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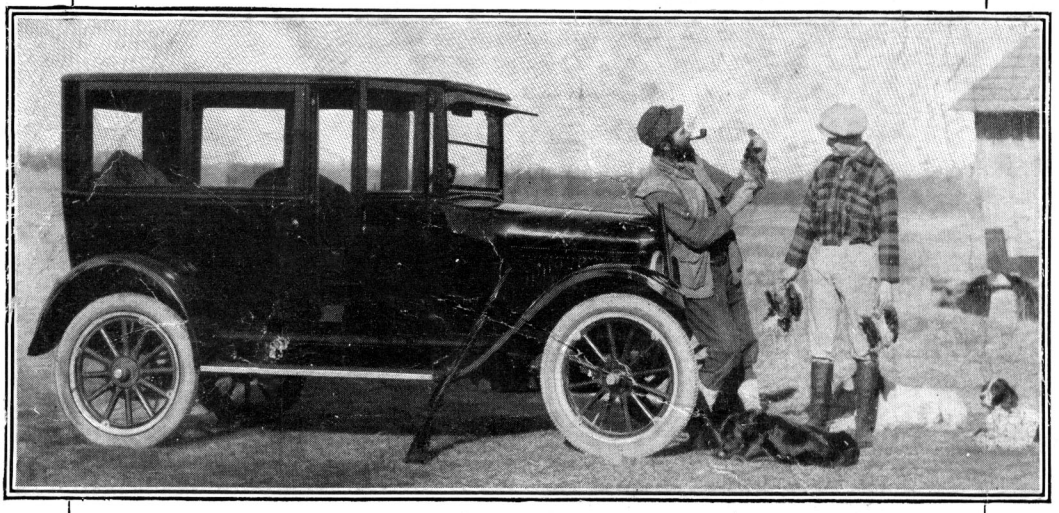

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The Gallowstree Mystery

That prince of story-tellers J. S. Fletcher, who wrote those delightful novels "Black Money" and "The Great Marquenmore Case," here gives us his greatest achievement thus far—a veritably captivating mystery novel.

By J. S. FLETCHER

I SUPPOSE the first thing to be set down in this history of black crime (in which a good deal of mystery, and some amount of love-making, will have to be duly chronicled), is the fact that at about four o'clock of a certain spring afternoon, Nellie Apps, who carried out the meager mail of our neighborhood, came to the garden gate of our house with something that we very rarely received—a telegram. I was sitting on the porch when she came, being downstairs that day for either the first or second time after an illness that had attacked me just before leaving school, and had put off the start of my career as articled clerk to Lawyer Philbrick in Kingshaven; and it was I who took the buff envelope from her. But it was no sooner in my hand than out of it; my sister Keziah, senior to me by twenty years, had the flimsy thing from my fingers before you could have counted two.

"Ben," she exclaimed in her sharp, decisive fashion, "I shouldn't wonder if Mrs. Hozier is taken bad!"

Mrs. Hozier was Keziah's great friend; a fellow-villager, she had lately married and gone to live in Kingshaven. At my age—eighteen—I was supposed—by Keziah—not to know much of such matters, but I had an idea that Mr. and Mrs. Hozier were expecting the advent of what might be a son and heir, and failing that, at least a daughter, and a shrewd suspicion that this event had transpired, or was about to transpire, came over me as Keziah smoothed

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out the sheet which she drew from its cover. But Keziah gave me no precise information; her hawk eyes had read the message, and her long fingers had crumpled up the paper and thrust it into her pocket, all in a second. She turned swiftly on Nellie Apps, who stood among the hollyhocks, staring at her.

"You needn't wait!" she said peremptorily. "There's no answer."

Then, as Nellie went away down the path, Keziah turned again, in more leisurely fashion, on me in my easy-chair.

"Ben," she went on, "I'll have to go to Kingshaven! And at once! I promised I'd go, and go I must! And I shall have to be away for the night, and maybe for some of tomorrow," she continued. "I can trust you, Ben."

"Trust me, Keziah?" I inquired wonderingly. "What about?"

SHE looked round, as if afraid the thrushes and blackbirds might hear us, and she dropped her voice to a whisper—a reverential whisper.

"The family silver!" she said. "Never have I left it before! And if anything should happen to it—"

She paused, and I looked up at her tall, gaunt figure, amazed, even at my age, that a grown woman could be so wholly infatuated. The family silver was Keziah's "Old Man of the Sea." I doubt if ever a night of her life passed by which did not find her agitated with fear for the family silver's safety: more than once, seeing her examination of locks, bolts and brass, I had wished the family silver at the bottom of the creek. She talked of it as if its value were colossal; in sober truth it consisted of a silver teapot, a cream jug, and a sugar basin, six large and six small forks, six large and six small spoons, a dozen teaspoons and a couple of soup-ladles. True, it had belonged to our great-, or great-great-grandmother, but Keziah affirmed that it had been made in the reign of Queen Anne; but even granting these facts, I saw no reason why our lives should be perpetually shadowed by the remembrance of its presence under our old roof. And I dare say I replied to Keziah rather dryly and a little sneeringly.

"Not much chance of anything happening to it, I should think, Keziah!" said I. "You've taken good care of that!"

I referred to Keziah's elaborate precautions for the safety of the family silver. It lay swathed in multitudinous folds of soft paper and rolls of wash-leather, in an oak box, iron-cornered and double-locked, which was clamped down to the floor in Keziah's bedroom, underneath her bed. The devil himself would have been hard put to it to get at that silver while Keziah was anywhere about, and up to now she always had been about, being one of those women who never take a holiday and would be utterly miserable if they did.

"I know—I know!" she agreed hastily. "Of course, one has to take great care when one's in possession of family heirlooms like ours! But promise me, Ben, that you'll not cross this threshold till I get back, and that you'll keep both doors locked!"

"I can promise all that easy enough, Keziah," said I, glancing at my wasted legs. "I don't think I could walk to the end of the garden!"

"Oh, but you soon will do, Ben!" she answered reassuringly. "You're improving wonderfully, and this fine spring weather'll do you no end of good. You're a great deal stronger today than you were yesterday—I wouldn't leave you if you weren't, even for Mrs. Hozier. And you'll manage, easy enough; you can get your own supper tonight and breakfast in the morning; you could even make shift to get your dinner tomorrow, if I'm not back in time. But—you'll not leave the house, Ben?"

"You can bet on that, Keziah!" I assured her. "I sha'n't!"

"Then we'll have our tea, and I'll put things to rights, and then I'll make ready and catch the six o'clock train," she said. "I don't like going, Ben: I'm not one for leaving home at any time. But when you've promised a friend that you'll stand by at a time of trouble—"

"Is Mrs. Hozier in trouble, then?" I inquired.

"Well, you'll hear more about it when I'm back," replied Keziah. "Maybe it'll end up in rejoicing; but anyway, I've got to go. But tea first."

WE had our tea; and Keziah, punctilious about such matters, washed up the tea-things and put them in their place, before attiring herself in her best clothes, in which, as she scarcely ever wore them, she looked strangely out of place. She fussed about a great deal before setting off, seeing to the fastenings of doors and windows, and giving me a pile of instructions and admonitions, from counsel as to what to

do in case burglars came, to the importance of taking my medicine at the exact minute and in the precise quantity; and I was thankful when at last, with an umbrella in one hand and an old-fashioned reticule in the other, she finally marched off, in a great hurry, to catch the train to Mrs. Hozier. She was a good woman, my sister Keziah, but she had a lot more of Martha than of Mary in her composition, and the house seemed delightfully quiet when her queer bonnet had disappeared behind the garden hedge.

That was a beautiful spring evening, and I continued to sit in my easy-chair in the jasmine-covered porch. I had books by me, and newspapers, but I looked at neither; there were things far better worth looking at in front of me. Our old house, in which, according to Keziah, at least nine generations of our family of Heckitt had been born and had died, stood, a quaint survival of other days, in the very center of a semicircle of coast line that turned inward from high cliffs on the west to a long, shelving promontory on the east. The sea came up to within fifty yards of our garden; a mile out, lay the bar, marked all day long by its line of white surf, and all night by a signal-light; beyond the bar stretched the wide expanse of the English Channel.

Our village, Middlebourne, lay behind our house—a collection of straggling farmsteads and cottages, through which ran the great highroad from London to Kingshaven; as far as we were concerned, there might not have been any village there at all, for we were well out of it; from our windows and our garden we could see only three objects which had any relation to human life, and as regards two of them, it was a relation of the far past.

ALMOST before our gate there stretched out into the shining waters of the creek a spit of sand at the seaward extremity of which was a group of black, smooth-topped rocks; on them stood a stout post or pillar of dark wood, clamped about with heavy iron bands, and riveted firmly to the rock by iron supports; it had an arm projecting from it at its head, and from that swung an old lantern, which occasionally was lighted. But in the old days men had been hanged from that bar—pirates, smugglers, murderers; and then their bodies had swung in chains until the flesh dropped off on the surf-swept rocks beneath. Hence the local name of the spit of sand and group of rocks—Gallowstree Point.

A grisly, grim spot, that, especially on moonlit nights! And there was another, close by, scarcely less eerie, in the shape of the ruin of a tide-mill, long since disused, and now given over to the ravages of the rushing waters which had once turned its wheel.

These things were of the dead; but there was a house of the living at the farther end of the semicircular sweep of the creek. This was a solitary, ancient place, once a farmstead but now modernized into a private residence, known as Middlebourne Grange. It had the sea on one side, and a wide moat on the other three, and there was a high, solidly built wall on all four sides, and within the wall a double line of high elms, fencing in and shading the house; and the only way into the place was by a bridge over the moat and through a door in the wall. It wore an air of seclusion and mystery, this moated and guarded house, and of its tenant at that time, a newcomer, none of us knew anything, except that she was a middle-aged woman named Miss Ellingham, who came from London, kept menservants and three or four maids, and had staying with her a nephew, who was just about my own age, and of whom I was madly jealous at that time, because I suspected him of casting sheep's-eyes on my girl, Pepita.

PEPITA was the daughter—and only child—of Captain Lucas Marigold, a retired mariner who lived in a smart little box of a place in the village. He had a nice, shady garden, with a tall mast in it, from which he flew flags, and an arbor, in the shelter of which he sipped his grog, smoked his pipe and told sea-tales: a brown-faced, gnarled old chap who, I think, had married late in life; anyway, he must have been getting on, when Pepita came into the world.

For Pepita, at the time of which I am writing, was only seventeen—and a very sweet seventeen, too. Her mother being a Spaniard, and Pepita having taken after her more than after Marigold, though he, no doubt, had been a good-looking man in his better time, Pepita was a beauty of the dark order—dark hair, dark eyes, rich coloring. And whoever says that boys of eighteen cannot fall in love, lies in his throat! I was eighteen just then, and I

was madly in love with Pepita, and properly miserable about it. For Pepita was one of those damsels who are happiest when not one but half a dozen swains are silly about them, and there was scarce a youngster of our neighborhood who had not begun being particular about his necktie and his socks, and the cut of his best clothes, and the proper parting of his hair, all because Pepita Marigold looked as if you could eat her and die in sheer ravishment of ecstasy at the first mouthful.

PEPITA came along as I sat there on the porch. She had been to see me two or three times during this latest stage of my illness, but her last visit had taken place a good week previously, and I had tormented myself every day since in wondering what she was after—if she was boating with the parson's son, or birds'-nesting with the squire's, or if Miss Ellingham's nephew, Bryce, had inveigled her into going a-fishing with him. But there were no signs of mental disquietude on Pepita's face: she looked as unconcerned and heart-whole as ever when, catching sight of me, she pushed open the garden gate and came up the path.

"Hello, Ben!" she exclaimed. "Out and about again? Hurrah!"

"Not much about, Pepita," I answered. "I haven't walked twenty yards so far—not been outside that hedge yet."

"Come now!" she said. "Come down to the Point! It'll do you good."

"Can't!" I replied. And I told her why—not forgetting Keziah's admonitions about the family silver. Pepita's big black eyes opened.

"Sakes!" she exclaimed. "You got to stop in that rambling old house all night through, by just yourself, Ben? I'd be frightened to death!"

"Oh, that's nothing," said I. "I don't mind. If I did hear anything, it would only be rats."

"Bad enough, too," she remarked. "What would you do, though, if robbers came? You'd ought to have a gun, like my old dad's. I reckon that would blow half a dozen robbers into mincemeat, once you let it off!"

"And me too!" I said, visualizing a certain blunderbuss which Captain Marigold kept hung on a rafter of his parlor. "No, I think I'd rather do without, Pepita. And there aren't any robbers round here, anyway."

"Well, ghosts, then, Ben," she insisted. "Ghosts! Seems to me this is just the place where you'd see a tidy lot." She craned her neck and looked up at the ivy-covered front of the old house. "Which is your room," she went on. "That one, isn't it, over the porch? Well, now, I guess if you look out from your window, you can see Gallowstree Point and that old gibbet! Fancy that, now, on a moonlight night! If I saw it, I'd let out a scream that would lick any siren or foghorn that ever sounded in the Channel!"

"You're a baby, Pepita!" said I indulgently. "You forget that I'm a man!"

Instead of laughing at me, she studied me closely, with a sidelong glance from under her big hat.

"You've grown, Ben!" she said suddenly. "You look like as if you were going to be a young man now, instead of a boy! Sakes! I guess you'll take to wearing a tailed coat Sundays!"

"Ordered!" said I proudly. "Members of the legal profession always wear tailed coats—it's etiquette. And silk hats! Mine's ordered too. You wait till I'm better, and start going to the office at Kingshaven every morning! Guess you wont know me!"

"Oh, yes, I shall, Ben, my boy!" she retorted, with the brutal candor of seventeen. "You haven't got a snub nose or a heap of freckles and sandy hair for nothing! But I'm no end glad you're better, old chap, and I'll come and take you out—look out for me tomorrow, Ben, and we'll have a nice walk."

AND then, with one of her ravishing smiles, Pepita was gone. The light of the day went with her—and I turned regretfully into the house, and after locking the front door, in religious observance of Keziah's behests, lighted the lamp in the parlor. It was then, I think, that I began to realize that the house, as Pepita had been kind enough to remark, really was rambling and old, and that there was a certain amount of queerness about being left absolutely alone in it.

However, there were things to be done, and occupation of any sort is a relief in circumstances like these. I prepared my own supper, and having been brought up from infancy by Keziah (my mother had died before I left the cradle), I washed up cups, plates and dishes after using them, and replaced each in its proper niche in

the kitchen dresser—Keziah, a veritable martinet in all domestic matters never allowed dirty things to be about, and she would never have slept if as much as a teaspoon had been left uncleaned overnight. All that done, I took my medicine, and sat down by what was left of the parlor fire, to read. And the old house got quieter and quieter and quieter—you could feel the quiet. If Keziah had come home unexpectedly, I wouldn't have minded if she'd talked for a solid hour about the family silver, and its hallmarks, and its history.

I got sick of that stillness by nine o'clock, and I went to bed. And being still weak after my illness, I soon fell asleep—dropping off suddenly. But I woke more suddenly—to hear two separate sounds. One was the sound of our old grandfather clock—it was striking midnight, twelve long, dull strokes. I didn't mind that. But I did mind the other sound—the sound of footsteps, stealthy, but unmistakable. I sat up in bed, listening, and I'm not ashamed to say, sweating with fear. And I sweated more than ever, and was more than ever afraid, when the footsteps stopped at our porch.

CHAPTER II

Uncle Joseph Krevin

WHEN you come to consider all the circumstances, you will not wonder that I was afraid. To begin with, I was weak, physically weak, from a long illness: there was not sufficient strength in me to grapple with a child. I was alone in a house which despite all its bolts, bars and window-fastenings, could be broken into. It was an isolated house, too; the nearest cottage was a couple of hundred yards away. And who should come to it, at that time o' night, but some evil-disposed person? It was not Keziah, returning unexpectedly; Keziah would have thrown pebbles at my window and raised her voice. It wasn't Veller, the local policeman—the tramp of Veller's feet could have been heard a mile away. Whoever this man was, he had a soft tread, not as quiet as a cat's, to be sure, and yet velvety. And who was he, and what was he after? I had heard the footsteps distinctly on the last stretch of the path which led from the garden gate to the shelter of the porch.

Now there was silence again; no doubt the man was examining the fastening of the front door: I pictured him—having a vivid imagination in those days—bending down to the lock in the moonlight, fingering the handle, perhaps, considering what he might do to get in. But suddenly I heard him going away again. There was no doubt of it—he was retreating down the path. And at that, I sprang out of my warm bed, and hurrying to the window, drew aside the blind and peered out into the night.

There was a three-quarter moon in the sky, right over the creek; but owing, perhaps, to the heat of the previous afternoon and evening, there was a heavy white mist on the shore and the land at its edge, and it circled about the trees and bushes in our garden. Still, I saw my midnight visitor; at least, I got a glimpse of him as he disappeared at the gate. He seemed to be a big man, broad of shoulders; maybe the mist made him look bigger than he was. And he went into the mist and was presently swallowed up in it, as he moved slowly in the direction of the spit of sand that ran down to Gallowstree.

I had some thought, then, of lighting a lamp, and setting it near the window of an upstairs room, so that this man, whoever he was, might know that the house was tenanted. But upon reflection I decided that he would probably take that as an invitation to come back. I did not want him back before full daylight, at any rate. So I returned to my bed, and of course lay there wide awake and listening, for a long time. I heard nothing, save the faint lap of the waves on the beach, and the occasional cry of a sea-bird. And at last I slept, and slept soundly; and when I woke, and went halfway down the stair to glance at the grandfather's clock, it was close on seven, and the blessed sun was high in the heavens and smiling cheerily over shore and sea.

THERE was no reason why I should get up; I could have lain in bed till noon if I had liked. But my strength and my spirits were coming back to me, and there was that in the fresh spring morning which impelled me to action. So I got into some clothes, and lighted the kitchen fire, and put on the kettle, and as it wore toward eight undid the ponderous fastenings of the front door and looked out into the garden. And at once I had a surprise which was almost a shock. For there, on

the left-hand side of the bench which ran round the porch, lay a bag—a queer-looking, travel-worn bag, old-fashioned in make, the leather much rubbed, the metal clasps battered and rusted—altogether, a bag that had seen much service. It was the sort of bag that you could carry easily in your hand, and it was roughly tied about with a bit of common cord in a fashion which suggested that the bag itself contained nothing that was valuable, and that anything was good enough for a fastening.

That my midnight visitor had set down his odd piece of luggage on the porch, I had no more doubt than that it lay there before my eyes. I made no attempt to touch it, but I went onto the porch and looked more closely at its exterior. There had been some initials painted on its side, in black, at one time, but they were now almost obliterated. And it had in past times borne many labels; there were traces of them all over it, back and front. But there was no recent label, nothing to show to whom it belonged, nor whence or by what route its owner had come there. Come he had, however, and straight to our door, as I made things out, and there had set down his bit of gear and gone away.

I WAS speculating with various why's and what's and who's, when I heard a heavy and unmistakable tread on the pebbly road outside the garden. That was Veller, passing along to his cottage; he passed every morning. Presently he stuck his big round red face over the hedge and saw me and grinned—he was one of those men who smile perpetually.

"Morning, Master Ben!" said he. "Glad to see you out and around again!"

"Much obliged to you," I answered. "But come here, Veller."

He opened the garden gate and came up the path, his small eyes inquisitive. I silently pointed to the thing on the bench.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Just so! I sees it—a bag! And what might it signify, now, Master Ben?"

"Veller," said I, "you listen to me. My sister's away; she had to go away last night to Kingshaven, to see Mrs. Hozier—"

He nodded understandingly, grinning more widely than ever, as if with great satisfaction.

"Ah!" he said, interrupting me. "Just so—exactly! I see Mr. Robinson last night as he come home on the last train from Kingshaven. Mrs. Hozier, now—her presented her good man with twinses yesterday. Afternoon it was, said Mr. Robinson—five o'clock. Which, when he called there, was doing well—all of 'em. Twinses—a boy and a gel."

"Oh!" said I. "Well, anyway, that's where my sister went, so I was all alone in the house, all night, d'ye see, Veller? And about twelve o'clock I heard footsteps come up the path there. They paused here, on the porch. Then they went off. I jumped out of bed and saw a man leave the garden and go away toward Gallowstree Point. And this morning—just now, in fact—I found this bag here, where you see it. What d'you make of that, Veller?"

He scratched the lobe of his red right ear, thoughtfully.

"Well, to be sure, that's a main queer thing, Master Ben!" he answered. "You wasn't expecting anybody—a visitor, now?"

"No!" said I. "Nobody!"

"Seems like as if whoever this here bag belongs to knew his way about in these parts," he remarked ruminatively. "Here he comes, straight to the spot, puts down his luggage, and goes away! Whither? And for what purpose?"

"That's just it!" I said. "Where's he gone? Will he come back? What would you do, now, if you were me, Veller?"

He consulted his ear again, and presently smiled as with a great inspiration.

"Just so—exactly!" he answered. "Ah—if it was me, Master Ben, I should get my breakfast! Let things bide till that was done with, so to speak—leaving that there article where it is. 'Cause you never know what may be inside luggage of that complexion. Maybe this chap is a seafaring man. And I've knowed seafaring men as carried queer goods in their gear! Snakes! I wouldn't open that there bag not for nothing—might be a rattle-serpent in it! You get your breakfast, Master Ben, and if so be as this here mysterious mortal do turn up, and there's cause for what they call invoking the presence of the law—well, you knows where to find me!"

HE became portentously solemn and dignified in pronouncing the last word, and we parted without spoiling its effect, he to his cottage and I into the kitchen, to cook my breakfast. As was our custom, I left the front door wide open, and

I had just got the bacon nicely sizzling in one pan, and the water for a couple of eggs near boiling-point in another, when I heard steps advancing along the garden path. I popped my head out of the kitchen and looked down the hall. There was a man on the porch.

He did not see me, for he was looking at the bag. So I took a good look at him. He was, I felt sure, the man I had seen from my window at midnight: the set of his shoulders seemed familiar. He was a big man, some five feet ten inches, I should say, in height, and broadly built, and his girth was accentuated by his loosely made suit of blue cloth. He wore a big slouch hat, and carried a queer-looking, un-English stick in his hand; there was a heavy gold cable chain across his waistcoat, and a gold pin in his neckcloth; somehow he gave the impression of being a solid, substantial man, financially. As for his face, which he presently turned in my direction, it was as big as his body, clean-shaven, pale-complexioned, flabby. There was a small nose in the middle of it, and two small, sly gray eyes, and a small, pursed-up mouth, but a big chin, and big jowl—my budding-lawyer instincts warned me that this was a man in dealing with whom it would be well to have all your wits about you.

I went toward him, and at sight of me he started. It was either a well-affected gesture, intended to deceive, or it was a genuine start of surprise; I found it difficult to decide which. And in making it, he let out a little, indefinite sound—a sort of almost affectionate murmur. But I was short and sharp enough.

"Well?" I demanded. "What do you want?"

His answer was as remarkable as it was unpleasant. He suddenly shot out a big flabby hand and grasped my chin and jaw, turning my face this way and that. It was all done in a second, and he spoke just as quickly.

"Aye!" he said in a fat, unctuous voice. "To be sure! It will be. Unmistakably a Heckitt! Know him anywhere!"

"I am a Heckitt!" I declared, edging away from him. "Who are you?"

He nodded at me solemnly, three times, and when he answered my question, his voice was fatter than ever.

"Your uncle, Joseph Krevin, my lad—that's who I am!" he replied. "Your poor mother's only brother Joe, what she was so fond of. You'll have heard of me, no doubt—from your sister Keziah."

"Never!" protested I. "Never heard Keziah speak of you at any time!"

HE looked highly pained at that. But a certain holy meekness spread itself as a cloak across the look of pain.

"Well, well!" he said. "Rellytives is—not always what they should be. But look you here, my lad—and this'll show you that I know what I'm talking about. Inside the parlor there, on the left-hand side as you go in, there's an ancient bureau, and on top of that bureau there's two family Bibles; one's bound in black morocco, and t'other in red calf. And the black one is the Heckitt family Bible, and the red one is the Krevin. And in the Krevin you'll find me—Joseph Krevin; and in both you'll find your mother, Hannah Krevin as was, what married a Heckitt—your father, Charles Heckitt. Uncle Joseph Krevin, I am—you can call me Uncle Joe for short, if you like; and well Keziah knows me, whether she mentions me or not. And where is Keziah—my niece Keziah, what I aint set eyes on for more years nor I can remember. A fine young woman, Keziah, and handsomest in these parts, when I was last hereabouts!"

He raised his voice considerably in the last sentence, as if hoping that Keziah would overhear this tribute to her charms, and his small eyes looked beyond me into the shadows of the hall. But I damped his ardor—or affectation of it.

"Keziah is not in at present," I said, still keeping in the doorway. "I'm not quite sure when she will be in, either."

"But you're in, my lad!" he retorted sharply. "And I smells bacon—and coffee! Aint you going to welcome your Uncle Joe, what was your poor mother's fav'rite? The Heckitts, as I remember them, was always given to hospitality, and—"

"Keziah doesn't allow me to ask anybody in when she's out," I said. "But since you're a relation—"

"Aye, there's no doubt of that!" he interrupted quickly. "And, my lad," he added, with a significant grimace, "not a poor one, neither—as you may find, to your profit, some of these days. And what may your name be, now, for 'tis so long since I was this way that there are matters I've forgotten."

I told him my name, asked him in, and

put more bacon in the pan and added more eggs to those I was boiling for myself. He sat down near the kitchen fire and watched me, making remarks about his surroundings from time to time which showed me that he was familiar enough with them.

"There's little changed in this old house, nephew Ben," he said, as he drew his chair to the table. "I says to myself as soon as ever I cast eyes on it that it was just the same as ever was!"

"That would be when you came to the porch last night?" I remarked, already curious about his movements. "I heard you—and saw you, too!"

But the words were no sooner out of my lips than I realized that I was a bit too cocksure in my assertions. He put down his knife and fork with a gesture of surprise.

"Me?" he exclaimed. "No, my lad! You didn't see me, nor hear me neither, last night, at your porch! 'Cause why? I wasn't there!"

"Isn't that your bag outside on the porch?" I asked.

"Surely! My bag it is, and no other's," he asserted gravely. "But not brought there by me, my lad. You see, I'd a bit of business with a man hereabouts. And when I come along from London and got out at the station, I gives that there bit of a bag to a man what had come along with me in the train for the last few miles and said he knew this part, to leave for me at Heckitts'. That'd be the man you see."

"Queer time for a man to come!" I said. "It was midnight!"

"Aye, well, it'd be past ten o'clock when I give him the bag," he replied. "Late train, you see. No, I wasn't nowheres about here last night, Ben, my boy—miles off, in the country. Seeing—ah—an old friend o' mine. And what may you be thinking of doing with yourself, my lad? Finished your schooling, no doubt, and ekally no doubt, you'll be a fine scholard?"

I gave him as much family news as I considered good for him, and then tried to extract some personal information about himself. But beyond ascertaining that he had knocked about the world a good deal and was for the present living somewhere in London, I learned very little of Uncle Joseph Krevin and his doings. He made a very good breakfast, and seemed to enjoy it; and when he had finally pushed aside his plate, drained his cup and lighted his pipe, he went back to the chimney-corner and became reminiscent. But all his reminiscences were of the family sort; he seemed to have the pedigrees of Krevins and Heckitts at his finger-ends, and if I tried to switch him off and to turn him into tracks more intimately concerned with his personal affairs, he adroitly eluded me and went back. About himself and his adventures during the many years which had elapsed since his last visit to Middlebourne, I squeezed nothing out of him.

KEZIAH came back from Kingshaven before dinner-time. She walked in on us unexpectedly, and she knew Uncle Joe Krevin at once, and at sight of him she looked as if somebody had just given her something very sour to bite at.

"So it's you, is it?" she said. "After all these years?"

"Better late than never, Keziah," he answered, almost humbly. "You see, I'd a bit of business in these parts, and I thought I'd look in. And no doubt you'll give me a bed tonight, Keziah—and you'll be glad to hear I've made my fortune since them other days?"

Keziah did not say whether she would be glad to hear that or not—she said nothing, except to reply dryly that she'd no doubt there would be a bed for our visitor, and a bite too. And I noticed that she held very little converse with Uncle Joe; what talk they had was of the nature of his talk to me after breakfast. He was out, by himself, that afternoon, and again for a couple of hours late in the evening: when he came in after that second excursion, he went straight to bed. And when he had gone, and his chamber door was shut, Keziah came close to my chair, and with a look of caution, whispered:

"Ben!" she said. "Flesh and blood of ours he is—but that's the deepest and wickedest old scamp you ever saw!"

CHAPTER III

Fiend's Work

UNCLE JOSEPH KREVIN had been put in the best sleeping chamber, right over our heads, and though there was a good solid floor between him and us, I glanced at the ceiling, involuntarily, as if afraid he might overhear his niece Keziah's denunciation of him. Keziah

saw my gesture and dropped her tones still lower.

"Never heard word or seen sign of that man since you were born, Ben!" she went on. "And before that, never heard a good word of him! He talks about our poor mother, and him being her fav'rite! Lord save us—he was her fav'rite to the extent that she was the only one that stood by him! He was a bad 'un at all times—sly, deceitful, dishonest; he was in troubl' with the coast-guard hereabouts, for he was mixed up in smuggling when but a lad; many's the time I've heard my mother talk of it. And his own father turned him out when he came to be a man grown; and after that, he'd come back to these parts now and again, and never could one find how he made his living, nor where he'd been, nor what he did, but I reckon whatever he did was black work, and done in dark places. And 'tis nineteen years, Ben, since I set eyes on him, and now he's back, and I'd like to know why! No good, I'll be bound!"

"He said he'd business hereabouts, Keziah," I remarked, "—business with some old friend of his."

"Business!" she exclaimed with a sniff. "Aye, I'll warrant him! Devil's business, if any! And what friends has he about here, I'd like to know? There isn't a Krevin left alive but him—your mother was the last. I can't think of a soul hereabouts that'd be glad to see him or would have anything to do with him! Joe Krevin was far too well known all across the countryside in his younger days for them that knew him then to want to have truck with him now. He's come down here for no good, Ben, and I'll be truly thankful to see his big back turn out of that gate!"

"You wouldn't ask him to go away, Keziah?" I suggested.

KEZIAH smoothed out the folds of the black silk apron which she always wore of an evening, regarding them with her head on one side.

"Well, flesh and blood is flesh and blood, Ben," she answered; "and after all, he belongs to our particular blend, doesn't he? You can't very well show the door to a man who's your own mother's brother, can you, however bad you believe him to be? We're half Krevins, ourselves—though we're not bad eggs, such as he is."

"He seems quiet and civil enough," said I, "and in a way, a bit afraid of you, Keziah. He's very humble and polite to you, anyway."

Keziah sniffed again.

"I'm afraid of a man like that when he comes extra-polite!" she said. "That's all put on! When a man of that sort gets soft-sawdery, Ben, you look out for yourself. I'd rather see a burglar with a dark lantern and a pistol in his hand than a man like that, all soft speech and sugary smiles—far rather! Joe Krevin's here in these parts for no good, and I hope to goodness he'll take himself off before another sun's down!"

"You don't think he's after the family silver, Keziah?" I suggested. "I suppose he knows about it?"

But for once in her life Keziah looked as if the family silver were a matter too contemptible to be mentioned in connection with Uncle Joseph Krevin. Her sniff deepened into a snort of something like derision.

"Family silver, lad!" she exclaimed. "No, indeed—it'll be something more than a mere parcel of spoons and forks that's brought Joe Krevin hereabouts! But it's no use speculating, Ben, on what his game is; it's wearing on to eleven o'clock, and time we were in bed. I'll lock up."

SHE went out into the hall and after winding up the grandfather's clock, passed on to the front door, and as was her invariable custom, opened it and went out onto the porch to see what sort of night it was and what signs there were for the morrow. I followed her. It was a very still night; there was scarce a breath of wind, and all the sound we heard was the faint lapping of the waves on the beach. The moon was high above us, over the creek, but there was a great deal of cloud about, and all along the shore and over the sea there was white mist; we could see neither the dark belt of trees about Middlebourne Grange, the headlands at the opposite end of the creek, nor the old gallows at the extremity of the sand-spit. But it was a shifting mist, that—while we watched, it shifted, swirling away above the flats of sea-pink and spear-grass, and curling round the edges of the coppices that here and there ran down between the village and the coast. Once upon a time, looking out of our windows, I had fancied those curling mists to be ghosts—the ghosts of the pirates and smugglers who had been hanged from the old gibbet.

WE were turning out of the porch, where the scent of the jasmine hung thick and sweet on the night air, when the clinging silence was broken by a scream. It was a scream such as I had never heard before, have never heard since, and pray God I may never hear again: the scream of a human being in awful fear—and unmistakably the scream of a man. It clove the air with the speed of a bullet; its echo came for a sickening second from the wall of our house, and then there was silence, and Keziah clutching at the pillar of the porch.

"Merciful Heavens, Ben!" she gasped. "What—what's that? *Oh!*"

For the scream came again—shorter and more subdued this time, snapped off, as it were, as if some hand had clutched the throat and mouth from which it came, and choked it ere it rose to full strength. And then the silence was deeper than ever. But I heard my own heart beating, and I saw Keziah put her hand to her breast.

"Where was it?" she asked faintly.

"Down there—out on Gallowstree," I said. "What—"

"There!" she exclaimed. "Of all places! Ben!"

"Well?" I answered.

"There's—there's something going on down there!" she said. "I—I wonder if it's—if it's got to do with—with what we were talking about?"

I got an idea of what she meant, and half turned toward the stair at the side of the hall.

"Shall I call him?" I asked.

"No!" she said. "No! But—we must see. Shut the door and come on!"

I pulled to the door of the house, and we crept down the garden, and out on the bit of coarse grass that lay between it and the sand. Suddenly Keziah gripped my arm and came to a sharp halt.

"Listen, Ben!" she whispered. "What's that? Oars!"

I too pulled myself up and stood listening. I heard a sound, and at first took it to be no more than that of the tide lapping against the rocks. But presently I decided that she was right in her surmise. Somebody was pulling a boat away from the shore, a little to our left, between Gallowstree Point and Middlebourne Grange, pulling steadily and swiftly—a single pair of oars, I fancied.

"Yes!" I said. "If only there was more moonlight—"

But just then another sort of light appeared. Round the corner of the narrow lane which led from the shore to the village came a blot of yellowy-red light, swinging to and fro, and near it we heard voices.

"Veller!" I exclaimed. "That's his bull's-eye, Keziah! He's heard those screams too, and he's got somebody with him."

We edged swiftly across the sand-hills toward Veller and his lantern, and suddenly emerging into the circle of light which it threw, found ourselves confronting him and Captain Marigold. He, the Captain, it appeared, was on his way home from the house of a friend with whom he had been spending the evening, and foregathering with Veller in the village street, had stopped to talk for a moment or two; their peaceful conversation had been broken in upon by the screams.

"And if those weren't the cries of a poor mortal in his death-agony, ma'am," declared Captain Marigold, "and being done to death in some devilish manner, then you may write me down a Dutchman, which I'm certainly not! You heard the cries, ma'am?"

"Twice!" answered Keziah. "And just now we heard oars—over there!"

We all stopped, on the ridge of a rise of sandy turf, and listened, straining our eyes into the gray mist. But now we heard nothing; the sound of the oars had died away completely. And presently, Veller and his lantern going on in front, we went forward, slowly, and full of a certain fear, in the direction from which we had believed the cries to come.

IT was Captain Marigold who first saw the horror on which we were all presently to stare and were never again to forget. Perhaps his eyes were sharper than ours; perhaps his position at the policeman's right hand gave him a better vantage point, but anyway, he saw before we did. And he let out a smothered exclamation that had nothing of irreverence in it.

"God in Heaven!" he said, and almost fell back on Veller. "Look!"

We were by that time at the edge of the rocks on which the old gibbet was so firmly fixed; and there, right in the middle of the circle of light thrown by the lantern, stood the gibbet itself, black, sinister. And to it was tied up a man—a little thin rat of a man, tied up by the throat. I saw at once how he had been tied; a coil of rope,

new rope, was wound with relentless tightness round his neck and the iron-clamped post behind him; he had been garroted, strangled, anything you like to call it; and it needed but a glance to see that he was as dead as man can be. His head hung downward; his arms and hands fell limp against his sides; his legs dangled aimlessly toward the slimy rock. And when Veller moved to him and lifted his head, I saw that the tongue was sticking out of the mouth and that the eyes bulged horribly, and glazed though they were, were still wide open.

Captain Marigold darted forward by the policeman's side, and seized the dead man's right hand.

"Warm!" he exclaimed. "Quite warm! The man hasn't been dead many minutes! And you heard oars?"

He snatched the lantern out of Veller's hand and swept the water with it in the direction which Keziah and I pointed out to him. But you might as well have tried to lighten midnight with a match; the lantern threw no more than a tiny patch of light on the creaming surf at our feet. We turned again to the gibbet and its awful burden. The two men produced knives and began to cut the cord by which the dead man had been strangled against the post.

"Look you well at this before we take him down, Miss Heckitt!" said Captain Marigold. "And you too, boy! Your evidence'll be wanted as to what you've actually seen. Get it fixed in your recollection!"

"There's no need for any special effort to do that, Captain Marigold!" answered my sister in her very quietest tones. "We've both got eyes in our heads, and we've seen enough already. But—this man?"

Neither Veller nor Captain Marigold had ever seen the dead man before. He was, as I have already said, a little man—a rat of a man, and dead though he was, and horribly murdered, I could not help thinking that he had all the appearance of a thorough bad lot. A thin, sly, ferrety face, a shock of red hair, sharklike teeth between evil lips—all these things I noted. And I noted, too, that across the left cheek, running from the corner of the eye to near the lip, there was a long, livid scar, as if the man had been at some time slashed across the face by a sword cut or had had a dagger-thrust.

"You're certain sure about hearing the sound of oars, Miss Heckitt?" asked Veller suddenly. "You don't make no doubt on it? Then this here poor fellow must ha' been brought in from sea by them as done this to him! He aint nobody belonging to these parts, and hasn't been seen about the village, I'll take my 'davy. I should ha' heard of him if he'd been about here—looks like a foreigneerin' feller, to me. Look at them earrings!"

The dead man had gold rings in his ears. And he had a gold chain across his waistcoat, and was carrying a good silver watch at the end of it, and wearing a good blue serge suit, and altogether he looked as if in life he had been in comfortable circumstances. Veller hastily examined some of his pockets and withdrew his hand, looking mystified.

"Money there!" he exclaimed. "Seems plenty o' money, too. I don't understand this, Captain. He aint been robbed!"

"Bah!" said Captain Marigold impatiently. "Do you think robbery's the only motive for murder? Something deeper and darker than that in this, my lad! Hadn't you better get the body up to the village and have a proper examination?"

"There's folks coming," answered Veller, nodding at two or three sparks of lights across the beach. "I thought others than us would hear those screams. We'll have to take him up to the Merry Mariner—that's how the law stands, I reckon. Inquest'll have to be there. And what evidence can anybody give, I'd like to know?"

"That remains to be seen," observed Captain Marigold dryly. "Don't interfere with his clothing any more now, Veller. Get him up to the inn, and send for a doctor, and get your inspector or sergeant."

KEZIAH and I went away as the village people came down to Gallowstree Point. One thought was uppermost in the minds of both of us: Had this awful and ghastly murder any connection with the presence at Middlebourne of our relation Uncle Joseph Krevin? And if so—but beyond that things became vague.

"If he's asleep,—and I suspect he is,—I'm going to wake him and tell him what's just happened, Ben!" exclaimed Keziah suddenly, as we stumbled across the rough beach. "He's got to know!"

"Keziah!" I murmured, half afraid of my own voice. "Do—do you think he'd anything to do with—with that?"

"I don't know, Ben, I don't know!" she answered. "I wish to God I did know! But—he's here! And he was out this afternoon, and he was out this evening, after dark. Where? On what business? Whom did he see? And who's this strange man—murdered by men that row away as quietly as they came? Here's murder, black, foul, horrible, at our very door, Ben, and he's there—sleeping in our best bed!"

We went into the house, and Keziah marched straight up the stair. The light in the hall was still burning at full, and it shone broadly on Uncle Joseph Krevin's door. And in the silence we heard him snoring—a long, steady, deep-bass snore.

Keziah knocked—once, twice, thrice. The snoring stopped at last, and she knocked again, more loudly. Then we heard movements and creakings, and Uncle Joseph Krevin's voice, demanding, sleepily, to know who was there?

"I'm here!" answered Keziah, peremptorily. "Come out! There's news for you!"

We heard more movements and tumblings; then the door opened, and Uncle Joseph appeared wondering and blinking. He wore a suit of gorgeously colored pajamas, and in that uncertain light looked twice as big as he really was.

"Anything the matter?" he asked. "Not a fire, I hope, my lass?"

"There'll be hell-fire for somebody over it!" said Keziah sharply. "No—murder! There's a man been murdered outside here—just now! A strange man! Now, is it anybody you're acquainted with—anybody you came to meet? I want to know."

I was watching Uncle Joseph closely, and I saw his big, flabby face grow pale, and a queer look come into his eyes. He stared from Keziah to me, moistening his lips. But before he could speak, I spoke.

"A little dark man, with gold rings in his ears, and a slash right across his left cheek," I began. "He—"

Before I could say a word more, he made a queer look come into his eyes. He stared straightway collapsed in a heavy heap on the doormat.

CHAPTER IV

The Lady of the Grange

WE each got a hand under Uncle Joseph's fat arms, and with some difficulty pulled his heavy body into a sitting posture against the door-post. After some sighings and groanings, he came round a little, rolled his eyes at us, and shaking his head, contrived to point a hand into the bedroom, toward his old traveling bag, which stood on a corner of the dressing-table.

"In bag!" he murmured faintly. "Bottle—brandy—glass."

I hurried into the room, opened the bag, found a large black bottle, and snatching up a tumbler from the washstand, went back to him.

"Pour it out!" he whispered. "Ready mixed—brandy and water—forced to keep it by me—case of—attacks like this."

He took a good swig of his medicine when I gave him the tumbler, and presently seemed to revive; certainly he looked at us with more assurance.

"Weak heart, Keziah!" he announced apologetically. "Suffered from it for some time. Can't stand being woke up suddenly, nor get startled. And you gave me a shock!"

"Do you know anything of that man?" demanded Keziah. "You've heard him described—Ben described him! Come, now!"

He took another hearty pull at the brandy and water, got up from his undignified position, and shook his head.

"No!" he answered suavely. "Oh, no, Keziah and Benjamin, I don't know the man you speak of! How should I? A man with gold rings in his ears, and a scar across his left cheek, say you? Oh, no, I don't know any such person! How should I? I aint been in these parts for a many years, as you know."

"This man isn't of these parts," snapped Keziah. "He's as much a stranger as you are. And you were out twice yesterday and may have met him. Anyway, there's been murder done at my very door, and in the morning the police'll want to know a good deal that I can't tell them, whether you can or not! Come away, Ben, and get to your bed."

SHE stalked out of the room, leaving Uncle Joseph, glass in hand, leaning against the post of his bed, and I followed her. And presently I went to bed, and found it difficult to sleep; as soon as I had blown out my candle, I saw that awful sight again: the black gibbet-post, the rat of a man tied to it by his throat, his protruding tongue, his bulging eyes. I did sleep at last; and then I dreamed—horrible

things. Dead men—Uncle Joseph—Veller—boats slipping away into darkness—lanterns dancing in yellow fog—all sorts of perplexing and terrifying matters. And at last somebody was shaking my shoulder, and I started up, and there was Keziah at my bedside, and the sun streaming in at the windows.

"Nine o'clock, Ben, and time you'd your breakfast," she said. "I let you sleep—I've been in twice before. And Ben, he's gone!"

I sat up in bed—no doubt with my mouth as wide open as my eyes.

"Uncle Joseph?" I exclaimed. "Left?"

"Gone when I got up, at six o'clock," answered Keziah. "Bag and all! He's as soft-footed as a cat, when he likes—always was, as I remember him; and that's another bad sign in man or woman. Never you trust anybody, Ben, that walks about as if they wore velvet-soled slippers! Yes, he was gone, and our back door left open."

"He must have known of that five-forty train to Kingshaven," I said musingly. "You aren't sorry, Keziah?"

"I'd as soon have the devil in my house as Joseph Krevin!" she answered. "That's a fact, Ben! No, I'm glad to be rid of him. But there'll be trouble. Of course it's known that he's been here; and now, in view of that murder, and his going off secret, like this, things will be said, and we shall have the police nosing round. Well, I shall keep nothing back! But get up, Ben; I've a nice piece of fish for your breakfast."

I GOT up, not so much because of the fish, though my appetite as a convalescent was keen enough, as from a desire to look out on the scene of last night's horrors. I drew up my blind, and opening the casements of the window, leaned out and looked across the beach toward Gallowstree Point. It was a wonderfully beautiful morning, with a blue and cloudless sky, and floods of bright sunshine covering sea and land; the thrushes were singing gayly in our garden, and I could hear the larks in the cornfields behind; I heard, too, the gentle lapping of the waves on the edge of the sands. And there, in the midst of all this springtide freshness, stood the black gibbet, on its platform of black rock; and once more, with a shudder, I saw the man tied to it, as clearly as I had seen him in the light of Veller's lantern. . . . .

Veller himself came in while I was eating my breakfast. After his usual custom, he told us nothing until Keziah began to question him. And both he and Keziah had discussed the weather, and the state of their gardens, before they came to what they were both really thinking about.

"Any more news about last night?" asked Keziah at last.

Veller, sitting by the fire, with his large hands folded across the broadest part of his tunic, twiddled his thumbs and smiled widely.

"Well, scarcely what you might term news," he answered. "We don't know who the man is, nor where he came from, nor what he was doing here. Seems like he was brought ashore. But nobody as I can come across, see or hear of any vessel a-standing in to this part o' the coast last evening. Mysterious affair—uncommon. He had plenty o' money, on him, that man. Gold and silver money—matter o' fifteen pound, all told. However, looking around that there old gibbet early this morning, one thing I did find as may be important."

"What?" asked Keziah.

"Have it on me," replied Veller. He unbuttoned one of the flap pockets of his tunic and produced a little parcel, done up in soft paper. "Have to be shown at the coroner's 'quest, this will," he continued. "You see what 'tis? An old pocketbook. Been a good article once, but now worn. Two or three pockets in it—morrocy leather, I believe. But—empty!"

"No papers in it?" suggested Keziah.

"Not a single dockyment, ma'am! I found it," he went on, putting his find carefully away, "at the foot of them rocks, beneath where we found *him*. Lying open, on the sand, as if somebody had thrown it away. Well—maybe something'll come o' that. No telling!"

THEN, getting at last to what he had really come for, he asked quietly if Mr. Joseph Krevin had yet risen.

"Yes, and gone away too!" answered Keziah. "He left early this morning."

"Ah!" said Veller, rubbing his chin. "I hear he was a-visiting you, and was out and about a bit yesterday, and I wondered if he'd seen this here dead man in his pilgrimages?"

"No, he hadn't, and knew nothing about him!" snapped Keziah. "We woke him out of his sleep last night to ask him that very question."

"Ah!" repeated Veller. "Just so—ex-

actly. That'd be Mr. Joseph's little bag, no doubt, that Master Ben, there, drew my official notice to on the porch yesterday morning?"

"It was his bag," said I.

"To be sure!" assented Veller. "Deposited there midnight, I think, Master Ben? Just so! And where might Mr. Joseph ha' been between midnight and breakfast-time?"

"Ben doesn't know, Veller, and I don't know!" said Keziah. "Nobody knows—here, anyway. Ask Joseph Krevin!"

Veller smiled more widely than ever, and rolled his eyes from one to the other of us, as if all this was a highly amusing game.

"Aye, just so, to be sure, ma'am!" he said. "And where might Mr. Joseph abide when he's to home, like?"

"We don't know that, either," snapped Keziah. "We know nothing whatever about him, except that after nineteen years' absence he came here yesterday morning about eight, left this morning before five, and went out twice yesterday on business that he never mentioned to us. And when you've written all that down, Veller, as you no doubt will, you've got every scrap of evidence we can give you!"

"To be sure, ma'am," said Veller, good-humoredly. "Well, 'tis a 'nation queer business, aint it? Don't remember that I ever heard of a queerer." Then, rapidly turning to a more congenial subject, he added: "If so be as you're wanting a setting of eggs for that there old brown hen of yours, Miss Heckitt, my missus she have some rare good 'uns."

"Well, tell her to send them round;" answered Keziah. "I can do with them." And as Veller, picking up his peaked cap, was moving off, she stopped him with a question. "I suppose some of your lot will be coming down to Middlebourne about this?" she suggested. "Police from Kingshaven, eh?"

"Half a dozen in the village, now, ma'am," replied Veller, cheerfully. "And newspaper fellers, too! And I hear the Chief say something about getting down a Scotland Yard detective too, as I come out."

"Well, I don't want any more policemen here!" declared Keziah. "I don't mind answering you, as a neighbor, Veller, but I want no more—I've told all we know. And as for those newspaper men, if any of 'em come here, I shall shut the door on 'em! I've no opinion of newspapers—a lot o' trash!"

VELLER promised to do what he could to keep me from molestation and went away. I thought hard when he had gone and while I was finishing my breakfast. Having been destined, at my own wish, for the legal profession ever since I was twelve years of age, and sent by Keziah to Kingshaven Grammar School with that aim in view, I knew rather more than my sister did about the things we had just discussed, and I foresaw trouble and annoyance over Uncle Joseph Krevin.

"Keziah!" I said. "I'm afraid it's not much good asking Veller to keep people away. People will come who wont be kept away!"

"An Englishman's home is his castle!" affirmed Keziah stoutly.

"Not when the law wants to get in," said I. "I'm afraid the law will want to know a good deal about Uncle Joseph. He came here, Keziah, under highly suspicious circumstances. The circumstances under which he left were highly suspicious also. Honest and innocent men, Keziah, don't leave their relations' houses at five o'clock in the morning, without as much as a hasty farewell; nor—"

"As if I didn't know all that as well as you do, my lad!" broke in Keziah. "Don't you start haranguing me! You're not a judge yet, nor a lawyer neither. And I don't want to hear another word about Joseph Krevin! This is my day for cleaning out the best parlor, and I don't allow anybody or anything to come between me and my work. You put on your overcoat, and go for a bit of a walk in this nice sunshine—it'll do you good."

I TOOK Keziah's advice, and after a while, when the morning had grown still warmer, went upstairs to get my best overcoat, preparatory to setting out for a stroll on the shore. The overcoat was kept in a wardrobe in the room in which Uncle Joseph Krevin had slept: I had to go in there to get it. And as I passed across the floor, I chanced to see lying on the carpet near a chair at the side of the bed,—on which chair, no doubt, Uncle Joseph had cast some of his clothing when he unrobed,—a couple of small squares of paper, or of cardboard, half-hidden by the dimity valance of the bedstead. I picked them up and found them to be cards, common things, cheaply printed. Each bore the same name and address—a surname, without prefix of Christian name

or initial—"*Crippe, Marine Store Dealer, Old Gravel Lane, E.*"

I carried them downstairs and showed them to Keziah, who looked at them with a suspicious eye.

"That'll be a London address, Ben," she remarked. "Where all the wickedness comes from! But who Crippe may be, or why *he* was carrying Crippe business tickets in his pocket, goodness—or as one should say, the devil!—only knows. Put 'em in the tea-caddy, my lad; they may come in for something, some time."

THE tea-caddy, an ornamental affair, used as a receptacle for odds and ends, stood on the parlor sideboard. I put the cards in one of the compartments and then went out, leaving Keziah to her cleaning. That was only my second time of going abroad since my illness, and though I had a stout stick to aid my steps, I felt that I should not get very far, fine though the morning was, and bracing as the light breezes, blown in from the sea, seemed to me. Still, I managed to wander round the semicircle of the beach until I got to near the wall of Middlebourne Grange. There I gave out, and was glad to sit down on a low balustrade that projected from the little bridge which crossed the moat.

And I had scarcely perched myself on it, when the door in the wall behind me opened, and there came out a woman whom, though I had never seen her before, I immediately took to be the recently arrived tenant of the Grange, Miss Ellingham. She caught sight of me, sitting there, and came forward, looking intently at me; and I, on my part, looked just as intently at her. There was reason—I had never seen anybody like her. She was a thinnish, spare woman, rather above medium height, and, I should say, somewhat older than Keziah, which would make her about forty or forty-five. But it was her face and her dress which attracted me; the dress was a plain black affair, prim and straight, with nothing to relieve its plainness but a white collar and cuffs; the face, sharp, angular, every feature clear cut, was bleached almost as white as the linen, and in it, deep-set, were a pair of the blackest eyes I ever saw in man or woman. They seemed to burn you, those eyes, and if they fixed themselves on you once, it was as if they were never to be taken off again.

Those eyes were on me now, and as their owner drew nearer, I felt as if I was being bewitched, or fascinated, or—something. But she spoke, and her voice was extraordinarily soft, gentle, soothing.

"I think you're Ben Heckitt?" she said, her thin, straight lips curving into a smile that was as pleasing as her voice.

"Yes, ma'am," said I.

"And you're about again after your illness?" she went on. "But"—here she nodded knowingly at me—"not feeling overstrong, eh?"

"I don't feel very fit," I answered. "This is about as far as I can walk, I think."

"Weak about your legs, eh?" she suggested, with another smile. "And only too glad to sit down? You see I know how you're feeling. But I don't think you ought to sit on that stone; you may get a chill. Come in with me, and I'll find you something more comfortable to rest on."

I suppose I did not realize it at the time, but this was one of those women whose orders you've just got to obey: I obeyed her, anyway, and rising, followed her through the door in the wall and into the grounds of the Grange. Oddly enough, though I had lived close by it all my life, I had never been in there before, and I was interested to see what a fine, romantic old place it was—an ancient, gabled old mansion set amidst fine trees and carefully tended gardens. But I had little time to observe this—Miss Ellingham marched me across a lawn, into the house, and through a stone-walled entrance hall to a big room that looked south. She pointed to an easy-chair, and then rang a bell at the side of the fireplace.

"I'm going to give you some medicine, Ben," she said, with another of her smiles. "A glass of good old port and a biscuit! Do you like port? Most boys do."

Before I could reply, the door opened again, and there came into the room, gorgeous in his brilliant Eastern dress, a Hindu manservant.

I SUPPOSE Miss Ellingham saw my start of surprise and astonishment at sight of this unexpected apparition, for when the man had taken some order from her and relieved the room of his multicolored presence, she turned to me with a laugh.

"Something new for you, that, eh?" she said. "Never seen anything like that before, have you?"

"Not out of a picture, ma'am," said I.

"Oh, well, he's real enough, poor Mandhu

Khan!" she remarked. "A very good and faithful servant! I brought him with me from India where I lived a great many years—most of my life, in fact. He feels the English climate, though, and so do I, up to now. We have to keep good fires going, in spite of the spring warmth. But here's the port, and you shall have a glass; when I was young, and people had been ill, they always had port, and I don't see any reason why that custom should change, though most customs have changed, I'm sorry to say, since I left England."

The Hindu had come back with a tray on which was a decanter and glasses, and a jar of biscuits: Miss Ellingham helped me to one glass of port and herself to another, and putting the biscuits at my elbow, bade me serve myself. She nodded smilingly at me over the rim of her glass.

"Here's wishing you a speedy return to your usual health, Ben Heckitt," she said. "The parson was telling me about you yesterday. Your illness caught you on the very brink of a legal career, didn't it?"

"Yes ma'am," I answered. "I was just going to be articled to Mr. Philbrick, in Kingshaven. I've been intended for the law ever since I was twelve years old, ma'am. I've lost six months through my illness."

"Oh, well, you'll soon make that up!" she remarked cheerfully. "Got to be articled five years, haven't you? You see, I know something about it—my father was a famous London solicitor—attorneys, they used to call them in those days. He made a big fortune out of the law; let's hope you will."

"Yes ma'am—thank you," said I. "What branch of the profession did your father go in for, ma'am?"

She laughed at that, as if my obvious eagerness contrasted with some recollection.

"Oh, I'm afraid he was a dull and prosaic commercial lawyer, my father," she replied. "Conveyancing, and companies, and all that sort of thing, you know. Which branch are you going in for?"

"I incline to criminal practice, ma'am," said I, with a grave assurance that she no doubt found amusing. "I've read a lot of criminal law and practice already. Mr. Philbrick, he's the best police-court practice in Kingshaven."

"Well, that's an interesting line!" she remarked, with another laugh. "More fun about police-courts than county courts, no doubt. I suppose you're well up in what they call leading cases—murder-trials and so on, eh? That's a deeply interesting—"

JUST then the door burst open, and in rushed Miss Ellingham's nephew, Bryce, evidently in a state of high excitement, followed by Pepita Marigold. Bryce was an aggressively healthy youngster, about my own age, whom I secretly hated because since his arrival at the Grange he was forever persuading Pepita to go boating or fishing or birds'-nesting with him, and so getting more of her company than I liked. But he was not thinking of Pepita just then; the blaze in his eyes rose out of sheer delight at something utterly unusual.

"Aunt Kittie! Aunt Kittie!" he vociferated at the top of his voice. "Have you heard? Do you know what's happened? There's been a murder—a real, proper, awful murder, just close by. Last night! Captain Marigold—"

He broke off, suddenly catching sight of me, and his eyes grew as big as saucers, and his mouth opened wider and wider. Then he pointed straight to my face.

"Why—why!" he exclaimed. "He saw it! You did see it, didn't you, Ben Heckitt? Pepita says—"

Pepita, too, was gazing at me as with an awful fascination, and I was quick to see that for that train at least, Master Bryce would have to take a back seat. I was the man who knew—the first-hand informant! I played up to the part, affecting an almost cynical indifference.

"Oh, yes!" I said, picking a crumb or two of biscuit off the table. "Oh, yes, I was there. Yes!"

"Where?" demanded Miss Ellingham, looking from one to the other. "What is all this? A murder? A man murdered? What man? When? And why didn't you tell me, Ben?" she went on, turning in my direction. "We've not heard of it here!"

"I thought you'd know all about it, ma'am," I replied. "It's known all over the neighborhood, I should think."

"No one has been out from here this morning," she said quickly, "except Bryce. But tell me about it, Ben! Do I understand that you were *there?* That you saw —whatever was done—you? Tell me!"

"Yes, tell, tell!" exclaimed Bryce, almost dancing in his eagerness. "Tell! Tell about the man you found, tied up to the gallowstree! Go on!"

I felt quite revived by that time, and the glass of old port helped me to be, if

not eloquent, at any rate dramatic. I imagined myself appearing for the prosecution, and laying out a case, lucidly, and with fitting detail, before a judge and jury, or a bench full of magistrates. And while I addressed myself to Miss Ellingham, I was conscious that Bryce on one side of me, and Pepita on the other, were drinking in and gloating over all the horrors of the story in full exercise of their youthful appetite for the gruesome. But young as I was, I could see that it was not the horror, but the mystery of the thing that impressed my chief listener. Miss Ellingham listened with concentrated attention, evidently forming ideas of her own as I went on. When I concluded by telling what Veller had told Keziah and me that morning, about there being a likelihood of a Scotland Yard detective being sent for, she shook her head.

"I don't see much of a clue for him to lay hold of," she remarked. "Well—here's something for you to exercise your taste for criminal practice on, Ben! A strange, dark affair! And close to one's own door! It would seem—"

She paused there: a man had come into the room, a man who carried some silver things on a tray, and was quietly placing them on the sideboard. I had never seen him before; Miss Ellingham and her servants had arrived at the Grange during my illness. I took him for the butler—that was what he looked like, in his gray trousers, black coat and vest, and neatly tied neckcloth. He was a little, quiet-looking man, very prim, proper, precise, with a rather taking, thoughtful face, on either side of the otherwise clean-shaven expanse of which was a bit of dark whisker, and his movements, as he flitted from one end of the big sideboard to the other, were as quiet and subdued as his looks. Miss Ellingham turned in his direction.

"Carsie!" she said. "Have you heard of this murder?"

The man turned, deferentially, folding his hands: I remember noticing, somehow, what soft, white hands he had, and how they stood sharply defined against the dead black of his cutaway morning coat.

"I have just heard of it, ma'am," he answered in quiet, level accents. "From one of the tradesmen who called just now, ma'am—a mere outline."

"No further news?" asked Miss Ellingham. "No clue?"

"Not that I am aware of, ma'am," replied Carsie. "My informant, ma'am, inclined to the opinion—a generally prevalent opinion, I gathered—that the unfortunate victim was brought ashore from the sea."

"That's what I should think," said Miss Ellingham. "You heard the sound of oars, didn't you say, Ben?"

"Yes ma'am—my sister and I both heard the sound of oars, as if a boat was being pulled away from the beach," I replied. "But we didn't see anything—there was a pretty thick mist over the sea."

"My informant, ma'am," remarked Carsie, still busied with his silver at the sideboard, "told me that he had heard that toward dusk of the evening in question, a strange vessel was seen just outside the bar. It is believed, he says, in the village that the dead man was brought ashore from her."

"I suppose there'll be an inquest," said Miss Ellingham. "Perhaps things will come out at that."

"The inquest, ma'am, is fixed for tomorrow afternoon, at three o'clock," said the butler. "In the village schoolroom, ma'am."

"Let's go! Let's go!" exclaimed Bryce. "I want to hear all about it! Shall we go, Aunt Kittie?"

CHAPTER V

The C. I. D. Man

MISS ELLINGHAM made no definite reply; all the same, I saw her and Bryce among the general public when Keziah and I entered the schoolroom on the following afternoon. They were squeezed into a corner; Keziah and myself, having been notified that we had better be present, were placed more to the front of things. There were a lot of people there whom I did not know—solicitors who didn't come from Kingshaven (I knew every Kingshaven solicitor by sight) and police officials, and men who looked very important and mysterious. And there was a young man, very smartly dressed, a boyish, pleasant-faced sort of fellow, who sat near the local police-inspector, and now and then engaged in conversation with him: I set him down as a clerk to some of the bigwigs, especially when I saw him from time to time make notes in a little black book.

But there was really very little to make notes about. The coroner, old Mr. Voules, whom everybody in the district knew as an

old-established legal practitioner in Kingshaven, said at the very beginning that this was a mystery which was not going to be solved in a hurry, and that they could do no more that day than take a little necessary evidence, and then adjourn for a week or two until more information was forthcoming. I gathered from this that Keziah and I were not going to learn any more than we already knew, but in that I was mistaken.

Veller and Captain Marigold set forth the particulars of our finding of the murdered man, and Dr. Bellairs testified as to the cause of his death. But there came into the witness-box a man whom I did not know, and who gave his name as John Watson, manager of the Collingwood Hotel, at Kingshaven. He was a middle-aged, rather surly-looking man, and when the coroner asked him if he had just been taken to see the dead body, he replied with a tense affirmative, and in a tone which seemed to imply that he would have much preferred to have been elsewhere.

"Did you recognize him as a man you have seen lately?" asked Mr. Voules.

"Yes!" replied Watson. "He's a man who came to our hotel a few days ago."

"What day was that?"

"Monday—last Monday afternoon."

Mr. Voules looked at his notes.

"Monday, eh?" he remarked. "Let me see—the man was found tied to the gibbet-post late on—oh, yes, Tuesday night. Very good! So he came to your hotel, the Collingwood in Kingshaven, on Monday afternoon? What time?"

"Tea-time—five o'clock, or thereabouts."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"A stranger to you. Well, what did he want?"

"Wanted to book a room. Said he might be there one night or two nights. As he'd no luggage, I asked him for a deposit. He gave me a couple of pound notes. I noticed he'd a fine lot of money in his pocket."

"Is yours a cheap hotel?" inquired Mr. Voules.

"Moderate prices. It's really a commercial hotel. But we get other people."

"Did this man give you any name and address?"

"Yes. He signed the register-book—the police have seen the entry. Name—Sol Cousins. Address—London."

"Well, what happened?"

"Nothing out of the common. He had his tea. He went out, came back about nine, had a bit of supper and went to his room. I saw him at breakfast next morning, and at intervals during the day—Tuesday. He seemed to be hanging about the place, as if he expected somebody. But I never saw him with anybody, and nobody made any inquiry at the office for him. About half-past six on Tuesday evening he came to me at the office window and said he was leaving and would settle up. There was change due to him out of his two pounds deposit. I gave it to him, and he went away."

"That was the last you saw of him?"

"Yes. I saw no more of him, of course, after he walked out."

"And that was at half-past six on Tuesday evening?"

"Just about that time."

MR. VOULES looked at his jury over the tops of his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"An important fact, gentlemen!" he remarked solemnly. "This man leaves a Kingshaven hotel at half-past six o'clock, alive and alert; within a few hours—five hours—he is found murdered, in a very strange and horrible fashion, on the beach at Middlebourne, nine miles away. A most extraordinary case! You're absolutely sure, Watson, that the man whose body you've just seen is the man you have been telling us about?"

"No doubt about that!" answered the witness, almost sneeringly. "I recognized him at once. I took particular stock of him while he was at our place!"

"Why, now?" inquired Mr. Voules.

"Because I didn't like his looks!" said Watson. "He was respectably dressed, and as I said, had plenty of money about him; but I didn't like him."

He was about to leave the witness-box when the young man whom I have mentioned as sitting near the police-inspector whispered something in the inspector's ear—who half-rose from his seat, motioning the witness to wait.

"A question!" he said. "Did you take this man, from his speech, to be an Englishman or a foreigner?"

Watson gave his questioner a glance which signified his own complete assurance about the point raised.

"I took him for what he obviously was!" he answered. "An East End Londoner—and no very good class, either!"

Mr. Voules adjourned the inquest on that—for a fortnight. During that time, he remarked, the police would doubtless acquire more information, and perhaps the gentlemen of the press—here he beamed benevolently on two or three men who had been scribbling away at a table beneath him—would give assistance.

KEZIAH bundled me out while the old coroner was still mumbling his platitudes—out and away before the rest of the folk could leave.

She gave my arm a grip as we quitted the schoolroom.

"Ben!" she said. "They never called you or me! And we haven't been asked a word about Joseph Krevin!"

"Well, aren't you glad, Keziah?" I answered. "You didn't want—"

"I don't like it, Ben!" she interrupted hastily. "I'd rather have been questioned straight out and been done with, than feel that the police are doing things behind one's back! They know about people, of course, and they'll follow it up. We shall have them at our door yet!"

Keziah was rarely wrong about anything: I think she was born shrewd. That very afternoon, as she and I were just sitting down to tea, a knock came to the door; and when I went to answer it, there on the porch stood the pleasant-faced smart young man whom I had noticed at the inquest making occasional notes in a little black book. He bade me good-afternoon smilingly, asked for Miss Heckitt, and thrust into my hand a card whereon I read: *"Edward Cherry, Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard, S. W."*

CHAPTER VI

The Crab and Lobster Inn

I WAS so utterly amazed to find that our visitor was a full-fledged Scotland Yard detective, having until then cherished a wholly fanciful and imaginary idea of the personalities of these sleuth-hounds, that for a moment I stood staring at him in blank silence. But Keziah called from the parlor, to know who was there, and I hurried back and thrust the card before her. She uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and stalked out into the hall.

"Now, I told Veller—" she began. But at sight of the caller, she checked herself. Keziah had certain weaknesses, and one of them, with which I was well enough acquainted, was for well-dressed and good-looking people. I saw her face change. "You don't mean to say that you're a policeman!" she exclaimed incredulously. "A smart young gentleman like you!"

"I hope I'm not the less fitted for my job because of that, ma'am," replied our visitor, with a laugh of enjoyment at Keziah's bluntness. "I believe I've the pleasure of seeing Miss Heckitt—Miss Keziah Heckitt?"

"You can come in," said Keziah, motioning him to enter. "Perhaps you'll take a cup of tea? It's all ready. Of course, I saw you at the inquest, but I never dreamed that you'd anything to do with the police. And as I was just going to say, I told Veller yesterday morning all I know, and all that Ben, there, knows, and I said that I wouldn't be bothered any more, nor with the newspaper men neither—especially them, a parcel of busybodies! But well I knew the police would come! However, sit you down—do you take milk and sugar?"

"Both, if you please, Miss Heckitt, and you're very kind," answered our visitor, taking the chair which I offered him. "But don't think that I'm going to bother you! As a matter of fact, I'm here to save you a lot of bother. You see, the local police—Veller, of course—told me what you'd already said, and I suggested to them that instead of putting you in the witness-box this afternoon, it would be far better if I just called and had a bit of quiet talk with you. Ladies, I know, don't care about going into witness-boxes."

"Well, I don't know that they'd have got anything much out of me if I had gone into the box," remarked Keziah. "As to finding that poor fellow, Captain Marigold and Veller saw as much as Ben and me did; and as to anything else—try a bit of that hot tea-cake, now!"

"It's the anything else, Miss Heckitt, that I called about," said the detective, helping himself. "And the anything else is—your uncle, Mr. Joseph Krevin. As I understand matters, Mr. Krevin came down here, where he hadn't been seen for a great many years, and said that he'd a little private business with somebody hereabouts. Since yesterday morning the local police have been making inquiries all round the immediate district, and they can't find that Mr. Krevin called on anybody, saw any-

body, did anything. Yet I believe he was twice away from your house during the day he spent here?"

"Out in the afternoon, and out again in the evening," asserted Keziah. "But we don't know where he went!"

"The notion is—or may be—that he came here to meet the dead man," said Cherry. "I gather that you don't know much about Mr. Krevin—of late years?"

"I know nothing!" declared Keziah. "Never set eyes on him—never heard tell of him for nineteen years, till the other day. I don't know why he came here, Mister, and I don't know what he did here, and I don't know where he went!"

"That's a queer thing, too," observed Cherry. "The local police spent a lot of time yesterday trying to find out where Mr. Krevin went when he left your house. They haven't heard a word of him! From the time he walked out of your garden—five o'clock in the morning, I understand—"

"I never said it was five o'clock," interrupted Keziah. "What I said was that he'd gone by five o'clock, at which hour, following my usual custom, I was up. He might ha' gone at three o'clock, or at two, or at one, for all I know. What I do know is only that he'd gone! And good riddance!"

"You don't feel friendly to your relative, Miss Heckitt?" suggested Cherry, smiling. "Just so—I understand. Well, he went during the night. But before that, you'd told him of what had happened—of what you and your brother had seen?"

"We had, and a nice turn it gave him!" replied Keziah. She proceeded to tell of Uncle Joseph's seizure and of his denial of acquaintance with the murdered man. "But he may ha' known him, for all that!" she concluded. "First and last, flesh and blood of ours though he is, Joe Krevin's a bad 'un, Mister! And I'll warrant me he was down in these parts for no good purpose."

"This is very excellent tea, ma'am," said our visitor. "May I trouble you for another cup? Well, mysteries are mysteries, Miss Heckitt, and all we can do is to keep finding one bit of the puzzle and fitting it into another, and—so on! Haven't found many bits of this, so far, though!" he added with a grin. "Pretty well obscured, I think! Now, I hear that you all thought that you heard the sound of oars—"

"We did!" said I, breaking in for the first time. "There's no doubt about that! We heard them distinctly!"

"Close at hand?" he queried, giving me a keen look.

OUR tea-table was set in the wide window-place, from which there was a view of the whole expanse of the creek; and I turned, pointing out of the casements.

"You see the big black post set in the rocks down there, across the sands?" I said. "That's Gallowstree Point, where we found the man tied up. Then you see the chimneys and gables of the big house set in the trees, to the eastward? That's Middlebourne Grange. And you see the promontory on this other, the west side, running out into the sea? That's Fliman's End. Well, the boat that we heard was being pulled across there; it was between Gallowstree and Fliman's End—I should say about halfway across. And it was a single pair of oars, too!"

He listened to me with great attention, nodding his head at each point I made, and following my finger as I indicated the various directions. But he made no comment on this information, and presently finishing his tea, he thanked Keziah again for her hospitality, promised that she should be kept out of things as far as possible, and said he must be going. Then as he picked up his hat, he turned to us as with an afterthought.

"I suppose you don't know Mr. Joseph Krevin's address?" he asked. "It might be useful."

"No!" said Keziah, with emphasis. "We don't know his address—if he has one! My opinion is that he goes about, like somebody we needn't mention, seeking what he can devour! We've no idea where he can be heard of."

But a sudden recollection came to me.

"Keziah!" I exclaimed. "Those cards!"

Keziah remembered too. She glanced at the tea-caddy.

"Oh, well!" she said. "You can give him those, Ben. But what use they'll be—"

IT seemed to me, when I had produced the cards and handed them over to Cherry, with an account of how and where I had found them, that they struck him as likely to be very useful. He put them in his pocket, said good-by to Keziah, and

went off. I walked down the garden with him, and when we were outside the porch, he gave me a keen look.

"I've heard about you—from Veller," he said. "You're going in for the law, eh?"

"As soon as I'm all right again," I answered.

"This affair interests you," he suggested. "Just so! Now, what do you make of it?"

I was flattered at being asked such a question by a man, who, young as he seemed, was, after all, a genuine detective. He saw that I was—and he laughed, and gave me an encouraging nod.

"You're old enough to have an opinion!" he said. "Come, now?"

"Well, I think it's a very queer thing that it should happen just when Uncle Joseph Krevin was here!" I replied, after a moment's thought. "Besides, Uncle Joseph's movements were strange." I went on to tell him about the midnight visit, and the bag on the porch, and all the rest of it. "And where did he go when he went out—twice—that day he spent with us?" I concluded. "If we knew that—"

"I'm going to know!" he interrupted. "I'll comb this neighborhood! He went—somewhere! He saw—somebody! All right! We've got to find that out. No love lost, I think, between your sister and Uncle Joseph, eh?"

HE laughed again, waved his hand, and went off in the direction of Veller's cottage. We neither saw nor heard anything of him during the rest of that day, nor on the following morning, either, until, just after dinner, he came up the garden and approached the open window of the parlor, at which I was sitting.

"How are you today?" he asked, leaning over the windowsill. "I just looked round to say that I'm going a few miles along the coast on a bit of business—got a car waiting up the lane. Would you like to come?"

"Aye, take him, Mister!" said Keziah, who was close behind me. "A ride'll do him good. Put your overcoat on, Ben—it's cold work in those motors. Got any news?" she inquired of Cherry as I made myself ready. "Anything come out?"

"Nothing much, ma'am," replied the detective, smiling. "Slow and sure is the game! We live on hope, you know."

"Poor stuff to live on, too, very often!" said Keziah. "I see there's plenty about this affair in the newspapers this morning: them newspaper fellows is the boys to make a lot out of a little, to be sure! What beats me, considering all the fuss there's been about this, is that that dead man's friends don't come forward to claim him! What?"

"They may have good reasons for keeping quiet, ma'am," answered Cherry. "If there's a bad egg in a sitting, the best thing is to throw it away, you know. Perhaps this man's people aren't overanxious to acknowledge any relationship. But I've no doubt somebody will be coming forward who knows something about him."

I was ready then, and Cherry and I went off to a car which was waiting at the end of the lane. Once outside the garden gate, he gave me a knowing look.

"I wasn't going to say anything before your sister," he said, "but I've heard of a bit of possible information, though I don't know of what value it may be. Look at this—it was sent to the police-inspector this morning, and he handed it over to me."

HE gave me a sheet of coarse, cheap letter-paper on which a few lines were scrawled in watery ink by some hand which, obviously, was not at all accustomed to the frequent use of a pen.

Crab and Lobster Inn,
Fishampton.

Dear Sir:

Hearing about this matter at Middlebourne make bold to tell you that if you will call here at any time convenient, me being always in, can tell you something as may have something to do with that but too long to write in a letter. Remaining yours truly,

SARAH TAPPEN.

"I've an idea that the something to which Sarah Tappen refers has to do with your uncle," said Cherry as I gave him back the letter. "That's why I asked you to go with me—if we hear any description of such a man, you can tell if it fits him. Now, where is this Fishampton?"

"Six or seven miles away, on the Kingshaven road," said I. "It's a queer little place, at the head of a creek. Tell the driver to go straight to the Crab and Lobster—he'll know it. And that's a queer place, too!"

Everybody knew the Crab and Lobster in our part of the country. It was one of the oldest houses in the neighborhood; a ramshackle place, one side of which rose sheer out of the waters of Fishampton Creek, while the other fronted the high-

road from London to Kingshaven. It was a place to which people walked out from Kingshaven in summer, to go boating and fishing on the creek, or to have tea in the garden—a place, too, convenient for drovers and carters, and sure at all times of a good trade: not the house, it seemed to me, where secret meetings could be held; and I had the idea that if Uncle Joseph Krevin had been there, there would be something secret about his visit.

BUT Cherry and I had not been closeted with Mrs. Tappen, a little, sharp-eyed elderly woman, many minutes before I realized that we had hit a trail.

"I heard, of course, of this here murder business at Middlebourne," said Mrs. Tappen, when she had assured herself of Cherry's status as a policeman, and seen her own letter produced as warrant and credentials, "and it struck me at once as there was something I could tell, but as I remarked, too long to put in a letter. You see, I learned that this here unfortunate man what was done in so shameful, he was wearing gold rings in his ears and had a scar, an unusual one, on the left cheek. Very well, young man—that there person came to this house one afternoon about a fortnight ago!"

"Alone?" asked Cherry.

"No! He'd another man with him," replied the landlady. "I see 'em come—I happened to be at the front, buying some fish. They come along the road from Kingshaven, walking. The other man was a big, broadly built, clean-shaven fellow, well-dressed in a blue suit; they both wore blue suits—serge, you know, young man, like seagoing men affects for their best: I took particular notice of both of 'em. They turned in here, and went into the little parlor at the side of the bar—turned in there as if they knew it quite well, though I'm sure I'd never set eyes on either of 'em before—at least, it's not in my recollection that I ever had. But I think the big man must ha' been in here at some time or other, for I heard him remark to his mate that the old place wasn't noways altered."

"Did they stay long?" inquired Cherry.

"Most of two hours," replied Mrs. Tappen. "The big man drank brandy and water, the man with the rings in his ears, rum. They talked together—with their heads close; from what I saw of 'em, it seemed to be very confidential business. At last they went off, and I saw 'em go back by the same road—Kingshaven way."

"And that was the last, I suppose?" asked Cherry.

"No!" said Mrs. Tappen. "The big man came here again last Monday. He walked in about four o'clock, and he asked at once if I remembered him being here a fortnight before with a friend, and if the friend had been in that day? I said I remembered him well enough, and that his friend had not been in; and at that, he said he'd wait for him. He did wait, in the little parlor—he waited till well past six, but the other man never came. It seemed to me that the big man got fidgety; he was all right with his brandy-and-water and his pipe at first, but after a time he began to look out of the door, up and down the road, as if impatient. And in the end he went away, but he gave me a card on which he'd scribbled something, and asked me, if his friend came in that night, or next morning, or any time next day, to give it to him. But the man with the rings in his ears never came at all, and the card's there, where I put it, stuck in that looking-glass."

She took the card down from a mirror above the fireplace, and handed it to Cherry. I looked over his shoulder, and I knew then that we had been hearing of Uncle Joseph. It was another of the cards bearing the name of Crippe of Old Gravel Lane; and on the back was written a line in pencil: *"Tomorrow, afternoon or evening. S. S."*

CHAPTER VII

High-Water Mark

WE left Mrs. Tappen, and the Crab and Lobster, soon after that, and went out to our car. But instead of getting into it, Cherry motioned me to walk along the road with him, and bade the driver follow us.

"Well?" he said as we moved away. "And what do you make of all that, young fellow? I saw you keeping your ears open!"

"I make of it that Uncle Joseph Krevin was here a fortnight ago with Sol Cousins, and that he came again, by himself, last Monday, expecting to meet Sol Cousins, and didn't meet him," I answered. "What else is there to make of it?"

"Just so—on the surface of things!" he

remarked. "But Monday is the important matter! It was Monday night when Krevin came to your house, wasn't it?"

"Monday midnight," I said.

"Well, we'll have to find out where he was on Monday evening," he continued, "between being here and turning up at your porch. It's an odd thing, putting everything together, that Cousins, being somewhere about—he was certainly at Kingshaven, at the Collingwood Hotel, on Monday night—didn't turn up here at the Crab and Lobster on Monday afternoon. And—where were those two to meet on Tuesday—in accordance with this card?"

He had the card in his hand, and kept glancing at the penciled line on the back. I too glanced at it.

"Uncle Joseph was out twice on Tuesday," I remarked, "—once in the afternoon, once in the evening. Perhaps they did meet."

"If they did, it must have been at some place nearer to your house than this is," he observed. "This is a good seven miles from Middlebourne, and your Uncle Joseph couldn't have come—we wont say here to Mrs. Tappen's, for we know he didn't, but anywhere about here, within the time. There's communication by train and by motorbus, is there? Yes, but we know that he was never seen on either—we should have heard of him in that respect by now. No! If he met this man Sol Cousins, on Tuesday, it must have been at some quiet place near your house. Did they meet?"

"Is that very important?" I asked.

He gave me a half-whimsical look, and pulling out pipe and pouch, began to smoke, keeping silence until the tobacco was in full blast.

"In jobs like this, my lad, there isn't a detail that isn't important," he said dryly. "It's very often the apparently insignificant things that are of prime importance. I'd give a lot to know if Cousins and Krevin met on Tuesday—in accordance with the suggestion on this card."

"Well," said I, "if even small things are of importance, what do you make of one that seems very small? On that card is written *'Tomorrow afternoon or evening. S. S.'* What does *'S. S.'* signify?"

He glanced at the card again, almost with indifference.

"Oh!" he answered. "I take it that those things are the initials of some name that Cousins knew Krevin by—they've always some fancy names, sobriquets, aliases, these chaps! No doubt, from what your sister says of him, Krevin had half a dozen: Cousins knew him as Sam Smith, or Silas Saunders, or Seth Simpson, or Simon Scott. See?"

"No, I don't!" I retorted. "I think that S. S. are the initials of the name of some place, well known to both, where they were to meet. That's what I think! Why should Krevin have signed any initials, assumed or otherwise, to his message? Cousins would know well enough from whom the message came."

He gave a start of surprise, laughed, almost gleefully, and clapped me on the shoulder.

"Good lad—good lad!" he exclaimed. "It may be! I'm an ass, Ben, not to have thought of it! And what places are there, hereabouts, now, whose names begin with S?"

"Two or three," I answered. "There's Summerstead, and Sheldrake and Settlecroft—all in the neighborhood. And there's another place, close by, South Stilbeach. There you are—there's S. S. for you!"

"Is that anywhere on our way back?" he asked.

"It could be made so," I replied. "It's between here and Middlebourne, but off the road—a quiet little place between the road and the sea."

HE turned and beckoned to the driver of our car, and we got in and went to South Stilbeach. It was a queer, out-of-the-way fishing village, a mere collection of huts and cottages, with a shabby beer-house fronting the beach. And we drew it blank; nobody there had seen or heard of any two such men as those we described. We went homeward after that. And we were driving down the one street of our village, toward the garage from which Cherry had hired the car, when, as we passed Veller's house, we heard ourselves hailed by more voices than one, and turning, saw Veller hurrying out of his door, followed by Pepita Marigold and Bryce Ellingham, and all three in an evident state of high excitement. We stopped the car, got out, and met them in Veller's garden. Pepita and Bryce were too full of something to be able to speak; Veller waved a big hand toward them as he strode in front.

"These two," he said with one of his

widest grins, "has made what they call a discovery. May ha' something to do with this here job, and mayn't. However, they come straight to me about it just now."

Bryce Ellingham shoved himself forward.

"Of course, it's a discovery, and a most important one!" he exclaimed in his cocksure fashion. "We came to find you about it, Mr. Cherry, but as you weren't about, we told Veller, because in these things time's important, isn't it? Look at this, now! If that isn't what you detectives call a clue, then I'd like to know what is!" He suddenly held out his left hand, palm upward, and there lying on its somewhat grubby expanse, we saw a gold coin, in which a hole had been drilled, and to which, by the hole, a bit of broken chain was attached. And as soon as I set eyes on it, I let out an exclamation which I couldn't repress.

"Uncle Joseph's!" said I, close to Cherry's elbow. "His!"

NEITHER Bryce Ellingham nor Pepita seemed to know exactly what I meant, but Cherry was quick to grasp the significance of my exclamation, and for the moment to divert attention from it. He took the coin out of Bryce's fingers and examined it, turning it over with special attention to the bit of broken chain.

"An American ten-dollar piece, eh?" he said. "Um! Very handsome coin, too! And where did you find this, young gentleman?"

"It was like this," replied Bryce loftily. "Miss Marigold and I were walking along the bottom of the rocks there at Fliman's End. There's a sort of recess, something like a cave, there. I picked up the coin in that cave, lying among some seaweed—"

"Look as if it had been there long?" interrupted Cherry. "Any sand on it?"

"No; it was just as it is now," replied Bryce. "Looked as if somebody dropped it recently, and it had fallen or rolled among the seaweed. But that's not all," he continued, growing more and more important. "There are footmarks in that recess that I'm sure you ought to see. A man's—a big man's too! And they lead straight across the sand: firm white sand it is, there, and they're the only marks on it. We didn't stop to see where they went—"

"No, we hurried back to see you!" interruped Pepita, obviously anxious to join in the game, "and as you weren't about, we were persuading Veller to go back with us—"

"We'll all go," said Cherry. He looked at Veller and winked. "How near can we take the car to this point they're talking about?" he asked.

"Down to the end of the lane that runs past our house," said I. "Get in—I'll show the driver where to go."

The other four got into the car; I seated myself in front by the driver. As we moved off, Cherry put his head over the low screen, close to my ear.

"Certain that coin is your uncle's?" he asked in a whisper.

"Dead certain!" said I. "I noticed it particularly the other day. It hung from his watchchain."

He nodded and sank his voice still lower.

"All right. But say no more about that when we get out," he whispered. "Those two youngsters were too excited to understand what you said just now, and they'll forget. And keep your eyes open when we see this place."

THE car took us to within a quarter of a mile of Fliman's End; on leaving it, we crossed a narrow field, and coming out on the beach, followed the line of the cliffs till we came to the rocks. Those rocks made a great black pile, noticeable along the coast for a long way in both directions. There were several caves and recesses in them; that to which Bryce led us faced westward, away from our creek; there was a view from its mouth of all the long curving coast as far as Kingshaven in the hazy distance. And within it were ledges of worn rock, and at the foot of them masses of weed and of driftwood, blown in there by the high winds that often swept up Channel from the Atlantic.

"That's where I picked it up!" exclaimed Bryce, pointing to a heap of seaweed at the bottom of the cave. "Just there! And now you look at those big footmarks! Lots of 'em here in the cave; and see, they go in a straight line down there!"

Cherry glanced round, and seemed to get some idea.

"Those footprints are plain enough along there," he said. "They're those of a big, heavy-footed man who's come along here by pretty much the same way that we did—from the end of that lane and across the field. But I'm not concerned

with that so much; what I want to know is where does this track lead to?"

He pointed to the marks which led away from the cave, westward, and adjuring all of us to walk on either side of them, began to trace them toward the sea. The sands thereabouts were white, dry and firm, and the big footprints were plain enough. The man who made them had evidently walked straight down to the beach, turning to neither left nor right, as if to a definite point, with an equally definite object.

"Whereabouts is high-water mark?" inquired Cherry suddenly.

Veller pointed a little ahead.

"You'll see where that is as soon as we come to where the sand changes color," he answered. "At this time o' year, somewhere about halfway up beach."

"Just so! And we shall find that these marks come to a sudden stop there!" said Cherry. "The man who made them has been taken off in a boat which came to this point to meet him, by previous arrangement. Here you are—there they end!"

He nodded confidently at a definite line in the beach, marked by a thin tangle of weed and rubbish; the line to which the tide flowed in at high water. The footmarks came right up to that in the dry white sand; beyond it, on the wet beach there were none.

"Yes, that's it!" remarked Cherry musingly, as we stood staring at the high-water-mark line and the wet sands beyond. "I see how it's been: here he came, and here he waited for the boat. Well, let's have another glance at that cave."

WE went back to the cave, and had a more careful look round it. And suddenly it was my privilege to make a discovery; fortunately, I made it when Bryce, Pepita and Veller were at one end of the cave, and Cherry and myself at the other. In addition to the seaweed and driftwood that lay heaped in the recesses, there was a lot of rubbish about in there—folk from Kingshaven sometimes came along that coast, picnicking, and they left stuff about, newspapers, bottles and the like. And I saw a bottle that had certainly not come from Kingshaven, a bottle that I recognized, and I picked it out from a corner into which it had been carelessly tossed, and held it up before Cherry.

"Another link!" I exclaimed triumphantly. "This too was Uncle Joseph Krevin's property! I know this is the bottle Uncle Joseph had in his old bag—I told you I got it out at his bidding, when he turned faint on hearing about the murder? Look at the queer names on the label! That's why I remember it."

He followed my pointing finger and nodded his acquiescence.

"I see!" he said. "Odd names, to be sure! 'Zetterquist and Vanderpant, Wine and Spirit Merchants, St. George Street, E.' Oh, yes! I think that's no local product. Come—we're beginning to get a bit of knowledge about your Uncle Joseph's haunts. He has something to do with Crippe, who keeps a marine stores place in Old Gravel Lane; and he buys his liquor, or has bought it, in St. George Street, which is fairly close by. We shall have to inquire about Uncle Joseph in those parts, Ben. But in the meantime—"

He gave me a warning wink, put the bottle in a deep pocket of his overcoat, and then, going across to the others, said that we'd be going back. On the way to the car he admonished Bryce Ellingham and Pepita to keep the news of this discovery to themselves, promising them at the same time that when the precise moment arrived for making it public, they should have the full and entire credit. When we reached the car, he sent them and Veller forward in it: he and I walked up the lane toward our house.

"Ben," he said, when we were alone, "I begin to see into some of your Uncle Joseph's little ways! There's no doubt that when he left your house in the night, he came along to that cave we've just seen. There he finished his brandy; there he dropped this American ten-dollar piece; and there he waited till a boat came to take him off. Now, all that—the waiting at that particular spot, anyway—presupposes cut-and-dried arrangement between Uncle Joseph and somebody hereabouts. Who is that somebody? That somebody was to be off Fliman's End at a certain time—high-water time, I think—on Wednesday morning, to take Uncle Joseph off—and probably, Sol Cousins too. He took off Uncle Joseph, but not Cousins, for Cousins had met his fate, and been murdered. Queer business, isn't it, Ben? Don't you wish you knew who murdered Cousins, and why? However, I want to have a look at the bedroom in your house in which Uncle Joseph slept—or didn't sleep, for I think he watched. By the by, are you

and your sister sound sleepers? Neither of you seem to have heard Uncle Joseph's movements!"

"I've thought of that," said I. "Yes, I think we are, both, good sleepers. And you see, neither of us was very near Uncle Joseph's room. Our house, as you know, is a big, rambling old house—he was in the best bedroom; we were in another wing. And there are two staircases; he could slip downstairs by either. I think he went in the very middle of the night—when Keziah and I were both fast asleep."

"Aye, well, I want to look round his room," he repeated. "While I'm doing that, don't tell your sister anything of what's transpired. Let it wait a bit—in all these cases, there's no need to hurry. We'll do the hurry business when we've got fairly on the scent—let's pick that up first."

Keziah made no opposition to his going upstairs, and I showed him to the best bedroom and left him. But I had scarcely got downstairs again when, greatly to our surprise, Miss Ellingham came to our door. She looked very grave, very serious, and she said without preface that she understood the Scotland Yard man was there, and she asked to see him at once. Cherry heard her, and came down—direct, businesslike.

"Yes?" he said. "You want me?"

"I want you!" replied Miss Ellingham, equally direct. "The fact is, I've just discovered that at some time since Monday afternoon, I've been robbed—and of an article of immense value!"

CHAPTER VIII

The Kang-he Vase

KEZIAH was standing in the doorway of the parlor, behind me and Cherry, and as Miss Ellingham spoke, I heard her let out a stifled exclamation which was not so much one of surprise as of assurance that what she had been expecting to hear was about to be told her. She moved aside, beckoning Miss Ellingham to enter. And Miss Ellingham, with a friendly nod, stepped in at once, and we all four turned into the parlor, where I made haste to hand our visitor a chair.

"Yes?" repeated Cherry. "You have been robbed? And of something valuable—very valuable? Yes?"

He showed no surprise. He seemed outwardly as unconcerned and indifferent as if Miss Ellingham had uttered some platitude. He took a chair himself, opposite to hers, and sat watching her, keenly. I could see, however, that her extraordinary presence impressed him as much as it had impressed me, and that already he was curious about her.

"Of very great value," said Miss Ellingham. She glanced at Keziah and at me. "Ben I know already," she continued with a smile. "And Miss Heckitt will forgive me, I am sure, if I inflict my troubles upon her—the news of them will doubtless be all over the neighborhood before—"

"That entirely depends, ma'am!" interrupted Cherry sharply. "It depends upon what you tell me. I know enough of Miss Heckitt and her brother to know that they wont tell anything they ought not to tell. But—what have you to tell? What is it you think you have been robbed of?"

"Think!" exclaimed Miss Ellingham. "It's not a case of thinking, if by thinking you imply—but I had better tell you my story in plain words. This afternoon, about an hour ago, I opened a cupboard which forms part of an old-fashioned bureau in my drawing-room, and immediately saw that the principal object kept in it had disappeared. I made an inquiry or two among my servants, and then came out to find you, as I had heard there was a Scotland Yard man in the village."

"What was this principal object?" asked Cherry.

"A Kang-he vase," replied Miss Ellingham, "—worth—I don't know how much!"

"And what is a Kang-he vase?" inquired Cherry, quietly. "Something ancient?"

"Chinese pottery," answered Miss Ellingham. "It is stuff, pottery, you know, made by the old Chinese potters about—oh, four thousand years ago! Collectors of it, who of course can only be very wealthy people, will give any price for it. Even damaged, badly damaged specimens will fetch an enormous price. An absolutely perfect pair of Kang-he vases is, you may say, literally priceless, so I'm told. Of course, mine is merely one—not a pair. But I know that it's worth a great sum. A good many thousands of pounds, anyhow!"

"How big is this vase, ma'am?" asked Cherry. His manner had grown very businesslike, and he put his questions rapidly. "Height? Width?"

"About twenty inches high, and ten across the top," replied Miss Ellingham.

"When did you see it last?"

"Last Monday afternoon."

"In the cupboard you mentioned just now?"

"Exactly! In that cupboard—in its usual place.

"Was the cupboard l o c k e d—kept locked?"

"No!" replied Miss Ellingham ruefully. "It wasn't! But of course, I never dreamed of this; I had no idea that anybody about here would know anything of the value of the vase. No, the cupboard wasn't locked!"

"Nothing to do but open the door and take out the vase, eh?" observed Cherry. "Precisely! But I think it highly probable, Miss Ellingham, that other people than your servants and the folk about here may have heard of your vase. Now, how long have you had it, and where did you get it?"

"I'd better tell you its history," said Miss Ellingham. "At least, as far as it's known to me. I may tell you that I am a duly qualified medical practitioner, and pretty well known in the scientific world, too, if it's worth while your knowing. Most of my work, however, has been done in India: I had fifteen years' experience there. Now, during my last year there, I was called in to see the favorite daughter of a very rich Parsee merchant. I needn't go into details, but I saved her life, undoubtedly—she had been given up by other doctors. Her father was almost extravagantly grateful to me, and in addition to forcing upon me a very generous fee for my services, he made me a present of this Kang-he vase. He had a wonderful collection of such things. This, of course, is an odd vase—one of a pair. If its fellow were in existence—"

"Perhaps it is, ma'am," interrupted Cherry, with a glance at Miss Ellingham which seemed to puzzle her. "However, did many people know of your acquiring this very rare and valuable object?"

"A few people in Bombay knew," replied Miss Ellingham, "—personal friends, you know."

"Just so," said Cherry. "But—when you came home to England? Did your possession of it get out here?"

"Well, yes, I suppose it did," admitted Miss Ellingham. "Yes! Some little time after I returned home and settled down here, at the Grange, I was induced to give an interview to a representative of the *Lady's Circle,*—you know, the illustrated weekly,—who wanted to know all about my work in India. I allowed him to photograph my more important art treasures—things I had brought home; and among them, of course, was the Kang-he vase."

"Just so!" remarked Cherry. "And no doubt you told the interviewer how you acquired the vase? Exactly! So a good many people were put in possession of the fact that you had it! For the *Lady's Circle,* I believe, has a very large circulation. By the by, have you got a copy of the issue in which the interview and photographs appeared? Good! I shall be obliged if you'll let me have it. And now, ma'am, if you please, I'll just walk round to your house with you, and you shall show me the cupboard and the drawing-room—and anything else."

I GAVE Cherry's elbow a nudge, and he was quick to catch the meaning of it.

"And, if I may, I'll bring Ben here with me," he added. "Ben is by way of being my right-hand man just now, and he's seen one thing today that I failed to see, so he may be useful."

"Oh, let Ben come by all means!" agreed Miss Ellingham. She stayed behind a moment to say a few words to Keziah, then joined Cherry and me in the garden. "I have been wondering, Mr. Cherry," she observed, as we set out toward the Grange, "if this robbery has any connection with the affair that took place there at Gallows-tree Point—the other night, Tuesday night. What do you think?"

Cherry laughed. "I shall be very much surprised—when we've ironed everything out—if it hasn't, ma'am!" he answered. "I think it exceedingly likely."

"That would seem to argue the existence of a scheme," observed Miss Ellingham, "a deeply laid scheme, too!"

"Possibly of more than one scheme, ma'am," assented Cherry. "It's certainly significant that at or about the time of your loss, one man should be murdered and another effect a mysterious disappearance! But this vase of yours—I'm getting interested in that. I gathered from what you said just now that these things were usually made in pairs. How is it that the Parsee merchant you mentioned hadn't the fellow to the one he gave you?"

Miss Ellingham laughed, a little cynically.

"Ah!" she replied. "Grateful—pathetically grateful—as he was, I don't think he'd have given me the vase if he'd still possessed its fellow! But that, once in his possession, had been stolen some years before."

"Oh!" said Cherry. "Stolen—um! Are these things—this Kang-he ware—thought much of in their own country, now?"

"Thought much of!" exclaimed Miss Ellingham. "Bless your life and soul! They're regarded there as something sacred! It's forbidden, by the Chinese Government, to take them out of the country. They are treasured in families for generation after generation. Lives have been lost in defense of them—yes, and in trying to get hold of them. I remember," she added with a queer little laugh, "that when I was given my vase, and showed it to a friend of mine in Bombay, he said that he wouldn't have such a thing in his house for a fortune, and that I'd better not let any Chinaman know I'd got it! But—I'm not given to cultivating panics."

"And you reflected, doubtless, that you were coming home, to a country where people don't cut throats or break into houses for the sake of a bit of pottery!" observed Cherry. "Still, ma'am, there is one thing you forgot!"

"What?" asked Miss Ellingham.

"There are Chinamen in England—plenty of 'em," replied Cherry. "And you advertised your possession of this sacred object pretty well if you told its story to an interviewer and permitted photographs of it to appear in a widely circulated journal!"

Miss Ellingham shook her head.

"I don't think Chinese laundrymen and opium-den keepers in Limehouse are very likely to take in the *Lady's Circle,* Mr. Cherry," she observed. "No—I don't think my vase has been stolen by a Chinaman!"

"Chinamen have long arms!" said Cherry with a knowing laugh. "I've heard of them stretching all the way from Pekin to Piccadilly—and getting a tight hold at the end of the stretch, too. However—no doubt much remains to be discovered!"

THIS profound remark, at which both my companions laughed, brought us to the door of the Grange. Carsie, the butler, chanced to be there as we entered, and Miss Ellingham at once turned to him.

"Heard anything, or discovered anything, Carsie?" she inquired.

"Nothing, ma'am," replied Carsie. "I have made every inquiry in and around the house, and have not succeeded in getting any information."

"Of what sort?" asked Cherry sharply.

Carsie gave his questioner a quiet look.

"As to any strange person having been seen about between Monday noon and today," he replied in his subdued level accents. "No such person has been noticed by any of the servants, indoor or outdoor, during the daytime, at any rate."

"And as to the night, of course you can't say," remarked Cherry, offhandedly. He turned away from the butler, and looked at Miss Ellingham. "I should like to see the drawing-room," he said.

MISS ELLINGHAM led us to a big room at the far end of the house, a great, square room with windows looking east and west, and a French window looking south and opening on the walled garden which lay between the house and the sea. It was to my eyes a very fine and beautiful room, filled with picturesque furniture, and lavishly decorated with ornaments, water-color drawings, and finely bound books in small cases. But Cherry gave no more than a glance at the general effect; his eyes turned straight to a bureau which stood on one side of the room and had in its upper part a small square cupboard fronted by an elaborately carved door. Miss Ellingham, too, went straight to this cupboard and laid a hand on the door. And she had no sooner thrown it open and looked inside than she let out a sharp exclamation.

"Oh, really!" she said. "I—I never noticed that! I've been robbed of more than the Kang-he vase! My two little Hindu gods are gone! Dear me! This—"

"I think you had better examine everything, ma'am," remarked Cherry. "You may find that still more has been stolen. But now just tell me about this cupboard; it has, I see, two shelves in it."

"Yes, and the Kang-he vase stood on that, and on the other, in the background, there were two quaint little figures, statuettes of Hindu gods," said Miss Ellingham. "They were all three here on Monday afternoon—"

"And now they're not!" said Cherry, peering into the gloom of the cupboard. "Very well, ma'am! Now just let me have a look at things."

HE was very speedy in what he did; and he reminded me, somehow, of a hound trying to pick up a scent. He looked all over the bureau; he looked at a big, thick rug which lay before it; he looked over the carpet. Then he crossed the room, examined the French window, opened it, walked out and disappeared in the garden. But within a few minutes he was back again in the drawing-room.

"I can show you exactly how your property was stolen, Miss Ellingham," he said, with an air of something very closely resembling cheerfulness. "To begin with, look at the fastening of your French window—a simple lock of the most elementary description, which any even half-trained cracksman would manipulate in two seconds with the greatest ease. Your burglar came in through that window, of course, and went straight to the cupboard in the bureau. He brought with him a bag, wherein to place the loot. The bag was fitted with those fine shavings that they use in crockery shops, to pack their wares in. Here you are—there are stray odds and ends of those shavings in this rug, strewed about among the long rough hair of which it's made. You couldn't have a simpler case than this! The man had nothing to do but walk in, help himself and go off by the way he came!"

"And yet," observed Miss Ellingham quietly, "Carsie assures me that there has never been any occasion on which he has not personally seen that that French window was locked at night and still locked when he examined it next morning."

"Just so!" said Cherry, smiling. "But the thief probably turned the key in it again when he left, to make you think the robbery was effected from inside—by some one in your house. The instrument he used to turn the key one way, to admit him, could be used just as effectually to turn it the other, when he'd got what he wanted. Oh, a very easy burglary! But talking of people inside your house—are you sure of all your servants? Your butler, now? It's best to be brutally plain, ma'am."

"I had the highest references with Carsie," replied Miss Ellingham. "I don't think there's the slightest doubt of his absolute honesty and respectability. As for my Hindu manservant, Mandhu Khan, he has been in my service twelve years, and is devoted to me. As to the rest—well I don't suppose my cook, nor my parlor-maid nor my housemaids and scullery-maids, or the boy who cleans knives and boots, or the two gardeners, or my chauffeur, would, any one of them, covet what to them would look like nothing but an ornamental jar and a couple of little stone figures—"

"You never know however humble a cat's-paw may be useful to a clever and unscrupulous criminal, ma'am," interrupted Cherry with a laugh. "And there's one thing you can make sure of in connection with your affair. This is no common theft! However—can you give me a copy of the *Lady's Circle* in which the interview and pictures figure?"

MISS ELLINGHAM found him the promised copy, and presently he and I went away. When we were out of the grounds, he began to turn over the paper, and suddenly he laughed cynically.

"Ben!" he said. "You'd think from her looks that the good lady we've just left was about as clever as they make 'em—and so, no doubt, she is, in her own line. But she's simple, my lad; she's simple! Knowing all she does about the something-like-superstitious value attached by the Chinese to this Kang-he stuff, she goes and advertises her possession of a fine specimen of it! Just look here, at these pictures! Photographs of the vase itself! Photographs of the cupboard in which the vase is kept—door open, showing vase! Photograph of the drawing-room, showing exact situation of bureau! Lord! Why, the thief had all his work done for him in advance! He'd nothing to do but slip in and lay his hands on the thing!"

He left me abruptly at the end of our lane, and went off to his lodging, muttering over the *Lady's Circle* and its pictures of Miss Ellingham and her treasures. But late that night, when Keziah and I were thinking of going to bed, in he walked and dropped into a chair between us, as we sat on either side of the parlor fire.

"Miss Heckitt!" he said abruptly. "You know me, by now, I hope! I'll take great care of him—but I must have what I want. And that's that Ben should go to London with me, first thing tomorrow morning."

Even more fascinating is the second of the three generous installments into which we have divided this, the best story yet written by the author of the famous "Black Money" and "The Middle of Things."

Mogollon's Partners

Here the author of "The Case of Mimbres" and "Manvel's Gold" tells an extremely interesting story and offers a faithful, vivid and picturesque re-creation of the old Southwest. Don't miss it.

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

ONE harsh, hot morning in the month of June, a solitary rider came down through the mountains toward the abandoned Bronco Mine. A tall, lean man whose beard reached to his chest, he sat with drooping shoulders and bowed back, swaying loosely to the step of his dun mule. The dust of many seasons stained his hat's limp rim. Within his deep-set eyes there glowed the steady light which marks those men who spend their days searching for hidden things.

So he came down the glaring draw between the pallid flanks of the great hills within whose folds the shadows deepened to ashes of roses. And as the mesa opened out below him, revealing long empurpled reaches where a ghostly multitude of brown dust-devils were dancing fantastic figures to the searing wind's weird tune, the men at the adobe house caught sight of him.

Bronco Bob Lee, Tinkham and Shotgun Moore were sitting in the narrow strip of shade before the adobe's door, discussing a certain deal in Mexican cattle which had kept the last-named two south of the boundary for some weeks. After the fashion of that day, when many hard-eyed citizens were paying more attention to the condition of their rifle-sights than they were to the laws of nations, their herd had grown by leaps and bounds as it traveled northward; and this swift growth had been attended by swift incidents. Old Tinkham shifted his hat, gingerly disclosing a blood-stained bandage.

"One of them soldiers creased me when they jumped us down Moctezuma way," he was saying. "Didn't amount to nothin', but the screw worms give me hell." His eyes roved to the mouth of the ravine and his right hand went toward the rifle beside the door. Bronco Bob Lee noticed the movement and perceived its cause.

"That's only Mogollon," said he. His manner of pronouncing the name was Mug-gyown, with the stress on the last syllable, and in his voice there was good-natured tolerance.

"Who's Mogollon?" demanded Shotgun Moore.

"All that I know," Bronco Bob told

them, "is that Curt Wilcox found him over in the Animas soon after yo' boys left. The Apaches had killed his pardner, an' he was out in the middle of the big alkali flat, crazy from want of water. Curt took him in to Paradise, and he worked a month or so for Pony Deal in the corrals. Sence then he's been prowlin' round these hills. He says he's from Pinos Altos, and all he knows to talk about is gold."

"Them prospectors," old Tinkham drawled, "is like that. Plumb locoed, every one of 'em."

THEY watched him riding down out of the cañon mouth, past the abandoned shaft and the dump upon whose flanks the candle cactus grew. They saw his eyes rove toward the weather-grayed windlass, from which a bit of frayed rope was still dangling in the wind. He pulled up his mule before the door and slid from the worn old saddle.

"Mornin'," he bade them.

"Howdy," they answered. He stood regarding them in silence.

"Which of yo' boys owns this here claim?" he asked at length. The other two glanced sidelong at Bronco Bob Lee.

"I reckon," the latter told him, "I'm holding her down jest now."

Mogollon turned his head to look again upon the signs of former mining activity, and the three partners smoked on in noncommittal silence.

" 'Pears like nobody has been workin' her lately." There was a mingling of diffidence and eagerness in his tone which did not escape Bronco Bob.

"Last time I heard of anybody burrowin' in that there shaft," said he, "was ten or twelve years back. A feller by the name of Hassayampa Bill come down into this country with two pardners and found seven men mining here. Him and his outfit done laid fer 'em on the dump one mo'nin' when they was coming to work; and before noon they'd managed to kill the hull bunch. Then they went on sinkin' the shaft, but ol' Cochise and his renegades happened along this way a little later on and got them. The graves is over in that patch of ocatilla, all ten of 'em."

"And sence that time?" asked Mogollon.

"Well, nobody's ever bothered their haids about it sence I've been here," the other answered.

Mogollon reached into his pocket and brought forth several small chunks of brownish rock. These he fondled with calloused fingers. Finally he offered them to Bronco Bob, who bestowed upon them one brief glance.

"What be they?" he inquired indifferently.

"I run acrost the outcrop this side of the ridge," said Mogollon. His manner was that of one who believes his announcement entitled to comment. Tinkham grunted. Shotgun Moore fell to rolling a cigarette.

"Ef yo' all aint int'rested," Mogollon went on, "mebbe yo' aint got no objections to my developin' the property."

"Meanin'," said Bronco Bob, "you'd like to go gopherin' round that there mountainside?"

"That," the prospector told him, "is what I was a-drivin' at."

"Go ahaid," the other bade him easily. "Nobody's going to bother yo'."

TO mind one's own affairs had become a fine art in southeastern Arizona. When Mogollon vanished on his dun-colored mule a few days later, no one gave the matter so much as a passing thought; and when he reappeared after a week, none wasted words in comment. To Bronco Bob, whom he seemed to have chosen for a confidant, he mentioned the fact that he had journeyed to Tombstone to record his claim.

Thereafter the three partners saw him frequently. Business was slack that summer at the Bronco Mine; the Mexican smugglers, who had been buying Tucson drygoods and hardware at the old adobe house for several years, were beginning to drive their pack-mules over the line by way of the San Pedro Valley. Bronco Bob Lee, Tinkham and Shotgun Moore had plenty of leisure to watch their new neighbor toiling in the blazing sunshine.

So they became accustomed to the sight of him about the old shaft-mouth. A Mexican, whom he had hired in Paradise for a dollar a day, would rouse himself from long inertia at some signal from the depths and fall to turning the rude wooden windlass. After weary minutes, a limp-rimmed sombrero would appear above the platform's sun-warped planks, followed by a pair of drooping shoulders; and at last a battered iron bucket would emerge, and Mogollon would climb forth with the red dust clinging to the sweat stains on his tattered garments. The partners began to regard him

as a sort of institution like the long-eared jackrabbits, and the lizards which were forever basking on the heated rocks.

In the little town of Paradise, over at the mesa's rim, where existence was growing dull in the lack of Apache raids and the falling off of illicit export trade, he was a source of idle speculation among the group of leading citizens who spent their evenings around the whisky-barrel in the rear of Beaver Smith's general store. When he rode into the place on his dun mule to buy a can of baking powder or a few pounds of flour, his appearance invariably aroused conjecture.

"What I cain't understand," Curt Wilcox said after one of these visits, "is what fun a man finds, gouging out holes in a mountain."

"That's becuz yo' was raised in Texas," Bull Lewis told him, "and all yo' know is cow-brutes and punchers and the like o' that. Now, up in Colorado, where I come from, the's a heap of these here prospectors. They're all alike. The's something gets into their heads, jest the same way as it is with drunkards, and they can't quit. I don't believe one of 'em ever expects to find anything, no more than I think one of them ol' soaks on Myers Street really figgers he's goin' to drink all the whisky in Tucson. But they keep on trying ontel they die."

"I reckon," Pony Deal chimed in, "Bull is right. I done spent a year in New Mexico, which is full of sheepherders an' prospectors; an' I have seen a man work hard fer six months so's he could make a stake to gopher round on a hot mountainside where the Apaches was as thick as fleas on a Mexican dog. I never yet did hear tell of one that got rich."

SO Mogollon took his place among them, arousing perhaps more than his share of passing interest; but in their minds there was no curiosity concerning the hidden thing which he sought. Mining was not their game. Because he showed no disposition to convert them to his faith, they did not resent his presence. But after a month had passed, there came a change.

Bronco Bob Lee was first to feel it. One morning, when his two partners were over in Paradise, Mogollon came down the hillside and called him to the door of the adobe house.

"I've done cleaned out the shaft and retimbered the tunnel," the prospector announced. "She's ready to go ahaid now."

"That's good," Bronco Bob answered idly. He noticed that the peculiar light seemed to have grown brighter in the deep-set eyes. Mogollon laid a calloused hand upon his shoulder.

"A hundred feet more of the crosscut, an' I'll reach the vein. She'll go more than eight foot wide, and she'll average a hundred dollars, free millin', to the ton."

"That's fine," said Bronco Bob.

"It's goin' to take about a thousand dollars," Mogollon went on as if he had not been interrupted, "and I aim to leave yo' in on the ground floor."

Bronco Bob shifted his position uneasily; and finally, when he had drawn a long breath:

"Look here, Mogollon," he managed to say, "minin' aint my game. I aint saying yo' aint got a good thing, but this business of looking at one side of a mountain an' telling what's a hundred foot underground on the other side, is more than ever I could get the hang of. I'd a heap ruther yo'd talk it over with somebody else."

Mogollon withdrew his hand. The light in his eyes remained unchanged. There was no shadow of disappointment in his face, only a faint regret.

"I sorta felt like yo' had the right to the fust chance," he said.

A FEW evenings later Bronco Bob rode into Paradise and got a sour greeting from the group around Beaver Smith's whisky-barrel.

"This ol' badger of yourn," Bull Lewis explained, "is gettin' to be a pest."

"Meanin'?" asked Bronco Bob.

"Mogollon," the teamster answered. "He's tryin' to sell a half int'rust in that there hole in the ground of his."

"I aint heard tell of any law ag'in' sellin' a mine in the territory of Arizona," Bronco Bob retorted serenely.

"The's a heap of things the law allows that don't go here," Bull Lewis asserted darkly. "I've seen men run outa camp that wasn't half the nuisance Mogollon has got to be. He clamped down on me this afternoon, an' I thought I never would get shet of him."

"He thinks," Curt Wilcox growled, "he's doin' a man a favor. He says he's got a shore thing, an' he wanted me to put up a thousand dollars to throw in with him on the deal."

"He nailed me when I was down in the corral shoeing that mean little mouse-colored mule the other day," Pony Deal chimed in. "The only way it would be safe to handle that brute's feet would be to bury him an' leave the hoofs stick up out of the ground. And right when things was gettin' lively, here comes Mogollon a-talking mine. He like to got me killed. Ef the mule hadn't reached out and chawed his shoulder, I reckon he'd of been pestering me yet."

Old Santa Cruz Castañada, the wagon-master, raised his hand.

"Hark," he said. "Now he has got Beaver."

From the blue night a querulous voice floated into the store's long interior. Bronco Bob smiled grimly.

"Beaver takes it hard," he murmured, but the others did not seem to share his amusement.

"Yo' wouldn't take it so blame easy ef yo' was in his shoes," they told him. The voice outside was rising to a final outburst. The words came to them:

"An' that's flat, Mogollon. I wouldn't resk a dobe dollar on yo'r swindlin' game. Now go away an' leave me be."

A moment later the proprietor entered his establishment alone. His goat's beard had assumed a horizontal angle, and he was breathing heavily. His eyes met Bronco Bob's.

"I tell yo' what it is," he sputtered shrilly: "yo' gotta get him outa camp."

"Ef it's goin' to he'p yo' boys to ferget yo'r troubles," Bronco Bob suggested, "I'll buy a drink." But the memory of their various ordeals did not leave the men of Paradise so easily as he had imagined. There was but little of light-heartedness about the whisky-barrel that evening.

AND as the days wore on, Mogollon became more and more an object of aversion. Men slunk from sight whenever he appeared; he walked the street a solitary figure; and some who saw him maintained that he had fallen to talking to himself.

A week later Bronco Bob Lee was within the old adobe house where the seven miners had fought their losing battle against Hassayampa Bill and his partners in years gone by. Hearing a step before the doorway, he looked up and saw the tall, drooping form of his neighbor upon the threshold.

"Come in," said he; but Mogollon shook his head.

"Got to be shovin' on," he announced. "The' aint no use tryin' to do business in Paradise. I'm leavin' today."

"The boys," said Bronco Bob, "aint much on minin', an' that's a fact. Now, ef yo'r game was cows or faro bank, it would be more along their line."

Mogollon stroked his beard; his eyes remained serene. "I would of liked to see yo' fellers get in on the ground floor."

Bronco Bob came to the door and watched him mount the dun mule.

"So long," he called after him. "Hope yo' get luck."

"Oh, I'll find some one," Mogollon told him over his shoulder; and with those words he rode away.

That was in July.

ON an August noontide a fat man, with flabby face and eyes as hard as jet, urged his jaded horse across the glaring flats below the great bend of the Gila, more than two hundred miles away. Behind him in the West his unsavory past remained; he looked ahead into the East, where there was none who knew him, and began to plan his future. To begin with, he had selected Williams as an easy-fitting name.

Dark mountain ranges closed in with perspective to north and south, making an exact circle, of which he always remained the center, an obese smudge ringed by the desert's savage splendor. As he moved, the plain unfolded, revealing new reaches but no change.

The sun crept on. When afternoon was at its height, he saw two objects far ahead. From what men had told him at the last stage-station, he knew the nearer to be the clump of mesquite at a water-hole; but into whom the crawling speck beyond was going to reveal itself, he could not tell. Now as they drew nearer to each other, he shifted the rifle from its sheath beneath the stirrup-leather, holding it ready across his lap; and his eyes became like two beads of dark obsidian.

The speck developed into a dual form; the twisting heat-waves distorted it to vast dimensions, lifting it into the pallid sky, then letting it down to earth again. The fat man distinguished the mule and its bearded rider. His eyes became less ugly, and he replaced the rifle in its scabbard.

"Only a prospector," he told himself. The afternoon was on the wane when the two of them rode into the mesquite thicket

from either side and met by the little pool.

"Howdy!" said Mogollon. "Hot day." He slid from the dun mule's back and left the other to take first possession of the spring. "Ef I was you," he remarked while he was loosening his cinch, "I'd unsaddle that hoss and leave him roll. He'll carry yo' better fer it when yo' go on."

After the mule had gotten its fill of water, and the two animals had fallen to cropping the scanty grass, the men sat down together in the shade.

"Come fur?" asked Williams.

"Tombstone," Mogollon answered—which brought the talk to mining. He took some brownish rock fragments from his pocket, and the fat man listened idly to his recital of what had happened in the town of Paradise.

"So I shoved on to Tombstone," Mogollon continued, "an' tried to find some one to back her, but the best I could get was a promise that they'd send an expert when I struck the vein; an' ef she showed up well enough, they'd buy."

"Yo' say them fellers in Paradise had money?" the other interrupted, heedless of this portion of the narrative.

"They could of raised ten thousand among 'em in half a day," said Mogollon.

The fat man had been lying flat on his back at the beginning of that statement. At its conclusion he was sitting bolt upright. The sun swung westward, and the shadows lengthened under the mesquite trees; the animals grazed unheeded in a widening circle, while Mogollon, in answer to his companion's questions, went on giving the financial rating of the leading citizens in Paradise.

SO it came about that when old Beaver Smith stood in the doorway of his store one morning two weeks later, he saw a buckboard approaching by the road down on the flat, and called a quartet of early customers from the rear of the establishment.

"That there nigh mule," he announced, "is Mogollon's. He's come back to pester us again."

"But who's the feller with him?" Pony Deal demanded.

"I reckon," Curt Wilcox hazarded, "the ol' boy has done found a pardner."

The buckboard climbed the grade to the mesa's summit and came rattling into the little town. The cloud of gray dust which mantled the vehicle and its two occupants swirled away before a gust of wind, and the group of watchers got their first clear view of the obese Williams. Bronco Bob Lee's eyes became narrow.

"Ef that's his pardner," said he, "he might have done well to look a little fu'ther."

When Mogollon had pulled up and tied the team at the long hitching-rack before the store, the men of Paradise noticed that he was still wearing the same patched overalls and faded shirt; the hat had grown perhaps a little limper about the brim. But there was, in his manner, a new assurance; and when he presented his companion, they could not mistake the pride in his voice. They acknowledged the introduction with noncommittal monosyllables, and during the brief session at the whisky-barrel which followed, they remained for the most part grimly silent.

"Well," Mogollon told the fat man after the second round, "I reckon we'll shove on to the mine."

"See yo' later," he called back to them from the buckboard, and released the brake. "Giddap!" The team sprang into a brisk trot.

"It's a blame shame," Beaver Smith growled. Bronco Bob Lee nodded.

"I wonder," he murmured, "what that fat sharp's game is?"

PARADISE waited to learn the answer to that question, but as the days went by, there came no enlightenment. During the pair's brief visits to the town, Mogollon retained the new assurance which they had marked on his arrival; and now they began to notice another change. He never mentioned the subject with which he had bored them before his departure. Once or twice Beaver Smith transgressed the rigid code of Southwestern etiquette which forbade asking another man about his business; but the best he got was the vague assurance that the Bronco Mine was doing nicely. Then Santa Cruz Castañada brought in the wagon-train from Tucson at the week-end, and four Tombstone miners, who had come with him as passengers, wrestled with Ma Smith's cooking at the boarding-house that evening. To those who had followed him to the rear of the store after the meal, the wagonmaster confided that he had hauled a half-ton of provisions, along with much steel and giant powder, consigned to the claim.

"Looks like this fat man aims to back

his play," Curt Wilcox commented. Bull Lewis chuckled.

"I was thinkin'," said he, "what ef that there mine should be a good thing after all."

"What ails yo', Bull?" Bronco Bob demanded. "Yo' look like yo'r drink had went the wrong way."

THEREAFTER Bronco Bob Lee, Tinkham and Shotgun Moore, returning to Paradise every evening after their daily vigils at the old adobe house where they still awaited stray bands of Mexican smugglers, reported increasing activity about the shaft mouth. And as suspicion began to evolve into a general conviction that the camp had allowed opportunity to pass into the hands of a rank stranger, solicitude for Mogollon grew strong.

"When this here pussy sharp gets done with him," old Beaver declared to the group of customers about the whisky-barrel one afternoon, "he'll have his hide a-hangin' on the fence. Su'thin' ort to be done."

"What's botherin' yo', Beaver," Curt Wilcox drawled, "is the same thing that's ailin' all the rest of us. We could stand passin' up a good chancet, but we hate to see that pot-bellied swindler walking off with it right onder our noses thet-a-way."

Bronco Bob, who was spending the day in town, ceased carving notches on the packing-box which served him as a seat. He closed his jackknife with a snap and thrust it into his pocket.

"Mogollon done tol' me last evenin'," said he, "how them two has organized into a stock comp'ny; an' this here Williams man owns half the shares. He claims they're due to strike that vein some time inside of the next month."

Thus Paradise became corrupted, and for the time forgot the art of minding its own business. And as the month which Mogollon had designated drew toward its close, speculation concerning the riches in that arid hillside beyond the mesa grew apace. In all the town, none took this thing so hard as Beaver Smith. Once, during his earlier career, he had spent a few months in Prescott and picked up a smattering of mining information. Mogollon himself, during the period when he had importuned them, had not talked so much of dips and angles of hanging walls and footwalls as the leading merchant of Paradise talked now. At last, when curiosity, which was not unmixed with avarice, had irked him beyond further endurance, he saddled up and rode over to the claim. Those who witnessed his departure awaited his homecoming with a degree of anticipation, but their hopes of gaining any information were dashed when he arrived.

"Anybody," he told them, "would think I was tryin' to spy on them, the way they done handled me." There was a flicker in the tail of his eye which did not escape Curt Wilcox, who mentioned the matter to Bronco Bob Lee that same evening.

"I didn't take notice of anybody mistreatin' him," the latter answered reflectively. "He had a bottle of whisky along with him, and he put in a heap of time with the man at the windlass. Between the two of 'em, they killed the hull quart. I reckon ol' Beaver will bear watchin'."

SO it came that Bronco Bob Lee, Tinkham and Shotgun Moore kept their eyes on the growing dump during these days, and were able to report subsequent visits by the leading merchant of Paradise. And so, on a September evening when Bull Lewis sought his friends down at the corrals, where they had gathered to help Pony Deal diagnose the ailment of an invalid mule, he found a receptive audience for his tidings.

"The way the play come up," the teamster told them, "I was dozin' in a chair by Beaver's whisky-barrel, me havin' been up all the night before tryin' to break a monte game that them Mexicans has started at the other side of town. But I was sleepin' like a dog with both ears open; and by and by I took notice of Beaver talkin' to somebody in the front of the store.

"'Yo're shore yo're right?' he was a-sayin'.

"'I was there when they cleaned away the muck from the last shot,' the other feller says, 'an' the vein shows ten foot wide!'

"I cocked one eye open an' got a good look at him. 'Twas one of them miners from the Bronco."

"So they've made their strike!" Curt Wilcox swore softly. "Now, what do yo' boys reckon that ol' miser aims to do?"

"That aint all I heard," Bull Lewis cut in. "This here miner goes on out without even takin' a drink. And I am jest about to make a play like I was wakin' up, when here comes the rattle of a buckboard, and that kettle-bellied Williams sharp busts

into the front door with a canvas bag in his hand.

" 'I want this sack of ore,' says he, 'took to Tucson when the wagons goes out in the mo'nin'. Tell them to give it to the assayer on Myers Street, and to fetch back the report to me in person.'

"Which Beaver says he will; an' this Williams party aint no more than left, before the ol' thief comes on his tiptoes to the back end of the store. Fust thing he does is to make shore I'm asleep. Then he onties the sack and pours out half of the rocks into another canvas bag. He sneaks out of the back door, and after a while, he comes in again with some chunks of stone which he puts into the Williams sack. He fiddles around for a little, and comes over to wake me up. It takes consid'able shaking to do it. He gives me the two bags; one is marked with his name, and the other is labeled 'Williams.'

" 'Take these to the assayer on Myers Street," he says, 'and bring back his reports on 'em. Be shore to give me mine the very fust thing, as soon as yo' hit Paradise. Keep yo'r mouth shet, and ef the's anything in it, I'll see yo' get yo'r share.'

"I tol' him I'd 'tend to it, and we had a drink. After that, I lit out to find you fellers."

"I don't jest get the hang of this," Curt Wilcox complained when the teamster had finished his narrative. Bronco Bob chuckled.

"Beaver aims to buy in cheap," said he. "The ore that he has stole will tell how rich the vein is. The Williams man will get a report showing about half the values. When Bull turns over them papers next week, jest watch that ol' scoundrel make tracks fer the mine and offer Williams good money fer some stock."

"Ef it wasn't fer his wife," Pony Deal growled, "I'd be fer runnin' that ol' hyena out of camp. Why couldn't he let us in on this?"

"I was thinkin'," Bronco Bob drawled, "why cain't we cut in, anyhow? Bull can show us Beaver's report when the wagons come in."

"But," Pony Deal interrupted, "we cain't do no business till the fat man gets his bad news; and by that time Beaver has got his figgers too. He'll burn the wind out to the mine."

"Let him," Bronco Bob answered serenely. "We'll organize our game so he don't travel very fur. The's a pack-train due from Sinaloa inside of the next few days, and I know that bunch of greasers. Half of 'em are bandits when trade is slack. Is the' any of yo' boys savvys the *reata* trick?"

Santa Cruz Castañada, the wagonmaster, swore softly in Spanish, and old Tinkham smote the speaker's back in the fullness of his joy.

A WEEK later, when the gray dusk was turning into purple darkness, the wagon-train came rattling down the single street of Paradise. Beaver Smith watched its arrival from his store's front door. For what seemed to him a long time he stood there waiting for Bull Lewis.

Down in the mule-corrals where the dust-haze showed golden in the lantern-light, the teamster grinned into the faces of the group who surrounded him.

"Well, boys!" His voice was vibrant with exultance. "She shows a little better'n a hundred dollars to the ton."

"Better fetch Beaver his report right now," Bronco Bob bade him, "or he'll be coming after it. He's been watching the road fer yo' sence four o'clock. The's a pony saddled behind the blacksmith shop. Don't lose any time, but climb onto him as quick as yo' can and ride over to the mine with Williams' paper before Beaver gets started. He turned to old Tinkham as the teamster was departing:

"Got them greasers ready?"

"They're waitin' now jest this side of Chilson's cabin, where the road leaves town," the Texan whispered. "I done give 'em their orders exactly what to do."

"All right, then, boys," the leader told them. "We may's well keep onder cover in the wagonshed fer an hour or so. That'll give this Williams party plenty of time to think over his bad news."

Beaver Smith ceased fumbling with his goat's beard and sighed with relief as he recognized the figure of Bull Lewis approaching through the dark.

"Here's that there paper from the assay-office," the teamster announced cheerfully. The storekeeper took it from his hand and began to open it with eager fingers.

"Go back to the bar'l an' he'p yo'se'f to a drink," said he. In the act of turning away, Bull hesitated. Bronco Bob's instructions for haste had been explicit, but the dust of the Tucson road had never seemed to rankle in his throat as it did now.

"Reckon a mule's earful wouldn't hurt me none," he muttered, and retraced his footsteps. When he was bending over the faucet, he got a glimpse of Beaver scanning the report by the light of the kerosene lamp in the front of the store. When he straightened up again, the room was empty save for himself.

"Wonder what made him pile out so sudden?" he mused. "Well, anyhow, he's got to leave me ride over there ahaid of him. Reckon I better be a-movin' now."

He hurried to the rear of the blacksmith shop and untied the waiting pony. He swung into the saddle and was off at a fast lope. Where the road took a sharp turn to descend into a dry wash, beyond which the Chilson cabin stood, he pulled down to a running walk; and then he felt the horse shy. He heard a whining whisper above his head. Cold, slippery strands of rawhide settled down and tightened to a rigid clasp about his throat. His breath was gone, but when he struck the earth with a bone-shaking jar, he was fighting manfully, if blindly. And two swarthy men from Sinaloa, in steep-crowned sombreros and wide-mouthed trousers faced along the sides with leather, assured each other fervently in their own tongue two minutes later that they would yet have a reckoning with the Texas man who had promised them a safe and easy job.

"It may be," one whispered, when they had dragged their victim into the shadow of the mesquite bushes, enwrapped as tightly as a cocoon, "this is the wrong man."

"No, Esperidion," his companion answered, "did we not see the first one leave the store and ride by? And this one comes next, just as the Tehuana told us. Hark! Now he swears again. Stuff the handkerchief some more into his mouth, so that we may leave him and go in peace."

IT was midnight when Bronco Bob and his companions left the mine to ride back to Paradise. The Williams man had driven a harder bargain than they had anticipated.

"I begun to be afeard we'd have to get a little rough with him before he was done," Curt Wilcox said when they were out of earshot from the tent.

"I wonder," Pony Deal speculated, "why he was so dead set ag'in' lettin' go of more'n half his stock."

"Fifty dollars a ton aint such a bad showin'," Bronco Bob reminded him. "We're in luck to get what we did fer five thousand. I wisht we'd doctored them samples of his a leetle more. What'll we do with ol' Beaver?"

"May's well leave him lay out till mo'nin'," Tinkham suggested. " 'Taint going to hurt him none. I kin come ridin' by and sort of find him, like, at sunup."

"An' the rest of us will be at the store to hear his hard-luck story when yo' fetch him in," Bronco Bob chuckled. "That's fine!"

SO it was agreed. But in the early morning they gathered at the store, to find the doors already open. The proprietor was behind the counter, whistling between his teeth. He cocked a jovial eye at them.

"Mo'nin', men," he bade them. "Have a drink?"

"Beaver," demanded Bronco Bob, who was the first to find his wits and tongue, "where was yo' las' night?"

"Me?" Beaver answered blithely. "Why, I done lit out right after the wagons come in. My ol' woman was settin' up with Mis' Chilson's kid, that's down with scarlet fever, an' I'd promised to fetch her some yarb tea that one of them Mexican women brewed up. Whassa matter with yo' fellers, anyhow?"

But the conspirators were spared the necessity of reply to his question by the arrival of Tinkham and the badly battered Bull Lewis, who managed to make known a pressing want by an extended finger. By the time they had ministered to his needs at the whisky-barrel, Bronco Bob had done quite a bit of swift thinking.

"Where did yo' go from Chilson's, Beaver?" he asked briskly.

"I dunno what's bitin' yo' fellers," the other told him. "Anybody would think I'd robbed a stage, the way yo' act. Ef yo've got to know, why, I done rode out to the mine an' put one over on that there Williams thief by gettin' a hunk of his minin' stock off'm him. Who's been beatin' yo' up, Bull?"

"Boys," Curt Wilcox interrupted, "my insides is feelin' sort of cold. I think I need another drink before we go fu'ther with this."

"What I would like to know—" old Beaver was beginning, when they had heartened themselves at his expense.

"I reckon," Pony Deal told him brusquely, "yo'll know purty soon. Didn't yo' never

hear of sellin' a salted mine? Come on, boys."

IT did not take them long to saddle up, and they rode hard across the mesa to the Bronco Mine.

A half-dozen tents were pitched hard by the cañon mouth. Before one of these, under a scrub oak tree, Mogollon was standing. His back was toward them, and he was bending over a rude iron mortar. The *thump-thump* of a steel bar, which he was employing as a pestle, was the only sound about the place. He turned at their approach.

"Howdy!" he bade them, and laid the bar aside.

"Where's Williams?" three of them asked at once.

Mogollon picked up the iron receptacle and emptied its powdered contents into a gold-pan. He rinsed the last grains forth with water from a battered canteen, poured a pint or so more into the pan and gave it a preliminary twirl.

"I reckon he done lit out last night," he answered slowly. "That's what he aimed to do."

Beaver Smith, who had had opportunity for much reflection on the way here, ripped out a hair-raising oath.

"I've a plumb notion to drill yo' between the eyes," he announced with fervor. "That crook has got five thousand dollars of my money, an' yo' was in on this deal from the start." Bronco Bob Lee laid a hard hand on the speaker's wrist. Mogollon ceased twirling the gold-pan and glanced up at them. His eyes held that same sure, far-seeing look which they had noticed so many times before.

"Did he sell out to yo' boys?" he asked placidly. Bronco Bob forbore from reply until he had disarmed the raging Beaver. And then he answered with a counter-question.

"What do yo' know about this, Mogollon?"

"I know," the latter said over his shoulder, the while he swished the water in the pan, "that he's a low-down swindler."

"I reckon mebbe yo' know he done salted this here mine, then?" Curt Wilcox interjected hotly.

"He didn't savvy enough about the business to do that." Mogollon was talking with provoking slowness. "He had a bag of samples which he had stole somewheres up La Paz way, an' 'twas them he used to bait yo' fellers on. An' he done paid one of the hands twenty dollars to tell Beaver that we'd made a strike."

"I wisht yo'd hol' this ol' tarantalar, Curt," said Bronco Bob. "I'd like to talk. Now, Mogollon, yo' knowed all about this, then?"

"Me an' him throwed in together," Mogollon said with pleasant indifference, "agreein' that he was to furnish a thousand dollars an' sell out his half of the stock to yo' boys ef he could. As long's yo'-all come in fer pardners, I was satisfied."

Bronco Bob swore. Incredulity and rising rage were in his voice.

"Our havin' paid ten thousand don't seem to hurt yo'r feelin's none!"

"Why should it?" Mogollon had finished the washing. He scraped the powdered remnants from the pan into a small glass bottle, which he held forth to them.

"Take a good look at it. I've got ten more samples just as rich. We made the strike last night inside of an hour after he pulled his freight. Ef yo' boys had took my word that 'twas there in the beginning, yo'd of got in cheaper. Anyhow, we're pardners now."

"Lampasas," another of Mr. Bechdolt's fine stories of the old West, will appear in an early issue. And next month Clem Yore will offer his dramatic "Latigo," a keenly exciting story of the modern West. You will find these well worth watching for.

Bait, Hook and Sinker

A delightful romance of business life by the distinguished author of "Voodoo," "Sold South," and "The Great New York Conspiracy."

By WILLIAM ALMON WOLFF

THERE was something irregular about Jimmy Scott's behavior. Anyone might have seen that, had he not been fairly safe from observation because his private office was the last word in privacy. He was, and he wasn't, the Scott of the Trainor-Scott Company; the explanation of that seeming paradox was that the original Scott had been his father, and that he was secretary and a large stockholder by virtue of his father's will. So he had a room, a room just as good as Trainor's, with nice, shiny mahogany furniture, and big, comfortable chairs, and a glass top on his desk, and a fine rug on the floor, and all that sort of thing. In fact, the only thing he lacked in that superbly equipped modern office was something to do. And—the devil, according to a fairly well substantiated rumor, has a way of finding mischief for idle hands to do.

Over the door in that beautiful office of Scott's there was, of course, a transom, which was partly open. The door, naturally enough, opened into the big main office, where stenographers and bookkeepers and such small fry sat and worked. That was what worried Jimmy—they worked. He would cheerfully have traded places with the junior office-boy! The boy would have been absolutely and entirely capable of running Jimmy's job—assuming that he knew enough to sign his name on the dotted line, right by the little penciled cross. And Jimmy was beginning to have doubts about whether he was qualified to fill even an office-boy's shoes. However, to revert to Jimmy's irregular behavior—

Jimmy wanted to know certain things that were going on in that outer office, and he wanted to become cognizant of them without crudely opening his door and looking out. He had been reading a good deal about submarines and periscopes, and his reading gave him an idea, which took him to the article on periscopes in his encyclopedia. As a result of that he procured these things: one reading-glass lens, one small mirror, one long cardboard tube, of the sort in which maps are mailed, one piece of ground glass.

These things he attached to one another,

by means of glue and pieces of string, in such a way that he could aim the lens at the outer office, through the transom. What went on outside was then thrown upon the mirror, through the lens. The mirror was fixed at an angle of forty-five degrees, and from it, down the tube, the image reflected in the mirror was cast upon the ground glass, so that Jimmy could perceive every movement of—well, of Miss Janet Cameron, in particular. It was her movements that interested him; he didn't care what the rest of the office force did.

MAYBE that periscope wouldn't have won the approval of an expert in such matters. But it pleased Jimmy. When it came to mechanical matters, he was a good deal of a dub. And the fact that his device worked was about all that counted with him.

It showed him Miss Cameron. Specifically, it showed him a girl attired in the most rigid, the plainest sort of clothes, who still looked—oh, like a girl! She had soft, fluffy brown hair, that rather obviously triumphed over efforts to make it look prim and slick. And she could wear a plain, tailored waist, almost mannish as to its collar, and an even plainer serge skirt, and could, thus, deceive the casual eye about her figure. But nothing short of a surgical operation, could have been done about her features and her complexion and a mutinous dimple that turned up, every now and then, just when she particularly didn't want it to show itself. Jimmy, it was plain, derived a certain pleasure from watching her. And it was, unmistakably, she that he watched.

He waited, with the patience of an angler regarding his float, for the proper moment. And then, when for the first time since he had begun his vigil, Janet was sitting in front of her machine, rather dreamily, with nothing to do, *and* all the other stenographers were scattered around in various offices, presumably taking dictation, he pressed one of the little row of push-buttons on his desk, dismantled his periscope with reckless haste and hid it under a leather couch, and then sat down, with a stern and resolute look, at his desk.

There was a dubious knock at his door, and he said, "Come in!" as gruffly as he could. Janet entered, tentatively, looking surprised.

"Good morning, Miss Cameron!" said Jimmy crisply.

"You rang for a stenographer, didn't you?" she said, hesitating in the door.

"Yes—got a letter I wish you'd take for me," he said. "Rather a long one."

She looked surprised, and a little suspicious. But she came forward resignedly and drew up a chair, and put her notebook on the extension flap of his desk, and produced a sharpened pencil. It was as if she had no real faith, somehow, in the letter he was talking about, but was prepared to go through the motions, anyway.

"Letter Mr. William—William—Smith," he said. "University Club—Chicago—yes, Chicago. 'Dear Bill.' "

"Oh—a personal letter!" she said, as if that explained a good deal.

"Yes—but it's perfectly all right to dictate it," he said. "Seems to be the thing, these days. Got a letter from a chap the other day telling me he was engaged—fixing it up for me to be best man—didn't even sign it! 'Dictated but not read,' you know. I'd call that a bit thick, but—well, there you are!"

She made no comment.

" 'Dear Bill,' " he repeated, tentatively. He paused and thought. Unconsciously his hand reached for a pencil, and he began to scribble on a pad. He wasn't used to dictating, and he showed it. But presently he got started—torrentially.

" 'Dear Bill: If I didn't know you, I'd think you meant to be sarcastic when you ask if I'm too busy to write letters! I am busy, at that—trying to find something to do. And I don't mean that I'm looking for a job, either. I've got a job—or it's got me. The one you know about—being secretary of the Trainor-Scott Company. I'm a dummy director. I'm a fifth wheel. For usefulness and earning my munificent salary, I'm a joke. If they appraised all the people connected with the concern, I'd come just after the office-boy from across the hall who comes in to visit with ours.' "

Miss Cameron took that down, unmoved, so far as he could see, and waited, her face bereft of all expression, for more. It came, after a pause for reflection.

" 'You, knowing my true calibre, will be surprised. The trouble is that Mr. Trainor doesn't share your knowledge, and has a set of preconceived notions. I went to college, and so he has put me down for a thing that yells rah-rah-rah at intervals and goes around in a checked cap leading a bulldog. I'm the son of a man who was unusually successful in business and made

a fortune; so he knows I'm a brainless fool and would blow said fortune in, if I weren't restrained—incidentally wrecking the business. The result is that I'm secretary of the company because my father was, and he left me his stock, but all I do is to sign papers when, where and how I'm told to do it. All I know about the business is what I can discover by snooping around, and if I told the office-boy to go around the corner and buy me an evening paper, he'd have to get an O.K. from somebody before he'd be allowed to do it! And—' "

He broke off, and stared at Janet. Her cheeks were very red, although she was taking down his words as fast as he uttered them.

" 'And,' " he went on, getting warmed up now, " 'I'm just sore enough to stick around and make the old geezer admit there may be something in me. There's another reason, too. I'm interested in one of the stenographers—chiefly, I think, because she has, and shows, such an absolutely abysmal contempt for me. She's taken Trainor's idea of me, you see, and—' "

Janet was on her feet, still flushed, with sparkling eyes and parted lips that showed her white teeth.

"Mr. Scott!" she said furiously. "You have no right to insult me—"

He was up, too, and he was just a little bit angry himself.

"Insult you!" he said. "Really, Miss Cameron! Sit down, please. After all, you ought to be fair!"

She sat down, reluctantly.

"I might mean one of the other stenographers—" he began. But he stopped, and grinned, rather sheepishly, when he saw how she took that—the look of contempt that was succeeding the anger in her eyes.

"I did mean you, of course," he said calmly. "And I dictated that letter because you so studiously avoided me. I wanted to explain some things to you, and you made it impossible for me to talk to you. So I chose the only way that was left, so far as I could see—"

She got up again. And she was still indignant, although, somehow, she didn't seem quite as indignant as she had been.

"Oh, please—be a sport, Miss Cameron!" he said. "Let me get this out of my system! You'd let anyone else you know talk to you, wouldn't you? You'd listen to them? Well—"

"This is office time—" she said rather weakly. He flashed up.

"Well—that's the only time I've got!" he said. "I've got as much right to dictate a letter to you as Trainor has, or Truesdale, or Fitch—haven't I? By George—I'll assert some of my authority around this office, first thing any one knows!"

She sat down once more. And though it was plain that she didn't want to do it, she couldn't help letting a smile crinkle up the corners of her mouth a bit, and that mutinous dimple was moved to make its appearance, too. There was a grotesque combination of earnestness and mockery about Scott, and he looked, somehow, in spite of his six feet of height and his sandy hair, like a boy engaged in conscious mischief.

"Well—that's better!" he said still truculently, but with rather a sigh of relief, too. "You see, Miss Cameron—I'm rather up against it here. If you'll refer to my letter to Mr. Smith, you'll get an inkling of what I mean. How would you like it if everyone took it for granted that you were a brainless boob? How would you like to have things fixed so that there wasn't a thing for you to do except to come down in the morning, go out to lunch, come back, and then go home at five o'clock?"

"I wouldn't do it!" she flashed back, and then bit her lip, as if she hadn't meant to answer him at all.

"Well—I've thought of getting out, too," he said. "I suppose that's what you mean? I could do that, of course. I'm drawing five thousand a year here as secretary, but I could do without that—my dividends are more than I spend, as it is. But—I'm hanged if I'll quit that way! I'm hanged if I'll be smoked out! It isn't as if I'd had a chance, and fallen down or made a fool of myself. I haven't had a chance to make mistakes, even. I'm a joke. I'll quit fast enough—after I've shown this gang something. But I wont do it before!"

SHE sat still, not looking at him. Her expression was rather thoughtful, now, and Jimmy considered it with a good deal of quiet satisfaction. Also, he proceeded to take further advantage of the opening he had made.

"Why—I'm the office joke!" he proclaimed earnestly. "Take you, for instance. If you hadn't been all alone out there when I rang for a stenographer just now, you wouldn't have come—even if it had been your turn. And—I don't want you to think I'm snoopy, or anything, but

I've got so much time and so little to do that I can't help seeing a lot that goes on in the office. I noticed the way you handled Rawlinson the other day."

She shivered a little, and looked up curiously.

"I know that sort of beast," he went on warmly. "And you made him look like thirty cents—and did it so that he didn't know what was happening to him. Well—you've been treating me the same way! And I did know what was happening."

Now she did get up, and this time she moved resolutely toward the door, her head high, her cheeks painfully flushed. And he made no effort to detain her.

"I think you are rather unfair, Mr. Scott," she said in a low voice. "I'm quite sure you don't mean to be, but it's so. If I've seemed inconsiderate, I'm sorry. I can see that you might have had some reason for thinking so. This—this letter isn't to go, is it?"

"I think not," he said gravely. "Thank you, Miss Cameron."

IT might appear that he hadn't accomplished much. But when he was left alone, Jimmy fairly beamed. He seemed to be remarkably well pleased with himself. And there was some reason for that.

Things had been neither easy nor pleasant for him in the office. Had his father lived, he would have made a normal start in the business, probably, and worked his way up gradually. His father's premature death, coming when Jimmy was just finishing the course in law-school which, it had been decided, would be a useful thing for him to have, though he had no intention of practicing law, had upset everything.

Jimmy wasn't disposed to be unjust to Trainor. Distinctly a self-made man, and one strongly opinionated, too, Trainor hated even a suggestion of nepotism. An old bachelor himself, he didn't believe a man should bring his son into a business. And so, unfairly, he had decided to insulate Jimmy, and had succeeded admirably. The office had perforce accepted Trainor's estimate of Jimmy; the way he sat down under that treatment and drew his salary without earning it confirmed the opinion that he couldn't amount to much. Jimmy, you see, couldn't very well go around buttonholing people and explaining that he was just waiting for a chance to show what he could do before he got out.

Except for Janet Cameron, Jimmy mightn't have cared so much. But she had managed to make the whole business intolerable rather than simply annoying. He had been attracted by her appearance when he first went into the office, and by her cool, quiet way of going about her work. She was far and away the ablest stenographer in the place; she knew every detail of the business. It had happened, just happened, that in Jimmy's early days in the office, she had answered his ring several times. He hadn't wanted to do any dictating, as a rule; he had been acquainting himself with the business, and had wanted files, and reports, and digests—things like that.

Jimmy was a pretty impetuous person. It hadn't occurred to him that there was an essential difference between a girl whom he had met as he had met Janet Cameron, in the way of business, and one to whom he had been introduced at a dance, say, or a tea. He liked Janet, and wanted to know her better. So he followed a perfectly natural impulse to stop at her desk for a salutation when he came in in the morning; he saw no reason in the world why he shouldn't fall into step beside her if they happened to leave the office at the same time in the evening—and saw to it that that happened with a fair degree of regularity.

He had been amazed and indignant, and finally a little amused, when he had realized that she was, very quietly, very skillfully, interposing a barrier to all that sort of thing. She had the position of her desk changed, so that he would have to make a wide detour between the entrance and his own door to stop to speak to her. She pointedly didn't answer his ring for a stenographer. She contrived matters so that he couldn't walk along with her when she left the office.

Since Jimmy was a perfectly normal specimen of the male sex, that sort of thing simply made him more determined. He didn't bother her, of course; he knew, for one thing, that she could leave the office and get another job any time she liked, and anyhow, that wasn't the idea. But he did get mad, and he amplified his program for showing the office what was in him so that it included an understanding with Janet. He was pretty sure that she had accepted Trainor's estimate of him; he had seen, once or twice, a sort of amused, tolerant contempt in her glance at him.

So he had invented that periscope, and won, by trickery and chance, that fifteen-minute talk with her. He didn't know, but he was disposed to hope that he had given her food for a little thought about him, and thought, perhaps, a little kindlier than she had been wont to harbor. And the next morning, when he walked into the office, she looked up, and turned half around, and gave him a cool, friendly little nod, which made him quite unreasonably happy. She had the same sort of greeting, he knew, for office-boys and bookkeepers, but it represented a distinct advance, for him—and it was about the first success of any sort that he had achieved since he had come into the office.

PROBABLY that was what nerved him to beard Trainor in his office. He went in rather casually, and asked the president to have lunch with him, and Trainor frowned.

"Lunch? Impossible, Jimmy! Get a lot done at lunch—do more business at lunch than in the office, often. Got to see Sperry today about that hotel proposition. We're trying to work off that block front we've been carrying for two years."

"Good!" said Jimmy. "Well—of course, if you're busy— Say, Mr. Trainor—I know you think I'm no good! But why not give me a chance? I'm not asking for any responsibility. I just want something to do—"

"H'm!" Trainor sat up, glared, started to speak, stayed still, for a moment, with his mouth open, and then shut it with a click of his teeth. And then he swung around in his chair and faced Jimmy. "Might as well have this out!" he snapped. "As long as I've got anything to say about it, I'll see that you're well paid to keep out of mischief! This is a business for specialists who've been trained to the minute. You're an amateur. You may have good stuff in you—probably have. The thing for you to do is to get out and prove it. You're wasting your time here. Now you've got it straight. I've got nothing against you, Jimmy—I like you for your own sake, and because you're your father's son. But I don't mix business and friendship—never have—never will."

"Thanks!" said Jimmy. "That's straight talk—and it's about time I got some! Now—I'll say my piece. I'm going to stick around here until I've had a chance to show this office up. I've kept my eyes open—and you've passed up at least three chances to swing big deals in the last six months. There's too much conservatism around here—too little disposition to take a chance. You don't want to go into anything unless it's a sure thing. That's the trouble with all businesses that don't bring in new blood once in a while. Good morning!"

HE got out, leaving Trainor in danger of apoplexy. He went after Truesdale, the office manager; but Truesdale had a business engagement for lunch too, and so he had to put up with Fitch, the treasurer, a colorless, capable man, without any imagination whatever, who owed his position to his genius for the details of finance. And from Fitch, though the treasurer seemed a little dubious about imparting the information, Jimmy learned a good deal about building loans and the Trainor-Scott plan, since adopted by other concerns, of selling bonds in small denominations to finance the construction of apartment houses and office buildings.

He had no plan at that time. He didn't know how he was going to find the material for the humble pie he proposed to bake for Trainor's eating. But he had an idea that something would turn up, if he kept his eyes open. And something did.

It was midsummer, and things were pretty dull. Vacations had reduced the office force. Trainor was fishing up in Canada—out of telegraphic touch. Truesdale was sitting on the lid; Fitch was mooning about; Jimmy was eating his head off. The combination of heat and idleness made Jimmy restless, and he went into Truesdale's room to bait him.

"Say—I heard the other night that we'd had a chance to get an option on that block the Eastern Central's got to have for its new terminal," he said engagingly. "Is that so, Mr. Truesdale?"

Truesdale glared at him. That was a sore point with him—with Trainor too. The office had had advance information about the Eastern Central's plan to invade the city—and hadn't acted on the tip, with the result that a rival concern had been able to swing the biggest real-estate deal of a five-year period.

"Yes—it's so," said Truesdale. But then he smiled. "I'm not sure that the Northeastern Development Company's so happy about it, though. That option hasn't been exercised yet. Of course, they may simply

want to hold up payment to save interest on the money—I don't know the terms of the option, but they've probably got to tie up at least a hundred thousand for thirty days, maybe sixty, before they transfer title to the railroad."

"There isn't any hitch, is there?"

"I haven't heard of any. I'm simply a little surprised to find that the transfer hasn't been recorded. I'm not a mind-reader, and I don't try to work deductive processes."

"Of course," said Jimmy sympathetically. "Too bad we didn't get in on that, though."

"This office doesn't go in for speculation—and that deal was strictly speculative!" said Truesdale with emphasis. "If you are disposed to criticize the management of the company, the time to do it is at the stockholders' meeting. Did you want to see me about business?"

Jimmy took the hint, and went out, whistling. And within an hour, though Jimmy didn't know it until later, Truesdale was called away by a wire that announced that his wife had been taken suddenly and seriously ill in Maine. Jimmy got back from lunch, and within two minutes looked up to see Janet Cameron standing in his door.

"Mr. Truesdale left this note for you, Mr. Scott," she said, coming in.

He glanced at the few words of the memorandum.

"Too bad!" he said. "And I was ragging him just this morning! Jove—I'm sorry! Hope Mrs. Truesdale pulls through."

"You'll be in charge until Mr. Trainor or Mr. Truesdale gets back," said Janet.

Something in her voice made Jimmy stare at her. He wasn't sure, but he thought she was smiling—a little—with her eyes.

"Hadn't thought of that," he said slowly. "Has any word gone to Mr. Trainor?"

"Not yet. Mr. Truesdale gave no orders. He was—upset, you see. Shall I have a telegram sent? It ought to reach Mr. Trainor in three or four days—"

"No!" said Jimmy explosively. He brought his hand down on his desk. "What's a vice-president for?"

Now there was no doubt that Janet was smiling, though she said nothing at all.

"No!" said Jimmy again. "By Jove—I'm sorry about Mrs. Truesdale, of course—but I'll crowd this as long as it lasts! How about it, Miss Cameron? You know the routine of the place. Will you act as my secretary as long as I'm in charge?"

"I'll obey orders, of course, Mr. Scott," she said sedately. "I suppose you'd like to look over the mail? Mr. Trainor's and Mr. Truesdale's? And will you sign the letters Mr. Truesdale had dictated before he went?"

JIMMY put in a busy and altogether delightful afternoon. It wasn't solitary, either; Janet was in his room most of the time, explaining things. And he saw some men who had had appointments with Truesdale, and made one or two small decisions—decisions he was sure Truesdale wouldn't have made without taking a week for thought!

Jimmy, being very much alone in the world, lived at his club. And that night, it happened that he had nothing to do, and so he stayed around the club after dinner, because it was too muggy and warm to seek amusement. There weren't many men about, and he fell into conversation with Cheney, of the Northeastern Development Company, Trainor-Scott's biggest rival in the real-estate and construction business in that section. Both companies operated on a large scale; neither allowed its business to be limited by local boundaries. Cheney was talkative, even a little noisy. It looked to Jimmy as if he had taken at least one extra drink at dinner—an unwise thing to do in such weather. Jimmy didn't like Cheney much, and was glad when young Crampton came along and proposed a game of billiards. It was too hot, really, for billiards, but he accepted the challenge, to get rid of Cheney.

Cheney defeated his object, however. He turned up in the billiard-room, before long, with another man whom Jimmy didn't know, and the pair of them sat down in big leather chairs and began drinking ginger-ale—which made Jimmy smile. Also, they talked—and it wasn't long before snatches of their talk, which they made no effort to pitch low, came to his ears and made him frown. Cheney was talking about the Eastern Central terminal site, and he seemed to be complaining of the rapacity of the owners of the land.

"Let 'em wait!" he said. "I tell you—money's too tight. We'd have to borrow at about seven per cent. Got a lot tied up just now."

The other man said something that was drowned out by a noise from the street.

"Not a chance!" That was Cheney again. "Who knows when the option runs out?" He chuckled, and leaned forward, confidentially. But—he didn't lower his voice. And Jimmy, prompted by some semi-chivalrous instinct, called to Cheney.

"Hello—thought you'd gone home, Cheney!" he said, to attract Cheney's attention to his presence.

"Don't you worry about me, Scott," said Cheney with great solemnity. "I'm all right. You'll have to get up mighty early tomorrow morning to be ahead of me!"

And then he went on talking.

"Safe as a church!" he said. "We could jump in before anyone else could close a deal." A trolley car drowned out a few words. "—Canada—and Truesdale was called away today! We should worry—"

JIMMY was very thoughtful when he went home. He was on the verge of an idea. But—he didn't feel disposed to take advantage of Cheney's slip. Perhaps everything was fair in business, as in love and war. But—

If Cheney hadn't called him up, early the next morning, he probably would have banished the memory of the conversation he had been forced to overhear. But Cheney did call him up—and his voice was keenly edged with anxiety.

"Hello—Scott?" His voice came thinly over the wire. "Say—last night—it was the heat, I guess—I don't know. Did I make any fool crack talking to Burton? Don't take anything I said seriously—there wasn't anything to it! I was getting things mixed up—"

Jimmy hung up the receiver in a white blaze of anger. Cheney took it for granted that he, Jimmy, had meant to take advantage of him! And so he was trying to lie, now! If he had confessed, if he had asked Jimmy, as a matter of courtesy and decency, to forget what he had heard! But to descend to a trick—to assume that Jimmy meant to knife him!

"That cleans the slate!" said Jimmy to himself. "I've got his number now—and I'll get him!"

He jabbed his finger viciously into the button that called Janet Cameron to his room.

"I'm going out," he said. "Answer as much of the mail as you can. And please have everything in the office files about the Eastern Central terminal ready for me when I get back."

His destination was the office of Landers, Spellman and Johns, the lawyers who represented the owners of the famous block that was to be the site of the E. C. terminal. His card took him at once to the room of Judge Landers.

"I understand the Northeastern's option on the Eastern Central terminal site has expired," he said without preface. That was a bluff—he wasn't sure of the dating of the option. "I've come to make an offer for a thirty-day option."

"I suppose you mean, when you say the Eastern Central terminal site, the property at Third and Market for which we are agents," said Judge Landers with precision. "I have no knowledge as to the plans of the railway." He paused, to let that sink in. He was much too dignified to wink, but he achieved the equivalent of a wink, somehow. "The option has expired. I am prepared to give you a thirty-day option for fifty thousand dollars—that sum, of course, to apply upon the purchase price upon the consummation of the transaction."

"Fifty thousand!" said Jimmy. He smiled feebly. "For an option!"

"You state the proposition correctly, Mr. Scott," said the Judge.

"But—that's not an option price! That's a sale with a deposit!"

"Practically—yes. We don't care to tie ourselves up with another option. We want to make sure of the sale. Having paid fifty thousand dollars down, you are not likely to forfeit and let the option lapse."

JIMMY did some quick thinking. He knew what Trainor or Truesdale would say. But—this was his one chance. And even as he hesitated, a clerk came in and whispered to Landers.

"Tell Mr. Cheney I will see him as soon as I am free," said the Judge. "What?" He listened. "No—I am sorry that his business is pressing, but I am engaged with Mr. Scott."

Jimmy swallowed hard and thought desperately. Judge Landers cleared his throat.

"Well, Mr. Scott?" he said.

"I'll take you up," said Jimmy. "You'll have to give me a couple of hours to make the payment—I suppose it's got to be immediate?"

"I can give you until noon—on the basis of a preliminary agreement, to be signed at once."

Jimmy was a little dazed. He had to get fifty thousand dollars out of Fitch—

but he thought he could do that. And he didn't have time to think much. He signed the paper that Judge Landers drew up. And on his way out, he met Cheney.

"I might have known you'd do this!" said Cheney bitterly. "I'll get square with you yet, Scott!"

That braced Jimmy up, and did him a lot of good. He went back to his own office and went for Fitch, who turned pale.

"But—the terms are preposterous!" he said. "I'm surprised that they didn't jack up the price—but fifty thousand dollars for the option! Mr. Trainor would never consent—"

"Trainor's fishing!" Jimmy interrupted brusquely. "I know I'm supposed to be a figurehead—but you'll remember that I'm vice-president, with full power to act in Trainor's absence. I'll assume full responsibility—and I'll countersign that check as soon as you have it made out. Have it certified and get it to Landers, quick!"

JANET was waiting in Jimmy's room when he entered it, after leaving a crushed and dazed Fitch behind him.

"I just got this wire from Mr. Truesdale," she said, holding out a slip of yellow paper to him. "He instructs me to notify Mr. Trainor at once of his being called away."

"Ignore it!" snapped Jimmy. "Get Mr. Vane, of the Eastern Central, on long distance and make an appointment for me to see him as soon as possible. Have some one look up trains."

She stared at him. The new crispness in his voice, the defiant carriage of his head, seemed to intrigue her. But she went out at once. He found the papers about the Eastern Central project on his desk, and went through them. And in about fifteen minutes Janet was back.

"I spoke to Mr. Vane's secretary," she said. "There's a train in ten minutes from the West Station. If you catch it, you can see Mr. Vane as soon as you get in. He'll wait for you. I've sent for a taxicab."

"Fine!" he said. Briefly, he told her what he had done. She caught her breath, once, and grew vivid in her interest. "Remember what old Shakespeare said, Miss Cameron? About the tide in the affairs of men? This looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Oh—I hope so, Mr. Scott!" she said. "Because—of course—Mr. Trainor wouldn't have done it—he'd have been afraid there was something fishy—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't think about that!" he said. "I wont have time to fuss with this mail. Let's see—what train can I get back?"

"Four o'clock," she said promptly. "It gets you here at seven."

IN two minutes more he was off—satisfied that the check would reach Landers in time. He caught his train with seconds to spare. In a little more than three hours he was received by President Vane of the Eastern Central. And in five minutes more he was reeling under the knowledge that he had made a blunder that was irretrievable—that he had saddled upon the Trainor-Scott Company a piece of property that would probably break the world's record for white elephants. For—the Eastern Central terminal project had been abandoned!

There was finality in Vane's crisp words.

"It looks as if you'd been tricked, Scott," he said. "I'm sorry. Your information was correct—so far as it went. If we could, we'd take that block and go ahead. But it's all off. We're blocked on our right of way. The Suburban Traction Company in your town owns property we've got to cross. Control of its stock is in the hands of the T. K. and V. Suburban, and they absolutely refuse consent to our construction! And there you are! It's a holdup. We might win in condemnation proceedings—we might not. We wont take the chance or put up a fight. We'll wait and come in later."

Jimmy never knew just how he made his way from Vane's office, or what he did in the time he had to wait before his train was ready. The fact that he forgot that he hadn't had any lunch, and so was faint from hunger when he got off the train at home, didn't occur to him. He walked along the platform to the exit gate with sagging shoulders and hanging head. And he never saw Janet Cameron until, with a little cry of concern, she touched his elbow.

"Mr. Scott!" she said. "What's the matter?"

"Why—what—how is it you're here?" he asked stupidly.

"I was anxious—I wanted to know what success you had had," she said. "I stayed late at the office, and came right over here to meet your train—"

"Success!" he repeated, and laughed bitterly. "Miss Cameron, you're looking at the biggest fool in the United States!"

"I am *not!*" she said furiously. "Mr. Scott—tell me what has happened!" And then she looked at him more carefully, saw how pale and tired he was, and the big dark circles under his eyes. "Mr. Scott—have you had anything to eat since breakfast?"

"I—I guess not," he said dully. "I don't want anything."

She thought for a moment.

"I do," she said. "Wont you—wont you take me somewhere for dinner? I was so rushed that I didn't get much lunch—"

That roused him, as she had hoped it would.

"Oh, I say—of course—come on!" he said. "Let's go over to the Westcott. What a beastly shame! I've got you all messed up, too—"

GENTLY, skillfully, she managed him, made him order for himself by forcing him to take thought of her. With deliberate intention she ceased to be Miss Cameron, stenographer, and became Janet Cameron, a girl he was taking to dinner. And not until there was cold consommé before them and she had, turning away her head to hide her smile, seen him absentmindedly devour a roll, would she let him tell her what had happened. She listened quietly; at the poignant revelation of his abasement she put out her hand instinctively, and touched his with a gesture that was full of a pity almost maternal.

"Oh—I was so afraid this morning!" she said. "So afraid there was some trick—"

"You were?" he said. "But you didn't say anything?"

"You'd made your decision—the responsibility was yours," she said, meeting his eyes. "And I didn't know what I was afraid of."

"Well—there it is," he said hopelessly. "And—do you know, what makes me maddest is the pettiness of it—the way a great public improvement is kept from the city because of the selfishness of the T. K. and V. people—who control Suburban Traction!"

"Suburban Traction," she said thoughtfully. "That's funny! I'm helping to block it—because I own forty shares of that stock myself. A lot of people do own small blocks of it—"

A sudden light came into her eyes, and she stared at him. There was a tense eagerness about her, all at once. Her fingers beat nervously upon the cloth. She seemed to be trying to influence him without speech. And suddenly he stirred, uncomfortably, and met her eyes.

"You—own forty—shares!" he said. "And other. . . . . I say—Miss Cameron, do you know what is meant by control, as a rule? About a thirty-five or forty-per-cent holding of stock—all in one place! With all the little stockholders sending in their proxies for meetings!"

He straightened up.

"By Jove!" he said. "I wonder! Janet!" That came out unconsciously, and she never even showed that she noticed it. "Will you do something for me? Make over your stock to me—at once—tomorrow morning?"

"*Yes!*" she said. "Oh—I was so afraid I'd have to suggest that!"

"There isn't one chance in a million—but isn't it worth trying?" he said, all on fire. "I might have known you'd see it. You—" His voice was unsteady. "What a wonder you are!"

"I'm not!" she said. "But—oh, I do want you to pull through! And—I didn't tell you before—until you'd braced up! But—Mr. Trainor'll be back day after tomorrow. Mr. Truesdale wired him, and it happened to catch him."

"Day after tomorrow?" said Jimmy. "Let him come! Hello—steak? Good—I could eat a horse! Janet—" He caught himself and flushed. "Oh, I say—I didn't mean that—Miss Cameron—you don't know what you've done for me!"

"Janet," she said with shining, laughing eyes, "as long as it isn't in the office! I do like it, you know! And, anyway, I've broken every rule I made when I went into business into smithereens tonight!"

He took her home in a taxicab, in spite of mild protests that weren't very convincing. And he stayed long enough to meet her mother.

"I've heard so much about you, Mr. Scott!" said Mrs. Cameron. "Janet's spoken more about you than about anyone in the office, lately."

And because she was Janet, she only smiled, and didn't lower her eyes when he looked at her triumphantly.

IT was perfectly inevitable that reaction should follow the exaltation that had held him up while he was still with Janet. He had a wretched night—a night in which he went over, again and again, all the

things that might go wrong. And in the morning, before he would even take the stock certificate Janet tendered him, he got Vane on the long-distance telephone, and told him what he planned.

"Well—I don't know," said Vane dubiously. "We'd about decided to pass it all up for the present, Scott. Still—if you could get Suburban Traction into line—"

Jimmy cut loose then; and Vane surrendered.

"You'll have to hustle!" he said. "But if you can put it over, we'll go ahead!"

Within an hour Jimmy was a stockholder of record, and engaged in exercising his newly acquired right to copy a list of stockholders. And the rest of that day he spent in an activity so feverish that he never could remember, afterward, half the things he had done. When he had to quit, at ten o'clock at night, he was on the verge of exhaustion. But he knew that the morning ought to tell the story. The controlling interest had let him get a start; but by midafternoon he had been fighting for the proxies he got, and he knew the final struggle in the morning would be the real thing.

He had worked miracles. By appealing to local pride and civic interest, he had secured proxies from forty per cent of the stock—as much as the controlling interest had. With five or six per cent more, allowing for scattering absentees who would never vote, he was probably assured of victory in a special meeting of stockholders that he already had the power to demand. He wanted to finish his work before Trainor got back. But he couldn't. Trainor got in late that night instead of at the time named—he descended upon Scott at seven o'clock in the morning.

"You wanted a chance—and you got it!" he stormed. "You walked into the trap Cheney set for you—you're the laughing-stock of the town! Cheney and Landers framed you—Landers to make the sale, Cheney to save the two or three thousand dollar forfeit they had up and, I suppose, to split commission with Landers if we paid their price! Well—anything to say?"

"Nothing, yet," said Jimmy, "—except that you've got to get out now and let me alone. I'm going to be busy."

"Stay away from the office!" snapped Trainor. "I'm a patient man, but—I'm going to arrange a compromise with Landers. We're hooked, and I'll admit it, and throw myself on his mercy."

Jimmy said nothing. He was a little too nervous for speech. He went to work instead. And by eleven o'clock he knew that he was, in all human probability, beaten. A last block of five hundred shares had eluded him. If the majority—the nominal majority—holders had secured it, he was through. And its holder had sold an hour before Jimmy had reached him.

"I don't know who bought it," said the owner's wife. "Give me a telephone number where he can get you, and I'll have him let you know."

DISPIRITED, Jimmy gave the club number and went there. He didn't expect a phone call—but it came. The man who had sold those all-important shares called him up and gave him the purchaser's name.

"Cheney!" he cried into the instrument, and hung up the receiver.

"Right here!" said Cheney himself, behind him. He grinned and held out his hand. "No hard feelings, Scott? I played it pretty low-down on you—but you were trying to put one over on me, you know, or you wouldn't have swallowed my bait!"

Jimmy stared at him. Then, on a sudden impulse, he spoke.

"Have you bought some Suburban Traction?" he asked.

"On you!" Cheney said. "Salted away some of my winnings. Why?"

Jimmy weighed the chances—blurted out his story, or part of it.

"Will you give me an option?" he said. "It can't hurt you—and it will save me!"

Cheney stared at him. Bewilderment, scorn, finally a dawning admiration struggled in his expression. And suddenly he laughed out and thrust out his hand:

"Damned if I don't!" he cried.

Jimmy reeled for just a second. And then he waited, while Cheney scrawled his signature. Jimmy walked on air to the office. He went in with his head up, and he saw how Janet went white, first, and then flushed, as she saw the look in his eyes. He grinned at her, and strode into his office. And he pressed, continuously, until the door opened, the push-button that summoned her.

"Come in!" he said unsteadily. "And shut that door! Janet—I've got 'em! Fifty-one per cent of the stock—irrevocable proxies!"

"Oh—Jimmy!" she cried.

That office was just as private as it had ever been. But Jimmy Scott had something to do!

The Fair America

The competent humorist who wrote "Stymied Kisses," "The Anthropoid Caddy" and other good ones is at his best in this quaint tale of golf, fishing and sundry other interesting things.

By ELMER BROWN MASON

THERE was a New England austerity about the sunrise. The first rays of light stole reluctantly above the horizon, grudgingly revealing the rocky shore of Cape Elizabeth. The sun itself followed, spreading a broader light that showed the strip of land between the rocks and the white road, touched the neat houses near the sea, and finally, as though with a distinct mental reservation, lit the world evenly but inadequately—exactly as some thrifty housewife might turn down the lamp in the living-room, forcing Grandpa to finish the perusal of the *Atlantic Fisherman* by lantern-light in the woodshed.

Twin Lights and Ram Island Light were still flashing when Captain Peleg Malady came out of his house and shaded his eyes to look out to sea. Jonah, the cat, rubbed against his legs ingratiatingly, then ran to the kitchen door with an imperative meow. Captain Peleg glanced at Twin Lights, at Ram Island, found them still burning, and spoke reprovingly:

"Aint time yet, Joney. Last watch aint over." He resumed his scrutiny of the sea.

Suddenly Captain Peleg's stout shoulders hunched forward, and he peered out to sea even more intently, spoke aloud:

"Yeah, 'at's her; 'at's the *Fair 'Merica!* Nicest, wholesomest vessel 'at sails outer Po'tland. Patch on 'at new fo'sail. Reef point muster tore out."

Captain Malady continued to watch and mutter until the shadowy schooner slipped past Ram Island, finally lowering his glass with a long sigh.

From inside the house came the sound of a pump-handle moving violently up and down. Twin Lights and Ram Island winked out with startling abruptness. A rooster crowed asthmatically from Captain Epps Norwood's house next door. Day had officially begun.

Peleg stamped back into the house. His sister, Hepsibah, was just setting the kettle on the shining stove. Her brother nodded to her, then turned to the sink.

"Wind nor'-nor'east," he announced as he dried his face on the roller towel. *"Fair 'Merica*'s comin' in, en-jine goin' an' all sails set. Didn't need no sails 'ith the en-jine goin'. Didn't need no en-jine, the wind an' tide bein' sich."

"Huh!" came from between Hepsibah's thin lips, and the ejaculation expressed the ultimate of resentment. " 'Spose ye'll pocket yer pride an' watch her unload while

'at dirty Sam Leggett, 'at stole her f'm ye an' forced ye to re-tire, laughs at ye?"

"I'm a-goin' ter Commercial Wharf ter collect my sixteenth share in her," Captain Malady answered with dignity; "an' Sam Leggett nor no other feller dass laugh at me 'less'n my back's turned," he added belligerently.

"Wa-ll, all I got ter say—" Hepsibah took a long breath. "Ef ye had feelin's 'at was right *or* proper, ye'd nev' go near the *Fair 'Merica* ag'in."

"I got ter git my money. I—" But Hepsibah was not to be checked:

"Ye'd nev' set foot on her ag'in, I sez. Ye'd— An' ter think ye'd go nigh a feller when he stole yer vessel an' now wants ye should sell him yer house fer 'at unchristian game of golf 'at the ungodly plays on the Sabbath! Aint no pride in ye."

" 'At's 'nough," Peleg said firmly but not unkindly. "Ye mind yer mouth an' dish up. I want I should see Cap'n Norwood 'fore I go ter Po'tland."

"Why don't ye take 'nother vessel?" Hepsibah asked wistfully. " 'Taint the money, Peleg, but ye aint happy."

"I've re-tired," Peleg answered, but he sighed.

"Yeah, an' ye don't take 'nough 'xercise," Hepsibah snapped, her momentary softening vanishing.

THE sun had shed its early morning inhibitions when the retired captain again came out the kitchen door. He cast a weather eye seaward, saw that all was well, then bent his head to listen as a steady, rasping drone struck his ears.

"Dinged ef Epps aint at it a'ready!" he exclaimed aloud, and turned toward the neat residence of Captain Epps Norwood a hundred yards away.

The steady drone continued as he approached the front gate, grew louder as he entered, and then was temporarily drowned out in the fervent "Lan'!" of Mrs. Norwood as he came around the corner of the house.

"Mornin', Esther!" Captain Malady greeted her. "Epps out yan?"

"Yeah, he's out yan. He didn't hardly eat no breakfast, an' we hed dinky slavens an' pancakes." Her voice was bitter. "He jus' went right out ter his sawin'."

"Wa-ll now, aint 'at somethin'!" Captain Peleg clicked his tongue sympathetically. "He'll jus' wear hisself out 'ith all this 'xercisin'—an' him seventy-two! Want I should slap his jaw crosswise, Esther, an' bring him in ter ye?"

Mrs. Norwood looked doubtful. Peleg weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds; the overexercising Epps tipped the scales at close to two hundred and thirty.

"Wa-ll, now, I guess I wouldn't do 'at," she said finally. "Ye go round an' talk ter him, Peleg—ye wuz allus a powerful talker. P'raps he'll take some rest listenin' ter ye."

"I 'low he will." Captain Malady bristled, and strutted down to the woodshed.

"How be ye?" Captain Norwood greeted him genially. "I got me the all-firedest, knottedest apple-tree ye ev' set eyes on, Peleg. I got the hull of it."

"Ye don't say!" His visitor spoke without enthusiasm. "Did ye see the *Fair 'Merica* come in 'bout sunup? She's got a patch in 'at new fo'sail a'ready."

" 'At cousin of Sam Leggett's aint no sailor *ner* fisherman," Captain Epps commented contemptuously, picking up his saw. " 'Low I'll hev ter git busy ter finish this ol' apple-tree afore— 'Sides, I need the 'xercise."

Captain Peleg snorted.

" 'At aint 'xercise; 'at's work."

" 'Tis fer some," his host answered darkly, and approached the sawbuck.

His visitor blocked him effectively, however, by sitting down on it.

"Ye listen ter me, Epps Norwood," he said hotly. "Ye're re-tired; ye got money in three savin'-banks; ye own six-sixteenths of the *Fair 'Merica,* seven-eighths of the *Only Daughter,* two of the wholesomest vessels 'at sail outer Po'tland. An' ye're breakin' Esther's heart by sawin' wood f'm sunup ter furst watch. Now, aint ye plumb 'shamed of yer self?"

"No, I aint. I need the 'xercise. Ev'body needs 'xercise, ye special. Git off'm my sawbuck!"

"Ye're tougher'n a hickory pole; ye don't need no 'xercise. An' ef ye do, why don't ye take it like a Christian? Shoot pool or—or row round in a dory. Put down 'at saw. I want ye should go ter Commercial Wharf 'ith me whilst I collect my sixteenth in the *Fair 'Merica* off'm Sam Leggett."

"Sawin's jus's Christian's shootin' pool. 'Sides, I'm a-goin' ter do 'nother 'xercise. 'At's why I can't go ter Sam Leggett's 'ith ye. I'm a-goin' ter play golf in an hour, an' I got ter git this apple-tree started. Ye git off'm my sawbuck—hear me!"

"Great lan' of Goshen! Golf! Why,

'at's a game like—like seven up, an'—an' penny ante. Why, Sam Leggett plays 'at game, Epps. Sam Leggett!"

"They's pro-fessors of religion 'at don't no ways deserve fer ter be saved; but 'at don't prove Christianity aint no 'count," Captain Norwood snapped. "Ye goin' ter git off'm 'at, or hev I got ter slap ye off?"

CAPTAIN PELEG MALADY was far from happy as he rode in on the trolley from Cape Elizabeth to Portland. He was never happy when he went down to Commercial Wharf after the *Fair America* had come in. But he couldn't help going down, couldn't keep away from the able little schooner that he had commanded for three years and loved as only a fisherman can love the vessel in which he has braved the perils of the Banks.

And the worst of it all was that he had not wanted to retire, was only fifty, and had twenty years more of sea-service in his wiry frame. He had been tricked out of his command, forced through pride to take up a purposeless life ashore, when his very soul yearned for the fogs and furies of the Georges. The way of it was simplicity itself: Captain Norwood owned six-sixteenths of the *Fair America,* Sam Leggett seven-sixteenths, and Captain Malady himself the three remaining sixteenths. Two years before, Peleg's house had burned to the ground, and it had taken all his ready money to rebuild it. That was the season he had a bitter quarrel with Sam Leggett. Swordfish were high, and the fish-buyer suggested to him that he sell below the market, so as to cut down the shares of the crew, receiving himself the full amount that would have come to him for a fair price, but saving the buyer a considerable sum, through paying the crew less than was their due. Captain Malady had indignantly sold his fish at the market-price to a rival buyer, this in spite of the fact that Leggett owned a large interest in the *Fair America.*"

When winter came, Peleg had no money to stake his crew to their winter gear. He did what every other fishing-vessel captain would have done under the same circumstances, borrowed from the man who would buy his fish, Sam Leggett,—who was a millionaire,—putting up two-sixteenths of his three-sixteenths share in the *Fair America* as security with his sixty-day note. An Atlantic gale, coming up without warning, had swept away his trawls and smashed three of his dories. When the note came due, Captain Malady could not meet it. The fish-buyer would not renew, and had taken the two-sixteenths in the *Fair America.* This, with what he already had, gave Leggett a controlling interest, and he had indulged a mean resentment for Peleg's refusal to accept his dishonest proposition of the swordfishing season by ousting him from his command and putting in another man, a relative.

Captain Norwood would have forced Peleg to take the money from him, but he had been carried south by Esther on that trip to Florida without which a New England woman's life is incomplete. Peleg might even have got the money elsewhere, "hired it," but he did not try. Hurt to the full extent of his pride, he had retired.

There was much unfavorable comment on the transaction along the water-front and Peleg had been offered other commands, only to refuse them brusquely. If he could not sail the *Fair America,* he would sail no other vessel. Sam Leggett was wealthy, however, and criticism had gradually died out. The matter was nearly forgotten save by the principals, who managed to quarrel bitterly every time the vessel came in.

But recently the quarreling had all been on Peleg's side. Leggett wanted his property for the clubhouse of the new golf-club that ran along the shore of Cape Elizabeth. Peleg had refused to sell, but the buyer was astutely biding his time. A man could not live forever on a sixteenth share in a small fishing-schooner, poorly captained, so that it earned little.

AS Captain Malady, with the lurching gait of the sea, made his way up Commercial Wharf, his resentment left him, as it always did at the first sight of the *Fair America.* His eyes ran lovingly up her delicate spars, caressed the graceful curve of her bow. The last of her cargo of swordfish had been swung onto the dock, and the great monsters lay in a long row in the cool of the warehouse. Shorn of fins, tails and swords, they looked like nothing so much as the carcasses of fresh-killed hogs.

"What did ye share, Noah?" Peleg called down to the captain who had taken his place.

"Hundred dollars and eighty cents," the man answered, but did not meet his eyes.

"What price did ye git?"

"Sixteen cents."

"They's eighteen, ter Boston. I 'lowed Sam paid 'ithin a cent of Boston?"

"The *Wanderer* an' the *Mart T.* come in 'ith us. Sam's got more'n he wants now."

Captain Malady snorted his disgust and turned into the office of Leggett & Company. He pushed his way to an inner room, opened a door marked "*President*" without knocking, and stood before Sam Leggett.

"Come for your check? Have it ready in a moment," the fish-buyer said. "Sit down, Peleg, and have a cigar."

"I wont hev no ci-gar, thank ye jus' same," Captain Malady answered, and found a chair. "Noah Johnson tells me he only shared a hundred dollars an' eighty cents?"

"The *Fair America* isn't very lucky, this year." Leggett watched his visitor closely. "Ten of his fish had jellied, big ones, too."

" 'Low they might," Peleg commented bitterly. "He's been out over three weeks. I call ter mind my last trips on the *'Merica:* three seventeen, one eighty-eight sixty-two, two eighty-four, they brung."

"Noah aint overlucky," Sam commented lightly. "Say, Peleg, about your house: I can get you a good price for it, more than it's worth—enough to buy another and have something left over besides."

"It aint fer sale," Captain Malady stated shortly. "Thank ye," he added as he took the check from the fish-buyer's fingers.

"It would be a good sell for you," Leggett insisted.

"I aint goin' ter sell 'at house—even ef it was ter git back the *Fair 'Merica.*"

"You *might* get the captaincy again—unless you have permanently retired."

The office swam before Peleg's eyes. Get back the captaincy of his vessel—sail out to the Banks again! Then his better judgment, born of bitter experience, warned him.

"Yeah, for a year. Then some of yer re-lations would need a vessel," he said, trying to keep his voice from breaking. "Ye wouldn't put them two-sixteenths I uster own in as part of the price of my house?" he ventured cautiously.

"It wouldn't leave you enough to buy you another home," Sam said hastily, "and it really wouldn't be a good investment for you. Better sell outright."

"Ye can go plumb ter hell, Sam Leggett." Peleg spoke with dangerous quietness, and rose to his feet.

The fish-buyer flushed but controlled himself. Then, since the time seemed unpropitious, he changed the subject.

"Why didn't Epps Norwood come down with you for his check?"

"The ol' fool's goin' ter play 'at golf-game," Captain Malady answered. " 'Taint 'nough 'at he should saw wood all day like a—a farmer; he's got ter take up 'ith 'at other ridiculousness."

"It's the best game in the world." Leggett was forced off his guard by his enthusiasm. "The very best game! I'll see Epps out on the links, going there now. Will you let me drive you home in my car?"

"No, I wont," Captain Malady snapped. "Suit yourself. Sorry the *Fair America* didn't make a better trip. She's unlucky. And she's likely to stay unlucky," he added, his tone significant.

"I git what ye mean, dang ye," Peleg said hoarsely, and flung out the door.

THE first tee of the Cape Elizabeth golf-links was directly across the road from Captain Malady's house. There were several buildings: a caddie house, locker shed, and a pavilion which served as a club-house. It had been from the beginning, however, but a temporary arrangement, since Sam Leggett was quite sure that he could secure Peleg Malady's half-acre for the site of the permanent clubhouse.

For two years Peleg had experienced a mild glow of satisfaction every time he looked across his front windows at the temporary buildings. Now, however, as he turned in at his neat gate, he felt them a menace. Certainly something would have to be done. There was no dodging the issue. Either he had to pocket his pride and captain some vessel other than the *Fair America*—providing he could get one—or sell his little property to the golf-club.

Peleg turned to glare across the white road at the smooth expanse of turf running off to the red marker in its circle of green. Some one was waving at him. He recognized Epps Norwood.

Captain Malady hesitated, then turned back to meet the old man. Captain Norwood began to talk when they were still fifty feet apart:

"Ye orter try it, Peleg. It's jus' what ye need in the way of 'xercise. Easy, too."

"Ye don't say!" Captain Malady answered with elaborate sarcasm. "Wa-ll, I aint come ter my second childhood yit, like some I could name. I got more on my mind'n shinny. What you 'low my house here an' half an acre's worth, Epps?"

Captain Norwood let his golf-bag slide to the ground and stared at his friend.

"Ye aint thinkin' of sellin' yer *home?*" he demanded.

"Wa-ll, I got ter do somethin' when the *Fair 'Merica* can only make hundred-dollar shares fer a three-week trip," Peleg answered.

"She orter do better'n 'at. What all's Sam Leggett thinkin' of?" the old man objected.

"Of gittin' my lan' fer a clubhouse fer ter play shinny f'm," Captain Malady retorted bitterly.

"Wa-ll, aint 'at somethin'!" Epps ejaculated. "Say, Peleg, why don't ye take the *Only Daughter,* next trip? She's right able."

"I've re-tired," Peleg stated firmly.

CAPTAIN MALADY saw the *Fair America* sail out past Cape Elizabeth at six o'clock, two mornings later. He reflected bitterly that had he been in command she would have been two hours on her way before that time. He had passed a miserable forty-eight hours and had finally come to the unsatisfactory conclusion that he had best wait to see what his former vessel shared on her next trip before doing anything definite.

Jonah, rubbing against his leg, brought him back to the present and he went in to breakfast, to escape as soon as it was over from the tight-lipped silence of Hepsibah's accusing face.

The drone of the saw lured him to Captain Norwood's woodshed, and he found a seat on the chopping block.

"*Only Daughter, Willard* an' *Fair 'Merica* went out at the flood," he volunteered, as the old man laid down his saw to mop his forehead.

"They oughter hev good trips," Captain Norwood said. "I certainly hope they hev, Peleg."

"Two of 'em orter," his friend responded gloomily. "Sam Leggett'll see 'at the *Fair 'Merica* don't."

"I can't understand 'at feller," Epps said unhappily. "He's tryin' ter break ye—I laid it ter him, an' he didn't make no denial. An' it aint the money. He's willin' ter bet anythin' he can beat anyb'dy at 'at golf 'xercise—he's crazy 'bout it."

" 'At's why he's tryin' ter break me," Peleg answered gloomily. "He wants my house fer his golf-club. 'Sides, he don't like me none, hevin' done me wrong. What's the matter of ye, Epps Norwood? Be ye crazy?"

Indeed, there was ground for Captain Malady's suspicion of his friend's sanity. The old man stared fixedly into space, then began to snap his fingers joyously and dance around the sawbuck.

"What's the matter of ye!" Peleg reiterated, alarm in his voice.

"Gimme minnut ter think! Jes' gimme minnut," Captain Norwood pleaded. Then:

"Ye're a good sailor, meanin' ye can turn yer hand ter anythin'," he announced, pointing a finger at his amazed friend. "No, don't ye dass cont'dict me: ye *be!* There's one of 'em links ter Brunswick. . . . . It's nigh ten o'clock. Sam'll be jus' 'bout drivin' off the first tee. Ye come long of me an' watch him." He seized Peleg by the shoulder and shook him impatiently.

"Fer the lan's sakes, Epps, tell me what's the matter of ye?" Peleg pleaded. "Ye ac' like yer brain's softened like a jellied swordfish!"

"Don't be askin' me foolish questions," Captain Norwood said feverishly. "Come an' see Sam Leggett drive off."

IN a daze Peleg followed his old friend across the road to the first tee. On top of all his other misfortunes it now appeared that Captain Norwood had come to his dotage at the comparatively early age of seventy-two. And yet the old man was extremely alive. Indeed, it was all that Peleg could do to keep up with him.

There was a foursome just ready to drive off: a local banker, the club professional, a boat-builder and Sam Leggett. Captain Norwood hailed the fish-buyer from afar:

"How be ye, Sam? I brung Peleg Malady ter see how rotten ye play—he not knowin' the game."

"At that you aint in my class, Captain Norwood," Leggett retorted, not quite good-naturedly. "Hello, Peleg! I should think you'd take up golf now that you've definitely retired."

"I aint got no time fer no childish games," Peleg said disgustedly, then turned in amazement as a voice prompted at his elbow: " 'Special when they's so simple ter play."

" 'Special when they's so simple ter play," Peleg repeated automatically.

"Simple, hey!" Leggett exclaimed angrily. "I've been playing golf for two years and I've never found anything simple about it, or easy either."

"Peleg means 'at bein' a fisherman it would be easy fer him," Captain Norwood put in eagerly. " 'At's what ye mean, Peleg, aint it? Yes, 'tis."

"Perhaps you'd like to try it?" the fish-buyer suggested. "We're playing for ten dollars a hole. Of course that *might* cut into your profits from the next trip of the *Fair America,*" he sneered.

"Ef it's a crooked game, ye might easy beat me," Peleg retorted furiously. "It looks simple ter me, though. Simpler'n gittin' hold of a schooner ye don't own fer nothin'."

"I bet you couldn't learn it in a thousand years," Leggett foamed. "And I've heard enough from you, Peleg Malady."

"I aint a-goin' ter try," the sailor answered, "an' ye'll hear lots more f'm me whenever I got the mind ter tell it ter ye."

"For heaven's sake, Leggett, quit talking! Can't you see I'm ready to drive?" the banker broke in irritably.

"Come on, Peleg," Epps directed. "Ye might make Sam lose ten dollars—an' he'd die ef he did."

"I'll bet you a thousand dollars I can beat you and give you a stroke a hole," the fish-dealer howled, but Captain Norwood was dragging his friend back toward home.

"Only thing he ever gits spleeny over, 'at golf game," he explained eagerly, "an' then he can't play. Ye done fine, Peleg. Now we're all ready ter set sail."

"What in time be ye drivin' at, Epps?" Captain Malady demanded angrily. "Ye're worse'n crazy, ye're—ye're se-nile."

"Thar's a links ter Brunswick, jus' six mile away. . . . . Don't ye *understand* yit, ye catawampus?"

"No, I don't."

"Come inter the woodshed," the old man directed, his tone that of a father about to explain to a stupid child why it's wrong to pick flowers in Central Park.

IT was too weeks later at breakfast in the Malady home. Peleg had just slipped a large piece of boiled cod from his plate to the floor where Jonah was waiting. Hepsibah was finishing the last of a lengthy dissertation:

"Ye're gone f'm mornin' till sundown, an' ye heven't made a moove ter git a vessel or—or nothin'. Aint nothin' ter do but 'cept the offer fer the place 'at come in the lawyer letter."

"The *Fair 'Merica* come in at sunup, fo'sail all slatted ter rags," Peleg changed the subject with ponderous lack of finesse. " 'Low I'll go down an' see what she shared."

"I thought ye weren't nev' goin' inter Sam Leggett's place 'long as ye lived," Hepsibah said bitterly. "Ye *said* ye wa'n't."

"I'm full of Christian spirit this mornin'," Peleg answered good-humoredly. "I 'low I'll give Sam a treat by seein' me."

"Aint no manner of use goin' down ter Commercial Wharf," Captain Norwood greeted his friend. "Ye'll jus' git all het up. Let's wait fer Sam at the links."

"Mebbe the *'Merica* got a good trip of fish this time," Peleg suggested hopefully.

"Great lan' of Goshen!" howled Captain Norwood. "Aint ye got *no* guts? Don't ye want—"

" 'At's 'nough," Captain Malady retorted acidly. " 'At's 'nough, Epps. Ye git yer coat an' come 'long of me. I aim ter be square and aboveboard—ef I can."

THERE was but one man, sitting on the forehatch, on the unloaded *Fair America,* when the two captains looked down to her littered deck. That man was Charley Gooms, the cook, and he was very drunk.

"What did ye share, Charley?" Peleg called down to him.

"Oh, 'at ye, Cap'n Peleg?" The cook cocked a bleary eye upward. "We shared forty-one dollars—all of 'at. Noah sold fer fifteen cents ter Sam Leggett. Boston's payin' twenty-one cents. The crew's gone an' quit. Aint goin' ter sail 'ith Cap'n Noah no more."

"Aint 'at somethin'," Peleg said dazedly. "Noah got *his,* of course. Don't ye 'low the law can do somethin' ter Sam, Epps?"

"Law can't do nothin'," Captain Norwood answered promptly. "He owns the majority part of the *Fair 'Merica,* an' majorities rule in these here United States."

"Wa-ll, I can't see the end of the month clear fer's money's consarned," Peleg stated unhappily. " 'Low I'll go in ter see Sam an' hev some words 'ith him."

"Aint no manner of use ter 'at," Captain Norwood objected. "He'll be goin' out ter the links directly. We'll meet him thar."

SAM LEGGETT was late in getting to the links that morning, and the foursome in which he usually played had gone ahead with a substitute. There was no one in the clubhouse and he started for the first tee in hope of picking up a partner

outdoors, then paused uncertain at the sight of the two figures he saw waiting there. Captain Malady and Captain Norwood were the last people in the world he cared to meet after his recent transaction in regard to the *Fair America.*

A voice hailed him, however, Epps Norwood's voice:

"Come out here, Sam. I'm a-goin' ter larn Peleg how ter drive. Ye might larn somethin' by watchin'."

"I could give you a stroke a hole and beat you, and you know it." The fish-buyer's voice held a boisterous good humor that was one of his greatest assets. "Let's see what you can 'larn him?"

"Don't see's all this's needful, jus' a waste of time," Peleg said disgustedly. "Aint nothin' ter this here game 'tall. Gimme 'at shinny-stick!"

HE took an awkward stance, brought back the driver, swiped, and missed the ball entirely.

"Want I should show ye now, ye obstinate por-poise?" demanded Captain Norwood.

"No, I don't; ye mind yer own rowin'," Peleg snapped, and connected with the ball for a seventy-five-yard drive.

"Pretty rotten!" Leggett laughed. "You strike at it like it was a swordfish."

"I do, hey! Wa-ll, I'll bet ye ye can't do so good." Peleg was plainly angry. "Say, what did the *Fair 'Merica* share this trip?"

"Not much," Leggett answered coolly, and on his guard. "About fifty dollars I should say. I couldn't pay near the Boston price. The *Only Daughter* and the *Willard* were in, too, and loaded me up."

"Wa-ll," Captain Norwood turned to his friend, "I 'low then ye'll hev ter take my offer of the *Only Daughter* an' go ter sea ag'in, Peleg. It's 'at or sell yer home."

" 'Low mebbe ye're right," Captain Malady answered meekly.

"All this retiring stuff was only a bluff on your part, then?" Leggett sneered, seeing his chance of getting the Malady property for the clubhouse vanishing.

" 'Taint no business of yours, is it?" Peleg turned on him.

"No, but it gives me a good laugh," Leggett retorted insultingly.

"Don't give ye as good laugh's gives me ter see ye puttin' sich importance on a simple leetle game like this here golf," the sailor retorted with strange calm. "Don't 'low ye know much 'bout it neither —'ith all yer fake bettin'."

"Fake betting!" repeated Leggett, then completely lost his temper. "I play golf better than you could learn how to play in a thousand years, and I've played for more money in the last month than the *Fair America* has earned this season."

"I don't believe ye," Peleg came back promptly. "I don't believe ye'd risk a cent —of yer own money."

THERE were several interested spectators of the discussion by this time. A foursome was in and making ready to start again. Two new arrivals had come from the clubhouse.

"I'll bet more than you own, more than you'll ever own on one round any time, you old—old mossbank."

"Mossbank, hey! Ye call me a mossbank!" roared Captain Malady. "Ye—ye —I tell ye what I'll do, ye thievin' fish-buyer, ye! I'll bet ye my house as she stands, ag'in' the two-sixteenths of the *Fair 'Merica* ye stole off'm me, I can beat ye the best out of nine of these here golf-holes."

For a moment there was speculation in Sam Leggett's eyes as he gazed at the furious sailor. An inner voice warned him that something wasn't right, this was too easy!

"You've never played over these links, have you?" he asked in final caution.

"Course I heven't. Do ye dass, or do ye dassn't bet?"

"I'll take you and we'll play the nine holes now," Leggett answered coolly. "These gentlemen are my witnesses." Then:

"Will you let your drive stand or make another?" Leggett asked, leaning down to tee up his ball.

"Ye knock furst so's I can knock further," Peleg answered, then added: "Dang ye!"

LEGGETT took his stance and addressed his ball carefully. He intended to finish the match as soon as possible, win the first five holes. He could feel the hostility of the gallery. Perhaps this was the reason that he pulled? At any rate his ball went into the rough ninety yards up the course. It was a poor beginning, but he tried to cover it with a bluff:

"Let's see you beat that, Peleg!"

"My name's Cap'n Malady, to ye," the sailor retorted, and sent the ball a clean hundred and eighty yards straight down the fairway.

It cost Leggett three strokes to get out of the rough, and he was on the green in seven. Peleg's ball lay two yards from the hole in three, and he went down in five.

Both drives were short at the second hole, but both made long brassie shots. As Leggett took his midiron from the caddy's hand he happened to glance at Captain Norwood. The old man was doubled up with mirth. A suspicion, indefinite but annoying, flashed through his mind. Had Peleg Malady played golf before? Was he, the astute Sam Leggett, up against a brace game? He glanced at Captain Norwood again, again found him laughing. The iron shot skittered off into the rough.

Leggett lost the second hole and halved the third in eight. He would have won the fourth but Captain Norwood stood right in his line of vision as he putted, and the old man was still laughing. The hole was halved.

"I told ye thar wasn't nothin' ter this game," Captain Malady spoke in loud tones to Captain Norwood as they approached the fifth tee. "A sailor can always turn his hand ter anythin'."

"Looks ter me's though ye was right," Epps Norwood went off into a roar of laughter. "Think of ye gittin' back the two-sixteenths ye got done out of in the *Fair 'Merica* at a fool game like this—Sam Leggett's game!"

"Oh, he'll try ter crawl out of it, see ef he don't!" Peleg shouted back as though he were hailing a vessel at sea.

Leggett told himself that it was ridiculous to let such talk bother him, told himself that in an hour the piece of ground that he so wanted for a clubhouse would be his. But his hands were trembling as he looked down the fairway past Peleg's short drive. He stepped back for a moment to steady himself, glanced behind him. Captain Norwood was laughing again!

THE fish-buyer picked up from a bunker after his ninth shot. His opponent was on the green in five.

"Ye got ter win jus' two more," Captain Norwood said in loud tones, "an' ye've proved yer point."

"Feller's a danged fool ter waste his time at somethin' so all-fired easy," Captain Malady answered, and got off a screaming drive. He was three up and three to play when he holed out on the sixth green.

Leggett realized his predicament without exactly understanding how he had gotten into it. Excepting the first hole, not one had been made under eight. Usually he considered that he was playing very poor golf when it took him seven strokes for the average hole. He told himself that it was impossible that he should lose even though he was three down.

Peleg dubbed his drive a bare thirty yards and Leggett took his stance. There was a bunker a hundred yards down the course closely trapped on the other side. Anything over a hundred and thirty yards would clear it, however, and he was a long driver. Still his opponent's drive was woefully short. Might it not be better to play up to the bunker rather than beyond? There was a chuckle behind him. He did not have to turn, he knew that it was Captain Norwood.

Something went to pieces inside Sam Leggett. He whaled at the ball with all his strength. It shot off at right angles far out of bounds to the right.

"I'll take two and drive again," he spoke in a choked voice, "—that is if Peleg—Captain Malady is agreeable."

"He is, yeah, he is," Epps Norwood answered for his friend, and was overcome by a paroxysm of mirth.

Both players were on the green in seven. Then Captain Malady ran down a thirty-foot putt for the hole.

There were a few moments of silence. Captain Norwood broke it:

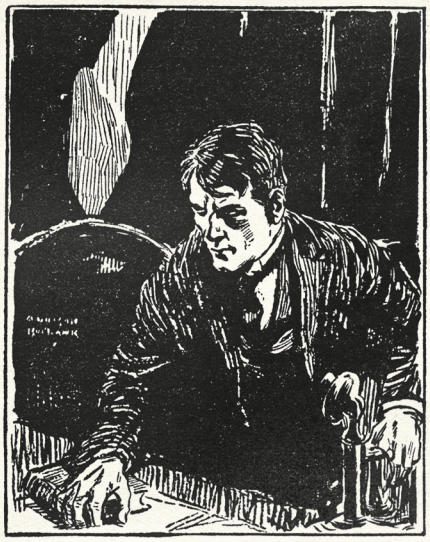
"Ye didn't de-serve ter win, Peleg; no, ye didn't. Ye done better'n 'at the first time ye played at Brunswick two weeks ago."

"It's a fool game," Peleg answered disgustedly. "Any danged landsman would be bound ter be beat at it by a sailor."

Leggett's face was pale with fury and his voice shaking as he spoke:

"I'll bet you whatever sum in cash you care to mention against the two-sixteenths of the *Fair America* and your home that I can beat you the next nine holes—and I'll give you a stroke on every other hole. What do you say? Be a sport! Give me a chance to get my money back!"

"Ye never give me a chance ter git *my* money back," Peleg Malady said calmly, "when ye took my vessel. I aint got time ter play no more 'cause I got ter see ter gittin' a crew fer the *Fair 'Merica.* I'm takin' her out at the flood termorrer."



The Ultimate Decision

A powerful and intensely dramatic story wherein the life of a man hangs strangely in the balance. Readers will look forward to more of Mr. Whitney's work.

By PARKHURST WHITNEY

THE gods play games with the lives of men, and produce amazing effects. Sometimes, in an excess of sportiveness, they outdo themselves—as when they turned their attention to the life and fortunes of Governor Daniel Malkiel.

The game was a long time playing, but the end drew near on a soft night late in spring. The great city gasped a little, after the sudden heat of the day, and the transplanted races of the Old World came out of their sultry rookeries and strolled and gossiped along the East Side street that lay in the shadow of the elevated. Trains roared above them, and below there was a great din of talk and traffic—such a volume of sound, in fact, that it was difficult to determine at the moment whether a succession of sharp, crackling sounds was the backfire of a taxicab rolling slowly alongside the curb, or came from some more ominous source.

The staccato sounds ceased quickly. The taxicab jolted around the corner, and disappeared up a side-street. A group of men loitering before the entrance to a wineshop burst, like a high-explosive shell, in all directions. Women screamed shrilly and dragged their children into dark doorways. Presently the street was deserted, except for the body of a man lying near the gutter.

Policemen came. They examined the limp body and counted five bullet-holes. Then they went into the wineshop and questioned the proprietor and his swarthy patrons. The result of that examination was a little less than nothing. Did the policemen find that the poor man was dead? Ah, but that was terrible. The saints grant that the wicked killer be found and punished! Who was the wicked one? Ah, but that was a mystery? It was said that he had come in a taxicab, but of the truth of that, the men in the wineshop could not say. They had heard nothing, seen nothing, until it was all over, and the poor man lay crumpled on the sidewalk. Who was he? Ah, but that was another mystery. He was a stranger. A little familiar, perhaps, but still a stranger, nameless.

The policemen seemed to expect just as much information as they received. They preserved an air of patient boredom—made a few notes, took a few names, and departed with the police ambulance, seemingly satisfied that their duty had been done. With their departure the street came to life again. The space where the dead man had lain was quickly surrounded by gesticulating talkers, firing off words that cracked like explosives. Children came back to play their games, and their mothers to gossip in doorways and bargain with shopkeepers. Over their heads an elevated train slowed down for the near-by station with a strident grinding of brakes. The night-wind fluttered at the curtains of open windows, and carried into musty rooms a faint smell of the sea and the deep, mellow calls of river-boats. Life flowed once more along its accustomed channels, washing out the dark stains near the entrance to the wineshop. It seemed likely that the tragic byplay of the East Side street would be dismissed with a paragraph or two in the morning papers. Another battle of gangsters, another victim, an incident typical of the foreign quarter of a great city—*finis*.

So it seemed the story would be written; but it turned out that the five shots, which at the time were barely heard above the rumble of traffic, echoed and reëchoed until they dinned at the ears of the country.

A FEW days before the shooting, Richard Mason, district attorney, received an interesting caller—a sallow, shifty-eyed man who introduced himself as Peter Lupo. He had come, Mr. Lupo explained, to give evidence of grave crimes and wrongdoings committed in his section of the city. He himself was an honest man, and the proprietor of a rooming-house, and he saw no reason why he should be persecuted by the Black Eagle.

The district attorney lifted his eyebrows when that famous bird was mentioned, and asked a question. Why was the Black Eagle persecuting Mr. Lupo?

Because, said Mr. Lupo virtuously, he had refused to pay the exorbitant tribute levied by the Black Eagle upon all who were able to make a little money.

"But why should you pay any tribute?" Mason inquired. "Are you getting protection?"

Mr. Lupo was quite distressed by such a question. He was an honest man, struggling for an honest living—

"Come, come," Mason interrupted. "What are you paying protection for? I can do nothing unless you're honest with me."

Mr. Lupo's dark eyes moved restlessly around the room. . . . . It was true that he was an honest man—but in a secluded upper room in his house there were facilities for games of chance. Ah, but it was honest gambling; and he was making no such amounts of money as the villains of the Black Eagle seemed to suspect. One hundred dollars a week had been demanded of him in return for police protection! It was robbery! It was dishonest! He couldn't pay it, and he wouldn't pay it; and so he had informed the bagman, the collector for the Black Eagle in the district. Since then, Mr. Lupo continued, he had been hounded persistently. He had been raided and fined heavily. Toughs had rough-housed his patrons and smashed his furniture. As a last outrage, a fire-inspector had condemned his rooming-house as a fire-trap, and ordered it to be closed. It was more than could be borne, Mr. Lupo protested. He wanted justice; and in return for justice he would disclose some of the methods by which the sinister political organization enriched its favorites and ground down its enemies.

Mason was in a receptive mood for such revelations. He had personal political ambitions, and he knew the value in votes of a crusade against crime and graft. He owed no allegiance to the Black Eagle, for he had slipped into office on one of those rare occasions when the organization failed to win all the offices of election. He had a wholesome respect for it; but he had courage, and he knew a few reliable tricks for rousing public opinion. He made some quick calculations and decided to go ahead. A stenographer was called in, and Lupo's statements were carefully recorded. Then the sallow little man was sent away with a warning.

"This is dangerous business for you, Lupo," said Mason. "I'll take care of you later on, but in the meantime—watch your step. You're bucking a dangerous gang. . . . . See here, suppose I send you out of town until I want you again?"

LUPO must have been made a little mad by his troubles, else he never would have gone to the district attorney in the first place. He would have taken his licking, and kept his mouth shut. The Black

Eagle, as Mason had said, was a dangerous bird to arouse. But Lupo chose to disregard the district attorney's warning, and returned to his haunts on the East Side.

Meanwhile, Mason planned his assault. He moved quietly enough, as he intended, at the outset, but not so quietly that the noise was not heard in the underworld. Three days after the conference with the district attorney, Mr. Lupo lay on a white slab at the morgue. It was he who had been found in front of the wineshop with five bullet-holes in his undersized body.

The pistol-shots startled Mason, but they failed to halt him. He made public the statement of Lupo; and with an aroused public opinion behind him, he drove the police so hard that the two gunmen who had riddled the gambler were tracked down and arrested. This was an unusual development; but even more startling were the consequences. Once in custody, the pair fairly fought each other in their eagerness to confess that they were only the unwilling tools of murder. They had been summoned to the back room of a saloon, and ordered to "get that rat Lupo out of the way." Who had given the order? Big Jim Warren.

If they had accused the President of the United States, the sensation could not have been greater. At one time or another every American city has had his prototype; but Big Jim was the most striking specimen of the breed of bosses. Tradition had it that he had once dictated a Presidential nomination, and it was not unlikely, though his was the kind of personality around which all sorts of stories collected. One was always hearing of his keen political judgment and his dull political ethics; of his benevolence and his brutality; of a hand that was open and charitable, and a hand that was always fumbling at the public strongbox; of the downright physical terror that he inspired in his foes, and the kindness he showed to the least of his constituents. The man was a contradiction, an elemental force, a cut off the material that goes into the making of a Napoleon or a Cæsar—great leaders and great rascals. Once he had been an amateur pugilist, of the school of bare hands and no nice rules of conduct. A man did what he had to do to win; it had been that quality which first attracted the district leader of the Black Eagle to him. A brawny young fellow with an active pair of fists was a handy person to have at the polls, and at other times when a little suasion was needed to make a man see right politically. It was in such a school that Big Jim learned the ethics of politics. He served the Black Eagle well with his great fists, and when age slowed him up a little, he pushed forward mental qualities that were even more valuable. In time he became a chieftain, and the most powerful figure in the government of a great city.

It was typical of the age that the man should be publicly condemned and secretly admired. There was something grandiose about him that tickled the public fancy, even though it cried out occasionally at the crimes that were charged against him. The Black Eagle had many of the instincts of the vulture; nevertheless, in his capacity as chieftain, Big Jim was a big man in a country which had an almost idolatrous regard for bigness. It was upon that aspect of his character that the citizen, busy with his own schemes of fortune, chiefly liked to dwell. Besides, he was unique, the political boss; no other country had anything like him—another cause for local pride.

It was even argued, such was the cynical state of mind of those days, that Big Jim Warren could have escaped all consequences by killing Lupo with his own hands. Acts of violence were common enough in the city, and more than one bright light of the Black Eagle was suspected of sanguinary shadings. But the accusation of the gunmen bombed the citizen out of his complacent attitude. Instigation of murder was too much, even for that tolerant community. What a hullabaloo there had been, with the whole country catching the fever of indignation, and foreign critics dropping ironic comments on the strange ways of democracy!

BIG JIM'S arrest came about in characteristic manner. He realized that in this hour of public fury, no power of his, great though it was, could entirely protect him.

So, instead of waiting for the inevitable, he boldly ordered it to happen. He summoned a policeman to the old brick house where he lived with his housekeeper and his aged bulldog, and had himself taken into custody. The act was neither an admission nor a denial; it was merely the calculated move of an astute politician who humored public opinion when it seemed necessary to do so.

His case was ably fought, but the odds were overwhelmingly against him. The district attorney had done well his work of arousing the citizenry. It was in vain for Big Jim's lawyers to try to clear him by attacking the stories of the gunmen. It was useless to argue that Warren was the victim of circumstances, that his instructions to "get that rat Lupo out of the way," had been murderously misinterpreted, that he only wanted the gambler driven out of the city, shanghaied, frightened into silence. The gunmen told a different version of that back-room interview, and they were believed. They were the sorriest types that the slums bred, but their stories *did* hang together. Their orders were to kill, they said. And all the savage cross-examinations failed to shake them.

So did the sinister power of the old chieftain of the Black Eagles fail to halt the relentless march of his doom. He was convicted of murder and sentenced to die. The case went through the usual forms of appeal, but the verdict was sustained. The last resort was to petition for executive clemency, and now the State waited in ominous silence for Governor Malkiel's decision. The gods had, indeed, outdone themselves.

THE afternoon sun dropped toward the horizon, and a long, thin shaft of light passed through the west window of the executive chamber. Presently it fell upon the still figure of a man, as motionless as one of the carvings of the great desk upon which his elbows rested. So deep were his thoughts that he was barely conscious of the gentle warmth that touched his bowed head; but he started as the point of the shaft came to rest upon the sheaf of papers lying before him. It was as if a ghostly finger beckoned.

The thought brought Governor Malkiel sharply back to the extraordinary nature of his present situation, and he rose from his chair and paced silently around the spacious room. He, a child of the slums, was in this high place largely by the grace of the man whose life now lay in his hands. If Big Jim Warren had not taken an interest in the ragged, ignorant boy; if he had not made school possible at an age when boys of the district usually were at work; if he had not found a place for the young man in a law-office, loaned money to him while he studied, groomed him for his first political job, fought for him with the Black Eagle leaders—if Big Jim had not done all those things, then certainly Daniel Malkiel would not now be pacing around this august room, the chief executive of a great American State.

Warren had not only been his benefactor, but had asked for nothing more tangible than friendship in return. In the cynical temper of the day, people scoffed at the idea that the old chieftain was not profiting in some unholy way from his connection with the Governor. It *was* incredible, but it was true.

Malkiel recalled a time when, as a young assemblyman, he had laughingly asked Big Jim why he demanded no tribute. "I wont say I'll pay it," he had added. "But why am I overlooked?"

Big Jim had chewed his cigar for a time before answering. "I don't know, myself," he had said finally. "Mebbe you come under the head of charity."

Well, whatever head he had come under, Malkiel reflected, his hands were clean. He had been, perhaps, a too tolerant son of the Black Eagle; but he himself had not had to practice what he tolerated. There, really, was the agonizing difficulty of his situation. How could he withhold his clean hands from the man who had never asked him to soil them?

The appeal for executive clemency had been anticipated, and Malkiel had long known that if he acted in behalf of his friend, it must be upon that point in the defense which claimed that the orders of the boss had been fatally misconstrued. Now he went over that point again. Couldn't he justify commutation of the death-sentence to life imprisonment, by arguing that murderous intent on Warren's part was reasonably doubtful? Yes, yes, he could do that! And he would do it!

And yet—

How could he override a verdict that the highest court had sustained, that was sanctioned by an unanimous public opinion? He was a public official; what right had he to set his personal sympathies against that great cry for atonement? Every day a secretary brought to him a bulky bundle of letters demanding that he step aside and let justice be done. It was a savage state of mind, but had he a right to thwart it?

Then too, he had to weigh these alternatives without illusion. Big Jim was guilty; no man was surer of that than he. A blind, imperious mood had grown upon

him; he was a benevolent autocrat, but unquestionably an autocrat. Malkiel knew that ruthless temper well, and the sinister game its owner played. It was played in the very muck from which he himself had come, from which he had struggled to free himself, only to be dragged back into it in the end.

HE sighed and looked at his watch. He saw that the hour was nearly six, and quite suddenly he felt tired—tired of the uncertainty and the endless questioning. The thing had lain heavily on him for days, and now another had gone without result. He returned to his desk and pushed another button.

"Gregory," he said to the secretary who entered, "I'm tired, and I'm going home. I'll be back after dinner. Tell the reporters that I hope to give my decision tonight."

The ride home through the broad avenue, flanked by the stalwart maples and deep lawns, had always soothed him at the end of the day at the capitol. Even this night he felt the charm of that hour, and for a time he relaxed in the rear seat and watched the chauffeur make his way swiftly, skillfully, through the home-bound traffic. How easily Joyce disposed of obstacles, he reflected bitterly. How clear, how simple were the duties of some men!

His thought leaped ahead of the car to the governor's house. There he would find only Agnes,—he was glad his two sons were at school,—who, alone of all the world, understood the division in his heart. What a wife she had been!

"Here you are, sir," The chauffeur's voice cut across his reflection.

"I shall want you after dinner, Joyce," Malkiel said as he mounted the steps slowly.

The door of the executive mansion opened as he put his hand on the latch, and Agnes Malkiel stood before him in the long, dim hall. She raised thoughtful eyes to his, as he kissed her.

"No," he said, sensing the question in her tender regard. He struggled for other words, but none came.

"Never mind, Dan dear. We'll talk later. Just now your bath is ready, and some clean things are laid out. Try and come down for dinner in half an hour."

Malkiel kissed her again and went up to his room. A little later, physically refreshed, he joined his wife in the small living-room where they spent their informal evenings. She rose as he entered, took his arm, and together they walked into the dining-room. He helped her into her chair, touched her hair lightly with his lips, and went to his own place. Then, for the first time, he spoke.

"The truth is," he said, "I'm about as far from a decision as ever. I only know that I'm going to make up my mind tonight." His brows were knit again with the internal struggle. "It's all so rotten, Agnes," he protested. "It's clear enough, if I look at it one way. I know what the state expects, and according to the facts, the state is right. But facts, facts,"—his voice grew bitter,—"what've facts got to do with it, when I've got the power to save his life?"

"I know, dear," Agnes spoke soothingly. "Remember, the servants are on tiptoe."

"Everybody's on tiptoe," Malkiel said irritably, "waiting to see which way I jump."

"Please, dear," Agnes pleaded. "Let's talk after dinner. . . . . Please try to eat something."

He subsided, but not to eat. The waitress came and went with dishes which he picked at, moodily, and he rose with a sigh of relief when he saw Agnes prepare to leave the table. He followed her into the living-room. On other nights he would have dropped into the comfortable wing-chair near the fireplace, lighted a cigar, and glanced at the evening papers; or they would have talked of homely matters, things far removed from his official life, or else sat quietly looking into the flames. He enjoyed those simple pleasures after the strain of behaving with the dignity demanded of the governor of a great State. But this evening he could only walk restlessly about the room, seeing everything in it as hateful—except Agnes. All else was associated with his trial. If he were not in this cursed house, if he were not Governor Malkiel—

He heard his wife's questioning voice, but the words escaped him.

"What?" he asked dully. "What'd you say, Agnes?"

"What do you suppose Jim Warren's thinking?" she repeated.

"I don't know," he said, still oblivious.

"He's been on my mind all day," Agnes continued. "I wonder if he thinks you are going to help him?"

"By George!" Malkiel was finally pene-

trated. "That gives me sort of a shock, Agnes. I've hardly thought about him, about him as a man. He's been a problem, mostly."

"I've thought about him so much," Agnes reiterated. "He must be wondering —about you—about everything. It's all he has to do now."

"Yes," Malkiel agreed. "I—Agnes, that thought sort of knocks me over. What do you suppose he *is* thinking?"

AGNES sat near the fire, and Malkiel watched her fine, grave profile, outlined against the ruddy flames, as she mused over his question. "I wonder," she said at length. "He must appreciate the terrible situation you have been put in. Somehow I can't believe he'd have you do the wrong thing."

"The wrong thing!" Malkiel echoed. "Tell me what is the right thing. Do you know?"

"I think *he* knows," she said simply. "He thought of you as his son, Dan."

"And the sins of the father—"

"No, no!" There was a vehement note in her low voice. "His love for you was the finest thing in his life. Don't you see that?"

"See it?" Malkiel stiffened. "It's a debt. I must pay it. I must—" His voice broke, and he stood tensely in the center of the room, clenching his hands. What else could he see? It was in his power to save the life of the man who had picked him out of the slums and set him on the path to the governor's mansion—this house in which he now stood. Right or wrong, how could he, how could any man of human instincts, decline to exercise the governor's prerogative?

"If you feel that you must." Agnes turned in her chair and studied his drawn face. "Oh, Dan," she cried, "you must do as you think best. I don't want to influence you, dear. I only want you to be sure that you see clearly before you act."

"I—I do see." No, he reflected, that was not quite true; but let it stand. Talking had become very difficult, and he was anxious to get away, even from her.

Agnes got up and approached him. There was a maternal gesture in the manner in which she put her hands on his tense arms, and looked into his troubled eyes. "Dear," she said, after a pause, "there is only one other person in the world who knows you as well as I do. I know what is in your mind—and so does he. I know what it will do to your life—and so does he."

"Oh—my life!" There was a tinge of resentment in his voice. "That doesn't matter."

"But do you see clearly how he regards you?" she persisted.

"Nothing is clear," he admitted. "But if he doesn't want me to help him, why did he allow the appeal for clemency to come to me? Why didn't he accept the verdict of the courts?"

"I've thought of that. I can't answer. He's a strange man—and his ways are strange. . . . . But he loves you, I can answer to that."

Malkiel nodded wearily, and was silent.

"You see," Agnes continued, "he has never asked you to do a thing that you didn't believe in. Even now I can't think he'd—"

MALKIEL stopped her. This—this haggling over a man's life was too painful, and his face showed it. "I—I can't talk any more, Agnes," he protested.

She folded him into her arms, as though he were her boy, and kissed his forehead. "Dan, dear," she said finally, "have you ever thought of going to see him?"

"Agnes!" Malkiel's voice was sharp with alarm. "Good God! What an idea? How could I?"

She assured him that it was an unconsidered thought, which had only that moment slipped into her mind.

"It's an impossible thing," he cried. But was it?

"Please, dear, don't think of it," Agnes urged. "It was just a chance thought. Dan," she continued, as he stood silent, irresolute, "there is only one thought I want to put in your mind: you wont wrong either him or yourself by doing what you think is right. Even in this terrible hour, I think he wants you to go the way your conscience directs you. . . . . You see, dear, Jim Warren sees in you the man he might have been."

Both, then, seemed to realize that the last word had been said. Agnes turned toward the fire, and Malkiel stood for an instant watching her. She didn't move until she heard the door close behind her. Then she knelt by her chair in front of the dancing flames and began quietly to weep.

Governor Malkiel turned his wife's

chance thought over in his mind as he returned to the capitol. At least, he admitted, it had the merit of action. It would be senseless to continue to torture himself with indecision. Suppose, then, he faced the suggestion squarely: suppose he did go this night to the prison and talk with Big Jim Warren? He faced it squarely, and drew back, quivering with apprehension. Preposterous, inhuman—and, the practical politician asserted, the height of indiscretion. What a scandal if the fact of his visit were to become known!

He dismissed the thought, emphasizing his decision by a vigorous slamming of the door of the private entrance to the executive chamber. The great room was lighted; the shades were drawn; shadows from a wood-fire played upon the dark, paneled surfaces of the high walls. Here the answer must be given—here, unassisted and alone. Yet even as he argued, the room of the governors seemed to dissolve, and in its place there rose gray walls and steel gratings, and behind the gratings a powerful figure slowly defined itself.

What *was* Big Jim thinking? What *did* he expect?

AN automobile hurried into the road which rises steadily until it ends at the high walls. Somewhere, in one of the steel cubicles of that feudal pile, Big Jim Warren brooded. The automobile that labored up the long grade carried Governor Malkiel to him. Agnes Malkiel's suggestion had worked upon him, and the vision that had so strangely passed before his eyes in the executive chamber had moved him to action. He had summoned his secretary, and together they had worked out a simple plan of action. Gregory was to drive Malkiel in a hired car, because Joyce, the State chauffeur, could not be employed on such a delicate mission. They would offer no explanations for their departure, and hope that none would be necessary later. The outcome was largely in the lap of the gods, and Malkiel was content to leave it there.

It was not that he was glad to go. He shrank from it; but the same time he had come to see that it was an inevitable ordeal. Above all considerations of public duty, he had come to see this strange trial as a personal issue between Big Jim Warren and himself. Between the two, the fate of each would have to be settled—and God have mercy on them both!

"Yes, God have mercy on us both," Malkiel muttered to the darkness.

The automobile strained at the last few yards of grade, passed it, and came to a stop in the plaza before the main gate of the jail.

"Don't keep me waiting long," Malkiel urged as Gregory climbed out. It had been agreed that the secretary should see the warden first, and prepare the way for the Governor's unobtrusive entrance.

Alone, Malkiel stirred restlessly in the rear seat. He peered through the curtains at the guard, whose figure could be vaguely seen in the shadows of the great gate. His thoughts ran ahead with Gregory, followed the warden through twisting corridors to Big Jim's cell, bringing word that the Governor had come to see him. What would the old fellow say to that?

Malkiel's nervous tension exploded in a long sigh, and he tried to restrain his apprehensions and wait calmly for Gregory's return. The time was short now; in a few minutes he and Big Jim would be face to face; difficult questions would get themselves answered; the unknown would begin to unfold itself.

The effort to achieve a calm bearing was not entirely successful. He was fumbling nervously at the car door, responding to some instinct that urged him forward, when it opened and Gregory's head appeared. "It's all right, Governor," he said. "Everything's clear. Felton will meet you at his office."

"And Warren,"—Malkiel moistened dry lips before he could finish,—"he knows?"

"He must by this time. Felton left to tell him as I started out here." Gregory took his place behind the wheel, and drove the car through the prison gate. It stopped before a darkened entrance; the headlights were turned off; and Malkiel, muffled in the collar of his heavy overcoat, got out and walked swiftly toward the door which a tall man was holding open.

"Felton?" Malkiel inquired.

"Yes, Governor," said the warden. He led the way without further words to an interior door, which he opened. "This is my office," he said. "I'll bring Warren to you here."

"You've seen him?" Malkiel wanted to know.

"Yes, I woke him up. He's dressing."

"How did he take it—when he heard?"

"Cool. He might have expected you. Did he?"

Malkiel shook his head. "I only decided to come an hour ago. . . . . Did he say anything?"

FELTON described the incident briefly. "I went into his cell, and shook him and whispered that you had come to see him. He sat up quickly, but he didn't say anything right away. 'He isn't coming here?' he asked me finally. I said no, I was going to bring him to my office. 'All right,' he said. 'Just give me a minute to dress. Then I'll be ready.' That was all."

The warden started for the door. "I'll be back with him in about five minutes," he said. The door closed behind his tall figure, and Malkiel glanced around the room in which the meeting was to take place. It had a bare, unhappy feel, and he crossed the stone floor to peer through the one window that opened out upon the starlit world. His eyes yearned toward the vague horizon, but they could not entirely avoid the stark sentry box on the prison wall, where a guard lurked with loaded rifle. . . . . No, there was no escape for him, either. He too was a prisoner until he had served through this terrible ordeal to which the gods had sentenced him.

He took out his watch, and returned it with no recollection of the hour. . . . . Five minutes the warden had said. Soon, then. . . . . Good God, how should he begin? What should he say? He must think, have something ready for that poignant meeting with his old friend. Big Jim had said that *he* would be ready. What did he mean by that?

Quick footsteps sounded outside in the stone corridor, and Malkiel whirled, trembling, as the door clicked behind him. . . . . It was the warden again—only the warden. How white he looked under the glaring electric bulb that dangled a few inches above his head. . . . . He seemed to be excited too; he was speaking, but his words were jumbled and somehow strange —something about a little bottle lying on the floor of the cell. . . . . Must have been smuggled in. . . . . Empty now, and Big Jim lying on his cot. . . . . Got there just too late. . . . . Too late for what? What was the fellow talking about?

Dead! The swimming room steadied itself a little. There was a word he could understand. So that was it! So that was what Big Jim had been ready for! So Agnes had been right!

MALKIEL stood before the dying fire in the governor's room, and watched the flames slowly consume a sheaf of papers—the appeal for executive clemency in behalf of Big Jim Warren. He was done with that forever; but he burned it, not as the symbol of an end, but of a beginning. For in the aftermath of tragedy he had come freshly upon an old truth, and discovered a way of life.

Underneath the sublime note of sacrifice upon which his old friend's life had ended, was something else, something which could no longer be disregarded, something sinister and ugly. Big Jim Warren was the creature of a system of corruption, of an evil, cynical philosophy of life. He had lived by it, been dishonored by it, and in the end it had destroyed him. Not even the strange, unselfish love he bore for Malkiel could outweigh that. There was the truth—and it was as old as time; yet it came to Malkiel now with the force of a revelation.

And the way of life? It would be a hard way. Perhaps his old friend, looking through the veil that separates the living and the dead, would not quite understand. For Malkiel saw that he had not been free to follow quite the same path upon which his feet had been set years ago. All that was done with. He could only pay his debt to Big Jim Warren by making war upon corruption, upon the cynical philosophy of life and government —yes, upon the Black Eagle itself. There must be no temporizing; what he himself did not believe in, he must fight. Only in that way could he fully discharge the debt that had been placed upon him in that night behind the gray walls of the jail.

He poked the ashes and saw that the papers were at last entirely destroyed. Then he took up his hat, turned off the lights and stepped out into the silent street. Yes, this same night which had witnessed the end of his great trial, should also witness the beginning of his war upon that system which had brought down his old friend, and had so nearly smirched his own honor. Sadness tugged at his heart; but sadness could be decently borne. Some day, perhaps, there would come the quiet satisfaction of bringing good out of evil. So reflecting, he disappeared in the darkness that enveloped the broad avenue. The gods had finished their game, and Governor Malkiel had made the ultimate decision.

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The Island Of Heaven and Hell

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

AS the yacht approached the Miraflores locks, one of the Administration launches which had been abreast of her across the lake from Pedro Miguel dropped back until close under her stern. The arc-electrics along the locks, and the yacht's powerful searchlight, made a dazzling glare ahead of her, leaving everything astern in more or less deep shadow by contrast. The launch, which had a light out of all proportion to her size, shut it off when she dropped back to let the yacht precede her, so that most of the group under awning on the after-deck had no idea how close the other craft was to them until a girl left her chair and stepped aft to the rail.

"Better not get too close aboard of us!" she called. "Our screws kick up a good deal of wash when the turbines start!"

An indistinct figure in trim white drill moved forward under the launch's awning until it stood by the helmsman forward, and looked up at the girl; another in linen, evidently some friend who was not in the service, joined the Canal officer as he replied to her:

"I was on the point of cautioning you against starting your engines so near the locks. The night-gang will pass a line aboard in a moment or two; then the motors will tow you in as they did at Gatun and Pedro Miguel. There's plenty of room for both of us in the lock."

Just then, to Captain Cranston's surprise, the launch's searchlight blazed out diagonally across the yacht's stern—not touching the girl's figure as she leaned over the rail, but giving enough reflected illumination to reveal her face very distinctly. After a muttered exclamation, the light was shut off.

"I beg your pardon! All my clumsiness! Don't blame it on Captain Cranston. My hand hit that switch when I stumbled on the coaming."

To the girl above them, it seemed that this second voice—from an impalpable

ghost on the launch—was about the pleasantest she ever remembered hearing. It was deep and vibrating, without being pitched too low—the voice of a good pal who generally smiled upon the world as he found it. The officer's voice had had something of the same quality—but with the note of authority which could be less pleasant, upon occasion. Although the light had made her jump, from its unexpectedness, she was a good sport—sure enough of herself to do and say things which the average girl wouldn't risk.

"Oh—accidents seldom need apologies. But that one put me rather at a disadvantage—don't you think? Seems to me it would be only fair if you switched on that light again and stepped into it while I counted ten! That'll give me some idea of what I'm running from—next time we meet."

Cranston—knowing who the girl's father was, and preferring to avoid any appearance of deliberate flirtation—would have let the matter drop there, with a courteous apology upon his own part; but his old classmate at the Rensselaer Polytechnic was of a more venturesome temperament. Switching on the searchlight again, he stepped forward until side-reflection from the beam clearly revealed him. And the girl nodded in approval—thinking that he rather matched his voice.

"H-m-m—I was sure you were game enough to do it! But how about your officer-friend—why this shirking of the limelight?" Suddenly she clapped her hands, and laughed. "O-o-oh—I get it, now! The official complex! He's afraid you'll get him in Dutch—you, and your startling accident!"

The Captain immediately stepped into the glow, where she could see him distinctly, and quietly answered her.

"My friend said it was an accident, Miss Hammond. I'll take his word for it. If you're still disposed to doubt us, I'm Cranston of the Canal Service—Engineering Department. This is Mr. Randall Barton of Syracuse and New York—also an engineer. And we both apologize."

"Accepted, Captain! By the way—you gentlemen should be able to give us information upon one or two points. We were told at Cristobal that there is to be a very decent ball at the Tivoli tomorrow evening. Do you know anything about it? What's the easiest way for our party to get there?"

"Why—if you cared to spend the day at Ancon, you *could* go ashore, here at Miraflores—telephone for reservations, run down by train in less than an hour. Or you can motor up from Balboa after breakfast. Dances are given at the hotel by the Tivoli Club—almost entirely Canal employees—on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. The custom lapsed for two or three years owing to the number of tourists who gave offense through their intolerance concerning the Panamanians and other Central or South American people, but it is being revived, and the balls are thoroughly enjoyable even if one doesn't care about dancing much. Splendid music by the National Band, beautiful costumes—better dancing than you'll see in New York. The view from the Tivoli is superb—but from the top of the hill, it is so much better that it's well worth the climb before breakfast."

SHE left them in order to discuss this information with the party sitting around the saloon-skylight; but though the night air was much cooler than the long tropic days, they were all too indolent for the bother of packing suitcases and going ashore at Miraflores. It seemed easier to run up from Balboa in the morning. Meanwhile the yacht had been warped into the lock, with the launch following her; and in less than an hour both were running down the Pacific stretch of the Canal, with the launch gradually leaving her companion behind. Cranston, being on official business and in a boat too small to do any damage by its wash, was not restricted by the eight-knot regulation applying to most vessels passing through. On the run to Balboa, he remarked to his old classmate:

"Your venturesome disposition will get you into a peck of trouble down here, Ranny, unless you curb it a little! You've always done things on impulse; some day you'll wish your self-starter worked a little more slowly, especially here in Latin-America, where folks are equally quick with a knife or gun if you rub 'em the wrong way. What in blazes did you spring the searchlight on that girl for?"

"Liked her voice—the sureness of herself that seemed to go with it—wanted to see what she looked like! Of course I realized in a minute that I might be getting you in wrong—so pulled that accident stuff—which, by the way, she didn't swallow for a minute. If I'd been alone, I

wouldn't have made any bones about saying that I wanted to see what she looked like."

"Hmph! Do you know who she is?"

"No. And I don't *give* a damn! I wasn't pulling anything rough—had no intention of doing so. I sized her up as a good-enough sport to stand for a bit of illumination—and was figuring that she'd suggest a come-back along that line when she did so."

"She happens to be the only daughter of Thornton B. Hammond, one of the richest operators and promoters in Wall Street! Suppose he had come along aft and taken in the whole show—just as it came about? A word or two from him in Washington might start something unpleasant, if he got sore enough to bother about saying it."

"Well—it might. But I doubt it! First place, from what I've heard of the man, he's a pretty good sport himself—wouldn't take offense at something his daughter was carrying off as all right. Then again—you had the whole play right in your hands from the start. You're an official, with the right to overhaul and question that yacht upon any technicality you happen to think of—turn your searchlight upon the name on her stern for your official records. I thought of that before I sprung it. If he raised any sort of kick, you could have called him down for the violation of a dozen trifling regulations. Say, Billy! We ought to show up at that ball in our cleanest whites!"

"Hmph! I get more dancing than I really need in this climate—but there'll be a lot of pretty nice girls whom you've met before. We can run up from Balboa as early as you like."

"Yeah—but let's stick around the old Hotel Central on the Plaza, during the day. That's the place to see Panamanian life—darned few of the tourists, with their superior airs, but some of the finest Latin-Americans in this neck of woods. Along about nine or ten in the evening, we can run up to Ancon. Besides, I want to get me a couple of first-class Panamas at the Montechristi on Avenida Central. Is Tobalina there yet?"

LEAVING the launch at one of the Administration wharves, they left Balboa about seven and breakfasted in the patio of the Hotel Central on the south side of the Independencia, facing the Cathedral. Before they had finished, the Hammond party came in and sat down at near-by tables. From bits of the talk which they couldn't avoid overhearing, another man of much the same type as the Wall Street magnate had been staying at the hotel a week or more for the express purpose of meeting Hammond as he came through and discussing some business proposition which had been one of the reasons for the yacht's cruise to the Isthmus.

Presently, Miss Doris happened to glance toward Cranston and his friend, casually turned so that she could see their faces more distinctly—and thought she was sure enough in her recognition to venture a rather hesitating bow, which they smilingly returned. Idling over their breakfast, their cigars and newspapers, they managed to pass the time pleasantly until the Hammond party got up to leave. Then, in response to an encouraging smile from the girl, they went over to shake hands and be informally presented to the others. In a brief chat, as they strolled through the hotel to the Plaza, Miss Hammond's need of some working information concerning them drew reluctant contributions of biographical data—enough for her to verify, if she cared to do so, in other quarters. Then, as the Hammonds beckoned a car for the ride out to Ancon, the two engineers went after Barton's Panama hats, spending the rest of the day about town looking up old acquaintances whom both had known while they were building one of the Peruvian railroads.

About ten in the evening they reached the Tivoli—having reserved by telephone several dances with ladies of their acquaintance. The Hammond party sat watching the ball from chairs at one side of the big room; but the men were not young enough to care for much exercise in a hot climate, and none of them had happened to run across anybody they knew among the younger set. Although the music was exceptionally fine, enough to intoxicate a good dancer, Miss Doris wasn't having much of a time—which was apparent to the engineers the moment they entered the ballroom. Putting down their names on her card for all the dances they had disengaged, they immediately fetched some of the Canal officers and prominent Panamanians, who were apparently pleased to take most of the others. All were accomplished dancers—some of them artists in that line; but somehow she enjoyed herself most with Randall Barton. He seemed to be of her

own rather adventurous type, on excellent terms with all the world—and a gentleman. During one of the intermissions, her father leaned over to ask:

"Didn't we meet that chap you were just dancing with, Dot? Down in the patio of the Central, this morning? Rather nice-looking fellow. Any idea what his line of business is?"

"Why—of course! He's an engineer—a classmate of Captain Cranston's, at Troy. They were on a railroad together in Peru after they graduated. Then Mr. Barton went out to China on one of the Yangtse Gorge surveys. Recently he's had charge of two sections in a New York subway tunnel. Had some money left him and is taking a vacation, I think."

"Ought to know his job pretty well after all that experience! Eh, Gunning?"—to the big saturnine man who had been waiting in Panama to meet him. "Don't s'pose he's had any mining work to handle?"

"He took a postgraduate course in geology at Columbia, and spent three months in the Baldwin Locomotive Works. I asked some of the Canal officers about Captain Cranston this afternoon—and pumped the Captain about Mr. Barton. So I guess the information is straight. Both are pretty well known, down this coast."

WHEN Doris got up to dance again, her father turned to his friend Gunning with a speculative expression on his face.

"Hmph! Be a joke if this chap turned out to be exactly the man we need! Eh, Sam?"

" 'Fraid he's too good to fall for it! If Miss Doris has the dope on him straight, he simply wont take it! An engineer with his experience doesn't have to—there are plenty of safer jobs that need him."

"You're probably right—and yet—Dot said he was taking a sort of vacation. If we made the inducement sufficiently strong, it might tempt him, at that."

"No harm in putting it up to him. He's prob'ly the sort of man who wont blab even if he doesn't feel like taking us up. Have Doris tell him we'd kinda like to go over a certain matter—after he's through dancing."

"Hmph! They keep these affairs up till daylight, Sam! He probably wont have any time for a powwow until tomorrow afternoon or evening— But he looks like pretty near what we want!"

Barton had frequently danced through until breakfast-time in his college days, but he was now reaching years of discretion and no longer wasted much-needed vitality in that way. He hadn't put his name down for any dances after two A. M., as nearly as he could estimate the schedule—and so told Miss Doris he would be at her father's service about that time, if he cared to sit up. So, as both Hammond and Gunning had been in the tropics enough to get a few hours' good sleep in the heated part of the day, he found them waiting for him in comfortable chairs on the veranda, overlooking the beautiful Bay of Panama with its canopy of brilliant stars reflected in the water—wine and cigars on a table by their side. It seemed to him that they were surprisingly cordial—though Miss Doris would scarcely have told them of the unconventional way in which they had met her—and laid it to a possible impression upon their part that he was an old acquaintance.

"Mr.—er—Barton," said Hammond, "we understand that you're an engineer of several years' experience. Know something about mining? Eh?"

"Well—I'm a geologist, though of course not so good a one as a man who devotes his time to nothing else. And I'm something of a mechanic as well—with my regular engineering experience."

"Know anything about New Guinea? Ever been there?"

"Papua? Yes—around the coast a bit. Made a trip on one of the Koninklijke boats, out of Sourabaya. Stopped at Port Moresby for a few hours, once, on a B. P. boat. Saw various tribes of the natives—something of the fauna and flora. But that's about all."

"That's a darn sight more than most engineers appear to know of the place. Ever hear any rumors of gold, in the interior?"

"Oh, there's more or less alluvial gold in most of the streams—in fact, I think from specimens I've seen, that Papua is richer in auriferous deposits than the Philippines. As for quartz, there are *some* outcroppings near the coast, but there must be more near the headwaters of the rivers and creeks to account for the placer-gold by ancient erosion."

"Hmph! Guess there isn't much use in showing you these nuggets—you've probably seen a good deal more of the stuff over there. . . . ."

"Wait a second, Mr. Hammond!" inter-

rupted Barton; he had poured out some of the specimens from the buckskin pouch handed him. "This piece which looks something like a fragment of sea-fan isn't a nugget at all! That came from a lode—presumably white quartz! H-m-m—there are five of them, here. Whoever found these specimens cradled some of them from a river-bed and either hammered out or blasted out these others from a pretty rich lode not far from the river where he got the others. People don't travel cross-lots wherever they take the notion, in Papua, you know! The jungle, upcountry, is almost impenetrable—full of deadly snakes and insects—full of cannibals who kill you with poisoned darts from blow-guns, or spears, when you can't see or hear them!"

"THEN you think there may be enough gold where this came from to make an expedition and regular mining operations pay?"

"I'd say the gold is undoubtedly there—and probably other minerals worth even more. But getting them out—that's a different matter! It'll be done some day, of course—when the partly civilized strip along portions of the coast widens and penetrates the jungle. Under present conditions, you'd probably need more of a force than what you got might warrant. Papua isn't a place one walks across in a day, you know—the island is very nearly fifteen hundred miles long, by four hundred and thirty wide, in the middle. In British Papua there are mountains over thirteen thousand feet high; and in the Dutch territory they reach more than sixteen thousand—the greatest altitude in the East Indies. Why—even from placer-mining, they got a hundred and ninety thousand dollars' worth of gold back in nineteen seventeen!"

"The devil they did! But are they carrying on regular mining operations?"

"Only in British Papua—the eastern end of the south coast. Australia now owns everything east of the hundred and forty-first meridian—Holland, everything west of that. But the former German territory along the northeast coast hasn't been developed, as yet, and the Dutch territory not at all. Don't get the idea that there's a gold-rush in Papua as there was in California, Ballarat, the Klondike or Coolgardie—nobody has taken any out of the interior, and it doesn't pay along the coast unless with an equipment of dredges and washers."

"Well, say—Barton. You're probably wondering what we're trying to get at. I'll explain how we happen to be interested. A wandering sort of cuss—rolling stone, adventurer if you like—went up into New Guinea last year from some native village on the north coast. How far he got, we don't know—he said he reached the center of the island, among the high mountains. In four or five months he got down to the coast again, all in. Gunning was cruising with a party of English friends and had gone ashore to pick up some of the native baskets and war-clubs at a little village. One of the blackies took him to a hut built on piles over the water, where this man was lying. He had temperature enough to kill an ox—said they got him with a poisoned arrow when he was rotten with fever anyhow. Gave a wandering description of where he'd been, and several distinctive landmarks around some locality where he said there was a lot of gold, like these nuggets which he gave Sam. Had no heirs that he knew of—just gave Sam the benefit of his experience because he was a white man trying to do what he could for him. Drew a rough map of his route as he thought it probably must have been. In about two hours he passed out—telling Gunning, just before he went, to file a claim at Brisbane on the district indicated, and go up there with a regular mining outfit. He was under the impression that part of the valley he'd described might be in Dutch territory—but said no Dutch official would get up there to do any kicking before he took out all the gold he wanted.

"Well—Gunning didn't take much stock in the yarn, or say anything about it to his English friends. But through casual questioning here and there, he finally became convinced that there might be enough in it to warrant spending a little money on investigation. Without telling them the inside story, as I'm telling *you,* he's asked at least half a dozen engineers if they'd go upcountry in New Guinea and make a report for him, but with a single exception, they all turned the proposition down cold. There's one man here in Panama who has been down on his luck, flat broke, talks as if he might take a chance on it. He's just an ordinary civil engineer—might do very well as assistant to the man who goes out for us. But he's no geologist—knows nothing about the country out there—probably wouldn't get very far if we gave him the whole responsibility. Now—your train-

ing and experience seem to be exactly what we want. Can't we offer some inducement that'll interest you in going down there for us?"

"I don't know what sort of inducement you may have in mind, but it would have to offset a fairly even chance of losing my life or coming out a physical wreck. No—I don't think I want it, Mr. Hammond!"

"W-e-l-l—let's look at it all round. Suppose you found enough gold or other valuable stuff to make it a really big proposition—running to millions, if worked on a large scale? Would there be much difficulty in getting a legal mining concession from the Queensland Government? From the Netherlands Government?"

"Practically no trouble at all with the Australians—that sort of thing is all subject to their Government regulations. If you comply with them, the rest is merely a matter of form, with nominal fees and taxes. But the Dutch wont give you a claim at all. They've got things just as they want them, with the natives subject to their rule, and they simply wont let outsiders do any developing. As far as that is concerned, however, probably not more than two or three scientists among the Dutch have ever penetrated a hundred miles inland on Papua; you might be fifty miles inside their territory, in the center of the island, and they wouldn't find it out in the next twenty years unless some idle gossip from your outfit in the coast villages got them unusually suspicious."

"All right! Then suppose we sent you up there with a sufficient expeditionary outfit to protect yourselves and keep your supplies steadily renewed from some base on the coast? Suppose we said that, in addition to the sum we pay for the survey and report, you and any other white men you may take along are to keep for yourselves anything of value you may pick up on the expedition—gold, precious stones, valuable minerals of any sort—as long as you stake out and duly record with the authorities, for us, a sufficiently extensive claim to cover all necessary future operations? We to foot the bills for an effective working expedition of whatever size you consider necessary. Wouldn't that sort of a proposition interest you—some?"

"It's a tempting one, Mr. Hammond! I really don't want to go—because, after getting pretty well into the interior, I might decide that my chances of getting out alive were altogether too slim for the money, and beat it for the coast while the beating was good—"

Gunning cast an appraising glance over the engineer's face—a grin wrinkling the corners of his mouth. "Now you've got *us* thinking p'raps we oughtn't to send you, Barton! If my judgment is any good, on a man's looks, you aint the quittin' kind—you kinda aim to finish anything you start, an' you'll do it if hell freezes over! What would you consider about right, f'r an outfit?"

"If this engineer you spoke of has any sand at all, he and one other white man ought to be enough—the third man ought to be a good mechanic, but needn't be an engineer. It'll be difficult to get any of the coast natives to go very far upcountry on account of their superstitions and antagonism to the interior tribes; but if they understand that we're going to keep relays of them going and coming along the trail with supplies, establishing camps which could be roughly fortified, about every twenty miles, I think they'd fall for it. The item of native expense will be light; it's more a question of finding out what particular object each of them has set his heart on possessing, and giving it to him, than of big wages which he'd have no place to spend. We ought to have a thousand-ton cargo-boat with a thoroughly reliable master and crew—under six months' charter. You could pick one up by cable in Sydney or Brisbane and have it meet me at Moresby when I reached there."

"How would you go—from here?"

"Some of the shipping agents around the Plaza will have advices of a cargo-boat for Sydney or Melbourne, due at Cristobal within a week or so—I can undoubtedly get passage on her. Then run up from Sydney to Port Moresby on a B. P. steamer."

"That may take you a couple of months. If Hammond feels like a little vacation that'll do him good, we could run across in the yacht and drop you there in a third of the time—his boat does twenty-eight knots in anything like smooth weather."

BARTON'S judgment was against considering the proposition at all. He had never seen anything of interior Papua, but he *had* seen wrecks of men who could give no clear account of their experience upcountry when they finally did get out. The coast opinion was that the greatest danger arose from cannibalistic natives, with poisonous insects and reptiles a close sec-

ond. As Cranston had said, however, one of his inborn characteristics was that of acting upon impulse—and frequently being sorry afterward. In this Papuan proposition, the lure of adventure began to grip him. If gold and precious minerals were as plentiful as they were supposed to be in certain localities, and he happened to strike one of them, he and his companions might easily make a big stake for themselves, with Hammond and Gunning footing the expense of the expedition. It was simply a question of nerve, constitution and luck—gambling with them against both known and unknown dangers which were deadly enough to make other men pass up the attempt.

When the name of the engineer willing to accompany him was mentioned to Barton, it seemed vaguely familiar—a Stevens Institute man, he thought, but some rumor which he half remembered as going about in reference to the fellow escaped him. When Williams was introduced, next day, Barton had an idea that they had met somewhere before, but couldn't recall the circumstances. Hammond and Gunning both impressed upon the man that if he accepted their proposition, he would be absolutely under Barton's orders—their lives and the success of the surveying expedition depending upon his much greater knowledge of the conditions they must face. After a little hesitation, the less experienced man consented to this—the pay he was to get being too attractive to refuse. In the selection of the third man, Williams suggested one who had worked with him in Costa Rica—but Barton preferred some one who would be under obligations to *him,* if it ever came to a three-cornered show-down—and was lucky enough to find a Canal mechanic who had worked under Cranston and was vouched for by him.

As Hammond could transact a good deal of his business by radio, he decided to run across the Pacific with his yacht, taking the three men along and arranging by cable for a small steamer to meet them at Port Moresby, with the supplies which Barton had listed.

During the run from Panama, Williams —who had education enough to make an agreeable showing when he had an object in so doing—paid a good deal of attention to Miss Doris—more, in fact, than she relished. Bates—the third of the party—was a quiet, mind-his-own-business individual who made no pretense at anything but proved to have fairly wide knowledge and experience when anyone drew him out. Barton, she liked better with each successive day they passed together. But in the case of the man Williams, she was instinctively on her guard, for no reason that she could define to herself. For one thing, she didn't like his assumption that Barton was overcautious in his estimate of the difficulties which the expedition might encounter. He had never been within a thousand miles of Papua. Yet he took the ground that practically no portion of the globe in these modern days need be so exceedingly dangerous to a well-equipped expedition armed with the latest type of weapons—and, in fact, gave it as his opinion that she would run no great risk if she cared to accompany them part of the way into the jungle. She afterward put this up to Barton as a supposititious case—to see what *he* thought of it; and the expression on his face was, at first, one of simple amazement.

"You'll remind me presently, Miss Doris, that a woman recently accompanied her husband on a big-game hunting-trip in East Africa? Eh? That was in open country, where the natives were all friendly, and the only dangers were from wild animals. I'm also quite well aware that women have gone on botanizing trips in other more or less wild country—but never under the conditions which exist in Papua. Along the coasts of their own territory, the Australians have suppressed cannibalism to a large extent—but not in the interior, where every native is a cannibal. Same proposition in the Solomons and New Hebrides—away from the shores. You're imagining a lot of wonderful things to be seen in the jungle—which very probably exist, and will be still there when the country is sufficiently opened up to make it safe for a woman to go in and look at them. But as things are today—great Scott! *Keep out!*"

BARTON'S list of equipment and supplies had interested the two millionaires—confirming their opinion that they'd been lucky in getting a first-class man for the job. Among other things he had ordered a large supply of the mustard-gas used during the war, and the tear-gas invented for mob-dispersion. Fortunately, he had happened to know an officer connected with the chemical section of the Australian War Department, and with his assistance had managed to have a supply of the two gases

shipped from Sydney on the small coasting-steamer which they had chartered.

Then—there were several rolls of steel screening with a fine-enough mesh to stop any insect from a mosquito, up. This was presumably intended for the camps along the trail—but Hammond and Gunning chuckled with surprised approval when, after accompanying the supply-boat around to a lagoon inside the Karan Reefs on the north coast, he showed them some helmets and knee-length coats made of the stuff—reinforced in some places with a double thickness. Putting one of the helmets over a stump on the beach, Barton threw a native spear at it with force enough to have gone half through the log. It dented the screening a quarter of an inch into the wood, and then rebounded. With a single thickness of the screening, it might have gone through—but with very little penetration beyond.

There was a native village on piles at the edge of the lagoon, some forty miles west of the former German trading-station Berlinhafen, and twice that distance from Humboldt Bay in Dutch Papua. By arrangement with the Queensland authorities, this village had been selected as their base for supplies. The villagers had been in sufficient contact with white men—officers of the patrol-cruisers, and others—to be trusted as long as they were reasonably well treated.

For the first day or two Barton made little progress in getting a party of them to accompany him. Presently, however, he found that one man would risk anything he had for a modern repeating-rifle and five hundred cartridges—another for a boat sufficiently well built to go through high surf—a third for a white man's spring opera-hat—and so on. In ten days a double-walled corrugated-iron shack had been put up on ground a hundred feet above sea-level at the foot of the cliff—under a portion of the rock which jutted out sufficiently to make attack from the top almost impossible. A spring which trickled down the face of the cliff provided excellent water for drinking and cooking. The shack was but two hundred yards from the water, and the supply-boat was anchored about as far out—just inside the reefs—with two rapid-fire guns covering the village in case of any misunderstanding with the natives. Finally Barton and Williams left just after sunrise one morning—leaving Bates in charge of the shack and supplies until he could break in the steamer's second mate to handle that end of the proposition.

AT the end of the ninth day two of the villagers came back, reporting that a couple of small camps had been constructed on the banks of little creeks—in clearings with enough open ground to prevent their being taken by surprise in case of a fight. They had been constructed on piles wedged between big stones in the creeks, so that they were protected against reptiles or insects, and while not supposed to last in the rainy season when the creeks were full, would probably stand until the expedition returned. A week later Hammond was thinking of heading for home on the yacht when another pair of natives came down with a small package from Barton containing half a dozen good-sized gold nuggets which he had panned from a riffle in a small stream, and a lump of matrix with three beautiful opals in it which he had chopped out of a moss-covered ledge after stripping it bare. (None but a geologist of some experience would have guessed from the outcrop what that ledge *might* contain.) This appealed to the imagination of the two millionaires. There were a dozen matters which they felt needed their personal attention in Wall Street—though Hammond was relaying his radio orders with sufficient regularity to keep in pretty close touch with the market. The more they thought it over, the less inclined they were to leave—particularly as Barton had reported two attacks from natives which he had repulsed with grenades of tear-gas, without any casualties. His villagers had been terrorized with the masks when first trying them on, but soon learned what they were for—and were ready to worship the engineer when their enemies ran back through the jungle—blinded, dazed, thinking they had run up against a band of spirits or demons. As Hammond put it one evening, over their cigars:

"Sam—I feel kinda responsible for those boys up yonder!" (Bates had now joined Barton and Williams.) "Barton didn't exaggerate what they'd be up against—and I don't believe they've struck anything like the worst of it, yet. Darned if I like to go away before they come out again!"

MEANWHILE, at the beginning of the fourth week, the expedition had penetrated about a hundred and sixty miles from the coast and was among the foot-

hills of the great mountain range which extends, barring several breaks, the whole length of the island. In three different localities, on the way up, Barton had been tempted to stake out a big claim for his backers, make careful surveys and call it a job. In each one there were indications of rich alluvial-gold deposits in the rapids of various creeks, together with outcrops of rock which from a casual examination appeared to contain both royal metals and precious stones—that is, if the area could be worked on a large scale, there were evidences of sufficient mineral deposits to make it, apparently, a paying proposition. But if any reliance at all could be placed upon the story and rough outline-map of Gunning's derelict, the section he had described must be a freak of nature in its concentration of mineral value. According to his last observations, they were now within two or three miles of the 141st meridian. By maintaining a parallel course to it up the mountains, due south, they would very shortly come to the valley which had been described—if it existed.

As they were smoking, after supper, Barton sounded out his companions in order to test their sense of observation and get their ideas as to farther penetration.

"Williams, I had some idea, after that first brush with the brutes, that they'd keep dogging us right along up—keeping out of sight and hearing in the jungle, but tagging along and watching for a chance to rush us. What's your impression?"

"Nothing to it! Both of those gangs that lit into us got the scare of their lives from our tear-gas. The ones who came back for more, and got mustard-gas are rotting back there in the jungle. We're safe enough as far as natives are concerned! The ones who got away will carry the news!"

"What do *you* think, Fred?"—to the quiet but efficient Bates.

"Seems to me Williams is too sure. We're practically surrounded right now—have been for the last two days. And it's an entirely different crowd from those who attacked us on the lower ground. *They* may not interfere with us immediately unless their spirit-doctors get them worked up to a pitch of reckless frenzy. But I'd say this lot up in the mountains have intelligence enough to be more dangerous. Chances are, they know nothing at all about us or our scraps with the other tribes. We're strangers they probably think may be good fighters. We're moving along in such a fool unguarded way, according to their ideas, that we can't be a war-party out to attack *them*. Got some business of our own—they can't see what it is—stalling along to find out before starting anything. Probably they've never seen a white man before, but I reckon we look as if we'd be good eating—and that's where we interest 'em a lot!"

Williams had listened with a sneering smile around his mouth.

"Gee, Bates, you're the old original boy sleuth, aint you! Where do you get all this dope about our being surrounded? There aint been a sign or sound of anything like that, far as I can see!"

"I reckon you're plumb short-sighted in some ways, Williams. Have you heard any monkeys cussin' at us, yesterday or today? Had to dodge any nuts, or bread-fruit, or jack-fruit, they were throwing down? Have we flushed any birds as we came along? Egrets—pheasants—parrakeets? All those little folks have been sticking around until we were almost on top of them, because we're different from anyone they've seen before—because we make a noise as we go, which arouses more curiosity than fear in them. But they've known the jungle-natives as enemies for centuries, known what deadly marksmen they are with poisoned darts out of their blow-guns—with bows and arrows, spears, throwing-clubs. And when the brownies come sneaking through the jungle, all these little critters hide—keep their mouths shut—keep so damn still that you can't tell 'em from the trees or bush or vines and creepers. My suggestion is to put on our gas-masks right now—we can thank Barton for making us get accustomed to wearing the steel-screening all the time. Then—I'd get the blowers limbered up and shoot at least one flask of mustard-gas into the jungle on four sides of us—pushing on with our flashlights until we can camp for the night somewhere beyond the spread of the fumes."

BARTON tapped the ashes out of his pipe and gave low, brisk orders to carry out the mechanic's suggestions.

"Williams," he observed, "this is one more case where Fred has put it all over you! If you go any farther with us, it may result in our whole crowd being wiped out just because you can't seem to keep your eyes open and learn what *has* to be

learned if one keeps the breath of life in him! As soon as we've scared this lot of savages off, it'll be safer for you back in charge of Number Three Camp. I think the brownies got a lesson there which ought to make the trail between it and the coast fairly safe for a while. You can pan for yourself a nice little stake in gold-dust and nuggets from that creek, and keep the supply-relays moving on up to us. I don't think we'll have to go much farther—but we'll need a lot more of the gas as soon as you can hurry it along. Chow we *can* shoot or pick from the trees if we run short—but I don't care about going a mile without plenty of the gas for emergencies!"

TEN minutes later four of the villagers—their mouths and noses protected with tightly fitting masks—were blowing a thick smudge from the nozzles of as many flasks, with hand-bellows, into the jungle which surrounded the party. In another moment or two choking coughs echoed through the undergrowth—and there was a swishing among the bush and creepers as frantic, panic-stricken figures crashed through to reach a spot where they could breathe—a dull jarring of the ground, where they fell in the attempt. Then with their flash-lamps, Barton and his party of twenty pushed through at a more leisurely pace to where they could sleep in safety. Including his constantly moving relays of natives in pairs, the expedition numbered sixty-five, all told.

In the morning, Williams took the back-trail with a couple of men,—after the arrival of two from the previous camp, with supplies,—and one of his native companions was the bearer of a note to Hammond, if the yacht was still at the coast-base, or the steamer-master, if not. It stated in carefully worded terms that Williams had been placed in charge of Number Three Camp in order to make sure that gas and supplies came through regularly *without fail.* Either the millionaire or the ship-master was quick-witted enough to read a good deal more than this between the lines and take extra precautions which did not depend in any way upon Williams' efficiency. And the villagers—being very far from as stupid as an inexperienced "white" might have thought from their looks—passed the word among themselves that that "Barton Fella" must get what he wanted, even if some of them were killed in pushing it through to him.

FIVE days later the chief and Bates came to the rim of a deep valley of the higher range, into which they had some difficulty in descending. At the upper end was a small lake, its outlet trickling along down as a creek, thirty feet wide, and disappearing at the lower end into an underground cavern which seemed to honeycomb the slope over which they had climbed to reach the place. Just inside the mouth of this cavern a vein of white quartz, apparently fifteen feet thick, was impregnated with gold to such an extent that, in a fragment which Barton knocked off and smashed with his hatchet, he obtained a piece resembling fan-coral as big as the palm of his hand. To what extent the gold occurred he could form no approximate estimate—but there was enough of the lode in sight to indicate an enormous sum and warrant a large expenditure to conduct mining operations in a wholesale way. Half a dozen riffles in the creek on its four-mile course down the valley yielded enough alluvial gold-dust in two pannings to indicate a fortune in that alone.

But as usually happens when Nature's prizes are stumbled upon by man, she tantalizingly protects them in ways which mean sure death unless he can get around or overcome them. The valley seemed to be alive with snakes whose triangular heads and coloring branded them as deadly species—was fairly swarming with fever-breeding mosquitoes and other intolerable insect-pests. Besides this, the first observation showed that the lake and the mountain-slope above it lay west of the 141st meridian, in Dutch Papua—though the portion apparently richest in mineral treasure lay within the Australian limits.

After studying the local conditions, next morning, Barton decided that in spite of the luxuriant vegetation which filled the valley, there were enough deadwood, dry grasses and creepers to keep a fire going until the greener stuff was scorched enough to burn; and he started fires at short intervals throughout the entire depression. In three days the valley was swept practically clean, with a pretty well scorched half-mile zone around the higher ground which hemmed it in—with the reptile- and insect-life obliterated. Eventually, of course, the lake and the occasional pools would breed the insects again, but not for some time; then other means could be used to eliminate them.

As soon as the ground had cooled suf-

ficiently to work in the valley, Barton rushed his surveying and mapping—with frequent observations to check up his triangulation and fix the exact line of the 141st meridian. He figured that it would be safe enough for the operating syndicate to drive a number of tunnels under the Dutch ground, and had no doubt that this would be done—but the claim he filed was accurately surveyed on the Australian side only. When he had gotten all the data needed, it was discovered that the stock of provisions was almost out, no relay of the villagers having reached them for six days. While they were speculating upon what could have happened, four men came in, exhausted from forced marches over double the usual distances—bringing with them but a scanty addition to the supplies and but three more flasks of the gas.

They explained that Williams had talked of expecting an attack in force upon his camp at any moment, and had commandeered practically everything that had come up from the coast for the expedition. When two of the head-men among the villagers begged to go on with supplies which they knew Barton would be needing, Williams had brutally knocked them down and thrashed them until they could hardly stand—which resulted in four of them sneaking up the trail at night with all they could carry and pushing through at a killing pace to reach Barton. As they got the whole story, he and Bates looked at each other.

"Hmph! We sized up that bird about right, Fred! He's yellow! I remember, now, some of the gossip in the Engineers' Club concerning him. They said he had just about nerve enough to fight like a desperate rat if he got into a corner where there was nothing else to do—but that he was cocksure and careless where carelessness was simply inexcusable. Now, unless the brownies have attacked him down there, which is very unlikely, I don't believe he's scared enough to hold up the supplies on that account. How does it strike *you?*"

"Why—I'd hate to misjudge any man, but it looks to me as though he were trying to fix it so's we wouldn't ever get back. He figures that the farther we go, the more risks we run from all sorts of unexpected things. With a shortage of provisions and gas, the chances might be ninety-nine per cent against us. These men say he's been working like a beaver, panning gold-dust and nuggets for himself—which he'll take down to the yacht, presently, and put in the safe. It seems Hammond and Gunning are still there, waiting for us to come out—I kinda thought the excitement of the game might hold 'em, if we're not gone too long."

"Well—that's about the way *I* size it up! We've finished our engineering work—but so far, haven't taken the time to pick up anything for ourselves, as we're privileged to do in our contract—"

"We *ought* to get out right now, when there's a chance of pushing through on what supplies we've got—but do you s'pose we could feed ourselves a few days on what we can shoot and pick around here?"

"The natives can—even with the risk from using poisoned weapons. There are plenty of wild mangoes, breadfruit, cocoanuts a few miles down the mountains—monkeys, wild-pigs and birds for the shooting. Good water. Say we put in the afternoon hunting—see how much we can stock up? Blongo and Kutori will tell us what stuff is safe to eat. If we can keep healthy on the stuff we get, for a week, holding our regular supplies in reserve, we can take out of this place a darned sight more value in gold and precious stones than you might think. Of course, if the change of diet makes us sick, we're probably gone. But there are lots of small sapphires—rubies in matrix—opals—chrysoberyl—"

"All right! We can tell by tomorrow whether we're running into fever or dysentery from the stuff we eat—if it agrees with us, we can put in the week stocking up on our stake. And if we get more than we expect, I'm willing to contribute my share of enough to pay Hammond and Gunning for what they've spent—"

"That goes! I've hoped we might be able to do that, all along!"

DURING the week they remained, there had been things happening at Camp Three and the coast which would have started them hurrying back on the jump, had they but known of them. The more gold Williams panned for himself, the more suspicious he became of the natives he was holding there with him, and the more he tried in every way to intimidate them. Presently, when he had nearly two hundred pounds of gold-dust and nuggets, he dared not keep the stuff hidden in camp any longer—it was too big a stake to risk losing; and he made a forced trip to the coast with it. On the yacht that evening, when

his employers and Miss Doris in silent amazement watched him pour the stuff out on the saloon table, he became overconfident—boastful. Properly managed, he said, the dangers encountered by the expedition had been largely overestimated. Danger from fevers, of course—but these had been minimized by the protection afforded from insect-bites by screen-helmets and coats. The danger from native attack was much less, after their lessons from the deadly gas. He described in detail the wonderful jungle life with its chattering monkeys, parrakeets, egrets, butterflies, orchids, alligators in the more sluggish creeks, pythons coiled upon the lower branches of certain trees or in the thicker undergrowth—the luxuriant vegetation, the cool dampness of the jungle, always in semi-twilight when there was a blazing sun overhead. After an hour or so of this, he suggested that they accompany him back to Camp Three and see for themselves—but the two millionaires shook their heads.

"Not any for *mine,* Williams! Not until we run a single-track railroad up through there! I play a good round of golf, but I'm not used to hiking through jungle undergrowth with monkeys grabbing off my cap and pythons falling on my neck! It's all a question of taste, of course."

DORIS, on the other hand, was fascinated. She began to think that, while she never could really like the man, Williams must have more cool nerve than she'd given him credit for. Next day he filled her up with more of his glowing description—minimizing any risk which might be connected with a hike along one of the trails to the interior. Finally he suggested that she run up to Camp Three with him and four of the villagers who were her devoted slaves. (She had made herself more than popular among both men and women in the village-on-stilts over the lagoon,—petting the babies, making little presents here and there,—until any of them would have defended her at the risk of life or limb had there been occasion for it.) With such protection, it seemed that she would be safe enough—and the lure of the jungle had gotten into her blood. Knowing her father would veto *this* proposition on general principles, she put on a tough whipcord tunic and breeches, with leather puttees, provided herself with an automatic, smoked-goggles, gas-mask and hunting-knife—and had gone up the trail with the five men before her absence was discovered, leaving a note to reassure her father that she would be back in two or three days with a lot of jungle-stuff she wanted to keep.

Hammond immediately dispatched a dozen of the villagers and the supply-boat's mate with orders to bring her back at once, but they were in such a hurry that they didn't bother about masks, gas or screening-protection. The mate died from a poisoned arrow just after leaving Camp Two—and but four of the party got back alive, some time after the expedition returned.

After leaving the first camp, the girl began to realize that she had been foolish. She could have returned then, of course, with her faithful villagers—but her breed were not quitters, in which respect they differed from the Williams type, as she began to suspect before the end of the second day. She had started out for Camp Three, with the wonderfully beautiful and deadly things surrounding it—had no real intention of turning back.

Just what may have been in Williams' mind can only be surmised. He tried to be sentimental and flirt a little—but she perforated a snake in the trail, fifty feet ahead of them, with a single shot, and then examined her automatic so carelessly that he was afraid to go near her. That night, with a much keener sense of hearing than Williams', she became conscious of a rustling in the jungle all around them, and woke the man up with orders to get a flask at once and blow gas all through the undergrowth—but he had carelessly piled other stuff on top of the flasks and wasted time in irritable argument with her. Before he got started toward any sort of defense, the party was rushed and captured by fiendish-looking savages, their bodies glistening with coconut-oil, their faces smeared with ochre—bones and bits of shell thrust through noses, lips and ears.

How long they were tramped through narrow jungle paths, she couldn't estimate very closely, but she was under the impression that the clearing and huts of the savages were much nearer Camp Three than the engineers had supposed, probably not over a mile or two. Before they separated, in front of the chief's hut, Williams whispered:

"If you get a chance to escape, beat it for the coast with any of our own natives you can find! I'll watch for an opportunity, myself. Of course you understand

it's everyone for himself in a fix like this!"

The girl whirled upon him with a look of amazed contempt. The chief and three other disgusting savages looked him over with a more gastronomic expression—pinching his arms, legs and side, appraisingly. Then they took Williams into the large sacrificial-hut which occupied the open space in the center of the clearing. There was a horrible shriek, a bubbling groan—a low jabbering, as of men gossiping over some pleasant occupation. For a moment or two Miss Hammond felt physically sick, but nobody offered to molest her, and one of the women presently took her to an empty hut in the center of the row.

NOW—this had happened on the eighth night after Barton and his party had started on their return-trip to the coast, pretty well loaded down with treasure and supplies, making much better time over the well-broken trail than they had going up. So they reached Camp Three about ten in the morning, having been hiking since five, and found two of their own villagers concealed in a pool of the creek—just able to gasp out some account of the catastrophe. They couldn't tell what had induced "that fella Mary" to accompany "Tuan Willem" or why he had even dreamed of letting her come if the idea had originated with her—but they did know where the savages' clearing was located and the blind trails leading to it through the jungle. They had just strength enough to make this fairly clear, and then passed out while Barton and Bates were forcing stimulants between their stiffening lips.

Reasoning that the raiding-party would suppose they had killed or captured everybody at the camp, Barton figured that they would be off their guard, with no thought of being followed or attacked. So—with his best scouts among the villagers a few paces in advance, he and Fred Bates pushed along the blind jungle-trails as rapidly as they could without making any noise. Two months before, their inexperience would have made such scouting impossible, but they had become wise in jungle ways since that time—had learned how to slip through the undergrowth without making a noticeable rustle. In a couple of hours they reached a position back of the huts which surrounded the clearing and presently discovered that Miss Hammond was, for the moment, alone in one of them. Noiselessly to make an opening through the nipa wall of the hut and attract her attention was a matter of little difficulty—and the girl was quick-witted enough, her senses keyed taut by the danger she was in, to act promptly upon what she heard without screaming at its unexpectedness.

"Put on your gas-mask at once—very carefully! Then stroll back to this rear wall of the hut!"

It took but two or three minutes to enlarge the opening in the nipa sufficiently to pull her through—while streams of deadly vapor were being blown from the spaces between four of the huts, out across the clearing. At first glance, the cannibals at their horrid feast in the sacrificial-hut thought it smoke from burning thatch—but the first breath recalled what they had heard from the two survivors of that night attack six weeks before, and they started frantically running from the smudge into the jungle on the opposite side, but hadn't breath enough to take more than a few spasmodic bounds. The whole population of the village had been in the sacrificial-hut, with its partly open sides—and not one of them survived. The whole party had time to escape along the trail to the camp before the gas backed up through the undergrowth after them—which made Barton thank his lucky stars, for he had not been overconfident in mask-protection if it were a question of traveling several hundred feet through the worst of the gas.

ALTHOUGH constantly alert, they were not molested again on the way down to the coast—in fact, a tradition is growing in that section of Papua that men with bags over their faces and great goggle-eyes belong to a race of powerful demons who kill whole villages with their breath if one of their number is injured in any way. On the journey, Miss Doris had ample opportunity for comparison between Randall Barton and other men she had known. Fred Bates was of the same breed, but didn't appeal to her imagination quite so much. They had—obviously due to Barton's experience, nerve and executive ability—successfully carried out an undertaking which no man, white or brown, had been able to put through before. And for the present, they'd gotten enough of it. She didn't realize this until Barton's talk with her father and Sam Gunning, on the yacht—supposing, of course, that the two engineers would proceed with the development of the mining-section they had staked

out for their employers. The sacks of gold and rough jewels which the native bearers had carried down on their heads were dumped under the saloon table; then Barton spread out his maps for their inspection.

"That whole valley and some of the camp-sites have been staked out in your names, gentlemen—as you see. I'm fairly positive that nobody, white, black or brown, will disturb the signs and stakes in the valley, because without the precautions we took, I don't believe one white man in a hundred thousand could reach it, and we've thrown a scare into the natives which will last for some time. It's scarcely more probable that any of the camps will be disturbed. None of these villagers would go back to them without Bates or me. So all you need do is properly record my surveys with the authorities at Brisbane. Bates and I have decided to pay the whole expenses of the expedition out of what we've fetched down—there's a good deal more than you may imagine—and divide the rest between us. . . . . Now—hold on! Wait till I finish! We know the stuff is all ours, according to the agreement—but we'll have a whale of a stake left after footing the bills—and that'll leave us free to get off this job for the present, anyhow! If you form a development company, push a single-track railroad up through to that valley (you couldn't work it profitably or safely until you do), we may feel like considering a proposition to come back and handle the mining operations for you. But for a year at least, neither of us would go back over that trail for a hundred thousand dollars! We're back—alive, well, and with a big stake. Another time, under the same conditions, we might stay up there permanently. I've heard Papua called 'the Island of Heaven and Hell'—the name sure fits! Under certain conditions there are parts of it which are lovelier than a pipe-dream—but if there's any worse hell than its jungles under certain other conditions, I hope I'll never go there!"

MISS DORIS' interest and disappointment betrayed itself in unconscious familiarity, as she spoke:

"But Randall, what are you and Bates going to do? Where are you going?"

"Well—I don't know just what Fred has in mind, after we've safely banked our stake, here. He may settle down and get married—may be open for any good business proposition—or possibly, tag along with me if he feels like seeing the world a bit. I was heading for the Orient when your father and Mr. Gunning roped me into this—back there on the Isthmus. So I guess I'll take an Eastern & Australian boat from Sydney up to Hongkong—or one of the N. Y. K. steamers to Kobe. There's going to be a lot of big river and railway work up in that region—also a good deal of harbor-development—work that shows up a man's ability without the risks that there are in this Papuan game. And yet—mind you—there is enough fascination in what Fred and I went through to make us feel like coming back if operations are started on a big-enough scale to eliminate most of the risks."

Hammond took the engineers down to Brisbane on the yacht, as he wanted their assistance in filing the mining claims, and it wouldn't have been safe to ship the gold on the little steamer he had chartered. Then, when Barton and his companion left for Thursday Island, on their way north, they regretfully parted. As Doris stood on the yacht's after-deck waving good-by to them, her various experiences with Barton since their first meeting in the Canal were running through her mind with the vividness of a motion-picture. Presently she perched herself on the transom around the saloon-skylight and struck a match for the cigar her father had just stuck in his mouth.

"Dad! You and Sam are going straight home, through the Canal, aren't you?"

"Hmph! I'll say we are! Been away too long as it is! And if we float a development company for that mining proposition,—retaining sixty per cent of the stock, of course,—Wall Street is the place to do it. May take six months or a year before we're ready to commence work up there in Papua."

"H-m-m—well—after you get things running all right again at home—what then? What'll you do next?"

"Can't tell—that far ahead. What's on your mind, Dot?"

"Why—I was thinking that there's nothing to really hinder your taking the yacht out to China and Japan, cruising through the East Indies for a month or so. They say that's the loveliest cruising on the globe."

"Hmph! I s'pose you took Randall Barton's word for it? Eh?"

"A Game of Draw in Borneo," another thrill-filled exploit of Barton the engineer, will be described by Culpeper Zandtt in our next issue.

The Twisted Mouth

A grim little drama of the sort Maupassant might have written had he known the American West. You will not soon forget this story.

By CHARLES HARVEY RAYMOND

HE leaned over the dingy counter of the third-rate hotel with the old false assumption of self-assurance that masked his inward fear. *"John Huff"* was the name he scrawled on the soiled page of the register.

It was not the name he had acquired at birth. Long ago, circumstances had forced him to forsake that. It was just one of the many he had assumed in that desperate effort to wipe out his own identity—an effort which had extended over a period of years and which had come to be with him a fierce obsession.

The fat-jowled clerk looked up at him with a swift glance of appraisement. The first thing that impressed the clerk was his tremendous size and strength: bull-like neck, thick barrel chest, legs like wooden piles. He might be a lumberjack, or a ranchhand, the clerk surmised.

But a look at his face, and the clerk revised his first estimate. There was something sinister about the heavy lines of the jaw under the seven-day growth of dark beard, something shifty about the pale blue eyes beneath a forehead that sloped back, narrowing. The clerk knew life, the soiled and seamy side of life. He had glimpsed that furtive, cunning look in a man's eyes before. And he had no difficulty in arriving at a classification of John Huff.

Huff's eyes wavered. But the clerk's gaze, if critical, was impersonal. And an almost imperceptible shrug of his fat, sloping shoulders betokened an attitude of noninterference, of unquestioning acceptance of things as they happen to be.

"Six bits a night for the room," he said casually; "you pay in advance."

Huff put the money on the counter and went out onto lower Market Street.

A policeman, holding his wooden billy tucked under his left arm, and flapping with his right hand a folded newspaper against his uniformed leg, sauntered along with the crowd, halfway down the block. To avoid passing him, Huff crossed over, in the middle of the block, to the other

side of the street, dodging clumsily among the traffic, at a pace not faster than a fast walk. It would not do to appear in too great haste, with a policeman looking on.

He gained the opposite sidewalk and went on toward the ferry-building at the end of the street, rubbing elbows with the crowd. He had a feeling that he was being watched, that some one was following him—a feeling that had been with him wherever he went, for months. Without stopping, he looked back over his shoulder once, and saw that the policeman across the street had continued on his way.

He turned the corner, walking along quickly. When he had passed the first ragged block of waterfront lodging-houses, pool-halls and eating-places, he slowed down and looked back. Apparently no one was following him.

HE stepped off the curb to go around a ragged, straggling line of roughly dressed men that stretched to the edge of the sidewalk, from an entrance opening onto the crowded cubby-hole of a ground-floor room with a long wooden counter. On a bulletin board outside the entrance, papers that were tacked insecurely fluttered in the wind. A waterfront employment office, before which the jobless of the city were seeking work.

The thick neck of the man third from the end of the line caught Huff's eye. In stature this man easily dwarfed the average-sized men in the line behind him. He wore a plaid reefer jacket with a belt, and a high-peaked new felt hat.

Huff stood at one side studying this giant who waited there stolid and quiet, obviously at peace with himself and with all the world, without fear and without regret, looking for an honest job. And he envied the other man's peace of mind, an envy mingled with resentment that this man should be standing there his own master, free to come and go as he chose, without a single haunting fear, while he, John Huff, was doomed to stand trembling, as long as he lived, in the very shadow of the gallows. John Huff had a sudden insane desire to change places with this other man, to shift his own burden onto the shoulders of this placid giant.

There stirred in his mind a vague recollection of some fantastic and hopeless idea that had once occurred to him, and that had been discarded for other ideas as fantastic, as hopeless. The idea crystallized again, took definite shape. It had come to him, he remembered, from something he had read at one time, in a newspaper.

He walked closer to the man, stood for a moment near him, making a measure of his height, of his probable weight. He and this man in the line were about of a size—a coincidence which, in all his experience, had happened but seldom.

He walked to the corner of the street, turned slowly and walked back again, thinking. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a uniformed policeman directing traffic half a block away. Directly across the cobbled street were the wharves and long gray warehouses. Stevedores were rolling heavy-ribbed casks along one of the wharves; across the upper rail of the nearest steamer a deckhand, stripped to his woolen undershirt, was swabbing away at the deck.

Huff regarded him intently, eyes narrowing, jaw-lines tightening. . . . . Hongkong — Yokohama — Sydney — the South Seas! He had heard of these places, faraway, remote, where a man might lose his identity, for good and all, might cast off that haunted feeling of being spied upon, of being tracked down, hunted. Once there, he might be safe, free from the old fears, lost to the world.

A WATCHMAN, gray-uniformed, came out of the nearest warehouse, and stood near the big wide-open double doors, looking one way and then the other, up and down the waterfront. Huff's shoulders twitched, as though a firm hand, the hand of the law and of the hangman, had taken a grip on his back, between his shoulder-blades. He shivered. These steamers were watched; many a time when he had thought of leaving the country, he had thought of that. At the first slight suspicion, they would call the police, ask questions. It would be like walking into the front door of a police station, to try that.

Abject fear had him by the throat now; he had all he could do to keep his teeth from chattering. He had been a fool, he realized suddenly, to trust his fate in a city. He saw now the futility of his crazy desire to lose his own identity in the crowd—a desire bred of long fear-ridden nights, and days in lonely places. He had a blind yearning to get away, to hide in some lonely, obscure, out-of-the-way place—any place where he could be alone. Even if

he had to go back again to the ranch in the foothills, from which he had fled—And then he recalled bitterly that even the ranch offered no certain place of refuge; with all its isolation, it would not be safe for long.

The big man in the line had crossed the sidewalk, was on the threshold of the entrance to the employment office. With a sudden resolution, Huff walked up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Want a good job on a ranch?" he asked. "I got a place for a good husky man like you."

The giant turned slowly, disclosing slow-moving, sleepy blue eyes set in a broad face.

"Maybe so," he answered with slow deliberation. "They're laying off men in the lumber-camps. I've got to eat. What kind of a job you got? How much you pay?"

Huff noticed that the right side of the man's mouth was twisted upward and that he had a nervous habit of spasmodically twitching its muscles as he talked.

For several minutes they stood together on the sidewalk, discussing terms. The man's name was Knut Larsen. Finally they walked along the waterfront together, away from Market Street. Huff stopped once at an eating place to buy some sandwiches, which he carried away with him in a paper bag.

"We'll save time," he explained, "by not having to stop to eat."

BY the middle of the afternoon they were well on the way down the peninsula, Huff's small and battered automobile rattling along a smooth, paved highway, past level green lawns of country estates, where watering sprays threw jets of silver into the sunlit air, through occasional sleepy little towns.

By the time the moon came up, they were in the open country. They rode along for the most part in silence. Once Knut Larsen, rendered confidential by the glamour of the moonlight and by the strength of the raw whisky which Huff had offered him and which they had both been drinking, fell to talking.

"Huh, now, funny, aint it? Me on my way to a ranch! I aint never tried nothing else before but lumberjacking."

And then, as an afterthought:

"Any cows on your place?"

Huff answered him briefly, keeping his gaze straight ahead, as he had done from the beginning of the trip, to avoid the other man's eyes:

"Nope; my place's a vineyard."

"Vineyard?"

"Yea," explained Huff. "Nothing but grapevines."

"Oh, yea, sure; I oughta knowed. But I told you at the start I don't know nothing about ranching. I never done nothing but lumberjacking."

Catching a side glimpse in the moonlight of the other man's twisted mouth twitching spasmodically, Huff did not encourage further conversation. In silence he sat slumped over the wheel of the machine, his eyes on the road ahead, where the headlights threw a yellow, wabbling path on the dark pavement. Now and then he varied this procedure to glance back over his shoulder at the road.

"You keep lookin' around like you was afraid somebody was going to bump into you from behind," observed the lumberjack presently after a long interval of silence. "Or like as if you was afraid a speed-cop—or somebody else—was a-following you."

Huff's hand on the wheel trembled the least bit, and he bent forward still farther, so that the other would not see his face. Before he could frame a reply, however, the lumberjack, his eyes sleepy in the moonlight, went on, lost in reminiscences:

"Lumber-camps aint so bad, at that. Moonlight nights like this, f'r instance. Y' all lay down on the ground, on the pine needles, with a little fire burnin', 'cause it's a little chilly up there, in the evenings, even in the summer. And the moonlight comes on down, just like this here, only more like some one was pouring silver down on you, through them trees—" He broke off, his mouth twitching, and then after a long silence, began again: "Not on your life, I bet there aint nothing—ranching or anything else—that's got it on lumberjacking in them pine woods."

They left the pavement presently and jolted along the ruts of a dirt road that swung off between barren fields. Gray, gently rolling hills stood out sharply, no great distance away, in undulating contours against the blue of a starlit sky. John Huff stole a covert glance at the big man sitting beside him on the seat, straight and smiling, at peace with himself and with all the world; and his body trembled as he was shaken again with the urge of that insane, implacable desire to change places with this other man.

Then for a moment he had a curious, restful feeling that he, John Huff, was riding alone there in the moonlight, under the vast shelter of that starlit sky, and that this other figure at his elbow was, oddly enough, no stranger at all, but his second self, a sort of a queer duplication of his own personality. John Huff raised the flask of raw whisky to his lips and drank deeply. He had a weird feeling of trying to determine, in his puzzled, whisky-befuddled mind, whether, inasmuch as just one man was riding there in the car, that one man was John Huff, the fugitive from justice, or Knut Larsen, the placid lumberjack. And his first inclination was to return the whisky-flask to his pocket, without passing it on.

A JOLT of the car as it struck a rut threw the man's weight against his shoulder, and John Huff's mind cleared instantly.

"Here, Larsen," he said apologetically, "have a drink. Watching this twistin' road, I almost forgot you."

Larsen accepted the flask without comment. Apparently he had noticed nothing strange in the other's hesitation.

After a while the road began to mount, twisting and turning around the bare shoulder of a hill. It looked down upon the sprawling vineyard of a little valley, with two small wooden shacks at one side, lights faintly glowing from their windows. But this was their last sight of human habitation. After that the valleys lay uncultivated, barren, beneath them.

The moon was directly overhead when they finally wound their way around the shoulder of the last hill. Huff stopped the machine at the top of the road and sat a moment listening, the engine bubbling and boiling. Then he started again, slanting abruptly downhill on a winding, crazy road. He stopped with a creaking of brakebands before a small weather-beaten ranchhouse at the foot.

On the floor of the little valley three or four acres had been given over to the cultivation of grapevines. But the rows between the scraggling vines were overgrown with weeds. Far to one side an ancient haystack, part of which was covered with scraps of burlap, had fallen away raggedly at the corners. Nearer the house old junk that included a discarded wagon-bed and a great many odds and ends of rusting iron, had been piled. The mountain ranch, as the white moonlight looked coldly down upon it, had every aspect of having been deserted for years.

The lumberjack hesitated, looking expectantly at the door of the house, as Huff brought the chugging automobile to a stop and turned off the engine.

"Happen to be married? Got a wife?" he asked.

Huff shook his head, averting his eyes.

"Nope," he replied. "No one but myself to look out for."

"That so," said the lumberjack, satisfied. "Well, it's better thataway, unless you're sure you can settle down for good and all. Same with me."

Huff unlocked a rusty padlock and pushed open the door. Through a broken windowpane at one side the moonlight laid a faint gray path across the darkness of the room. The lumberjack went in first, stumbling awkwardly against a bench in the dark. Huff hesitated a moment on the threshold and then followed, a shudder passing through his frame. His hand shook as he struck a match and applied it to the wick of the oil lamp in the corner.

In the yellow, wavering light, the interior of the room was disclosed: a rough pine-board table strewn with old newspapers, in the center; along the side wall, a bunk with rumpled bed-covers—gray woolen blankets and an old comforter with a faded design of large pink flowers. A half-open door, hanging askew on rusty hinges, led through the opposite wall to the room beyond.

"I'll have that room in there," said Huff, motioning to the door. "You take this one." He had difficulty in keeping his voice steady; and his body shivered as if from extreme cold.

Larsen stepped to the window. He stood there, bent over, looking out, his finger moving aimlessly across the thick dust of the windowpane. He nodded without turning.

John Huff edged across, his right hand in the pocket of his coat. The lumberjack bent lower, his face close to the windowpane. Huff's hand came out of his pocket, slowly at first, lest the other should turn; and then, at the end, swiftly. . . . . For one brief instant, as he stood poised to strike, his eyes stared at that thick, bull-like neck, at that massive, sloping head, so remarkably like his own. And as he struck down with the short end of lead pipe, a quick, crashing blow, John Huff

had a ghastly sensation that, in some curious manner, it was his own defenseless head he was striking down at—his own life that he was wiping out.

The lumberjack, with a single groan, swayed drunkenly. His knees sagged from under him and he pitched headlong to the floor. John Huff, standing looking down at him with ghastly, staring eyes, could not shake off the impression that the twisted lip twitched spasmodically even after the body had relaxed its hold on life.

HUFF stopped at the bend of the road and looked down upon the scraggling acres, the dilapidated house, and the burning haystack of his mountain vineyard. Flames, fanned into little curlicues and darting tongue by the steady breeze, were eating greedily into the dry hay on one side of the stack, lighting up the small automobile huddled close at its base, lighting up the figure of a man slumping in the front seat over the wheel. As Huff stood looking down from above, the side of the machine caught fire; flames from the burning hay ran along its side, crackling in the wood. There was an explosion, and a sudden blanket of blue flame thrusting upward toward the sky, as the gasoline in the tank took fire.

Huff wet a finger and held it to the wind, to make sure of its direction. He nodded his head, satisfied. The wind was blowing away from the tinder-dry house down there at one side; the flames would have little chance of reaching it. It was working out precisely as he had planned. For in the back room of the house, where the police would be sure to come upon it, was evidence, positive and final, that it was John Huff who was dead.

He bent over for an instant to light a cigarette, and then, with a final backward glance at the burning haystack, went on rapidly, his powerful legs covering the dirt road with a rolling gait.

His lurching figure cast a grotesque shadow in the moonlight of the road ahead of him. As he plodded on, he watched this shadow, fascinated by it and, at the same time vaguely puzzled. The shadow was broad at its center, and dwindled away to a sharp peak at its far end; for he had exchanged clothes with Knut Larsen and was wearing the other man's thick reefer jacket and his high-peaked hat.

The raw whisky had begun again to take hold, befuddling his mind. And at the outset he had a curious feeling that the shadow cast by the moon on the road always in advance of him was not his shadow at all, but that of another man. As long as this feeling was with him, the shadow would seem a thing apart and separate, altogether independent of the movements of his lurching body—a thing sentient and self-sufficient, as though it were another person marching along with him.

But before long his body and the shadow seemed to merge and become one; and he was aware of an altogether soothing and pleasant feeling of physical release and freedom. How could there be two men on the moonlit road, when John Huff, one of the men, was dead? He began to sing to himself, in gruff, low tones, as he lurched along. As the first words of the song were formed, the upper right-hand corner of his mouth, twisted upward, began to twitch spasmodically, without his being conscious of the muscular reaction. From childhood, this twitching had been a characteristic of Knut Larsen's; it had never been a characteristic of John Huff's.

On the far side of the road, halfway down the hill, he stopped to drink deeply from the whisky-flask. Numbness settled pleasantly over his senses after a while. He went forward with head bent, eyes fixed unblinkingly on the shadow in the road at his feet.

Now he discovered that the shadow, bobbing along with him in a friendly, companionable way, invariably gave him a certain confidence, a certain welcome release from haunting fear. For the first time in many months he walked abroad without glancing back over his shoulder to see if some one was following. He had lost altogether the old feeling of being spied upon. Instead, a feeling of buoyancy, of lightness, possessed him. His dazed mind seemed to register one supremely important thought: he, Knut Larsen, was free.

THE shadow grew faint as the moon paled in the early-morning sky. There was a rattle of wagon-wheels some distance ahead. The day before, he would have stepped aside and flattened himself against a tree, hiding until the wagon passed. But now he kept stolidly on along the road with no thought of concealment. As the wagon lumbered by, he exchanged casual greetings with the tall, raw-boned young rancher who sat on the rickety seat. For some reason his mind could not pre-

cisely fathom, this commonplace exchange of greetings thrilled him through and through with a wonderful joy.

He turned off onto the main highway. An occasional automobile whizzed by. Meadowlarks rose from the brown fields in sudden, sharp bursts of song. He bought food at a little crossroads store and sat down under a live oak tree to eat it. A tall and ragged old man who carried a blanket-roll on his back came along and joined him. He talked volubly, without comprehending exactly what he was saying. He heard his own voice, indistinct, curiously remote:

"Lumber-camps aint so bad, at that. "Y' all lay down on the ground, on the pine needles, with a little fire burnin'. And the moonlight comes on down, like some one pouring silver down upon you, through them trees."

The old man nodded appreciatively.

He went on placidly:

"Not on your life, I bet there aint nothing—ranching or anything else—that's got it on lumberjacking in them pine woods."

The old man left him after a while. Crossing a ditch and going into an open field, John Huff lay down under a grove of eucalyptus trees and slept until late in the afternoon, the reefer jacket folded under his head. He awakened dazed, his head throbbing with great shooting pains, his mind groping for understanding.

For one blinding moment he knew again the horror of the old fear. Acutely conscious for that instant of his own personality, John Huff shuddered. He glanced nervously at the highway, and then, over his shoulder, stole a furtive glance at the fields. He half expected to see a man walking across to arrest him—John Huff. He had a vivid recollection of having unconsciously played the rôle, during those early morning hours, of another man—of the man whose charred bones must even now be lying back there among the ashes.

He had a feeling of emptiness that extended to the very pit of his stomach; and his tongue, dry and rough, was glued to the roof of his mouth. He groped for the whisky-flask in the pocket of his coat, and raising it to his lips, drank greedily to the last drop. He tossed the empty flask into the stubble of the field. He went forward along the highway, exhilarated, buoyant, his nerves tingling with electric sparks, the raw whisky burning a path into his empty stomach.

His mind became muddled again, bewildered, confused; there were intervals of startling clearness when white shafts of light seemed to stab through it. A single red-hot coal burned steadily into the base of his brain. He watched the shadowy, nebulous form, grotesque and wabbly, that lurched along at one side of him, keeping pace with him, conforming with his every movement. He repeated over and over again two names: "John Huff—Knut Larsen; John Huff—Knut—" How could he be John Huff, when John Huff was lying back there in the ashes beside the haystack, dead? He felt of the thick reefer jacket, of the high-peaked hat, and then looked long at his shoes, the great heavy, broad-toed shoes of a lumberjack.

After a while he felt a great weariness of all his faculties and grew tired of the game. He smiled fatuously, his mouth, twisted, twitching spasmodically, repeating over and over to himself as he stumbled along:

"I bet there aint nothing—ranching or anything else—that's got it on lumberjacking in them pine woods. I don't know nothing about ranching. I never done nothing but lumberjacking."

John Huff's desire to wipe out his own identity, to change places with another man, had been gratified. For the man in the reefer jacket who staggered along in the late afternoon sunlight knew in his own mind that he was Knut Larsen, knew that John Huff was dead.

PASSING through a sun-drenched little town of wooden store-fronts, he bought a paper and sustained his own belief in the death of John Huff. The front page of the paper told the story in some detail:

> . . . . . the body was found cremated shortly before noon beside a burnt haystack at a deserted mountain vineyard. Old newspaper clippings, letters and a photograph, found in the tumbledown house, had, according to the sheriff, established the identity of John Huff as Jim Barker, sought for five years for having shot two mail-clerks and wounded a third, on a train near San Antonio, Texas. The murders had been particularly brutal, Barker, a former trainman, having killed the two men when they recognized him in the course of his robbery of the mail-car.
>
> According to the sheriff, the great size of the charred skeleton, and a ring, and some scraps of clothing, purchased by Barker, alias Huff, in a near-by town a few months before, made certain the identification of the remains. An unsigned letter, addressed

to Barker, apparently from some pal in the East, which was found in the house, disclosed the fact that Barker knew Federal detectives were closing in on his trail, and gave the motive for the suicide. . . . .

He folded the paper, tucked it down into the pocket of his jacket, and walked on to the next town, one of the larger towns in the valley. He registered in a hotel on a side-street and went upstairs to his room.

EARLY the next morning he bought a paper and read a rehash of the same facts about the death of Jim Barker, alias John Huff, that had been printed in the paper the afternoon before. He sat for a while in the lobby, puffing complacently at a pipe which he took from the pocket of the reefer jacket, and talking with the dapper little clerk behind the counter and with two or three transient guests.

He drank three cups of black coffee with his breakfast and then went around to the autobus office and bought a ticket on the eight o'clock bus. He sat on the seat with the driver and confided to him that he was on his way to the lumber-camps in the North.

At noon the bus stopped for half an hour before a two-story wooden hotel in the bustling city at the end of the peninsula. He got out and purchased, at the hotel news-stand, the latest edition of an afternoon paper. The headlines caught his instant attention, staggering him:

POLICE SEEK VINEYARD MURDERER

The name Knut Larsen, scrawled with a finger-tip in the thick dust of a windowpane of a tumbledown house on a lonely mountain vineyard, afforded today a clue which, the police believe, will result in the arrest of the man responsible for the murder of Jim Barker, alias John Huff, whose charred body. . . . .

Police now working on the mystery scoff at the suicide theory. . . . . It is thought that Barker had a large sum of money, taken from the mail-car five years ago, cached on his vineyard, and that he was killed by some one, probably one of his pals, who knew of the cache. The murderer, according to the police, obliterated every trace that might lead to his detection, neglecting only the name which he had absent-mindedly scribbled on the dusty windowpane at some time previous to the murder, in all probability before he had decided to kill Barker.

The lines blurred before his eyes and he stood nervously crumpling the paper in his hand. For a moment his mind was a blank, pains shooting through it like sheet lightning. However, one instinct—the old instinct of disguise, of self-concealment—held with him. He left the news-stand hastily, turned the corner, and pushing his way through the crowd on the sidewalk, hurried on. Looking back once over his shoulder, he thought that he saw a small man wearing a soft crush hat separate himself from the group around the news-stand and follow him.

He turned in at a small store near the second street-corner. He had ordered a suit, shoes and a hat, and was changing from his old clothes into the new, in a small cubby-hole at the end of the store, when the small man with the soft crush hat pushed aside the curtain to arrest him. He submitted dumbly, without a struggle.

He said nothing at all during the long trip in the police car back to San Francisco. But in the district attorney's office that evening they forced him to speak.

"Might as well come clean, Larsen," said the district attorney dryly. "This man here, manager of the employment office on the waterfront, can identify you."

The manager of the employment office, a short, stocky little man with a fat face and weak, blinking eyes, stepped forward, gazing doubtfully at him.

"Sure," he said, in deference to the opinion expressed by the district attorney, "I guess maybe I can identify him. But he only came once or twice to my office looking for a job; and I didn't pay no particular attention to him. This here's serious business, putting a man's neck in the noose, and I don't want to make no mistake.

"This feller looks like him, all right," he went on. "Same size and build, and all that. Eyes look like him, too. Maybe it's him, but there's so many. I aint—"

At just that moment the prisoner broke his silence of the afternoon, opening his mouth to protest that there had been a mistake in his identity.

But even as he did so, the manager of the employment office spoke:

"Sure, it's him—it's Larsen. I know it now. There aint a bit of doubt."

He pointed excitedly at one side of the prisoner's face. And the district attorney knew then that his case was complete.

For as the prisoner uttered the first few words, the right-hand corner of his mouth, twisted upward, began to twitch spasmodically.

The enthusiastic reception accorded to these detective stories is well justified by their excellence. Hercule Poirot is destined to join the select company of Sherlock Holmes and Vidocq.

No crime had been committed; no untoward event had occurred. But the astute Poirot saw, in the mere advertisement of a flat at too low a price, the manifestation of a curious plot.

The Adventure Of the Cheap Flat

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

SO far in the cases which I have recorded, Poirot's investigations have started from the central fact, whether murder or robbery, and have proceeded thence by a process of logical deduction to the final triumphant unraveling. In the events I am now about to chronicle, a remarkable chain of circumstances led from the apparently trivial incidents which first attracted Poirot's attention, to the sinister happenings which completed a most unusual case.

I had been spending the evening with an old friend of mine, Gerald Parker. There had been perhaps half a dozen people there besides my host and myself, and the talk fell, as it was bound to do sooner or later wherever Parker found himself, on the subject of house-hunting in London. Houses and flats were Parker's special hobby. Since the end of the war, he had occupied at least half a dozen different flats and maisonettes. No sooner was he settled anywhere, than he would light unexpectedly upon a new find, and would forthwith depart bag and baggage. His moves were nearly always accomplished at a slight pecuniary gain, for he had a shrewd business head, but it was sheer love of the sport that actuated him, and not a desire to make money at it. We listened to Parker for some time with the respect of the novice for the expert. Then it was our turn, and a perfect babel of tongues was let loose. Finally the floor was left to Mrs. Robinson, a charming little bride who was there with her husband. I had never met them before, as Robinson was only a recent acquaintance of Parker's.

"Talking of flats," she said, "have you heard of our piece of luck, Mr. Parker? We've got a flat—at last! In Montagu Mansions."

"Well," said Parker, "I've always said there are plenty of flats—at a price!"

"Yes, but this isn't at a price! It's dirt cheap. Eighty pounds a year!"

"But—but Montagu Mansions is just off Knightsbridge, isn't it? Big handsome building. Or are you talking of a poor relation of the same name stuck in the slums somewhere?"

"No, it's the Knightsbridge one. That's what makes it so wonderful."

"Wonderful is the word! It's a blinking miracle! But there must be a catch somewhere. Big premium, I suppose?"

"No premium!"

"No prem— Oh, hold my head, somebody!" groaned Parker.

"But we've got to buy the furniture," continued Mrs. Robinson.

"Ah!" Parker brisked up. "I knew there was a catch!"

"For fifty pounds. And it's beautifully furnished!"

"I give it up," said Parker. "The present occupants must be lunatics with a taste for philanthropy."

MRS. ROBINSON was looking a little troubled. A little pucker appeared between her dainty brows.

"It *is* queer, isn't it? You don't think that—that—the place is *haunted?*"

"Never heard of a haunted flat," declared Parker decisively.

"No—" Mrs. Robinson appeared far from convinced. "But there were several things about it all that struck me as—well, queer."

"For instance—" I suggested.

"Ah!" said Parker. "Our criminal expert's attention is aroused! Unburden yourself to him, Mrs. Robinson. Hastings is a great unraveler of mysteries."

I laughed, embarrassed but not wholly displeased with the rôle cast upon me.

"Oh, not really queer, Captain Hastings. But when we went to the agents, Stosser and Paul—we hadn't tried them before, because they only have the expensive Mayfair flats, but we thought at any rate it would do no harm— Well, we went there and everything they offered us was four or five hundred a year, or else huge premiums; and then, just as we were going, they just mentioned that they had a flat at eighty, but that they doubted if it would be any good our going there, because it had been on their books some time and they had sent so many people to see it that it was almost sure to be taken—"snapped up" as the clerk put it; only people were so tiresome in not letting them know, and then they went on sending, and people got annoyed at being sent to a place that had perhaps been let some time."

Mrs. Robinson paused for some much-needed breath, and then continued:

"We thanked him, and said that we quite understood it would probably be no good, but that we would like an order all the same—just in case. And we went there straight away in a taxi, for after all, you never know. Number Four was on the second floor, and just as we were waiting for the lift, Mary Ferguson—she's a friend of mine, Captain Hastings, and they are looking for a flat too—came hurrying down the stairs. 'Ahead of you for once, my dear,' she said. 'But it's no good. It's already let.' Well, that seemed to finish it, but— Well, as John said, the place was very cheap, and we could afford to give more, and perhaps if we offered a premium—a horrid thing to do, of course, and I feel quite ashamed of telling you, but you know what flat-hunting is—"

I assured her that I was well aware that in the struggle for house-room the baser side of human nature frequently triumphed over the higher, and that the well-known rule of dog eat dog always applied.

"So we went up; and would you believe it, the flat wasn't let at all. We were shown over it by the maid, and then we saw the mistress, and the thing was settled up then and there. Immediate possession and fifty pounds for the furniture. We signed the agreement next day, and we are to move in tomorrow!"

Mrs. Robinson paused triumphantly.

"And what about Mrs. Ferguson?" asked Parker. "Let's have your deductions, Hastings."

" 'Obvious, my dear Watson,' " I quoted lightly. "She went to the wrong flat."

"Oh, Captain Hastings, how clever of you!" cried Mrs. Robinson admiringly.

I RATHER wished Poirot had been there. Sometimes I have the feeling that he rather underestimates my capabilities. The whole thing was rather amusing, and I propounded the thing as a mock problem to Poirot on the following morning. He seemed interested, and questioned me rather narrowly as to the rents of flats in various localities.

"A curious story," he said thoughtfully. "Excuse me, Hastings. I must take a short stroll."

When he returned, about an hour later, his eyes were gleaming with a peculiar excitement. He laid his stick on the table, and brushed the nap of his hat with his usual tender care before he spoke.

"It is as well, *mon ami,* that we have no affairs of moment on hand. We can devote ourselves wholly to the present investigation."

"What investigation are you talking about?"

"The remarkable cheapness of your friend Mrs. Robinson's new flat."

"Poirot, you are not serious!"

"I am most serious. Figure to yourself, my friend, that the real rent of those flats is two hundred and fifty pounds. I have just ascertained that from the landlord's agents. And yet this particular flat is being sublet at eighty pounds! Why?"

"There must be something wrong with it. Perhaps it is haunted, as Mrs. Robinson suggested."

Poirot shook his head in a dissatisfied manner.

"Then again how curious it is that her friend tells her the flat is let, and when she goes up—behold it is not so at all!"

"But surely you agree with me that the other woman must have gone to the wrong flat. That is the only possible solution."

"You may or may not be right on that point, Hastings. The fact still remains that numerous other applicants were sent to see it, and yet, in spite of its remarkable cheapness, it was still in the market when Mrs. Robinson arrived."

"That shows that there *must* be something wrong about it."

"Mrs. Robinson did not seem to notice anything amiss. Very curious, is it not? Did she impress you as being a truthful woman, Hastings?"

"She was a delightful creature!"

"*Evidemment*—since she renders you incapable of replying to my question. Describe her to me, then."

"Well, she's tall and fair—her hair's really a beautiful shade of auburn—"

"Always you have had a penchant for auburn hair," murmured Poirot. "But continue."

"Blue eyes and a very nice complexion and—well, that's all, I think," I concluded lamely.

"And her husband?"

"Oh, he's quite a nice fellow—nothing startling."

"Dark or fair?"

"I don't know—betwixt and between, and just an ordinary sort of face."

Poirot nodded.

"Yes, there are hundreds of these average men—and anyway you bring more sympathy and appreciation to your description of women. Do you know anything about these people? Does Parker know them well?"

"They are just recent acquaintances, I believe. But surely, Poirot, you don't think for an instant—"

Poirot raised his hand.

"*Tout doucement, mon ami.* Have I said that I think anything? All I say is—it is a curious story. And there is nothing to throw light upon it—except perhaps the lady's name, eh, Hastings?"

"Her name is Stella," I said stiffly, "but I don't see—"

Poirot interrupted me by a tremendous chuckle. Something seemed to be amusing him vastly.

"And Stella means a star, does it not? Famous!"

"What on earth—"

"And stars give light! *Voilà!* Calm yourself, Hastings. Do not put on that air of injured dignity. Come, we will go to Montagu Mansions and make a few inquiries."

I ACCOMPANIED him, nothing loath. The Mansions were a handsome block of buildings in excellent repair, situated near Montagu Square. A uniformed porter was sunning himself on the threshold, and it was to him that Poirot addressed himself.

"Pardon, but could you tell me if a Mr. and Mrs. Robinson reside here?"

The porter was a man of few words and apparently of a sour or suspicious disposition. He hardly looked at us, and grunted out: "Number Four. Second floor."

"I thank you. Can you tell me how long they have been here?"

"Six months."

I started forward in amazement, conscious as I did so of Poirot's malicious grin.

"Impossible," I cried. "You must be making a mistake."

"Six months."

"Are you sure? The lady I mean is tall and fair, with reddish gold hair, and—"

"That's 'er," said the porter. "Come in the Michaelmas quarter, they did—just six months ago."

He appeared to lose interest in us and retreated slowly up the hall. I followed Poirot outside.

"*Eh bien,* Hastings?" my friend demanded slyly. "Are you so sure now that delightful women always speak the truth?"

I did not reply.

Poirot had steered his way into Brompton Road before I asked him what he was going to do and where we were going.

"To the house-agents, Hastings. I have a great desire to have a flat in Montagu Mansions. If I am not mistaken, several interesting things will take place there before long."

We were fortunate in our quest. Number Eight, on the fourth floor, was to be let furnished at ten guineas a week. Poirot promptly took it for a month. Outside in the street again, he silenced my protests.

"But I make money nowadays! Why should I not indulge a whim? By the way, Hastings, have you a revolver?"

"Yes—somewhere," I answered, slightly thrilled. "Do you think—"

"That you will need it? It is quite possible. The idea pleases you, I see. Always the spectacular and romantic appeals to you."

THE following day saw us installed in our temporary home. The flat was pleasantly furnished. It occupied the same position in the building as that of the Robinsons, but was two floors higher.

The day after our installation was a Sunday. In the afternoon, Poirot left the front door ajar, and summoned me hastily as a bang reverberated from somewhere below.

"Look over the banisters," he directed. "Are those your friends? Do not let them see you."

I craned my neck over the stairway.

"That's them," I declared in an ungrammatical whisper.

"Good! Wait a while."

About half an hour later a young woman emerged in brilliant and varied clothing. With a sigh of satisfaction, Poirot tiptoed back into the flat.

"*C'est ça!* After the master and mistress, the maid. The flat should now be empty."

"What are we going to do?" I asked uneasily.

Poirot had trotted briskly into the scullery and was hauling at the rope of the coal-lift.

"We are about to descend after the method of the dustbins," he explained cheerfully. "No one will observe us. The Sunday concert, the Sunday 'afternoon out,' and finally the Sunday nap after the Sunday dinner of England—*le rosbif*—all these will distract attention from the doings of Hercule Poirot. Come, my friend."

He stepped into the rough wooden contrivance. and I followed him gingerly.

"Are we going to break into the flat?" I asked dubiously.

Poirot's answer was not too reassuring.

"Not precisely today," he replied.

Pulling on the rope, we descended slowly till we reached the second floor. Poirot uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as he perceived that the wooden door into the scullery was open.

"You observe? Never do they bolt these doors in the daytime. And yet anyone could mount or descend as we have done. At night, yes—though not always then; and it is against that that we are going to make provision."

He had drawn some tools from his pocket as he spoke, and at once set deftly to work, his object being to arrange the bolt so that it could be pulled back from the lift. The operation only occupied about three minutes. Then Poirot returned the tools to his pocket, and we reascended once more to our own domain.

ON Monday, Poirot was out all day, but when he returned in the evening, he flung himself into his chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Hastings, shall I recount to you a little history? A story after your own heart and which will remind you of your favorite cinema?"

"Go ahead," I laughed. "I presume that it is a true story, not one of your efforts of fancy."

"It is true enough. Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard will vouch for its accuracy, since it was through his kind offices that it came to my ears. Listen, Hastings: A little over six months ago some important naval plans were stolen from an American government department. They showed the position of some of the most important harbor defenses, and were worth a considerable sum to any foreign government, that of Japan, for example.

Suspicion fell upon a young man named Luigi Valdarno, an Italian by birth, who was employed in a minor capacity in the department and who was missing at the same time as the papers. Whether Luigi Valdarno was the thief or not, he was found two days later, on the East Side in New York, shot dead. The papers were not on him.

"Now, for some time past Luigi Valdarno had been going about with a Miss Elsa Hardt, a young concert-singer who had recently appeared and who lived with

a brother in an apartment in Washington. Nothing was known of the antecedents of Miss Elsa Hardt, and she disappeared suddenly about the time of Valdarno's death. There are reasons for believing that she was in reality an accomplished international spy who has done much nefarious work under various aliases.

"The American Secret Service, while doing their best to trace her, also kept an eye upon certain insignificant Japanese gentlemen living in Washington. They felt pretty certain that when Elsa Hardt had covered her tracks sufficiently, she would approach the gentlemen in question. One of them left suddenly for England a fortnight ago. On the face of it, therefore, it would seem that Elsa Hardt is in England."

Poirot paused, and then added softly: "The official description of Elsa Hardt is: 'Height five feet seven, eyes blue, hair auburn, fair complexion, nose straight, no special distinguishing marks.' "

"Mrs. Robinson!" I gasped.

"Well, there is a chance of it, anyhow," amended Poirot. "Also, I learn that a swarthy man, a foreigner of some kind, was inquiring about the occupants of Number Four only this morning. Therefore, *mon ami,* I fear that you must forswear your beauty sleep tonight, and join me in my all-night vigil in the flat below—armed with that excellent revolver of yours, *bien entendu!*"

"Rather!" I cried with enthusiasm. "When shall we start?"

"The hour of midnight is both solemn and suitable, I fancy. Nothing is likely to occur before then."

AT twelve o'clock, precisely, we crept cautiously into the coal-lift and lowered ourselves to the second floor. Under Poirot's manipulation, the wooden door quickly swung inward, and we climbed into the flat. From the scullery we passed into the kitchen, where we established ourselves comfortably in two chairs with the door into the hall ajar.

"Now we have but to wait," said Poirot contentedly, closing his eyes.

To me, the waiting appeared endless. I was terrified of going to sleep. Just when it seemed to me that I had been there about eight hours,—and had, as I found out afterward, in reality been exactly one hour and twenty minutes,—a faint scratching sound came to my ears. Poirot's hand touched mine. I rose, and together we moved carefully in the direction of the hall. The noise came from there. Poirot placed his lips to my ear.

"Outside the front door. He is cutting out the lock. When I give the word, not before, fall upon him from behind and hold him fast. Be careful—he will have a knife."

Presently there was a rending sound, and a little circle of light appeared through the door. It was extinguished immediately, and then the door was slowly opened. Poirot and I flattened ourselves against the wall. I heard a man's breathing as he passed us. Then he flashed on his torch; and as he did so, Poirot hissed in my ear: *"Allez!"*

WE sprang together; Poirot with a quick movement enveloped the intruder's head with a light woolen scarf, while I pinioned his arms. The whole affair was quick and noiseless. I twisted a dagger from his hand, and as Poirot brought down the scarf from his eyes while keeping it wound tightly round his mouth, I jerked up my revolver where he could see it and understand that resistance was useless. As he ceased to struggle, Poirot put his mouth close to his ear and began to whisper rapidly. After a minute the man nodded. Then enjoining silence with a movement of the hand, Poirot led the way out of the flat and down the stairs. Our captive followed, and I brought up the rear with the revolver. When we were out in the street, Poirot turned to me.

"There is a taxi waiting just round the corner. Give me the revolver. We shall not need it now."

"But if this fellow tries to escape?" I objected.

Poirot smiled. "He will not. Just call the taxi."

I returned in a minute with the waiting taxi. The scarf had been unwound from the stranger's face, and I gave a start of surprise.

"He's not a Jap," I ejaculated in a whisper to Poirot.

"Observation was always your strong point, Hastings! Nothing escapes you. No, the man is not a Jap. He is an Italian."

We got into the taxi, and Poirot gave the driver an address in St. John's Wood. I was by now completely fogged. I did not like to ask Poirot where we were going

in front of our captive, and strove in vain to obtain some light upon the proceedings.*

WE alighted at the door of a small house standing back from the road. A returning wayfarer, slightly drunk, was lurching along the pavement and almost collided with Poirot, who said something sharply to him, which I did not catch. All three of us went up the steps of the house. Poirot rang the bell and motioned us to stand a little aside. There was no answer, and he rang again and then seized the knocker, which he plied for some minutes vigorously.

A light appeared suddenly above the fanlight, and the door was opened cautiously a little way.

"What the devil do you want?" a man's voice demanded harshly.

"I want the doctor. My wife is taken ill."

"There's no doctor here."

The man prepared to shut the door, but Poirot thrust his foot in adroitly. He became suddenly a perfect caricature of an infuriated Frenchman.

"What you say, there is no doctor? I will have the law of you. You must come! I will stay here and ring and knock all night—"

"My dear sir!" The door was opened again; the man, clad in a dressing-gown and slippers, stepped forward to pacify Poirot, with an uneasy glance round.

"I will call the police—"

Poirot prepared to descend the steps.

"No, don't do that, for heaven's sake," the man cried as he dashed after him.

With a neat push Poirot sent him staggering down the steps. In another minute all three of us were inside the door, and it was pushed to and bolted.

"Quick—in here!" Poirot led the way into the nearest room, switching on the light as he did so. "And you—behind the curtain."

"Si, signor!" said the Italian, and slid rapidly behind the full folds of rose-colored velvet which draped the embrasure of the window.

Not a minute too soon! Just as he disappeared from view, a woman rushed into the room. She was tall, with reddish hair.

"Where is my husband?" she cried, with a quick, frightened glance. "Who are you?"

Poirot stepped forward with a bow.

"It is to be hoped your husband will not suffer from a chill. I observed that he had slippers on his feet, and that his dressing-gown was a warm one."

"Who are you? What are you doing in my house?"

"It is true that none of us have the pleasure of your acquaintance, madame. It is especially to be regretted, as one of our number has come specially from Washington in order to meet you."

THE curtains parted, and the Italian stepped out. To my horror, I observed that he was brandishing my revolver, which Poirot must doubtless have put down through inadvertence in the cab.

The woman gave a piercing scream and turned to flee, but Poirot was standing in front of the closed door.

"Let me by!" she shrieked. "He will murder me."

"Who was it dat croaked Luigi Valdarno?" asked the Italian hoarsely, brandishing the weapon, and sweeping each one of us with it. We dared not move.

"My God, Poirot, this is awful! What shall we do?" I cried.

"You will oblige me by refraining from talking so much, Hastings. I can assure you that our friend will not shoot until I give the word."

"Youse sure o' dat, eh?" said the Italian, leering unpleasantly.

It was more than I was, but the woman turned to Poirot like a flash.

"What is it you want?"

Poirot bowed.

"I do not think it is necessary to insult Miss Elsa Hardt's intelligence by telling her."

With a swift movement the woman snatched up a big black velvet cat which served as a cover for the telephone.

"They are stitched in the lining of that."

"Clever!" murmured Poirot appreciatively. He stood aside from the door. "Good evening, madame. I will detain your friend from Washington while you make your get-away."

"Whatta fool!" roared the big Italian, and raising the revolver, he fired point blank at the woman's retreating figure just as I flung myself upon him. But the

*It is suggested that the reader pause in his perusal of the story at this point, make his own solution of the mystery—and then see how close he comes to that of the author.—*The Editors.*

weapon merely clicked harmlessly, and Poirot's voice rose in mild reproof.

"Never will you trust your old friend, Hastings! I do not care for my friends to carry loaded pistols about with them, and never would I permit a mere acquaintance to do so."

The Italian was swearing hoarsely. Poirot addressed him in a tone of mild reproof.

"See, now, what I have done for you: I have saved you from being hanged. And do not think that our beautiful lady will escape. No, no—the house is watched, back and front. Straight into the arms of the police she will go. Is not that a beautiful and consoling thought? Yes, you may leave the room now. But be careful—be very careful. I—ah, he is gone! And my friend Hastings looks at me with eyes of reproach. But it was all so simple! It was clear from the first that out of probably several hundred applicants for Number Four Montagu Mansions, only the Robinsons were considered suitable. Why? What was there that singled them out from the rest—at practically a glance. Their appearance? Possibly, but it was not so unusual. Their name, then!"

"But there's nothing unusual about the name of *Robinson,*" I cried. "It's quite a common name."

"Ah! Sapristi, but exactly! That was the point. Elsa Hardt and her husband, or brother, or whatever he really is, come from New York, take a flat in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. Suddenly they learn that one of these secret societies, the Mafia, or the Camorra, to which doubtless Luigi Valdarno belonged, is on their track. What do they do? They hit on a scheme of transparent simplicity. Evidently they knew that their pursuers were not personally acquainted with either of them. What, then, can be simpler? They offer the flat at an absurdly low rental. Of the thousands of young couples in London looking for flats, there cannot fail to be several Robinsons. It is only a matter of waiting. If you will look at the name of Robinson in the telephone directory, you will realize that a fair-haired Mrs. Robinson was pretty sure to come along sooner or later. Then what will happen? The avenger arrives. He knows the name; he knows the address. He strikes! All is over; vengeance is satisfied—and Miss Elsa Hardt has escaped by the skin of her teeth once more. By the way, Hastings, you must present me to the real Mrs. Robinson, that delightful and truthful creature! What will they think when they find their flat has been broken into? We must hurry back. Ah, that sounds like Japp and his friends arriving."

A MIGHTY tattoo sounded on the knocker.

"How did you know this address?" I asked as I followed Poirot out into the hall. "Oh, of course, you had the first Mrs. Robinson followed when she left the other flat."

"*A la bonheur,* Hastings! You use your gray cells at last. Now for a little surprise for Japp."

Softly unbolting the door, he stuck the cat's head round the edge and ejaculated a piercing, "*Miauw!*"

The Scotland Yard Inspector, who was standing outside with another man, jumped in spite of himself.

"Oh, it's only M. Poirot at one of his little jokes!" he exclaimed, as Poirot's head followed that of the cat. "Let us in, Monsieur."

"You have our friends safe and sound?"

"Yes, we've got the birds all right. But they hadn't got the goods with them."

"I see. So you come to search? Well, I am about to depart with Hastings, but I should like to give you a little lecture on the history and habits of the domestic cat."

"For the Lord's sake, have you gone completely balmy?"

"The cat," declaimed Poirot, "was worshiped by the ancient Egyptians. It is still regarded as a symbol of good luck if a black cat crosses your path. This cat crossed your path tonight, Japp. To speak of the interior of any animal or any person is not, I know, considered polite in England. But the interior of this cat is perfectly delicate. I refer to the lining."

With a sudden grunt, the second man seized the cat from Poirot's hand.

"Oh, I forgot to introduce you!" said Japp. "Mr. Poirot, this is Mr. Burt, of the United States Secret Service."

The American's trained fingers had felt what he was looking for. He held out his hand, and for a moment speech failed him. Then he rose to the occasion.

"Pleased to meet you," said Mr. Burt.

"The Mystery of Hunter's Lodge," another exploit of Hercule Poirot, will be described in our forthcoming June issue.

Mike Does His Duty

They couldn't fire old Mike, the Chief Engineer of the Tyee—and they were thankful they couldn't, one stormy night. This is the story of that night.

By PHIL B. WEST *And* LEMUEL L. DE BRA

IT'S been a long time since I felt the pitch of a laboring craft under my feet, and I'm afraid my old sea-legs would fail me in a pinch; but there never comes a sou'-easter boiling up with the dirty gray scud a-dragging the tree-tops that I don't think of old Mike Brosnahan, Chief Engineer of the *Tyee*, and that wild trip when Mike proved his right to the title of "The Man They Couldn't Fire."

The *Tyee* was on of those vintage-of-'seventy tubs you occasionally find batting around in the Gulf of Mexico coastwise trade even to this day. It was a composite affair with iron hull and wooden upperworks and not enough freeboard for a respectable horse-trough. She was about eight hundred tons gross. As for speed, it was rumored that she had once logged ten knots with Stout's Mountain coal. Her rate when I knew her, under Captain Youmans, was less than eight knots with a fair wind; and she limped around with a list to starboard like the poor old cripple she was.

Mike Brosnahan, queerly enough, loved the misbegotten old tub just the way some men take to a crippled dog. The engine-room crew hated the treacherous craft, but they loved Mike like a father. Partly because of that, but mostly because Mike was every inch a steamboat-man, he wheedled more real service out of the old *Tyee* than any other man who ever boarded her.

But there was one thing Mike couldn't do: he couldn't make the owner, Dave Irons, spend a dollar on repairing the worn-out engine. Mike had tried everything from blarney to threats, and failed.

We were taking on the last of our cargo at Panama City, Florida. Mr. Irons and his son-in-law, Weaver, were dining aboard in the main saloon. The colored stewardess was hovering around their table. I, the clerk, sat at a table near them.

In comes Mike. He was a big man, broad as a door and nearly as high. I noticed that his usually cheerful Irish face had taken on the look of a winter sunset.

"Stewardess," said Mike, "have ye a bit av string about the place?"

"Ah sho' have, Mistah Chief!" replied the colored woman, hurrying to Mike's side. "All kinds, sah. Now if yo' tells me what yo' want it fo'—"

"I want some string," said Mike soberly, "to tie that domned injine so it will hold together until I can get a pot o' glue."

IRONS and Weaver gasped. I saw Mr. Irons rise half out of his chair; but after a look at Mike Brosnahan's face, he sat down again. When Mike had gone, I heard Mr. Irons say quietly:

"Mr. Weaver, that's the end of him! I've had enough!"

"I seem to recall hearing that before," remarked Weaver sarcastically.

"Well, this time I'll fire him or sink the ship! I'm going to get a younger and cheaper man. I—"

"You can get a younger man and a cheaper man," observed Mr. Weaver thoughtfully; "but you'll never find a better man for the *Tyee*."

"It's my boat!" snapped Mr. Irons.

"True enough. But when you try to fire Mike, he'll tell you the same thing he always tells you: that so long as a man is 'doin' his jooty, nobody but a domned skunk—' "

"I've heard enough of that—and of Mike! Now, I have a scheme—"

Mr. Irons looked around, glared at me and lowered his voice. Now, one of the first lessons a man learns when he goes to sea is to mind his own business. I had learned mine years ago. I therefore paid no further attention to the two men, but finished my coffee and went aft to have a smoke. For the same reason I said nothing to Mike about what I had overheard.

By mid-afternoon the last bale of cotton had gone aboard and I hastened up the dock for my way-bills and final instructions. In the door of the little office I found Mr. Irons blocking my way.

"No hurry, Mr. Webster," he said. "The *Tyee* doesn't sail until four o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

"Very well, sir," I said, and turned away, wondering. However, since it was none of my grief, I hunted up my particular pal, the quartermaster, and we proceeded to make the most of the delay.

When the one daily rolled in the next afternoon, our passenger list was swelled by four additions. Two of them I immediately spotted as turpentine men. The other two puzzled me. One was a tall, gangling youth with a countenance like an abused Airedale. This fellow was introduced by the purser as "Mr. Ross." The other, a little, nervous chap with one of those disappearing trick chins, was presented as "Mr. Coyne." They were assigned staterooms opening off the main saloon.

As it was then nearly four o'clock, I hurried up to the office for the way-bills covering last minute local shipments. This time I found Mr. Irons in a most amiable mood. Also Mr. Weaver! As I gathered up my papers and turned to go, Mr. Irons spoke:

"Mr. Webster, you will deliver this to Mr. Brosnahan *after you pass the sea-buoy*. Understand?"

Here was a queer thing! I looked at the sealed envelope Mr. Irons gave me, noticed that it was addressed in his own inimitable scrawl, and crammed it into the pocket of my shirt.

"Understand?" repeated Mr. Irons. *"After you pass the sea-buoy!"*

"Yes sir," I said, and started back for the ship. But I didn't understand! If he had a message for Mike Brosnahan, why not give it to him at once? Why wait until the *Tyee* was some fifteen miles out of port?

HOWEVER, this also was none of my grief, and so I dismissed the matter. I stopped at the purser's office in the after deckhouse and left my way-bills. There I learned that Mike had left word that he wanted to see me at once. Since the Second was on watch at that hour, I knew where to find the old man. I hurried below to his quarters.

Mike was alone, sitting in the one chair, thoughtful-like. I perched on the edge of his berth and waited. The old man eyed me a moment in silence, then bent over and thrust a big paw beneath his pillow. Out came the ever-hospitable bottle.

"Mr. Webster," said Mike, "what do ye be thinkin', now, of this Coyne person?"

"You mean one of the passengers we—"

"The same," cut in Mike impatiently.

"I hadn't thought—"

"Then take this and ile up your thinker!" Mike cut in again, passing me a generous drink. "Manewhile, I'll inform ye that this Coyne person has already stuck his inquisitive nose into every part of the ship.

Do ye know what he is? You don't! Well, I'll tell ye! He's one o' them there young chaps that's spint six months larnin' navigation out of a correspondence school. I'll wager me month's pay he niver smelled salt water before; but that don't kape him from thinkin' he knows more than I've larned in thirty years o' sea-goin'."

I drank my drink and held silent; for I recalled suddenly the threat Mr. Irons had made. Then, as bad luck would have it, I leaned over to set down my glass—and that letter fell out of my pocket.

"Oh!" said Mike. "A letther for the old man, is it?"

"No," I lied, cramming the thing back in my pocket.

MIKE eyed me a moment, and the look that crept into his ruddy face made me forget that Mike's rule was "Two drinks at a time; no more, no less." I arose to leave.

"Mr. Webster!" said Mike. "Ye will set down and take your second drink. But first ye will give me me letther. I saw me name on it as plain as I see the lie on your face."

I saw I was cornered.

"Mr. Brosnahan," I said, "the letter is for you, all right; but Mr. Irons told me to give it to you *after* we passed the sea-buoy."

Mike jerked up. "That's domned funny. 'After we pass the sea-buoy.' To hell wit' old Irons! Gimme the letther!"

"Mr. Brosnahan," I said, "I'm sure you don't want me to disobey orders."

The chief looked at me a moment—and I looked at the door.

"That's right!" he said. "Orders is orders! Have a drink!"

I bent forward to take the bottle that Mike offered; but I never got it. Mike hooked with his left; his fist, the size of a picnic ham, caught me on the jaw, and the world turned red—then black.

When I opened my eyes, I was sprawled out on the bunk. Mike—and the letter—were gone.

I hastened out, making my way groggily. In the midship gangway I caught sight of Mike coming down the dock toward the ship. He was very calm; but again that winter sunset look was on his broad Irish face. I slipped back to his stateroom and waited.

Mike grinned when he saw me, and immediately produced his bottle again. "I hated to do it, lad," he said. "Ye know that, don't ye? But 'twas the only way. I read the letther and wint at once to have a conference wit' Misther Irons, but he saw me comin' an' departed me jurisdiction about three joomps ahead av me into the wilderness beyant the daypo. Not bein' wishful to pursue me jooty beyant the sacred precincts av me callin', I came back to me ship."

"That's all right about the way you got the letter from me, Mr. Brosnahan," I said, "but what was in the letter that made you go after Mr. Irons?"

"Ye will now take an Ould Counthry drink, me lad," went on Mike, ignoring my question, "—after which ye will l'ave me. Ould Mike is wishful to be alone wit' his thoughts."

I downed the half-pint the old man poured out for me, and left him alone. Shortly afterward, the *Tyee* steamed down the bay toward the sea-buoy. I remained on deck awhile; then, on account of my swollen jaw, I ate my supper in the seclusion of the galley. For the same reason I went at once to my bunk. That's how it came about that I did not know what occurred when we passed the sea-buoy. I did know, however, that the old *Tyee* was battling a rising wind and sea, a sou'-easter that already was washing her down from stem to stern.

IT was about three o'clock when I was awakened by a shock that nearly threw me out of the berth. For a moment I sat up, afraid that we had struck something; but I knew before long that what had awakened me was a huge sea that hit us. When another struck—squarely abeam instead of on our port quarter aft—I knew that we were off our course, that something was wrong. I sprang up and began dressing.

Suddenly the door burst open. Minturn, the quartermaster, fetched up against the washstand as the *Tyee* rolled violently to leeward.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Matter enough!" Minturn shouted back. "Get a wiggle on you!"

Minturn's agitation was cause for real worry. He and I had seen all kinds of nasty weather in the north Gulf; and I knew that the storm, bad as it was, could not be the sole cause of his alarm. I finished dressing and staggered out at Minturn's heels.

The main saloon was already a wreck. One of the long dining-tables had broken loose from its moorings—likewise the upright piano that customarily stood in one corner. With each pitch and roll of the *Tyee,* the heavy table and the piano played tag all over the place, crashing into each other, and both smashing up against the other table, then rolling back for another drive; through the broken windows shot tons of water every time a sea boarded us.

"That's sure trouble!" I shouted at Minturn above the roar of the storm and the smashing battle going on in the saloon.

Minturn halted in the shelter of the corridor between the staterooms and shouted over his shoulder: "Hell, that's nothing! Come on!"

A moment later we made our way down the leeward deck to the alleyway that ran athwartships over the engine-room and nearly over the throttle of the *Tyee's* one antiquated triple-expansion engine. There, to my amazement, I saw one of the passengers, the gangly youth with the disappearing trick chin. He was standing where, for so many years, I had seen the old chief, Mike Brosnahan.

"There," shouted Minturn, adding a curse, "is real trouble. That's the new Chief!"

"What do you mean?" I demanded, catching Minturn by the arm. "Where's Mike?"

Minturn braced himself, stared at me a moment.

"Hell!" he roared at me. "Didn't you know that Mike was fired, and the Second with him? That poor thing's been there since we passed the sea-buoy!"

AT once I saw through the game Mr. Irons had played. I looked again at the new Chief. In a solid rowboat in a quiet pond he might have been all right; but he certainly was up against it now. His face putty-colored with terror; he clung to the throttle, making awkward attempts to shut off the steam every time the *Tyee* rolled her screw out of water, which was every time a sea hit her; while the Spanish fireroom crew, working almost knee-deep in sea-water, cursed the new Chief in every language a seagoing man knows—which are several.

"Whatcha cuttin' her off for?" yelled Minturn.

The new Chief looked up, fear in his eyes. The disappearing trick chin made a movement as though he had tried to swallow something.

"The engine," he whimpered. "It will never stand the strain. Why don't you get Mr. Brosnahan, as I asked? Who is this man?"

"Brosnahan threw me out of his stateroom and told me that you and the whole damned ship could go to the devil!" Minturn shouted back. "Where are your oilers?"

"Sick. Both gone to their staterooms. Mr. Minturn, wont you please wake Captain Youman and tell him—"

"What! Wake that old Naval Reserve hellion about a little puff of wind? I'd rather drown! We'll try the old Chief again."

WE found Mike sitting up, dressed, smoking his short-stemmed pipe, and calmly reading a week-old New Orleans paper. Minturn wasted no time in preliminaries.

"Mike, I've brought Webster to back up what I say. You've got to take the ship in, or she wont get in."

"The bottle is under the pilly," said Mike, and went on with his reading.

"Mr. Brosnahan," I spoke up, "the Spanish fireroom gang are wading around knee-deep in sea-water. The fires can't last another hour. Coyne, the new Chief, hasn't got the guts to keep her turning over. He's afraid the engine will go to pieces under the strain."

"Let the domned thing go to pieces!" Mike bellowed at me suddenly. "We got plenty av rag on her. We can sail around till the sea runs down, then fix the enjine, just like I've done many a time. Only"—and Mike grinned—"tell that young lady at the throttle to see that none av the pieces go overboard!"

Minturn, steadying himself between the towel-rack and the foot of the berth, looked at me and shook his head hopelessly.

"Mike," I said earnestly, "I hate to think that you've turned the ship over to that correspondence-school sailor just because old man Irons wants to fire you."

"Mr. Webster," said Mike soberly, "I haven't decided yet whether I'm fired or not. But manewhile, I can't bring myself to harm the young lady that old man Irons put in my place. When we get to Pensacola, I'll tillygraph Misther Irons as to whether or not I accept his discharge."

"We'll never get to Pensacola," I argued, and a sudden violent shock as another

heavy sea boarded us made Mike look up at me with a new interest. "We're off our course, as you can tell. We're headed for Santa Rosa Island as fast as the damnedest sou'-easter that ever blew can slam us there. If we hit the green reef in this seaway, you know what will happen. Your old ship is lost unless you save her; and the chance to do it aint going to wait long."

"And that's the God's truth!" Minturn seconded me solemnly.

THE old man sat in sober meditation a moment; and I knew by the look on his face that he was feeling the sodden roll of the tortured old vessel, much like a doctor feels the pulse of his patient.

"Come on!" ordered Mike sharply. He made for the door with Minturn and me at his heels. Outside, Minturn left to advise the officer on watch of the change. Mike and I hurried to the engine-room.

"Misther Coyne," said Mike calmly, "will ye plaze take your domned knittin' and get to hell out av here!"

Coyne scurried away without a word. Mike yanked the throttle wide open, then poked his head in the fireroom door. Yells of glee greeted him from the sorely tried Spaniards. Old Mike—their old Mike—was back on the job!

Ten minutes later we had water going out through the auxiliary pumps, the siphons being clogged for some reason. Within an hour the fireroom crew was working on a dry floor. Then, old Mike passed in a full quart of his treasured Black Label.

Meanwhile, Minturn and I got Captain Youmans up and he took the wheel, righted the ship after a desperate fight, and headed for open sea. Daylight found the *Tyee* fighting her way inch by inch off shore with mountainous seas crashing over her forepeak. I can never forget that morning. What with the windward boats smashed to kindling, the ventilators twisted and crushed, the tall stack reeling drunkenly, and the old boat quivering like a stricken thing beneath every avalanche of green water, it's a miracle how we ever kept afloat. With all due credit to Captain Youmans, who, drenched behind the smashed pilot-house windows, kept the *Tyee* headed for sea, it was old Mike Brosnahan and his helpers, down in the reeking bowels of the vessel, who drove us out of that seething gray-green hell and saved the *Tyee*.

Nearly fourteen hours later, having missed Pensacola entirely, we docked at the foot of St. Francis Street, in Mobile. Captain Youmans at once held a conference with the company's agent, Williams—after which Williams filed a long telegram to Mr. Irons and another to Weaver, the general manager. Not long afterward I was called in.

"Mr. Webster," said Williams, "we have a very important matter we want you to take up with Chief Brosnahan at once. After getting our wire telling Mike's part in bringing the *Tyee* to port, Mr. Irons has decided to withdraw his discharge order. In fact,"—Williams glanced down at the telegram, and smiled,—"Mr. Irons is just as eager now to keep old Mike as he was to fire him, and he's afraid Mike wont stay. Do you suppose you can persuade Mike to forget the past and stick to his ship?"

"I'll try," I said, "but I don't know that I can do anything. Mike and some of his cronies have just gone down to the bar—"

"To have a farewell drink!" Williams cut in. "Hurry down there, Webster! Do your damnedest to get old Mike to stay with us. He's got a life job now!"

I FOUND old Mike and his gang lined up against the mahogany. Seeing me, Mike excused himself.

"Mr. Webster," said Mike, and again I saw that winter sunset look on his big face, "I have a bit av business wit' ye—afther which ye will jine us in an Ould Counthry drink. Ye will plaze write a tillygram to Misther Irons."

Then, before I dared ask a question, or mention the business Williams had given me, Mike dictated:

" 'Misther D. Irons, Panama City, Florida:

" 'Rayferrin' to your discharge order. Me conscience tells me I have done me jooty; therefore I will sthay on the job, and if ye don't like it ye can go to the divil.

" 'Very rispectfully, Mike Brosnahan.' "

So I sent Mike's "tillygram" just as he dictated it; and I never told him that Irons had already withdrawn his discharge-order. The story got out some way, with the result that thereafter wherever seagoing men gathered around to swap stories, our old Mike Brosnahan was always spoken of as "The Man They Couldn't Fire."

Mr. De Bra will follow this next month with one of his typical and fascinating Chinatown stories.

Even if you missed the first chapters of this splendid novel you can easily pick up the thread and enjoy to the full one of the best novels of the year.

The Amazing Dare

(What Has Already Happened:)

WHEN the *Fool-killer* ran away with Dare Colfax, it started big trouble—and an extraordinarily interesting series of events. You see, Dare was living with her inventor father and her mother and sisters on an island off the Maine coast. Her family had gone in the launch on an errand to the mainland, leaving Dare in charge, and leaving the hydroplane upon which Colfax was exercising his inventive genius (and which his family had with some reason named the *Fool-killer),* anchored outside.

Dare noticed a squall coming down the coast and went out to put the *Fool-killer* under shelter. She had trouble in rowing it, and ventured to start the engine—and only when the contraption went racing seaward out of control did she discover that the steering apparatus was out of order.

The storm struck very soon; for a time the *Fool-killer* rode it; and then, about a mile off the rocky headland known as Thunder Point, the hydroplane foundered. Dare was a good swimmer, however, and was wearing only her bathing suit; but it was heavy going in the rough water; and she barely had strength to make the inlet beyond the point two hours later, after nightfall.

The girl had always had a keen curiosity about this place, for the ancient half-ruined mansion there was inhabited by a wealthy and eccentric young bachelor about whom curious stories were told. But to meet him in such fashion! After resting awhile she climbed to the heavy door in the old tower —and from within came the racket of a drunken revel! Dismayed, she crouched in the shadow when the door was flung open and a man plunged out, then turned. "I've had my fill of the lot of you," he cried. "I hope you all kill yourselves and each other."

So it was that Dare met Perry Bridges. Disgusted with a party of undesirable acquaintances who had motored out to his place, he had flung himself outside, determined to leave the house to them and sleep on his boat. Dare explained her plight, and he at once took her aboard his little yacht, provided her with dry clothing and soon had her back to her island and her family none the worse.

Afterward Dare accompanied her father when he called on Perry Bridges to thank him, and found him extremely interesting—a world-traveler, a sailor, a soldier and, under a pen-name, a writer. His place was also unusual, and Dare's father was specially interested in a herd of alpacas which Bridges had brought from South America and was trying to acclimate.

Dare's friendship with Bridges progressed rapidly—to a point where she felt it wise

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The author of "Mile High," "Sea Scamps," "Pearl Island" and other fine stories is at his best in this novel of a daring girl's strange adventure.

By
HENRY C. ROWLAND

to compare him with her suitor, Arthur Dower, a popular fiction-writer and secret drug-addict; so Dare invited Dower for a visit at the island—but before he arrived, she had accepted Bridges' impetuous proposal. She did not announce the engagement, however.

Arthur Dower informed Dare that Bridges was in some danger from an old enemy, one Captain Ramonez, with whose drug-trafficking Bridges had interfered. Impetuous as usual, Dare went to Thunder Point in a motorboat late at night to warn Bridges. She found him absent, and was about to confide her warning to a note for him when she heard voices—and Ramonez with his companion Helen entered the house.

They were planning some sort of attack upon Bridges. "Aint he my lover, and the father of my chee-ild?" Dare overheard the woman say; and Dare failed to realize that she was only rehearsing a scheme of blackmail.

Presently Ramonez discovered Dare; she fought hard; but he captured her. Then he sent Helen to find Perry Bridges and demand money as Dare's ransom. Perry, however, appeared just as Ramonez was about to carry Dare off in the boat. He reported that Helen had been killed in a motor accident—and afterward in a bare-hand fight on the boat, and in the water alongside, Perry killed Ramonez. So again Bridges brought Dare home in safety after peril at Thunder Point. But that speech of Helen's she had overheard and misconstrued made her resolve to put him out of her life. *(The story continues in detail:)*

CHAPTER XIV

THE close and mournful tolling of an invisible bell (as if to signalize the passing soul of Ramonez) told Dare that they were halfway to the island.

From the position of this bell-buoy and the banded one that marked the sunken rock on the Middle Ground, Dare was able to reckon very nearly the spot where Ramonez had been sent to his accounting. This would be at the southeastern corner of the long ledge. She remembered now having been told that the lobstermen never placed their pots in this locality because of a strong ground-current said to flow straight out to sea at all tides—possibly for many miles, to judge from the force of the drift.

It struck Dare as odd, to say the least, that the motor should have stopped and Ramonez made his attack and been sent to bottom at this particular spot. Almost a stroke of destiny—or intention. She thought of Perry's peering backward under

his shoulder after turning his back as if to invite attack. Had it all been a ruse, even to the flooding of the engine with gas? Had this fatal individual in front of her now steering unconcernedly immobile in his dripping clothes desired and planned to dispose thus of his enemy, and chosen to make Dare a witness of his having done so in self-defense and without recourse to anything but his strength of body?

Dare could easily believe it of him now. It went with the reputation for deathly purpose given him by Arthur Dower and the ill-starred Helen, and the invulnerable sureness with which he had soared down on Ramonez, whom he must have known to be armed, and captured him. There had been no tentative skirmishing, no apparent preparation for either encounter. It was precisely as if a bird of prey had swooped and struck and vanquished some fowl of baser species that might be provided with weapons of its own, terrible to its peculiar prey but of negligible danger to the falcon.

This though assured Dare more than ever of the gulf that must exist between them, the hiatus in racial contact. Her reasoning did not take her far enough to reflect that if Perry had acted thus, then so had she defended herself as no girl of all the girls she knew ever could or would have done. She made the error of placing him as a man apart from other men of her knowledge and acquaintanceship, and herself as a fair type of the other members of her class. Instead of saying, "We be of one blood, thou and I," or admitting the comradeship of courage, she said to herself: "He belongs to the brotherhood of killers and bloodletters and I am a gentle dove."

It had always been thus that Dare had envisaged herself, blind to her sterner potentialities.

An overwhelming sadness enveloped her now. In a few minutes her brief dream of happiness was to see its image fade and its echoes die away. There would be no good-by's and there must be no retrospect. She would close the doors of her heart on Perry, not for what he had done, but because of what he could not help but be—a pagan, and a man of violence and blood.

DARE had not been thrilled by the demonstration of Perry's uncommon physical strength. Such exhibitions left her cold, and she enjoyed them only when associated with skill and finesse. But what removed Perry farthest from her now was the belief that he had summarily destroyed Ramonez, not on her account, but Helen's. It had to be laid to Helen's score, a retribution for having sent her to her death, dispatching her half-drugged to drive a closed car over rough, unguarded country roads on a black foggy night, and on such an errand—and she the mother of his child! Here was no lack of motive; whereas in her own case, there was none that Perry could be aware of. He could not guess what had happened in the tower. Dare had wound up her hair coming down the steps, and her dress showed no disorder. From Helen's dying words Perry could know only that they had planned to trick him by pretending to kidnap Dare, who actually was to have been taken back to the island by Ramonez, as soon as daylight came. So far as Perry could have seen, Ramonez was in the act of doing that very thing when he struck down at him from the misty heights. Wherefore the motivation of his act must all come from Helen's tragedy, and had no source at all in Dare.

And Perry had told her of how he had saved himself for such a maiden as herself! Not a very original stock property of the romantic lover, but like the lean cheeks and long black hair of the tragedian, more of a convention than a trick. Perry might be strong and brave and resourceful, but he was a born poseur. There was no lack of knightliness about him—and a lot of unconscious buncombe. A man can be honest in his posings when he poses continually to himself. Perry was archaic, a composite of *D'Artagnan* and *Don Quixote*, with perhaps a dash of Sir Henry Morgan thrown in. But Dare felt that whatever he might or might not be, one thing was certain; he did not belong to her own plane of civilization. (Ramonez, could he have spoken, might have disagreed with her.)

Nevertheless the rupture was beginning to pain her terribly, like a leg crushed off under the wheels of a train and the nerves so numbed that the hurt may not be greatly felt for some time after. Dare reflected that she would have to do something radical to achieve anything approaching a permanent cure. She would not admit the blasting of her life, and she had a disgust for the spectacle of the old maid with poignant memories. Better marry and go through the busy mill of wife and mother and mistress of a house and good-for-nothing servants, whether she liked it or not.

For the immediate present, she wished that Perry would put on an oilskin overcoat or something, and not sit there steering through the chill fog in his dripping clothes.

DARE was roused from these soggy speculations by the sudden rising of a dark wall ahead that seemed to tower like sheer cliffs. She knew it instantly for the island, uplifted by the magnifying fog. They were close in to the cove. Perry had "hit it on the nose," as pilots say. He sheered off, then stopped his motor. Dare's little boat drifted alongside the dory. Perry loosed the painter from the after cleat.

"Your landing is in there to the left," he said, "about three hundred yards away."

"I know," Dare answered listlessly. "This is good-by, Perry Bridges."

"That is no more than I expected, Dare. You sha'n't be bothered with me again. I'll be leaving soon. I'm sorry I smashed into your life. It was all a mistake. We belong to different worlds."

Dare nodded. "Good-by." She held out her hand. Perry grasped it for a moment but did not raise it to his lips.

"Good-by, Dare. God bless you."

Dare could not answer. She was fighting hard for the possession of herself, not of her emotions but the whole of her. Perry's closeness and the touch of his hand had unlocked the lid of her self-control, and it was holding only on the latch. The urge to fling herself over into his boat, into his arms, was overpowering. She wanted to be crushed against his chest and kissed and quieted. She wanted to be absorbed in him and to lose her identity in his, so that there would be a fusion of metals and a new compound formed, most of it Perry.

But she managed to hold herself, and was aided by the drifting apart of the two boats. Blind with tears, she got out her oars and began to row in for the landing. She did not hear the boat start, nor see it dissolve in the mist. That had not the importance of a final separation. This had come when she had fought back the impulse to go with it, out of her well-ordered world and into some sort of a blazing one.

Dare came presently to the landing, left the boat as she had found it, and went up to the house and to her room. It was half-past five and none of the household yet stirring. She undressed, put away her clothes, got into bed—and sleep mercifully claimed her.

CHAPTER XV

IT was noon of a lovely day when Dare awoke. She felt completely rested and refreshed, entirely normal. Perfect health can work this miracle. A brief mental review of what she had passed through brought no more than a profound sense of emptiness, and this was followed almost immediately by a fierce impatience at the thought that here was another day, and beyond it another and still interminable others, in which the same old tiresome things were to be got through, somehow. They had never seemed particularly tiresome before, but the drab prospect of them now was intolerable.

Dare contemplated this a little, lying comfortably relaxed. "There must be something wrong with me," she thought. "I seem to thrive on riding cheek to jowl with sudden death—in any horrid form, and preceded by no matter what! Nothing seems to jar me—not even cutting clear of Perry. It's as if I'd read about it in a book or seen it in a movie. And yet I'm generally known for about everything that's conservative in an epoch of girls that aren't."

Her bathroom door opened softly, and Elsinore's red head looked in. The rest of her followed, draped only in a bath-towel. "Twelve o'clock and all's hell," said she. "Papa's snorting around because nobody's awake, and he wanted to take us to Rockland to see the New York Yacht Club fleet come in, after we had inspected the alpacas. I forgot all about the alpacas, and so did you. Now it's too late to do both, and the sheol of it is—which *are* we to do?"

Dare stretched drowsily. "Neither, if you put it up to me. Is Arthur awake?"

"Only that and nothing more. At some unchristian hour I heard Papa fuming up the stairs, so I stuck out my head and suggested that we call off the Rockland trip and concentrate on alpacas. I told him Arthur had been sleeping badly and needed his rest."

"That was true enough," Dare said.

"Yes, but I wasn't thinking entirely of Arthur. I had in mind my erstwhile heart-whole unassailable sister."

"Elsinore, are you crazy?"

"No, nor deaf and dumb and blind. Neither are you, dear. I've always felt that when you did cut loose, the show would be worth watching. Go to it, with

all your arms and legs and things, old sweet. Maybe you'll take more interest in them now, as I do."

"What are you trying to say, you young —animal?"

"Oh, come!" Elsinore dropped on the corner of the bed, drawing the rolled back eider *couvre-pied* about her. "Why stall when the road is open and the running good?"

Dare sat upright. "Suppose you pretend that English is a foreign language, and you are trying to show how well you can speak it. Say something, and I'll tell you if it makes sense."

"All right, then." Elsinore gave a throaty laugh. "I'll be a sou'wegian, like my name. I ban t'ink you lofe Perry Bridges."

Dare shook her head. "That doesn't make sense."

"Oh, doesn't it? Then why did you pussyfoot over there with Papa to thank him for bringing you home and leave me behind? Why did you suddenly decide to encumber yourself for ten days with Arthur Dower when you've always said that you like to have people in the daytime but preferred that they go home to sleep? Because you knew he was a friend of Perry Bridges'. Why did you decide to stop here and make sketches for the church fair when it isn't for another three weeks? Why did you stop at Thunder Point with Arthur when you might have let poor Papa have had a good excuse to pass an afternoon with the alpacas? And above all, *why* can't you listen to what any of us are saying any more, but sit with your eyes focused on infinity?" She gave her sister a challenging blue-eyed stare.

Dare breathed freely again. She had been horribly afraid for a few moments that Elsinore really knew something—had heard the motor that morning and recognized its bark, then heard Dare as she came in. But here was only circumstantial deduction, clever but answerable; if she chose to answer. Dare decided that she did.

"I think, my dear but mistaken child," said she evenly, "that I had better clear your poor head of all this illusion. Your voluminous questionnaire should be stamped O. K., which stands for *"Only Kidding,"* by my single affidavited statement. I have made up my mind to marry Arthur Dower."

Elsinore's blue eyes showed mostly white. Her face grew pale with shock, surprise, and to Dare's own perplexity, a sort of horror. Then: "Oh, Da-Da—not really!" she almost wailed.

"Well, why not? You like Arthur."

"Oh, y-yes—but—"

"But what?"

"Why, can't you see he's not—not your kind? Not—not quite the same species of bird? And Perry Bridges *is*—so tremendously so. I thought of course it was Perry. It's just got to be Perry. You two belong. You're both such Olympians, so—so individual and *sui generis*—and clean-cut and —everything. There'd be a row, of course —not such an awful row, but still, a row. But what do you care? You could slip off."

DARE stared at her aghast. Here was Elsinore, voicing all the *pros* of a matter in which Dare had so definitely established the *cons*. There was something almost weird about it. Elsinore was no fool, and she had her instincts and intuitions. But it immediately occurred to Dare's mind that her sister was merely viewing Perry as she herself had seen him until the early morning hours of that day. And Elsinore, impulsive and a hero-worshiper, had always held exaggerated opinions of Dare's personality.

But Elsinore's discrimination between Arthur and Perry puzzled Dare. She would have expected her sister's choice to fall unhesitatingly on Arthur as a future member of the family. He was of excellent family and connections, easy and agreeable disposition, interesting, tactful, a celebrity in fact, and had the promise of a brilliant literary future. All of those assets were known to the Colfaxes, and Elsinore greatly admired the feats of strength that he sometimes modestly displayed.

And here arrayed opposite him was Perry Bridges, a man of mystery and sinister repute, son of a worthless local character, and heir to a rapacious usurer, a man of solitary life and no social affiliations he cared to mention, a nomad of the sea and recluse of the land, and author of a lurid book that had created some slight stir because of its raw depiction of primitive passions loosed in sanguinary strife. But apart from all of this, the chief objection to him from the viewpoint of conventionality was that of his being anomalous, as Elsinore had said of him, *sui generis*, an individuality unclassified and apart.

Wherefore it seemed to Dare that as rivals in the esteem of her family there could be no question of choice. And here now was Elsinore singing Perry's praises. Dare assumed a lighter tone and asked: "What have you got against poor Arthur?"

"You've said it," Elsinore answered promptly. "Nobody would ever think of saying 'poor' Perry."

"Then you think Arthur makes an appeal for sympathy?"

"No, not yet. But I should say that he might need some looking after before so very long."

"Why?" Dare asked.

Elsinore knit her brows, which, like Dare's, were straight and much darker than her hair and rather heavy. "I don't know—but I have a feeling that he's not altogether—"

"Well?"

"No, call it *sound*. He looks all right and talks and acts all right; but if he were a boat, I wouldn't buy him."

"That's not my extravagant intention," Dare said.

"Well, then, as a husband, I wouldn't take him as a gift. Arthur is a perfectly charming guest, and I think that as a husband he would keep right on being that rare little thing. He would be infallibly polite and painstaking, and continue to amuse you with his wit and epigram and thoughtful attentions, but I can't see him as the dominant he-male mate."

"That," said Dare, "is precisely what I desire to avoid."

Elsinore looked distressed. "You may think you do, now, but some day you're bound to feel differently about it. Somebody will wake you up."

"Yes," said Dare bitterly, "wake me up to the raw brutalities of life. Thanks, but I prefer my gentle sleep."

"Oh, darn it," Elsinore cried wrathfully, "that's all we do in this family, anyhow! Papa was right this morning when he said that sleeping sickness must be endemic on the island. I did have some hopes for you, Dare, but I guess you've finally caught it from Mamma and Randon. Maybe I'm infected too. I felt that way this morning. It's the result of the stupid, blameless, uneventful lives we lead. No break in the monotony, no exciting episodes nothing to stir our pulses out of their slow and rhythmic beat. Well, if that's what you like, I guess you'll find it as Mrs. Dower. He will never ruffle your serenity. When you've been married to him a few months, or hours, it doesn't matter which, you'll fold your hands and murmur placidly, 'So this is matrimony,' and wonder why people make such a fuss about it."

Dare smiled. "That's better than giving it the definition that Sherman gave to war." She leaned forward. "Elsinore, I'll admit that I felt for a while as you seem to about this cave-man rot. But I've thought it out differently. You can't have that without getting a lot more out of the same box of tricks, and it's a safe bet that you wouldn't like the rest. You see you are just as apt to be dragged out of the cave by your hair as into it, when the cave-man gets fed up with you. Besides, I'm not a wild creature, and I'd rather be a peacock on the lawn than a pheasant on the moor, for any gun to bag. So I think I'll marry Arthur Dower."

"But why pick on Arthur?" Elsinore demanded.

"Why not? He pleases me, and as you say he's not apt to prove a pest. I'm as sick as you are of this ultra-respectable monotony, and I don't like jazz. Arthur's circle is live and intelligent without being rotten, like the putrid pleasure-only set. *Entre nous* I've always felt that I might make a fool of myself some day with some sort of a troglodyte, so I'm just going to marry Arthur and forget it—if he still wants me."

Elsinore raised her eyebrows a little and her very clear blue eyes searched Dare's gray ones. "After repeated soundings," said she, slowly, "I think I am beginning to get the drift of your ground current a little. You have decided to burn your Perry Bridges—before crossing them. So I was nearly right."

"Nearly," Dare answered shortly, and throwing back the covers swung her legs over the side of the bed. "Now let's forget it."

Elsinore nodded. "Yes—let's. It seems a pity, but I suppose you know your card index. I'll take back what I said about Arthur. Sorry, Da-Da, dear—"

She leaned over quickly, dropped a kiss on her sister's cheek and fled out like a virtuous nymph pursued.

CHAPTER XVI

SUCH was the imperturbable character of Dare's self-command that she made no effort to avoid going with the others to

inspect the alpaca herd. Arthur Dower, looking better than the night before, proved his title to star entertainer during the quick passage made by the swift launch, and seemed entirely recovered from his *malaise*. By a considerable effort of will, and at the cost of a bad hour, from three to four, he had got through the night and this much of the day without another dose of the opiate, and as a reward of manful effort, Nature had helped him out toward sunrise by plunging him into a refreshing sleep. Nature will usually meet the one who really tries, a good deal more than halfway.

As a result, Arthur felt much better in his morale as well as physically. But he had been badly shaken to learn how his balance stood, and as might have been expected, his cheerfulness was subdued. This harmonized with Dare's feelings, which needed cheer but would have been rough-edged by exuberance. The picture of Arthur, benedict, drawn by Elsinore had been in complete accord with Dare's requirements, just covering the wall-space that she needed filled to the exclusion of another portrait that she knew was bound to occupy it if left vacant.

BUT Dare was spared the nervous strain of seeing Perry. The premises about the tower were deserted, and under the iron band on the door was another note. This one was to say that an old acquaintance of his had been killed at a railroad crossing while motoring over the road to Augusta, and that he had felt it his duty to see that proper disposition was made of the remains. Dare was momentarily surprised at the directness of this announcement, because the tragedy was bound to be reported in the papers, and all would know the identity of this acquaintance. But it was characteristic of Perry; and besides it did not matter to him now what might be his acquaintanceship, so far as the Colfax family was concerned.

The party returned to the island forthwith, Mr. Colfax disappointed but praising Perry's prompt response to what he felt to be an obligation of acquaintanceship. "It shows that he is a man of heart; and after all, that's the main thing," Mr. Colfax opined. "The more I see of Perry Bridges, the higher I esteem him. You can't tell me that there's not good blood there. He's got the hall-mark of a gentleman of the Old School."

Arthur was rather silent, and although Dare did not know of what the hotel clerk had told him about Helen's request for a room, she guessed that he was connecting what had happened with the presence of Ramonez in the vicinity.

A little later, when Dare and Arthur had gone for a stroll along the cliffs on the seaward side of the island, Arthur brought up the subject. "Do you know," he said abruptly, "I'm very much inclined to think that this person who was killed at the railroad crossing was Ramonez's wife, the woman I told you about, who called herself Helen Chomondeley, or as she was nicknamed, 'Helen Chummy.'"

"Why do you think that?" Dare asked. She had seated herself on a fallen pine; Arthur came to rest on the dry moss at her feet, leaning forward with his stick across his knees.

"Well, I can't think of anybody else that Perry would take that trouble about, or whom he knows that would be motoring hereabouts. I think she may have learned what Ramonez was up to, and was on her way to call him off, or to warn Perry."

"Why should she do that?"

"Because Helen wasn't a bad sort, with all her faults; and she knew that Perry had done his best to get her out of what he thought was a bad fix, even if he did refuse afterward to fall for her."

"How can you be so sure that he did refuse?" Dare asked.

"Because I understand his character. Of course, he may not always have been a Percival or Galahad, and you could scarcely expect it of a man like Perry, though he may actually have been, for all I know. But for one thing, I'm positive that he wouldn't take that sort of pay for that kind of service; and if in a moment of overwhelming temptation he had done so, then he would have stuck to her afterward through thick and thin."

"That's just what he seems to have done, if you're right," Dare said. "He may have helped her from time to time, though refusing to have anything further to do with her when he learned how she had tricked him."

"The argument is sound," Arthur admitted, "but all the same I don't believe that Perry ever had any intimate relations with her. He is such a complete and absolute idealist. He's got some pretty lurid views on the total extinction of utterly unworthy human life, especially where such lives become agents for evil; but that's only

a militant phase of his idealism. I remember once discussing with him a story that I thought of writing. There was a scoundrel who had a blackmail on a perfectly innocent girl and was trying to make use of it to get her in his power. The hero knew about it and got by chance a perfectly good opportunity to croak this blackguard, and nobody the wiser. But it would have smacked of assassination, and I hesitated about having him do it, for fear of spoiling my nice clean-handed hero."

"Spoiling him for whom?" Dare asked, staring at the sea. "For the girl or the reader?"

"Both. A fight would have been too obvious. He had practically to murder him. I've always felt that it was taking a cowardly advantage for an author to kill off his villain in a fight, though of course it's the classic method."

"What did Perry advise?" Dare asked, though well knowing the answer. Her heart was thumping almost painfully. She had not thought of this possible motive for Perry's act.

"'*Advise*' is scarcely the word. He said contemptuously that he didn't think the author mattered; but that if I wanted to interest gentle-hearted readers in a gentle-hearted hero and heroine, I'd better not have any killing at all, unless by the Hand of God, or reform my villain. But if I wanted sense and realism of an admirable kind, then my hero would have to act radically, no matter what came of it. I asked him if he meant 'gentle-hearted' disparagingly, and he said no, that all properly constructed people were gentle-hearted in some respect. So I asked what his was. 'Little children,' he answered. 'They get under my ribs, probably because I was such a lonely little kid.'"

DARE, breathing hard, felt something getting under her own costal arch. This would not do. She clenched her hands. Arthur, intent on his own thoughts, did not notice the struggle that was going on, but pursued his theme.

"If I am right, and it was really Helen who was killed, then that leaves Ramonez more poisonous than ever. He was really mad about her in his silent Spanish way. He must long since have despaired of her being true to him, because he could not have helped but know that she was more or less at the mercy of her inclinations of the moment. He probably had got partly reconciled to that, or made the best of it. But it's bound to lend more venom to his hatred of Perry. I think Helen was in love with Perry in a hopeless way, and Ramonez knew it. Helen was courageous and would have run any risk to keep Perry from being murdered. No doubt she may have held Ramonez in check all this time. So if she's dead, then God help Perry! A man can't be always on his guard, and Ramonez has all the patience and cunning of his breed. Perry really must be warned. We should have left a note, or something."

"Arthur—"

He looked up from the prodding of the moss with his stick. Dare's voice, and the expression of her eyes may have startled him a little. "Why, Dare—I'm sorry I've upset you with all this—"

"You haven't—particularly. But what if I were to tell you that I have fallen in love with Perry Bridges—or at least, that I had."

Arthur paled a little. "Well, Dare," he answered steadily, "I've told you what I think about him and his qualities. That stands."

"How about yourself?" Dare asked.

Arthur drew a deep breath, then let it slowly out again. "I came up here intending to ask you again to marry me, my dear. You must have guessed that. But you already know that I'm not a troublesome suitor. I might be, with some other woman. But you have always seemed so far beyond what I have any right or hope to be given, that it's silly of me to make a fuss over a refusal."

"Would you want to marry me," Dare asked, "if I were to tell you that I fell in love with Perry Bridges almost at first sight, and he with me, and that I want to marry you so as to put him forever out of my life and thought?"

"I should want to just the same, Dare," Arthur answered. "But I should feel in honor bound to advise you to wait until you were sure beyond all shadow of doubt that it would be better for you to marry me than him."

Dare reached over and laid her hand on his. "You are the salt of the earth, Arthur. Just that! It's what I need for my steady diet. I don't want Chili sauce and tabasco and other flavoring fireworks. I've always known my own mind pretty well, and I do now. This man had me stampeded for a while, but— Perhaps my vision of him is clearer than yours. I've got nothing to say

against his honor or good intention; but he's a pagan, not in religion but at heart, and has no place in my scheme of things. I want to keep him out."

Arthur turned his palm upward to clasp Dare's hand. He held it for some moments without answering. Finally Dare said:

"Do you think that's good enough, Arthur?"

"It's too good for me, Dare. I wasn't thinking of that part. I was only wondering at you a good deal. This act of yours is so opposed to the character I smugly fitted to you that it shakes my faith in the faculty I thought I had for getting the dimensions of the people I know. In that case, I may be wrong in thinking Perry Bridges such a knightly person, and you right in seeing something out of your solar system there."

"Suppose we assume that I do," Dare said. "What then?"

"Why, then I can understand your wanting to marry me. You feel that as long as you are unattached, there may always be the tug,"—Dare winced a little at his use of Perry's word,—"and while you may not distrust your power of resistance, you don't want the fret of fighting it."

Dare nodded. "That's it, precisely. But why do you think me acting out of character?"

"Because," said Arthur slowly, "I should have sworn that once you—liked a man that way, had been roused, nothing under heaven would have stopped you."

"Perhaps," said Dare in her still little voice, "it wasn't anything under heaven. It might have been something from some other place."

"What do you mean, Dare? Something that you saw or heard or felt?"

"Never mind, Arthur. But it was enough to stop me in full flight."

"Does Perry know that you—cared?"

Dare gave him her level look. "Yes. I told him so. I told him that I loved him and was ready to go with him to the end of the world. He could have had me that day. I would have got aboard his boat and gone with him anywhere. He told me he loved me, and that he would take me as soon as he had put his house in order."

Arthur stared at her, stupefied. "Does he know that it's all over?"

"Yes."

"And he accepts your decision?" Arthur's voice was incredulous, amazed.

"Yes."

"He lets you go—without a struggle?"

"There could be no struggle. He never asked for anything. He said in the first place that we belonged to different worlds. He did not mean that in a social sense, but in a deeper one—as if there was some sort of taboo that set us apart. I wouldn't admit the truth of that. But now I know that he was right. He has gone out of my heart, and I want my mind to be free of him also. I don't think I could go on as before, Arthur."

"And you think it would help you to marry me, Dare."

"Yes. Until I met Perry Bridges, you were the only man that I had ever been able to think of marrying at all. In the case of the others, the mere idea repelled me. I lost my head with him. It was a case of madness. I don't want a mad love. I want a sane married life, like other women. So if you want me, you can have me, Arthur. It isn't much, I know, but just now it's the best I have to offer. She looked at him with brimming eyes and a pitiful droop to the corners of a mouth that had always hitherto been firm. "I think I should make you a good wife, Arthur."

ALL the manhood that Arthur possessed responded in him to this plaintive appeal to it. He should, of course, have told Dare about the canker at his core. But in spite of painful proof he was not ready to admit that it was at his heart. He felt that with such an incentive as this, he could cure himself, and the determination to do so gave him strength.

So he rose up from the moss and seating himself beside her on the fallen log took her gently in his arms and kissed her tenderly. Dare did not grudge him her lips. She found even some pleasure in being held close and comforted, as might a little girl who has been grievously hurt and dazed. Her physical self no longer seemed to her that inviolable structure to touch which was a profanation. She desired to be a flesh-and-blood woman, and to run the curious gamut that is run in normal course by others of her kind. She gave herself gently to Arthur's wooing, and if she was not thrilled, at least she was not spent and shaken.

They decided then to announce their engagement immediately, and to be married a month later. Arthur had won the esteem of the Colfax family, though Mr. Colfax

may have held him rather lightly as something of a boudoir knight and fop. But there would be no objection to the match.

Elsinore met them on their return. This Viking maid glanced keenly from one face to the other, then said in the tone of one whose decision is reserved:

"Well, you've gone and done it, haven't you?"

CHAPTER XVII

IN his easy-going way that took paternal affection as much for granted as it might the tide and other natural phenomena, Mr. Colfax adored his daughter Dare. He had recognized from childhood the richness of her gifts, and his devotion to her had been a curious combination of fussiness and irresponsibility.

Dare reciprocated this love without realizing the closeness of their ties any more than did her father. They had always been companionable. As a little girl she liked to slip into his workshop and play quietly by the hour. Elsinore soon wearied of it and went out, or became distracting by persistent questions or meddling with things and was sent out. Dare was content to be in the atmosphere of creative effort.

As she grew older, Mr. Colfax would sometimes explain to her what he was trying to do, less perhaps to interest Dare than to crystallize the idea in his own mind, and because he liked to talk when not bothered by questions. Dare scarcely ever asked questions. The result of this mental sympathy was that Mr. Colfax formed the habit of talking to her about other matters, social or domestic or even personal. Dare seldom had much to say in response, but what she said was good. Mr. Colfax came therefore to find in his daughter the sort of intimate mental companionship that he might otherwise have felt the lack of in his charming but indolent wife.

For this very reason, his perturbation at Dare's engagement to marry Arthur, and to be wed almost immediately, injected Mr. Colfax with helpless dismay. There seemed nobody to whom he could turn in his trouble, for the simple reason that it was that. If the prospect had been pleasing to him, he could have talked it over with almost anybody—his other daughter, his wife, or even Dare herself. Or if it had been Elsinore's engagement that upset him, he could have discussed it with, or at, Dare.

But he was shy of Elsinore's slap-dash findings, held Randon to be about as much support as the floating leaf of a Victoria Regia, and had learned better than to go to his wife with a trouble that she did not consider in the light of such. Mrs. Colfax would make lazy fun of his misgivings, tell him that he was an old fuss-budget, which always made him cross. It vexed him to be called old anything, because old he certainly was not, in mind and body. And it irritated him to be called a fuss-budget because he so very often was that thing.

Mrs. Colfax had never worried about her daughters' choice of husbands. She reclined upon the cushioned platform that the offspring of two such finished products as her husband and herself could not in the natural order of things go wrong. They would not hunt the wrong sort of a quarry any more than well-bred, well-trained pointers would point skunks. Mrs. Colfax did not put it in just this way, but that is what she meant.

A combination of shyness and ceremony in Mr. Colfax, together with his shocked surprise, led him to receive Arthur's formal request for Dare's hand with an equal formality that, having no ground for refusal, resulted in his consent, with a stiff parental felicitation that sounded as solid as a drum. Arthur had to be content with that, and no doubt was. The ordeal over, Mr. Colfax felt the urgent need of blowing off his safety-valve. This being inadvisable upon the island, and the weather fine, he arose early the following day, ordered the launch and headed over for Thunder Point, with only Tim. Perry might or might not be there, but in any case Mr. Colfax wanted distraction, and he could walk up to the High Pasture and look over the alpacas, in which he now felt a proprietary interest.

PERRY was there. His little ketch was alongside the stone jetty, and he and Fosset were engaged in loading stores. Perry greeted Mr. Colfax in quiet, friendly fashion, then apologized for his absence when the party from the island had come to call.

"Who was the victim of this dreadful tragedy?" Mr. Colfax asked.

"A woman I used to know," Perry answered. "She was the wife of a bad character named Ramonez, a Cuban. In the course of one of my West Indian voyages, I learned that he was smuggling narcotic

drugs on a considerable scale into the United States. I obtained information about him that led to his being too closely watched to carry on with it. He swore revenge, of course; and his wife was on her way to try to blackmail me."

"Well, upon my word!" cried Mr. Colfax. "You mean that her object was to extort money to buy him off?"

"No sir; they would have known that was no good. This woman had learned in some way of my friendly relations with your family, and jumped to the conclusion that I had ambitions to become a member of it." Perry's eyes fixed on the troubled ones of Mr. Colfax, who was beginning to feel as if instead of freeing his high pressure he had stepped into a caisson where it was even higher. "They had concocted a false story about my being a narcotic-smuggler myself, and having had intimate relations with the woman, and their plan was to threaten furnishing you with proof of this unless I paid them a considerable amount of money."

"But how could they have managed that?" demanded Mr. Colfax.

"There was a certain amount of circumstantial evidence, due to a silly act of mine. And of course a woman can usually swear away a man's character in regard to herself without much difficulty. I should not have paid. But the whole rotten business proves what I've already felt, that a man who has lived the careless life that I have, really has no business to enter into social relations with families like your own."

"But my dear fellow," Mr. Colfax protested, "it's really not your fault—if—"

"Yes, sir," Perry interrupted, "it's my fault for having been fool enough ever to have got mixed up with this woman at all. I thought that I was rendering the sort of service that any man in my position ought to do under similar circumstances. I was wrong. On my word of honor, sir, there was not one atom of truth in any part of the story they threatened to tell of me. But since I'd got myself in such a mess and was liable to this sort of an attack, I had no business to take advantage of your kindness and accept your hospitality."

Mr. Colfax shook his head. "Perry, I think you're entirely wrong. To begin with, you did not thrust yourself on us, but we on you. I shouldn't have believed a word of this story. Without flattering myself, I think I can claim to be a sound judge of character, and I feel convinced that whatever your past life may have been, it has been clean and honorable."

THERE came over Perry's fierce, aquiline face that marvelous softening that Dare had once or twice observed, and been so deeply stirred by. The steely eyes glowed instead of glinting, and the hard lines about the jaw relaxed. "Thank you, Mr. Colfax," he muttered.

"This tragedy has upset you," Mr. Colfax went on. "But at any rate, there can be no more danger of annoyance from that source."

"No sir," Perry replied with a curious emphasis.

"How did you learn of the accident so soon?"

"By accident. Strange, how such things happen, as if directed from some central agency! My man McIntyre was in Augusta, attending a three-day religious revival. He is an evangelist of sorts, as I told you, I believe. It seems that his discourse made a big hit, and one of his admirers took him for a ride in his car. They were run into by some speeder and McIntyre cut and bruised. It was nothing serious, but they thought at first it might be, and sent me a wire from the hospital. I ran up there in the car, and finding that he'd be out in two or three days, I started right back, at about one in the morning. I reached this crossing only ten or fifteen minutes after the accident had happened. The woman was still living, and knew me and confessed the plot. She died in my arms, asking me to forgive her."

"How strange and dreadful! But don't you see, my boy, that this most providentially removes all chance of embarrassment to yourself? Did—eh—did anybody overhear her confession?" Mr. Colfax looked anxiously at Perry.

"No sir. I could scarcely get it myself, and she was whispering in my ear."

"Then don't take it so to heart—the whole unfortunate affair. Her scoundrelly husband will never dare bother you. Nobody'd believe him. It needs the woman to get any hearing in such attempts. Why are you provisioning your boat? Surely you don't intend to leave us—"

"I'm afraid I must, Mr. Colfax."

"But not on account of what you have just confided in me—and you may be sure it shall remain confidential. Nobody need know anything about it. There's no reason in the world why we should not con-

tinue our pleasant relations just as if nothing had occurred to interrupt them. Consider that nothing has occurred. There was really no reason for your telling me, though I feel complimented that you have. Also, it increases my regard for you. So come, cheer up—" He smote the young man genially, almost affectionately on the shoulder.

BUT Perry seemed to be in the grip of some sort of inward struggle. Totally unaccustomed as he was to such warm and trusting friendliness, the display of it unnerved him. For a moment the lonely little boy in him was uppermost. But the lonely man that was the product of him could not immediately thaw the ice that had been forming these many years. The pathos of it was that Perry did not actually know how to respond to such a kindly, ingenuous advance, from a man of Mr. Colfax's position. Mr. Colfax may have sensed this, for he said, earnestly: "You really take this thing too much to heart, Perry. Call it an act of Providence, and be grateful. I think you have shown a very fine spirit in undertaking the care of this unfortunate woman's remains. Few men would have done that. And fewer still would have told me what you just have. Suppose now you consider the episode as closed. And don't go away."

He seated himself on a packing-case. Perry, standing in front of him, erect and beautifully posed as the falcon about to quest, stared out across the water intervening White Island and Thunder Point. Then, he said slowly:

"I can't thank you enough for what you've said, sir. Your sympathy and trust in me—nothing could help me more, right now. But I've got to go."

"On account of what has happened?" Mr. Colfax asked.

"Yes sir. But not entirely on account of this episode alone. It's because I'm a man to whom such unpleasant things are apt to happen. I started my life with the wrong idea that to be interesting and exciting and romantic, it had to be in contact with violent people and events—like a boy who devours dime novels and sees a thrilling desperado in every cheap bragging tough, or an Arsène Lupin in the cheap, slippery two-cent grafters he may run across a little later. Dime novels would have been better for me than the sort I read and thought about."

Mr. Colfax nodded. "I have a weakness for that sort of literature, myself."

"A good many people have," Perry said, "but they've sense enough not to let it color their minds, but merely amuse them. There was nothing nor anybody to keep it from doing that to mine. I was a sort of professional schoolboy, raised like a kennel-pup, with no personal supervision. My old uncle was kindness itself, but he encouraged the idea of a spectacular career. He wanted me to be like his grandfather, who was a sort of picturesque and melodramatic figure, I imagine, and a near-pirate. I wanted to be like him, too. I used to look at his portrait, that one in the tower, wondering how to go about being such an admirable figure. But I went about it in the wrong way, by frequenting bad society to the exclusion of people like yourselves."

"Too bad," Mr. Colfax muttered. "The perpetual tragedy of orphanage, and the child's imperative need, which is a lovable home! But it's not too late, Perry."

"I'm afraid it is, sir. Past associations and experiences have unfit me for social intercourse with the right sort of people. The working of my mind unfit me for it. I'm not adapted to any society at all. You were perfectly right just now when you did me the honor to say that my life had been clean. It has, but that is not enough. Barring carrion-eaters, the life of a wild animal of prey is clean; but you wouldn't want one in your household. I've never done anything dishonorable, but it would take a court of law to decide whether or not some of the things I've done were criminal."

Mr. Colfax looked very much disturbed. "You mean, perhaps, offenses against such arbitrary laws as smuggling, or gun-running—"

Perry gave a bleak smile. "No sir. I consider smuggling to be dishonorable, if a man defrauds the customs of his own country. Filibustering depends. That's within my code if it doesn't make you a traitor. I was referring more to homicide."

"Dear me!" Mr. Colfax's slightly prominent eyes bulged a little. "I hope you haven't killed anybody, Perry."

"Never except in self-defense, sir. It's rather hard to get out of some tangles without. There are one or two ports south of the Tropic of Cancer where I might have to remain indefinitely if I were to land, or else dispense a great deal of money to entirely unworthy folk."

"Well," sighed Mr. Colfax, "I don't suppose that a man of your temperament can go adventuring about as you have without sometimes getting into a jam. But I must confess that it all sounds rather thrilling to me. I've a very considerable spice of adventure, myself; but so far, I've always had to gratify it vicariously. I am one of these map explorers and Home Guard soldiers of good fortune. This life up here, out off a dangerous coast in all sorts of weather, is a sort of mild excitant that helps. But I suppose that seems very tame to you."

"On the contrary, sir, I scarcely consider the fair weather here as safe to go offshore in. Almost the only times the dangers of the sea impress themselves upon me are when I'm skirting this coast, or coming on to it at the end of a voyage. I could be quite satisfied for the rest of my life to get all the excitement my system needs right here on Thunder Point."

"Then why in thunder don't you do it?" Mr. Colfax exclaimed. "Why go ramming off like this because of a silly, sentimental idea?"

PERRY looked at him intently. "Mr. Colfax," he asked in a quiet voice, "would you be willing to have me marry one of your daughters?"

"Yes, I would," snapped Mr. Colfax, his mind immediately focusing more on his present dissatisfaction than on Perry's demand. "I'd rather that any one of them should marry a clean-cut, straight-spoken, two-fisted man like you than the pampered asses they're all three engaged to."

Perry shot him a startled, puzzled look. Mr. Colfax, staring moodily out at the island, did not observe it. "Dare's gone and shuffled into line, now. I might as well admit that she's always been my favorite daughter, and I'd hoped better things for her. Says she's going to be married within a month. I don't know how I'm going to get along without her. She's the only one that ever understood me or sympathized with my honest efforts to accomplish something. I could stand it, though, if she was going to tie up with some young chap I thoroughly approved and liked, and who would be willing to share her with me a little. But this fat chunk Dower makes me sick. Typical society slug! I'll bet he has seen more cussedness in one season than you've been shipmates with in all your life."

HE glanced gloomily at Perry, who had leaned over to inspect a case of beef that had been dropped so that the corner was slightly stove and the cans dinted. Mr. Colfax was morosely silent for a moment, his mind dwelling on the catastrophe that had disturbed its tranquil, cheerful trend.

Mr. Colfax sighed deeply. "Better chuck those tins overboard, Perry. There might be a little leak to start ptomaines. Dower thought he had 'em last night, so Elsinore dosed him up with paregoric from my ship's medicine chest, and he went dodo until noon. Spoiled the run I had planned to see the New York Yacht Club fleet at Rockland. Somehow the fellow doesn't strike me as tough-fibered, for all his parlor stunts of strength."

Perry straightened up, his face a little turgid as if from stooping over. Against this suffusion his eyes shone like polished steel through narrowed lids. Even the self-absorbed Mr. Colfax must have noticed the peculiarity of his expression if he had happened to look at his face. But Colfax's gaze was fixed now dejectedly upon the deck of Perry's boat, littered with duffle of various sorts. "I'm hanged if I don't envy you, Perry. When anything goes bean-o, all you've got to do is get aboard the lugger and beat out for where the best is like the worst—or the worst is like the best. When did you expect to leave—because you really mustn't, you know. You are now about the only interesting interest I am apt to have in my blasted life." He gave a wry smile. "I mean the blasted in both the classic and the vulgar sense."

Perry found his voice with a little difficulty, like a fog-horn with water in it.

"Tomorrow night, I think, sir. They ought to bring McIntyre back in the course of the day. He will look as if he'd been mixed up in a moonshine-and-razor party, and briny air is good for healing cuts. I might as well tell you confidentially that I've got a very live interest down there that is apt to keep me all winter. Fact is, Mr. Colfax, I'm a sort of *Monte Christo*."

"What's that?" Mr. Colfax brightened up, as almost anyone would do at hearing such a statement. "Found treasure, or something?"

Perry nodded. "I believe I've discovered where a good bit of the treasure of the Incas came from."

Mr. Colfax sat bolt upright.

"Not really!"

"There were signs of the place having been worked a little, but a great many years ago, a thousand or more, I should say. These traces were almost obliterated, and so slight that it made me think the spot to have been known only to one or two persons, and that their secret died with them. It was on the shore of a little lake not on any map, and buried in the jungle. All the gold I found would be covered by water except for two or three months at the end of the dry season, possibly for only a few weeks. It did not appear high up. The matrix was a rotten quartz running through metamorphic rocks that formed the bed of the lake, but the gold veining was so rich that it was almost like finding nuggets."

"Were you alone?"

"Entirely. I had followed up a little stream, prospecting for bauxite. My only servant, an Indian boy, was making camp some distance down the ravine. I broke off and carried back all I could handle, and made a cache. I kept on doing this every day, lugging down all that I could pack, until the water rose over the place, about a month later. I had already solved the question of how to get it secretly away. I'm afraid you may be sore when I tell you about this."

"Never mind," said Mr. Colfax. "It may prove a counter irritation."

A FINE ripple went through Perry, like the shiver that one sees a bird give for the fraction of a second when touched in full flight by a charge of shot fired at long range. Mr. Colfax was as blind to it as he had been to other symptoms of the sort. Perry went on in an emotionless, almost cursory tone:

"On the way up, I'd passed a valley where I'd seen a herd of alpacas. These beasts had interested me before as a commercial possibility, and I was examining the wool of one of them when the owner came up and asked me if I wanted to buy some stock. I asked his price, and my boy said it was very cheap. So I decided to pick up a few on my way down and drive them to the coast and ship them here by a schooner that would be in the port for a couple of months, I thought. They were in full coat, and you know how voluminous it is. A fine, heavy shaggy thatch, and bunchy. That gave me the idea, so I told my boy Manuel that I had decided to buy those alpacas, but as we were going back by a different trail we had better gather them up now."

Mr. Colfax nodded eagerly. "I see. You wanted them to pack down the ore."

"Yes. It was practically pure virgin gold. We went down to the valley, a day's journey going up, and I bought fifteen—that was all I pretended to have money to pay for. I had them loaded with sacks of grain for their forage. We went back up to our camp, and the next day when Manuel went off to hunt in the jungle I wrapped the nuggets, for they were practically that in weight and value, in pieces of a blanket and stowed them in the bottom of the grain-sacks. I figured that I must have about seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of gold, and with the quartz attached something like six hundred pounds of weight. This made forty pounds burden besides the grain to each alpaca, but not much bulk to the ore. Still, it was too much. I had meant to secrete a good many of the smaller pieces under their wool, attached around them by cords, but I was afraid that wouldn't work. It might have bothered them when lying down, so that they would work it off."

"Precisely," Mr. Colfax agreed. "Your object was to keep your find a secret."

Perry nodded. "Yes, and I had no scruple about beating their government out of it. The Conquistadores looted it from the Incas, and the Republic looted it from Spain, and I was looting it from the Republic. Then I told Manuel that I had changed my mind and that we would go down the way we came. I decided also that since I was shipping alpacas, I might as well fill the schooner up; so going past the valley, I told my man that if he would drive down a hundred and fifty more in a fortnight, I would take them at the same price. When we got to the port, I loaded the feed bags into a boat and took them first alongside my own little ship, here, and got out the gold. Then I arranged with the captain of the three-master, himself a Maine man whom I knew, to take aboard the rest of the herd and bring them here. I cabled for money and left it with him to pay for the balance. So that, sir," Perry smiled, "is how I came to go into the alpaca business."

"Well, upon my word," breathed Mr. Colfax, "a most astonishing adventure! Talk about Yankee ingenuity! And so you are going back to do the same thing again?"

"Perhaps," Perry answered. "But I feel that my treasure is always there for the taking, and about as safe as it would be anywhere else. I hope, though, that it's not going to destroy your interest in the alpacas."

"Not a bit of it! On the contrary, the whole affair appeals to my relish for the unusual and bizarre. We'll call the alpacas a by-product. And I can quite understand your desire to have another go at it."

"Before I sail," said Perry, slowly, "I should like to have a talk with Dower. I've got a book manuscript I want to leave in his hands."

"Very well," said Mr. Colfax resignedly, "I'll send him over. Dear me, but you are certainly a versatile young man, Perry. I envy you your active interests. Well, I sha'n't keep you longer from your loading. But it is a relief to know that you are not leaving us purely on account of this unfortunate affair. I think now I'll stroll up and have a look at these most expedient animals. We might classify them as the *Auchenia pacos, auriferous,* or gold-carrying Alpaca—"

And chuckling at his little joke the kindly gentleman went up the steps.

CHAPTER XVIII

ARTHUR was considerably disturbed at receiving Perry's message. Perry might want to talk to him about a book manuscript, of course, but he might also want to talk to him about something else. To shirk the interview would be to offend Mr. Colfax, who would consider it discourteous, and to Dare it might appear unmanly. Arthur asked her what she thought about it. She made a weary little gesture.

"I don't see that it can do any harm for you to go. He seems to want to play the game. I told him before you came that I meant to use you for a measuring-stick to stand him up against. Well, it must be obvious to him that he loses the count. If you can help him any with his book, then by all means do so. If he had any ill-feeling for you, he would scarcely ask the favor. So far as I'm concerned, there's nothing much for him to say."

Arthur could not tell her what Perry might see fit to say so far as he himself was concerned. There was quite a lot that Perry might wish to say to Arthur, that nerve-racked young man opined. But he decided to go at once, and get it over with. Perry would scarcely murder him; and besides, Arthur was no physical coward.

"Please leave me out of it," Dare said, as he set off. "My book with Perry Bridges is ruled off."

Tim piloted Arthur over to Thunder Point, his instructions being to leave Mr. Dower and go on to town for the mail, then call for him on the way back. Arthur, on his approach, saw the ketch lying alongside the jetty with Perry and Fosset at work on her decks, evidently bending a new suit of sails. A little to Arthur's surprise, Perry greeted him in quiet, friendly fashion, with no hint of formality or constraint.

"Very good of you to run over, Dower," he said. "Let's go up to the house."

"'House' sounds very commonplace, Perry," Arthur objected. "If you are so picturesque as to live in a tower, why don't you call it that? You must feel very medieval living in this way, with your two faithful henchmen."

"I think I've always felt that way," Perry answered. "It cramps my style sometimes. About the worst thing that can happen anybody is to be an epochal misfit—behind your times, or ahead of them. It messes up everything."

"I'm not so sure," Arthur said. "I should say that I belonged exactly to this period, and yet I manage to mess things up pretty often."

"It doesn't matter particularly how much a man scrambles himself, Dower, so long as he keeps from dragging others into the frying-pan. I've found a perfectly effective way of preventing that."

"What?" Arthur asked.

"When it's in danger of happening, to clear out. That's what I'm in train for doing now. The expediency of a wide geographical separation cannot be overestimated. Sometimes I think it's better than the removal to another plane of matter."

"Yes," Arthur admitted, "it's a generous failing of humanity to speak nothing but good of the dead. A woman might manage to think kindly of a rotten husband in the grave when she would have nothing but abuse for him if he were in Paris, where good Americans are said to go when they die."

THEY came to the tower and entered. Perry closed the door, and having drawn a chair for his visitor, seated him-

self at the desk. On one corner of it was a mass of manuscript, neatly typed. Perry looked at Arthur and said:

"Here's the novel that I spoke about to Mr. Colfax. It's a sea-story of sorts, but rather better baked than the last, I think. Strange to say, it attempts a sort of philosophic humor. All the fun-rays that are split out of my spectrum were gathered by reflectors and thrown into it."

"I'll bet it's good, Perry."

"The proof of the literary pudding is in the selling. I had intended for some time asking you to godfather it. But that would be a friendly service; so, before requiring it, I must know if we are going to be friends."

"We are so far as I'm concerned, Perry. Of course, I see what you are driving at. But before we take that up, I want to thank you for not letting Dare know that I had been here before. It was mighty decent of you."

Perry frowned. "I merely followed the ball. But why should you have cared if she knew that you had been here?"

"She'd have wanted to know why I didn't send them word or run out there when I was so near. That would have meant complicated lying. I couldn't very well say that I had been persuaded to drive a maudlin party from New York to Boston and thence here, when crazy myself from some sort of dope that I had been cajoled into trying once."

"I understand." Perry dropped his chin on his knuckles and stared thoughtfully at Arthur. "Well, when it comes to friendly services, I did you an even greater one the other night. That was your car Helen was in when the fast freight hit her. I recognized the wreck of it and cut off the numbers."

Arthur stared at him, aghast. "Good Lord, I never thought of that! I told her when I left to come up here, that she could have the use of it in town with my chauffeur, while I was gone. It never entered my head that she might have bribed him and gone touring with it. I took it for granted that the car belonged to Ramonez."

"No, it was yours," Perry said. "You took me for a ride one day last spring, and I have a habit of remembering details. I thought of course that you had loaned it to Helen, and wanted to save you embarrassment in case somebody took it into his head to look up the license-number."

"Thank you, Perry," Arthur muttered, his voice trembling a little. "That *was* a friendly act."

"The car was a total wreck," Perry said. "I telephoned the nearest garage to send and get the motor and keep it until further advised." He leaned over and handed Arthur a slip of paper. "Here's the address. You can do what you like about it. Now, to come to the real object of this interview, what about your being engaged to marry Dare Colfax within a month, or later?"

Arthur moistened his lips. "That is exact."

"But don't you understand that you can't?" Perry's voice was austere. "That is to say, that you have no right to do so?"

"Why not?"

"Because you are constitutionally unfit. You are diseased. You are a drug-addict."

ARTHUR shrank back a little, then with a tremendous effort pulled himself together. "Oh, come, Perry—it's not quite as bad as that."

"It's worse, Dower. But that is quite enough to go on. You are not only a narcotic habitué, but a hopeless one. I know the symptoms, and the type. I've seen so much of the accursed thing. It's got you in a strangle-hold. You're a gone goose. I don't believe that any power on earth can save you. There might possibly be one—that's your aunt. She might get you back to where she had you as a little boy, and start you fresh from there. It would be a long, tedious review, but I think that if you were to go to her and 'fess up and let her take you in hand, you might possibly some day be a clean man again. There's your only chance."

Arthur leaned back in his chair, his face livid and bedewed with perspiration, although the room was cold. He reached for his cigarette-case, fumbled at it, dropped a cigarette and stooping over, seemed unable to pick it up. Perry watched him narrowly. The austerity of his face relaxed. He reached down, picked up the cigarette himself, but instead of handing it to Arthur threw it over on the desk. Arthur looked at him, puzzled and angry.

"Well, what's the matter?" he demanded. "Can't I have my smoke? That fag isn't doped."

"I know it," Perry answered. "I am going to give you one that is. You need

it, if we are to finish this unpleasant discussion rationally. You are not any longer normal without. Your nervous control and power of clear thought is all shot to pieces. You can't think intelligently, let alone talk that way. Here are some that Helen must have left—" He picked up a tortoise-shell case with a gold monogram and tossed it to Arthur. He clutched at it and missed. Perry picked it up for him, drew out a fat cigarette and handed it to him, then lighted a match. "Smoke up and get back where you now belong."

THERE was nothing insulting nor sneering in Perry's tone. It was more that of a physician, a nerve specialist, cool, quiet and concise. Arthur hesitated for a second, then obeyed. He leaned back, inhaling deeply. For a moment or two he seemed almost oblivious of Perry, and the terrible truth he had been told.

"You see, Dower," Perry said, "I don't intend to quarrel with you, and I want you to make your decision in this matter from the most lucid thought that you are capable of at this moment. That can't happen when you are suffering acutely from the want of the drug, as your symptoms show you to be now. If you were to decide when overwrought and startled by what I have just said, you would be very apt to change your mind about it when tranquilized again."

"Give me a few moments to think, Perry," Arthur muttered.

"All right. I'll start Fosset to town in the dory. We need some more fifteen-thread manila. Take your time and give me your final decision when I come back. I sha'n't try to coerce you. I appreciate your not having asked what business it all is of mine."

Arthur made a slight gesture of dismissal. "What's the use of stalling, Perry? Any fool would know that you were in love with her yourself. I quite understand your motive. You don't want to give her up and sail off to have her marry a man that you think is certain to wreck her life."

"Precisely. It's not dog-in-the-manger stuff. I'm thinking of her best good." He rose, laid the shell case on the corner of the desk, then picked it up again, took out one cigarette and placed it on the manuscript, dropping the case into the side pocket of his coat. "Nor the other extreme," he said, and went out.

Half an hour passed. At the end of that time Arthur found himself, so far as he could ascertain subjectively, in a state of absolute physical and mental normality, the first that he had enjoyed since leaving the city. The sensation of mental and bodily well-being was not excessive. He knew that, because of little tests that he had practiced. There was neither depression nor exuberance. He appeared to be, so far as he was able to ascertain, at the mean high-water of his capabilities.

Perry, coming in a few minutes later found Arthur calm, self-possessed, pleasant of manner and expression, and in all ways as fit as he could be to decide upon his future course. It was precisely thus that Perry had not only wished to find him, but had taken measures that he should be.

PERRY glanced sharply at Arthur as he seated himself. "Feeling better, aren't you," he said.

Arthur nodded. "I think you threw it in rather hard, don't you, Perry?"

"Yes, but it was the truth. What have you decided?"

"This," said Arthur. "I shall make an excuse to go back to New York, and from there I shall send my aunt a cable saying: 'Send cable for me to go to you immediately owing to your ill-health or some other pretext.' She is now in Rio. I will take the first steamer sailing, and not provide myself with any drug. That will be a test. Then I shall turn round and come back. If the craving still persists, I shall tell Dare all about it and advise her to break the engagement. But if I find, as I believe I shall, that I killed the desire by force of will and the long sea voyage, then I shall consider myself free to marry Dare."

Perry leaned forward. "Dower," he said, earnestly, "that sounds on the face of it like a fair and manly proposition. But it's no good. If you were to go six months at a stretch without it under full sail and on a smooth sea, you couldn't be sure that the first knockdown you got wouldn't drive you to it again."

"Well, that's the best I can do, Perry. You think that I can't smash it, but I am convinced I can. If I do, I believe I am entitled to my happiness."

"You are not entitled to risk the destruction of Dare's. She would stick to you through thick and thin."

It was on the edge of Arthur's lips to say, "She didn't stick to you through thick and thin," but he forbore. Instead he rose and held out his hand. "If I make the grade down there without a single slug, I'll be safe. Good-by, Perry. Will you shake hands?"

Perry rose. For a brief instant the defeated and the successful rivals exchanged the gesture of parting friends. Then Arthur turned and went out. The speed-launch was a white speck behind a whiter gash as it foamed toward the inlet. Arthur went down the steps slowly but with a sure tread. Turning out on the jetty, he looked back and saw Perry standing like a caryatid under the arch of the doorway. And again Arthur was puzzled at what he thought to be his wrong estimate of the man. Why had Perry let Dare go without a struggle?

CHAPTER XIX

THERE must have been the makings of a fine nature in Arthur, because the proof of soul greatness is not only in what one may do oneself, but what one may think others capable of doing; and it never occurred to him as a possibility that Perry might denounce him as a habitué of drugs.

Apart from this, Arthur was a little disappointed in Perry. He was inclined to think that he had overdrawn his character as one of dominant masculinity. He would previously have sworn that Perry, loving a woman and knowing himself to be in possession of her love, would never have given her up, no matter what befell.

Arthur had anticipated a bad time with Perry. But, instead of bullying, as a lesser man might have done, Perry had carefully loaded Arthur's weapons and handed them to him. Perry's evident desire had been not only to give his adversary a fair show, but to see how well he could shoot when at his best.

That was all right enough, and according to the highest traditions of duelling. But Arthur now reflected that a most important feature of the encounter had been absolutely lacking. Perry had not himself fired—not even in the air. More than that, the two had parted with the etiquette of friendliness, and Arthur knew that if Perry had intended him any future personal maltreatment, he would never have shaken hands. That act had been in the nature of a peaceful parting, an account closed to all future dealings between them.

The solution of all this seemed to be that Perry had decided to efface himself from the entire picture, the group of which Dare was the central figure. He must, Arthur thought, have undergone a disillusionment about her.

Arthur was content with this theory because it pleased him, and because it discounted the obligation of further worry. He told Dare no more than that Perry was leaving for an indefinite period and had asked him to godfather his book. Dare was relieved, and being ultra-feminine, she was also resentful. She saw Perry's aspect of herself as Arthur had wrongly viewed it. He saw her no doubt as the sort of society heroine that Arthur liked to write about—risquée but playing safe, igniting passion with a fuse long enough to let her get into her bomb-proof. Perry must now believe that she had been shocked into breaking off with him as the result of what she might have learned about his past relations with Helen. Dare did not want him to think this. It was not the truth. She did not want him to think that any act of his had frightened her away, or that she blamed him for his course of procedure, either in Helen's case or that of Ramonez. He might not know that she had witnessed the attack of Ramonez upon himself, but believe her to think that he, Perry, had provoked it. As a matter of fact this is precisely what Dare did believe. But she did not want Perry to ascribe her withdrawal to her horror of the fact that he had slain this man.

Dare desired to convey this idea to Perry, as briefly but comprehensively as might be possible. She did not want to see him again; nor did she wish to write. All could be said in a few short words, as can most things of direct importance. She decided to intrust a brief verbal message to Elsinore. Mr. Colfax was going over to Thunder Point for a final parting word with Perry. Arthur was going also, because in the agitation of his interview he had forgot about the book-manuscript, and he really wished to serve Perry in the matter, should Perry still desire it. Elsinore, who had conceived a great admiration and liking for Perry, had insisted on going with them. Dare knew that Elsinore was fully to be trusted if confided in a little; and for once in her life Dare felt the need of a confidante.

Dare found her strenuous sister in a moment of relaxation, bare of throat and shoulder, mending a blouse in which she was to shine that afternoon.

"Elsinore," Dare said with the directness that she knew when to employ, "when you go over to Thunder Point with Papa, I want you to say something for me to Perry Bridges, if you can manage to get him alone for a moment."

"What-ho!" Elsinore murmured, raising her straight dark eyebrows and looking intently at Dare. "I was right in thinking that there had been more between you two than was contained in your official report."

"Quite a lot more," Dare said evenly. "We all have our moments of madness, and mine was very lurid while it lasted."

Elsinore looked startled. "As much as that? Oh, Da-Da—are you sure—"

"Positive. It didn't take me long to find out that we are a different species of bird. I've told Arthur all about it, and he understands."

ELSINORE'S blue eyes gleamed. "Then he ought to get off your map, and not try to profit by it."

"He offered to," Dare said. "Don't blame Arthur. He has acted from the start more like a true friend than a selfish suitor. You have seen yourself how he's done his best for Perry with all of us. He kept on doing it, even after I told him that for a few wild hours I was all Perry's."

Elsinore looked scared. "Da-Da—what do you mean? That you lost your head or—"

"I didn't lose anything. Do you think I'd marry Arthur if I had? But that's not the point. I don't want to marry Perry, now, and I don't want him to think that I am going to marry Arthur because of anything that he has done to make me change my mind about him. It's merely that I've come to my senses, and realize that we are alien species; Perry himself admits that."

Elsinore shook her sunny head. "Da-Da, you are entirely wrong. You are making a dreadful mistake."

"No, I'm correcting a mistake—and doing it radically. I'm insuring my future against emptiness and vain regrets. Because I know it wouldn't do to marry Perry, I don't intend to be a spinster. I'm going to marry Arthur and do the whole show. Perry agrees with me that we don't entirely belong."

ELSINORE frowned. "Then perhaps you don't. And he's not the man I thought him—or else he is that, but fool enough besides to spoil it all. You never can tell about these self-sufficient idealistic nuts. They are apt to fancy the silly-martyr 'save you from myself' rot. Why do they want to start something they're not prepared to finish, though?"

"He didn't start it, Elsinore. He told me what my trouble was, then offered to remove the source of it. There were a few moments when it wasn't any too easy for him. I'd have made him a present of this girl, gone with him wherever he liked with benefit of clergy or without, whether he'd had a string of wives in all the ports around the world, or been a Percival the Pure. But he held me till my feet touched ground again."

"Literally?"

"Yes—" Dare's eyes looked mistily at Elsinore. "I can see what would happen to me if I were Perry Bridges' mate. Good-by, Dare Colfax! No more of the girl that I'm so far acquainted with. Well—I propose to be the captain of this little ship. But it wasn't altogether that. It wasn't that at all, really. It was something else I found out about."

"Did he tell you?"

"He didn't have to. I think he would, if I had asked. He merely agreed that I was right about our not being of similar clay. Now, Arthur *is*."

"But he's *not*," Elsinore almost wailed. "If you could only see you two as I can see you. Arthur is a domesticated, born in captivity, barnyard fowl compared to you. You are like a sea-pigeon in comparison. You are actually like Perry."

"Then I don't want to be," Dare said. "I much prefer the laws and customs of civilization. I know that I've always been a sort of storm center, especially for hot-headed youth. But I'm not a bit hot-headed. Ructions seem to boil around me as if I were a cake of yeast. It's not my fault, and I don't want it for the leading feature of my life. I'll be safe and sane with Arthur. We understand and appreciate each other."

"Well, let's hope so," Elsinore said with a sort of despair. "But I'm glad you are going to have this final showdown with Perry. You may find that you've been mistaken."

Dare shook her head. "No, there isn't much for me to be mistaken about. It's

what I feel him to be, more than what he is or does. He's predatory, like the hawk they named him after."

"You must have got some sort of shock from Perry," said Elsinore.

"More than that, dear. I got the picture of an entirely lawless world where nothing is under any restriction at all from a central controlling authority. That is the sort of world that Perry lives in, and the sort that I might live in if I were Perry's. Dreadful things have no importance to him, so long as he is stronger than they are."

Elsinore nodded. "I felt that about him, too," she admitted.

"Well, it's not for me," Dare said. "I belong to civilization. He realizes that. So take this message from me to him, Elsinore. Say to Perry: 'Dare wants me to tell you that it is good-by not because of anything that you have ever done, but because of what you cannot help but always be.' "

Elsinore stared intensely at her sister, then repeated the message. She blinked once or twice, then rose, stooped over Dare and kissed her on the cheek. "I am not at all sure whether you are being an awful little fool or an awful big sport, Da-Da, but I guess it's possible to be both together, sometimes. If Perry were the man I took him for, he'd grab you up and carry you off. I almost wish he would."

Dare gave a tired smile. "He wouldn't do that for the few moments I wanted him to, so he's not very apt to do it when I don't want him to. It's all right to be a sport, Elsinore, but it's sometimes pretty hard to tell what that thing is."

CHAPTER XX

THE gusty buffeting of wind at her corner of the house awakened Dare a little before dawn. The soft still weather had been broken by a clear, hard nor'wester, and it had turned colder.

She slipped out of bed, went to the window. The stars still twinkled like diamond points, and the sapphire of the sea was flecked with snowy splashes. Through the big pines the gale swept with a soft deep pleasing sound, but the defiant oaks flogged at it with their branches in a mad, tormented way. Down on the shore a sea abruptly roused lashed the iron corselet of the island with the hoarse growlings of a mob.

Dare knew that here was precisely the weather Perry would want for getting to sea. Such a breeze of wind must set him far on his course before he ran it down. The chances were, Dare thought, that he had been watching for the change, and got away on the brim of it.

She got back in bed, but could not go to sleep again. The uproar of wind and trees and surf excited her. The dawn came in rapidly, almost with the abruptness of the tropics. Dare rose, slipped on peignoir and slippers and went to the window again. Great crimson bands with intervening rays of gold shot skyward behind Thunder Point, which did not share in the illumination but lay dark and brooding against the brightness flanking it. . . . .

The sun rose, the flashing disk sending its heliograph across the sea. Thunder Point caught it now aslant, and revealed itself a velvet train to the sweeping skirt of the shore, delicately green and shot with deep shadows. There was a white speck against it, as if a feather had floated down and clung. This caught Dare's eye. She knew at once what it must be.

Elsinore had found occasion to deliver her verbal message to Perry, just as they were leaving. He had shown no surprise, made no comment, but merely bowed. He had already told them that McIntyre was due to arrive that evening, and that the first fair wind would start them on their way. Perry's little cruiser was primarily a sailing craft; the motor was auxiliary to her canvas and of service only in flat calms and congested waterways. Perry had said that the warm weather must soon break.

Elsinore told Dare that their father and Arthur and Perry had gone into the tower to discuss alpacas or something equally dull, when she had roamed about exploring the place. Arthur had been unlike his usual self, moody and nervous, which Elsinore did not attempt to account for. Perry had been charming.

So here now was Perry outward bound, questing seaward in a clear gale that most mariners would have been apt to let blow out a little before putting off before it in so small a boat. Dare watched the *Venus* with misty eyes and thought her not so badly named with her creamy hull and white new bellying sails. Evidently Perry meant to cut the island rather close, on the lee, with that wind the seaward side. She would presently be hidden from Dare's view by the flanking woods, and the girl

thought that she would like to watch the plucky little vessel out of sight, soaring off into the spray-flung distance with the galloping white horses of the sea.

Scudding past the western end of the island, snowy sails shot with the crimson sunrise and glowing like a nautilus, the boat was blanketed from Dare's sight by the deep solid green of pine trees bulking up. She knotted the cord of her peignoir, stole softly down the stairs and out. She took a path that plunged directly into a growth of young white birches where in her long white gown she was furnished with a sort of mimicry of nature. Swaying with them in the gusty blasts of wind, she hurried on, soon passing into the shelter of big firs, whereof the tops alone deigned to record the commotion in the air. As she approached a sheltered cove about a quarter-mile across that part of the island, it grew absolutely still, and the water on its surface was unruffled near the shore. Farther out, little cat's-paws struck down to brush it like green velvet. The big trees here grew to the water's edge.

Just as Dare reached this tranquil spot, the boat glided around the point. Then, instead of holding on as Dare had expected, she hauled on the wind and headed directly for the cove, still moving rapidly by virtue of the breeze aloft. Dare saw the bulky figure of McIntyre move forward along the deck. He appeared to be clearing the lashings of a small-boat swung in on deck. Then the mainsail jibbed in a backdraught off the island, and Dare saw Perry at the wheel. He threw off a turn of the jib-sheet as she watched, luffed sharply around the end of a projecting ledge and shot his heavy little vessel up into the cove.

Dare realized that he meant to land. Had he anticipated her being on the watch for his passage, and counted on her crossing the island to see him dissolve into what she had resolved must be nothingness for her?

Something close to panic seized her. Perry could not have helped but see her standing there in her white robe against the dark green background. She had come to watch him pass distantly out of her life, and here he was about to thrust into it again. She stood as she had stepped from bed, in bath-peignoir and nightgown, bare feet slipped into low buckskin moccasins, and her bright chestnut hair in two loose braids hanging over either shoulder.

She had now to take her choice between standing fast or taking flight. It was outrageous to think of meeting him like that, but she could not bear to run away. Flight was contrary to her nature, habit and all precedent. It would not be Dare. Pride compelled her to play the last hand of this game that had cost her so dear.

TRYING then to assemble herself in some sort of form, Dare found that she was in shocking disarray. Evidently she had stumbled through the woods blind with tears, and not taking much heed of her course. Cheeks and throat were wet from disregarded tears, and her eyes still dazzled with those refusing to be winked away. Both nightgown and peignoir were short of skirt; a bramble of blueberry bush had scratched one ankle deeply, and a little stream of blood had stained the curve of it. Some spray of birch or spruce had further demoralized her hair, already loosed enough. She felt her face to be congested and eyes puffy from a sleepless night.

Realizing all at once the disorder of her at this moment of all moments when she had need to be serene, composed and garnished becomingly of body and mind, Dare's perverse sense of the ridiculous was stirred. This was apt to happen in such crises. The absurdity of her position counteracted its tragic element, as had happened before. It gave her a sort of reckless desperation. Any silly girl could run away, but such tactics were not in her code.

The massive figure of McIntyre in bright yellow oilskins and with a bandaged face was occupied up forward, like a well-trained gorilla intelligently executing orders. Headsails were hauled down, and as the little vessel lost her way, close in to the beach, a light kedge anchor splashed over the bow. A dinghy took the water. McIntyre swung himself nimbly down and picked up his oars. Perry had flung aside the oilskin overcoat he had been wearing, and took his seat in the stern clad in the immaculate white flannels Dare had come to think of as his proper plumage.

In all of their encounters there had been something to sustain her—danger or passion or suspense. Here there seemed nothing. She seemed standing on the edge of a void. A few brief words, the best that she could muster, and after them emptiness. The tears gushed into her eyes again, and she

fought in vain to blink them back. She could only stand and wait, there on the edge of the sighing pines. She had stopped considering what Perry might think of her, while McIntyre had not mattered at all, nor would, any more than if he had been the simian servitor that he resembled. Here was merely something to be got over with.

Then, as Perry came up across the beach, Dare discovered that something about him had undergone a change. She saw immediately just what this was. His assured, devil-may-care jauntiness was lacking. There was none of the peculiar springy smartness that she had associated with him. Perry's step as he approached her was firm enough, and his body straight and shoulders square, but not with the former air of challenge.

The next Dare noticed was that he looked haggard, and seemed entirely oblivious of her negligée. For all the difference it made to Perry, she might have been dressed for a fête. He walked directly up to where she stood, took off his hat in a perfunctory way, replaced it and said: "Dare, I've come to take you away."

BEFORE the astonishment of this could penetrate her mind, Dare made a fresh discovery. Perry's voice had changed. The didactic accent had gone out of it. The keen, cocksure precision had disappeared. There was even a tremble in its note. She looked into his eyes, and saw to her amazement that they were swimming with moisture, almost tears. Then, she considered what he had just said.

"What are you trying to tell me, Perry Bridges?" she asked.

"I have come to take you away."

"Away—where? When—how—"

"Anywhere, darling girl. Now—in my boat."

"Perry, are you out of your head? Or drunk—or drugged?"

"No. I never was subject to any of those things. I've studied it all out, Dare. Even if I hadn't, instinct is better than reason about some things. There is only one way to save you from dreadful unhappiness. That's to take you with me, now."

"But that's—that's insane," Dare cried.

"No, it's not. I've got the truth of every side of it, and you haven't got the real facts of even one. Not about myself. All the same, I meant to give you up. Not because of anything I've ever done, but because of such a lot that I fall short in. That's not nearly as important, though, as the way a man and woman like ourselves can't help but love each other. Such love must come first—ahead of all the other things."

"It can't, Perry." Dare's voice broke a little. "It's impossible."

"Nothing is impossible to love like that. Nothing else matters. If you hadn't loved me as only a woman such as you can love, you would never have engaged yourself to marry Dower. I understood that."

"Then why don't you help me," Dare cried, "instead of making this wild talk about taking me away? You are not a piratical girl-stealer, and I'm not the girl to be taken in that way. Where could you —oh, do try to be sane. Can't you see how I am dressed? Don't you understand that I did not come here to meet you, but merely to watch you sail out of my life? I came to see the last of you." She struck her sandaled foot against the ground.

Perry glanced up at the sun. "Dare, I expected this, and it is only a small part of what I shall have to suffer, I should say. But I am going to take you with me now, no matter what comes of it."

Dare stared at him intently, then threw back her head with a short laugh. "Still the romantic figure of melodrama! The actor in spite of himself. What do you mean by *'take'* me? The way that devil over there would have done if I hadn't fought him off with a knife?"

"I knew of that," Perry said. "I saw the knife beside you in the boat, and the signs of the struggle in the tower. I knew your high courage, and more than that, I knew Ramonez."

"Oh, did you?" Dare demanded scornfully. "Then in what way are you different, unless all this is silly bluff? In what way do you propose to take me, my dear sea cave-man?"

Perry's answer came slowly and deliberately. "For what you promised me not many days ago, and what you meant to give me until you saw fit to break your promise."

"You released me," Dare said.

"I released you for yourself, not for you to turn round and wreck your life. Dare, you know that you belong really to me. Your face is covered now with stains of tears for me, and you have run out of the house and across to this beach for a

last glimpse of the boat that was carrying me away. Knowing all of this, with such proof of what is really in your heart, I am going to do this thing: I am going to take you as men from time immemorable have taken the women they adored and by whom they were themselves adored but for some insufficient reason denied. Marry me if you wish. Hate me if you will, but for your own dear sake I shall not sail away and leave you to ruin your life's happiness. I am going to take you with me, Dare—here—now—just as you are."

He moved a step toward her, his eyes fixed intensely on her own. Dare was standing on the rim of driftweed that had been rolled up by the last flood-tide and southerly wind. Here also was heaped a tide-windrow of loose stones.

Dare reached down and her hand clutched one of these. She swung it up at arm's length; and her gray eyes, red-rimmed and fringed about with wet black lashes, shone out at Perry with the flame of all the fighting spirit in the girl.

"Try to touch me, you fool, and I'll brain you," Dare said between her set teeth.

Perry looked at her thoughtfully, as if considering the answer to some problem. "That might be better, darling girl. I think it would keep you from marrying Dower. And you might hate me less."

With both arms hanging at his sides, he took a firm step forward, his dark head within the arc of the big stone if it were to sweep downward. It hung for a moment in the balance, and so did Perry's life. The square mass trembled poised as Dare's grip tightened on it.

Then it fell—behind Dare's shoulder to the beach. She swayed unsteadily. Sobs began to strangle her, and the tears gushed out. Perry's arms went out to her then, and drew her toward him, against his chest. Dare felt the comforting crush of it against her bosom. Her head sagged forward, but as if drawn upward by some potent compelling force, she raised her face and her eyes stared into Perry's with the stricken look of some wild creature mortally hurt and in the hunter's grasp. They met no triumph, but a flood of molten tenderness.

"Oh—Perry—my own!" Words came babbling out, incoherent and unselected until the wet lips insensately molding them were welded in a kiss that contained a multitude of kisses. She was scarcely aware that her feet were no longer touching ground, and that she was cradled and swaying across the beach as Perry carried her down to the boat.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. COLFAX, up early and fussing about, failed to register his usual discontent with a family that slept through the best part of what promised to be for him a perfect day. Since leaving Thunder Point late in the afternoon of the day before, Mr. Colfax had been perturbed by the feeling that something he failed to sense was going on about him, not so very far away. Coming back in the launch, Arthur Dower's symptoms of acute nervousness puzzled and worried Mr. Colfax. "He acted as if he thought we were going to get torpedoed, or something," said he later to Elsinore.

But this girl was too busy wondering if she might not have torpedoed Dare to worry about Arthur, and before the end of the evening Mr. Colfax had noticed her disquiet, also. Then Dare excused herself early and went to bed, on the plea of feeling very tired, this remarkable in itself, as Dare was seldom known to get tired. Elsinore soon followed her, and then Mr. Colfax found himself called upon to entertain Arthur, which he attempted in the billiard-room without brilliant success.

"Feeling a little off the true again, Arthur?" Mr. Colfax asked. They had just finished a game for which neither had much zest. Arthur, a brilliant player at most times, missed continually, and Mr. Colfax could not but notice this fact and the trembling of the hands that caused it.

"Rather more than that, sir," Arthur answered. He sank wearily into a big chair before a driftwood fire that was flickering on the hearth, for most evenings on the island were a little chilly. Mr. Colfax seated himself opposite and looked at him with friendly anxiety. Arthur, in his nervous state, found himself more anxious for help and sympathy than for his reputation as a young man of exemplary hygienic habits. It buttressed his courage for the moment to talk about himself, with a certain reservation. He had also done so with his aunt, who knew and loved him well enough to understand.

He now painted his case lightly for Mr. Colfax. For some months he had been working under forced draught, sleeping so

poorly as to have recourse to soporifics, injudiciously perhaps, and not under the advice of a physician. He had talked it over with Perry Bridges, who had rather frightened him, told him that he was in a bad way and well started on the road to perdition. That was all rot, of course, but it had made him think. He had decided to take a cure, and in all fairness felt that he ought to tell Mr. Colfax about it. As a man of high standards Mr. Colfax would appreciate that Arthur through his sense of *noblesse oblige* should not think of carrying on his matrimonial program until assured that he was in no danger of a drug-habit.

Mr. Colfax was infinitely kind and sympathetic. But he also was a devoted father. He expressed sympathy for Arthur and praised his sense of honor. But he was secretly delighted. He did not believe for an instant that any man as frightened about himself as Arthur could be in the slightest danger of a drug-habit, then or later. But it let Dare out. He agreed with Arthur that he had better consult a specialist immediately—not lose a day about it. Perhaps a long sea-voyage—

ARTHUR did not tell him that he had promised Perry to do this. He left Perry out of the confidence, and also Dare. Arthur really wanted to get back to town as soon as might be. The paregoric had run out, and a furtive examination of the seagoing medicine chest had disclosed nothing that he thought would help him. He wanted relief, instant, effective and not too temporary. After that, a gradual return to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness without dependence—on drink or drugs.

It occurred then to Mr. Colfax that since here was a guest in a bad state of nervous funk, the sooner he was started on his way to salvation the better for all concerned—save a lot of wear and tear and explanations to speed this parting guest. But Mr. Colfax went about this idea with the wiliness of a serpent or a doting father. He told his squirming guest that he might as well try to make the best of it for a few days longer, and that it looked, indeed, to Mr. Colfax as if he might have to. His weather-wise experience bade him look for a sudden violent change. It had been far too hot, and that night the sunset had been ominous. The sun had gone down "scorched," as the lobstermen say. They might wake to find the passage to the mainland impossible, perhaps for several days.

This prophecy put the finishing touch on Arthur. The prospect of another racking night had been bad enough, but more than that seemed unendurable. He got panicky—asked Mr. Colfax if it would not be possible to send him off immediately, and make some plausible excuse. Mr. Colfax thought with indulgent regret that it would. The night was fine and still—too fine to last long, Mr. Colfax opined, in which he was unwittingly correct. He could tell the family that Arthur had received an urgent summons that day, but had wanted to think it over. It was preying on his mind, and he had decided that it was best to leave, without disturbing anybody. There was an early morning express, and the hotel people would manage to oblige a guest of Mr. Colfax.

So this plan was put immediately in execution. It was only ten-thirty. Tim was roused, and had the launch ready as soon as Arthur had packed his luggage. Mr. Colfax parted with him warmly, and Arthur felt that he was indeed a friend in need.

This was why Mr. Colfax was not fussing irritably at eight in the morning, and none of the girls about. The roaring nor'wester had more than verified his prophecy, vindicating him as a weather prophet. It had sprung up with the change of tide at about two o'clock. But on more mature consideration Mr. Colfax was disturbed by the growing feeling that there might be something deeper and more serious about the business than what Arthur had confided in him—something that had to do with his girls, and even Perry. Dare and Elsinore had acted in a manner abnormal to their wont. And Perry's departure had been curiously sudden. No doubt he had taken advantage of the clear offshore gale to set off.

AS Mr. Colfax was pondering over his grapefruit, Elsinore came in. She looked strangely at her father, and strangely to him, also. Her red hair was blown by the wind, and her blue eyes set in a white face, like sapphires in snow. But there was a vivid spot of high color in either cheek.

"Why didn't you tell me that Arthur had gone, Papa? What made him bolt off like that?"

Mr. Colfax looked at her suspiciously.

"This is the first time that I have seen you today. Arthur confided in me last night that he was greatly upset about a personal affair, and feared that he would have to leave today. With my usual instinct for the weather, I foresaw this change, and told him that if go he must he had better do so at once, spend the night at the hotel and take the early train."

Elsinore stared at him fixedly. "Did he say that he'd run out of dope?" she demanded.

"Now, why do you suggest a thing like that," protested Mr. Colfax, and avoided her eye.

"Because that was his trouble, I should say. I ought to have guessed it before. I knew that there was something that wasn't sound about him. I told Dare so, but she wouldn't listen to me."

"All the same, I don't think she was one bit in love with him," snapped Mr. Colfax.

"She never was, and isn't now," Elsinore answered. "She got engaged to him because she and Perry Bridges had fallen in love with each other at first sight, and Da-Da got it into her silly head that he wasn't at all her sort, but that she was in danger of tossing her bonnet over the mill and bolting off with him."

MR. COLFAX dropped his fruit-spoon and stared at his daughter aghast. "So that was it," he cried, with a sort of despairing wail. "And Perry Bridges the finest chap I ever met! Straight and manly, and clean as a hound's tooth. And she couldn't see it. And now he's gone!"

"Yes, Papa dear," said Elsinore. "He's gone. He sailed past here at four this morning."

"For South America!" sighed Mr. Colfax.

Elsinore puckered her red lips. "Perhaps. But when I last sighted him, he seemed to be heading up to the eastward."

"Well," barked Mr. Colfax, "all I can say is I wish he'd carried that foolish girl of ours off with him."

"That, Papa," murmured Elsinore, "is precisely what he did."

Mr. Colfax dropped both hands on the table and partly raised himself. "Elsinore —what's that? What are you trying to say?"

"Be calm, my dear." Elsinore reached across the table and patted his hand. "I heard Dare go out a little after sunrise. I followed, to see what she was up to—across to the southeast cove. Perry ran in there and came ashore. I stopped watching—for a few minutes, then. A little later I looked and saw him carrying her down the beach—off to his boat. Her arms were round his neck, I think. At any rate—she wasn't struggling very hard. They pulled alongside and went aboard. As the boat paid off to run out to sea again, I walked down on the beach—and stood watching them as well as I could—and that's not saying much."

ELSINORE caught her breath, swallowed like a little girl fighting for self-control in which to tell her tale with clearness, and with dignity. A new experience for Elsinore, this struggle for composure. Mr. Colfax did not try to help her. His world seemed shifting on its axis, its smooth established terra firma tortured by undulations, opening at his feet to disclose what might be treasure—or the abyss.

"You say she wasn't struggling very hard? Not *very hard?* But she was—struggling, Elsinore—to get away from him. . . . ."

"Oh, no, Papa," Elsinore smiled, her blue eyes dancing and flashing through their tears. "The way we used to snuggle up to you when we were little. To keep from slipping. Perry's strong, but Dare is quite an armful. As they sailed away he was standing at the wheel, still holding her close and steering with the other hand. Then she looked back—" Elsinore choked again.

"G-g-go on—" Mr. Colfax leaned forward. Two little streams were running down his florid face. "She saw you?"

"Of course, Papa. The boat was like a fairy barge with her creamy hull and sails like pink rose-petals in the sunrise. I couldn't see her very well because I was blubbing like a baby. But as she glided out and caught the breeze that struck down over the tree-tops, Dare turned and flung out her darling arms to me—"

"Elsinore!" wailed Mr. Colfax. "You mean that she was sorry?"

"Oh, no, Papa dear—"

"But you say she flung out her arms to you. She was—she was—"

"Throwing me kisses," said Elsinore.

THE END.

Tusker and the Vampires

To capture a wild elephant alive is no easy task—
as the hunters in this quaint story of the jungle,
by a man who lived long in India, discovered.

By HUGH THOMASON

THE little brown monkeys in the tree-tops were in a paroxysm of fury. They chattered, bared and gnashed their teeth, and in impotent anger grasped and shook the branches on which they sat. Then, finding that the demonstration had no effect, they fell to quarreling among themselves, as is their wont, and bit and scratched each other savagely, breaking off their fights now and then to look down and shriek out more abuse.

But the big elephant on the ground below was indifferent to their insults and anger. He was too used to the wordy clatter of the *banderlog* (monkey-folk) to notice it; and with skull pressed against the tree-trunk, he continued to push steadily with all his weight, until the roots gave way and the tree came crashing down, rending the ropelike creepers that bound it to its neighbors, and agitating them wildly in its fall. Then the destroyer moved forward to its crown, and sweeping huge branches of leaves from its upper limbs with his trunk, crammed them into his mouth.

His calm indifference infuriated the monkeys beyond measure. It hurt their vanity; for the great grievance in life of their tribe is that the animals of the world on the ground below ignore their existence—except, indeed, the tiger and the leopard; and their attentions the unhappy *bander* would gladly dispense with. For these great striped and spotted cats are far too fond of breakfasting on any unwary monkey that they succeed in surprising on the ground or in grabbing off a low bough by an unexpected spring.

Against elephants, monkeys have a different cause for complaint. These big beasts have a selfish habit of destroying the trees in which the dwellers above the earth find homes and their food-supply. A herd will in a few hours lay low a large patch of trees—which, among other results, closes the air-road in the upper branches and forces the monkeys to descend and travel on the ground, a thing they naturally dislike to do, for there they are apt to have undesirable meetings with those unpleasant beasts of prey that have a penchant

for monkey-flesh. So it was not to be wondered at, that this particular band voiced their grievance against this particular elephant in a loud and boisterous manner. And, still abusing him, they leaped off by airy paths to other and undisturbed parts of the jungle, swinging across the voids between the trees, gripping the meeting boughs with ready hand, the babies holding fast to their mothers, and proving no hindrance to their flight. Indifferent to their departure as to their presence, the elephant continued his meal, in the course of which he did further damage to the forest.

BUT the jungle possesses a marvelous power of recuperation, and recovers from worse ravages. In the hot weather, when the leaves fall from most Indian trees at the very season when in northern climes they are greenest and freshest, come the forest fires. Through the parched jungle they sweep, devouring the tinder-dry grass and undergrowth, shooting up the trunks of the trees and along the great boughs, seizing on the glossy green orchid-plants that blaze as fiercely as though steeped in oil. The roar of the rushing flames is terrifying, rising through a gamut of appalling sound when the breeze freshens, diminishing in volume as the wind dies away. But with every puff of wind, clouds of sparks fly forward; where they drop, little fires begin to flicker, and swell into tongues of flame that lick up the vegetation around. And the red ruin roars on, and leaves utter desolation behind. The forest is swept clear between the scorched trunks of the monster trees; the earth is blackened and covered deep in ashes; the tall undergrowth, the interlaced creepers, the breast-high grass and the matted bushes have all vanished in flame. And the eye can now see far between the tree-trunks, where formerly five or ten yards was the limit of vision. The forest seems blasted, dead.

But presently the black clouds will gather before the swift breath of the monsoon, the sun be blotted out, and the heavens rent by the flaming swords of the tropic lightning, as the world shakes at the awful crashing of the thunder. Then the rain will come—not as the dweller in the temperate zones sees it, but in ropes, in sheets. Six, seven, eight inches a day, and that for weeks without intermission. The forest awakes to a new incarnation. The blackened earth is washed clean, the parched and thirsty soil drinks its fill, and the jungle is born again. The grass, the tangled undergrowth, spring up incredibly fast at the welcome, revivifying caress of the water, and rise in taller, denser growth than before. And the forest animals, which fled before the fires and starved, come back to roam the forest again and feast on the new and luscious vegetation.

The elephant had seen many such visitations during the forty years of his life. When he was born, the great Terai Jungle in which he lived was not under the scepter of the white-haired Empress Victoria, Kaisar-i-Hind; but eight years later, her soldiers made it hers in the Bhutan War. In his early days the myriad elephant-paths were seldom pressed by the feet of men. Now the farthest recesses of the jungle were known to the white hunter. And already the ax was sacrificing the forest giants to the needs of the tea-planter.

HEEDLESS of history and the encroachments of man, the elephant browsed contentedly on the leaves of the tree he had brought down. He was a splendid specimen of his race, nearly nine feet ten inches in height, worthy to carry the silver howdah of a viceroy. Although he would not arrive at his maximum strength for another five years, he was now fully grown and immensely powerful, truly a Samson among animals. He was all that an elephant should be. The best points of the thoroughbred were his: short, muscular legs, a straight back sloping to a long tail, a massive head set on a short, thick neck. His tusks were magnificent—long, shapely, curved, and spreading gracefully outward.

He was alone; for he had strayed, as was frequently his wont, from the herd to which he belonged. He had always been a wanderer. In his early youth this propensity had sorely perplexed his mother, and once in his young days had nearly made him fall a victim to a prowling tiger. Unlike his kind,—as a rule elephants are sufficient unto themselves,—he took a lively interest in the other denizens of the jungle. And this curiosity led to trouble when, as a calf, he came upon what seemed to him a misshapen elephant with malformed trunk permanently raised. When he tried to approach it, the stranger beast, which was a surly rhinoceros, resented his familiarity with sharp teeth.

The elephant babe used to watch inquisitively the huge, solitude-loving Himalayan bear as it shambled through the jungle, rooted in the ground like a pig, or climbed trees in search of food. He shrank back instinctively from the rippling, sinuous curves of that dreaded snake, the hamadryad, fifteen or sixteen feet long, as it glided swiftly through the undergrowth in search of prey. After his narrow escape from the marauding tiger in the days of his calfhood, he was careful to give striped beasts a wide berth, until he grew too big to fear them, and they slunk aside when they encountered him in the jungle.

ONLY of the world that existed above ground-level was he ignorant. Animals do not often look up; and so this great babe knew nothing of the life of the tree-tops. Of course, he had sometimes seen the bald-headed vultures when they jostled and pecked and quarreled with each other over a carcass. And often the jungle-fowl whirred up suddenly from his feet and disappeared into the branches above his head.

He sometimes saw those noisy tree-dwellers, the monkeys, on the ground, squatting on their hunkers or loping along on all fours, babies clinging tightly to their mothers' bodies, all ready at the least alarm to spring up into the nearest trees and disappear above the level of his eyes. But once they reached the upper branches, he knew nothing of their life, though sometimes, in their rage at his indifference, they threw missiles at him.

Of men, too, and their habits he was ignorant. For the jungle tribes hold all wild elephants in dread, and keep out of their way, because of the cruel deeds of the few "rogues" among them. And in Government jungles, the stern laws of the Indian Forest Department protect the well-behaved of his race from the rifle of the sportsman. Only these evil "rogues" are condemned to slaughter and allowed to be fair game for the hunter.

In the forty years of his life, our tusker had roamed through much of the great woodland in which his lot was cast, the wonderful Terai Jungle, that lies at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains and stretches into the plains of Bengal and Assam. Always a rover, he had quitted the herd into which he was born, and had won admission into another on sufferance, being then too youthful to excite the jealousy of the bulls in it. After some years he had abandoned it for a third, into which he had had to fight his way. Here, young as he was, his strength and courage had gained him the leadership of one of the groups into which an elephant herd is divided. This group he often deserted for days or weeks at a stretch—though when he returned, woe betide the tusker, young or old, that had dared usurp his place during his absence!

HE was now on one of his solitary expeditions, prompted by the wander-desire that had always possessed him. No dislike to the society of his kind moved him, for he was of a companionable temperament—only the spirit that ever urged him on to new ventures, new haunts. He had been alone for some days. It was early in the hot weather of the year. The cool north wind, which swept down from the mountains and agitated the tree-tops wildly, did not penetrate through the canopy of foliage—the leaves had not yet begun to fall. But now and then a faint air stirred the undergrowth. Suddenly the elephant raised his head and stretched out his trunk in the direction from which the breeze blew; for it bore a message to his sensitive nostrils. Elephants can scent their kind two or three miles away when the wind is favorable, and the breeze carried to him the unmistakable odor of others of his race, unknown to him, and not members of his herd. Curiosity overpowering him, he left his meal and moved slowly toward the strangers. Without undue haste he advanced, halting every now and then to sniff for the scent again, proceeding cautiously, not from fear of any bull-elephant that he might come upon, but lest he might startle the newcomers and put them to flight.

After he had gone a mile or two, he came upon them—five cow-elephants plodding in single file. On the back of each one's neck was a curious great hump that stirred and heaved strangely. But, unsuspiciously inquisitive, the wandering tusker went forward to greet them. At the sight of him they stopped, and their humps became more wildly agitated than ever. Then, with true feminine coyness, they pretended to ignore him, broke their file, and strayed off slowly and separately in different directions, halting to pluck a mouthful of grass here and there.

Our tusker was skilled in the ways of the females of his kind. He had won the favor of many of them in his time; and he knew that these cow-elephants were not as indifferent to him as they seemed. As the superior male, it behooved him to show as little interest in them. So he too checked and began to eat, although he felt curious as to the identity of the strangers. Then, keeping apart and yet together, the six great animals trudged on aimlessly through the jungle, feeding as they went. Whenever the tusker approached one of his coy companions, she moved away from him; but at once another would come closer to him, as if to attract him toward her. Yet, if she succeeded, her boldness would be followed promptly by a shy fit, and she in turn would shrink away timidly from his advances. First one, then another, of the cows decoyed him to her, only to repulse him and keep at a respectful distance. But the big tusker was content to be in their company, if not of it, and remained with them. They continued moving on, even when night was beginning to fall.

IN the gathering gloom the tusker did not notice that one of his charmers had gradually dropped behind. Out of sight she deliberately halted and allowed the rest to go on, until she was a long distance from them and well out of sight and earshot. Then from the strange hump on her neck came suddenly the cry of an owl. Silence succeeded. The elephant remained motionless. Ten, twenty minutes went by, and again the night-bird hooted. Then from a few hundred yards away came an answering cry. Again the owl called; and again the reply was heard, nearer this time. It was followed by the noise of breaking twigs and the trampling down of the undergrowth; and through the darkness loomed the figure of another cow-elephant. Once more the owl's hoot, and the new arrival stopped. On its neck and back were three men, and four or five more stepped from behind it. Then the mysterious hump of the first heaved up and resolved itself into a blanket concealing a man crouching on the neck, who flung the covering off as he sat up.

"Allah be praised!" he piously ejaculated in a low voice, stretching himself. "My bones ache, and my limbs are sore, as though I had rheumatism."

"Kuch dekkha? Kuch mila?" ("Have you seen anything? Have you found anything?") asked one of the newcomers eagerly.

"Hai. Dekkha aur mila." ("Yes, seen and found,") answered the *mahout,* or elephant-driver. *"Dhantwullah."* ("A tusker.") *"Pukkha shaitan!"* ("A veritable devil.")

Then, striking his elephant's head with his goad, shaped like the head of a boathook, he cried to the animal: "Lie down, Pearl."

The obedient animal sank stiffly down, and the *mahout* slid to the ground and rubbed his cramped limbs. Then, squatting on his hunkers, he cried: "Hi, brother, Man Singh; for the mercy of God give water."

He held his cupped hands to his mouth, palms uppermost, fingers to the front, wrists against his chin, while a young Oudh Rajput took down from the newly arrived elephant a *mussack,* or goatskin bag, filled with water, and poured a stream from its nozzle into the hollowed hands. The *mahout* washed out his mouth, then drank thirstily.

"Ah, *bhai,* that is good," he said.

"What has happened? Tell us, Ebrahim," said the first speaker.

"Slowly, *havildar-ji,* slowly," returned the *mahout.* "Let me get my breath. Twelve hours have I been stifling under the blanket. It is well to be thou, *bhai,* sitting at ease on Gulbi's back, eating the air in comfort, while we smother."

The *havildar* laughed, and came to squat beside him, patiently waiting while the *mahout,* a gray-haired old Mohammedan, slowly unfastened a cloth-wrapped bundle tied to his *cummerbund,* or waistbelt, and with much deliberation produced from it the big bowl of a red-clay pipe and some dried leaves of native tobacco. Shredding the latter, he filled the stemless pipe, lit it with sulphur match, and inhaled the rank smoke with enjoyment.

MEANWHILE the rest of the party prepared to bivouac for the night. Some cleared away the vegetation from a space of earth in the open patch of jungle in which they had halted, and lit a fire. Others unloaded the elephant that they had brought with them. First they threw down short chains and lengths of rope, then bundles of ragged blankets and cotton-filled quilts—their bedding. The thick cord surcingle that bound the big straw-

packed pad on the beast's back was loosed, and the pad itself allowed to slip down to the ground. Then the hind-legs of both elephants were shackled to trees close by, and the animals left to browse contentedly on the lower branches and the long grass within reach of their trunks. Each man squatted down and opened a little bundle that he carried on him—a cotton handkerchief containing his pipe, tobacco, *chupatties* or flat cakes like thick, leathery pancakes, some handfuls of parched grain, an onion or two, and a few peppers. The Rajput went round the group with the *mussack,* pouring water into the hollowed palms of the various members of it. Then in native fashion each man turned away from his fellows and ate his solitary meal, conveying the grain to his mouth by his hand, and tearing the tough *chupatties* with his fingers and teeth.

The leaping flames of the fire lit up the scene with strange effect, shining on the dark faces of the men, and half revealing, half leaving in shadow, the huge forms of the restless elephants. This was a *kheddah* party, sent out by a wealthy *zemindar,* or landholder, who had paid a large sum to the Government of India for the *kheddah* rights of the district—that is, permission to catch wild elephants in it. The method usually employed by such private individuals, and adopted by this party, is to dispatch a number of well-trained cow-elephants—their *mahouts* crouching on their necks and concealed under dark cloths—into the forest to find and approach a wild male. Guided by their riders, they endeavor to retain the male in their company and keep him constantly on the move, until he is thoroughly fatigued and resigns himself to a heavy sleep. Then the treacherous females close in on him, and a couple of their *mahouts* slip down noiselessly from their necks and bind his hind-legs firmly together, so that he awakes to find himself a prisoner.

Until he is captured, each tame elephant falls behind him in turn to allow of her driver being relieved by other men, who follow with a spare elephant carrying the food and bedding of the party, and extra ropes and chains to secure the prisoner when he is taken. These reliefs are effected twice in twenty-four hours, and enable *mahouts* to get food and rest. With the extra elephant are two or more *puhlwans,* men armed with guns, usually old muzzle-loading muskets, to be used in case of necessity against a dangerous captive or an attacking beast of prey.

THEIR food eaten, the men sat around the fire and smoked, while the old *mahout,* Shaikh Ebrahim, described the happenings of the day, and descanted eloquently on the perfection of the tusker. He told how they first came upon his tracks, and found the spot where he had lain down to sleep the previous night. They had been able to gauge the size of his tusks accurately by measuring their impression in the soft ground where the huge head had rested. They were following up his trail when he had turned back to meet them. Ebrahim's narrative provoked tales of former hunts from the other men, until the *havildar,* who was the head *puhlwan* and in command of the party, bade them pile wood on the flames, and told off some of their number to act as a sentry and reliefs, to keep guard and replenish the fire throughout the night as a protection against wild beasts. Then one by one the men stretched themselves on the ground, pulled their blankets or *rezias* (quilts) over their bodies and heads, and slept.

Before dawn began to filter through the leaves overhead, the loud crowing of the jungle-cocks proclaimed its coming. The men awoke, yawned, sat up and stretched themselves, and cleared their throats with raucous coughs beloved of the Oriental in the early morning. Shaikh Ebrahim called his coolie, the groom whose duty it was ordinarily to wait on his elephant, and who was now to relieve the *mahout* for the next twelve hours on her neck.

"Ahré, Gul Dad," the old man said to his understrapper, a young Afghan, who as a boy had fled to India from his native country to escape a blood-feud. "Take thy food and blankets, and unshackle Moti. Let her have her head when thou startest, and she will guide thee to the others. For me this is the day of rest."

Gul Dad tied his bundle to his *cummerbund,* threw his blankets on Moti's back, and standing facing her, seized her ears, one in each hand, and placed his bare feet on her trunk. The well-trained animal raised him until he could clamber onto her head and swing himself astride her neck.

"Chel!" ("Go on!") he cried, kicking her under the ears with his toes; and Moti lumbered off.

The rest of the party did not hurry. There was nothing that they could do until the tusker was captured; and in the meantime it behoved them to keep well out of his way. So they prepared to breakfast. A fireplace was built with stones, and a handful of dry twigs kindled in it. Man Singh, who, being a Rajput, was of sufficiently high caste for any Hindu of the party to take food and water from his hands—Mohammedans have few prejudices about caste—mixed a quantity of *atta* (flour) with water in a brass dish, rolled the dough into balls with his hands, patted them into cakes, and spread them on a convex iron plate, called a *towa,* placed over the fire. When they were browned on one side, he turned them over, flipping them deftly with his fingers, until the other side was equally toasted. They were now *chupatties.* He lifted them off and stacked them in little piles—he had to bear in mind that the absent *mahouts* had also to be fed. On a small flat stone he minced up green peppers, onions, turmeric and black peppercorns, and with a round stone crushed, rolled, and mixed them into a paste with a little water, and thus made curry. He distributed a little of this and a handful of *chupatties* to each of his companions. The Hindus withdrew, and each one ate his meal apart, while the Mussulmans fed together. Man Singh then finished his own repast. Besides acting as cook and *bheesti* (water-carrier) for the party, he was Gulabi's *mahout;* and while eating, he bade his coolie unshackle her and let her loose to graze. When she showed any tendency to stray too far away, he called reprovingly to her; and the elephant, starting at the sound of his voice like a naughty child rebuked, sneaked back with a guilty air.

AFTER a smoke and a chat the *havildar* gave orders for moving. Gulabi's coolie led her up. While Man Singh was busy cleaning his cooking-utensils, the other men lifted the heavy pad, bound it on her back, and loaded her with bedding, chains and ropes. The *havildar* went to her tail, rapped her hind-leg until she lifted it into the air to enable him to place his foot on it and step up to reach the crupper-rope, and the coolie mounted after him. Man Singh, seizing Gulabi's ears, was lifted onto her neck by her trunk. The party started, two of the men on foot going on well ahead to pick up Moti's trail and guard against the danger of stumbling unawares on the decoy elephants and their dupe.

All through the night the cow-elephants had been stirring, for their *mahouts* had kept them moving around the unsuspecting tusker to prevent him from resting. Their object was to tire him so thoroughly that, when at last he would be overcome by sleep, it would be so profound that the men could safely approach and bind him. When dawn came all began to graze; but the decoys were not allowed to move far from the spot where they had passed the night. Consequently they were found and joined by Moti and her new rider, who, like the rest, was concealed under a dark blanket. It is strange that in this method of hunting, the tusker does not always wind and discover the men on the tame elephants' necks. Some do, and never let the decoys get near them; but others remain to the end as confiding as our tusker was.

On Moti's arrival one of her companions was made to wander out of sight, and then taken to find the rest of the *kheddah* party, one of whom relieved her *mahout* and brought her back to play her rôle of "vamp" again. During the morning the other riders of the decoy elephants were similarly changed.

Throughout the day Tusker was never allowed to rest. His treacherous charmers played the same game as on the previous afternoon, always cajoling him, always drawing him on, but never permitting him to approach too near, lest he should discover the men on their necks and take fright. The trained elephants, accustomed in captivity to work all day long, were not put out by the loss of a noonday siesta. The tusker, who should have felt the deprivation acutely, did not seem to miss it, and appeared as wide awake and as little inclined to sleep as they. The concealed *mahouts,* watching him through peepholes in their blankets, marveled at his vigor and at the strength he displayed in uprooting trees, and began to despair of ever tiring him out and catching him off his guard.

"Havildar-ji, he is a *shaitan* straight from Eblis, that *dhantwallah,"* said Gul Dad with conviction when he returned with Moti at nightfall. "We all, men and elephants, are weary, worn out; but the *budmash"* (rogue) "is as fresh as ever."

The *havildar* pulled thoughtfully at the long stem of his gurgling pipe, made out of a coconut-shell, and blew a cloud of acrid smoke into the still air.

"Then he must taste of our *dhawa*" (medicine), he said. "Shaikh Ebrahim, do thou take it with thee when thou departest in the morning."

"Very good," replied the old *mahout,* sucking at the stemless bowl of his earthen pipe. "I do not like to use it, but—it is the order."

And when the next morning, he swung his leg across Moti's neck and drove her forward, he carried under his blanket two bundles of sugar-cane cut into short lengths. One, the smaller, contained pieces drugged with opium. In the other the cane was not doctored.

EBRAHIM soon caught up with the others, and found Tusker as lively and wakeful as ever. When in the early afternoon of this, the third day of the chase, he still seemed fresh and not inclined to sleep, the old *mahout* took Moti a little ahead of the rest, and in a spot clear of undergrowth scattered pieces of the undrugged cane about on the bare ground. The other elephants were maneuvered to bring them and the tusker on the spot. Tusker, to whom sugar-cane was unknown, for it does not grow in the jungle, sniffed it suspiciously and would not touch it. But when he saw his companion eat it greedily, he ventured, after a good deal of hesitation, to try the new delicacy. It was much to his taste. And so, when later on, Ebrahim dextrously contrived to drop pieces of the drugged cane directly in his path, he devoured them readily.

The opium soon took effect. Before long the tusker nodded drowsily, lay down and stretched his great body on its side. For some time his ear was lifted and dropped regularly and mechanically, falling with a flap that echoed through the forest like a pistol-shot. Then Tusker slept the heavy sleep of the drugged.

Cautiously the hidden riders forced their elephants to gather close around the unconscious victim of their wiles. Then one by one they revealed themselves, thankfully flinging aside the stifling blankets.

"Victory to mother Kali!" exclaimed a Hindu *mahout,* wiping his streaming face with the end of his turban. "I feared that the *shaitan* would never sleep."

Shaikh Ebrahim broke off a dry branch from a tree and hurled it at the slumbering colossus. It fell on his ribs, but Tusker never stirred. Then two of the *mahouts* slipped down from their elephants, each with a length of thick rope in his hand. One picked up a hard lump of clay, and from a distance, threw it at the tusker. It struck heavily on the skull, but elicited no movement from him. The other *mahouts* forced their reluctant elephants close up to him and ringed him round; while the two men on foot crept stealthily between the tame animals' legs and touched the sleeper, at first timidly, then more boldly.

"The dog is as the dead," said one contemptuously; whereupon he and his companion proceeded to tie the unconscious brute's hind-legs together with the ropes they carried. Another *mahout* threw them a longer piece, stout as a ship's hawser, and this they used to tie one leg to a tree.

"Well done!" cried Shaikh Ebrahim when Tusker lay effectively enmeshed in the toils. He shouted loudly to call up the rear party with Gulabi, while the other *mahouts* slipped off their elephants to the ground. One or two of the animals stretched out their trunks and timidly touched the sleeper; then all of them, freed of their *mahouts,* strayed away to feed. The work of the cows was done. Poor Tusker was ensnared, and lay a fettered and helpless captive.

The men gathered about the prize, marveling at his size. They boldly slapped his rump in derision, and fingered and measured his enormous tusks. Old Ebrahim, who had not dismounted from Moti, turned her around and set off at a brisk pace to find and guide the *havildar* and the others to the spot.

When he returned with them, the tusker still lay fast asleep. The newcomers joined in the chorus of wonder and congratulation. Ebrahim slid to the ground and spanned one of the tusks.

"In the name of God," exclaimed the Mussulman *havildar,* "never have I seen such an animal. A Rustum among elephants. *Ahre,* brothers, this will mean much reward for us! A rajah would give twenty thousand rupees for such a one to carry his state howdah."

"TAKE care!" cried Gul Dad, who had taken Ebrahim's place on Moti's neck. "The *shaitan* awakes."

The men scattered. The tusker stirred, slowly opened his eyes and lifted his head. Evidently the drug was not potent enough to keep him long unconscious. He looked about him with a dull, uncomprehending stare. Then he extended his trunk and sniffed the air. Suddenly understanding came to him, and he seemed to realize all at once that there were enemies around him. He tried to rise quickly, but was hampered by his bound legs. He fell; and the watching men, confident in the strength of his bonds, laughed, and shouted derisive remarks at him. He struggled to his feet. When he realized that he was a prisoner, his fury was terrible. He trumpeted shrilly and tried to charge his jeering captors. The treacherous cow-elephants paused in the act of conveying food to their mouths to stare affrightedly at him. The men continued to deride his wild and futile struggles.

"Shabash! Kiya tumasha!" ("Well done! What an entertainment!") cried Gul Dad in high glee, restraining the startled Moti from bolting by pounding her thick skull with the *ankus*. She was barely out of reach of the maddened tusker.

"Don't be afraid, O Moti!" cried Ebrahim, walking to her head and rubbing her trunk to reassure her. "The *budmash* cannot hurt thee. See—he is dancing to amuse thee."

He stopped in front of the fiercely struggling beast, and just beyond his reach saluted derisively.

"Salutations, O Maharajah! Greetings, King of the Jungle."

The tusker glared furiously at him out of his vicious little eyes, and straining still more madly at his bonds, hurled himself at his tormentor.

Suddenly the *havildar* shrieked a warning: *"Bagho! Bagho!"* ("Run! run!") "The ropes are breaking."

The men yelled, and fled in all directions, as the stout hawser that fastened the captive to the tree parted suddenly. Almost at the same moment the cords binding his legs gave way. The maddened brute charged furiously at Moti, onto whose head Ebrahim was trying to climb. She turned to flee. Too late! Tusker crashed headlong into her, burying his tusks in her side. She was knocked down, falling with stunning violence to the ground, and flinging Gul Dad from her neck. The other elephants, infected with the panic of their men, stampeded. The *havildar* and Man Singh clung to Gulabi as she fled, and tried to clamber up on her pad. They succeeded in doing so, and Man Singh sought to stop her, while the *havildar* endeavored to unfasten his musket, which was tied to the pad.

WHEN Moti fell, Shaikh Ebrahim was knocked down. But he arose and attempted to run. The savage tusker rushed at him, hurled him to earth, and then crushed the old man's skull to a bloody pulp under his huge forefoot. Gul Dad, who had picked himself up, ran to his *mahout's* rescue, not seeing that he was too late. The gallant young Afghan, drawing the *kukri*, or curved knife, stuck in his waistband, boldly confronted the infuriated beast and slashed at his trunk, inflicting a deep gash. It was his last action. The tusker swung around at him, gored, kicked and pounded him to death. Man Singh had succeeded in arresting Gulabi's headlong flight, and now brought her back, while the *havildar* feverishly poured a charge into his muzzle-loading musket, spilling half the powder from his shaking hands. Capping the nipple with trembling fingers, he fired. But the bullet struck the tusker on the side of his thick skull, glancing off and merely inflicting a slight wound that only served to infuriate him more. With a shrill scream, he charged Gulabi, who swung around and bolted in terror, the two men on her crouching flat to escape being torn off by the low branches.

The tusker pursued her for a short distance, and then returned to the scene of the tragedy. Moti had taken advantage of his absence to scramble to her feet and escape. But the bodies of her men lay crushed and disfigured. The savage tusker went back to them, and trampled and kicked the mutilated corpses into a shapeless mass devoid of all semblance to humanity.

Moving a little away from his victims, he kicked up earth to plaster on his wounds. Then, with the light of battle still in his eyes, Tusker, free once more, stalked proudly off through the forest, his heart filled with hatred of the whole race of his new enemies—a hatred that many men were to rue bitterly in the years to come.

Check Number 1386

Wherein a beautiful and very spirited lady finds five thousand dollars drawn from her account without her knowledge—and a whole series of dramatic events ensues.

By ARTHUR CRABB

JAMES WEBSTER NASH and Hugh Ladd were lunching together at the Windham. James was twenty-five, tall, slender and good to look at; Hugh was forty, heavily built, with a firm jaw and gentle eyes. They were cousins by marriage, and each had an abiding faith in the other.

The large room was crowded. A woman, tall and dressed in black, came to the table next to them. Her hair was almost white, but her cheeks still had the bloom of health, if not of youth; she was remarkably handsome, and the sweetness of her eyes and mouth was very attractive.

"She must have been a wonder years ago," Jimmy said.

"She is yet, my boy," Hugh answered.

They let it go at that, till another woman came and sat at the same table so that Jimmy hardly had to turn his head to look directly at her.

"Did you ever see anything to equal her!" The boy's whisper required no answer. Hugh Ladd smiled; he never had, but wasn't going to admit undue interest.

"Hugh, I didn't know anything grew as beautiful as that."

Jimmy, fascinated, could not take his eyes from her, but she apparently did not see Jimmy. Around him, past him, through him, her eyes roamed, but they never stopped on him, till, luncheon finished, the boy arose. Then she looked at him; and for an instant, as he looked down, their eyes met, hers as if she simply saw a person, his as though he beheld a goddess. But she saw him, and she remembered him.

It would undoubtedly have ended there with Jimmy Nash, if André had not met him at the doorway and had not Jimmy, out of curiosity, asked André who she was.

"Miss Alma Glenn; she is in 'Rosebud.' "

THAT morning Alma Glenn had been sitting at her desk in her apartment. Mrs. Catherine Holmes was walking about

the room, tidying up. It was a bright, sunshiny apartment, very comfortable and very nicely furnished. Alma, finding such a place possible from the money point of view, had three years before suggested to Mrs. Holmes that they give up boarding-houses and set up housekeeping for themselves. Mrs. Holmes had a small income of her own, and Alma helped a little. She was a very pleasant woman, and the arrangement was very satisfactory all round.

"Through with these?" she asked Alma, pointing to a small pile of opened, empty envelopes.

"Yes." Alma handed them to her, and Mrs. Holmes put them in a wastebasket and went out. In a moment she returned with the empty basket, put it in its place beside the desk, took a magazine and sat down.

"What shall I do, write to them or go and see them?" Alma asked.

"It doesn't make any difference, I suppose. I'd write; it's easier. They'll find the mistake and fix it up."

"All right, I will." Accordingly Alma wrote a note to the People's Trust Company of Alden, saying that she had just gone over her August account and had found that the balance, as shown on the Trust Company's statement, was five thousand dollars less than it should have been. Then she put the canceled checks into a nicely ruled and printed envelope in which they had come from the bank, put the envelope and her check-book into a drawer of the desk, straightened up the desk itself and closed it.

"Let's go out to lunch, Catherine. I feel like having a good one today; call up André and tell him to hold a table."

Half an hour later Alma Glenn and Mrs. Holmes went down the elevator and out to the street, on their way to the Windham, Alden's best hotel. On the way, Alma stopped to buy a book, and Mrs. Holmes went on ahead to order lunch. When Alma reached the dining-room, she saw Jimmy Nash.

That night Jimmy Nash went to "Rosebud" alone. Such a thing was foreign to Jimmy's custom and nature, but somehow that night Jimmy wanted to go alone. He was very curious to see Alma Glenn and hear her talk. The play was a simple little comedy: a poor and distant cousin winning the young lord, despite the objections of everyone except the lord. Alma was the lord's sister. It was a part which Jimmy thought any lady might have played by simply learning the lines and being perfectly natural. As Alma seemed to be the fine lady without the slightest effort, it is to be presumed that Alma Glenn was an excellent actress.

She was certainly a most wonderful woman. At lunch there had been nothing but her face for Jimmy to see; then her hair had been hidden by her hat, her figure by her simple dress; but at night, on the stage, in evening décolleté, she shone forth in dazzling splendor. The boy sat and watched her, sure that he had never seen such a beautiful creature. Yet all the time he laughed at himself, for Jimmy was no fool.

He went home and went to bed. As he took off his coat, he tossed the program of the play on the table. There it stayed till the next night, when Jimmy, spying it, read:

"Rosebud, a Comedy, in Three Acts, by John Welch."

"Well, I'll be darned!" thought Jimmy, "I didn't know he wrote it." Jimmy knew the author; he belonged to one of Jimmy's clubs, and they played a rubber occasionally and had dined together once or twice.

The next night Jimmy got a seat in a box. It happened that Alma, as the lady, sat for a long time without saying a word, on a sofa very near Jimmy; and Alma saw him as her eyes wandered; and suddenly, remembering him she turned her eyes back for confirmation. The glance made Jimmy's heart pound and his face burn. He waited for her eyes to turn toward him again, but they never did. He went home that night still knowing that he was a fool.

The next night he went to the club, and John Welch was there. Jimmy spent the evening with him.

TWO evenings later Jimmy Nash went behind with John Welch and met Alma Glenn. Alma was very busy and not very much interested in Jimmy, but asked him to come back after the play. When he returned, she smiled and was willing to be pleasant to a friend of Mr. Welch.

Jimmy suggested supper, but instead she asked him to walk home with her. She talked well; her voice was low and sweet, her English quite as good as Jimmy's own. She was simplicity and modesty itself.

Jimmy pleaded for some of her time the next day and the next, but she said, smil-

ing, that it was impossible, but she promised him Sunday afternoon, and by keeping at it, Jimmy made her include part of the morning.

Thus, for the first time in many a day, Jimmy Nash did not play golf on Sunday. Instead he left the city and drove into the country with Alma. They came back to the city late and had dinner together.

Then Jimmy pleaded for more of her time, but Alma's time was very much engaged. Finally she agreed to tea on Tuesday afternoon, and then to dinner on Thursday, and later she gave him all of the next Sunday.

Saturday night Jimmy went behind the scenes and found her and took her home. This time he went to her apartment, after she had telephoned Mrs. Holmes to wait for them. Alma was no prude, but neither should there be any question, and Jimmy met the sweet old lady of the hotel dining-room.

Jimmy was in love with Alma. It would have been impossible not to love Alma, and Jimmy told her so. But Alma laughed; she had undoubtedly heard the same story before.

"Don't be silly," she said. "You don't know me nearly well enough. Don't talk that way, and we shall be good friends. You think you love me, because I'm good to look at; but that doesn't count, really. Oh, yes, I know that I ought not to talk about my good looks, but there isn't any modesty like that in my business. It's my stock in trade. How could I be a lovely lady if I looked like a scrubwoman?"

That was as far as Jimmy Nash got, but because she laughed at him was no reason for going away and being forlorn. He would wait and win her, finally.

Sunday morning they went away again, where Jimmy knew paths untraveled by the multitude. They lunched and spent an hour on a sunny beach, drove again, and as the sun was setting, gazed upon the glories of nature from the edge of a woody knoll. The glories of nature for Jimmy were all in the person of Alma Glenn. The world said that no woman was more beautiful than she, and the world is a hardened old sinner and not given to rhapsodizing over a pretty face, so Jimmy can't be blamed.

"But, Jimmy," she said, when, on the knoll, he told her again that he loved her, "you're awfully nice, and I like you very much, but you don't really love me, and I don't love anybody, and I'm not going to be married ever—anyway not for a long, long time. I'm going to be a great actress first. Besides, you don't know a thing about me, and I know that I was never intended to be your wife."

That was straight talk for a girl with a fortune dangling before her, which would be hers for the saying of one small word—straight talk for a girl whose future was no more than an uncertainty, for a girl who had waiting and ready for her a man like Jimmy Nash.

THEY went back to the city and had supper in Alma's apartment. After supper Mrs. Holmes disappeared, and they were left alone in the room where Alma had written the note to the People's Trust Company. A long day in the sun and air made their faces burn and their eyes heavy; they were very comfortable.

"Had a pleasant day, Miss Glenn?"

"Very, Mr. Nash." She said "Mr. Nash" with preciseness.

"That's a good idea."

"What's a good idea?"

"Dropping the 'Mister' and the 'Miss'; we can do that even if you wont marry me."

"*James, Jimmy*—it's not a very exciting name, but it will do."

"*Alma's* a nice name."

"Not particularly; it's simply because you're not used to it. Wait till you've lived with it for twenty years, and you wont care so much for it."

"Am I going to live with it for twenty years?"

"You know what I meant."

"And you know what I mean."

"Yes, I know, but why do you insist on talking about it?"

"I love you and I want you to marry me."

"If I were going to marry anyone, I'd love to marry you, but I'm not."

"Do you mean to say that if you loved an honest, respectable man, who didn't eat with his knife, that you wouldn't marry him?"

"I do mean to say that I am going to be a great actress, if I can."

"And can't great actresses get married?"

"Not before they're great. I couldn't, anyway. I never could do the two things at once, be a good wife and a good actress, and if I'm ever married, I want to be a good wife."

"Then you have thought of being married?"

"Of course I have. All sorts of men have asked me to marry them; they weren't complimentary proposals, most of them. You're the only man who has ever asked me that I really, truly liked. The sort of men I have to know aren't very pleasant; they look on marriage as a light thing."

"But you have thought further than just getting married; you've thought what sort of wife you'd like to be, and the sort of husband you'd like to have."

"Yes, you would have made me think of that, if nothing else had."

"Tell me, honestly, Alma—"

"Why should I be honest with you; how many men are honest with me?"

"Have you ever suspected that I have not been honest with you? I fell in love with you the moment I saw you. I didn't believe that anyone who was as beautiful as you were—are—could be—what you are, too. I thought I was a fool, in love with a pretty face. I didn't think it would last. I found out who you were so that I could get to know you and have that foolish love driven away; it drove everything else out of my mind. I expected to find that you were all sorts of unpleasant things, and instead I found—you. How you are what you are, I can't imagine, but I know what you are. I started with a crush on a beautiful actress; now I love a very sweet girl. That's all, and it's honest."

"I didn't fall in love with you the first time I saw you at the Windham, but you made me do a lot of thinking. I knew you were staring at me; I'm used to that; but I knew you weren't staring on the chance that I might look at you, close my eyes a little, look down and smile. I'm no fool, Jimmy—which is a good thing for me. You made me think of a home and comforts, being taken care of, of having some one to take care of. I didn't think of you; I thought of your type—the kind it takes generations to make: square, clean, high-minded, honest, pleasant men. I wondered whether I'd ever fall in love with a man like that, and if I did, if he'd ever ask me to marry him."

JIMMY NASH laughed. "It sounds almost as though you wished it would happen. Tell me something else, honestly—isn't there a chance of your loving me?"

"I will tell you something. I've known you—how long? Ten days. You are rich enough to give me everything I want. You're in the kind of society that is the best we have, not the newspaper kind, but the right kind. You're good to look at; you have a lovely smile and darling hair, and nice white teeth; you dress like a gentleman; you have a very pleasant voice; you're well educated; your manners are perfect and perfectly natural. There aren't any lugs about you, and I imagine, I'm pretty sure, that if you promised a girl you'd love her, cherish her and stick to her, through thick and thin, you'd do it, no matter how much you came to hate the job.

"Now, take me: I'm twenty-four. Six years ago I was a kid in a small town in the Middle West, the youngest of five girls, and I hated the town and everything in it, except the family, and I wasn't crazy about them. Mother and Father are wonders, but I wouldn't lead the life they lead for anything. Father's a small contractor, and Mother does her own housework, because she wants to. I came East to see life, and I've seen it. I've been a stenographer at eight dollars a week; I've worked in department-stores, and I've been in the chorus. I had luck and some friends and good looks, and now I'm pretty nearly ready to be a leading lady, if I can get a job, and that isn't easy, with the moving pictures and all. Maybe I'd go into the movies regularly if I got a chance and enough salary, but I don't want to.

"As it is, I have to work hard, sit up late every night, travel from city to city, spend my time with all sorts of people, some of them pleasant, most of them decidedly not, worry about whether the show will be a success or pass away, learn new parts, rehearse and grow old fast. It's a hard row to hoe; maybe there's fame at the other end, but it takes a long time to get there, and there's no telling whether you will ever get there; and if you do, what are you going to do with the fame when you get it?

"That's my side of it. You say: 'Chuck it, marry me, and you'll have a life of ease, an automobile, a fine house, plenty of friends, happiness.' It's too easy, Jimmy, too easy. I'd be a fool not to take what you offer me, but I'm that sort of a fool; I don't want it."

"What *do* you want, Alma? Don't you want to be loved?"

"That's just what I do want, and I want to love the right sort of man. If you were

poor, and if I married you, I had to cook your meals and do your washing, and carry your dinner to you in a pail, I'd marry you tomorrow. But you're rich—that's another matter. I've known you for ten days, you've known me for ten days. Suppose you married me, took me among your friends, and they didn't see me through rose-colored glasses the way you do; suppose they decided I wouldn't do, that I wasn't to the manor born, that I didn't ring true, and slowly but surely dropped you and me, and felt sorry for you—how long do you suppose you'd love me? You'd hate me. Love is all right to dream about, the prince and the goose-girl stuff, but the love that lasts and grows old gracefully is built on friendship, equality, respect, and a lot of hard work and self-sacrifice. I might be willing to take a chance on my happiness, but I'm not going to take a chance with yours; I like you too much."

"You mean, Alma, that you love me too much?"

"Yes, if you insist, I love you too much."

"Then it's settled; I knew somehow—I think I saw it in your eyes—that it would come; but I hadn't dared hope that it would come so soon. I could have waited, but it is very hard for me to wait now."

"I don't understand—wait for what, Jimmy?"

"For you to sit up and smile, and not struggle, when—come, Alma!" She sat looking up at him, her face crimson, her breath coming quickly, her heart beating fast.

"Will you believe that it is you, you yourself, and not what you have to give me, to save me from? Will you believe that always, always know it? Will you promise, on your word of honor, that if the time ever comes that you don't love me, that you will tell me so and let me go—away?"

"There is only one thing that I will ever believe or ever know; I love you and you love me—the world ends there. Your fears are wild fancies, but if they should ever come true, I will go away—with you."

She closed her eyes, and Jimmy's hands took hers. "Come, Alma."

She smiled. "I've warned you—if—"

But it was too late to protest. It was very late when he left her and it took a long time to say good-by.

"I came to see life—real life; and I'm doing what I could have done just as well at home—becoming a perfectly ordinary and respectable married woman. And all my good resolutions and fine ideas about you have gone—but I'm glad I came."

"I'm glad you did."

When he was gone, Alma sank back on her couch and buried her head in the cushions. When she sat up again, there were tears in her big brown eyes. "It can't be true; it must be a dream—it must. But it isn't; it's really so. And James Webster Nash, I'll make you a wife as is a wife; and if you ever regret, it wont be because I didn't try."

THE Thursday before the Sunday on which Alma promised to marry Jimmy Nash, there was a conference at the People's Trust Company which related almost entirely to Miss Glenn. Her letter had been duly received, noted, and passed along for investigation and report. The report had been that there had been no mistake; the books showed plainly that a check for five thousand dollars had been paid through the clearing house, and that it had been charged against the account of Miss Alma Glenn. The checks had been added on a machine, and the proper number of checks had been put in the envelope and sent to her.

Warren, the president, and Blair, the bank's counsel, were talking it over. It was possible, though very improbable, that a check had been charged against Miss Glenn's account which didn't belong there. It had been done before, once with disastrous results, for the Trust Company had returned certain other checks drawn against the account, with the statement that there were not sufficient funds. The drawer of the checks protested; the error was discovered; and the injured gentleman demanded satisfaction for the violent injury done to his credit by the Trust Company's error. The Trust Company settled promptly.

The same thing might have happened in this case, but no one had reported being short a check for five thousand dollars, and the check, whosever it was, should have been in Miss Glenn's envelope. Somebody was crooked; that was sure; but what was the Trust Company to do about it? Like many trust companies, the People's had a very simple way of keeping its customers' accounts. The first of every month it sent to each depositor an envelope, a large brown one, enclosing a pink one. The pink one, unsealed, contained all

the checks drawn during the preceding month. On the outside of the pink envelope was a nicely ruled space, showing in order the previous month's balance, the current deposits, the amount of checks enclosed, and the resulting balance. It was all very simple and had worked splendidly, until Alma's note had started trouble.

If Alma had drawn the check, and it had gone back to her and she had destroyed it, and denied that there ever had been such a check, the Trust Company couldn't prove that there had been. Of course, the presumption would be that the Company's books, kept in the ordinary course of business, were correct; but that presumption might not hold in a court of law, especially if Miss Alma Glenn could show that she was a respectable, law-abiding member of the community, and this Miss Glenn could probably do. Then she would be entitled to have the five thousand dollars put back to her credit, and the Company could whistle for it.

But if Miss Glenn was telling the truth, who had the five thousand dollars? Somebody had it, unquestionably, and it wasn't the Trust Company.

"That," said Blair, "exposes the weakness of the system. We can't prove anything. A paying teller, with or without confederates, might forge a check, take the cash himself, let the check go through the bank, and extract it from the envelope at the last minute. With the check gone, what proof is there of anything? None."

"Imagine," exclaimed Warren, "what could be done with one of our inactive accounts. Some of them are very large and are not drawn against for months, sometimes for years. Imagine a forged check, going through, say only one check in a year. The whole thing, check, envelopes and all might never leave the bank, might be destroyed right in the building, and nothing known of it for a year. Umph!"

"Or a case like this," said Blair; "some sanctimonious old rascal gambles with trust funds and loses. He's always been straight, supposedly, looked up to as an example of perfect righteousness. Suppose, facing ten years in jail, he puts through a check, say for fifty thousand dollars, denies it and gets away with it. He might, too, easily, with his reputation to back him up."

Warren scowled—it wasn't a pleasant idea.

"The trouble is," he said, "I don't know which way to turn. I don't know how to go at it to find the facts. There's nowhere to begin."

"Exactly," exclaimed Blair. "The only positive proof has been destroyed by somebody. I don't know Alma Glenn, but I'll give odds she did it."

"She's an actress; you've undoubtedly seen her."

"Probably—I don't remember. It's a thing to put before the Board, I think."

"When does the Board meet?"

"A week from Monday. In the meantime I'll see whether I can discover anything further."

"I would," said Blair. "Put Higgins on it; he may turn up something valuable."

Warren sent for Higgins, a detective of great ability and experience, and gave him the facts and told him to go to it.

MONDAY morning Jimmy Nash told Hugh Ladd that he was engaged to Alma Glenn, and it was arranged that he and Mary Ladd should dine with Alma and Jimmy on Tuesday evening. In the meantime Hugh went to see Alma. When he left her, he did not know what sort of woman she was. He was hopeful and yet afraid. He was no snob, but for a boy like Jimmy to marry an actress, who came from they knew not where, and who was they knew not what, was risky business; and Jimmy Nash was very dear to him. He was Mary's cousin, a boy who had no father or mother, and Hugh's responsibility was a heavy one. On Tuesday, Mary Ladd met Alma, and the party was a great success.

She did not say a word of what she thought of Alma, except to Ruth Graham, whom she had been saving with all her might and main for Jimmy Nash, until Jimmy had spoiled it all.

On Wednesday, Ruth had gone to Hopedale, the suburb in which the Ladds lived, and when Alma Glenn arrived late Saturday night, for her first visit among her new people, those two were waiting for her, ready to do battle for the boy; and pity the poor woman who must combat weapons such as were wielded by those two women, possessing brains and beauty that even Alma Glenn might well envy!

But Alma won. She was no coward, and went into the enemy's country with her head up and her teeth clenched, ready to fight, for she knew the Ladds and Nashs would never welcome her with open arms. What they would do when she was Jimmy's

wife was another matter, but she believed that the women among them would leave no stone unturned to separate her from him before she became his wife.

She had not been at dinner with Mary Ladd ten minutes on Tuesday night before she knew that Mary would be against her. Alma, far from sure of herself, fought single-handed the two women who had always been sure of themselves, and whose ancestors for generations had been sure of themselves. Alma knew that, beautiful as she was, it would not carry her far, and she did not count on it, for she understood that while she was beautiful, Mary Ladd's beauty was as great, and that with it was the beauty of breeding and refinement.

Alma went to the fray armed with all her pride. She talked little; she spoke quietly, frankly and modestly. She made them understand that she was fortunate beyond words, and that she would do her best to deserve her great good fortune. So far she went, and no farther, and they had to make the best of it; sure of herself or no, she made no mistake. If they had expected to find her narrow, uneducated, vulgar, or lacking in the graces of speech or manner, they were disappointed. But Alma did not win the two women.

On Monday morning the men went to town early, and later, Alma and Mary were alone together. Ruth, perhaps by plan, was elsewhere. Alma, knowing that the thing must be admitted, and still courageous, met the situation fairly.

"I am sorry, Mrs. Ladd," she said, "very sorry, that you are sorry that I am to be Jimmy's wife."

What could Mary say? Alma, accepting the condition and stating it so positively, left nothing to be said, unless Mary was willing to speak truthfully.

"I am sorry," she did say finally, "because I have always hoped that he would marry some one else, some one he had known for a long time, whom he had always been very fond of."

"That, of course, I know nothing about, but that is not what I mean."

"And you do mean?"

"That you do not approve of me, and will not approve of me as his wife."

"It is not for me to question Jimmy's choice; he surely knows better than I."

"Very likely not, Mrs. Ladd. Sometimes the one most—sometimes a man does not really understand; but I hope that he is right and that you are wrong."

Victory, it seemed, still hovered about Alma. There was nothing for Mary to say, unless she were to offer open battle, and that she would not do. So it was still, when Alma left after lunch; and so it was when Ruth consoled and comforted Mary, though it seemed as though Mary should have consoled Ruth, if Ruth knew and had approved of Mary's plans.

ALMA left Hopedale and went back to the city, for there was still a part to play, for another day or two, until the other woman could take her place. There was great happiness in Alma's heart, for she loved and was loved. She loved a man little older than herself, a gentleman, with high thoughts and high ideals, with a fine mind, who would go far with her at his side.

And she would not disgrace him; she had learned many things and learned them well, and she would learn more, to be a lady, dropping all that was imitation; learn to talk as Mary Ladd talked, learn to be a perfect wife, learn to be a perfect mother. She remembered the girl who had come to the great city from the small Western town, alone and almost penniless, seeking life. At first that life had been drear and lonely and full of low temptations, then brighter and brighter, till she had achieved a minor fame, with prospects good for greater fame. She had been successful; she had loved no man, though many had offered love. She had saved her love for Jimmy Nash, and she had been rewarded.

She knew, as she stood alone in her room, that she was worthy—worthy as to the soul and heart of her, worthy in all things that were to come. She *would* make every Ladd and every Nash and all the others love her.

WHEN Hugh Ladd left Hopedale that Monday morning, he was in trouble. He wasn't afraid of a family row; there never had been one and there never would be. Perhaps it would be the best thing that could happen in this case, and that was the trouble. Mary, than whom no sweeter, lovelier, gentler woman ever lived, would not complain. If Jimmy was to marry his actress, she would smile outwardly and weep inwardly; and inward weeping isn't good for a woman. Hugh knew that she did not approve of Jimmy's choice, and Hugh rather thought he did.

"She seems to me to be a damn' sensible, practical, straight girl," he thought, "and she's certainly a wonder to look at. I wish Mary liked her. Maybe it's only her disappointment about Ruth; match-makers don't like to have their schemes busted up."

At twelve o'clock Hugh, being a director of the People's Trust Company, went to the Board meeting and heard the whole story of Alma Glenn's five-thousand-dollar check. He also learned that Higgins was making an investigation and would be ready to report fully in a few days. The matter was allowed to stand so, it being understood that a special meeting of the Board would be called, if developments warranted it.

Jimmy had gone to him only that morning, begging that the only rift in his great happiness might be closed.

"Hugh," he said, "Mary must be wrong. I know that there can be no reason for her objecting to Alma. I know she does, though she tried not to let me know it."

He had told Hugh of Alma's life, of her struggles, of her success, how she had worked, how she had studied. Hugh had listened and had tried to cheer him. Then Jimmy had gone to Alma; and she, understanding, had comforted him and promised that all would be well, that Mary Ladd and all of them would change and take her to their hearts.

THEN came the meeting at the bank. Could Warren be wrong? He admitted that there was nothing but strong suspicion, with little chance to ever make it more, unless they could make Alma confess.

Hugh, with unutterable sadness, looked ahead to months, to years of uncertainty, that would be far worse than any truth could be. He saw the horror there would be if that uncertainty, by some twist of fortune, were changed to certainty, after Jimmy and Alma were married. Would it not be best to know now if the terrible thing was true, and break the boy's heart while it was young and would perhaps heal quickly?

He left the bank and went out into the October sunshine. The world was bright, but he was worried and very unhappy. Why must such things be; and why, if they had to be, should Jimmy Nash be dragged into them? He walked uptown, hardly realizing where he was going. He saw nothing of the city, crossed streets in a trance; once or twice he narrowly escaped being run over. There would be no joy in life for him till the thing was settled. Would Jimmy ever get over it, if Warren was right? Perhaps the worst could be prevented, if Warren was right, if Alma would only do it.

He found by telephone that she was at home.

"You don't look very happy today, Mr. Ladd," she said.

"No," he replied, "I am not happy. I wish that I might have come on a more pleasant mission than the one which has brought me."

"Of course; I quite understand."

"Yes, I know that you understand, without my telling you what it is. You have already told Mrs. Ladd that you understand."

"Of course, and I know that your objection to me is not I, myself, but that I am an outsider, and that you had no part in selecting me to be Jimmy's wife."

"I do not think that is altogether just. It is only natural that we would prefer to have his wife one whom we had known well, for marriage is not a light matter, and its success depends on more than a few days' infatuation."

"If it is only that, Jimmy will find it out for himself. We shall not be married for some months."

"You would let him go, if he discovered that it was no more than that?"

"Surely. I want Jimmy, but even more, I want him to want me; I would not marry him unless he did."

The real point he had yet to make, and he must make it quickly.

"You understand, Miss Glenn, about Jimmy's family, or rather, lack of immediate family?"

"Yes, he has told me."

"So, of course, you know that he had no one to advise him, unless it be I, who have that right only because he and Mrs. Ladd are cousins and have been almost brother and sister, and that I am very fond of him."

"And Mrs. Ladd has sent you?"

"Mrs. Ladd does not know I am here; neither does—but let that wait." He was about to say Mr. Warren. "I have but one appeal to make, which I make because we all love him, and which, if you really love him, you will not refuse."

"Yes?"

"Do not marry him unless you know

that you are not, by any possible chance, taking great unhappiness to him, unless you know that you are a woman that he, if he knew everything, would have his wife and the mother of his children be."

"If Jimmy loves me," she said, quietly, "he shall have no reason to be ashamed of me. If ever he does not love me, you may have him back, whether it be tomorrow or fifty years from now."

She won Hugh Ladd.

"Alma," he said, "I like you, I believe in you. I know that some day I shall be very fond of you, and I know that you will make Jimmy a good wife. Good-by."

WHEN he reached the street, he remembered Warren's words: "Alma Glenn has, beyond all reasonable doubt, put up this job. We can't prove it, legally, but I believe—I'm sure it's so."

"Am I a fool," thought Hugh, "or is my hunch right? Anyway, I'm going to stick to the hunch."

A. Augustus Warren took a great deal of interest in Alma Glenn's bank account. He had long talks with Higgins on the subject, and Higgins and several of Higgins' assistants worked their heads off finding out things about Alma Glenn. Higgins himself called on Alma immediately after the Board meeting. She showed him her check-book, which was a large one, her canceled checks, the envelope that contained them, and the adding-machine slip listing the amount of each check and the total. On this slip was an item of five thousand dollars.

Alma explained that the brown envelope in which all these papers had been sent through the mail had been thrown away—as, naturally, it would be.

The first check in Alma's book had been Number 886. The last check in the book was No. 1383. Three checks had been torn from the back of the book, from stubs Numbers 1384-5 and 6. She said she had used those three checks to take the place of checks which she had written incorrectly and destroyed. She produced all her canceled checks for months back; and two, 1384 and 1385 were found among them, with the printed numbers ruled out and other numbers written in their places. Number 1386 could not be found, and Alma had no idea what had become of it. Higgins thought that that might be an important point.

Alma said that she had never drawn a counter check in her life; she also said that she did not know one paying teller from another, and that she went to the window which was most convenient or which had the fewest number of people waiting at it. Furthermore, she had cashed checks at the bank not over half a dozen times.

ALMA didn't quite like it all; there was a suggestion that they suspected her of having done something wrong, and she didn't like being suspected. She told Jimmy about it, and Jimmy laughed; and later he told Hugh Ladd—and when he saw Hugh's face, Jimmy stopped laughing.

"Do you mean to say they believe that Alma is crooked?"

"They don't say that, Jimmy; but they do say that somebody is, and that what evidence they have points to Alma. It isn't evidence really. These are the facts." He told Jimmy the whole story.

"Do you believe she did it, Hugh?"

"I'll be frank; I'll tell you exactly how I feel about it. If it were an impersonal matter, I would believe that the owner of that account had swiped, or was trying to swipe, the money from the Trust Company. I heard the story last Monday, and I went to see your girl."

"Did you say anything to her about it?"

"I did not. I just talked to her, because I have your happiness very much at heart, and I believed you were taking a chance with your own future happiness." Hugh smiled again. "I came away believing that she's a straight, honest, sweet, pure girl, and I'll bet my last dollar that she's as innocent as I am. Is that strong enough for you? Because if it isn't I'll make it stronger. Anyway, I'll go a step further and say I think you're lucky to get her."

Then Jimmy smiled again.

But when Higgins left Alma, he wasn't smiling. If he had known where to put his hand on check Number 1386, he was pretty sure he would have laughed. Of course, miracles do happen, but Higgins' experience told him they didn't happen often, and he'd seen mighty few of them. But the trouble was that check No. 1386 most certainly didn't exist. Whoever had written it and put it through the bank, had of course destroyed it when it came back; it hadn't been put away in a safe place or hidden, not it! Whoever had done the job was no fool; and a paper burned was safe,

a paper hidden wasn't. The adding-machine list was proof that there had been a check for five thousand dollars and that it had been taken from the rest of Miss Glenn's checks some time between the balancing of the account and the writing of her note to the bank. Higgins wondered whether the thief should not have destroyed the adding-machine slip.

As to Miss Glenn herself, Higgins hadn't any qualms. The prettier they are, the more innocent they are, the worse devils they are. Get her with the goods—and good night to sweet voices and soft eyes and all that sort of thing. You bet your life Higgins couldn't be made a fool of by any dame—good lookin' or otherwise! Higgins went to see Bobby Brandt, and when he left him, Higgins smiled, for Higgins had his limitations. Bobby told Higgins a few things, and Higgins imagined some more, which, notwithstanding his knowledge of the world, was a foolish thing to have done. It wasn't legal proof, but it was something, and every little helped. He went to his office, and late that afternoon, being ready to quit for the day, he stood with his hand stretched out for his overcoat when the light came. Higgins had been racking his brain all day trying to place a face. He had seen the face through a door, and it had meant nothing at the time. Half an hour later, he had thought of it again, and almost unconsciously began to think of it, and the more he thought of it, the more he was annoyed because he couldn't place it. Remembering faces was part of Higgins' business, and he was proud of his ability to do it. As he reached for his overcoat, he knew whose face he had seen through the door, and he positively chuckled. Things were looking up. The next morning he had another talk with Warren and Blair, and as a result of it Warren started a search in every bank, trust company, savings institution, and broker's office in Alden.

THAT evening Jimmy took Alma to dinner and to the theater, where she played her part in "Rosebud" for the last time. After the play he took Alma to her apartment, where they were about to have a supper of crackers and cheese.

Alma, bringing the things from the kitchen, stopped as she passed Jimmy and rubbed her cheek on his.

"Well, I suppose I'm a lady now," she laughed. "I don't feel a bit different, only happier. Oh, Jimmy, I'm so happy."

"Perhaps part of it comes from making other people happy."

"I wonder if it does! It's awfully nice, anyway. And Jimmy, I've never talked seriously about some things with you before, but I *am* lucky, Jimmy."

"Lucky to catch such a fish as I am! Sure, I admit it—" Alma's hand was over his mouth.

"Don't be silly—even if it's so. Will you promise not to talk till I say you may? I want to tell you something, and I hate to have to do it."

Jimmy nodded his head.

"Jimmy, I'm lucky, not to have caught such a dear little fish as you, but to be all right to marry you, now that you're caught. I suppose I can tell you, talk to you about everything now; anyway, I'm going to."

"You most certainly can, Alma."

"Almost from the first moment I landed in this dear old town, it seems to me that I had chances to go wrong. Jimmy, you wont think I'm conceited if I talk about my good looks, will you? It's part of the story."

"Talk about 'em all you like. They're my property now."

"Jimmy, be serious! I'm going to be embarrassed in a minute, and I want to have it over with. When I was in school, I studied German because they made me. How I hated it; we had a book for translation—I can't remember the German name, but it meant 'The Curse of Beauty.' Those words stuck, and how I loathed them! I haven't the faintest idea what the book was about, but the title was enough. I know, or I did know, what the curse of beauty was. Men—time and again—annoyed me. And most of the time all I could do was to grin and say no. Other girls laughed at me and said I was a fool, which didn't help any. But I had sense enough to know I wasn't a fool, and here I am, thanking my lucky stars for it. It wasn't so bad, wasn't bad at all for the last two or three years; but something else did happen, and you've got to know.

"The man was Robert Brandt. I was in the chorus when I met him, and he took a shine to me. He was rich and rather pleasant, much the pleasantest man I knew. He had influence, and got me out of the chorus and a part in a real play. I expected to hear the same old story—ex-

pected him to begin the same old game, but he never did. He asked me to marry him."

Alma stopped and tried to read Jimmy's face. Jimmy smiled and patted her cheek.

"Through?" he said.

"No, I'm not through. He stuck to me like a burr for over two years and proposed to me at least twice a day. I liked him, and I let him stick, and finally I promised to marry him, and I knew I didn't love him when I promised."

"What happened, Miss Worry?"

"He bought me an engagement ring and I wore it. The next day he brought me a necklace—and I didn't wear it."

"Come on, Alma, get to the horror part. I'm real interested, of course, but we're wasting time."

"That's all, Jimmy."

"Then why all this fuss?"

"Don't you understand?"

"No, I don't."

"I was willing to lie—to sell myself."

"How long did you stay engaged—I mean sold?"

"Two days."

"And then?"

"I told him the truth, and called it off."

"And you've made me listen to all this junk just because you—oh, Lord, it's too silly to talk about. I'm rather glad it happened. I know Bobby, and he's a good fellow. I admire his eye for girls, especially."

"How about his homely spouse? You know he's married now."

"Perhaps he saw under the surface; she's a good sort."

"You know her too?"

"Yes."

"How, for goodness sake?"

"We're both brokers, Bobby and I."

"He's not in your crowd?"

"No, if I understand what you mean. But single men go where they like. I've been to his house and had a good time. I doubt if he'd have a good time at the Ladds'."

"And doesn't all this make any difference to you? Does it make you think—"

"Raspberries! Let's eat."

"Now, Jimmy, be good, please do! It has worried me terribly, and I don't want to worry any more. It's the only cloud in the sky. If I had even thought I loved him, it wouldn't have been so bad."

"My! Bite that." He put a large piece of cracker into her mouth.

Alma nearly choked, and she could hardly breathe; but she could see, and she saw Jimmy laughing at her.

SLIM WATTS was a gentleman, and clever. His life had been full of trials, personal and court, and the rough edges with which he had started his career with had been pretty well smoothed down. Slim, in a dinner-coat, nicely creased trousers, shiny shoes and a good-looking overcoat, would have passed anywhere for what he was not, a respectable business man, with nothing on his mind.

One Tuesday night Slim dined at the Windham grill. After dinner he went to the hotel ticket-office and bought a front row chair for "Rosebud." It was pure luck that he selected "Rosebud." In due course he walked down the aisle and took his seat. He glanced over the program, and a name caught his eye.

"Alma Glenn," said Slim to himself over and over again. Then he said: "Aint that the limit, though?"

He was particularly curious to see what Miss Glenn looked liked. One night later, and Slim would, in all probability, never have seen Alma, and there is no telling what might have happened. As it was, he did see her and was much taken with her.

"Some chicken," said Slim. Then: "Some kid! Aint she the sweetest bit of candy, though!" Then Slim's thoughts wandered to some one else, and what he said to himself wouldn't sound well anywhere.

After the performance Slim Watts walked down the street to the corner, thinking hard. At the corner he stopped to let an automobile go by.

"Ah, hell!" thought Slim. "What's it to me? I must be getting daffy." Whereupon he drew a very handsome cigar from his pocket, bit off the end and lighted it—lighted it so plentifully that the match burned his fingers. Perhaps Slim's thoughts were still far away from that street-corner; perhaps the bright light of the match, suddenly going out, left everything dark in front of him; but whatever it was, there was mighty little uncertainty as to what happened to Slim. He stepped off the curb, and a large, expensive automobile struck him squarely and smashed him up completely.

Some days later Slim regained consciousness and discovered that his chances of living two or three days were pretty good,

but that was the best that could be said for him. Slim faced death with as much grin as he could manage, and decided that he might as well enjoy those days, up to three. There wasn't any regret for his past life in his heart, no desire to make amends—not him! But the first thing Slim thought of when he got straightened out in his new surroundings was the last thing he'd been thinking of before he'd tackled the automobile.

Slim was nuts on the kid, sure enough, and proud of it. Slim sent for a special friend of his, to come while the coming was good.

ON Friday after the Board meeting, Warren, Blair and Higgins sat together in Warren's office, talking. Finally they came to a conclusion, and Warren sent a note to Miss Alma Glenn asking her to come to the Trust Company's office that afternoon at three o'clock.

Alma sent Warren a note by the same messenger, saying that she'd be delighted to go. At three o'clock she was ushered into Mr. A. Augustus Warren's office, the door was closed behind her and she was introduced to Mr. Blair and asked to sit down.

Warren spoke of the weather, regretted that they had been forced to ask Miss Glenn to come, and thanked her for having come to help them.

"You know, Miss Glenn," he went on, "the matter is most serious. Five thousand dollars is a large sum; yet it is not nearly so important as the honesty of our employees and the safety of our system of handling accounts."

"I quite understand, of course, Mr. Warren. I am only too glad to do anything I can to help, though I do not understand what I can do."

"We will come to that, if there is anything. You don't mind if we ask questions?"

"Oh, no, indeed."

"You have shown Higgins all your canceled checks, and they are in order, and correspond with the stubs. Therefore the check for five thousand dollars must have been from another book, or perhaps a counter check. There is, I believe, a check missing from the back of your book, Number 1386."

"Yes."

"And you don't know what has become of it?"

"No, I haven't the slightest idea."

"So," said Warren, and pursed his lips. "If you had drawn a check for five thousand dollars, you would not have forgotten it, certainly?"

"Oh, no, indeed; I have never written a check nearly as large as that."

"And, still presuming that there really was such a check, forged or otherwise, it was written during August; you could not have cashed it, or written a counter check, Miss Glenn, because you were on Long Island during the entire month?"

"Yes, that is so."

"It is of course perfectly evident that one of three kinds of checks may be involved. Your own check No. 1386, a counter check or a check from another book."

"I suppose so—especially about the check from another book."

"What do you mean?"

"Couldn't some one else's check, say some one whose signature looked like mine, have gotten in with my checks by mistake? I know that happened once to a friend of mine."

"But what became of the check; it was certainly sent to you?"

"I don't see how it could have been; I didn't get it."

"How do we know you didn't get it?"

"Do I understand just what you mean?" Warren had made a mistake.

"I am sorry, I meant to say—"

"Just exactly what you did say, and it's not the sort of question you ought to ask. If my word isn't good, why ask me anything?"

BLAIR laughed. The girl had spunk. Then he turned to Alma. "Miss Glenn, do you know a Harriet Boyle?"

"No, I think not."

"Please try to remember."

"No," she said, "I don't."

"You live, Miss Glenn, at the Niagara Apartments?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"No."

"With Miss Catherine Holmes?"

"Mrs. Holmes."

"Ah yes; and you know, I suppose, that Mrs. Holmes, under the name of Harriet Boyle, opened four savings-bank accounts early in August?"

"Did she? I did not know that; but there is no reason why I should."

"And, of course, you do not know, then, that the total sum deposited in those four banks was just about five thousand dollars?" Alma shook her head. "I know absolutely nothing about it."

"You would be willing, of course, to ask Mrs. Holmes where she obtained that five thousand dollars, and why she used the name of Harriet Boyle instead of the name she commonly uses?"

"Of course, if you wish; but perhaps it would be better if you asked her. It's really none of my business."

"How well do you know Mrs. Holmes?"

"We have lived together for three years."

"And you don't know that she was once Harriet Boyle?"

"No, I don't, and I do wish you would tell me what that had to do with my bank-account."

"Only this: that somebody had stolen five thousand dollars."

"Certainly I didn't, and certainly Mrs. Holmes didn't. She's the sweetest woman in the world."

"How did you come to know her?"

"I met her in a boarding-house."

"And—"

"I liked her. I wanted to live in my own place, and I couldn't do it alone, so I asked her to live with me."

"And you never suspected that she was one of the shrewdest swindlers in the country years ago?"

"What! I don't believe it; it's impossible!"

"As you will, Miss Glenn," said Warren.

THEN Blair began again: "Miss Glenn, I notice, from a statement of your account with the Trust Company, that you have had a balance of over ten thousand dollars for about three years."

"Yes, I think that is about right."

"And the deposits and checks drawn against them have been between six and eight thousand dollars a year. That is a great deal of money, Miss Glenn." Alma smiled.

"A great deal of money, Miss Glenn."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"You are an actress, Miss Glenn?"

"Yes."

"And you earn as much as that?"

The soft voice purred the words as though in admiration of the talent in so young a woman that paid so well.

"You earn eight thousand dollars a year, Miss Glenn?"

Alma laughed, a whole-hearted laugh. "What are you driving at? You are the funniest men; why don't you come straight out and tell me what you want to know? If I know it, I'll tell you. I haven't a blessed thing to hide, but I don't like the way you beat about the bush. I never earned eight thousand dollars a year on the stage; I wish I had."

A smile, a very small smile came on Warren's face. "You must excuse me, Miss Glenn, if I have gone too far. My excuse is the importance of the subject."

"Certainly," she said.

It must be then or never. The girl was smart, and an actress, and they were not getting anywhere. Higgins had told them things that he had learned, and they were sure of their ground. They knew where all that money had come from, and if they could make her confess that, she'd have to confess the other thing; they would have her then. For if she was that kind of woman, she wouldn't stand a chance on earth in court.

"Miss Glenn, do you—by any chance—know a man named—Robert Brandt?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Yes, quite well."

"Not more than quite well?"

"I knew him very well."

"As well as a woman can know a—"

"Stop!" Alma sprang to her feet. "Be careful," she said, and her voice was very quiet.

It was the end. Blair and Warren knew that they were beaten, and it began to dawn on them that Alma Glenn was exactly what she seemed to be.

Then Alma spoke again.

"I know that you are doing what, for some reason or other, you think it is your duty to do. But you see, I am going to marry Mr. James Nash, and I don't believe that you would like to remember that you said a thing like that to Mr. Nash's wife. You know him, don't you?"

They did—well.

ALMA GLENN was gone. Warren looked at Blair, and Blair looked at Warren; each of them smiled at the other, sheepishly.

"A fine mess we made of it," said Warren.

"You got me into it, doggone you."

"Yes, I did," Warren laughed. "But good Lord, think of having to get down

on our knees and beg forgiveness, and for all we know, she has the five thousand."

"You know mighty well she hasn't got it."

"You can't prove she hasn't."

"No, but I don't need any proof."

"No, I don't either. But who got it?"

"Heaven knows. Probably the woman she lives with, but how can we prove it? One thing is sure, though, young Nash has a corker."

"There's no doubt about that. I think we had—"

The door of Warren's office opened, and Higgins rushed in, unannounced.

"I've got the five thou!" shouted Higgins with no ceremony whatever.

"What!"

Then Higgins appreciated the fact that he had gone too fast.

"Well, anyway, I know who has got it. Luck, pure luck!" Higgins was conscientious. "It's Hattie Boyle; I got it straight. About three hours ago Slim Watts sent for me; he's in the hospital with one chance in a million of ever coming out alive. He says a friend came to him awhile ago and paid him a hundred dollars for writing Alma Glenn's name on one of our green checks. He remembers the number after a fashion—thought it was 1838, or 1586—something like that."

"Wouldn't he tell you who it was?"

"He would not, but he didn't have to. She's an old pal of his. All he'd say was that it wasn't the cute little chunk of candy. What do you know about that?"

The two men shook their heads and smiled.

"And he never seen her but once, and that on the stage. Can you beat it? Him of all guys."

"But how are you going to prove the case on Hattie Boyle?"

"It's proved; she's confessed."

"What are you going to do with her?" asked Higgins.

What they did with her has nothing to do with Alma Glenn.

Hattie was sore, which wasn't surprising. She had worked the thing out very carefully. She had waited until Alma's bank-account was large enough to have five thousand dollars taken from it without being overdrawn. It had been easy to get the blank check, and then a sample of Alma's handwriting; and Slim had been willing to help. She had had no trouble in getting the brown envelope before the late-sleeping Alma was awake, and no trouble steaming it open, taking out the check and sealing the envelope again. She had destroyed the envelope easily enough later, and she had been sure of Slim Watts. How on earth was she to know that Slim would see Alma, go daffy about her, and then get himself run over by an automobile? And how was she to know that the receiving teller at her bank would remember her and the check? It was her good looks, damn it, that's what it was. If she'd been a frump, he'd never have thought of her. And—it wasn't safe to have a past.

MARY LADD was three years older than Alma Glenn, and she had been married almost four years, which made a lot of difference. She heard all about Alma's trouble; she couldn't get her good-for-nothing husband to sympathize with her a bit; Jimmy laughed at her, and once even kissed her, which was most unusual.

Then Mary began to feel sorry for Alma, which was the beginning of the end. It was only a very few days after that, that Mary walked into Alma's apartment. Mrs. Holmes had gone long before, and Alma was living alone, for the few weeks that were left before her wedding. Mary Ladd sat down and faced Alma. Alma smiled, and wondered what was going to happen, for she had seen a subtle change come over Mrs. Ladd during the previous weeks.

"I don't think," said Mary, "that you ought to be here all alone."

"Of course I don't like it, but it's not for long."

"No, I know it isn't, but they are very important days. I remember the days before my wedding. I want you to come—to stay with me."

"I—oh, Mrs. Ladd!"

"Mary, Alma. You know that you and I are going through life very close together."

"I know. It is the only thing that makes me unhappy, that you are sorry."

"I'm not sorry, Alma. I'm very glad. I came to tell you so."

And then Mary kissed a very wet cheek, that was very close to a wonderfully happy smile.

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"A Night in the Kremlin" finds the Free Lances venturing a dangerous impersonation in Russia and discovering some highly interesting facts. Mr. New is in excellent form in this authoritative story.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

THE place had been once the drawing-room of a baroness, in the old régime; its marquetry floors had been covered with almost priceless rugs from Persia, Bokhara, Kashmir, its walls hung with Verestchagin's and Muncaczy's best work. But some of the pictures had been ripped to shreds by a freezing mob intent upon using the frames as firewood; the floors had been gouged and splintered, and most of the rugs sold for bread by servants who dared ask no more than a few rubles lest they be shot by the Cheka as bourgeoisie. Two of them, soiled and tattered, were used for extra warmth over the straw in a couple of bins roughly knocked together for beds by men who handled a pen much better than they did carpenter's tools—and yet, with thorough but gentle cleaning, each of those Persian carpet fragments would have sold in the United States for a thousand dollars.

Window-casings—almost every article made of wood—had been long since burned. The wall-frescoing had been smudged and streaked with dirt, every bit of lead pipe in the house long since removed. In the center of the room stood an old-type German stove, in which burned a few chunks of coal that had come up from the Nijni-Novgorod district in the summer months. Across the window-apertures two thicknesses of sacking had been stretched. By the stove one was conscious of a faint warmth in front, but had to depend upon the thickness of his clothes to protect the other side of him. Because even mob ideas of the simple life must give way eventually to the howling of tired, aching muscles, four chairs had been constructed by a sailor from Odessa who was handy with tools, and glad to spend a few days on the work in exchange for more or less immunity from the prowling hyenas of the Cheka. (Sawed lumber had been dribbling into Moscow from the nearer forested districts where German gang-bosses were getting the stuff out as best they could.)

The man who squatted, cross-legged, in the straw of a bunk near the stove, picked

bits of very beautiful music from a balalaika while he hummed an obbligato in a pleasing baritone not loud enough to get beyond the sacking in the front windows. For the moment, he had more sense of bodily comfort than either of his guests—thanks to the quart of champagne they had generously fetched in from a restaurant at a price which would have been classed under "burglary" in the annals of crime. He was a man of fifty, not quite as emaciated as he had been during '20 and '21, perceptibly less dirty as to face and hands, a degree or two more presentable in his boots and wadded coat, with its astrakhan collar. The other two were not really suffering, you understand—but only because they were men of iron constitution, accustomed to severe exposure and privations at times. But you couldn't have converted them to an acceptance of the life which Russians were finding at least tolerable had you offered either one a million, gold, to remain in the country a single year. Both were almost unmistakably German, with that manner of command which marks the army officer or the manager of large industries. They might have been of the old nobility—or of the more politic class evolved in big business. And they had come to Kravotkin with letters from a man in Paris to whom Russians were turning with considerable hope since the death of Lenine.

"*Ach, Gott,* Kravotkin! Do you know what you are playing, man! The 'Venetian Love-song' of Nevin—in a temperature like this, with the wind blowing through like a knife! It iss not appropriate—*nein!* We've not heard you play much of your Russian music—why iss that?"

THE Russian switched without stopping into the little "Polonaise Brillante"—one of the most charming things ever done in his country. After a few bars, he stopped abruptly with a crashing chord across the strings.

"You know that—eh? It was written by Andreyef—conductor of the Imperial Balalaika Orchestra which used to play at every court affair. He took his orchestra through Europe, through America, playing before great audiences. Made records for the big phonograph companies. A man of good family and great talent. Do you know what these swine did to him? Threw this artist, this gifted countryman of theirs, into a filthy and freezing cellar! Let him starve to death there! Sometimes, my friend—one is not in the mood to play Russian music. It suggests too much!"

"But—conditions are not quite so bad as they were, I think?"

"Not quite. Lenine is dead. In his bed—which is like an anticlimax! None of us expected it that way. The man had enemies—naturally. But even *he* had brains enough to profit by experience, he said openly that, with human nature in its present state, a communistic world was impossible, that we must return to the capitalistic system until there was a change, at least. And from that time, there has been improvement—of a sort.

"It is merely a beginning, so far—a promise of better things to come. This room, you observe, is not the place I could have wished in which to receive you. The hotel, where you would be much less safe, is warmer and more comfortably furnished at least. But the day is only beginning to break for Russia. There is still too much shooting in filthy cellars—because the opposition is known to be getting stronger every week. A stronger Kerensky would find his opportunity almost ripe. It may be that the upheaval will be almost bloodless; the whole country is weary of bloodshed and ruin and filth."

"Er—you found our man, Spielmeyer, without much difficulty?"

"Yes. He has brains—that one! When his newspaper, *Moskauer Zeitung,* was taken over by the Soviet to print ruble-sheets and propaganda, he went to the Kremlin and insisted upon an interview with Lenine. The Red Guard would have bayoneted him if Lenine himself hadn't come out, then, just by luck. Spielmeyer said, in few words, that he wanted to run the *Moskauer Zeitung* under Lenine's orders, any way he wanted it run—knew the whole plant better than anyone else. So he was kept on, there, with a part of his operating force. Today he is allowed to get out a semiweekly newspaper and collect what advertising he can to run it, but the presses are used more than half the time for Soviet work."

"You were careful not to give him my name, Kravotkin?"

"As you requested. Of course! I said you were a representative of the Internationale Pressbund which owned the paper in the old days of the Empire. He asked me to describe you—nodded his head, when I did so in a general way. He should be here now, almost any time."

IN a few moments, there came a pounding upon the door below—and when the Russian had gone down to unbar it, a stocky man with a blonde beard and blue eyes, peering from behind thick lenses, climbed the stairs to where they were sitting. In the none too good lamplight—the electric fittings having been long since ripped out—he peered searchingly into the faces of the two strangers. Then expressions of incredulity and delight flashed across his face as he grasped their hands with both of his.

"*Ach! Du lieber Gott!* Der Herr Doktor Liebknecht himself—and the good Von Bergmann!" He had spoken in Russian with a strong German accent—had never been suspected of being other than what he seemed, a very well-educated Wurttemberger. But in other times and places, the man was the Honorable John Sheldon of Hants, England. Moreover he knew "Dr. Liebknecht" for none other than Earl Trevor, foremost of the famous Free Lances in Diplomacy, and his secret employer. And "Von Bergmann" was Trevor's Afghan right-hand man Abdool.

"I couldn't imagine who, of the old crowd, might be left to come out here as the Syndicate representatives, knowing of course that we had been merged with the International since the war," pursued "Spielmeyer." "Well—presumably you know, sir, about what condition our plants are in and, generally, what has happened to us. The only definite information I can give you is concerning Brausch and Soldermann. Their papers in Saratov and Kiev were taken over by the Soviet, and it was reported they were both shot at the time. Had they gotten out of the country alive, the London offices would certainly have heard from or seen them. On the other hand, neither one was a fool. Both might have played politics and stalled along in any way they had to in order to come through and eventually turn in vitally important information. My impression is, however, that there would have been opportunity to hear from them before this if they are alive. As to the other papers in Odessa, Rostov, Nijni-Novgorod, Petrograd,—all over the place,—your sources of information are probably much more reliable than mine. One doesn't ask too many questions here, if he contemplates pulling through to better times! Are you making a systematic tour of the country for the Syndicate?"

"Hardly anything as dangerous and uncomfortable as that, just now. When some kind of responsible government is established, that will have to be done, of course—but for the present we wish to ascertain from Rykoff, if possible, just what the status of our newspapers is, today, and what his intentions are concerning them. Incidentally, of course, we shall keep our eyes open and learn what we can of the general trend. Now—what do you advise in regard to procuring an interview at the Kremlin?"

"Hmph! I would have suggested your coming here much more openly in the first place! Had you entered the country as duly accredited representatives of the Internationale Pressbund—"

"Which we really did—"

"I know—I know! But you didn't go to a hotel as such representatives naturally would, in the first place—and you didn't apply at once for your interview with Rykoff. Of course Kravotkin is now a Commissar, and as such, presumably above suspicion. But men accustomed to decent living as you both are, wouldn't put up with the deadly chill of this house, the total lack of civilized conveniences, when they could at least have kept warm in the one hotel which has been roughly gotten into shape again. It's a question as to whether your coming here wont arouse suspicion against our good friend himself—"

"Even if we knew him in the days of the old Empire?"

"Well—that helps, of course; but it still leaves a lot of explaining to do. My suggestion would be that we go at once to the German commissioner, here. He will be entirely satisfied with your passports and my vouching for you. Any explanation which he offers concerning your movements since you crossed the border is likely to be accepted, I think."

"You don't suppose it might be better for Kravotkin to apply for the interview—and introduce us?"

"No! Let him ask that an interview be granted you as old friends of his—that would be the natural thing for him to do in his position, and it will be a good indorsement for you both. But your request should properly come through the German commissioner, who, in a general way, looks after his nationals in Russia and keeps track of them. What makes it a bit awkward is that he *should* have had advance notice of your coming and applied for the

interview before you arrived. However—there are good explanations why he didn't. Suppose we go and see him at once—while our friend, here, goes to the Kremlin with his own request—eh?"

NEXT morning Liebknecht and Bergmann received word from the German commissioner that an interview with Rykoff had been arranged and that they should present themselves at the Kremlin about eleven. Appearing at the Porte Spasskiia with the pass which had been sent them, they were taken by one of the Red Guard to a small room on the ground floor of the Petit Palais just inside the gate—where Alexander II was born—and kept waiting there, without anything to eat or any chance to get it, until past five in the afternoon. It was understood in a general way that Rykoff had not settled as yet upon the rooms which he was going to occupy officially, and had been transacting business in various different imperial chambers until final arrangements were made. Eventually the two supposed Germans were taken into what was the Salon de l'Imperatrice on the ground floor of the Grand Palais, down near the river-wall of the Kremlin inclosure.

As the sun was just setting behind heavy snow-clouds, the big vaulted chamber was gloomy in the extreme. At the rounded east end where the Empress' throne had formerly stood on a raised dais, there was a broad table and several chairs, the only light in the room being from a lamp on the table. At one side, against the wall, there was an American typewriter on a small stand—a girl with black hair and dark red gown taking such memoranda or dictation as might be required. It took but a moment for Dr. Liebknecht to decide that the man who sat behind the broad table was neither Rykoff, Litvinoff nor Kalenin,—two of whom he knew by sight,—but a minor Soviet official who evidently acted both as interpreter and spokesman for the new dictator. Inferentially, the man who sat in a big leather chair at the left of this man and a couple of feet back from the table, smoking a very good cigar, was Rykoff himself. His features were markedly Finnish, indicating also his peasant birth, but his university education and ability to keep his mouth shut gave him a reserved ease of manner which was deceptive. He was neither as easy nor as considerate, according to Western notions, as he seemed—and was in poor health. Besides the dictator, his mouthpiece Michaelovitch, the girl and the two Germans, there were but two others in the room: officers of the Red Guard, at the other end.

After the callers had seated themselves in front of the big table, Michaelovitch glanced at some memoranda concerning them, and presently asked:

"I presume, Herr Doktor, that you and Herr Bergmann are here to check up in a general way the present status of newspapers formerly owned or controlled by your press-syndicate. Is that correct?" Both the man and his superior had eaten a plentiful lunch at four, with a quart of champagne each, and were feeling comfortably relaxed, in no particular hurry for the other things before them, that evening. Their visitors had eaten nothing since nine in the morning—and though tired, for this reason, were that much keener mentally. "Newspapers of the Imperial Pressbund, I believe?" added Michaelovitch.

"Before the war, sir, they belonged to the Deutsche Reichspressbund. We have since merged with the International—a much larger and more powerful organization. Of course in anything so chaotic as the upheaval caused by the war, the question of property ownership was blotted out for several years at least. But in any final adjustment of claims as a basis for business relations with Russia in future, it must naturally come up again. That is unavoidable. We spent several millions of good hard cash to acquire, equip and develop some twenty newspapers throughout this country—and while our original organization had its headquarters in Berlin, it was even then as much English, French and American as it was German. Today the German branch is the smallest end of the International. Concerning some of our papers here, we have more or less definite information—Spielmeyer's *Moskauer Zeitung,* for example. He placed himself at the Soviet's disposal, and I believe has faithfully carried out its orders—because he had no alternative under existing conditions. He is still in your hands—pending any future arrangement between us. As for many of the other papers, we assume that the plants have been destroyed and the operating forces shot. Fortunes of war, of course!

"Now—until some final adjustment can be made concerning what we had before the war, I have a tentative suggestion to

offer concerning those papers which are still in operating condition. Of course we don't expect you to let us publish our newspapers as we do in countries under more settled conditions—that is, publish *all* the news, as our organization gets and telegraphs it. But it seems to me that we might agree upon some such working arrangement as this: You confirm and guarantee our title to the various properties—permit us to publish in them such outside news as your censors will pass, and have our editors, here, telegraph our offices in other capitals such Russian news as your censors are willing to have go out. Then allow us enough of each paper's revenue to cover its running expenses—the Soviet to receive any profits there may be until such time as some final adjustment of our claims is made. Considering that you have had the use of our property at no expense for the last six years, it seems to me that this is a more than fair offer upon our part—very much to your advantage, inasmuch as it gives you the outside papers of our syndicate, all over the world, in which to make any official statements you wish concerning your government and conditions in Russia."

"You would be willing to publish what we give you as your own news or editorials —coming from the editors of your papers?"

"Not for one holy minute! I didn't say that! What you suggest would be simply lending ourselves to the dissemination of your propaganda under the cloak of our own editorial opinion. Of course we assume that your propaganda in future is likely to be a less dangerous proposition to the outside world than it was under Lenine —but lending the resources of a great news-syndicate to any propaganda whatever is too impossible a proposition to consider for a moment! No! Give us statements or articles signed by one or more of your government officials, and we'll be glad to print them broadcast—because you will then assume the responsibility for them. Give us unsigned data which we say we obtained from your government, officially."

"And—er—if we decline to consider your proposition altogether, Herr Doktor—on the ground that your newspapers were spoils of war, taken by us during the war —and that, whatever future adjustment of your claims *might* be made in some improbable contingency, the whole matter doesn't in the least interest us just now? Eh?"

"Well—let's go into that a bit. After persistent effort during the last two or three years, you have just secured tentative recognition of your Soviet government by Great Britain, Italy and Norway—with the probability that other European states will soon risk it on the same basis. This recognition, however, is founded upon the implication that resumption of trade-relations with Russia will be governed by the same rules of fair-dealing which form the basis of all business in other countries. If, for example, one single Englishman is murdered by anyone connected with the Soviet government,—or the property and business of another confiscated without just cause, —trade-relations between Russia and the British Empire will cease.

"With any other nation, the case will be the same. The price you pay for recognition by other governments is the guarantee of safety and fair-dealing with their nationals. Russia cannot exist in complete isolation without the trade of outside nations—she cannot even develop her own vast resources without outside capital and engineering. So, when you put the question as you did just now, it means that you are quite willing to jeopardize all you have been working so hard to obtain—throw it away, rather than make what other nations consider fair business concessions. Of course, none of Russia's outside creditors is foolish enough to think of occupying your country with an army—starting another senseless and bloody war, for the sake of collecting some part of his just claims by force! It is your privilege to do as you please in matters like this. But as Russia gradually works out of her ruin and horror to more stable conditions and brighter days, she must have outside help. This help is available if Russia will give it any kind of a gambling chance. It's up to you gentlemen of the Soviet!"

A SLIGHT movement of anger and impatience from the half-sick man in the chair behind him prompted the tone of warning that was evident in Michaelovitch's next remark.

"You are not here to instruct us in the policy of our government, Herr Doktor! In fact, your general tone is grossly impertinent! And really, we have no means of knowing with any certainty that you two are even the men you claim to be—"

"Then we must settle that point before we say anything further, Herr Michael-

ovitch—because our personal safety depends upon it! I will write out a message which your radio-operator may send at once to your representatives in Berlin, Paris and London—to be presented to the managers of our local offices in those cities and subsequently verified by one of the government officials. In this message, there will be one word which has a separate code-meaning to those managers—is known only to them and us two. Their replies will guarantee to your representatives that none but Herr Bergmann or myself could have written the message in just that way. Of course you've seen our Berlin passports, which scarcely could have been obtained by impostors. The German commissioner, here, has vouched for us. Herr Spielmeyer, of the *Moskauer Zeitung,* has known us both for years. Any interruption in our daily messages to Berlin and London, while we are in Russia, will bring an official inquiry as to our safety and whereabouts—"

"Notwithstanding all that,—assuming that your identity is really established, which we do not actually question,—we might consider it advisable to eliminate you as being of those in control of a great publicity machine which by no means sympathizes with our aims and has been often quite openly inimical."

"Oh—suit yourselves as to that! Herr Bergmann and I have both lived our lives—fairly active ones, I assure you. In any circumstances, we've but a few years more—so it's no great matter one way or the other. Look you, Herr Michaelovitch! We came here under the impression that a change for the better had already started. Lenine dead, Trotsky living through his final illness from cancer in the Caucasus, your two houses of Parliament and Council of Commissars beginning to function with more or less system, some effort being made to reorganize your currency and finances, an encouraging start at reconstruction-work under German supervision in progress, the prospect of your being able to open up world-trade again. Our impulse was to help you in bringing order out of chaos. Herr Bergmann, here—no longer with our syndicate—is looking for development-work—mines, railways, electric-generation—in which to invest millions. If you have no interest in what we offer, if it's really the same old régime in other clothes,—which we don't wish to believe,—why, we're sorry—that's all! Ready to leave Russia and wait another ten or twenty years for real improvement here."

DURING the latter part of the discussion a tall, striking-looking woman had quietly slipped into the room through some concealed door—and stood leaning against the wall, in shadow, back of Rykoff's chair. Her face seemed vaguely familiar to "Liebknecht," but it was "Bergmann" who recognized her and whispered two words so that none but his companion heard them: "Anna Tcherinoff."

In all the hell-brew of the revolution and its aftermath, any attempt at tracing out the proportion of basic truth in the stories told about this woman would obviously be futile—though there was no question that many searing experiences had gone into the making up of Anna Tcherinoff and left their mark upon her. Among the many stories and rumors, it was said that she had been a governess in one of the princely families before the war, educated as an aristocrat, mistress of a grand duke, with more rubles to throw away than she could spend; then—a starving refugee in a freezing cellar during the revolution, mistress of a butcher who rose slightly above the surface-scum as a commissar, murderess of three early Soviet officials in succession,—she called them "necessary executions," and got away with it,—then the most deadly marksman of all the fiends in woman's form who performed wholesale executions in the cellars and pits. It was said to be one of her little amusements, at twenty paces, to place the eight shots from her automatic through the lobe of each ear, as the victim stood against the cellar-wall—through the flesh over the ribs at each side, through the joint of each great toe, through the navel and then through the heart. The men to whom she was supposed to have granted her favors all died, of one thing or another—though there appeared to be no suggestion of her instrumentality. Presently Anna dropped a bit of penciled memoranda so that it fluttered into the dictator's lap. After glancing at it with a slight lifting of the eyebrows, he passed it to Michaelovitch—who understood his unspoken instructions and said, with deceptive friendliness:

"How long have you known the Commissar Kravotkin, Herr Doktor? How does it happen that you are staying in his quarters instead of a hotel—where we usually lodge our distinguished guests?"

"We both knew Kravotkin before the war—as professor in the University. He is an old and valued friend whom we considered likely to have more information concerning our various newspapers than even Spielmeyer, because he has been sent upon government business pretty much over the country. We talked until three o'clock this morning—then accepted what sleeping accommodation he had. Tonight we thought of staying at the hotel if we can find room in it."

"Suppose we invite you to remain here in the Kremlin, instead? We can offer you more comfortable beds and a warmer room."

"If you really mean that, sir, it sounds most attractive. Frankly, a hot meal would be even more so—we've eaten nothing since morning."

MICHAELOVITCH glanced at them searchingly. Could it be possible that these two sophisticated men had misunderstood his sinister meaning? Beckoning the guard-officers from the other end of the big, gloomy room, he instructed them to escort the supposed Germans around to the Caserne by the Porte Troitskaia, place them in a vacant officer's-room at the end of the upper dormitories and see that they had something to eat.

But as the two got out of their chairs to accompany the officers, Anna Tcherinoff suggested that it would be better for various reasons to lodge them in one of the sleeping-chambers directly overhead, in the Grand Palais itself, as it would be easier to send for them if further points for discussion came up—adding, as an afterthought, that she herself would see to the preparation of a meal for them. And this last remark sent a creepy feeling down the length of their spines as they overheard it.

Michaelovitch and his superior, however, had serious doubts of the consequences if they actually permitted what they supposed she had in mind—these two might be of sufficient importance in Germany for any outrage committed upon them to stop the work of every German in Russia. And there were some eighty thousand Germans in one capacity or another, with the type of thoroughly efficient brains which the Soviet had practically annihilated among its own nationals. The suggestion as to confining them in one of the Palace rooms overhead, instead of in the barracks, was adopted—but a curt word or two cautioned the woman that while there was no objection to her talking with them, getting what amusement she could, it would be unhealthy for her if she went too far. (Probably for a moment, she coolly speculated to herself as to what would probably happen if she killed Rykoff and Michaelovitch where they sat—with just two shots! Neither had ever been quite so near sudden death as he was at that moment. But she appeared to acquiesce.)

The officers conducted their prisoners to one of the upper rooms in a pleasant, friendly way as if they were really guests of the government, and one of them said he would himself oversee the preparation of their dinner.

"I'll eat it with you, gentlemen—so you needn't hesitate about enjoying it. Confidentially, I think you need not feel overapprehensive about being detained here. We belong to the same organization as your friend Kravotkin—have been instructed to look after your safety while in the Kremlin. There are at least forty of us within the walls, in one capacity or another. The time isn't quite ripe for an upheaval, though matters may come to a show-down any time. Conditions can't go on as they are in Russia—there must be a change for the better, soon, because the masses are beginning to want stabilized conditions—a cessation of bloodshed, trade with the outside nations, more than any visionary idea of an impossible Utopia."

WHEN the officers left them, the supposed Germans made no attempt to leave the room or explore the upper floor of the Palace. There were no guards in sight, but there was the possibility that spies of the Cheka had them under observation. Presently, as they were smoking and chatting, they had the feeling that some one had entered the room behind them—where, apparently, there had been no door. Without the slightest evidence of being on their guard, Bergmann said something which suggested going over to one of the windows and looking down into the court. They did this casually—one hand holding a cigar and the other in a pocket for warmth. When they turned and seated themselves again, it was in such positions that each commanded a view over one half of the room with its obscure corners dimly revealed by the single lamp and the smoldering logs in the fireplace. It took the

Earl but a second to make out the shadowy figure of Anna Tcherinoff in one corner, where she had just stepped through a panel in the wainscoting—having known certain things about this particular room when she suggested their being confined in it. As the supposed Liebknecht watched her, she slowly raised one arm—something gleaming dully in her hand.

If the stories told of her had much foundation in fact, the woman was quite reckless enough to kill them both in defiance of Michaelovitch's orders—just for the mere curiosity of seeing in what way he'd attempt to punish her for the act, and the satisfaction of killing several of the Soviet officials before they could carry it out—perhaps bluffing it through to a position of greater respect and authority for herself in the end. But something in Liebknecht's personality interested her. He had expressed his views to Michaelovitch so unequivocally, with such a complete disregard of what they might order done with him, that she wanted to know whether he had spoken through sheer ignorance of the danger he ran in using plain language under such conditions, or whether these two courteous gentlemen really *had* unshakable nerve. So what she had in mind was a little fancy pistol-practice—not actually hitting them if they kept perfectly still—to demonstrate whether she could break this nerve or not. There would be at least an hour, she thought, before the officers returned with the dinner.

But in all Anna's practice with the weapon, she had taught herself by the European method of using a steady and deliberate aim. The snap-shooting of Western America she not only knew nothing about but wouldn't have believed possible until she saw it done.

A corner of the table prevented her from seeing the hand which had been in Trevor's overcoat pocket as he sat down again; she'd no idea that either of them had seen her as yet. Before her own arm came up to a level with her eyes, a streak of flame spurted from the hand which lay in the Earl's lap. The automatic was torn out of her grasp with a violent blow which paralyzed the limb to her elbow for a moment—during which Trevor got out of his chair in a leisurely manner, walking over to pick up her pistol, from which he emptied the clip of its remaining shells before handing it back to her.

"Ah, Madame! I'm sorry! I fear I've made your hand numb for a bit,—a thirty-eight bullet hits with terrific force,—but it was difficult to disarm you more gently. You'd have pulled your own trigger in less than a quarter of a second—the light was none too good, either!"

AFTER disposing of her weapon, mysteriously, in the folds of her skirt, she was rubbing and stretching the fingers of her right hand while looking him over appraisingly. This man was something new in her experience. Having oiled that sliding panel herself, she knew that she had entered the room without a particle of noise; yet both these Germans must have sensed her presence instantly—could undoubtedly have killed her before she drew a weapon. Then had come the Herr Doktor's unbelievable shot—premeditated, of course, and sure. She knew it had been no chance hit—knew the man probably could have placed the whole eight shots within a silver ruble at that distance, firing from his hip!

"Herr Doktor—I salute you! That was more than good shooting! But you really weren't in as much danger as it looked from where you sat. You see, I had the notion of testing out your nerve a bit—seeing whether you spoke as you did to Michaelovitch through sheer ignorance of your position since coming within the walls of the Kremlin, or whether you were in the habit of pleasing yourself with plain talk regardless of any personal risk. It might have been either, you know. American Senators and representative businessmen have made recent tours through Russia and gone home again with the impression that conditions here have been greatly exaggerated as far as the personal safety of tourists is concerned. Naturally! It served the purpose of the Soviet leaders to have them go home with just that impression—and they were 'personally conducted' from the moment they crossed the Russian border to the time they left the country. Presumably they didn't know it—but some one was accountable for them at every step. We anticipated much from their influence at home.

"The same thing is happening with distinguished visitors from America and other countries every day—with committees sent here to look Russia over and report upon what they see. But when any of them *do* seek interviews with our highest Soviet officials, they are most politic in what they

say. You were not! Your whole manner was that of one who is positive that we must eventually accept alternatives and greatly modify our political convictions whether we will or no. Well—a great many have been shot in Russia during the last few years for a much less offensive attitude! What we will do with your former newspapers and plants is for *us* to decide without advice or suggestions from you! Now, privately, we may think that you were partly right in what you said—*some* of us, at least; and one admits that your manner was courteous enough—for a German. But Germans, knowing more about conditions here than other nationalities, are quite well aware that the Soviet hasn't power enough to guarantee the safety of human life in Russia if it really wished to, that it considers itself entirely justified in executing any person who threatens its rule."

"Then we are prisoners, eh? Not guests of the government?"

"Now you are pleased to joke at my expense, Herr Doktor—which has never been a safe thing to do. I have a long memory—and pay such debts, sooner or later! You couldn't make me believe for an instant that you are the stupid fools who could possibly misunderstand your position, here!"

"I'm sorry, Madame! I offer you my apology—not because I fear you in the least, but from the fact that the joke seems to be upon *us,* and we have the right to be amused if we choose to look at it that way."

"So! You consider me harmless—colorless, perhaps? H-m-m—others have not altogether agreed with that view. Perhaps you do not know what things have been said of me—or even my name? Eh?"

"Your reputation has traveled, Anna Tcherinoff—Bergmann recognized you at first glance. You are handsome enough to win the heart of a woman-hater, and devil enough to kill him after you've done it—if one believes what he hears. If I had the time to remain in Russia long enough, I'd make *you* love *me*—just to see what would happen to both of us! But as I haven't, we can at least salute each other—and 'pass in the night'—each wondering what might have been? *Eh—ma belle?*"

The woman stood there partly in shadow, her face alone lighted up by fitful gleams from the logs in the fireplace—looking at him strangely. This man was—different. He treated her courteously, as a decent woman, knowing, as he thought, a good deal of what she'd done. With the probable conviction that she was about to kill him, he had merely disarmed her by the most wonderful shooting she had ever seen. He had laughed at her warning that she was dangerous to joke with—and said he would make her love him if he had time. Well—she thought it quite within her power to see that he *had* the time. If he made good his threat—she would see what came of it—somehow, a game of that sort had its attractions for her. If he failed—she would thoroughly enjoy killing him—rather slowly. She smiled a little, challengingly, into his eyes—and disappeared through the panel just as Sanovitch came along the corridor with a trooper bearing their dinner.

AS they chatted over the meal after the trooper had gone out, they gave him the details of Anna's visit—the gist of what had been said. The officer shivered a little, nervously, as he lighted a cigarette.

"I think you are unnecessarily reckless at times, *mon ami!* You could have spoken a good deal less plainly to Michaelovitch than you did—which got you detained here in what might be a very serious position if it were not for our men in the Kremlin tonight. And that's nothing to the risk you incur by joking with, even threatening, the Tcherinoff. I assure you in all seriousness that she's more dangerous than a cobra—and that so many men live in deadly fear of what she may do that her influence and sources of information are pretty widespread!"

"Then why the devil hasn't somebody killed her before this!"

"Because it is supposed that she has put a mass of typewritten information in certain hands, outside of Russia, which will be made public here if anything happens to her—information which, unquestionably, will cause the assassination of a good many in the Soviet government. Like a boomerang—nobody knows who'll be hit by it, and things are chaotic enough, anyhow. Aside from that, unless taken completely off her guard, it's fairly certain that she could answer for the lives of two or three men in any attempt to capture her. That wonderful shot of yours must have been the surprise of her life! I doubt if you'd catch her a second time the same way!

"Well—I think we'd better get you out of the Kremlin before morning. H-m-m—I'm tempted to suggest something which I wouldn't dream of in connection with men who were less daredevils than you two? Eh? Look here, gentlemen! You're in Russia to get as close an idea as possible of what conditions really are—yes? You've shown that you'll risk a good bit in securing such information. And whatever report you take out of the country will find its way into the hands of those willing to back our organization, outside—perhaps with men and munitions, perhaps with money and supplies, at the proper time. It is even likely that they will be guided by your opinion as to the time to make a definite start. Now, it just happens that most of the Soviet leaders are gathering at this moment in what was formerly the Salle St. Alexandre in the south wing, one of the largest in the palace. It's to be a general discussion of government policy—and some of the Parliament are pretty sure to crowd in too. Rykoff is too sick to say much tonight—but he and Kalenin and Litvinoff are pretty much in accord. They really supply the power behind him, have the nearest a definite plan to propose, I think. Well—just above where the throne used to be, where the committee-table is now, there's a little concealed balcony with a small closet behind it in the wall. I doubt if more than two or three men in Moscow have bothered to hunt out the secret passage which leads to it. Are you game to sneak up there and get all you can of the discussion?"

"Hmph! Give us a chance, and see! It'll be an adventure worth remembering even if we get little more than we've picked up already. Overhearing a Soviet conference within the walls of the Kremlin, patrolled by the Red Guard, is an experience which few men will ever boast of, I fancy."

WHEN they had finished their dinner, Sanovitch left them for a few moments, then returned with a couple of troopers' overcoats, cloth helmets, belts and muskets. Acting upon his suggestion, they put these on over their own clothes—looking pretty bulky, but not suspiciously so, from the fact that a good many of the rank and file wore all they could get under their uniform overcoats for the sake of the additional warmth. Their own sealskin tarbushes they stuffed inside the coats; and as both had been wearing heavy Russian boots, there was nothing suspicious in their footgear beyond a better quality which would not be noticed, particularly at night.

Following him as two sergeants of his troop,—with a much snappier military bearing than any but a few of his men had,—they walked along the upper corridors of the east and south wings until they came to a small lumber-room directly over the Salle St. Alexandre. When the door of this had been closed and locked, Sanovitch touched a spring which opened a large panel in the wainscoting—saying as he did so that he believed the little balcony under them must have been used by the Czar's secret guards rather than musicians. As the balcony was merely a part of the mural carving between two of the pilasters, as seen from any corner of the big hall, it was practically unnoticeable; there were openings several inches across, of course, but these appeared to be merely spaces between the carvings. They really ran no risk at all in looking down through some of the smaller openings, and such were the acoustic properties of the hall that they seemed to be in the drum of an ear, catching every word that was spoken.

The end of the big hall directly below was fairly well lighted in order that faces might be seen distinctly as various men spoke, but the opposite portion was in deep shadow; the whole effect was dramatic—Rembrandtesque. In addition to the Council of Commissars, perhaps thirty or forty men from the Council of Nationalities (Senate) had insisted upon being present at the conference. They really had no business there—but the Earl and Sir Abdool noted as a significant fact that where, in Lenine's day, any usurpation of privilege like this would have been dealt with before a firing-squad, the new Soviet leaders seemed to be letting their subordinates get badly out of hand.

For a while the proceedings resembled a bear-garden—a dozen men from different parts of the crowd shouting what they supposed to be speeches, and clamoring for attention. It might have gone on for hours that way if some unseen force hadn't presently brought about a general hush without anyone understanding just what was happening. Then it was seen that Anna Tcherinoff, in a flame-colored gown, was standing at the side of Rykoff's chair—one beautiful arm resting carelessly across the back of it. When the chamber

was absolutely silent, she made a few brief observations—pointing out that if they expected to get any action whatever, come to any decision, but one man could speak at a time. She would act as chairman—giving first one and then another his opportunity for addressing them.

The woman was feared by every man in the room, yet respected for some wonderful and mysterious ability which they believed her to possess. So their answer was a wild burst of applause—then silence. She recognized a violent agitator from Kiev, who sprang upon his feet and began denouncing other members of the Council for what he called a betrayal of all their radical principles. He said the eyes of the whole labor world were upon them, that the abandoning of communism and anti-capitalism advocated by Lenine was a betrayal of every laborer in other countries. He ended up with a wild tirade of denunciation against the bourgeoisie, stating that there were still a few millions too many of them in Russia who must be executed as soon as possible—cursing every form of capitalism and so-called "civilization."

There was some applause as he finally sat down, but it seemed to be clear that the majority were not with him at all. He was amazed at his lack of support—almost frothing at the mouth with rage and hatred. For the opposition to his views, the Tcherinoff then nodded to a spectacled man of quiet, assured bearing who spoke in a tone clear enough to be distinctly understood, but without raising his voice. He used simple terms—homely, everyday comparisons—quoted facts which nobody present could dispute and made the conclusion to be drawn from them so apparent that even the most thick-headed fool in the gathering could grasp it.

None of them could refute his arguments—but the majority could kill a capitalist wherever they found one, and that seemed to be the dominant idea in their minds. On the other hand, there was an undercurrent entirely in accord with him, made up of those present who had any capacity for independent thinking. And with all these different opinions and forces in conflict, the big chamber, shortly after midnight, was chaos, as far as any definite plan of government was concerned. Trevor and Sir Abdool picked out from the faces below them at least half a dozen whom they knew to have been friends of Kerensky in the old days, members of the circle, blood spurting between the fingers which he pressed against his side—then pitched headlong to the marquetry floor, while the furious bolshevik from Kiev wiped a long knife on his coat-sleeve and then shoved it back inside his coat.

"Who did that!" The words cut through the momentary silence like a whip. "Stand aside—the rest of you!" And then—a shot from Anna Tcherinoff's automatic went squarely through the forehead of the Ukrainian, who survived his victim less than two minutes.

IN the silence which followed, while the two dead men were being carried out, Sanovitch whispered to the supposed Germans that they had better be getting out of the Kremlin before anything further happened which might make it impossible—saying that he would have to get an order from his colonel for some detail in the city before he could take even a file of his own men outside the walls. His superior officer, quite evidently, was also a member of the revolutionary organization; while more recent, growing organization for revolution—and there had been enough opposition during the conference to show that even if suspicion of this were directed against them, it wouldn't mean, necessarily, risk of execution or assassination, as would have been the case a year before. The times were slowly changing in Russia. But even as this thought was in their minds, a scream rang through the chamber. One of the groups separated a little as a member who had been arguing on the more progressive basis staggered around in a small Sanovitch was making his request, Colonel Akov gave no indication that he knew they were not his own troopers or suspected why the outside detail was wanted. He merely filled out a blank ordering the captain to proceed to a certain address with a file of men and search the house for a conspirator wanted by the government.

The three clicked their heels together, saluted and went downstairs—picking up eight more at the barracks. With Sanovitch at their head, the troopers mounted at the stables back of the officers' quarters and rode out through the Place du Tsar, with only the fitful light from a foggy moon to guide them.

A little farther, and they rode through the gloomy Porte Spasskiia, and on through the silent, ruined city to the house occupied by Kravotkin, where Sanovitch

thought they would be as safe as anywhere, inasmuch as there was an underground passage in the rear to a house on another street through which they might escape if too closely pressed. Accompanying them inside, they found Kravotkin and Spielmeyer sitting by the stove in the room on the second floor—noticeably relieved at the sight of them.

"*Gott!* You are lucky, my friends! You always haf been, to be sure—but one should not push one's luck too far! They made no attempt to detain you, then?"

Sanovitch laughed.

"The joke of it is, they *did* detain them—in fact, were of two minds whether to shoot them at once and have done with it! Our good friends are not discreet, you understand. They gave our new dictator about the plainest line of talk he has yet heard from an outsider—in a very courteous way, of course, but not sugared. Then, when I'd arrested and confined them in an upper room of the Palace, along comes the Tcherinoff through a secret panel in the wainscoting to amuse herself with a little pistol-practice—and the good Herr Doktor shoots the pistol out of her hand before she could pull the trigger, once. Anna was surprised—I'll swear to that! They joked at her in a courteous way. And upon my soul, I believe the woman was half in love with Liebknecht when she left them!

"She's a strange mixture, that one! She's been loved by several infatuated men—who died of it afterward. She's vindictively hated by thousands—who yet lack the nerve to kill her! Apparenly she has the mind of a fiend—and no morals! Yet an hour ago she prevented what undoubtedly would have been a massacre of at least half the Council by calmly killing a little Ukrainian assassin in the midst of them, after he had just knifed one of our progressives. Tonight she exhibited the only absolutely cold, thinking brain in all that Soviet mob who claim to be governing us. She dominated them—and—here is food for reflection—as far as I've heard, every prominent man she's ever killed has been an implacable communist or bolshevist who would have assassinated every believer in constitutional government as a matter of principle!"

FOUR days later, as their train stopped at a little station near the Roumanian border and they were congratulating themselves upon getting out of Russia,—aided at every step by Kravotkin's organization,—they and their luggage were taken from the compartment by a file of the Red Guard and brought to a stone cottage at the edge of the town. In the living-room a woman muffled in sables sat behind a table littered with official-looking documents, one of which she was filling out. As the soldiers retired, closing the door after them, she opened her fur collar slightly—revealing the handsome, brooding face of Anna Tcherinoff.

"So—gentlemen! After defying me, you thought there would be no great difficulty in escaping from Russia! And you, Herr Doktor, had the insolence to say you'd make me love you if you had the time! Well—suppose I give you the time, plenty of it, with the understanding that you die, rather painfully, if you fail? Eh?"

The supposed Liebknecht smiled, engagingly, in her face.

"I notice a couple of 'execution-blanks' among those papers, Madame. Were you considering that an hour—possibly two—should be plenty of time for me to make good? And how does this affect the status of my good friend Bergmann? He made no threats and didn't presume to joke with you! Oh, well—have your way! He thinks you can't kill him, because he is a fatalist and knows that his time has not yet come. As for me—well, I'm waiting to see. You're a handsome creature—and I believe you really want for Russia exactly what all of us outsiders do. Eh?"

She folded two documents and handed them to him with a smile.

"Herr Doktor—I think you win! These papers are safe-conducts which will get you out of Russia with no further trouble. I can't permit two men of your magnificent nerve and inborn courtesy to be shot like so many rats—and I know you came here to help rather than destroy Russia. Some day, I hope you'll both return—I shall not forget you! Try to think of Anna Tcherinoff as possibly something better than what her enemies say of her. Even my reported *amours* are lies, scarcely worth the trouble of denying—at least, all but one of them. *Au revoir!*"

As they leaned from the window of their compartment, looking back, a tall figure in priceless sables was sharply etched against the dazzling snow—watching the train out of sight.

You will find another story of the Free Lances in our next issue.

The Little Old Man

Whether you believe in transmigration or not, you will find this curious story of strange events in little old New York exceptionally interesting.

By WALTER CLARKE

"YOU never can tell how far any given act or circumstance is going to carry you." Hetherington paused and looked at the little group of men who were seated with him about the table in the club.

"That sounds as if it ought to mean something," said Dick Barnes, "but I'm blessed if I know what it is."

"Yes, Hetherington, cut the cryptic and tell us what you have in mind."

Hetherington smiled at the last speaker. "You, Mather, are the greatest living illustration of what I said. It proves itself in everyone's life. Yourself, for example: how did you, a man nearing forty, who must certainly have made some sort of a place for yourself somewhere, wait to come to this city until only two years ago?"

"I was invited to take charge of the legal department of the concern I'm with."

"And that concern is the largest in its line in the world, isn't it?" pursued Hetherington.

Mather admitted that it was. "You were practicing law up State somewhere, weren't you?" In response to Mather's assent he continued: "Are we to understand that your sheer genius as a small-town lawyer attracted their notice? No, don't answer, I know how it came about. You were appointed special attorney to prosecute a claim that the county had against them because of a highway encroachment by one of their plants up that way. Isn't that correct?"

"Yes, but—" began Mather—

Hetherington held up his hand. "One moment, please. You conducted your case so cleverly that you outwitted the half-dozen lawyers they sent out against you, and as they've made the same encroachment in a number of their other plants throughout the State, they hired you so as to draw your fangs. That is, if you could win the case against them, you could successfully plan a defense that would save them in other places."

"You've got the facts correctly," said Mather, "but there's nothing unusual about the circumstances."

"No, it's a common enough practice

among corporations. The information I'm after is: why did the executive that had the power of appointment designate you to be the special attorney to represent the county? Were you active politically?"

"No," said Mather. "I never interested myself in politics in any degree."

"But there must have been a number of attorneys who did, and it was a nice plum. Who made the appointment?"

"The County Commissioners."

"Did you know them? Were they acquainted with you?"

"Not personally. But just about that time I defended a poor woman who had been accused of stealing wash off a neighbor's line. I was sorry for her and took the case out of pity. I got an acquittal. Some years before, she had been badly bitten by a dog when she went to the rescue of a boy that the animal was attacking. The boy was the only grandson of one of the commissioners."

HETHERINGTON laughed. "There you are. The commissioner was grateful to you for helping her in her difficulty. Did you know about the dog and the child and the woman when you took her case?"

"No. I happened to be in the lower court that day. What I did was on impulse."

"Precisely," said Hetherington. "I repeat, you never can tell how far any given act or circumstance is going to carry you. Your act in impulsively coming to the rescue of a poor woman accused of theft, carried you to a place that many lawyers of twice your years and experience wouldn't even think of aspiring to, and yet you sit there and doubt the correctness of my observation. My boy, if this weren't a bone-dry country,"—Hetherington poured himself a generous allowance of Scotch,—"the drinks would be on you."

Mather refused to be convinced. "Of course, everything we do has a bearing in some way on our future lives, but it's my belief that each man's life is set beforehand and each act is only a bit of it, the same as the parts that go to make up a mosaic that has been designed before the work of making it began."

"My, you're a stubborn cuss," said Barnes.

"I'll wager he's got Presbyterian blood in him—don't you think so?" Pearce looked at Hetherington. Hetherington nodded. "He has the predestination idea very well defined. Mather, let us test our theories. Where do you live?"

Mather named one of the east Eighties as his place of residence.

"I suppose you always drive up Fifth Avenue when you're going home?"

"Yes, if I'm downtown."

Hetherington thought for a moment. The men found themselves becoming quite deeply interested in a situation that had grown out of a remark that was almost trite. Barnes pretended an attitude of great tension.

"Hurry, hurry," he pleaded with mock melodrama, "the suspense is too much."

Hetherington smiled and turned to Mather. "Just for the sake of experiment, don't ride up Fifth Avenue when you go home tonight. Send your chauffeur home, and trolley up Madison Avenue. That brings you only a block east of your usual thoroughfare and changes your vehicle. I am leaving town on a midnight train for a six weeks' trip to the woods. We'll meet here as soon after my return as we can all get together. Then we'll see if the simple circumstance of changing your usual route and means of locomotion has any effect on your life. Of course, sometimes the effect of any given action doesn't appear until years afterward, but sometimes the results are immediate. Will you risk it?"

Mather laughed. "Certainly. Only it doesn't count if something happens to the trolley-car and I get bumped off. What would you call that?"

"A fatality," said Barnes.

"It would be convincing proof of my statement," said Hetherington. The men laughed.

"Good night, boys," Mather rose. "It's time I went home, anyway, so I'll go now. Curious! Going home has quite a spice of adventure about it tonight. I feel as if I were an expedition equipped to discover a new pole or the top of a mountain or something."

"I'm all excited," said Barnes. "Think I'll try flying home and see if anything happens."

"Oh, pshaw!" Mather laughed. "Nothing more will happen to me than to be obliged to poke along in the rackety remnant of what was a new trolley-car forty years or so ago, instead of rolling along in a comfortable limousine." He shook hands with Hetherington. "Hope you have a nice trip to the woods."

Barnes chimed in: "Why don't you ask him to walk it and see if it makes any difference in his life?"

DURING the general laugh that followed, the men strolled to the coat-room for their hats and separated on the sidewalk, each to go his separate way—all save Hetherington, who lived at the club and whose train was due to leave the Grand Central station within the next hour. By the time he had written a few last letters and had made himself a bit late so that he caught his train without a moment to spare, he had practically forgotten about Mather. When he reached the woods, he was so absorbed in the good fishing that he overstayed his time by two weeks, with the result that some two months had elapsed when he returned to New York, and Mather's experiment had completely passed from his memory.

When Mather left the club, he told his chauffeur, who was waiting for him, to drive home, put the car up for the night and call for him at the usual time in the morning. Mather then walked through one of the cross-streets to Madison Avenue, took a northbound trolley-car and began the ride of thirty odd blocks that would bring him to his street. He occupied a house in which he maintained bachelor quarters, and he rather looked forward to arriving there, as he'd had a busy day and the thought of bed seemed good to him.

He closed his eyes and nodded for a few blocks. The motorman, after a stop, gave the car a particularly vicious jerk in starting again. Mather was tilted off his equilibrium and jarred out of his cat-nap. As he righted himself, he glanced vindictively in the direction of the motorman. Whatever blessing Mather had in mind for that individual was driven from his mind by the sight of a very old man who sat at the forward end of the car on the opposite side from Mather.

The man was small, almost a dwarf. He had a long white beard, and his hair was white. What arrested Mather's attention was the old man's eyes, fixed on his with a strange intensity of concentration. Bushy eyebrows that were of an iron gray, and so afforded a decided contrast to the white hair and white beard, gave the brows the appearance of small crags beneath whose shelter the eyes sparkled and gleamed.

The sensation that Mather had was as though some one had shouted at him from a crowd, or as if he had received a sharp blow. He sat staring at the man, powerless to divert his own gaze. At that moment the car gave a lurching stop. A woman passing in the aisle was thrown violently against Mather. The interruption broke the contact between him and the old man, and when Mather, after bowing an acceptance of the woman's apology, ventured to steal a side-glance to see if the compelling eyes were still fixed on him, he saw that the old man had changed his position slightly and now sat with closed lids as though in sleep.

Mather was surprised to find that he experienced a distinct sense of relief. He tried to laugh at himself. "I've not been able to afford a car so long that I should find the democracy of a trolley-car so disturbing," he thought. "Probably the poor old chap can't see six inches beyond his nose and didn't even know he was looking at me." But however jauntily he said it to himself, he knew that the man had deliberately held his eyes, and that he had been affected.

THE car was nearing his street now, and Mather rose. It had been his intention to go out by the rear door, but as he stood up, he involuntarily glanced toward the old man. Again his eyes were caught and held by an intent gaze. Mather felt himself drawn toward the stranger. Try as he would, he could not resist the impulse, and he found himself walking toward the front door. The old man's gaze shortened as the lawyer approached. When Mather was in front of him, he had such a strong impression of having been spoken to that he stopped.

"Did you speak?" he asked.

"No." There was no voice. The lips formed the negative—or did the eyes project it? Mather was not certain. He moved on and passed out on the platform. The car stopped, and he stepped into the street. As he stood back to let the car pass, he found that the old man was standing beside him. He had not been conscious that the other had left the car.

Mather was startled, and he was annoyed with himself for being so. As soon as the car had passed, he stepped briskly forward and soon reached his door. He made the short distance without looking back, but all the while he had the uncomfortable feeling that the old man was close at hand. When he had unlocked his door,

he turned. The old man was standing so close to him that they almost touched.

"Why do you follow me?" he cried sharply, and then, because the old man stood with dropped lids so that the effect of his gaze was not evident, Mather continued more gently: "Do you need help?" He felt in his pocket. "Shall I give you some money for a night's lodging?"

"You give a generous turn to your first impulse, young sir."

The voice was curiously cold and without any lights and shades of intonation. "No, I do not crave money. It is a portion of your time that I require."

"My time?" Mather spoke with an effort. "You have mistaken me for some one else. Good night."

He turned to enter his door. The hand that the old man placed on his forearm was so compelling, though the touch was so light as to be barely felt, that Mather could not move.

"You are wrong. I do not mistake you for anyone else. I recognize you as yourself."

"Who do you think I am, then?" Mather still experienced the same curious difficulty in speaking.

"If you mean what do I think your name is, I do not know. I am not seeking a name. I seek that which is within."

Mather thought that he detected a foreign accent. The idea occurred to him that the old man was one who bought furniture, or perhaps old clothes. He could give no other interpretation to the old man's remark, "I seek that which is within."

"I've nothing to sell," he said. "Anyway this is no time to—"

He stopped speaking, compelled by the expression that came over the old man's face. "My words are unrelated to barter and sale." His finger-tip touched Mather's breast. "Within here is what I seek, within you. Come, go with me!" And Mather, to his dulled surprise, found himself following the stranger. No word was spoken. He accompanied the man with docility, without thought of resistance and even with a certain gladness. How far they walked, he did not know. He had lost sense of distance. He was conscious of the usual street-lights, of people and of vehicles. Then after a short space of utter darkness, a door swung open, and he found himself sitting, cross-legged, on a divan of such cushioned softness that it was as though he were sitting on air. Before him moved the old man. His appearance had changed. In place of the fragile creature whose gaze had arrested Mather's attention in the trolley-car, there moved a figure of irresistible power. He filled all space. The room, the city, the world, even the fact of life itself became as nothing in the presence of the dominating personality that Mather felt had taken entire possession of his very being.

WITHIN a week the newspapers of the city shrieked with announcements concerning the disappearance of Frank Mather. The police, after days of futile search, turned their activities in the direction of more recent occurrences. Mather's place was filled by another promising aspirant for the honor of keeping a huge corporation from going legally astray and by the time Hetherington returned to the city, the general public had forgotten that anyone named Mather had ever furnished a sensation. Even the relatively small circle of men who had known him at all well, had ceased to speculate as to what had become of him.

On returning to New York, Hetherington went to his club and was immediately at home in the rooms that he always kept at his disposal, no matter how far afield his travels might take him. Having disposed of the affairs in connection with his absence, he was at liberty to get in touch with his acquaintances, and one night about a week after his arrival, he sat with Walter Pearce and Dick Barnes at the same table where they had been sitting that night some two months before.

"Your theory certainly worked out to perfection in Mather's case, Hetherington," Barnes remarked during a lull in the conversation.

"Mather?" Hetherington was puzzled for a moment. "Oh, yes, I remember. Nice fellow. A friend of yours, wasn't he? How is he?"

"*How* is he?" returned Barnes. "You mean, *where* is he?"

"No, I don't. Aside from the fact that he was a friend of yours, I'm not especially interested as to where he is."

Pearce and Barnes exchanged glances. Pearce spoke. "Didn't you read about Mather in the newspapers?"

Hetherington was a little annoyed. "No, what about him?"

"He disappeared."

"Disappeared? When?"

"Well," Barnes replied, "in view of the fact that he was never seen again after he got on the trolley-car you inveigled him into riding home on, it strikes me that you're good and ignorant of what's going on in the world! And we were all sitting right here when you made the suggestion."

Hetherington looked at Barnes in amazement. His words brought back to Hetherington's recollection the occurrence of that night two months before.

"Yes, yes. I remember. It had slipped my mind. I don't understand what you mean about his never having been seen." Hetherington turned to Pearce. "Is Barnes trying to have fun with me?"

"No," said Pearce. "We three went out of the club together. Barnes and I heard him dismiss his chauffeur. We walked up the Avenue a block with him, he turned off toward Madison Avenue. A policeman remembered seeing him get on a trolley-car. No one noticed where he got off. He's never been seen since.

Hetherington was aghast. "Was he murdered?"

"No one knows. His front door was unlocked, so he evidently reached his house and went in. He lived alone, save for a servant or two. They heard nothing of him."

Pearce paused a moment. "Your remark that night that no one could tell to what extent any act or circumstance would affect one's life was a hundred per cent true in poor Mather's case."

Hetherington was stunned and sat silent for a brief interval. Then he began raining questions on Barnes and Pearce, but they could add nothing to what they had already told him. After the three had separated for the night, Hetherington sat alone in his room. He could not get the fact of Mather's disappearance out of his mind.

"I feel as though I were responsible," he thought. "Who would have thought that such a fatality would follow a remark that was half a joke."

HE was still thinking about Mather when he went to sleep. In the morning he wakened with the thought still on him. As soon as he had breakfasted, he went to police headquarters and learned all that their records contained. Beyond the main fact of the disappearance and the investigation of numerous trails that led nowhere, he gained no information that told anything. Hetherington had served as a police commissioner during the incumbency of one of New York's mayors, and the department officials were more than ready to place all the papers at his disposal. Mather's record and the investigation of his life up to the moment of his disappearance showed that he had no reason for avoiding anyone. As a matter of fact, his prospects were so very bright that there was every reason for his remaining in the world.

Completely nonplused, Hetherington left police headquarters after having spent several hours in reading all the reports. Yielding to an impulse, he called a taxi and was driven to the house in the Eighties where Mather had lived. It was vacant, and though he lingered there, unaccountably attracted by the sight of its silent front, he finally walked over to Central Park and after strolling a short distance found himself near the obelisk. He sat down on a vacant bench and gave himself over to thoughts of Mather's disappearance.

Hetherington had been sitting for some time, so absorbed in thought that he was only dimly conscious that some one had sat down on the bench with him. After an interval he felt an impulse to see who his bench-neighbor might be. He turned and found himself looking into a pair of piercingly black eyes that seemed to glow and sparkle as they peered at him from beneath the heavy brows of a little old man with long white beard and silvery hair.

Hetherington was a man of unusual physical strength and well set up in every particular. He had been pretty much all over the world; he was well poised, and he was not at all impressionable; but as he returned the gaze of the old man who sat at the other end of the bench, he had the sudden, unexplainable flare of hostility that many people feel when they find themselves looking at a serpent.

He had an impulse to strike the man with his stick. The old man seemed to sense Hetherington's feeling. He raised his hand and pointing toward the obelisk, said: "The shadow of the needle reaches almost to our feet. We, who sit here in contemplation of its majesty, would do well to beware the power it represents lest it topple some day, crushing out our lives before the work that lies before us is accomplished."

THE old man spoke in a curiously impressive monotone, and there was about him such sense of extreme age and weakness that Hetherington's feeling of hostility passed. He was curious about his companion, and he felt drawn toward him, too. His impression was that here was a timid old gentleman who was worried lest the obelisk fall.

"Oh, it's securely set up enough," he said reassuringly. "There's no danger of its tumbling over on us."

The old man made no answer. The sun at that second reached the meridian. The old man, springing to his feet with an agility that surprised Hetherington, bent back his head and looked directly into the sun's rays. As he did so, his lips moved in a whispered invocation. Hetherington was amazed to observe that the man's eyes were wide open. He stared unblinkingly into the sun, no more affected by its brightness than if he were gazing at a low-burning gas-jet.

Hetherington studied the man curiously during the few seconds that he held his pose. Hetherington noted that his skin had something the coloring of the Oriental, and that in spite of his age, his back was as straight as an arrow. Before he had time to observe more, the man withdrew his gaze from the sun and looking toward the obelisk, stood in what might have seemed like silent contemplation, had Hetherington not been close enough so that he could see that the man's lips were moving.

The old man stepped to a near-by drinking fountain and filled his mouth with water which he spat on the ground. He then returned to the bench, and sitting down, turned to Hetherington and said with an air of extreme courtesy: "I extend to you my gratitude, sir. I felt the earnestness of your regard and the freedom from mockery. It is not that the mockery of unbelievers injures me. Their own souls suffer."

"I was deeply interested in observing you," replied Hetherington. "I noticed that you worship the sun and make obeisance to the obelisk."

"They are the foundations of my religion," replied the old man, "even as this needlelike mass of stone points upward to the habitation of the Sun, so does my spirit rear itself toward the place beyond."

"If it is not an impertinence, may I ask to what sect you belong?"

"To a sect that was old when the first Pharoah was young."

"I infer then that it comes out of Egypt."

"It *was* Egypt. It made Egypt that which she was." He stood up, his body vibrating with a force that seemed to shake every fiber of his being. "And it will make Egypt again! And there is only this frail vessel to carry all the burden of the restoration. Five times in twelve centuries I have tried, and each time failed at the moment success was in my hand; but now the time is ripe. I shall not be torn away again from my own and hurled into space. I will not! I will not!"

Trembling with a passion that Hetherington feared would tear him to pieces, the old man, apparently forgetting Hetherington's existence, moved away.

"The old gentleman takes his religion very seriously," thought Hetherington. "A fanatic."

The man walked on, apparently oblivious to the world about him. Hetherington, fearing that some harm might befall him, sprang up—and overtook the old man as he was about to plunge into the street in front of a swiftly moving car. Hetherington leaped forward just in time to draw the old man out of danger.

"Careful!" warned Hetherington. "You might have been killed."

The old man awoke to a sense of the danger he had been in. "You have saved me," he said in a whisper. "Even there, as we sat on the bench, cast together by what seemed chance, I felt that in you I saw one who would mean much in this existence. Had you not saved me a moment since, the world would have lost its salvation. I pray you, walk with me."

"Of course," said Hetherington. "I'll help you across the street."

THE old man, fully awake now, needed no help. He pressed along by Hetherington's side with a step so hurried that Hetherington felt the necessity of exerting himself to keep pace with him.

"Come to my house. I shall not disregard the sign. You have been sent to me." The man placed his hand on Hetherington's forearm and looked searchingly into his eyes. Obeying an impulse that he did not understand, Hetherington walked by the old man's side. Without speech they proceeded eastward for several blocks. Hetherington caught the glint of the sun shining on the waters of the East River

before his companion stopped in his rapid, gliding pace.

He turned into a covered passageway between two buildings. It ended in front of a door. He pressed a button, and the door swung open. Motioning Hetherington to precede him, the old man stood aside, and Hetherington found himself in an ordinary vestibule. The old man followed him in and closed the outer door. The other door opened. The old man clasped Hetherington's wrist again and led him into the dimly lighted hallway. After a few steps they turned to the left, and Hetherington found himself in a darkness that was as complete as though night had fallen.

Involuntarily he paused. "On, on, press on." The old man's voice, low though it was, carried a compelling quality. Hetherington followed. He felt that they were walking down an incline. To Hetherington it seemed as though they had walked a great distance, and the uncertainty of his position caused him a vague discomfort. He was about to ask the old man how much farther they were to go, when the incline stopped and he found that they were on a level footing again. He was conscious, too, that they were in a large room instead of a narrow entrance. The place did not appear to be lighted, but the darkness was less intense.

They turned again, and in what seemed a spot far remote from him, Hetherington saw a nebulous light. It did not seem to be so much a light as a luminous spot that appeared to move and sway slightly without leaving its fixed position. The little old man had not spoken since urging Hetherington to follow him. Now he let go his hold on his companion's wrist and moved away. Immediately the place in which Hetherington stood began to take form. He could see that objects were about him, and in a moment the spot of hazy light increased its glow, and he saw that he stood in a large place. He had a curious sense of great space, as though there were no walls or ceiling to limit the dimensions of the room.

"Is this where you live?" Hetherington was a little annoyed with himself for being impressed.

"Most of my hours are passed here," the old man replied. "Come, be at ease." He guided Hetherington to what he took to be a couch or divan, but that was of such exquisite softness that Hetherington felt as though he were sitting on air. The place began to take on better proportions, although he was still unable to fix the limits of the room.

"Have you tunneled under the whole block?" As he asked the question, he turned toward the old man and found that again the keen eyes, with their radiant lights, were burning into his. Hetherington waited for a reply. Instead of speaking, the old man continued to gaze at him. Hetherington returned the gaze steadily, and as he looked, the pupils seemed to turn yellow and grow larger. "You've very remarkable eyes," said Hetherington.

"Fix your eyes there." The man pointed toward the luminous spot that seemed so far away. "Listen now, and do not speak." The old man's tone was low and intense. "Hold your gaze there. We will travel back into the centuries. I know that you were there with me, and now you have come back to serve me as you did when I was on the throne in that far time. Long have I waited for you to come to me again. Thrice in the centuries I have thought that we had joined, but each time I was wrong. Even a few weeks ago I was confident I had found you. The man was an impostor. Responding to the sign, he led me to think that he was you whom I have sought. I brought him here, but he has proved an empty shell. Presently you shall dispose of him for me. Then we will be free to carry on the restoration that we must effect so that our land of the Nile can take its place once more and our souls be freed from ever returning. Rest now until I come to you again."

HETHERINGTON had listened without interrupting. The old man's remarks interested him, and he felt a curious disinclination to speak. He turned to do so as the man stopped talking, and found to his amazement that he was alone, or if the old man was in the room, Hetherington could not see him.

"Are you there?" he asked. He repeated his question several times, but receiving no reply, he stood up and walked toward the luminous cloud. "This is the most intense cellar I was ever in," he commented. He continued to advance toward the light, and thought he had almost reached it when he felt his arm clasped again. His companion had returned.

"Not yet," he said, "not yet." The old man spoke imperiously. Hetherington

looked at him, and was amazed to find that there rested, crownlike, on his silvery hair, a twining serpent of gold. The head was erect, and from its jaws and eye-sockets jewels gleamed. In one hand the old man carried a short scepter, also heavily jeweled, and he had donned a robe that gave a certain majesty to his appearance that he had not possessed before. Hetherington did not know whether to feel amazed or amused. The old man waved the scepter before his face, and his eyes were attracted to a huge stone almost the size of a golf-ball that was set in the scepter's end. Hetherington could not determine whether the stone was a diamond or a crystal.

As he contemplated it, its colors changed and moved. He had the feeling of gazing into an infinity of space. Hetherington was so fascinated in studying the ball that he barely heard the old man, but in obedience to the low-voiced directions which he felt rather than heard, Hetherington followed after him and was led along a dark passage. Presently they came to a spot where the passage enlarged. The space was circular in form, and evidently the passageway ended there.

Hetherington had the sensation of one who is asleep and who dreams that he is dreaming. He felt no lethargy; nor did he think that he was hypnotized. The only sensation of which he was conscious was one of absolute tranquillity.

The place in which they stood became less dark, as though a gentle glow of light were stealing in. The old man, still inclining the scepter so that the shining ball held Hetherington's eyes, moved toward a drapery which opened as he neared it and revealed a thronelike elevation. The old man, without turning his face from Hetherington, and still holding the scepter poised, mounted it and sat like any king upon his throne.

"Stand nearer."

Hetherington stepped forward.

"On your knees!"

Hetherington was dimly conscious of kneeling.

"That body you inhabit, Ptah-hetep, has never known its duty, though your soul still renders obedience to Pharoah. Approach!"

Kneeling, Hetherington moved forward until he was within a few inches of the throne. The scepter lay across the old man's lap, the gleaming ball closer to Hetherington's eyes than before.

"The centuries have made no change in your habit of obedience to my will, though why you have been so long in coming, I cannot fathom. Now you are here and all is well. The work can be completed."

IT did not seem to Hetherington that the old man spoke in English, and yet something within him understood. It was as though he were hearing thoughts instead of words. As a matter of fact, Hetherington had little regard for the old man's words. He had been gazing at the ball. Now its depth seemed to spread, and there was nothing in all the world but what he saw before him. In the midst of huge columns he saw a throne; and as he looked, an assemblage of men and women faded away, and there sat on the throne a dominating figure that gave a sign. In response to it, the figure of another man whose face Hetherington could not see stepped from behind a pillar, and falling on his belly, squirmed serpentlike to the foot of the throne.

The sitting figure rose, and followed by the one who had lain prostrate but had now arisen, glided to a spot in the floor which opened. The two figures went down into the opening. Immediately the scene changed to one of utter darkness, but Hetherington's vision was not obscured. He saw the two move swiftly to a cell-like room. Within, on a couch, Hetherington could see a man lying. His face was so emaciated that it was almost skeleton-like. The second of the two moving figures, in response to a signaled order from the leader, raised the man on the couch in his arms and walked through a passage that, without turning, cleaved its way through complete blackness.

As Hetherington watched, fascinated, and wondering that he could see so well in the dark, he saw that in the distance there was an opening. Then he became conscious that water flowed past the open place. The figures reached the opening, and with a shock of interest, Hetherington recognized that he was looking on the waters of the Nile. Now his gaze returned to the men. The kingly one was pressing a dagger of curious workmanship into the hand of the servitor. "To the apostate's heart!"

Hetherington knew the words were being said. "Then cast the body away, there!" —pointing to the river. Hetherington saw the dagger raised for the blow. At that

instant the figure poising the dagger turned its face toward Hetherington.

To his horror, he saw that the face was his own.

The sharp barking of a dog arrested Hetherington's attention; and the sound, so out of accord with the scene he had been observing, made Hetherington cry out. Something struck his legs sharply. He realized that it was a dog. Hetherington gave a wild cry as he felt himself being thrown off his balance. The next he knew he was falling, and then there was a splash, and water closed over his head. He sank a short distance; then, swimming, he shot up from the water. Before he had reached the surface he knew that this was no dream, and to his amazement he found that both in his descent and in his coming to the surface he had been closely gripping another man.

Overhead the moon was shining, and Hetherington's quick look about showed him that he was in the waters of the East River, being swiftly borne downstream and away from the spot at which he had fallen into the water. The body that he was holding stirred, and the eyes opened. The man gave a convulsive movement.

"Thank God, he's alive!" Hetherington cried. He shouted to a passing tugboat and was taken aboard after the unconscious man had been lifted out of his arms. The questions that he was plied with were unheard. The world receded from him. When he became conscious, he found himself in a private room in a hospital, with Dick Barnes and Walter Pearce sitting by his bedside.

HETHERINGTON looked at his two friends and they at him without exchanging a word. Hetherington was the first to speak. "This looks real, and you look real; but if you're not, it doesn't make any difference, after the dreams I've been having."

"Gad, Hetherington, you're a wonder." Barnes looked at Pearce for confirmation. Pearce nodded. He refused to take his eyes off Hetherington. A nurse appeared from somewhere. "The patient isn't to talk, gentlemen. Nor are you to talk to him."

"Why not?" asked Hetherington. "And what am I in a hospital for? I know I'm in one. I recognize the smell."

"Excuse me, sir. You mustn't talk." She spoke to an orderly who had come to the doorway. "Tell the doctor that he is conscious."

The orderly hurried away. "I must ask you gentlemen to retire now," continued the nurse. Hetherington watched them recede from his range of vision without making a protest. He had a far-away feeling, and a sense of unreality that made him feel quite tranquil. There were questions that he wanted to ask, but he didn't care especially whether he asked them now or later. While he lay trying to shape events in his mind and to recall what had happened to bring him into the hospital, he heard a familiar voice saying, "Hello, Hetherington," and looked up to see his own physician, Doctor Bell, standing beside him. Bell didn't wait for Hetherington's reply. "So you're out of your trance, eh?" He was taking out a stethoscope while he spoke. "When you begin going swimming in the East River at midnight, it's time for your friends to watch you."

"Then I *was* in the water?"

"You were. Don't talk."

Doctor Bell listened to his heartbeats and examined him thoroughly in every way. "I can't find anything the matter with you. How do you feel?"

"All right—just a bit lazy; and I'm confused. I thought I'd been dreaming, but you say I was in the water. I can't make it out."

He felt that he was dropping off to sleep again, and roused himself with an effort.

"I'm sleepy."

"Bless your soul," said Doctor Bell briskly, "go to sleep, then. There's nothing the matter with you that I can find. After you've had another good sleep, you can tell us all about it."

Before the Doctor had finished speaking, Hetherington had turned over and was asleep again. When he awakened, the room was in darkness, save for a night-lamp at the farther end of the room. "Nurse!" he called. The young woman sitting by the table came to his side. "Turn on the light and give me something to eat. Where are Barnes and Pearce?"

"Do you mean the two gentlemen who were here today?"

"Yes," said Hetherington. The nurse had turned on the switch. "I will send for them, and I'll get you the food that Doctor Bell said you could have."

"Good," said Hetherington. "Get it quick."

"Yes, Mr. Hetherington; and your

friends will be right here. They're with the other gentleman."

SHE went out of the room. As soon as she had gone, Hetherington tried an experiment. He got out of bed and walked to the window. "There isn't a thing the matter with me," he thought. "I'll dress and go to the club." He looked about for his clothes, but none were in sight. The night air chilled him a bit, and he got back into bed. "I wonder what she meant about Pearce and Barnes being with the other man," he thought. While he was pondering this point, the nurse returned, and he had barely finished eating when Barnes and Pearce came in. A third man was with them, but as he made no effort to speak, Hetherington concluded he was a hospital attaché.

"How is he?" whispered Pearce.

Hetherington answered: "I'm all right. Now tell me what this is all about."

Barnes drew a deep breath. "Hetherington!" He paused a moment, then resumed: "If you'll tell me how you did it, I'll tell you anything you want to know for the rest of our lives."

"How I did what?"

"Found Mather."

"What do you mean, found Mather? Who found him?"

"You did. Where in God's name was he that you should come up out of the East River at midnight with him in your arms."

"Then I didn't dream I was in the water with some one?"

"You didn't. You were right in it, and you had Mather with you." Pearce was speaking. "We can't understand any of it. Where did you find him?"

"I didn't know I had. I don't know where I was. What does he say about it?"

"He doesn't say anything. He doesn't know where he was. He's nearly all in, and he doesn't know that you rescued him."

"Did you ask the little old man?"

"What little old man, Hetherington?"

"The old man that was there. I thought he was a freak. He said he was Pharoah."

Barnes and Pearce looked at each other. "They're both dippy," said Barnes.

"No, I'm not," Hetherington protested.

"The only name Mather has spoken has been that—Pharoah. I wish you'd talk."

"Well, see here." Hetherington began; and then, taking his visit to police headquarters as his starting point, he told of all that had occurred.

When Hetherington had finished, a voice that was strange to him said: "I wish you were well enough to come out of here and take me over that route."

"Who is this gentleman?" asked Hetherington.

"He's from the police department. Lieutenant Foster." Pearce introduced him.

"I'd like to get on his trail before it's cold," said Lieutenant Foster.

"I'm able," said Hetherington. Doctor Bell had come in, and as he made no objection, Hetherington's clothing was brought by the nurse, and he dressed.

"I'd like to look in on Mather if they'd let me," Hetherington remarked. "No one is more surprised than I am over what's happened."

Doctor Bell and the three friends, accompanied by Lieutenant Foster, stopped in Mather's room. He was asleep. Hetherington stood looking at him for several minutes. As they stole quietly away he whispered: "He looks just about as he did when I saw him in that Egyptian palace I had the vision of. I'll be glad when my brain clears up and I can separate fact and fancy."

IN obedience to Lieutenant Foster's instructions, the chauffeur drove the car to the point on Fifth Avenue where Hetherington had emerged from the park with the old man. They drove slowly along the cross-street, Hetherington narrowly observing the passing houses. They had almost reached the river, when he cried, "there's the place." The chauffeur stopped the car and the four men got out. The alleyway that Hetherington pointed to was dark. On one side of the alley was a store front, on the other a private house. Lieutenant Foster summoned the policeman on the beat and had Hetherington give him a description of the man they were searching for.

"Do you know him?" Lieutenant Foster asked the patrolman.

"I think so, Lieutenant. It sounds like the old guy who runs the costume place." He pointed to the shop-window on the east side of the alleyway. Lieutenant Foster tried the door. It was locked, and there was no sign of anyone being inside.

"We went in that way," Hetherington pointed to the alley. "We were never in the shop, I'm sure."

Led by Foster, they went into the alley. Presently they were confronted by the door that Hetherington recognized as the one he had entered. Foster rang the bell and knocked, but there was no reply. "I'd like to force it, but I'd better get a search warrant. Now that I know the street and number, I can get one at once. I'll let you know when I want you, Mr. Hetherington."

TEN days later Hetherington, Pearce and Barnes were sitting at their accustomed place in the club. They were awaiting the arrival of Mather, who had been out of the hospital for several days, and none the worse for his experiences, had resumed his duties as attorney for the corporation whose legal affairs he had charge of. This was the first time that the four had found opportunity to meet in a leisurely way. They had planned to have dinner together.

"The police have investigated everything and everyone in sight without getting any line on your friend Pharoah, Hetherington."

"I know it, Barnes. I talked with Lieutenant Foster today. Apparently the old man lived alone, though how he managed to build that labyrinth beneath his cellar and to run that tunnel under the houses between him and the river, God only knows."

Pearce spoke. "I've a theory that all of that was there. It was probably a wine-cellar or a smugglers' place that antedated Revolutionary days. Maybe it was something the Indians made use of. How it happened that only he could have discovered it is a mystery."

"As much of a mystery as what he was trying to do," Hetherington answered. He looked across the room. "Here we are." Mather had entered and came quickly to them. After greetings had been exchanged, they went to the dinner-table. Naturally their talk ran on the events that had absorbed all of them so completely.

"No," explained Mather in response to their questions, "as I've told you before, what happened has not come back to me yet. I have a very vague impression of having been in the dark for centuries. At the same time, the interval between seeing the little old man on my doorstep and coming to in the hospital, seemed only like an awakening after a night's sleep. I have none of the recollections that Hetherington has of Egypt, and palaces, and the Nile, though I have an impression of Pharoah. I don't know whether I was drugged, doped or just plain hypnotized. I only know one thing, and that is that Hetherington will never make me the goat for any more experiments."

"How was I to know an innocent remark of mine would send you off on a hunt for Cleopatra?"

"Well, as you got me out of the hole, Hetherington, I can't complain, but there's this: isn't it odd that they've never been able to get any trace of our host?"

Barnes spoke. "He's an elusive bird."

A bell-hop came to the table. "Excuse me, Mr. Hetherington; there's a call for you on the telephone. Foster, he said his name was."

The four men looked at each other, and Hetherington hurried to the telephone booth. The conversation was very brief. He hung up the receiver and returned to his eager friends.

"Foster wants me to come down to the morgue," he told them.

"Is it—" Barnes did not complete his question.

"He thinks so." Hetherington turned to Mather. "He told me to bring you too. We will all go."

VERY little was said as they rode downtown. In a short time they were standing beside a slab in the morgue. The attendant drew back the sheet, and to their gaze was revealed the remains of a very aged man. The body had been found floating in the upper bay and had been in the water a week or more, Lieutenant Foster informed them.

"Is it the man?" he asked.

"Yes," said Hetherington. "Don't you recognize him, Mather?"

"He fits in with the face I remember seeing in my nightmare."

"That's all we've got," said Lieutenant Foster, pointing to the body. "We've not been able to find a soul who knew him or anything about him."

The men started away from the gruesome place. Hetherington lingered a moment and looked again on the aged face.

"Poor old chap!" he whispered. "Whether you were a madman or the Pharoah that you thought yourself, I'm sorry for you. You've got it all to do over again." Hetherington followed his friends from the place with a final glance at the little old man—unclaimed, unknown and unexplained.

Here's a complete novelette about one of the least-known regions of the world—the great French-controlled island of Madagascar. This picturesque background is only one of the many attractions offered by one of the most remarkable stories we have ever printed.

Madagascar Gold

A LARGE schooner, coming from the Seychelles, was drawing in upon the northeast tip of Madagascar. May was well advanced, and she leaned over with a bone in her teeth to the steady thrust of the southeast monsoon.

Two men stood at her starboard rail, carefully examining through their prismatics the patches of whitish cliff that marked Cap du Diable. Both were white men. A dozen laughing, care-free Malagasys were idling along the deck, thoroughly enjoying the rushing sweep of the schooner with all the seaman's delight inherited from far Polynesian ancestors. A Chinaman paused at the lee rail, grinning at the brown men as he heaved some slops overboard; he was Ah Sin, the cook, a sleek and rotund Cantonese, always grinning and yet possessed of incredible guile and malign cruelty. Beside the helmsman stood the mate Yusuf, a coast Arab. He was tall, half-naked, pockmarked, scarred, absolutely fearless. A magnificent seaman, he knew every inch of these northern Madagascar coasts, which are among the trickiest, least-known and most dangerous coasts in the world. Yusuf had been with Trenchard these three years, and would be with him for life. The two men were as one, and in their hands the schooner was no mechanical object working in the wind, but a live and sentient creature.

Trenchard, who owned this schooner, was a slim, quiet, rather small man. His features were neatly carven, very brown, always calmly poised; at times a slight and inscrutable smile glimmered in his level gray eyes. He lowered his glasses and turned to his companion, a large and almost bulky man whose face expressed heavy determination. The latter grunted.

"Sure you can find it, Trenchard?"

"No," said Trenchard quietly. "I've never been there. According to the charts, no such place exists. But Yusuf says that it does exist—that's all."

"You and your Yusuf!" Svenstrom laughed half-angrily, and turned to glance at the mate. "Trusting my life to him, eh?"

"No—my own." Trenchard made a gesture as though this ended the matter. So it did.

"Can't see any sign of shelter down there," grunted Svenstrom, eyes to his glasses.

"If you could, others would," retorted Trenchard. "We'll catch a signal from Grenille before long, provided he's there. Watch for it. I'd better go aloft to keep out an eye for coral patches."

The gifted author of "Cactus and Rattlers," "The Junk of Laughing Girls," "Shadows of Saffron" and many other memorable stories here contributes a novelette of great dramatic power that will hold your interest from the first paragraph to the last.

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

HE turned to Yusuf. A few words in Swahili passed between them; then Trenchard swung into the rigging. He was a remarkable hand at sighting patches; and now with the morning sun behind them, Yusuf on deck and Trenchard aloft, the schooner was as safe in these uncharted waters as though in Tamatave harbor—though few others would have believed it.

All this section of the coast was uninhabited, bare, desolate. The schooner was bearing down past Andrava Bay, with Cap du Diable and its chain of round hummocks off to the north, and Berry Head opposite, its bleak, reddish ground running back into the bush. On ahead, the coast alternated in long stretches of glistening white sand beach and whitish cliff, and appeared to go straight to the southward without a break or a shelter, the shores cloaked in scanty brush and running back in bare red uplands to the astonishing landmark of all this coast—Thumb Mountain, rising in the shape of an eagle's beak, with a deep cut on the right side, and from this approach extremely conspicuous.

Trenchard, up aloft, watched the water with extraordinary care. True, they were inside the usual lane of coast steamers, but any accident here would mean certain death—not from the sea, but from men. Once caught here, once recognized, the schooner could expect no mercy. Trenchard was glad that the sun was high and behind him, and that the sea was not calm, for thus every condition was at its best for his task.

Yusuf knew the waters, true; but he was not sure of the coral. Now the schooner began to zigzag slightly, the brown men standing at the lines, Yusuf watching the shore and the slim figure aloft. From time to time Trenchard pointed, then moved his left hand or his right. The left signified a light brownish patch, which betokened a scant three-foot depth; the right indicated greenish depths of a fathom or more. Svenstrom, watching it all, marveled and frowned at this conduct, for he had expected shoutings and quick warnings. These two men who worked together scarcely uttered a word, and comprehended each other perfectly. Svenstrom was no fool, was in fact extraordinarily alert; yet he was as far from understanding Trenchard, whom he regarded rather as a high-class outlaw and reckless scoundrel, as he was from understanding Yusuf, whom he regarded as an Arab ruffian. The fact that he regarded himself as a bold and dashing rascal, a gay dog who laughed at laws, did not aid his comprehension. How-

ever, in the usual course of events he would work in very well with the others. He knew Grenille quite well, and the fact that Grenille accepted Trenchard as a full equal was a high recommendation, for as a rule Grenille would have nothing to do with Anglo-Saxons.

Just what lay behind Trenchard, no one was quite sure, and the skipper himself was not the man to blow about it. Trenchard had a most astonishing reputation among the men who did things, who all swore by him; he had another sort of reputation among the men who ordered other men to do things, for these swore at him and offered rewards for him. Among the French colonial officials, in particular, Trenchard was held in abomination. It was not so much the fact that he broke laws, as it was his manner in breaking them. Blustering, hard-fisted roisterers, who acted by the code of desire, they could handle; yet they were helpless to cope with this quiet man who treated their laws with contemptuous disdain, whose idea of abstract justice they could not comprehend, and who seemed to regard a brown-skinned man as the equal of a white.

SVENSTROM had heard much of Trenchard, off and on, but had not seen the man until that morning the skipper came to the hotel in Port Victoria, capital of the Seychelles, and handed Svenstrom a letter from Grenille. The latter and Svenstrom had worked together previously, and Svenstrom had been expecting just such a letter; but his disappointment at sight of Trenchard was acute. This quiet little man, Trenchard the pirate, Trenchard the smuggler, Trenchard the knight errant of the Indian Ocean! Incredible! Trenchard had read his thoughts, and smiled a trifle.

"Better come into it," he had said, indicating the letter which Svenstrom held. "I met Grenille in Mauritius, and he caught a cattle-boat over to Madagascar, while I came up here to fetch you. Grenille arranges things there; I attend to the transport; then we cut across the Mozambique Channel and you arrange the disposal of the stuff in Portuguese East. They don't like me there, but that's the only place we can get rid of loose gold."

Svenstrom had had to laugh, at that, for he spent much of his time in the Portuguese colony and knew all about it. True, they did not like Trenchard there—to the extent of a large reward, dead or alive. Trenchard had helped some Arab skipper get his dhow out of the greedy clutches of a grafting official, and one thing led to another; men were killed; a Portuguese coaster was blown ashore with cut cables; shifted buoys put a gunboat on a coral bank; and at a rather high price the Arab got his dhow back and fled to Zanzibar.

"Grenille doesn't go into details," Svenstrom had said, glancing at the letter.

"His word's good with me," Trenchard had replied. "Fifty thousand pounds in free gold. How about you? We split three ways if you come in."

"Oh, I know Grenille; sure."

"Then get aboard in an hour. I have to get out before they discover who I am."

That had been all. Svenstrom had watched the trim, slender figure stride away, remembered the keen intelligence of the flashing gray eyes, and had made his decision instantly. Queer that he had, too, for he was a plodding and suspicious sort, slow to trust, apt at sounding out his man with sly words and furtive jinglings of coin. Now, as he stood under the whistling cordage, heard the pull and creak of the schooner, watched the slender figure of Trenchard waving first left hand and then right, he glanced ahead at the barren coast with narrowed and uneasy eyes. He could not understand why he was on this absurd errand, why such a man as Trenchard was fool enough to stick to a sailing schooner in these days of power, why the scent of raw gold and the word of Grenille had tempted him. Sometimes fear and hesitation struck into his spirit, and this was one of the times, as the loom of the red hills drew nearer, and the schooner rushed here and there among the coral patches with never a reef in her booming mainsail.

AS for Trenchard, poised aloft and staking against death his swift judgment of green and brown and clear turquoise water, his thoughts touched only fleetingly on the white man below. He had no particular fondness for Svenstrom, had plumbed the man's depths on the way south, and held aloof. Still, Svenstrom was badly needed in the enterprise, was no coward, and was instinct with a bulldog reliability in times of actual stress; oddly enough, it was at other times that the man might go weak. This was of little moment, however, or so it appeared. The agreement was that Grenille was to be in

absolute command ashore here, Trenchard while afloat, and Svenstrom when they reached Portuguese East.

Now the rocky, hilly coast began to open out ahead, inside Pointe aux Iles, where the little Ifontsi River trickled into the sea; a few scattered islets appeared, although at a little distance or from seaward they were totally invisible against the hills. The schooner rushed on, now to right, now to left, as though death did not lie just under her forefoot; Yusuf stood braced to the rise and fall, swinging easily from knees and hips, his gaze flitting between the shore marks and the figure up aloft conning the way. Presently he opened his thin lips, and a few words floated upward; Trenchard inspected the waters ahead, found them a clear deep green, nodded confirmation and came down to the deck.

"Two points off the port bow as she lies now," he said to Svenstrom. "That's the signal from Grenille. All clear."

SVENSTROM peered through his glasses. From one of the jutting masses of rock at the shore was winding up a thin trail of gray smoke, swiftly dissipated on the wind. A few moments afterward it had died out, vanished. The schooner was running in close along the shore.

"Inside the coral," observed Trenchard. "Good depth here, too—twelve fathom at least. Yusuf must be going inside those islands—"

Suddenly the voice of Yusuf drove at the two men.

"By Allah and the Excellent Names of Allah!" he cried, and changed to French. "Look there, above the headland!"

Svenstrom looked, not understanding. Trenchard looked, and his lips tightened. Against the reddish hills, inland above the jutting promontory of the point, lifted on the wind a second finger of smoke; not thin and gray and cautious, like the signal from Grenille, but a dark and massive column that wavered upward and then scattered. It rose, while they stared; then gradually it thinned and died away into a trickle, and this trickle was lost to sight behind an intervening hill.

"What's it mean?" asked Svenstrom.

Trenchard looked at the Arab, who threw up his head in negation.

"Hard to say. Not Grenille."

"No?" Svenstrom glanced swiftly at the skipper. "Who, then? Natives?"

TRENCHARD merely shook his head in silence. That dark smoke was inexplicable to him; yet he could not disregard it, and it troubled him. Not Grenille, certainly. Almost as certainly not an enemy, for here no enemy would advertise his presence, but would strike unseen. There were no French hereabouts, and few natives, for these bare volcanic hills offered no sustenance to the humped cattle of the island. There was no village; there was not even a hill road. That smoke might have been made by some natives, in disregard of the schooner skirting the coast; this was the only plausible explanation, for the moment. None the less, Trenchard remained staring at the red hills, which were now empty of the faintest trickle of smoke, with a slight frown on his face. He could not disregard such things. He lived by regarding them. Anything out of the normal was a warning, a symbol. And now he felt a vague disturbance, a premonition, an inward foreboding that this smoke was going to count largely if he could but translate it aright.

"Grenille should know," he said after a little.

The islands opened out now—tiny bits of rocky brush, offering slight shelter against a blow. Yusuf's voice cracked out, and the brown men leaped to work. The schooner, decreasing speed as the canvas was reefed or furled, glided onward, felt her way cautiously past the first islet, then spun suddenly on her heel with the last bit of steerageway. There came a splash, a clattering run of cable, a tug at the line, and she was at rest in a tiny little invisible haven, a cleft in the island rock. The shore was massive and bold, a quarter-mile distant, rimmed with surf.

"Put out the whaleboat," said Trenchard quietly. He glanced once more up at the higher red hills, for he could not get that smoke out of his mind; but the hills were empty and bare, the brassy blue of the sky was unsmirched. Trenchard shrugged and turned away.

CHAPTER II

THE three partners talked over the luncheon which Grenille furnished. They sat in the cool shade of a cleft in the high cliffs, a little niche where even the sky was shut out; the entrance gave them sight

of a narrow strip of shore, high rolling surf, and the schooner as she lay against the rocky island. Yusuf had the Malagasys at work getting down her topmasts and putting out a stern line; she might ride here a year unseen, unguessed. Grenille had left his camp and men half a mile away in the cañon of the Ifontsi River.

"Me, I do not understand that black smoke, either," he said, "but one of my boys has gone to investigate. He will report here to us, so be at ease. Those are good men, those of mine!"

"They'd better be," said Svenstrom, and then shifted uneasily under Trenchard's eyes.

Grenille was a wiry little man, with quantities of black hair masking a keen, hard set of features. He had a pug nose with flaring nostrils, and beneath heavy lids, his eyes were brown and luminous and ablaze with energy. He spoke no English whatever, but the other two men understood French perfectly.

Each of the three was of a distinct type. Here in this rock-cranny, where the whole world was shut out, one felt quite palpably the sharp clash of character among them. Grenille evinced a checked eagerness and vivacity, a nervous vehemence held well in control, an impatience which lay under a tight rein. Svenstrom's physique and powerful features and bull neck showed a far greater physical ability but much less self-mastery; there was a brutal strain in him which might break out if given an opening. Trenchard, whose brown hair showed dark and curly with perspiration beneath his pushed-back cap, betrayed an absolute subordination of matter to mind; the very strength of his quiet reserve was impressive. When he lighted his pipe and leaned back against the rock, it was as though he gave a signal for which the others had waited.

"Details," said Svenstrom. "I'd like to know the game, Grenille."

The Frenchman laughed and pawed his black mustache.

"My friends, you have complimented me! Well, you comprehend; I have friends among the natives, the unchristianized Hovas of the west coast. They know that I am to be trusted, that the officials are not exactly my pals. So through them I learned of a treasure that was laid away at the time of the French conquest. It is a great quantity of free gold, amounting to fifty or more thousand English pounds. The natives cannot use it. If they tried, the French would ask questions, would force them to disclose the hoard. They can get no gain from it, thus. But if I, whom they trust, can cash it in, they will give me three-fourths of it. They will be glad to have one-fourth, and they know I am to be trusted."

Svenstrom drew down his heavy brows.

"One has heard such stories before," he said, but genially, to avoid offense. "If I had known it was a question of this native gold—"

"If Grenille says it is there," said Trenchard, "then it is there."

GRENILLE showed his white teeth in a flashing smile.

"Well, it is there; I have seen it and handled it. It is two days' journey inland from here, just beyond the road that goes to Antsondririna, and was buried in big earthen jars. The chiefs will have it removed and sewed up in hide packs, ready for us. They will provide porters. You chaps come along and take it. I am to remain as surety for the gold, as hostage."

Trenchard laughed quietly and glanced at Svenstrom, who was astonished.

"I trust that you are satisfied now with our Grenille?"

"I do not like leaving you in their hands," said Svenstrom. The Frenchman shrugged.

"It is safe. I know you men. If the schooner is caught, if accidents happen, I shall not be harmed. I am to remain as a surety for your faith in handling the gold; that is all. The native mind has queer twists, my friends."

"All right," said Trenchard, stirring a little. "When do we start?"

"When you are ready," said Grenille.

Trenchard stood up, yawned, knocked out his pipe.

"I'm ready now. We'll want Ah Sin to cook for us. Need any men?"

"No," said Grenille. "I have six natives in camp. But you, Svenstrom! I took for granted you could handle the stuff at Lourenco Marques. Eh?"

"Yes." Svenstrom nodded thoughtfully. "It will cost a bit, perhaps a thousand pounds, but can be arranged."

"You needn't go after it unless you wish." Trenchard looked down at him. "If you'd rather stay here with the schooner—"

"Devil, no!" Svenstrom scrambled to

his feet. "I like the land, not the ocean, under my heels."

At this moment the three men were in perfect accord. Among them existed an absolute faith, an interdependence. Grenille's life was staked upon their honesty, for which he had answered to the natives. Svenstrom's life was staked upon Trenchard's ability to reach the African coast in safety. Trenchard's life was staked upon Grenille's assurance of safety here, and upon Svenstrom's ability to handle the Portuguese officials at the other end. One weak link in this chain would ruin all three.

"Get your devil of a yellow man, then," said Grenille, rising. "I'm to leave one man here to keep an eye on the schooner and let us know if anything goes wrong."

"Nothing will go wrong here," said Trenchard. "I'm leaving Yusuf in charge."

HE left them, passing along the cleft to the open shore beyond, striding across the white sand until he reached the water's edge. There he began to make signals toward the schooner. Grenille put the luncheon things together. Svenstrom stared after the skipper.

"He trusts that Arab," he muttered.

Grenille looked up and laughed. "Why not? When one knows, one trusts. He is in the greatest danger. You are a trader, of good standing, and at most would be expelled from the island. My sister is married to a high official in Paris; I run little risk. But Trenchard—ah! The bullet for him, if they catch him. . . . . He's coming back."

Trenchard was striding back into the cleft. Now he raised hand and voice to the two men.

"Your man's coming, Grenille!"

They hastened out to the opening. Running along the shore under the cliffs toward them was a native, spear in hand—a tall, bronze-colored man with shells in ears and nostrils. He ran up to the three, saluted them, and spat forth Malagasy at Grenille. The latter listened with incredulity lighting his brown eyes.

"He says," translated the Frenchman, turning, "that the black smoke was a signal made to your ship. Me, I do not understand this! He says that he saw a strange white man all alone on the hillside, a small man with long golden hair, who carried a rifle and was coming toward the sea, following the river. Therefore he will find my camp."

The three glanced at one another, puzzled.

"Go and see," said Trenchard. "Ah Sin is coming ashore."

Grenille ordered the native to take up the basket. In through the line of rollers was shooting the whaleboat. It drove to the beach, and Ah Sin leaped out, holding a bundle against his black silk jacket. The whaleboat was pushed out, turned, hung poised an instant, then smashed through the first line of surf and headed for the second.

"You've met Ah Sin before this, Grenille," said Trenchard. The Frenchman laughed at the yellow man, who gave him a grin in return. Then the five started off along the shore toward Grenille's camp.

They walked rapidly, frowning, silent, wondering what sort of person they would see. One man did not spell danger of himself, but his presence spelled disaster. One incautious word breathed abroad would bring trouble. If the authorities learned that Grenille, Trenchard and Svenstrom had been here in Madagascar together, there would be investigation—and if it came before the gold was safely handled, it would bring ruin. Svenstrom wanted no suspicion directed at him, for in the eyes of the world he was a trader and could not stand any blight; nor did Grenille care to be stopped and investigated before he had cleared out with his share. Trenchard did not care particularly what happened, yet could not rid himself of that premonition he had felt at first sight of the black pillar of smoke. All three men were wondering how best to take care of this stranger, how to shut his mouth.

Presently they left the beach and turned up beside the brown river. Grenille's camp was hidden amid a pile of twisted rocks, and they came upon it suddenly, saw the white man standing there with Grenille's five half-hostile Hovas around him. From Trenchard escaped a low whistle, and he paused abruptly. Svenstrom uttered a low and astonished oath. Grenille laughed and strode forward, sweeping off his hat as he advanced.

"Good day, madame!" he exclaimed. The white man was a woman.

TRENCHARD was the only one who realized in a flash just what it must mean to them, who saw his premonition fulfilled, who looked at this woman not as a thing of flesh and blood, but as a symbol

of what must inevitably come about. So he stopped short, and his gray eyes became cold.

The woman looked past the others at him and read the antagonism, the hatred, in his gaze. She looked past the smiling, bowing Grenille and the staring Svenstrom, whose eyes were preying upon her, to the slender man whose white seaman's cap was shoved back on his head and who met her look with a cold bitterness. Then the emotion went out of his eyes, and he took off his cap. She forced this much from him, in that first startled meeting of glances.

The woman wore khaki, a torn riding suit, and from beneath her helmet loose masses of golden hair hung about her neck. She was petite, slim and thinly developed as a girl; yet she was no girl; Trenchard put her down as five-and-twenty. A golden glow of joyous sun-bronzed health filled her face, and dark brows clouded eyes of a rich and glowing amber—eyes that could open very wide, or narrow thinly beneath heavy and masterful lids. When she smiled at Grenille, white and perfect teeth flashed out, and all her face radiated eager laughter.

"Monsieur, your natives were about to spear me like a fish—and my rifle empty!" she exclaimed. "I am glad you came. I am hungry, thirsty, lost, and my clothes are all torn by Mysore thorns, and there are some leeches under my shirt—"

"One suffers in these forests, madame," said Grenille. "One moment, and my tent shall be cleared. When you have bathed and refreshed yourself, a meal will be ready."

HE snapped orders at his men. The small tent was cleared; calabashes of water were made ready; it was only a moment or two before he was holding open the flap. She, meantime, drove another swift look at Trenchard, but he was filling his pipe and ignored her. All three men knew her discomfort, for not only were her clothes badly torn, but her mention of leeches showed that she had not emerged from the jungle unscathed. Any one of the three, at such a moment, would have ripped off clothes and rid himself frantically of the pests. When she had gone into the tent and Grenille closed the flap, Svenstrom turned to the skipper.

"A real woman, eh, Cap'n?" he said in a low voice, and his eyes were glowing.

Trenchard regarded him coolly.

"Not a phantom, certainly; so I imagine she's real."

"Eh?" Svenstrom frowned. "You're not glad to see her, then?"

"Not a bit," returned Trenchard calmly. "Are you?"

The other was put out of countenance by that question, and did not respond. Grenille came up to them, his brown eyes inquiring and mocking.

"The devil is in paradise," he said, but he sighed a little. Trenchard flung him an acidly bitter look.

"You are in command here. If you will take my advice, put a bullet in that woman and go."

Grenille started, stared at him in acute astonishment.

"This—from you! You are not in earnest?"

"When I am on French soil, I am usually in earnest."

"But—you don't know her? You have some reason for saying that?"

Trenchard shrugged. "She is a woman," he said. "Reason enough."

"Very well," and Grenille eyed him in somber reflection. "Put a bullet in her, then."

Trenchard grunted, turned his back and lighted his pipe. The other two men glanced at each other, and Grenille made a grimace. Svenstrom smiled slightly.

"I am entirely willing to remain here," he observed with a light manner. "You two chaps go ahead. I will entertain the lady, or take her back to her party."

Grenille put his head on one side, like a bird, and his eyes twinkled.

"Quite out of the question, I assure you, *mon vieux!*" he said smoothly. "This is a matter for caution. Anyone searching for this lady might, naturally, chance upon us; or, if she were returned to her party, she would certainly mention having encountered us. It is, of course, imperative that we help her."

"Of course," said Svenstrom with decision. Grenille flung him an indescribable look.

"But," he pursued gently, "we must first help ourselves. Not? To make sure of her, she must accompany us. I shall charge myself with her safety. First, however, we must hear her story—then decide."

Trenchard gazed up at the far mountains, and puffed at his pipe. He had not missed that gentle smoothness in the tone of Grenille, and he understood perfectly

what was in the mind of Svenstrom. A bitter smile touched his thin lips slightly.

"It has begun," he thought.

Presently the woman came out of the tent, laughter in her eyes.

CHAPTER III

WHILE she gratefully ate and drank of what Grenille could provide, Sylvie de Peyrier sketched her misadventures for the three men who listened. If she observed that Ah Sin and the six brown men were getting ready to march, she offered no comment; her manner was one of laughing delight at having met with friends; yet beneath the surface was a poise, a *sang froid,* a cool capability which was unusual in a woman rescued from an uncertain fate.

Her father was a geologist employed by the government and at work near Lokia, to the west of Thumb Mountain. Two days previously she had arrived by a coasting steamer at Vohemar, farther down the coast, and as her father had not turned up to meet her, she started off by road to meet him, having been provided with a horse and a trusty native guide. The guide, however, had drunk water from a stream, had swallowed a *tsingala*—the tiny waterbug which is death to man or beast—and remained beside the road. The girl went on alone after watching him die, helpless to aid him, and had lost her track; the hill roads were mere trails. Her horse fell and broke a leg. Afoot, not knowing where she was, Sylvie struck out for the coast to the east as her surest method of reaching some human habitation. She had sighted the schooner that morning, and sent up a signal. That was all.

"It is an unexpected pleasure to meet a ship and three gentlemen," she said, directing a smile at Trenchard, who did not respond. "You can take me to Vohemar, Captain Trenchard?"

"Sorry," said Trenchard, removing his pipe. "I think we can take you on with us, and get you safely to Lokia and your father. Ask Grenille about it. He's in command."

He met a swift flash of her eyes, a slight widening of the lids, which was expressive. The girl knew him for an enemy. Then she turned to Grenille.

"Well, monsieur? What do you say? Evidently you did not land from that schooner."

"No," said Grenille, who was far from losing his caution. "I was rather surprised to see her coming—"

Trenchard stirred, for this was a false move. He spoke out, roughly.

"The truth of it is, mademoiselle, we are slavers. We are going to get a party of slaves and take them away in the schooner, and we dare meet no one. But you are safe with us."

This statement caused Grenille and Svenstrom to blink; it was audacious, for it was obviously a lie—another way of telling the girl to ask no questions. She knew well enough they were nothing of the sort. Anyone would know it. Grenille, however, was prompt to the cue.

"We must regretfully confess," he said, and sighed. "Yes, you are safe with us, that is true. If you are able to march, you shall accompany us. I shall send ahead and have guides and a litter ready, and you can be sent on to Lokia."

"That is very sweet of you," she said, and gave Grenille a slow smile that brought the red to his cheeks.

A QUEER thing happened. Trenchard was just swearing to himself that she was not a good woman to look at any man like that; he had perceived that tinge of red in the cheeks of Grenille, the wiry rover, the hardened rascal whose moral sense drew blank when it was a question of women white or brown. He saw the girl turn to Svenstrom and meet his predatory gaze with that same full smile, her rich amber eyes dilating slightly on his. Then, as though feeling the scrutiny of Trenchard, she directed at him a grave and thoughtful glance, and lowered her eyes.

His thoughts were shattered by that look. It expressed to his mind a sharp fear, a fine clear innocence; he told himself abruptly that he was wrong, that she was alarmed and afraid, that she was perfectly all right and was appealing to him. A thousand conjectures flitted into his head. It was as though for an instant she had let fall a curtain, giving him a momentary level glimpse into some holy of holies. It left him confused and inchoate of thought, yet sure after all that she was what she seemed, unsullied and calmly brave.

"I am ready," she said, and rose, smiling again.

Grenille got the men into action, striking the tent, making up packs, one of them taking the girl's empty rifle. Ah Sin,

blandly rotund, smoked a tiny sleeve pipe, his oblique eyes missing nothing at all; as the men fell into line, he joined them, his high boots making an incongruous touch to his black silk costume. He watched the Hovas curiously, for these were no common natives, but picked men, each wearing a handsome *lamba* or *sarong* woven from the silk of the "ditch-crosser" spider —silk strong enough to entangle birds in the webs. They filed off, and Grenille made a signal to Svenstrom. The latter offered his arm to Sylvie de Peyrier, and she refused it, but walked beside him, talking to him, while he tried to peer down sidelong at her and purred with laughter and soft words which the others could not catch.

Grenille, walking with Trenchard, wore a cynical smile beneath his wide black mustache.

"I know De Peyrier," he confided to Trenchard. "He is a great old rascal, liking nothing better than a few horns of native rum. He is always drunk when working. Probably he was too drunk to go meet her. By the time she is missed, we shall be safely away, eh? Look at that fool Svenstrom, with his bull neck and square head! They wont have a boulevard of it long."

"Eh? Why not?" asked Trenchard, caught by the tone of these last words.

Grenille pointed to the men. "These are Hovas, you understand? From the interior! All about here is Sakalava country, and Hovas are not liked. These chaps will take good care that we meet no one, be sure! We shall strike the bush soon. And now what about putting that bullet into the woman, eh?"

"Oh, shut up," snapped Trenchard. "Just the same, it was good advice."

Grenille chuckled, pawed his tangle of black beard, and held his peace.

His words dwelt with Trenchard, however. The girl's father drunk, letting her come alone across almost unknown country! Nothing cowardly about her, at all events, he thought, and remembered how collected she had been, well poised. Such a girl was capable of high things. What did Grenille intend? Not to send her on as he had promised, certainly, for he had not dispatched any of the men ahead. Probably Grenille had encountered few such women as this in his roving life, and was not yet decided as to his course; one thing was certain, and this was the lack of any high nobility or pity in the man. Grenille could be hard as flint at times.

WHEN an hour had passed, the party was in the uplands, straggling through thorny bush which appeared to stretch endlessly toward the volcanic masses piled fifty miles distant. The brush and small trees were thorny, filled with the hooked Mysore barbs, and occasionally a cry of warning would come down from the natives ahead, and a wide sweep would be made to avoid clumps of the Agy vine, which showers its fearfully poisonous needles on any unwary passers-by. In general, however, there was no forest or jungle, this being restricted to the gorges and lower valleys.

The afternoon was half gone when, amid general consternation, the march was brought to an abrupt halt. Grenille had joined Svenstrom and the girl. Trenchard, bringing up the rear, watched the three figures—Grenille swaggering along, Sylvie maintaining the pace with effortless ease, Svenstrom's huge bulk floundering and already wearied by the rough going. A queer sense of disaster oppressed Trenchard; he could not explain it, knew better than to mention it to Grenille; yet he felt it distinctly. Once or twice Svenstrom turned to glance at him, and the man's eyes were singular. Trenchard had the feeling that they were talking about him. He felt, too, that he had somehow been detached from his partners, not only physically but mentally. Some men can sense such things by telepathy. Trenchard tried to tell himself that it was the heat, the land breeze, the irritating struggle with thorn and brush; yet it was none of these things. Then one of the Hovas cried out, and the cry was passed back, and the party halted.

Trenchard perceived the signal as soon as the others—two tall plumes of bluish smoke that ascended from some hillock miles ahead of them. Grenille plunged on to where the brown men stood staring, and talked excitedly with them, then came back to the others, his eyes anxious, nervous fingers worrying his beard.

"A signal to halt," he said abruptly, careless of the girl's presence or what she might deduce from his words. "Some trouble has come up—how should I know what it is?"

Svenstrom cursed and rubbed his hand, which some nettle had stung virulently.

"That's always the way," he said, a

morose frown clouding his heavy features. "This myth always ends the same way. There's never an end to the rainbow."

Grenille looked up at him with sudden fierce anger, but made no response. Trenchard filled and lighted his pipe and waited. Then he saw that the girl had turned; leaving the others, she came back to him, and her clear amber eyes were fastened upon him in coolly direct challenge. Svenstrom turned to look after her, and his gaze lighted on Trenchard. In that look was a burst of repressed enmity.

"I want to speak with you, please," said the girl quietly. He assented in silence. Grenille and Svenstrom went on to where the Hovas stood grouped, so that the two were beyond earshot. Trenchard met the girl's eyes and waited.

"Why do you hate me?" she asked abruptly, a puzzled curiosity in her words and air.

"I don't," said Trenchard.

"Bah! Don't deny it. Let us get somewhere. From the moment we met, you hated me; and then you wanted to kill me —put a bullet into me. Why? What have I done?"

SO Svenstrom had talked! Suddenly Trenchard realized that things had gone crashing down around him. He did not know what to say, and so stood silent, puffing at his pipe, his gray eyes resting coldly on the lovely features of the girl who faced him.

Those words of hers gave him a bad turn. They marked the end of things. They explained the singular looks of Svenstrom, and he wondered if Grenille shared the other man's feelings. A surge of bitterness uprose within him as he thought of what this woman had accomplished, as he looked back at the labor of weeks brought to nothing in an hour's time. He thought of his meeting with Grenille in Mauritius, of his long traverse to the Seychelles, his meeting there with Svenstrom, the letter, the departure and voyage south —of those long weeks, those plans so carefully laid and fostered. And now the hidden fault in Svenstrom had come to the surface and was rotting everything. Of Grenille he was not certain at all.

Those amber eyes probed him steadily. The girl spoke again, more softly.

"Well, what have I done, then? You should not hate me. It is to you that I look, Captain Trenchard. These other two—I am afraid of them. Grenille mocks me; Svenstrom looks at me as a hawk looks at a fowl. I know what to expect from them, but you are different."

"I am not different," said Trenchard.

"But you are. I know!" A sudden warmth shone in her face. "You say that Grenille is in command here; but I know better. You are the master. It is you who can protect me, if you will. Why do you hate me so? What have I done to you?"

Revulsion of feeling swept Trenchard. It was true—what had she done to him? Nothing, of intention. She was not to blame for the hearts of these other men. She was not to blame for having seen their party and joined them. It was not her fault at all; it was simply a dispensation of Providence.

"Before you came," he said quietly, frankly, "we three were as one. You are a woman, and no ordinary one. I knew what must happen—ruin to all our plans, disaster, perhaps death. I do not hate you for it, no; but you cannot expect me to regard it with joy."

His words were cold, dispassionate, clearly concise. He regarded the woman without emotion, without any slightest response to the warm appeal of her eyes. Then she spoke again, quietly, and every word was like a fresh blow to him.

"I understand," she said. "I am sorry. Svenstrom told me a good deal. I know what you are after—and I heard of you three men down at Tamatave. There is a reward of five thousand francs for your capture or death; you are supposed to be a terrible person. Well, I do not think so. I would trust you, where I could not trust these others."

Trenchard was really frightened now, almost for the first time in his life. That fool Svenstrom, that animal, must be mad with passion! He must have gulped out everything to this girl; he would go to any lengths; he would regard nothing. Trenchard could not quite fathom this insensate desire on Svenstrom's part, for the thought of the gold should have held the man steady; yet, did Svenstrom have any great faith in the story of Grenille?

"They are coming," said Trenchard, lifting his eyes past the girl to the figures of Svenstrom and Grenille, approaching. "You need not be afraid, I give you my word upon it. No harm will come to you. —Well, Grenille? What is the trouble?"

THE swarthy little Frenchman made a gesture of helpless irritation.

"*Mon Dieu,* how do I know? That double smoke is a signal to go no farther, to stop, a signal of danger! I am going ahead with two of the Hovas; we shall undoubtedly meet a messenger from the chiefs. You others had better go back and wait. There may be troops in the hills, constabulary, anything! For all I know, the secret may have leaked out. We may have to get away in the schooner. I shall go and see."

There lay courage. Trenchard's eyes glowed with swift warmth as he looked at Grenille and felt a rekindling of faith. The man might run into anything, there in the red uplands—native constabulary and trackers, troops, officials, treachery. In such an event, his only hope of escape lay in the schooner.

"Right," said Trenchard. "We'll wait for you, Grenille."

Grenille was satisfied with that. He bowed to the girl, his white teeth flashing through the tangle of beard; then he turned and departed. Two of the Hovas joined him, spears in hand, *lambas* wrapped about arms and bodies. The three plunged into the brush and were gone.

Trenchard beckoned the others, who took up their loads and began to retrace the trail, the rotund little Cantonese following closely. After Ah Sin went the girl. Svenstrom fell in beside Trenchard with a low rumble of words.

"I knew it, I knew it!" he said. "If I'd only known this was native gold before we started, I'd never have come. It always turns out this way—nothing to it at all. Grenille should have had more sense. Undoubtedly some of those accursed Hovas got drunk and talked, and the French sent up some constabulary. They'll nick the lot of us if we don't get out of here."

Trenchard repressed his anger. "Grenille's gone to find out."

"More fool he! I tell you, they'll send boats up the coast to catch us, if they do know. They wont spare any pains to nab you. They wont care much about Grenille or me, but they'll be after you hot and heavy. They'll send up some sort of boats that can get in among the coral banks."

Trenchard looked at the man, whose heavy features were all adrift with panic.

"What do you want to do, then?" he asked. "Run and leave Grenille?"

Svenstrom cursed. "Damn Grenille! He got us into this fool escapade. Let him answer for it. Eh? You'll be the one to pay if we're caught. Grenille can slide out of it—he has influence and can use it. I can lie and use money. You're the one they'll want to catch."

"You are eloquently persuasive," said Trenchard, and smiled a little. It was on the tip of his tongue to pitch into the man and buck him up, shame him; yet that was a hopeless task. The rotten spot in Svenstrom had spread and corrupted everything. A sudden abrupt crisis might have done the trick, but there was no crisis—only a slow anxiety, a growing lack of faith, a gradual feeling that the whole expedition was fruitless. Svenstrom had disintegrated from within, not from without. What use to reproach him with treachery, with talking too much, with the lust that consumed him? None whatever. Within a few hours, Svenstrom had become an enemy, a traitor, a panic-struck creature ready to cut and run.

"Go on and talk to the woman," said Trenchard, pointing to the slender khaki-clad figure ahead of them. Then he saw, to his astonishment, that Sylvie de Peyrier was already engaged in conversation—with Ah Sin. This was unprecedented, for the bland little Cantonese usually shunned all women as the plague. Svenstrom grunted and shoved on ahead, the girl turning to him with her eager smile.

"Aye, Svenstrom, you're better ahead of me than behind me," muttered Trenchard. "You'll bear watching and no mistake. I wonder why Ah Sin was talking with her?"

He trudged on, shaking his head, bitterness heavy within him. It occurred to him that he had made two promises that afternoon—one to the girl, one to Grenille.

CHAPTER IV

BACK again in Grenille's camp by the river, where the Hova left here by Grenille joined the others, Trenchard ordered camp made, for the sun was resting on the western peaks and night was at hand. Bidding Ah Sin attend to the meal, Trenchard left the camp and strode on around the shore to the cliffs. When his figure was seen, a boat put out from the schooner, the tall figure of Yusuf standing in the stern. Now, with evening, there was little surf, and the boat swept in easily

to the beach of white sand. Yusuf leaped ashore.

"Trouble, Rais Trenchard?" he asked.

"We were warned back," said Trenchard. "We must wait and see what it means. We have picked up a Frenchwoman who was lost. Nothing is certain now, except disaster. Get the topmasts up, and be ready to get the anchor in."

"We can slip the cable, Rais," said the Arab. "The anchor was no good on the coral bottom, and lest it be lost I got out that old wooden anchor which we took from the dhow at Zanzibar. We bent it to that old hawser—it will be no loss."

A flicker of a smile touched Trenchard's lips. How had this man guessed at trouble?

"You have seen nothing?"

"Yes, Rais. I sent a man up the cliff soon after you left this afternoon. He went around Pointe aux Iles, and made out two dhows far down the coast, inside the coral. They seemed to be lying inside the islands."

TRENCHARD remembered the words of Svenstrom. Dhows! They might be fishing there, of course, or might be doing anything; but no Arab dhows had any real business in such a position. Was it possible that Svenstrom's frightened brain had guessed at the truth? Was there a trap, then, cunningly laid to catch the outlaw Trenchard?

"Is the woman young, Rais?" asked the pockmarked Yusuf.

Trenchard nodded. "Yes. Everything has gone to smash."

"Ah! It was written by the Prophet—whom may Allah bless!—that the keys of Paradise lie in the hand of a woman; but I think he may have written this in a moment of forgetfulness. By the ninety-nine excellent names of God, Rais, this is bad news."

Trenchard waved his hand, watched Yusuf go back to the boat, stood frowning. After all, Grenille might have put his foot into a snare this time; constabulary might have gone around by land while others came up the coast in dhows. It was entirely possible. At the same time, it was equally possible to become frightened by shadows. Grenille might come in with word that everything was all right—perhaps De Peyrier was searching for the lost girl, and the Hova chiefs had become cautious.

TRENCHARD turned, started back toward camp, and as he neared the mouth of the little Ifontsi River he saw Ah Sin coming toward him in the gathering twilight. He walked on and met the bland little Cantonese, who addressed him in fluent French.

"Master, there is something wrong about that woman."

"Wrong? What is it, then?" asked Trenchard, with a hopeless sinking feeling. He was not certain just what the word "wrong" might mean to Ah Sin.

"I do not know," said Ah Sin calmly, "but I watched her this morning. It was true about the leeches, for there were spots of blood showing through her shirt, but those leeches might have been placed there for our benefit. At the same time she had not spent the night in the forest, nor had she come far, for her boots were fresh and had no mud on them."

"Boots! Well, is that all? What do you know definitely?"

"Nothing, master."

"Then be quiet," exclaimed Trenchard, almost with a groan. He felt it impossible to face this sort of thing longer; he wanted facts, not theories. "Don't come to me until you have learned something definite, you understand? Keep your eye on Svenstrom, rather than the woman."

Rebuffed, Ah Sin said no more.

Trenchard glanced back at the shadowed islet where the schooner lay, and was impelled to get aboard her and flee out to sea, away from all this, anywhere—if he only could! He felt trapped, snared, entangled in something with which he could not cope. It seemed as though a dark accumulation of ill-fortune was slowly gathering to burst over him. A quick, sharp danger he could meet and overcome; but here he sensed insidious peril, intangible in every detail, sending vague tentacles around him from without and from within. This gradual envelopment was a new thing. He went back to camp slowly, reflectively, his brain in a confused whirl.

THE evening meal was not pleasant. Svenstrom, once again so thoroughly absorbed in Sylvie de Peyrier that he had forgotten everything else, said no more about abandoning Grenille but sat beside the woman, chatting with her confidentially. From time to time she sent a questioning glance at Trenchard, who remained taciturn and aloof, quite ignoring them.

The night drew down; shadows closed in; the rocks around passed from gray to blue, from blue to dark obscurity. Across the heavens blazed out the stars, and from about their own fire came the voices of the Hova men. Trenchard, his meal finished, stuffed tobacco into his pipe and leaned forward, lighting it with a brand from the fire; the ruddy glare touched his face in high relief, accentuating its smooth lines, bringing a flash from his gray eyes. He rose, and strolled away along the river-shore.

For a little he paced up and down, looking from the sky to the dark, vague mass inland that bulked out the stars. From the river and the bar and the islands beyond came the murmurings of rustling water, and the far hollow reverberations as the slow night-surf rolled in and crashed on the sands. Here, save for a phosphorescent streak or two, the ocean was shut out; a slight cool land breeze swept down the river-valley; gradually Trenchard felt quieted and rested. The moon was not yet up, but the sky blazed, all the air was silvery, and he lifted his steady gaze to the constellations. He felt peace somehow from the starry roof, and wondered that he should have bothered himself with the petty vagaries of other tiny people; but when he turned, pacing back, and fronted the black rock-masses that shut out the western sky, these seemed to him pregnant with ominous silence, darkness, menace. What was breeding for him up in those hills? Was Grenille fallen into some trap, or—

"Ah! I was looking for you, Captain."

SHE seemed a fragile little thing as she came toward him, dark slender shape of a boy, thin in the starglow, her face white beneath golden hair. Suddenly her loveliness touched him, there in the night, made him aware of its fragrance and fine delicacy; after all, she was a tender creature, fighting against a harsher world with a finer courage than his own, facing more brutal things than he himself had to face. Trenchard took off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair, waiting. Characteristically, he said nothing.

"I must tell you something—there is something you must do at once, now!" She came close to him, caught at his hand, gripped her fingers into his wrist, peering at him as though trying to read his face there in the starlight. Oddly enough, he knew that the gesture, the touch, was no blandishment—he read urgency in her voice, in her manner, knew that her calm poise and control had left her.

"I can't explain; you must take my word for it," she went on, with a catch of her breath. "Oh, I didn't understand! I didn't know what sort of man you were, until I saw you beside these others! That beast Svenstrom—he has told me more than he knew. Why did you ever trust such a man? You are like steel, like steel! They are nothing beside you. I thought you were the other kind—a wild brute, a pirate, a rascal unhung—but you're not."

Trenchard was tremendously astonished. He could not know how terribly coherent was her whole thought just then; he considered that she must be incoherent, hysterical, thrown off her balance somehow. Her fingers gripped on his wrist, almost frantically.

"You must get out of here, at once! Get to your schooner and go away, without losing a minute!" Her voice was low and tense, vibrant with emotion. "Oh, I can't tell you—some day you'll know, and you'll not think so badly of me."

"Why, no, I don't." Trenchard found fumbling words at last. "Not a bit. It's not your fault at all—I can see that, of course. It's what you couldn't help in the least."

He felt her shiver, and felt horribly afraid that she was going to faint.

"See here, you needn't be nervous!" he went on hastily. "Nothing to be worried about. I'll see you through all right. Whatever happens, you're safe. Grenille may be back any time now, and I'll see to it that he sends you off—"

A sudden laugh escaped her. "Bah! Grenille makes a mock of me; nothing he could do would help me. But it's not for myself that I'm afraid. You're in danger here. You must get aboard that schooner and go, before morning! Don't ask me why—just do as I tell you. It's for your sake, because you're a man, not the animal I thought you were. Do you understand? Take your Chinaman and go aboard your schooner, and *go!*"

In this last word was an inexpressible force, an energy, as though by the imperative command she would compel him to do as she said. Trenchard felt bewildered at her mention of danger. From whom, then? Not from Svenstrom, though she might think so. He thought of those dhows down the coast, of the sudden break-down of

the expedition, of the vague fears which both Yusuf and Ah Sin entertained, of the mistrust and premonition of disaster which had filled his own mind. Danger from whom, from whence? There was no answer. She could give him nothing definite, was doubtless acting on intuition alone. Queer creatures, women!

"You've had a hard day," he said, and patted her hand gently. "Yes, a terribly hard day—no wonder your nerves have gone to bits. You get into that tent, now, and rest. Nothing's going to happen; you're quite safe, and you need sleep more than anything. As for leaving, I'm not leaving here until Grenille comes along. I know there's danger, of course—feel it the same way you do, by the sixth sense; but that's quite all right. We'll wait for Grenille."

HIS quiet voice, his calm words, seemed to anger her. She snatched away her hand, stepped back a pace, stood there staring at him.

"You wont go?"

"No."

"But—will nothing make you go, save yourself while you can? Oh, if I could tell you—"

"Don't try, don't try," he said, soothingly, as one speaks to a frightened child. "It's quite all right, I promise you. I told Grenille that I'd wait, and of course I shall. He depends on me, you know. Even if there were real and acute danger, it'd make no difference."

She stood silent for a moment, then her voice reached out with a deeper note.

"I said truly that you were made of steel! But—if I could show you that it were for myself that I ask—if it were not for your sake, but for my own? Surely you would do that? Surely you would take a boat at least, and conduct me up the coast?"

Trenchard shook his head gravely. "No, not at all. There is no danger to you from any of us; I assure you absolutely of that fact. Any other danger which might threaten you, would menace us all, or vice versa. You are here under my eye, and I shall see to it that you stand in no peril. But Grenille is somewhere out there in the hills, depending on me—"

"You would save him rather than me?" she flashed angrily. "Rather than yourself?"

"Yes," said Trenchard. "Yes. You don't understand it, because you're a woman—"

She leaned forward. "Do you know that Grenille would cheerfully kill you this minute and take me, if he thought he could succeed?"

Trenchard did not want to answer that question, yet her air compelled him to truth. He struggled against it, remembering Grenille's air and words that day, and then yielded.

"It might be so," he admitted. "But what difference does that make to me? Why should I run away and leave him, and curse myself? What the devil are you driving at, young woman?"

"Oh!" Scorn and despair cried out in her voice. "Will nothing make you go?"

"Nothing," he said, and replaced his pipe in his mouth.

She turned and was gone, melting into the shadows. He looked where she had vanished, and after a moment saw her figure pass against the glow of the fires, then she was gone. Shaking his head, he stuffed more tobacco into his pipe and retraced his steps into the darkness.

"Women are curious beings!" he reflected. "Now, why in the fiend's name was she so set on my getting away, clearing out? Perhaps Grenille infuriated her this afternoon with his cynical mockery, and she wanted me to cut and leave him—likely enough. That'd be like a woman. Yet there's something about her I don't savvy at all. Can't understand it. If I'd met her ten years ago, now! She'd be a good fairy to me—oh, the devil! I'm making a fool of myself. I wish I was fifty miles out to sea, and that's a fact. This cursed land breeze is playing hob with me."

HE swore softly, vehemently, forced all thought of the woman from his mind. A moment later he took a match from his pocket and lighted his pipe. Before the glow died, he heard the crunch of boots behind him, and turned. Even before the man spoke, he knew whose was that large, burly figure coming at him.

"You, Trenchard?" said Svenstrom, geniality in his voice. "See here. I've found the right way out of this thing—the woman, I mean. It's all clear enough now. I'm sick of this cursed affair; Grenille won't show up with any good news, you can depend on it. So here's the right way out for all hands."

Trenchard hated the man, whose low, sleek voice hinted at unlovely things, at some hidden knowledge, at some festering scheme of brutality. Trenchard, however, was not accustomed to letting his heart speak in his words.

"So?" he observed, puffing at his pipe. "Glad to hear it. What's the idea?"

"Well, it's simple enough." Svenstrom came close to him, spoke confidentially, softly. "I'd not mind dropping in at Tamatave, down the coast, and you can spare me that whaleboat, well enough. I'll pay for it, of course. It's got a sail, and I'll run down to Vohemar and maybe farther, if I don't catch a steamer."

"Good enough," said Trenchard, wondering what lay behind it. "When?"

"Oh, in the morning—give Sylvie a chance to get some rest. She'll be keen enough for it—was trying to get me to—"

"Look here, I'm sick of you," said Trenchard suddenly. "You're a damned lying rascal."

"Eh?" Svenstrom drew back, then laughed. "Oh! Don't believe it, eh? Well, you'd better, I can tell you! I've known all the while she was a liar, because I happen to know old man De Peyrier pretty well. He hasn't a daughter at all, hasn't a family, doesn't want one. Her whole yarn was a made-up lie, of course. I told her I knew the old chap, and she admitted without a blush that she had lied. Who she is I don't know, but it's not hard to guess—"

Trenchard swallowed hard. He had an uneasy conviction that Svenstrom was speaking the simple truth here, but his anger overbore him.

"Shut up and go to bed," he snapped, then spoke with a curious softness. "You're a beast, Svenstrom. What your game is, I don't know or care. I sha'n't run and leave Grenille, and you sha'n't either. That's flat."

Svenstrom breathed harshly in the silence.

"So?" he said, an ugly note in his voice. "You think you can get us all nabbed because of that damned Grenille? Not much. Maybe, now I've told you the truth about her, you'd like to take her somewhere else than down the coast, eh? I can see through you—and her too, the vixen! She can't play with me like that—"

His words had cloaked his actions. Suddenly he launched himself, his fist smashing through the darkness, knocking Trenchard asprawl. On hands and knees, Trenchard pulled himself up to find the other man leaping at him, cursing. In the starlight curved the blade of a knife, flung forward for the thrust.

Trenchard was not there when it plunged for him. This was action, hard concrete fact, murder darting at him; Svenstrom cursed and drove forward, cursed again, his hoarsely panting breath aflame with oaths and vileness. Trenchard fought him back desperately, bare fists against the whirling knife, and Svenstrom knew how to handle the blade. The issue could not be evaded. There was no compromise. When Trenchard slipped and fell on a loose bit of rock, Svenstrom reached for him furiously, hurling himself forward for the finishing blow.

So Trenchard, who had been feeling with his shifting feet for that rock, crashed it in just once, and Svenstrom plunged forward and rolled a little away with the slope. Trenchard stood over him, dropped his too-sharp weapon, and cursed.

"I might as well have used the pistol on him, after all," he said to himself. "Struck too hard—oh, the devil! Everything's against me this trip."

His trim, square shoulders sagged a little as he turned toward the camp and left the dead man under the stars.

CHAPTER V

TRENCHARD was profoundly disturbed, not by the death of Svenstrom, which had been quite unavoidable, but by the secret which Svenstrom had vilely cherished in his own breast all that day. He did not doubt its truth.

If this woman was not whom she claimed to be, then who was she? John Trenchard was no fool; remembering Ah Sin's words, remembering what the woman herself had said to him under the stars, looking back on everything, he was forced again to sudden doubt. Was it possible that he had come into a deliberate trap? He considered this thought, and could reach no decision, for this woman-factor was something totally new in his experience. He could not believe that this woman from the jungle was an agent sent to entrap him, for the French did not go about things that way; nor could he see how she had sprung any trap.

Feeling blindly confused, discovering nothing definite to work upon, he lay down to sleep. Weary as he was, he found sleep hard. From time to time, he wakened. He was not accustomed to lie on the cold earth, and the lack of motion disquieted him.

Finally Trenchard resolutely shut out all thought of the woman and made himself sleep again, this time more soundly. Then he suddenly came wide awake to a new sound, lay staring, wondering at it, until it came once more—the distant lift of a voice from a man's throat. The Hovas were instantly astir, sending up an excited chatter. Trenchard rose, pulled on his boots, saw the dark figures of the natives flinging fuel on the fire. He questioned them.

"Our men," they said. "They will be here quickly, white man!"

Grenille, then—at last! Trenchard flung up his face toward the dark hills, and thrilled to the urge of action. When Grenille came, anything might happen; it might be war or peace, swift hard travel or flight—there would be no pause. The woman must be wakened. He put a hand beneath his shirt, hitched around the pistol, which had hurt his ribs in sleep, and went to the little tent.

"Mademoiselle! Waken and dress—Grenille is coming, mademoiselle!"

There was no response to his call. The fire-flames were flickering up, beginning to light the camp amid the rocks of the steep gorge, illuminating everything more clearly. There was no response—yet Trenchard was certain that he caught a stifled sound, a gasp of breath, a low moan.

"Mademoiselle!" His voice became incisive, penetrating. "Are you there?"

A SLIGHT rustle came from the tent, then silence. Trenchard felt for a match, flung open the flap, ripping it recklessly, and scratched the match. Something warned him—and then, as he held aloft the splinter of flame, he saw everything. His hand dropped the match and leaped to his pistol. The falling spark showed a frightful contortion of his face.

"Master, wait!" A shrill cry, a scream, wailed out at him. The figure of Ah Sin leaped forth in wild terror, uttering rapid words. "You told me—learn something definite and then come to you—something definite—"

Trenchard fired. He was for the moment beyond coherent thought—the sight of what was in that tent was etched into his very brain. He forgot everything else. He forgot that this yellow man had served him well, had saved his life, was one of two persons in the world whom he could trust absolutely and beyond cavil.

The short, brutal crack of the automatic raised wild echoes. Ah Sin screamed and fell sideways, fell among the rocks, whimpered a little and then was dead. Trenchard thrust away his pistol, and his voice leaped at the Hovas, who were already darting forward with torches from the fire. These gathered about the tent entrance, staring, chattering, awe-struck, while Trenchard went inside.

Sylvie de Peyrier sat bowed over, her left wrist lashed to her ankles. She had removed only her boots and her khaki jacket. Her right arm was lashed about the elbow and pegged to the ground before her. Under this hand was pencil and notebook, as though she had been writing or had been about to write; yet she had written nothing. The sleeves of her white silk shirt had been slit to the shoulders and now hung down so that her lovely arms were bare—but they were no longer lovely. Her head was forced back by a cruel gag that was set under her throat and across her jaws. Above this gag, her eyes were wide upon Trenchard, lambent pools of amber and black jade, the pupils vastly enlarged in the torchlight. Down both her arms, from shoulders to fingers, ran a fine tracery of vivid scarlet lines, the skin swollen and purple.

The Hovas chattered at the sight, pointed to the razor-edged Chinese knife, to the little carved vial of rock-crystal, which lay as the startled Ah Sin had dropped them. The yellow man had gone after definite facts in his own direct and cruel fashion, slitting the tender white skin and into each scratch rubbing some malignant native poison. The tiny electric flashlight by the notebook showed that he had tried to make the woman write. Now, as Trenchard carefully slit the gag and the lashings, the woman fainted. He picked up the little vial and passed it to the Hovas, who sniffed and dropped it. Two of them dashed away into the darkness, their torches glimmering redly, and in no time they ran back bearing some leaves; these Hovas are supreme physicians, knowing every secret of the forest herbs. Another man had prepared a gourd of water, in which the leaves were hurriedly crushed;

then, removed, they were bound about the arms of the woman.

SATISFIED that these men knew their business, Trenchard followed them from the tent and stood there, drawing quick, deep breaths. He was still in a fury at thought of Ah Sin torturing this slender girl; yet this had been done for his sake, and a groan burst from him at the recollection of his own act. A frightful sense of intolerable misery oppressed him, a sense of being driven by a fatality which he could not escape; his remorse was fearfully acute, as he remembered a thousand instances of Ah Sin's devotion and faithfulness. He would have given his right hand to retract that deed, but it could not be undone. He sat down and put his head in his hands, shivering at thought of the passionate fury which had seized him; he was insensible to everything around him in the blind weight of bitterness. Another groan escaped his lips, a burning ache was seething in his very soul; a fearful horror of himself wrenched at his spirit. He gripped his head in both hands, cursing fate, cursing himself, cursing this woman.

Suddenly he became aware of noises all around—voices, feet, the scent of oiled bodies, sharp commands. He lifted a haggard and drawn face to the glare of a score of torches, and stared vacantly at Grenille, who stood before him in astonished horror at his aspect.

"What is it, what is it?" cried Grenille frantically. "Name of God, are you sick, are you deaf? What is it?"

Trenchard shivered. Then his gaze cleared, he composed himself, rose.

"It is fate," he said in a dull voice. "Where did you come from? What news?"

Grenille mastered his feverish excitement, his burning questions. He flung out a hand toward the torches and crowding natives, spoke with a crisp energy.

"Good and bad. There are soldiers in the hills, detachments of white and black troops. It is possible that the scheme has been revealed to the French. The chiefs have fled back to their own territory. They sent down as much of the gold as had been made ready—probably a third of the whole. They sent word to take it and get away quickly, and to remit their share of the money later on when I was able. We must get it aboard the schooner at once, before dawn; these men are wild to get away, to cross the hills and reach their own country again. Where is Svenstrom?"

"Svenstrom?" repeated Trenchard. "Svenstrom?" A harsh laugh broke from him. "Who the devil cares about Svenstrom? There is Ah Sin, among those rocks. He must be taken aboard for burial."

"Who killed him?" demanded Grenille. "Who did it, eh?"

"I did it," said Trenchard.

GRENILLE peered at him, met his eyes, then turned pale and drew back a step. But Trenchard was suddenly alive to the situation; he wakened to action, disregarded everything else, glanced at the crowding Hovas with their small but heavy burdens of hide sacks.

"Send two men with torches to accompany me," he said. Once more his voice was curt and concise, poised, quietly dominant. "Bring Ah Sin, and have the woman carried. I'll go ahead and be ready. We have two boats. The schooner can slip out instantly—for lack of any breeze we'll have to tow her beyond the island bight. Wind will come at sunrise."

"Where's Svenstrom, then?" demanded Grenille.

"Where he can't betray anyone," said Trenchard, and moved away.

He started down the river-bank for the shore, two of the Hovas accompanying him with smoky torches of candle-nuts blazing the trail. He was himself once more, his despair and remorse crushed down by the necessity for action. Troops and constabulary, eh? Then Svenstrom's panic-struck mind had struck at the truth after all—curious! And those dhows down the coast; where were they now? Creeping up, undoubtedly, bringing more soldiers, perhaps a pom-pom or a machine gun.

"Trapped me, have they?" exclaimed Trenchard, nerves and brain suddenly whipping alert and keen. "Trapped me at last, eh? Some drunken native gave away the game, or a spy found it out. But I'll show 'em! Half an hour to dawn—"

He strode along rapidly, came to the beach, found that there was no need of hailing. That shot must have roused Yusuf, for the whaleboat was already heading in through the surf, the second whaleboat following. The Malagasys grinned at the skipper; Yusuf splashed ashore, his eyes seeking Trenchard.

"Caught," said the latter quietly. "We have gold to put aboard, then off. The

game was betrayed. We'll have to tow the schooner out to catch the breeze. Those dhows will be along to catch us."

"All is ready, Rais," said the Arab composedly. "The rifles are broken out and loaded, the towing hawsers are bent on, the topmasts are up and the sails loosened."

Trenchard laughed suddenly; then he thought of Ah Sin and the laugh passed in a quick catch of his breath. He could not rid himself of that weight.

"Those torches, Rais Trenchard!" said the Arab. "If the dhows are close by, the reflection will be seen."

Grenille's party of Hovas was streaming down toward the spot, torches smoking. Trenchard flung an order at his two men, who dropped their torches in the water and ran back to warn the others; the smoky brands were dashed out or hurled into the surf. The moon was high and clear, and in her faint light the Hovas came crowding down to the beach, Grenille among them. They flung their burdens into a pile.

"Ya Allah!" struck out the voice of Yusuf suddenly. "In the name of God, the Compassionate—what is this?"

Trenchard looked down. At his feet had been laid the body of Ah Sin and the senseless figure of the woman, distorted in shape by the swathed bandages.

"It is the will of Allah," said Trenchard bitterly. "To work!"

NO time was wasted. The Hovas, having delivered their loads and accomplished their errand, were melting away into the obscurity. They were in mad haste to work through the parties of constabulary and reach their own people and villages. Where a moment previously had been a mass of forty or fifty crowding shapes, now remained only Yusuf and the dozen brown men of the schooner's crew, loading the hide packets into the boats. Grenille, who had lighted a cigarette, came up to Trenchard.

"Well, I heard about it," he said. "We found Svenstrom on the way down. I can imagine a good deal. What about this woman?"

Trenchard faced him, nerves tense.

"We'd better settle it now," he said quietly, "for I'll have work to do soon enough. She said you'd be glad to kill me and take her if you could. Svenstrom tried that. Let's reach an understanding."

Grenille stared at him, then chuckled.

"And, after that, you waited?"

"Don't be a fool," said Trenchard. "How does it stand?"

Grenille stood silent for a moment; then he threw away his cigarette, came a step closer, and laid his hand on Trenchard's shoulder.

"My friend!" he said. His voice was deep with some emotion, curiously rich and tender as a woman's. "We have been horribly blind. I was tempted, yes; what of it? I am a man. She came to me this afternoon on the march, with that same story. It was protection from you she wanted. She tried the same game on each of us. What was her object? I do not know. Deviltry of woman, perhaps. Well, you know me! I am not a monk, me. But now it is different. What is behind all this, I do not know; but there is something behind it. She is not what she seems; I cannot murder a woman, but I tell you that we had better leave that woman here on the beach, and go. I wish now," and his voice became indescribably mournful, "that I had taken your advice yesterday and had put a bullet into her."

Trenchard felt a chill run up his spine, for the words were uttered in terrible earnest. He stood silent, looking at the dark waters of the bay, where a thin mist of dawn crept out from the river-mouth. The gold had been loaded into the two boats, which were run out and held by the brown men to keep them off the sand. Yusuf and another came and took up the body of Ah Sin and laid it in one of the boats. Then they came back to the woman, but Grenille checked them with a somber word.

"Leave her."

They straightened up, looking from Grenille to Trenchard. The latter stood unmoving, his eyes fastened on the obscured waters. He knew now what to think of Grenille, knew that his faith was well placed, knew that he and Grenille were of one mind. Yes, there was something behind all this. Ah Sin had guessed it, perhaps had extorted the secret from his victim. This woman had come among the three of them, sowing hatred and dissension and treachery. She was responsible for Svenstrom's end. She was responsible for Ah Sin's end. Because of her, Trenchard knew that he had lost faithful friends, had fallen upon disaster; he no longer blinked the fact that she was actually responsible, had done this thing deliberately. Grenille had made this very plain.

And yet he could not forget her appeal to him, there by the river. Whatever she had done, she had repented the action. Perhaps her own insecure position had at first impelled her with frantic fear to divide these men and so save herself; that was natural. In any case, she had later repented. She had urged him to flee while there was time, and she had meant her words; he could still hear that low and vehement urge ringing in his ears, could still feel her fingers gripping into his wrist. She had mentioned having heard of these three men in Tamatave; perhaps, then, she had gained some inkling of the expedition against them, the trap that was being laid to seize Trenchard. That might be why she had urged him to go and save himself. She had been wildly afraid of him, of them all, and afterward had come to him with frank confession. After all, she was but a slender, fragile creature, a woman—

TRENCHARD drew a deep breath, and turned. He looked at the dark shape of Grenille, at the tall Arab and the brown men around.

"There is little time, Rais," said Yusuf simply.

"Good!" Trenchard made a gesture. "Put the woman in the boat. Grenille, all that you say is true, and more; but I cannot leave her here. She had some knowledge of our danger. Last night she urged me to get away. As you say, I do not know what lies behind all this, but I know that she repented what she had done—she was a woman among us, remember. If all that has happened were her deliberate fault, I should be tempted to leave her here; but it is not. It is fate that has come upon us."

Grenille sighed, and pawed at his black beard.

"Ah, *mon gars,* I wish I were a man like you! And yet I am glad that I am not."

Trenchard smiled slightly. "Right. Now, see here! Perhaps you'd better stay. You're not in any particular danger from the constabulary, and they're not after you. There are dhows somewhere around—Svenstrom was in blind panic, and hit the truth. It's a trap, and we may be nabbed. It's no easy job to get outside the islands and the coral; we'll get no breeze until dawn. Those dhows may be waiting for us. If they're clever enough, I'm afraid we're done for; at best, it'll be a tight squeeze. We've rifles aboard, but they'll do us little good. You had best stay ashore and run no chances."

Grenille uttered a little grunt.

"It is true," he said thoughtfully, "that we have had no luck this trip. We have been doomed from the start. I should not be surprised if we have walked into a fine trap set to catch us all. As you say, it is fate—and yet I think there is something behind it. We are like limed birds; the more we flutter, the harder we stick in the snare."

"All right," said Trenchard. "Then you stay?"

The other laughed softly. "If there is one thing on which I pride myself, Trenchard, it is my skill with a rifle. Stay? *Nom de Dieu,* no! We know each other better today than we did yesterday, eh? *Allons!*"

He took Trenchard's arm, squeezed it, and turned toward the boats. Trenchard made no response, but felt a warm glow in his heart.

CHAPTER VI

"WE delayed too long," said Yusuf calmly. "The land breeze has fallen. There is no wind. Yet if it is the will of Allah, we shall get outside the coral when the sun brings the breeze."

In the obscurity of dawn, the schooner was crawling through the water behind the two boats, her canvas listless. The sky was still clearly visible but the mist had increased, clinging low on the water and veiling everything, in the absence of any breeze. Grenille, quite worn out, had flung himself down and was snoring. Trenchard stood beside Yusuf in the bow, peering at the boats. The Arab had retained some sort of mental map of the coral patches, and stood listening intently to the reports of a man in the first boat, who was constantly heaving the lead and sending back softly floating calls as to the depth encountered. Whether any dhows were lying on their oars behind that enveloping mist, could not be told.

Trenchard, who had been munching some biscuit and tinned meat, went to the breaker and drank, then started aft, filling his pipe as he went. Everything hung now on what would be revealed when the sun came, and the breeze, sweeping away the mist; there was nothing to do but wait. As he lighted his pipe, some-

thing stirred on the deck by the rail. He turned toward the object, and then saw that it was Sylvie de Peyrier. She was sitting against the rail, her eyes open and staring, and she caught her breath in fear before she recognized Trenchard.

"Ah—it is you! Where are we? My arms—"

Trenchard sat down on the deck, facing her, and put out his hands to her right arm.

"You're quite all right," he said quietly. "Now let me look at this."

"I remember now." A shudder passed through her body; then she relaxed and leaned back. "Please don't talk about it. There is no more pain at all. Where are we?"

"Heading out to sea," said Trenchard, and felt her start slightly.

He lighted a match, the better to examine her arm, momentarily. A glance showed him that the inflammation had entirely vanished; the skin was white and firm, only the criss-cross tracery of scratches remaining. That bandage of leaves had accomplished its work swiftly, for the Hovas are remarkably able people at such things.

As Trenchard let fall the match, the action brought back to him vividly how he had let fall that other match, in the tent, and it seemed that he saw the face of Ah Sin darting toward him. He drew back from the woman; then her fingers closed tightly on his.

"You have taken my advice after all, then?" Her voice was eager.

"It is nearly morning," said Trenchard. "Grenille returned. When the mist lifts—"

"Morning! Then you are caught," she said wearily. "Oh, I am sorry, I am sorry! Believe me—I am sorry!"

"I believe you," said Trenchard. His voice was calm, dispassionate, cold. "You have good reason to be sorry, mademoiselle. If you had not given us a false name, if you had not sown discord among us, nothing would have gone wrong. As it is, Grenille is free of your net. Svenstrom tried to kill me, and is dead. Ah Sin tried to serve me, and that faithful man is dead. He died by my hand. You see what you have done to me."

SOMETHING stopped him there; he had neither reproached her nor asked her questions—he only stated facts. Yet he wished suddenly that he had kept his mouth shut. Both her hands fell about his hand, and drew it up against her breast, holding it there convulsively; he knew that she was choking down sobs, was conscious of the bitter repentance that worked within her. What had evoked this poignant emotion in her? What secret lay behind everything—what secret was it that Ah Sin had tried to torture out of her? He did not know; yet he was aware of her slender delicacy, her brave and even intrepid personality. The consciousness of her sex rushed upon him, left him confused, as she sat there and crushed his hand against her breast, and her tears fell upon his palm.

"I did not know—what sort of man you were," she said, chokingly. "If I had known, if I had only known! It seemed to me a glorious and splendid thing, a commendable action; oh, miserable that I am! Yes, I see what I have done to you, and I am ashamed."

Trenchard was rather bewildered. "I don't quite know what you're talking about," he said, then leaned forward. His voice softened. "If only things had not come about like this! You must not be sorry. You only did what seemed best. I am the one to be sorry; it is I who cannot forget what has happened. Perhaps, if I do manage to forget it, I may come later to find you; you are the sort of woman I have not met before, the sort I have dreamed about—"

He stammered to a pause, for he had spoken impulsively, without thought. One instant, the woman's fingers crushed into his hand, as though something in her were answering his words—then she pushed him away swiftly, impetuously, and with a swift movement sprang to her feet.

"You do not know, you do not know!" Her voice rose in a low cry, a wail, that pierced him to the very depths with its intensity of anguish. Then she whirled swiftly upon him as he rose. "Caught? Yes, you are caught, trapped beyond escape—the dawn is breaking now! But there is one way to get clear. You must take it. I can still undo everything. The men in the dhows are not natives, but white troops—Frenchmen! You comprehend? That alters everything. There is still one way for you to escape."

The woman's eyes blazed suddenly at him.

"Colonel Sainterre commands the dhows!" she exclaimed. "He is my father. I lied to you—ah, there it is! I must tell

you now, for your own sake. It was a question of catching you three men together. I said I would do it—I know the island; I am not a child; I was willing to pit my wits against you three men! I said that I would separate you, cause dissension, keep you at odds until the two dhows could reach here under cover of night. Everything was betrayed to us by a native chief—everything! The problem was to keep you ashore until the dhows came, for we knew the natives would warn you. There it is, all before you—all I have done to you."

SHE wilted suddenly, crouched against the rail, hid her face in her hands.

Trenchard was absolutely stunned. He had discounted this very possibility, and yet for an instant he could not react to it, could not assimilate the knowledge. It grew upon him slowly, with cumulative force. He thought of how the girl had met them, how she had spoken and acted, how she had worked upon the three of them. The face of Ah Sin uprose before him like a torturing blow, and from his lips came a sound that was wordless—a sound half a groan of sheer anguish.

Then, for a moment, a fearful wave of anger, of stark madness, surged through him. So awful was his blind rage that under it he quivered, trembling; as he was about to hurl himself upon the woman, in the very act of seizing her, he mastered himself. Nothing had been spared him; even to a moment ago when he had spoken to her from his heart, words of love almost at his lips—the memory stung, burned into him like a whip.

"That was too much!" he muttered thickly. At the sound of his voice, she looked up, rose.

"Listen! There is one way, you understand? You must place me somewhere high, that they may see me—that they may know you have me as a hostage! It is the only way possible. They were afraid you might suspect, might hurt me. My father would order them to fire, none the less, but they are white troops, *poilus;* they all know me. Not a shot will be fired. I will call to them—"

"Be quiet, be quiet," said Trenchard. Desperation was in his heart, yet his voice was so cold and calm that she stared at him in the dawn-light, astounded.

He turned from her, fumbled for his pipe, stooped and picked it from the deck. He was still reeling under the blow she had dealt him in this confession. A spy—this woman an agent of the police, one who had voluntarily set out to ensnare and trap him! For her sake he had killed Svenstrom; for her sake he had shot down that faithful yellow man; for her sake he had betrayed himself with thoughts of love—no, that was too much!

If Grenille found out what she was, then what? Well, he knew Grenille, and he could guess that no human power could stay that man's vengeance. Grenille would even put a bullet into him before letting vengeance be stayed. Bitterly, with consuming gall, Trenchard realized that even now he was thinking of her safety—that he could think of nothing else. He looked at her, and the realization brought a terrible laugh to his lips. At sound of it, her eyes widened upon him.

"You comprehend?" she exclaimed. "This is the one way. You will do it?"

"No," said Trenchard curtly.

"But you shall! I will do it myself!" She blazed out furiously at him. "This is the one thing I can do, the only way I can undo what I have done—it must be! You must do it! It is my only chance! Oh, can't you see what I think of myself now, how I look at myself? It is the only thing I can do. You cannot stop me—I will cry out to them—"

Trenchard perceived that this was true. She was verging upon a wild frenzy which he could not check; excited, a prey to remorse and grief, carried beyond her calm poise, she would carry out her threat. He raised his hand, checking her.

"Wait here a moment," he said quietly, and then turned from her and strode forward, leaving her to stare after him.

HER uncertainty of his intention gave her pause. Trenchard passed the snoring form of Grenille, struck a match, held it steadily to his pipe as he walked forward. The dawn was now lightening fast; the mist was moving. He knew what he must do, and knew that it must be done swiftly if at all. He came to the bows where Yusuf stood, and removed his white coat.

"How long?"

"Allah alone knows, Rais." Yusuf turned to glance at him. "Perhaps ten minutes."

"Good. We are caught—the two dhows have soldiers aboard. There is a current here?"

"A slight shore current, Rais. Farther out it becomes strong and sets to the south. Just here it sets in to the shore, with the tide."

"Good. Take this and rip it up." Trenchard passed his coat to the Arab. "Call in one of the boats and bring the men aboard. Swiftly!"

Yusuf did not hesitate, though for once he could not fathom the skipper's thought or intention. He called softly, and the nearer boat made response. He jerked the long knife from its sheath at his waist, and plunged it into the soiled white pongee coat. Then Trenchard, taking the pipe from his mouth, jerked it toward the stern.

"Go and bind that woman. Gag her first. Bring her here. But do not, on your life, hurt her! Do it swiftly, before she understands."

"Ha'am, Rais."

THE tall figure of the Arab departed at a bound. Trenchard did not look around, though his senses were listening acutely, but leaned forward and peered down. After an instant he saw the boat creeping in upon her hawser to the bows.

"Come aboard swiftly and bring all the gear with you," he ordered the six men in her.

Then a low cry sounded from aft. It was the voice of the girl—a low, shrill cry that rose and was checked, cut off, very abruptly. Trenchard did not look around. He stood puffing at his pipe. A gasping curse sounded, then the pound of feet, and Grenille was gripping at his arm.

"Trenchard—*nom de Dieu*, look! What's that Arab of yours about—the woman—"

Trenchard looked into his excited, bewildered face with cold eyes.

"I am in command here," he said quietly.

Grenille fell back, glanced around, then stood staring in perplexity. Yusuf was striding toward them, bearing across one shoulder the tied, gagged, struggling figure of the girl. Over the rail were coming the brown seamen from the boat, laughing and gazing at the spectacle.

"Go down and be ready to take her," said Trenchard to Yusuf, and held out his arms.

For a moment he looked into the face of the girl, met her eyes, smiled slightly as he held her.

"The boat will drift you ashore," he said, very calmly. "They will find you. You will be in no danger, and with us the contrary would be true. I forgive you what you have done to me, mademoiselle. *Bon voyage.*"

He caught her up in both arms, held her over the rail, and carefully dropped her into the strong grip of the grinning Arab below. Yusuf placed her in the stern of the boat, then came up over the rail like a cat.

"The breeze, Rais, the breeze!" he exclaimed. "I can smell it!"

"Call in the other boat."

"And this one, then?" Yusuf glanced at him, pointed down at the boat in which the figure of the girl lay. Trenchard shrugged and replaced the pipe between his teeth.

"Cut it loose. Now, Grenille, you had better get your rifle. Perhaps you'd like to pick out the best of the lot? You'll find them over here by the hatch, where the gold is piled."

Grenille followed him, pawing at his beard and wondering. Yusuf, with a slash of his knife, set free the boat.

The mist was clearing fast.

CHAPTER VII

AROUND the schooner the mist dissipated, eddying up, swirling in queer writhing shapes like phantoms twisting in agony at the coming of day. Grenille was choosing a rifle and putting cartridges into his jacket pocket. Trenchard and Yusuf went to the wheel; while the Arab examined the waters ahead and around, Trenchard spun over the spokes and felt the helm. Then Yusuf, comprehending that Trenchard would keep the wheel, laid a hand on his arm and pointed.

"I remember the patches exactly, Rais. There—if the current does not shift us before the wind strikes—there is a passage out. East by north, a quarter north."

"Right," said Trenchard.

Yusuf went forward, called the men, sent them to stations. The first puff of breeze slapped the listless canvas aloft. There was a creak as the boom swung, then swung back. The mist rolled away like a curtain, suddenly, piled up in a wall astern, hung there. All around, ahead and to starboard, the sea was clear as by magic. The canvas gently filled; the water rippled under the schooner's counter; scarcely heeling to that light breath, the schooner pointed for the eastern horizon where the

first radiance of dawn was touching the heavens with a roseate brush. Except for this, everything was gray—that pallid corpse-gray of the very early morning, cold and cheerless; when for a few moments all the world looks like some plant that has grown up in the darkness, unfed of sunlight; when gray sky blends into gray sea, and gray mist dims the stars, and the gray heart of man looks to the coming sun in wonder and adoration.

It was not to the sky that every eye aboard the schooner now turned, however. Behind her, the lessening mist hid the islands and coast and the cast-off whaleboat; ahead of her, not five cable-lengths distant—a scant half-mile—two blotches lay on the water. Perhaps deceived by the mist, the two dhows had run a little past the clump of islands and now had headed back. The schooner was quite cut off.

TRENCHARD, after that first sweeping glance, determined instantly on his plan and swung over the helm. He knew exactly where the reef lay, though it was hidden from sight, and knew exactly where the channel led through it to the safe water beyond. The closer dhow lay just inside that channel; the farther one was outside and to the south of it, bearing up for it. Both dhows had laid in their sweeps and their canvas was catching the faint breeze; they could far outmatch the schooner, being incredibly fast and able to head almost into the wind's eye. Trenchard watched them intently; each was about fifty feet in length, carrying a large sail forward, in shape, a triangle with a corner cut off, and on the after mast a small lateen. The masts raked forward. They were old-fashioned craft, decked fore and aft but open amidships, probably put together with Cairo lashings in place of nails, the beams projecting through the sides. The decks were littered with bales of cargo. Trenchard could make out only a scant dozen figures aboard each craft, and his lip curled as he watched them bracing the yards forward and hauling in the bowliness of the larger sail, the better to catch the light wind.

"And they expect to trap me with that clumsy artifice!" he muttered. "As though I wouldn't guess that soldiers lie under the tarpaulins, and that the bales for'ard hide a gun! It's an insult—the fools! They had to get a woman to do the real work for them. Well, they might as well take me for a pure Simple Simon; here goes for the reef."

SO, with barely enough way on her to answer as the helm spun, the schooner pointed up past the nearer dhow, directly for the unseen reef. It was plainly no tack. Trenchard, to all appearance, was ignorant of the danger and would pile up his ship on the coral. It was keenly significant, however, that though the mate Yusuf darted one glance ahead at the sea, he did not turn to question Trenchard's change of course. As for Grenille, who was lying in the bows on some coiled lines, he knew nothing about the coral danger.

Those aboard the dhow knew, however. That slight and inscrutable smile played around Trenchard's lips as he saw a motion of the tarpaulins flung in the dhow's waist, which instantly subsided. Those aboard her had decided to wait before flinging off the mask—if the schooner piled up, so much the better! The farther dhow was not, as yet, a danger to be reckoned with. In the eastern sky, a rosy glow was being limned across the horizon.

"Watch, Yusuf!" called Trenchard quietly. The Arab lifted a hand in response and stood peering intently at the water ahead, perfectly comprehending the strategem.

The breeze remained steady, but very light, so light that the schooner hardly heeled at all as she slipped through the water, heading northeast directly for the reef. The channel lay more to the east, with the first dhow just inside; the light breath of air was from the southeast, and she had hauled around before it. From the corner of his eye Trenchard saw that his Malagasys were ranged along the starboard rail, out of sight, each man excitedly waiting and fingering hidden rifle. He himself stood easily at the wheel, pipe in teeth, fingering the spokes lightly, just keeping the canvas filled; with every instant the schooner, responsive in his hands as though obeying his very will, rushed faster and faster toward the unseen pinnacles of coral that waited to rip the sheathing out of her. The first dhow was three hundred yards away now, as she slipped across its bows.

Then, swiftly Yusuf threw out both hands.

Trenchard threw over the spokes, snapped out a curt order. The brown men dropped their rifles, leaped to the lines,

made all fast, darted back to the rail again. Close-hauled, the schooner swerved aside, leaned into the wind as far as Trenchard dared thrust her, went rushing down past the dhow toward the channel. Yusuf made a gesture to show that her head was right, and then dropped from sight behind the bulwark.

Though he knew how surely they were trapped, Trenchard thought for an instant that the surprise of his action would win. The breeze was freshening. The schooner drove down past the dhow, and he knew that he would pass her within a hundred yards. Two hundred now, and leaning over to the swifter urge of the wind; still no movement aboard the dhow, until suddenly the tarpaulins were hurled aside. Movement enough, then!

Voices rang out, sharp commands, excited cries and oaths. Amidships, the dhow vomited men clad in white, sparkles of gold and scarlet, gleams of rifles. Up on her foredeck, the bales were hurled aside; half a dozen men appea there, the long brassy gleam of ounder swept into sight.

"Pom!"

The gun sp
no signal to
with whom
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Trenchard
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There was no warning, der; these men knew ce dealing. The brass vomit of white, Trenell scream and whistle . Then, as though in boom of the shot, there ws of the schooner a Yusuf cried angrily at but none of them had re awaiting his order. It pounder fell its gunner.

ed up; the dead man was along the 'midships of the s snapped out and rifles began to the air, bullets singing overhead, slapping into the schooner. Again that rifle in her bows spoke out; a second gunner fell across the silent brass piece. A third joined him in death. Grenille was firing more rapidly now. Seven times his rifle cracked; then he drew back and began to reload, coolly, lifting his bearded face toward Trenchard in a wild grin. The six men around the pom-pom were dead.

Confusion filled the dhow. The schooner was abreast of her now, starboard rail lifted high as she leaned to the wind, lifted like a wall to keep her deck invisible. The soldiers were firing rapidly, furiously, the rapid crepitation of their shots volleying on the wind; they could see only the torso of Trenchard, who was staring fixedly ahead at the channel, where the second dhow was now coming up to cut off his escape. He scarcely felt the whistling breath of the bullets that slapped and sang all around him; untouched, he stood heaving slightly at the spokes, keeping the canvas filled, keeping the schooner dead on her course.

"W'Allah!" cried Yusuf. "Fire!"

The brown men streamed up along the rail, yelling, and a ragged volley tore into the dhow that lay now a short hundred yards away. Men fell; there was a storm of cursing and wild shouts, wilder orders. Grenille leaped to his feet and began to fire again. His rifle was worth all the others put together. The sparks of scarlet and blue and gold disappeared, as he picked off the officers with deadly precision. Three men leaping for the silent gun on the foredeck came together, staggered, and Grenille laughed as he turned his rifle on them. The three went down one by one. Disabled, clumped with dead and wounded, officers gone, the dhow fell off into the wind and drifted.

"Past!" shouted Grenille triumphantly, as he came running aft, a blaze of excitement in his great brown eyes.

"And trapped," corrected Trenchard, then his voice leaped out in a quick and piercing shout. "Down! Down! All hands, down!"

Yusuf and the Malagasys obeyed by instinct, flinging themselves anywhere along the deck. Grenille, however, whirled about and stood staring.

The first dhow was passed, and the schooner was in the channel, boring through to pass a little south and to windward of the second dhow. This latter, however, had received full warning. She too had leaped into sudden life and activity; instead of a one-pounder on her foredeck, was visible the shape of a rapid-fire gun. Even before Trenchard's shout died, this gun began its horrible chatter and spatter.

GRENILLE, who had failed to obey the warning, pitched forward to the deck and slid down against the lee rail, and lay in a heap there. Little shelter could be had—the whole slope of the deck was fearfully exposed. Trenchard saw the white splinters fly in an arc of destruction as the quick-firer poured lead into her vic-

tim, as the soldiers let loose a volley. Splinters leaped from the mast and spars; the flying jib bellied out and began to thrash as the lines were cut. One of the brown men cried out and then rolled across the deck, bleeding terribly. Another, darting for cover, fell across the skylight and hung limp.

An instant more of this would be destruction, for that spattering machine gun had full command of the sloping deck. Another man, at the upper rail near Trenchard, threw out his arms and fell. His rifle, flung out in that dying gesture, hurled through the air and smashed Trenchard in the side. The next instant he felt a second crashing blow which almost knocked him from the helm, and he knew that he was hit.

Already he was leaning on the spokes, whirling them over, desperately flinging his weight into them. To sweep past that dhow would be hopeless—the very deck would be ripped out of the schooner. Already she was so close aboard that Trenchard could see the excited faces of the soldiers, the shouting officers, the gunners deliberately raking and laughing as they swept the canting deck. Then, as the helm brought the schooner over, as her bows swung about and the close-hauled canvas made her lean and heel in the wind, all this vanished. He saw only the dhow's sharp stern under his own bowsprit; over went the schooner, over until her copper glinted against the radiant eastern sky, over until the water came tumbling along her lee rail in green and gray foam, and flew like an arrow down the wind.

Trenchard held her there, held that sharp stern in his vision, though the strength was lessening in him and now he felt a numb hurt reaching through his body. A rattling roar vomited from the rapid-fire; volleys came from the rifles; the bows and fore-rail of the schooner let fly white splinters and her sails leaped into holes and tatters; a wild, frightful chorus of yells and shouts dinned in the ears of Trenchard. He smiled a little, glanced back at the land, saw that the mist had rolled away and that the black dot of a whaleboat was under the shore. Then he found Grenille creeping up the deck on hands and knees, soaked, blood streaming down his face and beard, saw Yusuf rushing at him from the other side, felt himself staggering.

SUDDENLY and dreadfully, the bows of the schooner lifted up. Her forefoot crushed down and then up, riding something that was not a wave, then slowly crunched down and over. A fearful shriek rose around her and swallowed up. She reeled, her canvas fluttered as she came upright for an instant; she stopped in mid-career, the masts shaking against the sky, the rigging whining and snapping taut with sharp reports, the canvas banging. Then Yusuf had the helm and swung it over, and she leaned once more to the wind and thrust a whirl of spray over the bows—and thrust something else beneath her keel, grinding and spurning it.

Trenchard, flung along the deck together with the brown men, dragged himself up to the rail and then pulled erect, a strange numb weakness seizing on him. He looked back, back past the staring Yusuf, back to where a shattered mass hung low in the water behind. Gr clawed up to him, followed his gaze a nt, then turned and put out a hand.

"You—look!"

Trenchard glanced d himself, saw the blood dripping ove nd trousers, and laughed. He was are of the brown men running to f Yusuf bawling orders, of the c nd bellowing out to get t wind. The schooner rig chard's brain cleared, an

"Look—there to the le

Grenille twisted aroun pointing finger, and discer of the whaleboat agains and cliffs. He turned b with an oath.

"Devil take the woman!

"No matter." Trenchard si "That boat—that woman—"

"Yes?" prompted Grenille, staring at him.

"Punished," said Trenchard. A grimace twisted his pallid lips. "Punished. They'll pick her up—oh, she's safe enough! But punished—"

He lost his grip of the rail. Grenille caught him as he went limp, lowered him to the deck, and saw that the smile had returned to his lips.

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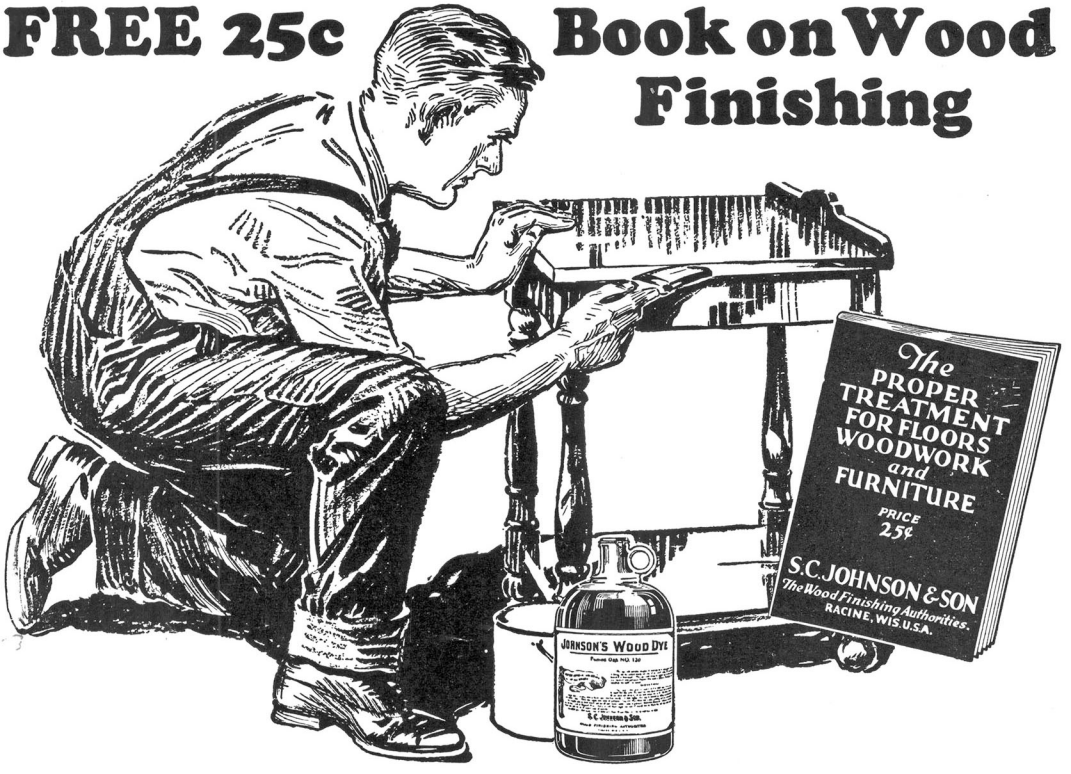

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