"

"The matter?" His face was blank.

"I felt sure, from the way you spoke and looked, this morning, that you could have said more than you did about him—and that probably it would not have been especially favorable."

Hoskins seemed distressed. "No wonder I cain't play poker—much," he complained, "if I've got a thought-advertising face. How did I look? I've got to take myself in hand thataway and see if I cain't control myself."

"That's it," I smiled. "Your face didn't express anything. It was a poker face. Would it be fair for me to ask you why?"

"It's fair to *ask* anything." He looked thoughtfully out of the window for a moment; then he said: "You've hung out in Texas some?"

"A few months."

"Maybe you've noticed we more or less ol'-timers are a little careful about mentioning our likes and dislikes, and prejudices, and all that. Dates back to a day and time when folks were likely to get held personally accountable. And while Texas is shore different from what she was, that day and time aint entirely past, not entirely."

"Miss Fessenden is a stranger—" I began, when he nodded decisively.

"I wouldn't want to see a nice young lady making any serious mistakes, either. And I reckon I can be a little confidential with you, without being in danger of having my opinions spread broadcast. You look like a young feller that can know quite a number of things without telling 'em. For instance," — he grinned broadly, —"we've associated together quite some, today, and you haven't once felt impelled

to explain how come you got into a fight, last night, in N'Orleans."

I grinned back at him. "I might have been disorderly, but I wasn't drunk, you could see that for yourself."

"Yeah," he nodded, apparently entirely satisfied with my continued failure to explain. "So I might say, just between you and me, that I don't know much about this Pete Groves, the lawyer; but I don't happen to like him. He is a prosperous feller, but I don't admire the way he makes it. Once upon a time it used to be damage-suits, but lately it's defending crooks—guilty crooks, usually. And he shore has ability at getting 'em off; the way he tries the cases doesn't always explain it. I don't say it is so, but there are folks in San 'Ntonio that call him a jury-fixer. I know one or two of his intimate friends better than I do him—and the better I know 'em, the less I like 'em."

HE blew smoke meditatively.

"I sort o' sized up Miss Fessenden that maybe she is one of those English people that come to Texas sometimes to invest money. If I was her, and if any of Pete Groves' financial friends were to recommend any sure-thing investments, I'd kind of hesitate before I decided."

I appreciated how unusually kind it was for one of the Texas natural conservatism of speech to give me such a warning, and said so. He dismissed my thanks with an abrupt nod.

"I'd rather you didn't repeat this to her—at least as coming from me—unless you consider it necessary," he said. "I'm trusting considerable to your discretion; but Miss Fessenden strikes me as a very fine young lady, and you and me have to sort o' look out for strangers in a strange land." He snapped his cigarette away with an air of finishing his smoke and the subject with the same gesture. "If we don't start pretty soon for that dining-car, we might be held up and not be through when we get to San 'Ntonio."

THERE were no untoward delays in securing seats or service, and when the train drew into the palm-surrounded station, we were ready to leave it. Hoskins was the first of our party to alight. He helped Miss Fessenden down, and then his sister. As I was following them, a young man who had been standing back from our track, earnestly scanning the faces of all passengers, stepped forward and removed his hat.

"Pardon me," he said, "but are you Miss Fessenden?"

He was a big chap, about my age and pretty close to my height and build, and he was dressed well and in good taste. His manners were easy and sophisticated, and his face not only conformed to the accepted standard of masculine good looks but was attractive for its expression of frankness and sincerity. You know how sometimes you are impressed at once by a stranger's personality, and possessed right away by a warm feeling of friendliness. Well, this chap made that impression on me, instantaneously. I felt as though he would be a good man to know, and a likable one.

As Miss Fessenden admitted her identity, he smiled winningly.

"Your father arranged for me to meet you," he told her.

"You are Mr. Ordway?"

"No. Ordway couldn't come; his work wouldn't let him off. He and I are old friends; we were at school together. So he got word to me—passed along the description of you that your father wrote him, and all that—and asked me to say 'Welcome to our city' in his place. I have taken the liberty of reserving a room for you at the St. Francis, and I have a car here." He included us in a comprehensive smile. "I expected you would be alone. However, if I can be of any service to your friends—"

"That is very kind, Mr.—" She hesitated.

"Oh, excuse me," he cried. "My name is Greene—Beverly Greene."

The second of the three big installments into which we have divided this novel is fascinating indeed. It will appear in our forthcoming February issue, along with many specially interesting stories by H. Bedford-Jones, Clarence Herbert New, Bertram Atkey, Lemuel L. De Bra, Meigs O. Frost and other noted writers.

Mostly Providence

A thrilling romance of the East Indies, by the brilliant author of "Lou-Lou," "The Taiping Ring," "Shadows of Saffron" and many other memorable Blue Book Magazine stories.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

SOME men believe in chance. Some in Providence. Some, not always believe in themselves. Some believe quite certain in what they believe, take what comes and make the best of it, usually with a laugh. Of this last type was Jim Morris.

The dinghy, badly smashed up and barely floating, drifted to the heave of long, swinging seas, amid a welter of fog. Morris had been in her two days, without food or water, since the schooner went down. Now he lay outstretched in the bow—a thin, gaunt figure of youth, nearly naked, his red-bronze hair matted with brine, his quick blue eyes a little dimmed but struggling with vitality.

"It's land," he muttered thickly, "but what land is it? Borneo? Then I'm a goner."

He could smell the mangroves through the fog, the odor of decaying fish and twisted sliminess of mangroves and reek of jungle. Nothing was in sight. Slowly and imperceptibly the dinghy was floating in with the tide.

As he strained to see through the fog, an object grew directly ahead of him. He blinked at it, rubbed his eyes, blinked again. No, it was real, rocking on the swells! His hand went to the knife at his waist. An insane, incredulous laugh broke from his lips.

There, under his hand, was a tiny float of rattans, and lashed to the float was a tiny red skull. It was a perfect skull, yet only a span across, painted a glittering scarlet.

Impulsively, Morris reached down with his knife. He slashed the float free, and with a great effort raised it to the gunnel. He stared at it a moment, realized that the skull must be that of a monkey; another laugh broke on his dry, split lips. With a slash of the knife, he cut the float free and tossed it overboard. The skull he placed on the little bow thwart just ahead of him. Then, weakened, he fell back and lay quiet, senseless and too feeble to move.

SUNRISE came and broke the fog. Morris tried to rise, and failed. He twisted about and saw the skull, and laughed.

"The Dyaks will get two heads instead of one," he thought.

Then, after a little, he made another effort. This time he drew himself up to the thwart and stared. The boat had come in, almost to land; ten feet away rose the dark trees, the tangled cluster of mangrove roots! And to his left was a creek—fresh water!

A hoarse, throaty sound came from his swollen throat. Morris rose to his feet, swaying. As though echoing the sound he had uttered, he caught another sound from behind him, and turned. To his consternation, he saw a Dyak fishing-craft plunging through the rifted fog, heard a loud yell, knew himself lost.

Weakly he clutched at his sheath-knife, his blue eyes flaming up in a last effort of will and energy. The Dyaks came alongside, three of them in the craft—then they seemed paralyzed. They stared past Morris, their eyes fastened on the red skull. A burst of speech leaped from them; Morris could make no answer, for he was past speech. He opened his lips, and they saw his swollen tongue.

One of them leaped forward, grinned, held a water-bottle to his lips.

That was all Morris remembered, for the shock of this friendly action left him nerveless, and his weakened body gave way. He wakened again, some time later, to find himself lying between mat partitions, in a long-house, and beside him the most glorious woman he had ever seen. He thought himself dreaming, and went to sleep again.

The woman was real, however.

He discovered the fact later on, that night, by the flicker of a flame in the mud fireplace. She fed him carefully, smiling down upon him, a golden woman, of fine aureate skin and blue eyes like stars and red-gold hair gleaming low across her brow. So, despite the clothes upon her, Morris knew that she was white, and a mere girl, and beautiful.

He could not talk to her. He could not talk with any of the Dyaks, for he knew neither their tongue nor Low Malay. He found that they respected him and considered him a great man, because of that little red skull which had lain in his boat, and which they carefully preserved.

He could love the golden girl, however, and he did so, and she loved him—and it was the innocent love of children. For one day Morris surprised a Spanish word upon her lips; she knew not its meaning, uttered it as a memory of childhood. So he learned that she was Spanish, and he wondered much how she came to be here, among Dyaks.

Of that he was fated to learn soon enough, and terribly enough.

THE dirty little schooner slowly slipping in under the point of land was not the spick-and-span schooner of romance. The dirt clustering about her was no honest dirt; it was the squalid filth of careless men. Anyone half a mile to leeward could catch the stench of rotten copra, unboiled shell and rank bilge that emanated from her putrid hold. Even her canvas was patched and scarred and streaked with pitch.

Three men were visible on her littered, untidy deck. A Moro lay in the bows; another stood at the wheel, chewing betel and expectorating redly anywhere. By her rail stood an erect old man clad in scarlet silks, glittering with gold and gems, incrusted with dirt. From his chin jutted a small pointed gray beard. His rough upper lip showed a thin and bitterly voracious mouth. His nose, once a proudly jutting beak, now lay broken and askew. One eye was dead; the other was black and terrible beneath jutting gray brow. The whole face was thin, malicious, powerful. In his hand he held a stick of ebony.

Such was the schooner of Rais Hamed ben Yusuf, he who stood at the rail.

Slowly, under a falling breeze of sunrise, she rippled through the water, slipped imperceptibly under the lee of the promontory, and floated on. Rais Hamed searched the trees, the unbroken stretch of green jungle along the shore.

Nothing there appeared worth the search. Only trees and jungle, stretching away in unbroken curves, an occasional creek-mouth barbed and masked by the mangroves. No sign of man's presence appeared anywhere. No trail of smoke floated up. The monotony of this shore-line was unspeakable and terrifying.

Rais Hamed, as the schooner swung around to parallel the shore, came over beside the helmsman. His one eye sparkled venomously; an astonishing fury contorted his wrinkled face.

"It is gone!" he said. His voice was melodious, rich, soft as a woman's.

"W'Allah alim!" said the helmsman. "Allah alone knoweth! If it is gone, it is gone by God's will, and who are we to question Him, the Ineffable?"

Rais Hamed met this mechanical patter with a grunt. A positive man, this old raider and pirate of the islands, son of an Arab father and a Chinese mother.

"Iblis swallow you! Here is the place, although I have not seen it in four years. Yonder creek, ahead, leads to the long-houses. With the tide thus, there should be five fathom off the creek."

"Yet it is gone, Rais," repeated the helmsman.

"And may Allah blast me if I do not flay the taker of it!" swore the old Arab. "Ho, Kalil! Drop anchor."

THE Moro up forward stirred himself negligently. He stooped above a small bower, idly laid on the deck. He picked up the bower and dropped it over the side. This display of prodigious strength caused him no effort, passed without comment. Slowly, her gray canvas flapping, the schooner swung around to the cable.

"Five fathom, Rais!" floated the soft voice of the Moro.

"A boat, six men, arms!" snapped Rais Hamed. He strode to the companionway and went below, the echo of his sweetly cadenced voice flinging back from the wall of trees.

The Moro went forward and called. To the deck came a number of yawning men, all brown or yellow men, but of mixed races. They had one thing in common: no man could become a member of Rais Hamed's crew unless he had at least two actual crimes to his credit.

This Moro was the mate. He was unusually large for a Moro, nearly naked, and his strength was tremendous. Kalil was his name, and he had a large share, almost a half-interest, men said, in this schooner and her proceeds of smuggling and piracy. In the old days this Kalil had been a famous blackbirder, but the Christians had stopped all that. He was older than he looked, this Moro. It was he who had originated the red skull which was known all through the islands as the symbol of Rais Hamed. If he obeyed the Arab, it was because the latter could navigate and was a very wily old man, worthy obedience.

Kalil picked four men to row the boat which was lowered from the protesting slings. In a socket at the bow of this boat, he stuck a short pole to which was affixed a tiny red skull. Then he turned to the men at the rail above, and issued orders.

"In two days we return. Wait here. We bring hard camphor and women. If any Christian boat comes, let yourself be searched, for there is nothing aboard—but send up a smoke-signal to us."

Good sense in this last, since hard camphor means death—in the wrong hands. The Borneo Company allowed no infringement of their monopoly.

From the cabin came Rais Hamed, in one hand his ebony stick, in the other a duffel-bag which was filled with presents for the Dyaks, his friends. This he handed down very carefully, then got into the boat and seated himself on faded scarlet cushions in the stern, taking the tiller. Kalil took place in the bow. Rifles under the thwarts, close to hand but hidden, the four oarsmen dipped blades.

The boat darted into the creek-mouth and was gone from sight.

Almost instantly the sea was shut out and forgotten. From the surf-resounding turmoil of the coast, the boat entered upon peace—a narrow lane of water inclosed by jungle. This creek was one of many mouths of a river whose delta was all tangled mangrove swamp. After twenty minutes of hard pulling the creek widened out, and the boat was driving up against the sluggish current of a wide and yellow river.

From among the trees throbbed a sound. Hearing it, the men paused on their oars, their eyes going fearfully to the grim face of Rais Hamed. The sound came again, and again; a deep and booming *clang*! as though some brazen throat had yelled up at the heavens. It drifted away over the trees and was gone—three heavy notes, then a pause, then five more in succession.

"We have been recognized," said Rais Hamed. "Forward, in the name of Allah!"

JIM MORRIS was not unwarned of how Fate was drawing in upon him. Two days before the booming gongs announced the coming of Rais Hamed, there slipped into the village a grinning Negrito, escorted by some Kapit Ai Dyaks. He was met with respect, and was given a room in the same long-house that Morris occupied. This Negrito, a genial and friendly scoundrel, heard with some astonishment the story of the white man. Then he came in and sat down by Morris, and offered the latter a cigaret.

"You speak Spanish, señor? Good! You are English?"

Morris felt like clasping the dark little native to his bosom, but refrained.

"American," he responded, lighting the proffered cigaret. "Thanks!"

"English or American, what difference?" The Negrito waved his hand and chuckled. "Now tell me the truth, señor! How came you by that object, and what means it?"

His finger pointed to the red skull in the corner.

MORRIS told him. The two men were alone in the chamber, although behind the mat partitions other men were crowded, listening to the words they did not understand. Morris was astounded to see his friendly interrogator break into an irrepressible flood of laughter, as the tale of the red skull was unfolded. At length, wiping his eyes, the Negrito spoke.

"Hola, señor! Do you know what these men think? That you are a friend of Rais Hamed! That skull is his private signal, his trademark! It showed to close-searching eyes the channel by which this river and village might be gained. A lorcha or prau comes along the coast with its cargo. It sees that float. It turns into the creek, displaying the proper signal, and here at the village leaves its cargo. You understand? This village is a depot, a gathering place, for camphor and other smuggled goods! Rais Hamed has many such. Once or twice a year, perhaps, he sends a ship and takes away the stuff; this time he is to come in person—"

"Who the devil is Rais Hamed?" asked Morris, bewildered, yet half comprehending.

The Negrito puffed at his cigaret. "A pirate, a smuggler, a what you like! For many years he has been allied with these Sea Dyaks. He hates all Christians, and tortures them in strange ways aboard his schooner. I am sorry for you."

"Why?" demanded Morris.

"Because I like Englishmen. One of them saved my life once. Therefore I am paying back the good turn by telling you all this."

"Yes, but why do you feel sorry for me? Will not Rais Hamed rescue me?"

The Negrito's lips twitched. "Yes—only to torture you himself. He enjoys it. Besides, you removed his float and saved your head by means of the red skull. He will not forgive that fact. He is a cruel man, but Allah loves him, and he prospers. Look!"

From his breast the Negrito took a joint of bamboo, a foot long and three inches in diameter, sealed at each end with gum.

"One of these long-houses," he said, "is crammed to bursting with hard camphor. It also contains many sacks of gold dust. And this tube"—he tapped the bamboo—"is filled with diamonds. To deal in these things unlawfully is death—but Rais Hamed deals in them and dies not. Allah favors him!"

"How the devil do you know so much?" asked Morris.

"Because I am Rais Hamed's agent in this district." The Negrito grinned. "Come, I like you, señor! Let us eat dinner together."

It was true that they liked each other. Morris found the brown man to be merry, brave, cheerful and upright. The Negrito, in turn, liked Morris and felt genuinely sorry for him. He could do nothing to save Morris—in fact he would do nothing, for he was devoted to Rais Hamed. But his complex personality was frank enough.

"You are helpless, señor. Make the best of it! You cannot run away."

THAT afternoon Morris went up river to a little island with the golden girl. There on the island they pretended to fish, but tried to talk and exchanged the few words each had taught the other, and Morris knew that he loved this girl-woman. Also, he respected her and stood in reverence of her. Lucky for her that Morris was the straight, clean man he was, since her heart had no secrets from him. Isabel, he had named her, loving the name.

Although he could talk with her only in the language of love, he had talking and to spare that evening, for the Negrito had been discovering a few things and was waiting for him. Also, the brown man's smile had unexpectedly turned into an ominous scowl.

"Come with me and talk, señor," said the Negrito after the evening meal.

Darkness had fallen. Together the two men went up the notched log that brought them to the *tanju* or veranda of their long-house. In this and the other houses Dyaks were squatted about the fireplaces, over which wood and shrunken heads dried in the smoke; the many *bilik* or sleeping apartments in each house were being made ready for the night. The unmarried girls,

Isabel among them, had gone up above into the big lofts where paddy was stored.

The two men sat on the veranda, the floor of ironwood poles swaying a little under them as men and women moved about inside. Then the Negrito opened up.

"I hear that you are the lover of the Spanish girl, señor. Is it true?"

"If we can get away safely, I hope to marry her," said Morris, frankly enough.

The other man sighed, laughed under his breath, sighed again.

"I am sorry for you, but I must do what is my duty," he said thoughfully. "Listen! Four years ago Rais Hamed was at this place. He deals much in flesh, that man. He brought with him a young white girl, a Spanish girl whom he had stolen somewhere. He had found her in the north, among other people who had stolen her as a child. Well! He gave her to these Dyaks and told them to rear her to womanhood, that in four years he would come again for her. She is his slave—"

From Morris broke an astounded, incredulous oath.

"Nay, señor, doubt me not!" said the Negrito. "Tomorrow or the next day Rais Hamed comes. He will take her. He will slay you. You understand? I am very sorry for you, because I like you; but I must do my duty—"

Before Morris knew what was happening, the Negrito made a signal. Out of the darkness Morris felt naked shapes hurtle upon him. In the twinkling of an eye he was seized and bound with strong cords.

"I am sorry for you," repeated the Negrito, regretfully. "But my duty, you understand—"

IT was early afternoon when Rais Hamed arrived at the village, met and escorted by a number of boats.

A great feast had been made ready, pig and fowl and game and arrack; his reception was regal. And in his faded scarlet silks, with Kalil looming at his shoulder, his was a proud and regal and barbaric figure. His men scattered. He, with Kalil, took position beneath a sunshade of mats out in the open. The wise old men of the Dyaks gathered around him, the warriors squatted in a semicircle, the women hastened the feast. And the one eye of the old Arab roved ceaselessly, cruelly, proudly.

Gifts were exchanged. The Negrito came forward, swaggering, greeted Rais Hamed in Arab fashion, squatted down and lighted a cigaret. He made report, and the Dyaks confirmed this report, pointing to the storehouse. Rais Hamed turned to Kalil.

"Go and inspect the goods."

Kalil departed, accompanied by certain of the Dyaks. The Negrito agent stayed where he was. When the mate was gone, the agent produced his bamboo tube and handed it to Rais Hamed.

"Here, Rais, beloved of Allah, are certain things for thy hand alone. Also, there are certain sacks of gold—"

The old Arab clutched at the bamboo and thrust it out of sight.

"The gold goes into the general cargo," he said. "You have done well, friend! Trading-goods shall be landed to settle our accounts. Now, there is another matter—"

"Wait!" The Negrito spoke in bastard Arabic, which the Dyaks did not understand. "I have another matter to lay before you—"

HE spoke swiftly, told of Morris and of how the latter had come here, told of the girl and of what he had himself done. The gray features of the old Arab became hard and stony; his black eye glittered with rage and a fury of delight. Presently he turned to the old men and addressed them.

"Four years ago I left a girl with you to be raised. I have come to take her. Let me be shown how you have conducted this matter!"

Two of the old men made haste to obey. They brought Isabel, her golden body covered with a sarong of rich golden silk, and she stood facing Rais Hamed.

"Here is thy master, girl," they said to her.

At this instant Kalil returned. He stopped short at sight of the girl, stared at her, his eyes all ablaze with her beauty. Then, panting, he hurried to the side of Rais Hamed.

"The goods are correct, Rais!" he said rapidly. "In the name of Allah, speak a word with me concerning this girl!"

Rais Hamed smiled thinly, and waved his hand to the Dyaks.

"Take her away and hold her ready to accompany me. Now, Kalil!"

The Moro drew himself up. Seldom did he assert himself before this Arab, but now he spoke eye to eye, man to man.

"Rais Hamed, well I know that not for yourself do you desire this woman, since you deal with women only for the sake of

gain. I have seen her, and I desire her. Sell her to me."

The old Arab fondled his jutting gray beard.

"I design her for the harem of the sultan at Sibuko," he said slowly. "I have promised her to the sultan. The price is arranged. By the names of God, who am I to go back upon my word?"

"By the ninety-and-nine ineffable names of Allah," spoke out Kalil, a kindling flame in his lowering eyes, "who am I to be denied?"

"You are my mate," said Rais Hamed, with a cackling laugh.

"I am your pardner also. Look, now! I will offer you the price that the sultan would pay. Let it be withdrawn from our accounts. Besides, one of these Dyaks told me there was a white man here, who has looked on the girl with eyes of love. That will be a fine tale to reach the ears of the sultan, after you have sold the girl to him!"

"You threaten me?" asked the musical voice of the old Arab.

"By Allah, I threaten you!" cried the Moro passionately. "Look to it!"

"I do not yield to threats, Kalil."

"Then yield to friendship."

Rais Hamed laughed and held out his hand.

"Done! The girl is yours. The sale shall be consummated after we return to the schooner. Until then, hands off! Also, we take the white man with us. He goes with the girl—I give him to you. Hands off, however, until we have settled matters with these Dyaks!"

The eyes of the Moro flashed.

A little later the Negrito came to Jim Morris, who lay bound hand and foot in a corner of a long-house, and told him of all these things.

"I am sorry for you, señor," he concluded with a sigh, "for I like you. They will start back sometime tonight, after the feast. I shall not see you again. Farewell!"

Morris, perceiving that the man was quite sincere in his words, could not restrain a laugh at the oddness of it all.

IN the dawn-darkness Rais Hamed returned to the schooner, whose triangle of red riding-lights signaled that all was clear. With him came a string of Dyak boats, bearing the hard camphor and other things—half a dozen captive girls among them.

Morris was brought to the deck, and the cords were cut from his numbed wrists and ankles. The cords were replaced by manacles. He was flung to the deck, and the manacles were made fast to ringbolts in the decks, so that he lay spread-eagled, looking up at the sky.

The girls were locked below in a cabin. The cargo was stowed away swiftly in the hold. Rais Hamed and Kalil and the Negrito went to the Arab's cabin, lighted by a red lantern slung inside a skull; certain of the Dyaks went with them, and there was much casting up of accounts, which lasted well into the morning. Then, with goods and presents aboard, the Dyaks and the Negrito agent departed; the schooner's bower was dragged up, and under a listless land-breeze she headed slowly out to sea.

Five of her crew disappeared below. The other five, lounging about the deck, sampled arrack that had come aboard and regarded the manacled white man with interest. Rais Hamed beckoned his mate, and both went below to the cabin.

SEATED across the table from each other, they bargained for half an hour, while Kalil steadily emptied the rum-bottle at his elbow. Rais Hamed, who touched no liquor as became his faith, craftily delayed matters until the keen wit of the Moro was numbed by the rum; then he proceeded to cheat his pardner deftly and accurately. He drew up a bill of sale which Kalil signed with stumbling fingers. Then:

"Bring the girl here," said Rais Hamed, plucking at his beard. "I will speak to her."

Kalil grinned and departed, his naked brown torso gleaming with sweat, for it was very hot here in the cabin, and he had drunk deeply. Presently he came back, dragging by one wrist the shrinking Isabel. He thrust her forward, facing Rais Hamed, and waited.

The golden girl drew herself up. She knew why she had been brought aboard, knew what fate awaited her, and had learned also what fate awaited Morris, chained to the deck above. Traces of tears marred her face. Under the golden silk, her bosom rose and fell with swift breaths; her starry eyes blazed with passionate grief and anger.

"My child," said the old Arab, in the Dyak tongue that she understood, "I have been as a father to you. I have paid the Dyaks well to care for you. Among them

you have been as a goddess, a cherished and reverenced guest. Now I shall hand you over to this man yonder, whose name is Kalil. He is a great man, a wealthy man, and you shall be the light of his harem and make him happy. Forget that white man of yours, who will soon be dead—"

"Ai, you are a sea-devil!" broke out the girl hotly. She gave Kalil one contemptuous, fiery look. "And this—this wood-devil—thinks to marry me! He will not."

"Then," said Rais Hamed gently, musically, "he will burn your white man with hot irons. He will make him die very slowly. I have given your white man to Kalil."

HER eyes went from one to the other, in questioning, in appeal, in terror. She read only desire and cruelty in the two faces. A pallor crept into her cheeks.

"No, no!" she said slowly. "Spare him—you must spare him—"

Rais Hamed chuckled. "I have given him to Kalil."

Swiftly, impulsively, the girl turned to the Moro. "Spare him!" she cried, fright in her voice and eyes. "You are devils—do not torture him! Let him go free!"

Kalil grinned into her eyes. "Well, girl? You will love me a little? You will not call me a devil?"

She flinched before his bestial look, before the frank hunger of his mien. Still paler became her face; her tortured eyes closed for an instant, then opened.

"Yes," she said, with a weakly assenting gesture.

"Bah!" observed Rais Hamed. "By the prophet, Kalil, I was beginning to regret my bargain—but she has no spirit after all. Why spare the Christian? Break her to your will."

Kalil leaned forward, poured himself another drink, gulped it.

"Not so," he said, and wiped his lips. "Better willing than unwilling, Rais! I shall let the man go. She will love me."

"Will you throw him overboard, then?" asked Rais Hamid with a cynical smile.

"I will give him a boat and let him go as he came."

"Who will pay me for my boat?"

"I will pay, by Allah!"

"The men will not let him go. They expect amusement."

"I will give them rum," and Kalil grinned, "and more arrack."

"But who will pay for this liquor?"

"I, by Allah!" shouted the Moro in sudden anger. "Am I a beggar?"

Rais Hamed shrugged, drew brush and ink toward him across the table. "Give me the bill of sale. I will add to it the price of the boat and the liquor."

For a little the two men bargained further, Rais Hamed cunningly cheating his pardner and making much gain. Then they came to terms. The girl watched, quivering, trembling.

"Set down the sums," said Kalil. "I will go and have the boat lowered and pass out the arrack."

He turned and left the cabin.

Rais Hamed, brush in hand, paused and looked up at the girl, his one eye glowing. Then he reached out a hand and poured rum into the glass before him. He pushed it over the table.

"Drink, girl! So you will go happily to your husband."

The girl's fingers closed on the glass, lifted it. Suddenly, swift as the flirt of a snake across a jungled glade, she moved her hand. The rum leaped into the one glittering eye of Rais Hamed, spread across his face. Before he could move, the girl caught the bottle and brought it crashing against his head.

Rais Hamed fell forward across the table and lay quiet.

Terrified, desperate, Isabel stood staring down at him. He groaned, then lay quiet once more. She lifted the bottle as though to strike again, but could not. With a shudder, she dropped it on the table and leaned forward.

Swiftly she searched the unconscious man. Her hand found an *illang,* a long, curved blade of finest Malay steel, inlaid with gold; she found a tube of bamboo, which puzzled her; she found a pistol, of whose use she was ignorant. Taking the knife and the bamboo, which was heavy and sealed at each end, she darted from the cabin, slamming the door behind her. The catch of the door slipped into place. It could only be opened from the inside.

JIM MORRIS sat up, staring in wonder, and rubbing at his skinned wrists. Why he had been released he had no idea. The mate had stooped, unlocked the shackles and gone on. Not a word had been spoken to him.

The breeze had freshened. The land was fast falling away into a purple line on the western horizon. The schooner, her sails

carelessly tended, was beginning to heel sharply over, and little by little Morris slid down the inclined deck as he rubbed his wrists. The helmsman had slipped a loop over the wheel and was seated, drinking from a pottery wine-jar.

Afar on the southeastern rim of the ocean was a tiny smudge of smoke, as yet unseen by any. This tiny smudge caught the eye of Jim Morris alone. He did not guess, however, that it was a signpost of Fate, or luck, or Providence.

He wondered that he was unguarded, that the Moro mate had called the watch aft. They were clustered there at the stern, and Morris perceived that they were getting into the water a boat that had lain chocked up by the stern rail. One of the men ran forward to the galley, pausing to snatch a drink from a bottle of squareface, and reappeared soon with a bag of biscuit and a breaker of water in his arms. He carried these aft. They were got into the boat. The mate and the four men were getting the little craft into the water safely.

MORRIS, staring aft, saw the head of Isabel emerge from the companionway, saw her glance quickly about, saw her look at him. Then, with a leap, she gained the deck and came running toward him, unseen by any others. She waved her arm, and Morris saw the glitter of a knife. An instant later she ducked under the starboard counter boat and was hidden. Along the deck, where she had flung it, slithered the curved knife, stopping almost at the feet of Morris. He swiftly bent over, picked it up, straightened himself.

"By gad!" His eyes flashed. He carefully stowed the knife under his waistband. "There'll be a fighting chance—"

The boat was in the water, trailing astern. The mate came forward, flung Morris a black scowl, and turned down the companionway. The four men, drinking from bottles, grinning, jesting, surrounded Morris, fingering their knives. Then, after a moment, one of them uttered a cry and pointed to the shagreen handle of the knife protruding from his waistband.

From below, at this instant, came a bellow of rage—a wild and furious roar of anger. Not knowing what was going on below, yet swift to play the golden girl's game, Morris drove out with his knee, caught the man in front of him, and snapped home his fist as the brown man doubled up in agony. One was gone.

DOWN at the door of the cabin Kalil was pounding, bellowing, hurling himself furiously. He thought that Rais Hamed had locked him out, had locked Isabel in. He began to smash down the door.

The three natives closed in upon Morris, who drew his knife and dropped the first of them with a desperate stab. He was not used to such work, however—the knife went with the man, and he was left weaponless. The other two struck at him, struck keenly and surely. A knife streaked crimson across his naked chest, but he avoided the points and his fist sent one man staggering.

Before that one man could recover, a golden flash leaped from beneath the starboard boat and across the man's skull fell the heavy bamboo joint. That man lay quiet.

Isabel straightened up, threw herself forward to aid Morris. The helmsman was coming now, staggering and reeling, a flame-bladed kris in his hand. Then, deftly, Morris tripped the last of the four, caught him with a smash under the ear as he fell, laid him out. Isabel whirled on the helmsman—but he, with a yell of terror, turned and scrambled forward.

"Quick, girl!" Morris was at her side, caught her arm, laughing as he met her eyes. "Come quick—the boat!"

She fathomed his gesture if not his words, and turned. Side by side they ran aft, and when she saw the boat trailing there, she understood. Morris stooped and drew in the line until the boat was under the rail.

"Jump!"

A laugh broke from her lips. Her hand touched his cheek in caress—then, with a leap, she was in the boat below, asprawl across the thwarts. Morris reached to cast loose the line, when a shadow falling on the deck made him whirl.

Over him stood Kalil the mate, his brown features a mask of fury incarnate.

Swift as light, Morris leaped, struck, drove his fist fair and square to the point of the jaw. Kalil rocked to the blow, but only uttered a bellowing laugh and then caught Morris in his arms.

At the first instant of that grip, Jim Morris knew that he was a doomed man unless he broke free of it. Swift work, swift work—or death in that grip!

He went utterly and completely limp, sagged down with all his weight. His head drooped against the breast of the Moro, slimy with cocoanut-oil; a grunt of

exultation burst from Kalil. Then the body of Morris stiffened. His head snapped up —snapped up under the brown jaw. His arms locked about the brown, massive thighs, his fingers clenched in upon the folds of the *sirat* or loin-cloth.

The head of Kalil jerked suddenly up and back. A scream burst from his lips. He threw up his hands to release that neck-breaking grip—and Morris was free, out of his grasp. One leap, and Morris had loosened the line about the rail, let the boat and the crouching wide-eyed girl fall behind.

Then, turning, he drove in at Kalil. The Moro was fumbling for a knife, but had no chance to use it. The fist of Morris smashed in one staggering, convulsing blow square in the throat, a deadly blow. The mate was knocked backward, fell against the rail, leaned over it with his chin in the air.

Morris drove home on that chin with all his weight.

The brown body slid farther over the rail, let go, went hurtling down into the white foam below. A chorus of mad yells, a flash of leaping figures, and Morris knew that the watch below was at hand. A knife sang past his ear. He uttered one ringing laugh, then hurdled the rail and went feet first into the depths.

AS long as he might, he stayed under. When he emerged, gasping, the schooner was three hundred yards distant. No sign of Kalil appeared on the surface of the crested rollers. Morris struck out for the boat where the figure of the golden girl awaited him.

Two minutes afterward she drew him aboard. Then, as he came to his feet, she clutched his arm, uttered a cry, pointed.

Morris looked at the schooner, and panted a low curse of desperation. She was coming about, her streaked gray canvas fluttering in the breeze. Men were tailing on her lines. Beside her wheel stood an erect, tall figure whose scarlet silks matched the scarlet that bedewed one side of his gray head.

"Rais Hamed!" said Morris. "That devil has got us after all—"

But he had forgotten the signpost of luck, or chance, or —*Providence.*

RAIS HAMED, blood streaking his gray hairs, staggered to the deck almost as Kalil went over the rail.

At the yell that burst from his lips, his six men stood transfixed. He was a figure of wild, unleashed fury. His glittering eye took in everything—the fallen men, the boat astern, all!

An order, followed by a stream of curses, broke from his lips. The men rushed to the wheel, to the lines; the schooner came up into the wind and began to come around on her heel, her canvas flapping. With another oath Rais Hamed strode to the wheel, dashed the helmsman away, took the spokes himself.

Then, as he looked over his shoulder at the boat, his one glittering eye caught that distant smudge of smoke on the horizon. And the smudge was growing fast!

The old Arab stood paralyzed for one long instant. He knew only too well what that smudge signified; this was no ship-lane of commerce, and under that smudge was a patrol-boat. If he delayed five minutes longer, if he even delayed to run down that boat tossing on the waves, he was lost, and his schooner with him. That hard camphor down below was damning.

Even so, he hesitated, with fury hot in his soul. But his men, too, now saw that smudge on the skyline. They cried out. Rais Hamed swiftly spun the wheel, shouted an order; the men rushed to the lines; the schooner paid off—and Rais Hamed let her wear into the wind. She heeled over; foam ran along her counter; into the hand of the helmsman the old Arab put the spokes, with an order to keep her so.

Some men believe in chance. Some believe in themselves, some in blind luck. But Rais Hamed, as he stood at his stern rail and looked back across the tumbling waters to the speck that was a boat, uttered one fatalistic phrase that showed the whole man.

"W'Allah alim!" he said, and shrugged. "God knows best!"

Had he realized that the bamboo tube of diamonds had gone with the golden girl, however, his pious utterance might have been a trifle more vivid.

MR. BEDFORD-JONES has written for our next issue one of his most brilliant stories—a novelette of romance and adventure in the East Indies that has a thrill on every page. Watch for "Fifty Thousand in Gold" in the next—the February—issue of *The Blue Book Magazine.*

Red Eggs

Wherein golf is taken North to gladden the placid Eskimo—and exciting complications ensue: a joyous tale by the author of "Bunkered on Bai-o-Hae."

By ELMER BROWN MASON

BENEATH a leaden sky the icebound silent land lay rigid under its coverlet of snow. The semi-darkness of the winter Polar day served only to accentuate the bleakness of the ice-fields.

The five round Eskimo stone houses, scarcely breaking the level of the snow, and a single square squat wooden building were lost in the white immensity. Immaterial, ghostlike, it seemed that they might fade from sight at any moment, be swallowed up in the snow and ice.

The door of the low wooden house opened, and a fur-clad figure stepped out into the Polar cold. From a blue-fox parka hood peered the cheerful features of Rodney Styles, Arctic explorer, ardent sportsman, and son of William P. Styles, millionaire inventor of the Styles Perfection Collar Button—"One to a Lifetime."

He was a well-built young man with a determined chin and optimistic blue eyes which gazed approvingly over the gloomy prospect.

"Great! Simply great!" he announced after a few moments' contemplation of the bleakness before him.

Then, coming back from his survey of the Arctic scenery, he bent down and placed a bright scarlet object on a little mound of snow which he scraped up with his heavily mittened hand. From beneath his arm he took a straight piece of polished wood, its end terminating in a crook about the size and shape of a flamingo's beak. For a full minute he waggled this contrivance over the round crimson speck, then brought it back over his shoulder, raising his right heel as he did so, brought it down swiftly, lowering his right heel and rising on the left toe. The flamingo-shaped head struck the scarlet object; there was a sharp crack.

IN contrast to the bitter cold outside, it was warm and comfortable in Apilaq's stone igloo. The moss wicks of the three train-oil stone lamps flared high. There was a thick layer of hay beneath the bear-skins of the stone sleeping-bench on which

sat Apilaq's wife Arnanguaq, Ajako and the beautiful Isigaitsoq, his mate. The host sprawled on a meat-chest; and old Maage, the wrinkled grass widow, squatted on a heap of sealskins. She was talking now, had evidently been talking for a long time.

"And the great gull, my ancestor, came down upon the roof of the house, and near the nose of the house where the warm air comes out, it built a nest of moss unassisted by any mate. In this nest it laid three eggs—"

"I saw a falcon, this morning, with broad wings. I think it must have been a ghost-falcon," Apilaq broke in on the old woman's recital, grinning his amiable Eskimo grin at Ajako.

"Tell me more of it," Ajako asked eagerly, grinning back. He too had heard Maage's story of the mateless gull many, many times before.

The old woman glared at the two men.

"I am talking," she announced scathingly. "Those who interrupt me when I am talking will have children born with noses as long as the narwhale's horn. I will continue."

Apilaq glanced imploringly at Arnanguaq, his wife, but she was incapable of coming to his rescue even had she wanted to, since her teeth were firmly set in a long strip of seal meat. The beautiful Isigaitsoq smothered a yawn by the simple expedient of snuggling her face down on her husband's shoulder. The old woman went grimly on with the often-told tale.

"The gull laid three eggs, as I have said, and without the assistance of any mate she brooded them. They were not ordinary eggs. They were red as the blood of the seal that flows from the spear-thrust. Every morning the gull called down the nose of the house to the woman who dwelt within: 'Come you up on the house and turn over my red eggs!' The woman always did as she was bidden, because she knew that the gull was a ghost-gull, and she feared it. Every morning she turned over the eggs, wondering at their redness.

"There came a time of great cold—a cold so great that the degenerate men of this age, who stay within their houses all winter, could never have endured it. In the morning when the gull called down to the woman, 'Come you and turn over my red eggs!' she was afraid to go out in the cold.

"'Do you go and turn over the ghost-gull's red eggs', she directed her husband, and he rose dutifully to obey her, as did husbands in those good old days.

"The man climbed to the roof of the house and stretched out his hand to the nest, but as he did so, the gull flew at him shrieking:

"'Do you not touch my red eggs! A woman alone shall touch my red eggs!'

"'But my wife told me to turn over your red eggs,' the man objected.

"'Don't touch them, don't you dare!' the gull shrieked.

"But the man—as was only right and fitting—was more afraid of his wife than he was of any ghost; so he stretched out his hand and laid hold of a red egg. Instantly, with a sound unlike he had ever heard before, a terrifying sound, the egg burst—"

"*Crack*!" sharp and clear as a pistol-shot came from outside the igloo.

THE two young women, and the two men jumped to their feet. Even the old woman looked startled.

"What is that?" demanded Apilaq.

"Let us go and see," suggested Ajako, who was very brave.

Struggling into their furs, the five Eskimos began to wiggle through the long tunnel that led from the house to outdoors. Before they emerged, there was another sharp crack. As they came out into the Arctic bleakness, Rodney Styles was just placing a third scarlet golf-ball on its tee of snow.

With bated breath the five Eskimos watched him drive, followed the flight of the crimson streak through the air, then fell in behind the American as he tucked his club under his arm and walked out over the snow.

"What can it all mean?" asked the beautiful Isigaitsoq in an awed voice.

"Evil, doubtless!" Maage snapped back at her.

A hundred and eighty yards away they all paused and gazed appalled at what Styles was contemplating. In a little hollow in the snow, not an inch apart, lay the three red golf-balls.

"That's darn funny!" the American soliloquized. "Never saw three balls fall so exactly together. "Looks as though a little red hen might have laid all three of 'em." And he bent down to pick them up.

"Don't touch them!" implored Apilaq.

"They will explode and blow us all into small pieces."

The young man laughed.

"How do you get that way?" he asked, in the Inuit tongue, and picked up the three red balls.

There was a gasp of horror from the Eskimos. Then they fled wildly back toward their igloos.

Styles gazed after them, a frown on his usually pleasant face, and a distinctly forward thrust to his firm chin.

"What's eatin' 'em now?" he spoke aloud. "I don't get it!" He relapsed into a brown study as he went back toward the squat wooden dwelling that was his winter quarters.

IT was Styles' first expedition into the Arctic alone, though he had been in Greenland twice before. The two previous trips, as well as the experiences of other adventures into the farthest North, had taught him that, to be successful, it was necessary to have a small outfit, and that Eskimos were the only practicable companions. Therefore he got together his party and dogs at Upervinik in the autumn and moved up into Inglefield Land to train during the winter for the dash up the coast to Peary's Land, then back through the unexplored center of Greenland to Melville Bay. At first all had gone well. In addition to the supplies he had brought with him he had been able to kill a great deal of game. The Eskimos' meat-pits were full to the brim with seal and walrus. Consequently the entire party was well and happy.

But all in one week, misfortune descended upon the little community in the immensity of the Polar North. It began by the unexpected departure of Inuteq, the ancient husband of Maage. One morning both he and his team of dogs were gone. For sole explanation of his defection he left behind a picture scratched on a piece of bleached sealskin. It showed a woman with smoke and fire coming out of her mouth, and a man with his hands over his ears. An additional touch was the circle of dogs, their muzzles raised to heaven in howling distress.

As though this had been a signal, an epidemic broke out among the dogs, and within forty-eight hours, they were all dead.

Styles dispatched an Eskimo back to Upervinik to buy new dogs and bring them up in the spring. Then he settled down for the winter.

Realizing that it is just as necessary to train for an Arctic dash as it is for a football season, the American planned to keep his expedition in shape by the old army hike-system. But it didn't work.

Eskimos without dogs are about as full of pep as a prohibition cocktail. The four men and five women had plenty of food, and they refused to leave the shelter of their warm igloos for mere exercise, and there could be no hunting without dogs.

Styles had begun to despair when the inspiration came. An English scientist had once lived in the squat wooden hut that he now occupied. Among the things that he had left behind, the American was amazed to find a full set of golf-clubs and a box of red balls. From this, inspiration was born. If the Eskimos had no dogs to tempt them out into the open, here was something else!

The young man hung his blue-fox-skin coat in an outhouse, lest the warmth within should injure the delicate fur, and entered his own dwelling. Here he stripped down to his bird-skin shirt and threw himself on a rude couch to think.

At least he had been able to arouse the interest of the Eskimos as he had hoped to do, but why had they all run away when he had picked up the three red balls? It was an annoying problem. They were disgustingly fat, too, he had noticed. He *must* get them outdoors, or the spring expedition would resolve itself into an attempt to roll four Eskimo butter-balls up the coast. *Why* had they shied off when he had picked up the red golf-balls?

Well, there was no use speculating. The best way was to ask. True, the Eskimos were a reserved race, not prone to revealing their reasons for anything to strangers. Still, what else was there to do?

GOING to the door, he stepped outside and struck three resounding blows with a hammer on the empty meat-tin that was used as a summons to council. Then, bringing out four treasured packages of chewing-gum, he waited.

Presently a hail from outside was followed by the unceremonious entrance of the four uncertainly grinning Eskimo men. Gravely Styles shook hands with each of them and presented his largesse of chewing-gum. When they had discarded their

outer garments and all their jaws were moving rhythmically, he spoke:

"The dogs are gone—but there will be more dogs with spring. There is no hunting—but the meat-pits are full. It is warm in the igloos, and they are very fitting places for sleep—but men do not sleep always as do women.

"I have a magic here"—he touched a golf-club—"that makes the hand of the hunter more certain, his eye see clearer, his body stronger. It is a great magic, used much by young hunters in my land, that they may be successful in the chase. I will teach it to you. See, here are red balls . . . . . What's the matter with you all?" he demanded sharply, as the Eskimos, with one accord, drew back.

"Are—are you sure that they are simply balls? Not....not eggs?" asked Apilaq timidly.

"Certainly they are not eggs," Styles went on, mystified but determined to finish what he had to say. "If they were eggs would they not burst when I hit them with this club? This is the magic," he continued: "We will make little holes in the snow like those through which the seal breathes when he comes up under the ice. From afar off we will try to knock this little red *ball"*—he accented *"ball"*—"into these holes. He who takes the least number of knocks to accomplish this for the nine holes we will make, proves himself strongest, keenest of eye, deftest of hand—in short, the best hunter. Tomorrow Apilaq, the husband of Arnanguaq, and Ajako, the husband of the beautiful Isigaitsoq, will make this magic against each other to see which is the best hunter. We will all go with them so that we can judge of the force of the magic they make."

There was a long silence, while the Eskimos glanced furtively at one another. Finally Ajako spoke:

"I am the best hunter, though Apilaq is the luckiest at finding game."

"It is so," agreed Apilaq readily.

"Damn!" said Styles beneath his breath. "Haven't these guys *any* sportin' instinct?

"That may be," he went on aloud, "but if Apilaq works hard at this magic, he may become the best hunter as well as the luckiest."

"That is not fair," objected Ajako indignantly. "I have always been known as the best hunter, and I do not want Apilaq to be better than me."

"Then you must also work hard at the magic,"the American seized on the opening.

Apilaq's grin grew complacent; Ajako's had grown forced. Suddenly Majaq, the husband of Aninaq, spoke:

"What will the women say to this magic? What will Maage, the old grass widow say? She has been the only one who makes magic among us, and I do not think that she will be pleased."

"This is a magic exclusively for *men,"* Styles answered impatiently, disposing of the golf-sirens of his own land without even a qualm of conscience. "Women have nothing to do with it. Tomorrow we shall see whether Ajako is truly a greater hunter than Apilaq. Rest till then, for this magic requires much strength, a clear eye and a steady hand."

THE four Eskimos silently filed out into the snow. Later they would discuss this matter which did not concern women; later in Apilaq's igloo, while they gravely chewed strips of luscious seal meat. However, as they emerged from the tunnel into Apilaq's stone house, they glanced at one another commiseratingly. Old Maage was telling her tale of the red eggs all over again, had nearly reached the place where she had last broken off:

"But the man—as was only right and fitting—was more afraid of his wife than he was of any ghost; so he stretched out his hand and laid hold of a red egg. Instantly, with a sound unlike he had ever heard before, a terrifying sound, the egg burst!

"'I told you so!' shrieked the gull, 'Now see what you have done!'

"From the egg came a little white bird with many heads. It flew at the man and pecked his face, leaving red spots. Those spots were smallpox.

"The next morning it was again cold, and the woman again sent her husband up on the house to turn the two red eggs that were left. The ghost-gull shrieked at him not to touch them, and as soon as his fingers were around a red egg, it burst with even a louder sound than the one before, and out came a snake that went down the nose of the house and wrapped itself tight about the woman's waist. And the snake was hunger.

"The third morning the woman sent her husband up again on the house, and the last red egg burst in his hand. From it came out a green wasp that flew down

and stung all the dogs. And this wasp was madness.

"Then the man died from smallpox, and all the dogs went mad and ran away so that the woman perished of starvation," the old lady finished abruptly, and glancing about her complacently, announced: "I know many other magic tales, but that is the best."

"It is indeed a good tale," Apilaq said politely. "Do you, Arnanguaq, give Maage a large piece of seal meat."

THE course that Styles laid out the next morning started with a three-hundred-yard bunkerless hole, turned slightly to the left and ran over a small hummock of ice to Number Two, then down to the sea over plenty of rough, and back again in a wide circle, to end in front of Apilaq's igloo. The intense cold made the snow of the consistency of sand, so that the fairways were really very good. The rough was exceedingly rough, however, and continually shifting with the wind. Ice crevices were, of course, unplayable, and Styles instituted the rule that the ball might be thrown out at the cost of a stroke. He had planned to do this preliminary work alone, but he had the entire camp as gallery, all four of the men and all five of the women. They watched him gravely while he stuck up little red flags in the snow to indicate the holes, but they made no comments. Somehow this silent scrutiny got on his nerves, and he was glad when the last flag had been planted in front of Apilaq's igloo.

Teeing up one of the red balls, he stepped back from it and addressed his audience:

"You can throw the spear that pierces the seal through its breathing hole in the ice. I cannot. It is because you have practised doing this. I can hit the little red ball better than can you, because *I* have practised doing it. If you will watch me, you will see how it is done." He stepped up to the tee, waggled his club above it, then brought it back over his shoulder. Twice he drove off with moderate success—then motioned Apilaq to take his place.

The Eskimo accepted the driver gingerly and took his stance. He eyed the red ball with deep distrust, then glanced back at Styles.

"Are you sure this is not an egg?" he demanded.

"Quite sure," the American assured him impatiently.

Apilaq shut his eyes, brought the club down with a mighty sweep, and as sometimes happens, connected with the ball, which rose in a beautiful curve toward the little flag in the distance.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Styles. "Splendid! Come, now, Ajako. See if you can prove yourself the best hunter."

"But I *am* the best hunter," Ajako objected. "Apilaq himself says that I am, though he is luckier at finding game."

"It is so," agreed Apilaq readily.

"Well, if you don't work hard at this game—this magic," he corrected himself, "Apilaq will become a better hunter than you are, also."

"I do not want him so to become," Ajako complained bitterly. "I do not want him to do this magic if it will make him better than I am in the hunt."

"Ajako is my friend. I would not do as he would not have me do," Apilaq said gravely.

Styles bit his lips in vexation.

"Then who will make magic with Apilaq?" he asked, ignoring the discussion. "It takes two to make this magic."

"I will," promptly announced the beautiful Isigaitsoq, wife of Ajako, and held out her hand for the driver.

"It is not fitting that one man's wife should make magic with another woman's husband," shrilled Maage.

Styles drew a deep breath.

"Look here," he explained patiently. "This is *not* a game for women. The women will go back to their igloos and prepare a good meal, each for her *own* man, when he returns tired from making this magic which will bring good to all of you. Ajako, do as Apilaq did."

AJAKO kept his eyes open and managed to get off a fair drive. It was far from being as long as Apilaq's, but it wasn't bad.

Four of the women went toward their respective igloos, with glances back over their shoulders. Maage, since Fate had bereft her of a husband, argued to herself that this order did not apply to her, and remained behind. The men stepped out toward the flag that marked the first hole. As they went, Styles explained the use of the other clubs in the bag.

Eskimos are quick-witted, and their very existence depends on the deftness of

their hands. The final score rather amazed the American. Apilaq lost, one down, his score totaling sixty-three for the nine holes, and Ajako had made the course in sixty-two.

"You have proved yourself the better hunter," the American told Ajako as they paused at the last hole.

"But I *am* the best hunter," Ajako asserted. "It needed no proof. Apilaq himself says so."

"Yes, it is true," agreed Apilaq, "though I am luckier at finding game."

"Apilaq would have been the best hunter according to this magic had he not twice entirely missed the red egg," announced Maage, who had come along unchallenged.

"This is not a magic for women," Ajako objected hastily.

"All magic is for women, and I can do this magic better than you," came the prompt answer. "Do you dare to try it against me?"

"This afternoon Majaq and Osarqoq shall play," Styles broke in hastily. "And if the women have prepared good meals, they too may come along and watch," he added, and walked hastily in the direction of his wooden house.

THE readiness with which the four Eskimos took to the king of sports filled Styles with amazement as well as delight. Within a month, good golfer though he was, he frankly acknowledged to himself that he would not dare to put his skill to the test in Arctic surroundings against either Apilaq or Ajako. He *might* have a chance with Majaq or Osarqaq, but even of this he was doubtful.

There were disputes, of course. When Ajako got into an ice-crevice and lost a stroke in throwing out, he never could be made to understand why Apilaq's ball should not arbitrarily be placed in an unplayable position also. It took exactly three weeks for him to accede to this rule, and then only grudgingly through the explanation of the American that Apilaq was luckier.

Also the lifelong friendship between Majaq and Osarqaq had been nearly disrupted when the former lofted to the snow green where Osarqaq was standing, hitting him in the stomach so the ball bounded off into the hole. Followed a bitter controversy in which Styles did not dare to interfere, so that the Eskimos finally hit on a solution. It became a matter of courtesy, after that, for the man who first made the green to stand near the hole and let his opponent shoot at him in the hope that this fortunate accident would be repeated.

In spite of all this, however, Styles was delighted. The men were getting into splendid condition. There were two matches a day, sometimes three, even when the weather was such that no self-respecting Polar bear would have willingly faced it. The American nearly froze, but he told himself that it was all in the interests of science.

The men were getting in splendid physical condition and were happy, but the head of the expedition was dimly conscious that all was not well with the women. At first they had followed around the course quite as interested as their husbands. However, this only lasted for a little while. Finally Maage alone came out to the matches, being very welcome, as she acted as voluntary caddy. Then she too ceased to come. But Styles paid little attention to the women. He might have paid more could he have listened to their talk in the igloos.

The beautiful Isigaitsoq, wife of Ajako, emerged from the tunnel into the house of Apilaq.

"This is by a great deal too much," she announced angrily to the four women there assembled. "This is by a great deal too much," she repeated, and exhibited the bird-skin shirt that she held in her hand.

"There is no need for you to take all of anger for your exclusive portion, Isigaitsoq," Arnanguaq, the hostess, stated calmly. "See this shirt of Apilaq's," and she held up the garment, indicating where it had ripped beneath the armpits.

"Each day must I mend Osarqaq's shirts," Arsarfaka commented.

"And Majaq has burst his blue-fox-skin coat up the back," contributed Aninaq.

"Women would not have stood such things in my day," Maage broke in. "No good can come of taking magic out of the hands of those who alone can legitimately make it," she added darkly.

"Well," — Isigaitsoq took up the conversation, — "I'm tired of mending Ajako's bird-skin shirts. The tears get larger and larger. I am also tired, during the long evenings, of no longer being told that I am beautiful. Ajako talks only with the other men of this magic, and explains why

he failed to make the third hole in three instead of five. I do *not* like it."

"All our men no longer talk of aught but this magic," Aninaq said with a sigh.

"For two hours did Apilaq and Osarqaq discuss whether it were better to try and clear the bunker on the fourth hole or only play up to it," said Arnanguaq. "Nor did they cease when I offered to sing them the song of the White Bear's Mother. Still, I do not complain," she continued, with a sidelong glance at the beautiful Isigaitsoq. "Has not my husband Apilaq worked so faithfully at this magic that he daily beats Ajako? Therefore is he not now the best hunter as well as the luckiest at finding game? I shall fare well."

"That is a matter to which I have given some thought," Isigaitsoq answered, returning the sidelong glance with a dagger-thrust of her own eyes. "If Apilaq is really the best hunter as well as the luckiest at finding game, it is only right that I should exchange my husband Ajako for him, since I am the most beautiful woman here."

"Mangy seal no dog would eat," shrieked Arnanguaq, "you *try* stealing my husband! You just try it!"

"Tut! Tut!" broke in old Maage. "Don't bother about husbands; they aren't worth it. *I* am the one to complain, I who have made magic all my days. Do the men listen to me when I tell the story of the ghost-gull, my ancestor! They do not. 'If I had made the sixth hole in three —' interrupts Apilaq. 'Playing from the rough on the fourth—' begins Ajako. This magic is a wicked magic. No good will come of men playing with red eggs."

BUT Styles knew nothing of this conclave, or of the many others. The Eskimo husbands heard often from their women on the subject of their absorption, of course, but at this time the American introduced a new and absorbing factor into the game that fairly fascinated them—namely handicaps.

He explained that it was not enough for each man to do the best that he could, but that he should do better than he could. To make the competition that leads to inspirational playing, it was necessary that all should be on the same level. Therefore Apilaq, who was the best player, should give Ajako a stroke on every third hole; to Majaq he should concede a stroke a hole; to Osarqaq a stroke a hole, except on the first and ninth where he should concede two strokes. So carried away were the Eskimos by this new idea that in a few days, they were making their own handicaps, and every minute not spent in playing was given over to discussing their respective ratings for the next week.

Not only did these Highlanders of the frozen North give to golf the absorption of the dour Scot, but in addition they treated the game with all the reverence of a religious ceremonial. Indeed so gravely did they play, that Styles came back from umpiring their matches feeling like a small boy who has sat through a long sermon. He tried to shake off this obsession, but it persisted, and gradually the suspicion began to dawn on him that he might have created out of his would-be-cleverness a Polar *Frankenstein*. The day that this suspicion crystallized he summoned his retainers to council.

IT was wicked weather, so cold that a nose uncovered from a parka hood froze instantly, so fiercely blowing that the wind cut like a knife through foxskin coat and shaggy bearskin trousers.

It seemed to the American that the amiable Eskimo smiles were not so amiable as usual as the four men slipped off their outer garments in his wooden house.

"The north wind is very bitter," he began his address, "but tomorrow it may cease."

"And it will leave the fairway to Number Six hole as rough as Sikûssaq ice," Apilaq interrupted grumpily.

"It may cease," repeated Styles, paying no attention, "and we will all go down to the sea to hunt seal, that we may have fresh meat."

"Go down to the sea if the weather is fair?" interrogated Majaq in tones of amazement.

"Yes, why not?" asked the American sharply.

"But it will interfere with the magic," objected Majaq.

"What if it does?" Styles said angrily.

"But that must not be," stated Ajako in a shocked voice. "This magic is a good magic, a magnificent magic. You yourself have so said."

"But I am sure that the women would like some fresh meat, that they will be angry if you do this magic all the time," Styles explained patiently.

"It is a magic that does not concern women," Osarqaq put in promptly. "You yourself have so said."

"I know, I know," Styles agreed testily, "and all I have said is so, but we cannot continually make magic. We must work to live."

"It is not necessary," Apilaq spoke with absolute faith, "if we do this magic with all our hearts,—as we have been doing it, —we need worry over nothing. The magic will take care of us."

"Look here," — the American's voice was sharp with foreboding, — "if you do this magic all the time, how are you going into the North with me when the dogs come from Upervinik?"

Apilaq looked at Ajako; Ajako glanced at Majaq; then they all regarded Osarqaq. He met their gaze, evidently drew confidence from their eyes, for he turned to Styles and spoke:

"We have been intending to tell you for some time, though we thought that you had guessed it. We are not going north with you. In summer it will be much pleasanter to make this magic. We cannot let a long journey interfere with it."

"Then who is going with me?" the would-be-explorer demanded unhappily.

"We have given that matter much thought, also," Ajako took him up at once, "and it seems best to us that the women should go. I am violating no confidence," he added, "when I tell you that you find favor in the eyes of the beautiful Isigaitsoq."

"Nor is Aninaq averse to you," put in Majaq.

"Arnanguaq will do as I bid her," volunteered Apilaq.

"Arsarfaka doesn't care whom she cooks for, so long as she has something to cook," Osarqaq urged tactfully.

"Get outdoors, every last one of you," shouted Styles furiously. "Think I'm an Arctic Mormon? Get outdoors this minute!"

"Yes, that is a good idea," assented Apilaq. "The wind is moderating, and it will be well to roll away the largest pieces of ice that have fallen on Number Six fairway."

RIDICULOUS as the situation was, Styles knew enough of the Eskimo character to realize its seriousness. Once the children of the North had made up their minds to a course of action, they are not to be turned aside. He had created his own handicap, too. How could he object to the Eskimos doing what he himself had so highly recommended? Golf was golf, the whole world over, he admitted to himself; the whole world recognized the fascination of the game. The trouble was that he had raised it to the level of a religious ceremonial.

He thought of appealing to the women. Surely they could not look with favor on something that had so entirely absorbed their men. He even hesitated near the beautiful Isigaitsoq, one morning, when she was chopping up a frozen seal from the meat-pits. She looked up at him with a ravishing smile, so ravishing that Styles, remembering the proposal that the men had made to him, decided at once that it was not such a smile as a married woman should bestow even on her husband's employer, and passed hurriedly on.

He thought of refusing to give out the clubs and balls each morning. On second thought he realized that this would only lead to open rebellion and would have the same result in the end—the Eskimos would refuse to go with him.

At last he concluded that there was absolutely nothing to do but to wait for the dogs to come from Upervinik, and to try to enlist a new expedition from the Eskimos that brought them.

Meanwhile he watched his own men grow healthier and healthier as they pursued the little red golf-balls across the Arctic immensity.

And there the matter rested.

AT last came spring. They knew it first by the roar of the calving glaciers, from which broke off great icebergs to float away on the Polar seas. Then came birds. The sea-kings, from whose skins the Eskimos make soft undershirts, the feathers turned inside, nested in countless thousands on a snowy cliff near by.

It was a time of joy, of shedding of heavy winter garments, of budding from beneath the snow. All day long and far into the sunlit Polar night might be heard the sharp crack of club meeting ball as the happy Eskimos went ceaselessly around and around the nine-hole course.

Then, one clear morning, just as Apilaq and Ajako had finished an extra hole to decide the winner of the first match of the day, there were shouts, barking of dogs, and the teams that Styles had ordered

from Upervinik came noisily into camp. The drivers were wildly excited, turned the dogs over before Styles had a chance to speak to them, and were off after the herd of musk-ox whose trail they had crossed.

IN desperation Styles called a council. He distributed the last of the chewing-gum; then, for a moment, he looked over the four splendidly fit Eskimos who had come in answer to the summons of the beaten meat-tin. At last he spoke:

"We have dogs, we have provisions; we are well and happy, thanks to the magic of the red balls. Say farewell to your wives tonight, for tomorrow we start for the North." He paused, waiting breathlessly to see if his bluff would work.

It didn't.

The four Eskimos glanced at one another and shifted uneasily from foot to foot.

"What's the matter? Did you not agree to go with me?" the American asked.

For a moment the Eskimos were silent. Then Apilaq removed his gum and stuck it carefully behind his ear.

"We are well and happy," he said. "We have dogs and plenty of provisions. It is all due to the magic that you have taught us, and we are very grateful. It is a strong and a good magic. It will take care of us always. Therefore we are not going into the North, as we have told you once before. We shall stay here and make this magic. This afternoon there is a match between Ajako and Majaq to see who shall play Osarqaq for this week's championship. Then we revise the handicaps for next week."

"But,—but what will your wives say if you do not go north, or hunt fur for new garments, or fill the meat-pits for the winter?" demanded Styles, grasping desperately at any argument, at the first argument that came to his mind.

"This is not a magic for women," Apilaq stated comfortably.

STYLES opened his mouth for further speech, then shut it firmly. He realized that he was beaten. With difficulty he restrained his impulse to gather the four smiling Eskimos into his arms and beat their heads together. Turning abruptly, he walked out of the house and away toward the sea.

A voice broke in on his bitter reflections.

"It is my wish to talk to you?"

"You have my permission," he assented mechanically, looking up to see old Maage in his path, her broad Eskimo face stamped with unhappiness.

"You are a maker of magic who has come among us," she began hurriedly. "Formerly it was I alone who made magic, and then both men and women were happy. Now the men will no longer listen to my tales, and the women quarrel continually. The men are happy; the women are not. Therefore is not my magic better than yours?"

"It certainly is," Styles mentally assured himself, then spoke aloud: "There is nothing to prevent you from making magic as you used to do. Indeed, I am sure your magic will bring good to all."

"But they will not listen to my magic tales; no one will listen," Maage said bitterly.

"I will listen," Styles assured her, touched by her unhappiness.

"Will you listen to the tale of the ghost-gull, my ancestor?" Maage demanded eagerly.

"I shall be delighted," the American answered politely. "Just step into my house."

"It would be hardly fitting—my husband is far away," the old lady objected rather coyly.

"I'll leave the door open. The weather is quite warm," Styles suggested, and Maage stepped in through the door which he courteously held open.

AS the Eskimo woman droned on and on, the young Arctic explorer turned his thoughts inward. He was hardly conscious of old Maage's voice as he racked his brain with his problem. It was no use; there was no solution. If the Eskimos wouldn't move, he couldn't make them. There was no law anywhere to prevent a man from playing golf continuously if he wanted to.

A sentence broke in on his consciousness:

"The ghost-gull shrieked at him not to touch them, and as soon as his fingers were around a red egg, it burst with even a louder sound than the one before, and out came a snake that went down the nose of the house and wrapped itself tight about the woman's waist. And the snake was hunger."

"What's that?" Styles interrupted. "The red egg burst?"

"Of course it did," Maage answered indignantly. "It burst as did the first red egg from which came out smallpox, and as will the last red egg from which is coming out the green wasp that kills the dogs with madness."

"But—but do the men believe this?" the American asked.

"They used to before you brought to them magic red eggs that do not burst," Maage stated indignantly, and she added angrily: "Those who interrupt when I am talking will have children born with noses as long as the narwhale's horn. I will continue."

"I am sure they will. Do continue," Styles urged apologetically, and settled himself down to listen.

"I know many other magic tales," the old lady finally concluded triumphantly, "but that is the best."

"It is a corking magic tale!" her auditor agreed enthusiastically. "Do you mind if I ask you a few questions, though? No! Well, you say when one of these red balls—I mean eggs—bursts it instantly brings misfortune?"

"It bursts only at the touch of a man; women may handle it," Maage answered jealously.

"I see," Styles said thoughtfully. "It is a wonderful magic. I shall most certainly make use of it." And he ushered his pleased guest out the open door which he shut behind her.

Returning to a table, he got out the box of red golf-balls, badly battered and nicked now, and selected the best of the lot.

"Where the devil is that saw?" he said aloud, looking around the room.

He found it and placed it on the table by the golf-ball. Then he took a cartridge, pried out the bullet, and carefully removed powder and cap.

APILAQ accepted the ball that Styles handed him, drew a driver out of the golf-bag and stepped up to the first tee. All the other Eskimos were waiting for him, even the women.

He placed the scarlet speck on a little mound of snow, took his stance.

"I warn you it is not well for men to touch red eggs," spoke up old Maage suddenly.

Apilaq lowered his club.

"This is magic concerning which women know nothing," he answered shortly, "You will keep silent while I drive." He turned to address the ball.

"I am sure that I could do that magic," announced the beautiful Isigaitsoq with conviction. "Do let me try it?"

Again Apilaq lowered his driver.

"Can you not keep discipline in your own family, Ajako?" he asked bitterly. "This chatter disturbs me."

"Be still, woman!" said Ajako sternly.

"I warn you that it may burst and evil come therefrom," said old Maage, but she had lowered her voice.

Three times the Eskimo swung his driver slowly over the ball, glanced down the fairway, settled himself more firmly in his tracks. Up came the driver slowly in perfect Prestwick form. Down it swept in a beautiful arc, and—

Bang!

Apilaq found himself sitting on the snow with only half a golf-club; Ajako was holding his hand to a rapidly closing eye that a piece of red golf-ball had found; the other Eskimos were staring open-mouthed at the place where the red golf-ball had been.

"The red egg has burst!" shrieked Maage, and turned to flee. Without a moment's hesitation the others followed her.

IT was three weeks after Styles and the four Eskimos had started up the coast that Maage gave a housewarming to the four wives who had been left behind.

It proved to be a notable event. To begin with there was real coffee with sugar in it. This was a gift from Rodney Styles. The other women had thoroughly discussed his reason for giving it to her and agreed, with regret, that no breath of scandal could be attached to one so aged as Maage. Then there were little seakings done to a turn and with just the proper gamy flavor that comes from hanging them up for ten days in a warm igloo; delicious seal meat, cooked rare so that the blood followed the knife; and cigarettes—also a gift from Styles—to top off with.

Maage rose to her feet.

"Good magic always prevails in the end," she began, "and good magic is made only by women. As a proof of this I will now tell you the story of the ghost-gull, my ancestor. Then we will go and do the magic of the red eggs with the clubs—as we now do it each day."

Lucky Elkins, Drifter

The lure of strange tropic trails led Elkins always to new lands. You will find it well worth while to accompany him through the exciting events of this new series by a very able writer.

By ROBERT S. LEMMON

ALL up and down the West Coast they called him Lucky.

From sun-baked, shower-drenched Panama to Valparaiso glittering in its setting of snowy peaks, men knew him as the coolest, the happiest, the most determined of all that company of footloose wanderers whose lives at times hung balanced on the tremor of a hand or the vibration of a nerve. Even the peons, meeting him on the hummocky mountain trails or in the squalor of the native villages, would shuffle dully aside with a muttered *"Bueno' dia', Señor Luckee!"* They looked at the ground as they said it, but when he had passed, they would turn and gaze after him almost with admiration.

He had other names, of course. On the pay-roll of the Rosario Compania de Guanos, where insistence was laid on accuracy in such matters, he had been set down as "John Elkins, *Americano*." Thus, also, was he recorded in the consular books at his numerous ports of entry. But on the formal pedigree-blanks which the Government required all travelers in the interior to fill out, he was apt to scrawl in the space reserved for name such aliases as "None of Your Damn Business," or "Go to Hell"—thus expressing his own whimsical sense of humor as well as his contempt for the linguistic attainments of the inspector who would collect the documents, examine them with laborious dignity, and finally affix the mark of his official approval with a stubby and far from immaculate pencil.

None remembered exactly when Lucky's tall, angular frame, gray eyes and drawling Alabama speech became features of the West Coast life. Vague rumors there were that his first appearance has been via a charred spar which drifted ashore at Bahia a dozen years back, last vestige of some unknown vessel burned at sea. Lucky himself neither affirmed nor denied these tales, seemingly content that his past should remain a blank, an unanswered question out in that great space where the languid lift of the Pacific met the sky.

IT was at the building of the Quito-Cayambe railway that he won his nickname and showed to the full the metal of

determination that was in him, for he proved to be the best construction boss on that whole discouraging undertaking.

Through those months of wearing, mud-caked toil while the railhead crawled toward the crest of the Cordillera, he had been in the forefront of the struggle. Did a slide break and pour in a torrent of yellow ooze and gravel across a cut, undoing in five minutes the work of weeks, it was Lucky Elkins and his gang of hard-bitten Jamaican negroes and halfbreeds who quelled it, slaving day and night with picks and shovels, timbers and cribwork, to check the flow.

And if there was an awkward mountain to scale or a threatening boulder to blast without bringing down half the Andes in its wake, Lucky and his men accomplished the task. Through the steaming weeks of the rainy season, in the dust and sun of the dry months, whether by day, or under the glare of the searchlights and torches of the night-shift, first and last he was the boss, the leader who ordered nothing that he would not himself undertake, who drove his men to the limit of endurance and kept them cheerful by his own good spirits and resourcefulness.

OTHER gangs lost courage, cracked under the strain of obstacles, of seeing men crushed by caving tunnels, swept into rivers when the banks slithered down into a mile of grinding rapids, snuffed out in a day by fever. But there at the railhead none of these things interfered. The spirit of winning out, and the deity of good fortune, seemed to watch over that gang, for Lucky Elkins was the boss, and he was proving the fitness of his name.

There came a day when the final spike was driven and President Lopez and his staff, scarcely less ornately caparisoned than the special car in which they lounged, made a tour of the road and formally accepted it in the name of their republic. From the doorway of the little *cantina* in Yalancay, Lucky had watched them pass, a sardonic grin on his face.

"Hello, old sports!" he had yelled, knowing their ignorance of English. "How's the joy-ridin'? Like the road we built for you-all?"

And with the fading of the train among the *quebradas* and hills to the eastward, he had kicked the worst of the clay from his boots, sought out another American as restless and devil-may-care as himself, and set forth on a six-months' search for that ever-alluring pot at the foot of the rainbow, the lost gold of the Incas.

WITH much clanking and banging of her antiquated capstans the *Manta* dropped anchor in midstream, a mile below the town. At that distance it appeared a fair-enough city, white-walled in the midst of green flats and clumps of jungle. Behind it, pearl gray in the early morning mist, the foothills of the Andes showed dimly. Everywhere were the singing and twittering of birds, a sweet chorus scarred with the screams of parrots and macaws among the mangroves on the farther bank. The air was warm and damp with the peculiar oppressiveness of the equatorial lowlands.

The Director leaned on the rail and scanned the waterfront of the town through his binoculars. Presently he spoke to the younger man beside him:

"There's Stendel's boat now, I guess, Richards. I wonder if he's located the man we want? Anyhow, I want to get off this confounded ship and start field-work, even if the town is so full of plague and yellow fever that they wont let us anchor within a mile of it!"

He handed the glasses to his companion, who focused them on a rowboat that had left the shore and was pulling steadily toward the ship. Behind it straggled a nondescript flotilla of scows and outriggered dugouts urged on by the paddles and clumsy sweeps of half-naked watermen.

"Yes, that's Stendel in the stern!" exclaimed the Director. "No mistaking those windmill arms of his—see, he's waving to us!" He snatched off his hat and signaled a reply. The fleet of small-craft drew alongside; questions and answers in half a dozen languages flew back and forth; and almost before young Richards realized it, their baggage had been transferred, and with Stendel swearing in mongrel Spanish at his crew, they were making their slow and deeply laden way toward the town.

Perched aft on a duffle-bag, the Director's stocky, erect figure radiated satisfaction as he listened to Stendel's report, given in short, matter-of-fact sentences.

The field-work, it seemed, had been going well. Six cases of specimens, chiefly birds and small mammal skins from the eastern Cordillera, had been shipped north to the Museum the week before. Yes, there were many valuable ones in the

lot. No, he had had no sickness, nor trouble of any sort, barring a little disagreement with some of the head-hunters in the *Oriente*. Everything was ready for them to start southward through the mountains for their collecting ground in the Colta region.

"And have you," asked the Director during a pause, "obtained any definite word of the *quinde d'oro*?"

"Yes and no," Stendel replied. "There is such a bird—I've seen a scrap of its plumage in an Indian feather cloak. Bright gold, it was, with the depth and luster of solid metal, and of queer hairlike character. When I asked the owner of the mantle where the *oro* came from, he just grunted: *'Sangalagua—muy lejos!'* You know what that means; Sangalagua's never been explored—even Humboldt failed to reach it. A thousand miles of jungle, fever, waterfalls and rapids—"

The Director nodded. "Yes; perhaps no one ever will succeed in getting into that region and bringing back specimens of the golden humming-bird. But tell me what you know of Elkins, the man you wired me you might be able to locate. He may have a direct bearing on the matter."

STENDEL leaned forward and launched another fluent volley of Spanish and American expletives at his men. They were nearing the wharf, and the swifter eddies of the river made rowing increasingly difficult. Then he straightened up and looked at his chief.

"He's around the town now," he said. "Tramped in last week, dead broke but happy as a bear in a berry-patch, from some wild-goose chase after a new rubber district up the Amazon. Reached the place all right, I understand, though there wasn't any rubber there to speak of; the Lord knows how he ever got back. But that's the way with him—I mean, he seems to put through anything he tackles—combination of luck and nerve. He's an original sort of duck—Alabama man, over forty, been knocking around the West Coast for years, takes any job that pays money, finishes it, but never will settle down for more than six months at a time—you know the type. How did you come to hear about him? He's never done anything for the Museum, has he?"

"No, but his uncle has—Judson Wellman, you know, our biggest benefactor, and the man who is financially back of all our work here in South America. Wellman is pretty well along and entirely without relatives except Elkins, whom he hasn't seen or heard of in years. It seems that the old man has extensive property and business interests in Georgia and Alabama and wants his nephew to take them over at his death. He made an offer to me that may be of great benefit to everybody concerned if we can locate Elkins; so I wrote to you on the bare chance of your coming across him down here under the Line. It's odd that a shot in the dark like that should hit the mark so squarely."

"Sure is," Stendel agreed laconically. "Maybe it's just another example of Elkins' proverbial luck. He's a mighty likable fellow, from the little I've seen of him, but an incurable drifter. I can't imagine him settling down to big business life back in the States. But anyhow, I arranged with him to come to the hotel this evening, so —*Cuidado, cuidado!*" he broke off sharply to the boat's crew. *"Derecho pronto,* you roughnecks!" The boat bumped along the wharf amid a shower of chattering yells from the natives. One of the men sprang out and made her fast. A swarthy customs official with bare feet and cotton trousers flapping about his ankles came running to meet them.

"Welcome, *amigos mios,*" grinned Stendel, turning to his companions, "to our city!"

AT eight o'clock that evening the Director, his sturdy figure in marked contrast to Richards' slender, boyish build and the loose-jointed power that characterized Stendel's tall form, strode into the *patio* of the hotel and led the way to a table in the far corner.

"He'll be along soon," said Stendel as they sat down. "I told him to meet us here."

Early though it was, the cool, marble-floored court was rapidly filling up with its evening habitués. Prosperous Spanish merchants and traders, a few foreign steamship agents, here and there a malarial-looking consular official caught in the slow drift of the tropic life, were gathering for their nightly cigarettes, wine and after-supper gossip. Waiters shuffled about carrying trays cluttered with bottles and glasses. A many-toned chatter came from groups at the little round tables. Here and there a word or a phrase filled an instant's hush—*"señorita"—"mañana por la*

mañana"—"*caramba!*"—island-like in an ocean of strange sounds. The day's heat was gone, forgotten, buried with the sinking of the sun into the Pacific. The world jogged easily toward tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that.

"Is that your man?" The Director was the first to catch sight of a tall, lounging figure that paused under the arch at the court entrance, half hidden in the shadows.

"Correct," answered Stendel, glancing up.

In a moment Elkins saw them and came forward. The Director watched him appraisingly as he approached.

"Director Ellison, this is Elkins," introduced Stendel, informally. "And Lucky, shake hands with Richards, here, one of our bird-collectors."

Elkins' rough, sinewy hand gripped those of the three men in turn, and the ghost of a friendly smile hovered at the corners of his mouth.

"I'm right glad to see three *Americanos* all together in one place," he said whimsically, twitching a chair up to the table.

Without parley the Director plunged into the business on hand.

"I am the Director of the National Museum, Mr. Elkins, and I sent word to Stendel to arrange this meeting so that I could make a proposal to you that may prove to be a pretty important one. It's from your uncle, Judson Wellman."

ELKINS' careless figure straightened like an unloosed spring, and for a moment his eyes bored unwaveringly into the older man's.

"Uncle Jud!" he muttered half to himself. "After all these years—" Then, with a quick recovery of poise:

"You-all will have to excuse me, sir. That name took me back, like, a right smart while—clean back to a big white-pillared house on a hill, and a hundred acres o' cotton gleamin' in the sunlight—"

"They're still there," the Director nodded. "House and all! I spent a day with Mr. Wellman only six months ago, when he told me of this plan of his. Let me tell you what it is.

"Your uncle, as you know, is one of the richest men in the South, and for years he has been turning over large sums to the Museum for carrying on its scientific work. Putting up money for our various expeditions is a sort of hobby of his.

"The last time I visited him, I happened to mention a gold-colored humming-bird here in South America of which I had heard rumors, a species that has been reported indirectly for years but whose actual existence has never been proved by any scientific institution or private collector in the world. He sparked on the idea and offered to finance an expedition into the interior to search for the bird, on one condition—that you should be the man to make the trip."

"*Me?*" Elkins' voice showed his surprise. "What the—"

"It's this way," the Director continued: "Mr. Wellman wants to retire from active business in a year or two, and it seems he has always intended to turn his affairs over to you when the time came—you're his nearest of kin, I understand.

"When you left the States, he felt that sooner or later you'd come back, but that was so long ago that now—well, he feels that he'd like to test your determination to see a thing through before putting you in charge of his affairs. He knows that a successful expedition after the golden humming-bird, the *quinde d'oro,* would be the stiffest kind of a test of a man's grit, and so he asked me to try and locate you and make the proposal. If you accept it and win, you come into very valuable business holdings, and your future is assured. Your uncle will be satisfied, of course—first, to get you back home, and second, because he will have done something real for the Museum and science by locating the *quinde d'oro.* How does it strike you?"

FOR a minute Elkins did not answer. He had followed the other's words with an absorption from which he reacted slowly. At last he said thoughtfully:

"I don't rightly know what to say, sir. It's certainly mighty white of the old gentleman to offer me that—he always was kind of fond of me, I reckon. But I don't know as I ever could settle down now. I —let me give my side o' the case.

"I left home about twenty years ago—just a young lad, with money, prospects, everythin'—'bout as old as Mr. Richards, here. Wasn't anythin' wrong, you understand—only I sort of made up my mind after a couple of years at it, that stickin' to the cotton business all your life would be a good deal like workin' in the chain-gang. I wanted to see the world, to spend my days kickin' round from one country to another, from one job to the next, doin'

pretty much as I durn pleased. Wasn't any sudden idea—I thought it all out right careful, and when I finally decided, the folks never tried to argue me out of it. Reckon mebbe they knew that when I made up my mind, 'twouldn't be much use.

"Well, I've done it. Been twice around the world, seen Ceylon, New Guinea, Sumatra, Borneo, Australia, and the Lord knows where else. Seems like I've seen 'em all, and got tired of 'em, and moved on. And it's been fun—startin' when I was just a kid and havin' no strings on me all these years."

He paused and raised his eyes to the faces of his companions—the Director's, intent and appraising; Stendel's, noncommittal, almost indifferent; Richards', alight with the clear fire of admiration and sympathy.

"Yes, it's been fun, takin' my luck as it came, calm and storm, owin' nobody anythin'. And the things I've seen, cut sharp into my mind—ships slippin' out of port, then hull down, smoke-lines on the horizon. A sea-beach and wind in the palms. Docks piled with bags o' spices stacked in the sun. *Fiesta* day in an Indian village, scarlet ponchos against dark faces. This *patio* here tonight, and a hundred others like it. It gets into your blood, a life like that—the freedom and the chances of it.

"No, I don't know as I'd ever give it up, sir."

"I don't want to persuade you into this thing against your will, Elkins," said the Director, after a pause, "but let me ask you a question: You were about Richards' age when you started out—everything before you. You're forty now, and you've done what you planned—seen all the corners of the world, and tired of them, and moved on. Twice around the world, you say. Is there any particular point in making it three times?"

ELKINS, slowly turning the wineglass on the table before him, had lapsed into a brown study. The three men, watching him in silence, saw the lines about his mouth deepen. Presently he spoke, as though unconscious of their presence.

"Yes, I reckon I must be forty—past it, likely, and all the time I've been thinkin' of myself as still a kid, like this young Richards. Seein' him somehow makes me feel different, sets me wonderin'. I never wanted to be a failure, like; and yet, what do I amount to? Over forty, and no job; twice around the world, and no particular reason to make it three times; foot-loose, and mebbe my feet gettin' tired in a few more years.

"Now, here's a chance to shake all that, comin' out of a clear sky like I've always wanted my chances to come. Back to the States, a solid income from as good a business as there is in the South, as soon as I pick up the reins again and get a good grip on 'em—mebbe marryin' and havin' a real home. . . . . One last big jump after this hummin'-bird, one more long chance, and then—"

He set the glass down with a quick gesture of finality and leaned forward, elbows on the table.

"All right, Director. When do I start?"

A WEEK later they stood among the mountains at the split of the trails. Southward, through the scrub skirting the upper limit of the tropical forest, lay the way which the Director, Stendel and Richards would take to their own collecting-ground a hundred miles away. To the east, over the piled ranges of the Cordillera, straggled the trail toward Sangalagua and the legendary golden humming-bird.

The Indian *arrieros*, squat, barefooted, stolid, were making the final adjustments to the pack-saddles of the mules and burros. The animals stood motionless, blindfolded with woolen ponchos until the cinching should be finished. The Indians conversed gutturally among themselves, grunting as they heaved at the ropes and buckles. Elkins walked about, eying the work. Presently he came over to where the other white men stood.

"All ready," he announced.

The Director held out his hand. "Good-by, Elkins—and good luck! Remember what we've shown you about preparing your specimens and getting full data on the *quinde d'oro*. Go get 'em, now—we'll look for you to meet us at the port in six months. *Adios*!"

"You bet!" laughed Lucky. "It's *quinde d'oro* or bust! Don't you-all kill all the critters down Colta way—leave some for seed. *Adios*!"

They swung into their saddles. With lisping whistles and cries of *"Burra, burra —bu-u-r-r-r-a!"* the Indians got the pack-animals into motion.

"Hoosh—hoosh!" yelled Elkins encouragingly, hustling his train up the first sharp hill. At its top he turned and looked back.

The others were already across the little valley. Richards, bringing up their rear, waved a final farewell.

"Good kid, that," muttered Lucky, answering the salute. "A mighty good kid! Got everythin' before him, same as I had. Reckon I've a good many kicks left in me still; and yet—mebbe I'd better quit this knockin' round loose. Well—"

He swung his little gray-faced mule into the trail again and settled into the easy slouch of those who travel far.

"YA NO MAS!"

For all his Southern drawl, Elkins spoke the three Spanish words like a native. His mule sensed their meaning and stopped in her tracks. Behind, the pack-train halted apathetically. The two Indians tightened a strap here, a knot there, then stood stolidly by. Elkins eased himself in the saddle, his weight in one stirrup, and looked about.

They were on the crest of the range. To the west, immeasurably far below, lay the plain they had left twelve hours before. Like a great dun carpet it looked, finely traced from left to right with an irregular thread in which were tied dark knots. The thread, Elkins knew, was a river fifty yards wide; the knots were groves of eucalyptus trees a hundred feet high. A larger spot, reddish brown and touched with specks of white, was a village. Beyond it, sixty miles in an air line, the western Cordillera, where like serfs crouching about their lord, the ranges crept up, up toward Chimborazo's snowy dome, calm, majestic, white.

From where the pack-train stood, far above timber-line, a sea of yellow paramo grass rolled up on either hand in great billows. The eye was caught in their swing, carried higher and higher to where they merged into the white of snowfields. Clouds eddied and swirled about the peaks beyond. Through the curling mists, rock-shoulders and escarpments showed blackly, then were blotted out. To the east, thousands of feet below, an illimitable sweep of forest, the wilderness of the Amazon.

Elkins considered briefly. It was sunset. Soon even the short tropic twilight would be gone. No man in his senses travels those mountain trails after dark. They must find a camping-place near by. He settled in the saddle again and touched his mule's ribs with his heels.

In the lee of a cliff they unslung the packs, cooked and ate by a fire built of the gnarly brush that clung about the head of a ravine. With the darkness came the biting chill of three miles above the sea. Elkins, rolled in his blankets, scarcely noticed it, but he wondered sleepily how the Indians could stand such cold, with only ponchos wrapped about their heads and bodies, and their bare feet sticking out under the stars.

BEFORE dawn he was astir, routing out the packers and sending them after the picketed animals while he rekindled the fire. By sunrise they were off, slipping, skidding down through the slimy ooze of the trail toward the cloud-ocean that blotted out the world.

All day they descended steadily. Swift progress was perilous, often impossible. A maze of ravines and mountains, unnoticed from the main crest, shunted them back and forth. Cliffs jutted into the track, shouldering it to the verge of thousand-foot drops. Sometimes as Elkins rode his stirrup overhung the edge, and he looked down to a rushing stream so far below that the white of its cascades seemed motionless, as in a painting.

Slowly the forest rose to meet them. Birds became more plentiful and of more vivid, fantastic colors. The air lost its snap, took on a humid, half fragrant quality. The clear skies of the upper ranges gave way to dragging clouds that thickened in places and sweated a fine, misty rain. And still the trail zigzagged down, always down toward the roof of the jungle.

In the late afternoon they reached a native village sprawled beside a stream. On inquiry Elkins knew it as the point beyond which pack-animals could not go; in the swamps and sink-holes which lay beyond, their small hoofs would find no bottom. He must hire porters for the rest of the journey, to carry the equipment on their backs and in canoes.

He had the packs deposited in the shelter of a thatched lean-to, and paid off his men. Indifferently, with only a muttered *"'dios, señor,"* in acknowledgment of his cheerful "So-long, boys," they took the back-track, driving the burros before them. The little gray-faced mule lingered behind, unwilling to end the gentle rubbing of Elkins' hand on her muzzle.

"Better beat it, old single-footer," he said, "or you'll get left."

He led the animal into the trail and with a slap on the flank sent her after the others.

Whistling softly to himself, he watched them out of sight. They were his last definite link with civilization.

ELKINS slept that night beside his baggage, and in the morning set about securing the necessary porters.

The head man of the village, a heavy-faced, squalid Indian in grass sandals and half of a pair of linen trousers, gave him no satisfaction. There were no porters in the country, the man said; if there were, they would not go. Sangalagua was too far away, and evil spirits lived there. To all of this Lucky listened patiently; having seen at least a dozen able-bodied Indians of the male persuasion loitering about, quite calmly delivered three kicks in the most prominent portion of his informant's anatomy, the while admonishing him in the native tongue to round up five good men mighty sudden or lose what remained of the precious trousers. Therefore in ten minutes the porters appeared, mutually satisfactory terms were arranged, and at noon the packs were reassembled, swung to bare brown backs, and the little party splashed through the stream and vanished into the jungle.

Followed days of blundering travel along dim trails feet deep in mud and so choked with creepers, lianas and jungle débris that the men were constantly swinging their *machetes* to slash them clear. Day and night the rains fell, a steady drizzle punctuated with sharp showers. The hot dampness mildewed the tent so that it leaked, and Elkins gave up trying to sleep dry. He lived on quinine and sealed rations that required little cooking. Then, abruptly, they came to the River.

Coffee-colored and cluttered with floating trees and rafts of water-hyacinths, it snaked its mile-wide way between oozy banks where crabs and lizards scuttled feverishly across the mud. At an Indian village Elkins bartered an ounce of salt for two canoes, hired paddlers and pushed on upstream.

HE welcomed the change from foot to water travel. Amidships of the larger canoe he rigged a hood of thatched palm-fronds to shed the rain and the occasional scalding sunlight which steamed down through the murk, and placed most of the equipment under it, reserving only room for himself.

From the shelter he could see the coppery backs and shoulders of his two bow paddlers swinging rhythmically, hour after hour. Sometimes the crew sang weird, minor chants of haunting syncopation in time with their strokes. To right and left the forest crept slowly past, forbidding, unchanging save as they saw it in greater detail on some projecting point of shore, or more dimly in the receding curve of a bayou.

As dusk approached, Elkins sought a place to land for the night. Where a higher bit of shore promised comparative dryness, he motioned with his hand, and the canoes swung in toward the vine-hung trees.

There, when they had cleared a space for their hammocks, they ate around a carefully guarded fire, and turned in. With the darkness came the myriad sounds of the tropic night—the batting and scrambling of giant beetles among the leaves, the cries of birds, the soft padding of four-footed prowlers, weird moanings like distant cattle, the sudden rush and scream which told of yet another of the jungle's tragedies.

DRAGGING days lengthened into discouraging weeks. Four of his men deserted one night, taking the large canoe and half the supplies and getting clear away. Progress became painfully slow, for the river was in flood and flowing strongly. There was little for Elkins to do in the cramped quarters of the small remaining dugout except write up his daily notes and take a hand at one of the paddles now and then for the sake of the exercise, and he found himself lapsing frequently into musings. Two main themes his thoughts always followed: old Judson Wellman's offer, and the *quinde d'oro.*

In a way they were inseparable, for each automatically suggested the other. His interest in the birds was very real by this time, for the uncertainty and adventure of the whole undertaking held a peculiar fascination for him. Restraint, certainty of any sort, had always galled him. Yet the old ties and associations recalled that night in the *patio* far down on the coast had surged up with greater strength than he realized.

Unwilling as he was to settle down among races for whom he had little love and no respect, too careless to thrust old habits aside and return to the States of his own volition, the aimlessness of his life

had come home to him now the more forcibly for having been so long ignored. In those few minutes after Director Ellison's proposal in the hotel, he had realized sharply that he had been relying chiefly on chance for years, on the luck which so far had never failed him. Indeed, only luck had brought him thus far on his search for those specimens of the golden humming-bird which would mean so much to him if he could get them.

The specimens—yes, he'd get them, come what might. That was his job. Besides, they were the key to settling down. A lucrative business, the States, a home—well, he was through with kicking around. Some day he would trust his luck too far; even he couldn't expect it to last forever. Just let him deliver the skins of these *quinde d'oros,* take the steamer north—how friendly and almost human steamers were, carrying a man on, always on to other lands and peoples, to new scenes, footloose. The beat of their engines, the long, lazy days under the deck-awnings, and ever the far horizon, mysterious, beckoning.

A FORTNIGHT of steady paddling passed, while imperceptibly the river narrowed and grew swifter between steepening banks. Rocks began to appear above the surface, and often the canoe could scarcely make headway against the current.

Then one of the Indians died from some malignant fever, in spite of heroic efforts to save him. The one remaining man, a powerful, silent fellow who followed Elkins' every move with the worshiping eyes of a dog watching his master, discarded his paddle for a pole, and together they fought on foot by foot close to the bank. A few days more, and even this became impossible. But one course remained: to rig bow and stern lines on the canoe and drag it by sheer power of bone and muscle. Travel through the jungle was impossible now, for there were no trails, and the forest growth was impenetrably dense.

Somewhere in the untold miles ahead, miles marked with death in a hundred forms, lay the fabled mountain of Sangalaqua and, perhaps, its golden hummingbirds. The wilderness spread its protecting net about them, held up its forbidding hand. A new gleam came into Elkins' eyes, welcoming the challenge. Two men, leader and led, an oddly assorted pair drawn together by the elemental need of human companionship and support, facing a common enemy. Doubts or no doubts, they would see it through.

A GRAY, vaporous half-light filled the forest, where the land swung upward from a ravine beyond the stream-wraiths of mist twined among the trunks. The green of the upper branches, touched with the scarlet points of air-plants, was cool and fresh. The night's moisture spatted down irregularly on the leaves below.

For the most part the jungle was silent. Somewhere away in the gloom a quadrille-bird sang at intervals, seven silvery bars marvelously cadenced. Over the treetops from the east a flock of parrots swept with a torrent of discordant cries, bound arrow-like for their feeding grounds. Then again all was still.

At the edge of an opening in the forest Lucky Elkins crouched and watched the coming day. He was a far different looking man from the one who had waved goodby to Director Ellison and the others at the butt of the mountain trail four months before. Six hundred miles of struggling through the perils and hardships of a hostile jungle, losing men, equipment, all but a few bare necessities and his abounding determination and faith in himself, do strange things to a man—put new lines in his face, scars on his hands, add a curious sunburnt sallowness to his skin and a greater steadiness to his eyes. That is, they do these things if he is a real man; if he is otherwise, he will not be pleasant to look upon.

From the pocket of his tattered shirt Elkins drew pipe, tobacco and a waterproof box of matches, treasures beyond price. Presently a faint cloud of bluish smoke encircled his head. With no motion of his arm he flicked the butt of the match into the dank leaves at his feet.

A few yards away, in the center of the clearing, stood a tree clouded with purplish flowers. Against the background of taller growths their pastel shades were like those in a Japanese print. Motionless as a stump in the forest, Elkins watched them, his little collector's gun across his knees.

The light strengthened. Honey creepers and other small birds flitted about in search of breakfast. A jeweled lizard crept up the trunk of the tree and out among its branches. Full daylight had come.

Suddenly Elkins' ear caught a faint, deep humming, like a distant, giant bumblebee.

His hands tightened on the gun, slowly raising it to his shoulder.

The droning grew louder. Presently he could tell its direction definitely, in spite of the curiously elusive quality of the sound; it came from the far side of the tree. Then as he watched there floated from behind the thickest of the flower-masses a tiny form, a fairy creature yellow as fine gold, poised on hazy wings against the purple blossoms. Infinitely graceful, ethereally dainty and unreal, it drifted from flower to flower, touching each with the tip of its needle-like bill, its tail tilting, spreading, closing like the smallest of elfin fans. On a bare twig it paused, a brilliant, sunny mite in a mist-green solitude, preening and ruffling.

Before Elkins' vision flashed a picture of a stately, tree-shadowed house looking out across miles of snowy cotton, a picture of certainty and great peace. For an instant it filled the space about his gun-sights, shutting out all else—the tangle of jungle, the jagged peak of Sangalagua towering above, the midget form of the *quinde d'oro*. Then it faded, merged into another, of a steamer slipping out to sea through the mist of a tropic dawn, silently vanishing toward some unseen, mysterious land far beyond the horizon's rim.

The picture passed; the mist cleared away. Elkins smiled, as a man does when doubt at last leaves him. His gun steadied; his finger tightened on the trigger. Across the stillness cut the crack of powder.

IN the interests of science men do strange things. The archeologist endures weeks of suffering in arid lands for the sake of a few bits of age-old bone; the explorer lives with death that he may add a little mark to a map; in the code of the museum collector one line stands supreme: *get what you go after, regardless of the cost.*

It was in much this spirit of bulldog persistence and concentration that Lucky Elkins had come to the end of his search for the golden humming-bird; but now, with the uncertainty of the hunt ended, a curious reaction set in. A crushing weight seemed lifted from his mind. The sense of endless, striving effort vanished before a great elation which he could not exactly define, and as he waited in the shadow beside the clearing for shots at other *d'oros* as they came at intervals to feed on the tree's blossoms, his thoughts turned eagerly to plans for the return journey.

Two days, he figured, would suffice to finish collecting a series of the birds, preserve their skins, make the necessary observations and notes on the region, and break camp. On the third day he and his Indian would load the canoe and start back. The distance that had needed four months to cover against the rush of the water ought to be done in three weeks, with the current to help them. He would pack the specimens in a small watertight tin which could be fastened to his belt. Thus if anything should go wrong the chances of losing them would be lessened.

The time came when the two men, boon companions now, loaded their crazy dugout and pushed into the stream. Like a brown leaf in a gale the boat was caught up by the current and whirled away. Thrilled into something like his own self, Elkins grinned cheerfully at the Indian.

"We're off, old-timer!" he exclaimed. "And we know just what we're goin' to do, soon's we get down to the coast!"

FORTUNE favored them, and in the first week they covered a good two hundred miles. Had it not been for laborious detours to avoid impossible rapids, they would have done even better. By the middle of the second week the river had widened to half a mile, and with its greater depth came an increasing danger—rough water. At times they were hard put to it to keep from swamping the dugout, but progress along the marshy banks was out of the question here in these lower altitudes, and so they redoubled their care and kept on.

That night it rained, a tropical downpour that sluiced the sky. The river rose by feet. While the flood lasted, the risk of boat-travel would be far greater, but Elkins and his canoeman had passed safely through so much that they were reckless now, and urged by the fever of return which every wilderness traveler knows, they started ahead in the early dawn.

A mile downstream the river bent sharply to the west. Forests hid what lay beyond the turn. The canoe shot forward close to the inner bank but in the full grip of the flood. They neared the point at the bend, swirled around it. The view downstream opened out.

"*My God!*"

Even as the cry broke from him, Elkins realized the full danger of the swollen, raging rapid ahead, and strove frantically to swing the dugout inshore. Like madmen

he and the Indian lashed their strokes through, the stout shafts of the paddles bending under the strain. A brown, curling wave licked in over the bow. Another, and the boat settled. The Indian, crouching in the bow, half turned, his glistening arm flashing through a signal to follow, then leaped overboard and struck out for the shore, desperately far away. Elkins plunged after, but his clothes hampered his swimming. The tumult of the water dazed him, filled the world. His body crunched against a rock and hung for a moment before the current swept it clear. Something rasped across his face—a vine trailing from an overhanging branch. He clutched at it weakly, but it broke midway and fell, coiling about him. He felt himself going down, down into a vortex of spinning darkness.

"AND he said nothing about Elkins, the white man?"

The Director's voice was grave as he shaded his eyes from the lamplight and put the question to the Spaniard standing before him. Through the night came the slow chiming of the bells in the port cathedral, bells which had chimed there since the days of Cortez.

"No, señor," answered the man. "Just he give these little paper to my peon, and then he go. A full-blood Indian, my peon say when he give me the paper—a beeg, beeg *Chacha* from the *Oriente* beyond the mountains. I see the word of your *museo* on the paper and think they for you, so I bring it here."

The Director turned again to the packet of specimen-labels which the Spaniard had handed to him. They were soiled and water-stained, but the printing on them was still legible—the name of the Museum, the words "Name," "Locality," "Elevation," "Date," "Sex," "Collector," "Remarks," each with a space after it to be filled in by hand.

Presently the Director glanced at Stendel and Richards, silent beside him.

"Something's happened, boys," he said quietly. "That Indian never would have brought these labels except as a sign that Elkins is gone. There's no chance to trace him, either."

Absently he untied the packet, spread the tags on the table. Richards gasped, reached over and caught one of them up.

"Look, sir, look!" he exclaimed. "It's been filled out!"

Eagerly the three bent over the label, deciphering the pencil marks that showed faintly on its face.

" 'Quinde d'oro,' " Richards read haltingly, his eyes close to the paper. " 'Sangalagua. 6,400, May 6, 19—. Adult male. J. E. Feeding on *ola* tree. *D'oro* apparently found only alt. 6,000-7,000.' "

" 'J. E.'—those were his initials," muttered Stendel. "Had the label all ready to tie to the skin. He found the *d'oro,* all right. 'May 6th'—that's three months ago. Poor devil!"

THE others nodded silently. A draft as from an opened door stirred through the room, drew a curl of smoke from the lamp-flame. It passed, and the flames steadied. The Director glanced up, turned uneasily toward the door.

"Look!"

At his cry the others spun around, Stendel's hand darting to the automatic at his belt. There at the edge of the lamplight, silhouetted against the gloom beyond, stood Lucky Elkins, tattered, barefooted, gaunt almost beyond recognition. The pallor which follows fever stamped him, but the old whimsical smile was there as he came toward them, a little tin box in his hand.

"Three *Americanos* all together in one place!" he drawled. "Lordy, but I'm glad to see you-all! Here's your hummin'-birds. Director, like I said I'd get 'em for you.

"But I don't reckon I'll go back to the States," pursued Elkins a little later. "I figured it all out back there at Sangalagua, kind of in a flash like I'd had a vision that showed me the way.

"You see, ships and the things they take you to have a mighty strong hold on me. They've carried me round the world twice already—and I guess I'll let 'em make it three!"

"The Raiders of El Negro," another picturesque adventure of Lucky Elkins, will be described by Mr. Lemmon in an early issue of *The Blue Book Magazine*. You'll find it well worth watching for.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

Mr. New has special sources of information on international affairs and a great gift for making it into thrilling fiction. "When Intrigue Was in Flower" describes one of the most interesting of all these exceptional stories.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

MOST Washington hostesses, when they expect some one of prominence among their dinner-guests, will hint to the others that they are to meet "So-and-so." Of course one is supposed to accept a dinner-invitation without inquiring as to one's fellow-guests—and politely take the chance of sitting next or opposite to a person he doesn't like. But a little advance information certainly adds to the comfort of the evening or gives one opportunity for the excuse of sudden indisposition or a previous engagement. The case in point happens to be one in which the lady who monopolized the whole evening in her own quiet way had not been heralded to her fellow-guests as anyone out of the usual run. There were, at the table, two Senators, an ambassador, a Congressman, a British statesman and a famous French general—all of them presumably of more importance in the world than the French widow of thirty or thereabouts who spoke such surprisingly good English.

She accounted for this by explaining that her father had been in the diplomatic service for many years and that her girlhood had been spent in many of the world's capitals. Being a cousin of the famous general, (she had introduced herself to him as such, one day in Paris, during the war, and presented credentials which he never thought of questioning), she had written him of her presence in Washington when he first arrived, and as there were no ladies accompanying him, was naturally included in his invitations.

Her manners were exquisite, her voice low and musical. The average American wouldn't have called her beautiful. The average artist raved over her after the first ten minutes. She had been taken in by the Congressman. Before the entrées, she had him straightening his tie, surreptitiously patting down his cowlick and deciding that he was really a devil of a fellow with women. Then she got him explaining to her the American system of politics, and by that time, the man on the other side was neglecting his dinner-partner, and

two men across the table had longings to assist in her political education. (She could have told either of the four more about political intrigue than they'll ever learn in this life.)

"THE feature which it is so difficult for a European to understand, Mr. Twombly, is how either your people or your politicians ever know enough about the individual ideas in your voters' heads to predict with any certainty how an election will probably go—which of several different parties will get into power, or how far they'll go afterward?"

"The people *don't* know, Madame d'Auvergne—but the bosses generally do—at least, enough so to run their campaign in the different States along one set of party lines or another as seems expedient at the time. Then—there are various ways in which advantage may be taken of momentary conditions and a man elected to office when, on the face of it, he hadn't much of a chance. For instance, in one of our States, this year, a Senator and a governor are to be elected. The Democratic power in that State is controlled by the political machine which continuously governs its chief city save when there is fusion of all other parties against it. For that machine, it is far more important to have a governor of its own party, inasmuch as he has a good deal to say about city affairs, than a Senator in Washington whose influence is used in a more general, less vitally direct way. The machine's nominee for Senator is a man who has had no political experience whatever and might make a lot of altruistic blunders through ignorance of practical politics. Ordinarily, the Republican nominee for governor would win on his previous splendid record. But, actually, the Democrats will probably elect their man."

"How can they do that? Go on, m'sieur! You interest me!"

"By trading Senatorial votes for gubernatorial ones. They're quite willing to sacrifice their inexperienced man and let the Republicans elect their Senator if enough of the Republicans and Independents will sacrifice their governor for the Democrat."

"But—isn't that the basest sort of political treachery, m'sieur?

"Well—it's known here as 'double-crossing' a man—but it's practical politics and is done more or less in every election."

"Then—if one wished to know what party will be in power next year, and the sort of foreign policy they would favor, it would be merely a case of securing the proper introductions to the men who manipulate politics, here, under the rose—gain their confidence, give them *parole d'honneur* that the information will not be used improperly, and summarize their opinions as to how the elections will go in each State? Eh?"

"That might work, in a general way—but it would be some undertaking! There's a simpler method of getting at pretty much the same thing. The newspaper men are more nearly on the inside than you'd probably get, madame—though of course they color what they print, often against their better judgment, to please the class of people who read their papers. So if you were to make a practice of reading the political news in four different sorts of papers,—Republican, Democratic, Socialist and Labor,—you'd get a fairly close idea of the general trend by checking up one against the others—noticing, particularly, what each omits mentioning or treats as of no importance. You seem to take an unusual interest in our American politics, madame! Have you anything particular in view? Are you writing a book about us?"

"Mon Dieu, m'sieur! Why should I attempt that? The subject is much too involved and exhaustive! You ask why I have so much of the personal interest? Consider! Is it not obvious? Me—I have lived much in embassies and legations. I could tell you of diplomatic affairs in other countries because I have lived in the atmosphere—so it is but natural that I ask for explanation of something in the American idea which seems to follow no system and is difficult to estimate in your relations with other countries. Beyond that, France and her former allies are now confronted with decisions which will be far-reaching either in peace or another war. We naturally wish to know the real American attitude: how desperate the general world-conditions must be to secure American coöperation and assistance?"

"As it happens, madame, I am on one of the House committees which handles questions of that sort. Such a one would be problematic, of course, and would require a lengthy consideration of various features—but if you happen to have a spare hour or so, some afternoon—"

"Oh-h-h—would you really be so kind, Mr. Twombly? Would you come tomorrow—at three? I could be at home to nobody else until we had finished our talk! And really—I'm immensely interested!"

AN hour later the Senator who happened to be host that evening managed to smuggle into his private study Congressman Twombly, another member of the House who had just dropped in and Senator Greshingham, with the excuse that "a little medicine" was a good preventive of indigestion after a ten-course dinner. As soon as he had taken the precaution of fastening the door to prevent interruption, he produced the "medicine" from its place of concealment, and each of them prescribed for himself according to his anticipated needs.

Senator Brantland was, and is, a statesman of long experience. He knew that administering a cautionary rebuke to one of the younger Congressmen for a serious diplomatic blunder would be a mere waste of breath, inasmuch as he had no force or pressure at his disposal which might be used to coërce the younger man—who, if sufficiently angry, would point out that he was responsible to none but the constituents in his district, most of whom believed in open diplomacy, openly arrived at, and would see nothing wrong in his being perfectly frank about American politics with a lady who had been formerly in the diplomatic service of Europe. But he also knew the type represented by the lady—knew that she would turn his fellow-statesman inside out if she got half a chance, and obtain a great deal of information which it wasn't good for the United States Government to have in any foreigner's possession. So he started with what might be termed Oriental obliquity of attack. Passing around some excellent cigars, he remarked while lighting one:

"Rather an interesting discussion at your end of the dinner-table, Twombly! I don't think any of us realized madame's wide experience and power of fascination until she started in on you—and I noticed she was monopolizing the drawing-room as we came in here. Being a relative of the General's, she naturally would be somebody in France because, unlike some of his celebrated fellow-commanders, he comes of an old Ardennois family; but until I got a word with him after dinner, I knew nothing of the fact that, just before the war broke, her salon in the Faubourg St. Germain was really a rendezvous for all branches of the French service."

"H-m-m—that explains her desire for information on American politics."

"Exactly! And she knew the proper man to ask for it, too!"

"How do you mean, Senator? 'The proper man'? Why—she never saw me until just before we went into the dining-room!"

"Possibly not—but she knew a devil of a lot about you, all the same! Knew your State and city, what district you represent, what House committees you are on—and even some idea as to what you do on those committees. I overheard her requesting my wife to have you take her in because she thought you must be a most interesting man—and rattling off what she'd heard about you from mutual friends; but I was too far away to venture a suggestion to my better-half even if I'd been so inclined. If you wont take offense at a little mild joking, Twombly, I'd say you must be more of a lady-killer than any of us have suspected."

TWOMBLY'S face had grown a bit thoughtful. He was by no means the inexperienced amateur in judgment that the Senator had feared—and an impression was slowly growing in his mind that he might have been led on by a brilliant woman a little farther than he meant to go.

"That's all right, Senator! Joke as much as you like! But there's something about this Madame d'Auvergne proposition that I don't quite understand! Why single me out, beforehand, as a good man to pump for political information? I'm assuming, of course, that you are sure of what you heard her say to your wife."

"Seems to me you were one of the few men who had the information she wanted to get—and this dinner-party supplied as good an opportunity as she could wish."

"Hmph! She hasn't got such a hell of a lot—so far! I must have disappointed her, some!"

"No—I'd say she is very well satisfied—considering your appointment for tomorrow."

"Well, but—what do you suppose she expects to get—if I'm not quite such a fool as I look?"

"I don't know how clever a fencer you are with a woman as bright as that, Twombly—but I'm damn' sure that if I were to keep that appointment in your place, she'd obtain from me, one way or another, so much more than it would be safe to have her get that, personally, I wouldn't dare risk it. Instinct and intuition supply the kernels in a good many unfinished sentences with a woman, you know. A man often really answers her questions by evading them."

"H-m-m—there's a contrary side to that sort of thing, too! We talk a lot, here, about our absence of secret diplomacy—keeping our politics absolutely out in the open, in their shirt-sleeves, so that every newspaper reader knows what's going on and what our relations are with other nations from day to day. On that basis, there would seem to be no objection to any of us telling a foreigner anything he or she wanted to know about our foreign policies. And yet, in a case like the agreement I went into this evening, without thinking, some of the yellow journals might write it up in such a way as to give it the appearance of being a great deal more than it possibly could be. Once a story of that sort gets started, a lot of unscrupulous journalists can do a hell of a lot with it—and dare you to sue them for libel! The more you sue, the deeper you get! Of course neither Madame d'Auvergne nor any other foreigner could really do anything against the interests of our Government with any information she could get from me—"

"That's one point upon which I can't agree with you, Twombly! Your view is the generally accepted American view—that all our political machinery is so open, our aims and policies so well known, that any gum-shoe spying on us is a laughable waste of time. But as a matter of cold fact, we stand to lose fully as much through having our real administrative policies and undercurrent of popular thought known in the European chancelleries as any of *them* do!"

"Well, I've heard that opinion expressed before, by a few men of experience in public life whose ideas I value as I do your own; but so far, none of you has got down to cases and shown me just how or why it is dangerous for other governments to know what there is to know about us. I'm open to conviction—if you care to illustrate the point, Senator."

"WELL—as an example," replied the Senator, "the churches of the United States, representing a *bloc* powerful enough to put over the Volstead amendment when we were occupied with something else, are solidly importuning the administration to interfere, by force of arms if necessary, in the Turkish question—and keep the Turks out of Europe at all costs. So far, the President—knowing very nearly what would result from our interference—has presumably refused to do anything of the sort. Constantinople and Thrace have been Turkish fatherland for over five centuries—holy places of the Mohammedan religion. Smyrna has been their most thriving commercial city. If any race on earth has a right to its own country, it is difficult to see upon what just grounds the world can deny the Turks the right to theirs. If the Christian minorities in that locality cannot live there safely, the Christian minorities should be the ones to move—not the bulk of the national and racial population. You can't say this is a Christian world,—no other religions permitted,—because that simply isn't so. It isn't even half a Christian world! The United States is not a Christian country. If you don't believe that fact, read the Constitution. But—getting back to the point I was about to make: suppose the British Government had had secret information that our President's hand would be forced in this matter, within a month, and that an expeditionary force would be sent to the Dardanelles? That would have stiffened their dealings with Kemal Pasha. They would have refused his demands absolutely. An Anglo-American-Turkish war would have been started. Within a few weeks, Russia and Bulgaria would have joined Turkey. Jugo-Slavia would have joined *us*—Germany, eventually, joining Russia and Turkey. Don't forget that Europe is a powder-magazine waiting only for a single spark! As it happened, Britain could not be sure of us at the critical moment—and sided with France and Italy in choosing the smaller of many evils, permitting the Turk to reoccupy his home-land, and averting for some time another frightful cataclysm. That's just one case in which even the possibility of a change of mind in our Administration should not have been known in Europe under any circumstances! I'm convinced that the pressure brought to bear was difficult to resist!"

"Hmph! Madame d'Auvergne wouldn't be likely to get information of *that* sort from any Senator or Congressman! What I'm chewing over is what could she get from anybody, here, that might do us any harm?"

"Stop and think a bit! We have a number of secret political organizations in the United States with a strictly foreign membership — organizations whose acknowledged policy it is to overturn our Government and substitute impossible ideas which have been proved utter failures since the days of Rameses. Those organizations have a stronger voting membership than the people of this country even dream—so strong that in some localities they actually hold the balance of power for whichever of the bigger parties they join in any given election. Now, we have every assurance that our fascinating lady is French in every drop of her blood. The foreign policies of France and the United States do not conflict in any way at present; we are friendly nations, with mutual good-will. But suppose—merely for illustration—that Madame were *not* really French at all, but a brilliant secret agent of some more dangerous country, secretly inimical to us—a woman who in some clever way has succeeded in completely deceiving the General and his government as she has us? Any information obtained by such an agent, passed on to the executives of these political organizations within our borders, easily might be used to bring about the election of several Congressmen, assemblymen, State senators, with extreme radical tendencies, and exert a great deal of strong, ugly pressure upon the Administration at some critical moment."

"But, hang it all, Senator—we know all about Madame and her antecedents!"

"We know she's the General's acknowledged cousin and came here with about as reliable letters as anyone could well present. Presumably, there's no question about her at all—I'm not raising any. But it is none the less possible that a clever secret agent might get herself presented in Washington society under exactly the same conditions and obtain dangerous information in just the way Madame might have gotten it from you if sober second-thought hadn't made you more cautious. And this illustrates exactly the point I'm trying to make—that the United States Government has as great a need of secret diplomacy as any nation on earth. And unfortunately, has *less* of it! Under other governments, diplomacy is a life-career. We've nothing to correspond with that—as yet. We never will know exactly what we are about in some unforseen crisis until we do have!"

"Oh, come, Senator—I think we're pretty ably represented abroad!"

"Then why isn't our State Department better informed as to what is going on in Europe? I'm on the Foreign Relations Committee—wanted the inside dope on the real situation in England the day after Lloyd-George resigned—not the newspaper-gossip which everybody knows, but the real line-up of the different parties and what combinations were likely to be formed. One man's guess is as good as another's—but guessing isn't good enough for my committee. We want to know the underlying trend; it might easily make considerable difference in our action upon certain legislation which is likely to come up. As member of that committee, I had the right to know what the State Department knew. Well, either they purposely withheld it, or they actually didn't know the things most vitally important to know! I got practically nothing—and I'm betting they didn't know, because I tried enough third-degree to dig it out if it was there. If I could only get hold of some man in London or Paris who is even half on the inside of what's likely to happen, and there was any prospect of gaining his confidence, I'd run across on the *Paris* or *Berengaria,* Saturday!"

SENATOR GRESHINGHAM quietly offered a suggestion. He had been listening closely, agreeing with his confrère upon every point.

"There's a man in Paris who'll come nearer giving you exactly what you want to know than anyone else you could find. And what he may not happen to have at his fingers' ends, his handsome wife or a couple of their intimate friends will supply. They have been celebrities for years but recently have been entirely out of the limelight—living quietly in either their London, Devon or Paris houses, but none the less, having among their house-guests some of the most famous people in the world. Trevor and his wife recently made a flying trip over here—staying in a mysterious place of theirs on Staten Island. (Very few people know anything about

their ownership—the place, with its high surrounding wall, is supposed to be some kind of a sanitarium or convent.) You and I happened to be home for a week or two at the time, so didn't see them when they were in Washington—but I've been told they had some idea of giving the Administration a hint or two worth having, and were not 'encouraged' to do so. If I could discover the fool who discouraged them, I'd say a few sizzling hot things to him!"

Here, the junior Congressman who had come in after dinner took up what he considered a challenge—in a way which he afterward regretted.

"I guess three or four of us may have had something to do with that, Greshingham! I've been rather fed up with these Trevors for some time. They were Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint when I first met them, but were forced to resign from the peerage for some reason which was carefully suppressed—probably a damn good one! And they came over here, going about in Washington and New York society, as if nothing had happened. Takes a lot of gall, attempting to get away with anything like that!"

"Young man—you evidently don't know that George Llangolen Trevor always has been an American citizen, born in Boston—that he and his wife resigned from the peerage because they wouldn't consider themselves British subjects before their American citizenship! Matters had reached a point with them where they couldn't say what they thought, over there, until they did resign—but their Majesties had them to dinner at Buckingham immediately after the resignation in order to express regret and appreciation of the valuable services for which they were rewarded with the titles. If you hear anyone spreading that lie over here about there having been any scandal, just knock him down for me, will you! Meanwhile—whoever prevented them from giving the information I'm convinced they came over to give, did the United States Government a dirty trick which may result in complications that might have been avoided. Brantland—if you can really get away for three or four weeks before Congress meets, I'll guarantee that it'll be worth your trouble to run across and see the Trevors!"

"That's about all the tip I needed, Greshingham. I'll go! And—partly because I've suggested a few very unlikely possibilities concerning Madame d'Auvergne, I wish you and Twombly would cultivate her while I'm gone. If she leaves for Paris before my return, cable me—I'll be very much pleased to call upon her in her own town. Don't forget, now!"

AS the General had been just winding up his stay in America, it happened that Brantland found him in the next chair at the Captain's table on the *Paris,* Saturday evening—which gave them a chance to renew the acquaintance upon more intimate terms, as they were mutually attracted to each other. During the voyage, the French division-commander went into some of his family history, for his American friend seemed interested. He described the Ardennes estate which had been in his family for several hundred years, and how it had been ravaged by the boche during the war, retaken by the French armies, held again by the Bavarians—and finally divided by the lines of trenches.

This description naturally led to some account of his cousins, the Deschamps family, whose château was three leagues to the south of him, and the lively Héloïse who had married the popular subaltern of engineers, Jules d'Auvergne, from down in the center of France. After the war commenced, his advancement had been rapid. As colonel, with the *Croix de Guerre,* he had been left for dead in a shell-hole on his wife's estate after a sortie at the head of the regiment to which he had been transferred. When the ground was recovered, two weeks later, search was made for his body—but the shell-hole was by that time full of water and nothing recognizable had been found. Héloïse had been in the *Croix Rouge* from the first—got leave of absence to come home and search for him herself—though the enemy's barrage made it an exceedingly dangerous undertaking. She was seen to fall, one night, when the beam from a boche searchlight touched her, and was supposed to have been killed. When she turned up again in Paris and called upon the General, she explained that she had been stunned by the bursting of a shell over her head, had found herself in a shell-hole between the lines, next morning—then a prisoner, with a pretty serious outlook. She said that if she hadn't escaped that night, she would have shot herself.

When the General heard that his friend's errand in Paris was chiefly to meet the

Trevors and discuss a business matter with them, he instantly offered to introduce him as soon as they reached the city, and sent a radio asking if he might call. A reply came back within two hours to the effect that the General and Senator Brantland would be expected as guests for an indefinite stay in the Avenue de Neuilly mansion.

"I had the impression they would do something of the sort, *mon ami*! Me—I 'ave been mos' intimate there almost since the house was built. I had the honor of accompanying Madame on that memorable trip in her seaplane, from Rochelle—when she sink t'ree of the boche submarine' in as many hours. She was decorate' with the *Croix* for that! They are, what-do-you-call, unobtrusive—that pair! Ver' quieet—nevaire put on the 'dog' like the leetle people who pretend to sometheeng w'ich they 'ave not. But *voilà!* They are of the great ones!"

UPON arrival, the Senator found himself in the sort of house which approached his ideal but which he rarely saw. Apparently the place and all the various services it offered were at his disposal any hour of the day or night; yet this privilege was not obtrusive. He might come and go as he pleased. If he turned up at meals or in any of the living-rooms, he was accepted as one of the family with the privilege of doing as he wished. Opera, the theater, clubs, other amusements were casually mentioned as being available if he cared to go. If not—suit himself in any old way. For the confidential talk which Trevor and Madame Nan had been hoping for, they took their recently arrived guests up to the isolated study at the top of the house, after dinner—and some of the "Honorable George's" famous long cigars were produced by way of stimulant to clear thinking. Madame Nan outlined the main points of what they had wished to communicate when in Washington — which gave Brantland enough to think about for some time and formed the basis of a telephone-conversation across the Atlantic which he was amazed to find possible next morning, his talk being camouflaged, of course, in a way which none but Greshingham, at the other end, could understand. But for the moment, he switched the conversation to underlying conditions in Europe. Trevor pointed out sources of information on this which hadn't occurred to him at all—and seemed to involve more effort than he had supposed necessary.

"In the old days of monarchy and its chancelleries, Brantland, if one could get reliable information as to what a particular ruler or his premier were likely to be considering, that settled it! You had a line upon which you could gamble with more or less certainty. And you could check it up by the more or less known policy of that ruler's government in regard to its relations with other states or the advantages which were obvious in case it decided to gobble some of them. But since monarchy has been abolished to a large extent, the game of international relations is more complex,—far more difficult for the people themselves to handle,—simply because carrying out the policies of an imperial government is child's-play compared to working out a general foreign policy which will satisfy a majority of the people in any state. There are among the masses of population far too many conflicting *blocs* of different nationalities, each with its own aims and prejudices.

"So a condition has arisen in which such policies are strongly influenced if not controlled by juntas made up of delegates from local organizations in every part of each country. For example: you want to know what the outcome is likely to be in England during the next few years? Well, in order to give you any working idea as to that, we will have to attend, in disguise, certain meetings in the East End of London, dine at three different political clubs there, manage to be 'among those present' at a few Union meetings in Manchester and Leeds, attend four or five more meetings in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Belfast, and finally spend two week-ends in the shires—one at the manor of a Liberal 'whip,' the other, in the hereditary castle of a certain Marquis, who is so conservative that there are spikes on his shell, like a horseshoe crab.

"When we've done all that, and you've had your observation guided by me, day after day,—you'll be able to form a fairly close estimate as to what sort of men will control the British Government during the next four or five years. And pretty much the same kind of procedure would give you a line on France, Spain, Italy—even Germany. To get the whole picture with any real foreknowledge as to the trend in each State, would be at least a six months' job."

Brantland whistled softly. "Say, Trevor—if I were sufficiently in your good graces and confidence, couldn't you summarize a little and give me the benefit of your own observations covering a much longer time than that?"

"I'll gladly give you impressions, right now, Senator—but only for what they're worth. The point of your getting the knowledge first-hand—or building up a United States Intelligence Department which would be constantly at it—is that combinations change from hour to hour, day to day. If I told you a certain party would come into power in England tomorrow, and three men I could mention got their heads together while they were out shooting grouse, a party alignment might be announced within forty-eight hours which, at this moment, seems utterly impossible. That's why you've got to know something of the various cliques and juntas, and what each is after. Catch the idea?"

THE GENERAL had left word at his official quarters as to where he might be found or communicated with in case anything came up which needed his immediate attention. While they were talking in Trevor's study, there was a call for the French officer over the telephone—and the others couldn't avoid hearing one side of the conversation. It appeared that a Colonel Jules d'Auvergne had called to see the General that afternoon and was now calling again—representing himself to be a connection by marriage who had been taken prisoner during the war. At the General's startled exclamation and amazed repetition of the name, a look of sudden interest came into Trevor's eyes—in a moment, he took the liberty of making a suggestion:

"Why not have your friend come and see you here, General? If he'll wait where he is, fifteen or twenty minutes, I'll send a car for him. Evidently he seems quite anxious to see you—"

"But—*mon Dieu!* The fellow is claim' to be a dead man! The husband of my cousin Héloïse! An officer whom a whole regiment saw kill' during a sortie!"

Senator Brantland, with a recollection of their talks on the steamer, suddenly put in a word. "Didn't you tell me they never found his body in that shell-hole?"

"Of a certainty, *mon ami*—but there were many thing' to account for that! And the shell burs' so close to him that he mus' 'ave been little more than pulp!"

Trevor's mind was flashing from one to another of three incidents which recently had come under his observation.

"You had seen the man frequently enough to recognize him at a glance, hadn't you, General? Of course! Then—let's have him here and get his story. If he's genuine, it will be interesting—if he's an impostor, you can't know it any too soon!"

The message was sent over the phone, and one of the Trevor cars dispatched at once for the man. In ten minutes the General went down to the drawing-room to receive him when he arrived—and when he had left the room, Trevor lighted a fresh cigar in his usual delibrate manner when there was something on his mind.

"Senator, you were describing Madame d'Auvergne at dinner—referring to her thirst for knowledge concerning American politics and the naïve way in which she went after it with Congressman Twombly at your dinner-table? I don't know just why—but something in your manner gave me the impression that you may have had some reason of your own for repeating that incident to us. You and the General must have discussed the lady while you were crossing on the *Paris*—doubtless he sketched for you some of her personal history, as she's by way of being something of a personage here. If it wasn't told you in confidence, would you mind outlining for us just what he gave you concerning her? I've a fairly strong reason for asking."

BRANTLAND was only too willing to do this—sensing a mystery about the lady which he had instinctively felt but couldn't account for in any way. He had finished just as the General brought his friend up to the study to introduce him. There was little question as to the man's genuineness. He had lost an arm; his face had been torn in places by little fragments of shell; and he looked as if his constitution had been all but ruined by the experiences of the past few years. He said that, after the Armistice, the Germans had illegally used his engineering knowledge by making him work in one of their East Prussia mines. Afterward he was given a choice of indefinite imprisonment upon framed-up charges or going with a German operating outfit to one of the Russian mines in Siberia which was being worked

under German supervision. And this had gradually broken his health to such an extent that he was finally permitted to go—by way of Vladivostok. As his professional knowledge was of value in any place, he accumulated sufficient funds to get him on a Messageries boat from Hongkong. He had found most of his relatives dead—and hoped the General would be able to give him information as to others. He heard with evident amazement that his passionately loved wife was living—and in comfortable circumstances.

"But—but—how is that possible, *mon vieux?* Me—I painfully go back to the little village near her estate, for news. There are still a few survivors of the old days. They describe how my Héloïse got leave of absence from her hospital duties and came up to search for me—how she was caught between the lines, at night, by a boche searchlight, and killed. In the constant fighting over that bit of ground, there was no opportunity to recover her body—the dead were lying in heaps—buried by the explosion of this shell—unearthed by the next one."

Brantland and the Trevors were by this time intensely interested. The Senator couldn't help interrupting for a moment.

"We can assure you that she's very much alive, Colonel, because she was dining at my house in Washington ten days ago! Of course her war experiences may have changed her somewhat—as they did everyone else—but I'd say that she never was more fascinating than she is today. It just happens that I have some of my wife's snapshots with me—taken the day after. She's a very good amateur photographer and was quite set upon getting a few characteristic pictures of Madame d'Auvergne. I should be very much pleased to give you one or two of these—"

THE COLONEL eagerly took the unmounted prints in his hands—looked at some very closely, taking them over to an electric table-lamp and using a reading-glass to get a little magnification. Then he was silent for a moment or two—slowly shaking his head. There was another close inspection under the reading-glass; then he turned to them, nervously, almost angrily, with a mystified expression:

"*Mes amis*—I do not comprehend! The resemblance is most striking in some of the positions. But—she is not my Héloïse! My dear wife is dead; there is no longer a doubt of it. She had a little scar—just under the right ear—her eyes were darker. This woman's are almost gray! There are other little differences which perhaps none but a husband would see. You had not met her so often, in recent years, *mon Général*—it is not surprising that you thought you recognized her, particularly if she had other credentials—"

The General's face was a study. Doubt, amazement, chagrin—and finally disbelief. For a moment or so, he studied his supposed relative-in-law's face and whole appearance—studied them closely, his eyes roving sharply from one detail to another.

"Hmph! M'sieur, do you realize what you are saying? The seriousness of the charge you are bringing against a lady of my family? I noticed changes in her when we met—to be sure! Why not? *Mon Dieu*—has not the frightful war left changes upon all of us, yourself included, m'sieur! *Voilà!* You are not exactly the man I remember as the husband of my cousin—the war has bitten you deeply in spots. And in your case, m'sieur—you present yourself to me with no credentials whatever! My cousin Héloïse had the forethought to do that—knowing how greatly her tragic experiences had changed her!"

"Even to the color of her eyes and the elimination of a deep scar, *mon vieux?* Was it necessary that your own cousin should take the trouble to provide herself with documents, letters, proofs, to convince you of her identity? You have no doubt of *me* at this moment, *mon Général*—in spite of my changed appearance! Had this woman presented herself without those credentials, it would have given your memory a better chance—you would have doubted and distrusted her!"

EXACTLY what was running through the minds of the Trevors and Senator Brantland, it might have been difficult to arrange in any sort of order. Neither of them had lost a word which passed between the two men or any of the expressions which flashed across their faces. D'Auvergne's statements bore conviction from their very simplicity. Even the General was forced to admit this in a moment. While they were still arguing over Mrs. Brantland's photographs, Trevor got out of his chair and took down a file from one of the wall-cases which covered two sides of the room. Running through the papers contained in the "M" section, he

came in a moment to a small memorandum-slip which he carefully glanced over. Replacing the file and coming back to sit down with them, he said:

"It has been a practice of ours for several years to jot down brief memoranda of anything unusual which has come under our observation—because we have found it, in many cases, a key to something which subsequently occurred. That little slip to which I have just referred—filed under 'Montmartre'—is a case in point. Two weeks ago I happened to be in a cabaret up there, investigating something which interested me. It was the cheaper type of place—a resort of men employed around the Gare du Nord and its yards. With them, of course, were the usual sprinkling of *Apaches* and *Cocottes*. Orderly enough for its sort, you understand, but frequented by people whose clothing and habits are none too clean. Among those who were quite evidently regular habitués, was an ex-*poilu* who seemed to be country-born. His mind appeared to have been affected—possibly shell-shock, perhaps wounds of various sorts. His manner was nervous—he kept incessantly looking from one person to another, then leaning his face on his hands, and muttering. The man was drinking absinthe in a regular, artistic way—prolonging its effect and sensations. I bought more for him—got his tongue loosened, after beating him two rounds of dominoes.

"If he told the truth, he was Ardennois like yourself, General—in fact, had been a man of better than average schooling in the little village between your place and your cousin's château. Had known her—was on the spot with his regiment when she turned up to look for the Colonel's body—followed her between the lines, that night, to be of assistance. And he told a story—well, I'll not repeat it now! It'll be far more convincing if some of us have the luck to get it from him again. I've reason to think he's in that cabaret every night until after twelve. Suppose that two of us with the necessary changes in appearance go up there now, in a car, and see if we can't make him talk? He'd probably recognize the General and D'Auvergne at a glance—so that lets them out—but the Senator and I will do. You'll accept anything we get as fact, of course. This matter is beginning to assume proportions which make it no longer negligible, gentlemen! I've an impression that there may be a serious menace to the United States Government in it!"

This suggestion was acted upon immediately—the General and D'Auvergne regretting that it was not advisable for them to be of the party but seeing, of course, that any recognition of either would be likely to defeat Trevor's object.

The General, by this time, was becoming convinced that he had been duped by a clever adventuress who might be using him as sponsor for some purpose of her own which he couldn't guess but which his two American friends seemed to think might be a serious matter, politically. D'Auvergne, so far, had heard nothing of the discussion at Brantland's dinner-party and had no idea that the lady supposed to be his wife was using the name with any criminal or political intention. He was an officer of engineers—personally as much the soul of honor as the General himself—and took it for granted that she had married some other D'Auvergne. There were several of that name in the length and breadth of France—presumably from the same parent stock a few centuries back. Before leaving the house, Trevor cautioned the General to say nothing whatever concerning Brantland's dinner-party or what had occurred there—it being his idea, implied somewhat vaguely, that if Colonel D'Auvergne knew as many sides of the affair as *they* did, he might through sheer ignorance of politics take some hasty action which would prevent their getting at the underlying facts.

A FEW minutes after they had seated themselves in the cabaret at Montmartre—in cheap clothing, with roughened hands and faces—Trevor located the *poilu*, drinking by himself in a corner, and went over to renew the acquaintance. A word of two served to recall his identity in the man's mind—and the explanation that Brantland had served in the A. E. F. was sufficient to establish friendly relations—also to account for the Senator's very limited French. In less than an hour the *poilu* had been primed until he was muttering to himself—carrying on a monologue, apparently only half conscious of their presence at the table. Presently he drifted into a fragmentary story which evidently had become an obsession with him.

"It was raining—that day when Madame came up to us! The mud—so deep that

the caisson of the *soixante-quinze,* she stick in him! *Les boches* drum-drumming with their barrage—the 'planes, high above the rain-clouds dropping the bomb—zoom! zoom! Sometimes too close—sometimes so far behind that we make the big laugh because they could not see our lines. For three nights Madame goes out to search for the body of M'sieur. On the third I go over the top after her—to be of assistance. I am twenty paces at the side when the boche turns on his searchlight—and registers on Madame, standing by a shell-hole. As the light touched her, the snipers began—every shot a hit! I saw the blood spreading through her waist as she fell.

"The light was shut off before our seventy-fives could register on it—I started crawling to her, over and through the mud. As my hand touched her, a shell burst overhead, and I saw—I saw a boche—a little fellow—tearing the *Croix* from her breast—slashing her face with a trench-knife so that it could not be recognized again. I raise my automatique to fire, just as another shell bursts—then think I am crazy or have been killed. Under the tin-hat of the boche, a mop of hair has become loose! I behold it is a woman! Again I try to fire—but a fragment of shell has struck me. I am bleeding—fainting—rolling down into the shell-hole.

"After the Armistice, I am demobilized with a citation and pension. I come to Paris—work my way through the country of the boche—searching, always searching—for the face of a woman who is a fiend! Some day we shall meet. She will not know or fear me—she does not know what I saw! And I shall feel the grip of my hands about her soft throat as I slowly squeeze it until the breath comes short! Not too quickly, you observe, comrades—but so that she may know she is dying. At the end, I slit her white throat and tell her what I saw before she dies!"

THERE was repetition of fragments—embellishment of the story here and there—before the *poilu's* head dropped upon the table in unconsciousness. Leaving a few francs with the coarse woman in the *bureau* to put the *bon camarade* to bed where he would come to no harm, Trevor and the Senator returned to the Avenue de Neuilly—the vivid picture of that night on the battlefield so compellingly in their minds that they were in no mood for conversation.

After breakfast, in the morning, they repeated the story to the General—but concocted something entirely different for D'Auvergne. It seemed to them that one bloodhound upon the trail of the lady in Washington was enough for the time-being. The Colonel was going down to see his few remaining relatives in Aurillac—but readily agreed to their request that he return to Paris within a week, there being some probability of their obtaining more complete information concerning the lady supposed to be his wife and, in fact, the clearing up of any doubt as to whether she had been actually killed or not. That evening, when the General and Brantland were up in the study again, Trevor said:

"We have known for some time that European diplomatic circles consider it easier to obtain confidential decisions of the United States Government in advance than those of any other nation—and have sent across the Atlantic the most talented men and women in the game. It is also a matter of question as to whether there exist in any other country as efficient foreign political organizations as those which are strongly influential in every city of the United States. This knowledge and well-grounded supposition upon our part has been communicated to various Administration officials in Washington, more than once. It is touched upon frequently by American newspaper and magazine writers. But it seems to us on this side that such communications are very largely discredited. Well—we can't help that. It's a temptation to keep our mouths shut in future—but there's one outstanding feature about every 'hundred-per-cent American: he is for the United States—first, last and all time—and they're welcome to any effort he can make in their behalf! I'm rather of the opinion, Senator, that you have had some such instinctive feeling ever since the moment when Madame d'Auvergne started in so ingenuously at your dinner-table to acquire whatever information Twombly had inside of him. Did you really distrust her—at first?"

"Well—honestly—no. She was so damn' open and aboveboard in her questions—as frankly curious as a child. She was the General's cousin—her family and social position unassailable; the letters she brought were to some of the most conservative people in the United States from others equally conservative in France and England. From the way he naturally fell

for her, I was afraid that Twombly was more of a careless fool than any statesman in Washington has any business to be, no matter what the pressure or inducement. Of course, in the States, a senior legislator of the upper house has no such coërcive power over the less experienced men that he would have over here. The most I could do was to josh Twombly a bit about his conquest, and incidentally tip him off to her being on his trail for several days before. Fortunately, he had a much more level head than I thought—I'll bet she hasn't been able to get anywhere near, with other Congressmen, where she was with him, because he's been making a point of turning up pretty much everywhere she's invited. You see, when he and I got to discussing her after dinner, we both began to have an instinctive feeling that, while she was undoubtedly all right, it wasn't altogether safe to let it go at that."

"By Jove, Brantland! It was mighty fortunate that both of you had that feeling! It helps me a lot in getting some action in regard to Madame which, without your co-operation, would be more difficult. Now—listen! (*Attendez—mon Général.*) If that fascinating lady *is* a secret agent, it's a ninety-nine-per-cent chance that she is an emissary of the Charlottenburg and Moscow juntas. With her French atmosphere and backing, she would be of course directly under the orders of their chief Paris executive —(that nest in the Rue Vanneau which we have so carefully protected against police interference because it has been our best source of information). Now—if she's convinced that some one is really on her trail in Washington—knows all about her, will either arrest or kill her, or everlastingly dog her from place to place, she wont stay another day in the States for the present! She'll pull out on the first steamer, come directly here to report and consult with the Rue Vanneau. Well, this is where we want her in the final show-down—not in Washington, where an exposé will drag too many fine American families into beastly notoriety through having entertained her as their guest. It's now eleven o'clock, here—about five-fifteen in Washington. Where can I be reasonably sure of catching Twombly at such an hour?"

"Dressing for dinner in his own apartment, if he's dining out, anywhere. Going over some of his private correspondence if he's dining at his club."

"Good! I'll get the big radio station at Chincoteague right from this room. Give me his Washington phone-number and the operator will put him directly on to the air from the land wire. Then you talk to him. I'll tell you exactly what to say!"

IT took less than fifteen minutes to get Congressman Twombly in his own Washington apartment. He recognized Brantland's voice immediately, but could scarcely believe it possible that he was talking so easily across the Atlantic Ocean. As soon as he was satisfied of this, Brantland asked if there were anyone within hearing at his end—and upon being assured that even his Chinese valet had gone out upon an errand, he asked the Congressman to listen closely and carry out certain suggestions to the best of his ability. This, Twombly promptly agreed to do.

"You remember the fascinating widow who started in to vamp you at my dinner, two weeks ago?—Yes—that's the one—but don't mention any names! Her husband, supposed to be dead, has turned up very much alive. He has seen those amateur pictures taken by my wife and says the lady absolutely is not his wife—proved the statement to our satisfaction and even that of her distinguished cousin, whom he came to see at this house where we are both guests. Now—if the lady really *is* an impostor as seems to be established without question, we know that there is just about one object she could have in attempting anything of the sort in Washington. To expose her there, means a rotten scandal for a lot of perfectly innocent, highly respectable people. Beyond that, the interests of the United States Government are best served by getting her quietly out of the country at the earliest possible moment. She's dangerous! If she's convinced that her husband is alive and on his way over there to see whether she's really his wife or not, she wont wait for him! Catch the point? She wont try hiding in the United States, either—because she'll know that husband wont let up until he's found her! I want you to see her within the next two hours, get into some corner and say you have a piece of wonderful news for her. That you have just been talking with me by radio, and that I said her beloved husband has turned up alive after having been kept prisoner by a German gang in a Siberian mine where they were

using his engineering knowledge—that he has been made brevet general with a decoration—and that when I told him of her being in Washington, he immediately booked passage for New York on the steamer leaving Cherbourg tomorrow.

"He has been certain she was dead—the Germans told him she was killed on her own estate, one night, between the lines. He can't quite believe, even now, that she is alive—and is hurrying over for a touching reunion if it is true. Do you get the idea? She'll be so happy that she will be all broken up, and you must go the limit in congratulations—put in a good word for me, too, for my thoughtfulness in getting word to her that he is on the way. But—if she quietly leaves the city, I want you to follow her, every step, and advise me by radio through Chincoteague—every two or three hours! Just tell the operator whom you want to speak to and he'll make the connection ahead of any other business. Our friends over here are the principal stockholders in that company."

AT six in the morning the Senator was called to the phone with a message that Madame had just registered at one of the New York hotels under an assumed name, and retired to her room. At noon, another message—that she had secured a room just canceled by another passenger on a boat leaving at three o'clock. On the seventh day afterward, that steamer was boarded by four gentlemen and a lady, from the famous yacht, off Ouessant—the commander having been ordered by radio from the company to permit this. The lady and one of the gentlemen—who were promptly recognized and welcomed as owners of the famous yacht—appeared to be merely the temporary hosts of the three others, who immediately commenced a tour of the upper decks and in a few moments came to where Madame was leaning against the rail with two acquaintances. She had booked under an assumed name, but of course there was not the slightest use of attempting to brazen out a claim of mistaken identity either with the General or Senator Brantland—that would have most effectually barred all chance of returning to Washington, and she had by no means given that up. D'Auvergne, she didn't recognize in the least. When presented as her husband, she gave them a consummate piece of acting. With real tears in her eyes, she said that a thousand men had seen her dear husband killed—that this M'sieur might have the same name, but was not her husband—never had been. And he, as positively stated that she was not his wife, never had been. The General was staggered, didn't know what to believe—until the Trevors strolled up. Taking them a little farther along the deck where nobody could overhear them, Trevor began describing the cabaret at Montmartre. With the skill of a dramatist he pictured the room, reeking with tobacco-smoke, heavy with the odor of cheap wine and absinthe—the rough tables and chairs, the sullen-faced *Apaches* and their women—the ex-*poilus,* who came there to strangle memories, the man from Ardennes in the shadowy corner. Then—in a masterly impersonation of the *poilu*—the muttered fragmentary story and its climax. When he had finished, Madame was shivering—as if from a chill.

"Madame, you may not be this gentleman's wife or the cousin of that one. We are not so indiscreet as to ask who you really are—that doesn't interest us. But if ever you set foot in the United States again, the man of the cabaret au Montmartre will be told exactly where to find you!"

Another of Clarence Herbert New's remarkable "Free Lances in Diplomacy"— the most unusual, interesting and longest-sustained series ever printed—will be a feature of our forthcoming February issue. And with it will appear stories by H. Bedford-Jones, J. Frank Davis, Lemuel L. De Bra, Robert S. Lemmon, Bertram Atkey, Meigs O. Frost and other noted writers.

The Shadow of a Claim

The story of a young scientist who proved he was not a doddering dodo, and who used an astronomical calculation to win a lawsuit and a lady: an unusual story by the author of "Witchcraft" and "A Single Fact."

By FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE

I'M getting a bit tired of hearing sweet young things say, when they learn what my profession is: "Why, I thought astronomers were old men with bald heads and long white whiskers." I'm fed up with being patronized by business men who assume that astronomers are what they are pleased to call "impractical." I take violent exception to being pitied by globe-trotting young pirates because there is, as they put it, no romance in my career. And the next time some rural Congressman objects to raising our salaries for making the observations and computations for *The Nautical Almanac,* because we're only a lot of doddering dodoes who spend our time mooning up among the stars, I'm going to trail the aforesaid member from Buncombe County to his lair and throttle him in his own hall bedroom.

Astronomers are human. In proof of that thesis I offer myself, Mark Edgerton, and the events that have lately befallen me. I am twenty-nine, and I'm not bald-headed—yet. I confess to being red-headed, and I concede that I may be bald-headed some day, but I swear I shall never wear whiskers, white, black, red or parti-colored. "A bald head," said Plato, Mark Twain or some other philosopher, "is an act of God; but whiskers are a man's own fault." I indorse the sentiment.

I pulled Number Three oar in my varsity boat the year we rowed Harvard, Yale and Princeton to a standstill, and whether for that or some other occult reason known only to the faculty, they gave me a Phi Beta Kappa key when I took my A. B. I had majored in Math., and had a good pair of eyes and a lively curiosity about the universe in general as well as a certain amount of manual dexterity; so I managed to get on to Uncle Sam's pay-roll as an astronomical photographer, and except for a couple of years which I spent in learning the theory of artillery fire and then commanding a battery in France, that's been my job ever since.

Doddering dodoes, eh? I took a party of doddering dodoes down to the Cape of Good Hope to make a few snapshots of the transit of Venus, a couple of years ago, and with one exception I was the oldest man in the party. There *was* one old fuddy-duddy, of thirty-five or so, along.

ROMANCE? Well, that's something into which the personal equation enters so largely that I wont quarrel violently with anyone who insists that *his* idea of Venus is much more romantic than mine. But if by romance you mean high adventure, strange and wonderful sights that stir the imagination and exalt the spirit as you look back upon them, come out to the Naval Observatory some night and let me show you a new solar system being evolved from its primal nebula into an orderly arrangement of sun and planets, revolving in their appointed orbits. Can you think of anything more romantic than to have been a spectator at the Creation? And I'll admit, now, though I wouldn't have done it so readily a year ago, that there may be something in certain human relations that are usually regarded as romantic.

I suppose people call us astronomers impractical because we don't make very much money, and because we are not intensely interested in many of the things most people regard as consequential. To find traces of gold in the spectrum of Saturn isn't nearly so important, such folk think, as to find similar traces in the sands of the Yukon; so, because the one interests us more than the other, they jump to the conclusion that we must lack interest in all other human affairs. That isn't true, as the things I'm going to tell you about will prove, though I'll admit that a great many things people make a fuss about do seem rather temporary when you turn to them from the study of the swing of the planets in their orbits, like great clocks of eternity which beat ages as ours beat seconds. After you have seen a world burst into flame and die down to a cinder, the failure of the milkman to arrive on time falls somewhat short of your conception of a catastrophe.

I once said something like that to my sister Mary. She married Dan Comstock of the Geological Survey while I was still in college, and when I came to Washington, I took a room with them. Mary is a good sort, for a woman. She isn't afraid of snakes, and doesn't find it essential to her happiness to put it over the other women of her acquaintance in the matter of clothes, and there are times when she even shows signs of being able to reason logically from cause to effect, instead of jumping straight to her conclusion. That's a sort of trickery that is very offensive to the orderly mind. My sister does it at times, but not in the annoying, triumphant way some women do. On the whole, I approve of Mary, except when she says such utterly inconsequential things as she did when I made that remark about relative catastrophic values.

"What you need," she said, "is a wife. Run down to the grocery, wont you, and get a bottle of milk."

ALL the way to the grocery I tried to figure out by what means Mary had arrived at any such absurd conclusion and what it had to do with the lateness of the milkman. I could not find a single premise on which to establish a syllogism that would even lead in that direction, and entered the house fully determined to ask her for an explanation. The postman had come in my absence, however, and I found Mary already at the breakfast-table, reading a long letter from Dan. He was heading a surveying party up in the northwestern corner of Montana that summer, near the Canadian line, and I found great interest in the photographs and descriptions of that wild region which he sent back.

"Dan's coming home!" exclaimed Mary, tossing me some photographs as she read on.

The pictures were rather striking ones of a bare, windswept cliff, or rather a cluster of cliffs, terminating at the top in sharp pinnacles of rock. The views had been taken across a wide cañon, evidently from a height almost as great as that of the cliffs shown in the photographs. I had turned my attention from the views to my oatmeal when Mary handed me the letter.

"This is terribly exciting, Mark," she said. "Dan found a man frozen in the snow at the bottom of a cañon, and it turns out he was an English lord or something, and he's bringing the body back East and has to go to the British Embassy and tell them all about it, and he'll be here next Friday, and he can only stay till Sunday night."

I glanced over Dan's letter idly, little dreaming that the news it contained could have the slightest import for me. Mary had already given me the gist of it. The dead man was the Honorable Jeffrey Blythe of Middle Deeping, Sussex. He had fallen or been thrown from a cliff into the cañon, where his body had been buried in the snow. Dan had sent a wire to the British Embassy, after reporting his discovery to the local authorities, and the Embassy had responded with a request for him to accompany the body back East and give them a detailed statement of the circumstances surrounding its recovery. The Honorable Jeffrey Blythe seemed to have been a person of some importance in England.

As Dan had a bit of leave still due him, that he would have to take before the end of June, when the fiscal year expired, he had agreed to make the trip—at the Embassy's expense. The photographs, he added, had been made with the dead man's own camera, which he had found in its case, the strap around the Englishman's neck. There was a roll of exposed film still in the camera, and Dan had developed this in camp.

IT was all interesting enough, but hardly what Mary called it, "terribly exciting." Still, one could hardly help feeling a sort of sympathetic curiosity as to how the unfortunate fellow had come to his end, thousands of miles from home.

Dan arrived on Friday and spent most of his time for the next twenty-four hours at the British Embassy. As I had observations to make, which kept me at the Observatory at night, I didn't hear the details until Sunday.

"It seems this Blythe person started out from Calgary last September on a hunting-trip, with only a couple of Indians as guides. He seems to have been an uncommunicative sort, rather pig-headed, as I gathered, and disinclined to take advice. He insisted upon going south, although he was warned of the danger from blizzards in the mountains if he got too far away from the beaten trails," Dan told us.

"The Indians, who were rather an ignorant lot, returned to Calgary late in November, bringing what was left of the supplies and camp equipment with them, including Blythe's rifle. They reported that they had lost him in a blizzard far to the south. Their story sounded straight enough, and checked up in some of its details with the report of a searching-party that had gone out to look for the man but had been turned back by the heavy snows.

"The Indians were held under surveillance all winter, and as soon as it was possible to travel in the mountains, another search party went out, taking the Indians with them. They followed the trail as nearly as they could, but didn't get to within a hundred miles of the cañon where we found the body. The plain truth seems to be that the Indians got lost and didn't know where they were, and that Blythe had been cut off from his camp by a sudden blizzard and either walked off the cliff in the dark or was blown off. The body was frozen stiff, in a perpetual snowbank, when we found it. We were scraping away the snow to build a cairn there as a monument for a base-line, or we never would have discovered it."

"Why was the British Embassy so concerned?" I asked. "Was this Blythe a person of some consequence over there?"

"Not in his own person, as nearly as I can make out," replied Dan. "I gathered, in fact, from some hints that were dropped at the Embassy, that he was a good deal of a rotter. But the disposition of a considerable estate depends upon proof of his death. His father left his property to his two sons, with the provision in his will that if either died before the father did, his share was to go to the survivor. The old man died some time last winter, and the surviving brother can't get title to the property without proof that this other, Jeffrey, is dead. He's dead enough now to satisfy any court of chancery."

I RESUMED my perusal of *The Astronomical Review*, while Dan and Mary continued a discussion that had evidently been begun some time before, as to whether Mary should accompany Dan back to Montana. She had been out with him on several of his summer surveying expeditions, but never quite so far from civilization, for the quadrangle on which the party was working this summer was more than a hundred miles from the nearest railroad.

As I was nearest the telephone, I answered it when it rang. A woman's voice responded to my "Hello!"

"Is this Mr. Comstock's residence?" she asked. "May I speak to him?"

"Oh, Dan," I called, "a lady with a pleasant voice wants to speak to you."

Dan went to the telephone, and Mary turned to me with a curious expression on her face.

"Well, Mark Edgerton!" she exclaimed. "When did *you* begin to take notice of ladies' voices?"

I thought the question entirely uncalled for. It *was* a pleasant voice. It had struck me as the pleasantest voice I had ever heard.

"It's Mrs. Blythe," said Dan, coming back from the hall. "She is coming out here."

"Not the dead man's mother?" cried Mary.

"No—his widow," Dan replied.

"Oh, the poor woman!" Mary exclaimed. "What do you suppose she wants of you? I didn't know this Blythe man was married."

"Neither did I," said Dan; "but it seems that he was, and the widow is having her troubles. The important question that brought her over here as soon as she could get a ship, after the Embassy had cabled the news that I had found the body, is just when he died. If he died before his father, she doesn't get anything out of the estate—some family quarrel, I suppose. Goodness knows, I can't give her the date. He might have been dead a month or six months, or sixty years, for that matter—the body was so well preserved in the frozen snow.

"She got to Washington this morning and called at the Embassy. They gave her what information they had, which wasn't much, and told her I was in town but was leaving tonight; that's why she's coming here to see me."

MARY had begun to bustle around, setting the living-room and veranda to rights, before Dan had finished speaking.

"Do, for Heaven's sake, put on a decent suit of clothes and throw that dirty old tie away," she called to me. I didn't see anything the matter with the clothes I had on, but Mary kept at me, and so I retired and later came down in blue serge and white flannels that met Mary's entire approval.

They arrived a few minutes later, the widow and a man whom she introduced as Mr. Balmaine, her solicitor. Anyone could see at a glance that she was the helpless kind, the sort that have to have a man around to do things for them. She was hardly more than a girl, little and dark and big-eyed, and so shy that she seemed almost timid.

"I brought Mr. Balmaine with me because he understands about evidence and such things," she said. "I couldn't come alone, and I should have died if I had had to stay in England, in suspense. Mr. Balmaine can explain to you just what we want to find out."

She was addressing Dan, but her eyes included me. It had never occurred to me before that a man might find a degree of pleasure in being of service to a woman, but I felt as if I would like to be of service to this one and was glad that she seemed to regard me as a factor in the situation. Her voice was as pleasant at first hand as it had been over the telephone.

THE solicitor was a middle-aged, red-faced Scot, whose manner suggested that he had been dragged across the ocean on a fool's errand and sincerely wished that he was back home again.

"It is logically improbable that we can find any convincing evidence," he said, "but Muriel—Mrs. Blythe, that is—is convinced that it is possible, and that you can put us on the track of it."

"Oh, I just *know* you can, Mr. Comstock," she interposed.

Again she included me with her eyes.

"What we are trying to determine," the solicitor resumed, "is the precise date upon which Jeffrey Blythe met his death. The value of the property that depends upon that fact is considerable. He left Calgary on the fifteenth of last September. No one saw him alive after that except his two Indian guides. They returned to Calgary on the twenty-sixth of November, saying that they had lost him about a month before. They are very vague about the time, but it is of the utmost importance to my client's interests. The elder Blythe died on the twelfth of October. Unless we can produce positive evidence that Jeffrey Blythe was alive after that date, the entire estate left by his father goes to his brother Mortimer, who bears so little good will toward my client that she can expect nothing from him."

"And if Jeffrey Blythe survived his father—" Dan began.

"In that case, under the terms of his will, drawn in accordance with a certain antenuptial contract, my client will inherit

upward of one hundred thousand pounds."

"Nearly half a million dollars," commented Dan. "I don't know what I can tell you that will be of any value, but I'll gladly give you all the facts in my possession, though I've already told them to the officials at the Embassy. It occurs to me that it may be rather a dry recital, and if a nip of Scotch—"

He did not need to finish the sentence. The solicitor's countenance lighted up like Arcturus on a winter night.

"Mr. Balmaine has been quite downcast by the discovery that prohibition is taken seriously in America," remarked Mrs. Blythe. Again she seemed to be addressing me as much as anyone else.

"You men go into the living-room to have your drink," said Mary, "that is, unless Mrs. Blythe would care to have one, too."

"I never want to see the stuff again," responded the latter promptly. "If it wasn't for that, all this trouble would never have happened."

"I GATHERED from things that were dropped at the Embassy that your client's late husband was rather a poor specimen," said Dan, after he had poured a stiff drink for the appreciative Balmaine and we three men were comfortably settled in the living-room, while the ladies were getting acquainted on the veranda.

"Whisky—and women," replied the solicitor sententiously. "She married him to reform him, with the usual result."

For the next hour he questioned Dan until every circumstance surrounding the discovery of Jeffrey Blythe's body had been gone into and examined.

"I'm afraid I haven't given you much help," Dan said, after his recital had been finished.

"We'll have to go much farther, I'm afraid," admitted Balmaine. "Frankly, there's nothing to go on, and I would have refused to undertake the quest if Muriel had not been so set upon it. Her intuition, as she calls it, convinces her that we shall find that Blythe was alive after the twelfth of October, and she has a most uncanny way of getting people to do things for her. I've known her since she was born, and she's always been that way. It will take more than intuition to win this case, though. Mortimer Blythe will fight every step of the way unless we have indisputable evidence."

The two women came in just then. Mary had her arm around the other in a mothering sort of way. It was clear that they had taken to each other quite completely.

"I want to show Muriel those photographs," she said. "I think I put them in the desk here."

Balmaine was interested, too, in the prints Dan had made from the films he had found in Jeffrey Blythe's camera; and suddenly, while we were looking at them, I found them the most interesting pictures I had ever seen.

"See here," I said to Balmaine, with an emphasis that made him start, "you said you wanted indisputable evidence. Well, here it is, right in front of you."

Everyone stopped talking and looked at me.

"Oh, I knew it! I knew it!" cried Mrs. Blythe. "My intuition told me to come here."

"I don't understand you at all," said Balmaine, scowling at the print in his hand. "How can these pictures prove anything? There's no date on them that I can see, and if there were, that wouldn't prove anything; the date might have been put on by anybody."

"The shadows, man, the shadows!" I exclaimed. "Can't you see? Your chancery courts will take the evidence of the sun, wont they? You can prove that these prints were made from the negatives you found in the dead man's camera, can't you?" I asked, turning to Dan.

"Yes; I scratched my initials and the date I developed them on the edge of the films," he replied. "They're in the package I turned over to the Embassy."

"Then here's positive proof that Jeffrey Blythe was alive on the day these photographs were made," I said, "and what day that was any astronomer can figure out for you, with the aid of a few data that should be comparatively easy to get."

DAN caught the idea at once; Balmaine was puzzled but somewhat impressed, apparently, by my earnestness; Mrs. Blythe clapped her hands in girlish enthusiasm.

"Oh, that is wonderful!" she cried. "I don't care what the date may prove to be; it is the uncertainty that is the worst. If the property is honestly Mortimer's, I don't want it. I would rather know that it was his than to live in the thought that perhaps it really belonged to me."

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Edgerton,

that you can tell by looking at a photograph what day of the year it was made?" Balmaine asked incredulously.

"My brother is an astronomer," explained Mary. The others seemed to regard me with heightened respect.

"That is not true of every photograph, nor of any, unless we have some further data to go on," I replied, "but in the case of these particular photographs it ought to be possible to assemble the data in such completeness that your own Royal Astronomer would be compelled to the same conclusion as to the date upon which they were made that anyone else would be.

"See," I went on, pointing to the photograph to illustrate my explanation, "this picture was taken across the cañon, a distance of perhaps half a mile. Upon the face of the opposite cliffs, here, is the strongly marked shadow of a high pinnacle of rock, almost like a church spire. If that pinnacle is still standing, or even only partly standing, it will cast a shadow upon precisely the same spot at the same hour on the corresponding day once a year and no oftener."

"It's just like a giant's sundial, isn't it?" suggested Mrs. Blythe.

"The simile is an excellent one," I replied.

"But a sundial's shadow is the same every day, at any given hour," objected the solicitor.

"It only appears so because it is on such a small scale," I replied. "As a matter of fact, a sundial tells the exact time on only one day in the year.

"You see," I continued, addressing Mrs. Blythe and trying to make my explanation simple enough for her understanding, "the relative position of the earth and the sun is constantly changing, and the position of every point on the surface of the earth, relative to its own center, is also changing. For all practical purposes, it is perhaps enough to understand that the earth revolves on its axis and travels around the sun in its orbit; but an astronomer has to take into account a dozen or so other movements of the earth, like the precession of the equinoxes, nutation, planetary precession, variation of latitude and some others, all of which affect any problem that has to do with determining precisely the apparent angle of the sun when viewed from a given point on the earth's surface at a given time.

"That's the sort of thing we are working on all the time at the Naval Observatory, calculating the ephemerides for *The Nautical Almanac*.

"Now, if we can determine the exact latitude, longitude and altitude of this spire-like pinnacle, the height of it and the width of the cañon at this point, and the height of the opposite cliff from a given base-line, as well as the angles of its principal planes, we can find out just what day these photographs were made and prove to the satisfaction of any competent astronomer that they could not have been made on any other day."

"We've got all the instruments necessary to get those data, right there in the surveying camp," cried Dan.

BALMAINE turned to Mrs. Blythe. "Muriel," he said, "I'll never question your intutition again. You said you were sure we would learn the truth if we came here, and I'm convinced that we shall. But you must remember that the truth may turn out against you."

"I'm not afraid," she replied. "I feel as if the whole array of celestial bodies was working for us."

" 'The stars in their courses fought against Sisera,' " quoted Balmaine.

"Just what I was thinking," interjected Mary.

"What chariots, what horses
Against us shall bide
While the stars in their courses
Do fight on our side?"

"My dear," she went on, "I know you are right, and I'm sure Dan and Mark want to do everything they can to help you. Now, Dan has to go back to Montana tonight, and I propose we shall all go with him."

I looked at her in amazement, and so did Dan.

"An hour ago you were trying to prove that you couldn't possibly go with me," said Dan.

"I claim a woman's right to change her mind," Mary replied. "An hour ago I didn't know this dear girl. I can be ready to take the midnight train, and these travelers are ready now. Mark, you call up Professor Blackburn and tell him you'll take two weeks' leave beginning now, if he doesn't mind. If he objects, let me talk to him."

"What do I need to go along for?" I demanded. "There's an occultation of one of the satellites of Jupiter due next week, and I want to photograph it. Let Dan get the

data and send them on to me and I'll make the calculations."

"How will Dan know what measurements to make?" insisted Mary. "He's only a surveyor, but you're an astronomer. Besides, I'm not going away and let you keep bachelor's hall in my house. I'd never get it cleaned up."

"Do come, Mr. Edgerton," urged Mrs. Blythe. "I'm sure everything will be all right if you do."

Well—I yielded.

THERE were certain books I had to have, to make the calculations, and along with them, moved by some impulse I did not quite comprehend, I threw into my bag the case containing the medal they pinned on me after that scrap in the Argonne. I don't go around bragging about my part in the war; in fact, I rise up in wrath if anyone calls me "Captain," a fact which Dan and Mary understand, and so they never use the title in my presence.

"That poor girl has been abominably treated," said Mary, at the supper-table, "and she hasn't a soul in the world to stand up for her except old Balmaine, who thinks she's a child. Her husband's people look down on her because she hasn't any family connections, and they turned her husband against her with their contemptuous insinuations. He was an officer in the British army, and she was a nurse in a base hospital and took care of him when he was gassed. His brother made him believe afterward that she married him because she thought he would die and she would inherit the estate. If it hadn't been for old Mr. Balmaine, they'd have fixed it so she never could get anything but a pittance, but he was her father's friend, and he made Blythe sign a contract before they were married, that can't be set aside. The brother even set spies to watch her, and tried to get his father to change his will. I never heard of such meanness, and I want Muriel to win. She's one of the dearest little women I've ever known."

"Trust a woman to find out all about another woman's affairs," commented Dan. "I only hope she's a good mountaineer."

"She seems rather a helpless kind, to me," I ventured.

"Helpless?" echoed Mary. "I think she's the gamest, most self-reliant little person I ever saw. And she's climbed mountains, too. Before her husband's mind was poisoned against her and he began cutting loose with other women, and drinking, they spent two summers in the Alps. They were really quite crazy about each other, at first, but after the way he treated her—well, of course, she's sorry he came to such a tragic end, but that's about all. Why, he even beat her, so that she would have grounds for divorce. Imagine, beating that frail little thing!"

I had been perfectly neutral in regard to the late Jeffrey Blythe up to that time, but now I began to feel a violent and unaccountable prejudice against him.

BY the time we reached Kalispell, we had all become very well acquainted, indeed. The principal drawback to the trip was Mary's insistence upon my playing bridge, with Muriel—we all called her that after the first day out—for my partner. Cards always seemed to me like child's play, but the mathematical problems involved in a hand of bridge offer interesting permutations at times, and I held my own with the rest.

Muriel got along better than I had expected, on the long ride from the railroad to the surveying camp. She was so afraid of snakes and wild beasts that I had to ride with her most of the way, but she was a good little horsewoman, though she looked more like a boy of twelve, with her black hair tucked up under a Stetson and her trim boots and riding-breeches. She was crazy about the country.

"I don't ever want to go back to England," she said, after we had been in camp a day or so. "I think America is wonderful, and I've never known such wonderful people. Why, every man in the camp is just lovely to me."

They were, too. Even Mary's cooking didn't seem to make the hit with the boys that Muriel made simply by smiling at them. If she dropped a handkerchief, five out of the six of them would bump their heads together trying to pick it up first. I spoke about this to Mary one day when Muriel had gone for a climb with a couple of the boys.

"I think if you'd speak to her about it, she wouldn't be quite so flirtatious," I suggested.

The answer I got from Mary was a burst of laughter.

"I declare, Mark," she said, "you are the funniest human being I ever knew. Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

That was all I could get out of her. I

couldn't see anything funny about it, any more than I could see why she called me John.

It took only a couple of days to make the observations and measurements we had come for, and I was tabulating them, getting them in shape to be certified to by the whole party before going ahead with the calculations that would reveal the evidence we were after, when old Balmaine strolled up. He had watched every detail of the work, and showed a really keen appreciation of the scientific problems involved. He had brought a couple of bottles of Dan's Scotch with him, and had picked up some more at Kalispell, in some way, so that his prejudices against America were rapidly vanishing.

"Ye're a wonderful mathemateecian, my lad," he said; and I knew by his lapse into the Scottish accent that he had had at least two drinks in succession. "Ye're a wonderfu' mathemateecian, an' a braw lad to luik at, but I'm thinkin' no woman 'll ever tak' ye, for a' that, until ye show her there's red blood in your veins, likewise."

"What are you driving at?" I asked. "I'm not interested in women."

"That's as it may be," he answered, chuckling, and strolled away.

I WAS still puzzling over Balmaine's cryptic utterance, which kept intruding itself upon the figures I was setting down and verifying, when Muriel came back from her climb, panting a bit from the exertion in the high altitude, but as flushed and eager as a schoolboy over the wonders of the scenery and the excitement of the climb. She came over to where I had set up my table, under my tent-fly. My suitcase lay open on the ground beside me.

"What are these books?" she asked, picking one of them up. "I hope they're novels. Oh, what horrid titles! 'Terrestrial Magnetism.' 'Principles of Geodesy.' 'Logarithms.' I don't even understand the names of them. Haven't you got something light?"

She kept on rummaging into my bag. I dislike to have my belongings disordered, and if it had been Mary, I would not have hesitated to say so; but I found it hard to object now without appearing impolite, so I went on with my figures and had just checked the last of them when I heard Muriel exclaim again.

"So this is where you keep her portrait, is it? I'm going to look."

I looked up. She had my medal-case in her hand.

"Don't open that, please," I said, but I realized as I spoke that I did want her to open it. It would have made no difference, anyway, for she had it open before the words were out of my mouth.

She said nothing, but looked first at the medal and then at me. I felt my face flushing in a silly, sheepish sort of way.

"Yours?" she asked at last. I nodded.

"The Distinguished Service Cross, with two palms," she went on. "And you never told me."

"There wasn't any reason to tell you," I replied. "A fellow had to do what he could."

"You were an officer?"

"Captain of artillery," I admitted.

"I think I like you a great deal," she said simply. "I was rather afraid of you, with all the wonderful mathematics and astronomy and things in your solemn old head, but now I'm not a bit afraid of you."

She acted as if she were, though, for she turned on her heel as she spoke and ran down the cañon path to where Mary was showing the camp cook how to make old-fashioned Virginia cornbread.

I was glad I had got through with the tabulation of the observations, for I felt as if I couldn't have put down another figure. I wondered if the altitude were affecting me, for my mind did not seem to be functioning with its usual precision.

EVEN the Virginia cornbread didn't rouse me from my state of depression. Mary rallied me about my lack of appetite at supper. Muriel seemed to avoid my eyes; I was rather glad when the meal was over and I could retire out of the range of the lights and look up at the stars. Even without a telescope there was calm and comfort in their contemplation. Boötes was just coming up over the edge of the mountain with his hounds in leash, hot in pursuit of the Great Bear. Polaris, swinging yearly wider and ever wider from his ancient base, to give way in a mere twenty thousand years to Canopus as the mariner's chief guide, glittered brilliantly in the thin mountain air. How unimportant, I reflected, were the little things that men and women magnify beside this slow and solemn pageant of the skies. And yet—

My philosophy was interrupted by a call from Mary.

"Is Muriel up there with you?" she asked. To my negative reply, she responded in some alarm.

"I can't find her. She said she was going to walk up the path, and I thought she meant this one."

"There's only one other path she could have gone, and she surely wouldn't try that at night," I replied, exasperated at the suggestion of such recklessness. "I'll go up, however, and see if I can find her."

The path led upward for a hundred feet and then around a spur of the cliff, out of sight of the camp. Taking an electric torch with me, I climbed as rapidly as I could. I had gone half a mile or more before I found any trace of Muriel's passage; then I saw a tiny handkerchief in the path and recognized it as hers as I picked it up. A hundred yards farther on the path took a sharp and sudden descent, I remembered. Even in broad daylight it was a treacherous spot; by night it would be almost impossible for one unfamiliar with it to escape a terrific fall. The picture of Muriel falling, falling down to the awful rocks below sent a chill through me. Suddenly I knew—knew that there was and never could be but the one woman in the world for me.

With equal suddenness I realized that I could wait no longer, if I found her. I called her name. A faint call answered me, from the path ahead.

"Muriel!" I cried. "Don't go on. Wait."

I FOUND her huddled against a rock, on the very verge of the precipice. The light from my torch showed traces of recent tears on her cheeks. Before I knew it I had gathered her into my arms.

"I came up to see the stars—your wonderful stars," she whimpered, her arm around my neck, her little head pillowed on my shoulder. I dared not move, for the amazement of it.

"I thought I could see them better from here," she went on, "and I turned my ankle and almost fell off the cliff, and it got cold and I was afraid, so afraid."

"Afraid of me?" I asked.

"I was afraid of the dark," she answered, snuggling closer in my embrace. "I'll never be afraid of you again, my Captain."

I felt not even a passing resentment at the title. "Are you sure?" I asked.

"Oh, my dear, I've known it ever since—well, a long, long time."

"Even if you should prove to be an heiress?" I asked. "I couldn't wait, because tomorrow we will know. Tonight we don't know whether you are rich or poor, so you mustn't think I'm a fortune-hunter."

"It doesn't make a bit of difference—now," she said, softly.

"I TOLD you so," said Mary to Dan, in a whisper that was not intended to reach my ears, as I brought Muriel back to the campfire in my arms. "You must have been blind not to see it coming, days ago. I'm so glad!"

I began to understand some things that had been mysteries to me. Even old Balmaine's enigmatic remarks began to assume meaning.

Muriel calls me "Captain" all the time now, and I rather like it. She seems to think a lot more of that military medal of mine than she does of the Ph. D. my old university gave me last commencement, and when I take her up to the Observatory, which I do sometimes when the night is not too cold, she doesn't seem at all interested in the important stars but wants to see what she calls "nice shiny ones." Somewhere up there, she insists, there's a star that belongs to us two and to nobody else, a star that has watched over us both from the beginning of things. And when I tell her she's talking astrology instead of astronomy, she just laughs and calls me a solemn old granddad. But that's the way with women; and the curious part of it all is, I like it.

The estate? Oh, that's still in chancery, but we had a cable from old Balmaine the other day saying that the case was coming up for decision in the course of a few weeks. I told you, didn't I, that the computations showed that Jeffrey Blythe must have made those photographs on the twenty-first of October and that they couldn't have been made on any other day? No? I remember—something more important intervened. I had a most complimentary letter from the Astronomer Royal, Sir Gilbert Harvey himself, who was called in as an impartial witness and verified my conclusions to a hair.

There, that's my case. Now, I leave it to you; *am* I a doddering dodo?

Watch for Mr. Stockbridge's next story, which will appear in an early issue. It is delightful indeed.

Down Again

A talented new writer here tells the surprising story of Slim Hand the pickpocket, and of the events which led those agile fingers of his into the pocket of the District Attorney.

By F. R. BUCKLEY

"YOU see this eye?" asked Billy the Slim Hand. "I got this here particular eye tellin' a bunch I'd 'boed with for years, that I was all through. If I'd do that, Mister, not to mention fightin' four of your cops when I see them knockin' that moll about, I guess you can see I'm past bein' any tame roughneck in any election. I'm reformed, Mister, and I'm goin' to stay reformed."

The District Attorney arrayed the former contents of Billy's pockets in a methodical row before him.

"All right," he said, "you're reformed. You're going to start fresh as a farm-laborer. How do you account for being found beating your way on a freight-train, while you had in your pocket a receipt covering the purchase of ten dollars' worth of violets in Chicago, the day before yesterday?"

"I wasn't found on a freight-train," said Billy the Slim Hand, flushing dully. "I got off in the yards here when I saw the bulls hittin'—"

"Never mind about that. You're known here in Taylorsville as a hobo and pickpocket. You say you are reformed. The judge is going to believe that, isn't he, when he hears you spent your last ten dollars buying one of your girls violets—in the middle of winter!

"Now, look here, Billy. I know you: and there's some help you can give me this election-time. You know me, so you'll believe I'm not bluffing when I say that if you stick to this reform bunk, I'll put you out of the reach of temptation for two years anyway—for vagrancy and assaulting the police. Now, then—which? I've wasted more time on you already, than you're worth."

Billy the Silm Hand, his face a dull brick-color, rose slowly from his seat. The District Attorney's finger hovered over a push-button.

"It's all right," said Billy, "I aint goin' to punch you, Mister Aitken. I said I was through with all that stuff, an' I mean it. If you want to send me to jail for bein' straight, go to it. I aint afraid of you."

"You're not going to jail because you're straight," said the District Attorney gently. "You're going because you as-

saulted police officers in the execution of their duty. So don't figure on coming before whoever it was that converted you, as a martyr."

"You know why I done it," said Billy the Slim Hand, through his teeth. "That girl was standin' in front of the factory on Railroad Avenue because they's a lot of Poles work there, an' her Dad's a Pole, an' she was beggin' for money because he's in St. Louis, dyin', an' she hadn't enough money to get home an' see him. An' what the cops said she was doin's a lie: an' I tell you, Mister, that if I hadn't gone an' punched them policemen, the way they were knocking her about, some of them Poles would ha' pulled knives."

"Better have let them," said the D. A. "You haven't got quite the record to back up a story like that."

"Not before you or a judge," said Billy the Slim Hand, "but I aint afraid of you, Mister. An' the only person I do care about, Miss Armstrong, I guess she'll believe me when I tell her what happened."

NO one, looking at Mr. District Attorney Aitken, would have guessed that his heart had suddenly suspended business. A narrow escape! Half a dozen words more, and he would have been in the mess too far to back out. Half a minute later, he would have committed himself irrevocably to the framing up of a protégé of Lucilla Armstrong. Thirty seconds, and all the graft he had lost cleaning up the town to get the women's vote would have gone for nothing. Awaiting trial, the prisoner would have been allowed to notify his friends: the handsome woman with the gray hair would have come down from Chicago and stuck her long nose into the business on the spot; and within a week she would have arrayed every female voter in the county against John Aitken's reëlection.

"Is that final?" the District Attorney asked coolly.

"Yeah," said Billy the Slim Hand.

"Well, I'm glad of it, Billy," Mr. Aitken smiled, "and so will Miss Armstrong be glad. Most of you boys talk gratitude and reformation with your mouths, and that's all. You went farther spending your railroad fare to send the lady violets: but I didn't think you'd stick to your reformation as hard as you have. Well—on your way! Guess I can't countenance your riding the rods any more. Here's five dollars. And don't make a hobby of punching cops. Up in Michigan, they wont have heard of the East Street Settlement."

Billy stood perfectly still, staring. "All a test, huh?" he asked slowly.

Aitken nodded, smiling. He was wishing, behind that smile, that the big-eyed young dip wouldn't stand there thinking. Lavish thanks and a quick exit were to have been expected.

"How about the girl?" asked Billy at last. "She being tested too?"

"The girl you fought the police about? Why, no. Of course not. What's the idea?"

"Why, I'll tell you, Mister," Billy replied. "I punched the officers because I didn't think they were treating that girl right; an' I still don't think they were. If she was doin' wrong, then I shouldn't ought to have hit the cops, an' you'd ought to be keepin' me in jail."

"Well?"

"Well, if you're goin' to keep her in, I'd just as soon stay too. I promised Miss Armstrong—"

It was Mr. Aitken's boast that he had an infallible instinct for the moment at which it was necessary to stop being imposed upon. In other words, he knew when society would be likely to condone his acting like the bully he naturally was.

"All right," he snapped, pressing the button on his desk. Then to the patrolman that entered:

"Take him downstairs again, Casey."

THE women voters of the district would probably have honored Lucilla Armstrong more than ever could they have seen the businesslike manner in which, sitting in the courtroom next morning while the usual procession of drunks came up for reprimand, their long-distance leader investigated the forensic fitness of their District Attorney—though perhaps some of them might have thought that she paid overmuch attention to a single case, and that her refusal to hear any justification of her protégé's arrest, until Mr. Aitken had admitted himself wrong to have arrested him at all, was something less than just. She was, on the other hand, extremely well dressed, and handled a lorgnette in a manner which would have brought almost any quibbler back into line.

"This—this female all the trouble was about?" asked Miss Armstrong, as the last gentleman to be found sleeping on the car-tracks worked the old gag about being

obliged to the officer for picking him up, and was discharged. "Where is she?"

"Coming up now. Here's the policeman."

From the witness-stand came the drone of the oath, followed by the usual formula.

"At a quarther past five, Y'r Honor, yestiddy mornin', I was on duty in Railroad Avenue, whin I saw the prisoner loiterin' an' accostin'—"

Miss Armstrong shuddered slightly.

"Will Paradisa have to give evidence in this case?" she asked.

"Who? Oh, Billy. Not if you don't want him to. He's not our witness, and the girl wont know enough to call him."

"I certainly do not want him mixed up with a case of this kind. I think I will go down and see him now, if I may?"

Aitken beckoned a patrolman, and exchanging smiles with the Bench, Miss Armstrong moved off toward the detention cells.

She would have been gratified, had she actually entered the cell-block instead of preferring to remain in a room which did not smell of carbolic, to hear the firmness of Billy's reply to a gentleman held together largely by string, who from an adjoining cell had been urging the delights of a free trip South.

"We can get a freight outa here for St. Louis this afternoon, an' get down just about when the circuses start movin'."

"I'm goin' north," said Billy the Slim Hand, "—Michigan, on a farm. I'm goin' straight, Alf."

There was a pause of amazement.

"Goin'—straight? Wassamarrer, Billy? Somebody bin tellin' you dippin's wrong, er somepin? Why, them darkies don't think they enjoyed themselves unless they had their pockets picked. Say—"

It was at this point that the officer arrived to lead Billy to the reception room.

MISS ARMSTRONG'S reaction to his entrance was not favorable. She missed the expression of doglike adoration which had filled Billy's eyes while he had lain in the Settlement hospital with his broken leg, and which had solidified into the charming improvidence of the violets. She resented, too, his abrupt breaking into the details, not of his own case, but of that of the girl upstairs.

"The girl," she interrupted calmly, "does not interest me, Paradisa. I am here on your account, and at very great inconvenience. I am very sorry to hear—and to see by your bruised eye—that after all you promised me, you have gone back to your old ways."

"Miss!" cried Billy the Slim Hand, in agony, "I aint! I bin keepin' my promise to you. I said I'd go square with women for the future, an' those cops—"

"I had not considered it likely," said Miss Armstrong, "that you would be associating with women of that class."

"But she aint of that class, miss!"

"I have told you already, Paradisa, that I am not interested in her; and I may say that I am becoming less interested in you, the more you persist in talking about her. Whether she was—well, whether she was begging or not, she is evidently a person who would be better under supervision. I do not wish to discuss the matter any more."

"But you tol' me young women needed all the protection they could get, an'—"

Billy stopped as his eyes met Miss Armstrong's, and slowly, very slowly, he grew pale.

"I wanted you to speak for her in court," he said reflectively, as officers in the corridor began to bawl his name. "I figured you could explain how it was, same's you did for me when I rolled that guy for his leather in Chicago. Thought maybe you'd lend her money, same's you did me—only I'd pay this back."

Miss Armstrong rose.

"Her case has apparently been dealt with already," she said, from the door of the reception room. "I am not pleased with you, Paradisa."

"Nor I—" began the wastrel who had sent her violets.

BUT she was gone—to find, in the courtroom above, that the girl's case had been dismissed. Several Poles from the factory had lost a morning's work to come up and tell what they knew of the case, and the court had no option. One of these volunteers was telling the judge he would like to stay and speak for the wop that hit the policemen.

Aitken cleared his throat and arose expansively, as an officer led Billy the Slim Hand to a seat beside Miss Armstrong.

"That, Your Honor," he said sweetly, "will not be necessary. I am, of course, about to move that the case against William Paradisa be dismissed. I am aware that the court would naturally take this course

without remarks from me, but I should like to mention—"

And so, the judge being of his own political party, he went on to give a rather discursive sketch of what he and the gracious lady beside him had done for Chicago and Taylorsville respectively in the past, and of what they might be expected to do in the future.

Meanwhile, a foot from his broadcloth elbow, Billy was muttering to the gracious lady.

"That's her over there. She's bin cryin' again," he said. "She don't look bad, does she? Her dad's dyin', and'—"

Miss Armstrong looked through the lorgnette.

"Her friends, the Poles appear to be giving her money," she said icily. "My assistance does not seem to be required. In any case—"

She stopped to listen to a particularly adulatory sentence of Mr. Aitken's.

"This man Paradisa," said the District Attorney, "formerly a notorious pickpocket, came under Miss Armstrong's influence. I confess to having been skeptical, Your Honor, as to the result of this—er—this social work; so as a clinical experiment I offered this man the alternative of returning to his old ways, or going to prison. He chose the prison without a moment's hesitation. Again, his almost fantastic chivalry with regard to the young woman—"

He boomed on, but Billy the Slim Hand paid no attention to him. Billy knew that the District Attorney had not been making a test when he offered that thug-job; and this eloquence on the subject made him feel sick. Yet, glancing at the face of Miss Armstrong as she stared coldly across the court at the Polish girl, he impulsively shifted his seat a little further along the bench from his benefactor, and a little nearer to the District Attorney.

In fact, when Mr. Aitken sat down, rather flushed with his effort, he almost sat on Billy the Slim Hand.

"Dismissed!" said the Court wearily. "Next!"

AN hour later Billy, accompanied by a certain Alfred, against whom the evidence had failed to support a charge of pocket-picking, met the other person who had been discharged that morning as she came out of the courthouse. She had quietly fainted from lack of food, and had had to be restored in the matron's room.

"We've just got time," said Billy the Slim Hand impatiently. "Take her under the other arm, Alf."

They hurried her to the station.

"How much did the Poles give you?" demanded Billy, as he fumbled in his pocket before the ticket-window.

The girl exhibited a handful of small change. It was the day before pay-day at the factory.

Billy turned with a ticket to St. Louis, and a bundle of greenbacks.

"Here's fifty dollars, all told," he said. "You'll just make a train. Good-by! Good luck!"

He shoved her rather roughly through the wicket, and turned to the man Alf, who was held together so largely by string.

"All right," he said, "Lead on to the sunny South!"

It was not until the chill wintry evening had quite darkened the interior of the box-car that Alf thought it advisable to venture a small taunt.

"Thought you was goin' on a farm, Billy!" he said. "Thought it was you for the decent life!"

Billy laughed shortly.

"So did I. But I guess there aint no such thing—really."

Alf nodded sagely in the dark. "Reform dame give you the razz, huh?"

Billy laughed again. "I gave it to her," he said.

"Oh—say, Bill, where did you get the fifty smackers you give to the doll? You was clean when they frisked you."

"Do you remember," said Billy the Slim Hand slowly, "when that D. A. goat got up and fired off that line of bull about me bein' reformed, an' so on? Well, I was sittin' right next to him, an' I hooked it out of his trousers pocket."

Alf drew a long breath through his teeth.

"Gee-wow! Thought you was off dippin'!"

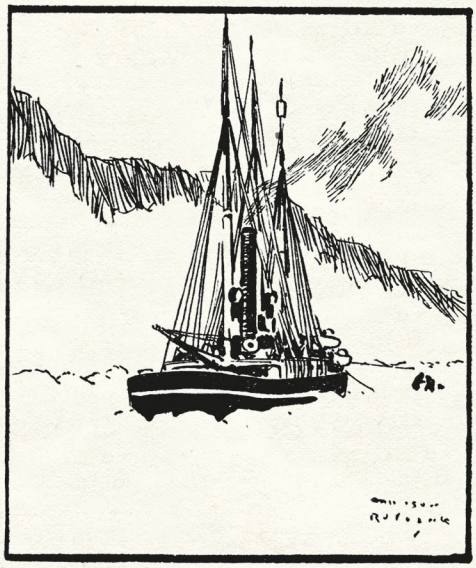
"So did I."

There was silence until a flying arc-lamp threw its beam across the box-car. Then Alf spoke.

"Why," he cried, "you aint blubberin', fer Gawd's sake, are you?"

"No," said Billy the Slim Hand in a choked voice, "I'm just laughin' like hell."

And when the next arc-lamp threw its momentary glare into the car speeding toward the land where the darkies just love to be robbed, it appeared that he really was.



Icebound

The story of a feud on a whaling ship icebound in the Arctic — narrated by a man who knows the North and who writes with conviction.

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

CHARLEY MADISON and I had faced so many tight situations together that I had come to regard him as absolutely fearless. There was that time on an ice-floe when my gun had jammed at the critical moment and an enraged polar bear was gaining on me at every leap. He had stepped in, and at a most unhealthy narrow margin emptied a clip of forty-five-caliber pistol-bullets into the brute. We afterward found that two bullets had pierced the brain through the eye. The white pelt lends atmosphere to my den now.

Then there was the time a Cape Serdz walrus ripped our *omiak* to shreds with his huge tusks; but—well, anyway, because of our many adventures, during which he had always proved himself without fear, I took it for granted he knew not the meaning of the word.

And yet now, as we stood there in his cabin, listening to the uproar in the fo'c'stle, I realized that for once in his life he was actually afraid—not for himself, you understand, but because of the others.

"You've never been frozen in, before," he remarked, "and so you don't know what it means. Men get sick of looking at each other's faces; a little thing that ordinarily would pass unnoticed frequently leads to quarrels in which a whole ship's company may become involved."

I shuddered. It lacked a week until Christmas, and they were already quarreling for'd. It would be months yet before the Arctic released its relentless grip and freed our craft. In fairer lands thousands of miles to the south, people talked in terms of Christmas shopping; the world was filled with brotherly love and Christmas cheer. But up here, where men go mad from lack of companionship when they are alone, they were now fighting because of one another's presence. In a way I appreciated their feelings and was sorry for them. They had not expected to winter in, though of course as with all

vessels entering the Arctic, such a possibility was not overlooked, and the schooner carried provisions for two years.

We had missed reaching Point Barrow by a narrow margin. Once clear of the Point, we would doubtless have made it, but the floes had willed otherwise. Beautiful things they were to look at, yet terrible in their power. Under Madison's skilled hand we had threaded many a lead that led to safety; yet eventually he had told the crew in plain words: "It's no use, men; we're caught!"

And then we had prepared for the winter. For weeks all had been well, but a storm such as I had never dreamed of was upon us—had broken, in fact.

MADISON stepped out onto the icy deck, listened a moment, then with an angry growl disappeared into the fo'c'stle. There are times when men instinctively know their place, and I knew that he did not want me tagging along, for I am not a man of the sea or a fighting man, but merely a buyer of furs who had ventured into the ice aboard one of the dauntless trading schooners that but few ever see.

From below came shouts and cries and the sound of blows, then the Captain's voice in sharply spoken orders. Presently he emerged, somewhat flushed of face, nursing his bruised knuckles, but as ever, calm.

I waited for him to speak as I followed him into the cabin.

"A fight between Olson and Mallory," he commented, "and some of the others mixed in. A little thing, too. Olson stepped on Mallory's foot in passing. He apologized, but Mallory flared up, and Olson told him to go to the devil and withdrew his apology. Blows followed. They've been cooped up there too long, and it's only a week until Christmas."

"And you made peace by fighting for it, so to speak." I suggested.

He was bathing his bruised fist as I spoke. He raised it from the water and regarded it solemnly. "Sometimes words wont do what blows will, and then it must be blows. In the months to come, these fists can subdue them and quiet them when words fail; but strong as they are, they can't crush the black hate from men's hearts. They'll slink away, and avoid me, and keep their hands from each other for a while; but the hate is there, a dull flame that always burns and is always ready to flare up as it did a moment ago. If I could have held this thing off until Christmas, then it might have never occurred. The New Year is close at hand then, and the men begin to think of the time when the ice will break up. The old year, the year that caught them, is behind."

"They know the penalty of your displeasure, Captain?"

"Such as it is, yes," he replied, "but in a moment of blind rage men do not think of penalties, either such as I might impose, or the extreme penalty, for that matter."

KNOWING the Captain as I did, I knew that while he ruled with a hand of iron, he was not of the old school that accompanied orders with blows from a belaying-pin. It was as he said: he could crush their bodies with his fists, but he could not crush the hate in their hearts.

"If I can only hold them off until Christmas," he said thoughtfully, "then I've won my fight, and won it without more blows—which is the better way."

"Is it always this way, Captain, when men are locked in the ice?"

"No. Many a time skipper, mates and crew are like a family of pups," was the quick reply.

With the best intentions in the world I entered the fo'c'stle the following day. I say "day," for though the nights were twenty four hours long, we ordered our lives as normally as possible. I spent perhaps an hour recounting experiences in business life, mixing in a few yarns that they had not heard; then Olson produced a pack of cards, and we started a friendly little game. To make it interesting, the cook brought in a box of matches in lieu of chips. It was Blackjack, and it so happened I was dealer; five minutes later Olson turned a Blackjack and took the deal. Up to this time Mallory had played with varying luck, but the instant Olson took the deal, his luck changed. He won once perhaps in every four or five deals. His stack of matches was half gone, and his black eyes blazed beneath glowering brows.

"Better walk around your chair and change your luck!" suggested some one.

"You can't change your luck when you're playing with some people!" retorted Mallory evenly.

In the twinkling of an eye, I saw the arraying of forces. The crowd in the

fo'c'stle was about evenly divided. Those who favored Mallory instinctively moved behind his chair; those who followed Olson's leadership shifted about the confined space to a point behind him.

THERE was an expression on Olson's face not pleasant to contemplate as he laid his cards face down on the table. "Meaning I'm cheating in a friendly game?" he demanded harshly, his fists closing and opening slowly.

With a fine disregard for the traditional fate of a peacemaker I leaped to my feet.

"Now, gentlemen," I pleaded, "we're all cooped up together and should make the best of it. Mallory, you've had a run of tough luck. And—well, Olson, you know how it is, when a fellow has a bit of bad luck, eh?"

"You call steady losing tough luck?" shouted Mallory. "Well, maybe you do, sir, but I've got another name for it!" He shoved his pile of matches onto the card that Olson had just dealt. "All right!" he shouted. "I'll prove it!" He slumped back into his chair, his blazing eyes flashing a challenge at Olson, which the latter eagerly accepted.

The atmosphere was charged as the others silently shoved out the two or three matches they desired to bet. All eyes turned to Olson. He silently dealt each man a second card. A queer look flashed over Mallory's face as he glanced at his hand. "I'm good!" he said in a low voice. I was glad to hear it.

"Hit me!"

Olson tossed me a card to add to my fifteen points. I smiled a bit ruefully as I shoved my matches toward him—he had presented me with the seven of hearts. In quick succession he disposed of the others; then Mallory turned his hand over.

A king and ten of diamonds rested beneath Mallory's powerful fingers. Olson seemed to be on the defensive as he turned his own hand over: a king of spades and an ace.

With a bellow of rage Mallory launched himself at the other. Olson met him halfway—and perhaps a little more, I thought. The cook, Sam, knowingly motioned to me. As the air became thick with flying missiles and the blows and curses of enraged men, I slid clear of the fight.

"We're neutral, eh?" grinned the cook.

It seemed impossible to stop the fight. It was as Madison had said: hate ruled and reason vanished. But suddenly the door was thrown open, and almost filling it was the bulky form of the Captain—a giant for strength. Fearlessly he leaped into the fray and with fists that played no favorites smote his way to victory through the crowd. Then he caught Mallory by the collar, and the next instant had Olson by a similar grip.

"Anxious to be at each other?" he snarled. "Well, you'll have your wish." With that he brought the heads of these two men together with such force that both of them were dazed. Again he smashed them into each other, then released his grip and watched them crash to the deck.

"The next man that lifts a hand goes into irons," he warned them. Then seeing my position, the faintest smile passed over his face as he left the fo'c'stle. I followed him out, while the cook set about reviving the fallen gladiators.

"You see how it is?" the Captain said. "I don't know what started it, but you'll notice the whole crew was at it."

"Where'll it end, Captain?" I inquired. "I'm worried. If it hadn't been for your interference, somebody'd have been killed."

"If I can keep 'em quiet until Christmas," he said, "I'll not worry after that. With the help of yourself and Sam, we'll manage?"

"A plan?" I queried.

"A sort of plan," he replied; and he outlined it. As he talked, I nodded approval. "You've got to get the spirit of Christmas into their hearts and drown out the black hate," he said, "—that's one time that white will mix with black and the whole mixture turn out white in the end. And besides, sir," he added, "I can't be forever breaking my fists on men that I like."

TWO days followed, two tense days, when the men for'd were excessively polite on the Captain's order, but for no other reason. He had tried to reason with them; he had listened with sympathy to real and fancied wrongs; he had pleaded and advised, to no effect. Now he ordered; and with the orders came a strange resentment that set them plotting against the very man who saved them from one another.

The devil himself seemed to urge them on. I sensed it, before I fully realized

what it was. A change had come over the fo'c'stle that did not seem natural. When I dropped in for an occasional chat, our former friendly relationship was changed. They were polite enough, but my appearance was the signal for a sudden silence, then a resumption of conversation that to me seemed forced.

And then as if to fortify them, this same devil whispered a plan that would drown out their caution and fear and lend the encouragement of desperation when the time came for revolt. Yes, it would end in a mutiny, though as yet even Mallory dared not think in such terms.

IN the hours when men are supposed to sleep, Sam gently shook my arm. I was wide awake instantly. "Best we had not disturb the Cap'n, sir," he whispered, "until we're sure!"

"Sure of what, Sam?" I demanded.

"I'm a cook, sir," he replied as we stepped onto the deck, "and awhile back I missed a kettle, and then some prunes and sugar, and other supplies, and there's been tinkerin' up for'd, sir; it commenced even before Olson and Mallory fought." He led me to a point on the fo'c'stle head. The cold air was heavy with a sickening sour smell of fermenting fruit.

"Booze, eh?" I suggested.

"You might call it that, sir," he replied, "but in the North it's White Mule, because of its kick. It's a brew of the Old Nick himself."

"How long has this been going on, did you say?"

"I missed the prunes some time ago; it's hard to tell just when they got it to working, but three nights ago I came out to watch the Northern Lights, and I got a whiff. I've been whiffing ever since, sir. Being nearer the Captain than I am, I thought I'd tell you. Later it might be mighty healthy for me if I swear I never mentioned a word to the Cap'n."

"I understand, Sam!" I replied. "And you can count on me to keep my source of information dark."

Sam headed for the galley, where he lived in some degree of privacy. I returned to the cabin and called Madison and explained the situation. There was a hard light in his eye as he donned his clothing.

His descent on the fo'c'stle would have done credit to a whole squad of prohibition-enforcement officers. Mallory was watching the trickling stream that dripped from the coil. The condensation was assisted materially by frequent applications of snow on the coil. The fo'c'stle stove was keeping the missing pot boiling at the proper degree.

"You fools!" shouted Madison. "You want to poison yourselves? A lead worm is one way to make sure of it!" He snatched a blanket from the nearest bunk, picked up the pot of sickening brew and carried it out. With a gesture of disgust he heaved it over the rail. The pot crashed onto the ice below.

Hard eyes gleamed from the bunks when he again entered the fo'c'stle. Mallory backed away, his attitude threatening, but he was afraid to try conclusions alone. Madison snatched the half-filled bottle from his hand, picked up the worm and stalked out.

"For that," he declared as we entered the cabin, "they'll not forgive me until after Christmas; and maybe—" For the first time he seemed to doubt. "Well, it's our only chance," he ended.

"You don't think they'd go so far as to attack this cabin?" I inquired. He regarded me curiously before replying.

"Afraid?" he queried.

"I'm not made of the stern stuff you read about, Captain. I was never accused of being a coward, but just the same, two of us against the pack isn't cheerful."

"I doubt if they'd give you a thought," was his answer. "If they come, they'll come for me. And of course they'll get me," he added calmly, "because numbers would count. It wont be tonight, though, so let's turn in!"

Three minutes after he crawled into his bunk, he was sound asleep. As for me, I remained awake for several hours, thinking of our peculiar situation. In a way, we were a world of ourselves. A schooner in winter's grip! From no outside source could we receive aid. When the law came and exacted its penalty for what might take place, it would be too late to alter the present situation. . . . . At last I too fell asleep.

WHAT took place in the fo'c'stle after Madison left that time, I was to learn later. Without a word being said, Mallory became the leader. Olson slipped into second place, though there was little love lost between them.

"We'll get him for that!" Mallory

promised. "A little nip hurts nobody, and it was going into our stomachs, not his."

"Get him, yes!" replied a voice. "But how? We've laid down like a pack of curs every time he comes in. It's about time—"

"Yes, it's about time!" agreed Olson. "And we'll dig him out Christmas. Back there in that cabin of his, he's got some real stuff he brought along as medicine. When this fight's over, we'll all be sick!"

"And take the medicine, eh, boy?" shouted a voice.

MALLORY, in his operations, had succeeded in distilling two quarts of liquor. One of these he turned over to the crew that night, but the other he tucked away for his own use.

From a source known only to himself Madison learned of the contemplated attack. He examined his automatic pistol, then laid it carefully away. "If it's out of the way, then there'll be no shooting, and the chances of some one's being killed are reduced."

"But Captain," I insisted, "some of them will be armed?"

"Yes, but not with guns," he replied.

I did not visit the fo'c'stle again, because it did not seem to be healthy for me under the circumstances. To keep my mind off of the doubts of the future, I assisted the Captain with what he was pleased to term his first line of defense. Incidentally this was his only line. We worked like fools, too.

Christmas day dawned most places in the world, but not up there. There was a stirring around in the fo'c'stle, and in time the cook sent the mess-boy for'd with breakfast. As the door opened, I heard Mallory's voice coming distinctly: "Christmas day, and cooped up in this hell-hole!" he shouted. "Better quarters tonight, boys." The man was half drunk even then. Something about the mess-boy displeased him, and he knocked him spinning with his open hand. The boy scrambled nimbly away and avoided a kick. The others roared with laughter. Through the opening Mallory caught sight of me. He shook a huge fist my way on general principles; then I heard him cursing as he pawed through his bag in which he kept his clothing. A sock was missing, and with much profanity he commented on shipmates who would steal a man's socks on Christmas day.

IT was noon, and in the schooner's cabin Madison and I waited. The cook was barricaded in his galley, having none too much faith in Madison's plan.

We could hear Mallory's voice in some sort of speech. He was a natural leader; otherwise he could never have aroused them against their captain; yet they were discontented, and one or two small grievances fanned by Mallory's words aroused them to a pitch of ugly excitement. With a final tirade, the man turned and threw open the door.

For an instant he paused; then lurching drunkenly across the snow-covered deck, he ordered them to follow. On they came, an angry crowd with passions unleashed.

Peering through a port-light, I saw a look of hatred I shall never forget on the man's face as he paused an instant before the door. Then, half turning, he lowered his shoulder and charged. A moment before he hit, the door opened wide, and his body hurled unimpeded into the cabin and crashed to the deck. At any other time, it would have been laughable; but now it was serious. Before he had time to arise, the others crowded through; then those in the lead came to a halt. Anger vanished from their bearded faces, and in its place came amazement. Their eyes swept about the cabin, then rested for a moment on Madison. He stood there unarmed, hands at his side—waiting.

Gradually a smile lighted their faces. "Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed one. "I certainty will. Boys, what do you think of this?"

The boys showed what they thought of it by hanging their heads in shame. A Christmas tree, lighted with candles, stood in one corner of the cabin. It was an artificial tree, but it was a tree nevertheless. Along the wall were a number of socks—socks that had been stolen two days before from the fo'c'stle. Each man recognized his property, and with foolish grins they crowded forward and claimed their property. Investigation disclosed knives, tobacco, pipes and other articles dear to the heart of the sailorman. On a table near the tree a box of cigars was invitingly open.

Mallory crawled slowly to his feet. His bleary eyes glanced from one thing to another, then stopped at last on his followers. "Quitters!" he snarled. "Are you going to fall for a lot of this Christmas slush?

Are you—" He rushed toward the tree, and a dozen hands caught him. Madison brushed them aside and grasped the man himself. "Be quiet boys; he's drunk!" he said. Then with the utmost ease he twisted Mallory's two great hands behind his back and forced him into a chair. Next he bound him securely with a light line and placed him out of the way.

"Sam!"

At the sound of the Captain's voice, Sam thrust his head cautiously into the cabin. "All ready, sir?" he queried.

"Bring on the turkey, Sam!"

SAM vanished. Turkey? In the Arctic? And then it came; not a steaming turkey, oozing with gravy and nicely browned right out of the oven, but it was turkey just the same, even though it was cut in small pieces. Sam and the mess-boy made six trips before they stopped. Then they took their own seats at the table, for this was Christmas, and Madison had determined all hands should eat together.

"It's like this, men," Madison explained as the men fell to. "When we venture into the ice, we never know whether we're going to be caught or not; so we prepare for it. You can thank Mrs. Madison for this. She looked ahead and realized what a Christmas dinner would mean under our present conditions. She has a way of canning turkey in glass jars; and I'll leave it to you if it isn't as good as the real thing. And the rest, the cranberries, the mince pie and all the fixin's, were stowed away in cans too. Everything was packed in a big case, including the tree, and I was given orders to open it a week before Christmas if we were caught in the ice."

It was typical of the man not to refer to the late unpleasantness and thereby mar the occasion. That they were heartily sorry for their actions no one could doubt. At first not a man dared look him in the eye; then as the wonderful meal progressed, the former relationship was resumed.

I WAS eating my second wedge of pie when the low hum of voices was suddenly broken.

"Captain, will you shake hands with a yellow cur?"

The room became absolutely still, and all eyes turned to Mallory.

Captain Madison stood up. "No, Mallory, I wont shake the hand of a yellow cur!" he said quietly. "But, I'll shake the hand, and gladly, of a man who made a slight mistake and is now sorry for it!"

Mallory made no attempt to excuse himself on the grounds of being drunk. He admitted his error simply, and we respected him for it. Madison released him, and he walked around to Olson. "I guess, Olson, maybe we'd better start out again like shipmates, eh?"

"Righto!" exclaimed Olson, gripping the extended hand.

We smoked while Mallory ate; then we smoked some more while he smoked; then all hands fell to and helped the cook clean up the débris. After that we returned to the cabin, and somebody started a song, and the rest of us joined in.

LATER I missed Madison, and as I suspected, found him outside. He was facing the south. Most of the world lay at our feet, and as it turned, and Christmas dawned in the different longitudes, voices in a warmer and fairer land greeted one another with Christmas cheer; yet no man could say the Christmas spirit was warmer anywhere than among our own ice-locked little crew. I knew what Madison was thinking.

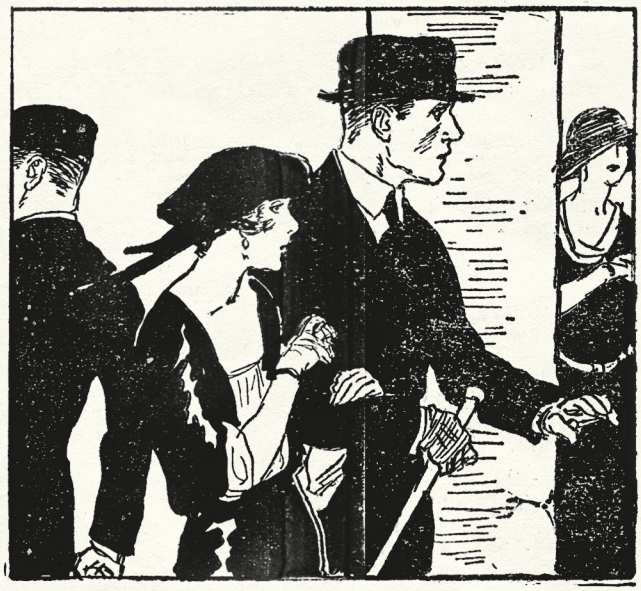
"I stood for a lot," he said quietly, "and there were times when I felt like wading into them; but I've been in the ice many a season; and as I grow older, I get more sense, I guess. This seemed the best way."

"But Captain," I demanded, "how did you manage to stave this off until Christmas noon, and how did you know that the attack would come just when it did?"

He laughed pleasantly. "I had an ally, for'd, a fellow named Olson," he explained. "He's a pretty level-headed fellow, and told me he realized where the quarrel between himself and Mallory was leading to, but his self-respect wouldn't permit him to cringe before any man. This happened shortly after I bumped their heads together."

"And it was Olson who stole one sock from each man?" I inquired.

"Olson took a sock from each man; he even included Mallory. And though I didn't know it at the time, Olson stuffed up the worm in that still so only a drop or two would ooze out. He said nothing to me about the still, believing that would cause trouble. A wise man is Olson. Come, let's go in and join in the fun."



BLACK

A Three-part Mystery Novel by

J. S. FLETCHER

(*What Has Already Happened:*)

HETHERWICK was going home in a Tube train late one night when one of his two fellow-passengers was taken suddenly ill and died almost immediately. And at the next station the dead man's companion, under pretext of fetching a physician, disappeared. Inspector Matherfield took charge of the case, for medical testimony proved the man to have been poisoned; and Hetherwick, a young attorney going in for criminal practice, joined Inspector Matherfield in his investigations.

A search of the dead man's pockets revealed papers which identified him as Robert Hannaford, retired police inspector of Sellithwaite, who had come with his granddaughter Rhona to live in London, there to pursue his hobby of chemical experiment. One of his formulæ, he had told Rhona was certain to bring him a large fortune.

Among the papers in Hannaford's pocketbook was found a newspaper portrait of a handsome woman with a penciled notation, "*Passed through my hands ten years ago.*" Research at Sellithwaite identified this woman as a Mrs. Whittingham, an apparently wealthy woman who had given a local jeweler a worthless check for nearly four thousand pounds in payment for a necklace, had been arrested, had escaped and disappeared. Years afterward, however, she had sent a check for the money, plus the interest, explaining that she had given the original check in good faith, but that an expected remittance had failed her. Had this woman been concerned in Hannaford's strange death? Or had Lady Riversreade—who later was also strangely identified as the original of the newspaper portrait?

In the hope of running down this clue, Rhona Hannaford, under an assumed name, obtained employment as secretary to Lady Riversreade—a wealthy widow of social prominence who gave most of her

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MONEY

You will find here a masterpiece in detective-story writing, by the famous author of "The Middle of Things," "Ravensdene Court" and "The Inner Temple Mystery." Don't fail to enjoy this really remarkable novel.

time to a pet charity—a home for wounded officers.

And presently Rhona reported curious developments—a mysterious visitor named Dr. Baseverie, who, they presently discovered, had been attempting to blackmail Lady Riversreade, and had eventually been sent about his business by Major Penteney, a suitor of Lady Riversreade. This "lead" likewise brought the investigators further information: for instance, that the Mrs. Whittingham of the necklace episode was not Lady Riversreade but her twin sister Madame Listorelle—who was now a dealer in precious stones and sometimes visited her sister.

Meanwhile Hannaford's shabby companion, Granett, returned to the case—as a corpse found in a lodging-house, apparently poisoned by the same drug that had killed Hannaford. A medicine bottle by his bedside led the investigators to the prescribing physician Dr. Ambrose; the doctor had disappeared from his lodgings, but a search brought to light letters from Hannaford and other clues.

And then — Rhona Hannaford and Madame Listorelle were kidnaped. (*The story continues in detail:*)

CHAPTER XIX

WITH a sharp exclamation, Hetherwick leaped to his feet.

"Impossible!" he said. "Kidnaped—in broad daylight? And—from there?"

But Penteney was still busy at the phone.

"Yes, yes!" he was saying. "To be sure! Police—yes! I'm coming straight there, now—car—tell police to get busy."

He turned sharply to Hetherwick.

"Fear there's here no impossibility about it!" he said. "Lady Riversreade says they were carried off as they crossed from the Court to the house—she's heard something of a big car with strange men in it. I'm going down there at once."

"I'll come with you," said Hetherwick. "Where can we get a car—a fast one?"

"Garage close by, in Kingsway," answered Penteney, hurriedly seizing on one of several greatcoats that hung in a recess. "Here — get into one of these. You're about my height—and the air's still nippy, motoring. Now come on; we'll be there in under the hour. You know," he continued as they left the office and hastened toward Kingsway, "I think I see through something of this already, Hetherwick. These fellows probably believed they were kidnaping Lady Riversreade—and got her sister in mistake for her. Ransom, you know! The blackmailing dodge failed; now they're trying this. A desperate and dare-devil lot, evidently!"

HETHERWICK nodded a silent assent. He was wondering whether or not to tell Penteney that the Miss Featherstone of whom he had just spoken was in reality the granddaughter of the man whose mysterious murder appeared to be the starting-point of the more recent, equally mysterious events. That fact, it seemed to him, would have to come out sooner or later—and there might be possible complications, perhaps unpleasantness, when Lady Riversreade discovered that Rhona had gone to her as a spy. Might it not be well to take Penteney into his confidence and explain matters? But on reflection he decided to wait until they knew the exact situation at Riversreade Court: so far, in spite of Lady Riversreade's news, he felt it difficult to believe that two women, one of them, to his knowledge, a girl of character and resource, and the other a woman of the world used to traveling and to adventure, could be carried off in broad daylight in immediate prospect of two large houses: the thing seemed impossible.

But when, some fifty minutes later, the big, powerful car which Penteney had commissioned in Kingsway dashed up to Riversreade Court, Hetherwick found that there had been no exaggeration in Lady Riversreade's telephone message. She herself came hurrying out to meet them; there were men standing about the terrace outside, and others visible in the park: a couple of uniformed policemen followed Lady Riversreade from her study, where Hetherwick supposed her to have been in consultation with them. And her first glance was directed on Hetherwick himself: she addressed him before Penteney could go through any hurried introduction.

"I've seen you before!" she exclaimed abruptly. "You were with my secretary, Miss Featherstone, at Victoria, Sunday morning. Are you engaged to her?"

"No!" replied Hetherwick. "But we are close friends."

"Well, Miss Featherstone's been run away with—and so has my sister, Madame Listorelle," continued Lady Riversreade. "That's the long and short of it! You seemed almost incredulous when I rang you up," she continued, turning to Penteney, "but there's no doubt about it: they've been kidnaped, under my very windows. And we haven't a single clue, no trace of any sort."

"So far, you mean," answered Penteney coolly. "But come—but let me hear all about it. What are the details?"

"Details!" exclaimed Lady Riversreade. "We don't know any details! All I know is this: my sister came here from Hampshire yesterday evening, to stay a few days. This morning, after we had breakfasted, she and Miss Featherstone set out across the park for the Home, leaving me here—I meant to follow in a few minutes. I did follow—I wasn't ten minutes behind them. But when I got to the Home, they weren't there; and Mitchell, the man at the door, said they hadn't come. They didn't come! Eventually, I came back here, to find out if something had happened and they'd returned by some other way. But they weren't here. Then I began to make some inquiry. One of the housemaids who'd been looking out of a top window said she'd seen a car go at a great rate down the middle drive in the direction of the high-road soon after Madame Listorelle and Miss Featherstone left the house. And of course there's no doubt about it—they've been carried off in that! This is more work of that man Baseverie's!"

"You said something over the phone about strange men being seen in the car," remarked Penteney.

"Oh, that? Yes, the same girl said she thought she could see two men sitting in the car," answered Lady Riversreade. "Of course they'd be strange."

PENTENEY turned to the policemen, at the same time tapping Hetherwick's arm. "I think we'd better go across the park and see for ourselves if there are any signs of a struggle at any particular place," he said. "I don't think either Madame

Listorelle or Miss Featherstone likely persons to be carried off without making a fight for it. Have you been across the grounds yet?" he added to the elder of the two men. "I mean by the path they took?"

"Not yet, sir—we've only just arrived," answered the man.

"Come along, then," said Penteney. He lingered a moment as Hetherwick and the policemen left the hall, and said a few words to Lady Riversreade; then he hurried out and headed his party. "This way," he continued, leading Hetherwick along the terrace. "I know the usual route to the Home—plain sailing from here to there, except at one spot; and there, I conclude, whatever has happened did happen!"

Hetherwick paid particular attention to the route along which Penteney led his party. The path went straight across the park, from the end of the terrace at the Court to near the front entrance of the Home, and from the Court itself it looked as if there was no break in it. But about halfway between the two houses there was an important break which could not be seen until pedestrians were close upon it. Transecting the park from its southern to its northern boundaries was a sunken roadway—the middle drive to which Lady Riversreade had referred—gained from the park above, on each side, by ornamental steps. Whatever happened in that roadway, Hetherwick realized at once, could not have been seen from the higher ground above, save by anyone close to its edge. But two or three hundred yards or so from the steps which made a continuation of the path, the embankments of the sunken road flattened out into the lower stretches of the park, and there the road itself could be seen from the top windows of the Court, and from those of the Home also.

Penteney paused at the top of the ornamental steps.

"If these two ladies have been carried off, as they certainly seem to have been," he said, turning to his companions, "this is the spot! Now just let me explain the lie of the land. The main road edges the park at the northern end, as you all know. But there is a good road at the southern extremity, and the sunken road runs down from it. A car could come down from there, be pulled up here, and kept waiting until the two ladies came along. They would have to descend these steps, cross the road and ascend the steps on the other bank to get to the other half of the park. Now, suppose they're forced into a car at the foot of the steps—the car goes off for the main road and gets clear away within a minute or two of the kidnaping taking place! There's the difficulty! The thing would be easy to do—granted force. Probably the two captives were forced into the car at the point of revolvers."

"That's about it, sir!" agreed the elder of the policemen. "No choice in the matter, poor things! And as you say, they'd be in and off—miles off!—before they fairly knew what had happened."

"Come down and let's see the roadway," said Penteney.

BUT there was nothing to see at the foot of the steps. The road, like all roads and paths on the Riversreade Court property, was in a perfect state of repair, and there was scarcely a grain of dust on its spick and span, artificially treated and smoothed surface: certainly there were no signs of any struggle.

"That's how it's been, you may depend upon it," observed Penteney to Hetherwick as they looked about. "The men were waiting here with revolvers. They'd force them into the car, and get in after them; a third man, an accomplice, would drive off. If only we had some more definite information about the car and its occupants!"

"There's an old chap coming down the road who seems to have his eye on us," remarked Hetherwick, looking round. "He may have something to tell. After all, some of the people hereabouts must have seen the car!"

The old man, evidently a laborer, came nearer, looking inquiringly from one to the other. He had the air of one who can tell something on occasion.

"Be you gentlemen inquirin' about a moty-car what was round here this mornin'?" he asked as he came up. "I hear there was somebody a-askin' questions that way, so I just come down along, like."

"We are," answered Penteney. "Do you know anything?"

The old man pointed up the sunken road to a part of the park where it was lost among trees and coppices.

"Lives up there, I do," he said. "My cottage, it be just behind they trees, t'other side o' the road what this here runs into: my garden, it runs down to the edge o' that road. And when I was a-gardenin'

this morning—mebbe 'bout half-past nine o'clock, that was—I sees a moty-car what come along from your way, and turns into this here sunken road. Mebbe that's what you're a-talkin' 'bout?"

"No doubt," agreed Penteney. "And we're much obliged to you. Now, what sort of a car was it? Closed, or open?"

"Oh, 'twas closed up, same as one o' they old cabs what us don't see no more now," said the old man. "But I see inside it, for all that. Two gentlemen."

"Two gentlemen, eh?" repeated Penteney. "Just so. And a driver outside, of course."

"Oh, aye, there was a driver outside, to be sure. In livery, he was, like a gentleman's servant. Smart feller!"

"Could you describe the gentlemen?"

"No, surely—two gentlemen, though, a-sitting back, I sees 'em! And sees the moty-car, too, turn down this here very road."

"What sort of car was it?" asked Penteney. "What color was it painted?"

"Well, now, you beats me! It might be a sort o' grayish color—or again, it might be a sort o' yaller, lightish yaller, or drabbish—I could'n 'zac'ly go to for say what it was, proper. But a lightish color."

"Lightish—gray, yellow or drab—something of that sort?"

"Surely! Her wasn't a dark un, anyhow. But the feller what drove, now, he were in a dark livery—I took partic'lar notice of he, 'cause he was so smart as never was. Green, that was his color, and gold lace. Looked like a duke, he did! And I thought, hearin' as there was them in the park as was inquirin', like, as 'ow I'd come and tell 'ee."

Penteney rewarded the informant with some silver, and turned to his companions with a shake of the head.

"A light-colored car with two men in it, driven by a man who wore a dark-green livery with gold lace on it!" he remarked. "That's about all we're likely to get. And—if this has been a carefully planned affair, the chauffeur would change his livery before they'd gone far—slip another coat on! However—"

They went back to the Court, consulting together; but obviously there was nothing to do but to send out inquiries in the surrounding country. Penteney was skeptical about the success of these.

"When one considers the thousands of cars to be seen in any given area during one morning," he said, "how can one expect that anybody, even rustics, should give special attention to any particular one? There's no doubt about it—they've got clean away!"

IT seemed as if nothing could be done but to give the kidnaping full publicity through the police and the press. In the neighborhood of the Court nobody beyond the housemaid and the old cottager appeared to have seen the car and its occupants. But during the afternoon, as Hetherwick and Penteney were about to set out for London, a man came to the house and asked to see Lady Riversreade. Lady Riversreade went out to him; the two men accompanied her, and found at the hall-door an elderly, respectable-looking fellow who had driven up in a light cart. He had heard, he said, of what had happened at Riversreade Court that morning, and he believed he could tell something, for he was sure that he had seen a car, such as that the police were inquiring after, pass his house.

"And where is that?" asked Lady Riversreade.

"About two miles the other side of Dorking, my lady, on the London road. I'm a market gardener—name of Thomas Chillam. And I was outside my garden gate this morning, about, as near as I can reckon, ten o'clock, when I saw a car, light-colored, coming from Dorking, at a particularly high speed—a good deal faster than it had any right to do! I watched it, careful, my lady. But just as it got near to my place, there was a man drove some sheep out of a by-lane, a few yards past my garden, and the car was obliged to slow down. And so I saw the folks in it."

"Yes?" said Lady Riversreade. "And—who was in it?"

"There was a couple of men, my lady, on the front seat, and a couple of ladies in the back. Of course, it was a closed car, but I saw 'em, plain enough, all four. It seemed to me as if they were all either quarreling or having high words—they were all talking together, anyway. But though the car had slowed down 'cause of the sheep, it was still moving at a fair pace, and of course they were past and gone, London way, in a minute, as it were. All the same, I saw 'em clearly enough to see that one of the men inside was a man I've seen before."

"About here?" asked Lady Riversreade.

"No, my lady," answered Chillam. "In London. It's this way, my lady: me and my missis, we've a grown-up daughter what's in service in London—Grosvenor Gardens. Now and again we go up to see her, and stop a night or two close by. And of course we take a look round. Now, I've seen that man two or three times about Victoria Station way; I knew him at once when I saw him this morning, and—"

"Just tell us what he's like, will you?" interrupted Penteney. "As near as you can."

"Well, sir, I aint good at that, but he's a tall, good-looking, smart-dressed gentleman, with a beard and mustache—taller nor what you and that other gentleman is, sir. I seen him in Victoria Street—mebbe it was his height made me notice him."

"And you're sure that was the man you saw in the car this morning?"

"Make no doubt on it, sir! I'm as certain as that I see yourself. Oh, yes!"

Hetherwick put in a question.

"The second man in the car? Did you notice him? Can you remember him?"

Chillam reflected for a while.

"I remember that he was a white-faced chap," he said at last. "Wore a top-hat, silk."

When Chillam had gone away, Hetherwick turned to his companions.

"That sounds like Ambrose, for one man, and Baseverie for the other," he said. "What deviltry are they up to now? Penteney, we must get back to London."

An hour later they pulled up at Matherfield's headquarters and went in to find him. Matherfield, brought to them after some search, rubbed his hands at sight of them.

"Come at the right moment!" he exclaimed. "I've got news—of Ambrose!"

CHAPTER XX

MATHERFIELD evidently expected his visitors to show deep interest if not positive enthusiasm at this announcement, and he stared wonderingly on seeing that their faces showed nothing but gloom and concern.

"But you—you look as if you'd had bad news!" he exclaimed. "Something gone wrong?"

"I forgot that we might have telephoned you from Riversreade Court," replied Hetherwick, suddenly realizing that Matherfield seemed to know nothing of the day's happening. "But I thought the Dorking police would do that. Gone wrong? Yes, and it may have to do with Ambrose—we've heard news that seems to fit in with him. But it's this:" He went on to give Matherfield a brief account of the day's events. "There you are!" he concluded. "I've no doubt whatever that Baseverie and Ambrose are in at this—kidnaping in broad daylight! Matherfield, you've got to find them!"

Matherfield had listened with close attention to Hetherwick's story, and now he looked from him to Penteney, and from Penteney to a printed bill which lay on his desk at his side.

"I think I see what all this is about," he remarked after a pause. "Those chaps think they've got, or they thought they got, Lady Riversreade—to hold for ransom, of course! They took Miss Hannaford because she chanced to be there. What they really kidnaped—and there's more of that done than you gentlemen might think, I can tell you—was Lady Riversreade's sister. But now, however closely sisters—twin sisters—may resemble each other, there comes a time when difference of identity's bound to come out. By this time, perhaps long before, those men must have discovered that they laid hands on the wrong woman! And the question is—what would they do then?"

"It seems to me that the more immediate question is—where are the two women?" observed Hetherwick. "Think of their danger!"

"Oh, well, Mr. Hetherwick, I don't suppose they're in any personal danger," answered Matherfield. "They're in the hands of brigands, no doubt, but I don't think there'll be any maltreatment of them; set your mind at rest about that. They don't do that sort of thing nowadays—it's all done politely and with every consideration, I believe. As to where they are—why, somewhere in London! And there are over seven million other people in London, and hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of inhabited houses! A lot of needles in that bundle of hay, gentlemen!"

"They've got to be found!" repeated Hetherwick doggedly. "You'll have to set all your machinery to work! This can't—"

"Wait a bit, Hetherwick," interrupted Penteney. He turned to Matherfield. "You said you had news of this man Ambrose? What news?"

MATHERFIELD tapped the printed bill which lay on his desk.

"I had that circulated broadcast early this morning," he answered. "And then, of course, the newspapers have helped. Well, not so very long before you came in, I was called to the telephone by a man named Killiner, who told me he was the landlord of the Green Archer Tavern, in Wood Street, Westminster—"

"Westminster again!" exclaimed Hetherwick. "That seems to be the centerpoint!"

"And a very good thing to have a centerpoint, Mr. Hetherwick," said Matherfield. "When things begin to narrow down, one gets some chance. Well, I was saying—this man rang me up to say that if I'd go down there, he thought he could give me some information relative to the bill about the missing man; what he'd got to say, he said, was too long for a telephone talk. I answered that I'd be with him shortly, and I was just setting off when you arrived. Of course, I don't know what he can tell—it may be nothing; it may be something. Perhaps you gentlemen would like to go with me and hear what it is?"

"I would, but I mustn't," replied Penteney. "I must go to my office and hear if Lady Riversreade or the local police have had any fresh news. Keep in touch with me, though, Matherfield—let me know what you hear."

"I'll go with you," said Hetherwick. "Westminster!" he muttered again when Penteney had gone. "It looks as if this man Ambrose was known in that district."

"Likely!" assented Matherfield. "But you know, Mr. Hetherwick, there are some queer spots in that quarter! People who know the purely ornamental parts of Westminster, such as the Abbey, and the houses of Parliament, and Victoria Street, and so on, don't know that there are some fine old slums behind 'em! But I'll show you when we get down there—we shall go through one or two savory slices."

He was putting on his overcoat as he spoke, in readiness for setting out, but before he had buttoned it, a constable entered with a card.

"Wants to see you particularly, and at once," he said. "Waiting outside."

"Bring him in—straight!" answered Matherfield. He pushed the card along his desk in Hetherwick's direction. "Lord Morradale!" he exclaimed. "Who's he?"

"The man who's engaged to Madame Listorelle," replied Hetherwick in an undertone. "Hampshire magnate."

The Inspector turned expectantly to the open door. A shortish, stoutish person, who looked like a typical city man, prosperous and satisfied, came bustling in and gave Hetherwick and his companion a sharp, inquiring glance which finally settled on Matherfield.

"Mr. Matherfield?" he asked. "Just so! I'm Lord Morradale—oh, of course I sent in my card—just so! Well, Mr. Matherfield, I've had an extraordinary communication from Lady Riversreade; she telephoned to my house in Hill Street this morning, but I was down in the City, and didn't hear of her message till late this afternoon. She says her sister, Madame Listorelle, has been kidnaped! Kidnaped—preposterous!"

"I'm afraid it's neither preposterous nor improbable, my Lord," answered Matherfield. "I'm quite sure Madame Listorelle has been kidnaped, and Lady Riversreade's secretary, Miss Featherstone, with her. Mr. Hetherwick here has been down at Riversreade Court and there's no doubt about it: the two ladies were carried off from there by three men in a fast car which was driven toward London. That's a fact!"

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Lord Morradale. "In broad daylight! And is there no clue?"

"None so far, my Lord. Of course, we've noised the affair as much as possible, and all our people are on the lookout. But it's a difficult case," continued Matherfield. "The probability is that the ladies have been rushed to some house in London, and that they're there in captivity. Of course, one theory is that the kidnapers took Madame Listerolle for her sister—they meant to get Lady Riversreade and hold her to ransom."

LORD MORRADALE pursed up his lips. Then he rubbed his chin. Then he shook his head—finally he gave Hetherwick a shrewd glance, eying him from head to foot.

"Um!" he said. "Ah! This gentleman—not one of your people, I think, Matherfield?"

"No, my Lord. This gentleman is Mr. Hetherwick, of the Middle Temple, who is interested very deeply in certain matters connected with the affair. Mr. Hetherwick has been down at Riversreade, and your Lordship can speak freely before him."

Lord Morradale gave Hetherwick a friendly, knowing nod. Then he glanced at the door—and Matherfield made haste to close it.

"Thank 'ee," said Lord Morradale. "Just as well to be in private. Um! I think I'd better tell you something, Matherfield. I dare say that's a reasonable supposition of yours—that these villains took Madame Listorelle for her sister. But I don't think they did; I think they knew very well whom they were seizing. Mind you, they'd have seized Lady Riversreade too, if she'd happened to be there. But it was Madame they were after!"

"If your Lordship would explain—" suggested Matherfield.

"I'm going to—it's what I came here for. I think I can just put you on the right scent. You may have heard that Madame Listorelle and I are about to marry? Very well; I, accordingly, knew a good deal about her affairs. Now, I don't know whether you know or not that Madame Listorelle is actively concerned, or has been, in buying and selling jewels on commission? That's her specialty."

"Heard something of it, my Lord," replied Matherfield.

"Very well. Now, quite recently, Madame Listorelle bought up in Paris a magnificent set of stones which had been at one time the property of a member of the Russian imperial family. She brought them here to London, meaning, either to send or take them personally to America to her customer. This deal, unfortunately, got into the papers. Now, it's my belief that these fellows have kidnaped Madame in order to get hold of these jewels. Do you see?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Matherfield. "I see, my Lord! That puts a new aspect on the case. But surely Madame Listorelle wouldn't have the stones on her?"

Lord Morradale winked, deliberately, at both his hearers.

"No!" he said. "No, she wouldn't. But the scoundrels would figure on this—that when she was fairly in their power, they would be in a position to make her give them up, to force her, in short, to disclose their whereabouts. If they're desperate villains, not likely to stick at anything, I think they'll have forced Madame to compliance—and in doing so give you a chance to lay hands on them!"

"How, my Lord?" asked Matherfield eagerly.

Lord Morradale gave the two men a confidential glance.

"This way," he replied. "The jewels were deposited for safety, by Madame Listorelle at the Imperial Safe Deposit. She rents a safe there. Now, don't you see what I'm suggesting? These men may force her to give one of them the necessary key and a signed order to the safe-deposit people to let the bearer open Madame's safe and take away a certain case in which the jewels are packed. That's what I think will be done. And what you ought to do is to see the Imperial Safe Deposit officials at once, warn them of what I suggest may happen, and take your own means of watching for such a messenger arriving, and for tracking him when he departs. Eh?"

"Or arresting him, there and then," said Matherfield.

"No, I shouldn't!" declared Lord Morradale. "I'm not a policeman, ye know, but I can give a hint to one. Instead of arresting the man—who, you must remember, will be sure to have Madame's written authority on him, I should carefully follow him. For he'll probably go back to where Madame and the young lady, Miss What's-her-name, are detained! Eh?"

MATHERFIELD shook his head.

"I should doubt that, my Lord!" he answered. "If things work out as you suggest, — and it's a highly probable theory,—that's about the last thing he would do! Once the jewels were in his possession—"

"You forget this," interrupted Lord Morradale. "They may use a cat's-paw!"

"Well, there's that in it, certainly," assented Matherfield. "However, I'll see that the Imperial Safe Deposit people are warned, and that this entrance is carefully watched tomorrow morning. But—the thing may have been done already! There's been plenty of time since the ladies were carried off."

"No!" said Lord Morradale. "Nothing's happened so far. I called in at the Imperial Safe Deposit as I came here; they had neither seen Madame Listorelle nor had any communication from her today. And now the place is closed for the night."

"Did you warn them, then?" asked Matherfield.

"I didn't. I thought it best to see you first," replied Lord Morradale. "The

warning and the rest of it will come best from you."

"Very good, my Lord—much obliged to your Lordship for looking in," said Matherfield. "We'll keep you posted up in anything that happens at Hill Street... Now," he continued, when Lord Morradale had left the office, "we'll get along to Westminster, Mr. Hetherwick, to the Green Archer and its landlord, Killiner."

THE GREEN ARCHER proved to be a respectable tavern which boasted a saloon bar. Behind the glass screens of this they found a middle-aged, sharp-eyed man, who at sight of his visitors immediately opened the door of a parlor in the rear and ushered them into privacy. He pointed silently to a copy of the bill asking for news of Ambrose.

"Aye!" said Matherfield. "Just so. I had your message.. You think you know this man?"

"From this description of him in that bill, yes," replied the landlord. "I think he's a man, a gentleman by all appearances, who used to come into my saloon bar pretty regularly during these last six or nine months—since the end of last summer, I should say, up to about three weeks, or so, ago."

"Not since then, eh?" asked Matherfield. "Three weeks?"

"About that. No, he hasn't been in for quite that. But up to then, he'd be in, well, four or five days a week. Handsome, fine man—in fact, you've described him exactly, there. I never knew who he was—used to pass the time o' day with him, you know, but that was all. He always came in about the same time—one to one-thirty. He'd have sometimes a glass of bitter ale and a sandwich or two, sometimes a whisky-and-soda and two or three biscuits. Stood and had his snack, and went away. Never talked much. I took him for some gentleman that had business hereabouts, and just wanted a bite and a sup in the middle of the day, and turned in here for it. But I don't know what business he could be concerned in, round here. He hadn't the tradesman's look on him, you understand: I should have said he was a professional man of some sort. Always very well dressed, you know—smart. However, I did notice one peculiar thing about him."

"What, now?" asked Matherfield. "It all helps!"

"Well," said the landlord, "I noticed that his hands and fingers were stained—all sorts of colors. Sometimes it was more noticeable than at others. But there it was."

"Um!" remarked Matherfield. He exchanged a knowing glance with Hetherwick. And when, a few minutes later, they left the tavern, he turned to him with an air of assurance. "I'm beginning to feel the end!" he said. "Feel it, if I don't see it. Stained fingers, eh? We've heard of them before, Mr. Hetherwick. And I'll tell ye what it is—somewhere about this very spot there's some place where men are dabbling—secretly I should think—with chemicals; and Ambrose is one of 'em, and perhaps Baseverie's another, and it was there that Hannaford and that man Granett had been that night, and where they were poisoned; and there, too, no doubt, these two ladies are at this minute! Well—come to my place first thing in the morning."

Hetherwick, at a loss what to do further that night, went away and dined; and that done, he strolled home to his chambers. There was a light in his parlor; and when he opened the door, he found Mapperley, evidently awaiting him, and with Mapperley a young man noticeable for his curly hair and beady eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

HETHERWICK realized at once that Mapperley had news, and was waiting there to communicate it. But he looked not so much at Mapperley, as at Mapperley's companion. Mapperley, as Hetherwick had remarked to more than one person in the course of these proceedings, concealed his sharpness under an unusually commonplace exterior; he looked, as a rule, like a young man whose ideas rarely soared above a low level. But the curly-haired young man was of a different aspect—Hetherwick was not quite sure whether he was rat or ferret.

"Hullo, Mapperley!" exclaimed Hetherwick. "Waiting for me? You've some news, I suppose?"

Mapperley, grave and formal, pointed a finger at his companion.

"Mr. Alfred Garsten, sir," he said. "Friend of mine. I got him to give me a bit of assistance in this Baseverie and Vivian affair. The fact is, sir, he knows Vivian's—don't you, Alf?"

"Some!" replied Mr. Garsten with a grin.

"And he knows Baseverie, too," continued Mapperley—" by sight, anyhow. So I got him—for a consideration—to watch for Baseverie's next appearance on that scene, and then, when he did come, to keep an eye on him—track him, in fact. And Alf's seen him tonight, Mr. Hetherwick, and followed him. Then Alf came to me, and I brought him here."

"Good!" said Hetherwick. "Sit down, both of you, and I'll hear about it." He dropped into his own easy-chair and again regarding Garsten, decided that he was probably a creditable witness. "What do you do at Vivian's?" he asked. "Employed there?"

MR. GARSTEN glanced at Mapperley and smiled knowingly. Mapperley nodded.

"All confidential, Alf," he said reassuringly. "Going no further."

"Of course this is all confidential—and secret," remarked Hetherwick. "I only want to know the precise connection between Vivian's and Mr. Garsten."

"It's sort of semiofficial, Mister," answered Garsten. "The fact is, I do a bit o' commission work for Vivian's customers. So—I'm in and out of an evening. See?"

"I see," said Hetherwick. "All right! And you know Baseverie?"

"As well as I know my own nose," replied Mr. Garsten.

"How long have you known him?"

"Some time."

"Do you know what he is?"

"Aint an idea, Mister—and nobody else that I knows of! Lives on his wits, I should say, if you ask me. Wrong un!"

"Nor where he lives?"

"No, Mister! All I know is that he comes to Vivian's—now and then."

"And you saw him tonight?"

"I did, Mister—tonight as ever was!"

"What time was that?"

"About eight o'clock,—near as I can fix it."

"Well, what happened?"

"This, Mister: he came in about eight, as I say. I was there, doing a bit o' business with another customer. Baseverie, he didn't stay. He wasn't in the place three minutes, and while he was in, he seemed to be a bit fidgety—suspicious like. Looked round and about—cautious. Then he went—and I followed him. According to instructions from Mapperley."

"Where did he go?"

"Well, Mister, I'll give you the particulars—in full: when I set out on a job o' that sort, I do it proper. He turned out o' Candlestick Passage into the Lane, and he had a drink at a bar there. Then he went to Trafalgar Square Tube. I was close behind him when he booked—"

"A moment. Does he know you?"

"May just know me by sight, Mister, but not enough to excite any suspicion in his mind if he saw me there behind him. I never had no truck with him—never spoke to him."

"Well, go on. Where did he book to?"

"Warwick Avenue, Mister. So did I—of course. When we got there, I followed him out—at a safe distance. He turned down to the Canal, crossed the bridge, and went down to Saint Mary's Mansions. And there he went in."

Hetherwick glanced at Mapperley. Mapperley permitted himself to wink at his employer—respectfully but knowingly.

"Went into St. Mary's Mansions, eh?" said Hetherwick. "Walked straight in?"

"Straight in, Mister—front entrance. I see him, from across the road, talking to the man in livery—porter or whatever he is. I could see through the glass doors. Then I see both of 'em go up in the lift. So I waited about a bit, just to see if he'd come out. He did."

"Soon?" asked Hetherwick.

"He was inside about ten minutes. Then he came out,—alone. This time he went in t'other direction. I followed him across Paddington Green to Edgware Road Tube, and there—well, to tell you the truth, Mister, there I lost him! There was a lot o' people about, and I made sure he'd be going south. But he must ha' gone west. Anyway, I lost him altogether."

"Well—I think you saw enough to be of help," said Hetherwick. "Now—just keep this to yourself, Garsten." He motioned Mapperley into another room, gave him money for his assistant, and waited until Garsten had gone, shown out by the clerk. "Eleven o'clock!" he remarked, glancing at his watch as Mapperley came back. "Mapperley—we're going out—to St. Mary's Mansions. And after we've been there, and made a call, you'd better come back here with me and take a shakedown for the night; I shall

want you in the morning, unless I'm mistaken."

IT was one of Mapperley's chief virtues that he was always ready to go anywhere and do anything, and he at once accompanied Hetherwick to the top of Middle Temple Lane, found a taxicab within five minutes, and proposed himself to sit up that night and the next, if necessary.

"Scent's getting hot, I think, sir," he remarked as they drove off, after bidding the driver carry them to Paddington Green. "Things seem to be coming to a head."

"Yes—but I don't think you know everything," answered Hetherwick. He proceeded to give the clerk an epitomized account of the day's doings as they had related to himself, concluding with Matherfield's theory as expressed after leaving the Green Archer. "You're a smart chap, Mapperley," he added. "What do you think?"

"I see Matherfield's point," answered Mapperley. "I can follow his line. He thinks like this: Hannaford, when he came to London, wanted to get rid, advantageously, of that formula of his about a new ink. He got into touch with Ambrose, whom, of course, he'd known before, at Sellithwaite. Ambrose introduced him to some men who deal or dabble in chemicals, of whom one, no doubt, is Baseverie, and who seem to have a laboratory or something of that sort somewhere in the Westminster district. On the night of the murder, Ambrose met Hannaford, by appointment, at Victoria, and took him there. Probably, Hannaford left the sealed packet—opened by that time—with these fellows. Probably, too, while there he told them—jokingly, very likely—what he'd discovered, from the picture in the papers, about the identity of Mrs. Whittingham and Madame Listorelle. And now comes in—Granett!"

Hetherwick gave an exclamation that denoted two or three things—surprise, for one.

"Ah!" he said. "Granett! To be sure! I'd forgotten Granett!"

"I hadn't," remarked Mapperley with a cynical laugh. "Granett—and his murder—is an essential factor. What I think is this: We know that Hannaford met Ambrose at Victoria Station that all-important evening. Ambrose, without doubt, took him to the place I hinted at just now, the exact location of which is a mystery. I think Hannaford stopped there until late in the evening. But—I also think he went back again! With Granett!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Hetherwick. "I see!"

"We know," continued Mapperley, "that Granett went that evening to see the druggist who gave information about him; we know, too, that he and the druggist went and had a drink together, and parted at about closing time, Granett then, according to the druggist, going toward Victoria Street. Now, I think that Granett then met Hannaford, accidentally. They'd known each other in Sellithwaite. They talked; Granett told Hannaford he was down on his luck. Hannaford, evidently, was a kind-hearted man, and I think he did two things out of kindness for Granett. He gave him that five-pound note—"

"That was got at Vivian's!" interrupted Hetherwick quickly.

"To be sure!" assented Mapperley. "But we know that Hannaford had been at Vivian's—with Baseverie, undoubtedly—taken there by Baseverie—which makes me certain that for two or three days before his death he'd been in touch with both Baseverie and Ambrose. Hannaford got that fiver in change at Vivian's. And he gave it to Granett, on hearing his story. But he did something else, something that was far more important to us!"

"What?" asked Hetherwick.

"He turned back to the place he'd just left, and took Granett with him!" answered Mapperley with confidence. "He knew Granett was a trained and qualified chemist; he thought he could get him a job with these men who, presumably, were going to take up his own invention. It would be little more than half-past ten then. Where else then at this place are Hannaford and Granett likely to have been between that time and the time at which they got into your train at St. James' Park? Of course they were there—with Ambrose and Baseverie."

"As you put it—highly probable," said Hetherwick. "Two and half hours—doing what?"

"Ah, now we come to the real thing!" exclaimed Mapperley. "My own belief is that Hannaford was fatally poisoned when he left those two men the first time! They'd two objects in poisoning him—or, to put it another way, he'd intrusted them with two secrets—one about Madame Listorelle; the other about his invention.

They wanted to keep both to themselves and to profit by both. The invention, no doubt, has considerable value—Hannaford believed it had, anyway. They thought they could blackmail Madame and her sister, Lady Riversreade. So, before Hannaford left them the first time, they poisoned him,—cleverly, subtly, devilishly, —knowing that so many hours would elapse before the poison worked, and that by that time he'd be safe in bed at his hotel and would die in his sleep. But—he went back to them again, and took another man with him! So—that man had to die too!"

HETHERWICK thought awhile in silence.

"All very good theory, Mapperley," he said at last. "But—it may be nothing but theory. Why did Granett run off at Charing Cross?"

"Because Granett knew that Ambrose lived in John Street, close by," replied Mapperley with promptitude. "He may have known it before; he may not have known it until that evening. But—he knew it! Most likely he thought that Ambrose had returned home from the place in Westminster; Ambrose may have left there before Hannaford and Granett did. Anyway, we may be reasonably certain that when Granett left you with the dying or dead man, he ran off to Ambrose's flat—a few minutes away."

"Why didn't he come back?" demanded Hetherwick. "I'm only watching to get at probabilities."

"I've thought of that too," replied Mapperley. "I think he found Ambrose out. But by that time, he'd had time to reflect. He knew something was wrong. He knew that if he went back, he'd find the police there, and would be questioned. He might be suspected. And so he went home, with the bottle in which Ambrose had given him a drop of whisky for himself. And—he died in his sleep, as they thought Hannaford would."

"Why should Ambrose have that bottle down at Westminster?" asked Hetherwick.

"Why shouldn't he?" retorted Mapperley. "A man who's taking a tonic takes it at least three times a day—regularly. He'd have his bottle with him. Probably there are several similar empty bottles there at that place."

"Where is that place?" demanded Hetherwick. "Where?"

"Got to be found," said Mapperley as the cab came to a stand. "But—here's this!"

HETHERWICK led his companion across Paddington Green and to the house from which he and Matherfield had watched the flats opposite. Late as it was, the lodging-house keeper was up, and lent a willing ear to Hetherwick's request that he should go with him to his friend the caretaker's of the Mansions. That functionary was at supper. He continued to sup as Hetherwick, morally supported by the lodging-house man, explained matters to him, but at last he allowed his cheek to bulge with unswallowed food and turned a surprised and knowing eye on his principal visitor.

"Blamed if I didn't wonder whether it was all O. K., with that chap!" he exclaimed, banging the table with the haft of his knife. "For all he was quite the gentleman, I somehow suspicioned him! And yet, he'd a straight tale to tell—come here on Madame's behalf, to get something for her out of her rooms, had her keys, and give me a note from her saying as how I was to allow the bearer to go up to her flat! What more could I expect—and what could I do—under the circs? I asks yer?"

"Oh, he had a note, had he?" inquired Hetherwick. "In Madame's writing?"

The caretaker laid down his knife, and thrusting his hand in his breast-pocket, drew forth an envelope and silently handed it over. It was an azure-tinted envelope, of a very good quality of paper, such as is only sold in high-class stationery shops, and the sheet inside matched it in tint and quality. But Hetherwick at once noticed something about that sheet; so too did Mapperley, peering at it from behind his elbow. About an inch and a half had been rather roughly cut off at the top; obviously some address had been engraved, or embossed, or printed on the missing portion. As for what was written on the sheet, it was little—a simple order that the caretaker should allow bearer to go into Madame Listorelle's flat.

"You recognized that as Madame's handwriting?" suggested Hetherwick.

"Oh, that's her fist, right enough, that is!" replied the caretaker. "I knew it at once. And no wonder! I aint no scholard, not me! But I knows enough to know that it'd puzzle one o' them here forgers

as ye reads about, to imitate that there sort o' writing. Oh, that's hers."

Hetherwick handed the letter and envelope to Mapperley, who was holding out a hand.

"Well," he said. "I wish ye'd just let me have a look into Madame's flat. There's something seriously wrong, and—"

"Oh, you can do that—'long as I'm with you," said the caretaker readily. He rose and led the way to the left, and presently ushered them into a smart flat and turned on the electric light. "Don't see nothing wrong here," he observed. "The chap wasn't here ten minutes, and he carried nothing heavy away, whatever he had in his pockets."

Hetherwick and Mapperley looked round. Everything seemed correct and in order; the surroundings were those of a refined and artistic woman, obviously one who loved order and system. But on a desk that stood in the center of the sitting-room a drawer had been pulled open, and in front of it lay scattered a few sheets of Madame Listorelle's private notepaper, with her engraved address and crest. Near by lay some envelopes, similarly marked. And with a sudden idea in his mind, Hetherwick picked up a sheet or two of the paper and a couple of envelopes and put them in his pocket.

A few minutes later, once more in the cab which they had kept waiting, and on the way to Hill Street, whither Hetherwick had bidden the driver go next, Mapperley turned to his employer with a sly laugh, and held up something in the light of a street-lamp they were passing.

"What's that?" asked Hetherwick.

"The order written by Madame Listorelle," answered Mapperley chuckling. "The caretaker didn't notice that I carried it off, envelope and all, under his very eyes! But I did—and here it is!"

"What do you want to do with it?" demanded Hetherwick. "What's your notion?"

But Mapperley only chuckled again and without giving any answer restored the azure-tinted envelope and its contents to his pocket.

CHAPTER XXII

LORD MORRADALE, who kept up honest, country-squire habits even in London, had gone to bed when Hetherwick and Mapperley arrived at his house, but he lost little time in making an appearance in pajamas and dressing-gown, and listened eagerly to Hetherwick's account of the recent transactions.

"Force!" he muttered, nodding his head at each point of the story. "Force! Got it out of her by force—that is, if the order's genuine."

Mapperley produced the sheet of paper which he had filched under the caretaker's eyes and silently handed it over.

"Oh, that's Madame Listorelle's handwriting!" exclaimed Lord Moradale. "Hers, without doubt. Difficult to imitate, of course. Oh, yes—hers! Well, that proves what I've just said, Mr. Hetherwick—force! She's in their power—with the young lady, Miss— Miss— Featherstone, to be sure; and they've made her write that. Next, they'll make her write an order on the Imperial Safe Deposit. We must be beforehand with them there. Early—early as possible in the morning. Meet me at Matherfield's—I think he's pretty keen. Bless me, what a pack of villains! Now I wonder where, in all London, these unfortunate ladies are?"

"That's precisely what all this ought to help us to find out," remarked Hetherwick. "I'm not so much concerned about the valuables these men are after, as about the safety of—"

Lord Morradale gave him a quick, understanding glance.

"Of Miss Featherstone, eh?" he said. "I see—I see! And I'm concerned, too, about Madame Listorelle. Well, this, as you say, ought to help. But look here: we must be cautious—very cautious! We mustn't let Matherfield—you know what the police are—we mustn't let him be too precipitate. Probably, if a man comes to the safe deposit place, he'll go away from it to where these scoundrels are. We must follow—follow!"

"I agree," said Hetherwick.

"Nine o'clock, then, at Matherfield's," concluded his Lordship. "And may we have a strong scent, a rousing one, and a successful kill!"

With this bit of sporting phraseology in their ears, Hetherwick and Mapperley returned to the Middle Temple and retired for the rest of the night, one to bed, the other to a shakedown on the sitting-room sofa. But when Hetherwick's alarm-clock awoke him at seven-thirty and he put his head into the next room

to rouse the clerk, he found that Mapperley had vanished. The cushions, rugs and blankets with which he had made himself comfortable for the night were all neatly folded and arranged; on the topmost was pinned a sheet of brief-paper, with a message scrawled in blue pencil:

You wont want me this morning—off on an important notion of my own. Look out for message from me about noon. M.

Muttering to himself that he hadn't the least idea as to what his clerk was about, Hetherwick made a hurried toilet, and an equally hurried breakfast, and hastened to meet Matherfield and Lord Morradale.

HETHERWICK found these two together, and with them a quiet, solemn-faced individual, clad in unusually somber garments, whom Matherfield introduced as Detective-sergeant Quigman. Matherfield went straight to business.

"His Lordship's just told me of your adventure last night, Mr. Hetherwick," he said, "and I'm beginning to get a sort of forecast of what's likely to happen. It was, of course, Baseverie who went to Madame's flat last night—that's settled. But what do you suppose he went for?"

"Can't say that I've worked that out," answered Hetherwick with a glance at the others. "But I imagine he went there to get, say, certain keys—having forced Madame Listorelle to tell him where they were. The keys of her safe at the deposit place, I should think."

"No!" replied Matherfield, shaking his head knowingly, and with a sly smile at Quigman. "No, not that. I'll tell you what he went for—a very simple thing. He went to get some of Madame's private note-paper! He knew well enough that if he was to take an order on the Imperial Safe Deposit to allow the bearer access to Madame's safe, it would have to be what the French, I believe, call *en regle*—eh? Written on her own note-paper in her own handwriting, and so on. See?"

"I think you're right, and I think he got it," said Hetherwick. "A drawer in her desk, containing boxes of stationery, had been pulled out, and some of its contents lay about the desk. As a matter of fact, though I scarcely know why I did it, I put some paper and some envelopes in my pocket—here they are! I had a faint idea that they might be useful."

"Well, that's the notion, depend on it," asserted Matherfield, glancing at the paper which Hetherwick produced. "I've no doubt that somebody, representing Madame Listorelle, and bearing an authorization from her, written on her note-paper in her own writing, will present himself at the Imperial Safe Deposit this morning. But—it wont be Baseverie! And it wont be Ambrose!"

"A stranger, eh?" suggested Hetherwick.

"We shall see. Now," continued Matherfield, glancing at the clock, "we'll be off to the scene of operations. This Imperial Safe Deposit is in Kingsway—and very fortunately situated for our job, being close to the Tube station. There'll be lots of people about there, and we sha'n't attract attention. And this is the way of it: his Lordship and myself will go into the Safe Deposit, see the people in charge, explain matters, and get them to tell us at once if and when the expected ambassador arrives. We shall let him—"

"Or her," interrupted Quigman solemnly.

"Just so, my lad—it might be a she," assented Matherfield. "Quite likely! We shall let him or her get what is wanted from the safe and go away, closely followed by all four of us. While Lord Morradale and I are inside, you and Quigman, Mr. Hetherwick, will be outside, talking casually. When we come out,—and you'll both keep a sharp watch on the entrance hall,—I'll give you the office as to the particular person we're following; and wherever that person goes, you two will go. But don't come near us; we'll keep one side of the street, you the other. If the person takes to a cab or a bus—well, we'll have to do the same. But I've reasons for thinking he or she will stick to his feet!"

"How do we go—all together?" asked Hetherwick. "Because—it's a mere idea—how do you know, Matherfield, that these people—there would appear to be more than one concerned—aren't keeping an eye on you?"

"I've thought of that," answered Matherfield "No—we're all going separately. It's now nine-fifteen. That Imperial Safe Deposit doesn't open its doors till ten—nobody can get in there until that time, anyway. We all four go out of this office on our own hook. Each takes his own method of getting to the top of Kingsway. As soon as I get there, I go straight in and ask for the manager. As soon as Lord Morradale gets there, he follows suit—he

and I foregather in the manager's room. As for you two, go how you like—fly, if it suits you—or wander round the side streets. But—you meet right opposite the Safe Deposit entrance at precisely ten o'clock, and under pretense of casual meeting and conversation, keep your eyes on it, noticing everybody who goes in and comes out. That clear? Then we all clear out—one by one."

OUTSIDE, and left to his own devices, Hetherwick walked a little way and then hailed a taxicab. He gave its driver a confidential smile.

"You can just help me to employ forty minutes," he said as he got in. "Drive round, anywhere you like, up and down, as long as you put me down at the corner of the Holborn Restaurant at precisely two minutes to ten. Got that?"

The driver comprehended, and began a leisurely journey round certain principal streets and thoroughfares. Two minutes before ten he pulled up at the Holborn-Kingsway corner and gave his fare a grin.

"Done it to the second, sir," he announced, nodding at an adjacent clock.

"Good man!" said Hetherwick, handing out something over the registered fare. Then an idea struck him. "Look here," he continued confidentially, "I—and another man—may have to follow somebody from here, presently. Just drive down the street here: keep your flag down, and wait—if I want you, I shall be close at hand."

The driver showed his understanding by a nod and a wink and moved a little distance off to the curb. Hetherwick walked slowly down the west side of Kingsway. And precisely as the clock struck ten he saw Lord Morradale come from one direction and enter the formidable-looking and just-opened door of the Safe Deposit, and Matherfield appear from the other: looking round again, he was aware of the solemn-faced Quigman, who sauntered round the corner of Parker Street and came toward him. Hetherwick went on to meet him.

"There you are!" he said, doing a little acting in case any inimical eyes were on him. "To the minute! We'd better appear to be doing a bit of talk, eh? The others have just gone in."

"I saw 'em, sir," replied Quigman, coming to a halt on the curb, and affecting an interest on anything rather than on what he was really working. "Ah! But the question is—when will they come out? Might be in a few minutes—so to speak. Mightn't be for hours—as it were!"

"You seem to be a melancholy chap," observed Hetherwick.

"Melancholy job!" muttered Quigman. "Watching isn't my line. But Matherfield, he particularly wanted me to be in at this."

"Why?" asked Hetherwick.

"Peculiar knowledge of solicitors and their clerks in this part o' London," replied Quigman. "My line. Matherfield, he's an idea that the order to open this safe'll be presented by a solicitor."

"Good Lord, has he?" exclaimed Hetherwick. "I wonder! But—"

"Big help to these chaps, don't you see, if they can make a solicitor do the cat's-paw work," suggested Quigman. "Who'd suspect a solicitor of the High Court? And as I know pretty nearly all of 'em—there's one I know now coming up t'other side of the street," he continued suddenly. "That tallish, thin, pale-faced chap—see him? Look at him without seeming to look. Now, I wonder if he's the party we want?"

HETHERWICK looked in the direction indicated. He saw a youngish, spectacled man in a silk hat, morning coat, and the corresponding additions of professional attire, who was walking rapidly along from south to north. He was a very mild, gentle-looking person, not at all the sort to be concerned in dark plots and mysterious aims, and Hetherwick said so.

"Aye, well, you never know!" remarked Quigman lugubriously. "But as I say, I know him. Mr. Garrowell—Mr. Octavius Garrowell—solicitor, of St. Martin's Lane, that is. Been in practice for himself about four years or so. Nice young feller—quiet. And he is going in there—see?"

Hetherwick saw. There were several people, men and women, entering the Safe Deposit just then, but Mr. Garrowell's silk hat and sloping shoulders made him easily identifiable.

"I dare say it's him!" observed Quigman, with a sigh. "Just the sort to be took in, he is! Innocent, unsuspecting sort o' gentleman. However—it mayn't be. Deal o' people use these safe deposits nowadays."

Mr. Garrowell disappeared. The two watchers waited. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes went by: then Mr. Garrowell came

out. He came out just as any man would come out after transacting his business quietly. Nobody followed him; nobody seemed to be watching him—from the Safe Deposit. But Hetherwick noticed at once that whereas he had entered carrying nothing but an umbrella, he now carried a small square leather-covered box. With this in his left hand he crossed the roadway, and advanced straight toward Hetherwith and Quigman.

"No need to move, sir," whispered the detective. "Take no notice—spot him, though."

Mr. Garrowell, seen at close quarters, looked to be a somewhat absent-minded gentleman. But chancing to look up as he stepped on the pavement, his eyes encountered Quigman, who touched his hat.

"Morning, Mr. Garrowell," said the detective. "Nice morning, sir."

"Morning, Quigman," responded Mr. Garrowell. "A very nice morning!"

He nodded smilingly and went on his way, and round the corner into Parker Street. Quigman glanced at Hetherwick and shook his head.

"Not him!" he said. "Matherfield's not following. And as I said we may have to wait—hours!"

BUT at the end of another ten minutes Matherfield and Lord Morradale came together out of the entrance hall opposite. An official, smiling and talking, accompanied them to the threshold; when they left him, they came straight across the road. And it was obvious to Hetherwick that each was in a state of surprise—possibly of perplexity. Matherfield hailed them as soon as he was within speaking distance.

"Here's a queer business!" he said. "Did you see a professional-looking chap come away just now who carried a small leather box?"

"We saw Mr. Garrowell, solicitor, St. Martin's Lane," answered Quigman. "I know him. Gone down Parker Street."

"It was Garrowell," assented Matherfield. "I know him, too. Well,"— he turned to Hetherwick,—"it's a queer business. They knew Garrowell across there—he's been to Madame Listorelle's safe for her, before. He came there just now, with the usual authorization, on her note-paper, went to the safe, got that small box, and went. Garrowell—a highly respectable legal practitioner!"

"Why didn't you stop him and ask him questions?" inquired Hetherwick.

Matherfield exchanged a glance with Lord Morradale.

"Not there!" he said. "It—well, it looks as if Madame really had sent him! Her business."

"Of course she'd sent him!" exclaimed Hetherwick. "Sent him under compulsion! The whole thing's a clever plant! These fellows probably know that she's employed Garrowell now and then, and they forced her to write a letter to him, authorizing him to come here again and inclosing an order on the Safe Deposit people! Don't you see?"

"By Gad, there's something in that, Matherfield!" said Lord Morradale. Didn't strike me, though! 'Pon my honor, I really thought he had come direct from her. Couldn't think why, exactly, but then, as Matherfield says, a highly respectable solicitor—eh?"

"We'll soon settle it!" exclaimed Matherfield suddenly. "We'll go to Garrowell's office. Better discuss it there than have tackled him here. Anyway, he'll have the square box. Quigman, call a taxi!"

"There's a man here waiting for me," said Hetherwick. He signaled to his former driver, who quickly came alongside. "For anything we know," he continued as all four took their seats and were driven off, "Garrowell may have gone straight away somewhere to hand that box over! We ought to have followed."

"I don't think so," replied Matherfield. "The whole thing's queer, and not at all what I expected. Lord Morradale says that he never heard of Madame employing Garrowell, and yet the Safe people say he's been here two or three times on her business. But we'll soon have it out of him."

GARROWELL'S office proved to be up two flights of stairs in St. Martin's Lane. They were dark and dingy stairs, and none of the four men, clambering up them, noticed that an office-boy, rushing unceremoniously downward, carried a small parcel with which he fled out of the door and away down the street. They were, indeed, thinking of Garrowell—and within five minutes they were all in his private room. For another five minutes Matherfield was explaining matters—explaining to an obviously startled and much astonished listener.

"That's how it stands," concluded Matherfield. "You've evidently got the explanation, Mr. Garrowell. Now—"

"But you surprise me!" broke in the solicitor. "I've acted for Madame Listorelle in two or three matters—I've got things from her safe for her before, once or twice. And I saw nothing unusual in the letter she sent me this morning. Here it is! You can see it. Her usual note-paper—certainly her handwriting; nobody, I think, could imitate that successfully. You see what she says—I was to give the inclosed authorization to the Safe people, take out a small, square, brown, leather-covered box from the safe, pack it up, and send it off to Mr. C. Basing, Post Office, Southampton, at once, by express delivery. Nothing unusual in all that, I think. Of course, I carried out her wishes. But look at the letter."

All four men were looking at the letter. It was as Garrowell described, and whether it had been written under duress or not, the writing was bold and firm. But Matherfield seized on the envelope, and after a glance at it, pointed to the postmark.

"See that!" he exclaimed. "Posted in the S. W. district late last night. If Madame had been at home in Paddington, the postmark would have been different. Well—but the square box, Mr. Garrowell! You've got it, of course? Do you know that that box probably contains jewels worth—"

"The box?" ejaculated Garrowell. "Got it? Of course not! It's gone! The boy went off to the post office with it—oh, just before you came."

"Gad!" muttered Lord Morradale. "Well—the post office at once, Matherfield!"

But Matherfield suddenly laughed, throwing up both hands as if with a sudden inspiration.

"No, my Lord, no!" he said. "No! The box is safe enough in the post. It's off to Mr. C. Basing, Post Office, Southampton. And when Mr. Basing calls to collect it, he'll find me!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE was triumphant conviction in Matherfield's tone: there was the impulse to immediate action in the way in which he pulled out a railway guide from his pocket and rapidly turned its pages. But Hetherwick and Lord Morradale looked at each other. And each saw that the other was dubious.

"Yes," said Lord Morradale slowly. "Um—no doubt, Matherfield. But I say, you know, those jewels are worth no end! Safe enough, perhaps, in the hands of the postal authorities, now they are there, but—there's many a slip, you know, and—"

"You might take the postal authorities into your confidence," suggested Hetherwick. "These people are up to all sorts of wily tricks—"

Matherfield laughed quietly. It was the laugh of a man who knows his own business thoroughly and is a little impatient of outside advice or criticism.

"I know what I'm doing, gentlemen," he answered. "Leave it to me as to what I do with the post-office people. I've as good as got the handcuffs on Baseverie or on Ambrose—perhaps on both! This is how I figure the thing," he went on with a final glance at the time-table: "These two men have got Madame Listorelle and the young lady secretary in their power, safe somewhere in London. They forced Madame, last night, to write that letter to Mr. Garrowell here—we know what they made her write. Mr. Garrowell got the small box containing the jewels, and he's sent it off, already, by express delivery, to Southampton. It will be there early this evening, and one or other of the men will be there to meet it. If Baseverie calls for it, Ambrose will be round the corner. If Ambrose calls for it, Baseverie will be close at hand. Probably they're already in Southampton—they'd go this morning, to be on the spot. As soon as the box is in their hands, they'll be off—probably to the Continent, by Southampton and Havre. They wont try the Atlantic—the five days' voyage would be too risky. They'll make for France. But they wont get to France—they'll find themselves in the lockup at Southampton before bed-time! You see if that doesn't come off, gentlemen, as sure as my name's what it is. Now, Quigman, you come with me. We've just nice time to catch the one-thirty, and to get in touch with the Southampton police and lay our plans and make our arrangements Some time tonight, gentlemen, you'll hear from me!"

Then Matherfield hurried away with Quigman, and the three men left behind looked at each other. Mr. Garrowell was

obviously much concerned, and his hands, thin and nervous, trembled as he began to arrange the papers on his desk.

"This is a most distressing business, gentlemen," he said. "It is very painful to me to think that I have been made an instrument in a crime of this sort—however innocent a one! But how could I tell that this letter was forced out of Madame Listorelle? On the face of it—"

"Oh, there's no blame attaching to you, Mr. Garrowell!" interrupted Lord Morradale. "On the face of it, the letter's genuine enough. But I wanted to ask you a question—how much do you know of Madame Listorelle? — I mean, how often has she employed you?"

"TWO or three times only," replied Garrowell. "She came to me first about an agreement which I had had to send her on behalf of another client. She seemed very friendly and was kind enough to say that next time she had any legal business she would remember me as she hadn't any regular solicitor of her own. I think," he added with a deprecating smile, "she probably saw that I was beginning, and hadn't much to do."

"I see," said Lord Morradale, looking round at the somewhat humble appointments of the office. "And you've been to that safe deposit place on her behalf — how often?"

"Twice. On each occasion Madame Listorelle wrote her instructions from abroad. Once she was in Paris. The other time she was at Nice. The instructions were similar on both occasions; I was to go to the Safe Deposit, get a certain parcel or article and post it to an address given. The first time I sent a small parcel to Amsterdam—I have the exact address, and name; the second, to New York. So, of course, when I got Madame's letter this morning, I saw nothing unusual in it."

"Just so!" agreed Lord Morradale. "You wouldn't. Well, I hope Matherfield will clap the irons on the men who forced her to write it! Eh, Hetherwick?"

"With all my heart!" responded Hetherwick. "But I too want to ask Mr. Garrowell a question. How long," he continued, "have you been here, in St. Martin's Lane?"

"About four years," replied Garrowell.

"Then you know this district pretty well, of course. Have you ever come across a man whom I'll try to describe to you?" He went on to give an accurate description of Baseverie. "That man," he concluded, "is sometimes seen around here."

Garrowell nodded.

"I know him!" he said. "In fact, he's been in this very room—to see me. But I don't know his name, nor anything much about him. He was brought here by another man, and he only stayed a few minutes."

"How much do you know about him—however little?" asked Hetherwick.

"This much: You know that people who have invented things come to solicitors—for legal advice, and sometimes to get information as to how they can best dispose of their inventions? Well, about nine months ago, a man came to me who claimed to have invented a drop-bottle—that is, a bottle from which you could only drop one drop of stuff at a time. He said such a thing was badly wanted, and that there ought to be a pile of money in it. He wanted to know how best to get it on the market. I didn't know, but I mentioned the matter to one or two people; and a man I know—or knew at that time, for he's since dead, unfortunately—said that he knew a man who was a sort of commission agent for inventions—took up a good idea, don't you see, and introduced it. And he promised to bring him to see me. He brought him—the man he brought was without doubt the man you describe. His name was not mentioned, but I am sure he was that man. I don't know what your man is, but I felt sure that the man I am talking about either was or had been a medical man."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hetherwick. "What made you think that?"

"From his conversation—from the remarks he made about the bottle. He didn't take it up—he said my client was too late and was wrongly informed into the bargain—there was such a thing, and a superior one, already on the market. He went away, then—and, as I say, I never heard his name, and I've never seen him since."

"That's the man we want!" said Hetherwick. "If Matherfield can only lay hands on him! But we shall know more by midnight."

OUTSIDE, he turned to Lord Morradale with a shake of the head.

"We're no nearer to any knowledge of

where the two women are!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I don't know!" responded Lord Morradale. "I think we are, you know. You see, if Matherfield nabs those chaps, or even one of them, he or they will see that the game's up and will give in and say where their captives are. Odd business, Hetherwick, that people can be kidnaped and imprisoned in broad daylight, in London!"

"I don't think anything's impossible, or odd—in London," answered Hetherwick dryly. "If one had only the least idea as to which quarter of the town that car was driven, one might be doing something!"

"Lots of subsections in every quarter, and subsections again in each of those," replied Lord Morradale with equal dryness. "Take some time to comb out this town! No! I think we must trust to Matherfield. Nothing else to trust to, in fact.

But Hetherwick suddenly thought of Mapperley. He began to wonder what the clerk was after, what his notion had been. Then he remembered Mapperley's admonition to look out for a message about that time, and excusing himself from Lord Morradale, he jumped on a bus and went along to the Temple. There, in the letter-box, he found a telegram:

Meet me Victoria three o'clock.
Mapperley.

HETHERWICK set off for Victoria there and then. But it was only a quarter past two when he got there, and as he had had no lunch, he turned into the restaurant. There, when he was halfway through a chop, Mapperley found him and slipped into a chair close by before Hetherwick noticed his presence.

"Thought I might find you in here, sir," said Maperley. They were alone in a quiet corner, but the clerk lowered his voice to a whisper. "Well," he continued, bending across the table, "I've done a bit, anyhow."

"In what way?" asked Hetherwick.

Mapperley produced from his breast pocket some papers, and from amongst them selected an envelope—the azure-tinted envelope which he had picked up from the caretaker's supper-table at St. Mary's Mansions.

"You recognize this?" he said, with a sly smile. "You know where I got it. This is the envelope which Baseverie took to the caretaker, with the order to enter Madame Listorelle's flat. You knew that I carried it off, from under the man's nose, last night. But you didn't know why—I only laughed when you asked me."

"Well, why, then?" inquired Hetherwick.

"This reason," replied Mapperley: "We both noticed that the sheet of paper on which the order had been written by Madame had been shortened—there was no doubt that a printed or embossed address had been trimmed off, rather roughly, too. We noticed that, I say, both of us. But I don't think you noticed something far more important,—for our purposes."

"No," admitted Hetherwick. "I didn't. What?"

"This," said Mapperley, turning back the broken flap of the envelope. "You didn't notice that here, on the envelope, is the name and address of the stationer who supplied this stuff! There you are—W. H. Calkin, 85, Broadway, Westminster. You never saw that, Mr. Hetherwick, but I did!"

Hetherwick began to comprehend. He smiled—gratefully.

"Smart of you, Mapperley!" he exclaimed. "I see! And you've been there?"

"I've been there," answered Mapperley. "I saw a chance of tracking these men down. I couldn't get hold of Calkin till nearly noon, but I got on like a house afire when I did get him. You see," he went on, "that paper is, to start with, of an unusual tint. Secondly, it's of very superior quality, though very thin—intended, chiefly, for foreign correspondence. Thirdly, it's expensive. Now, I felt certain its use would be limited, and what I wanted to find out from the stationer was—to whom he'd supplied it. That was easy. He recognized the paper and envelope at once. Of the handwriting on the paper he knew nothing whatever—Madame's writing, you know; that he'd never seen before. But he said at once that he'd only supplied that particular make of paper and envelopes to three people, and for each person he'd prepared a die, to emboss the addresses. The embossing had been done at his shop, and he showed me specimens of each. One was for the Dowager Lady Markentree, 120, Grosvenor Gardens. That was no use. The second was for Miss Chelandry, 87, Ebury Street. That was out of count, too. But the third was what I wanted.

It was just the address, 56 Little Smith Street, S. W. 1. As soon as I saw it, I knew I'd got on the right track."

"Go on!" said Hetherwick.

"The stationer, Calkin, didn't know the name of the man who ordered this paper and gave this address," continued Mapperley. "He knew him well enough as a customer, though, and described him. Baseverie, without a doubt! Calkin says that Baseverie, during the last few months, bought various items of stationery from him—notebooks, duplicating paper, office requisites, and so on. He never knew his name, but as he always carried away his own purchases, and paid spot cash for them, that didn't matter. Calkin supplied him with ten quires of this paper and envelopes to match a couple of months ago. So—there you are! And there I was—sure at last that Baseverie's mysterious hiding-place was 56 Little Smith Street!"

"Good—good!" said Hetherwick. "What next?"

"Well, I thought we could do with a bit of help," replied Mapperley, smiling. "So I left Calkin—bound to secrecy, of course—and telephoned to Alf Garsten. Alf is just the sort of chap for games of this sort! We came—and he and I took a stroll round. Do you know Little Smith Street?"

"Not I!" answered Hetherwick. "Never heard of it!"

"Oh, well, but it is a street," said Mapperley. "It lies between Great Smith Street and Tufton Street, back o' the Church House—not so far from the Abbey. Bit slummy down those quarters—sort of district that's seen decidedly better days. Still, there's good, solid houses and there—56 is one of 'em. From outside, it looks the sort of house you can't get into—dark, silent; heavily curtained windows—sort of place in which you could murder anybody on the quiet. Very substantial front door, painted dark green, with an old-fashioned brass knocker. That sort of house! We took a good look at it."

"See anything?" asked Hetherwick.

"Nothing but what I've told you—lifeless sort o' place," answered Mapperley. "However, having once seen it, I wasn't going to leave it unwatched; so I posted Alf there, in the window of a convenient public-house, and came away to telegraph to you. And there Alf is—either in his pub, or loafing round. And now we ought to go and hear if he's anything to report. And if he hasn't—what then?"

"Just so," said Hetherwick. "That's it—what then? But before we do anything at all, Mapperley, I'd better post you up as to what's happened elsewhere this morning..... You see," he continued, when he had finished his story, "if Matherfield's theory is correct and Baseverie has already gone to Southampton to collect that parcel on its arrival, and if Ambrose has gone with him, we sha'n't find Baseverie at this address. But—we might inquire if he's known there."

Mapperley reflected awhile. Then an idea seemed to suggest itself.

"Pay your bill, sir, and let's get out to a post-office directory somewhere," he said. "We'll get the name of the occupier of 56 Little Smith Street."

TEN minutes later they were looking down the long columns of names in a directory: Mapperley suddenly pointed to what they wanted.

"There we are!" he said. "Mrs. Hannah Mallett—boarding-house proprietor."

"Come along!" said Hetherwick. "We'll see Mrs. Mallett, anyhow."

But on arrival at Little Smith Street, Mapperley looked round first for his friend Mr. Alfred Garsten. Alf materialized suddenly, apparently from nowhere, and smiled.

"Afternoon, Mister," he said politely to Hetherwick. "Lovely weather, isn't it? Aint seen nothing, Mapperley, old bean! Aint been a soul in or out o' that house since you hopped it! Seems to me it's locked up."

"We'll see about that," remarked Hetherwick. "Come with me, Mapperley, You stay here, Garsten, and keep your eyes as open as before."

He advanced boldly, with the clerk at his heels, to the door of Number 56, and knocked loudly on the stout panel, supplementing this with a ring at the bell. This dual summons was twice repeated—with no result.

"Somebody coming!" whispered Mapperley suddenly. "Bolted inside, as well as locked!"

Hetherwick distinctly heard the sound of a stout bolt being withdrawn; then of a key being turned. The door was opened—only a little, but sufficiently to show them the face and figure of an unusually big woman, an Amazon in appearance,

hard of eye and lip, who glared at them suspiciously, and as soon as she saw that there were two of them, narrowed the space through which she inspected her callers. But Hetherwick got a hand on the door and a foot across the threshold.

"Mrs. Mallett?" he inquired in a purposely loud voice. "Just so! Is Doctor Baseverie in?"

Both men were watching the woman keenly, and they saw that she started a little, involuntarily. But her head shook a ready negative.

"Nobody of that name here!" she answered.

She would have shut the door but for Hetherwick's foot; he advanced it farther, giving Mrs. Mallet a keen, searching glance.

"Perhaps you know Dr. Baseverie by another name?" he suggested. "So—is Mr. Basing in?"

But the ready shake of the head came again, and the hard eyes grew harder and more suspicious.

"Nobody of that name here, either!" she said. "Don't know anybody of those names."

"I think you do," persisted Hetherwick sternly. He turned to Mapperley, purposely. "We shall have to get the police—"

"Look out, sir!" exclaimed Mapperley, snatching at Hetherwick's arm. "Your fingers!"

The woman suddenly banged the door to, narrowly missing Hetherwick's hand, which he had closed on the edge; a second later they heard the bolt slipped and the key turned. And Hetherwick, as with a swift illumination, comprehended things, and turned sharply on his clerk.

"Mapperley!" he exclaimed. "Sure as Fate! Those ladies are in there! Trapped!"

"Shouldn't wonder, sir," agreed Mapperley. "And as you say—the police—"

"Come back to Garsten," said Hetherwick.

Going lower down the street and retreating into the shelter of a doorway, the three men held a rapid consultation, suddenly interrupted by an exclamation from Garsten, who still kept his eyes on the house.

"S'elp me if the woman aint leavin' that house!" he said. "See—there she is! Lockin' the door behind her, too! Goin' up the street!"

Hetherwick looked and saw, and pushed Garsten out of the doorway.

"Follow!" he said. "And for God's sake, don't miss her!"

CHAPTER XXIV

GARSTEN silently and promptly set out in the wake of the hurrying woman; presently she and her pursuer disappeared round a corner.

"That's the result of our call, Mapperley!" said Hetherwick. "She's gone somewhere—to tell somebody!"

"Likely!" assented Mapperley. "But wherever she's gone, Garsten'll spot her, He's the eyes of a lynx."

"He let Baseverie slip him, the other night, though," remarked Hetherwick.

"Well, there was some excuse for that," said Mapperley. "To begin with, he was only instructed to find out where Baseverie went, and to end with he had found out! He'll not let this woman slip him. She's good to follow—plenty of her."

"I wish we knew what she'd left in that house," said Hetherwick. "We'll have to find out, somehow!"

"That's a police job," replied Mapperley. "Can't walk into people's houses without a warrant. And you say Matherfield's off on the other track. However, I should say that this woman's gone off now to find somebody who's principally concerned—she looked afraid, in my opinion, when she saw me."

"She's in it, somehow," muttered Hetherwick. "That house looks mysterious enough for anything. We'll keep a close watch on it, anyway, until Garsten comes back, however long that may be."

But the curly-haired young man was back within twenty minutes. So was the woman. She came first, hurrying up the street quicker than when she had left it. As far as the watchers could make out from their vantage-point, twenty yards away from her door, she looked flustered, distressed, upset. After her, on the opposite pavement, came Mr. Garsten, his hands in his pockets.

The woman reëntered the house; they heard the door bang. A moment later Garsten turned into the entry in which Hetherwick and Mapperley stood half-hidden from the street. He smiled, inscrutably.

"See her go back to her house?" he

asked. "Well, I followed. I saw where she's been, too."

"Where, then?" demanded Hetherwick, impatiently.

Garsten jerked his head in the direction from whence he had come.

"Round that corner," he said, "you get into a regular slum. Little streets, alleys, and so on. In one of 'em, a narrow place, where there's a sort of open-air market, there's a good-sized piece of blank wall, with an iron-faced door in it. Well, the woman went in there—let herself in with a key that she took from her pocket. As soon as she'd gone in, I took a closer look. The door's faced with iron, or steel, as I said —jolly strong. There aint no name on it, and no keyhole that you can look through. The wall's a good nine or ten feet high, and it's covered with broken glass at the top. Not a nice place to get into, nohow!"

"Well?" inquired Hetherwick. "She went in?"

"Went in, as I say, Mister, and the door closed on her. After I'd taken a glimpse at the door, I got a post behind one of the stalls in the street and watched. She came out again in about ten minutes—looked to me, too, as if she hadn't had a very pleasant time inside. Upset! And she set off back here, faster than what she came. Now she's gone into her house again—as you no doubt saw. And that's all. But if I was you, Mister," concluded Garsten, "I should just find out what there is behind that door and the wall it's set in—I should so!"

"That's a police job," said Hetherwick in reply. "If we'd only got Matherfield with us, we could—" he paused, thinking. "Look here, Mapperley," he continued, with a sudden inspiration. "I know what we'll do! You get a taxicab, as quickly as possible. Drive to the police station where I usually meet Matherfield. There's another man there whom I know, and who's pretty well up in this business—Detective-sergeant Robmore. Ask for him. Tell him what we've discovered, and ask him to come back with you and to bring another man if he thinks it necessary. Now then, Garsten, tell us exactly where this place is."

The curly-haired youth pointed along the street to its first corner.

"Round that corner," he said. "First turning to the right; then to the left, then to the right—that's the spot. Lots o' little stalls in it—a busy crowded place."

"Didn't ye notice the name?" demanded Mapperley, half-scoldingly.

"To be sure I did!" grinned Garsten. "Pencove Street. But it's better to describe it than to name it. And don't you go tellin' no taxi-driver to drive you in there—there aint room!"

MAPPERLEY gave no answer to this piece of advice; he shot off in the direction of Victoria Street, and Hetherwick turned to Garsten.

"We'll go and have another look at this place, Garsten," he said. "But we'll go separately—as long as we're in this street, anyway. You stroll off to that first corner, and I'll join you."

He crossed the street when the young man had lounged away, and once more took a narrow look at the house into which the big woman had vanished. It was as close barred and curtained as ever, a veritable place of mystery. For a moment Hetherwick doubted whether he ought to leave it unwatched. But the descriptions of the wall and door in Pencove Street had excited his imagination, and he went on, turned the corner and rejoined Garsten—who at once went in front, piloting him into a maze of unusually dirty and crowded streets, and finally into one, narrower than the rest, on each side of which were tentlike stalls whereon all manner of cheap wares were being offered for sale by raucous-voiced venders. He saw at once that this was one of those open-air markets of which there are many in the poorer neighborhoods of London, and wherein you can by a sixpenny frying-pan as readily as a paper of fried fish, and a gay neckerchief alongside a damaged orange.

Threading his way behind Garsten, and between the thronged stalls and the miserable shops that lined the pavement, Hetherwick presently came to the piece of blank wall of which the youth had told him. The houses and shops round about were old and dilapidated, but the wall was either modern or had been rebuilt and strengthened. It stretched between two low houses, one used as a grocer's the other as a hardware shop. In length it was some thirty feet, in height quite ten; its coping, as Garsten had said, was liberally embattled with broken glass. The door, set flush with the adjoining masonry, was a solid affair, faced with metal, newly painted, and the lock was evidently a

patent one. A significant fact struck Hetherwick at once: there was no sign of a bell and none of a knocker.

"You say the woman let herself in here?" he asked, as he and Garsten paused.

"That's it, Mr. Hetherwick—let herself in," replied Garsten. "I saw her take the key from her pocket."

Hetherwick glanced at the top of the wall.

"I wonder what's behind?" he muttered. "Building of some sort, of course." He turned to a man whose stall stood just in front of the mysterious door, and who at that moment had no trade. "Do you know anything about this place?" he asked. "Do you know what's behind this wall—what building it is?"

The man eyed Hetherwick over, silently and carefully. Deciding that he was an innocent person and not a policeman in plain clothes, he found his tongue.

"I don't, guv'nor!" he answered. "Aint a bloomin' notion! I been comin' here, or hereabouts, this three year or more, but I aint never seen behind that wall, nor in at that there doorway. S'elp me!"

"BUT I suppose you've seen people go in and come out of the door?" suggested Hetherwick. "It must be used for something!"

"I reckon it is, guv'nor, but I don't call nobody to mind, though, to be sure, I see a woman come out of it awhile ago—big, heavy-jawed woman, she was. But queer as it may seem, I don't call to mind ever seeing anybody else. You see, guv'nor, I comes here at about ten o'clock of a morning, and I packs up and 'ops it at five; if there's folks comes in and out o' that spot, it must be early in a morning and late at night, and so I shouldn't see 'em. But it's my belief this here wall and door is back premises to something—the front o' the place'll be on the other side."

"That's a good idea," said Hetherwick, with a glance at Garsten. "Let's go round."

But there was no going round. Although they tried various alleys and passages and streets that ought to have been parallel to Pencove Street, they failed to find any place that could be a frontage to the mysterious wall and its close-set door. Presently, however, the youth's alert faculties asserted themselves.

"We can see what's behind that wall, Mister, easy enough if we get one o' them shopkeepers opposite to let us go upstairs to his first floor," he said. "Look right across the street there, into whatever there is. Try that one," he went on, pointing to a greengrocer's establishment. "Tell him we're doin' a bit o' land surveyin'—which is true!"

HETHERWICK made his request; the greengrocer's lady showed him and Garsten upstairs into a bow-windowed parlor, one of those dismal apartments which are only used on Sundays, for the purpose of adding more gloom to a gloomy day. She observed that there was a nice view both ways of the street, but Hetherwick confined his inspection to the front. He saw across the wall easily enough, now. There was little to see. The wall inclosed a yard, bounded on its left and right sides by the walls of the adjoining houses, and at its further extremity by a low, squat building of red brick, erected against the rear of a high, windowless wall beyond. From its mere aspect, it was impossible to tell what this squat, flat-roofed structure was used for. Its door, closed, was visible; visible, too, were the windows on either side. But it was easy to see that they were obscured, as to their lower halves, by coats of dark paint. There was no sign over the building, no outward indication of its purpose. In the yard, however, were crates, boxes, and carboys in wicker cases; a curiously shaped chimney, projecting from the roof above, suggested the presence of a furnace or forge beneath. And Hetherwick, after another look, felt no doubt that he was gazing at the place to which Hannaford had been taken, and where he had been skillfully poisoned.

Garsten suddenly nudged his arm, and nodded at the crowded street below.

"Mapperley!" he whispered. "And two men with him!"

Hetherwick, glancing in the direction indicated, saw Robmore and another man, both in plain clothes, making their way down the street between the stalls and the shops. With them, and in close conversation, was a uniformed constable. He turned to leave the room, but Garsten again touched his elbow.

"Before we go, Mister," he said, "just take another glance at that place opposite. I see where we can get in! D'ye see, Mr. Hetherwick, the wall between that yard and the next house—the right-hand side one—is fairly low at the far end. Now,

if the man in that house would let us go through to his back-yard—what?"

"I see!" agreed Hetherwick. "We'll try it. But Robmore first—come along."

He slipped some silver into the hand of the greengrocer's lady, and went down to the street. A few brief explanations to the two detectives supplemented the information already given them by Mapperley, and then Robmore nodded at the constable, who stood by, eagerly interested.

"We've been talking to him, Mr. Hetherwick," he said. "He's sometimes on day duty here, and sometimes he's on night. He says he's often wondered about this place, and it's a very queer thing that though he's known this district more than a year, he's never seen a soul go in or out of that door, and hasn't the least notion of what business, if it is a business, is carried on there!"

"Never seen anything or anybody!" corroborated the constable. "At any time—day or night! When I first came on this beat, maybe fifteen months ago, that door had been newly set and painted, and the glass had just been stuck atop the wall. But it's a fact—I've never seen anybody go in or come out!"

"I propose to go in," said Hetherwick. "I think we've abundant cause, knowing what we do. It may be that the two missing ladies are there. I've been having a look into the yard, and we could get into it easily by going through the grocer's shop there, on the right, and climbing the wall from his back premises. What do you say, Robmore?"

"Oh, I think so!" agreed Robmore. "Now we're on the job, we'll carry it through. Better let me tackle the grocer, Mr. Hetherwick—I'll see him first and then call you in."

Robmore entered the shop and spoke with its owner. Then he came to the door and beckoned the rest to approach.

"That's all right," he said in an aside to Hetherwick. "We can go through to his back-yard, and he'll lend us a step-ladder to get over the wall. But he's told me a bit: he knows the two men who have this place in the next yard, and there's no doubt at all, from his description of them, that one's Ambrose and the other Baseverie. He says they've had the place almost eighteen months, and he thinks they use it as a laboratory—chemicals, or something of that sort. But he says they're rarely seen; sometimes he's never seen them for days and even weeks together. Usually, they're there of a night—he's seen lights in the place at all hours of the night. Well—come on!"

THE posse of investigators filed through the dark little shop to a yard at its rear, the grocer's apprentice going in front with a stepladder, which he planted against the intervening wall at its lowest point. One by one, the uniformed constable going first, the six men climbed and dropped over. But for their own presence, the place seemed deserted and lifeless. As Hetherwick had observed from the greengrocer's parlor, the windows were obscured by thick coats of paint; nevertheless two or three of the men approached and tried to find places from which the paint had been scratched, in an effort to see what lay inside. But the constable, bolder and more direct, went straight to the entrance.

"Door's open!" he exclaimed. "Not even shut!" He pushed the door wide, and went into the building, the rest crowding after him. "Hullo!" he shouted. "Hullo!"

No answer came to the summons. The constable crossed the lobby in which they were all standing, and opened an inner door. And Hetherwick saw at once that the grocer's surmise as to the purpose to which the place was put had been correct—this was a chemical laboratory, well equipped, too, with modern apparatus. But there was not a sign of life in it.

"Nobody here, apparently," murmured one of the men. "Flown!"

Robmore went forward to another door, and opening it, revealed a room furnished as an office. There was a roll-top desk in it, and papers and documents lying there; he and Hetherwick began to finger and examine them. And Hetherwick suddenly saw something that made a link between this mysterious place and the house he had called at earlier in the afternoon. There, before his eyes, lay some of the azure-tinted note-paper which Mapperley had traced with the embossed address on it of which the stationer had told.

"There's no doubt we've hit on the place at last, Robmore," he said. "I wish we'd have Matherfield here. But—"

Before he could say more, a sudden shout came from Garsten, who, while the others were investigating the lower regions, had courageously and alone gone up the low staircase to the upper rooms.

"Mister!" he called. "Mr. Hetherwick!

Come up here—come up, all of you. Here's a man here, a-sittin' in a chair—and 'elp me if I don't believe he's a stiff un—dead!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE rest of the searchers, hearing that startled cry, with one accord made for the upper part of the building. Robmore and Hetherwick reached him first; he was standing at the half-opened door of a room, into which he was staring with eager eyes. They pushed by him and entered.

Hetherwick took in the general aspect and contents of that room at a glance. It had been fitted up—recently, he thought, from certain small evidences—as a bed-sitting-room. A camp-bed stood in one corner; there was a washstand, a dressing-table, a chest of drawers, two or three pictures, a shelf of books, a small square of carpet in the center of the floor, the outer edges of which had been roughly and newly stained. On the bed lay, open, a suitcase already packed with clothes and linen; by it lay an overcoat, hat, gloves, umbrella: it was evident that the man to whom it belonged had completed his preparations for a departure.

But the man himself? There was a big, old-fashioned easy-chair at the side of the bed—a roomy, comfortable affair. A man lay, rather than sat, in it, in an attitude which suggested that he had dropped there as with a sudden weariness, laid his head back against the padded cushion, and—gone to sleep. But the men knew, all of them, as they crowded into that room, that it was no sleep that they had broken in upon—it was death.

The head of the dead man lay quietly against the padding of the chair, a little inclined to his left shoulder: the face was fully visible. It was—to Hetherwick—the face of a stranger; in all his and Matherfield's investigations it had not been described to them. Yet he was certain that he was looking on the man known to them by repute as Ambrose — disguised, of course; he had shaved off the dark beard and mustache of which they had heard, and Hetherwick could see at once that the loss of them had made a remarkable difference in his appearance. But nothing could disguise his height and general build. This, without doubt, was the man Matherfield and he had hunted for, the man who had met Hannaford at Victoria, who had disappeared from his flat in the Adelphi—the man who was associated with Baseverie, and who—

"Dead as a door-nail!" muttered Robmore, bending close to the still figure. "And he's been dead a good bit, too—some hours, anyway. Stiff! Do ye know him, Mr. Hetherwick?"

Hetherwick said what he thought. Robmore pointed to the things on the bed.

"Looks as if he'd been taken with a seizure just as he was about to set off somewhere," he remarked. "Well, if this is the Dr. Ambrose we've been seeking—but let's see if he's got anything on him to prove his identity."

WHILE the rest of the men stood by watching, Robmore put his hand into the dead man's inside breast pocket—he was wearing a smart, brand-new gray tweed suit; Hetherwick, later on, remembered how its newness struck him as being incongruously out of place, somehow—and drew out a pocketbook. Touching Hetherwick's elbow and motioning him to follow him, he went over to the window, leaving the others still staring wonderingly at the dead man.

"This is a queer business, Mr. Hetherwick," he whispered as they drew apart. "You think this is the Dr. Ambrose we were after?"

"Sure of it!" answered Hetherwick. "He's shaved off his beard and mustache, and that's no doubt made a big difference in his appearance, but you may depend on it, this is the man! But—what's caused his sudden death?"

Then a keen, vivid recollection flashed up in him, and he turned sharply, glancing at the rigid figure in the background.

"What is it?" asked Robmore curiously. "Something strikes you?"

Hetherwick pointed to the dead man's attitude.

"That's — that's just how Hannaford looked when he died in the railway carriage!" he whispered. "After the first signs —he lay back and—died. Just like that—as if he'd dropped quietly asleep, Can—can it be that—"

"I know what you're thinking," muttered Robmore. "Poisoned! Well, what about —eh?—the other man?"

"Baseverie!" exclaimed Hetherwick.

"Why not? To rid himself of an accomplice! But this pocketbook," said Rob-

more. "Let's see what's in it. Doesn't seem to be anything very much, by the thinness."

From one flap of the pocketbook he drew out a wad of carefully folded bank-notes, and rapidly turned them over.

"Hundred and fifty pounds there," he remarked. "And what's this paper? A draft on a New York bank for two hundred. New York, eh? So that's where he was bound? And this," he went on, turning out the other flap. "Ah! See this, Mr. Hetherwick? He'd got his passage booked by the *Maratic,* sailing tonight. Um! And Matherfield's gone to Southampton, after Baseverie. I'm beginning to see a bit into this, I think.

"What do you see?" asked Hetherwick.

"Well, it looks to me as if Baseverie had gone ahead to collect that box containing the jewels, and that Ambrose was to follow later, join him there, when Baseverie had secured the loot, and that they were then to be off with their harvest! But do you notice this—the name under which the passage is booked? Not Ambrose—'Charles Andrews, Esquire.' Andrews! And Baseverie is Basing. Basing and Andrews. Now I wonder if they carried on business here under these names?"

"That's an unimportant detail," said Hetherwick. "The important thing, surely, is—that! How did that man come by his death?"

"Well, but I don't think that is very important — just now," replied Robmore. "After all, he is dead, and whether he died as the result of a sudden seizure, or whether Baseverie cleverly poisoned him before he left, is a question we'll have to settle later. But I'll tell you what, Mr. Hetherwick: I'll lay anything he didn't poison himself! Look round—there isn't a sign of anything he's been drinking out of. No sir—the other man's done this. And if Matherfield has the luck to lay hands on him tonight —ah! But now, what was this your clerk, Mapperley, told us as we came along about the Little Smith Street landlady coming here this afternoon?"

"She was followed here by Garsten," replied Hetherwick. "Garsten saw her admit herself by a key which she took from her pocket. She stayed inside a few minutes, came out looking much upset, and hurried away to her own house."

"And now you and I'll just hurry after her," said Robmore. "After all, she's living, and we'll make her find her tongue. Of course, she came in here expecting to find this man, and to tell him somebody was on the lookout. And—she found him dead! Come round there with me, Mr. Hetherwick, at once."

HE turned to the other detective and the constable, and after giving them some whispered instructions, left the room — Hetherwick, after a word or two with Mapperley, following him. But before they had reached the outer door, they heard steps in the yard, and suddenly two men appeared in the doorway.

If Hetherwick and his companion looked questioningly at these two men, they, on their part, looked questioningly at Robmore and Hetherwick. They were youngish men—Hetherwick set them down as respectably dressed artisans. That they were surprised to find anyone confronting them at the door whereat all four now stood was evident—their surprise, indeed, was so great that they came to a sudden halt, staring silently. But Robmore spoke. "Wanting somebody?" he asked sharply.

The two strangers exchanged a glance, and the apparently elder one replied:

"Well, no," he said, "not that we know of. But—might we ask if you are—and how you got in here? Because this place happens to be ours!"

"Yours!" exclaimed Robmore. "Your property?"

"Well, if buying it, paying for it and taking a receipt and papers makes it so!" answered the man. "Bought it this morning—and settled up for it too, anyway."

Robmore produced and handed over a professional card, and the faces of the two men fell as they read it. The elder looked up quickly.

"I hope there's nothing wrong?" he said anxiously. "Detectives, eh? We've laid out a nice bit on this—savings, too, and—"

"I don't suppose there's anything wrong that way," replied Robmore reassuringly. "But there's something uncommonly wrong in other ways. Now look here: who are you two, and from whom did you buy this place?"

"My name's Marshall—his is Wilkinson," answered the leader. "We're just starting business for ourselves as electrical engineers. We advertised for a likely place hereabouts, and Mr. Andrews came to us about this—said he and his partner, Mr. Basing, were leaving, and wanted to sell it, just as it stood. We came to look at it,

and as it's just the place we need, to start with, we agreed to buy it. They said it was their own property, and to save law expenses, we carried out the purchase between ourselves. And we paid over the purchase-money this morning, and got the papers, and the key."

"What time was that?" asked Robmore.

"Ten o'clock or thereabouts," replied Marshall. "By appointment—here."

"Did you see both men—Basing and Andrews?"

"Both—in that little room to the right. We settled the business—paid them in cash—and settled all up. It was soon done; then they stood us a drink and a cigar, and we went."

"Stood you a drink, eh?" said Robmore suddenly. "Where?"

"Here! Basing, he pulled out a big bottle of champagne and a cigar-box, and said we'd wet the bargain. We'd a glass apiece, Wilkinson and me—then we left 'em to finish the bottle; we were in a hurry. But—is anything wrong?"

"What is wrong, my lad, is that the man you know as Andrews is lying dead upstairs!" replied Robmore. "Poisoned, most likely, by his partner. But as I said just now, I don't suppose there's anything wrong about your buying the property, providing you can show a title to it—you say you've got the necessary papers."

Marshall clapped a hand on the pocket of his coat.

"Got 'em all here, now," he said. "But—did you say Andrews was dead — poisoned? Why, he was as alive as I am when we left the two of 'em together. They were finishing the bottle—"

"Look here," interrupted Robmore. "Wait awhile until we come back; we've some important work close by. There are people of ours upstairs—tell them I said you were to wait a bit. . . . . Now, Mr. Hetherwick."

OUTSIDE the yard and in the crowded street, Robmore turned to his companion with a cynical laugh.

"Champagne—to wet the bargain!" he said. "Left them to finish it, eh? And no doubt what finished Ambrose was in that champagne—slipped in by Baseverie when his back was turned. I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Hetherwick, that chap's a thorough-paced un—he goes the whole hog! I only hope he wont be too deep for Matherfield at Southampton! I'll be anxious till I hear."

"Is it possible for him to escape Matherfield?" exclaimed Hetherwick. "How can he? I look on him as being as good as in custody already! He's bound to call at the post office for that box—"

"Is he, though?" interrupted the detective, with another incredulous laugh. "I'm not so sure about that, Mr. Hetherwick. Baseverie is evidently an accomplished scoundrel, and full of all sorts of tricks! I'll tell ye what I'm wondering: will that parcel ever get to Southampton post office, where it's to be called for?"

"Whatever do you mean?" demanded Hetherwick. "It's in the post! Posted this morning."

"No doubt," agreed Robmore dryly. "By special delivery, eh? And when it gets to Southampton station, it's got to be taken to the head post office, hasn't it?"

"Well?" asked Hetherwick.

"There's many a slip twixt cup and lip—so the old saying goes," replied Robmore. "That parcel may slip. But isn't this the number your clerk mentioned?"

The door of Mrs. Mallett's house looked more closely barred than ever. And no answer came to several summonses by bell and knocker. But presently Robmore tried the handle—and the door opened at his touch.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "Open! Um! That seems a bit queer. Well—inside!"

For the second time that afternoon Hetherwick walked into a place that seemed to be wholly deserted.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE detective, walking a little in advance of his companion, stepped forward to a hall table and knocked loudly on its polished surface. No answer came. He went farther along, to the head of a railed stair which evidently communicated with a cellar kitchen; again he knocked, more loudly than before, on an adjacent panel, and again got no reply. And at that, turning back along the hall, he opened the door of the room which faced upon the street, and he and Hetherwick looked in. A musty-smelling, close-curtained room, that, a sort of Sunday parlor, little used, cold and comfortless in its formality. But the room behind it, to which Robmore turned next, showed signs of recent occupancy and life. There was a fire in the grate, with an easy-chair drawn near to

it; on the table close by lay women's gear —a heap of linen, with needle and thread thrust in, a work-basket, scissors, thimble; it required no more than a glance to see that the owner of these innocent matters had laid them down suddenly—suddenly interrupted in her task.

"I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Hetherwick!" exclaimed Robmore. "This house is empty! Empty of people, anyway."

"Silent enough, to be sure," agreed Hetherwick. "The woman—"

"You've frightened her by calling here," said Robmore. "Then she slipped round to Pencore Street. And there she found Ambrose dead! She's some connection with him and Baseverie, because she possesses a key that admits to that yard. And finding Ambrose dead, she came back here, got her things and cleared out. There isn't a soul in this house! I'll lay anything on that!"

"It struck me that this might be the place where the two ladies were detained," remarked Hetherwick.

"We'll soon see about that," declared Robmore. "Come upstairs—we'll search the place from top to bottom. But stop—downstairs first."

HE ran down the stair to the cellar kitchen, with Hetherwick at his heels. And at the door he laughed, pointing within.

"Look there!" he exclaimed. "I told you you'd interrupted things. See—there's one tea-tray, laid all ready for two—cups and saucers, teapot, bread and butter cut, cake. There's another for one. And there's the kettle, singing away like a bird on a bough. What's that mean? The woman was going to carry up tea for two—somewhere; t'other tray was for herself. Well, you nipped that in the bud—she'll have to get her tea somewhere. But the others? Come upstairs."

Going back to the hall, he led the way up the main staircase. There were two stories above the ground floor; on the first were rooms the doors of which, being opened, or being found open, revealed nothing but ordinary things; of these rooms there were three, opening off a main landing. But on the next floor there were only two rooms—one was unfurnished; at the door of the other, a few inches ajar, the detective immediately paused.

"Look you there, now, Mr. Hetherwick!" he said, pointing here and there. "Here's recent work! Do you see that a strong bolt, more like a bar, has been fitted on the outside of this door? And the door itself fitted with a new patent lock—key outside. And good Lord—a chain as well! Might be in a jail! But what's inside?"

He pushed the door open and revealed a large room, fitted with two small beds, easy-chairs, a table on which books, magazines and newspapers lay; on the table, too, was fancy-work which, it was evident, had been as hastily laid aside as the sewing downstairs. Hetherwick bent over the things, but Robmore went to the one window.

"Jail, did I say?" he exclaimed. "Why, this *is* a jail! Look here, Mr. Hetherwick! Window mortised inside and fitted with iron bars outside. Even if whoever's been in here could have opened the window, and if there'd been no bars there, they couldn't have done anything, though, for there's nothing but a high blank wall opposite—back of some factory or other, apparently. But what's this?" he added, opening a door that stood in a corner. "Um! Small bathroom. And this," he continued, going to a square hatch set in the wall next to the staircase. "Ah—trap big enough to hand things like small trays through, but not big enough for a grown person to squeeze through. Well, I shouldn't wonder if you're right, Mr. Hetherwick. This, probably, is where these ladies were locked up. But—they're gone!"

Hetherwick was looking round. Suddenly his eyes lighted on a familiar object. He stepped forward and from a chair near one of the beds picked up a handbag of green silk. He knew it well enough.

"That settles it!" he exclaimed. "They have been here! This is Miss Han—I mean Miss Featherstone's bag; I've seen her carry it often. These are her things in it—purse, card-case, so on. She's left it behind her."

"Aye, just so!" agreed Robmore. "As I say, they all left in a hurry. I figure it out like this: the woman, who's of course acted as sort of jailer to these two unfortunate ladies, when she made that discovery round yonder, came back here, got her outdoor things, and cleared off. But before she went, she'd the decency to slip up here, undo that chain, slip the bolt back, and turn the key! Then, no doubt, she made tracks at express speed, leaving the ladies to do what they liked. And they, Mr. Hetherwick, having a bit o' common sense about 'em, did what I should ha' done—

they hooked it as quick as possible. That's that, sir!"

Hetherwick thrust Rhona's hand-bag into his pocket and made for the door.

"Then I'm off, Robmore," he said. "I must try to find out where they've gone. I've an idea—probably they'd go to Penteney's office. I'll go there. But you?"

"Oh, I'm going back to Pencore Street," answered Robmore. "Plenty to do there. But off you go after the ladies, Mr. Hetherwick—there's nothing you can do round here, now. I'll keep that clerk of yours a bit, and Garsten—they might come in. We shall have some nice revelations in the papers tomorrow, I'm thinking, especially if Matherfield has the luck he expects."

"What are you going to do about this house?" asked Hetherwick as they went downstairs. "Do you think the woman will come back?"

"Bet your life she wont!" answered Robmore. "Not she! I should think she's halfway across London, north, south, east, or west by this. House? Why, I shall just lock the front door and put the key in my pocket. We shall want to search this house, narrowly."

HETHERWICK bade him good day for the time being, and hurried off to Victoria Street, to fling himself into the first disengaged taxicab he encountered and to bid its driver go as speedily as possible to Lincoln's Inn Fields. He was anxious about Rhona—and yet he felt that she was safe. And he was inquisitive, too; he wanted to hear her story, to find out what had happened behind the scenes. He felt sure of finding her at Penteney's office; she and Madame Listorelle, once released from their prison, would naturally go there.

But the clerk whom he encountered as soon as he rushed into the outer office damped his spirits at once by shaking his head.

"Mr. Penteney's not in, sir," he answered. "He was in until not so long ago, but he got a telephone call and went out immediately afterward. No—I don't know who it was that rang him up, Mr. Hetherwick, nor where he went—semed a bit excited when he went out, and was in a fearful hurry."

Hetherwick concluded that Madame Listorelle had summoned Penteney, and that he had gone to meet her and Rhona. He went away, somewhat at a loss; then, remembering that Matherfield had promised to wire from Southampton, he turned toward his chambers. At the foot of the stairs he met his caretaker.

"Been a young lady here inquiring for you, Mr. Hetherwick," said the man. "Been here twice. I said I didn't know when you'd be in—any time or no time. She said—but there is the young lady, sir—coming back!"

Hetherwick turned sharply and saw Rhona coming across the square. Hurrying to meet her and disregarding whatever eyes might be watching them he took both her hands in his in a fashion that brought the color to her cheeks.

"You're all right—safe?" he asked quickly. "Sure?"

"I'm all right and quite safe, thank you," she answered. "I—I've been here twice, before, but you were out. I came to borrow some money. I left my bag and purse in—the place where we were locked up, and—"

Hetherwick pulled out the handbag and silently gave it to her. She stared at him.

"You've been—there!" she exclaimed. "How—"

"Got in this afternoon, an hour ago," he answered. "Here—come up to my rooms. We can't stand talking here. Madame Listorelle? Where's she?'

"I left her at Victoria, telephoning to Major Penteney," replied Rhona. "She too had no money. She wanted me to wait until Major Penteney arrived, but I wouldn't. I walked here—I—I thought you'd want to know that we'd got out—at last."

Hetherwick said nothing until they had entered his sitting-room. Then, staring silently at her, he put his hands on Rhona's shoulders, and after a long look at her, suddenly and impulsively bent and kissed her.

"By Gad!" he said in a low voice. "I didn't know how anxious I was about you until I saw you, just now! Now I know!"

THEN, just as suddenly, he turned away away from her and in a matter-of-fact manner lighted his stove, put on a kettle of water, and began preparations which indicated his intention of making tea. Rhona, from an easy-chair into which he had unceremoniously thrust her, watched him.

"Liberty!" she said suddenly. "We're both discovering something. When you've been locked up, day and night, for a while—"

"How was it?" he asked, turning on her. "Of course, we know all about the kidnaping—but the rest, until today? Baseverie, of course?"

"Baseverie and another man," she answered. "A tall, clean-shaven man whose name we never heard. But Baseverie was the chief villain. As to how it was—they met us at the sunken road at Riversreade, forced us at the point of revolvers into a car and drove us off to London—to Westminster — and into a house there — the house you've been in. There—"

"A moment," said Hetherwick, who was finding cups and saucers. "The driver of that car? He must have been an accomplice."

"No doubt, but we never saw him again. We only saw those two, and a woman who acted as jailer and brought our meals. We were fed all right, and they gave us books and papers and actually provided us with fancy-work. But they were inexorable about Madame and her jewels. They must have known all about them, because they got her own note-paper—"

"I know all about that," said Hetherwick. "I'll tell you my side of it when you've had some tea. Forced her, I suppose, to write the letters?"

"They forced her to do that just as they forced us into the car," said Rhona. "With revolvers! And—they meant it. I suppose they've got the jewels, now?"

"Remains to be seen," replied Hetherwick. "Did Madame Listorelle happen to tell you what those jewels were worth?"

"She talked about little else! Between eighty and ninety thousand pounds. She's in an awful state about them. But it was, literally, a question of her life or her jewels. I don't know what they'd have done with me. But now—I'm all right!"

Hetherwick opened a tin box and producing a plum-cake, held it up for Rhona to inspect.

"What d'you think of that for a cake?" he asked admiringly. "Present from my old aunt in the country—real, proper cake that. Yes," he went on, setting the cake on the table, "yes, yes, you're all right, now. But, by George—"

Rhona said nothing; she saw that his relief at seeing her was greater and deeper than he cared to show. She poured out the tea—they sat discussing the recent events until dusky shadows began to fall over the whole room.

"I ought to be getting back to Riversreade," she remarked at last. "It's late."

"Wait a bit!" said Hetherwick, who by that time had told her all he knew. "There'll be a wire from Matherfield before long. Don't go down to Riversreade tonight. Telephone to Lady Riversreade that you're staying in town—her sister will be there by now and will have told her everything. Wait till we get the wire from Matherfield; then we'll go and dine somewhere, and you can put up at your old hotel in Surrey Street for the night. I want you to know what's happened at Southampton and—"

He broke off as a knock came at his outer door.

"That'll be Matherfield's wire," he exclaimed. "Now, then—"

A moment later he came back to her with the message in his hand.

"It is from Matherfield," he said. "Handed in Southampton West, six-nineteen. Doesn't say if he's got him! All he says is: 'Meet me Waterloo arriving eight-twenty.' Well—"

"I wonder?" said Rhona. "But Baseverie is—"

"Just what Robmore says," muttered Hetherwick. He looked at his watch.

"Come along!" he continued. "We've just time to get some dinner—at Waterloo —and to be on the platform when the eight-twenty comes in. If only we could see Baseverie in charge of Matherfield and Quigman first, it would give me an appetite!"

THE vast space between the station buildings and the entrances to the platform at Waterloo was thronged when Hetherwick and Rhona came out of the restaurant at ten minutes past eight. Hetherwick was inquiring as to which platform the Southampton train would come in at, when he felt a light touch on his arm. Turning sharply, he saw Robmore. Robmore gave him a quiet smile, coupled with an informing wink.

"Guess you're on the same job, Mr. Hetherwick," he said. "Wire from Matherfield, eh?"

"Yes," replied Hetherwick. "And you?'

"Same here," assented Robmore. "Just to say I was to be here for the eight-twenty —with help," he added significantly. "I've got the help — there's four of us round about. Heard anything of those ladies, Mr. Hetherwick?"

"Here is one of them," replied Hether-

wick, indicating Rhona. "They're safe—you'll hear all about it later. But this business—what do you make of Matherfield's wire? Has he failed?"

"I'll tell you what I make of it," answered Robmore: "I think you'll find that Baseverie is on this train, with Matherfield and Quigman in close attendance. For some reason of his own, Matherfield means to arrest Baseverie here—here! That's how I figure it. They've seen Baseverie there and decided to follow him back to town. As soon as that train's in—"

A sudden sharp exclamation from Rhona interrupted him and made both men turn to her. She clutched Hetherwick's arm, at the same time pointing with the other hand across the space behind them.

"Baseverie—himself!" she said. "There—under that clock. See—he's going toward the gates!"

With a swift and unceremonious gesture Robmore laid a hand on Rhona's shoulder, twisted her round and drew her among a group of bystanders.

"Keep out of his sight, miss!" he muttered. "He'll know you! Now, again—which man? That one with the pale face and derby? I see him—good to remember, too. All right! Stop here, you two; if he moves in this direction, Mr. Hetherwick, move away anywhere. Wait!"

ROBMORE slipped away: a moment later they saw him speak to a couple of quiet-looking men who presently glanced at Baseverie. Hetherwick was watching Baseverie too. Baseverie, quiet, unconcerned, evidently wholly unsuspicious, had taken up a position at the exit through which the Southampton passengers must emerge; he was smoking a cigar, placidly, with obvious appreciation.

"You're certain that's the man?" whispered Hetherwick.

"Baseverie? Positive!" declared Rhona. "As if I could mistake him! I've too good reason to remember his whole appearance. But—here! Daring!"

"Well!" said Hetherwick. "Something's going to happen! Keep back—keep well back—we can see things from here without being seen. If he caught sight of you—"

Robmore came strolling back and joined them.

"All right!" he murmured. "Four pairs of eyes, beside ours—that's three pairs more!—on him. My men are close up to him, too. See 'em—one, two, three, four!—all round him, though he doesn't know. I sha'n't let him go, whether Matherfield turns up or not. Cool customer, eh?"

"The train's due," said Hetherwick. He had Rhona's hand within his arm, and he felt it tremble. "Yes," he whispered, bending down to her, "that's how I feel! Tense moment, this. But that scoundrel, there—"

Baseverie was glancing at the big clock. He turned from it to the platform behind the gates, looking expectantly along its lighted surface. The others looked, too. A minute passed. Then, out of the gloom at the farther extremity of the vast station, an engine appeared, slowly dragging its burden of carriages, and came sighing like a weary giant up the side of the platform. The passengers in the front compartments emerged and began filing toward the exit.

"Now for it!" muttered Robmore. "Keep back, you two! My men'll watch him—and whoever's here to meet him. For he's expecting somebody."

Nothing happened for the first minute. The crowd of discharged passengers, men and women, civilians, soldiers, sailors, filed out and went their ways. Gradually it thinned. Then Hetherwick's arm was suddenly gripped by Rhona for the second time, and he saw that she was staring at something beyond the barrier.

"There!" she exclaimed. "There—the man in the gray coat and fawn hat! That's the man who drove the car! See! Baseverie sees him!"

Hetherwick looked and saw Baseverie lift a hand in recognition of a young, fresh-faced man who was nearing the ticket-collectors, and who carried in his right hand a small square parcel. But he saw more—close behind this young man came Matherfield on one hand and Quigman on the other. They drew closer as he neared the gate, and on its other side the detectives drew closer to Baseverie.

"Now, then!" whispered Robmore, and stole swiftly forward.

IT was all over so swiftly that neither Hetherwick nor Rhona knew exactly how the thing was done. Before they had realized that the men were trapped, or the gaping bystanders had realized that something was happening under their very noses, Baseverie and his man were two safely handcuffed prisoners in the midst of a little group of silent men who were hurrying both away. Within a moment, captors and captives were lost in the outer reaches of

the station. Then the two watchers suddenly realized that Matherfield, holding the square parcel in his hand, was standing close by, a grim but highly satisfied smile in his eyes. He held the parcel up before them.

"Very neat, Mr. Hetherwick, very neat indeed!" he said. "Uncommonly neat—eh?"

But Hetherwick knew that he was not referring to the parcel.

CHAPTER XXVII

RHONA went back to her old quarters at the little hotel in Surrey Street for that night; and next morning Hetherwick came round to her—with an armful of newspapers. Finding her alone, he laid them on the table at her side with a significant nod of his head at certain big black letters which topped the uppermost columns.

"Matherfield must have given out plenty of informing news last night," he remarked with a grim smile. "It's all in there—his own adventures at Southampton yesterday, mine and Robmore's in Westminster, and all the rest of it. I believe the newspaper people call this sort of thing a story—and a fine story it makes! Winding up, of course, with the dramatic arrest of Baseverie at Waterloo! I'm afraid we're in for publicity for a time—worse luck!"

"Shall we—shall I—have to appear at that man's trial?" asked Rhona.

"That's unavoidable, I'm afraid, and at other things before that," answered Hetherwick. "There'll be the proceedings before the magistrate, and the adjourned inquest, and so on. Can't be helped—and there'll be some satisfaction in knowing that we're ridding the world of a peculiarly cruel and cold-blooded murderer! That chap Baseverie is certainly as consummate a villain as I ever heard of. A human spider—and clever in his web-spinning! But I wish one had a few more particulars on one point—and yet I don't see how one's to get them."

"What point?" asked Rhona.

"That sealed packet, containing the details, or formula, or whatever it is, of your grandfather's invention," replied Hetherwick. "Where is it? What—precisely—is it? Did Ambrose get it from him? Has Baseverie got it? So far as I can make out, the whole thing began with that. Whether it was really worth a farthing or a fortune, your grandfather brought to London something which he honestly believed to be of great value, and there's no doubt that he got into the hands of these two men, Ambrose and Baseverie, because of it. There's no doubt, either, that in conversation with them, he told them, perhaps jokingly, what he knew about Madame Listorelle. Nor is there any doubt that these two murdered him. But for what—precisely? Did they get rid of him so that they could keep his secret about Madame Listorelle to themselves and blackmail her and her sister, or that they could rob him of his invention and turn it to their own profit? If the latter, then—"

HE paused, looking inquiringly at Rhona, as if he expected her to see what he was after. But Rhona shook her head.

"I don't follow," she said. "What—then?"

"This," replied Hetherwick: "If their desire to get hold of your grandfather's secret was their motive, then that secret's worth a lot of money—money which ought to come to you. Don't you see? Where is the secret? Where's the sealed packet? I suppose the police would search Baseverie last night—perhaps they found it on him. We shall hear—but anyway, it's yours."

Rhona made a gesture of aversion.

"I should hate to touch or have anything to do with it if it had been in that man's possession!" she said. "But I don't think there's any doubt that they murdered my grandfather because of that secret. Only—I think, too, they'd a double motive. The secret about Madame Listorelle was their second string. Probably they believed that Lady Riversreade would be an easy prey. And I think she would have been, if she hadn't had Major Penteney to fall back on. I know she was dreadfully upset after Baseverie's first visit. So I put it this way — always have: they thought they could sell grandfather's invention for a lot of money, and get another lot out of Lady Riversreade and Madame Listorelle as blackmail."

"Black money, indeed, all of it!" exclaimed Hetherwick. "Well—"

A maidservant put her head into the little parlor in which they were sitting, and looked significantly at Rhona.

"There's a policeman downstairs, miss, asking for you," she announced. "Leastways, he wants to know if you can tell him if Mr. Hetherwick's here or been here."

Hetherwick went to the head of the stair

—a policeman standing in the hall below looked up and touched his helmet.

"Inspector Matherfield's compliments, sir—and could you step round and bring Miss Hannaford with you?" he asked. "There's new developments, Mr. Hetherwick. Important!"

"We'll come at once," assented Hetherwick. "Ten minutes." He went back and hurried Rhona away. "What now?" he asked as they hastened toward Matherfield's office. "Perhaps they've extracted something out of Baseverie? Or possibly the newspapers have attracted the attention of somebody who can give further news?"

THE last suggestion strengthened itself when, on entering Matherfield's room, they found him closeted with two strangers whose appearance was that of responsible and well-to-do commercial men. All three were discovered in what looked like a serious and deep conversation, and Hetherwick was quick to notice that the two unknown men looked at Rhona with unusual interest. Matherfield made haste to introduce her as the late ex-Superintendent Hannaford's granddaughter, and Hetherwick as a gentleman who had been much concerned in the recent proceedings.

"These gentlemen, Miss Hannaford and Mr. Hetherwick," he proceeded, waving his hand at the others, "are Messrs. Culthwaite and Houseover, manufacturing chemists, of East Ham—incidentally, they've also a big place in Lancashire. And having seen this morning's papers, in which, as you've no doubt noticed, there's a good deal about our affair, they've come straight to me with some news which will prove uncommonly useful when Baseverie's put in the dock before the magistrate this afternoon. The fast is, Mr. Hetherwick, these gentlemen have supplied a missing link!"

"What link?" asked Hetherwick, eagerly.

Matherfield nodded at the elder of the two men, Culthwaite, who produced a pocketbook, and extracted from it a sheet of paper. Silently he passed it over to Matherfield, who turned to Rhona.

"Now, Miss Hannaford," he said, with a note of triumph in his voice, "I dare say you can positively identify your grandfather's handwriting and his way of making figures? Can you swear that this has been written by him?"

Rhona gave but one glance at the paper before looking up with positive assurance.

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed. "That is his writing, without a doubt! Nothing could be more certain!"

Matherfield turned to Hetherwick.

"That's the formula for the ink!" he said. "Now we've got the big thing we wanted! And Mr. Culthwaite will tell you how he got it."

CULTHWAITE, after allowing Hetherwick to look at the paper, carefully replaced it in his pocketbook.

"We got it in this way," he said. "And I may as well say, as I've already said to you, Mr. Matherfield, that I don't think we should have got it at all if you police people hadn't been so reticent on that one particular point—if you'd noised it abroad about Hannaford's secret, we might have been forewarned. However, some little time ago, a man whom we knew as Basing, and whom I firmly believe to be the Baseverie that we've read about in the papers this morning, — a man, mind you, that we'd done business with now and then during the last year or so,—came to us and offered us the formula for a new black ink which he asserted would drive every known ink off the market, all over the world! He made extravagant claims for it; he swore it was the first absolutely perfect writing fluid ever invented. But he did more—he offered us the use of the secret formula so that we ourselves could make and test it before deciding whether we'd fall in with his suggestion, which was that we should offer him a lump cash sum for the formula. Well, we did make the ink, from the formula, and we did test it, and there is no doubt about it; it is all, and perhaps more than Basing, or Baseverie, claimed for its excellence. I needn't go into the drawbacks attaching to most well-known inks—this has none of them. And when Basing came back to us, a few days ago, we decided to buy the formula from him. We agreed upon a cash price, and day before yesterday we paid the amount over—at our office in East Ham."

"Yes?" said Hetherwick quietly. "And —what was the price agreed upon?"

The two partners exchanged a glance; it seemed to Rhona, who was watching them intently, that they looked more uneasy than before. But Culthwaite replied with promptitude.

"Ten thousand pounds!"

"How did you pay him?" asked Hetherwick. "In cash?"

"No—by open check, at his own request.

That, of course, was as good as cash. But," continued Culthwaite, "as soon as we read the newspapers this morning, we—that is, I, for I read the whole thing on my way to business—went at once to our bank to see if the check had been cashed. It had—an hour or two after we'd handed it to Basing. He'd taken the amount in Bank of England notes."

Hetherwick looked at Matherfield.

"Of course," he remarked, as if he were asking a question, "that formula belongs to Miss Hannaford? Baseverie had no right to sell it; he stole it?"

"That's the fact, Mr. Hetherwick," assented Matherfield. "These gentlemen, innocently enough, bought stolen property. But I've just told them something that I'll now tell you. We found the money—notes—on Baseverie last night. Intact—in his pocketbook. Of course, with that, and the jewels which his accomplice succeeded in getting at Southampton, he'd got a nice haul. But now we can easily prove how he came by that ten thousand—and it'll go back to Messrs. Culthwaite and House over there. We can prove, too, from their evidence, that Baseverie poisoned Mr. Hannaford for the sake of that formula. Baseverie's done!"

"These gentlemen will recover their ten thousand pounds, then?" said Hetherwick. "In that case"—he turned to the two partners—"I don't see that you've anything to worry about?" he suggested. "The formula, of course, must be handed over to—"

"Well, now, that's just it, Mr. Hetherwick," interrupted the partner who until then had kept silence. "The fact is, sir, we don't want to lose that formula! We gave this man Basing, or Baseverie, ten thousand pounds for it, but—"

"But you really believe it to be worth more, eh?" said Hetherwick with a smile. "I see! Then in that case—"

"If we get back our ten thousand, sir, we shall be pleased to treat with the rightful owner," said Culthwaite, after an exchange of looks with his partner. "In the meantime, the formula is safe and secret with us. We are well-known people—"

"We'll leave it at that, just now," answered Hetherwick. "Miss Hannaford will trust you to keep your word about safety and secrecy. And later—business!" He got up, and Rhona rose with him. "Shall you want us today, Matherfield?" he asked.

"No!" replied Matherfield. "Merely formal business today; then, this afternoon, he'll be brought up. Only evidence of arrest and application for adjournment. You can go away, Mr. Hetherwick; we'll let you both know when you're wanted!"

HETHERWICK led Rhona out, and once clear of the police precincts, smote his stick on the pavement.

"When we're through with this business, I'm hanged if I ever dabble in crime affairs again, personally!" he exclaimed. "Baseverie has been a pretty vile example to tackle! And that you should be dragged into it too!" he added suddenly. "That upset me more than anything. "However, it's getting to an end, and then—"

He paused, while she looked up at him with a little wonder at his vehemence. Then, and as they were at that moment walking along a quiet stretch of the less frequented side of the Embankment, she timidly laid a hand on his arm. He turned sharply, laying his hand on hers.

"I think you've been very considerate and thoughtful for me," she said. "After all, it wasn't quite mere interest in crime that made you—"

"Good Lord, no!" he exclaimed quickly. "At first, perhaps, half that—half you! I felt, somehow, that I'd got to look after you. And then—and when you disappeared—but I believe I'm a bit muddle-headed! I'll tell you something—all that time you were lost, I—well, I scarcely ever slept! Wondering, you know. And when you turned up yesterday afternoon—but I want to ask you something that I'm not quite clear about—I was certainly muddled just then!"

"What is it?" she asked.

Hetherwick bent down to her and dropped his voice.

"I was so glad, so relieved to see you, yesterday afternoon," he said, "that—that I felt dazed—eh? And I want to know—did I kiss you?"

Rhona suddenly looked up at him—and laughed.

"Oh, really, how amusing you are!" she said. "Why, of course, you did! Twice!"

"That's good!" he exclaimed. "I—I thought perhaps I'd dreamt it. But—did you kiss me?"

"Do you really want to be dead sure?" asked Rhona mischievously. "Very well—I did!"

"That's better!" said Hetherwick.

THE END

Every Mountain

Wherein Black Buck, the great dog who had gone back to the wild, meets a Russian female of his species, and battles follow: One of Mr. Alexander's best.

By CHARLES ALEXANDER

"DOWN," snarled Professor Popoff in loving harshness. "It is not me you love; it is Mount Hood. And I don't blame you. Such a hound! A real *borzoi,* as real a *borzoi* as yourself. Wait till you see him."

Silk's round eyes politely indicated that she heard the Professor and reserved judgment on Mount Hood. She was a tall, slim Russian wolfhound. Her graceful little head and long, clean nose were in constant motion. She was very much alive, very vital. Yet she was uncollared and unleashed, dancing beside Professor Popoff as he strolled across the meadow toward the mountain and the cottage of Tchieff, the laborer, who had just brought home a great wolfhound from the express-office, and had rechristened him Mount Hood.

"Tchieff swings a pick on the railroad track," Popoff told Silk. "Yet is he a poet, born on the Volga. He named him Mount Hood—and you will see Silk, that his coat is as pure white as the rivers of ice on Mount Hood, and with the same hint of blueness beneath. You will love him. And such a litter you will bear—ah, you will be proud. No more black, shapeless mongrels, from these rough American dogs."

The Professor was well-stocked with proverbs out of all the philosophies; and he murmured, as he and Silk entered Tchieff's gate: "The whelp is as pure as his sire."

Tchieff, just home from the railroad, had forgotten his bachelor supper and was talking with Mount Hood. Silk sat in the background and heard the two men, in strange speech, exclaim over Mount Hood's slenderness of head, leg and waist, his depth of chest, his well-let-down hocks and pasterns. He was of great size. His blank eyes the men declared technically perfect.

Silk's inventory of the new marvel was not concerned with his technical perfections. In truth, she did not compare his color and form to any standard she held within her head. Yet she was questioning him, sounding him, wondering. When Tchieff unleashed the great hound, and he and Silk were turned outdoors, she promptly disappeared around a corner of the house.

Mount Hood, tall and statuesque on his haunches, looked after her as though it had dawned on him that another *borzoi* besides himself might exist in the world, might even be very near. There was no doubt but that he was very well aware of his slenderness, his perfect hocks, his gently roached spine. Silk bounded around the house and in front of him, zigzagging across the yard, so intent upon some mysterious errand that she did not see Mount Hood at all. He still stared at her as at a shocking phenomenon. He still sat immovable on his royal haunches.

"Much life in her," said Tchieff.

"Much, much," agreed Popoff. "They will make a fine pair; and I will give you half the litter."

FOR ten minutes, while the sun sank behind the forested mountain, Silk was industriously preoccupied in the vicinity of the sphinxlike Mount Hood. She never looked at him directly. And finally, hot and panting, she forgot to pretend. She was madly angry. Mount Hood had not batted an eye, had not moved from his flawless haunches. He was as immovable, as cold, as the great mountain for which he had been named.

Silk's fury was like that of a woman scorned. Suddenly she stopped, ten feet from Mount Hood, and measured him with glittering, challenging eyes. In the poise of her faunlike body was all of feminine contempt, all of sex disdain for a sexless male. He was royal; his blood was blue and cold. His pale eyes looked at her as though his soul were shocked at the sensate life of her.

And then Silk shattered his poise, brought him crashing from his pedigreed pinnacle. The distance between them she covered with one bound. As she shot beside him, her wolf-trap jaws flashed in, flashed out. Mount Hood, the beautiful skin hanging from his ripped throat, yelped in pain and ran in terror to Tchieff.

Silk ran straight, almost blind. She cleared the picket fence, disappeared like an arrow up the mountain-side. Nor did she stop within the forest. Not once did she look back at the shining college spires, the bungalow of the Professor, the cottage of Tchieff and Mount Hood. No heed did she give the frantic whistling that Popoff set up to call her back. She boiled with humiliation. They had brought her to this majestic hound, breed of her breed, fashioned nobly even as she was fashioned. They had offered her to him. And she, thus misguided, had bid for his acquaintance, had made of herself an abject invitation.

Like the night-wind, Silk fled on. She did not consciously pick her course. When a road bisected the mountain, she crossed it without noticing. Unconsciously she kept to the darker forests; unknowing, she ran west. The forest night was as a living thing, its movement and breath warm and fecund and wholly sympathetic. All night the hound ran—and all day. . . . .

In the coast range there is a certain lowland with heavily wooded mountains surrounding it, that is especially secretive. In it are a few highly moral maples, many crooked vine-maples, and here and there an almost black grandpa spruce. The low arms of the trees are covered with thick sleeves of brown moss. The dank ground is muffled in the same moss. The old-looking ash and cascara trees have yard-long beards of gray moss. There is no note of gayety, no sunlight. The spaces under the limbs are a series of caves and tunnels. Honest creatures, like elk and deer, make no trails in this lowland.

Silence lends to its mystery. Sounds, of death or of life, would seem to be muffled into nothingness by the moss of the floor, of the twisting walls of foliage, and of the heavy roof. Yet there is one sound that issues out of this lowland, is magnified and made far-carrying by it, and seems almost the voice of the moss-caves themselves.

ON the night after Silk ran away, a young wolf trotted among the tunnels, leaped upon a mound that once had been a log, and sat waiting, while the blackness gathered in all the caves. He threw open his jaws at last—threw them wide, nose almost straight up—and sent out a quavering, heartbroken wail.

It was more terrible half a mile away. On mountain-sides where fern-brakes, with dead-white snags strewing them, lay waiting in the moonlight, the wolf-howl pealed and trembled like a thing passing in the night air and dying as it passed. Its sadness penetrated the forests and rolled and drifted in the cañons.

More than one shadowy form answered the young wolf by slipping into the lowland, but no answering howl went up. This did not worry the sad one. He saw two huge forms come close to his log and pass

on, and knew that others lurked in the lowland. Paying no attention to them, he howled with increasing emotion.

The two huge forms emerged again beside the log. Each sat down and stared disinterestedly into the darkness. Of the among other flashing eyes back in the moss-hung limbs, none ventured into the cave where the two great ones sat. The young wolf howled again.

The two as they sat were of nearly the same height. One was gray, shading to white beneath. It was slightly taller, slightly slimmer. It stood up, and the sinewy hindquarters sloped down to the shoulder. The head it turned to the other creature was broad above the eyes, long and strong of jaw. The foxlike ears stood up. He was a stranger, a visitor wolf from far up or down the coast, a rover and a leader, larger than any wolf in the Yachats country.

The creature who turned and answered his glowing slanted eyes was black, massive and deliberate. He was a huge dog—Black Buck, leader of wolves in the wild Yachats, master of all creatures within his domain by virtue of his fangs and his strength and the cunning he had been forced to develop. His black nose was creased with a scar—in his puppyhood a bullet had broken his nose, disrupting its sensitive nerves, destroying his sense of smell. And he had learned, perforce, to calculate and scheme and forestall the movements of creatures who depended upon their keen noses to lead them to their prey or away from the beasts that preyed upon them.

He measured the strange wolf, and knew that he was the largest timber-wolf on the coast. He knew, too, why no other wolves trotted into the glade—why he, Buck, was left alone with the stranger. The two waged a duel of eyes. The young wolf slipped down from the log, and his eyes flashed among other flashing eyes back in the moss-caves. He did not howl again—he did not need to howl again this night, for his wavering call had brought about a drama as tense as he could have wished.

Still the two beasts sat quietly. The lobo's eyes burned hard and fearless. Buck's eyes were softer, the flame of them more golden. He was dog; and the wolf, the world over, goes out of his way to kill men's dogs—renegades and traitors who trade their birthright freedom and ferocity for soft food, warm kennels and slavery.

Yet Black Buck was more than dog. He had won back to wolfhood, yet was more than wolf. The five-foot timber-wolves admitted him as master. Most of them admitted his mastery and followed him; some had admitted it only by their death under his great fangs.

This new wolf did not know. He had not given allegiance to Black Buck, or any dog or wolf. Wherefore many gleaming eyes moved quietly in the moss-caves, and Buck and the wolf sat alone, each waiting the move of the other.

Suddenly there was shifting and movement in the dark tunnels. There was a chorus of snarls, a swirl of vague bodies. At the same instant, Buck and the wolf leaped that way.

IN a mossy arena half a dozen wolves fought over a being strange to the wilderness night, a being that showed in flashes of white leaping out of the mass or lost beneath it. Black Buck and the strange wolf, side by side, burst through the knot of bodies. A tall, slender creature, pale as moonlight, silky as rabbit-down, shook herself free.

At first sight Buck was filled with fire. She was all of grace, all of feminine litheness, all of ethereal figure and movement. But she was dog, and the wolf beside Buck knew, in that moment, that she did not share the queer immunity the other wolves granted to Black Buck.

He did not pause to marvel at her. He sprang. She was longer even than he, but her length and her great deep chest were designed for running. He caught the side of her throat, bore her head down, while her body flashed white as it flopped in the air and struck the ground.

Buck also sprang. He was kin to her, closer kin than to his own wolves. Yet perhaps it was something else, something greater, something vital, that flamed in him as his hundred and fifty pounds hurled upon the great lobo.

For half a second the wolf faced him. The strange hound who had brought them together was unnoticed. In and out the wolf leaped. His saberlike fangs did not reach Buck's shoulder, for Buck's own teeth met them. The wolf's side-leap was only quick enough to save his own throat. Three times, in lightning rushes, the timber-wolf leaped in and out; then they were swept from their feet by a torrent of shaggy bodies.

The wolves had discovered that the white hound had vanished. Buck and the strange wolf rushed after the pack. The slim dog was not in sight, but Buck knew that the noses of the wolves were on her trail. He wanted to rush up to her, to run at her side, his shoulder close to hers. Yet she must run alone. He could not race ahead of the pack, because his dead nose could not identify her trail.

ANOTHER desire he knew, as he ran, noting that the white she held in a line that led toward Criminal Creek. He wanted to show her his wilderness, to have her alone to himself, to run beside her, no wolves following, through the moon-white fern-brakes.

He dropped back. Frenzied with the dog-taint in their nostrils, the wolves ran on. When he was well behind them, Buck turned inland, cutting across the long inside of a triangle formed by Criminal Creek and the straight line the white she was making toward it. He knew that when she came to the creek, she would veer and follow it inland, for neither dog nor wolf swims if there is any other way out.

Hard running brought him to Criminal Gulch and a turn in it where its steep walls formed a pocket against the roaring little river. There was no sign or sound of the chase, of the fleeing hound or of the wolves blindly following their noses on her trail. But there was a shadow behind him—and Black Buck sprang at a she-wolf whose madness for him had been greater than her madness for the trail of the white hound.

She cringed. He slashed her shoulder a little and drove her from him—and then saw a slim splash of white where Silky, far ahead of the pack, broke from a covert and came leaping down to him.

She stopped abruptly on seeing him, and stood in her tracks. She seemed a part of the moonlight, and he a part of the black shadows. They were two dogs, in a country where dogs are anathema to every wilderness citizen.

Whining, Buck trotted proudly to the water and tried to lead her in. She ran up and down. Precious moments fled. Again and again the black dog showed the white one how to wade out into the boiling torrent. And finally Buck bore down on her, caught the loose skin of her neck, and dragged her, floundering, until both were swimming and being swept rapidly downstream.

Far below, where Criminal Creek was quieter, Black Buck waded out on a little white bar. Silk shook herself from nose to tail. Standing in the ancient gravel, she was more luring, more mysterious, slimmer and daintier than ever. Her long, easy bounds as she ran beside Buck were exquisite rhythm. He turned his head to see her small, smooth head. The little fringes on the backs of her slender forelegs were *chic* feminine vanities.

Like two night-spirits, one black, one white, they loped a winding trail up and about on a vast moonlit mountain-side, where seas of fern swept in brown billows, and great bleached snags lay this way and that like strewn toothpicks. Sometimes they leaped onto these snags. Then Buck would stand motionless, his eyes searching over the thousand acres of fern below them. There was no sign to tell him that the big stranger wolf had swum the river and found his trail. There was only the night and the great mountain-side. They were alone.

At such times as Buck watched and listened, Silk's eyes were upon him. His chest and shoulders were massive and covered with shaggy ringlets, his body a black bulk. There was no Mount Hood about him. He was dog, wholly dog, great and glorious; and never (of all his mates) had Buck had a slim white dog mate. They wandered on.

WHEN daylight came, bringing out the creatures of day, Buck showed her his strength and cunning. There was a shiny black beast, half as long as Buck, built low to the ground, snakelike in his movements, who somewhere had picked up a stray coot. His teeth were ivory needles. He came dodging among the rocks on a creek-bank, and Buck flung him a dozen yards, breaking his back and escaping the needle-teeth. Half a day's wandering away, Buck showed Silky how easy it was to pester to death a black bear that would have knocked the life from him at one blow—had the bear been quick enough to land that blow.

Or they drifted through the warm fern, or ran like conquerors, side by side, heads tossed high, through gloomy forests. Far on the headwaters of the Ten-Mile, Buck snapped the slender forelegs of a deer, and they spent lazy days and nights near the divide. And his eyes watched her sail, in dog daintiness, over a windfall; and her eyes glowed when he threw a deer down. . . . .

Buck awoke, one day, to see Silk returning to him. There was in her eyes an air of fierce ownership. He felt it, knew it for a strange immense thing. But he did not know that she had fought with a jealous young she-wolf she had found lurking in a copse.

Yet next day, crossing the divide, a strange trouble came over the hound. For whole seconds she forgot Black Buck. In the end she edged off north and east, begging him to follow; and in the end, puzzled, he followed. She was herself once more as they ran—all that night; but next morning, on a shoulder of the mountain Chintimini, Silk became eager with an excitement that Buck could not feel or understand. He was very quiet.

Far away, far below them, an endless valley with a tiny endless ribbon coiling through it stretched out. It was the Willamette—a valley sprinkled, farther on, with towns and cities. Buck felt that he was losing her. He tried to lead her back. He turned toward his own coast country. For a way she obediently followed. But she did not run at his shoulder.

Buck did understand the picked carcass of a fawn he found on his own back-trail. The bones were not stripped, as a cougar would daintily have stripped them. Every bone was crushed and broken—and only a wolf breaks the bones of his kill.

It was the big stranger wolf. He had found their trail. And Buck knew—as all mates know these things—that the great wolf had not come to kill the white hound. He waited, grim and jealous, certain of himself, certain of the stranger.

And then Silk left him, slipping back onto Chintimini. But Buck did not stir. The lobo would pass on his trail. Beside that trail Buck waited.

HE first saw his enemy at a distance, weaving about with his nose down, trying to untangle the double trail of Silk. Buck's limbs gathered; the black hackle on his neck stiffened.

And as suddenly, Buck knew that he must let the wolf pass. Silk was gone. She had left only her trail, and Buck could not follow her trail. Time after time he had used the noses of other beasts to trail for him—and so he must do now, letting the wolf lead him back to Silk before he killed the wolf.

Thus they came down Chintimini, across the Shot-pouch, and along various roads and trails—a skulking wolf with his nose to the ground, a stealthy black dog creeping behind him. It was still early when they followed the last narrow wooded ridge, and Buck, looking out, saw a shining little city amidst the shining fields. Also he saw, threading down the slant of the ridge, the white form of Silk, loping eagerly toward two cottages.

Stealthily, step by step, Buck crept along the ridge toward its end, the final end of all the forest. Down below, four thousand students learned the humdrum contents of musty books. On the ridge Black Buck taught a big timber-wolf a handful of first principles. Through the days that followed, while Buck lay and watched the white spires, Silky never reappeared. There was an evening when a gaunt *borzoi,* Mount Hood by name, sauntered on the ridge. Him, too, Buck educated, before turning away slowly west.

MUCH Professor Popoff had to say to Silk, now safely leashed.

"You're a bad dog, to snap Mount Hood and then run off. You've got too much pride. Tell me, what backyard mixture did you fall in love with on that hill?"

Tchieff burst in. "Mount Hood is gone —gone on that hill, like Silk was. Only he is dead—killed."

The Professor found what Tchieff had not found, the carcass of a huge wolf, his throat torn out.

"Every mountain—" he quoted the Russian proverb. He returned to heap fresh disapproval on Silk. "Every mountain, every mountain," he repeated, tapping the notes of his forthcoming lecture on the Simplicity of Mystery, "every mountain has its wolf. I shall work that in. You, madame, what do you want of a litter of wolf-whelps? Once more you disappoint your old friend."

The morning of his lecture he rubbed his old eyes. Silk lay in the midst of a squirming mass of brand-new life. Dazed, the Professor sorted them out. They were not wolf-whelps. They were not gray. They were partly white, and mostly magnificently, shiningly coal-black.

He gave his lecture, ringing in the proverb, *"Every mountain has its wolf."* A time or two he gazed away through the windows toward the mountain behind his cottage. At these times his brow gathered up like a puzzle-map. Then he returned to his theme, the Simplicity of Mystery.

Poetic Injustice

The author of "The Lobster List," "Thinner Than Water" and many other attractive stories of Young America is at his best in this vivid tale of the Pole, the Austrian, the Italian boy and the old Colonel.

By GEORGE L. KNAPP

WHEN Aleck Ralli first became office-boy for the firm of Stein & Walewski, he thought himself launched on a business career that would bring him fame and fortune. When the firm suddenly stopped selling phony oil-stocks a few weeks later and left the city, Aleck went with them—they were afraid to leave him behind—and accepted the setback as a normal incident of a commercial career. He did not mind the numerous changes that followed, though he wanted to stay longer in New Orleans and wondered what put Walewski in such a furious rage at St. Louis. At least they were traveling in some fashion, and the boy who does not like traveling has yet to be born. Aleck changed town for town, and cheap hotel for cheap hotel, as readily as a flea changes dogs in a crowded kennel; and when, after a year, the partners came back to Chicago and stopped in a fourth-rate hostelry on the South Side, well away from the scene of their former business exploits, the lad was still taking life as it came, with less hope than formerly, perhaps, but certainly without gloom.

There was a certain stolidity about him which few English-speaking people associate with Latins; but Aleck was more Latin in name than in race. By birth and ancestry, he was Piedmontese. Some drop of Roman blood had regularized his features; but his hair was only dark chestnut, his eyes gray, his complexion light, his head as round as an onion. It was natural that he should have some of the stolid temperament of the Alpine stock to which he really belonged. Also, he was an orphan. Native Americans seldom realize how many foreign orphans we have in our midst, though the high death-rate among adult immigrants ought to prepare one for such a result. He belonged in school, but the machinery for enforcing attendance is far from perfect. He was not badly treated—as a rule. Both partners jawed him, but they seldom indulged in this exercise at the same time. Walewski threatened him ferociously now and then, and beat him occasionally; but

Stein usually moderated the rages of his partner; and when the boy got a licking from the one master, he was pretty sure to get a half-dollar from the other. Besides, one would think that a year's experience would accustom him to this kind of life, which certainly was growing no worse. Yet now, on a bright June day, with the weather just pleasantly warm, Aleck was wishing that he were dead, or had a big house with heaps of servants, or owned a bank, or were a successful jockey, or almost anything else that would be a complete change from his present estate.

THERE were two reasons for his discontent. One was Betty Havlicek, whose father kept a small store two doors away. At ten years of age—Aleck was thirteen—Betty was an imperious little coquette. She did not so much fascinate the boys as assume that they were fascinated, and order them around accordingly; and they responded to the suggestion as male animals have been wont to do since the days of Eden. In the three weeks of their acquaintance, Aleck had become her devoted slave; but the disciple of Freud who looks for any precocious sex-interest in this tale is doomed to disappointment. To the little street-Bedouin, Betty simply represented home, parents, affection, security—everything that was lacking in his life. He seemed to get a vicarious hold on these things by playing with her, and he feared she was going to cast him adrift.

"I don't know's I ought to play with you," she remarked dubiously the day before.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"My papa says them men you live with is just cheap grafters," reported Betty. "I better be careful."

"Aw-w—" began Aleck with street-bred bluster, and then stopped. If he retorted by aspersions on her father, as his code of conduct taught him to do, the chance of her society would be gone at once. "They're pretty good," was his lame and impotent conclusion. "Let's play jacks."

This was a bit of shrewd diplomacy. Betty could beat him to death at jacks, and both knew it. The little tyrant consented to tolerate Aleck long enough to taste the delights of victory, but she left him in no sort of doubt as to his questionable status. Just of itself, this was a fair reason for some discontent.

The other reason was Colonel Sampler, who was already at the hotel when Aleck and his unlawful guardians arrived. In spite of his snow-white mustache and goatee, I think Sampler was too young to have commanded a regiment in our Civil War, but assuredly he was too old to have achieved such a position in any of our later conflicts. He looked so much like the conventional Kentucky colonel that he got the title of one. It fitted him, too, for he was of the warrior type. He limped a little, but could get around with surprising spryness when he chose. For the most part, he sat in the hotel lobby, always with his back to the wall and always where he could watch the entrance. A Westerner would have noticed, too, that his right hand always was free and unhampered; but city eyes could not be expected to see this, or city brains to draw the deduction that would have been made at once in a mining camp. He even carried his cane in his left hand, and once dropped it when rising. Aleck, remembering the fine manners of the movie hero he had seen the night before, picked it up and handed it politely to its owner. The old man accepted the courtesy with a grunt and a stare.

"Where'd you learn to do that, kid?" he inquired.

"I—I don't know," said Aleck.

"At home, I suppose?"

"I aint got any home."

"Since when?"

"Oh—long time. Three years, I guess."

"R-rrmmp!" remarked he Colonel. "Too bad. Don't lose your nerve, though. I went out on my lonesome 'bout your age, an' I've made it—after a fashion. Damn shame, though."

THAT incident, two days after Aleck reached the hotel, was the beginning of their acquaintance, which for a time ran the usual haphazard course. Then one day the boy, coming down from his room, saw Sampler standing in the balcony, looking at some one in the lobby below. He beckoned Aleck, pointed to the group, and spoke in a low tone:

"See that long-geared fellow with the mustache?" he said. "The one that looks like a Western sheriff? Just go down an' keep an eye on him, an' when he leaves, find out where he's goin' if you can without askin' questions. If he don't go in an hour, come an' tell me that."

Aleck went down, loafed around the lobby for half an hour until the man who

looked like a Western sheriff called a taxi and told the driver to go to the Northwestern station; then he went to Colonel Sampler's room and made report.

"Good!" said the Colonel. "You're a bright kid. Here's a dollar. That chap was in with a gang that skinned me out of a pretty fair mine out West, years ago, and I didn't want him to see me. Now clear out, an' don't say a word to anyone."

For all his premature sophistication, Aleck was not wise enough to pick out the weak spot in this story, but he was not interested in any more detective work. He ran downstairs, found Betty and asked her to go to the movies with him. Her mother refused, relented when the child suggested that the washerwoman, then just finishing her weekly labors, should come along as chaperon, and the two kids had a very satisfactory afternoon. Aleck came back to the hotel, feeling fairly content, in spite of his association with cheap grafters—and the next day Walewski began making inquiries about Colonel Sampler.

"What's his lay?" demanded the crook. Walewski was a Pole; Stein was from Vienna; and Aleck was Italian by birth; so naturally they conversed in English, the English of the streets.

"I don't know," returned the boy.

"Well, why don't you know? You hang roun' him enough. Why don't you fin' out somet'ing?"

"He wont answer to questions," said Aleck.

"How the hell you know? Lazy, ungrateful pup! After all we done for you—"

"Easy!" exclaimed Stein, for Walewski was working himself into one of his furious tempers. The warning had enough effect to make the grafter unclench his fist, but he struck the boy an open-handed blow that knocked him sprawling, leaped after him, dragged him up, cuffed him savagely a dozen times, booted him once, and flung him out of the room with orders to get the desired information within twenty-four hours. Walewski turned back, puffing but well satisfied with himself. Stein looked at him disgustedly.

"Some day you kill some one with them tempers," he said. "Then there'll be hell to pay."

"You threatenin' me?" demanded Walewski truculently.

"I'm tellin' you," returned Stein, with more force than usual, for the instinct of the hunted told him that Walewski's dangerous fury had passed. "Some day you wallop that boy, an' he yell."

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it? My God, such an imaginator you got! You see everyt'ing—I don't say so! What right we got with that boy? Hey? Then what happen if he yell? Hey? The neighbors, the manager, the teachers by the school, the women, the courts, all raisin' hell! We get pinched for kidnapin', maybe, hey? Damn fine business!"

"He wont yell," said Walewski sullenly.

"Oh, no. My God, no! Such a wise man, my partner; he knows everyt'ing. A boy never yells when you croak him on the bean! Never! Say, what for we try to be genteel? Why not go out an' stick up a bank? Hey? Come, let's go!"

"Aw, quit knockin'," said Walewski. Stein was a good-humored crook, and Walewski a vicious one; but both were cowards and both knew it, though Walewski did not suspect that Stein knew. Gun-play under circumstances where the other fellow had a chance to shoot back did not appeal to either of them. The Pole was quite ready to patch up a truce.

OUTSIDE in the hallway, Aleck snivveled quietly for a few minutes, then slouched downstairs, unaware that tears and blows had left traces on his cheeks. Colonel Sampler's eyes were keen for distance work, however; he noted these marks and beckoned. The boy crossed the lobby haltingly.

"Sit down, Aleck," said the old man. "That flat-nosed guy been wallopin' you again?"

"How'd you know?" The lad's surprise was unfeigned.

"Then he has," said the Colonel, disregarding the question. "Somebody ought to introduce that ape to a good, heavy boot. What was he sore about, this time?"

"I—I didn't want to do—something he wanted," explained Aleck.

"What was it?" demanded the old man. He could not for the life of him have told how or why, but in some manner he had guessed at the essential elements of the case. Aleck evaded and dodged, but his cross-examiner had too good a hunch, and at the end of a few minutes the boy confessed:

"He wanted me to find out about you."

"If I've got any money, an' what I do for a living?"

"Something like that."

"Well, now, there aint any reason why you shouldn't tell him—"

"I don't want to!" exclaimed Aleck, but the Colonel went on:

"I've got a little laid by, most enough to live on, in fact, though some more'd come in handy. I've got a few hundred dollars layin' idle now, that I'd like to invest before I go back West, if I could find something good. You just tell Mr. Walewski that."

"No, no, no, no! I—I—don't want to."

"Well, all right. When did he say you had to find out—tomorrow?"

Aleck's look of almost superstitious awe at this divination was answer enough. Colonel Sampler nodded.

"I figgered that'd be about it," he said. "All right. He wont wallop you any more on that score—an' maybe that's the best plan." With which cryptic remark, the old man got up and went to his room.

NOT to have any secrets from the reader, I may say at once that the firm of Stein & Walewski, for lack of more refined methods of avoiding work, had engaged in the ancient green-goods business. The technique of that swindle has remained the same for at least fifty years, but it catches a new crop of suckers each season. The prospective victim is told of the great amount of counterfeit money in circulation, and the ease with which it can be passed. If he shows interest, the swindlers hand him a real bill, telling him it is a counterfeit, and defy him to find anything wrong with it. Naturally, he cannot do this, and marvels at the skill of the imitation. When he has been worked up to the proper pitch, the grafters offer to sell him, say, five thousand dollars in phony bills for five hundred dollars in good money; and he agrees. The supposed "green-goods" or counterfeit money is put up in packages, good bills on the outside, and the whole, if bulky, made into a bundle. The sucker accepts the stuff, pays over his cash, and his attention is attracted for a moment while one of the crooks puts a dummy in place of the original package or bundle. The victim hurries away, and on opening his treasure in secret, finds that he has purchased some neat packages of worthless paper, cut to the size of bills. Since his own part in the transaction is wholly illegal, he cannot squeal, and the swindlers are comparatively safe.

This is what may be called the basic formula of the business. There are several variations. Some swindlers have no counterfeit money in their possession at all; others have some but are careful never to part with it. Some bank heavily on the hoary yarn about the plate for a ten- or twenty-dollar bill that was stolen from the United States treasury. Some show the paper on which the phony bills are printed, vowing that it has been swiped from Uncle Sam's hoard; and a good many accommodatingly present the sucker with a satchel in which to carry away his wealth. That, obviously, makes the substitution process easier, for one can buy standardized satchels in job lots. Stein and Walewski always worked the trick in this way, and they had quite a lot of counterfeit bills which looked good enough in a package with only the edges showing, faced and backed by real money.

The partners had swindled several fellows while Aleck was with them, never getting very large sums. The boy knew all about it—in fact, he had changed the satchels several times, and was rather proud of his dexterity. Of moral qualms, in the ordinary sense of the term, he had none. But Betty's remark about cheap grafters had roused in him a healthy disgust for the mode of life which left one subject to such indignities, and he was determined not to help cheat that nice old gentleman, Colonel Sampler.

NEXT day Walewski came up to the rooms, radiating insolent triumph.

"He's easy!" said the cheap grafter, with a jerk of his head in the general direction of the south pole, which was intended to indicate Colonel Sampler. "E. Z. Mark's his name in the middle! Wont talk, that guy? Say, he spilled everyt'ing, an' then some. He give it all up."

"Well?" said Stein, whose accent seldom showed except under stress of excitement, though his choice of words was not precisely that of a native. "What did he give up, hey?"

"All he got."

"Not so soon?" Stein's voice was a squeal.

"No, not money, yet. He just tell how he get along, an' such. He's got five hundred dollars to invest, an' he nibbles on the long green, just like the rest of 'em, damn 'em."

"I don't feel none too satisfied," protested Stein after a pause. "That don't look like him, some ways. I don't like it."

"You don't have to like it!" retorted Walewski. "I'm runnin' this show."

"Oh, such a fine piece of news. My partner runs the show." Stein's explanation was addressed to the bed, the washstand, the sofa on which Aleck curled up at night, the closet in which three or four satchels were still reposing behind a heap of soiled clothes. His gesture and voice took them all into his confidence. "My partner runs it. I don't need to think none at all. He does all that. I aint got nothin' to do but stand the guff." (I think he meant gaff.) "He's such a great man, my partner! He was a great man by St. Louis awhile ago, hey? I'll say he was—not."

"I'll say dry up!" snarled Walewski, and there was menace enough in his tones to make the other halt.

Aleck went out, disconsolate. He could not understand. Sampler knew that Walewski was a crook, yet told this crook all about his private business. The boy could not make it out, and he felt depressed. He went over to play with Betty, but she had other company, and he came away. He loafed around through the afternoon, ran to a one-horse fire near by, shot craps with a neighboring lad in the alley and won eleven cents; but even this failed to cheer him when he went up to bed at night, leaving Walewski in earnest confab with Colonel Sampler.

THE following day the lad fared even worse. When he went over to see Betty, she was alone, but she gave him his walking-papers.

"I don't believe I'd play with you," she explained. "My papa was talking about them cheap grafters you're with again, and he's very cross. I don't believe I dast play with you. You better go away."

It was a badly garbled report. Havlicek really had been talking about the wrongfulness of allowing two grafters like Stein & Walewski to have charge of a boy who obviously was not kin to either of them. Also, he had warned his wife to keep a close eye on Betty when she played with Aleck, which was natural but needless, for Mrs. Havlicek had been doing that from the first. But Betty had heard only part of the conversation, dramatized that in her own fashion, and Aleck was crushed. He shambled back to the hotel, too miserable to seek any other diversion. He sat down by Sampler, at the latter's invitation, and moped. Sampler regarded him thoughtfully.

"What's the matter, sonny?" he asked.

"Everything!" returned Aleck sourly, with a dig of his toe at a worn place in the linoleum.

"Yeah? Well, son, I've noticed that when a man says everything is the matter, it generally simmers down to some one little thing. What is it, this time?"

There was no answer.

"Get another lickin'?"

"No."

"Didn't think he'd try it again, quite so soon. Come to think of it, I aint seen you playin' with that little girl, last day or two?"

AGAIN Aleck avoided a reply in words, but his look was eloquent. A much duller man than Colonel Sampler could have seen that the shot had told. The old man followed it up.

"They—they're cur'ous critters, womenfolks are, even when they're just knee-high to a duck. Can't most always tell what they'll do next. Don't reckon this is Betty's doin's, though. Did her mother stop it?"

"Her pa."

"That so? What for?" Sampler's voice showed some surprise, as if this were not what he had expected from a man.

"He—he says I'm goin' round with a pair of cheap grafters," confessed Aleck, almost in tears. "He said it once before. 'Taint my fault! I hate grafting! I didn't know—" He stopped short for fear he should say too much, not guessing how much he had said already, but after a moment went on in a cooler, more sullen tone:

"I've got a good notion to run away!"

"Might do worse," was the old man's surprising comment. "Maybe, though, if you'll wait a little, you might get a new deal without runnin'. 'Tother fellow might do that."

HE stopped and looked around. They were alone in the lobby, and no listeners were hanging over the balcony railing. He took a cigar from his pocket, clipped it carefully, lighted it; and not till it was drawing well did he speak again:

"You mustn't take it too hard—what Betty's pappy said, I mean. I reckon we all graft, some. There's a good deal of it in everything, more in some things than in others. But if you go into a business that's all graft—"

He stopped again, and after an awkward wait, Aleck asked:

"Well, if it's all graft, what then?"

"Why, then, son, you got to do business with a new set of folks each time. It's only the kings an' such, over on the other side of the water, that can go on trimmin' the same set of suckers, year after year. The little grafters have to keep makin' a fresh start. An' when a fellow gets old, he wishes—sometimes—that he could keep on with the old faces, an' didn't have to start among strangers."

The words and the surface tone were casual, but the lad sensed the strong feeling underneath, and it both awed and stimulated him. There was a full minute of silence before he spoke suddenly, as one who has taken a vital resolve:

"Say, Colonel Sampler—if they,"—he jerked his thumb toward the upper back section of the hotel where the firm was domiciled,—"if they try to sell you something, don't you buy!"

And springing up before the Colonel could reply, he hurried away.

The generous glow of his good deed made him feel better all day; nor did he worry much that night when Walewski explained, with much boasting, that the sucker was ready to bite, and that they would make the bait look extra pretty for him. But the next forenoon, when he would have gone downstairs before lunch, he was ordered sharply to stay in his room, keep his mouth shut, and do as he was told. He slumped down on the sofa, disturbed and alarmed, and waited. In a little while came a knock on the door of Walewski's room, and the voice of the newcomer told Aleck that Colonel Sampler was in the toils.

THE boy's bewilderment was so great that he did not follow developments very closely for a few moments. When he roused to take notice, the swindle seemed to be running its normal course. Colonel Sampler was paying over the money, and Aleck heard the click as the satchel containing the supposed counterfeit was snapped shut. Then Walewski said jovially:

"Now we celebrate. Aleck, bring me that other black satchel."

It was idle and dangerous to disobey the order, but Aleck's feet were leaden as he complied. He brought out the satchel, an exact counterpart of the one just presented to the Colonel, but with a ribbon holding a key conspicuously looped around the handle, and carried it into the next room. He tried to catch Sampler's eye, but the old man obstinately looked the other way. Aleck put the satchel on the table, hoping that this slight diversion might be of service, but Walewski merely scowled and lifted it to the floor, close to the other satchel, before opening it. He took out a bottle bearing a once-hallowed label of astronomical significance, leaving the dummy package inside, and passed this bottle to the Colonel with the injunction to drink hearty. Stein was ostentatiously looking out of the window. Aleck, lingering near the communicating door, saw the Colonel sniff at the bottle, then with an exclamation of pleased surprise, put it to his lips and take a long drink. He saw Walewski, who already had slipped off the marking ribbon, change the satchels and put the ribbon on the wrong one. What he did not see was that the Colonel put his tongue over the mouth of the bottle, and did not really swallow a teaspoonful.

"THAT tastes like old times," said the Colonel, handling back the bottle and stepping around to the table to get a chaser of water from the iced pitcher. Walewski sniffed scornfully. This old fool was almost too easy. Half turning to watch the victim, the swindler took a drink himself, a real drink—and Aleck saw his chance. It was risky, but—the Colonel was his friend, and he was tired of being a cheap grafter. One quick move restored the satchels to their original positions, another put back the guiding ribbon and key; and the boy, his heart thumping till he could hear it, dropped on the sofa again. The Colonel came back toward his place. Stein always made it a point to let the sucker pick up the wrong satchel for himself, but Walewski was running the show today, and he was in a hurry.

"Well, I got to see a fellow downtown," he said boastfully, picking up the satchel with the ribbon on its handle. "Good-by!" The Colonel did not see the extended hand, perhaps because he had taken out a handkerchief and was wiping his lips. He tucked the handkerchief back under his coat tails —and his right hand came up holding a blued steel revolver with a bore that to Walewski's startled eyes looked big enough to crawl into.

"Put that satchel on the chair!" Walewski obeyed. —"Come over here, you!" This to Stein, who also showed himself a

soldier who went where he was told. "Keep your hands up!" said the Colonel, and turned to Walewski again, ran a hand over the latter's person till he found and confiscated the automatic which the swindler carried, and gave another order:

"Dig up that money I gave you, *pronto* —which means damned quick!"

ANYONE will dig when the muzzle of a forty-four is within two inches of his stomach, but I think the surprise scared Walewski as much as did the gun. He handed over the money. The Colonel identified it hastily and put it into his breast pocket. Then he ran his cold, blue eyes over the baffled scoundrels, and his lip twisted with mirth.

"You cheap skates!" he remarked. "You dirty, sewer-rat crooks! Tryin' to rope in a live man with that old game, that was dyin' of old age before you were born, an' cartin' a kid around the country on your lousy deals, tryin' to make a cheap swindler out of him too! I thought I was done with graftin', but when you dirty skates come round beggin' to be trimmed, I just made up my mind to trim you—an' if you don't put that kid with some decent folks, I'm liable to come back here an' kill you!"

HE backed out, keeping them covered, and not till the doors closed behind him did Aleck realize that his friend had walked away with the wrong satchel. The partners lowered their hands, and Stein spoke:

"Such an easy mark!" he exclaimed. "Such a feeble old sucker, like what anybody could trim, hey? I'll say so!"

"Shut up!" snarled Walewski, but his pistol was in the Colonel's pocket, and Stein did not shut up.

"Such a sweet, trust-like disposition that poor old boob got!" he went on. "An' two hundred dollars used in that deal to make the bait look pretty! It don't make no difference when we eat next time. The thing to do is to make the bait nice for such a poor old sucker. My partner run this show, an' he is a wise man. He showed it by St. Louis, an—"

He stopped with a grunt as the offending satchel, thrown with all the strength Walewski could muster, caught him in the region of the stomach. The next instant he was gripped by the hair and flung into his own room, where he collided with Aleck, and both fell sprawling. Walewski stood over them, murder in his eyes, murder in his voice, but, most luckily, no handy implement of murder in his grasp.

"Get out!" ordered the ruffian in a voice that was a scream in tone though no more than a half-whisper in volume. "Take that damned brat with you and get out—now, before I cut your throat!"

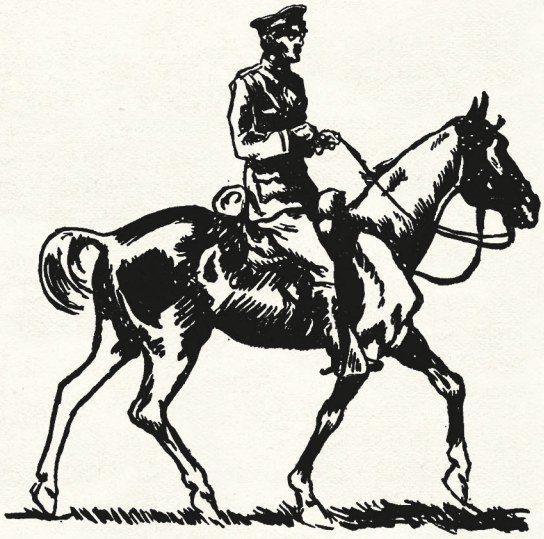
Stein picked himself up. The satchel had come open in the crash. He stooped to pick it up; something about the contents caught his attention; he stared for a moment with bulging eyes; then, with a warning glance at Aleck, he began to pack.

DOWNSTAIRS the Colonel paid his bills, stopped at the mail-box and dropped a letter addressed to an orphan's aid society, called a taxi and drove to a depot. He carried the satchel with him, carelessly; his other baggage must have gone on ahead. Not till the train was well outside Chicago did he open this present from the grafters, and cut the string on the package inside. For a moment he stared unbelievingly at the neat collection of blank paper; then his brows drew down in quick wrath, and he understood.

"The kid!" he exclaimed. "The plucky little devil! He thought I was a sucker, in spite of what he told me, so he sneaked in and changed the satchels back so I wouldn't get stung too much. Did it when Walewski was takin' that drink, I reckon! He was goin' to save his friend, an' he's cost me whatever the grafters had in the pot! Oh, Lord, this is rich! Me, at my time of life, gettin' stung by the old green-goods game!"

And the near-by passengers started in surprise as an old man with fierce eyes and a hawk nose threw back his head, and laughed and laughed and laughed.

"The Disappearance of Armitage," another of Dr. Knapp's true-to-folks stories, will appear in an early issue of *The Blue Book Magazine*. Be sure to read it.



Blinky

The story of a young army officer who demonstrated a few very interesting things on the Border. Mr. Markey writes with skill and from knowledge.

By GENE MARKEY

WHEN Geoffrey Arbuthnot Islip arrived one May evening at La Quitas, the officers of that portion of of the Sixth Cavalry which was stationed there, laughed for the first time in four months. La Quitas being a hot, God-forsaken cluster of 'dobe houses, set down in the midst of desolate cinnabar hills on the Rio Grande, there was, naturally, little enough to make them laugh, but one look at the new second lieutenant who crawled from the quartermaster truck brought a chuckle from the entire outfit.

He was tall and thin and ungainly, with a scrubby blond pompadour and pale-blue eyes that twitched nervously behind great, goggly spectacles. (It was this habit of constant blinking that won him an instant sobriquet.) He had come, newly commissioned, from the Army Service School at Fort Leavenworth. His uniforms and Stetson had about them a taint of newness, and his boots were so much too large for his spindly legs that the dapper cavalrymen at La Quitas groaned. All in all, he was quite the most unsoldierly looking officer they had ever seen—and his voice was the crowning indignity. It was a high, quavery voice, and when he spoke his words had a way of trailing off into a falsetto titter.

"The first time I heard it," recounted Major Killeen in his tent the next morning, "I thought he was talking that way on purpose. When I found he couldn't help it, I made up my mind that instead of a comedian they'd sent us a boy soprano. And on a horse—My Gawd, you ought to see him!" Here the Major shook his head sadly, and muttering that the Service was going to the dogs, reached under his bunk for a bottle.

Young Puffer, his adjutant, who was fat and lazy as all good squadron adjutants should be, agreed.

"He's terrible," admitted young Puffer. "I don't see how he ever got by the examining board. And what's he doing in the cavalry? Why did *we*—"

"Don't," protested the Major; "it's hot enough this morning without talking about *him*. How'll you have it, Puffer,—straight or with some water?"

"Straight, thank you, sir," said the adjutant.

They raised their glasses.

"How!"

"How!"

"To think," mused Major Killeen, wiping his sandy mustache on a fresh handkerchief, "to think that *my* squadron should draw a bird like him." He was a tall, impressive man, the major. Some one had once told him he looked like Lord Kitchener, and he believed it.

"Geoffrey Arbuthnot Islip! He'll make a bird of a cavalryman, *he* will. Where is he now?"

"McQueen," said Puffer, setting down his empty glass, "has taken him out for a little lesson in equitation. And from the way he looked as he started out I think there's a pretty good chance of his falling off and breaking his neck!"

"I wish he would," growled the major savagely. "What is a lily-fingered bird with a voice like an agitated chorus-man doing in the cavalry, anyhow?"

BUT Geoffrey Arbuthnot Islip, though he proved himself an execrable horseman, did not, as was expected, break his neck. He fell off, Heaven knows, a dozen times in the course of his first morning's lesson, and sorely disgusted his mentor. But each time he picked himself up gamely, blinked and clambered back on his patient horse.

"*Say,*" demanded Lieutenant McQueen exasperatedly, after the twelfth tumble, "weren't you *ever* on a horse before?"

"No," said Blinky shrilly. "You see, I had all my training at Leavenworth in the infantry, and then at the last minute they —whoa, there!—they commissioned me in the cavalry. Silly of them, wasn't it? *Whoa!*"

As they rode back into camp, McQueen, who prided himself on being hard, and had been known, on occasions, to chew tobacco, shook his head hopelessly.

That evening when mess-call trilled from the bugle, Blinky did not appear, and many a grin went round the long table.

"Where," queried young Puffer, "is our demon second lieutenant?"

"As they say in the classics," replied McQueen, "he's eating off the mantel tonight. But he's found a man down in K troop who used to be a masseur, so I guess he'll be able to walk all right tomorrow."

Major Killeen growled. It was quite impossible for him to talk without recourse to profanity, and since he disapproved of profanity at mess, his conversation was limited.

"That bird," said he, "will be the death of me yet! When he reported for duty and I asked him if he'd had had any previous military service, he said, 'Yes, sir—I used to be a boy scout!' "

The mess howled appreciatively.

"A boy scout," wailed Puffer, wiping his eyes.

Captain Hornby coughed. Blinky had been assigned to his troop and he had taken rather a fancy to him.

"Islip," he said, "isn't a bad fellow, Major."

"A-ah!"

"It's a fact, sir. Of course I don't suppose he'll ever make a soldier, but—"

"That's just the point," snapped the Major, "he'll *never* make a soldier!"

IN truth, the education of Blinky progressed slowly. There was an old custom in the cavalry providing that when an officer was unhorsed, he must set up his brother-officers to champagne, and it was fortunate that no champagne was to be had at La Quitas, or Blinky would have been buying it every day, and the mess would have been in a state of constant inundation. But by the end of a week he was able to stay in the saddle at a canter, provided the horse cut no capers, and his pasty complexion had been metamorphosed by the broiling sun of Texas to a vivid lobster color. The rough usages of army life, however, seemed not to have brought his vocal tones down to a more manly range, and each time he piped a command, in his shrill, quavering voice, some trooper laughed. In spite of his unfortunate voice, however, there was nothing effeminate about him. He was simply a misfit. He should have become a botany instructor at Princeton instead of an officer in the Regular Army, for never in the world would he develop into the type of officer that enlisted men worship. The poorest horseman in the troop could ride circles around him; the scrawniest private was able to do more stunts on the rings during physical exercises. In short, there was no phase of the military in which the poor fellow excelled. And the sight of him, holding a pistol at arm's length, standing before a target, blinking, firing wildly, and not so much as hitting any portion of the target,

was enough to bring tears to the eyes of a hardened sergeant.

"But you must admit that Blinky's a gentleman," Captain Hornby, his champion, was wont to argue; "he graduated at Princeton before he took his Army examinations, and his family—"

"He may be a gentleman," Major Killeen would grumble, "but by gad, sir, he's not a soldier! Look at him—he doesn't drink, smoke, or swear—"

"I heard him say 'damn' to his horse the other day," said young McQueen facetiously.

"I should think he would!" roared the major, "the horse had just tossed him into a patch of cactus!"

IT was very dull for everybody at La Quitas. Since Major Killeen's officers were all either married, engaged, or willing to be, and since there were no white ladies in the village, small wonder that it was dull. Squadron headquarters, and troops K and L occupied the rows of brown tents that flanked the village; I troop was encamped ten miles up the river, and M troop, ten miles down. When they had first arrived in February, there had been enough excitement to ward off the lethal monotony of border existence, for roving bands of Mexicans were making things interesting in the Big Bend, and though actual raids on the American side stopped with the coming of the Sixth, not infrequently a trooper's hat was shot off by some playful Mexican concealed in the hills across the narrow, muddy stream. But for the past two months the Rio Grande had been as peaceful as the Potomac, and, having exhausted poker as a diversion, the officers at La Quitas had become as much bored with each other as they were with their desolate surroundings.

There was the Major, of course, who reigned supreme, and was quite satisfied with himself; then there was Captain Hornby, of K troop, who had a kind face and wrote to his wife every evening. Captain Jiggs, who commanded L troop, was a thin, pale little bachelor, slightly bald and troubled with dyspepsia. Young Puffer and the other three subalterns were varying types. There was McQueen, a pleasant-faced young egotist, who talked of nothing but horses; Mudge, a pale, taciturn youth who never smiled, and Rawkins who was—oh, ever so superior. Back at Fort Sam Houston, where the rest of the regiment was stationed, they called Rawkins the haughty blond.

And between the glaring heat and the boredom of hearing Major Killeen reminisce on the Spanish War, La Quitas lacked much of being a summer resort. When, on lonesome evenings these marooned souls would think of the rest of the regiment, up at the post, where it was comparatively cool, and where the verandas of the brick quarters were screened with honeysuckle vines, and the band played every night, they were wont to mop their damp brows and swear ferociously under their breaths.

Of course, the advent of Blinky furnished a certain amount of amusement, but after two weeks they had become quite inured to his shrill voice, his horsemanship, marksmanship and the rest of his unsoldierly ways. Even the boy-scout story had been repeated until it had ceased to be funny. Major Killeen no longer cursed as he heard Blinky's falsetto commands, and the troopers no longer laughed. It was difficult to laugh at anything in La Quitas, for May had turned to June, and one day was like another, with a burning sun overhead, and the cinnabar hills on every side absorbing the heat and flinging it back in fiery waves. It was too hot to play poker, too hot to sleep or eat, and the flies were simply insufferable.

FROM the railroad, eighty miles inland, arrived one baking afternoon a telegram for the Major. His orderly brought it up, and the Major, who was lying in a shocking state of dishabille under his mosquito-bars, thrust forth a brown hand for it. As he read, a look of alarm overspread his countenance, and he sat up in his bunk and called profanely for young Puffer, who was asleep in the next tent. In bathrobe and boots the adjutant came running.

"My daughter," roared the Major, purple with exasperation, "my *daughter* wires that she's coming down here. *Down here,* mind you, to this hot, God-forsaken—"

"I thought she was in school in Washington, sir."

"She was," nodded the Major with a burst of profanity, "the last I knew. But apparently she's turned up at San Antonio for her vacation, and now she says she's coming down here. Why, *we* can't put up a woman *here,* Puffer! It's out of the question. We're in the *field!* There's no place for a girl in this hell-hole—"

"It's too late now, sir," said Puffer, read-

ing the telegram and consulting his gold wrist-watch, "she's started by this time."

THERE were but two people in the world of whom Major Killeen stood in awe. One was General Funston, and the other was Miss Mary Louise Killeen. And when Miss Mary Louise Killeen climbed off the quartermaster truck that had brought her down from the railroad, and flung herself into her father's arms, that hard-hearted old campaigner relented. All morning he had been rehearsing in his mind a stern speech with which he would tell her that La Quitas was no place for a lady, that there was no room for her, that she must let the truck take her right back to the station, etc., etc., but the sight of her in that *chic* linen traveling suit and brown straw turban was too much for him. He hugged her to his military person, and sent the officers who were standing about waiting to be introduced, packing off to have a tent erected for her, next his own.

Mary Lou was eighteen, and much too pretty for the peace of mind of an army camp. The thing about her that impressed you first, was her intense vitality—and the quick, graceful little gestures she made with her hands. Her hair was a lovely reddish gold that curled and crinkled delightfully all over, and when the Major's young unmarried officers gazed upon the blue of her eyes and the perfection of her scarlet mouth they ran away to turn cartwheels back of their tents. The Major, instead of being merely their commanding officer, was at once apotheosized. That this lovely creature was his daughter! That she had announced her intention of staying two weeks—two whole heavenly weeks!

IT is amazing what a difference the presence of an attractive girl on the Mexican border can make. Never was such a bustling seen! Furtively the enlisted men sought to catch glimpses of her, and many a pair of field-glasses was trained upon her when she appeared for dinner.

More officers shaved that evening, and put water on their hair, than had ever done so before in a cavalry camp, and when they lined up to be presented, all were on hand but Blinky, who had generously agreed to go on guard in place of the superior Rawkins. Rawkins had come from West Point with the idea that he had something of a way with women, and naturally wished to let no one get in ahead of him. And since the arrival of the Major's daughter had created quite as much consternation in the hearts of Captain Jiggs and Lieutenants Puffer, McQueen and Mudge, you may readily imagine what a gay affair was that first dinner in the officers' mess.

Mary Lou, like every pretty girl of her generation, consumed flattery and attentiveness as the modern prep school youth consumes cocktails, and her father, who adored her, sat by, much amused to see the contest for supremacy that was being waged among his junior officers. By the time dinner was over, Rawkins and McQueen seemed undeniably in the lead, with Puffer, a close second, and Mudge and Jiggs running somewhat behind, but hopefully. The Major was rather glad that Blinky had not appeared, for he was proud of his squadron, and wanted Mary Lou to get a good impression of the officers.

WHEN Blinky did appear, an hour after dinner, they were sitting out in front of the tents, watching the moon rise over the cinnabar hills, and the Major was almost reluctant to introduce him.

"Mr. Islip," he grumbled, "my daughter."

To his credit Blinky did not unloose his falsetto laugh, but bowed gravely.

"Islip," repeated Mary Lou, as the young gentleman whose face she could not see, stood twisting his campaign hat before her, "I don't suppose you're related to Genevieve Islip of New York?"

Whereat Blinky's self-control departed abruptly.

"I should say I am," he giggled shrilly; "she's my cousin!"

"No!" said Mary Lou.

"Yes!" said Blinky and tittered.

"Well, of all the—why, Gen and I went to the same school in Washington. You sit right down here by me. I want to talk to you!"

"A-ha!" whispered Captain Hornby, much pleased, "a dark horse in the race!"

"Good thing it *is* dark," came young McQueen's answer, "she can't see what a horse he is! Give him time—he'll queer himself."

But the enchantress seemed not to mind the vocal atrocities of Geoffrey Arbuthnot Islip, and when the others had grudgingly made room for him, the two of them entered into such a spirited pursuit of mutual friends in the East that the four suitors were for the time being quite out of it, and

sat glowering into the darkness. Only Captain Hornby, who, being married, was not in the contest, smiled to himself.

A while later the Major leaned toward him.

"Good gad, Hornby," he said in an agonized whisper, "you don't s'pose she'd fall for such a—"

"Ah," whispered the Captain, with a malicious chuckle, "you never can tell!"

MARY LOU'S sudden attention to the impossible Blinky was, of course, a decided shock to the vanity of the other eligibles, but unfortunately the favor he had found was not of long duration. He was outclassed the very next morning, when it developed that Mary Lou was a horsewoman *par excellence,* who loved horses and riding above everything else in the world. She appeared at breakfast, adorable in a white linen habit and tan boots, and demanded an English saddle put upon her father's hunter, that she might do some jumping. Blinky's rivals of the evening before exchanged triumphant grins.

"It's all over now," whispered McQueen to Captain Hornby. "She'll never have the heart to look at him after she sees him on a horse!"

Forsooth, the unfortunate Blinky himself was aware of all this. It was just his luck that she should be interested in horses. . . . . His hour had been a brief one—in the darkness, at that. . . . . Quite naturally he suffered upon examination in the light of the day; Mary Lou had not, the night before, seen him blink, nor had she observed what ill-fitting boots he wore. Compared to any one of her other four devoted slaves, he presented the awkward figure.

When McQueen suggested a ride for the morning he maliciously invited Blinky, adding with a wink at Rawkins, that there would be some excellent jumping. Scarlet with embarrassment Blinky declined.

"Why, Mr. Islip," said Mary Lou, don't you enjoy riding?"

"Yes," stammered Blinky, "I mean no!"

And no one at the table enjoyed his discomfiture more than did Major Killeen.

But when the horses were brought round, and Mary Lou had mounted and cantered gayly off (she was superb in the saddle!) followed by her four attendants, a dejected figure stood staring after them. And Captain Hornby, looking out from his tent, saw him and sighed, for the woebegone expression on Blinky's face told only too plainly that he was a victim of the young god Eros.

It was unfortunate, too, because from that morning forth he basked no more in the favor of the lovely blue eyes. Not being a horseman he was, quite naturally, left out of Mary Lou's riding parties, and at night his timorous nature kept him in the background. He had a desolate feeling that the goddess regarded him as little more than a worm, and daily his spirits sank. Indeed, she might never have known the state of his heart had she not at breakfast one morning, chanced to glance up and catch him gazing worshipfully at her.

His adoration discovered, the young gentleman blinked furiously, blushed under his lobster-colored sunburn, and choked on a piece of toast. But the Major's daughter knew, and thereafter was more kind to him, though she did not take him riding.

ONE evening they cleared the things out of the mess-tent, and brought in the victrola from the enlisted men's quarters. This was the superior Rawkins' idea, for he held a great pride in his dancing. But to the amazement of every one, including Mary Lou herself, it was Blinky who carried off the honors. True enough he was not so much in the saddle, but on the dance floor—ah, that was another matter! And he was the only one of that amorous crew who knew the intricacies of a dance called the fox-trot, which had not yet reached the outposts of Texas. All, it seemed, that Geoffrey Arbuthnot Islip had lost in execrable horsemanship he made up that night in terpsichorean shuffling, and again the four baffled suitors sat scowling on the sidelines.

But the next morning he lost all the favor he had gained,—when Mary Lou saw him for the first time on a horse. Thus far he had, with desperate cleverness, managed to keep her from seeing him mounted, but as she chanced to glance from her tent after reveille, she caught sight of a chestnut horse trotting past, bestridden by a familiar figure that bounced and jolted disgracefully in the saddle.

Two passing troopers, unaware of the proximity of the Major's daughter, turned to stare after the spectacle.

"Set down, Loo-tenant," grinned one of them, "ye'll give that hoss a headache!"

"Dad-gum," mused the other, "ef Blinky

aint the worst man on a hoss here I ever seen. Ye c'n git a view o' the hull o' Mexico 'tween him an' the saddle!"

And Mary Lou knew that Blinky would never do—never in the world.

IT was Captain Hornby, himself a shrewd judge of army post love affairs, who first noticed that her interest in the other suitors was waning. She had taken to riding alone, instead of accompanied by the faithful four, and the Captain, whose fondness for Blinky increased daily, was curious. He had known Mary Lou since she wore hair ribbons, and one evening when the two of them happened to be left for a moment alone he determined to ascertain how matters stood.

"Mary Lou," he said, "are you getting tired of it here?"

Mary Lou, who was gazing pensively off into the scarlet sunset, looked up.

"No-o," she replied, "not exactly."

"How do you like our young officers?"

"Oh," she said, "I like them—"

"But," pursued Hornby, "I haven't seen you riding with them the last few days."

"Well, I like to ride alone *sometimes.*"

"H'm. But do you find Rawkins, for instance, as amusing as—"

"I don't find him amusing at all," said she frankly; "he's such a *dreadful* egotist."

"And McQueen?"

"Oh, he's a nice boy, but he can't talk about anything except horses. And Jimmy Mudge can't even talk about horses. As for Captain Jiggs—oh, well!" She shrugged her shoulders.

"I thought so," nodded the Captain.

There was a moment's silence.

"Have you," he ventured, "had much of a chance to know—Islip?"

"Geof?" said Mary Lou, naïvely. "Geof's a dear. But of course, Captain, he *is* impossible. After all, I'm an army girl, and I'm like father in a good many ways. I couldn't stand a man who looks as terrible on a horse as Geof Islip does!"

And the Captain knew she wasn't joking.

But poor Geof continued in his blind worship, and Mary Lou continued to ride alone. Sometimes she would have her father's hunter saddled, and slip away before the four suitors were aware; sometimes she would smilingly turn aside their offers to accompany her.

"Major," said Hornby one day, "do you think it's safe for her to ride alone along the river the way she does?"

"Sure," nodded the Major gruffly, "the river's as safe as Grayson Street in San Antonio. There hasn't been anybody seen on the Mexican side in over two months. Don't worry about Mary Lou—she can take care of herself."

"All right," said Hornby, "you know best."

And many a time, as the golden hair and the white linen habit and tan boots cantered off down the path by the Rio Grande, a tall ungainly cavalryman stood looking after her, blinking nervously, and wearing a most wistful expression.

WHEN Mary Lou's horse galloped riderless into camp about ten o'clock the next morning, a greater uproar broke forth than would have been occasioned by an attack. So great was the consternation that hardened sergeants who would have been calm under fire, rushed around madly; and officers bit their nails and organized searching parties that rode off with no coherent idea where they were to search. As for the Major, that veteran of a dozen campaigns was frantic.

Two buglers, who had been off practicing calls a half-mile from camp, had first caught sight of her horse The hunter, they reported, came galloping down from the hills—*not* from the direction of the river. This, of course, complicated matters.

"You don't think," ventured Captain Hornby anxiously, "that anything could have happened to her along the river?"

"No," said the Major, pale and agitated, "the man who was riding patrol on the river saw nothing of her—and her horse came down from the hills. It's perfectly evident that she rode up there off the trail—and—Oh, God, why did I ever let her go alone! Why did I—"

"Come, buck up," consoled Hornby, patting his commanding officer's arm, "we'll find her all right. She can't be far away."

All morning Lieutenants Mudge, McQueen and Rawkins, each at the head of a column of sweating, swearing troopers, searched the hills in every direction, while Hornby and Jiggs bent over maps and made plans for further search. The Major paced the sand in front of his tent, muttering to himself and smoking innumerable cigarettes.

As for poor Blinky, he felt rather out of things. No one seemed to consider him in the excitement; he was not ordered on any of the searching parties, and his agitation, as the morning wore on with no news of the missing girl, was pitiful to see. After an hour of fidgeting in his tent, he sought out the Major, halted before him and rendered his snappiest salute.

"Sir," he said, in his high-pitched voice, "I should like to be of some assistance—"

"You?" Major Killeen frowned at him with distraught eyes. "What the hell could *you* do?"

It was an unkind cut, and forgetting to salute, Blinky slunk away. For the first time he realized poignantly what a misfit he was as a soldier. Rawkins, Mudge and McQueen had set off heroically to rescue the maiden. . . . . *He* wasn't capable of doing anything. With a feeling of impotent anger he strode to his tent, buckled his pistol-belt about him, filled a canteen with water and hurried out to the corral. Here he approached Mary Lou's hunter and examined each of his four hoofs. Then, this apparently ridiculous procedure over, he saddled his own mare, and without a word to anyone, rode off at a cautious trot, down the path by the Rio Grande that Mary Lou had taken that morning.

NOW, Blinky, if he was not a dashing cavalryman, had a logical mind, and it seemed to him stupid that in all the hullabaloo no one had actually tried to follow Mary Lou's trail. To do so, of course, would not be easy. Above burned a pitiless sun, and the rocks and cactus and sand all about danced with heat waves that made his goggled eyes ache. But he kept them on the trail, nevertheless, and hung perilously from one side of the saddle, while his horse jogged patiently along.

After proceeding in this fashion for something over an hour, he suddenly shouted "Whoa!" and swung from the saddle. Passing the reins around a cactus plant, he dropped on one knee and examined a pattern of hoofprints on the hard, clayey surface of the trail. Mary Lou's hunter had worn one shoe that differed from the other three, and here, plainly, was the imprint of that shoe—*together with the imprints of two pairs of men's heels.*

Jumping up he blinked nervously around. Beside the trail rose a great flat rock. The river below was scarcely knee-deep and not over fifteen feet wide. Could it have been possible that—well, why not? There were the fresh footprints! Dropping to his knees again he crept along, following the impressions of the horseshoes. They led off at one place, beyond the flat rock and disappeared.

While his horse stood by, watching him with equine patience, he turned and crawled down the sandy bank toward the river. As he snooped along he suddenly uttered a little cry and pounced upon something. It was a bronze hairpin, of the sort that he had often seen in Mary Lou's coiffure. With an odd glitter in his eyes, he leaped up and splashed through the muddy stream to the opposite bank. There he stopped short abruptly. In the sand on the Mexican side was the distinct impression of a small feminine boot heel.

Mopping his brow he splashed back through the water, caught up the mare's reins, and led her across the Rio Grande, pausing not to consider that he was thereby violating the strictest of military orders.

BEFORE him an indistinct trail led upward between two low hills, dotted with gray-green cactus and soap-weed. It was only reasonable to assume that Mary Lou and her companions, whoever they were, had gone that way. Clumsily he swung into the saddle, clucked to his horse, and set off at a trot, his head bent low, goggled eyes intent on the ground.

A mile farther, the trail descended to a level prairie, baking with heat waves. Ahead, beside a flat patch of cactus, a tiny white something caught his eye. He pressed forward, and when he had come upon the white something, swung from his horse and picked it up.

"Gee whiz!" he exclaimed.

In his hand he held a little square of linen, with the initials M. L. K. embroidered in blue in one corner. Mary Lou's handkerchief!

Thrusting it into one of the pockets of his khaki shirt he climbed again into the saddle, clapped his spurs to the horse's fat flanks, and was off at a canter.

Overhead in the vast blue gridiron of sky, the sun was like a molten pancake that seemed to sear and shrivel the desert below. On the summit of one of those hills that rolled southward into Chihuahua, he drew rein, and shielding his eyes with one hand, stared off over the desolate stretch of rocks and cactus and sand.

"Gee whiz!" Blinky muttered again.

Miles ahead a faint cloud of dust showed against the glaring horizon.

INTO a shallow cañon, when the sun was low over the hills, trotted three dusty, sweating ponies, and halted. General Juan Lopez turned and, flinging one leg over his saddle-horn, removed his sombrero and brushed the damp hair from his eyes.

"We are perfectly safe here," he said, "let us make our camp for the night."

On the second horse slumped the figure of a very pale girl, whose golden hair fell in disarray about her ears, and whose white linen habit was rumpled and soiled. Behind her saddle, with his arms about her, sat a swarthy, mustachioed man in the tattered uniform of a Mexican colonel. A third, hungry-looking individual, with a week's growth of beard upon his face, sat on a pinto pony in the rear of the little cavalcade.

"We need fear no pursuit," continued the General, cocking his sombrero over one eye and twisting his bushy mustachios. "I lay you a bet the stupid *gringos* are not even searching along the river."

"It was a clever idea," grunted Colonel Tequila, slipping down from behind the girl, "a clever idea to send her horse galloping up into the hills."

"Certainly," smiled the General, dismounting, "all my ideas are clever."

"That was *my* idea," interposed the third man, whose ragged khaki blouse bore the insignia of a major in the Mexican army.

"Never mind whose idea it was," said the General sharply. "Get down and look for some fire wood."

Then, with exaggerated politeness he approached Mary Lou's stirrup.

"Permit me, *Señorita,*" he said, and set about untying the thongs that bound her wrists to the saddle-horn.

Quietly, defiantly, the girl leaned forward in the saddle, her lips set in a straight line. Major Killeen would have been proud of her could he have observed the disdain with which she treated her captors.

"The *Señorita* understands," began General Lopez, "that no harm will come to—"

"I do not care to discuss the matter," she replied, her blue eyes flashing; "please get out of my way."

With a shrug of his shoulders the General stepped aside, and Mary Lou, her hands still bound, swung with boyish grace from the saddle, while the three Mexicans looked on in unfeigned admiration.

When their horses had been tethered they returned and seated themselves on the ground before the flat rock on which Mary Lou was resting. A picturesque trio, they were, in their straw sombreros and ragged khaki, with bandoliers of cartridges strung across their chests.

"The *Señorita* understands," said General Lopez, "that she is only being held for ransom, and that as soon as it is paid, she will be returned to her father, the *Comandante* at La Quitas?"

MARY LOU regarded him in hostile silence.

"You must not believe," continued the General, showing his white teeth in a smile, "that we are common bandits, *Señorita.* Ah, no! It is merely that we have fallen upon evil days. Since last we were officers in the revolutionary army, our meals have not been so regular. There is little hope of another revolution within six months—and meanwhile we must eat."

"Quite so," grunted Colonel Tequila, plucking at his straggly mustachios.

"Quite so," nodded Major Mescal, running a finger over the week's growth of stubble on his chin.

"Therefore," went on the General, "I hit upon the little plan of taking you as our guest—"

"It was *I* who hit upon the plan," interrupted Major Mescal.

"Never mind whose plan it was! You are to be our guest, *Señorita,* for a brief sojourn in the hills. Of course—" he shrugged his shoulders—"we regret that we were forced to so rudely interrupt your ride this morning, but chivalry steps out, *Señorita,* where necessity steps in." And smiling, he fell to rolling a cigarette.

"Do you know," said Mary Lou calmly, "what'll happen to you? In about an hour a troop of my father's cavalry will ride in here and shoot the buttons off your coat!"

General Lopez threw back his head and laughed.

"Excellent, *Señorita,*" he said; "I admire your courage—but not your philosophy. Even if your father's cavalry *should* start across, Washington would call it back. See what our little friend Pancho Villa gets away with! Ah, no, *Señorita,* we are in no danger of pursuit."

"Let us get a fire going," grunted Colonel Tequila; "I am hungry."

"First," said the General, "I must write the message to the *Comandante*." And while the rest sat by silently, he produced a stubby pencil and scribbled laboriously for three or four minutes. At length he finished, and held up the message for his companions to see.

"I have named the ransom at ten thousand dollars," he explained. "You, Mescal, will deliver it as we planned."

"Tomorrow," yawned Major Mescal, lazily exhaling a cloud of cigarette smoke.

"No," said the General, frowning, "*now!*"

"After supper, then," said Mescal.

And while they argued, Mary Lou sat clasping and unclasping her hands. In the past two minutes her courage had died within her, yet she was determined not to let them see that she was afraid. With frightened eyes she stared back at the trail over which they had come. Miles and miles to the northward lay the Rio Grande. She wondered if they had missed her yet in camp. . . . . About this time the bugles would be blowing for retreat. And for the first time Mary Lou experienced an overpowering desire to cry.

A ROUND white moon was high over the rolling wastes of Chihuahua, as the man on foot paused wearily and looked at his wrist-watch. Close to midnight. He had been traveling over twelve hours!

From the time he had caught sight of that dust-cloud, miles ahead over the trail, the pursuit had been easier. He knew from the size of the dust-cloud and the way it lifted that a small band of horsemen was traveling swiftly, yet not once in that hot, dusty afternoon had he beheld a living object. It was simply a question of urging on the poor horse.

Then, shortly before sundown the horse had stumbled and gone lame. But by some miracle of good fortune, a water-hole lay not fifty yards distant, and to it Blinky led her and allowed her a moderate drink, then, tethering her in a clump of sage bush, screened from view of the surrounding desert, he took his bearings once more, and set off on foot in the direction of the dust-cloud.

The walking was difficult. Sand and stones cut his boot soles, and he was desperately thirsty. About this time, too, the dust-cloud dissolved in thin air against the horizon, and he knew that the party ahead had halted—possibly for the night. The trail, of course, was difficult to follow after that, but by means of his compass and his almost uncanny instinct he kept on.

Mile after mile slipped beneath his weary feet, and ere long darkness shadowed the hills. The night was cool, but his throat was dry as sandpaper, and his tongue beginning to feel thick. But he was determined to keep that last bit of water, sloshing about in his canteen. Mary Lou, perhaps, might need it. Never once had he given up the idea that he would find her, but with the falling of night some of his courage waned. It was not pleasant to be walking alone into Mexico. His imagination bothered him. Every tall cactus plant ahead seemed a lurking figure; every clump of vegetation held an imaginary enemy. But each time he felt himself growing panicky, Major Killeen's unkind words sounded in his ears. "*You?* What the hell could *you* do?" And gritting his teeth Blinky trudged on.

"WHEN the moon sets," said General Lopez, "you may awaken me, and I will stand guard the rest of the night."

Colonel Tequila, sitting beside the smoldering fire in the cañon, grunted.

"Mescal will join us in the morning," went on the General, rolling up in his blanket; "meanwhile I believe we two are capable of keeping an eye on our fair guest."

"Is she asleep," queried the Colonel, tossing a dry branch on the fire.

The recumbent one nodded.

"She seems to be. I wonder if it is wise to keep that fire—"

"Why not? We need have no fear of pursuit. Besides, the smoke cannot be seen at night."

"But there is a moon—"

"Oh, go to sleep," said the Colonel.

And not many minutes later a lusty snore announced that his advice had been taken.

The air in the cañon was chill. Several times during the night, Colonel Tequila put another stick on the fire, and huddled closer to its feeble blaze. Once or twice he looked over at the motionless figure of the girl, wrapped in Mescal's poncho, to all appearances, sleeping. He was very tired, was the Colonel, and the warmth of the fire was comfortable. At length his eyes closed and his chin dropped forward.

How long he dozed he never knew, but of a sudden there came a roaring volley of shots above him, and he found himself on his feet, with his hands raised trembling above his head. General Lopez crouched in a similar attitude on the other side of the fire.

"Now then, you two," came a shrill voice out of the darkness, "back up against that cañon wall,—*pronto!*"

Shivering, the Mexicans complied, and into the circle of firelight strode a tall, ungainly figure in the khaki and campaign hat of a United States army officer, holding before him a heavy automatic pistol.

With disheveled hair and wild eyes, the girl sat up suddenly and stared at this apparition. Then she uttered a little cry, and shaking off the blanket, sprang to her feet.

"Geof!"

"There, there," muttered the tall spectacled fellow, flinging a clumsy arm about her; "don't cry, now. Don't cry. We're going to be on our way home in about five minutes."

"I'm not—crying!" Shaking with little sobs, she clung to him, her face pressed against his shoulder. "But—oh, I'm so g-glad you—"

"Are there any more," he interrupted gently, "besides these two?"

"One. He—he's gone with a m-message. He'll be back in the morning."

"H'm. Oh—*there's* a coil of rope! Just what I'm looking for."

AND when the General and his companion lay scowling on the ground, bound hand and foot, Geoffrey Arbuthnot Islip removed their shoes and tossed them upon the fire.

"Just so you wont take any little walks around this prickly country," he explained grimly. "Wait here, Mary Lou, while I saddle their horses."

In a moment he was back leading the two ponies, and after he had assisted her to mount, he stooped and gathered up the carbines and bandoliers of cartridges that lay on the ground.

"If we weren't in such a hurry," he announced, blinking down at the uncomfortable Mexicans, "I'd have you two walk ahead of us—barefooted—all the way to La Quitas. As it is, I'm going to send a troop of cavalry back here after you tomorrow. *Buenas noches!*"

And turning, he swung into General Lopez' silver-mounted saddle.

"Are you all right, Mary Lou? Then follow me!"

And with a jingle of bit-chains they rode out of the cañon.

AROUND, fiery ball of sun had just risen over the eastern cinnabar hills as two weary horsemen, mounted on Mexican ponies and leading a lame cavalry horse, rode up the trail into La Quitas. One of the horsemen was a girl—a girl whose reddish hair tumbled in disarray about her shoulders. And when Bugler O'Brien, who was just getting ready to blow reveille, saw her, so great was his excitement that he jammed the bugle to his lips and blew fire call. From every direction half-clad troopers came running, and such a shout went up that the Major, who had not closed his eyes all night, dashed from his tent, followed by the fat Puffer and Captain Hornby. Pandemonium ensued, and when Mary Lou was safe in her father's arms Lieutenant Geoffrey Arbuthnot Islip was being triumphantly assisted from his saddle by wildly cheering troopers.

Everyone seemed to be trying to clap him on the back at the same time, and with an embarrassed grin Blinky allowed his erstwhile rivals, Messrs. Jiggs, McQueen, Mudge and Rawkins to wring his hands.

"How in the world," Captain Hornby was saying, "did you manage to—"

But Blinky was pushing them away.

"I haven't time to talk about anything now," he said shrilly; "what I want is some breakfast—then I'm going back across the river to collect those Mexican gentlemen!"

Whereat the troopers all cheered again, and McQueen shouted to the others that Blinky was the real stuff.

"Islip," the Major was saying, "I can't —I can't thank you adequately—"

"I'm going to do that, Father!" announced Mary Lou, looking up with a smile more radiant than the morning.

"Oh," giggled Blinky. "Oh, gee whiz!"

But the Major was serious. There were tears in his eyes.

"I don't see yet," he said, "how you ever followed that trail all the way."

"Well," grinned Blinky, "you forget, sir, that my previous military service was as a boy scout!"

And nobody laughed.

Easy Street Experts

"The Daffodil Dame" describes one of the most unusual and exciting of these delightful romances of roguery by the noted author of "Winnie O'Wynne and the Wolves" and much other entertaining fiction.

By BERTRAM ATKEY

"FAR be it from me to make personal remarks about a lady," observed the Honorable John Brass as he leaned restfully back in his chair between courses one evening at the Astoritz, "but that goldfinch sitting in the corner on your right, has certainly had a considerable spell!"

Colonel Clumber studied the lady—a willowy, daffodil blonde, whose beauty would have been striking even at the Astoritz, where beauty is a commonplace, had not her charming face been veiled by the disconcerted expression to which Mr. Brass had directed his partner's attention.

"She looks to me," continued the old adventurer, "as if she is in a state of mind where her dinner is doing her no good at all—harm, in fact. And that's a pity,—a very great pity,—for I wouldn't deliberately deny that she is a dame who looks about my style. However, dinner first, dalliance second; and here, unless I make a serious error, are the *cailles à la Maréchale*. I'm sorry for that little dame, but I'm bound to own that she is beaten a length and a half by these quails."

He nodded solemnly at the savory example of high-class cookery before him, and rather like a serious man saying grace before an eagerly anticipated meal, he muttered, musingly:

"Let's look, now—*cailles*—quails, in fact—boned, stuffed with veal and liver, and braised, then sliced, put in molds lined with chicken farce and poached, dressed round a pile of savory rice, garnished with asparagus points and broad beans and served with *sauce madère!*—amen! I allow no blonde to come between quails *à la Maréchale* and me," he added, and proceeded to prove it up to the hilt.

Later he and his partner returned to consideration of the lady. There may be men who, during the last few laps of a leisured and perfect dinner, can witness unmoved a beautiful woman in distress, but neither the Honorable John nor his partner was one of them.

"Not having my gift for noticing details like a hawk, probably it has escaped your attention that she is worried about money—in fact, is desperate about it," stated John presently.

Colonel Clumber glanced redly from under his formidable brows at his partner.

"If you've noticed anything but the contents of your glass and plate for the last half-hour, you've done it so secretly that it's been invisible," he growled. "How do you know she's worried about money?"

"She's counted the contents of a little note-case three times in the last half-hour—and made it less every time," replied the Honorable John with perfect good humor. "No woman with a sufficient wad ever does that, and very few men of the kind who dine here. No, squire, you can take it from me, that there is a short-circuit in Daffodil's budget or I have lost my remarkable powers of observation."

HE paused to invite attention to the perfectly useless condition of his liqueur glass, a defect duly and swiftly remedied.

"Twice," continued the Honorable John, his jocund visage reddening one shade with emotion and old brandy, "twice the tears have welled up into her eyes—and twice she has fought 'em back; three times—as I said—she has counted her money, and three times it has given her bad news; twice she has shivered as though she felt cold—though I'll admit I'm not surprised at that, taking the present fashion for evening dress into consideration; and lastly"—he drained his glass—"she has just wirelessed as clear an S-O-S signal to me as ever a broad-minded, chivalrous, man o' the world responded to."

He rose massively.

"Just wait here, squire, while I see what her trouble is. She's got a sweet face when she smiles, and I like her eyes. I'm going to throw her a life-buoy—if she cares to produce a reasonable reason for it. Soft-hearted as a child! I confess it. Pay the bill, and if I signal to you, come across."

He rose and ambled across to the table at which sat the Daffodil Dame.

"Soft-hearted!" sneered his partner, watching him, "yes—soft-hearted like a buffalo. I guess anybody would be soft-hearted after the champagne he's inhaled tonight!" He felt reluctantly for his note-case, while the Honorable John bowed as gracefully as could be expected before the lady.

BY the time the Colonel had paid the bill, the Honorable John was sitting opposite the willowy one, talking gravely.

But the Colonel had not long to wait in sulky loneliness. Almost immediately his partner beckoned him, and nothing loth, he completed the trio around the table.

"Let me present my good friend Colonel Clumber, to you, dear Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe," requested the Honorable John, adding with heavy urbanity: "Squire, be grateful for the privilege of making the acquaintance of a lady to whom I have long paid homage."

The Colonel looked grateful, and accepted the lady's invitation to sit. Nobody knew better than he that the old rascal beside him had never seen beautiful Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe before in his life—but because much experience and no little profit had long since taught him the wisdom of promptly returning his partner's lead, he appeared to believe implicitly what he was told.

"The Colonel is my partner, child, and you may speak as freely of your little difficulty to him as to me. Now, this trouble of yours—tell me quite freely and frankly what's wrong, and I think we can promise to put it right for you. Anyway, we'll take a slant at it—I mean we'll look at it and consider the way out.—Hey, Squire?"

The Squire agreed cordially.

"Ah, thank you so much, dear Mr. Brass," replied Madam Daffodil. "Let me think for a moment—it is all so mixed up and distressing. I—I have been so foolish."

She reflected, the partners watching her more or less sympathetically. Now that they were nearer, they saw that her beauty was not quite so distractingly young and fresh as it had seemed from their table, but nevertheless she was an unusually lovely woman.

"I know now that what has happened to me is the result of my own folly," she began. It was not a markedly original opening—indeed, it is probable that Eve, hoeing vegetables on the small-holding outside Eden, frequently made much the same observation to Adam, but it sounded candid and fell as sweetly, trippingly and naturally from her full, curved lips as it does from those of any other lady.

The Honorable John made sounds of encouragement.

"But I am really desperate," she continued. "You see, my husband is in Am-

sterdam on business. He has been away a week now, and it was very lonely for me. I endured the loneliness for a week, and then I did the first foolish thing. He had given me a little present before he left—fifty pounds to spend. And I was weak enough to allow myself to be persuaded by a friend to go with her to a house in the West End where—she said—they had a most exciting and amusing game. It was a kind of race-game. I have not seen anything like it before, but it is easy to describe. There is a big box with twelve holes in the side. Twelve strings come out of these holes—they are fastened to a—a—rod—isn't it called an axle?—inside the box. The strings are about ten feet long and reach down a long table and at the end of each string is a sweet little model ivory horse, each of a different color.

"You can bet on these horses. When the axle inside the box is revolved the strings are wound up on—on—I think they are called cams—things like swellings on the axle. They are of different sizes, and so the horses are never drawn up to the box at equal speeds. The "two-to-one-against" horse—Red—has its string attached to a bigger cam than the four to one against, and so on—and the horse on the biggest cam should always win. But somehow—isn't it odd?—he doesn't, you know, owing to the way the coils of string sometimes slip instead of winding steadily, one coil over the other.

"IT is so fascinating. And quite fair—you may examine the box as often as you like. I won seventy pounds last night there. But today—this afternoon—I lost it again, and my fifty pounds as well—and"—her fine eyes widened and were startled at the very thought—"the emerald necklace my husband left in the secret drawer of his desk. Geoffrey is a diamond merchant—that is why he has gone to Amsterdam. I wore the necklace. I—I oughtn't to have done that. And when I kept losing and losing, I lost my head—and when the proprietor of the game offered to lend me five hundred pounds on the security of the necklace, I let him have it. And then I lost the five hundred pounds! And what will Geoffrey say?"

She buried her face in her hands—quietly, without flourishes, attracting no attention—and left the partners to guess for themselves what Geoffrey would observe—which they did without any difficulty at all. For a moment they watched her in silence. A little sob escaped through her slim pretty fingers.

"She is overwrought," said the Colonel softly.

"Distraught, in fact," agreed the Honorable John, and at once ordered three liqueur brandies.

"Can't bear to see 'em cry," he muttered, and continued aloud: "Don't cry, my dear—don't sob. I've no doubt my partner and I can help you—not the slightest. You poor, unlucky little soul, leave it to us."

He leaned across the table and gently pulled the Daffodil Dame's hand from her charming face.

"Why, you don't need to worry yourself seedy," he said. "I don't doubt for one moment that we can get your necklace back for you. And we have all the evening before us. Listen to me, my dear. We are going to help you. Can't think of a better way to spend an evening, in fact. Shall enjoy doing it, hey, Squire?"

"Sure, sure," acquiesced the Colonel eagerly.

"We may not look very talented in that direction, my dear, but, as luck would have it, we happen to be no slouches at race games ourselves—I mean, we understand 'em. That horses-on-strings game is but one of the many we understand. We can pick winners every time, practically speaking. And so, all you have to do is to be a good little girl and drink up that spot of brandy, which will do you good, and come and watch us win your necklace back for you. Am I right, Squire?"

"Certainly," rumbled the Colonel with emphasis.

A gleam of hope dawned in the eyes of the Daffodil Dame.

"Oh-h! But—really? Do you really mean that?"

"Try us," said John with a grim smile.

"I can hardly believe my good fortune. You know—I ought to tell you—to warn you—that I am afraid that the house is really a gambling den!"

John chuckled.

"Yes, yes, my dear. I've no doubt it is. But can you find it again?"

"Oh, yes, quite easily."

"Well, that's *your* part of the campaign. You show us the place—and leave the rest to us. Hey, partner?"

The Colonel was ready, aye, and willing.

"Men who have won money on real live

race-horses ought not to have much trouble in picking up a packet over race-horses on strings that come out of a box," he declared humorously.

She thanked them passionately, drank her liqueur "like a good girl," and in ten minutes they were on their way.

AS the Honorable John had very truly said, neither he nor his partner was in any sense a "slouch" at race-games. What they did not know about these, and all kindred devices for separating the toiling (financial) bakers of this world from their (financial) dough, would not have filled a saloon-bar liqueur-glass; but oddly enough, their knowledge and experience blunted itself in vain against the gentle little pastime at which, on behalf of the Daffodil Dame, they occupied themselves for the next four hours or so.

The gambling den, of which she had spoken in such tones of awe and terror, proved to be a very large, very comfortably furnished drawing-room in a quiet street off one of the fashionable squares. The "guests" present throughout the whole evening were never more than forty or fifty —quiet, well-dressed, reasonably sober people, on the whole, who bet in large sums, some of them winning quite heavily; and the hosts were a couple of good-looking gentlemen, calling themselves brothers, youngish, with easy manners and a public-school style, known to the assembly as Tommy and Chris.

Tommy officiated at the electric box in which revolved the cam-shaft hauling the steeds; Chris hovered around, receiving the guests as they arrived with their money, or gracefully speeding them out as they left—without their money. A lean man, with a very closely shaven but still dark-blue chin, who looked like an ex-actor—as indeed he was, without the hyphen—acted as croupier. There was a buffet at one end of the room, where an attentive, butlerlike person administered restoratives or stimulants with a slightly paternal air that was not unpleasing.

The smiling Chris, receiving the Daffodil Dame and her cavaliers, had made no secret at all of the transaction of the necklace.

"Ah, dear Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe, I feel that you have come to win away from us that charming necklace, haven't you?" he said as he shook hands. Dropping his voice a little, he added: "I would like to wish you good luck—the very best of good luck. Take my advice, and back Blue—he is in good form tonight, and is winning more than I have ever known him."

"Something gone wrong with his cam, hey?" laughed the Honorable John pleasantly.

Chris smiled with good-humor.

"That is what *I* said to Tommy," he answered—"though what there is to go wrong I honestly don't know. But Tommy and Milvale — the croupier — only laughed. They say it is just a series of runs—you get these odd runs in every game. And of course the box is open to inspection. . . . . No, I think Tommy is right. It's just Blue's lucky night. I should be inclined to bank Blue heavily—but don't let me influence you. Come and see the game working."

Deeply interested, the partners did so.

THEY found it extremely simple, even as the Daffodil Dame had stated. The camshaft bore six cams and was driven by a little dynamo, the tiny gear-wheel of which meshed with a large gear wheel on the shaft. To each cam was attached one end of a ten-foot cord, the other end of the cord being attached to a race-horse modeled in colored ivory. The race-horses were drawn to the end of a long polished table—to the "Starting Post"—lined up there exactly level; and, the bets having been made, Tommy pressed a button and the cam-shaft inside the box revolved. Because the diameter of Silver's cam was very much larger than, for instance, Red's, theoretically it would coil up more of Silver's cord in one revolution of the shaft than Red's cam—thus causing Silver to travel faster and consequently giving it a better chance to win, as was reflected in the odds laid by the croupier against Silver—two to one, whereas Red's price was ten to one. But actually, owing to the erratic way in which the cords wound themselves, there was no real certainty as to which horse would reach the side of the box first—that is to say, win. A cord would wind up sometimes in a series of perfect coils side by side or in a large overlapping coil, this governing the speed of the horse.

It was delightfully uncertain and therefore very fascinating.

The Honorable John had had a thoroughly bad day's racing—on the second favorite, Green—before he had been in the room twenty minutes.

He became a little bloodshot in the right eye as he suddenly switched off Green and took a twenty-pound flyer on Red—a ten-to-one chance. Red ran well for half the course; then his cord-coil slipped, and he had only finished about half the course when Silver rapped his ivory nose against the ebony box, an easy winner by two lengths.

The Honorable John's other eye went bloodshot, and he sheered off to the buffet, where he commanded champagne in no uncertain fashion.

"This is a game and a half you've got here, my lad," he stated to the butler.

"Yes, indeed, you may say so, sir," replied that one. "You find the ponies fascinating, sir?"

"I find 'em damned expensive," corrected John.

He finished his glass of champagne and sweetened the butler with a pound note.

"Any tips for the next race?" he asked facetiously—but not wholly without significance.

"Some of our gentlemen have done well by backing Green consistently, sir. Consistently *and* persistently. Though, speaking for myself, I have a weakness for Blue."

The Honorable John returned to try out fifty pounds' worth of the butler's weakness, Blue.

Blue won once during the next hour—on the occasion when the Honorable John's good money was intrusted to Gold, which lost by a very short nose.

JOHN returned for moral support from the butler and the buffet—meeting Colonel Clumber, scowling ferociously, on his way.

"Are you going or coming, Squire?" he said curtly. "The champagne is the safest bet in this establishment. Join me."

The Colonel, nothing loth, joined him, and together they utterly ruined a bottle of really fine champagne.

"And how much have these bone Arabs set you back in your accounts, Squire?" demanded John.

"More than I intend to leave here when closing time takes place," growled the Colonel. "If I can't beat a nursery game of pretty gee-gees like this, you can call me a four-flusher from Quitterville."

He cocked a lurid eye at his partner.

"D'you think there's a joker in the ebony box?" he asked softly.

The Honorable John, restored by the noble wine which he had consumed, smiled comparatively blandly.

"I don't know—yet; I can't say—at present. But I got a whiff, as you may say—just a whiff—of the lurking rodent a minute or so ago. I can't honestly say I've smelt a straightforward rat yet—but there's a slight tinge of mouse in the atmosphere. I'm giving another couple of hundred a chance—and perhaps the mouse will grow into a full-sized old English rat."

He dropped his voice.

"Some of the people here have won heavily, but they may be—" He broke off abruptly, turning to greet the Daffodil Dame, who was swaying up to them with deep distress still writ large upon her lovely face.

"How have you been succeeding, please?" she asked in plaintive tones. "I have been dreadfully unlucky. You know I have not made a single bet of more than ten shillings, and my luck has fluctuated *so*! I have not one single penny left, and if I were not afraid, I would go home and have a cup of tea and go to bed at once. Oh, I wish I had never seen this place."

The Honorable John patted her beautiful arm gently.

"Bear up, my dear; this race-meeting isn't over yet," he reminded her. "Take a little refreshment and wait till the numbers go up for the last race. I have got my eye on these ivory mustangs, and they know it—and if they don't all jump into the box in sheer terror before I've finished with them, you can call me no judge of a thoroughbred," he concluded, beckoning the gentleman with the corkscrew in his tail pocket.

A LITTLE later the Honorable John rose. "I am going to see Red," he declared. "It's just come into my mind, like a flash of Chinese fire—Red!"

He swung massively across to the table and put fifty pounds on Red three times in succession.

Red lost handsomely every time.

But the Honorable John did not keep his promise to startle the little animal and his companions clean into the box by the power of the human eye alone.

On the contrary, he beamed upon the little "bone Arab" as though he loved it, and proceeded to intrust another fifty to its care.

It was at least halfway home, when the dilated nostrils of White, winning easily, tapped the side of the box.

The Honorable John beamed some more, and reduced his bets to pound notes. His note-case, which at the beginning of the séance had looked so portly, was assuming the appearance of a limp book-cover without any literature inside it.

It was nearing three o'clock in the morning when he and the frankly maddened Colonel, the only visitors left (except the Daffodil Dame, who was still watching with strained attention) made their last bets—a modest ten pounds apiece on Gold.

Silver won—and Messrs. Tommy and Chris announced that, for tonight, the séance was ended.

"After all, you good sportsmen are not in the vein—but you can have your revenge tomorrow!" said Chris smilingly.

Instantly, and more like a mechanical device than a man, the blue-chinned croupier rose, bade them a polite good night and left. Evidently he had no more financial interest in the place than was provided for by his weekly salary and tips from heavy winners—if any.

The butlerlike laddy also faded away.

"Well, perhaps you're right, you boys—all good things come to an end," chuckled the Honorable John, fingering his empty note-case. "Even a bale of notes big enough to choke a python—like mine was."

His glance roved across to the Daffodil Dame, as the debonair Tommy came up, clutching a bottle of champagne and five glasses.

"A glass of wine to christen the advent into our circle of two good sportsmen, I think, what?" suggested Thomas, and became busy with the wire round the cork.

The Honorable John nodded indulgently.

"Well, well, if I had won five hundred instead of losing it, I should have expected you boys to moisten it with me, no doubt," he purred, like an old bear with his nose buried in the honey-cupboard of a wild bees' nest. "And I guess my friend"—he glanced at the Colonel—"will be glad to drown the memory of his loss in a little refreshment—hey, Squire?"

The Colonel growled a reluctant acquiescence. The wine foamed and sparkled.

"BUT before we drink to the pastime of kings," said the Honorable John, "I should like to make an appeal to you two boys on behalf of the charming little lady on my right. May I?"

"Certainly," smiled Tommy and Chris.

"You have here as pretty a game as I ever remember butting into—pretty, fascinating and profitable. It has run me fairly off my hind-legs tonight, and my friend off his also. And neither of us are men easily knocked off our stances. We have lost a lot of very good money—but we can afford it. But with Daff—with Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe here, it is otherwise and different. She, poor little soul, has lost what she can't afford—and what is not hers to lose. I mean her hubby's emerald necklace. It's part of his business stock, and if he is dreaming about it, far off in Amsterdam, so to put it, he dreams that it is fast asleep in its secret drawer in his desk at home. Well, we know—just we five here together—that Daff—that Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe has lost that necklace here this afternoon. And what I want to point out to you two boys is that it means blue ruin to Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe. Her husband loves her and trusts her—and love is a very beautiful thing. So is trust. I don't like to feel that you two nice, gentlemanly young sportsmen are willing to ruin Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe—and if I am any judge of men, you are not willing. My friend and I came here to win back that necklace for this lady. We've failed—the ponies were too slick for us. It's cost me pretty nearly five hundred pounds in cold cash. You have that money, boys. So I am going to ask you, Tommy and Chris, to return that necklace to this lady, free gratis and for absolutely nothing—as an act of sportsmanship!"

He leaned toward the proprietors of the "ponies," his heavy face a little flushed, his gray-green eyes a trifle hard.

"You've won from my partner and myself, all told, something like a thousand pounds tonight. I want to ask you to show that you are generous winners. Let this little lady off," he asked them.

Messrs. Tommy and Chris stared, clearly a little disconcerted at the modest request.

Even the Daffodil Dame's fine eyes shone with sheer surprise.

Chris spoke.

"This is—er—novel, what? D'you mind if we chat it over?"

They retired, talking together for a few moments, speedily came to a decision and returned, smiling.

"We are perfectly willing to return the necklace," said Chris, bowing to the Daffodil Dame, "tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" echoed the Honorable John.

"You see, the necklace is not here. Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe lost it this afternoon. We do not live here—for obvious reasons. The necklace was put in a safe at my flat after our afternoon session here. That is all. If Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe will call here tomorrow afternoon, it shall be waiting for her. She may take it freely—without feeling in any way indebted to us or under any obligation."

"Oh, thank you—thank you so," said the Daffodil Dame, and burst into tears—at least, she covered her face with her hands.

"Well said, Tommy and Chris!" boomed the Honorable John, and patted the lady's shapely shoulder. "There, there, my dear, don't cry. All's well! Your troubles are over. Nothing to do now but be happy. Be good, and don't gamble any more with hubby's stock-in-trade, and you will be happy!"

He rose ponderously.

"Slip your cloak on, my dear, and come with us—we'll put you in a taxi and send you home. —Good night, Tommy — good night, Chris. Must take another whirl at your ebony box some of these nights. Let me catch Red in form, and I'll put a kink in your bank balance yet, hey, boys?"

They cordially invited him to try whenever the mood was on him; and so, a minute or so later, they left, with their grateful protegée.

"WELL, my dear, that's that," said the Honorable John as he shook hands with the Daffodil Dame. "Be a good girl in future and leave the ponies to those who understand 'em—"

"Like you, for instance," snapped the Colonel acidly, apparently jealous of the way in which his partner seemed to assume possession of the entire copyright of the dame.

The Honorable John laughed.

"Like me, yes—in a manner of speaking," he agreed.

He escorted the now volubly grateful lady to their big limousine for which he had telephoned at about midnight.

"We're going to send you home in our car," he said, still fatherly. "Go straight to bed when you get home, and have a good, long, luxurious sleep. Don't hurry to get up early; eat a sensible, substantial breakfast,—never neglect breakfast, my dear,—then fetch the necklace, put it back where you took it from, and spend the rest of the day making yourself sweet and pretty for hubby when he gets back from Amsterdam. There, that's sound advice—if I were your papa, I couldn't give you sounder advice!"

The Colonel, listening with ill-concealed impatience to this little lecture, glanced at Sing, the Chinese slave and worshiper of the Honorable John, who usually drove the limousine about town,—when not engaged upon the production of meals,—and his lips opened. But they closed again without sound. The driver was not Sing the Chink.

The Colonel shot a look at his partner, who was opening the door for the Daffodil Dame. What was this? Had the old buffalo a card up his sleeve still? It was quite likely—nobody knew better than the Colonel that quite the last man to leave without protest a big bale of notes behind in an obvious gambling-den was the Honorable John.

Then they said *au revoir* to the lady, and the great car slid smoothly away. A white hand fluttered for an instant at the window, and the Honorable John waved back.

"I suppose you're aware that the driver of the car wasn't Sing?" asked the Colonel.

John was lighting a cigar.

"Hey, Squire? Oh, yes, I knew that. In fact, I arranged that over the phone just now. You see, I needed Sing to drive us home."

"I don't get your idea," said the Colonel. "I don't get it at all. If you wanted Sing to drive us home, why didn't you let him bring the limousine, and we could have given Daffodil a lift home. Is Sing bringing the touring-car for us?"

"No, not the touring-car—the taxi!" replied John absently, looking down the street.

"A taxi—what taxi?"

"Oh, the one that I bought cheap the other day," said John casually. "You remember how it amused you at the time—but—"

A belated-looking taxi turned into the street.

"This should be Sing," announced John. "Keep your eyes open, and follow my lead!"

The Colonel made a noise expressive of angry bewilderment.

"This gambling has gone to your head, old man. You're getting a bit mixed up, aren't you? Why use a cheap, ramshackle, secondhand taxi when we've got two first-class cars of our own?"

The Honorable John did not imme-

diately answer his partner. Instead he raised his voice in a hoarse bawl that must have startled more than one denizen of the street from his or her slumbers.

"Hoi—taxi!" he bellowed.

THE taxi ground itself to a standstill by the curb. It was driven by a yellow-faced person with slanting eyes and a hard, a very hard, visage—Sing.

Before the Honorable John could speak, the door of the house behind them swung open, and Messrs. Tommy and Chris, the race-game experts, stepped out, well-muffled and overcoated against the chill night air. Each carried a leather attaché-case.

"Why, gentlemen, not gone yet?"

"Why, hullo boys! No. We sent that little woman home in our car, and have only just succeeded in getting this taxi," said John genially. "Which way are you going, you two boys, hey? West? Good. That's our way. We'll give you a lift—might wait here a month for another taxi at this hour of the night."

He stepped in and they heard him sit down with a thud that shook the taxi.

"Tell the driver what corner he is to drop you at."

"Why, thanks very much—it's only a quarter of a mile—still, it's late for walking. Squat in, Tommy!"

Chris told the idol-faced driver where to drop them, and followed his partner in, the Colonel bringing up the rear.

A grim smile was hovering at last on the hard lips of the Honorable John's hefty partner.

He had noted that which indicated to him that his old hunting companion was not yet passing into senility. Like the Honorable John on his right, he flung his overcoat open, and jamming both hands into the pockets of his dinner jacket, leaned back facing "the boys," a big cigar gripped between his teeth.

"Well, you two boys certainly trimmed us two poor old boobs tonight," said the Honorable John genially. "That is certainly a sweet game. Do pretty well at it?"

Tommy was modest.

"We have our ups and downs, naturally, what? But we get a modest living."

The Honorable John passed his cigar-case, and they helped themselves. The Colonel, expecting it, felt a slight warning pressure of his partner's elbow as Chris struck a match, and politely held it to his pal's cigar.

"I've been wondering whether you two would really have returned that necklace to Daffodil if there had really been a necklace at all—if she had lost it—and if she had really been your victim instead of your decoy, you man-eaters!" said the Honorable John then very swiftly, very distinctly, and with a rasp in his voice like the sound of a file on hard metal:

"Sit still! Keep your hands still—*up*—up, damn you!" he ground out; and the change from friendliness to ferocity in his voice was startling.

"Use your eyes, you cam-experts! Look! Move your hands, and we'll spray you!"

Pale-faced behind a wispy cloud of cigar-smoke Messrs. Tommy and Chris stared, their hands at the level of their mouths. They were wise, for the two partners were facing them, each with his hands buried in the pockets of his dinner-jacket — and something hard inside those pockets was pointed directly at the gambling-den proprietors.

The Honorable John withdrew one hand. It contained a small but businesslike automatic pistol, the muzzle of which he jammed into Tommy's overcoat where it covered his solar plexus.

Faithfully the Colonel followed his example. Then the Honorable John romoved Tommy's neat brown leather attaché-case from his side.

Minutely the Colonel copied him in the case of Chris.

"That's better—a great deal better," said the Honorable John, an echo of good humor in his voice.

"Highway robbery, you'd call this, hey?" he continued.

"It is! And you will pay for it," snarled Chris.

"Yes?"

The Honorable John nodded.

"At the corner of the next street there will be a constable on duty," he said, chuckling. "Shall I tell the driver to stop at him so that you can give us in charge?"

They glanced at each other and were silent.

"Answer that—do we stop or not?"

"No!"—sullenly.

"Why not?"

No answer.

"You wont tell me, hey? Very well, I'll tell you. You wont appeal to any policeman to save you from us because the cams on the shaft in your ebony box are variable and adjustable—and you know it, you

young thieves! You can increase the circumference of any one of those cams to almost any extent you like, whether the shaft is revolving or not—and that means that you can allow any horse to win you like. Am I right?"

A SPASM of acute anguish contorted the good-looking faces of "the boys."

"Ah, then that's settled. . . . . See if they are armed, old man," said John. The Colonel speedily satisfied himself that they were not, and the Honorable John rapped on the glass behind Sing's ear.

"We part here," he announced.

Chris spoke shrilly, horrified.

"But there's three times as much in those bags as you lost, you hog!" he objected.

The Honorable John shook his head.

"When you have lived as long as I have, my boy, you will have broken yourself of the foolish habit of making unnecessary remarks," he observed as the taxi drew up.

Not four yards away shone the light over the murky portals of the police-station.

"Get out, you boys," invited John. "But before you go, let me tell you that you are running a low-down and unclean business. Take my advice and close down before you are closed. I've half a mind to give you in charge now. If you weren't so young—and foolish—I would. But if your den is running three nights from now, look out for trouble. I've no doubt you'll only open up somewhere else, anyway—so the best thing, in fact the only thing, I can do is to sequestrate—impound—take away—your capital. May keep you out of mischief that way—but I doubt it."

The door swung open, and reluctantly the swindlers stepped out. A policeman on the steps of the station surveyed them idly.

"Good night, my boys," said the Honorable John.

"Good night," they replied shortly, and the Colonel swung the door shut again. Sing swung the taxi off on the home trail.

"A perfect pair of scoundrels," said John, sadly. "How much is there in the bags?"

IT panned out at something between three and four thousand pounds.

"Not bad, though it might have been better. On the whole I'm dissatisfied—very," said John, over a nightcap.

"Were you ever satisfied in your life?" inquired his partner caustically. "How did you get wise to the scheme, anyway?"

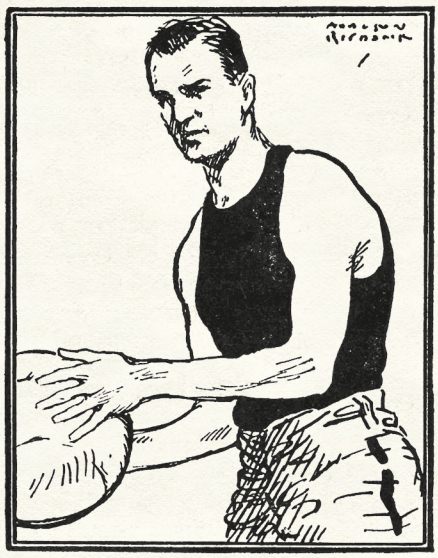
John laughed.

"Quite simple, Squire. When I entered that den, I was very nearly as dense in the head as you. I really believed this Daffodil had been plucked. She was a magnificent decoy—but she made one or two little mistakes. Only details—little things that anybody like you would never notice—but which couldn't get past a man with a wonderful natural gift for noticing details—like me. In the first place, she never told the butler what she wished to drink when we invited her to take refreshment. He knew. He poured her out a Maraschino—as no doubt he had poured her many a one before. That opened my eyes to the fact that she was an old hand there.

"And when I decided in my mind that she was a decoy, I speeded up the revolutions of my brains till I made myself giddy. I watched the winners and watched Tommy's hands. He was the lad who pressed the electric button to start winding the horses. He used the right hand for the button. Every time Silver won, Tommy's lily-white left hand rested carelessly in the same spot on the box; every time Green won, his paw also rested in the same spot—a different one from Silver's spot. And so on. I decided that Tommy could enlarge the cams quite a good deal, as required. I wasn't far wrong, hey?"

The old rascal chuckled as he held his glass to the light. "I knew I was right when they couldn't produce the lost necklace. They hadn't won one to produce. Daffodil invented it—a fairy necklace, and no doubt, a fairy husband. Yes, you've got to hand it to me again," he continued complacently. "You've got a very observant man for a partner—hawk-eyed and fox-witted, in fact—and you may as well admit it. I remember you were very much amused at my idea of buying a taxi—refused to pay for a half-share at the time, hey? I'll have to trouble you for that half-share now, Squire? Y'see, I had studied the thing,—worked it out,—and you can take it from the old man that there are times—and may be more—when a private taxi is more valuable than a private limousine. Those crooks would have been suspicious of getting into a private car with all that money on them, but they fell for an obvious thing like a lift in a taxi! Pass the brandy."

Another Bertram Atkey story in our next issue.



Harper Wins a Game

You will find thrills aplenty in this swift-moving basketball story by the author of "The Drivin' Fool," "Danton Goes It Alone" and other well-remembered sports-stories.

By WILLIAM F. STURM

THE crowd of fifteen thousand vociferous spectators was on tiptoe for the final game of the State High-school Basketball Championship. Weeks before, five hundred ninety-six teams had started in thirty-two sectional contests. The thirty-two winners in the sectionals were then divided into two regional tournaments of sixteen teams each. The eight winners in each regional came to the State capital in a tourney that poured them into a funnel, out of the small end of which would emerge one team—the State Champion.

The tier on tier of Colosseum seats were a mass of varied color—a solidly packed section with orange-and-blue caps and pennants; next a section of red and white, one of yellow and white, blue and white, solid green and as many other combinations as the fertile brain of high-school classes could evolve.

An announcer with a huge megaphone came to the center of the playing floor.

"Redgate and Central—for the State championship—Redgate and Central! At nine o'clock—thirty minutes to wait!"

With the announcement echo hardly dying away, came yells in a score of different keys. Pennants waved; graybeards jumped up and down and yipped like the schoolboys they had been years ago; hats went into the air; toy balloons escaped from nervous hands. In the crowd were those whose teams had gone down to defeat, but they were none the less partisans of one of the two teams yet to fight it out.

The Redgate yell-leader, yellow-and-white-striped, burst into action.

> Redgate, Redgate!
> Wow, Wow, Wow!
> We'll beat Central!
> We know how!

From across the big Colosseum burst back the retort:

> Redgate, Redgate,
> Our country cousins!
> We lick teams like you
> By the dozens!

DIRECTLY behind the press-stand, from which wires spread like tentacles to all parts of the State, and close by the Redgate rooters' section, sat two men. One of them, an alumnus of a big Eastern college, had made his pile in oil, and was renewing his youth by making a scouting tour with the athletic director of his alma mater, for reasons perfectly obvious to anyone who could have heard their closely guarded conversation.

"You got to hand it to Harper," the athletic director was saying; "I didn't think it could be done. Captain of the State University basketball team. Gets a bid to coach Redgate when he finished at State. Don't believe at that time he knew whether Redgate was a town or a brand of barn paint. Never had been a team there before. But the little town fell for the game, just like every other town in this Mississippi Valley, and she wanted to get her hat in the ring right. So her citizens chipped in, raised a pot of money and told the committee to get the best coach in the country. Imagine that—a town of seven hundred asking an all-American forward to coach its team, when there wasn't even a team!"

"Well," the oil alumnus answered, "there's worse things. And when you consider that we're likely to gobble him and his whole team and invite 'em to come over, bag and baggage, to the best college in the world, it wont be so bad. If your athletic committee runs a little shy on funds, you can count on me for what you need."

"We don't want him if he doesn't win," the athletic director replied, "but if his team puts it over here tonight, we're going to have a team in our gym next year that will make the Tiger tremble in his shoes. If Harp has passed on to his boys his own skill at basket-shooting and getting down the floor, this big city team will have to go some. He led his State team into Pittsburgh the last year he played and made the Varsity there look like a German mark."

BACK in the dressing-room Coach Harper went among his charges, patting them on the back, handing out encouraging words. He was asking his team to do the well-nigh impossible. Of his original squad of eight players only five were left, for injuries had put his three substitutes on the sidelines. All of Redgate's hopes of victory lay in the ability of the five to go through without relief.

"How you feeling, Shag?"

"Fine, Coach."

"How's it with you, Goldy?"

"Little nervous, Coach, but I'll be all right as soon as the whistle cracks her open."

The coach smiled. "That's all right, boy. We're all nervous just before a big battle."

"That leg of yours all right now, Smitty?" The coach's face was serious, for Smith had twisted his leg in one of the earlier games of the tournament.

"She'll be all right as soon as I get warmed up. I'm just like Goldy."

"Feel like you can jump a mile tonight, Cat?" The coach's gaze rested on his rangy center, named for his jumping ability and quickness, after the feline.

"Just rarin' to go, Coach, rarin' to go!" Cat Stonebraker showed a set of teeth any girl would have given her right hand to possess.

"Miller, all set?"

"Ready, Coach."

"Boys, I'm proud of you." The coach's voice vibrated. "You've all come through a hundred per cent. I'm proud of the little town that could develop such a team. No other team has ever come to the State tournament from a place so small. You've fought your way up, and a battle against the largest high-school in the State wont worry you. After all, its team has only five men. And you have five. I'm with you all the way. Don't get careless. Remember what I've tried to teach you. And remember little old Redgate—and you can't fail!"

"Coach, if we win tonight, the credit goes to you. There's not a better coach in the whole country." Cat Stonebraker, captain of the team, wasn't used to speech-making.

A DRIED-UP little old man, with a yellow-and-white Redgate cap surmounting his bald dome, a Redgate white-and-yellow arm-band on each arm, and a Redgate pennant in his right hand, edged over to the two big college men. He had heard them discussing his team. It mattered not to him that he had never seen them before. A little touch of basketball makes the whole world kin. A Methodist preacher might not refuse to argue with a bootlegger in the heat of a basketball contest. So when the two strangers mentioned his team's coach, he perked up his ears, ready to rage at any misstatement or to volunteer information if the opportunity

to extoll his team should arise. And if no opportunity should arise, he would make an opportunity! He inserted a wedge, as he looked at the two and said: "Some coach, old Harp!"

The two smiled at the incongruity of the bald head and the high-school enthusiasm.

"Know him?" the athletic director inquired.

"Sure, I do. Everybody in Redgate does."

"This Harper must be the mayor of your town," the oil alumnus interpolated.

The old man warmed to them. "Mister, he can be anything in our town he wants to be. And he's going to marry Phyllis Mansfield, too, if anybody asks you."

"What's that got to do with this game?" one of the scouts asked, now sure that he had started something.

"Well, it's got a-plenty much, a-plenty much! Know anything about this little old Redgate team that's going to wallop the livin' daylights out o' this big city team tonight, and pack away the State champeenship?"

"No, we're strangers here. Don't even know much about basketball; so if you'll tip us off once in a while to what's going on, we'll appreciate it. Tell us about Harper—we've heard lots of talk about him in the hotel downtown."

"Well, sir, Mister,"—the narrator puffed out his chest,—"Phyllis Mansfield was dead set on havin' a basketball team for our town. That's how it all started. She's old Lumber Mansfield's daughter, and she went to school at one of them co-editorial colleges and seen the boys play there. Then she comes to these high-school tournaments and sees how crazy the people gets. She put the basketball bee in her dad's bonnet, and it stung him right smart. We got Harp to come to our town, all right, and when he got there, I bet he durn near had failure of the heart. We had ten boys in high school, and it takes five men to make a basketball team."

"Yes, we've heard it takes five," the oil alumnus interrupted, at the same time he was warding off a jab in the ribs from his companion.

"Some of these big schools have got two thousand boys to get a team from—two thousand."

"Go on, you're opening Redgate to us."

"Us basketball fans knowed we didn't have no team at all, on that figurin'. But old Harp scouts around the country to see how many boys could come to high school, and when he gets done combing our county with a fine-tooth comb, he had twenty all together that hadn't gone no further than common school and was willin' to go to high school if that let 'em out of workin' on the farm. Husky boys, too.

"Phyllis even made her paw have a lot of the lumber moved so they could have a smooth place to practice while we was buildin' a gymanasium. Left two stacks of lumber the right distance and nailed basket nets on each one of 'em for the boys to get a basket eye. That's the way this champeen team started shootin' baskets. That was two year ago. Harp makes the boys practice all summer, and by fall he had a team that had some idea of the game, but that was all—just some idea. They played a few games with other high schools, but didn't seem to get any place. And all this time the coach was gettin' sweeter and sweeter on Phyllis Mansfield.

"The people begin to worry Harp to death about when they are going to have a regular basketball team. Guess they expected us to win the champeenship right off the reel."

The two nodded.

"Along about this time comes one of them smart Alecks from the big town. Got charge of a dredge ditch outfit, and when we didn't have no suitable place for him to stay, what does old man Mansfield do, but offer him the freedom of his home, as they say. Old man is kinda stuck on havin' a city dude around—gives him class, I guess."

THE narrator fidgeted. "Guess they aint never goin' to call this game. Well, Mansfield begins ridin' Harp with a big saddle because the team aint winnin' many games. And Harp aint very welcome up at the Mansfield house. Mansfield begins to throw his daughter in the way of this ditch slicker—name of Fox, and I'll say he's that kind of animal. The girl, she falls for him hard at first, and I can see that takes all the heart out of the coach. You know how them things are."

His hearers acquiesced with a nod.

"Bang! All of a sudden the girl quits bein' so thick with the slick guy—I never got the straight of it. The hired girl told me that she heard 'em arguin' about Harp one night, and the city guy said a few things that wasn't right. But whatever it was, I don't know. His throw-down didn't take any of the starch out of the city dude.

He plays the old man hard and gets thicker than elephant hide with him. I heard him tellin' the old man about how he had influence at the Statehouse down at Indynoplus, and a word from him would make this State highway commission buy about a million sacks of cement from Mansfield every year.

"Things was movin' along all right again. Phyllis was perkin' up to Harp, and Harp was puttin' more jazz into his work. But I knowed the girl wouldn't marry no one without the old man said so, and Harp didn't have a chance in the world to get the old man to say yes, not especially when Harp wasn't gettin' nowhere with the team—and the team bein' the apple of Mansfield's eye. Phyllis begins workin' on her old man, and about that time the team wins in our sectional and then breezes into the regional and cops that, too. Then, when she might have got the old man to say yes, this other thing comes up and spills the beans."

"What's this other thing?" one of his listeners asked.

BUT the narrator had lost all interest in his story. The Redgate team had filed out on the playing floor; and the Redgate yell-leader galvanized into action in front of that part of the stands that held practically all the Redgate population. The little old man's eyes gleamed. He watched the yell-leader as he called: "Central yell!" Then he joined in with the rest as they split the air with:

Redgate! Redgate!
Wow! Wow! Wow!
You beat Central!
You know how!

The white-and-yellow jumpingjack subsided for a moment, then jumped in front of his howling host again. In response to another appeal, the loyal Redgaters burst out with:

Rah! Rah! Rah! Coach!
Rah! Rah! Rah! Shag!
Rah! Rah! Rah! Goldy!
Rah! Rah! Rah! Stony!
Rah! Rah! Rah! Smitty!
Rah! Rah! Rah! Miller!

Stopping only long enough to give his rooters time to get their breath, the yell-leader once more megaphoned: "Team!" and once more the rafters shook:

Rah! Rah! Rah!
Whole Blame Team!

The hubbub was terrific. Central became equally busy with her war-cries, flung from four thousand throats, drowning every other sound.

THE referee and umpire took their places. guards went back to their positions; forwards came in toward the center of the floor. In the immediate center the two centers stood like statues, while directly to one side of them was the referee, basketball poised in his hand, ready to throw the ball up between them and start the game.

A shrill whistle! The referee tossed the ball high in the air between the two opposing centers.

Cat Stonebraker jumped into the air as though flung by springs; his fingertips reached the ball a fraction of a second before his opponent, and he tipped the ball to one side, a point toward which Goldy, one of his forwards, was dashing to meet it—and the game was on!

Goldy snatched the ball from the hands of the oncoming opposing guards, shot it across the floor with bullet speed straight into the hands of Shag, his fellow-forward. Shag took it high in the air, turned as he came down to the floor, and in the same motion propelled the ball with an easy lob toward the basket. It hit the glass backboard eighteen inches above the netted ring. Because of the "english" put on it, and the skill with which he had banked the ball on the smooth surface of the backboard, it dropped into the basket.

Pandemonium broke loose as the scorers put up the first markers to read: *"Redgate, 2; Central, 0."*

The ball was brought to the center of the floor and put into play. Again the agile Cat vaulted into the air, balanced the ball on his fingertips, and twisted it toward the hands of Goldy, now circling to throw off the pursuing guard. But the big Central guard was quicker, and Goldy grasped only empty air.

The ball, now in Central's possession, was passed down toward the basket amid frenzied rooting from the Central section. Miller, Redgate guard, in a desperate effort to break up the play, elbowed a Central player. Instantly the referee's shrill whistle stopped the play and the referee bawled: "Foul on Miller!"

The Central captain made the free throw from the foul-line and the score stood: *Redgate, 2; Central, 1.* In the next minute of play Central scored a field goal. Then came another—and another. The rooting of

the Central section was deafening. The score was now 7 to 3 in Central's favor, the only point beside the first field goal that Redgate had been able to make being one lone foul.

With the tide setting decidedly against them, the Redgate players redoubled their efforts to prevent further baskets by their opponents. In this they succeeded, but the Central players, while kept from shooting baskets, in turn broke up all attempts at a rally on the part of Redgate. They beat Stonebraker's crew to every tip-off. And if the Redgate team did manage to get the ball and pass it basketward, the Central defense stiffened at the crucial moment and prevented scoring.

When the whistle blew for the end of the half, the score still read: *"Central, 7; Redgate, 3.*

WHILE Central rooters were executing a snake-dance on the playing floor during the rest period between the halves, the oil alumnus settled back in his seat and asked: "What was that you were saying?"

The bald-headed little man with the rah-rah cap looked at them as though he had never seen them before. His mind was on the score. Again urged to continue his narrative, he exclaimed: "Where'd I get at?"

"You were going to tell us about everything with Harp any Phyllis slipping along pretty much all right when the new thing came up."

"This sneak Fox gets Mansfield into his library one night last week and shows him a letter that says a bunch of gamblers has fixed Harp, and that he aint goin' to let his team win. Letter says they bought off all the coaches that had a chance in the finals and then they pick the winner and grab a bunch of dough on it. The old man ought to know that you can't buy a high-school team with a wagonload of money, but he didn't think, I guess. Bein' all wrapped up in the team, he went wild and wanted to go out and hunt Harp with a shotgun, but the slicker was just smart enough to get him quieted down. 'Better let the team go down to the State tournament and let this Harper hang himself,' he says. 'That's the best way to prove it on him. It would be awful,' he says, 'to let Phyllis marry such a dirty hound. But if you tell him now, he'll lie out of it, and she wont believe it.'

"Don't ask me how the old man couldn't use his bean and know that if he jumped Harp, he would scare him out of it and the team would win then if it had any chance at all. But he took this crook's bait, hook, line and sinker.

"The ditch dude was sure our team couldn't win, and he was just layin' up this trick on Harp to feather his own nest. That's the way I figured it. But he don't know no more about basketball than he does about women. We're goin' to lick this Central team, sure as shootin'!"

The two scouts looked at each other significantly, the eyebrows of both arching in perfect harmony.

"Don't believe what I'm tellin' you, huh!" the little man shrilled.

"You're trying to tell us if Redgate loses this game, Harper will be run out of Redgate by Mansfield?"

"Sure, he will."

"Anybody else hear this wild story of yours?"

"Nobody. Wouldn't have knowed it myself if I hadn't listened in when they didn't know it. I work around Mansfield's yard. I couldn't do any good by tellin' anybody, and I couldn't stop it no way. Besides, I didn't need to do anything or tell anybody. We're goin' to win the champeenship, and Fox's scheme will blow up. I aint worried none."

"ALL right now, boys," Coach Harper was saying to his perspiring charges behind closed doors. "You've got a four-point lead to overcome." A ring of discouraged faces looked into his. "You're going to win this game. I know it. Watch the big Central back-guard. Keep away from him all you can. Pass the ball short. Teamwork all the way; that's what we want. When you shoot for the basket, shoot to make it. You are still five men, and that's all that Central has. You know basketball. Don't let them get another point. But if they do, you go right ahead. They got three baskets in less than two minutes. You can get three in a minute, if you try hard enough. When you get the game on ice, don't try too hard to run up the score. Play safe. Nobody will remember the score—all they will remember is that you won. Fight them off their feet. Show 'em your stuff this half. And watch your fouls!"

The teams trotted out on the floor for the second half. The air was electric. A

State high-school basketball championship would be won in the next half-hour.

Encouraged by the faith and the dynamic personality of their coach, Redgate went into action in a burst of rapid-fire play that gave promise of shattering the stonewall defense of their opponents. Stony tipped one over to Goldy, and the latter relayed it to Shag across the floor. By the time Shag had the ball safely, Goldy had moved up the floor on his own side. Back the ball came. Snatching it from a Central back-guard, Goldy returned it to the center of the floor, but near the basket. When he started the throw, it seemed that he was throwing the ball away, but by the time the ball had reached what had been a vacant spot, Stony was there to take it. As unerring a basket-shot as ever played in a State tournament, the elongated Redgate center dropped the ball through the ring. Two of the four points that Redgate needed to tie the score were registered!

AS Stonebraker went toward the center of the floor for another jump after the ball, he stopped long enough to tie his shoe, though a close observer would have seen it did not need tying. When the referee threw the ball up, the Redgate center, instead of contenting himself with barely touching the ball with his fingertips, shot into the air and batted it. The Central guards, who had come up to cover the two Redgate forwards were caught temporarily off their guard. It seemed certain that Redgate would make another field goal and tie the score. But by the time the ball came down near the basket, the Central players had so smothered Shag that the best he could do was to shoot the sphere back toward the center of the field to prevent its falling into enemy hands. Smitty, playing well up for just such emergencies, reached for it, but his weak leg was handicapping him, and his fingers only brushed the ball as a Central forward grabbed it. Turning around in order to unwind himself from possible attack, the Central player did the only thing to be done in the circumstances—he tried a long shot for his basket. The ball hit inside the iron hoop of the basket, juggled across and hit the other side, ran halfway around, and then dropped—outside!

Groans from the Central rooters, and wild yells of derision from the Redgate crowd!

As the ball dropped outside, a Redgate guard made a jump for it. A Central player jumped at the same time, and the two went down in a tangled mass on the floor. The referee's whistle shrilled, and the ball was recovered and handed to him. He tossed it up between the two players, and the mad effort to make a goal was on again.

One more goal!
One more goal!

The insistent cry rang out from the Redgate rooters. As if in response to this appeal, a Central forward took a shot at the basket, missed, and the ball fell into a Redgate guard's hands. He was immediately smothered by the Central players, but not before he had managed to get the ball out of his hands. But instead of a Redgate man getting it, it fell into the hands of a Central player, who started dribbling it back to his goal. But he didn't get far. Like a flash, Shag seemed to come out of nowhere, took the ball away from the Central player, relayed it down toward his own basket to Stony, who had managed to divorce himself from the Central guards. Redgate hearts stopped beating when the ball was shot upward toward the basket. But even the redoubtable Stonebraker was not superhuman, and the ball only balanced on the iron hoop for an instant and then fell back in the direction from whence it came! Redgate rooters swallowed hard. Central rooters boohed the failure to score.

CENTRAL HIGH still had a two-point lead. The Central coach took out his two worn forwards and put in two fresh men. The Redgate coach had no fresh men to put in. He could only hope that the stamina of his boys would make them immune to the fatigue that was fast tiring their opponents.

A foul was called on a Central forward for roughing Smitty. Cat Stonebraker took the ball from the referee, walked to his foul-line and nonchalantly made the point.

With the score 7 to 6 against them, the Redgate team braced and fought hard for the field goal that would put them a point in the lead.

The little man with the rah-rah cap had climbed down to the seats nearest the floor and was alternately sitting and standing in his effort to put the one field-goal across. The yell-leader had forgotten his job. Time was fleeting. Less than three minutes of the game remained, and something would have to be done quickly. Central tight-

ened up its defense, on the theory that it could hold the one-point lead by keeping Redgate from scoring. In a desperate effort to break up a Central passing-rally, Smitty came hard after the ball. A Central player came in at the same time. There was a terrific impact. The force of Smitty's rush caused him to veer, and the strain came on his injured leg. He swayed for a moment, then dropped to the floor.

The Redgate partisans were furious. "Put him out! Put the dirty Central player out!" came the cries. But the referee was impervious to them, for he knew there had been no foul. The Central player dropped to the side of the Redgate player and helped lift him to his feet. Rousing himself with an effort, Smitty limped over to the sidelines for a moment between the two players. Then he signified that he was ready to play. His face was greenish-yellow with the pain in his leg.

From the Redgate section boomed the cry:

Rah! Rah! Rah! Smitty!

A FIELD GOAL for Redgate, and she had a one-point lead, with the score eight to seven.

Two field goals in rapid succession for Central stifled the yells of triumph that had begun to well from the Redgate rooters. The score was now: *"Central, 11; Redgate, 8."*

In the next jump-off Redgate brought the whole Colosseum to its feet by scoring a field goal and making the score eleven to ten in Central's favor.

A foul on Central, and Goldy scored a marker for his side by dropping the free throw through the basket. Score eleven to eleven!

One minute to play!

Cat Stonebraker had been tipping the ball over to his forward consistently, against the time when some trick play would have to be pulled. The time had come. As he walked to his place in the center of the floor to jump for the ball, he rubbed his hands together. Shag caught the signal and came forward on the move, as though he were going to take the regular tip-off. The Central guard moved up to checkmate him. Cat outjumped his opponent, got the ball himself, sidestepped, and relayed it to Goldy directly across the floor. The moment the ball left his own hands, Stonebraker moved like a flash toward the basket. Behind him swarmed the Central players, prepared to break up any attempt he might make to catch the ball and make a field goal. "When they are sure they have blocked you, do it anyhow," Harper had always told his boys. Goldy shot the ball into the milling mass directly under the basket. It looked like throwing the ball away, and there were groans from the Redgate rooters. But Stonebraker was not the tallest man in high-school basketball for nothing. Above the heads of the others he reached, caught the ball, and in spite of the clawing and pawing and jumping of his opponents, managed to drop the ball into the basket. Score: *"Redgate, 13; Central 11."*

And ten seconds left to play!

The final whistle blew just after the ball was put into play in the center of the floor.

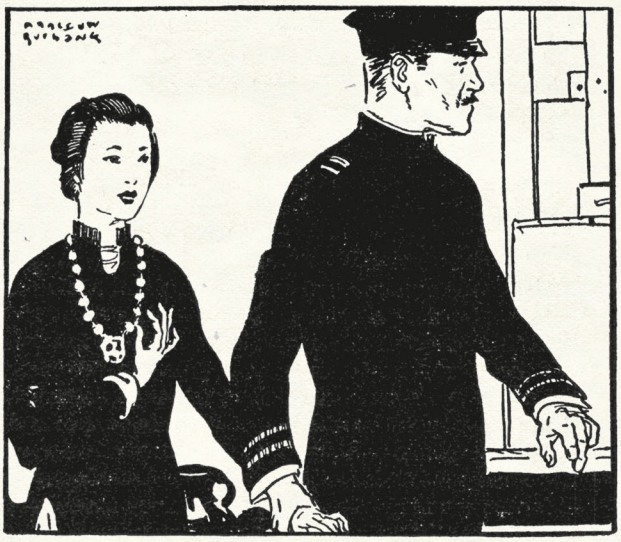
THE Redgate rooters, led by the little man in the rah-rah cap, made for the Redgate players. Harper, center of a milling mob, was searching through the people crowding the floor. He saw Phyllis Mansfield working her way toward him. Elbowing his way to her, he grasped her hand. Just then he got a hard blow on the back. Turning, he saw Phyllis' father. "Harper, you're a good coach—Phyllis has told me that all along. You've given us a winner. Redgate's the champion of the whole State. You can have anything in Redgate you want."

The coach smiled.

"I'll take her right now, then, Mr. Mansfield," he said, as he looked into Phyllis' eyes. And as he and the girl walked out of the building by a rear entrance to escape the throng of Redgate rooters for a moment, an oil-wealthy alumnus and an athletic coach were walking alongside them.

Here's good news! E. Phillips Oppenheim, author of "The Evil Shepherd," "The Great Prince Shan" and many another justly popular novel, has completed for *The Blue Book Magazine* one of the best stories he has ever written. Watch for "The Mystery Road," in an early issue.

A complete novelette of the most delightful character, by the talented author of "The Other Key," "A Thunderin' Thriller" and many other stories which have stirred BLUE BOOK *readers to enthusiasm.*



Ways That

By LEMUEL

CHAPTER I

"Pity, O Chen, for they saw not the approaching shadow of evil!"

AT last Soo Wang, venerable importer and dealer in silks, ornamental wood-carvings and *Ng Ka Py,* laid down his long-stemmed bamboo pipe and looked across the teak-wood desk at his daughter. It was the hour of midday rice, a quiet hour in the Shop of Ten Thousand Profits. From outside, the main street of San Francisco's Chinatown, came the muffled *slf-slf-slf* of padded slippers, pierced now and then with the sharp *click-click* of American heels; inside the store, in a corner office hidden by tapestries from the finest shops of Canton, Soo Wang and Ah Chee had lingered over their rice and tea.

"To know what we know," said Soo Wang, nodding his head sagely, "and to know what we do not know—that is understanding! Now, the problem is quite simple; but the solution—*ts*: That is different! I have meditated many pipes over the question; but I am as helpless as a white foreign devil trying to tell Shangtung silk from Hang-chiu goods. And so, Little One, I may let you decide."

A look of surprise flashed into the girl's dark eyes; but she bowed her head respectfully and held silent. Soo Wang, combing his thin gray beard with slender hands, regarded the girl through half-closed eyes. Ah, but she was utterly desirable! In all Chinatown there was none other so bright, so captivating as his little Ah Chee. Hair like the raven of Kwan-lun; eyes as clear and beautiful as the lotus-pools of Hu'ang: and cheeks that stirred fond memories of the peach-blossom in the Valley of Fragrant Spring!

"Now, Lee Quan, the artist, is an honest and learned man," went on Soo Wang. "The family of Lee is one of the most honorable and powerful in all China. But the youth has wasted his time in the foreign-devil college learning to paint pictures instead of taking up some useful pursuit. Therefore, Quan's father rightly

"No man ready to fly unarmed at a tiger, or plunge into a river and die without a pang, should be with me; but one, rather, who is wary before a move and gains his ends by well-laid plans."—Confucius.

Are Wary

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refuses to pay a single copper *cash* to buy the boy a wife. Thereupon, Quan declares that he, alone, will raise the two thousand dollars I am asking as your betrothal price. He urged the marriage-broker to give him a week's time."

FOR about as long as it takes a butterfly to alight, the girl's silken lashes fluttered, then closed; and again Soo Wang narrowed his long slant eyes and regarded her shrewdly.

"Then there is Bo Ch'at, the butcher. He has no learning; but he is a very rich man. He will give you a good home, provide you with plenty of rice and flour; and he can pay at once the sum I ask.

"Of course, as anyone knows, it isn't proper for me to discuss this matter with you," went on Soo Wang, the merest shadow of a smile on his lips. "But it is written that a heart filled with love is more precious than chests of silver; so before you walk out of my house forever, I thought I would hold speech with you and learn your wishes, especially since I could do so without loss to me.

"That is all," he concluded abruptly, picking up his counting abacus and a sheaf of papers. "Go now, for I have much to do before the Customhouse closes."

Ah Chee arose.

"But, honorable father, I have not spoken. I—"

The old merchant looked up, a slender hand poised over the abacus, an indulgent smile tugging at his lips.

"Walk your way, my Thousand of Gold! Do not annoy me with small talk! *Kuai!* You have spoken your heart plainly and emphatically!"

Then, as Ah Chee stood in hesitation, her lips parted like the petals of an almond-bud, her jeweled fingers plucking nervously at the embroidered hem of her jacket, she saw, over her father's bowed head, the tapestries that hung across the doorway drawn stealthily aside. Into the opening came slowly a high-cheeked, saffron face with sensuous lips and drooping eyes. Out

of those drooping eyes crept a sullen leer that lingered for an instant on Soo Wang's bowed head, then crossed the desk, crawled slowly up Ah Chee's jacket, and over the girl's face like some foul, living thing.

"Father!" Ah Chee whispered chokily. "Bo Ch'at is here!"

CHAPTER II

"Look at a man's acts! Watch his motives!"

WITHOUT ceremony Bo Ch'at appropriated the ebony stool vacated by Ah Chee. He got out his monogrammed case, selected a cigarette and lighted it.

"How's b'iness, Soo?" he inquired in his clipped English, of which he was very proud.

Soo Wang gave the butcher a lip-smile. He answered in musical Cantonese:

"I am very busy, Bo Ch'at. Duties must be paid today on my latest importations of *Ng Ka Py*, and I have not yet checked the statement from my broker."

"I am also very busy," retorted Bo Ch'at, lapsing into his native tongue. "I hope you wont keep me long. Old Louie, the maker of brooms, ascended the dragon yesterday; and I have to roast a hog, three ducks and three chickens for the funeral.

"Well, to business!" Bo Ch'at went on, and there was something almost sinister in the way he snapped his fat, long-nailed hand to jar the dead ash from his cigarette. "It is about your daughter, named Ah Chee. I have decided to take her as a wife. Yesterday I told the marriage-broker to offer you the two thousand dollars you demand, although I think it much too high. But I don't like to deal with a fat old woman who earns her rice arranging marriages for persons who know more about it than she can ever learn. So I have come to you to conclude the bargain. That's my way. Decide what to do—then let nothing stand in my way. That's how I built up the biggest pork business in Chinatown. Your daughter should be proud to go as a first wife to the house of Bo."

Soo Wang reached for his pipe. Suddenly his eyes had narrowed and became dull and hard like crude teak. A moment before he had decided, for his daughter's sake, to wait and give Lee Quan every opportunity to obtain the betrothal price. If the youth, with no business training, could raise two thousand dollars in a week, he had great possibilities.

But there was an arrogance about this big-mouthed butcher that whipped the old man to immediate decision. He wanted to rid himself at once of this bigoted pork-vender, as one hurls spoiled rice over the fence into the neighbor's yard.

"How unfortunate!" quoth Soo Wang, when he had taken three puffs on the amber mouthpiece. "Not an hour has passed since I concluded that matter. Old Gow, the writer of letters, is this moment preparing the announcement of my daughter's betrothal."

Bo Ch'at took a long draw.

"What," he asked, smoke writhing from his mouth and wide-spread nostrils, "is the man's family name?"

"He is of the family of Lee, named Quan —the son of Lee, the worker in gold and jade."

BO CH'AT jerked the cigarette from his lips.

"Haie-e! Old man, do you know what you are doing?"

Soo Wang frowned impatiently, but before he could take his lips from his pipe, Bo Ch'at went on:

"Do you know that you are giving your daughter to a man who earns his rice selling the forbidden white drug? Some day the Federal officials will trap him, and he will go to prison. Then, where will be your family pride, venerable Soo?"

"What strange talk!" exclaimed Soo, his eyes wide. "What is this forbidden drug?"

"What! Do you not know?"

"You forget, Bo Ch'at," said the merchant coldly, "that I am of the older generation, a student of the classics, an honorable dealer in silks and woods and *Ng Ka Py*. I have nothing in common with the white foreign devils, neither speaking their language nor worshiping their gods. In this land there are many wicked things, therefore, of which I know naught."

Bo Ch'at's eyes were drooping, his face as expressionless as a Wen-ce mask. He lighted another cigarette.

"Well, Soo, I will tell you: You remember how one time most of our people and many white men and women smoked opium. Then one day the government at Washington passed a law forbidding it. After that there was no opium to be had except from smugglers; and they were such robbers that most of us quit opium rather than pay their price. Some of our old men had used opium for many years; and

those who had to have opium and couldn't buy it went out of their heads and killed themselves. The young men either quit, or found some way to continue smoking.

"But the white men and white women who had learned to smoke opium—*haie!* Lots of them went crazy. It was very funny. They would get down on their knees in the dirt and tear their clothes and their hair, and call on their God, and beg the police to give them opium or kill them —they didn't care which; but the police would give them a curse and a kick and drag them away to jail.

"Finally these white men and women found they could relieve their suffering for a time by using a white powder made from opium. This powder is called morphine. Morphine is a terrible drug; and no Chinese in America ever uses it. At that time it could be bought and sold like rice; so before long practically all the white men and white women who had been smoking opium were putting this white drug in their arms with sharp needles, and were worse off than before.

"Today there is a law against morphine the same as against opium, and the price for contraband morphine is sometimes as high as a hundred dollars for a single ounce, although the honest wholesaler gets only about fifteen dollars an ounce for the drug when used lawfully. A few of our people, those who have more greed for gold than respect for their ancestral honor, make much money selling the white drug to the foreign-devil morphine-slaves."

Soo Wang was bent over his desk, his lips parted, a bony hand clutching his pipe.

"And you say, Bo Ch'at,"—the old man's voice shook with emotion,—"you say that Lee Quan deals in this terrible drug?"

"My words are easily proved."

"Then prove them! And if this be true of Lee Quan, by the Nine Heavens my daughter shall never kneel before his household gods!"

"Within three days," concluded Bo Ch'at, rising, "you shall have all the proof desired."

Soo Wang stood up. For three breaths he studied the butcher's face.

"Let there be no tricks—"

Bo Ch'at lifted his drooping eyes.

"*Aih,* by the yellowed bones of my grandfather, there will be no tricks! *Tso cha!* Good-by!"

"Walk slowly, Bo Ch'at!"

FOR about the time it takes one to clean an opium-bowl, the old merchant stood gazing at the swinging tapestries through which Bo Ch'at had passed. Then he sat down—and reached for his pipe.

"It is written," Soo Wang muttered in his pipestem, "that without thought for far-off things there will be troubles near at hand."

He struck the brass gong over his desk.

"Wing," he said, when one of his trusted men stood before him, "the butcher, Bo Ch'at, has just left. Go you and dog his steps. Report to me whenever possible whatsoever you see or hear. Do you understand?"

"Yes, venerable sir."

"Then walk your way!" And again Soo Wang struck the gong.

"Ah Lim, I fear misfortune may befall the son of my friend Lee, the worker in gold and jade. Go you and follow Lee Quan each day until he seeks his grass-seed pillow. Report to me whenever possible whatsoever you see or hear. Understand?"

Ah Lim winked his snapping black eyes and bowed from the hips.

"Then, be on your way!" commanded Soo Wang. "I hope you have a safe walk!"

When Ah Lim had gone, Soo Wang sat for a long moment gazing with narrowed eyes at a stand screen that stood before the door opening into the stairway that led up to the living-rooms. On this screen deft fingers had worked in threads of many colors figures of bamboo, chrysanthemums, plum-blossoms, and epidendrums — emblems of the four seasons, summer, autumn, winter, and spring. But Soo Wang had no eye for the beauty of the handiwork. He raised his voice.

"Ah Chee!"

The girl stepped from behind the screen. Her face was as pale as the white narcissus, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Not until it was too late did I discover that you had returned and hidden behind that screen. It was very improper of you. Well, it seems that you overheard everything. Punishment enough!"

CHAPTER III

"Now mark ye, sires, how spawned this evil plot!"

THE Meat-shop of Fragrancy and Prosperity was an inconspicuous store on one of Chinatown's quietest streets. At the

rear of the store was an alley so narrow, so crowded and crooked, that even at high noon the place appeared dim and shadowy. Its official name was Hongkong Alley; the Chinese spoke of it as the Alley of Lingering Shadows.

Entering his store through the alley entrance, Bo Ch'at mounted the half-dozen steps to his main office and stood for a moment looking over the shop. His clerks were not busy, for Bo Ch'at dealt only in the choicest porks and catered only to the best trade. His specialty was supposed to be the preparation of funeral meats.

In the main office were a long, high desk, a safe, a few stools, and other office equipment. Seated at the desk was a young man in a soiled blouse of black satin. He was Bo Ch'at's bookkeeper. His accounts were few and simple. He spent much of his time appearing to pore over long columns of Chinese characters in an old ledger. Over this ledger his sharp slant eyes kept a close watch on the meat-shop, the front door, and the little-known entrance from the alley in the rear. He had seen Bo Ch'at enter, but he did not look around.

"Where is Ah Kee?" asked Bo Ch'at in Cantonese.

"In the sausage-room, sir."

"Very well, Leong. Do not disturb me until I call."

BO CH'AT passed to the end of the long desk and came to an inconspicuous door marked in both English and Chinese "Private." Taking a key from his blouse, the butcher unlocked the door, passed in, closed the door again and locked it.

This private office was a small room without windows. It was lighted by a single incandescent globe over the flat-topped desk. On this desk were a few papers and a desk-telephone. The walls were lined with shelves stuffed with a litter of bundles of various shapes and sizes wrapped in old newspapers. All of them were thick with dust. The floor was bare, but singularly clean and dustless.

Bo Ch'at's padded slippers made no sound, left no tracks on the dustless floor, as he crossed to the opposite corner and stood before one of the tier of shelves. Here he pressed deftly and swiftly on several spots on the underside of one of the shelves. Instantly the shelf swung back, disclosing a small doorway in the wall, and steps that led down into darkness. Bo Ch'at passed through; the shelf swung back into place. Not a grain of dust had been disturbed.

At the foot of the stairs was a heavy unpainted door. On the panel Bo Ch'at sounded a signal, using the ends of his long nails in a swift and peculiar *rat-a-tat*. The door swung open. Bo Ch'at stepped in.

THIS room was even smaller than Bo Ch'at's private office. The walls were of rough pine, the ceiling of the same material hung with smoked sausages. Suspended from the center of the ceiling was an electric light, and beneath it a table and two stools. In one corner stood an old, much-worn bed-roll.

Seated on one of the stools was an old Chinese with gaunt face and hollow, feverish eyes. Deep in those burning eyes was stamped a look of overwhelming sorrow. By means of a push-button beneath the edge of the table, Ah Kee had opened the door; now, by the same method, he swung the door shut and locked it.

Bo Ch'at took the stool opposite Ah Kee.

"Rat of the dark!" he shrilled angrily. "It is long past the hour of midday rice, yet you have nothing ready. Is your head still full of opium?"

A flash of venomous hatred lighted Ah Kee's hollow eyes, but it passed quickly. "I am an old man!" he whimpered. "I am an old man!"

"Well, old man, I brought you something that will make you feel younger. To work now! We have much to do today."

Ah Kee sprang into life. From the floor by his feet he took a large, sealed can covered with many Chinese characters. Stamped across the face of the label were the English words: *"Pickled meat—China."*

With a can-opener Ah Kee cut out the entire top, and poured the contents of the can into a wooden tub that stood on the floor beside him. Then, using the can-opener again, he romoved a smaller can that had been soldered to the inside bottom.

Opening this smaller can, Ah Kee deftly removed a glass jar whose crimson label bore many scrawly characters printed in black. On this label were three English words: *"Morphine sulphate—Japan."*

"Ah Kee," spoke up Bo Ch'at sharply, "do you know Lee Quan, the son of Lee, the worker in gold and jade?"

From a drawer in the table Ah Kee took a set of druggist's scales. He began weighing out a quantity of the white, flaky drug.

"Only by sight do I know him, sir. He went to a foreign-devil school and learned to paint pictures and do many other things. He wishes to marry Ah Chee, the daughter of Soo Wang; but his father will not pay the betrothal price. Indeed, he has forced Quan to leave his roof and earn his own rice. The youth only last night hired a room in the House of Morning Twilight."

Bo Ch'at snorted.

"I might have known that you eat every scrap of gossip like a duck eats worms. Still, it is profitable sometimes to have one's stomach filled with knowledge.

"Well,"—Bo Ch'at lowered his voice, although in that underground den he could have screamed with no fear of being overheard,—"I have work for you. Prepare two packages of the white drug. Take them to Lee Quan's room when you know he is out. Conceal them where he will not find them, but where they will be found by the Federal officials."

FROM one of the strings suspended from the ceiling, Ah Kee removed a sausage. Untying the cord at one end, he dug out a portion of the meat. The morphine he had weighed and wrapped in waxed paper he now concealed in this opening. Then a part of the meat was replaced, and the end tied shut again. Just as the cans of pickled meat that contained the smuggled morphine resembled the hundreds of other cans that came through the custom-house, so these sausages looked just like any other sausages that went out of Bo Ch'at's shop.

"Well?" Bo Ch'at's voice held a sullen menace.

Ah Kee lifted fear-stricken eyes.

"Sir, I have always done your bidding. When you told me to put the white drug in the house of Wong Shim, I did it because he was of the family of Wong and nothing to me. He went to prison for many years, and you got all his morphine business. But I cannot do this thing to Lee Quan. Have you forgotten that I too am of the family of Lee?"

"I had forgotten," scowled Bo Ch'at; "but what does it matter? The thing must be done. And you are going to do it!"

"I cannot do it," whimpered Ah Kee. "Although many generations removed from Lee Quan, I have the same family name, and I cannot do such a thing to a blood cousin."

"Very well," concluded Bo Ch'at, rising. He took a small parcel from a pocket, looked at it, then concealed it again in the folds of his blouse. Ah Kee trembled, and licked his dry lips.

"When I decide to do a thing," went on Bo Ch'at, "I do it. Understand?" He caught the old man by the arm and twisted it cruelly. "You do as I say, or you get strung up again; and this time I'll lash you with leaded whips instead of bamboo. Hear me?"

"I hear, master!" Ah Kee was crying. His wasted body was shaking in a spasm of fear. "I hear, but I cannot do this thing to one of the family of Lee."

"Fool!" Bo Ch'at hurled the epithet in the old man's face. "What did the family of Lee ever do for you? Would they give you so much as half a card of opium? No! When you want *pin yen,* and you always want it, you have to come to me, don't you? Well, I'll teach you something!"

He dragged the old man to a corner and bound him with a rope that hung from a ring in the wall. Then, from the table drawer, he took an opium-pipe, a long needle used in cooking opium, and a small opium-lamp. He lighted the lamp.

"Now," said Bo Ch'at, "all you need is opium." From his blouse he took the small parcel and held it before Ah Kee's tortured eyes. "This is yours when you say you'll carry out my orders."

"I can't do it!" wailed Ah Kee. "I can't do it to one bearing the same family name!"

Bo Ch'at flung the package on the table.

"Tsau kom lok!" he shouted, and his voice rang like a heavy cleaver cutting through bone. "Hang there, you dried pig! Beg for opium until you chew your tongue out! Maybe I'll hear you; maybe I wont!"

Adjusting the lock so he could open the door from the outside, Bo Ch'at left the den and went up to his private office. When the shelf with the dust-laden bundles had swung shut, he unlocked the door to the main office, called the bookkeeper, then returned to his private desk.

"Leong," said Bo Ch'at, when the private door had been locked, "I want you to write a letter to the Federal officials who watch secretly for the forbidden white drug. Write it in Chinese; they can have it translated. Be careful of finger-prints. Do not sign any name. Do not make any mark that may enable the officials to trace the letter to us.

"Tell the officials that in Room No. 5, in the House of Morning Twilight, No. 21 Canton Street, lives a man named Lee Quan. He is the biggest morphine-peddler in town, tell them. If they search his room, they will find plenty of evidence."

The drug-vender drew out his gold watch.

"Mail the letter late tonight. The officials should have it in the morning, but not before. When Lee Quan goes out to his evening rice, the drug will be hidden in his room."

"Am I to do that also?" asked Leong indifferently.

Bo Ch'at lifted his drooping eyes to his henchman's face.

"Certainly not! The matter will be attended to by Ah Kee as usual."

CHAPTER IV

"For when one takes counsel of his opium-pipe—"

AT four o'clock, which as any one knows is the proper time to eat one's evening meal, Bo Ch'at's clerks closed the doors of the meat-shop, drew the red shades, and set up the big round table. From the kitchen in the basement the cook and his helpers brought great platters of steaming food, and a huge pot of Crab's Eye tea. At Bo Ch'at's place they set a jar of *Ng Ka Py.*

Bo Ch'at, his mind taken up with his plot against Lee Quan, gulped down two small bowls of the strong millet liquor, and followed it with a bowl of hot egg-flower soup; then, leaving his clerks to chatter over their *chow mein,* their rice-cakes and tea, the drug-vender went down to the secret room.

Ah Kee did not look up.

"Aih-yah!" Bo Ch'at shouted in the old man's face, and shook him roughly. "Have you been so foolish as to let your spirit take leave of your body?"

Faintly, like the weird rattle of devil-papers, a whisper came through the opium-slave's lips.

"Pin yen—master! *Pin yen!"*

"Oh!" chuckled Bo Ch'at. "You want opium, eh? Well, I'll get those two packages ready for you to put in Lee Quan's room. Meanwhile, you may have two pipes. Two pipes, mind you! No more until you come back!

"By the three green devils, what a fool you are!" Bo Ch'at rattled on as he released the old man and let him fall to the floor. "I have made opium my slave; and it has brought me wealth and power. You have let the poppy-drug become your master; and it has brought you poverty and misery."

Then, on the floor by Ah Kee's head, the drug-vender placed the opium-pipe and the burning lamp. Opening the package of opium, he thrust the flat end of the needle into the black, sticky substance, and twisted it until there adhered to the *yen hok* a "pill" about twice the size of a pea. He placed the cooking needle in Ah Kee's right hand.

Instantly, Ah Kee opened his eyes and turned on his side. Holding the opium over the flame, he watched eagerly while the little black ball sizzled and writhed in the heat. Before all the moisture had been evaporated, Ah Kee, unable to wait longer, placed the opium over the tiny vent in the pipe-bowl, and pierced it through with the other end of the needle. Then, relaxing into a more comfortable position, he held the bowl over the flame, and his lips sought the mouthpiece.

Slowly, in a long, sobbing breath, the opium-slave inhaled until not a wisp of smoke remained in the drug. Then, his eyes closed, his muscles relaxed. Slowly, as though reluctant to part with the soothing vapor, the old man exhaled. Gray, filmy smoke was still curling about his mouth and nostrils when he began scraping the charred opium off the bowl and preparing for the second pipe.

FIVE minutes later Ah Kee stood by the door of the secret room; but now he stood erect, his deep black eyes gleaming like wet ebony.

"Remember!" cautioned Bo Ch'at. "If you are caught putting the drug in Lee Quan's room, you will probably be killed. It would serve you right for being careless. Walk your way carefully. Return here as soon as you are done, for we must prepare and make ready the usual night deliveries."

In the narrow doorway that opened into the Alley of Lingering Shadows, Ah Kee paused. Without moving his head, he glanced swiftly up and down the walks. It was growing late; shadows were deepening. A few white men had ventured into the alley, but Ah Kee quickly knew them as tourists. No one, looking like a foreign-

devil official, was in sight. Shoving his hands into the sleeves of his blouse, Ah Kee moved swiftly down the walk toward Canton Street.

Hardly had he gone a dozen steps when from out of a gloomy doorway at his side came a low, sharp call: "Ah Kee! Ah Kee!"

Instantly Ah Kee recognized the voice. Had the speaker been a Chinese, he would have intoned the syllables *"Ah"* and *"Kee"* so as to give them the proper meaning—that is, *"Number Two."* But this was the harsh, toneless voice of a white foreign devil; it was one of the men to whom Ah Kee each night delivered a large quantity of morphine. Knowing that only some extreme urgency would bring the peddler down to Chinatown, Ah Kee turned into the doorway.

THE drug-peddler, a pallid, well-dressed youth, kept his eyes on the alley. Out of the corner of his mouth he spoke cautiously:

"Listen, Kee! A pal of mine that makes the beach missed his connection. See? He's got to have something for his early trade. Gimme forty dollars' worth of M. Savvy?"

Ah Kee's opium-drugged mind was clinging tenaciously to its latest impression. He had but one thought: to put the morphine in Lee Quan's room and get back to his opium-pipe.

"No can do," he replied, shaking his head and starting away. "I come see you bime-by."

The white man caught Ah Kee by the arm.

"See here! Don't gimme that 'no can do' talk! I gotta have that stuff for my friend now. You come see me as usual with my own stuff. See? But you gimme some M for my friend. I can tell you got it on you by the way you were flat-footing it down the street. Give it to me; you can get more."

The dull light in the eyes of the opium-slave flamed for an instant. The mind had received a new impression; instantly everything else was forgotten.

"All light!" said Ah Kee. "Thass all light. This all I got. You gimme only twenty-fi' dolla's."

He gave the peddler the two packages of morphine intended for Lee Quan's room. The peddler handed him the money, and left.

AGAIN Ah Kee tucked his hands into the long sleeves of his blouse and moved swiftly and silently down the alley; but he did not go to Canton Street. He turned in at a Chinese restaurant. The proprietor, sitting at his counter just inside the door, recognized Ah Kee and moved his right knee just enough to press a hidden electric push-button. No bell rang, but in a certain room on the top floor, tiny electric lights flashed their signal.

Ah Kee stepped into a curtained booth; but he had no thought of food. Passing out of the booth by a secret door, he hurried up a deeply carpeted stairway. Before a small door built of heavy oak timbers strapped with pieces of sheet iron, Ah Kee paused and waited patiently. He knew that hidden wires beneath the carpet were flashing a warning to the guard on the other side of the oak door. He knew that although the proprietor downstairs had flashed a signal that a "safe" customer was on his way, nevertheless the guard would take a look through some secret opening before he unlocked the door.

Presently the door swung open. Ah Kee glided in. Here was a narrow, windowless hall. Down the hall, only a dozen feet or so, was another door. Passing through this door, which the guard closed quickly, the odor of burning cinnamon assailed Ah Kee's nostrils.

Now, as anyone knows, the white foreign devils who hunt secretly for smuggled opium have very sharp noses. Regardless of stuffed windows and heavily draped doors, these men can smell opium through many walls, which, after all, does not seem strange to anyone who has ever smelled opium but does not smoke it. Therefore, since smoke arises, those who wish to toy with the bamboo seldom go to underground places. Instead they hide in some room high above the street. There, mingled with the pungent odor of burning cinnamon, the smoke from their opium-pipes passes out into the air and is lost on the winds.

INSIDE the den Ah Kee paid no attention to the other habitués, yellow men and white, but made his way quickly to where the keeper sat on an ebony stool in one corner of the room. On another stool in front of him was an open suitcase. In this case were playing cards, a bowl of silver money, and a horn jar half full of opium.

Ah Kee put three silver dollars into the bowl. The keeper laid out a playing card

and picked up his *hop toy* of opium. With steady hand he poured a quantity of opium on the back of the card. Ah Kee took his card of opium and went to the nearest lay-out.

Then, while the moments slipped by rapidly, Ah Kee lay on a mat-covered bunk and smoked pill after pill of first-grade opium. Rest came to his clamoring nerves; peace quieted his feverish mind. Now and then, between pipes, he dozed; and in these brief moments of opium sleep, age and infirmities slipped away, and Ah Kee, young again, mounted on wings through heavens of rosy cloud-dreams.

But always there came a rude awakening. Out of the filmy smoke that writhed above his opium-pipe would come a heavy, saffron face with drooping eyes; and Ah Kee would start as though in a nightmare, and turn quickly to the solace of another pipe.

So, calling for more and more opium, Ah Kee smoked until his numb fingers could no longer hold the *yen hok* and his numb lips could no longer cling to the mouth-piece. Then over the opium-slave's weary soul descended the mantle of the Great Peace, that sleep that is like unto the sleep of the dead.

And who knows but that in this death-like sleep Ah Kee's spirit did, in all truth, ascend the dragon to the Chambers of the Dead where those who are lost may take counsel with the Evil One Who *Knows All?* For when Ah Kee awoke, a crafty smile lingered on his lips; and in his heart burned the fire of an evil purpose.

CHAPTER V

"For now to my Balcony of Beauteous Night
My lover no more—"

IT was a warm spring evening in Chinatown. By the third hour after evening rice, the streets and alleys were alive with a noisy, colorful throng. Men, smoking cigars, their hands in their pockets, or tucked into their long sleeves, strolled down the walks, followed by their obese wives in somber black trailing a group of chattering children. From the restaurants came the long-drawn wail of flageolets, broken at irregular intervals by the crash of cymbals. Above the walks, on balconies ornately carved and bright with splashes of crimson and imperial yellow, maidens sipped daintily at their Felicitous Spring tea, listened to the sound of merriment on the street below, and wished that they had been born men.

The balcony of Ah Chee's home was dimly lighted with colored paper lanterns strung across the front of the building. At either end of the balcony incense-sticks emitted curling wisps of jasmine-scented smoke and dropped their white ash in the brazen censer-bowls. Around the railing, blooming narcissi in quaint majolica pots shone white and ghostly in the dim light.

In the center of the balcony stood a large lacquered bamboo table with a cover of Cantonese embroidery. Here, on an ebony stool inlaid with mother-of-pearl, sat Ah Chee playing the *yung kum* that rested on the table, her jeweled fingers flashing in the light as she swung the tiny hammers.

Ah Chee's mandarin coat was of shimmering blue silk. Ornaments of gold and jade gleamed softly in her sleek black hair. On her lips was a single fine line of rouge, on her face a light dusting of perfumed rice powder. Sitting in the soft glow of the lanterns, she was a picture of rare and alluring beauty.

When she had struck the last of the quaint, high-pitched chords that concluded "The Ballad of the Unapproachable Maidens," Ah Chee began singing, slowly and softly, something of her own composition, improvising the accompaniment on the dulcimer:

"Dim grow my eyes with the waters of sorrow;
Small grows my heart in the grip of fear;
For now to my Balcony of Beauteous Night
My lover no more ——"

SUDDENLY, as though materialized from the air, a figure swung to the floor by Ah Chee's table. The girl checked a cry of fright, and sprang up.

"Lee Quan!"

"Good evening, Ah Chee!" said Lee Quan calmly. He drew a stool from beneath the table and sat down opposite the girl. He was a slender youth, becomingly dressed in American clothes. His dark eyes were quiet, thoughtful. *"Ts'ing tso!"* he went on in musical Cantonese. "Please sit down."

Ah Chee stopped staring at Lee Quan, and looked around. Dangling from the cornice of the building, above the paper lanterns, were the two ends of a light, strong

silk rope. Yet the girl knew that Lee Quan could not have come from her father's roof, for Soo Wang, fearing thieves, had barred all approaches to the roof. So Ah Chee looker farther.

Across an alley, some fifteen feet or more, stood a building the roof of which was but slightly higher than Ah Chee's balcony. Lee Quan had stood on the edge of this roof, thrown the loop of his rope over the cornice, then swung across the dizzy gap to the balcony.

"Oh!" gasped Ah Chee. "You might have been killed!"

"Thank you!" said Lee Quan, bowing.

"And you must not stay! My father—"

"Is at the store inventorying his stock of *Ng Ka Py*. Your mother and the servants have gone to the street. We are safe."

Lee Quan got out a cigarette, and lighted it.

"I came to tell you, Ah Chee, that you are to pawn your jewelry only as a last resort. I am sure I can raise the two thousand dollars demanded by your father as the price of your betrothal. In fact, only this afternoon I learned something that may enable me to earn the money in just a few days."

"Oh, how can you do that? So much money in so short a time!"

Lee Quan hesitated. In the dim light, Ah Chee could see his head bowed, could not read the expression on his face.

"I think," said Lee Quan slowly, "that it would be better for me not to tell you that."

"Oh!"

There was a moment of awkward silence.

"But Lee Quan, listen!" exclaimed the girl suddenly. "Today, Bo Ch'at came to see my father about me. Oh, how I hate that man! Every night I pray the Mother of Heaven that some one will split his head with one of his own cleavers and that they will bury him where his bones will get wet and mildew.

"Well, I hid behind a screen and listened. It was very improper, but I don't care. I heard my father—may his lucky star auspiciously shine—my father told him that I was already betrothed to you. Bo Ch'at became very angry. He said a terrible thing about you. I know it isn't true, is it?"

"Of course not," smiled Lee Quan. "But what did that tub of old lard have to say about me?"

"He said that you earn your rice selling the forbidden white drug—morphine. He told my father that some day the Federal officials will catch you and send you to jail. He said that in three days he will prove that you are one of these terrible drug-peddlers. *Haie!* Bo Ch'at speaks lying words. May devils pluck out his wicked tongue!"

LEE QUAN was strangely silent. Trying to read his face in the dim light, Ah Chee saw the red tip of his cigarette slowly and steadily creep toward his lips.

Presently Lee Quan spoke in English:

"Isn't it too bad, Ah Chee, that I am what the Americans call 'an educated Chink?' If I belonged to the old generation, my problem could be easily solved. Bo Ch'at is my enemy. For a trifling sum I could hire a professional knifeman to run a blade through Bo Ch'at. Exit—Bo Ch'at!

"But,"—Lee Quan shook his head with mock seriousness,—"in complex, civilized America, killing one's enemy is not in good taste. It simply isn't done. So I must watch, must find some other way to outwit my rival."

"You can do it!" declared Ah Chee. "You are just as clever as Bo Ch'at is wicked. But Quan, you must be wary! My father suspects that Bo Ch'at will set a snare for your feet. He has sent Wing to watch Bo Ch'at; and he has sent Ah Lim to watch you."

"To watch me!" Lee Quan glanced quickly to the roof across the alley.

"Yes. And this evening Ah Lim reported that your father has driven you away from home, that you have taken a room on Canton Street. Ah, Quan, why did your father do that?"

Lee Quan tossed his cigarette-stub over the railing, and lighted another.

"I do not blame my father, Ah Chee. He belongs to the old order, and does not understand. He offered to advance the money to start me in any business I would choose; and while I appreciated his offer, and told him so in the best way I knew, I cannot give up my painting. There is no race, and through all history there has been no race, with so keen an appreciation of color-values as the Chinese. Does not the whole world bow to the marvelous color-work of our old porcelains? Foreigners have spent their whole lives, studying, analyzing, trying to explain the beauty, the

mystery of the Chinese eye for delicate, elusive colors.

"So I told my old father politely that since there is no sure road to riches, I would follow the path I love—and he sent me away in anger. Ah, that reminds me!"

Lee Quan laid down his cigarette. From his inner coat pocket he took something wrapped in many folds of tissue paper, unwrapped it, and disclosed a small plaque of white Ningpo wood. He held it so that the light from the lanterns behind Ah Chee illumined the face of the wood.

On this plaque, in deft touches of color, Lee Quan had painted a miniature of the bay as it appears from the hills of Chinatown. Above the blue water, white gulls wheeled in the sunshine. Beyond lay the Berkeley hills, green and peaceful.

"You know," said the artist, "how our old people long always for just one more glimpse of their native land before they close their eyes for the long sleep. Every spring my father becomes almost ill, thinking of the flowers blooming on the hills back of his old home in Kwantung. So I have painted this for him; and beneath it I have written this verse that—"

OUT of the darkened hallway back of Ah Chee came a voice in sharp, guttural Cantonese:

"Daughter! Who is that man?"

"Haie-e!" cried Ah Chee, springing up. "My father!"

"Good night!" exclaimed Lee Quan in flippant but emphatic English. He leaped up and started for his rope, still hanging from the cornice. Then, abruptly, he stopped. Soo Wang, calling to his daughter, was shuffling rapidly down the hallway toward the balcony. Lee Quan knew he could escape; but there was no time to swing from the balcony to the roof before Soo Wang would see him. This would leave Ah Chee alone to face her father's anger.

There was only one way to get out of sight quickly. Lee took it. He dropped to his knees. With considerably more agility than dignity, the Chinese artist crawled beneath the bamboo table.

Ah Chee turned with her back to the table, and waited. For once in her life she wished that she wore skirts. Her modest Chinese trousers did not offer much concealment for the man beneath the table.

Soo Wang emerged from the hallway into the light. He frowned at Ah Chee, then glanced quickly over her shoulder. "Oh," he exclaimed, "it's you! What are you doing here?"

Ah Chee swung around. There, grinning and bowing as usual, was Ah Lim. Looking up, the girl saw that now two ropes hung from the cornice above the paper lanterns.

"Daughter," said Soo Wang, "you may go."

Ah Chee picked up her dulcimer and walked away from the table—walked slowly, for her heart had grown small with fear. Ah Lim must have been watching from that roof all the time. Now Lee Quan was in a trap.

Ah Chee moved down the hallway, opened—and closed the door of her room. Then, stealthily, she went back to the heavy shadows by the balcony door and waited.

CHAPTER VI

"White gleam the gulls across the darkling tide!"

SOO WANG took the stool his daughter had just left, and sat down.

"Ah Lim," he said, "you bow and scrape and grin like a Buddhist priest full of wine. Sit down! Moreover, much as I hate the odor of the thing, I'd rather you'd eat your smoke than burn my furniture.

"Yes, sire!" Ah Lim moved quickly to the table, took the stool Lee Quan had left, and sat down. Before him, its burning tip scorching the lacquered bamboo, was Lee Quan's cigarette where he had laid it when he got out the picture to show Ah Chee. Ah Lim picked it up, flicked off the ash with a jaunty flourish, and stuck the cigarette between his lips. Neither man noticed Lee Quan's miniature.

"Well," said Soo Wang, "what are you doing here? Where is Lee Quan?" He bent over the table, his slender fingers combing his thin, gray beard.

"Lee Quan is in bed, sire." Beneath the table, Ah Lim dug the toe of his slipper in Lee Quan's ribs.

"How do you know?"

"Because, from a roof near the window of his room I saw him. He is in Room No. 5. For a while he read the American Bible and—"

"The American Bible!" snorted Soo Wang. *"Kuai!* Isn't the religion of his ancestors good enough for him?"

"Yes, sire. As I was saying, when he finished his American Bible, he knelt before his ancestral tablets and prayed long and earnestly; and then he sought his grass-seed pillow and went quickly to sleep." Again Ah Lim nudged Lee Quan with his slipper.

"And is that all you know?"

"No, sire. As I told you this evening, it was late before I learned that Lee Quan's father had forced him to leave home and that he had taken a room at the House of Morning Twilight. Well, by the time I located the room, Lee Quan had gone out. I concealed myself in a doorway and waited for him to return."

"How did you know he was out?"

"Well, sire, the House of Morning Twilight is one of those inexpensive, homelike rooming-houses where one never thinks of locking one's door. So, after I had waited awhile, I went down the hall and opened Lee Quan's door. Had he been there, I would have pretended that I had made a mistake. But he was not there.

"While I was waiting for Lee Quan to return, a very strange thing happened. Down the hall came an old man. At first I paid no attention to him, thought him one of the roomers; but when he passed Lee Quan's door the third time, I began to be suspicious.

"Finally the old man tried the knob, then opened the door. Again he looked warily up and down the hall, but he could not see me. He went in and closed the door.

"He was in there only about as long as it takes to change one's socks; then he came out and hurried down the hall and out of the building. As he passed me, I recognized him. It was old Ah Kee, the opium-slave."

THERE was a moment of silence.

"What business," asked Soo Wang in a strange voice, "would an opium-user have with Lee Quan?"

"I don't know. Maybe," chuckled Ah Lim, and again his foot found Lee Quan's ribs, "maybe Lee Quan hits the pipe himself; or maybe he peddles opium and morphine and—"

"Silence! You—you don't know—what you say!"

"Yes, sire."

"Leave me, Ah Lim! I must meditate!"

"Yes, sire; but have I done wrong?"

"No. Watch as usual. Now leave me."

"Yes, sire." Ah Lim bowed, and passed down the hallway.

For a long time Soo Wang sat like one stupid with opium. He did not seem to hear the shuffling feet, the chatter of voices in the street below, the muffled wail of flageolets in the restaurant across the way.

"By the Holy One, it must be true!" he groaned aloud. "And my Thousand of Gold—loves him!"

He bowed his head; and his hands, groping across the table, came in contact with a plaque of wood. Curious, Soo Wang sat up, and held the object to the light.

For a long time the old man gazed at the picture—the blue water, the white gulls wheeling in the sunshine, the hills green and peaceful. Then, slowly, reverently, the words of Lee Quan's poem fell from the old man's lips like the weirdly musical chant of some priest of the Orient:

"Snow-water laughs, running to join the brook;
In the sunshine, birds gleam.
Hills are green; brightly they shine with flowers.
Aih-yah! Oh, how piteous!
For this is spring again; aid I
An exile.....
A thousand, thousand li from home!"

With the last words Soo Wang's voice quavered and broke. He struggled to his feet. His head bowed, his trembling hands pressing the miniature to his breast, Soo Wang stumbled blindly down the hallway to his room. . . . . .

Lee Quan had wrapped the silk rope about his wrists and was ready to swing across the alley to the roof, when he heard a step on the balcony behind him. It was Ah Chee.

"Oh, Quan, I heard everything! What does it mean? Is it a trap for your feet?"

"Have no worry, Little One," Lee Quan spoke kindly. "The Eye of Heaven sees all human actions; therefore what is evil cannot long prevail. And I have been thinking! It is nothing strange that Bo Ch'at should want me out of his way; the queer thing is the method he has chosen. He charges me with selling morphine. *Morphine!* What made him think of *that?*"

CHAPTER VII

"If you hit a tiger and do not kill him—"

IT was growing dark when Ah Kee left the opium-den and shuffled down Canton Street, his head up, his eyes burning. He

knew from bitter experience that it would be folly to try to escape from Bo Ch'at. For a time he might bury himself in one of Chinatown's secret haunts, or in some den up the river; but it would not be for long. Bo Ch'at's spies were everywhere, his vengeance swift and terrible.

At the junction of Canton Street and Shrimp Alley, Ah Kee entered a Chinese drugstore. If his purchase aroused any curiosity, the clerk did not betray it by asking questions. He wrapped the two parcels. Ah Kee paid for them, and left.

A moment later Ah Kee entered the House of Morning Twilight and made his way up to Room No. 5. In less than five minutes he was on the street again.

Leaving Canton Street, Ah Kee turned down the Alley of Lingering Shadows and into the rear entrance of Bo Ch'at's meat-market. The bookkeeper and the clerks were there, for only the indolent white foreign devils close their shops and offices before nine o'clock at night. Without a word he passed the bookkeeper and made his way down to the secret room. Bo Ch'at was not there, for which Ah Kee was thankful.

Ah Kee knew what to do, and he lost no time getting at it.

He was weighing out morphine when Bo Ch'at's rap sounded on the door, the sharp, swift *rat-a-tat* of long nails. Trembling in spite of his determination, Ah Kee opened the door.

A long time Bo Ch'at studied Ah Kee's face.

"Spawn of a turtle! Where have you been? What have you been doing? What kept you so long?"

"I was not gone so long, master. I returned, and have been working. I—"

Ah Kee's voice wavered and broke. He could not face the baleful glitter in Bo Ch'at's drooping eyes.

"You lie, Ah Kee. I waited long, then went to seek you. I saw you just as you left the House of Morning Twilight. I followed you here. Do you mean to tell me you were all afternoon trying to get into Lee Quan's room?"

"Just that, master. For Lee Quan was in his room. He did not go out to evening rice until late."

"And when he did go—"

Ah Kee looked up, looked into Bo Ch'at's sullen eyes.

"When he did go, I put two packages of white drug in his room."

"Your word," said Bo Ch'at after a long silence, "is not worth a candarin; but I hope you're not lying now. If you are, I shall find it out; and then—"

Thumb to thumb, Bo Ch'at held his powerful hands before the old man's face, then clutched quickly at some imaginary object and tore it asunder.

Ah Kee shuddered; but now his eyes were meeting Bo Ch'at's watchfully, half-defiantly.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded the drug-vender suddenly. "You act as if you have had more opium."

"I have not," Ah Kee lied calmly. "I want more. You promised it."

"I forgot to bring it," said Bo Ch'at easily. "I'll bring it tonight. Now get to work."

HE took a package from beneath his blouse, unwrapped it, and set it on the table.

"You tell me that my customers still complain that I cheat them on weight." Bo Ch'at laughed. "Just as if they expected anyone in this miserable business to be honorable! Well, give them correct weight for a while, but adulterate it with this. It is sugar of milk, an American drug. Put in plenty. It is harmless. What is more important, it is very cheap. Ha! That way we cheat the fools even more, but they don't know it."

Ah Kee took the morphine off the scales and dumped it on a large sheet of paper. To this drug he added a liberal quantity of the sugar of milk. When he had mixed it thoroughly, he began his weighing.

In a half-hour Ah Kee had finished. On the table lay a large number of packages wrapped in butcher's paper. Each package contained a number of ordinary Chinese sausages. Four sausages in each package contained morphine in waxed paper.

Ah Kee took one of the packages and went upstairs. He strolled casually through the shop, spoke to several of the clerks, then walked out the front door and turned down the street. Under his arm, in plain sight, was the package of sausage.

Two plain-clothes officers of the Chinatown police squad, standing at the corner, glanced at Ah Kee, saw the package, and gave him no further thought. Why suspect a Chinaman carrying home meat for his morning meal?

Ah Kee took a cable-car up the hill,

transferred to a cross-town line, and alighted in one of the fashionable apartment sections. At one of these apartment-houses he rang the bell—a short, a long, and a quick short again. The door opened presently, and a white man with pale face and sleek black hair stepped out, nodded curtly to Ah Kee and accepted the package. As he did so, he slipped something into Ah Kee's hand. Ah Kee took a quick glance, saw that it was two twenties and a ten, and deftly palmed the fifty dollars.

Twenty minutes later Ah Kee was again in the secret room with Bo Ch'at. He gave Bo Ch'at the money, and left with another package of "sausage."

BY the time Bo Ch'at was ready to close the store,—nine o'clock was the usual hour,—all the packages had been delivered.

"The wise man," chuckled Bo Ch'at, when he had finished counting the night's profits, "is the one who can make profit out of the mistakes of others."

"That is true," Ah Kee spoke up boldly. "And who made a greater mistake than I?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Bo Ch'at, a surprised look in his widened eyes.

"For years I have been a slave," replied Ah Kee, his voice still deep with the sleepy rumble of the confirmed opium-addict. "I have been a slave to opium; but I have been in even greater slavery to you. Opium has given me many hours of almost unendurable happiness; you have given me only abuse. You have made me take all the chances in this drug-traffic; for yourself you have kept all the profits."

"By the Three Green Devils!" laughed Bo Ch'at. "Well said! I didn't know you had it in you. Ah-ha! It is as I thought. You have had more opium! It is not you who talks so boldly and cleverly; it is the demon of the drug. Well, where did you get it?"

Ah Kee, suddenly frightened at his own boldness, did not answer.

"And *how* did you get it?" went on Bo Ch'at. "By what trick did you get money to buy opium? Answer me!"

But he did not wait for Ah Kee to answer. He caught him by the throat, backed him against the wall, searched his clothes, and drew forth a sum of money. It was the balance of the money Ah Kee received from the sale of the morphine intended for Lee Quan's room. Bo Ch'at looked at it a moment, then put it into his own pocket.

"So! There is some trick! I give you two packages of morphine to put in Lee Quan's room. You come back with your pockets full of money and your head full of opium. Wait!" With his open hand he struck the old man in the mouth. "Don't speak until you are ready to tell the truth."

"It is the truth, master. I put two packages of white drug in Lee Quan's room."

"Then where did you get this money?"

"A friend—owed it to me."

Swiftly, Bo Ch'at struck the old man again. He staggered, fell. Bo Ch'at bent over him.

"Lies! Lies! Truth and opium are never found in the same head. Tomorrow I will know the truth. The officials will search Lee Quan's room. What they find, I shall know quickly. And if you have tricked me—may the Evil One help you!"

When the door had closed behind Bo Ch'at, Ah Kee arose and staggered to the table. There he sat down—and waited.

An hour later, when he was sure that everyone had left the store, Ah Kee made his way upstairs, then down by the regular stairway to the basement kitchen. There he lighted the gas and heated a bowl of soup, his only food for the day. He had had so much opium that the hot soup brought on a pleasant sense of drowsiness.

Returning to the main floor, Ah Kee searched around the shop until he found what he wanted, then went down to the secret room. Moving like one following a carefully thought-out plan, he got a few cords from the table drawer, then crawled beneath the table. When his task was finished, he took the bed-roll from the corner, spread it on the floor, and prepared for bed. About to turn out the light, he decided to take a last look beneath the table.

Fastened with cords to the table frame, where Bo Ch'at would not see it, but where Ah Kee could grasp it quickly, was a heavy, keen-edged cleaver.

CHAPTER VIII

"Prince We'ng, frightened by a harmless serpent, left the straight path to go around —and a tiger ate him!"

AT half-past eight Harry Brown, narcotic agent-in-charge, threw aside the morning paper to take the mail brought him by a clerk. Among the other letters, this morning, he found a cheap white en-

velope bearing his name and address in a wretchedly scrawled hand. At first he thought the envelope contained a piece of cloth, but it proved to be a folded sheet of rice-paper. On this paper were several columns of Chinese characters.

"Ellwood," Brown said to his confidential inspector, "step downstairs and ask Wong to come up a minute."

Wong was a post-office clerk in charge of the Chinese mail. He was in the confidence of many government officials. So far as anyone ever knew, he had kept his trust.

"Wong," said Brown, when Ellwood and the Chinese entered, "here's another batch of hen-tracks for you. For heaven's sake, why don't the Chinese learn to write English?"

"Aw, English too old-fashioned and difficult," retorted Wong, smiling. "Chinese writing is like American shorthand—phonetic, composed of sounds and syllables. It's short, simple, rapid. Why, I know a man on the *Chronicle* who makes all his notes in Chinese, keeps his telephone-numbers in Chinese so his wife can't read them. It's the oldest and best shorthand system known. Any intelligent person——"

Abruptly, Wong dropped his good-natured persiflage. His lips hardened; his dark eyes grew wide. "Mr. Brown," he said quietly, "this letter says that you will find morphine in Room No. 5, occupied by Lee Quan, a drug-peddler, at No. 21 Canton Street."

"I supposed it was something like that. Do you know this Lee Quan?"

"I know of him. He paints pictures. His father is a worker in gold and jade and very wealthy. I don't see why Lee Quan should have to sell morphine for a living. Personally, I think this letter is a malicious lie; but I don't want to influence you. If Lee Quan is bringing disgrace on our people by dealing in these terrible drugs, then go get him!"

"Any clue there as to who wrote the letter?" asked Brown.

Wong shook his head. "Ordinary rice-paper. You'll find it everywhere among the Chinese. The writing was most likely done by a merchant or his clerk. This is not the classic style used in books and written by scholars; it is the running script adopted for business correspondence."

"That doesn't help much," concluded Brown. "Well, we'll see about it. Much obliged, Wong."

"Somebody in Chinatown is wholesaling a lot of white stuff," spoke up Inspector Ellwood. "We know it, but we've never been able to run it down. Maybe this will give us a lead."

FROM such of his force as could be taken from their other cases, Brown selected five men who had had experience in Chinatown. Brown intended to lead the investigation himself, making six. Chinatown had been found to be such a maze of hidden avenues of escape that it took no less than six men to make sure that nothing got away during the raid, and then they were never sure.

Shortly after nine they left the Customhouse, singly and by separate exits. Brown noticed an unusual number of Chinese loitering in the hallways, but he did not pause to investigate. Each man taking a different route, the squad strolled casually into Chinatown. Two men circled around to the rear of No. 21 Canton Street and took up stations where they could watch the rear doors and the back roofs. Two others did the same at the front of the building. Brown and Ellwood went quickly and quietly up the stairs to Room No. 5.

Brown tried the door, found it unlocked and went in. Inspector Ellwood followed, closed the door again and stood with his back to it. He folded his arms with an assumption of lazy indifference, but his right hand rested on the pistol in his shoulder holster.

It was a small room, plainly but neatly furnished. In addition to the usual furniture of a hotel room, there was a large table covered with books, paints, oils, brushes and similar material all orderly arranged. The walls were hung with small paintings. The one window was open, disclosing a gravel roof some six or eight feet from the sill—an excellent get-away, Brown thought.

Standing by the window, before an easel, was a young Chinese dressed in American clothes. As the officers entered, he turned to them and smiled.

"Good morning, gentlemen! What can I do for you?"

Brown showed his badge.

"We're Federal agents. Want to take a look-see. What's your name?"

"Lee Quan."

Rapidly, Brown ran a practiced hand over Lee Quan's clothes.

"He's clean," Brown announced—by

which Ellwood knew that the Chinaman carried no weapons. Ellwood unfolded his arms.

"Sit down, Lee," Brown ordered. "We wont disturb you or your things."

Lee Quan obeyed.

"Evidently some one has informed on me," he told Brown. "May I ask who it was?"

"I don't know," replied Brown truthfully. "I wouldn't tell you if I did. We can't give out such information. I can tell you, however, that some one has tipped you off. Maybe you know who it was?"

BROWN knew that very often anonymous tips came from drug-peddlers eager to see a competitor put out of business. By setting one against the other, he had frequently been able to round up the whole nest. Lee Quan, however, did not seem disposed to talk.

After a casual examination of the room, including an inventory of everything found in Lee Quan's pockets, Brown, with Ellwood's assistance, settled down to a systematic search. The walls, the ceiling and the floor were carefully gone over for secret panels and doors. The table, the chair and the painting easel were examined. Brown went through the books, flipped the pages of Egan Mew's "Monograph on Old Chinese Porcelains," looked into Petrucci's "Chinese Painters," and gave it up. There was not a thing to indicate in any way that this man was engaged in the illicit drug-traffic.

He faced Lee Quan and spoke sharply.

"See here, Lee! We got the goods on you. We know you've been peddling morphine. My men have seen you sell to dope-users. We know you have morphine right here in this room. If you want to open up and get off easy, now's the chance. Otherwise we'll find the stuff if we have to rip the whole house to splinters."

Lee Quan smiled.

"I wont get angry, Mr. Brown. I suppose in your business you have to bluff and threaten. In this particular case, perhaps I can help you. If you will be so kind as—"

A sudden commotion outside the door drowned Lee Quan's words. Ellwood opened the door. Inspector Edwards strode in, dragging an angry and much frightened Chinese.

"Shut up, you!" Edwards ordered, shaking his prisoner. "I'll do all the talking necessary just now." He turned to Brown. "Found this Chink in the hall. There's a lot of excitement in Chinatown over something. Bunches of them standing around in front of them red bulletin-boards reading their puzzle pictures and jabbering. Thought I'd come up and see how things were going. This guy acted suspiciously, and I gave him a frisk. Here's what I found—two packages of morphine."

He flung the opened parcels on the table. They had been wrapped in green paper and tied with green string. Each package was about twice the size of an ordinary pill box and contained a white, flaky substance.

Brown picked up one of the papers, touched the tip of his tongue to the drug.

"Morphine sulphate," he said tersely. He turned to Edwards' prisoner. "Who are you?"

"I am Ah Lim. I—"

Lee Quan cut in quickly with something in Cantonese. Then he addressed Brown.

"This looks bad, and I see my mistake. In trying to get out of a snare I have fallen into a deeper pit. Let me explain that this is my friend Ah Lim. Ah Lim, will you please tell these officers what you saw yesterday?"

AH LIM bobbed his head and once more managed to grin. Rapidly, in fair English, he told how Soo Wang had sent him to watch Lee Quan, and how he had seen Ah Kee sneak into Lee Quan's room.

"Who's Ah Kee?" interrupted Brown.

"I know him, Chief," spoke up Ellwood. "He's a hop-head. Works in some butcher-shop. More'n likely he came up here to make a buy, eh?"

"Certainly," agreed Brown. "Lee Quan, do you think I'm foolish enough to swallow that story? You're selling dope. Ah Kee came up here to buy. This man, Ah Lim, was delivering stuff for you, or maybe he was delivering from a smuggler to you. Ah Lim, where did you get this morphine?"

"From Lee Quan."

"Ah! Then you were delivering for him. Where—"

"No," interrupted Ah Lim, "I was keeping this for him until he called for it."

"Until after we got through searching, eh? Clever! Well, this is getting interesting. We'll just flop here awhile and see who calls on Mr. Lee Quan."

"Gentlemen, please let me explain,"

begged Lee Quan, his face grave. "This is a plot. Ah Lim told me he had seen Ah Kee enter my room. I became suspicious. I searched carefully, and found those two packages.

"I knew it was a trap. I knew that whoever had Ah Kee put that stuff in my room would tell you officers that it was here. So I waited for you. But I wanted to explain everything, then give you the morphine. That's why I gave it to Ah Lim to keep for me. It never occurred to me that you would find him in the hall and search him."

Brown and his men exchanged glances, and shook their heads. This surely was a puzzler!

"Lee Quan," said Brown, "I'll have to place you and Ah Lim under arrest until I can investigate your story. Frankly, I don't know whether you're lying or not; but it ought not to take long to find out."

He turned to his men.

"Ellwood, take Ah Lim to my office. I'll follow in a minute. Try to avoid attracting attention in Chinatown. If Ah Lim tries to speak to anyone, choke him off quickly.

"Edwards, go out back and tell Westing to stick. Tell Mason to follow you to this room. Who knows this Ah Kee besides you, Ellwood?

"Summers knows him. I left him down in front."

"Good. As you go out with Ah Lim, tell Summers to scout around and see if he can pick up Ah Kee. If he gets him, tell him to bring him right down to my office.

Ellwood and Ah Lim left at once, going down the front stairs. Edwards went out the back way.

"Mr. Brown," said Lee Quan, the moment they were alone, "I hope there wont be any disagreeable publicity about my arrest. I—"

Brown's eyes struck fire.

"Lee Quan, I don't give a damn what you hope. A drug-peddler is the lowest criminal unhung. If you're a drug-peddler, then you know what I think of you. Publicity? Why, if I had my way, the only publicity a dope-peddler would get is a funeral notice."

Edwards returned, followed by Inspector Mason.

"You two stay here," Brown directed. "Keep quiet. Nab every person who comes to that door. No matter what they say, don't turn anyone loose until I can question them. You understand? —Well come on, Lee!"

They passed out, and turned down the hall. When they reached the street, Agent Brown looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock.

CHAPTER IX

"Loving hearts find peace in love; clever heads make profit out of it!"

THE morning sun, creeping slowly above the tin and gravel roofs of Chinatown, struck in a splash of gold on the big window of Soo Wang's study-room. Inside Ah Chee had just served her father, seated at the teak-wood table by the window, to his usual morning bowl of *Ng Ka Py*. Soo Wang sipped it slowly, for the *Ng Ka Py* was raw and fiery, and with many noisy smacking of the lips, which as anyone knows is the proper way to show one's appreciation of good tea or liquor. When but a few drops remained, Soo Wang drained the bowl into the palm of his hand; then, throwing back the sleeve of his robe, he rubbed the *Ng Ka Py* briskly over his right elbow where his rheumatism afflicted him most often.

Presently a servant announced that Mr. Sutherland, the white man who attended to all of Soo Wang's Customhouse papers, wanted to see him regarding a very important matter.

The broker was brought in, a young man with alert eye and brisk step. He took the stool opposite the rich merchant. Soo Wang told his daughter to remain. He needed her, of course, to interpret.

"Tell Mr. Soo," began the broker, "that all the morning papers carry a Washington dispatch stating that the Prohibition Commissioner has issued an order forbidding any further importation of *Ng Ka Py*. I have just come from the Customhouse. The dispatch is true. This morning the local Customs-office received a night-letter from Washington instructing them to refuse all further requests for *Ng Ka Py*."

There was considerable talk between Ah Chee and her father. Then:

"Why have they done that?" asked Ah Chee. "*Ng Ka Py* is a medicine; it is not a liquor. The Chinese have used it for centuries. You have never seen a drunken Chinese, have you? Why does your Pro-

hibition Commissioner now say the Chinese can have no more of this old medicine?"

"I guess he wants to be on the safe side. It is true that one never sees a drunken Chinese. But chemists have analyzed *Ng Ka Py* for the Government and found that it contains over fifty per cent alcohol and can be used as a beverage."

"That may be true," argued Ah Chee, after a talk with her father; "but it also contains medicine. The Chinese take the spirits obtained by distilling millet and infuse in it nine different herbs. There is *gee tsz, hong hai pei, ning gong*—"

"I admit all that," interrupted Sutherland, smiling. "I know the stuff tastes like a last year's bird's-nest and smells to high heaven. I know that a white man in his right mind wont drink the stuff. I tried it once. I had to hold my nose to keep from smelling it; and when I let go my nose, the stuff came back up. However, I'm not making this rule. I'm merely telling you what's what. It's done, and you can't get around it."

"May we use what stock we have on hand?"

"Yes. And that's why I wanted to see you at once. As soon as this order becomes generally known, and there is considerable excitement on the street already, the price of *Ng Ka Py* will go up like a rocket. It is forty dollars a case now; it will be a hundred within thirty days. Hang on to what you have for a higher price."

ALL this Ah Chee related to her father. Soo Wang appeared much excited. There was a long exchange of rapid Cantonese. When Soo Wang finished, he was pounding the table with both fists and spluttering in a most undignified manner.

"My father says to tell you that some one has tricked him," Ah Chee announced calmly. "Yesterday afternoon he sold his entire stock of *Ng Ka Py*."

"What! Who bought it?"

"A broker named Gerhart."

Sutherland stared. "I don't understand that. I know positively that Gerhart had no inkling of this new order yesterday. He was as much surprised this morning as the rest of us. How much did he pay a case?"

"He didn't buy it outright. He paid five hundred dollars cash for an option tying up father's entire stock of *Ng Ka Py* for thirty days. He offered such a good price per case that father, thinking he could readily withdraw more from the Customs warehouse, signed the option."

"Looks queer, Miss Soo! Ask your father if I may see that option."

Soo Wang, in answer to Ah Chee, shouted something in angry Cantonese and waved toward the store. Ah Chee left. When she returned, she handed Sutherland a folded paper.

"The man who tied your father up with this will make a nice fortune overnight," said the broker. "I'd like to know how he knew about this order; for unless he knew of it, he wouldn't be likely to load on so much stuff as your father has in stock. Well, this looks like Gerhart's signature. And here! What's this, Miss Soo? Probably the name of the principal, but it's written in Chinese, the same as Soo Wang's."

Ah Chee took the paper, glanced at it, and an astounded expression swept over her face. Slowly she laid the paper on the desk beneath her father's eyes.

Soo Wang put a finger on the Chinese characters at the bottom of the option, and shouted:

"Lee Quan!"

"Who is Lee Quan?" asked Sutherland.

"He is just a young man, but he is very bright," replied Ah Chee, her eyes shining.

"I'll say he's bright, all right!" laughed the broker. "He'll make a barrel of money. What business is he in?"

"He is not in business. He is an artist."

"An artist! What does an artist want with all this *Ng Ka Py?* Has he ever bought any from you before?"

"Father says he has not; but there isn't anything dishonest about this, is there?"

"Not in the least. It's a square business proposition. Wish I was in on it myself. But the funny thing is this: how did it happen that Lee Quan goes to the biggest importer in Chinatown only a few hours before this prohibitory order and ties up Soo Wang's entire stock?"

Ah Chee was beaming over her father's peacock fan.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir; but Mr. Lee has many influential friends among the Americans. Everybody likes him. Some day he will be a very famous Chinese painter. But Father is asking if there is any way he can break this contract?"

Sutherland's reply was emphatic.

"Not a chance! Lee Quan has your father tied hand and foot!"

TWENTY minutes later Soo Wang, too disturbed to eat, gulped several bowls of steaming hot tea, put on his street slippers, and exchanged his study cap for one of plain black.

"Daughter," he said, "many a trapped animal has escaped by leaving its gnawed-off foot in the steel. Well, I am going to the House of Morning Twilight to see Lee Quan. I shall ask his price to release me from this hateful paper. With good luck I may yet save my face as a maker of bargains."

"Lee Quan is very young and knows nothing of business," Ah Chee taunted him, laughing. "You should—"

But Soo Wang had gone, slamming the door behind him. Ah Chee, knowing she would have to remain in the store until her father returned, drew back her sleeve and looked at her watch. It was ten o'clock.

CHAPTER X

"Life flickers like a wick; a passing breath blows all our joys away!"

THE gilded hands of the clock in the window of the Celestial Brightness Jewelry Store were pointing to half-past ten when an elderly Chinese turned in at No. 21 Canton Street and with steady, dignified step mounted the stairs to the House of Morning Twilight. On these bare stairs, clean but unpainted, the man stood out in sharp contrast. His jacket was of the finest satin. The glasses that set off his strong, intellectual countenance were rimmed with gold. His padded slippers were heavily figured with silk.

At the landing, the man paused and looked around, his long fingers toying nervously with the polished handle of his cane. Then with head up, he moved quietly down the hall and rapped at the door of No. 5.

The door opened; a hand flashed out. It caught the man by the wrist and jerked him unceremoniously into the room. Another hand, rough and heavy, closed over his mouth, choking his startled cry.

One of the white men showed a badge. The Chinese continued to struggle, for it was well known that thieves often tricked their victims by pretending to be officers. Moreover, one of the white men was searching the old man's pockets.

"He's clean!" whispered Edwards, taking away the cane.

The other officer released his prisoner; and instantly the Chinese raised his voice in a shrill cry for help. Edwards clapped his hand over the man's mouth. "Shut up!" he hissed in the man's ear. "We're officers; we wont hurt you!" But the Chinese, not understanding a word of English, continued to struggle. Since there was nothing else to do, the officers handcuffed him, gagged him and shoved him into a chair.

"Well!" breathed Inspector Mason. "Wonder who this old bird is? Don't look like a hop. Maybe a peddler, but I'd never think it. Doesn't seem to understand English."

"Can't tell about that," argued Edwards. "That's an old trick. Whenever a Chinaman doesn't want to talk, he falls back on that old 'No savvy.' And that's all—"

Edwards broke off, and raised a warning hand. There was a step in the hall, then a quiet, hesitant rap on the door.

Before the rap had ended, Edwards opened the door, struck out swiftly and caught the upraised wrist in a grip of steel. A quick jerk, and he had his prisoner in the room. His big hand choked off a frightened scream.

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed Edwards in disgust. "It's a girl!"

Inspector Mason closed the door.

"Be still!" Edwards whispered to the struggling girl. "We're officers. Do you understand English?"

The girl managed to nod.

"Then be quiet, and I'll release you. Understand?"

The girl managed another nod. Edwards released her.

"What is the matter?" the girl demanded excitedly, tears springing to her eyes. Then, as she caught sight of the old man, gagged and handcuffed, she uttered a cry of mingled pity and dismay.

"Not so loud!" cautioned Edwards. "Listen to me a moment! Who are you?"

"I am Ah Sen."

"Where do you live?"

"In Oakland."

"Do you know Lee Quan, the man who occupies this room?"

"Yes sir."

"What business have you with him?"

"I sell his paintings for him."

"Sure you don't sell morphine for him?"

"Morphine? I don't understand you."

MASON whispered in Edwards ear. "That doesn't sound right. You know well enough that a Chinese girl would have to have more reason than selling pictures before she would go to a man's room like this. Chinese girls don't do such things. She's pretty much upset about something."

"Well, what are you going to do?" returned Edwards. "We can't search her. And talking is just a waste of time. We'll just have to wait until we can take her down to the office and have Miss Watkins look her over if the Chief thinks it necessary."

He turned to the girl. With a nod he indicated their other prisoner.

"Do you know this man?"

"Yes sir. His name is Lee Fong. He is the father of Lee Quan.

"Ah! What do you know about him?"

"He is an honorable merchant. He has never dealt in morphine or opium."

"Well, he put up quite a fight when he came in. Explain to him that we are Government officers. Tell him if he will behave himself we'll remove the gag and handcuffs."

This was done. And the instant the gag was removed, Lee Fong poured out a volley of high-pitched gutturals.

"He says that he mistook you for thieves," translated the girl. He wants to know why you are in his son's room."

Before Edwards could reply, Inspector Mason drew him aside. "Have a heart now, Edwards," he whispered. "I've been studying that girl and the old man. She's a classy dresser and a swell looker; and so is he. I think they are all right. Maybe Lee Quan is mixed up in this dirty drug-business, and maybe he isn't. I wouldn't tell the old man or the girl about it—yet."

Edwards shook his head. "You're too easy. I think we should throw a scare into them. Tell them Lee Quan has confessed and implicated them. See?"

"Sure, I know the game; but I wouldn't do it—yet. Better wait until the Chief comes. Just listen to that jabber!"

Lee Quan's father and the girl were whispering in their native tongue.

"Why are these men here?" demanded Lee Fong. "Is my boy in trouble?"

"No sir. He is helping these men lay a trap for thieves."

"But didn't you say they were Government officers?"

"Yes sir."

"Then I do not understand. What have Government officers to do with thieves? I thought the *suey kwan hou* searched only for smuggled opium and other drugs."

"Yes, now that you speak of it, I know that is true. Perhaps the thieves have stolen smuggled opium."

Lee Fong shook his head slowly. "I do not understand. Why should these men lie in wait in my son's room for thieves who have stolen smuggled opium? *Aih-yah!* I should never have sent my boy away from home."

FROM the long sleeve of his blouse the old father took a large handkerchief of yellow silk. For a time he sat with bowed head, the handkerchief over his eyes. Then he looked up at the girl. She was regarding him curiously.

"Tell me, daughter, what is your lofty family name?"

The girl bowed her head respectfully. "I am of the insignificant family of Cheong," she said. "My despicable given name is Sen."

"Cheong Sen, what is your honorable father's business?"

"He is a dealer in antiques, sir."

Lee Fong appeared to meditate for a moment.

"And may I ask what brings the daughter of Cheong to the room of my son?"

"I made a mistake," replied the girl easily. "I came to visit my cousin who has a room in this house. I came to the wrong door."

"Then you do not even know my son?"

The girl shook her head.

Lee Fong breathed a huge sigh of relief. He nodded his head many times; then he spoke as much to himself as to the girl.

"My son is an upright boy. Never has he given his parents a moment's concern. He is a painter of pictures. See! All these on the walls are his work. Are they not beautiful?"

"Indeed they are beautiful," the girl replied quickly.

"Yes—beautiful. And you too, Ah Sen," the old man went on like a father speaking to his daughter, "you too are beautiful. And you talk with the tongue of one who has learning. What is more important, you use a respectful tone with your elders. Ah—" he shook his head sadly, but did not finish his sentence.

"Ah, how true the words of Kung-foo-tsze!" mused Lee Fong aloud, after another long silence. " 'Misery and unhappiness of

themselves have no door of access to our hearts, but man invites them.' I did what I thought was right; but two sleepless nights showed me I had made a terrible mistake. How often, those two nights, I went to his room, and saw only the pale moonlight shining on an empty bed.

"And it was all over such a trifle. I want to see my boy happily married, and therefore made plans to select a wife for him. He would not listen to me. Said he intended to marry one Chee, of the family of Soo. Moreover he said he intended to be a painter instead of taking up some business as I wanted him to do. So we quarreled.

"Well, I shall take him back home. He can be a painter if he wishes. I shall prepare a studio for him with the finest teaks and tapestries money can buy. It shames me to see one of the family of Lee in such a hovel as this. But I shall not permit him to marry Ah Chee, for I have been told that she is unfilial, disrespectful, and has adopted many of the ways of the white women."

"Perhaps that is not true," suggested the girl respectfully. "May I ask who told you?"

"I think it was Bo Ch'at, the butcher; but it doesn't matter. I have decided that my son shall not marry her. But he may return home. He is all we have. When he sees the maid I have selected for him, he will forget Ah Chee and make the old folks happy. And that is right. For is it not written that 'life flickers like a wick—' "

"S-sh!" Edwards raised his hand to enjoin silence. There was a heavy tread in the hall.

Lee Fong stood up. All faced the door expectantly—all save the girl. She had turned away, her head bowed, her face burning with shame, hot tears falling through her fingers to the floor.

CHAPTER XI

"In gossip from four corners one may find some truth!"

ARRIVED at Agent Brown's offices on the second floor of the Customhouse, Ah Lim was held in one of the rear rooms while Brown in his private office questioned Lee Quan. Brown sat at his big, flat-topped desk, a stenographer on his left, Inspector Ellwood flanking him on the right. Across the table, where the strong light from the window would betray every facial expression, sat Lee Quan.

Lee Quan was sworn; then Brown opened a drawer and got out a typewritten sheet marked "Questions That Must Be Asked in Order to Make Sure of the Identity of Chinese."

"What is your family name?" Brown read the first question.

"I belong to the family of Lee."

"What is your *tong* name?"

"Hop Sui Bin Kee."

"What is your book name?"

"Lee Ah Doo."

"What is the given name by which you are now known among your own people?"

"Quan."

"Mr. Lee Quan, if you are married, please state your married name."

"I am not married—yet," smiled Lee Quan.

"If you are in business, what is your business name?"

"I have not yet chosen a business name."

"What is your name on your *chaak gee*?"

"I was born in America; therefore I have no Chinese registration certificate."

"By what name are you known among the Americans?"

"My Americanized name is Joseph Q. Lee."

There were further questions regarding Lee Quan's age, residence, occupation, and similar inquiries concerning his father. Brown hurried through these, then laid aside his question sheet. "I hope that will identify you," he smiled. "Funny, all the names you people pack around. Well—" Brown laid out the two parcels Edwards had taken from Ah Lim. He leaned back in his chair and looked at Lee Quan. "Mr. Lee," he began in that kindly, conversational tone that had seldom failed to inspire confidence, "I wish you would tell me frankly and truthfully where you got this morphine."

"I found it in my room last night, Mr. Brown. One package was hidden beneath the mattress; the other was concealed in a crack between the window-frame and the wall."

"Yes, yes; I understand. But where did you get this stuff *in the first place*? Come! The truth now!"

"Mr. Brown, I swear I never saw these parcels before I found them in my room. I had reason to believe that some one was plotting against me, that Ah Kee had hid-

den this morphine in my room, and that some one would notify you to arrest me."

Brown swung forward quickly. "All right! But when you found this morphine, why didn't you get in touch with me at once and tell your story? Why did you give it to Ah Lim to hide it from us? If this story of yours is true, why did you let us waste our time searching your room?"

"I did what I thought was best; but I see my mistake now. Although I have an American education, it seems that I still have a Chinese mind. And the Chinese never take the direct, obvious course."

BROWN studied this for a moment; then he turned to Ellwood. "Go out and see how many men are in the office. Send every one of them up to Chinatown right away. Tell them to connect with Inspectors Summers and Westing. We got to grab this hop Ah Kee."

Ellwood left. Brown turned again to Lee Quan.

"What reason had you for thinking that Ah Kee put this morphine in your room?"

"Ah Lim saw him go in."

"What was Ah Lim doing there?"

Lee Quan hesitated.

"Mr. Brown," he said courteously, "I want to help you, and I want you to believe me. But there is a personal matter connected with this that, since it concerns others, I am not at liberty to discuss. I cannot tell you why Ah Lim was watching my room. Nor can I tell you how I chanced to overhear Ah Lim tell about seeing Ah Kee go into my room."

"I see," Brown mused, his eyes narrowed. "There's usually some mysterious thing that keeps you fellows from telling the whole truth. Well, if this is a plot against you, who is behind it? Who had Ah Kee plant this stuff in your room? Who wrote us this letter about you being a morphine peddler?"

"Of course, I have no proof to back up my belief; but there is only one person whom I know who has any reason for wanting to make me trouble. That is Bo Ch'at."

"Bo Ch'at, the butcher?"

"Yes sir."

"Nonsense! Where would he get all this dope?"

"That," replied Le Quan with significant emphasis, "is what I have been wondering."

"I see." Brown was silent a moment. "Why would Bo Ch'at do a thing like this to you?"

"That too, Mr. Brown, is purely a personal matter that I prefer not to discuss."

Brown's eyes flashed. "Ellwood," he snapped, as the latter entered the office, "this man is altogether too talkative and confidential. Take him out before he talks himself into jail. Bring Ah Lim here!"

AH LIM, much to Brown's satisfaction, proved a willing witness. With many bows and grins he answered every question put to him. In fact he talked so freely, and frequently rambled so far afield, that Brown was a bit suspicious.

"Ellwood, it looks like we have been dragged into an old-fashioned Chinese melodrama. There's Ah Chee, the bee-yutiful maiden. Soo Wang, her rich father, thinks she should marry Bo Ch'at, the deep-dyed villyun with the butcher-knives. She prefers Lee Quan, the misunderstood hee-ro who hides beneath a table. Funny business. I wish the boys would hustle up and grab Ah Kee. He seems to be the—ah—key to the whole business. And say, Ellwood, you'd better run up to Chinatown yourself and ask old Soo Wang to drop down here. Also, go around by Lee Quan's room and see whom the boys have nabbed there. Remember, don't tell Soo Wang a thing. Don't let him see Lee Quan or Ah Lim. He doesn't know we've talked with them. If he verifies what they said, then—"

The door opened. "Pardon me, Mr. Brown," said the clerk. He whispered in Brown's ear. "There's quite a delegation out there to see you. I thought I'd better not phone. There's Soo Wang, and Sutherland the broker; there's a Chink named Wing; and there's Toi Lo, secretary of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Toi will interpret for Soo Wang, who is very anxious to see you."

Brown whistled.

"Ellwood, take Ah Lim out through the hall. Leave him there, and hustle back. We're going to learn something yet."

As soon as the door had closed behind Ellwood and Ah Lim, the clerk ushered in Soo Wang's party. Sutherland, the Customs broker, attended to introductions. Brown knew Toi Lo.

"Glad to see you again, Toi," he said. "I'm up against another Chinese puzzle."

The secretary, a prosperous-appearing young man in American clothes, did not smile at Brown's remarks. "Mr. Brown," he said soberly, "this is very bad business.

It isn't right that a few Chinese should be permitted to cast a stigma on all of us. If there is anything we can do to help you wipe out this morphine-traffic, we will gladly do it. It doesn't seem possible that Lee Quan and Ah Lim are mixed up in this business, but I understand that you have them under arrest."

"Who told you that?" demanded Brown.

"Mr. Soo."

"How did he know it?"

TOI and Soo conversed for a moment in Cantonese. "He says," translated Toi, "that he was afraid that Bo Ch'at would do harm to Lee Quan; so he sent this man Wing to watch Bo Ch'at. Bo Ch'at left his house this morning at about nine and went at once to Canton Street. He hung around there all morning. When the officers left with Lee Quan and Ah Lim, Wing saw them. Bo Ch'at also saw them, and appeared to take great delight in their arrest. He hastened away at once. Wing was about to follow him when he happened to see Mr. Soo. Mr. Soo was on his way to Lee Quan's room to see him on a business matter. Informed by Wing of Lee Quan's arrest, Mr. Soo got in touch with me at once—and here we are."

"I see," mused Brown. "Now ask Mr. Soo if Ah Lim ever said anything to him about a man named Ah Kee?"

Toi did this. Soo Wang quickly confirmed everything Ah Lim had said about Ah Kee and the plot against Lee Quan.

Brown was convinced. This couldn't be a cooked-up story. It had been confirmed too many times. Moreover, Brown could not but be most favorably impressed by Soo Wang. Sitting erect and dignified, his slender fingers combing his thin gray beard, he looked every whit the Chinese gentleman.

"Toi," said Brown, "do you know this man Ah Kee?"

"I don't know him, but Mr. Soo has told me what he has learned. It seems that Ah Kee is one of the few remaining old men of our people who smoke opium. They say he works for Bo Ch'at. I am rather surprised at that. Bo Ch'at is not particularly well liked by the Chinese, but he has always borne a good reputation. Why he should employ an opium-user I do not know."

"And where did he get the morphine he had Ah Kee put in Lee Quan's room?"

"You will have to ask Bo Ch'at about that," smiled the secretary.

"That," concluded Brown, rising, "is just what I propose to do without any more delay. Toi, if I release Lee Quan and Ah Lim, will you give me your word that they will in no way interfere in my investigation of this case?"

"More than that, I will give you my word that they will assist you in every way possible."

"Good enough. Ellwood, bring Lee Quan and Ah Lim here. We'll tell them just where we are at."

This was done. Brown and Ellwood prepared to leave for Chinatown.

"We'll go by your room, Lee," said Brown. "I'll pick up the two men I left there and take them with me to call on Bo Ch'at."

"I'll go with you," said Lee Quan. "I remember you told those two officers to grab everyone who came to the door. I'm curious."

Sutherland touched Lee on the arm.

"Mr. Lee, can you step over to my office a minute? Mr. Soo is very anxious to see you."

Lee Quan turned to Brown.

"I really wasn't expecting any callers this morning. Do you think it necessary for me to accompany you to my room?"

"Not at all," smiled Brown. "I'll make due apologies to any of your creditors who may have dropped in."

ACCOMPANYING the broker across the street to the latter's office, Lee Quan found that Soo Wang and Toi Lo had preceded him. Sutherland put out chairs, then sat down at his desk.

"Lee," said Sutherland, smiling, "Mr. Soo wants to know how much you will take for that option you have on his stock of *Ng Ka Py*?"

Lee Quan registered surprise. "I hadn't thought of selling."

Toi put this into Chinese for Soo Wang's benefit. Soo turned to Lee Quan. He spoke in his most ingratiating Cantonese.

"I will return your five hundred dollars and will give you five hundred dollars additional if you will tear up that paper I signed."

"That isn't enough, Mr. Soo," returned Lee in Cantonese. "I can make much more by holding for a rise in price."

"You are a robber!" cried Soo in sudden anger.

"No," smiled Lee, "I am merely a good business man. I do not like business, but circumstances forced me into it, and I must make the most of it."

Soo Wang fumed. "This is an outrage, but I must have something to supply my customers or I will lose them. I will give you a thousand dollars for that option."

"That is still not enough, Mr. Soo," replied Lee. "A friend of mine in Washington obtained knowledge of this order yesterday by honorable means and telegraphed me, hoping it would be of value to me. Well, it is." He looked the shrewd old merchant in the eye. "Mr. Soo, I need exactly two thousand dollars!"

Soo Wang glared; then, slowly, he began nodding his head, his slender fingers curled at his thin gray beard.

"Son of Lee," he intoned in musical Cantonese, "you move warily and gain your ends by well-laid plans. Now if you can paint pictures as cleverly as you can swindle an honest merchant, you will become famous. Shall I make out a check?"

"It is not necessary. Merely give me your word that I have paid the betrothal price of your daughter Ah Chee."

Soo Wang leaned back in his chair and sighed deply.

"It is paid, Lee Quan; but by the seven-faced god, I never thought I would have to pay it myself!"

CHAPTER XII

"When death hovers, truth draws near!"

NARCOTIC-AGENT BROWN, having no desire to be pulled unceremoniously through the doorway of Lee Quan's room, rapped a quick signal that he knew the rough-handed inspector would understand. The door opened. Brown and Ellwood walked in.

"Everything is all right," announced Brown. "Well! Who's this?"

"Le Quan's father," replied Edwards. "Girl says her name is Ah Sen. Old gent don't savvy English."

"It's all right, Miss," said Brown, gazing in undisguised admiration at the girl. "I'm sorry we had to do this. You may go now. But first, will you please tell Mr. Lee that his son has been released—and completely exonerated."

The girl quickly dried her tears. "The officers say we may go now," she told Lee Fong in Cantonese. "It was all a mistake. They apologize for annoying us."

"Ah, didn't I tell you!" cried the overjoyed father. "Didn't I tell you that my son had nothing in common with thieves and drug-smugglers? I shall leave a note for my son to return home at once. I must hasten home and tell his mother to prepare his favorite dish, *chow heung-sen gai min,* for the midday meal.

"And Ah Sen! I shall tell my boy about you at once. A marriage-broker will call on your father this afternoon. If there is no stain on your family name, I shall pay the betrothal price quickly. And when Lee Quan sees you, he will be glad I have kept him from that impudent little upstart Ah Chee!"

"Come on, boys!" said Brown. "That girl is going to cry again. Leave them here to enjoy themselves. We have work ahead."

Out in the hall, where he was not likely to be overheard, Brown gave his men their instructions.

"Edwards, you and Mason kick along and connect with Westing and Summers. Tell them to close in on Bo Ch'at's shop, but not to tip their hand unless I give the word. Find out if they have seen Ah Kee. Then meet me at Bo Ch'at's."

The two inspectors left.

"Ellwood," said Brown, "you remember that Soo Wang's man Wing reported that Bo Ch'at was hanging around here all morning and saw us take in Lee Quan and Ah Lim Now when Bo Ch'at sees you and me walk in his front door, he may become suspicious and try the vanishing act. So—watch out. Come on; let's go."

THEY went down Canton Street, crossed the Alley of Lingering Shadows, and circled around to the front entrance of Bo Ch'at's shop. There, Brown led the way through the mess of clerks and chattering customers to the stairs that led up to the main office.

The bookkeeper was humped over his ledger. Bo Ch'at was not in sight.

"Where is Bo Ch'at?" Brown asked the question in a casual tone.

"Bo Ch'at?" echoed the Oriental, looking up. "He go out."

"When will he be back?"

"Oh, bime-by. Mebbe long time. No can tell."

Ellwood tried the door of the private office and found it locked. "Chief, I bet a month's pay he's in there," he whispered.

"What is your name?" Brown asked the man at the desk.

"Leong."

"Well, Leong, we're Government officers. You understand?" He showed his badge. "We want to talk with Bo Ch'at. No trouble. Just want a little information. You savvy?"

For an instant Leong's eyes rested on Brown's badge.

"I savvy," he said calmly. "But Bo Ch'at—he go out."

"Then why is the private office locked?"

"Bo Ch'at all time lock 'im when he go out."

While Brown debated what to do, Edwards and Mason returned. Brown drew Edwards aside.

"We've got 'em, Chief," Edwards replied to Brown's question. "The boys have had a ring around this place for two hours. Ah Kee sleeps here; and he hasn't gone out this morning. Bo Ch'at came to his store shortly after ten o'clock and has never left it."

"Good enough!" returned Brown. "But we must go slow. Remember, we haven't a thing on this crowd yet. You scout around and see what is behind this private office. Ill try the door again."

Brown pounded on the door, and called. There was no answer.

Then Inspector Ellwood touched his arm, pointed to something on the desk in front of Leong. It was the telephone. The receiver was off the hook. "That's an inter-office phone, I bet; and Bo Ch'at is inside getting an earful."

Brown stepped to the desk, picked up the receiver and listened. For a moment there was silence; then—the tell-tale *click* of a receiver being put on the hook.

"Leong," said Brown, and his tone brooked no trifling, "Bo Ch'at is in that office. Are you going to open the door, or must we smash it in?"

"Aw, whassa mallee you?" cried Leong. "I tell you Bo Ch'at go out. You savvy? He go out!"

"Come on, boys," concluded Brown. "We can't waste any more time. Down with that door!"

ELLWOOD flung his weight against the door with such force that the whole wall creaked and trembled.

"*Haie!* You wait!" Leong sprang off his stool. His hand dived into a drawer. "You wait!" he shrilled, swinging a bunch of keys. "Bo Ch'at go out. Mebbeso he leave key. You wait!"

"Time!" called Brown—and the door swung ajar.

"The key wasn't on the bunch," spoke up Ellwood. "I saw him take it from his blouse."

They crowded through the doorway—and stopped short. The room was empty.

Brown's suspicions were now thoroughly aroused. His narrowed eyes whipped around the room, taking in every detail, the desk and chair, the telephone, the absence of windows or doors, the spotless floor, the dust-laden bundles on the shelves.

"Boys, there's something wrong here. Ellwood, give Leong a frisk. Mason, skip out and tell Westing to give you a couple of raiding axes. Say, what is that smell? Not opium!"

"Heaven only knows," sniffed Ellwood. "Might be—"

"I see it!" cried Brown. He stepped to Bo Ch'at's desk. There, its burning tip scorching the varnish, lay a cigarette. Brown picked it up, studied the ash a moment.

"Hasn't been lying here long," he concluded, tossing it away. "Bo Ch'at sat right here and listened in while we talked to his bookkeeper. Then he hung up and skipped, skipped in such a hurry that he forgot this cigarette. Now, when a Chink forgets something like that, he's scared, believe me! But how did he get out of this room?"

Getting to his hands and knees, Brown put his eyes as near as possible on a level with the floor. "Ellwood, if you're through searching that Chink, slip the cuffs on him and run the chain through the arm of that chair. Leong wont get far dragging that. Then turn out the light."

Ellwood had found nothing of interest on Leong. He carried out Brown's instructions. As soon as the light was out, Brown turned on his flashlight, held it close to the floor, swung it in a half-circle.

"Aha!" Thought I'd see it now if there was anything to see. Ellwood, listen to me! Bo Ch'at got up from that desk and walked straight over to that wall—*but he didn't come back!*"

"How the deuce do you figure that, Chief? I can't see any dust for a man to make a track in."

"That's just it," explained Brown, jumping up. "Bo Ch'at knows how we frequently get on a hot trail by finding a track in

the dust. To avoid that, he's gone too far the other way. The floor is so confounded clean that Bo Ch'at, coming in from the street, left a very faint imprint of dust on his spotless floor. Well, on with that light again! No use to ask Leong to show us the door. Get all those bundles out of the way. Then, if we have to, we'll tear out those shelves."

BY the time the shelves were clear, Inspectors Mason and Westing returned with two short-handled, keen-edged, hard-tempered axes.

"Leong," said Brown, "I'll give you one chance. Will you open this hidden door?"

"No savvy door!" grunted Leong sourly.

"All right, boys; go to it! Wish we had time to get a search warrant. If this proves to be a fizzle, we'll be stuck for some mighty heavy damages. But go ahead!"

Ellwood and Mason fell to with the raiding axes. In a moment one of the shelves was splintered, disclosing two electric wires.

"Keep going boys!" Brown called out. "That shows we're on the right track; but there's no use trying to hit on to the secret of opening the door with those wires."

Ellwood and his companion swung their axes with renewed vigor. Before long they had cleared away the shelving and chopped a small hole in the wall.

Brown called a halt. With his flashlight he looked into the opening. There was a stairway, leading down. At the bottom—a door.

Two minutes later they had enlarged the hole, crawled through, and were down the stairs flashing their lights on a heavy, unpainted door.

As they stood there, Brown caught the sound of a low, sharp *click*. It might have been an electric latch; it might have been something else. With a warning cry to his men, Brown sprang out of range of the door. Nothing happened.

"Gimme an ax!" Brown called out. "Come on, Ellwood!"

Standing one on each side, Brown and Ellwood attacked the door. Blow after blow fell over the spot where from experience they expected to find the lock. It was slow work.

Perhaps ten minutes had passed when Brown, fuming with impatience, rose on his toes and swung his ax with terrific force. The door crashed in, swinging back on its hinges. "Look out!" cried Brown, and sprang aside. Again nothing happened.

THROUGH the partly opened door, Brown could see a chair and a table. Above them was an electric light, burning. The ceiling was strung with smoked sausages.

"I thought I smelled opium," said Brown. "Come on, boys; but be careful."

With revolver ready, Brown flung the door back and stepped in. There he halted, amazed by an incongruous sight.

On the floor lay an old man. Beside him was an opium layout, the lamp burning. With steady hand the old Chinese was cooking a "pill." He looked up at Brown, his eyes hollow, weighted with some overwhelming, crushing sadness as though the very soul of the man were gripped in the tentacles of some hideous vice.

"Hullo!" he sang out, and his gaunt face wrinkled in smiles.

"Are you Ah Kee?" demanded Brown.

The opium-smoker put the steaming bolus of opium over the vent and pierced it.

"Uh-huh! Me Ah Kee. Thass all light! Thass all light!"

"Where's Bo Ch'at?"

Hungrily, Ah Kee's lips closed over the mouthpiece of his opium-pipe. He sighed, and his eyelids drooped sleepily. Over the bowl, a filmy white smoke was curling; the heated opium was singing its old lullaby.

Then—Ah Kee raised his hand, motioned casually with the *yen hok!*

Behind the door they found Bo Ch'at, a cleaver sunk deep in his skull.

WITH Ah Kee's assistance Brown quickly located the drug-cache, the cans of pickled meat with their hidden vials of morphine, and the "sausage." With this evidence, Brown and Ellwood escorted Ah Kee and the bookkeeper to the Custom-house. There, Ah Kee talked freely. Confronted with Ah Kee's sworn statement, and informed that Bo Ch'at was dead, Leong denied nothing, placing all the blame on his employer.

"I'm satisfied that is where it belongs," said Brown.

He got out the two parcels they had found on Ah Lim, and laid them on the desk in front of Ah Kee.

"Ah Kee, I want to ask you as a matter of record if you can identify these as the two parcels you planted in Lee Quan's room."

Ah Kee grinned and nodded.

"They were given to you by Bo Ch'at?"

"Oh, no! I ketchem China dlug-sto'."

"Drug-store! You bought this morphine in a Chinese drug-store?"

"Oh, thass all light," chuckled Ah Kee. "Thass quinine!"

"What!"

"Thass all. I no put mo'phine in Lee Quan's loom. Him same family name. You savvy?"

"The devil! Can it be possible, Ellwood, that the biggest morphine-dealer in Chinatown has been put out of business with a dime's worth of quinine? Skip up to the laboratory and get a little nitric acid!"

Ellwood returned soon with a small vial of colorless liquid. The acid test confirmed Ah Kee's story.

"Of course I knew that quinine sulphate looks, tastes and feels just like morphine sulphate; and we'd have tested this before we used it in court. If I'd discovered before that this stuff is only quinine, I'd have chucked the whole case, and that'd have been very unfortunate. Well, Ah Kee—"

Brown hesitated. Duty sometimes led into unpleasant paths.

"All right, Ellwood," he said finally. "It can't be helped."

Ellwood stepped quietly to the door, opened it and beckoned to some one in the waiting-room.

Two uniformed police officers walked in.

"Ah Kee," said Brown kindly, "I'm sorry for you. I'll do all I can do for you; but that isn't much. You're guilty of complicity in the unlawful sale of narcotic drugs; and that's bad enough. But that must wait. Just now I have to turn you over to the police for the murder of Bo Ch'at."

In the silence that followed the click of steel sounded clear and sharp, pregnant with terrible meaning.

Ah Kee looked down, jingled the handcuffs that gripped his bony old wrists.

"Oh, thass all light," he grinned happily as they led him away. "Thass all light!"

CHAPTER XIII

"Congratulations! May you gather wealth!"

THEY had lingered long around the bamboo table on Ah Chee's balcony. The lanterns were glowing softly. Across the way the Chinese orchestra finished its "Ode to Dying Winter"—a tremulous wail of flageolets, a crash of cymbals. Then, out of the silence, from the street below came the stealthy *slf-slf-slf* of Chinese slippers, the imperious *click-click* of American heels.

From a jar of their best *Ng Ka Py*, Ah Lim refilled the bowls, then poured tea for Ah Chee.

"But Father," argued Lee Quan gently, "did not our own Kung-foo-tsze say: 'Where love is, yield not to an army'?"

"The Master's very words!" Soo Wang exclaimed. "And hear me, Lee Fong: It is also written:'Outwardly one may conform, yet inwardly keep to one's own standard.' In her heart my daughter did no wrong, did only her filial duty, and did it nobly. Soon after I had started for Lee Quan's room, she heard that Lee Quan had been arrested. Thinking that I might walk into a trap and become entangled, Ah Chee hastened after me. When she got so far as Lee Quan's room and had not seen me, she became alarmed, and made bold to rap on the door. You know what happened then, Lee Fong, for the same thing happened to you. Ah Chee recognized you; but she was afraid to let you know her identity until I could explain for her. She is—"

"Haie!" spluttered Lee Fong impatiently. "Ah Chee conducted herself with modesty and dignity. I am thinking of my own conduct. I am trying to remember what I said *about* Ah Chee this morning when I was talking *to* Ah Chee but thought I was talking to a strange girl from Oakland. By the Three Pure Ones, Ah Chee, you tricked me neatly!"

Ah Chee did not know what to say. She wanted to hide her burning cheeks; but she could not do that with one hand, and Lee Quan simply refused to let go of the other one. So Ah Chee bowed her head, too happy for words.

"Well," rumbled Lee Fong, "we shall have a big wedding with an orchestra and a procession and—"

"And I shall give a three-day banquet," spoke up Soo Wang. "Well, Ah Lim, what in the honored name of Kung-foo-tsze is the matter with you now?"

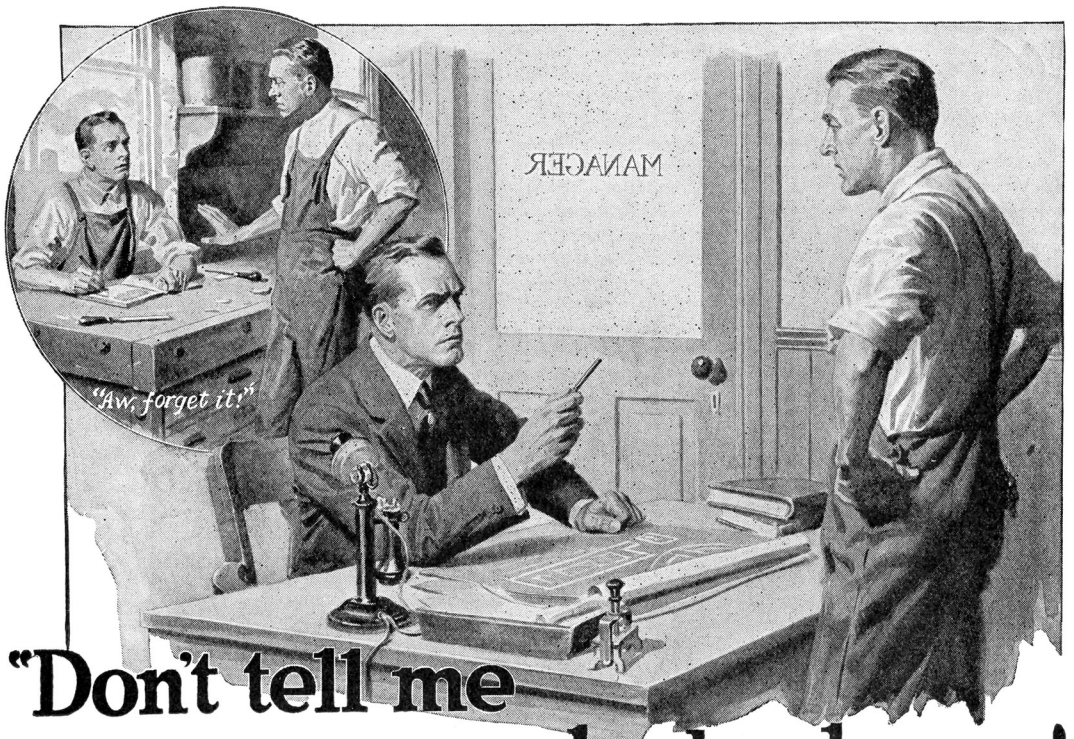
Ah Lim had been serving the party. Now, grinning and bowing, he stood just back of Lee Quan and Ah Chee.

"I am very happy, sire. I ask permission to drink to bride and groom our favorite Chinese toast."

He raised his bowl:

"May you have ten thousand sons and grandsons!"

THE END.



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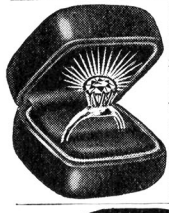

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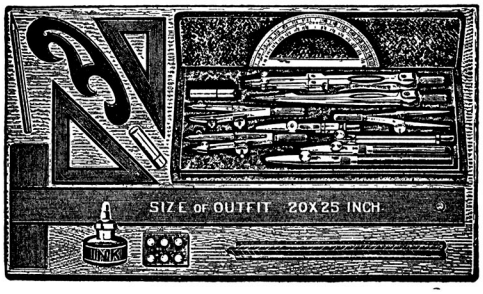

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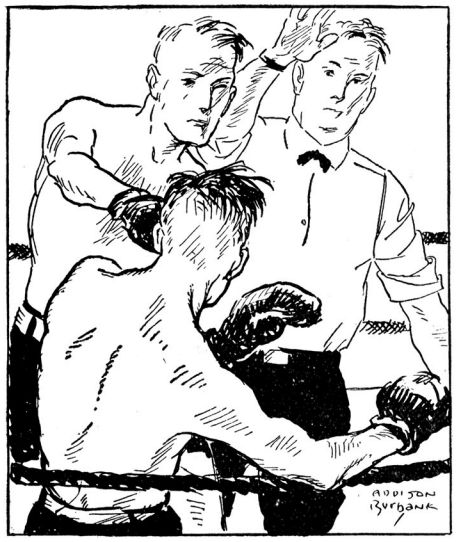

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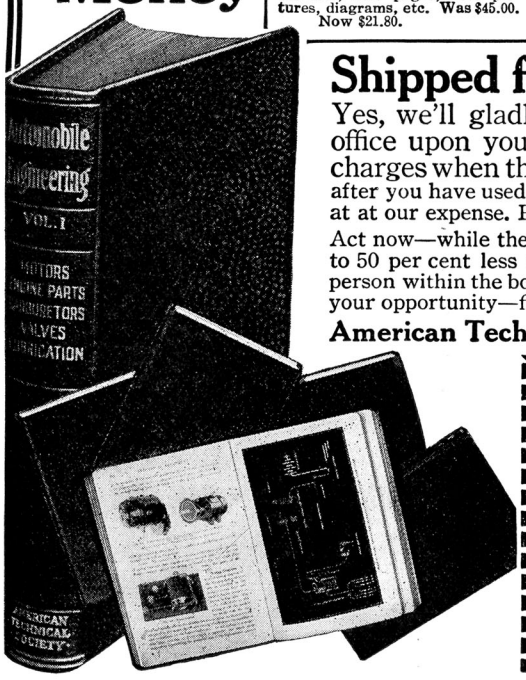

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As I Have Proved

I proved it many years ago by restoring the original color to my own prematurely gray hair with the same Restorer I now offer you. This time-tested preparation never fails, as hundreds of thousands of gray haired people since have learned.

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Mary T. Goldman's Hair Color Restorer is a clear, colorless liquid, clean as water. No greasy sediment to make your hair sticky and stringy, nothing to wash or rub off. Application easy, restored color perfect, in any light. Faded or discolored hair just as surely and safely restored as hair naturally gray.

MAIL COUPON TODAY for special patented Free Trial and full instructions for making the convincing test on one lock. If possible, enclose lock of your hair in your letter.

FREE TRIAL COUPON

Please print your name and address

MARY T. GOLDMAN
17A Goldman Bldg., St. Paul, Minn.

Please send your patented Free Trial Outfit. X shows color of hair. Black..... dark brown..... medium brown..... auburn (dark red)..... light brown..... light auburn (light red)..... blonde.....

Name _____

Street _____ *City* _____

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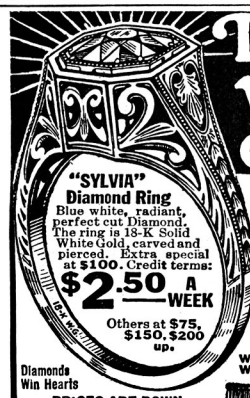

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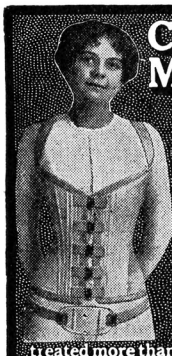

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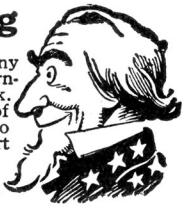

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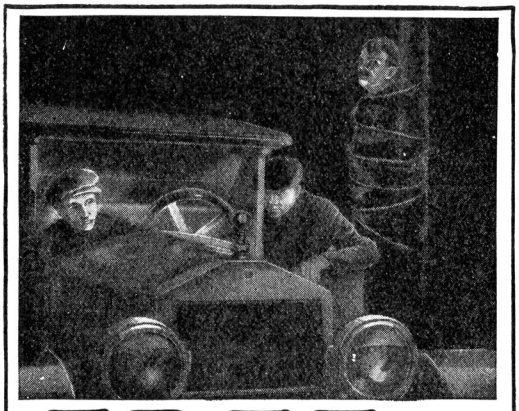

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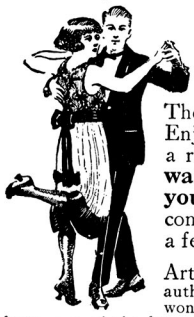

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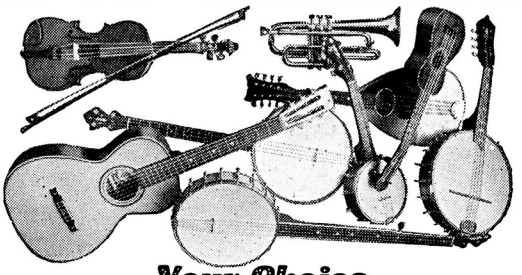

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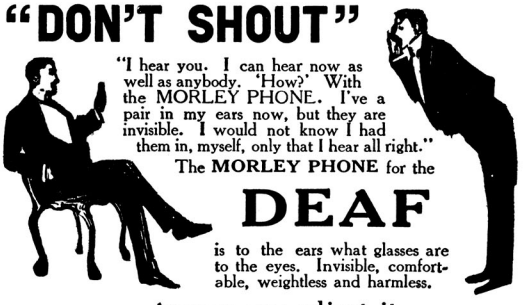

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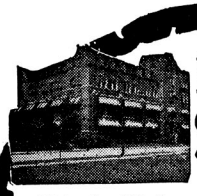

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A "Jack of All Trades" is usually Master of None

DEFINITION

The practice of Chiropractic consists of the adjustment, with the hands, of the movable segments of the spinal column to normal position for the purpose of releasing the prisoned impulse

'Ask Your Chiropractor for "The Last Word"

A chiropractor is not a "Jack-of-all-trades." He is master of one.

All that the properly trained chiropractor pretends to know is how to adjust the spine.

He doesn't know much, but what he does know is true. What he **does** know works so well that Chiropractic has been built upon the failures of those who know so much that isn't true.

It takes three years of constant application in a first-class resident school to train a chiropractor to properly adjust the spine, **providing** he has the ability to learn. All the schools in the world, however, cannot train a person who lacks in faculty or desire to learn. Such incompetents invariably attempt to hide their lack of ability behind a mass of adjuncts, such as electrical devices, dietetics, baths, etc.

The competent Chiropractor uses nothing but his hands, and does nothing but adjust the misaligned vertebrae.

If you are thinking of trying Chiropractic, select a competent Chiropractor.

Employ none but a **competent** chiropractor.

Write for information regarding Chiropractors or Schools to the

Universal Chiropractors' Association, Davenport, Iowa, U. S. A.

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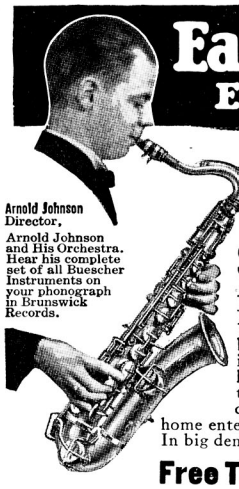

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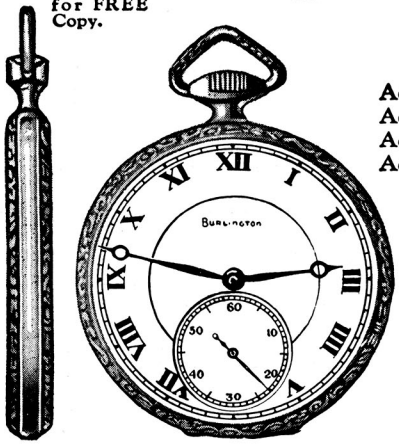

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You not only have this uniformity, but you see your hair the actual shade it had in the past. Hair once brown becomes brown once more, once red it becomes red, once black it becomes black, once blonde it becomes blonde. The one clean, colorless solution gives results with any gray hair. No "matching" of color, no sample of hair is required.

The results are amazing. That faded appearance is gone, any brittleness is absent also. Your hair is luxuriant, brilliant, soft, glistening beautiful as it ever was in youth.

Also Brings Relief for Dandruff, Itching Scalp and Falling Hair

Thousands have found also that Kolor-Bak works wonders in the most presistent cases of dandruff, itching scalp and falling hair. It is not greasy, mussy—it is agreeable to use. Its ingredients are known to be beneficial to hair and scalp.

My Hair Was Quite Gray

"Only a short time ago my hair was quite gray and becoming grayer. It was falling out. My scalp itched and dandruff appeared.

"Only a few applications of Kolor-Bak stopped the itching and dandruff. My hair soon stopped coming out. Most wonderful of all, however, is that my hair is again its original color. I look ten years younger. No wonder I'm so thankful for Kolor-Bak!"

(*A typical letter*)

"My hair began to turn natural color in twelve days."

"Am 60 years old. Hair was white. Now brown as in youth."

"Hair was streaked with white. Now a nice even brown and dandruff all gone."

"My hair was falling out badly. Kolor-Bak has stopped it and put it in fine condition."

From everywhere come words like the above praising this wonderful treatment for the hair.

Gray Haired—"Too old for active service."

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The Makers Guarantee It

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"What do I think of Kolor-Bak? Simply wonderful. No more gray hairs for me and dandruff a thing of the past."

"It restored the natural color to my hair and has cured my little girl of dandruff."

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