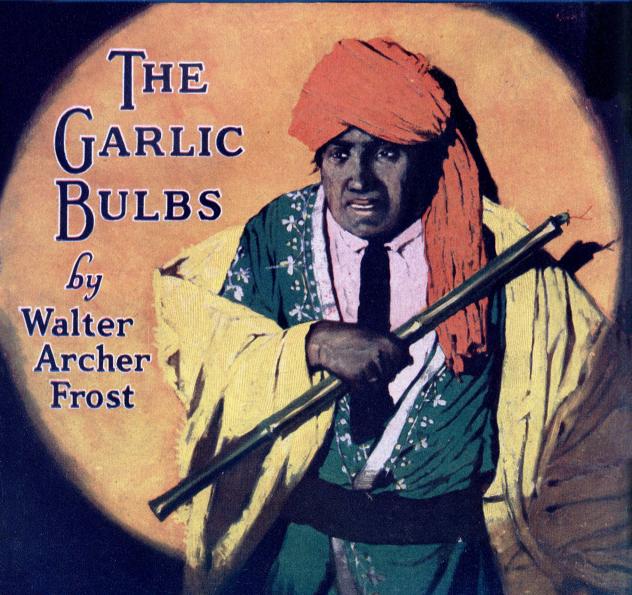
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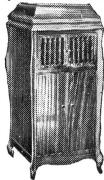
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FLYNN'S WEEKLY

VOLUME XVIII

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1926

NUMBER 3



His eyes were the worst things I ever looked at

THE GARLIC BULBS

By Walter Archer Frost

"IT'S ONLY THE DANGEROUS CRIMINAL WHO IS INTER-ESTING," I SAID, AND RUGGLES DID NOT DENY IT

CHAPTER I

A NERVOUS VISITOR



ROM our excellent breakfast at an adjacent café, Ruggles and I had just returned to our snug little apartment on West Eighty-Sixth Street; and, having

got my pipe going well, I forgot for the moment the hazards of our profession and

could view life from the standpoint of a reflective bystander.

"It's only the dangerous criminal who is interesting," I said. "The others are as harmless as toads."

"As I've told you before," said Ruggles, "all reptiles are dangerous, in their way. Frogs, toads, and lizards are poisonous. And don't make the mistake of thinking them stupid! Remember, their secretions often are agreeable in odor and, therefore,

r F W

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disarming: the common toad produces a poison that has the fragrance of vanilla."

"That sounds clever of the toad," I said with a smile. "'Magic in Animals: a Popular and Recent Discovery,' you might call it."

"One would not call it recent," Ruggles corrected; "you forget Pliny's work on natural history, which appeared in the year 77 A.D., and was dedicated to the Roman emperor, Titus. It filled thirty-seven volumes and contains some startlingly interesting passages on medicine, the treatment of maladies, and magic.

"Describing the great cleverness of certain animals, he says that they prepare themselves for combats with poisonous snakes by eating certain herbs: the weasel eats rue; the tortoise and deer use two other plants, while field mice that have been bitten by snakes eat condrion. The hawk tears open the hawkweed and sprinkles its eyes with the juice."

"People may have believed that in the seventy-seventh year after the birth of Christ," I said; "but modern science would not admit any such wisdom on the part of animals."

"I'd hardly say that. For John Burroughs reminds us to-day that we have no means of estimating fully the knowledge, of animals. How does the red squirrel tell so unerringly on which side of the butternut the meat lies? Yet he always gnaws through the shell so as to strike the kernel broadside, the one spot where the meat is most exposed, and thus easily extracts it."

"Interesting. But rather out of date in this age of radio, for instance."

"Not out of date at all, Crane," Ruggles reminded me; "the air was full of talk and music countless ages before man invented wireless broadcasting. Any number of other creatures, which we never hear and never can hear, are busy talking to each other.

"Spiders are constantly making sounds and listening to sounds that are inaudible to us. For some reason, a woman's ear can catch a higher pitched sound than a man's: a woman, for instance, can often hear a bat's high note that a man cannot hear.

"We know that all sound comes to the

human ear in the form of vibrations; and our ear is so constructed that it can catch only a range of seven octaves of sound, constituting from thirty to thirty thousand vibrations a second. Now, a bee's wing normally vibrates about four hundred and forty times a second, making the musical note A. If the bee is tired, it makes the note E, with three hundred and thirty vibrations

"Oh, yes, Crane, we can hear some things. But when it comes to the question of sight or hearing or the sense of smell, we fall far below the other animals. Some odors attract certain animals; other odors repel them—a fact taken advantage of by people who live in countries where protection is needed from poisonous or otherwise dangerous animals."

"That's enough for now, Ruggles," I remonstrated. "I feel as if a cyclone had struck me."

"The China Sea," he replied absently, is the greatest permanent reservoir of cyclonic circulation—low barometer, heat, and moisture."

I said nothing. Ruggles's prodigious mass of stored-up information flattened me. I had been associated with him for something close to ten years. I had known him to spend eight months in a native village in India for the sake of studying the reptiles, with which the adjacent jungles were alive, and the native remedies.

At another time, he had gone thirty degrees south of the equator for the sake of learning, first hand, some of the earlier symptoms of coast fever, so prevalent in that part of South Africa;* it was his familiarity with the quality of the cement-like mud of Texas, in the wet season, that enabled him to solve almost instantly a murder mystery which had baffled the best brains of Scotland Yard.

His restless, eager, and photographic brain was a veritable storehouse of information on every subject under the sun. What, in any other man, would have seemed to be only miraculously lucky guesses, in the case of Ruggles were deadly sure deductions, swiftly arrived at by turning on the prob-

^{*}The coast district immediately above Durban, Natal, South Africa.

lem all his accumulated knowledge of crime and criminals and their offensive and defensive methods, from the crude violence of primitive times down to the scientific refinements of modern murder.

It was thus, and thus only, that he could find so readily the solution of the most obscure tangle, produce the key to the most baffling mystery, and lay bare the trail of the most shrewd and resourceful criminal.

The morning was fair and a strong, inviting wind blew in from the river. "Come, Ruggles," I said, "it's too fine a morning to work! Let's walk in the sunshine, so that we can run faster in the night, if we have to!"

Ruggles smiled. "Go out and enjoy yourself; but don't expect me to come: I've got some things left from last night, and those have got to be cleaned up before I can start square with the work of to-day. I'll walk with you for an hour, after lunch." He turned to his work.

I was walking north along Riverside Drive in three more minutes, reveling in the beauty of the Hudson, which I verily believe is one of the loveliest rivers in the world. The air was like wine and, though I fell far short of Ruggles in physical strength and vigor, I am what any doctor would call an unusually well man.

What I mean is, I should have enjoyed my walk, but I didn't; time and again, I found myself wondering whether the uneasiness I felt were nervousness or a warning that I was needed back at our apartment.

The result was that after half an hour of it, I faced back to West Eighty-Sixth Street. As I walked, I felt pretty sure that when I entered our rooms, I should find a new client with Ruggles, some man or woman who had got in a bad hole somehow, or thought she had, or was afraid she might; some innocent person who was being blackmailed, some one who was "wanted" by the police of some place or other, some one who had escaped from arrest, some fugitive from justice or from injustice.

Ruggles and I got about every class and kind. I mean, they came to him when their danger or dread reached the point where they couldn't stand it another instant. As I entered our living room and saw the rather short, squatty figure of a man sitting there deep in talk with Ruggles I asked myself whether our visitor was revealing a story of a toad or something really interesting. Then his voice rose:

"Do you ask me if there was anything more?" he demanded impatiently. "Wasn't that enough in itself to set any man's mind working? I tell you, that hand bag, which he said held only books, had a jimmy in it, a folding crowbar, three hammers, some nippers, reamers, drills and a coil of rope!"

"Well," said Ruggles, soothingly, "I admit that was something. But, well—suppose you go back to the beginning again, if you will, so that my assistant, Mr. Crane, can have the facts from you first-hand. Crane helps me on all my cases."

Ruggles nodded toward me. "Dan, this is Mr. Lemuel Stevenson, whose new neighbors in the town of Deersdale, up in Westchester County, thirty five minutes from here by train, are making him a little nervous."

"I wouldn't call myself a nervous man," said Lemuel Stevenson, closing the door, which I had left slightly open when I came in from the street. "I wouldn't say I was what you'd call nervous." He glanced quickly at our windows to see if they too were closed.

CHAPTER II

TWO DOGS AND A GUN



UT, for all that, he didn't look nervous. There was not one heroic line in his commonplace features or in his dumpy body; there was

nothing distinctive in his carriage; nothing particularly purposeful in his glance—his bluish gray eyes were rather kindly.

Yet something there was about Lemuel Stevenson that made me feel that he'd gone a long way, and might go much farther, without showing or feeling the least consternation when faced by danger. I judged that he was about fifty-five years old, in comfortable circumstances.

His bones seemed rather small, but there

was plenty of spread to his shoulders, and he didn't "carry a bass drum in front" of him, and there wasn't a pad of fat at the back of his erect neck. I pictured him as a very vigorous, active man through his thirties and forties; not a New Yorker; his eyes had the freedom of glance, the unhurried look, of one who has known, and preferred, the open places.

I wondered where he'd moved over the face of the earth, and what his dominating impulse had been. I wondered about him. He set one wondering. Of one thing I was sure: he'd never showed the white feather.

As if he realized that Ruggles and I were sizing him up, he looked collectedly from one of us to the other. Then he said, "If you're both ready, I'll get ahead with it." I noted his unconscious use of the English idiom, and also the fact that his speech showed no trace of an English accent, as he went on:

"I take things pretty much as I find them, and I don't bother myself with what my neighbors are doing—not generally. But I'll own up I don't like the look of things at that big, dark house next to mine in Deersdale: the folks in that house aren't right, and you'd agree with me if you'd seen what I have." He lowered his voice to a whisper and leaned a little toward us. "It's my opinion they're in terror of their lives."

"What makes you think that?" Ruggles asked. "And why do you keep looking at the street door and at those windows? Do you think that some one from that old, dark house may be following you?"

"I don't know," said Lemuel Stevenson.
"I don't really figure they are. But, on the other hand, I wouldn't be surprised if they had. I don't mean the young one, the son. It's the old man, his father, that gives me the shivers every time I look at him.

"A handsome, high-bred old gentleman I took him for when I saw him the first time, walking up and down the gravel path that runs from the back of his house to his garden. I'm a quiet, regular, steady-going man myself, and when I found he'd taken that house next to mine I said to myself—'Here's a neighbor that looks on life the way I do,' and it made me feel sort of comfortable."

"Yes, of course," Ruggles agreed. "When did he begin to make you—shiver?"

"I'm coming to that," said Stevenson, slowly. "It was last night, three nights after they'd moved into the house, old Hathaway and his son and the two servants. That's their name—Hathaway. I'd sort of expected one of them, the old man or the young fellow, to speak to me over the fence—at that time there was just a low, wooden fence between the two houses.

"But they hadn't spoken to me; so, that third night after they'd moved in, I thought I'd just take a little look in for myself; and, it being a nice, fine night and the fence easy to get over, along about half past nine I—"

"Not wishing to disturb your new neighbors," Ruggles supplied quickly, "you climbed over the fence and took a little stroll quite near the windows of their living room, where you had noticed there were lights going as if old Mr. Hathaway and his son were sitting in there; and, when you'd got quite close to the windows, you naturally looked in, as you strolled by. That's what you mean, isn't it, Mr. Stevenson?"

"Why, yes," said our visitor in surprise. "Yes, that's just what I did. You're pretty cute, if I do say it, to know that! How—"

"Not cute at all," Ruggles denied. "I was simply telling you what almost any one would have done, in your position."

"In my position?" Our visitor asked the question with a cool abruptness which contrasted sharply with his manner of a moment before. "You're using a big expression there, Mr. Ruggles. What do you know about my position?"

"Nothing," said Ruggles, with equal self-possession. "If you'll let me say so, Mr. Stevenson, I judge that you are a man who can keep his position very much to himself. But it's not your personal position or situation that I'm concerned with," Ruggles added smiling.

"Let's go back to that third night after the Hathaways moved in: last night when you took that stroll past the windows of their lighted living room. You looked in, just as Crane or I would have done in your place. Do you mind telling us what you saw, when you looked in through that window?"

"Young Hathaway," said Stevenson, nodding a little as he met Ruggles's eyes, "was sitting there, in a big leather-covered chair, reading a book, at least there was an open book on the table beside him."

"Nothing very shivery about that," said Ruggles, himself smiling. "I'm disap-

pointed."

"You won't be long," said our singular visitor. "Young Hathaway was sitting there by the table; he'd been reading, but he'd laid the book down, keeping the place where he'd been reading by putting a revolver in the open place in the book; he kept looking around him all the time as if he thought some one might be trying to creep up behind him.

"There were two dogs on the rug at his feet, two heavy, big-boned dogs, black and savage-looking, the kind a man might see in a nightmare. They crouched there at his feet, not sleeping, for I could see their eyes

shine as the light caught them.

"When I first saw them I didn't think they were alive, they both kept so quiet. But then one of them growled, or maybe both of them did. The night was mild and the window was open a little at the top, and I heard it. I nearly let out a yell—they growled so deep and sudden and savage."

"What did they growl at, do you know?" Ruggles asked. He was not smiling now. "Could they have seen you? Or scented you? You know the astonishingly keen

scent dogs have."

"It wasn't me," said Stevenson, again clearing his throat. "It was the servant, a foreign looking sort of a little man. He came in through another room somewhere, and the two dogs must have heard him coming. Young Hathaway spoke to the dogs, then called to the servant, 'It's all right, Rajak,' or some such name, I don't know just what it was; 'It's all right, Rajak: the dogs won't hurt you.' Then the servant came in.

"He was afraid of the dogs, and I don't blame him; but he came in and asked what young Hathaway wanted. Young Hathaway said, 'I've been trying to find that suit case of books I brought out from town last night, but I can't locate it. Maybe I left it in the car in the garage. Go out and look, will you?"

"And then," said Ruggles, "you climbed the fence to your own yard, went into your house, locked your door, and went to bed."

"No," was Stevenson's unexpected reply, "I ducked away from the window and beat it to the garage; the door was open and the car was there, and before I knew what I was doing I had that suit case in my hands—it took both my hands, it was so heavy. Then I threw it over my fence and shinned over after it, with my teeth feeling all loose in my head, and, I tell you, I was glad there wasn't any moon light!"

"I should think so," Ruggles ejaculated.

"We can understand that!"

"You don't understand yet," said this surprising visitor of ours. "As I ran across my lawn to get into my back door I saw the figure of a man cross the ray of light which came through the windows of my living room."

"You mean that a man had been looking into your living room, through your windows?" Ruggles asked, his eyes alight

with eager interest.

CHAPTER III

FROM FIEND OR DEVIL



HERE was a man there, but he wasn't looking in through my garden, and, through my windows; he was walking back and forth

from them, he kept on into my flower beds. He had a flash light in his hand, and he kept it on the ground, just as if he were looking for something."

Lemuel Stevenson stopped abruptly in his strange narrative, and leaned back in his chair as if suddenly struck nerveless. "I don't know what possessed me, Mr. Ruggles," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I'm not what you'd call a brave man. I'm timid.

"But when I saw that man going through my flower beds like that, I set down that suit case on the grass and I went over to that man, touched him on the shoulder and asked him what he was doing there.

"And when I touched him he'd have screamed if he'd had breath enough—he just couldn't do a thing but stand and stare at me, there in the darkness—his flash light dropped and lay just where it fell, in my flower bed. I picked up the flash light and turned it on him, right into his face; then I saw it was old Hathaway, and his eyes were the worst thing I'd ever looked at."

"What do you mean?" Ruggles cried.

"Just what I've said—the worst thing I'd ever looked at—fear, horror—not of me, I don't mean, but of something, and what it is, is what we've got to find out. Old Hathaway just stood there and looked at me, with that look in his eyes—the kind an animal might have, if it knew that something was hunting for it close by, something that meant to kill it.

"That was what I felt when I looked into that old man's eyes. And, all the time, I kept my hand on his shoulder and kept asking him, over and over, 'What are you looking for?'

"And when my breath gave out, as it did, after another moment, old Hathaway said in the kind of a whisper you'd expect from a ghost:

"'Garlic bulbs. Have you any garlic bulbs?'"

Stevenson's head bent forward until his chin rested on his breast. "I dropped the flash light then," he said, panting and shaking. "I dropped the flash light and ran for my life, to the back door of my house. Right near the steps up to the door I'd left the suit case, and I didn't remember it until I tripped over it, and I lay there, just as I'd fallen, until I was sure old Hathaway had gone.

"Then I dragged the suit case up the steps and into my house—I hadn't the strength left to lift it. I locked the door and put on the night latch and an old night chain I'd had put on that door years back and never used.

"Then I told my servant, who'd come to know what all the noise I'd made was about, to clear out and go to bed; and, when she'd gone, I hauled the suit case into a little 'den' I've got off my living room, and when I opened that suit case of books I found in it just what I've told you—a folding crowbar, some hammers, a jimmy, I suppose you'd call it, some nippers, reamers, drills, and a coil of hemp rope.

"And I've come to you, Mr. Ruggles, who the newspapers say can work out almost any puzzle that has crooked work at the bottom of it—I've come to you, Mr. Ruggles, to do two things for me: get that suit case back into that house for me and tell me what's scaring the life out of that old man, old Hathaway."

For a long moment Ruggles said nothing. His deep-set eyes remained fixed on Lemuel Stevenson. And when he spoke he said, slowly and earnestly, "I'll help you. I'll be glad to help you." Then Ruggles glanced at the door, just as Lemuel Stevenson had done when he had settled himself on our couch to tell his amazing narrative. "If you haven't any garlic bulbs, Mr. Stevenson, I suggest, as your first step, that you immediately get some."

"Me get garlic bulbs?" Stevenson demanded. "You're not turning joker, are you?" There was indignation in his voice.

"No, I am rot joking," said Ruggles, and I had never seen his face wear a graver expression, never seen him more eager, even impatient, to launch into action all his amazing powers. "Think I'm dreaming. Believe me, you've come to the wrong man for help and advice. Do anything you like, only get some garlic bulbs, man, and carry a couple of them in your pocket. I'll tell you more about them later."

"Tell me now!" Stevenson's face was as grave as Ruggles's.

"I'll tell you when the time comes, but not now," Ruggles said with decision. "First, as you drive on, with Crane and me, to your house, tell me what you meant when you said that when the Hathaways first came there was a low wooden fence around their house. Has the fence been altered, since then?"

"Altered? You'll see for yourself! Before it was just as I said, and you can see where the old posts were—just the little, old kind of a fence that a man like me could climb over easily, or even vault over,

if he had the mind; but it's different now: old Hathaway's had carpenters and men take down that fence and put up another—not a fence," corrected Lemuel Stevenson, "but a wall, a barricade, right close down to the ground it comes at the bottom, with thick posts sunk deep down in and running six feet up, if they're an inch—the kind of a fence it would take a good man to climb even if it weren't for the barbed wire they were putting on top of it when I started away this morning.

"This fortification runs all the way around the big house, with just one entrance at the front, with a lock on it that I'll

warrant is a first-class one."

"You mean, it is as if the Hathaways wanted to protect themselves from some—"

"From some fiend or devil they think wants to get in at them from the outside," Stevenson interrupted. "I know: it's no business of mine. But you wouldn't feel right if, for some reason you didn't know anything about, the man who lives next to you here suddenly had people come and bar his windows with sheet iron and you saw him sitting in his front window fingering a revolver. Fiend or devil, animal or human, there's something hanging around that house of old Hathaway's, or he thinks there is, that's driving him crazy with terror."

Ruggles said nothing for a long moment. Then he spoke again—"Do you carry a

gun?"
"I used to," said Stevenson slowly, "but

not of late years."

"Have you one at your house, a good gun in good working order?"

"Yes," said Stevenson, enigmatically.

" Are you any sort of a shot?"

"I don't know. I-used to me."

Both of us waited again for him to explain, if he cared to. But he apparently did not. As Ruggles had said, Lemuel Stevenson knew how to keep his own secrets about himself.

But I was determined to draw him out in spite of himself, and for that reason I put a straight question which, under the circumstances, I thought was not an improper one:

"By the way, Mr. Stevenson," I asked casually, "what's your business?"

"My business," he said promptly. Then looking at me with one of his disconcertingly keen glances, Stevenson said—"As a matter of fact I haven't any business now: I've retired from active life. Not but what it was active enough once," he added, in a sort of undertone.

But I had had my lesson: I wasn't going to try any more questions on him. His clean-shaven lips had set like a trap. He lighted an excellent cigar, and I noticed that the fingers which held the match were capable looking and steady.

"There's a big marsh," he said in his abrupt way: "it backs up close behind

Hathaway's house."

"What makes you speak of it?" Ruggles asked quietly. "Do you think—"

"I don't think much of anything about it," said our strange visitor. "Only it's big enough and thick enough grown up to make a good place for a man to hide in, if he wanted a place where it would be hard to find him. I saw a light out there three or four nights ago, but I couldn't find anything when I went out and hunted until sun-up with a flash light."

"If you're ready, we'll go out to your house with you," said Ruggles. "Throw some stuff into a hand bag, Crane, while I do the same. Ready in five minutes."

CHAPTER IV

SERVANTS FRIGHTENED OFF



N even less time we were in Stevenson's car and instantly we were on our way up Riverside Drive. Stevenson drove the car himself, a fact

which Ruggles welcomed, for he said to me in a whisper:

"No chauffeur. Stevenson does things with his own hands when he can—a good, safe rule to follow when possible; and good, too, in this case, because there's no one to overhear us."

But it was not until we had swung into the parkway which paralleled the Bronx River that Ruggles spoke again, and this time it was to ask Stevenson to pull up and park for a little. Then, when the car came to a stop, Ruggles began swiftly: "How long have you lived where you do now? Are you married? Have you a family? Have you been confidential about yourself with your nearest neighbors? Be as brief as you can, for we've no time to waste!"

"Lived where I do fifteen years," Stevenson shot back, a bit crustily. "Bachelor. Housekeeper and one servant. Only living relatives two nephews in Europe. Never tell neighbors anything."

"Good," said Ruggles. "You boil things down well! Crane and I are your two nephews, from Europe. Crane's name, for the time being, is Howard, and I'm Paul—Howard and Paul Stevenson. We're living with you, uncle Lemuel. Introduce your postman to us, that way, to-morrow morning."

"What?" demanded Lemuel Stevenson.
"Yes," said Ruggles. Then, with his nearest approach to real anger, "I say, don't waste time! You've asked Crane and me to come into this, and we've come. You don't realize it yet; but what you've blundered into by sheer accident is a life and death matter! Not your life or death—Mr. Hathaway's!"

"Old Hathaway," scoffed Stevenson. He settled himself obstinately in his seat and scowled at the lovely curve of the parkway, banked by the first, fresh green of early spring. "I see, now, I was a fool to feel as I did last night, a fool to go to you. Not that you weren't cute to guess I peeked in through their windows, but a fool to think old Hathaway was in danger from anything.

"Garlic bulbs! Hathaway's simply an old lunatic who ought to have a couple of keepers to stop him from treading down my flower beds! Well, I've got the thing straight at last, Mr. Ruggles, and," with a glance at his watch, which, like himself, was fat and prosperous looking, "there's just time for me to drive you and your friend back to your rooms and have you there in time for lunch." He started his motor.

But before he could start swinging the car around Ruggles said tensely: "The garlic bulbs which old Hathaway looked for were for his protection from a danger more terrible and an enemy more merciless and cruel than you or Crane or I have ever known. It was not for garlic bulbs that Mr. Hathaway was looking that memorable hour in your garden—he was looking for life, and he knew it, if you don't, Mr. Stevenson.

"You were not a fool when you asked for help in this matter: it was the wisest thing you ever did in your life. Trust me for forty-eight hours and see how soon this car of yours can get us to your house in Deersdale. I'm interested to see, among other things, that suit case which you—borrowed last night from your new neighbors."

"That suit case," Stevenson cried sharply. "I'd forgot all about it! I don't know what possessed me to take it last night! I don't, Mr. Ruggles! Honestly, I don't! I'd never done such a thing in my born days before! It was just because I was so upset by looking into that living room, through that window and seeing that revolver and those devilish dogs and their growling that way—and their keeping so still, those black dogs!

"All I meant was to see what was inside the suit case, then heave it back over the fence. Then, when I saw old Hathaway in my flower bed and his eyes—and his raving about garlic bulbs, I—"

He stopped short. "Do you figure any one of them saw me there at the window? No, I wasn't close enough. Or heard me? No, for there was soft grass under my feet. And old Hathaway—had his back to me—when I got to him—anyway, there wasn't any moon—garlic bulbs?"

The spring of the car flung Ruggles and me back against the seat. Into second gear, then into high, and we were flying up the parkway at forty miles an hour. Like many another man who has got into a hole much deeper than he first realized, Lemuel Stevenson wanted action, swift, abrupt action to relieve his charged nerves.

It seemed only a few minutes before we reached Deersdale, and he swung the car off the smooth bed of the parkway and into an unpaved road which almost immediately began to climb up, up, and up into the hills, which were closely covered with beech,

birch, cedar, and, now and then, a leprouslooking sycamore.

It was within half an hour of noon, but the sky was overcast. A glance at the speedometer showed that we had left the railroad station at Deersdale only a short three miles behind us, and vet the country on either side of the narrow, dirt road over which Stevenson was driving his car at high speed seemed a wilderness.

Then the road began to descend sharply, disclosing a valley through which a small river ran, scarcely more than a stream here, swelling into a small pond there, at other points appearing to lose itself altogether in

patches of swamp.

"There, over there," said Stevenson, slowing his car down and pointing to the left with one hand, "is where my land begins; and along this road we're running on now. That's my wall, there; and I planted that hedge myself. And that's my house-you can just see the top of it over those pines. And that house over there, just this side of that bit of swamp, is the Hathaway's. Well, well, I wonder what's that for?" he broke off abruptly.

A taxi, with one trunk on the runningboard and two boxes on the seat beside the driver, had just come out through the gate into which Stevenson was in the act of turning his car. The taxi had passed and was off up the road before Stevenson could hail it.

"I wonder," he began again, clearly very much puzzled. "I wonder who-"

We were right in front of the portecochère now, and a grocer's truck was just visible at the side door; as we looked the grocer's boy came staggering out of the house with a battered little old trunk on his shoulder.

"What's the meaning of this?" Stevenson demanded, springing out of our car and walking with angry strides to the boy. "That trunk belongs to my housekeeper, and I forbid you to touch it."

"All right, Mr. Stevenson," the boy said, sitting down on the trunk and fanning himself with his cap. "She's inside. She'll tell vou."

We followed Stevenson into his house.

"Suppose you let Crane and me look at

that suit case while you are talking with your servants," Ruggles said, to remove us from the scene of impending domestic disturbance.

"Yes, that's a good idea," Stevenson said, gratefully. "The suit case is in there." He pointed to a small room which adjoined the living room. "It's over behind the couch where I left it this morning. I mean last night—this business has got me so fussed up I don't half know what I'm saying. Anyway, the suit case is in there."

"No, it's not there, sir" a woman's

voice said shakily.

"Not there? Then where is it. Mrs. Hollifield?" Stevenson demanded, his voice suddenly taking a harsh tone and his eyes

glinting almost savagely.

"It's gone, and I'm going," said the housekeeper. She was a capable-looking, honest-faced, middle-aged woman with thick, untidy, iron-gray hair. "I've looked after this house for you for near a year and I never thought the day 'd come when I'd leave you; but after you went away this morning he came again, and this time Mary and I saw him."

Stevenson's flushed face lost its color. He started back, then recovered himself with an effort. "It's time you went," he said coldly to the housekeeper. "I can forgive anything in the world almost but dishonesty. I've said this before to you, and I meant it when, a week ago, I warned you that another offense would terminate your employment." Then, seeing the tears rise in the eyes of the housekeeper, Stevenson's face changed. "I spoke hastily, Mrs. Hollifield, and I'm sorry."

He put his hand gently on her trembling shoulder. "Don't be alarmed. You've nothing to fear, with we three men here. Tell us about it, of course. But don't do

it now."

"No," she said, "I'd rather tell you now and get it over with. You left the house this morning at a quarter past eight. I remember I was out on the back piazza watching the carpenters Mr. Hathaway had got down from White Plains. They were putting up all that netting and barbed wire all around their place.

"I was out there and heard your car,

and you drove out of the garage and down the drive. I heard your car, and so did he, whoever an' whatever he is, for you hadn't been gone three minutes when he come in, right into the kitchen, and I looked up and if he wasn't standing right there, clear as you are now!"

CHAPTER V

A SAUCER OF MILK



HE housekeeper drew a long, choking breath, then went on: "I must have called out or done something—like as not I did, the way he looked

—and his coming into my kitchen without knocking or anything. You know, sir, how it would be, even with some one that looked honest and safe, if you just happened to look up and find him standing there close to you, looking at you without speaking.

"I must have called out, or something, for Mary come running in, and she screamed —I never heard such a scream—then both of us stood just where we was, looking down at him."

"Down?" Ruggles asked. "I beg your pardon. Please go on, Mrs. Hollifield. You said you and Mary stood looking down at him."

"Just as we was. And I was just going to tell him to get out and be off about his business, the way I do peddlers and such folks, when he said to both of us, throwing his hand in our faces:

"'You can't speak! You can't move!'
He had a bamboo stick in his hand, about three feet or four long, with something bright, that I don't know what it was, in the end of it; and he moved that rod back and forth across in front of our eyes, with that bright-eyed thing in it and it was all we could see.

"Then he said, or I think he did—I think I heard it and Mary does—'You will stand here, just as you are, until—'We couldn't hear the rest.

"We couldn't see very well, and I can't remember just what was the rest; but it seemed to me he went to the pantry and got a saucer, then poured some milk, just a little, into it, and warmed the saucer over the stove, then, with the bamboo stick in one hand and the saucer of milk in the other, he went out through the pantry toward the dining room, and—"

"Yes, yes," Stevenson interrupted,

"what happened then? Tell me!"

"I don't—know," said the housekeeper, "for it was near ten, when I came out of the faint I'd fell into; and Mary was lying there, like I was, on the kitchen floor, and the suit case you spoke of is gone, and Mary's gone, and I'm going, sir."

She put her rough hands to her forehead, then passed them nervously over her dilated eyes, then she looked down at the floor. "There's the tracks he made with the marsh mud on his feet. He came here

from the marsh. I'm going-"

She spoke the truth; she collapsed and fell down on the floor, across the muddy tracks to which she had just pointed. It was Ruggles's strong arms which lifted her to the couch in the little den, and it was he who sent Stevenson running upstairs to the medicine-chest in the bathroom for the ammonia which brought her back to consciousness.

She was made of good, stout material and she recovered herself quickly; but she was determined to get away as quickly as possible from the house which, to her, represented only danger. In another five minutes, she and her battered little trunk and her package of hats and odds and ends were stowed on the grocer's truck and on their way to the railroad station at Deersdale.

"Well, anyway," Stevenson said, getting down on his hands and knees and examining the mud stains carefully, "she was right on one point, anyway; that's mud from the marsh, all right! The rest of what she said was just nonsense, crazy stuff that couldn't possibly have been true.

"She was—I don't know what possessed her to act that way; but I mean to be fair to her; she told the truth on one point—this is marsh mud, all right!" He scratched his head. "How do you figure the stuff got here?"

"The suit case is gone," Ruggles reminded. "How do you suppose it got out of the house? That's a simple, practical

question for you to wrestle with, while Crane and I take your car, if you'll let us, and follow Mrs. Hollifield to the station and talk with her there until her train comes. There are some questions I must ask her, before we lose sight of her. She was too excited and hysterical to talk just now; and everywhere she looked, in these rooms, reminded her of what she'd just been through. But she'll be quieter after the fairly long drive to the station and reassured by being away from here, and ready for the questions I must put to her.

"Crane and I'll be back inside of two hours at most. I've an errand at White Plains and Crane and I shall lunch there. Good idea; pasting that time-table on the wall, there, by the telephone. Crane, it's just noon, and she can't get a train to New York before one thirty-four. That'll

give us plenty of time-"

"Plenty of time," Stevenson interrupted, "to talk with a woman who sees and hears things that ain't there! I wouldn't waste time on her, Mr. Ruggles, though you're more than welcome to take the car. Wouldn't it be better to have Mr. Crane stay here with me, just in case "—he looked out of the window toward the house on the edge of the marsh—" just in case some one came from over there and asked for the suit case? It would be better to have a witness, wouldn't it?"

"No one will ask you for the suit case," Ruggles said. "We can eliminate the suit case, for the time being. What is much more to the point is for you to measure these tracks on your kitchen floor, hall runner, and here on this den rug, and see—"Ruggles was measuring the footprints as he spoke, then jotted down the measurements and gave the figures to Stevenson. "There you are!"

He had made a swift, but accurate tracing of the muddy footprint, copied it painstakingly, verified it, then stuck one of the copies into his pocketbook and handed the other to Stevenson. "While Crane and I are off, see if you can find, in the marsh, any footprints or tracks to fit this."

"What for?" Stevenson laughed. "It's not worth it. Why, you don't figure this is the first time I've seen tracks like these.

on my floors, do you? I've had to speak sharp time and again to Mrs. Hollifield and Mary about their wiping their shoes or taking off their rubbers at the door instead of tracking in.

"They always said they'd never been near the marsh and hadn't made the tracks, but had left them there for me to see, so I'd know—whatever that meant. More than once, I told 'em to own up, instead of trying to blame it off on some one else when they'd made 'em all the time. And what possessed 'em to walk in the marsh, with all our nice lawn to—what's wrong now?"

"Nothing," said Ruggles. "I've just discovered that you keep a cat and are very fond of it, since you feed it on the rug in this room here."

"Cat?" cried Stevenson. "Cat? No!

I don't keep a cat. Why-"

"Oh, just because of this saucer of milk here," said Ruggles, "over here back of the couch, where you had put the suit case, Mr. Stevenson. You see, Crane," Ruggles went on, turning to me, "he found the suit case too heavy to lift over the back of the couch, and the couch was too heavy for him to shove; so to get the suit case out, he had to open it and take out some of the contents; and, even then, it was quite a struggle for him, quite an effort.

"He hasn't much physical strength, of course, and we can almost see him heaving and working and shoving and hauling to get the heavy suit case in a position where he could open it while standing with it behind the couch where the space was so

cramped.

"But finally he got it open and the stuff out, then he scrambled over the back of the couch *here*," indicating the mud stains, "then repacked the suit case, added to it, of course, his most precious possession, and left the house by the way he had come, as usual."

"As usual?" Stevenson demanded. "What do you mean?"

"I was wrong," Ruggles admitted; "he left in more of a hurry than usual, for he dropped, without being aware of it, something he needs, as he knows very well—something he will almost surely come back

for to-night, if I'm not mistaken. Put this in one of your pockets and keep it about you until Crane and I come back, after lunch."

Ruggles picked up from the rug back of the couch, and handed to Stevenson a small, pearlwhite object, pear-shaped, with small, irregular outcroppings and coarse little roots at its rounded bottom.

"What's this?" Stevenson cried, staring at it intently.

"Oh, just a garlic bulb," Ruggles said easily. "They don't cost much, but they're very hard to get, in this big house of yours, or the Hathaways' next door, or on themarsh."

Then as Stevenson continued to stare at the small, pearlwhite bulb, Ruggles went on: "The man who lost that garlic bulb will come back here after it. So be careful! Come, Crane. Time we started!"

Ruggles and I left the room, Ruggles calling back over his shoulder: "Oh, one thing more: I wouldn't use that saucer again until you'd washed it well with soap and boiling water—remember, boiling!"

CHAPTER VI

DEAD OF FEAR



T the Deersdale station we found, as we had hoped, Mrs. Hollifield, the ex-housekeeper, and, as we had not counted on, Mary, the ex-housemaid.

Their hysteria had passed, more, I believe, from their escape from the scene of their terrifying experience than from the interval of time which had elapsed.

But though their stories coincided from start to finish, the two women could not give us a single clew, as I looked at it; they had no idea who or what the mysterious being was who had appeared before them in broad daylight and dominated their wills and left them unconscious; except for the fact that he had mud from the marsh on his feet, they had no idea where he had come from, or where he had gone to with the suit case which he had taken from Stevenson's study.

They had never seen the man before. As soon as we got to the station, we

got hold of them and, leading them off to the distant end of the platform where there was no one to overhear us, we let them talk until they got more or less talked out, if there is such an expression.

But as I have just said, the total of it all was disappointing; they simply repeated, over and over, what Mrs. Hollifield had told Ruggles and Stevenson and me earlier.

The only new fact which they volunteered was that, as Stevenson had said, the muddy tracks had been found on the kitchen floor several times before, and always when Mary and Mrs. Hollifield had come down to start the fire, the first thing in the morning. They had always spoken to Mr. Stevenson about the tracks, and he had always believed the tracks had been made by his two domestic servants.

"But, honest, they weren't ours," Mary insisted.

"No, they weren't," corroborated Mrs. Hollifield.

"Here comes the train," Ruggles said, looking up the track; "we must walk up the platform a little, and you'd better not walk so close to the edge. There's something you might have mentioned, but probably you didn't think of it: you didn't notice these tracks, I mean there weren't any of these muddy tracks until about three weeks ago, when the Hathaways took the house next to yours. Is that so?"

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Hollifield; "we noticed them first then. But how did you know it?"

"And," said Ruggles, as the train came to a stop, "this strange-looking man, who came into the kitchen this morning, was very slender and short; his hair was straight, rather long, and a dull black, like his eyes, and his face and hands were about the color of strong coffee that's got a little cream in it—not black, but a very dark tan."

"Yes," Mrs. Hollifield said shakily, while Mary gasped. "You don't see him anywhere on this platform, do you?"

"No, he's not here," Ruggles said.
"Don't worry! And don't tell any one about him." He dashed down the address they said they should be at in New York, then helped them up the steps of the train.

"I've got to go to town," he amazed me by saying. "I'll drive out in our own car, so don't bother trying to meet any train for me." He swung himself aboard and I saw him turn into the "smoker."

As I drove Stevenson's car slowly back to his house, I tried to work out some clear-cut explanation of what the two women had told Ruggles and me, but the more I tried, the less sure I felt of the accuracy of my deductions.

When Stevenson finally unlocked the front door—I had decided that the bell was out of order—his face was white, and he locked the door instantly after admitting me, then caught my arm like a vice.

"Heard what's happened next door? You couldn't. One of the servants found dead, in that house, this morning. The doctor's been there all the morning, trying to do something, or find out what—" Stevenson moistened his lips—" there's no sign of any wound or disease or anything," he said. "The man's just dead, as he sat in the doorway at the back of the house, taking the air before going to bed."

"He may have had a bad heart," I suggested.

"No, the doctor said his heart was all right. He had examined him only two weeks or so ago for additional life insurance and found him perfectly sound. The fellow was about twenty-six or seven and one of the most active, powerful men the doctor had ever seen; besides that, the doctor says, there are half a dozen medals for marksmanship on the walls of the fellow's room, a little one opening off old Hathaway's.

"He'd served in the British army in India, evidently. But all his strength and courage and being a quick man with a gun hadn't helped him when his time came. The queer part of it is—the look on his face. Go and see for yourself!"

"What?" I asked in surprise. "Where is the body?"

"In the back part of this house," said Stevenson. "Old Hathaway couldn't stand its being in his house. The doctor told me that, and I had him bring it over here until the funeral."

"You say Mr. Hathaway couldn't stand—"

"It does seem strange. But it's not so queer after you've had a look at it. I'll show you where it is."

I followed him to the rear of the house and one glance was enough for me; the man had been young and seemed the embodiment of physical vigor; the lines of his face were strong and magnificently resolute; I mean, they must have been when he was alive.

But that face showed, in death, every evidence of the most frightful, speechless terror; moreover, the unfortunate victim had died with his right hand pressed against the right side of his neck, high up, close to the ear—such a position as a man might take if listening intently for the repetition of a sound which had arrested his attention suddenly. Death, abrupt and awful, had caught him in that attitude and fixed him there.

We left the room and went back to the living room. I admit that I was shuddering. "Good God," I said to Stevenson, "that man looks as if he'd died of fright!"

"That's what the doctor told me—but he said I wasn't to tell any one."

I had had no lunch, and I didn't want any. I wondered what Ruggles would say, at this new development.

It was five before he returned. He came in with a paper-wrapped box, about eighteen inches long and five inches across, under his arm. I noticed that air holes had been punched in the wrapping paper and I asked him what he had in the box.

"A pet," he said lightly, "to keep us company, during the nights we spend here."

He was beginning to untie the string on the box when Stevenson broke in with the news of the tragedy of the night before. Ruggles instantly made the string fast again and we stood, in another moment, by the body of the unfortunate victim.

"No wound or disease," Stevenson explained. "Just killed by fright. Look at his face! Ever see such a sight in your life? No, or any one else! Fright did it, Mr. Ruggles. The doctor agrees with me, though he said I mustn't tell any one. This poor fellow had thought he heard something, and he put up his hand, up there to his ear, to listen, and then—"

Ruggles replaced the sheet over the body and led the way back into the living room. After a long moment of silence, he turned to Stevenson: "I don't wonder the doctor told you not to say that that man died of fright. The doctor himself will not admit that he believes that. His face shows terror in its most horrible form, but it was only because he recognized, too late, the midnight marauder which had attacked him."

"Attacked?" Stevenson-cried hoarsely. "You think the man was murdered? What

do you mean-attacked?"

"You would not believe me if I told you now," Ruggles said thoughtfully. "You have never heard of such a thing happening; you would tell me that it was impossible for such a thing to happen, here in America, in the year 1924. But the time is coming, fast and soon, when you will believe it because you have been forced to believe it. Then I shall give you the facts which I now withhold."

Then, as Stevenson stared at him, speechless with amazement, Ruggles went to the center table, on which he had laid the oblong, paper-wrapped box and slowly undid the string.

"Mr. Hathaway lost one protector last night," he said quietly. "I am able to provide him with another and even a better one, if he will accept it from my hands."

He took off the wrapping paper and lifted the cover of the box.

CHAPTER VII

OUR STRANGE ALLY



E took from the box what looked, at first glance, like a small cat, for it seemed to have a cat's fur and tail; but its head was shaped like a

weasel's and its restless eyes and the end

of its sharp nose were pink.

When Ruggles lifted him out of the box, the small creature sat up and put his fur in order, just as a cat does; then it looked around, walked to the edge of the table, and jumped from there to Stevenson's shoulder.

"That's all right," Ruggles cried as Stev-

enson started to fling the little thing off. "Don't be afraid! He won't hurt you! He's simply making friends."

"Well, I'll say he's tame enough," Lem-

uel Stevenson laughed. "He's-"

"He's an ichneumon," Ruggles explained, "and they're all like that. It's been quite a long trip, in that box, out here from the animal shop where I bought him, on lower Broadway, and probably he's tired and hungry. We'll give him a little piece of raw meat, then he'll go to sleep, so as to be ready for the night."

"What does he do at night?" Stevenson

asked.

"He gets up," said Ruggles slowly and significantly, "and attends to every noise he hears and finds out what made it. He's a good little friend and ally: if he'd been in the Hathaway house last night that man wouldn't have died." He lifted the little animal from Stevenson's shoulder, saying: "Come, old fellow, you've got to have your supper."

"Just a minute," said Stevenson, "you said raw meat was the ticket, didn't vou?"

"Yes," said Ruggles, "but we'll let Mr. Hathaway give it to him. It will be a good way for them to become acquainted." Ruggles lifted the ichneumon back into the box and put back the cover and tied it.

"But," said Stevenson, "I thought he was going to stay here, with us, I mean."

"No, he must go to the Hathaways and go at once, for the enemy which struck body servant and protector last night, will strike again. There's no time to be lost. Come!" Ruggles turned to the door, the box under his arm.

But Stevenson called him back. "Got a gun on vou?"

" Of course."

"You'll need one, once you're over that fence."

" Why?"

"The dogs."

"They, too, are protecting Mr. Hathaway and, God knows, he needs all the guards he can have, human or animal. I don't want to shoot them." Ruggles thought a moment.

Stevenson went closer to him and spoke earnestly: "Look here, Mr. Ruggles, I know you've done some great work against crooks in New York and other big cities; but you've always worked alongside of the police, as I remember it. Why don't you call in the police now? We've got a good one in Deersdale.

" All you've got to do is drive down there to-morrow morning and ask him to help vou. The fact of it is "-he looked irresolutely at Ruggles, then at me, then back at Ruggles again-" I don't like the way this thing is going. When I called you in, all I wanted was to have you get that suit case back to its owner and-"

"And find out," Ruggles supplied, "what was threatening old Mr. Hathaway. That's

what you said."

"Yes," Stevenson admitted unwillingly, "that's what I said; and I meant it, then. But it's different now: some fiend or devil has come into this house of mine and scared my servants into a faint so they've run off and left me; and something else has killed a man next door-anyway, you say he was killed, and he's dead, that's sure, and you say that's only the beginning."

He threw an anxious glance about his solidly furnished, comfortable living room. "You make me feel as if anything might happen here, any time, and I want to get out of it." He hesitated again, then relighted his cigar nervously, then began again:

"So, I've decided to go to New York and put up at a hotel there for a few days. You and Mr. Crane stay here, in this house of mine if you want to. I'll be glad to have you do it, honest! But I'm going to a New York hotel and stav there until what's about to happen here has-happened.

"I'll be at the Melbourne on West Forty-Fourth Street. You know the place." Ruggles nodded. "Drop me a line there when things have stopped-happening out here, and I'll be glad to come back." He smiled in a simple, honest way on both of us.

"Don't think I'm a coward. I'm not. But I've reached a time in life when a man, who likes things quiet, wants them-quiet, especially in the house he lives in and expects to be taken out of, when his time comes. But you and your friend will stay on here, won't you?"

"Yes, we'll accept your hospitality and be grateful for it," said Ruggles; "and I promise to let you know just as soon as things have—stopped out here."

"Good," said Stevenson with evident relief. "And, as soon as I get to the Deersdale station—that 'll be in half an hour about-I'll tell that policeman there in the village you're up here and would like to have him help you."

"No, don't tell him anything," said Rug-"I've no doubt he's a good man, as you say he is; but he wouldn't know anything about—a ichneumon, or mongoose,

which is another name for him."

"About a mongoose or garlic bulbs? Is that what you mean?" Stevenson asked.

"Yes, that's what I mean. But put it another way: Mr. Hathaway, who would be the natural one to call on the police for help, has not done so. Doesn't it look as if Hathaway didn't want the police brought into his troubles?

"Look at it in still another way: if you knew that a relentless enemy was lying in wait for you, day and night after coming a very long distance to find you, would you want that enemy to be just driven away for the time, or would you want him to be captured?"

"Do you mean," Stevenson "that it was an enemy of old Hathaway that killed that man last night?"

"I mean just that," said Ruggles. "The servant was not the one the killer was after. but the servant was Hathaway's most effective protector, so the killer had to put him out of the way."

"But where does old Hathaway's son come in? Wouldn't he be the one you'd think would protect his father best?"

"Yes," Ruggles admitted, "on the face of it, but it is possible that the father has a chapter in his life of which he has never told his son-something he does not want his son to know about-something the father thought had been forgotten-until suddenly this implacable enemy appeared.

"Suppose that the father, now an old man and a loved and loving father, after having thought himself safe for many years. is suddenly confronted by his all but forgotten enemy who is seeking his blood payment for an ancient wrong. Driven distracted by fear, the father lacks the courage to confide the facts to his son."

"Fear for himself, you mean?" said Stevenson hoarsely.

"Fear for his son first and for himself next," said Ruggles. "It was not the son but the servant whom old Hathaway selected as his bodyguard, the post of danger."

"Danger from what?" Stevenson demanded, his face pale. "That's what I want to know. Tell me this before I go down to New York. Tell me one thing, Mr. Ruggles, and I won't tell a living soul or ask you anything more: what was it that killed that poor fellow that lies in back there?" Stevenson indicated the rear wing of the house with a gesture. "You say he was killed. What killed him?"

"It was a *karait*, a dusty brown snake, a native of India. The *karait* is very small, but his bite is as deadly to its victim as a cobra's."

Stevenson said nothing. His face, so memorable though its features were so indistinctive, showed amazement but no incredulity. "Are you sure it's a—what did you say it was, this snake?"

"A karait," said Ruggles quietly. "There can be no doubt of it."

"You speak as if you knew." It was more of a question, though, than a statement indicating agreement.

"I know," said Ruggles, "because I once made a particular study of snake venom, and, in the course of that study, I spent some months in India. I know this snake and the precautions the natives of India take against it."

For a long moment none of us spoke. Then Stevenson said slowly, "I'm going to get away from here, Mr. Ruggles, as I said I would. I'm going to New York. I'm—going."

Strangely enough, those last two words were the ones the housekeeper had used. And it was almost as true in this case: after standing a moment, rigid and tense, he staggered slightly, and Ruggles's strong arm eased him to the nearest chair.

It was a good half hour before his dilated eyes had recovered their normal and he was sufficiently his rugged self to justify us in letting him start for the Deersdale railroad station.

Just before he left us he thrust his hand into one of his pockets and brought out a small, pearl-white, pear-shaped object and handed it to Ruggles, saying: "Here, I shan't need this where I'm going. You take it!"

"For old Hathaway?" asked Ruggles, taking the garlic bulb from Stevenson's hand.

"For old Hathaway—or for yourself, whichever of you needs it most," said Stevenson.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SNAKE FROM INDIA



S we watched Stevenson's car glide down the drive and swing out into the country road, then disappear in the direction of Deersdale, Rug-

gles turned to me thoughtfully:

"He believed what I said of the *karait*, and he's left the field of danger. Do you think him a coward?"

"No," I said instantly.

"You're coming along, Dan," Ruggles said approvingly. "Mr. Lemuel Stevenson is no coward: I would even go so far as to say that he is one of the most determined men I have ever known—a man of the most conspicuous courage. You agree with me?"

I nodded.

"Then," asked Ruggles, "has it struck you that if Lemuel Stevenson ever did turn from the straight and narrow path into a crooked way, we should have a foeman worthy of our very best efforts? What do you think his past life has been?

"What was he before he turned into almost a recluse and decided to make his home in this ancient house in this remote and isolated wilderness? He's getting along: I should set his age as well on in the fifties.

"Yet, as you see, he's as solid as an oak: one of those quiet, unobtrusive men who is capable of forcing to any end a relentless purpose, a generous friend and an unforgiving enemy, yet a man who, if he forgave at last, would take prompt measures to make full restitution."

"What evidence have you of this?"

"Of his quick desire to atone, if he found himself in the wrong? Why, look back a little: you saw how sternly he reproved his housekeeper for trying to escape blame for making those muddy tracks on the floor of the kitchen. He was convinced, let us assume for the moment, that the housekeeper had made the tracks herself or that the maid had.

"But as soon as I had suggested the impossibility of the servant making them, I mean the housekeeper, her feet being much larger than the muddy tracks on the floor, you saw how quickly his manner changed and how kindly he addressed her."

"By the way," I said, "I noticed something, which of course you did: Stevenson has a small foot, much smaller than his housekeeper's."

"Yes, that's true," Ruggles agreed, "but it's equally true that the man who left those muddy tracks on the kitchen floor is flat-footed; and it's equally true that Stevenson isn't. There's no good in following that clew; Dan Stevenson didn't make those muddy footprints."

"Yes, I should have noticed that." Then, because I was a little chagrined at having made such a blunder just when I made what I thought was a telling discovery, I went on: "You have accounted for your thinking him one who would eagerly repair a wrong he had done to any one; but what makes you think he has such notable courage?"

"For one thing, he has been haunted by a nightmare, out here in this lonely house, and yet, until he appealed to us this morning, he had called in no one to help him."

"What do you mean?" I asked, looking

at Ruggles in surprise.

"This," said my friend, whose strangely keen eyes missed nothing. He went to the nearest window and indicated what I had not seen: "This lock is not the ordinary one: this small wire, which you see now, is so cunningly adjusted that no one can raise this sash either from the inside or from the outside without—"

Ruggles slipped the lock and lifted the sash of the window a short inch, and instantly the room was flooded with light from the chandelier; so was the hall; so, from as much as I could see, was every room in the huge old house; and from every room came the ringing of bells—more than that, a sustained alarum, which did not cease until Ruggles had shut and locked the window.

"The unnecessary precautions of a nervous old bachelor." I scoffed.

"No," Ruggles corrected me; "the wise precautions of a man as free from nerves as I have ever known a man to be."

"You call these precautions wise?" I reminded him. "Do you mean you think Stevenson was actually in danger here?"

"I have every reason to think so. Yes, I am sure of it."

"What threatened him?" I was irritated by an increasing conviction that Ruggles was speaking very guardedly.

"Whatever it was," Ruggles said thoughtfully, "it was enough to worry him, for all his precautions. Unquestionably he saw death staring at him through every one of these windows; and this must have been going on for some little time too, for you observe that these effective window locks and these wires were not put on yesterday."

I examined the locks and the staples which held the wire which descended from the window frame to the floor. "They've been there several days at least," I had to admit.

"During which," Ruggles went on, "Stevenson remained here when he could have taken refuge in New York or fled for further safety to the most remote part of the world. To face it here as he did, even for a matter of only a few days, required cool courage."

"I admit all that," I said obstinately. "But still you don't speak out. Why can't you be frank with me?"

"I shall let things speak for themselves," said Ruggles quietly. "We shall see Lemuel Stevenson again, and, when that time comes, he himself will answer your questions.

"It's a strange world that we live in, Dan, and a strange fate that is mapped out for some of us: a chance slip, made at a critical period, the sudden development of an over-mastering passion, some such thing takes the tiller of a man's life and steers him into what he has never planned for.

"And a fine life is wrecked with little chance of salvage; and not the one life alone—that's the pity of it: the wrecked life wrecks the life of others. But," coming out of the almost sad reverie into which he had fallen, "of that, later! We must dismiss: Stevenson from our minds for the time and follow close on the trail of the murderer of Hathaway's servant: there's enough to require all our energies there, and the need of immediate action is desperate.

"That is the house of death over there, Dan," he said, indicating the Hathaways', "and this house we're in is equally dangerous. I wish you'd go back to New York now, and let me face this through alone."

"You are sure that that snake killed old Hathaway's servant?" I asked, ignoring his suggestion that I quit the field.

"There can be no doubt about it. And it is equally sure that to-night or to-morrow night, or on the next night at the very latest, the deadly *karait* will be turned upon Hath-

away himself."

"But Stevenson said the doctor examined the servant's body and found not the least sign of any wound."

"The doctor didn't look in the right place," said Ruggles obstinately. "Come, I'll show you."

He led the way to the rear wing of the house where lay the powerful body of the man from whom the life had gone. Ruggles moved the rigid right hand.

"There," Ruggles said, "look there under where that hand pressed—that hand which, even in death, remained pressed against his neck. Let others believe that this man died of fright! Let his secret die with him! But we know that he died of a tiny wound, high up there on his neck where the snake's poison proved almost instantly fatal! Bend down a little and you will see it."

I did so, and there, as Ruggles had said, high up on the neck, were two punctures so tiny that scarcely a drop of blood had oozed through. "You realize," said Ruggles, allowing that rigid hand to return to its former position, "that there can be no doubt of what caused this man's death."

"But just a moment," I objected. "How could a snake, as small as you say this one is, reach to a man's neck even when, as in this case, the man was sitting down?"

"The snake was lifted to the man's neck by human hands."

"You can't mean that this servant held the snake, in fact committed suicide! No man would have selected such a terrible way to die!"

"No," Ruggles said. "Human hands directed the snake; but they were the hands of the half crazed fiend whom the snake serves."

"Who and what is this fiend, Ruggles?"
"There's no time to go into that now.
But I'll tell you this: many years ago,
Hathaway wronged this man or the man
thinks Hathaway did. It's the same, for
our purposes. And now this ancient enemy
has come, like a living nightmare, to wreak
his vengeance on Hathaway.

"You remember that the description which the servants gave us of him tallies exactly with what I said before that: he was short and slight, black haired and black eyed, of a dark tan skin. It is from India that he has come here with his deadly little snake as executioner; and it is to India that they will return with the errand completed unless we save Hathaway from them.

"Once I am in that house," Ruggles said, looking from the window across to the looming house on the edge of the marsh, "once there, Dan, I shall be able to defy these two demons successfully. But, though I bring the safety which Hathaway longs for, I am by no means sure he will let me enter his house."

He stopped abruptly. "A young man has just unlocked the high gate in front of the Hathaway house, locked it after him, and—yes, he's coming this way. He has no coat or hat on. It must be young Hathaway. We'll manage it! Good; he's turning in this driveway."

As he went out to meet the newcomer Ruggles said to me, confidently: "He'll take us back to his house with him when he goes; and, after his father and I have had a moment in private together, our course will be clear.

"Make it a point, Crane, to give me a private audience with the older man as soon as possible after the son takes us to the house. Occupy this young fellow's attention, and leave his father to me! I don't believe the son has been told of the danger his father—"

Ruggles hurried to the front of our house and I followed him.

CHAPTER IX

DESPAIR REIGNS



T was young Hathaway. He introduced himself immediately, and Ruggles said that we were friends of Lemuel Stevenson, and that we were

visiting him over the week-end.

"I am sorry," said young Hathaway, "that my father and I have made you, in a way, sharers in the unfortunate occurrence which took place at our house last night." He was tall and fair-haired and held himself in a simple, manly way, looking us frankly in the eyes in a way which commended him to us at once.

He did not seem over twenty-five, nor overvigorous, but with a resolute will for all that. He was clearly ill at ease over the fact of the body of his father's dead servant lying in the house which, as Stevenson's guests, we occupied. "If I could have avoided the situation in any way—" he went on.

"Please do not think of it again," Ruggles said cordially. "Mr. Stevenson has been called to the city and will not return until to-morrow, but he told us—"

For the first time young Hathaway's face showed more than embarrassment. He was anxious on the instant: "What did Mr. Stevenson tell you?" young Hathaway asked nervously.

For a moment Ruggles hesitated. Then he said earnestly, "I will tell you more than you may expect to hear. I am, as I have said, a friend of Mr. Stevenson; but he asked me to come here because I have had the good fortune to be able to help, in

some cases, those who were threatened with danger beyond their own power to escape."

Hathaway's frank manner had gone, as I have said; but now his nervousness gave way to almost hostile aversion. "Are you a detective?" he asked bluntly.

"Perhaps you might call me one," my companion said quietly. "My name is Ruggles."

Young Hathaway's expression did not change. "I have not the honor of your acquaintance," he said haughtily. "You may be well known in New York; but my father and I do not go to the city. Since coming here, three weeks ago, we have kept wholly to ourselves."

"Do you prefer this country to Europe?" Ruggles asked, careless in manner now, as Hathaway was tense and alert. "I imagine that, to any one who has lived, for example, in India—"

"I am afraid," young Hathaway interrupted, "that you are not showing much skill, just now, as a detective, Mr. Ruggles; neither my father nor I have ever set foot in India."

"It is an interesting country," said Ruggles lightly. "The people native there have their own way of doing things. I was just speaking to my friend, Crane, about it. The subject came up from something I found here in Mr. Stevenson's house just now." Ruggles slowly took from his pocket the garlic bulb.

But if Ruggles or I expected any confession from young Hathaway's face, we were disappointed; he showed only fierce anger.

"I might have known," he said bitterly, "that Stevenson would tell you what any gentleman would have realized was to be kept a matter of confidence; I mean, of course, my father's—visit—to Mr. Stevenson's property last evening. I hope that Mr. Stevenson told you that my father is very old, a sick man, a victim of an illness of long standing—"

"A victim," Ruggles interrupted sternly, "of a danger which you obviously know nothing about. We lose time, Mr. Hathaway!"

"We do, indeed, lose time," cried young Hathaway, turning away from us. "I may as well tell you that, when you speak of danger threatening my father, you are acting impertinently and are talking nonsense! I have come to look once more at the servant who died last night-"

"You mean, who was killed last night,"

said Ruggles evenly.

"I must refer you to the doctor," said Hathaway insolently. "The man died a natural death."

"With terror written, even in death, on his face!"

Hathaway, who had turned away, swung back and faced us.

"I remember you now, Mr. Ruggles," he said, less scornfully. "Though I do not go to the city and have been in this country only a few weeks, I read some of the newspapers, and I recall some of the stories printed about your ability. But I must tell you that in this case you are wrong."

"Wait a moment," Ruggles said earnestly; "believe, if you will, that your servant died a natural death. Yet his face, as I have just said, shows the uttermost terror. He was a fearless man, accustomed to danger. You admit that?"

Hathaway inclined his head. "Yes," he said.

" Have you not thought yourself that it was strange for his face, in death, to bear the expression it has?" Again young Hathaway bowed. "He died in terror," Ruggles went on, "and your father knows the cause. Your father will die as his servant died unless-"

Young Hathaway shook himself free of the spell of Ruggles's strange words. will not believe it," he cried obstinately. "If danger threatened my father, he would have told me! If poor Tom "-young Hathaway with a gesture indicated the rear wing of the house-" had died of a wound or-"

"Look at his body again," Ruggles said "Press back the right hand and look at the skin high up on the neck against which the hand presses. You will see there two small punctures, where the tiny fangs set the poison in. Then go back to your house and realize your father's deadly danger and his-despair.

"Then if your father and you will let my friend and me help you against the enemy who means to kill both of you as he has already killed your servant, come back and tell us that we can be by your side when that enemy tries to strike again."

For a moment young Hathaway seemed about to speak. Then, with a baffled gesture, he turned and left us, and we saw his tall, slender form pass with lagging steps to the rear wing of the house.

A few minutes later we saw him descend the drive on the way back to his home, his shoulders slumped, his head drooping forward on his breast.

CHAPTER X

THE KILLER STALKS THE KILLER



N half an hour, perhaps less," said Ruggles, "we shall have their decision."

"What if-" I began.

"Let's not cross any

bridges before we come to them. By the way, it's only fair to let this little fellow have his supper now. I'd wanted old Hathaway to meet him that way; but I shan't wait any longer. The ichneumon has had nothing to eat since early morning and is probably ravenous. A piece of raw meat is what he needs, and there's probably some in Stevenson's icebox."

"I know where it is," I said; "I noticed it when we talked in the kitchen this morning with Mrs. Hollifield." Then, as I led the way, I said: "I don't know much about the habits of the ichneumon, how often he should be fed, or much of anything about him. What part do you expect him to play in this present situation?"

"I should have gone into that more with you; the ichneumon is more dreaded by snakes than any other animal in the world. Small as he is, he will take on an eighteen-foot cobra as quickly as he will a garter snake. He's one of the quickest things there is in the animal world and one of the most fearless.

"Though he looks so harmless, he is really a natural killer, and snakes are his specialty. That's what I mean when I say that if this little creature had been in the Hathaway house last night, Tom, the servant, would not have died.

"For the ichneumon's sense of smell is enormously developed, and he would have smelled out that *karait* in time to spring on it before it could bite; or if, as I am sure was the case, the *karait* was lifted by its savage keeper, to where it could reach Tom's neck, this little ichneumon would still have saved Tom, for he would have made such a fuss, having smelled the *karait* from a distance, that he would have warned Tom to be on his guard.

"This little fellow is a born investigator of smells, noises, and a thousand other things which his miraculously keen senses reveal to him, but of which we never dream of the existence. He is brave and yet, generally, cautious.

"I mean that though he sometimes rushes on a snake so eagerly that he gets wounded, his most frequent and certain mode of proceeding is by a cautious, quick dart either on the head or the neck of the reptile, disabling it by breaking its back in one bite. You can see what a valuable little guardsman he will be to old Mr. Hathaway, if only the father and son will consent to accept him." Ruggles stopped abruptly, for the door bell had rung. "I wonder if that can be young Hathaway, back so soon?" he said.

We gave up, for the moment, the search for fresh meat for the little ichneumon, and hastened to let Hathaway in. His face, as we led him into the living room, told the tale.

"My father," he began at once, in a tone and with a manner very different from his earlier visit, "asks me to express to you his gratitude for your interest in his personal safety and your offer to help him in any way in your power. But he asks me to tell you as well, Mr. Ruggles, that he cannot accept your offer. I have done all that I can to try to induce him to admit you to his confidence; but he is immovable. He now will trust no one!"

"Can you let me have two minutes with him—one?" Ruggles said with deep feeling. "Why did he come here to Stevenson's garden, seeking garlic bulbs? It was because the garlic bulbs which your father ordinarily kept close to his bed every night, had been mysteriously taken away. I have

not been in your house. You are the only member of the household I have talked with; but, I ask you, is not what I have just said the truth? Yes or no, Mr. Hathaway?

"Hasn't your father, back as far as you can remember, kept a jar of garlic bulbs by his bed every single night? When they were taken away, has not he always showed terror immediately on discovering the loss of the bulbs? And when he has acquired fresh bulbs, has he not always showed as mysterious but as evident relief? That's the truth, I say! Isn't it?"

"Yes, it's true as that we're standing here," said young Hathaway. "But how could you know it?"

"Have you ever asked him why he kept the bulbs by his bed every night of his life?"

"Yes, and he said that it was simply a habit of his."

"But it was not habit which made your father begin to insist that you, too, have garlic bulbs by your bed, since arriving here, three weeks ago," said Ruggles.

Young Hathaway stared at him. "You've never been in our house, as you say, or talked with any of us except me! And yet you know, in some manner I can't account for, about my father's passion for garlic bulbs. Tell me what has been puzzling me for years, Mr. Ruggles: why does my father insist on having these bulbs in his bedroom and in my own?"

"Because," said Ruggles slowly, "the natives of India believe that the odor from the bulbs offends the delicate mechanism of the olfactory nerves and nasal organs of the karait and cobra—with the result that these deadly reptiles will not go into a room where garlic bulbs are kept. So the natives keep garlic bulbs as a protection against these most dangerous snakes."

"But my father-"

"He is taking this means to protect himself, as best he can, against the *karait*. Similarly, he believes he is protecting you."

Young Hathaway put his hand to his forehead in a bewildered way. "Can you tell me more? It will help me to—protect my father—"

"I will tell you this much more now,"

said Ruggles, "because it is most important for you to know it: the reptile which killed your servant, Tom, and now threatens your father and yourself with the same terrible fate, is beyond question the *karait*.

"It cannot be a cobra, for the relentless being, who has brought this snake here, carries it about in a hollowed-out bamboo rod, i. e., a slender, little bamboo rod from which he has hollowed out the pith at the joints; and no member of the cobra family is sufficiently small to be carried in such a space. Keep your eyes open every instant you can, night and day, for a darkskinned, small, slender, black-haired, black-eyed man who carries in his hand a thin bamboo walking stick."

"Your description fits our Japanese butler, except for the bamboo walking stick," said young Hathaway. "Could he

e-"

"No, your father's enemy and yours is from India, and India alone. From there, he has come here to wreak his vengeance on your father and has brought the deadly little *karait* as executioner."

Young Hathaway started back and his cheeks paled. "Have you seen this man and his—snake?"

"No, but during Mr. Stevenson's absence, the man came into the kitchen of this house with his bamboo rod in his hand. The housekeeper and the cook saw him, and they saw the snake's eyes, without recognizing them as such. But even so, the sight and the man's exertion of his strange, hypnotic power, threw the two servants into unconsciousness.

"That was the first time and the only time they have seen him; but there is strong reason for believing he entered this house, in the night, several times before, probably to steal food for his snake and himself. He comes and he goes again, soundless as a ghost.

"He may be in this house now, crouched motionless as a huge bat in one of the

blackest corners of the huge old attic, or where the shadows are deepest in the cellar beneath—waiting for the night to come always waiting for the long-sought opportunity to strike your father down."

"Good God!" cried young Hathaway.
"If only I could convince my father of this creature's existence—this inhuman

devil and his snake-"

"No need to do that," Ruggles said somberly; "your father knows of their existence only too well, as I have tried to make clear to you."

"Do you mean that my father knows this Indian native?"

"Beyond any doubt."

"But I tell you my father has never been in India!"

"Before your birth, your father undoubtedly lived there long!"

Ruggles looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. "You have been here too long already. Go back to your father and tell him all or nothing—just as you see fit—of what I have said. Try to persuade him to let Crane and me come and spend the night in your house.

"And," Ruggles added, as we entered the living room on the way to the front door of the house, "take with you this ichneumon, or, as many people prefer to call it, this mongoose; he, too, is an enemy of the *karait*, as your father knows. Your father may consent to receive the mongoose, though refusing to accept my offices."

"A mongoose!" said young Hathaway.

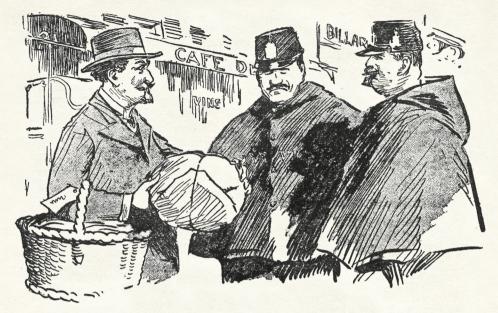
"May I see it a moment, before I take it back with me to our house?"

"Certainly," said Ruggles, undoing the string and lifting the cover of the box.

Then Ruggles started back with a fierce cry, and, thrusting his hand into the box, he brought out the limp and lifeless body of the mongoose, whose head had been crushed within the past few moments by a relentless hand, for the soft, flexible body was still warm.

TO BE CONTINUED





"This parcel contains two large hams, gentlemen," said Voibo

THE ONE-TIME CRIMINAL

By Louise Rice

CRIMINOLOGISTS AND DETECTIVES FAIL TO EXPLAIN THE INCENUITY AND FIENDISHNESS OF THIS PEACEFUL CITIZEN IN HIS ONLY CRIME

A Story of Fact



ERY once in awhile, in going over the criminal records of the world, the investigator comes across some famous story which shows the inexplicable

depths of the human heart. A man or a woman, without criminal ancestry and seemingly without criminal instincts, suddenly seems to turn into a jungle beast.

A deed is done that might well make a hardened criminal pause. Search as we may, we cannot find, as we usually can in crime histories, the true mainspring of the fearful action.

This is especially true of the very occasional murder.

The case which prompted these reflec-

tions was that of Pierre Voibo, who, in 1869, in Paris, become one of these mysterious and baffling criminals and the perpetrator of one of the most revolting of murders.

Voibo was a tailor, but he was by no means a mere workman. He had good manners, he was known to a good many people not of the working classes, he was a lover of the simple pleasures of the milder night life of Paris.

He liked to be well dressed, and to stroll on the boulevard after the theater with "the swells," and to have his bock in fashionable restaurants. It was true that he was a little of a spendthrift, but he was not a vicious man in any sense of the word and was quite moral and good natured.

The very nice girl to whom he had been paying court for some time, in the discreet manner of the French middle classes, was interested in him and, in fact, he was a pleasant figure, always well dressed, always good natured, friendly, and attentive. Her father, in the French manner, had investigated the young tailor and decided that the match was entirely suitable, but had demanded that Voibo add ten thousand francs to the girl's dowry of fifteen thousand francs.

When Bodasse Disappeared

Well, as Voibo was in love with the girl, he was also well in love with the modest dowry which she would bring. Not so modest, either, when you remember that this was long before any such cost of living as we know now had been imagined as possible and while Europe was still on the living scale which it had known for hundreds of years.

The fifteen thousand francs would pay some very pressing debts that the tailor had and would clear up his business so that he could branch out a little.

In his difficulty—for he did not have even a thousand francs, Voibo went to his most intimate friend, an old man named Desirè Bodasse, who was a worker in fine tapestries. The old man was an eccentric—had few friends, was a confirmed bachelor and a miser, and lived for a week on what would have just about paid Voibo's dinner check.

Bodasse knew of the impending marriage and had warned his young friend that, in his opinion, the man who married might as well go and jump in the Seine and be done with it. But, notwithstanding this, he really was fond of the dapper young man, and Voibo had hopes that Bodasse would advance the ten thousand francs, as he could do, if he chose.

Bodasse, however, absolutely refused to do this. He told his young friend that the marriage was all the better for being put out of mind. From what came out afterward, it seems that Voibo, when he found that he could not get the money, agreed that perhaps he had better not marry. Then he tried to borrow the money to put into

his business, believing that he could use it for the dowry without the knowledge of the old man, who often did not even read the newspaper for weeks together.

Old Bodasse was a very queer character. He was such an expert workman that he could get work whenever he chose and drop it when he chose, knowing that he could return to it as he choose. It was his habit, then, to occasionally lock himself up in his room and refuse to open it to any one.

Letters would be pushed under the door and a restaurant well used to the old man would send him in, once a day, a hot meal and a bottle of wine, which would be left at the door. Bodasse would take it in when he was sure no one was looking. The secret of these disappearances was never known.

The probability is that the old man was a mild drug taker and that occasionally he indulged himself in his taste with an isolated orgy. Sometimes he would leave the house, carrying a little old black bag and be gone for weeks. He was, therefore, a person of such erratic habits that no one would notice it if he were gone for quite awhile.

To Dispose of the Body

Voibo had invited the old man out to a café after their business conversation, and something of this ran through his mind, he afterward declared, as he sat and thought what he was to do. He did not mean to miss having the girl nor her money, and he had no wealthy friends.

He had been for a long time a member of the secret police of Paris, bringing information when he could and occasionally being assigned to some special work. He had, on several occasions, when very hard pushed, used this position of his for the obtaining of small sums of blackmail, but there was no "prospect" from whom he could hope to squeeze the amount of ten thousand francs, and—queer kink in his mind—he hated himself for ever having yielded to the temptation at all. What seemed to Voibo a better scheme was to murder the solitary old man and get the money.

The plan was fully matured by the time that the two men finished their meal. The

waiter noticed that the shabby old man laid his hand fondly on the shoulder of the younger as they went out. Voibo invited his elderly friend to come and spend some hours at his rooms, and the old man did so. It was late when they arrived—about the dinner hour—and no one saw the two go in.

The young tailor waited until the old man had his back turned and then he struck him on the head with one of the heavy flat irons of his trade. While the man lay unconscious, Voibo cut his throat.

His next business was to dispose of the body.

What the Packages Held

As is so often the case, the first thing he did was to cut off the head, and then to dismember the body. There was a good deal of blood, but the resourceful murderer kept the stains from "setting" on the floor by pouring water over them.

The floor slanted a little and the water drained off to the part under the bed, which was over a shed, so that there was no danger of the drip falling on any ceiling below and thus disclosing the crime.

The head was, as always in this dreadful operation, the difficult matter, since, without it recognition is difficult. Voibo filled the eyes and mouth with lead and tied it up with a weight.

No one had seen the old man go into Voibo's rooms and no one went to his rooms. The next night he set about the matter of disposing of the body.

It was Christmas time, and he rightly judged that a person with large bundles would be far less conspicuous at that time than otherwise. He thought of taking a cab, but shrewdly rejected that as too sure to leave a trail.

Parts of the body he packed in a hamper, in which a relative had sent him some Christmas goodies and gifts, and the thighs he made up to look like butcher's packages. Burdened with this he went out on the snowy streets, his heart in his mouth.

It is worth while to stop and remember that his heart was in his mouth, as he afterward confessed, not with horror of what he hugged to him, but with the simple fear that he would be found out. Yet this was a man who was gentle to animals and had never so much as slaughtered a chicken in his life.

These nocturnal figures, lugging with them the horrible bits of flesh, these people with knives and cleavers and blood-stained hands, familiarly handling the body of their victim—how in the world do their nerves stand it? Where do they get the coolness? Where, indeed, do they get the stomach for it?

The deadly qualm that attacks the normal person at the sight and especially at the touch of such objects is innate. Even detectives and criminologists often feel it, yet here was a young man in the flush of youth, never having had so much as a bloody fight in his life, who coolly spends a night and a day in a charnel house, a shambles, then washes up and goes out to brave the world with parts of his victim. This is the real and amazing mystery of these one-time murders of horror.

Well, Voibo got along very well in the merry jostling crowd until two policemen who had been eying him suddenly stopped him and demanded to know what was in his very heavy packages.

Deep in the Seine

The little tailor must have had an iron nerve, for, although he was shaking with fright, he said:

"I am carrying home my purchases, messieurs, as I could not get a cab near the market and now I am halfway, so I might as well go on."

"Well, what were your purchases?" they demanded.

"This parcel contains two large hams, gentlemen—you can feel them," said Voibo, coolly offering the package containing the thighs of the old man. The policemen poked at them and were satisfied. Voibo had chosen his simile well!

"And what's in that hamper—a big one?" demanded the other policeman.

"A hamper from home," said Voibo, offering it for inspection, "it just arrived for me by express."

In the street light the date on the tag was obscure and the policemen were quite satisfied with the explanation, borne out so well by the hamper, so they said that that was all right and let *monsieur* get along, for it was true that his packages were heavy.

They had stopped Voibo only because there had been several robberies of houses in the neighborhood and they were investigating all men who carried heavy packages.

The "purchases" were dropped in the Seine.

The tailor was afraid to try another expedition with any kind of bundle after this, and so he decided to drop the legs down the well of an apartment house near by, to which he could have access at night without being observed. This well was not used for drinking water. Afterward, he said that his conscience would not have allowed him to drop them in the well if he had not known that the water was used only for washing clothes!

The Day of the Wedding

In and between all this Voibo had been seeing his sweetheart and telling her father that his wealthy, but eccentric, friend Bodasse would give him his ten thousand, and the family were all pleased. They wanted Bodasse to be invited to come and visit them, and Voibo said that he would gladly convey the invitation, but that he doubted that it would be accepted.

It had been years, said he, since Bodasse had been out socially and now it seemed that he never would go again, which, of course, was true in a sense that was other than it seemed to the grateful family of the bride.

He now went at night to the rooms of Bodasse, to which he had long had a key and there did what he knew the old man was accustomed to do. Walked up and down the room for an hour or two, coughed and wheezed occasionally and forged the writing of the dead man in a note which he left for the concierge. He found and took all the gold that Bodasse had so long hoarded in his rooms and all the securities.

As he left, silently and in stockinged feet, in the dead of night, he lighted a big candle, which burned near the window until long after dawn and made the neighbors say that the old man must be on one of his secret sprees again, for when he was he often allowed candles to burn out after the day had come.

Voibo invented a very good disguise, too, in which he looked very much like the old man. As he always went and came at night, and as Bodasse had frequently passed the concierge without speaking or looking, his chin buried in his collar and his hat pulled down over his eyes, it was possible for Voibo to actually pass the concierge without a thought entering the head of the latter that it was not his lodger who shuffled by in the usual somewhat shabby, but clean, garments.

On several occasions Voibo sent a note to the restaurant that the food and drink which was the custom should be sent him and then went there at night and took it in and ate it.

The ten thousand francs were turned over to the girl's parents.

"Père Bodasse may be persuaded to attend the wedding," Voibo told his sweetheart," and, anyway, I am sure that he will give us a nice present."

However, he regretfully announced on the day of the wedding that Bodasse had an attack of his strange shyness and has run off to the mysterious retreat in the country, and so they were married and went away on a trip. The bride then and thereafter adored her husband, whom she considered a model man and who made her very happy so long as the storm did not break.

Mace Studies Legs

That the storm was brewing Voibo found out in 1870. He had had the decency not to take his young wife to the murder apartment and what with her money and all they were getting along very well.

But through his connection with the secret police the tailor found out that a pair of legs, well wrapped, had been found in a well of an apartment house on the Rue Princesse. A young detective named Mace, whom Voibo knew quite well, was on the case.

Voibo made it a point to meet Mace shortly afterward, and Mace, unsuspecting, told Voibo, whom he knew to have an official connection with the police, about the new case that he had.

Mace believed that the legs belonged to an old woman, since they had long stockings on them and that her name began with a "B," since this letter was sewed into the top of one. But Dr. Tardieu, a well known physician, who examined them, believed that they were the legs of an old man.

After a few days Mace confided to Voibo that he believed the cloth in which the legs were wrapped and the string with which they were tied were such as tailors use in sending home suits of clothes, although he was not sure: and he subjected those objects to the professional scrutiny of Voibo!

The Stocking Maker

The tailor did not flinch, but handled the objects with which he must have had such associations, and finally gave it as his opinion that they were the same kind of paper and string that tailors sometimes use, but that butchers used them, too, for the wrapping of large parcels of meat.

Mace thought, he said, that he would try to look up the matter of the tailor first. Voibo agreed that he might as well, and then excused himself, for he had to go home to his wife, who was not very well. Although there had been some little inducement of money in the marriage, the husband had been impeccable in the care of his wife and her relations were loud in their praise.

It was their testimony afterward that he never showed the slightest uneasiness, or the slightest ill nature or moodiness during all this time while Mace was slowly digging down in the case.

Slowly, patiently, as is the immemorial custom of the Paris secret police, Mace worked his way along the Rue Princesse until he came to the house. There, by patient questioning, he found out that Voibo had had a room there and that while it was nominally the room of a seamstress named Dard, Voibo alone had occupied it finally. The name of Bodasse was mentioned, too, since the friendship between the dapper young man and the eccentric old one had occasioned some little remark.

Mace looked up the residence of the old miser, but on inquiring for him was told that Bodasse was even then at home, but that he was in one of his usual *incommunicado* sessions. Repeated knockings at the door brought footsteps from within and a senile mumble.

The concierge, in no wise disconcerted, said that this was nothing—that M. Bodasse often spent weeks in seclusion, in fact, come to think of it—said the concierge—he himself had not actually seen the old man for a long time.

Mace left a note for the old man and went away, very thoughtful. There had been something vaguely familiar about the tones of that mumble. He could not place it, he could not put his finger on anything and it looked as if it were absurd to trace a man who was seemingly following his usually erratic course in life, but there remained that queer sensation—in short, Detective Mace had what we now call a hunch.

He played that hunch by finding out that Bodasse had an ancient aunt down in the country. She was sent for, came to Paris, under astonished protest, but at once expressed the gravest fears when she saw the stockings which had been on the legs.

She declared that she herself had made them from the feet of men's socks and the tops of women's stockings, because Bodasse was a chronic sufferer from cold and pains in his legs.

Beyond Human Understanding

Mace and some of his companions thereupon returned to the room of Bodasse and demanded admittance in the name of the law. That was the time when Voibo was not on hand to make the impersonation. The room was obviously empty, and after the due warning required by law, the door was broken open.

It was at once clear that something unusual was going on in that room. There were bits of clothing that did not belong to the old man, many cigarette stubs—which he was known not to use—old food lying about, the bed not slept in.

Still, this was not enough as yet. The police began to hunt through Paris for some of the securities which the old man was thought to have had. They found some Italian securities which Voibo had sold.

The case was complete and the arrest of Voibo was ordered.

That very day Voibo called casually on Mace at police headquarters and chatted about the case. Mace agreed that the matter was a mystery, that Bodasse was undoubtedly alive, although putting in a longer period than usual of seclusion, and Voibo sorrowfully said that for a long time now he had been unable to get his old friend to come out of his room. He feared for his reason, that he might slip out some night and make away with himself.

Mace, in watching the man, was astonished at the sincerity with which he spoke. However, the fates were just about to hand Voibo the one black mark—the fatal ace—for as he was about to go he put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief and in doing that pulled out a card which fell to the floor.

Mace politely stooped and picked it up, and saw that it was for a passage on a boat leaving France that very day. Voibo, foreseeing that he could not keep up the impersonation of Bodasse and knowing that the long hunt was drawing to its close, had made up his mind to abandon his wife, his home, and his country and fly for his life.

Mace instantly arrested the man, knowing that it would be most unwise to allow him to slip out of sight.

Voibo's acting then was so convincing, Mace afterward said, that if he had not had positive proof, in the finding of the Italian securities, he would have never believed it possible that it was not an amazed, indignant, and innocent man who had been accused.

As it was, Mace compelled Voibo to take him home and there to disgorge other securities, which were found hidden in the basement of the house. Voibo's wife fainted when they were found. Up to that very moment, she refused to believe a word of the accusation.

Then Mace took Voibo, still protesting that Bodasse had given him the securities, to the old room where the murder had been done and by slowly pouring water on the floor and observing that the tilt of the room made it run under the bed, found where there was the possibility of blood having

dripped. He tore up the boards and found the dust below thick with dried and clotted blood.

Voibo broke down when he saw that, and confessed.

The case was closed, all but the actual conducting of it before the courts, but Voibo never appeared.

Some one—and who, was ever a mystery—got a small, sharp knife to Voibo, the tailor, and one night, without a cry or a sound to betray him, he cut his throat. The guards found him stiff and cold.

As a one time murder this one stands almost alone. There is no way by which one can judge this case.

Voibo lost all his assurance and his astounding nerve the instant that he saw the blood of Bodasse under his old floor. After that he was a brooding, silent figure, refusing to eat, seldom sleeping, a man ridden with fears and horrors, and hardly able to talk coherently. Every one, including Detective Mace, thought that his devoted wife, as the last service that she could do him, got him the instrument of self-destruction.

But, think of the nerve that he had before that! Think of the lonely task of cutting up the body, of spending hours and hours with the bits of flesh! Think of the solitary hours spent in the room of the victim, imitating his walk, imitating his speech—an ordeal which, imposed as a sort of third degree for a short time by the Paris police—one of their clever last resorts to compel a breakdown—has been known to bring a hardened criminal out weeping and hysterical!

Think of the open life the man seemed to lead, and think of the incessant watchfulness it must have needed in order to time the impersonations of Bodasse in his room so that Voibo, the happily married man and busy tailor, would not be missed!

Voibo seems never to have felt a quiver during his frightful crime or during the time afterward while he knew himself unsuspected, yet there was nothing in his previous life and nothing in his ancestry to suggest that even the smallest crime would be possible to him. Such crimes as these are the ones which completely baffle criminologists and psychologists.



"It's the size and shape of a grave"

SACKCLOTH

By Winston Bouve

THROUGH A MIRE OF PASSIONS, MISCARRIED AND VICIOUS, NEM PARSONS
TRACED THE CHANCE MARKS LEADING TO THE DOUBLE TRACEDY



EM PARSONS leaned back in his swivel chair, rubbed a reflective thumb across a smooth, pink jowl, and surveyed his caller with blue eyes that were wise

and as innocent as an infant's.

It was a plain, colorless little woman who faced him, hands clasped tightly in her decent black silk lap, worn face twitching with worry; but her halting story kept the old detective alert and interested.

"And there's no trace of her, hide or hair, since she left the Suttons and started home. I'm near distracted, Mr. Parsons—not that Rose Miller was dear as a daughter to me, being only my husband's niece and a

girl who wouldn't take a word of warning or scold from any one—but she's young, and flighty, and hasn't a soul but me to look after her."

Parsons puckered his lips, squinted thoughtfully at the cabinet photograph Mrs. Miller had laid upon his desk. From the water marked sepia folder a plump, pretty face, lit by laughing, coquettish eyes that must have been blue, smiled at him.

The girl's face was shallow; her beauty may have lacked distinction; but Nem knew that those soft, big eyes, that curved mouth and dimpled chin, spelled allure to most men. There was something pitiful about the photograph. It was so like a challenge to a game already won.

For that sweet, come-hither look would attract men who could best Rose Miller so easily, so willingly; that rustic beauty, fresh and lovely now, was destined to early ripeness and decay.

"Must have been a mighty pretty girl,"

Nem said softly.

The inadvertent past tense caught the

woman up with a gasp.

"Must have been-then you think what I do! Rose never ran away, Mr. Parsons. She'd no reason to, winding me 'n' her uncle around her finger as she did. I thought of that first off. And if she'd run away she'd never have left all her good clothes, her savings, like she did.

"And who'd she run away with? liked George Link best of all the fellows she had hangin' around. But she didn't like him well enough for that—a fickle, changeable girl was Rose! Besides, he's as worried as I am. Clean crazy about her,

George is."

Nem grunted, passing an enormous hand tenderly over the graying fluff that fringed his baldness and made him look like an elderly cherub.

"George Link, who has the garage, corner of State and Elm? Nice looking young

fellow."

He hadn't been on Bridgehaven's police force for twenty-seven years without knowing a good deal about every one in the small manufacturing city and its environs. Link, he knew, was a hard-working, efficient young mechanic, who had become owner of the garage he had spoken of, in spite of his wild ways.

For George Link was wild, in the parlance of Bridgehaven; attractive to women, with his black hair and ruddy coloring and splendid physique; attracted by them; able to hold a vast amount of bootleg liquor after a grilling day's work, and still beat all comers at Kelly pool.

Nem felt a sudden prescience of tragedy. The instinct that made him as good a detective as he was told him that Rose Miller was in sore need of aid-or possibly be-

voná it.

"Yes," her aunt in law said dully. "If only she hadn't played fast and loose with him she'd be better off now. Something's happened to her, Mr. Parsons—something

Nem patted her shrunken shoulder reassuringly.

"Now, don't go imagining things, Mis' Miller. I'll go see Link, and then I'll drop in on the Suttons, where she works. They might know something they didn't think to tell you over the phone."

Nem regretted, as he heaved his vast bulk up out of the chair that encompassed it, that Arthur Sutton and his wife had to be involved in the affair, and all that it

foreboded.

For the Suttons had had their share of tragedy already. Sutton had brought his wife to Bridgehaven seven years before, when he became professor of economics at the Industrial College on the outskirts of the city. They had not occupied the pretty timbered-brick bungalow two years when an automobile accident left Alice Sutton a cripple for life, paralyzed from the waist down, chained to bed or wheelchair.

Sutton had dedicated his life to the care of the invalid; and, whatever the cost to the man, he had fulfilled his tragic obliga-

tion beyond the letter.

When Nem had parted from the troubled little woman on the steps of the red brick building that was headquarters he turned up State Street toward Link's garage.

During the short walk in the April sunshine he checked off all that he had been told, all that he had gleaned, from Rose Miller's aunt. And when he faced handsome George Link as that individual crawled out from under a truck, it was with conviction.

" My name's Parsons," Nem began, "Rose Miller's aunt came down to headquarters this afternoon, feelin' real worried about Rose-"

Link flung down the greasy wrench he held, wiped his hands on his overalls.

"If she hadn't, I would have." His dark eyes glittered. "Want to step into the office? We'll be more private there."

He preceded Nem into a cluttered, dingy little room, cleared off one of the two chairs with a sweep of his elbow for his caller, and dropped into the other.

"I suppose you think I know something

about her. Ask any one who was at Riordan's pool parlor last night if I wasn't there from half past nine till midnight, missing most of my shots, waiting for her!"

He ripped out the words savagely.

Nem dug a leisurely thumb into the bowl of his veteran pipe, waited for Link to vent that which was boiling up within him.

"A little after ten I called up Sutton's house, and Mr. Sutton said she'd just left. Wherever she went she didn't come here, as she said she would. And that's all I know—except—"

His brown jaw clamped in a sort of violent indecision. Nem spoke:

"Except that you've got some idea of what might have happened to her."

The young man's black eyes flickered, fell. He was obviously ridden by fear; not for himself, but for the girl. Ridden too with a gnawing uncertainty.

"Just that, Mr. Parsons; I'm not saying it did happen—God knows! But the house-keeper where Rose works—Rose is sort of companion nurse to Mrs. Sutton, who can't walk—has it in for Rose, and on my account." He hung his dark head, struck the battered oak desk with the flat of his hand.

"Reckon I'd better come clean with you. The housekeeper up there — Ellen Clarke her name is—and I, well, we kept company until Rose came along. Ellen's older than I am; she's forty anyway, and I guess she likes me a lot. Women her age get sort of batty about a man, sometimes.

"I'm not holding any brief for myself, but it wasn't all my fault. Then when I met up with Rose, it was all off. Ellen took it hard, all right. But she soon saw that her ranting around wouldn't do any good. So she took it out in being nasty to the girl."

Nem, squinting through his smoke, filled in to his own satisfaction the gaps in the jerky, sordid story.

"And last night—Ellen's night off it was—she came down here to the garage right after supper, and made an awful rumpus. She was wild, all right. She cried, and raged, and—threatened." Link's voice was low, toneless as he recounted the scene. "She swore she'd kill Rose if I didn't stop seeing her, even if she had to swing for it!

I laughed, and she took herself off. And Rose never showed up. That's all I know."

II



EM drew on his pipe, mammoth hands resting idle on his knees.

"Weren't you kind of uneasy?" he asked meekly.

Link made a vicious stab at the scarred desk with the penknife he was playing with.

"Not then." A sullen red crept up to his temples. "Rose doesn't keep all her dates with me, you see. She's got me coming and going, Mr. Parsons. I—I take a lot from her that I wouldn't take from any other girl in town."

There was pathos in his look, and Nem remembered the challenging coquetry of the sepia photograph. But he was too anxious to take the next trolley out to the Sutton's home on Golden Hill Avenue and interview Ellen Clarke to offer more than brusque solace.

"She may turn up any time. Don't worry, and keep quiet until you've heard from me."

He saw the street car lurch around the corner, and lumbered toward it. His flapping gray clothes, his clumsy girth and gait, made him elephantine, ludicrous. But he swung on to the trolley ahead of the men who had been waiting for it, and seated himself far up in front, close to the motorman.

He nodded to the scattered handful of passengers.

"Business kind of dull this time of day, isn't it?"

The motorman chuckled, not averse to breaking the rule placarded above him.

"It's lively compared to what it is later on; lots of times I make the run from Golden Hill into town with the car empty. Easy shift, mine. From four to midnight."

"Guess you know most everybody that gets on and off, then?" Nem mused, and leaned forward confidentially to put a question on whose answer hung more than the public employee could guess.

When he got off the street car at the foot of Golden Hill he contemplated the climb ahead of him. The last rays of the April

sunshine illumined the hill, cast a sort of glamour upon the modest dwellings that dotted the avenue sparsely. For Golden Hill had never been developed as much as other outlying sections of Bridgehaven. Ten minutes' walk brought Nem to his destination—the last house on the thoroughfare, just over the crest of the hill.

The Sutton bungalow stood well back from the street, on a lonely site. Beyond it stretched empty fields that would one day be plotted off into neat suburban streets. Behind it, below the flower and vegetable gardens that bespoke Arthur Sutton's hobby, the lot degenerated into swamp land that had yet to be drained.

Nem mounted the veranda steps, rang. But it was not Ellen Clarke who admitted him. A tall, gaunt man with tired eyes and tufting dark hair, streaked with gray, greeted him with a courteous, questioning word.

Nem stated his business diffidently, was grateful for the professor's response, as he showed him into the book-lined study to the left of the center hall.

"We'll be glad to tell you all we know, Mr. Parsons. As a matter of fact, Rose Miller's aunt got in touch with you at my suggestion. She called up several times during the morning. My wife and I are very much worried, naturally—will you smoke?"

Nem took the proffered cigar, sat gingerly on the worn leather chair. He rather liked Arthur Sutton. What a mask his slender, bony face was; a mask that he had schooled himself to wear, perhaps. His eyes burned through it with some avid significance.

"Unfortunately I can tell you little enough. I went out directly after supper last night; I am tutoring one of my pupils in mathematics—Lloyd Dodge, on Walnut Street." The ghost of a smile touched his line.

"My pay isn't adequate to all my needs, unless I take on some outside work. We worked there until ten, and I strolled home, in spite of the light rain and his offer to drive me back. It was just ten twenty when I unlocked the front door.

"The phone was ringing. It had waked

my wife, who was already in bed, asleep. Some man asked for Rose, but she had left some time earlier, it transpired, after getting Mrs. Sutton to bed." He paused. "My wife is very much of an invalid, you see. When Rose didn't come at her usual hour this morning we were puzzled, for she has been very faithful. And when the aunt called up to ask about her—"

He shook his head in perplexity.

Nem scratched his creased pink neck with a pudgy forefinger.

"Mind if I go out and talk to the house-keeper?" he asked. "If seems she and Rose Miller weren't very good friends, but she might know something about the girl."

He heaved himself up.

"Ellen Clarke?" Arthur Sutton flicked off the ash that tipped his cigar. "Certainly. She is a competent, capable sort of woman. Indispensable to us. But she had little enough in common with Rose."

He preceded his caller down the pleasant center hall of the bungalow, off which the various rooms opened, to the kitchen.

Through its western windows the setting sun sent its shafts of light upon the immaculate blue and white workroom, upon a tall, deep-bosomed woman who was paring potatoes at the sink.

She looked up, and Nem saw a heavyboned, rather sullen face between smooth wings of black hair. Her eyes were lightish, hard as agate. Only a handsome, sulky mouth redeemed her from absolute plainness. And that betrayed the volcanic violence of her, at which George Link had hinted.

"This is Mr. Parsons, from police headquarters," said Sutton, in that lifeless, well modulated voice of his. "I have told him all we know of Rose Miller."

Nem saw the woman's thick brows meet; heard the clatter of the knife as it dropped. She raised her hand to her lips, sucked at the bright thread of scarlet that appeared between thumb and forefinger. Nem tendered a large, clean handkerchief, and clucked sympathetically under his breath.

"Right dangerous peelin' potatoes with a big knife like that. Apt to cut yourself bad." She moved her heavy shoulders impatiently.

"What should I know of Rose Miller?" If the old detective had ever seen hate, it smoldered in her eyes now.

"We're trying to figure out where she is, and why," Nem said. "You know any reason why she should run away like this?"

Sutton leaned against the wall, arms folded, thin face immobile. Once more Nem got the impression that he was too absorbed in his own tragic problems to be anything but remote.

The housekeeper's colorless skin seemed to go a shade paler, then crimsoned in an angry tide.

"No. Wherever she is, good riddance to her! Smirking, doll-faced—"

A soft creaking sound stopped her tirade against the missing girl. Nem turned to see a rubber-tired wheel chair, propelled by the woman who sat in it, glide over the threshold. Alice Sutton had been a pretty girl, might have been a handsome woman. But, though she was no more than thirty, the indefinable aura of age was about her.

Her pallid skin was taut over her cheek bones; her gray eyes sunken; her smooth, parted chestnut hair gave her the look of an austere madonna. A tragic figure, all told, with her thin, fragile hands emerging from the loose sleeves of her dark red dressing gown; her helpless limbs covered by a light robe.

Her eyes met her husband's, and Sutton explained Nem's errand.

"If only I could tell you precisely when she left last night!" Mrs. Sutton said, wrinkling her pale forehead. "She got me to bed a little after nine, and gave me my sleeping medicine. Mr. Sutton was out, and it was Ellen's evening out as well. I told Rose to run along, without waiting for Mr. Sutton to come back.

"She was tidying my room when I dropped off. I have a vague memory of hearing the door close—and then the ringing of the telephone awakened me, some time later. My husband had just come in and was answering it. The call was for Rose—"

"I told Mr. Parsons about it."

Sutton rearranged a pillow at his wife's back, and she thanked him with a pale smile.

Ellen Clarke wiped her powerful hands on the crash toweling close at hand.

"She went off in a hurry, Mrs. Sutton; such a hurry that she didn't stop for her raincoat. It's hanging in the outside pantry!" she told them defiantly, with a jerk of her dark head toward the door in question.

"And it was raining hard between nine and ten," Nem mused aloud.

He lumbered across the kitchen in his soft, creaking shoes and opened the pantry door. The small cubicle was used almost as a storeroom. A sink occupied one corner; a washing machine and other articles of household equipment filled most of the available space; but just opposite the door was a row of hooks. From one pended a green glazed raincoat—the sort of protection a girl would choose for inclement weather.

"This it?" Nem asked.

A little surprised gasp from Mrs. Sutton answered him.

"Yes. Why on earth didn't she wear it? Her frock was light, too—"

But Nem was inside the dark little room, taking the garment from its hook, kneeling with a grunt of discomfort to examine baseboard and floor.

Not one of the three could see what held him tense and expectant. He rose at last, round pink face inscrutable and solemn.

"She didn't wear it because, unless I'm mightily mistaken, she didn't leave this house alive, Mrs. Sutton." His blue eyes fastened upon the frightened, ashen face of the housekeeper, who was plucking at her apron.

"I knew when I came up here that she hadn't gone back to town by trolley last night, as she always did. Now I know more than that." He gestured to a dark, brownish stain on the baseboard that the girl's green coat had concealed. "That's blood, Mr. Sutton—fresh blood. She was probably lying here, dead, when you got in last night!"

Arthur Sutton passed a dazed hand over his forehead.

"I—such a thing couldn't have happened!" he muttered mechanically. "Lying here—good God!"

Alice Sutton clutched her husband's

"No-oh, no!"

Nem looked at her with compassion.

"I'm as sure as if we'd already found her." He looked away from the housekeeper's livid face. "We'll have to search."

III



IS mournful certitude wrenched a shuddering sigh from the invalid's lips. It evoked a defiant challenge from Ellen Clarke:

"I don't believe it! If it's true, it's no more than what she deserved—"

"Ellen!" said her mistress sharply.

Nem looked at the trembling house-keeper

"Where did you go after you left George Link's garage last night, Miss Clarke?"

She glared at him, but terror was writ upon her.

"So this is his doing? Your snooping around here—oh, I could kill him, and her too!" She laughed on a hysterical note. "But I didn't, God knows!"

"Mighty foolish of you to go down there with your threats," he said softly.

Alice Sutton spoke in breathless whisper, one thin hand at her throat.

"I—I knew nothing of all this. What does it mean?"

Sutton quelled the housekeeper with a look.

"Is it necessary that my wife listen to all this? She isn't strong enough to stand such a scene, Mr. Parsons."

He was behind the wheel chair, and he touched his heart with a slight, significant gesture. Nem glanced at her pityingly.

"'Course not; just make her comfortable, and come back to me."

Sutton guided the noiseless vehicle out through the kitchen to the front of the house. Nem surveyed the housekeeper, waved her into a chair with a curt nod of his head.

"You hain't answered me, Miss Clarke;

where'd you go after you left George Link at the garage?"

Her hands twisted feverishly in her lap; her light eyes gleamed with fear and malevolence.

"I went-walking."

"Alone?" Nem persisted.

"Alone. Oh, I was mad enough to strangle her; I'll grant you that. I reckon you know why. He was mine, George was, until she came along with her simpering face and yellow hair. But I took it out just in walking last night. It was pelting rain; blowing hard, too; but I didn't mind that. I walked out Easton way—miles and miles, I guess!"

"Meet any one?" Nem inquired idly. She shook her head.

"Not a soul. 'Twas close to one when I came in. I'd sat on a stile, thinking, for I don't know how long." Defiance edged her tone again. "I suppose you're looking for an alibi; why don't you find your dead girl first!"

He couldn't help pitying anything so consumed by venom. She was an embodied fury as she crouched there in the kitchen chair, glaring up at him.

"Reckon I will." He turned to face Sutton, who had come back, and was looking from one to the other. "Guess I'll have to ask you to show me around, Mr. Sutton. It oughtn't to take long."

Sutton shivered, his eyes still resting upon the housekeeper, as if she were exerting some strange charm over him.

"Of course. I still can't believe—where do you want to look?"

"Start with the cellar," Nem suggested. The master of the bungalow led the way through the storeroom, with its gruesome mark of violence, to the cellar door. His flash lighted Nem's creaking steps down the short flight, while he followed just behind.

The basement was a tidy, barren place. The coal bin was empty, yawning black under the shifting disk of light. The partitioned-off vegetable closet at the far end contained only a few cabbages and perhaps a bushel of potatoes, beneath which not so much as the body of a cat could have been hidden. There was no shed, no possible place of concealment.

"Nothing here, thank God!" Arthur Sutton murmured, mopping his forehead.

He showed the strain imposed upon him by the gruesome task, and Nem felt again that this was an unnecessary evil to fall upon these people, who had already borne so much.

But he peered into the furnace and found its firepot, its grate and ash receptable clean and guiltless.

"Stopped the furnace, I see."

"The past week's been unseasonably warm," Sutton reminded him. "Mrs. Sutton likes the fireplaces. Finished down here?"

Nem covered the last foot of cement, that gave no sign of cleavage; of having been tampered with, and sighed his assent.

"Satisfied. I'll say you're a careful housekeeper, professor. You got your cellar slicked up nicer'n most."

Sutton overlooked the praise.

"Where next?"

Nem pondered, one hand on the stair rail.

"Hain't no upstatirs to your place is

"Hain't no upstatirs to your place, is there?"

"Nothing but an unfinished attic, which is more air space than anything else."

"How do you get up to it?"

"Only by ladder—and that's out in the tool house—up through a trapdoor in the center hall."

Nem smiled.

"'Tain't likely that any one would carry a dead body up a ladder and through a trapdoor when it 'd be a whole lot easier to carry it out of the house. The likeliest way to dispose of a corpse is the ordinary way, professor. Burial. And you've got plenty of ground."

Sutton followed Nem upstairs, and they passed directly outdoors from the store-room. Nem stood beside his pale, perturbed host, looking down the slope into the little dell that formed the garden. Only a small, unpretentious building that seemed destined for a garage stood between the bungalow and the swamp land.

"How far does your land go, Mr. Sut-

ton?"
"Down to that woven wire fence this side of the swamp."

"H-m!" With ponderous, easy tread

Nem lumbered down the path that led to the small building, tried the door with a rattle of its padlock. "What's this, a garage?"

Arthur Sutton nodded.

"If ever I can afford a car, yes. Right now I use it as a tool house."

"Keep your shovels and picks in here?"

"Yes, but the place is always locked." Nem rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Who's got the key?"

"It always hangs in the outside pantry," Sutton told him. "Where—you found the blood stain."

"Mind getting it?" Nem asked, peering through the panes, and turned to watch the professor's wiry stride up the small slope to the bungalow. He emerged from the outside pantry a moment later with the key dangling from his forefinger, swung down the path to the tool house, and unlocked the swinging doors.

The interior of the tool house, like the cellar, spoke a good word for Sutton's orderliness. At the far end stood a carpenter's bench, clean of shavings. A tool cabinet bespoke his handiness. Rakes, shovels, hoes, depended from proper nails on the studding of the little shack, all oiled and polished and clean.

A suit of blue denim overalls hung from another peg, above a clean pair of rubber boots. These Nem inspected with a casual air, and photographic certainty of detail. He came to a pile of gunny sacks stacked neatly in one corner, felt them. They were damp; sufficiently impregnated with fresh loam to soil Nem's hands. And on one he discovered a tiny green plant.

He looked up, nether lip puckered between his teeth, to see Arthur Sutton staring out of the window, toward the bungalow. He looked troubled; eager, perhaps, to be with his wife in this time of stress.

"What are these for, Mr. Sutton?"

The man started, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Those are fertilizer sacks. I'm saving them becase I get a dime rebate on each. Look out—they're covered with garden loam; I just finished spading my early garden before the rain. I wanted to get the fertilizer in—"

Nem straightened with a grunt. He appeared to have gleaned all he could from the tool house. He stood in the doorway, looking over the land.

"You haven't planted yet, have you?"

"Not yet," Sutton said in that tired voice of his. "I'll do it as soon as the ground dries a little more. It's pretty damp down there."

"Reckon gardening's your hobby, professor," Nem said. "Do you depend a lot on your garden for your greens?"

"Yes. And I'm a bit late getting things in this spring. I started my hotbed earlier, though," he vouchsafed as he saw Nem's round eyes fasten upon the cement cold frame that nestled against the bottom of the south slope. It was perhaps six feet long, and four wide, with thin cement walls two feet high on the north side, sloping to a foot high on the south.

And thither Nem directed their steps. The glass panes had been removed, and were stacked in orderly array against the wall. The tender, early grass of the lawn bordered the frame; and the look of it to the south attracted Nem's interest. It seemed to have been recently beaten down as with a roller, or some heavy weight, for the length of the hotbed, and was just beginning to straighten up again. The hotbed itself was planted with serried rows of radishes about an inch high. But these brought a puzzled frown to Nem's brow. They should have been flourishing, yet they drooped forlornly above their rich soil.

He bent grotesquely over them, pudgy hands resting on his knees.

"Radishes look kind of peaked, Mr. Sutton. Funny for 'em to wither down, after last night's rain."

But he had no need of calling Sutton's attention to this irregularity. For he, too, was staring at the hotbed; eyes intent; pale face set.

"You're right," he told the detective in a brittle voice. "I'm gardener enough to know that these plants have been tampered with. But—why?"

Nem's own voice quivered with excitement as he acknowledged the fear that leaped into the other man's eyes.

"They've been taken up and replanted,

within twenty-four hours," Nem said. "It was done in the dark, too—or else done mighty carelessly, for the rows aren't a mite regular."

Arthur Sutton was a canny man. He dashed a hand across his brow, that glistened, shuddered.

"It's the size and shape of a grave, Parsons—"

Nem nodded.

"It is a grave. The Miller girl's; I figure whoever made it her grave thought resetting the radishes would be blind enough to keep any one from looking further down. Kind of lucky that radishes can't be transplanted without withering on the next day. Lucky, too, I came up to-day, before they got strong and healthy again."

Sutton touched the little muscle that throbbed in his lean, dark jaw.

"Horrible!" Yet he seemed to believe Nem's theory, unwillingly enough. "But the dirt—where was it piled?"

Nem pointed to the trampled-down grass. "Tarpaulin—no, those burlap fertilizer sacks in your tool house were used to protect the grass. And—I found a young radish plant on one of the sacks. Let's go get a spade and see how near right I am."

He had to guide the other man back to the tool house. Arthur Sutton walked like a man in a daze of horror.

"Could Ellen—would she have thought of anything so macabre?"

"She's big and strong enough," Nem admitted gravely. "And she hated Rose Miller enough to kill her." He picked up two shovels, halted by the pile of sackcloth. "Want to lay down the sacks to keep your grass fresh?"

Sutton shook his head.

"Good God, no! Let's find out as soon as we can—"

So they retraced their steps, and with ruthless disregard for the tender, withered plants, threw out the moist loam in spadefuls.

Nem, panting from the unusual exertion, finished his train of thought.

"She hated the girl, Mr. Sutton, and if the wish could kill—but most every one livin' would be in the dock if to will some one else dead was murder—steady, there!" Scarcely two feet down, Nem's shovel found a soft obstruction which made him withdraw the implement quickly. Sutton stood by, transmuted, fixed with horror, while Nem ladled handfuls of earth aside.

A bit of light blue cotton; a tendril of yellow hair; peeping beneath a ragged square of sackcloth, that Nem drew aside with gentle fingers. And they looked upon lost Rose Miller as she stared up at the sky with sightless, astonished blue gaze, fixed now upon eternity.

"Poor child!" whispered Sutton. And again: "Poor child!"

Nem, still holding the square of burlap that had protected her soft, round prettiness from the desecration of loose earth, uttered an untranslatable sound. He was staring at her stiff, folded hands, arranged as reverently as any corpse's for Christian burial.

Between the cold fingers were laid a handful of withered crocuses; and in the midst of the faded flowers there protruded, from the girl's breast, the horn handled knife that had found its sheath in her heart.

"God!" said Arthur Sutton, and turned away.

Nem covered the pitiful, blind face with the sackcloth, looked past his companion to the bungalow on the hill. He was thinking of Ellen Clarke, and the unseemly knife she had used to pare potatoes with. This small sharp blade, that was buried in the crimsoned bosom of the dead girl, must have come from the rack above the sink!

"We won't leave her like this long," he said, and they made their way to the house.

IV



HE inquest took place in Reynolds's Undertaking Parlors at noon the next day. After the legal formality, lean, lank Tom O'Malley, chief of

Bridgehaven's police force, walked back to headquarters beside Nem in sulky silence.

At the station he followed Nem into the dreary little den the latter chose as his office, flung himself irritably upon the edge of Nem's flat top desk.

"Why you haven't arrested the Clarke woman for the murder is one of the Eleu-

sian mysteries," he barked bitterly. "She's as guilty as bloodshed can make her, or I'm an Indian!"

He clamped a thin black cigar into his wide mouth for a dry smoke and rumpled his brick red thatch.

Nem packed a fresh load into his battered pipe and mournfully regarded an incipient crack in the bowl.

"Kind of looks that way, doesn't it?" he sighed. "'Fraid I got a bad piece of wood in this pipe, Tom, though it cost me—"

But O'Malley brushed aside Nem's divergence.

"It's a plain, unvarnished case of jealousy," he snapped. "Motive, opportunity, and malice are all there. You know what women of that age and temperament are—sex complexes and all the rest of it."

Nem looked down his nose in a way that made O'Malley yearn to punch him.

"So the book says, Tom."

"It's as clear as daylight. Ellen Clarke had been brooding over George Link's defection, at the little chippie's flaunting him before her, for a long time. Wednesday night brought things to a head. She knew Rose had a date with Link later in the evening. She gave the girl one last chance when she went down to Link's garage, stormed at him, threatened—threatened to cut the girl's heart out if she didn't let him alone! And he laughed at her. That laugh was what signed the girl's death sentence, Nem.

"Ellen Clarke didn't go walking in the rain; not then, anyway. She went back to the Sutton's, slipped in the back way, knowing that Sutton was out, that Mis' Sutton would be asleep before ten o'clock, when the girl would be leaving to meet George. The house was hers.

"She hid herself in that back closet you tell about, hate boilin' up in her. She waited there, fingering that newly sharpened paring knife—waited for Rose to come in for her raincoat. And when she did, Ellen Clarke struck with sure aim. The girl died between nine and ten, remember.

"Sutton never used that outside pantry; when he got in, found the telephone ringing,

his wife played into Ellen's hands by saying Rose had left. Later, when Sutton had gone to bed at the front of the house Ellen stole out, buried the girl, set back the radishes, and crept into bed. Her yarn of rambling through the rain couldn't be proved, or disproved. If there isn't a complete chain of circumstantial evidence, then I don't know a June bug when I see one."

Nem smoked serenely.

"Sounds real nice," he commented. "Sure, Ellen Clarke could've done all that."

His chief uttered an unclassified sound between a yelp and a snort.

"What in hell keeps you from arresting her, Nem?"

"Burlap, Tom. Sackcloth, you might say. That and a kind of hunch of mine—mebbe she's guilty, like you say. Sound's reasonable. But if she is, she'll give herself away soon enough. Guilty knowledge gets 'em, every time."

Nem's pipe was going at full blast now. He leaned back in his chair, elevated his soft kid shoes to the top of his desk, and loosened their strings with a grunt of relief. Then he leaned back, pudgy hands linked behind his pink, bald head, and contemplated the ceiling.

O'Malley slid off his perch, and went out to his own sanctum. Nem sat where he was for a longish time—a seemingly immobile, ponderous mass of inert flesh. Then the mass took life once more.

"There ought to be something. A girl like that, sentimental, stuck on herself and her conquests—"

He lifted his feet off the desk and tied his shoes. Then he went out once more into the cold, if brilliant sun, of the April afternoon

A short walk took him across town, into the oldest, poorest section of the city. The small, obscure street he sought, hardly more than a lane, was soon reached. Three ragged children were playing in the spring freshet that ran through the gutter of number sixty-five.

"Rose Miller live here, sonny?" he inquired of one of them.

"Yes, sir. She did, anyhow," the urchin said, round-eyed and curious.

Nem mounted the two steps that lifted

themselves almost from the sidewalk, crossed the dilapidated porch gingerly. His tug at the ancient bell brought to the door Rose Miller's aunt.

Her face showed lines of sorrow, but no traces of tears. Life had hardened her against surrender to emotion.

"I dropped in, Mis' Miller, sort of hopin' that you'd let me look through Rose's things."

Her face softened.

"I'll let you do anything, Mr. Parsons, that'd help you find out who killed the poor girl. What things of hers do you want to see?"

Nem stepped into the shabby hall.

"Everything, I guess. I hain't lookin' for anything in particular. Did she have a room to herself?"

"Oh, yes. She was dead set on that from the time she went to work."

Nem followed her up the narrow, creaking stairs into a small room at the back of the house. The window shades were down. Mrs. Miller bustled across the floor to raise them, flood the room with light.

A little old-fashioned poster bed, neatly made up and covered with a cheap pink spread filled one corner of the room. The windows were hung with flowered challis—the same stuff that, tacked to a shelf, improvised closet space for the dead girl's dresses.

A dressing table, vain altar to vanity, held a pathetic muddle of rouge and powder, presided over by a gaudy carnival doll, such as are given as prizes at summer beaches. Here stood empty candy boxes, ribbon tied; snapshots of Rose in swimming; Rose surrounded by youths; Rose with George Link.

And one other snapshot, that of a slender, smiling man who shielded his eyes against the sun in such a way as to render the likeness almost unrecognizable. Nem lifted it from its solitary place, scanned it for a long moment, lips puckered in a soundless movement.

Then he turned to the cheap, much carved little desk that stood between the windows. The half dozen books standing there beckoned to him.

"Give me free rein, Mis' Miller?"

"Of course!"

Nem fingered the few volumes gently. "Pilgrim's Progress"—unsullied, and probably a school book; "Five Little Peppers," much thumbed; "Philosophy of Love," read and reread; as were two novels of Laura Jean Libby's in paper covers; and—an old copy of Swinburne's poems.

Swinburne's lyrics, on Rose Miller's desk! That was worth any man's interest. Nem pounced upon the book, and his round blue eyes roved to Mrs. Miller. She was flecking a bit of dust from a chair, evincing no interest. It was clear that she did not guess the strangeness of Rose Miller's having that Swinburne on her shelf.

Nem looked at the yellowed flyleaf. A name had been erased carefully from the middle of the page, so carefully that the portion of paper that had borne that scrawl of ownership was worn almost transparent. But the first letter of the name was decipherable. Nem brooded over that, and over the inscription that had been made so recently at the top of the page:

To Atalanta March 2, 1926.

There was one marker in the volume—a thin strip of paper half way through. And Nem read the scored stanza to himself, round eyes sorrowful, lips moving softly:

From too much love of living
From hope and fear set free,
We thank, with brief thanksgiving,
Whatever gods there be
That no life lives forever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river,
Winds safe at last to sea.

And in the margin was the notation: "So I too thought—until you came."

Nem laid the book down, turned to Mrs. Miller:

"Rose was sort of popular with the boys, wasn't she?"

She nodded grimly.

"Too popular; boy crazy, Rose was; but she was a good girl. Mr. Parsons. You—you believe that, don't you?"

Nem's childlike eyes circled the room again, with its pathetic notes of sentiment, of aspiration unguided. And he lied stanchly.

"'Course she was a good girl!" He ran through the few unimportant letters tucked in the pigeonholes of the desk. "Well, I guess that's all for now. I'm much obliged, Mis' Miller."

She twisted her apron helplessly. "Did you—did you find anything?" Nem sighed.

"Quite a lot, Mis' Miller; quite a lot."
And he creaked cautiously down the stairs, out into the April weather.

By means of a transfer at the junction point he rode out to Golden Hill without delay. And he stared out of the car window unseeingly all the way, wrapped in some inner contemplation. Just before the end of the line was reached he astonished the plump old lady across the aisle by murmuring aloud:

"Much good knowin' does me, when I've got no proof. Not a mite of proof—"
After which he lapsed into seemingly somnolent silence.

There were no signs of life, other than a curling plume of smoke, about the Sutton bungalow. Nem paused in front of the house, then, treading noiselessly on the springy turf, he skirted the little porch and terrace and took the garden walk down toward the hotbed with its gruesome heap of dirt still piled by the cement wall.

The toolhouse was open. And Arthur Sutton was in there, standing with his back to the door, arms folded on the tool cabinet, dark head bowed. His attitude was expressive of despair, and, more than that, Nem thought.

"Mr. Sutton-" he said.

Sutton turned as if that gentle summons had been a pistol shot. He was gray of face, grim of jaw. And for that brief, betraying moment his eyes were those of a man doing penance, bitter penance, for past sins or future glory. Even amazement did not cloak that naked suffering of his. But amazement served to cover the transition from agony to nonchalance as he came toward Nem.

"Any news, Mr. Parsons?" he asked impersonally.

"Some!" admitted Nem, and saw a darting flame in those dark eyes.

"What news?"

"That Rose Miller read Swinburne."

Sutton's poise was perfect. Nem knew from that instant the full strength of the man he was dealing with.

"Scarcely news, Mr. Parsons, to me at least. The child was ambitious, wanted to cultivate her mind. I helped her. I gave her my own copy of Swinburne, in fact."

Nem sauntered further into the tool house, closer to Sutton, who still stood beside the tool cabinet.

"Reckon I don't know much about poetry, Mr. Sutton, but I'd hardly say Swinburne was the sort of lit'ry food for a young, uneducated girl."

Sutton's dark pallor was suffused with color.

"She had understanding—" and he snapped his teeth shut over the rest of his speech.

Nem loomed even closer.

"And she had a very decent burial, Mr. Sutton. Doesn't it strike you as queer that Ellen Clarke, hatin' here as she did, would have laid crocuses in her hands, covered her dead, pretty face with sackcloth to keep the garden mold from her blue eyes, her yellow hair—"

"What the devil are you getting at?" gritted Sutton.

"Just tryin' to figure things out," Nem said softly. "No, Mr. Sutton—the one who buried little Rose Miller was mighty fond of her—or had been."

Sutton stared at him with a sort of tragic hostility.

" And-who was it?"

Nem parried.

"Ellen Clarke wouldn't have dragged those denim overalls on over her skirts, either; and she'd have been in too much of a hurry to change."

"What makes you think they were used?"

"Little flecks of burlap lint, bits of fresh loam, in spite of your brushing. After you'd filled the grave, Mr. Sutton, you carted the sackcloth back to the tool shed, and got the lint on your overalls doing it."

"You accuse me of Rose Miller's murder?"

The man's face was a mask, not good to look upon.

Nem loomed past him, forestalled his sudden protective motion toward the tool cabinet, jerked open the little wooden door and found the trifle he sought: a withered scrap of green and yellow bloom.

"I accuse you of loving Rose Miller; of taking all she had to give, that you were starved for; of bringin' her to her death—and laying her in her grave—the grave you tried to make decent with sackcloth—and a handful of early flowers. These!"

Nem unfolded his thick fingers upon the ruined crocuses, round eyes fixed upon the unhappy man.

"Arrest me, then," said Sutton drearily. But Nem turned to the door.

"You might better act as if you were innocent, for your own sake, professor. Think it over for a spell."

When Sutton's tragic face lifted from his hands the detective was gone.

V



EM PARSONS did not pause long in the pleasant blue and white kitchen of the bungalow.

The housekeeper was washing dishes at the sink, and looked up dourly at Nem's unheralded entry. She straightened, shook her powerful hands free of the soapy water.

"What do you keep pesterin' me for? Why don't you go and find out who killed the girl?" she demanded, voice cracking from sheer nervousness.

"Didn't come to see you, Miss Clarke," Nem reassured her. "I'd like to see your mistress, Mrs. Sutton. Where is she? In her room?"

A look of intense relief relaxed Ellen Clarke's sullen features.

"Yes," she said shortly, and turned back to her work.

Nem passed on through the pleasant hall, bright and vivid again with the lowering sun, his soft shoes making the merest squeak. The door of Mrs. Sutton's room was open. The invalid herself was there, sitting in her wheel-chair between the two sunny windows. The book she had been reading slid from her thin hands as Nem's elephantine bulk filled the doorway.

She turned her chair with a deft twist of one hand so that she faced him more squarely, so that the sun streamed in more directly over her shoulders, cast a shining auriole upon her smooth chestnut head, enriched the splendid garnet dressing gown she habitually wore.

"Oh, Mr. Parsons, have you come with news, or to ask more questions?" she wanted to know. Her pale sad mouth smiled mechanically, but her gray eyes, in their hollows, were anything but gay.

Nem cautiously seated himself.

"There's quite a few things I'd like to know still," he admitted, apologetically.

She leaned back against her pillows.

"I hope I can help you. I feel so sure that poor Ellen Clarke had nothing to do with Rose's death—"

Nem shook his enormous head.

"You're right there, Mis' Sutton; Ellen Clarke is innocent."

"Oh." She caught her breath a trifle. "Then who could have done it?"

Nem's childlike eyes were not fixed on Alice Sutton's face, but on her thin, drooping left shoulder and its covering of patterned silk.

"I reckon I'll be able to tell you that soon. First off, I want to ask you a question. Did you know of your husband's friendship for Rose Miller?"

The woman's graceful, death-white hands tightened upon the arms of her chair, but her face remained immobile.

"Yes. I suppose you'd call it that. We both liked her—were willing to do much for her."

"What, for example?" Nem urged. She bit her thin lip.

"Why—consideration, time off, good wages—what a strange question?"

She moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue as if she were suddenly athirst. Nem's bland blue eyes met hers now.

"I think you know what I mean."

He saw the pulse in her thin throat quicken its beat; her light breath raced unevenly between the pale, parted lips, and he was all solicitude.

"You don't feel well, do you, Mis' Sutton? Can I get you something? A glass of water from the kitchen?"

She shut her eyes wearily, as if she craved respite of any sort.

"Yes, please. Do you mind?"

Nem got the water from the housekeeper and took it back to the invalid's room. Mrs. Sutton roused herself from her lethargy at his reëntry, thanked him with a wan smile. Nem stepped close beside her, to help her drink; then awkwardly, inadvertently, as he held the glass for her, he spilled a few drops from the overfull glass upon her shoulder.

All contrition, he waited until she had drained the cold draft, handed back the glass. Then he took his handkerchief and clumsily mopped at the damp spot.

"I'm the awkwardest old cuss that ever wore shoe leather," he apologized.

"It was nothing," she brushed aside his regretful words. "I feel better now. What else have you to ask?"

But Nem did not heed her question. He had finished wiping up the water he had spilled. Now he held his broad white handkerchief up to the light. A large stain of lightish red was visible upon it.

Alice Sutton's deep-set eyes followed Nem's.

"What's-that?" she asked.

Nem looked at her pitifully.

"Blood, Mis' Sutton. Rose Miller's blood. I saw the dark, stiff stain on your dressing gown in the sun here. It wouldn't show up anywhere else. Then I moistened it—"

He had to admire her audacity. She laughed a little, though her lips were ashen.

"But the garnet dye-"

"That robe is made of fast dyed silk; 'twouldn't even run in the wash, I reckon. The stain that came off is blood. I'm sorrier than I can say, but I've jest naturally got to hold you for the murder of Rose Miller. Your husband buried her, to protect you; but you killed her, while he was out; while she was getting you ready for bed. She bent over you, and you stabbed her with an upward thrust of that sharp little paring knife—"

Alice Sutton's lips moved, but she uttered no sound. Nem went on:

"I can show how it happened to be in here—the weapon. You keep your pencils

sharpened real nice, don't you? All of them—" he nodded to the trayful of delicately pointed leads upon her desk—" were sharpened just lately—probably Wednesday. And you didn't take the knife back to the kitchen." His eyes left the betraying litter of sharpenings in the shallow waste basket, returned to the invalid. "Too bad you didn't; for I don't believe you planned to murder Rose. It was just a wild impulse, wasn't it?"

Alice Sutton inclined her head.

"It came over me suddenly; I heard her answering the phone, after he—my husband—had gone out. I thought she was promising to meet him. I knew, God help me, that she had won him; her look—the very tones of her voice—betrayed her! And I—chained here to this chair—had to see it all; had to submit to her treachery; his suffering. He did suffer, for he loved me. And I—I loved him more than he can ever know. That was why I sat here that dreadful evening, nursing that sharp, deadly little knife. And then, as she bent over me, young and lovely and alive—as I can never be again—"

Her tragic voice died away; her waxen hands covered her face.

Nem cleared his throat, blinked out_at the golden afternoon that had suddenly blurred.

"I'm mighty sorry for you, Mis' Sutton. But the law—"

The cripple sucked in her breath.

"I know. I know. But my husband? He did what he did to save me; in expiation for his own sin. He must not suffer for mine!"

"I understand!" said Nem gently. "It won't go hard with him, Mis' Sutton. Your confession 'll clear him, right enough."

"I'm glad you know the truth," she whispered at last. "It was too terrible for me to keep—for him. Now—they'll come and take me away, won't they?"

Nem bent his head.

"I'm part of the law, Mis' Sutton." She smiled faintly.

"Before you do your duty, will you hand me that little pasteboard box of pellets? My heart is very weak—"

She pointed with an unwavering fore-

finger to the stand beside her bed. Nem picked up the little round box, shook the tiny pellets.

"Strychnine?"

She breathed short assent, leaned forward to draw his eyes with the magnet of her own.

"I am not strong," she told him. "I—I cannot face all that is coming. I have suffered so much already."

She might have been referring to the actual arrest; to the legal procedure she faced. But Nem, reading her piteous look, her stricken face, knew that her words meant infinitely more than that. His big hands closed convulsively upon the heart stimulant she asked for.

"What is the dose?" he wanted to know.

Those tragic, asking eyes!

"Six pellets-crushed in a little water."

To most people Nem looked like a shabby unwieldy old fellow, distinguished only by a kindly mouth, incredibly innocent eyes. To the woman in the wheel-chair he was suddenly transfigured; he was no longer a bald old man who saw everything; he was justice and mercy incarnate. For without looking at the legend on the box, he spilled six tiny pellets into his enormous palm and reached for the glass of water.

"Here. Reckon these will see you through."

Then he strode to the door, called the master of the house sharply.

Sutton was close at hand; at the sound of his hurrying footsteps the woman in the chair stirred, lifted her ashen face.

"She wants you," Nem told told him as he brushed past, and watched him bend over his wife in an agony of love and tenderness.

"Alice, you're ill! Your medicine—"

She seemed to grow smaller, younger; to relax utterly in her husband's arms.

"Alice—Alice—" he mourned in the prescience of love. But he could not warm her wasted hands, hold off death. He could only kneel beside her, in penitence, as she died.

And Nem, with hushed step, went from the room, tearing to bits the cover of a pasteboard box, on which was printed: Dose one pellet in water.



The garage reverberated as he fired five shots into the bundle

THE MISSING HUSBAND

By H. C. Bailey

EACH VOICE WAS RAISED AGAINST THE INTERLOPER WHEN CRIME STAINED THE LAST INHERITORS OF THE GREAT HOUSE



If an orchard where the apple blossom rose out of a flood of bluebells a hammock was slung. In the hammock lay a creature the same size all the way

along, like a slug, a slug wearing gray tweed and fair hair.

To this scene of peace entered with sprightly grace, like an actor manager to his love scene, the chief of the criminal investigation department, the Hon. Sidney Lomas. He approached the hammock, put up his eyeglass, and gazed tenderly at the still body.

In it one blue eye opened. "Reginald, my dear fellow," said Lomas with affection and patted him. "How goes it?"

Reggie Fortune squirmed, revealing a face of delicate complexion and brushed back his tumbled hair. "Can aught atone?" he murmured. "Lomas, you have waked me up. That was my after-lunch sleep. And it isn't time for tea." He sighed deeply and looked at Lomas with large, reproachful eyes. "You have no heart, Lomas. I believe you actually want me to work."

"Oh, no. We're doing splendidly without you. There's nothing to do. I only came over to see how you were getting on."

"The patient is going on as well as can be expected, but cannot yet sleep more than twenty-four hours in the day."

Mr. Fortune was, in fact, recovering his strength after the blood poisoning which he acquired in his work as medical expert for the crown upon the historic crime of the abominable Armenian, Comnenus. For his convalescence that majestic woman novelist, Mrs. Hamilton Chapone, lent him her cottage on the Wessex downs and there you

behold him living the simple life in beautiful isolation-with his own cook!

At tea in the sun lounge, which looks across five miles of smiling fields to the sea, he ate cream cakes pensively while Lomas dallied with an anchovy sandwich and explained how he came. The chief constable of Wessex had asked him for advice, so he combined business with pleasure, the chief constable with Reggie Fortune.

Mr. Fortune looked at the empty plate, Mr. Fortune sucked cream from a finger and sighed. "Is there a constable in Wessex?" said Mr. Fortune, dreamily. "Why?"

"He hasn't much to do or he wouldn't have bothered me with this. A husband has left his wife, Reginald. That's all."

"In Wessex?" said Mr. Fortune. "Nasty fellow."

"I don't know the local rules, but it's not a crime."

"Depends on the wife. Who are they?"

" Mr. and Mrs. Julian Brase."

"Brase? One of our good old county families, what? Genuine antique, aren't thev?"

"Oh, prehistoric. So's the estate. Julian Brase, heir of all the ages and a lot of land mortgaged up to the treetops, married an Australian heiress two years ago. She paid off the debt and they've been living down here putting the place to rights. The coun-

ty didn't take to Mrs. Brase.

"They think she's rather free and a good deal too easy. Julian Brase is a limp fellow-the sort of stuff these old families finish in. A week ago the Brases were due to dine at the rectory. Mrs. Brase sent a note to say her husband was ill. The rector's wife called at Brase Hall next day with kind inquiries.

"Mrs. Brase was very short with her. Said he had gone to London on business. Brase has a brother somewhere near, exarmy man, little place of his own, breeds Pekingese, that sort of fellow. The rector's wife set him on to call. Mrs. Brase was very short with him, too.

"Told him Julian had gone off for a holiday and left no address. The brother thought it over for a day or two and then came to the county police and said it was queer. The rector's wife seems to have stirred him up. The chief constable didn't think much of it, but he put some men on and they found out that nobody had seen Julian go away.

"You know what a country station is. The local magnate gets noticed. Julian wasn't. And the Brase chauffeur swore he didn't go in one of his own cars. Then the chief constable began to sit up and take notice. He asked me what to do about it. I said, have the lady seen by an inspector and shaken up. So an inspector called, and Mrs. Brase told him her husband had gone to the devil and turned him out. The inspector thought her peevish."

"Not one of our good liars," said Mr. Fortune sadly. "He was ill. He had gone to London. He had gone on a holiday. He

had gone to the devil."

"Quite feminine," Lomas smiled. "Quite conjugal. They've had a row and the lady didn't want it known."

"Yes. Yes. Does it seem to you that explains anything? When was the missing husband missed?"

"My dear fellow!" Lomas looked at him with sympathy. "I told you, you know. A week ago. When they were due to dine at the rectory and Mrs. Brase said he was ill."

"I know you told me," said Mr. Fortune, a little petulant, a little shrill. "I mean when was he last seen? Who saw him?"

"Oh, I haven't gone into it," Lomas waved it away. "It's no matter."

Mr. Fortune sat up. "He's reported missing when he has an outside engagement. He's said to be gone and no one saw him But it's no matter."

"My dear fellow! He had legs when last heard of. He could have walked to Kingford or Highbury-say, four miles and both busy stations. He might have picked up a car on the road. We know nothing about it."

"That's what I'm pointing out, Lomas."

"Yes, I see. Quite. But, my dear Reginald, why so earnest? We're not taking it up, you know. I only told you to amuse you. You mustn't let it bother your head."

"Don't soothe me," Mr. Fortune cried. "I'm not an invalid."

"Of course not," Lomis smiled at him with paternal affection. "In the pink. Extremely pink, to be frank. Well, when we have anything you shall hear all about it. I must really be going, you know."

Of which he had no intention, but as he did intend he made Reggie Fortune's hospitable conscience smart and he was persuaded to dine and sleep and was promised one of Elise's supremes and some Montrachet of nobility.

II



HE dinner was all that Mr. Fortune's fancy painted, but afterward as they sat on either side a fire of old apple wood Lomas was called to the tele-

phone. He came back humming a love song of musical comedy. Mr. Fortune looked at him reproachfully. "You said I should hear when you had anything, Lomas," he complained.

"Confound you," Lomas frowned—and laughed. "Well, it is something. Mrs. Brase has bolted."

"Well, well," said Reggie Fortune.

"She went off by the London train today. When the police heard of it she was clear away. No trace the London end. They went up to Brase Hall. She had told the servants she was never coming back. That's all."

"And very interestin', too," Reggie murmured and reached for a cigar.

"No," said Lomas with decision.
"You've had quite enough. Go to bed and sleep, Reginald. It isn't your case."

"Oh, I shall sleep all right," said Mr. Fortune. "You really are soothing, you know."

Though Lomas has an European fame for late rising, Reggie Fortune was later next morning. He appeared dreamy and benign, as Lomas drew to the end of breakfast, praised the beauties of nature, and gave a lecture on sausages with an excursus on the right kind of marmalade to eat after them.

It was at this point that the telephone asked for Lomas again.

When he was done with it he found Reggie extended peaceful with a large cigar. "May I ring for my car?" he said, and did so

"Are you taking up the case, Lomas?" Reggie smiled.

An official solemnity rebuked him. "Julian Brase has been found," Lomas announced. "This morning his body was found in his own park. The county police have asked for our assistance. Of course this alters the whole case."

"Dear Lomas," Reggie chuckled. "Has he been moved?"

"I told them to touch nothing. I am going over at once. I've telephoned for Bell."

"Me, too," said Reggie Fortune, and rolled out of his chair.

The car bore them away by the road at the foot of the downs.

"I feel rather criminal, Reginald," Lomas apologized. "I wish I hadn't mentioned the case to you."

"I wouldn't be out of it for the world."

"You're really not yourself, you know. It's not like you to be so keen."

"It's not like your usual cases, Lomas."

"Isn't it?" said Lomas gloomily.

"Well, look at it. He was missing a week ago. His wife bolted yesterday. He was found this morning. Not quite normal crime, Lomas, old thing. Very odd sequence."

"We don't know that it is a crime."

"No. No. Slight flavor of the late Dr. Crippen upside down. But nothing definite. No base imitation."

"What do you make of it?"

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. "I wonder."

"You thought there was something queer last night."

Reggie chuckled. "Aha! The mysterious, sinister figure of the rector's wife."

Lomas, with some heat, declined to know what he meant.

Where the downs break into a cluster of hills, Brase Hall stands gray in a hollow and takes the valley and one sheltering hill for its park. The car turned in at a gate guarded by two stone bears of the Brase arms and one policeman.

The latter stopped them, saluted Lomas's name, said the inspector was waiting for

them and they must turn off the drive and take the track up the hill and they could not miss him. "Very efficient, Reginald," Lomas smiled. But Reggie only grunted in reply.

The lower slopes of the park bore mighty trees of beech and ash, but when they turned and climbed the track led over bare turf. On the wind-swept breast of the hill nothing moved, the turf bore no marks, but that of the old gray track by which they climbed and another coming to meet it on a long slant from the blue smoke where a village nestled.

They came in sight of the circle of stunted beech that marked the summit. There stood two cars and some men.

One of them hurried forward. "Mr. Lomas, sir? I'm Inspector Warnham," he was bullnecked and brisk. "Only waiting for you to move him."

"Quite right. This is Mr. Fortune, inspector, our medical expert."

"I've got a doctor here, sir. He says it's quite a clear case. Man was shot in the head."

"Sounds conclusive," Reggie murmured.
The inspector nodded. "Yes, sir. Pretty clear. You'd like to speak to Dr. Harcourt?
Here we are."

Dr. Harcourt, a voluble fellow, could tell Mr. Fortune all about it in a sentence and took twenty, but they came to the body at last.

Julian Brase lay on his face in the ring of beech trees, a slight body in brown tweed on the brown leaves. He might have been asleep but for his stiffness, but for the dark stain which came from his head down his face and neck. Reggie knelt beside him and looked long, moved his cap and the head bent closer, while above him Dr. Harcourt discoursed, telling him what he should see with growing impatience.

Reggie rose slowly and stood surveying the landscape. "Extensive view, what?" he murmured and wandered away.

"What about it, Fortune?" Lomas called. Reggie turned and strolled toward him. "Well, the man was shot by a revolver fired close to the left temple and died some days ago." He looked curiously at Inspector, Warnham. "Any questions?"

"Why did they bring him to the top of a hill to shoot him?" said Lomas.

The inspector nodded. "Ah, that's got it. sir." He lowered his voice. "This place here was the favorite walk of Mrs. Brase. Kind of haunt of hers," he gave the aspirates a sinister emphasis.

"Who put you on to it?"

"Well, sir, when we heard Mrs. Brase had bolted we made arrangements to search the place. There was talk in the village as Mr. Brase might be somewhere in the park and some said as Mrs. Brase was often up here. I couldn't tell you who said it first."

Reggie smiled wearily. "The rector's wife, Lomas," he said, and again wandered away.

"It might be or it mightn't," the inspector was offended. "Does the gentleman want to do any more, sir?" He stared angrily at Reggie's back.

"I'm afraid he wants to do a lot more," said Lomas, and went after him while the inspector and the doctor conferred and agreed that Mr. Fortune was too clever by half.

It is not the impression that he is wont to make. He has been heard to apologize for his work on the case, confessing he was not in his best form. Lomas, following him as he drifted hither and thither among the trees, thought that such aimless delay was sadly unlike him.

He came to a stand on the edge of the hill where the tracks met, and looked again at the extensive view. Lomas put a hand on his shoulder. "Always jolly where the chalk ends, isn't it?" Reggie murmured.

"My dear fellow! Do you feel up to this?" Lomas said anxiously.

"Yes, I think so," Reggie smiled.

Inspector Warnham arrived to ask if Mr. Fortune wished to be present at the post mortem. Reggie contemplated him with dreamy eyes. "Oh, ah! Where does that track go to?" He pointed to the one by which they had not come.

"That one? Down to Brase. The village," the inspector snapped.

"Where the rector's wife is," Reggie murmured. "You didn't come up that way?"

"No, sir, we didn't. Would you come along, please? Dr. Harcourt's in a hurry."

III



EGGIE stared at him in a mild surprise and strolled down the village track. He came back to find the body already in a car and the doctor fum-

ing, but he lingered about the place where it had lain. "Perhaps you'll join me at Horsbury, Mr. Fortune," the doctor cried, and drove away.

Mr. Fortune rose from the ground. "And that's that," he murmured.

Inspector Warnham and his men climbed into their car and departed and still Reggie wandered among the trees.

"What is it, Reginald?"

"Hasty, don't you think, a little hasty?"

"Why, there's nothing more here."

Reggie stared at him with large vague eyes. "No. Nothing here. Come on." They walked to their car and Reggie sank down in his seat with a sigh. "Let her out, Lomas, or they'll hang somebody before we get there."

"Who?"

"I don't know. I don't know. A horrid case, Lomas. Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive. Let her go. No paltry caution."

In his office at Horsbury the chief constable of Wessex presided over a conference. He was a colonel of the old school, and he had a good deal to say which was not relevant, and Inspector Warnham reported what they all knew, and Lomas, who had been reënforced by his lieutenant, Superintendent Bell, smoked many cigarettes.

The afternoon was thus far spent when they were interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Fortune. "I hope I don't intrude?" he murmured, as Lomas introduced him.

"Come in, doctor, come in," said the chief constable. "We're waiting for the medical evidence."

"Well, the dead man had lived rather fast. Not a very nice man."

"We've got nothing against him, doctor," said the inspector.

"Lived a man's life, eh, what?" the chief constable chuckled.

"Yes. He was feeling like that. He was shot in the left temple at close quarters by a service revolver. Death was immediate. And he died some days ago."

"Say a week?" the inspector asked

sharply

"Quite possible. Oh, is that a map of the place?" Reggie bent over the table. "Six inch ordnance? Good!" Superintendent Bell made room for him and he sat down to it.

"Service revolver," the inspector repeated. "Sure of that, doctor?"

Bell snorted. Lomas laughed. Reggie looked up and gazed mildly at Inspector Warnham. "Oh, I think so, I think so," he said, and produced a small box wherein on cotton wool lay a revolver bullet. "Any objection?"

"That's all right," the inspector rubbed his hands. "Service revolver. Mr. Brase went through the war, sir." He turned to the chief constable. "There'd be a service

revolver of his handy."

"It wasn't suicide, you know," Reggie murmured.

"I bet it wasn't," the inspector grinned. "We'll have a hunt for that revolver, sir."

"Yes. Yes. Might have a look for the cartridge case, too," said Reggie. "Did you notice it wasn't there?"

"What do you mean?" the inspector cried.

"The blood wasn't there, either."

"Blood! He'd bled down all his face and neck."

"Yes. Yes. And not a drop on the ground. Very tidy of him."

"I don't know what you're getting at, doctor."

"He wasn't killed where you found him dead."

Bell smiled benevolently. "Now you've got something, Warnham."

"God bless my soul!" said the chief constable. "You mean to say his body was carried up there?"

"I shall say at the inquest he wasn't killed where you found him."

"What's the sense of that?" the inspector frowned.

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! You supply the sense. I only produce the

facts." Mr. Fortune bent again over the

map.

"Cherchez la femme, what, what?" said the chief constable. "That's the thing, Warnham."

"Well, well," said Reggie, and lay back in his chair and gazed at them as they began to devise the hunt for Mrs. Brase, then sighed and left them to it.

IV



HUS they arrived in the musty but seventeenth century sitting room reserved for them before the case was spoken of again. Then Reggie sway-

ing before the fire with his cigar said: "Well, what about Mrs. Brase?" Bell

handed him a photograph.

"Oh, my aunt!" he murmured. It showed a woman tall and strongly built, a woman who might be handsome, but was given by photography a haggard and restless aspect.

"They say she don't take well, but this

is like her. Striking face, sir."

"Striking!" Lomas chuckled. "That's the word, Bell."

"Yes. But you can't hang her for her face."

"It will rather prepare the public mind, though," Lomas said.

"This isn't the photograph we're circulating, Mr. Fortune," Bell explained. "But they're all alike."

"Oh, photograph and description to all police stations. Warrant, too?"

"No, sir. Not yet."

"You surprise me."

"Spoke very sarcastic," Lomas smiled. "Reginald, you're being superior. It hurts my trustful nature. What's the matter?"

"You're all so hasty."

Lomas shrugged. "The woman ran away. We've got to run after her."

"What's the case against Mrs. Brase?"

"That's what I want her to tell me."

"Charge her first, find the evidence afterward."

Bell shook his head. "She shouldn't have run, Mr. Fortune."

"One murdered husband is a prima facie case," Lomas said mildly. "I want

to hear her explanation. She's given four, you know. He was ill. He'd gone to London. He'd gone on a holiday. He'd gone to the devil. And all the while he was dead."

"The case against her is that the rector's wife don't like her, the county don't like her, the county police don't like her and the county inspector is God's own ass."

"My dear fellow, somebody killed the husband. We must ask her for her views about that. It's only decent. He was shot at her door."

"You think so?" said Reggie. "I'm going to swear he wasn't killed in the park."

Bell whistled. Lomas sat up. "This isn't quite nice of you, Regginald," he said. "Not even in the park? Evidence grown a little, hasn't it?"

"Yes. I had found sand in the blood clot. I didn't know the park was all chalk."

"A little subtle, a little thin, isn't it?" Lomas frowned. "Anything more?"

"No. That's the lot. But it don't fit Mrs. Brase."

"I don't know. It might do very well. I've got a sleeve, too, Reginald. There was a man down in the village a month ago, painting or pretending to paint. Mrs. Brase said he was an old friend. She played at art in Paris before she was married. They were together a good deal. It was talked about. Warnham says it made bad blood between her and her husband."

"The rector's wife again," said Reggie.

"I dare say. Brase has a brother, too, you know."

"Yes. Yes. Lots of nice friends for Mrs. Brase. Was the artist down here when Brase was missed?"

" No evidence."

"Rector's wife draws the line somewhere. Who is the mysterious artist?"

"Used the name of Alford. Big fellow. Spoke with some sort of a twang. Foreign in his ways, they say."

"Big fellow. And she's big, too," Reggie murmured. His round face was lined with melancholy. "I wonder."

"You mean they could have carried him up there between them, sir?" said Bell.

Reggie gazed at him. "It could be.

Sorry, Lomas. My error. You'll have to find them. Nasty case." He rose like a very tired man and lounged out.

"Not himself, Mr. Lomas," Bell shook his head. "Not up to it yet, he isn't."

But the morning brought Reggie down in his usual amiable placidity, only a little silent and dreamy. He woke up when Lomas spoke of going back to town. "Yes. You go and find them. Leave me Bell."

"My dear fellow! Are you staying? There is nothing more for you, is there?"

"I don't know. I don't know the place. I don't know anything. Leave me Bell. I want him to protect me. I'm afraid of this fierce inspector."

Lomas went off with a laugh. "All right. Don't let him hang the rector's wife, Bell."

The methods of Mr. Fortune seemed to Superintendent Bell uncommonly frivolous. They took a car, they put it up at an inn two miles from Brase Hall, they walked out not to the place where the body was found, but by a rambling route to the village of Brase.

On the way, they talked with every human creature they met, in the village they had to wander about like trippers, admiring a cottage here and there, going over the church with the sexton, drinking beer with the landlord of the inn.

Superintendent Bell admired, not for the first time, Mr. Fortune's ability to make anybody talk to him, but found the innumerable conversations remote from the crime.

V



HEN they came out of the inn Mr. Fortune smiled. "Well, what do you make of it all, Bell?"

"Sir?" Bell stared.

"They all like Mrs. Brase. And nobody cares a damn about him."

"Now, you put it like that," Bell said slowly.

But Reggie slid back from his wondering eyes into the porch of the inn. "Look at that. Go and talk to him. Don't say I'm here." Bell was left staring at the police car which stood by the rectory gate. He obeyed orders.

When the inspector and his car were out of sight, Reggie joined him again. "Warnham's been up searching the hall with Brase's brother," Bell reported. "Found nothing much. No pistol. Some old letters to her, signed Tim. He says that's this artist chap. But he can't get any proof the man was here last week. That's what he went to the rectory about. He's made up his mind Mrs. Brase hasn't gone abroad. He's found her passport."

"Passport!" said Reggie with contempt. "Well, well. There's some brains somewhere, but not in Warnham. One of the bulldog breed. Muddled case, isn't it?"

"He's not what I'd call bright, sir. But he's working the only clews he's got."

Reggie stopped. "Oh, Bell! Oh, my Bell!" he said sadly. "He hasn't even begun."

"No, sir. Where would you begin?"

"When was the dead man last seen alive? Who saw him? Where was he?"

"I reckon Mrs. Brase is the one to tell us that."

"Oh, my aunt! Of course, the murderer saw him last. But there must be somebody here who saw him last but one. Who was it and where was he?"

"Well, sir, Warnham's got it pretty close. Brase was alive at the Hall at lunchtime on that day of the rector's dinner. He didn't sleep at the Hall that night. He must have been killed between lunch and dinner time. That's near enough."

"My only aunt!" Reggie gasped. "Nothing strike you about that, Bell? No? But it's all sand down here and it's all chalk in the park. He was killed on sand, you know."

Bell thought it out. "That's neat, sir," he said with respect. "You mean I ought to look about in the village for some one who saw him that afternoon?"

"Not you. No. You're too conspicuous. But I think we'll have one of your bright boys down."

"Harland, sir. He can sketch. Like this artist chap. I'll phone for him when we get back to Horsbury."

They had indented for Sergeant Harland, they were sitting over tea when Inspector Warnham's car drew up at the inn. He entered with a grin. "Hello, doctor. Taking it easy? I've got something for you. I've got the pistol. Would that do the trick?"

Reggie looked at it curiously. "It's a service revolver."

"I know that, thank you," the inspector laughed.

"Where did you find it?"

"Up there where we found the body." Reggie looked curiously a him. "Splendid," said Reggie. "Did you find the cartridge case, too?"

"Nothing else about. But there's been

one shot fired."

"Yes. I noticed that."

"When I couldn't find Mr. Brase's revolver in the house I thought I'd go and have another look on the hill. There it was, lying among the leaves, you know. I don't wonder I didn't notice it before. We were in the devil of a hurry."

"Yes. You were in a hurry. Is this

Brase's revolver?"

"Got his initials on it anyway," the inspector laughed. "J. B., see?"

"Yes. Better get his brother to identi-

fy it."

"He has," said the inspector triumphantly. "I took it straight down to him at his place. He knew it at once. He saw Mr. Brase put those marks on it himself. That's good enough, eh?" he laughed. "There we are, superintendent. You find Mrs. Brase for us and we'll do the rest." He bustled out.

Mr. Fortune lit a cigar and sank deep into his chair.

"Looks as if he was really killed up there, sir," said Bell sadly.

Mr. Fortune turned on him a slow, benign smile. "Some error," he murmured gently. "Some error."

VI



ELL had trouble with his pipe. He had met that smile before. It was wont to lead to action. But it did not. Mr. Fortune seemed to have lost his grip.

The telephone called. Lomas was speaking. Lomas wanted to know what was doing about the inquest. "Don't mind me,"

Mr. Fortune said. Bell conferred with Warnham and suggested to Mr. Fortune that they should begin to-morrow, give evidence of identification, and adjourn. "Yes," Mr. Fortune murmured. "Make 'em all happy."

In the morning he declined, amiable but quite firm, to attend that inquest. But while it was being held in the parish room at Brase, he appeared in the silent village, he spent some time there and chatted with the young artist who was sketching that picturesque bit by the rectory.

Superintendent Bell came back to the White Bull to find him at tea and politely ready to hear all about everything. Bell had many grievances. He hated all inquests and all coroners, and these two he pronounced conspicuously evil in their evil kind.

"This old fellow, sir, he as good as told his jury at the start Mrs. Brase did the murder. Nice sort of justice. Nice for the police, too. Telling her we've got a case when we haven't got her!"

"Very fair all round," said Reggie.
"Who identified the body? The rector's

wife?"

"She was there all right. Telling everybody how Mr. and Mrs. Brase were always quarreling. The brother, Roger Brase, was called to identify. Just swore to the body. The old coroner was going to ask him something, but I made Warnham get up and stop that."

"Well, well. What's Roger Brase like?"
"Smallish chap, dark, looks sporting.
Gone the pace in his time, I should say."

"As like his brother as no matter."

"Yes, sir, so they say."

Again the telephone interrupted them. "Mr. Lomas, sir," Bell reported. "You'd better hear yourself."

And Reggie heard this: "Is that you, Reginald? Congratulate me. I've found her. She's at St. Ives. My idea entirely. I thought she might be in some artist colony, so I tried them all. She's at St. Ives."

"Splendid," said Reggie. "In her own name? Fancy that. Found the man too?"

"He's been there all the winter. Left a week ago, Reginald. We're after him. But we'll make sure of her. Warnham's sending down a man with a warrant to-night. What did you say?"

"I said 'God save the king!'" said Mr. Fortune, and rang off. But when he came back to Bell the superintendent saw again that slow, benign smile forming. What he said was of startling irrelevance. "Any views about Warnham, Bell? I mean to say, is he playing the game?"

"Sir? I've got nothing against him. He's got twenty years' service. Absolutely

straight, I should say."

"Well, well. There's no hurry," Mr. Fortune murmured.

The next morning he went up to town, declaring that he was in need of edible food. When he came back Bell found that they had been reënforced by his car and his chauffeur and factotum, Sam. Late in the evening Mrs. Brase was brought to Horsbury and charged with the murder. Bell, who attended that ceremony, reported that she didn't turn a hair and didn't say a word.

She was brought before the magistrates in the morning. Reggie went to see that and found Lomas going into the court. "Come down to see your triumph, Lomas? How nice and human of you."

"So glad to find you here, Reginald," Lomas smiled. "I was afraid you were losing interest in the case.

"Oh, we're all here. Look, there's the rector's wife."

What Lomas was going to answer was hushed by the coming of the magistrates. Mrs. Brase was put into the dock, a large stately woman, who stared straight before her. Her face had the pallor of ivory, but she showed no fear nor any other emotion. "More chin than brow," Lomas whispered.

"Yes. She married Brase," said Reggie. She was charged with murder. She said she was not guilty. The clerk asked her if she had counsel. "You have not given me time," she said quietly. There were murmurs of consultation. The counsel for the public prosecutor arose—they would not take it far that day—every facility would be given—and Inspector Warnham went into the box.

It had been reported to the police that Julian Brase was missing. He had called on Mrs. Brase, who told him that her husband had gone to the devil. He called the next day and she had left home. He searched the house and park and found Julian Brase shot. He later found on the spot a revolver marked "J. B."

The prosecution proposed to adjourn. "I wish to say—" Mrs. Brase began.

"Better not, better not," said the old chairman.

"I wish to say that my husband was alive when I saw him last. It was in my room at the Hall. He asked me for money. There was nothing new about that. I refused him. He went out of the room and I never saw him again. I don't know what became of him."

With that, with another admonition to consult a solicitor, the bench adjourned and she was led away.

Reggie was outside the court, watching the spectators depart. There were many cars. It was difficult to attract his attention. Lomas came up with him as he was chatting with his own chauffeur. "Don't shun me, Reginald."

"Dear Lomas! Did I ever?" Reggie drew him away. "But I want you. I want you to get that pistol for me."

"Good God!" said Lomas. "You never

mentioned the pistol before."

"No," said Reggie. "Not before. Come on. Talk pretty to Warnham."

"What do you want to do?"

"Fire it," said Mr. Fortune.

They turned in to the police headquarters. The chief constable and Inspector Warnham were, in a decent official way, very pleased with themselves and had to say so and let Lomas knew that they thought he had done quite well. It was not good for a ruffled temper.

Lomas was curt. "I don't see the end of the case yet. Where's the revolver? Mr. Fortune wants to make some experiments."

"The revolver? Mr. Roger Brase will swear to that," said Warnham sulkily.

"Did he see it fired?" said Reggie.

"Of course he didn't see it fired. What do you mean, doctor?"

"Well, I mean several things. I mean it wasn't there when we found the body."

"You couldn't see it, so it wasn't there."

"Yes. I couldn't see it, so it wasn't there," said Reggie, mildly.

"But it was there and I found it."

"That's what's so interesting," said Reggie. "Isn't it, Lomas?"

"It's going to be damned awkward for somebody," Lomas frowned.

"I don't know what you mean, sir," the inspector cried.

"Well, how did it get there, for instance?" said Reggie, watching him. He was very red. "Are there any other service revolvers about in Brase? And who—well, never mind. The revolver, please."

VII.



HEY went off with it, hearing the inspector lift up his voice as the door closed. Reggie loitered. Reggie had to go into a tobacconist's. While

he was being critical of the local cigars, the inspector's car drove past furiously. "God bless him!" Reggie smiled. "He has his uses. Come on, Lomas."

"Why didn't you raise this before?"

"Oh, I have my uses, too," said Reggie. In the yard of the White Bull—it is the only comfortable part of that inn—stand several lock-up garages. Reggie led the way into one and fastened the doors. "We have here," he pointed to a corner, "a bundle of cotton wool with a sandbag behind it. If the gentleman will satisfy himself there is no deception—"

"Get on," said Lomas.

"The revolver is that handed us by Inspector Warnham, certified to belong to the dead man, still containing five cartridges. Are you ready?"

The garage reverberated as he fired five shots into the bundle. "We now collect the cartridge cases and the bullets." It took some time. "Five in all. Come on." He marched Lomas up to their room.

Bell stood there poring over some small sheets of paper. "I say, Mr. Fortune—"

he began.

"One moment. One moment. We now examine our bullets under a magnifying glass of low power and we find that—in between the regular grooves—they exhibit two scratches—"

"You don't want a glass to see 'em," Lomas grumbled.

"Caused by some small faults in the barrel of the J. B. revolver. We now compare the bullet which killed J. B. And find—only one scratch—quite different."

"Good Gad!" said Lomas.

"The provisional conclusion is that Julian Brase was not shot with the revolver placed where his body was found."

"Provisional!" Lomas cried.

"God bless my soul!" said Bell. "Here, Mr. Fortune—you ought to hear this."

"What's your trouble, Bell?"

"It's a report from Harland, sir. He's found a chap who goes round the villages with a cart selling china. Always calls at Brase on Mondays. He says that on the Monday Julian Brase was first missed he saw him go into his brother's house in the afternoon. Quite definite. Harland says he makes a good witness."

"Yes. I thought Mrs. Brase was telling the truth," said Reggie. "That fits. Julian asked her for money after lunch. He went down to tell brother Roger she wouldn't give it him—and brother Roger identifies a pistol that was found where he was found dead."

"But it was brother Roger reported him dead, sir."

"Well, brother Roger and the rector's wife. Strong, determined woman. Brother Roger's been a little coy all through, don't you think? He hasn't exactly thrust himself on us. He only talks to Warnham. Stay at home fellow. Yet he has a car—though he didn't come in it this morning."

"What do you mean?" said Lomas quickly.

But Reggie held up his hand. Some one was coming heavily upstairs. The door opened to reveal a policeman. "Mr. Lomas, sir? The chief constable says would you step around immediate?"

Lomas beckoned to Reggie. In the outer office they passed a large man fidgeting impatiently under the gaze of curious policemen. The chief constable, purple of face, was conferring with a uniformed inspector.

"Ha, Lomas! Good. Here's a new development. That artist fellow, Mrs.

Brase's flame, has turned up. We've got him sitting out there now. He came in as bold as brass, and asked if it was true Mrs. Brase was charged with her husband's murder. Seen all this stuff in the papers, he said. The inspector here asked him what business it was of his. He says he has a statement to make that will clear her."

"Well, he'll have to make it, colonel," said Lomas.

"Quite so. Just my view. Bring him in. You'll take down what he says, Jordan." The large man was brought. "Now, sir, who are you and where do you come from?"

"Timothy Arnold. Paris last. I live at St. Ives. Who are you?"

"The chief constable of Wessex, sir."

"You've put Mrs. Brase in the dock for murder?"

"Ha. Has Mrs. Brase been communicating with you, sir?"

"Mrs. Brase didn't know where I was."

"I dare say," the chief constable laughed, and turned to Lomas. "I dare say, eh?"

Lomas shrugged. "Mrs. Brace was charged with murder this morning," he said. "Do you want to say anything about it?"

"I'm here to say she didn't kill the man."

"You want to give evidence for the defence?"

"No, sir. I've come to give myself up. I shot her husband."

The chief constable breathed hard. Lomas put up his eyeglass. "Be careful," he said. "That is a confession of murder. What you say can be used against you."

"That's what I'm here for. I'm an old friend of Mrs. Brase. I hadn't seen her since she married till this spring. I was down here sketching. I found her husband was a drunken, gambling brute, giving her a hell of a life. I couldn't stand for it.

"I came back and found him alone up there in the park, and shot him and cleared out to Paris. I never thought any man would be fool enough to put it on Mrs. Brase. She—why, she never hurt anything. She couldn't. Then I saw in the papers what you were up to, and here I am."

"Did you bring your pistol with you?" said Reggie.

"No, sir. That's in the Channel. You can go and dive for it."

"What sort of pistol was it?"

"My army pistol," Arnold laughed. "What do you think?"

Reggie lay back in his chair.

A silence was broken by the inspector laboriously reading out the record of the confession. "Will you sign that, Arnold?"

" Sure."

"Very well. You'll be detained while we make inquiries." They watched him march out. "That's a sportsman," Lomas said.

"Damme, sir," cried the chief constable, "I always thought Mrs. Brase had a man with her in the business."

"She hadn't, according to Arnold," Reggie objected. "She wasn't in it at all. He clears her."

The chief constable laughed. "Don't you believe it, doctor. They're both in it. The eternal triangle, eh, what? They wanted the husband out of the way."

"Oh, my head!" Reggie murmured. "Either you believe him or you don't. Better make up your mind which. A jury won't do both. Even juries have their limits." He turned; Inspector Warnham had come in. "Hello, Warnham. Roger Brase still swearing to the pistol?"

VIII

ARNHAM glared at him.
"Yes, doctor, I have been to
see Mr. Roger Brase," he
said sulkily. "And he says
that was Mr. Julian's pistol,

and there never was any other at the Hall."
"Wash out, Warnham; wash out," the chief constable waved his hand. "Never mind that pistol. We've got a confession," and he told of it with glee.

Inspector Warnham struggled to reorganize his ideas. "Yes, sir, there was a lot of talk about Mrs. Brase and this artist fellow. I did always have a notion he was in it. But what about the pistol I found?"

"Yes. You'll want some new evidence," Reggie smiled.

Lomas stood up as one having authority.

"Arnold's story must be tested," he announced. "I'll arrange for inquiries about his movements at St. Ives and in Paris. You must see if you can find any trace of his being here. Let's have a scheme ready for the morning."

They went back to the inn, and Reggie stretched himself upon two chairs. "Well meaning man," he murmured. "Did it all for the best."

"Who do you mean?" said Lomas testily.

"Oh, all of them. The old colonel the hasty Warnham, T. Arnold, artist. All meaning so well."

"You're helpful, aren't you?" said Lomas. "It's a cursed mess of a case. Here, Bell, let's get to business." Superintendent Bell, listening in sad surprise to this bad temper, was told of the confession, and required to concert measures for the discovery of Arnold's movements. And Mr. Fortune watched and listened. But he seemed to be listening for something else.

It did not come till after dinner; it came with the purr of a car and the quick step of Sam the chauffeur. Reggie sprang up to meet him. "Anything happened?"

"Quite a lot, sir. Harland and me been watching Roger Brase's place, like you said. Warnham came over there this afternoon, and was inside for a while and went away. Roger Brase saw him off and walked about in the grounds a bit. After dark he came out again.

"Walked down to that bit of rough ground behind. Knelt down and stuffed something into a rabbit hole. Kicked the earth out of it and went back to the house. Then we got onto it, and this is what he was burying." He held out another service revolver.

Reggie took it. "Sand, Lomas, old thing," he smiled. "Lots of sand. He shook the revolver over a sheet of paper.

"Of course there's sand," said Lomas. "The thing's been in a rabbit hole."

"Yes. But this is the right sort of sand. The sand that was in Julian Brase's blood. Service revolver. Marked R. B. Empty. Barrel not foul. But a trifle of sand about. Just clean it, Sam. Another little experiment is indicated."

"There's no cartridges," Lomas objected.

"Oh, I have some. I thought we might get a little more shooting."

Again they went to the garage, switched on the light, and shut themselves in. "Ordinary service ammunition, Lomas. No deception. We now load and fire. Six bullets, Sam."

In the upper room he laid them on the table and sat down and bent over one with the magnifying glass. But Lomas was quicker. "Good Gad!" he said softly. "The single scratch."

Reggie examined them one by one, slowly, minutely. "Yes. One scratch," he said at last, and compared them with the bullet that killed Julian Brase. Which is the same scratch. And that's that." He lay back in his chair and smiled. "There's your case, Lomas."

And again Lomas said, "Good Gad!"

"Yes. I always told you Warnham had his uses."

"What the devil has Warnham got to do with it?"

"He went out and told Roger there was some catch about the revolver. So Roger thought he'd better put his out of the way. And here we are."

"Yes, sir," said Bell. "But what about this fellow Arnold?"

"Oh, Arnold! He's irrelevant. He's picturesque. He only wanted to hang himself to save Flora Brase. He believes she did it, of course. I dare say, she'll forgive him."

Lomas said something about Mr. Arnold. Lomas went out to wrestle with a chief constable who was incredulous, bewildered, and at last anxious to oblige. For the rest of that night Sergeant Harland kept watch on the house of Roger Brase.

Early in the morning Inspector Warnham called there once again and arrested Roger Brase as the murderer of his brother. It was reported by the accompanying constable that their drive back to Horsbury was like hell, so wild were the reproaches of Roger Brase at Warnham's false friendship, so fiercely morose Inspector Warnham.

Taking the morning air at the door of

the White Bull, Mr. Fortune and Superintendent Bell watched that car pass. "Not a nice man, Bell," said Mr. Fortune, and went into breakfast.

"I've been wondering what set him on

to do murder, sir."

"Well, go back to the beginning. The two of them, Julian, the heir to an estate that was loaded with debt; Roger, the younger brother. Both of 'em went the pace. Julian catches an heiress. His marrying clears the estate, but if he had a child that would cut Julian out.

"He didn't, and there was plenty of money going. Roger came in for his share. Then the wife found out her husband was a wrong 'un, and money got scarce. You heard her say Julian wanted money and she turned him down. Julian went off to tell brother Roger. No more money out of

Julian's wife.

"But if Julian was to die, the estate, the cleared estate, would come to Roger. Julian and Mrs. Julian were known to be quarreling. There was Arnold in the offing. If Julian was murdered, lots of the best people, like the rector's wife, would suspect Mrs. Brase. It ought to be pretty easy to put it on her. That's how it looked to Julian. So he shot. A clever fellow. Quite clever fellow. But a little timid."

"Timid, sir?" Bell gasped.

"Well, it was all going nicely, but he wasn't comfortable. He had to get Julian's revolver and put it up on the hill. His error. His gross error."

"He'd have got away with it if these Wessex police had handled the case."

"Yes. I wonder how many clever fellows do get away with it?"

At this point Lomas, who loves not breakfast, arrived to contemplate in horror the relics on the table.

"Just reconstructing the crime, Lomas," Reggie smiled.

"My God!" said Lomas reverently, and drank a cop of coffee with visible effort.

"Fresh air and gentle exercise," Reggie advised him, "and you won't know yourself at lunch. Come on. I'm going to Brase."

Some village folk gaped from the road at the shut windows and drawn blinds of Roger Brase's house. "Want to go in, sir?" Bell said as Reggie stopped the car. "I want to go into the garage."

Superintendent Bell, introducing himself to the frightened housekeeper, asked for the key. Mr. Brase had no key. The garage stood in a shrubbery away from the house. A little experiment on the lock by Bell persuaded it to open. Reggie pulled the dust sheet off the little car within.

"Sturton Mandeville, two seater, Gorham tires. You'll find marks to fit that on the track from the village through the park. Open the doors wide, will you? Yes. There are blood stains on the seat and the floor. I thought he was very coy with his car."

"Do you think the man was killed in here, sir?"

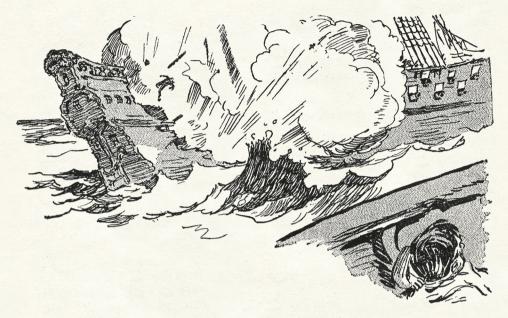
"Oh, no, no! Remember the sand. No. On that afternoon Julian came to the house, and our china merchant saw him go in. Nobody saw him go out. Where did he go? To see the grounds? Let us see brother Roger's grounds. They walked across a tennis lawn, through the garden, and beyond the garden into rough ground where heather and furze grew amid broken patches of sand.

Here Sam joined them. "Want to see where he hid the pistol, sir? This way." He led them on, explaining volubly.

But Reggie wandered off by himself. They found him in a little hollow, contemplating a clump of gorse. "Look. Something has lain in there." The bushes were twisted and broken. "Something that left threads on the gorse." He collected them carefully.

"Brown woollen threads. And Julian was in brown tweed." He moved to and fro and stirred the loose sand, peered here and there, stooped and picked up a cartridge case. "Service ammunition. Marked by the ejector with a deep nick similar to that in the cartridges fired from brother Roger's revolver. Well, well!"

He smiled serene. But suddenly his smile faded. "Oh, my aunt! Look!" A woman was coming—a plump, important woman in black, at full speed. "The rector's wife! Mr. Lomas will now explain himself to the rector's wife." He fled



The next moment with a roar mightier than its forty cannon-

MORAL PIRATES

By Joseph Gollomb

UNIQUE IN HISTORY IS THE LAWLESSNESS OF MISSON AND TEW, WARRIORS AND DREAMERS, WHO FOUNDED AN EMPIRE ON CRIME

A Story of Fact



HIS true tale will bewilder youngsters and many a grown-up. What, moral pirates? Men who with cannon, cutlass, and pistol capture treasure galleons

on the Spanish Main and then capture the hearts of their prisoners by the royal treatment they accord them? Pirates who fly the skull and crossbones and at the same time preach brotherly love?

Pirate chiefs who can slash and shoot with the best, but who will not tolerate drunkenness or even profanity on board their ships? Men who sack and plunder seaboard towns and with the loot found tiny republics on a dark continent, Utopias

where men actually live in liberty, fraternity, and equality?

Freebooters who fight like fiends and live like great-hearted missionaries? Why not rather make us believe in white blackbirds, I can hear some of my readers exclaim. Moral pirates! Bewildering; no, worse, incredible! Well, life and truth are so often bewildering and incredible. But let the story of Francois Misson and Thomas Tew speak for itself.

Francois Misson was the youngest of a brood of children born to a none too prosperous French family in Provence. In such circumstances a boy if he is the youngest will find himself at the bottom of the heap, or he will develop fighting qualities.



-the great warship broke in two, a volcano in its midst

The Misson children liked to play at soldiering. Their forbears were soldiers. And always Francois, the youngest, was general.

There was never any dispute among them as to who was to lead the valiant Misson army against the fire-belching dragon who guarded the luscious orchards of Marquis de Braie. For it was Francois who created the dragon, made him seem almost real to his brothers and sisters, fired them with the sense of their mission to slay the wicked monster, and made their mouths water with promises of delicious apricots and grapes that would be theirs as the reward of the adventure.

Then, born captain that he was, he would outline the battle tactics, lead the assault, set examples of high valor, and crown the enterprise with ringing victory.

The only thing his troops didn't like about their general was his habit of making long-winded speeches about liberty, brother-hood, fraternity, love of one's neighbor, sharing one's possessions with the whole world, and so forth and so on interminably. But as he permitted his loyal troops to gorge themselves on their loot while he talked they didn't mind it so much.

Francois had the physique of a wrestler with the face of a poet. At sixteen he had the body and strength of a young man. His glossy brown hair was long and wild; he had great, brown, glowing eyes; his fine skin was always bronzed with wind and sun. His was the broad-boned square face of the man born to withstand the battering of storms and circumstance.

He had a strong mouth alive with sensibility, gleaming teeth, and vivid lips; whether set grimly in fighting or flashing with eloquence it was mightily convincing mouth.

Home and the village soon became too small to hold Francois. He was like a wild colt in a stable. It was hard on both the young and his narrow environment for them to remain together. So the family proposed to make a soldier of him.

But that meant living in barracks, traveling on foot, and although the period did not lack in wars and fighting, inevitably in a soldier's life there are long periods of inactivity. That didn't suit the temper of Francois.

He wanted action even when there was nothing to do; and the sea is the only element that provides a storm to rock you even when you are asleep. So to the sea went François as naturally as a gull goes to salt water.

He had a cousin, Captain Fourbin, who commanded the frigate Victoire, fighting for the Grand Monarch. Francois joined his cousin on board the ship not as an ordinary sailor, but as a sort of gentleman volunteer, who could go with the ship or leave it as he pleased.

The Victoire was sent on a cruise in the France was at war with Mediterranean. England at that time and the cruise of the Victoire was a highly colorful affair, full of fighting and plundering of the enemy.

No Lack of Fighting

The captain's job was replete with exigencies that called for all the talent a man had, both for seamanship and fighting. Captain Fourbin was a master at both. And always at his side in the press of storm or battle stood young Francois, learning the art.

He was a glutton for learning, whether from books, men, or life. It was not long before the voracious youngster could, so to speak, steer a ship with one hand and wield a cutlass with the other. And the more able he grew the more impatient he became to use his talents.

There was no lack of fighting for any one with the Victoire. She was pierced for forty guns; she carried only thirty; but Captain Fourbin always acted as though he had the full complement. For instance, off Sicily they encountered two Sallee rovers, the Lion and the Dragon, both Englishmen, therefore enemies.

The Lion carried twenty guns, the Dragon twenty-four, forty-four against the But Captain Fourbin Victoire's thirty. shut his eyes to mathematics and pitched

into the fight.

The Lion got to one side of the Victoire, the Dragon on the other and then they let fly from every porthole. They aimed not at men, but up at the rigging of the Vic-Their idea was first to disable the Frenchman and then board him.

But the French at the guns fed them, as though they were modern stokers feeding an ocean liner's fires and their mates pointed

them with eyes as keen as hawks'. Every shot bit into the hull of the Lion just below the water line.

The result was the Lion found itself so badly hulled that it began to list heavily. Fearing capsize the captain of the Lion ordered guns and cargo to be shifted to the other side so as to careen his vessel and keep the shot holes above water. Answering to the maneuver the ship began to tilt over. Up above the water showed the wounds in her hull. So far so good.

But to the horror of all on board the Lion the ship kept on careening. and down went her ports, freighted by all the guns on board her. Would she never stop? Suddenly with a sickening lurch the Lion completely capsized, keel in the air; then sank.

Now the Victoire had only the Dragon to deal with.

The latter, although it had shot to pieces the Victoire's rigging and raked its decks with gunfire, now decided for discretion, and turned to run. But Captain Fourbin had become too interested in the fight to call it a draw. So he gave chase and steadily gained.

Misson, the Leader

It would be only a question of minutes now before one could leap from the deck of the Victoire to that of the Dragon. And at the rail of the Victoire poised for the leap stood young Francois Misson at the head of a boarding party.

His long, brown hair was whipping in the wind; his shirt was torn by a bullet and discolored with sweat and blood; he was actually laughing aloud with the exultation of fighting; his right hand held a

cutlass, the left a pistol.

Mere yards now separated the two ships. The decks of the Dragon were simply swarming with dark-faced Moors. Frenchman had lost heavily under the cannonading from the two ships. Captain Fourbin had concentrated his guns on the now vanished Lion and the heavily manned Dragon had as yet suffered little loss. The odds in man power were against young Francois and his followers.

Now the two ships ground their timbers

against each other and onto the deck of the Dragon leaped young Misson and his crew. Instantly they found themselves in the thick of the fight of their lives.

One French blade had to parry the thrusts of two and three Moors. Slashing and cutting, yelling exultantly, young Misson fought as miraculously as against the dragon he himself had created in his childhood's exploits.

Agonies of Remorse

But the scores of fighting Moors led by English pluck and brains were no figments of a boy's imagination; and back to the rail were pressed Francois and his men. Some of them were hacked to pieces. Some were thrown down the hatches or into the sea. Some fought on partly disabled. But those who survived went as mad as their young leader and for every man they lost their cutlasses and pistols took usurious toll.

Then from the Victoire to the Dragon leaped another boarding crew, and back this time went the Moors, firing and slashing, on the defense. The decks were treacherous with blood and cluttered with dead and wounded. The fighters stumbled and plunged like stampeded cattle.

The roar of guns and the yells of battlecrazed men, the shrieks of the wounded and the cries of the dying were to young Francois like the trumpeting of a storm to one who loves the sea at its maddest. He was in his element, and as he was leading the fight he led his men to victory.

Cut to pieces the Moor crew threw up their hands in surrender. Francois saw one Moslem leap down the main hatch. One would think that occupied as he was Francois would not have an eye for such a detail at a time when men leaped and fell into the sea literally by the score. But in the Moslem's hand Francois saw a lighted fuse. Down into the hatch after him went the youth.

The Moslem was running three bounds ahead of Francois. Down through the dark passages in the hold went the pursuit. Francois had a fair idea where his man was headed. And it was with a furious effort that he threw himself on the man and cut him down with his cutlass just as the Mos-

lem had thrown open the door to the powder magazine and was about to thrust into it the lighted match.

The danger of being blown to shreds now averted, the men of the Victoire gave the Moors the quarter and mercy they would not themselves have received had they lost. And deep down below the water line in the foulest conceivable of holes were found fifteen Christian captives who were led up to the deck.

"White for bliss and blind for sun and stunned for liberty."

Into the port of Leghorn went the Victoire with prisoners and prize. Young Francois went ashore to spend part of his prize money and to go to confessional. There was a side to the youth which was as different from the cutlass-slashing fighter in him as oil is different from water.

The deepest passion in him was love of man. If along with it went a talent for fighting to the death it is not my job to explain the contradiction. Men often are that way; and we must take Francois Misson as we find him. But now that the lust of battle was over the youth felt agonies of remorse.

Two of a Kidney

So he went to confessional to purge his conscience of murderous memories. The priest to whom he confessed was little older than himself. Caraccioli was a fiery-eyed young Italian who had made the mistake of his life when he chose a career that would confine him to a priest's cell. As Francois told of the battles he had been through, instead of filling the priest with the sense of Francois's guilt he infected him with restlessness.

Caraccioli was as predestined to the sea and fighting, to untrammelled thinking and restless roving as was Francois himself. The confession became instead a lure. The young Italian heard the wild music of battle, he visioned the glint of the sea and its limitless surges—and his little white-washed cell became a prison to him. Then, too, in the youth confessing to him he sensed a kinship in spirit, a comradeship it would take more than a lifetime to exhaust.

The upshot was that Caraccioli put away forever his cassock and went along with Francois back to the Victoire. The ship returned to Marseilles. Here the two young men spent a restless month while the Victoire underwent repairs.

Then the ship was ordered to Rochelle to escort a merchant fleet to Martinique. At Rochelle the two young men found that the convoy was not yet ready; that it would be perhaps another month or two before they would move.

A month or two of waiting on top of already two months of inaction was more than the two friends could endure. So they volunteered for a cruise in the English Channel on the Triomphe under Captain Le Blanc.

The Dream of Francois

It was, of course, not a pleasure cruise, this scouting around of a French frigate in the English Channel at a time when France was at war with England. Francois and Caraccioli got all the action they wanted.

First, they chased and pounded to pieces a Jamaica freighter. Here Francois saw an action on the part of Captain Le Blanc which dropped into his nature like a seed in fertile soil.

The Frenchmen had boarded the sinking Britisher and took every bit of booty they could lay hands upon. Then the search by the French crew extended to the personal belongings of the British sailors. But peremptorily the captain stopped it.

"We are not pirates," he said, "but servants of the Grand Monarch. We do

not rob the poor!"

Where the soil is deep and rich the bounty of a cornfield flows over and flowers into bluets and poppies and other gay little blooms. So it seems to me that in the hearts of great fighters there is enough richness to give soil to the bloom of chivalry, magnanimity.

Captain Le Blanc's decent act in not letting his crew plunder the poor belongings of their prisoners chimed in Francois's nature and woke reverberations. That was the way to treat a conquered opponent!

Two things had drawn Père Caraccioli to Francois—the man of action and the

dreamer. For in rare men the two do meet and reënforce each other; Francois was such a man.

At a time when the first of our modern democracies was yet unborn by a hundred years, when kings and despots were the rule and slaves in chains were as familiar a phenomenon as dogs on leashes to-day, Francois dreamed of a state in which all men had equal rights, shared everything like brothers, in which one race was as good as another and men would prefer living in peace together to slaughtering each other for gain.

To all this Caraccicli, with the fervency of a young Italian and a one-time priest, said a loud amen. If ever they came to power, the youths promised each other, they would bring these beautiful dreams to realization. We shall see whether they kept this promise.

When their former ship, the Victoire, was ready for its cruise the two friends rejoined it. The frigate safely delivered the merchantmen at Martinique and Guadeloupe. Then it set out to hunt down whatever British ships it should meet.

They had no difficulty in meeting their first Britisher; the difficulty lay in getting away from it. For into sight hove the Winchelsea, a mammoth warship carrying forty great guns and equipment to match. It was more than big enough to blow the Victoire out of the water; and Captain Fourbin had bitten off more than he could chew.

Victory or Death

But having started it there was no alternative but to press the fight as strongly as possible. The two ships hove broadside to each other and let fly. The Victoire had only fifteen guns on that side and the Winchelsea twenty.

When the roar of the British broadside answered the Victoire it was like a lion replying to a wild cat. At the first blast from the Britisher the tornado of lead swept the Frenchman's deck with terrible havoc.

Among the first to be killed was Captain Fourbin himself and his three lieutenants. That left only the ship's master alive as the commanding officer. Plunged suddenly into supreme responsibility by a catastrophe

that had swept off his superiors and threatened to wipe out the rest of the crew the master laid his hands on a rope to run up a flag of surrender.

His hand never reached its destination. A strong young hand knocked it aside. Young Francois, cousin to the dead captain, and born leader that he was calmly thrust the master from his position in command.

"By your intention you lose your post!" Francois cried. "Only the man willing to lead this ship to victory or to death is entitled to command. Men!" he cried to the crew about him. "Will you follow me on with the fight?"

A Bolt from Heaven

He had to make himself heard above the roar of the Winchelsea's cannon and his own. But they had no trouble understanding him and certainly he had no difficulty in hearing their thundering assent.

Then the Victoire proceeded apparently to commit suicide. For instead of standing away from the Winchelsea Francois steered his ship up to the Britisher. Down among his cannoneers he went keying them up to still higher pitch.

Ramming and firing for their very lives yet keeping their brains cool and eyes clear for the deadliest precision they could summon the men of the Victoire made every gun do the work of two; and every shot went home. Meanwhile, of course, the other ship was riddling the Victoire and playing havoc with it.

The brave have a faith that even in the midst of blackest misfortune they can count on the grace of good luck. Perhaps never was this faith so well borne out as in this fight.

For one of the shots from the Victoire shrewdly found its way into the very bowels of the Winchelsea. Where the shot struck timber took fire and iron broke into sparks. And one of the sparks lit on the powder magazine.

To the desperate men on board the Victoire it seemed as if a timely bolt from the heavens had struck. One moment the Winchelsea was belching flame at them from the muzzles of its cannon. The next moment and with a roar mightier than all

its forty cannon together the great warship broke in two, a bursting volcano in its midst.

Even those on board the Victoire were were shaken by the explosion. Still more were they shaken by the unexpected turn of destiny's whirligig. Between black despair to radiant hope only the flicker of an eyelash intervened.

What became of the Winchelsea has remained one of the mysteries of marine history. For reasons we shall amply learn the Victoire never reported the loss of the Britisher. From what we know of the explosion the ship must have broken in two. But some time later at the end of a great storm the head of the ship floated ashore at Antigua.

On board the Victoire her new commander and what was left of the crew, were still stunned with the unexpectedness of their salvation. Then Francois turned to his men:

"Ours is the victory! And ours is the Victoire! It is by your consent that I am in command, and it is your consent I ask to make my comrade, Caraccioli, my lieutenant!"

Captain, Supreme

Caraccioli was lying in a pool of his own blood. One of the Winchelsea cannon balls had carried away his left leg. With rough sea surgery a man was binding up the stump as best he could. Even when he was down Caraccioli had helped direct the fighting. So it was with unanimous acclaim that the crew gave Francois the lieutenant for which he asked.

It was a curious, momentous speech of acceptance that Caraccioli made. His face was drawn with pain, but when he spoke it was as if some other man had just lost his leg, so little did his thoughts run on himself. He thanked Francois for the honor of the appointment. He thanked the men for their hearty endorsement of him. Then he proceeded to propose a plan as bold as had been the fight they had so unexpectedly won.

He pointed out to Francois that they were now masters of their own fate. "If we go back to Martinique to our superiors,

the most that you, Francois, can hope for is a lieutenant's commission. Whereas now

vou are captain, supreme.

" And all that you, my comrades of the crew, may expect is perhaps a pat on the back and a continuance of your lives as common ordinary sailors subject to the orders of a captain who obeys an admiral, who obeys a minister, who obeys a monarch! All these have a power of life and death over us.

A Deo a Libertate

"But as yet we are free men. We can still dispose of our lives and fortunes as we will. Shall we keep this freedom? Or shall we return it to our masters?"

François was shaken to the heart by this challenge. And among the crew an agitated murmur ran. Caraccioli pressed his ad-

vantage.

"You, Francois, and you, my friends, have often spoken idly of wanting to be not subjects to a king, but free citizens in a better world, in which liberty and equality of rights prevailed. You have wished for an ideal republic. Well, here it is, the republic of the Victoire! What say you, Captain Misson? Shall we raise the flag of our own little republic and remain free, defending it against the world?"

"Yes!" roared Francois passionately.

"Yes!" roared the crew. "Long live our little republic! Long live our Captain Misson! Long live our Lieutenant Caraccioli!"

The other officers of the little republic were chosen by the crew with inspiring unanimity. Misson then put the question as to whither the republic literally was to go. It was decided for the Spanish West Indies.

The question next came up what was to be the flag. To most of the men there was They knew that a but one alternative. ship flew either the flag of its country or the black flag of piracy. So that a cry arose for the skull and crossbones on the field of black. But Caraccioli objected.

"We are not pirates, but lovers of liberty! We are not fighting to amass loot, but

to put down tyranny!"

To all this the young captain more than agreed. And it was at his suggestion that there was adopted as their flag a white field on which the motto was inscribed A Deo a Libertate—for God and Liberty.

Then followed perhaps the most amazing scene in the annals of what I suppose must be called piracy, since most readers will agree with most of the Victoire's crew as putting the color of piracy on the expedi-The ship's money was brought up from the cabin and put into a great chest.

"This money, my friends," announced the captain, "belongs to us all in common. It shall be divided, with equal share to every man on board, be he captain or cabin boy. To this money I add the silver of the captain's plate service. Everything we have on board belongs to every one of you!"

But the crew objected. A spokesman for them presented their point of view. "The captain's plate service must remain part of the captain's cabin furnishings. His cabin must be worthy of the post and the man we honor!"

Thus the question of possession was dismissed as settled. Misson went on to address his crew, urging them to live in harmony among themselves.

The Republic of the Sea

"But you will have to fight the whole world, I am afraid. For society will declare us to be pirates, and not only close its ports to us, but will send its warships to destroy us if they can. That means war and we shall not be the unprepared victims. I now, hereby, in the name of the Republic of the Sea, declare war against all nations who will so judge us!

"At the same time I recommend to you, my brothers, a humane and generous behavior toward all prisoners you will take. We cannot expect to meet the same treatment from others should we encounter ill fortune. But all the more compulsory is it upon us to show a nobility greater than those on whom we wage war!"

A muster of the crew showed two hundred fit for duty and thirty-five sick and wounded. Then the Republic of the Sea set out on its cruise of conquest. In the Windward Channel they came on a becalmed Boston schooner from which they took a supply of sugar.

The captain, thinking the Victoire still a French man-of-war, declared later that he had never been more civilly treated. Later a Jamaica privateersman fell into their hands. From this they took only ammunition and allowed it to proceed otherwise unmolested.

But their next encounter was a less polite one. They came on two Dutch traders, one with twenty-two guns, the other with twenty-four. The Dutchmen refused to surrender. One on each side of the Victoire they kept up a stubborn defense until Misson lost his patience.

The Cornerstone Slips

Regardless of the Dutchmen's belching guns he ran his ship alongside one of them, tied up to it, then pressing the muzzles of his cannon against her side, he gave the order to fire. With great holes rent in her hull the Dutchman went down to the bottom of the sea, carrying every living person along with her.

Its consort, seeing the disaster, asked for quarter; and the Dutchmen were more than surprised not only to have quarter promised, but the promise kept. The surviving ship had a cargo on board of fine goods, gold and silver, lace, brocades, and the like.

The citizens of the little floating republic then voted to take the captured ship into Carthagena and sell it as the prize taken by a French warship. This was done, and Misson used the name of the dead Captain Fourbin to avert suspicion.

Caraccioli was sent ashore with a letter signed Fourbin, "explaining" the capture of the Dutchman and asking the governor, Don Josef de la Zerda, to send the merchants on board the ship to buy the captured wares.

The governor graciously acceded to the request, and not only received the prisoners, but sent the French captain a gift of fresh provisions. The goods brought fifty thousand "pieces of eight." In return the governor received as a gift a fine piece of brocade.

In his apparently innocent heart the governor was touched. He then wrote "Captain Fourbin" that the galleon St. Josef would sail from Puerto Bello in eight or ten

days for Havana and that she had on board silver and gold bars to the value of eight hundred thousand "pieces of eight." Would "Captain Fourbin" be gracious enough to escort with the Victoire the treasure ship and see that it did not fall into the hands of pirates?

Then it was that Misson and his crew saw the reason for the governor's surprising kindness. He had an ax to grind. He had been angling for services to which he was not entitled. But magnanimously, even enthusiastically, Misson and his crew decided to accept the governor's touching commission.

The Victoire hurried off to Puerto Bello. It looked as if the Republic of the Sea would start off with an ample treasury. For, of course, while the republic was founded on sentiments of brotherhood within its borders—or shall we call them sides—its citizens were far from being sentimentalists.

They knew that if the governor had learned of their real identity he would have trained his cannon on them. So that they felt the Spanish galleon would be rightly theirs when it fell into their hands.

But when the Victoire, all avid for its expected prize, hove into Puerto Bello, there was no St. Josef there. The galleon had already set sail. The cornerstone of the new republic's treasury had slipped away!

"Black Brothers, I Set You Free!"

To have one's mouth water in anticipation of a Lucullian banquet and then to have it vanish into thin air before one has touched a crumb would be mild disappointment compared to Misson's when he found that the galleon with eight hundred thousand pieces of eight which he was to escort, had escaped him. So he turned elsewhere for consolation.

He began to pick up crumbs of comfort. A London ship bound for Jamaica cost him but little fighting and yielded four thousand "pieces of eight," some rum and much sugar. Also there were on board twelve French prisoners. These were only too delighted to join the Republic of the Sea.

Then north of Cuba he captured the Nieuwstadt, a Dutchman carrying eighteen guns. So overawed was Captain Blaes, the commander, at the Victoire bristling with its thirty guns, that he, too, offered but little fight; and the Nieuwstadt became consort ship to the Victoire. Also she had two thousand in gold dust and seventeen black slaves.

Misson rounded up the Dutch captain, crew, and their slaves and proceeded to deliver a long harangue denouncing the institution of slavery.

"Men who sell other men like beasts prove that their religion is nothing more than a grimace! No man is worthy enough to have power over another! You, my poor black brothers, I set you free! I offer you sincerely your choice of life. If you so wish I will set you on shore and let you take your way wherever you please. Or, if you so wish, I shall welcome you to join us as equals in the Republic of the Sea!"

Lectured By the Pirate Chief

To a man the blacks chose to enter as citizens of his republic.

Caraccioli became captain of the Nieuwstadt and the two ships ran into the river Lagoa for cleaning and repairs. Here in the languor of a semitropical climate, in a tand where man had no need to toil for fruit, and food grew literally for the mere picking, the citizens of the Republic of the Sea—or if you choose to call them so, the pirates—leisurely enjoyed the taste of life ashore.

In spite of all the sentiments of brotherhood and equality that sincerely prevailed in the Republic of the Sea decorum and man-of-war discipline were strictly maintained. But now they had in their midst Dutch prisoners, who were not part of the republic. There was no check upon them; for although Misson did not consider them brothers, he did treat them as human beings.

But the Dutchmen were tough tars. They had enormous capacity for liquor and corresponding thirst. As Misson, consistently with his humaneness, put little check upon them, the Dutchmen soon hit their full drinking stride. The result was that the most common sight in the daily life of the republic was a drunken carouse.

Then, too, the Dutchmen had a style of their own in profanity. Now, profanity like capacity for liquor, is considered by many men as a talent and become tempting to exhibit. The more soberly speaking citizens of the republic began to envy the Dutchmen's magnificence of swearing. They began to emulate their style.

What followed seems a little hard to believe; but I could lay before my readers dusty, but impressive documents to prove what I am about to relate. Captain Misson, master pirate, called a meeting of the deep-drinking, free-swearing Dutchmen, and preached them a sermon on the vileness of profanity and drunkenness!

He had to use the Dutch captain as interpreter. But he managed to get every syllable of his sermon understood. His ears, he told them, had been little offended by bad language until they had come on board. His sight had not been annoyed by sottish drunkenness until they had come.

"These practices minister neither to profit nor to pleasure," he went on.

The leathery Dutchmen could scarcely believe their ears. They began to show their intense amusement. They, hard-drinking, gin-pickled, sea-toughened mariners, were being lectured by a pirate chief in the language and spirit of a small town minister scolding his congregation for drinking and bad language!

"These New-fashioned Pirates"

One more sentence remained to the sermon; and the grins of the congregation were broadening.

"I have only this to add," Misson concluded. "The next man I see drunk or from whose lips I hear profanity will be tied to a grating and severely whipped. Into the welts on his flesh salt will be rubbed. For every time the offense is repeated the punishment will be doubled."

Then he stepped down from his pulpit and went about his work. Most of the grins disappeared. And after three Dutchmen had occasion to realize that Misson meant every word he ever uttered, drunkenness and profanity died natural deaths in the Republic of the Sea.

When the two ships were spick and span again the republic took to the sea once more. Off Angola a second Dutch merchant was taken. She had much cloth on board, which gave the citizens of the republic a new wardrobe.

But now there were ninety prisoners to handle; too many for comfort. So all the prisoners were put on board the new prize and allowed to sail away unmolested. It is interesting to read part of the report written by these prisoners of their former captors:

"We were not a little surprised at the regularity, tranquillity, and humanity which we found among these new-fashioned pirates. Indeed eleven of our men, including two sailmakers, one carpenter and an armorer, chose to remain with the pirates rather than go free with us."

For a Newer and Better World

In Saldanha Bay, ten leagues north of the Cape of Good Hope, an English ship fell into their clutches. She put up a stiff fight, but it cost her the loss of her captain and fourteen men, the Victoire losing only twelve. In return the republic was the gainer by some sixty thousand pounds and much broadcloth.

The slain captain was buried by Misson with all the honors of war. He was sent to the bottom of the sea like the good mariner that he was. But the romantic Misson was not content with giving him the ordinary burial. In his ship's company was a stonecutter. Somewhere on board ship they found a small block of granite. Misson ordered the stonecutter to hew out a gravestone on which was carved:

"Ici gist un brave Anglois."

Then he sent the tombstone down to the bottom of the ocean to tell the fishes where lay "a brave Englishman."

Thirty of the English decided to remain with the republic. Their ship was added as the third of the fleet.

I want to repeat that full half of Misson, alongside of the man of action, was the dreamer. So far the republic had had only the stability of the ocean to rest upon. Now Misson began to dream of founding a republic on land. So his eyes turned to the green shore of East Africa.

Here were dazzling white beaches with an emerald sea breaking lazily over a land sleeping in the sunlight. Palms and fruit trees bowed their heads benignly and offered unstinted bounty to man. Birds of brilliant plumage darted through the air. The soil was rich beyond the dreams of any tiller in more niggardly lands.

Misson remembered from his rich store of reading how many times republics had been founded by pirates. He, who with considerable justice felt himself far above a mere robber, had vaster dreams for his republic than any pirate band ever had in going to live on shore.

Why should not the Republic of the Sea become a republic on land and begin a newer and a better world? So Misson hoisted the signal to his little fleet to make for the nearest land. It proved to be an island in the Comoro group between Madagascar and the east coast of Africa.

As the crews landed on the coral-tinted white beach, out of the green jungle came a black queen and her councilors. Behind them was a strong party of warriors, hideously painted and armed to the teeth. For some moments the two parties looked at each other, wondering whether it was to be blood or peace. Then the African queen with a woman's intuition read aright the heart of the young man at the head of the whites.

The Mingling of Bloods

A smile of welcome was her greeting. At once the two parties grounded their arms and freely mingled in peace. In the motley collection of races and nationalities of the republic there were several who managed to fulfill the rôle of interpreter between Misson and the queen. And through them both parties soon evolved a "pidgin" language.

Between the heads of the republic and the feminine members of African royalty there soon developed ties closer than political. Misson became attracted to the queen's sister, a slender specimen of primitive womanhood.

In his profoundly friendly feeling toward all races Misson dreamed of a humanity mingled of the bloods of all the races, whose genius would be all the more splendid because it comprised the gifts of all humanity, and whose vitality would be the greater because the culture of civilization and the freshness of a primitive people would be thus united.

Caraccioli also became interested in her majesty's niece. There was then held a gorgeous double wedding, the first of a series of marriages between the citizens of the republic and the subjects of her majesty, the queen of Johanna.

Meanwhile on the mainland the African king of Mohilla had been planning the capture of the queen and her desirable domain. He was, of course, ignorant of her new ally. Nevertheless the war-party he brought down was a powerful one. Attacking the queen's island empire by a descent in war-canoes, the king of Mohilla looked to a fairly agreeable conclusion.

An Idealist Outraged

To his amazement came the queen's warriors headed by hundreds of whites, all commanded by a white youth. To the king's horror instead of the familiar and anticipated attack with bows, arrows, and javelins, there broke out from the defenders the roar of musketry and of cannon.

The king's war-canoes were smashed like children's toys, and he saw scores of his fighters drown in the sea. The issue was only too easy to foresee. Wisely the king made the sign of surrender.

Only one hundred warriors remained to him when the battle ceased. With these as prisoners the king went ashore and delivered himself up to the mercy of the queen and her subjects. Gallantly Misson permitted the queen and her warriors to behave as if the victory were solely due to them.

But soon he saw that they meant to treat their hundred prisoners according to the practice prevailing among savages. To the victor belonged the lives of the vanquished, and the queen's warriors licked their chops at the prospect of a juicy massacre.

That didn't meet with Misson's sentiments. He was too understanding to try to reform with a single stroke what was perhaps an elemental emotion on the part of his allies. So he took the hundred prisoners on board his ships.

With his customary chivalry he had sent back the king of Mohilla to his stronghold on the mainland. Now he managed to convince the queen that it would be good policy to live in amity with the king and to send the hundred prisoners to him as a peace offering.

She was easily convinced, and Misson sent a detachment of his men as an escort to the prisoners and to deliver his message of good will. But the king of Mohilla was a savage, and not a very intelligent one. All his mind could grasp was that he was, so to speak, back in his home town with his own gang about him. Back, too, were one hundred of his best fighters.

In his clutch were a dozen whites who had inflicted such a humiliating beating on him. This was as far as he could see. So he seized the messengers of good will, stripped them, maltreated them and sent back only one of them with an insolent message to Misson.

The young idealist was outraged and the man of action, very warm as to temper, unlimbered. Boarding one of his ships and taking with him an ample supply of ammunition Misson set sail for the mainland.

A Double-crossing King

In front of the king of Mohilla's town Misson proceeded to pound daylight into the king's thick skull. He said it with cannon. Shell after shell dropped on the horrified blacks and tore their proudest strongholds into so many handfuls of grass and bits of mud.

It was not long before the king, a sadder if not a wiser man, was down at the seashore on his knees, his hands aloft pleading for mercy.

This was a plea to which the heart of Misson always responded. But never did his head part company with his heart. Having once experienced the king's capacity for treachery Misson now demanded that he send two of his children and ten of his nobles as hostages. The king accepted only too readily, and sent the twelve people, presumably most dear to him, on board Misson's ship.

In return Misson and his comrade Caraccioli with only a boat-crew in attendance went to dine with the king, in token of amity. The dinner went off with surface smoothness. But as the handful of whites were returning to their boat, from the bushes there came a shower of arrows. Out of seven of the boat-crew three were killed outright, two more were wounded.

Misson himself took out his pistol and fired into the bushes. But an arrow lodged in his side and put an end, for the time being, to his fighting. And as though fortune meant them ever to share equally, Caraccioli was similarly wounded.

The Preordained Home

Then from the ship came rescuing parties. With Misson temporarily removed from command the others were not checked by any of his humane considerations. They descended on the king of Mohilla with guns blazing, and the torch ran wild.

The foolish savage received what I suppose must be called another lesson. After the guns got through speaking and fire had sated its gluttony, there were neither king nor subjects left to benefit by what wisdom they may have got in the lesson.

Returned to Johanna, Misson and Caraccioli and their men were tenderly nursed by their wives. It took them six weeks to recover from their wounds and get back their tireless energy. The enforced wait awoke again their restlessness for the freedom on the seas, the hourly chance that adventure and riches may heave in sight. So the fleet of three ships sailed forth again. Ten days after leaving Johanna they met game worthy of their valor.

It was a great Portuguese ship, carrying sixty cannon. Neither side hesitated to engage. The three ships formed a triangle, whose fire was concentrated on the Portuguese. But the latter was no helpless victim. She was equipped for sturdy fighting, and fight she did.

Her cannon ripped into the republic's fleet and sowed disaster on its decks. Part of Caraccioli's remaining leg was carried away by a cannon ball. Twenty of Misson's Englishmen gave up their ghost in the battle. But the odds against the Portuguese in cannon and men were too great; and she finally struck her colors.

I just spoke of Misson's cannon and men. In fairness I should add women. For both his wife and Caraccioli's accompanied their husbands on the cruise.

When eventually the three ships closed in on the Portuguese and the fighting became hand to hand, the two women armed themselves with cutlasses and threw themselves into the fight, neither asking nor giving consideration on the ground of sex. Misson's wife got a nasty slash in the shoulder from a cutlass, and Caraccioli's got a bullet in her side. But they accepted these as part of their marital fortune.

The Portuguese was taken in tow by the fleet, and in a bay ten leagues north of Diego Suarez Misson cast anchor. Here was the land holding out two arms of welcome to him. Here was a natural harbor and enticing interior. And it was as if destiny had pointed out to a wanderer his preordained home.

Misson announced to his republic that they would now "have a place they might call their own." Not a human being was visible on shore. It was as though they had come on a new world waiting for the advent of man.

The whole republic went on shore, and fired by Misson's dream and their own zest, they fell to chopping down trees, clearing ground and preparing habitations. It may be remembered that the republic's flagship, the Victoire, was pierced for forty guns, but carried only thirty.

The Colony Grows

From the Portuguese armament the ten empty portholes were now filled with cannon. The remaining thirty Portuguese guns were so placed on shore that the crescent of harbor became strongly fortified.

Then leaving most of his men at work Misson returned to Johanna and notified the queen of his purpose of founding a settlement so near to her. At first she and her councilors were alarmed at the coming of a new power so near by which might soon threaten their own existence.

But no one could for long doubt Misson's sincerity; and when he pointed out that a neighbor may mean an ally as easily as an enemy, the queen again capitulated.

She furnished him with forty of her subjects to act as laborers for the new colony, the only stipulation being that they were to be returned to her after the passing of the fourth moon.

With the addition of laborers the building of the colony took on increased momentum. The Portuguese ship was torn apart and what was once her deck now became a dock. Her guns, as I have said, commanded the bay.

The Realization of a Faith

Houses combining native architecture with what the whites could add to building from their own architecture, began to outline a town. The queen of Johanna now encouraged many of her women to join the colony as wives. Land was tilled in common. Property was shared by all in general.

Overlooking the town was a plateau, which, in turn, was topped by a natural amphitheater of little hills. Here Misson encouraged his subjects each to set up his fane to whatever God he wished.

One hillock was a Catholic altar; its neighbor was preëmpted by the Moslems; the natives worshiped on another hillock; three Chinamen made an attempt to sketch out a little temple of their own; and those who believed in no god were free to indulge in their lack of belief so long as they did not intrude it on the worshipers.

It was in the midst of this little amphitheater and surrounded by the smoking altars of many faiths that Misson held the ceremony of naming his republic.

"Here comes into being to-day the Republic of Libertatia!" he cried. "You, my people, are the Liberi. We dedicate ourselves to the spread of liberty and the love of liberty, toleration, and love of humanity under whatever faith and whatever skin. May our fortune equal the greatness of our hope!"

It will be seen how much sincerity and strength of purpose had gone into the idealistic talk and speeches of young Francois and Caraccioli they made first as midshipmen in the hold of the Victoire under Captain Fourbin. For here in building and street, in harbor and tilled soil was the

realization of what had once been only the generous words of youth.

A party of Misson's hunters went into the jungle for fresh meat. Up to then, as I have said, they felt as though they had come upon a fresh, unpeopled world. But now they saw a lone native looking with startled eyes on their hunting party.

They well knew in what spirit their leader, Misson, would have greeted the shy wonder and anxiety of this native; and the hunting party acted truly in his spirit. They showed themselves so friendly and so cordially urged him to come with them that the native did so.

He was brought to Misson. The chief called for a bolt of scarlet cloth, an ax, and trinkets. Draping the cloth about the native, Misson hung trinkets on his person and put into his hand the ax, a wonderful instrument to one used only to implements of primitive make. Then he sent the native back to his village.

It was not long before the native reappeared with a number of the chiefs of the tribe, bearing flowers, fruits and gifts. They entreated the white chiefs to honor them by coming to visit their village.

A Two-sided Nature

Gladly Misson, Caraccioli and several of the leaders of the colony acceded. They were royally entertained and a holiday was declared in their honor. A strong party of picked warriors escorted them back to Libertatia.

My excuse for dwelling on this incident, devoid of drama or melodrama though it may seem, is the thrilling contrast it offers to the usual story when one strange tribe encounters the encroach of another.

Thus at peace with its neighbors and in the bosom of a fecund land and climate Libertatia leisurely developed. But much as Misson dreamed of peace and quiet there was that in him which grew tired of mere dreaming.

And whatever made him restless also animated the others. It was not long before the glittering sea beckoned to them again and the clangor of fighting sounded in their imagination like a siren's call.

It was a tribute to the high loyalty of

the two friends that Caraccioli, restive though he himself was for the sea and action again, consented to remain in charge of Libertatia while Misson in the Victoire and the pick of their men went roving again.

This time they sailed toward Zanzibar and if fighting was what they yearned for then fortune smiled upon them. For across their path heaved the great sides of a Portuguese ship showing twenty-five guns on each side. Such an armament meant rich treasure to guard.

So that both adventure and appetite decided Misson for battle. Running up his white flag with its device, A Deo a Libertate, he opened fire. The Portuguese didn't stop to decipher the flag, but replied with more guns than the Victoire.

Enter Thomas Tew

Under the blistering sun of a tropical sea the two ships spouted fire and death at each other. Misson knew that so long as they stayed at a distance the duel would go against him, for the Portuguese had more guns.

He also could see on the decks of the enemy twice as many men as he had. But whereas one cannon is about as good as another of equal caliber, one man may be worth more than his number once he can come to grips with the enemy. So in the face of a galling cannonade the Victoire closed in with the Portuguese, and from one deck to the other leaped a boarding party.

The approach had cost Misson men enough. Now the hand-to-hand fight against superior numbers was taking still greater toll. But, like the good psychologist and valiant fighter that he was, Misson cut his way through to the captain of the Portuguese.

Him he engaged in single-handed duel with cutlasses. The captain was a good seaman and a fair fighter. But Misson was a picked man, destined to stand out in his generation; and fighting was one of his great talents. So down to death went the captain of the Portuguese.

They had fought their duel at the edge of a companionway on an upper deck. When Misson's cutlass finally clove the captain from collar to breast the dead man toppled down the steps into the midst of his own men.

Every one saw him fall, and his hacked body carried with it the psychology of defeat. Misson's men were, after all, picked fighters and, mistaken or not, they had something in their hearts to fight for; whereas the crew of the Portuguese were serving only for wages. So, not long after the death of the captain, the crew surrendered.

Into the captain's cabin went Misson and his lieutenants to discover what reward was theirs. In great copper-bound chests they found the greatest prize their cruising had as yet brought them. In bullion and in coin they found two hundred thousand pounds in gold.

Laden with more treasure than they could spend in the uncivilized land they now called their home, yet fully appreciating all that gold would buy to make Libertatia the more livable, Misson returned to his haven. The guns on shore boomed a welcome and the guns on board the Victoire echoed the greeting.

A festival was held at the reunion. Then Misson gave Caraccioli a pleasant holiday on the sea by sending him in the Victoire, accompanied by a consort, down the coast to the Cape, there to buy with gold many of the comforts civilization had to offer.

And here, for the time being, let us leave the Liberi in their charming Utopia while we go to Bermuda on the Atlantic to make the acquaintance of Thomas Tew, who was to play such a vital rôle in the careers of Misson, Caraccioli, and Libertatia.

The Rhode Island Yankee

He was a spare-framed Rhode Island Yankee, tormented habitually by a lust for change and action. His mind was as restless as his body and was forever forging ahead of him, in imagination exploring dark continents, hewing roads through the jungle to new lands of treasure, charting out new sea routes for lanes of rich trade.

Madagascar had fired his imagination as a land of raw riches. And New York, with its great warehouses, enticed him as the other end of a route which he could ply, growing richer with each voyage. The fact that no one had thought of this combination before made the project only the more attractive to Tew.

As capital for his scheme he had little more than his burning imagination and considerable skill as a mariner. Of money he had little or none. What he needed was first of all a ship, second a fit crew for his enterprise.

A Golden Chain or Hempen Rope

Then he heard that in Bermuda, Governor Ritchie was fitting out two sloops to go to the mouth of the river Gambia on the west coast of Africa, there to attack and pillage the stations established by French traders in competition with the English. Tew applied for the captaincy of one of the sloops, and got it.

Once on the high seas he permitted the other sloop to lose sight of him.

Then calling his crew together he addressed them to this effect: He pointed out that the mission on which they were sent would benefit nobody but a handful of private traders. There was danger in the expedition, but not the least prospect of booty or public good.

He had a better scheme to propose, one which would lead them to ease and plenty and enable them to spend the rest of their days masters of themselves and with gold in their pockets. Instead of pulling chestnuts out of the fire for others, why not do it for themselves?

The crew were more than ready for his proposal.

"A gold chain or a hempen rope!" they cried. "We'll stand by you! Lead us!"

His response was as generous as theirs. "I accept. But you shall have your say in the conduct of our enterprise. Let you choose a quartermaster who will represent you in all matters of general concern and without whose consent, as your agent, I shall do nothing. Then you, my crew, and I, your captain, will rise or fall together."

With a roar of approval the crew of the Jezebel, instead of proceeding north, rounded Cape Horn to that Madagascar of which Tew had so long dreamed. But it was to the sea that he looked for the fulfillment of

his dream of riches—to the sea, to his good cannon and the better men under him.

And just as the Jezebel came abreast of Madagascar there hove into sight a gallant, prosperous looking ship, fairly reeking with suggestion of good looting. "Our first prize, my lads!" cried Tew, pointing to the stranger. "Let's show them our colors and speak the first word!"

Then to the masthead of the Jezebel ran up the black flag and the skull and crossbones of piracy. And Tew's biggest gun fired to the windward, demanding surrender of the stranger.

But the stranger ran up a white flag with an inscription dedicated to God and liberty and sent an answering gun to the leeward of the Jezebel. The answer was as eager as the challenge, and the crews of both ships prepared for battle with the avidity of beasts of prey in sight of succulent game.

As I picture to myself Francois Misson on his Victoire and Thomas Tew on his ship, each unlimbering his cannon to open fire on the other, I cannot help visioning some figure of destiny brooding over their ships at that moment and calling upon its infinite resources to stop at the last instant the two men from slaughtering each other, they who were to mean so much to one another.

The Finger of Destiny

Just as the battle was about to break out there came from over the horizon the mastheads of a great ship flying the colors of a British man-of-war. The same thought must have occurred at that moment to Misson as well as to Tew. Here they were about to let fly at each other, protagonists of equal strength.

After either of them had disabled the other that British man-of-war would come in and lick the platter clean. For each ship knew itself to be quarry to the Britisher. Tew would be hunted down for his black flag. Misson, in spite of his white flag with its pious motto, was as unequivocally known for a pirate.

On each ship the captain looked at the other and at the man-of-war and hesitated which to take on first. Then each man recognized something kindred in the hesita-

tion of the other to fire. Misson, with his characteristic impulse to trust people, took a chance. Signaling to Tew for a parley he got into a boat with his lieutenant and rowed over to Tew's ship. He was allowed to board and was received civilly by Tew.

"Look here, captain," said Misson. "I have a feeling that you and I have more in common than either of us have with that British man-of-war. Suppose we first settle with him?"

How Brotherhood Worked

" Right!" said Tew.

Misson went back to his ship and both craft turned a united front on the slowly approaching Britisher. The warship was bigger than either the Victoire or the other. It was not big enough to tackle them jointly. So the Britisher showed discretion and, putting about, gave the smaller craft a long stern chase and finally escaped them.

Then the two captains held a parley to decide what next.

"Before we fight each other," suggested Misson. "Suppose you come to Libertatia and see if you don't want to join us instead."

The two men had already recognized in each other spirits profoundly akin. So Tew readily agreed to accompany Misson. The two ships put about and made for the harbor of Libertatia.

Caraccioli, who had come back from his shopping voyage before Misson set out on this cruise, was on shore to greet Misson. He saw coming in with the Victoire another ship and fired a salute of nine guns. Tew replied with a salute from his own guns. And all Libertatia came down to the shore to greet the newcomers.

I have said that in the restless Yankee Tew there was a spirit kindred to Misson's; which means that there was a strain of the visionary in him. When Tew saw Misson's little Utopia with its citizenry of all races, owning everything in common and flying as its colors the emblem of liberty and universal brotherhood, he became enamoured.

He threw himself so headlong into the scheme that some of his crew, headed by the quartermaster they had elected, could not, and would not, follow him. They understood the desirability of having a little settlement of their own near by, which they would use as a base for their pirating. And this they decided to bring about.

But all the rest about universal brotherhood and community of ownership seemed childishness to them. So they let Tew and half the crew remain in Libertatia, while they sailed down the African coast and, picking out a favorable spot, made a settlement based on purely practical and piratical considerations.

Stimulated by the arrival of new and able recruits the citizens of Libertatia went ahead with renewed vigor developing their beloved land. More ground was cleared. More soil was tilled. More vegetable farms and grain fields were sown and harvested.

But not everybody laboring there worked in the spirit of Libertatia. It must be remembered that there were about a hundred and fifty Portuguese and other prisoners who were no more converted to the ideals of Libertatia than were those of the crew of Tew, who had sailed away. These men were exceedingly unwilling laborers.

A Word of Honor

At first Misson applied the pressure of the rudimentary justice that those who do not toil do not deserve to eat. But that astonishing streak of kind-heartedness in him which we have encountered before kept him from pushing this remedy to the limit. Besides he was so sincerely a lover of liberty and a hater of slavery that it went against his principles to force men to labor who did not wish to.

In all this Tew and Caraccioli heartily agreed with Misson.

But there still remained the problem of what to do with these unwilling elements in Libertatia. Misson proposed to put them on board the Bijou, to provision the ship, and land them at Zanzibar. Tew heatedly protested. "Do you want these men to tell the Portuguese or the British navy where Libertatia is and have them come and blow you off the face of the earth?"

Misson recognized the weight of this objection. But he countered it by proposing to make the prisoners give their word of honor that they would not reveal the loca-

tion of Libertatia to any enemy, or serve against them.

"'Word of honor!'" Tew cried. "Would you entrust our lives to the word of honor given you by your prisoners?"

There are two kinds of "hard-boiled men." There is the man who knows that many street beggars are frauds and will not give a plugged penny to the most pathetic-looking mendicant. Then there is the man of Misson's caliber.

He, too, knows that many beggars are professional frauds. But prefers to retain his faith in men and would rather give money to ninety-nine beggars he suspects of fraud than to deprive the hundredth genuine unfortunate of his needed alms.

Friends of the Slaves

Misson preferred to act on his faith in men and run the grave risk that this faith would be imposed upon. His will prevailed.

He called his prisoners before him and addressed them. He told them that they would be released and sent to Zanzibar on the condition that they give their word of honor they would not serve against him in any way. "Do you promise?"

There was a unanimous affirmative. But in the forefront of the prisoners were two Portuguese who had been petty officers on board their ship. Caraccioli had been observing them. They were over effusive in giving their word of honor as they had been over pleasant whenever any one in authority was looking in their direction. Caraccioli did not put much faith in their word of honor. But loyally he supported Misson.

The Bijou with one hundred and thirtyseven prisoners and ten loyal Liberi set sail for Zanzibar, where the prisoners were put on shore. The ship with its loyal crew returned to Libertatia.

The inland sentinels now reported that a strong war-party of Malagasy blacks and many slaves they had captured in native warfare were coming. The Malagasy offered the slaves for sale to Misson. They were subjects of the queen of Johanna, these slaves.

Misson bought them. Then he made it clear to the Malagasies that he was opposed to slavery, and proposed to send those he had bought back to their queen. Neither the Malagasies nor the slaves understood the spirit of the speech. But the latter were delighted to be sent back unharmed to their queen.

Tew, with his enthusiasm for Libertatia, proposed that he go out on a cruise to capture treasure; and what was more important, secure recruits for their republic. He and a crew of thirty-seven blacks, forty Portuguese, thirty English, and about a hundred Frenchmen set out, and off Angola captured an English slaver. The ship put up no fight and Tew, followed by his blacks, boarded the captive.

With his hatred of the institution of slavery Tew took great pleasure in throwing open the hatches and releasing from the hold the two hundred and forty shackled negro slaves who had been inhabiting their indescribable hell below decks.

As these now came up into the sunlight and saw their shackles struck off, their only thought was that only a greater misfortune was to follow what they had already been through. Grown men with the minds of savage children, they had been living through one hell after another. And to a man they sank cowering to the deck, their bloodshot eyes wildly looking to see what new terror was coming to them.

Battalions of Fighters

But from the well-dressed blacks of Tew's crew came shouts of recognition, messages of cheer. Kinsmen were recognized. And in their own tongue they heard that so far from having to fear anything they were now set free, and would be taken to some sort of paradise on earth.

And sure enough they were taken back to land and with every token of kindness assured that they had but to choose. They could either stay there and settle down in this comfortable colony, learn their language and their ways, be treated as equals with the whites, and allowed to share equally in the wealth of the colony. Or they would be given safe escort back to their tribes.

So universal a language does the heart speak that what Misson said touched the blacks. They decided for citizenship in Libertatia. Whereupon the Frenchmen taught them their language. The other whites taught them to till the soil and build.

Misson trained them into a battalion of fighters with firearms. This was not because fighting seemed to him the highest good. But being a realist as well as a dreamer he knew that his republic was threatened by the white world from over the sea, as well as by the great black continent at his back.

He mounted many a time to the little plateau overlooking his colony, and looking down on the hundreds of his men of all races and nationalities, he must have dreamed greatly.

The Portuguese Armada

If his Frenchmen, Portuguese, Dutchmen, Chinamen, and other Europeans and Asiatics lived together in brotherhood and amity as they were now doing, could not hundreds of others like them—thousands—and later hundreds of thousands—find it possible to do likewise?

If he could get two hundred and forty Angola blacks to agree to a man to become Liberi; if his ideals could so easily appeal to primitive minds; if he was so easily able to teach them the language and husbandry of white civilization, why could he not eventually convert more and more of the dark continent to Libertatia?

Knowing on what swift wings dreams will soar, to what great heights and with what wide sweep they encompass the invisible, we can be sure that Misson envisioned a republic of brotherhood commencing with Libertatia, taking in all of Africa, sweeping over to Europe and finally embracing the whole world of man.

Even as he dreamed he saw from his plateau five Portuguese men-of-war bearing down on his reality. They were each carrying fifty guns. And there was no mistaking their intent. They had come to wipe out a pirate's lair.

Their two hundred and fifty guns made an armament that exceeded those of the land batteries. It took Misson an instant to come out of his dreams and plunge into reality. The alarm had already been sounded. The guns in the little fort were manned. By the time Misson was at the shore Tew stood at the head of the whites, armed and prepared to repel the invaders. Misson's own battalion of drilled and disciplined blacks was waiting for their commander.

On came the Portuguese armada, their guns spraying the crescent harbor. But the little forts on shore had been cleverly concealed, somewhat in the manner of modern warfare camouflage. While the land batteries had distinct marks to shoot at, the invader could only take a continent for target. The result was that although the Portuguese had more guns, the little forts wasted less powder.

Every shot from the land found its target. And soon the foremost of the oncoming ships began to careen. On its decks wild confusion was visible. Then a wail came over the water as the ship rolled over on its side like some sick thing, and sank.

But the four survivors were now inside the inner harbor, their guns sending lightning and thunder onto the land. For every three shots from the Portuguese only one replied from the land. But now another of the invaders lurched heavily and began to settle in the water.

The Pick of the Seven Seas

It was sinking out of sight, when still another of the armada got its death-wound. Again the wail of trapped men in a wooden ship sinking into shark-infested waters reached those on shore.

Now only two ships remained. The shore batteries sounded a deeper note as each gunner redoubled his efforts. Down to the dock where the Victoire and the Bijou were moored now poured Tew's white regiments and Misson's black battalion, rabid not to defend, but to pursue the foe.

For the two surviving Portuguese, catching a turning tide, were now trying to run for it. Then followed what has been reported as one of the fiercest fights in sea history. Twice Misson and Tew managed to board one of the Portuguese. But the latter carried a crew of picked fighting men; and twice Misson and Tew were thrown back with losses to the decks of their own vessels.

However, if the crew of the Portuguese were champions of their country's navy, behind Misson and Tew were the pick of the seven seas. And finally the captain of the Portuguese was crowded to the rail and threw up his hands for quarter.

The remaining ship managed to get away. But the captured Portuguese was taken back to the harbor.

The captain and all but two of his crew were treated with the utmost kindness and courtesy by the Liberi. The two exceptions were the petty officers whom Caraccioli recognized as among those who had given Misson their word of honor that they would not serve against him.

A Community Without a Law

He brought them before Misson. "Didn't I tell you, Francois, that you were a dreaming fool to trust these dogs?" he demanded bitterly.

"I didn't trust them," Francois replied quietly. "I know a thief by his face as well as you do. But if it has cost us something to act on our faiths rather than to live in fear and to follow only the light of suspicion, I prefer to pay the price. The question now is what we shall do with these two?"

Caraccioli interrupted curtly. "It is a question, François, which I shall take the liberty of taking out of your hands!"

He marched his two men into the square of the settlement. There he ordered the building of something new and exceedingly unpleasant to the eyes of the Liberi. It was the gallows. Most of those looking on felt an unpleasant tautness about their own throats even as they helped to erect the grim structure.

Murmurs arose in protest. It was a protest which Misson would support, and even Tew agreed with. But Caraccioli, the practical, did not give this protest time to grow.

With his own hands he twitched a rope and up into the air went the two men, whose word of honor had meant nothing. There they hung, a warning as to how some idealists meet grim reality when it threatens their dreams.

It would be a mistake, of course, to sup-

pose that all the Liberi partook of the breadth of vision of their leaders. And between Tew's Englishmen and Misson's Frenchmen there soon developed friction. Now, friction between men of their caliber meant something sterner than words. Nor did words allay the friction.

Tew, Misson and Caraccioli labored to overcome the racial antagonism which had been stirred up; but they labored in vain. Finally the impatient Yankee lost his temper.

"If they are fools it will be no great loss if they kill each other off!" Tew said. "I propose that we give them guns and let them settle their argument!"

Caraccioli took a more civilized view. His suggestion was that each company should choose a captain and that the spokesmen decide on some basis of peace other than violence.

Again Misson took the long view, the most difficult course, the way of the creative visionary. "No," said he, "neither of your suggestions goes far enough. And I am glad this difficulty has come up. We are as yet a community without law.

Government Is Organized

"We are as yet no better than the jungle in which the strongest survives because he can kill the weaker. We must have something greater than brute force prevail in Libertatia. Law must be born. The will of man must be expressed in a civilized way."

He then called a meeting of the whole colony. He proposed that regardless of race, color or nationality the whole colony be divided into groups of ten. Each group was to elect a representative to an assembly which would meet and make laws for their republic.

As usual Misson's vision had its way. The whole colony fell to enthusiastically and built a state house for their legislature, every man and woman in the colony having some share in the labor, regarding that share a privilege.

When the assembly met, Caraccioli, presiding, made a handsome oration, proposing that Misson be elected as "Conservator" or chief of the colony. The thunder of

unanimous assent overflowed the house of legislature and was taken up by the enthusiastic crowd outside.

Misson accepted the post and appointed Tew admiral of the republic, and Caraccioli secretary of state. Caraccioli selected from among the colonists a council of the ablest who were designated as the cabinet.

Then the legislature proceeded to pass laws. From one of the ships captured by Misson had been brought ashore a printing press and type. This enabled the legislature to have their laws printed, and thus attain the dignity of a written constitution.

Wives for the Colonists

To take in fully the thrill that lies in this perhaps staid chapter, which I have just recorded, I must remind my readers that these proceedings were, after all, those of, what most people would consider, only a band of pirates building a lair on the coast of a savage continent in an age more than two centuries removed from ours.

Freebooters and pillagers of the sea though they were, here was the founding and the making of a state; and many a proud state to-day had as humble and less picturesque an origin.

Tew, as admiral, urged the building of an arsenal and the augmenting of the fleet. He succeeded to the extent that Misson did build several small sloops, mounting them with eight guns each from the various ships the colony had captured. These proved to be "not only shapely vessels, but excellent sailers."

But, like most war department heads, Tew was opposed by those who felt that he was taking away too much from the peaceful energies of the republic. A compromise was agreed upon; and the impatient admiral was more than satisfied when Misson consented to a cruise with himself in command of one ship, the Liberty, and Tew in charge of another, Childhood.

The latter would seem a surprising name for a ship in such a setting. But there was much meaning behind it. The colonists realized that if Libertatia was not to die out in a few years, children must soon make their appearance there. So it was largely to answer the colony's elemental

need for wives that the cruise was undertaken.

The two ships set out for Arabia Felix, where they expected to meet and did meet one of many Mogul ships filled with sixteen hundred men and women bound on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The vessel bearing this huge human cargo was little better than a vast ark.

It was carrying one hundred and ten guns for protection. But so poor was the fighting ability on board that when the Liberty and the Childhood bore down on the ship the pilgrims fired one volley of small arms and abandoned the decks.

Misson and Tew landed on the ship without the loss of a single man. It was resolved to put all the males and married women ashore. One hundred girls were then taken on board the two captor ships as a human levy. Scenes of heartrending lamentation ensued as they were torn from their families. Misson's kindness of heart pleaded for them. But the other dreamers with more granite will prevailed.

Then the two ships with their precious prizes turned back and soon entered the harbor of Libertatia. I am strongly tempted to dilate on the scenes that ensued at the distribution of the hundred wives among the colonists. But it would take genius and more space than I have at my disposal to do justice to the theme.

Rumors in the Jungles

Meanwhile through the dim jungles of the continent a disturbing rumor was spreading. White people had landed. They had come not for a raid for slaves, not to hunt for ivory and gold, and for once their greed was not to be sated with a handful of riches after which they would sail away.

No, these whites had come to plant an empire. They had magic weapons that spoke with thunder and lightning and carried devastation invisibly over a range far beyond the hardest thrown javelin, swifter than the truest arrow.

They had leaders of wisdom, whose words carried magic. Under their banner even men and women of their own continent changed their gods and instead of being stricken for it they flourished. They

learned the ways of white men and fought side by side with them. Women had come to join the colony. Their offspring was appearing. Every month the strength and boundaries of that colony increased.

Would not one day this colony arise and invade and overwhelm the rest of the continent? This was not a question these primitives asked themselves so much as a doom they visioned. Or it would be, unless the thousands of tribes now warring among themselves realized their danger in common, and arising in mighty numbers overwhelmed the new colony before it was too late.

While Tew Was Away

So while Libertatia began to hear the prattle of children within its borders, throughout the eastern continent there spread the sound of "dim drums throbbing in the hills half heard." Painted black couriers hurried from village to village, from tribe to tribe.

War-parties came to parley with other war-parties between whom only recently there had been savage war. Like some thundercloud forming below the horizon, but with a gathering storm behind it, events were developing in the jungle, of which the colonists in Libertatia little dreamed.

So little aware were they of all this that when Tew proposed another cruise with a considerable number of men and several ships, Misson consented. Away sailed Tew with the pick of the colony, while Misson and the rest settled down to the peaceful tasks of civilization.

From heights along the coast hidden spies marked the departure of Tew and his ships. Through the jungle they slipped bearing the tidings. Tom-toms began their ominous mutter.

Harvest time had come—the easy harvesting time of the tropics—and yielded such a golden plenty to the colony that upon the plateau with its ring of altars to the various gods the smokes of worship went up in thank offerings. Peace was in the hearts of the worshipers.

Then from the jungle, which closed in like a dense wall on three sides of Libertatia, arose a vast rumor, mounting to a roar. The jungle began to crackle, and from the dense greenery there came a rain of arrows and javelins. Piercing savage yells from thousands of throats broke the Sabbath peace of the colony and sent its members leaping from their altars to their firearms.

Then the jungle opened and out burst from all sides wave upon wave of hideously painted savages. From behind rhinoceros skin shields they hurled darts of death at the colonists, and with sheer numbers threatened to overwhelm them.

Misson had theoretically considered such a disaster; and like the good commander that he was, had rehearsed his troops for such an eventuality. But it must be remembered that Tew was off on a cruise with the pick of the colony's fighters.

Nevertheless Misson got every man behind his gun and let loose a barrage of fire and death at the oncoming hordes. But it was like trying to stop a tide by shooting at the waves. Row upon row of savages were mowed down by gunfire. And wave upon wave of blacks swept over them and on to slaughter, as if a whole continent were debouching on the scene.

Dreamers to the End

It was as much a slaughter of savages as of colonists. But even if one hundred blacks died for every colonist they killed, the outcome was inevitable. The swarming fecundity of Africa could stand decimation; the colony could not.

The lovingly tilled fields were trampled into mud. The houses erected with so much effort and care went up in smoke and flame. And by handfuls and scores the men, women, and infants of Libertatia went down to death from the arrows and javelins, the spears and warclubs of savages.

Misson soon saw that it was a case of either perish or fly.

Such women and children as were not slaughtered in the surprise of the attack were hurried down to the harbor and crowded on board the Childhood, the Bijou, and the Hope.

Then when fire and foe had laid the colony waste and threatened to sweep the survivors into the sea, Misson and some

forty of his fighters, white and black, hurried on board the three remaining sloops and cast off, with Misson in command on board the Bijou.

Caraccioli, crippled though he was, had directed the whites under him in the fight as valiantly as Misson the blacks. Now he took charge of the Childhood in escape. The ships had barely cast off when the savages were down at the water front sending clouds of arrows at them.

Certainly the fates were with the Africans that day. For Caraccioli, who had lost two legs in battle with cannon, who had received several other wounds in the scores of fierce hand-to-hand conflicts on the sea, could reasonably have escaped hurt now that his ship had cleared by some fifty or sixty feet.

But of the thousands of arrows that flew from the shore in pursuit, one found a vital target and lodged in Caraccioli's throat. He dropped to the deck dead.

Into such panic his death threw the rest of the hastily-organized crew that they bungled the handling of the ship and again headed for the land. In five minutes savages were swarming over its decks.

Helpless to aid them the Bijou and the Hope fled out of the harbor.

Misson's body, throughout the whole battle, had not received so much as a scratch. But he had not escaped harm. His followers scarcely recognized in their leader the young man who had seemed so nearly godlike to them.

For he had grown aged in a few hours. Something vital had snapped in him. He who had fired with courage, youth, and vitality every one about him, now crouched like an old woman before a feeble fire.

His splendid spirit had died when he saw Libertatia go up in flame. The continent on which he had hoped to found a new fair world had stamped to death and destruction his great effort and dream. His spirit was dead, as it developed, beyond recovery. And soon after came his merciful release from death-in-life.

Off the Guinea coast a typhoon caught the two little sloops. It crushed in their ribs. And down plunged every soul on board to the very depths of the churning seas.

Over the broken fields of Libertatia, dotted with smoking ruins, crept the fecund jungle. Vines and creepers, swordgrass, wild shrubbery, and young trees festooned with parasitic growth soon blurred the rectangles of once cultivated fields; and wild life again swarmed down to the water's edge.

Where were once the voices of Utopians now sounded only the chattering of monkeys, the screaming of parrots and the mournful howl of predatory beasts. And the stillness of the blazing tropics over the spot to this very day.

Thomas Tew sailed back to Libertatia and found it gone. Even from afar he guessed its story. Without landing he ordered his ship to put about.

He went back to America and engaged in semi-respectable trading adventures in the South Seas. His dream, too, was shattered, and with it his great romance. Of adventures, however, he must have had many. For we can judge this from the brief, but horribly vivid account of his death, which has come down, as told, to this day.

Somewhere in the Indian Ocean the merchantman he commanded encountered a fighting Mogul ship. Says the log of that voyage:

"In the engagement with the Mogul ship a shot carried away the rim of Tew's belly, who held his bowels in his hand some small space before he dropped dead. This struck such terror in his men that they suffered themselves to be taken prisoners."

I have called Misson and Tew "moral pirates." Now that you know something of their story you will characterize them according to your own conceptions of praise or blame. But few will deny them the laurels which are the just due of splendid dreamers and valiant adventurers.

Next week, "Watch That Car!" by Henry Gollomb



He seemed to be executing a weird dance out there

THE HIGHWAYMAN

By Robert Brennan

MIGHT IS RIGHT IN THE DEATH BATTLE OF THE THREE RIVALS. CLASHING ON THE LONELY SEA FOR SUNKEN TREASURE



O M. Oscar van Duyven, of Paris and New York, manufacturer of the Van Duyven Electric Fan, famous in five continents:

DEAR SIR:

On the occasion of the death of the late lamented Jean Michel, the blind man of the Carrousel, you received from Charles Lafitte, butcher, of 7 Passage Racine, Paris, a cipher key to the hiding place of the pirate's treasure, which is concealed under the sign of the Crooked Star, somewhere in the Breton country. As I have nothing in particular to do at the moment, I am anxious to find that treasure, and I would thank you to send the cipher key to me by bearer.

With kindest regards to M. Lemasse and yourself, I am,

Yours respectfully,

LEON GAVEAU."

Van Duyven perused this letter with a smile and handed it to Pierre Lemasse.

- "What do you think of it, Pierre?"
- "Mere theatricals," replied Pierre with a shrug.
 - "Who brought it here?"
 - "A young man who is waiting outside."
- "Who is this M. Gaveau?" inquired the American, "or do you know anything of him?"
- "Only a little," said Pierre. "He is a somewhat mysterious personage, who prides himself on his powers of outwitting the police who want him for various robberies of a rather daring character. He is something of a hero amongst the underworld of Paris, but I do not like him," added Pierre. "I think he is too fond of the limelight."
- "How can he have heard of the cypher and the treasure?"

Pierre shrugged his shoulders. "One never knows, monsieur."

"Well," said Van Duyven, "he evidently does not know that we have already dug up the treasure, and that it is lying in several fathoms of water off the coast of Brittany. Shall we see his messenger?"

"By all means," answered Pierre.

He conducted the messenger to the room. The latter was a tall, lanky youth with a huge cap, a sallow complexion, and a budding mustache. His dark eyes roamed round the apartment.

"Who are you?" asked Van Duyven.

" Marcel Fayard."

"Who sent you here?"

"My master, Leon Gaveau."

"Where does he live?"

"In Paris, monsieur, and everywhere."

"And what is his business?"

"He is a highwayman, monsieur."

He spoke as if he had said "a baker" or "an undertaker."

"And you know what he wants?" asked Van Duyven.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, will you tell your master, M. Leon Gaveau, that we cannot accede to his request?"

"Very good, monsieur."

The messenger turned without another word and left the apartment. Pierre thought it necessary to see him to the door.

"Well, Pierre," said Van Duyven, "it strikes me that this M. Gaveau is an interesting character. I must say that I should like to have met him, but, of course, we could not give him the cipher key. That would be undignified."

" Assuredly, monsieur."

At seven thirty next morning Pierre called Van Duyven to breakfast. They had planned a day at Le Bourget to witness the army air maneuvers. The American appeared in his dressing gown.

"Hello! What's this?" said Pierre.

"What's what?" asked Van Duyven, turning round.

"This," said Pierre, trying to get behind Van Duyven to have a look at his back.

"What?" asked the latter, wheeling round again.

"Stand quiet, for a moment, monsieur,"

"One said Pierre, "there is something pinned on your back."

Pierre took from the back of the dressing gown a piece of paper pinned by the four corners, on which there was written in pencil:

DEAR M. VAN DUYVEN:

I am sorry you refused my request for the cipher key. I hope you will forgive the liberty I have taken, in visiting your residence and taking the document for myself. I shall let you have it back when I have recovered the treasure.

Kindest regards to M. Lemasse and yourself.
Yours sincerely,

LEON GAVEAU.

Van Duyven laughed at the expression of amazement on Pierre's face. His annoyance was obvious.

"Do you know," said the millionaire, "this M. Gaveau is a very interesting character. How the devil did he get in here?"

He examined the drawer where the cipher key had been and found it empty. Pierre scrutinized the fastenings on the doors and windows. There was nothing to indicate that an entry had been forced.

"That is really very clever," said Van Duyven. "And I am strongly tempted to go to Les Rochers to see him at work."

"So am I, monsieur," said Pierre. "I should like to get a chance of taking back that document. Now that the terrible blind man, Jacques Lanneau, who went down with the treasure, is out of the way, I should have no objection to revisiting the scene. If we leave immediately we should reach there some time this evening, in time to anticipate any operations by Leon Gaveau and that Apache who came here with his letter last night."

They had no delay on the journey. The angelus was ringing when the touring car pulled up in front of the Hotel de France, in the little town of Les Rochers, on the coast of Brittany. Mine host was at the door, bowing politely. As he opened the door of the car he said:

"M. Oscar van Duyven, is it not?"

"Yes," replied the millionaire.

"I have a letter for you, monsieur," said

the landlord, as he handed Van Duyven a note.

The latter tore it open and read:

DEAR M. OSCAR VAN DUYVEN:

I regret exceedingly having brought you such a long journey for nothing. I have just discovered that the treasure was dug up, I suppose by you. I am sorry I am unable to return the document with this letter, but I shall leave it in the place where I found it to-night, when I get back to Paris.

Please accept my apologies for not being there to receive you and your astute companion, M. Lemasse, in person, but I could

not wait.

Yours very sincerely, LEON GAVEAU.

II



HE American handed the note to Pierre, whose face flushed with anger.

"Who gave you this?" he asked of the landlord.

"A young man who had no need to say he came from Paris," replied the landlord, rapidly describing Marcel Fayard.

"Would you let us have something to eat," said Pierre, "and we shall start right back for Paris?"

"But we're not going back to-night, Pierre," protested Van Duyven.

"Yes, monsieur, it is really necessary."

They partook of a hasty repast and reentered the car. Pierre set off at a fast pace, but a mile to the west of the town he swung off on a by road.

"What's the matter, Pierre?" asked

Van Duvven.

"The matter is," said Pierre grimly, "that we are not going back to Paris tonight. I said what I did back there, so that the ears that were listening would convey it to M. Leon Gaveau the news that we were out of the way. We are making a detour to Aubers, two miles to the south.

"We shall garage the car there and make our way back on foot to that ugly rock called the Devil's Hoof, where we dug up the treasure. I am convinced that M. Gaveau would not have written that letter, but that he wanted to get rid of us.

"He has probably found out that the treasure is in the sea, and he is going to recover it."

In a few minutes they reached Aubers and left the car at the inn. Then they made their way on foot back to the gaunt rock near the seashore, known as the Devil's Hoof. Half an hour's walk brought them in sight of the scene of their last encounter with the terrible, old blind man, Jacques Lanneau. Even with the knowledge that he was long since dead, Pierre could not look on the scene without a sense of fear.

"He was a terrible fiend," said Van Duyven, answering the other's thoughts.

"Horrible!" said Pierre.

As he spoke they rounded a bend of the road, and Pierre stopped short with a faint cry that was like a sob strangled in his throat. He gripped Van Duyven tightly and trembled as though he would fall. His teeth were chattering, and his face became an ashen hue.

Van Duyven himself turned pale, as he gazed, speechlessly, on the figure of an old man, who came toward them tapping the ground with his stick. His silvery white hair was so long that it tossed in the light breeze. His head held erect, and his sightless eyes turned upward to the light, imparted to his face and figure an expression of benignity.

He was thirty yards away when they sighted him, but, as they stood spellbound, he rapidly approached, and covered half the distance before Van Duyven found the power to move or speak.

"Courage, Pierre," he whispered, "over the fence with you."

Hastily they climbed the fence. Pierre would have bolted, but that Van Duyven held him by the arm.

"Pull yourself together, Pierre," he whispered, crouching behind the fence and drawing the boy down beside him.

The blind man came along with a quick, short pace and, as if he had somehow become aware there was some one in the vicinity, he began to beg in a curious, singsong voice:

"May the All Merciful bless and preserve you and yours, good people, and all those who make light the way of the afflicted, and one sou, for the love of Heaven."

He halted in the spot immediately op-

posite them. Van Duyven saw a despairing look in Pierre's eyes, and feared he would cry out. He caught the boy's wrist in a grip of steel, as much to quiet him as to steady his own nerves. Lanneau ceased speaking, as if expecting an answer, and a puzzled look crossed his face at the silence. After a pause, he moved toward the fence.

"I am in darkness, good people," he said, "pity my distress and spare a sou, for the love of Heaven."

With his head raised in the old, familiar, listening attitude, and with a curiously intent look on his face, the blind man groped about with his stick, and, finding the fence, he leaned against it.

For a moment, Van Duyven feared he was going to climb over, but instead, he sat down not a foot from where they lay. He was evidently puzzled, and he looked incredulous, as if asked to believe something that was impossible. After a long pause, he said to himself:

"Well, that's curious."

He produced a black cheroot and lit it leisurely. Van Duyven was convinced that all his senses were on the alert, but, to reassure Pierre, he slowly winked at the boy, whose lips were moving silently as he crouched on his hands and knees.

It seemed hours before the blind man stirred. It was really ten minutes before he stood up and resumed his journey, muttering a self-satisfied "Aye." He was a hundred yards off before either of them ventured to speak.

"That was a close shave," said Van Duyven as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. "You don't mean to say you're

crying, Pierre?"

"I thought he was dead," said the boy, brokenly, his eyes still glued on the retreating figure of Jacques Lanneau. "He knew that we were here."

"He did not," said the American. "He thought there was some one here, and our silence merely puzzled him. He must have swam ashore that night we thought he was drowned."

"I do not think we ought to stay in this locality," said Pierre solemnly. "There is something uncanny about that creature, and I have a presentiment that he will kill us."

"Pierre," said Van Duyven, "I am surprised at you. It was an easy thing for that old rascal to string you up as he did when he took you unawares, but it is a different proposition now when we know the Satanic personage we are dealing with. Where is he going now?" he added, his eyes on the distant figure.

"He is climbing the Devil's Hoof," he continued. "Come along, Pierre. If Leon Gaveau and his friend turn up here now, there will be a delightful tussle. I would

not miss it for millions."

As if they thought the blind man could really see, they crouched as they crossed the road and climbed the fence at the other side. Sheltering behind the bowlders on the broken ground, they reached the crest of the rise and lay prone, hidden in the bennet, at a spot from which they had a view of the strand as well as of the Devil's Hoof. Outlined against the sky, they saw the figure of the old blind man on the crest of the Hoof, placidly smoking.

After some time, two men appeared on the beach, one of whom they immediately recognized as Marcel Fayard. The other was a young man, slim, graceful, and debonair, with handsome dark features.

"That is Leon Gaveau, I expect," said the millionaire.

"It must be," said Pierre. "There is going to be some excitement now."

The pair stopped when they saw the blind man, and at the same moment, the latter stood up and proceeded to make his way down the broken path toward the strand. Tapping the ground, he approached a small, flat-bottomed fishing boat lying upturned on the strand.

He turned it over, and having placed in it a pair of oars and some tackle which were lying underneath, he dragged the little craft to the water's edge. The tackle included a heavy, ungainly affair that looked like the jaws of an enormous rat trap.

He was about to push the boat into the water when he stopped, listening to the footsteps of Gaveau and his companion as they drew near. He began at once to address them as possible benefactors.

"God light your way," he said, "have pity on the blind. Will you give the poor

old man one sou for the love of Heaven, and God bless you?"

"But you are not a poor man," said Leon

"Indeed I am. I've nothing but this little boat and the fishing tackle and all I am able to catch."

"You don't mean to say you go out to

fish by yourself?"

"I do, indeed, sir," said the blind man as he approached the speaker, "I do, indeed, though I am entirely blind. You will ask how it is I manage to get back to land and not row out to sea. But the lowing of the kine, and the tolling of the angelus bell are my guide ropes and they bring me safely home."

Van Duyven chuckled as he watched the astonished face of the highwayman.

"What sort of fish do you catch?" asked the latter.

" Any sort I can."

"Isn't it strange you have no one to help you, or that you would not find something to do ashore that was not so dangerous?"

"You do not understand, sir. I love the sea, for I sailed the ocean for many a year when I had my eyesight. The accident that deprived me of my eyes might have ended my life, but the Creator was kind in giving me time to repent my evil life."

Leon Gaveau gave the old man some money and the latter pushed off the boat and commenced rowing strongly seaward. Gaveau and his companion strolled along the strand for some little distance and then, returning, squatted down on a knoll within a few yards of the spot where our friends were hidden.

Their eyes were on the movements of the old man in the boat. The latter, having rowed a couple of hundred yards, threw overboard a short net fitted with cork floats.

III



ELL?" Pierre and Van Duyven concluded that the voice was that of Leon Gaveau.

"I can't make it out," said Fayard. "He is not

fishing, whatever he is doing. That's not a net."

"He is fishing," said Gaveau, "but not for fish. There's a little black buoy on his starboard hand. It marks the place where he last finished his search and he won't begin to drag for his oysters until he finds that buoy."

As he spoke, the net fouled the buoy, and the blind man shipped his oars and hauled in on the rope. Catching the buoy, he lifted it into the boat. Then he threw out his oyster drag, and proceeded to row in such a manner that he described a large circle.

Ever shortening his stroke on the inner oar, he maneuvered in such a way that his circles became smaller and smaller, until he had swept all the area within his first circle. Then he pulled on the mooring rope and recovered the anchor to which it was fast. He rowed straight out to sea for about thirty yards, where he dropped the anchor again, and began to drag the new ground thus gained.

"He doesn't seem to be catching many

oysters," said Fayard.

"He doesn't want to," replied Leon Gaveau. "He is looking for the treasure which was buried under the sign of the Crooked Star. I told you the treasure had been dug up. I did not tell you that Jacques Lanneau, the blind man, was nearly drowned when he tried to follow the men who took it.

"I feared at first that the treasure was gone, but now, I know where it is. It's out there, under the sea, and that old blind man, with a wealth of patience and industry worthy of a better cause, is hunting for it. I must say, I am glad I brought the Marguerite along. She will come in handy to-night,"

"Do you mean to say," asked Fayard, "that you are going to fish for the treasure too?"

"Yes, and that to-night, when that venerable old gentleman, who, if he's not a saint must be Satan himself, thinks well of coming ashore. Hello, what's up now?"

The highwayman's exclamation was called forth by the movements of the blind man. The latter had suddenly ceased rowing and began to haul slowly and steadily on the oyster drag. His catch was heavy

and his little boat tilted, with her prow high in the air.

As the drag came to the surface, they saw that it held fast in its jaws something black and heavy. Lanneau almost capsized the boat, but he managed after a desperate effort to get the booty safely aboard. He bent over it eagerly, and then, in the failing evening light, they saw him rise to his full height.

He stretched his arms above his head and seemed to be executing a weird dance that threatened to swamp his little craft. Across the water, they could hear the chanting of an old sea song. Suddenly he sat down again, and, taking the oars, he listened for a moment with his head raised in the air and then began rowing fast and strong for the open sea.

"Diable!" cried Leon Gaveau, rising to his feet. "He has got the treasure."

"And he's going off with it," said Fayard.

"He won't go far," said Gaveau calmly, lighting a cigarette. "Before he covers half a mile I shall catch him if the light holds. Come along."

The pair went off, running in the direction of Les Rochers. Pierre was gazing earnestly at the American.

"Well, monsieur?" he asked.

"Is there another boat about, Pierre?"

"There is one on the strand a quarter of a mile to the south."

"Well," said Van Duyven, "we are going to be in the chase, too, and we have no time to lose."

They ran all the way to the boat and were lucky to find a pair of oars beneath her. They had her quickly afloat and went off in the wake of the old blind man, who, fortunately for them, had changed his course slightly to the south.

Their boat was making water, however, and Van Duyven had to keep baling her out while Pierre worked at the oars like one possessed. In the spirit of the chase he had forgotten his fear. The daylight was failing fast, but the distance between them and the quarry grew every moment perceptibly less.

Suddenly, on the evening silence, there broke a strange noise, the vibrant hum of a

motor boat which, even as they perceived it, grew more and more distinct.

"There comes the Marguerite," said Van Duyven.

They were now some distance out at sea, and the whir of the motor boat began to fill the universe. Lanneau had stopped his rowing to listen to the strange noise, and they gained quickly on him.

Out from the dusk, the motor boat swung into view, making a grand curve toward the blind man's boat. Van Duyven and Pierre were ten yards from their quarry when Leon Gaveau and his companion came alongside the blind man's little craft.:

"Well, M. Lanneau," cried Gaveau as he shut off the engine and laid his hand on the gunwale of the fishing boat, "have you caught many oysters?"

Lanneau did not reply. He was sitting quiet and still on the thwarts.

"He will murder the two of them," said Pierre in a whisper.

"I dare say, you are surprised at my familiarity," continued Leon Gaveau, "and I must introduce myself. I am Leon Gaveau, highwayman, at your service, and with me is my friend, Marcel Fayard.

"Now, I'll trouble you, M. Lanneau, to hand me over that little treasure you picked up. And," he continued, raising his voice, and turning toward Van Duyven, "I want you, messieurs, whoever you are, to stand off. If you come closer, I shoot you dead!"

The old blind man began to whine, as if in fear of his life.

"For the love of God, monsieur," he said as he leaned toward the motor boat, "don't murder me, I'm only a poor old fisherman."

"Very good," said Gaveau, "I'll buy your fish. How much shall we say?"

"Ah, sir, you shouldn't-"

"Silence," cried Gaveau, "I want no play acting. Just hand over the treasure without any more talk."

There was a ring in his voice which showed he was in earnest. Lamenting loudly, the blind man lifted the box to the edge of the motor boat. He overbalanced himself and tumbled in after it. Then he lay in a heap, crying that he was hurt. Fayard went to his assistance, and leaned over him.

"Look out, Gaveau!" cried Van Duyven in his excitement, standing up in his own boat. "Look out for treachery!"

He had just realized that Gaveau did not know the fiend he had to deal with. Even as he spoke, the blind man flashed his right arm upward, and, with a fearful cry, Fayard, his face covered with blood, sprawled over the boat's side, slid off into the water and disappeared.

On hearing the warning cry, Gaveau had stepped back a pace. The action saved his life, for the blind man's hand, bearing the bloody dagger, cut the air not an inch from his chin. The force of the futile blow staggered the old man, and Gaveau on the moment jumped in under his guard. Locked in a fierce embrace, the pair rocked this way and that.

Van Duyven seized an oar, and started paddling toward the motor boat. But before he reached it, both men fell, and all at once the engine started and the boat leaped forward. Gaveau was seen to rise in the air, the blind man holding his legs. The former gave a sudden twist, and they both tumbled into the water and disappeared. Almost at the same moment, Van Duyven's boat, which had been slowly filling, went under.

"Are you all right, monsieur?" asked Pierre as he came to the surface.

"All right," answered Van Duyven.

IV



HEY climbed into the blind man's boat and peered all around for a sign of the others, while away in the distance they could hear the

whir of the motor boat as she careered madly out to sea bearing the accursed treasure with her.

A white object came into view on the surface of the darkening waters. Pierre, without a moment's hesitation, dived off and swam to it. He grasped by the hair the unconscious body of Leon Gaveau. With difficulty they got him aboard, and Pierre attended to him as well as he could while Van Duyven rowed around, vainly scanning the sea for signs of the others.

They were gone for ever. After awhile,

the purring of the motor boat became a faint hum and then died away altogether. Van Duyven rowed toward the land, and Leon Gaveau, the highwayman, slowly opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"You're all right," replied Pierre.

Painfully, Gaveau sat up.

"You are Van Duyven," he said, addressing the American. "It was you who shouted that warning. He would have had me but for that. Where is he?"

"He is gone," said Van Duyven.

"Well, he nearly brought me with him," said the other. "Poor Fayard is dead, too, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm sorry for that." He stopped speaking and leaned weakly over the side. Then he took a violent fit of vomiting.

"I'm not used to drinking," he said. "Where's the treasure?"

"Gone off in the motor boat."

"And no one with it?"

" No."

"Well, that's a pity."

He turned to Pierre.

"Boy," he said, "from all I have heard, I have a liking for you. If you take the dagger out of my back, I will let you have it for a keepsake."

"The what?" cried Pierre in amazement. Gaveau shifted his position so that Pierre could step behind him. Sticking in his back, near the shoulder, was the blind man's dagger. The highwayman did not wince as Pierre drew it out.

"I suppose," continued Gaveau, while Pierre undressed him to bind the wound, "I should thank you people for saving my 'ife. I am not sure that I am very grateful, to tell you the truth."

"You ought to thank your Maker," said Van Duvven with some solemnity.

"I suppose so," said Gaveau, and was thoughtful for awhile.

When the boat grounded he stepped ashore and stood about while the others dragged her up on the beach. Then he came forward, offering his hand.

"I may do as much for you people another time," he said and, turning on his heel, he disappeared into the darkness.



"Trade with me once," said the matron, "and you buys from nobody else"

THE PERSECUTED RECTOR

By H. M. Egbert

ALL NEW YORK WAS PUZZLED, AND THE POLICE WERE BAFFLED, WHILE ONE OF THE STRANGEST OF TORTURE DEVICES WAS PRACTICED

A Story of Fact



N the month of February, 1880, there was not a man in New York City who stood in higher esteem or acknowledged fewer enemies than the Rev. Dr.

Morgan Dix, rector of Trinity Church. Yet he was singled out for an apparently aimless persecution, which was carried on with such malicious ingenuity that the venerable clergyman was reduced to despair and the police were at their wits' ends before a happy suggestion enabled them to lay hands upon "Gentleman Joe."

To this day those who were instrumental in the capture of this scoundrel are uncertain whether his extraordinary ingenuity in harassing Dr. Dix was a madman's prank or whether it was part of a deep design to extort money. He was convicted of attempt to blackmail and sentenced to serve a term in Sing Sing, where he died.

Yet, from the manner of his persecution, it appeared that money was not the main object he had at heart. In carrying on his campaign against the rector he spent considerable sums and involved himself in almost as much annoyance as his victim; blackmal alone could have been sought with a minimum of labor and of the publicity which his behavior brought about.

In the month of February, 1880, almost every large manufacturing concern in the West received a postal card, purporting to come from Dr. Dix, stating that the writer desired to make large purchases for the

supply of certain charitable institutions under his control, and requesting the fullest information regarding prices.

During the same month all the principal boarding schools and female seminaries in America received letters, signed with the rector's name, asking terms with a view to the placing of three little girls with them.

During the ensuing week hundreds of letters and circulars, together with samples of dry goods, were delivered at the rectory; communications were received from innumerable boarding schools, offering special terms with a view to securing the wards of the distinguished clergyman. Members of faculties, educators and commercial travelers called hourly at Dr. Dix's home in order to expatiate upon the advantages of their various institutions or firms.

A Method of Torture

Agents traveled from many Western towns and college instructors came from all over the country in order to set forth the advantages of contracting for their goods or putting the little girls to school in the seminaries which they represented, and Dr. Dix was kept busily explaining that a hoax had been perpetrated.

The matter soon became public and the police took up the matter. It was found that all these communications were in the same handwriting, and that the sender had even procured paper engraved with the address of the rector.

It was thought that some clew to his identity might be obtained through the medium of the engraver, but the hoaxer had covered his tracks thoroughly. The order had been received through a messenger boy, and another boy had called and paid the bill. Neither of these boys could be located.

A week or so later, when the matter was beginning to fall into oblivion, several bishops and a number of the leading clergymen of the Episcopal Church received letters, apparently from Dr. Dix, demanding to be informed why his letters had been ignored. As a result Dr. Dix began to be the recipient of numerous replies, some apologetic, some angry, and all insisting that no previous communication had come.

This necessitated an immense amount of correspondence on the rector's part, and he had just begun to complete his task of explaining that no such communication had ever been sent out by him when circulars, letters, and agents from the various Bible societies began to arrive at the rectory in response to postal cards requesting information as to the price of books for Trinity Sunday school.

The amusing feature of these communications was that, although the fullest publicity had been given to these various hoaxes, the communications were so artfully worded, reference being made to the hoaxes that had previously occurred and assurance being given that these letters were genuine, that the recipients were always deceived.

On February 21 the rector's tormentor sent him his first communication. It took the form of a postal card, which briefly informed Dr. Dix that on the following Monday he would receive visits from the "old clothes ladies" of Chatham and Baxter Streets, who would be prepared to take his wife's wardrobe off his hands for a fair price.

Sure enough, while the rector was concluding his breakfast a rickety wagon, drawn by a broken-down horse, rattled up to his door. From the seat descended a fat and stately woman, who climbed laboriously up the steps. Dr. Dix himself opened the door and informed her that this was a hoax.

Competition Among the Ladies

But the story had not penetrated into the recesses of the East Side, and the prospective purchaser saw in this statement of the rector merely a device to obtain a higher price.

"Trade with me once," said the matron, and you buys from nobody again."

"But, madam, I assure you that I have no clothes to sell," persisted Dr. Dix.

"I gives you money down," answered the woman, producing a roll of dirty bills, evidently to tempt the rector into immediate acceptance of her terms.

Just at that moment a second cart rattled up to the door and a second matron leaped from the seat and ran nimbly up the steps. "Don't you buy from that woman,"

she cried. "I gives the best price in the market."

Dr. Dix retreated into his home just in time to escape the ominous rattle of another creaky cart. Soon a congregation of old clothes dealers was assembled upon his doorstep, pulling the bell from time to time, and wrangling and quarreling over the privilege of purchasing the wardrobe of the rector's wife.

The presence of this throng soon attracted the attention of the street urchins, and the neighbors also began to manifest a considerable interest in these doings. After plainly attempting to force an entrance the women retreated to the lower steps and placidly sat down, evidently determined to starve out the unfortunate gentleman within.

Victims Who Won't Believe

As none of them evinced any desire to leave, and the number had increased by noon to twenty-eight, not to speak of the innumerable children, Dr. Dix finally telephoned to police headquarters, and a squad of officers was sent to disperse the besiegers—a task which was not accomplished without considerable difficulty.

The last of the carts had finally rattled away and Dr. Dix was beginning to congratulate himself upon his freedom when a carriage whirled swiftly around the corner from Fifth Avenue and stopped before the rectory, and one of the chief physicians of the city alighted and ran up the steps.

When he was admitted he told Dr. Dix that he had been summoned in urgent haste by a messenger, who stated that the rector had suffered an epileptic fit and was in a dying condition.

While he was still explaining and receiving the rector's explanation two other carriages came racing up and two more physicians came running up the steps. They had received similar notifications. Before this affair had terminated some twenty-five or thirty doctors had called at the rectory, each ready to have the honor of saving the doctor's life.

On the next day Dr. Dix received a letter from his persecutor in which he stated that he had witnessed these various spectacles from the window of his apartment with great amusement, and suggested that Dr. Dix would have found the old clothes women more agreeable if he had had the forethought to order out the fire engines to play a stream of cologne upon them.

The police at once began a systematic search of all houses that commanded a view of Dr. Dix's residence, and a complete census of their inhabitants was taken, but without the slightest success. On the same afternoon the shoemakers of the city began to visit the rectory in troops; each of them had received a request to come for the purpose of measuring some children for shoes.

But this was not all, for a peculiarly distressing incident was the appearance of some fifty or sixty men and women who, having advertised for employment, had received communications upon the Trinity Rectory notepaper requesting them to call during that afternoon and evening. These people were very persistent, and many of them refused to believe that the letters they had received were really hoaxes.

The Joker Tires

Dr. Dix received a letter from his tormentor on the following day in which he said that he had been one of those who had applied for aid, and he congratulated the rector upon the courtesy and consideration which he had shown toward him.

Dr. Dix had two days' respite now, and then the various dry goods stores began to receive letters in which they were informed that their impudent communications had been received, and that they had been turned over to the rector's lawyers, who would proceed against them. These firms made haste to disclaim the writing of any such letters, only to learn that no such letters had been written to them.

On that or the following evening many prominent clergymen of the city received invitations to dine with Dr. Dix, to meet the bishops of York and Exeter, and arrived at the rectory only to find their invitations were also a hoax.

The joker seemed at this juncture to have tired of his game, for he turned his attention from Dr. Dix to several of the

prominent members of churches, to each of whom he sent a communication from some well known liquor dealer threatening prosecution unless he paid for the liquors which he had purchased.

The recipients were naturally incensed, and many turned these communications over to their lawyers before the truth was learned. But it was this incident which seemed to show that the writer was rather engaging in these pranks for his own amusement than out of any desire to levy blackmail.

His Most Daring Coup

However, he soon disclosed another purpose, for he sent a letter to Dr. Dix informing him that all further persecution would cease upon the payment of one thousand dollars. Dr. Dix was instructed that, in the event of his accepting this proposition, he should insert a communication in the personal column of the New York *Herald*, addressed to "Gentleman Joe," saying "All right."

By the advice of the police Dr. Dix did so, but on the following day "Gentleman Joe" was made the recipient of three personal notifications in this column. Whether he had inserted two of them himself, or whether two came from other victims was never determined, but at any rate no response was elicited, and the scoundrel now gave the rector a couple of weeks' respite.

The persecution began again upon St. Patrick's Day, when Dr. Dix received a letter demanding the sum of one thousand, five hundred dollars, enclosing a name and address to which the money was to be sent. No notice was taken of this communication, and on the day which "Gentleman Joe" had mentioned in his communication, a member of a well-known firm of lawyers arrived at the rectory, having received a letter purporting to come from Mrs. Dix stating that she desired to consult with them regarding a divorce.

Other lawyers called during the day on the same errand; besides these there came an agent of a steamship line, carrying with him two tickets to Havana, and a number of persons who had advertised offering rewards for lost or stolen property, and had received notice to call at the rectory and bring their rewards with them.

One of these callers had advertised a reward of one hundred dollars for the return of two thousand dollar bonds, and, not being aware that the house in question was the residence of Dr. Dix, had brought a private detective with him.

The arrangement was that, if the bonds were turned over, the gentleman was to leave the house scratching his leg, where-upon the private detective, who was stationed in the street opposite, was to rush in and arrest the man who had received the reward. All these callers felt particularly foolish at having been made the victims of a prank that had been so extensively advertised in the newspapers.

On the following afternoon Mrs. Dix received a pair of soiled stockings, with the intimation that a new pair would be placed at her disposal when these had been sufficiently worn.

"Gentleman Joe" having apparently exhausted his resources in providing himself with amusement, now achieved his most daring coup. About ten o'clock one morning, shortly after the last of these occurrences, the rectory bell was violently rung, and the servant who opened the door was confronted by a determined-looking man carrying a cane.

"You Infernal Liar!"

"Is Dr. Dix at home?" he demanded

sharply.

"Yes, sir," replied the servant, surmising that her master's visitor was probably the victim of another hoax. "What do you wish to see him about?"

"It's none of your business what I want to see him about," the visitor returned. "Tell him to come down immediately."

The girl fled in affright and informed her master, who descended the stairs and approached his visitor with his customary urbanity.

"What can I do for you, sir?" the rector asked.

The stranger looked the rector over from head to foot and then burst out into a torrent of profanity and abuse.

"You sanctimonious old rascal, you make a fine minister of the Gospel!" he exclaimed, threateningly. "Don't you dare to open your mouth until I'm through with you, or I'll call an undertaker."

"My dear sir, what is the matter?" in-

quired Dr. Dix.

"Matter?" shouted the stranger. "Do you mean to say you don't know what the matter is, you infernal liar? Now I tell you what I mean to do with you. I ought to take you out into the street and cane you in the presence of the public, but I'm going to be lenient and thrash you in your own house instead. Don't you dare to yell for help or it will go all the worse with you."

A Threat of a Thrashing

"May I inquire why you propose to thrash me?" demanded the rector.

The stranger, who had already grasped the clergyman by the collar and raised his cane in a threatening manner, stared at him and released him.

"Well I'm damned!" he exclaimed. "If you don't win the prize for nerve! I'm going to thrash you for writing that letter to my wife, you scoundrel." And he pulled a letter from his pocket and thrust it under the rector's nose.

"I'll teach you to make an appointment with a respectable married woman and call my wife your 'darling Annie,' when you never spoke to her in your life! I'm going to give you such a thrashing that you will wish you had died before you had ever been born."

"I never wrote a letter to your wife," the rector exclaimed.

"You damned liar, there's your name to it," shouted the man.

"It's a forgery!"

"Oh, it is, eh?" the visitor sneered. "Well, I tell you what I'll do. Get some of your own handwriting and compare it with this signature."

"I will do so at once," said the rector.
"I am just finishing a sermon and can show you the very manuscript." And he started for the stairs.

"Come back here!" cried the other.
"You've got some dodge to get a revolver
or escape along the roof! You can't play

any of those tricks on me, you rascal. You and I will go upstairs together."

The clergyman and his visitor accordingly mounted the stairs side by side and entered Dr. Dix's study, where it was readily seen that there was no resemblance between the rector's writing and that of the letter.

The stranger seemed taken aback at first, but quickly recovered himself, and, muttering something about a disguised hand, threatened to put the matter into the hands of his lawyer, saying which he departed downstairs and left the house.

On the next morning the rector received another communication from "Gentleman Joe," in which he stated that he was the visitor of the day before, that he had greatly enjoyed his call, and hoped the doctor had recovered from his fright.

It now became evident that stringent methods would have to be taken to protect the rector against any further persecution of this character. In spite of all the annoyance that "Gentleman Joe" had caused, there was only one thing which could afford grounds for criminal proceedings, and that was the fact that the persecutor had written a letter threatening to make certain scandalous charges against the rector through the medium of the press.

Who Laughs Last

Strange as it may seem, he had not technically violated any law in any of his other actions. But this new act enabled the police to invoke the aid of the post office for the discovery of his identity. Detectives were accordingly posted to watch every letter box and branch post office in New York City, being provided with keys and with samples of "Gentleman Joe's" handwriting.

Throughout several days these men stood at a short distance from the letter boxes, and every time that a letter was mailed the letter box was at once opened and the handwriting examined. This went on for a week, detectives being withdrawn from practically every branch of the police service, but "Gentleman Joe" did not make use of the mails.

And now came a singular piece of chance

which enabled the police to run down the scoundrel. All the clergymen in the city had been personally consulted upon the matter without being able to throw the slightest light upon the subject.

One of them, however, belonging to a different denomination, happened to mention casually that a few days previously he had seen in the city a man calling himself Williamson, who had once been a teacher in Trinity Church Sunday school, and had been dismissed by the trustees on account of degrading conduct.

This seemed to supply a possible motive, and the detectives were not willing to let even so remote a possibility of discovering the culprit escape them. It happens that every person who writes to the post office desiring to have his address changed has had his handwriting filed by the department, and, since almost every one at some time or other changes his residence, the writing of practically every citizen of New York City is thus placed on file at the post office.

The superintendent at once began to investigate his books in order to ascertain whether Williamson's peculiarly neat handwriting was to be found. Surely enough, a postal card was discovered in the same handwriting as "Gentleman Joe's," but signed by Williamson, and requesting that his correspondence should be forwarded to the Windsor Hotel.

The detectives hurried to the Windsor Hotel and found that Williamson had registered there on February 17, and had that day left for Baltimore, instructing the clerk to forward all his letters to Barnum's Hotel in that city. The detectives hurried south upon the trail and traced the man from one place to another, until finally they arrested Williamson in a Baltimore boarding house.

Williamson was brought back to New York and placed upon trial on the charge of blackmail. He pleaded guilty, admitted that he was the author of all the trouble, but declared that his only motive was the desire to have some fun at the expense of the rector.

Investigation of Williamson's antecedents revealed the fact that he suffered from a peculiar form of abnormal mentality which led him to the commission of acts having as their end the obtaining of notoriety. He had devoted many years of his life to the commission of petty crimes, wholly unprofitable—in fact the total sum of his thefts would not have paid a single week's board bill—but causing trouble to his victims.

He had traveled extensively abroad, and had served a year's imprisonment in London for having committed a series of offenses there precisely similar to those in New York, having sent out false invitations and business propositions in the name of a prominent financier, hiring a room opposite his house in order to witness the fun. He had also lived in Turkey and entered into all the customs and vices of Oriental life.

The only misdemeanors in America that were brought home to him were the theft of small articles of little value from a stationer's shop on Broadway, whose proprietor was an intimate friend of his, and the swindling of jewelry firms out of small sums of money.

Williamson had written a quantity of poetry, and was the author of a play which had met with favorable comment, although it was subsequently alleged that this was the work of a nun in a convent in New Orleans. His death in Sing Sing, while he was serving the term of his sentence, removed the most dangerous practical joker since the days of Theodore Hook.

"All Covered Up," a novelette by Victor Maxwell, will appear soon



He was turning loose the bowlders on the men trying to get up

THE TREASURE OF CARICAR

By Roy W. Hinds

FROM THE QUAY AT MARSEILLES I STEPPED INTO A MYSTERY THAT WHIRLED RAPIDLY INTO A MAD AND GHASTLY CARNIVAL

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HORROR OF THE SEAS



I didn't seem to me that it would take the police long, if they were interested or any way suspicious, to trace this affair to the Angela Lee, the yacht on

which I, George Ranholm, was captive of Brakely and his thugs. The policeman would want revenge for the rough treat- would probably be willing to overlook it. ment the gang handed him in seizing me from him while he was attempting to arrest me, and he would tell a colorful story -not forgetting to mention that the sailor he was after was armed.

Would they learn that I had said at the

Café de Paris I was pursued by cutthroats? If they did, and if the mere mention of crooks were enough to get them started, they would make things uncomfortable for Brakely, the pseudo society millionaire.

Would Brakely be able to smooth things over by saying it was merely an escape of his crew? If he could convince the police that the rumpus developed from too much liquor and that the sailors simply rescued one of their comrades from arrest, the police

No doubt Brakely, known as a rich American society man, had influential friends at Monte Carlo, among the guests in the hotels. He'd fix it some way. If the police demanded money, he'd be ready with it.

Anyhow, the hours went by with no sign that the yacht was being made ready for sea. Neither were there any visitors that I became aware of, but, of course, many persons could come aboard without me knowing it. When I laid down to sleep that night I was convinced that the affair had either blown over of its own accord or that Julius Brakely had smoothed it over.

We were still in port next morning, all that day and all that night—and all the next day, too. It was the most monotonous experience I had ever had—nothing to do but sit on the floor with my knees hunched up, or lie down as comfortably as I could, or walk about to the music of the chain on my legirons.

I saw absolutely no chance of escape. I had failed in getting word to the authorities of the mysterious doings and the murder at the island of Ouerolle.

And, of course, my thoughts turned almost altogether to Querolle. My next struggle with Brakely and his gang would take place there. My only hope of starting anything depended on some chance which might cause my captors to take me out of the hold. But they wouldn't do that as long as we were in port.

It was very late on the fourth night after our arrival at Monte Carlo that the monotony was broken by signs that the yacht was being made ready for sea. I heard heavy objects being moved about on the decks above, and some word passed to the man on guard duty outside my door assured me that cans of gasoline were being brought aboard. I heard talk, too, of fresh water and provisions.

Once, when my door was opened by the guard, who often looked in, I heard talk between our crew and the crew of a lighter. I knew that there was a concern at Monaco which dealt in stores and provisions for yachts, and the lighter was from its dock no doubt.

There was no sleep for me after that.

Querolle, Miss Mary Lee—was she still on that island with her father?

I had often wondered how the Lees were faring there with Captain Fawcett. Of course, I no longer put any stock in Brakely's insinuations that Berivou, Captain Lee's mate; Fanier, his engineer, and the others of the yacht's crew were probably in league with the crooks.

That had been part of his trick to get me aboard the yacht and out to sea before I could discuss my suspicions with the Lees. I was certain that Captain Fawcett was the only enemy of the Lees at Querolle, with the possible exception of Splinters, the galley boy, who probably was dominated by the skipper of the Seabird.

John Vernon, my new friend who was also imprisoned, had told me of giving Miss Lee a warning in the hurried moments before he slipped back aboard the yacht. She would tell her father of this. He would warn his officers and crew. Captain Fawcett and Splinters would be watched closely, and the odds were greatly against the captain. Splinters himself would turn on Captain Fawcett if given half a chance. He had been a friend of Radd, the murdered cook.

And lurking in the background, creeping about the cliffs and peering down upon the little ship in Marble Cove, trailing them whenever they went ashore, was Hippolyte, the deaf mute, with his big hands and powerful limbs.

Hippolyte had given every sign that he was my friend. He was the sort of man who once having bestowed his friendship would cling to it with a doglike devotion. He would understand that I had been the victim of a trick. He knew that the girl must be protected.

No, I wasn't greatly alarmed as to the welfare of Miss Lee and her father at the moment. Their danger lay in the return of this gang of crooks to Querolle.

There were two or three hours of inactivity, after the stores and provisions were aboard. Then some one for whom they had evidently been waiting came aboard.

"They're back," I heard a man say to my guard.

Some of the crew had returned from some mission ashore.

And then they got the Angela Lee under way as quickly as possible.

She went out of the harbor under the power of her engine, and I had an idea that enough gasoline had been put in to enable her to make the trip that way. This gang wouldn't bother with sail if they didn't have to.

We were at sea again, bound for Querolle.

There was no indication that they intended to take me out of the hold. Hours went by, hours of stirring about and hours of drowsing. My routine was the same at sea

as in port.

They had given me a pillow and a blanket. They gave me plenty of food and cigarettes. The cigarettes left one soft spot in my heart. Only a man who has been in that position, with nerves on edge, with intermingled hope and despair of the future, with a feeling that disaster might fall at any moment, can understand what the cigarettes meant to me. My guard held the match for me whenever I wished to light one. I wasn't permitted to have matches with me.

Of what went on aboard the Angela Lee all that day and up to midnight I didn't know, and I am even unable to say whether I was asleep or awake when the big commotion broke out in the passage outside. I know I was lying on the floor, wrapped in the blanket, but sleeping for me had become a series of fits and starts.

I heard feet running in the passage and out again, excited words. I didn't hear what the words were, but it seemed to me that my guard left with the man who had come tearing in. I got up hurriedly and tried the door. It was locked.

The stir had transferred itself to other parts of the yacht, but the excitement was enough for the sounds of it to reach me. They all seemed to be racing aft—the men from the crew's quarters over my head. Danger, pregnant in the air, communicated itself even to that isolated hold. I began to hammer on the door with my handcuffed hands.

None answered.

The motion of the Angela Lee was smooth and even, with just the faintest suggestion of a quiet swell on the sea. The danger couldn't be from wind. I heard no sounds that indicated the pumps were being employed. The possibility that such a stoutly-built craft might spring a leak in that

sea was remote, hardly to be considered, as she hadn't struck anything.

I continued to hammer on the door—and added yells to the din.

And then I smelled it. Smoke.

The pungent odor held a tale of flaming wood, and paint, and oil—and in just a moment the reek of flaming gasoline gained the ascendancy and told me the story.

"Turn me loose!" I yelled, hoping some one would hear. "I know how to fight a fire aboard ship! Hey-y-y! Turn me loose!"

No answer. All hands were aft, fighting the fire, which was somewhere near the engine—and the gasoline tanks, too!

I could hear muffled cries. I strained my ears, but could not hear the noise of the gas engine. The engine was out of business, and the Angela Lee was drifting. I yelled myself hoarse, but none answered.

The only sound I heard close by was when men came into the passage to get chemical fire extinguishers which hung on the walls there. They paid no heed to my clamor, and left me there alone.

The smoke was increasing in volume.

Disaster moved swiftly. The passage of time became an unknown quantity for me, and I couldn't have said whether a minute or an hour elapsed between the outbreak of the fire and the explosion of the gasoline tanks. There were two explosions.

The Angela Lee lurched violently, going down at the head and righting herself slowly. I realized, still beating on the door and crying out, that the smoke had become almost suffocating.

It seemed as though I had been forgotten by every one. I supposed that John Vernon was in the same fix.

CHAPTER XXV

CAPTAIN OF THE RAFT



HERE must have been a rush for the boat deck, judging by the cries that now filled the night and which came to me through the passage and

the open transom.

And then, as I waited for some sign that I wasn't to be abandoned, a kind of a

frenzy came over me—the frenzy that comes to a doomed man denied a fighting chance for his life. I shrieked, and hauled at my irons until the flesh of my wrists and ankles was cut.

I don't know how long it was after that that Julius Brakely opened the door.

I had kept up an incessant clamor against the stout walls and door and my hands were bleeding.

"Sinking," he said. He stared at me, as

though doubtful of my identity.

I calmed down the instant the door was open. An opportunity to struggle for his life has that effect on a man. I was a sailor again, and I was on a ship going down, and I seemed to realize that I was the most capable sailor aboard.

"How's she sinking?" I asked, as Brake-

ly got at my irons with the keys.

"Stern first," he said. "Gas tanks went up—tore a hole in the side, below the water line.

I could now feel the yacht settling astern. My irons were off and Brakely and I were rushing down the passage.

"Where's Vernet?" I demanded, not forgetting even then to conceal John Vernon's

identity.

"He's in one of the boats," Brakely told me. "We had him quartered aft—turned him loose before the explosion. You'll go in the other boat. We want a real sailor in each boat—understand?"

The smoke was thick, but the fire hadn't come very far forward yet. We reached the forward deck, Brakely first.

"Well, I'll-"

That was all he said, and he began shooting out to sea just as I got to the deck.

Both boats were in the water, and the men in them were rowing as fast as they could away from the doomed yacht.

Brakely emptied his pistol, but without result so far as I could see. He ran to the rail and reloaded the gun, but gave shooting up as a hopeless task. The moon, on the wane, shed only a dim light. The glare from the burning yacht suddenly disappeared, as incoming water drowned the flames. The Angela Lee, drifting, had swung around so that the fleeing lifeboats were astern.

"That's the work of Barney Masters," Brakely said.

"All right," I rejoined. "To blazes with your differences with Barney Masters! We're on a sinking ship. Tell me about that hole. Have we got any chance if we get the pumps going?"

"Not a chance in the world. The hole

—I took a look at it after the explosion—"

With his hands he spaced off the approximate size of the hole. Too big for the pumps to catch up with. Besides that, flames had leaped up again near the quarter deck. The fire had been merely retarded for a moment.

"It's a raft for us," I said.

"Raft?"

"Life raft. There's one on each deck, if they haven't pushed 'em overboard."

"That's right," Brakely said. "Come

Brakely still had the gun in his hand, but I grabbed him by the arm and spun him around.

"Come on nothing," I said. "It's you who'll do the coming on. I'll command that raft, and you'll obey my orders if you want me to fetch you out of this mess."

He looked at me and smiled. He was dirty, and his clothes were torn from the work he had done fighting the fire.

"All right, George," he said.

"And I'll take that gun, too," I told him. "I don't propose to have you around me with a loaded gun."

He backed up a step and shifted his eyes.

"Hand it here," I told him, "or we'll fight it out on the deck, and maybe go down with the ship."

He answered me by tossing the gun overboard.

"Now we're man to man," he said. "What are your orders, captain?"

"Go below, and fetch up sail cloth and rope, and any sticks you can find for masts," I told him. "I see the raft over there. I'm going into the galley—grub and water."

We separated.

I judged that we probably had a half hour—maybe a little more—to get clear of the Angela Lee. The flames weren't doing much on account of the water that poured into the ship and through some of the passages. But, of course, the fire might get a clean sweep any moment, and come roaring forward with a speed that would trap us.

It was impossible to get at any of the instruments or charts, which were in the quarters aft, if Barney Masters hadn't taken all of them. The fire was burning briskly around there now. Brakely and I would have to put off to sea on a raft with no navigating instruments, but that was a small thing in the face of all we had to be thankful for—a life raft strong and seaworthy, a calm sea, and a position that would undoubtedly result in us being picked up within a few hours.

Indeed, ships might be bearing down on us now, drawn by the glare of our fire in the sky. The glances I stole out to sea while going back and forth at my tasks did not reveal any ship lights however.

The men who had left us there to die were out of sight now.

"Are you sure Vernet, the French sailor, was in one of those boats?" I asked Brakely.

"Yes. Masters worked that nicely. He got that sailor in, then beat it the moment my back was turned. He'll need the sailor—if he makes Querolle."

"They'll be picked up."

"Not if they can help it. You don't understand, George, but Barney Masters will not let himself be picked up. He's bound for Querolle, and God help Mary Lee if he gets there!"

I stared at Brakely.

"Is that why he abandoned you?" I asked.

"That-and something else."

"Then we'll head toward Querolle," I said.

We got the raft in the water, and Brakely was passing down various articles to me. I exchanged places with him.

"A matter of sailor's pride," I told him, working on the deck of the yacht with Brakely on the raft. "The captain should be the last to leave a sinking ship."

With the raft loaded, I went over the side. We pushed off, easily, being on the

lee side. The Angela Lee flamed tremendously.

CHAPTER XXVI

WE WERE ALONE



SHORT piece of plank from the lumber room was the only thing in the shape of an oar I'd been able to find, and I paddled the raft away as fast

as I could with that. A light swell running with the breeze helped us, but even at that it took us some little time to get far enough off so that we should be out of danger if the mainmast fell our way.

The raft consisted of two light booms with a thin but stout flooring between, built so that the flooring was probably six inches above the water. It was safe enough so long as the wind remained quiet. We had loaded it pretty heavily.

The fire was now sweeping forward and aloft on the Angela Lee. The most of its havoc up to this was confined to holds and the officers' quarters, it having been held back considerably by the incoming water, but it was above that now and the breeze caught it. The sails were furled, the yacht having been under engine power, and the flames were running up the sails and rigging of the mainmast on the after deck.

The water was dragging the ship down astern. She had been settling only gradually while we were aboard, but I knew that when the flood in her holds reached a certain point she would go speedily.

Suddenly I reached over and felt of Brakely's pockets.

"What's wrong, George?" he asked.

"I just happened to think," I told him, "that that gun you threw away might not have been the only one you had. I see it was now."

He laughed.

"It sometimes takes you a long time to think of things," he said; "but you do think of them."

I didn't know whether to take that as a compliment or a slam.

Brakely was looking toward the yacht. An exclamation of wonder escaped his lips.

" Beautiful!"

It was a wonderful sight. The flames raced along the halyards, and these pitched ropes were like oily fuel. They reached the foremast, and were licking up the furled sails there. One rivulet of flame ran down the forestay with the speed of lightning and clear out on the bowsprit.

The burning ropes and sails, with the fire blazing up, too, in the 'midship house and with the quarters aft a regular furnace, the ports glowing from the inferno that now raged the length of the hull below decks, made the yacht look like a ship painted in fiery colors against a dark background.

We didn't know when the masts might fall. It depended on the work of the flames around their stumps below. I paddled again, and got clear of that danger with the help of the swell.

The fire now put us in the spotlight. The lifeboats were beyond the illumination, but to the crowd in them we would be visible, if they weren't on the other side of the yacht. The Angela Lee, drifting, might have come between us. We didn't know. If it hadn't, Barney Masters would know that we had escaped from the death he meant should overtake us.

I remembered the glimpse I got of Barney Masters's face when I first looked at the fleeing lifeboats. He wore a horrible grin, meant for Brakely, I suppose, and this impressed me with the sinister qualities of the man.

The stakes must be good in this game—big.

"Is Barney Masters likely to come looking for you," I asked Brakely, "if he sees you're clear of the yacht?"

"I don't think so," he replied. "He'll understand we're on a raft—lucky he forgot the rafts. He won't think we'll be able to make Querolle on this raft. He'll make speed for Querolle. And I don't see," he added, "how you expect to make Querolle on this."

"We'll bear that way," I told him.

I depended on being picked up by some ship, telling my story to the captain, who would see that the lives of a rich American and his daughter were in danger at Querolle. Things would move pretty fast then, with the wireless to work with, and no doubt whatever ship picked us up would speed to Querolle.

But I said nothing about this. If Brakely thought that was on my mind, he gave no sign.

The mainmast of the Angela Lee went down with a crash and a shower of embers. It fell aft, the settling yacht being tilted that way, and smashed the wheel and quarter deck to smithereens. The mast was of steel and, with the sails and rigging burned off it, showed no sign of fire. The weight of it hurried the inevitable doom of the yacht. She was settling fast. Her taffrail was down to the sea.

There wasn't such a glare of light now. I was rigging a mast on the raft.

"How many of those fellows did the explosion knock off?" I asked.

"None," Brakely said. I was surprised. "We didn't lose a man. I saw it coming—saw the fire reach the tanks—and ordered all hands away. Our fight had been to keep the flames away from there. We lost it. The gas tanks went up, but we were out of danger. Nothing to do but take to the boats. The water pouring in checked the fire for awhile and gave me a chance to look at the damage. I saw it was no use. She was gone."

"How'd the fire start?"

"Carelessness—I think." He spoke reflectively. "Yes—carelessness. There was liquor aboard. They were all drinking more or less. Some of Barney Masters's men were on duty in the engine room. But I think both Throgg and Masters were asleep. They looked scared and surprised when I first saw them.

"I hardly think Masters pulled that trick—the fire. I think he just took advantage of it when it came along. The engine men were probably drinking and smoking. Lots of oil around the engine room—a dangerous place to smoke. But they were probably sneaking a cigarette, and the thing started."

"You did a good piece of work," I said, with the admiration of a sailor, "in saving all hands from the explosion."

"Thank you, George. But I don't mind telling you that if I had known what was

in Barney Masters's mind, there'd be a whole bunch of frying carcasses aboard the Angela Lee at this minute."

I believed him. The glint in his eyes and the set of his jaw told me that he wouldn't hesitate to wipe out Barney Masters and the crew who had double crossed him. I wondered what would happen if we all did meet on the island of Querolle.

My mast was up, and I was working at the roll of sail cloth.

"Brakely," I said, "what kind of a game are you playing anyway? I don't see—"

He raised a hand and smiled amiably. "Now, George," he said, "you and I have been thrown together on this raft, with nothing around us but water and sky. We've got to pull together for the time being. The state of your mind, which I've been watching pretty closely since we've been together, makes us enemies. There was a time when I had hopes. But no use to speak of that now.

"Under ordinary circumstances, you're a constant threat to me. That's why I wanted to keep an eye on you—wanted you with me on this voyage. But, George, we are enemies compelled to work together. Ashore—that's another story. That being the case, you will pardon me if I don't play right into your hands by telling you of my affairs."

"That's natural," I said, and went on with my work.

"But," Brakely assured me, "you ought to be told that both of us have every reason to get to Querolle as fast as possible. In a way, we have the same object there. I want to save Miss Lee from Barney Masters as much as you do—and I don't want to see any harm come to her father either. If things had gone the way I first intended, they wouldn't be in danger. I have more reasons for getting there than you have, but that one reason we have in common. We must protect Miss Mary Lee."

"We'll go to Querolle—some way," I promised him.

The Angela Lee reached a state where the weight of the water pulled her down with increasing speed. All of a sudden her stem went skyward, and a burst of flame appeared in the fo'c's'le. She hovered there a moment with the forepeak aloft and blazing like a torch.

Brakely and I stood on the raft watching, me with a coil of rope in my hand. We seemed to be losing something—at least I did. A sailor feels that way about any ship going down. A sinking ship is a death at sea, a melancholy thing at night with the sky dark.

The Angela Lee went down with a sputter of doused flames, leaving only a cloud of steam which soon vanished.

I looked all around. No lights. Julius Brakely and I were alone on the sea.

CHAPTER XXVII

"A TOUGH-LOOKING CUSTOMER"



HAT are you going to do,"
Brakely asked me, "sail this raft on a course, or keep it going any old way until you sight a ship?"

"That depends," I told him, "on how much you remember."

"What do you mean?"

I kept on working at my mast and sail, explaining:

"I've got no instruments, and can't get position—unless your memory's good. For instance, did you sail a straight course?"

"Yes, we laid a course; and I think we kept on it pretty well, better than we did on the way up."

"Can you give me the point you steered on the compass?"

He did that.

"And how many hours sailing time did we have until the fire broke out?"

He calculated it, and told me right down to minutes, as he remembered the sailing time and the time of the fire.

"What was the speed of the Angela Lee?"

He was able to give me that, too, and, of course, the speed would be the same hour by hour, as the sea had been smooth and the breeze light. The yacht had made big distance, for she had been under engine power all the way. We weren't very far from the big island inside one of whose bays Ouerolle lay.

"Now figure up," I told him, "your total distance."

He worked that out in his head. The figures bore out what I suspected when he told me the yacht's speed—Querolle was within striking distance, thanks to the yacht's powerful gas engine.

"Then," I told him, "I've got a general idea of where the Angela Lee went down."

"So have I," Brakely rejoined; "and I know we're not so very far from Querolle."

"Maybe not," I said.

I didn't want to tell him any more about that than I could help, as I had begun to think of running up to one of the lighthouses on the big island and getting help there, if we weren't picked up by a ship.

If we sighted the island, I knew that Brakely would attempt to take command. An effort of mine to attract the attention of a ship or to approach the lighthouses meant a battle.

"If the sky stays clear," I informed Brakely, "knowing our general position now, I'll be able to sail by the stars and sun."

"You won't need the stars after daylight," he rejoined calmly, "as we'll sight the island before another night."

" Maybe."

"No maybe about it, George—if you try. You'd better believe me when I tell you that if you want to do a service for Mary Lee, you'd better make for Querolle as fast as you can."

"That's what I'm going to do."

And I meant it. If I could pick up help on the way, from a ship or from the lighthouses, so much the better—but the lifeboats, filled with strong men with oars, had a big advantage over us. I couldn't lose too much time. The thing for me to do was get my feet on the island of Querolle, and take things as they came after that.

Brakely and I would probably fight the moment our feet hit the ground, if not on the raft when we got close in. Until we did get close in, I, as a sailor, had the fate of both of us in my hands.

My sail was up, and it was rigged stoutly. I looked aloft, found the pole star, and

laid a course as best I could. I swung the raft onto it, a laborious job, for the breeze was unfavorable, and the craft a clumsy thing in the water. But we did go ahead on the course, by a tough job of tacking.

I knew that I couldn't hold up long at that business. What I had been through began to tell. The breeze was strong enough to prove a constant pull on my muscles, managing the sail.

"Do you think you could do this?" I

asked Brakely.

"If you'll show me how," he responded. That took a long time, too, before he learned to make headway with a contrary breeze. It's a job of shifting the sail so that craft makes her course by a system of zigzagging, but all the time getting ahead. I pointed out a star, and told him to keep working the raft toward that.

A man with his brains, with the sail in hand, learns what a raft will do when the sail is hauled one way and what to expect when he hauls it another. Brakely managed the sail while I sat by and smoked a cigarette. I took a drink of water, and laid down to sleep.

I slept about two hours, and felt much stronger. The sun was up when I took the tiller of my sail again. And by looking at my watch and at the sun, I was able to see that the course would be easier sailing now, for the breeze had hauled around astern.

"I think I kept her on," Brakely said. He was eating food I had got out for him after getting my own breakfast. "That star disappeared, but I found another that seemed to be in a line above it. Knowing the direction we want to go, I've been steering by the sun since it came up. I don't think we'll miss the island."

"It's pretty much guesswork now," I told him. "If you got off the course very far it might throw us way off the island."

That was true, but if we weren't too far off and night came, we would have the beams from the lighthouses. The flashes of a light can be seen in the sky a longer distance than land can be seen in daylight. Much depended on luck, but I was certain that we would pick up the big island somewhere on its long coastline.

"George," Brakely said, "do you realize what a tough-looking white man you are?"

"Thanks to you and the liberties you gave me aboard the yacht," I returned.

"Yes, that's right. Well, it couldn't be helped. You had me scared. I had to have you miss your shaves. You got out of captivity so much that I couldn't take any more chances. That's a fine set of whiskers you have."

"I don't mind the whiskers. It's the dirty feeling I have. You wouldn't let me take a bath, and it's pretty hard for a man to even keep his face clean with

handcuffs on."

"That's right," Brakely agreed. "I'm not making fun of you, but when I took a good look at you in daylight this morning, I felt sorry that I hadn't let you shave. You look fierce and ferocious."

"You're nothing to boast of yourself."

"No, I suppose not. Fighting fire isn't a clean job."

I was a tough-looking customer. I hadn't shaved since the afternoon I cleaned up in preparation for the entertainment aboard the Angela Lee in Marble Cove. I hadn't had a bath since then either, except the ducking I got in the harbor at Monte Carlo.

My clothes were rumpled and wrinkled. I wore a hat that had belonged to some one on the Angela Lee, having picked it up while getting ready to abandon ship. It was a soft hat, a little too big for me, and I had to wear it hauled way down on my head.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LE GORILLE



NOTICED a couple of newspapers that Brakely had brought onto the raft. They were in a box of stuff he carried out of the galley on the

Angela Lee, folded so that I could see that one of them was a copy of the Paris edition of the New York *Herald*.

I thought maybe I'd like to look at that when I got time, but Brakely had a different idea. He got the papers out of the box when he saw me looking at them, went behind me, spent a little time reading something in one of them, and tossed them overboard.

"What's the idea?" I asked him. "I thought I'd like to look at that American paper."

The papers were out of reach. He didn't answer for a little while. Then I guess he decided it wouldn't do any harm if he told me of something that had been worrying him.

"One of those papers has bad news in

it for you," he said.

"How's that?"

"You're suspected of being a notorious Paris thief—an Apache known as 'Le Gorille'. Gorille is French for gorilla."

I looked around. He was smiling, highly amused.

"Yes, George, there was a piece in one of those papers about you. The police are hunting you." He laughed. "They think you're Le Gorille."

"Stop your kidding."

"It's a fact. Now I happen to know about Le Gorille. Read about his doings in Paris newspapers, years ago. The police never captured him. They say he vanished by going into the French army during the war—and was probably killed. But it seems that he's turned up again—on the Riviera, at Monte Carlo, to be exact.

"The newspaper said a gendarme at Monte Carlo tried to arrest an American sailor, or a man he thought was an American sailor, but the man was snatched away from him by a gang of his friends. The policeman, however, got this man's pistol away from him and got it into his own pocket before he was overcome. It seems that a few days later the private mark of *Le Gorille* was found on the pistol."

I kept my thoughts to myself, and made Brakely think I looked on the thing as a joke of some kind.

"This little affair," he went on, "happened on the causeway at Monte Carlo. Ah, George—didn't you have a brush with a gendarme on the causeway?"

"You needn't ask me," I replied.
"You've had a full report on that."

"Yes, I have—and it's very mysterious. As a matter of fact, it worries me a little. They say the Gorilla had a habit of leav-

ing his mark on things, a funny-looking 'G' that the police know very well. The French are highly imaginative people, George. Even the thieves among them will go out of their way to do a job in a spectacular fashion, when it could just as well be done without trimmings. They like the bizarre.

"For instance, there is no reason for *Le Gorille* to leave his mark on places he robs—but he does that, or did. The paper discusses him now as though he had come back to life. They look for a resumption of his spectacular criminal career.

"They say he put his mark, that funny-looking 'G,' on his private effects, including his pistol, in a spirit of bravado, which isn't uncommon among the Apaches in the underworld of Paris. It's a sort of dare to the police. Anyhow, this pistol had, on the under side of the butt, *Le Gorille's* mark. Now, what do you know about that?"

"I don't know anything about it. I tangled up with a policeman on the causeway, as you know. Your men took me away from him, and politely socked me on the jaw. The only pistol the policeman could have got off me was the gun I took away from the fellow you had guarding me."

"What kind of a pistol was that, George?"

" An automatic."

"Automatic, eh? Well, George, the policeman didn't get the automatic. One of my friends got that off you. The pistol the policeman got was a French army pistol."

"He didn't get it off me."

Brakely was silent a little while, sitting there behind me.

"I don't think he did," he said presently. "I don't think you had such a gun on you—don't see how you could have. What I think is, the policeman got it off one of the other fellows, in the scrimmage—and that's what I'd like to sift. I'd like to know if there's a man in that crowd—those fellows with Barney Masters—who has anything to do with Le Gorille. Of course, none of them is Le Gorille himself—"

"How do you know?"

"Well, the physical description of Le Gorille doesn't fit any of them. The Apache is a man with unusually long arms and a tremendous chest development—I suppose his physical peculiarities earned him his sobriquet."

Hippolyte!

I was certain of it now. The deaf mute's pistol had been taken from me by the gendarme, but I kept my mouth shut about that. Brakely was exceedingly mystified, and I suppose that when this news came out he thought it best to cut short his visit in Monte Carlo. What had looked like a drunken escapade of sailors took an unexpected turn, and though the police wouldn't think the Paris Apache came off a handsome American yacht, they might want to question the sailor as to where he got the pistol.

I guarded my secret. Le Gorille was on the island of Querolle, and somehow I felt that he was my friend.

Brakely lay down to sleep. I handled my sail as deftly as I could, crowding it for all possible speed, which at best wasn't much. I hoped to get a landfall before the sun went down.

A fight lay ahead, and complications too due to the enmity that now existed between Julius Brakely and Barney Masters. It was hard to say whether this would prove an asset or an obstacle to me in my enterprise of rescuing Alonzo Lee and his daughter from all the sinister forces in action against them.

The sun kept us warm even in the stiffening breeze, which was balmy and pleasant. We had suffered from chill during the night, but the autumn in that climate is warm so long as the sun shines.

Our danger from the weather lay in one of the sudden storms for which the Mediterranean is known among sailors—danger of the raft foundering and the sun being obscured so that we would lose all sense of direction. But the breeze held steady, almost astern, and there were no signs of the shift that precedes a gale.

We suffered neither for food nor water, for the Angela Lee had been heavily provisioned. Brakely had stood by while the lifeboats were being loaded, and, of course, Barney Masters had no chance to get rid of the stores that were left. When the boats were launched and Brakely went into the hold to release me, Masters had no time to destroy the stores on the yacht, even if the thought occurred to him.

All hands were in the boats, and their hope lay in the speed with which they got out of range of Brakely's gun. Anyhow, Barney Masters no doubt thought there was no escape for Brakely and me, and he didn't care if he did leave food and water. We had enough on the raft for a week's full rations.

There was no sign of a ship anywhere around the horizon.

I gave up hope in that direction. I thought that we were below the steamship tracks, and would run across no ships except one perhaps bound for some port on the big island. Sailings to and from that island were few and far between.

Brakely slept, with his head pillowed on a life preserver.

I didn't lose sight of the fact that we were likely to become active enemies at any moment. Just now each would do all he could to save the other, for our immediate hopes were the same. What would Brakely do when we got a landfall?

He'd think himself capable then of managing the raft, if he had the island itself to make for. He'd no longer need me to keep the raft on its course, if the weather remained favorable.

Brakely woke up about noon, yawned, and stretched himself.

"Well," he said, "I feel like lunch, George."

" Suits me."

He handed food to me, and I could eat and sail the raft at the same time now. By a system of calculation in which I employed my watch and the sun, I never was far off in my sense of direction.

"That story you told me about Caricar the pirate," I said to Brakely, "it was an interesting yarn."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it."

"You got Alonzo Lee with that story, too?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"I don't see why you wanted Alonzo Lee with you at Querolle."

"That is a mystery, isn't it? Have a cigarette."

"Thanks." He held a match for me.
"I suppose Mr. Lee has been hunting for Caricar's treasure?"

"Yes," Brakely agreed, "and perhaps he's found it."

I grinned, and turned so that our eyes met directly.

"Are you going to stick to that yarn?" I asked him. "Buried treasure—pirate gold! Huh?"

"Perhaps the treasure isn't so much of a dream as you think," Brakely rejoined. "Anyhow, that's my story, George, and I'm going to stick to it."

I knew that Brakely was too clever to be pumped by me, but it was a subject that I couldn't abandon.

"It wasn't a fair thing to drag Miss Lee into such a mess," I suggested.

"I agree with you. But it's her own fault. Whatever happens, George, I want you to understand that I didn't want Miss Lee down here. Her presence complicated things. I had to make a complete new set of plans.

"She put it over her father, pumped him—and when he told her of a voyage in quest of buried treasure, he couldn't get rid of her. She abandoned all her plans for the winter, and stuck with him. But, of course, we shall get her out of it."

"I hope so."

CHAPTER XXIX

SUSPENDED HOSTILITIES



BOUT three o'clock in the afternoon I asked Brakely to relieve me at the tiller. He had offered to do that at intervals ever since he woke up,

but I put him off until three. I had a particular object in that. I laid down for a little sleep, and had it on my mind to wake up in about two hours. I hit it pretty close.

It was exactly ten minutes past five when I sat up on the raft. I took a quick look at the horizon. No land in sight. Then my eyes traveled clear around the circle. No sign of a ship.

Brakely turned around and saw that I was awake.

"I'm getting worried," he said.

" Why?"

"I'm afraid we've missed the island."

"Well, I don't know. There's certainly no sign of it yet."

"I want you to play square with me, George," he said earnestly. "Are you really trying to make the island—did you lay the right course for that—or are you keeping off it until you can sight a ship?"

"I'm doing my best to make the island."

That was the truth.

"Barney Masters and his gang are there now," he reminded me. "They had oars and sails too. Those boats were equipped for that, and they're much easier to handle and twice as speedy as this raft. They had that French sailor with them, Vernet—and he'd do all he could to fetch them to Querolle."

" Maybe."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," I said, "he might want to keep

that crowd away from the Lees."

"Barney Masters would make him hit Querolle," Brakely assured me. "He'd put a time limit on it. He'd say, if we don't pick up the island at a certain time, overboard you go. Vernet's life wouldn't be worth a sou if he tried any tricks."

That was probably true.

"And Vernet," Brakely continued, "knows the Mediterranean like a fisherman knows a duck pond. He's been cruising on yachts in this sea for years, I understand. He'll be able to calculate where the Angela Lee went down, the same as you did. Barney Masters and I sailed the ship together, and Barney had the figures to give him. He'd compel Vernet to make Querolle."

I got up and took a good look.

"Well," I said, "I'm trying to make it."
We ate supper. I was comforted by the continued good weather. I took the sail for an hour, then asked Brakely to relieve me. He hesitated a moment, but obeyed reluctantly. I had it in mind to make my request a command, but he saved me from that by taking the tiller.

A tenseness had sprung up between us. We watched each other. I wondered if he thought of the same thing I did. Night came early on that fall day, and I stood on the raft scanning the horizon as darkness fell.

The man working the sail was at a disadvantage. He had to sit down to do it properly, and he was forward, facing ahead. The other man could remain behind the helmsman and on his feet. I wanted Brakely to be at the tiller when the lighthouse was picked up.

It was too dark now for a landfall. I depended on the lights that stood on the hooks of land inside of which was the island of Querolle. I knew there would be no moon, and this was an advantage, for the darker the sky the greater distance would the flashes be visible. The sky was clear, but lighted only by the stars.

About eight o'clock Brakely said:

"Take her, will you, George?"
He looked around at me, and I

He looked around at me, and I answered:

"No. You stick to your job. I'll stand the lookout watch."

And we knew then that each had the same thing in mind.

He made a movement as though to get up on his knees.

"Sit right where you are," I ordered him. He obeyed, with a shrug of his shoulders. It wasn't time for him yet to start hostilities. If he did win a battle with me he'd be in a bad fix. We exchanged no words now except what concerned the sailing of the raft.

At twenty minutes of nine I picked up the light.

It was on our starboard side. I saw then that we would probably have missed the big island altogether in daylight, for we were steering a course which would take us far east of it. Night and the light had saved us.

I didn't say anything about the light to Brakely for a minute, just stood there thinking. Yet I had to tell him how to change course, so I might as well tell him of the light.

"I got it," I told him.

"What?" His eyes got busy then.

"The light."

He saw its flashes in the sky too, and laughed happily though a little nervously. I told him how to manage the sail so that we'd bear toward the light. He did a good job of it, but I had to watch him every minute, for it was harder sailing on the altered course. And I had other reasons for watching him.

Julius Brakely would now feel himself capable of making the island of Querolle alone, for he had learned how to manage the raft and sail. The light offered him a definite object to steer for. He might think that his own security lay in hurling me into the sea.

I discovered that bad luck in the shape of a contrary wind was offset on the altered course by the rip of a current that now bore us toward the light at a faster clip. That current might veer in a direction unfavorable at any moment, but just now it was what a sailor would pray for.

"George," Brakely said after awhile, "I'll make a bargain with you. I think you saved my life on the Angela Lee. I couldn't have got off on a provisioned raft, and I'd have probably bungled around until the fire caught me. All right. Now, no matter what game I'm playing with that gang at Querolle, I'll promise you to do all I can for Alonzo Lee and Mary Lee if you won't try to run the raft up to one of the lights."

"I'll think about it," was the only answer I made.

"You'd better. If I see you're making for the light, to get help there, I'll have to put up a fight. One of us is going into the sea. It might be me, it might be you. It might be both of us.

"No telling what might happen if we put on a battle. We may slip off, and the raft drift away. It's man to man. And you'll have to admit that I can put up a pretty husky fight. Now what do you say if we pull together, and make Querolle with no stops?"

"I'll have to think about it."

" All right."

I knew that he would attack me the first opening he got.

"Perhaps you don't believe my promises," he suggested.

"I have nothing to say about that," I told him.

The current carried us toward the light, but nothing but the beams of it in the sky was visible yet.

"I wouldn't promise," Brakely said, "that I might not have to kill you at Querolle, if you operate there as I think you will. You will try to round up all of us, Barney Masters and his gang and me too. I'd be a fool if I promised to let you round me up. It may be your life or mine at Querolle. Aren't you willing to take a chance on that, if I agree to pull with you until we drag the Lees out of danger?"

It was a fair proposition, and of course an effort to run up to one of the lights meant a fight. It was hard to say what might happen if we fought. Brakely wouldn't be an easy man to overcome, unless I hit him on the head from behind as he sat there on the raft. Maybe I was justified in doing that, but I didn't have any intention of seeking that kind of an advantage.

"I might agree with you," I told him.

"If you give me your word, I'll trust you."

"I'm not ready to do that yet."

It was hours afterward that I gave Brakely my promise, and we had a lot of talk meanwhile. I became convinced that the welfare of all concerned lay in both Brakely and myself getting to Querolle. He knew Masters and his crowd. He had a personal object in defeating them. With that job off our hands, with the Lees out of danger, then Brakely and I would probably have our struggle—and the best man win.

I had Hippolyte in reserve too, to employ against Masters and against Brakely.

We made our bargain. The outcome of a fight on the raft was so uncertain that it looked like the wisest thing to do.

So we kept clear of the lights, steering in between the hooks of land about four o'clock in the morning—both dead tired from our battle with contrary breezes and shifting currents which we encountered as we got closer to the island. We had battled with both the sail and the piece of plank used as a paddle, but we made it.

It was just breaking day when Brakely and I set foot on the island of Querolle.

CHAPTER XXX

ALLIED ENEMIES



AGGED out, but we had no thought of sleep.

We dragged the raft up on the beach, high and dry, and cached our provisions behind

a cluster of rocks. I watched Brakely closely, but he seemed intent on going through with his bargain. Maybe he thought he could work things so that I would become his accomplice not only in rescuing the Lees, but in helping him to get away with the game he played. He watched me too.

We snatched a hurried meal, and set off into the woods. Each of us picked up a few rocks of formidable weight, but easy to carry in our pockets. Before long each of us was armed with a club too.

I kept my eye peeled for Hippolyte—Le Gorille—who was likely to be found wandering around the island almost anywhere and at any time, if I had judged rightly his furtive character. Brakely, of course, had no suspicion of the deaf mute's presence on the island. Hippolyte became again my reserve force.

We had landed on the island almost directly across from Marble Cove, where we had last seen the Seabird. Foamy Cove, in the cliffs of which was Hippolyte's cave, was off to the right. The hill I thought of as Signal Hill, the highest on the island, and on top of which I had first encountered the deaf mute, lay between us and Marble Cove.

Brakely knew about that hill too, and we made for it.

"We'll take a look at the Seabird, if she's still there," he said. "I don't know what we're going to run into."

And neither did I.

The sun came up while we were ascending Signal Hill, came up with a promise of a clear, warm day. The chill oozed out of my bones.

I discovered now that my feet were in bad shape, due to wearing my shoes so long. They tired quickly. I could tell by the way Brakely walked that he was in a similar fix, though he hadn't suffered from imprisonment in irons. But we never thought of stopping.

We got to the top of the hill. The Sea-

bird still lay in Marble Cove.

There was no sign of any one on her decks, though if things had gone well with those we left there Alonzo Lee should have with him on the craft Miss Mary Lee, Berivou, the mate of the Angela Lee; Fanier, the engineer, three sailors, the cook, and the engineer's helper off the yacht. There was a possibility that Captain Fawcett and Splinters had been driven ashore, if Captain Lee had caught them at any tricks, or even that they had suffered a worse fate.

Absolutely no hint could we see of the presence at Querolle of Barney Masters and his evil crew.

"Wonder if Masters got here?" I said.
"I can't believe that he didn't," Brakely replied, "knowing what he was up to."

"You mean Miss Lee?"

" Miss Lee-and something else."

The something else was the stakes for which Brakely and Masters would fight; and though I dismissed all thought of the treasure of Caricar the pirate, the idea of treasure—wealth of some sort—persisted in my mind.

We were lying on the hilltop, still in doubt as to whether we ought to show ourselves, thinking of Barney Masters.

Then suddenly we heard the report of a pistol, off in the direction of Marble Cove.

"That was a shot," I said.

"It certainly was!"

"Did you see any smoke?"

"No," Brakely rejoined. "The automatics those fellows carry dont belch smoke."

We waited, scanning the cliffs around the cove and the decks of the ship. I detected a movement on the cliffs.

"There—on the cliffs!" I said, pointing.
"A man—"

Another shot sounded. The man on the cliffs skulked out of view. Brakely hadn't seen him. Suddenly a puff of smoke came from one of the ports of the Seabird, then

the report of a third shot reached our ears. The distance was such that the smoke of a shot would be seen first.

"There's a fight on," I said, "between the people on the ship and Barney Mas-

ters's gang on the cliffs."

"No doubt about it," Brakely agreed.
"The Lees and their people are beleaguered on the ship." He drew a long
breath of satisfaction, and I was impressed by his sincerity. "We got here
in time, didn't we, George?"

We had. It wasn't likely that Mary Lee had yet fallen into the hands of Barney Masters. The crooks hadn't been able to creep up on the Seabird. Their presence was detected, and a fight was on. How long the struggle had lasted we didn't know."

"Well," Brakely said, "we've got the lay of the land now. I just got a glimpse of one of those fellows on the cliffs. Looked like a fireman who worked in Masters's black gang. If that's true, there's no doubt as to which side is in possession of the ship. And it means that we've got to attack Masters and his gang from behind."

" All right-let's go."

We were a little rested now, and we hurried down the hill. I saw no sign of Hippolyte.

On our way over to Marble Cove I wondered if I hadn't ought to tell Brakely about the deaf mute, and make an attempt to enlist him in the fight. Brakely and I faced tremendous odds—two weary men armed with stones and clubs against a crowd of thugs armed with guns.

But I realized that I still had to face a struggle with the man now at my side. I relied strongly on him in the present emergency—relied on his cunning and stealth to wage a winning fight against even those odds—but the time might come when my own victory would depend on the surprise of Hippolyte's appearance.

I kept up a sharp lookout for the deaf mute, but said nothing about him.

The nearer we got to Marble Cove the more cautiously did we proceed. Close to the slopes running up to the cliffs we picked our way step by step, darting behind trees and rocks, and remaining under cover for long intervals, listening and watching. It was our object to attack one or two of the gang separately, whip them, and seize whatever guns we could.

I don't think an Indian could have gone through the woods more stealthily than we did, and the nature of our progress accounts for the way in which we blundered into Barney Masters and his right hand man, Charles Throgg.

I saw them first. They were asleep in a little natural den formed by rocks and brush, one of the many covers with which this island abounded. I first saw their stocking feet, and beckoned to Brakely.

We crept into position. Yes, they were asleep, perhaps after a night on the cliffs. We could see both their faces. There was no sound from the cliffs above. Those up there were lying quietly no doubt, waiting for a shot at some of the people on the Seabird.

Brakely and I took a good look at our surroundings before we made a move.

"You take Throgg," Brakely whispered. "Leave Masters to me."

There was a murderous gleam in his eyes. "Don't kill him," I urged.

He did not reply.

This was no time and place, with those odds against us, to plead for the life of a thug, one of whose motives in leaving Brakely and me to die on the yacht was to get his dirty hands on Miss Mary Lee. We crept toward them.

Barney Masters awoke and sat up. He took in the situation at a glance, for Brakely and I, getting close, had been compelled to get out from cover. He shook Throgg violently, yelled, and leaped to his feet. Throgg was up in an instant too.

And the fight was on.

CHAPTER XXXI

STRONGEST MAN IS MASTER



F it had not been for the threat from the cliffs above this would have been a leisurely job for Brakely and me, for we were in action the instant

we saw Masters was awake. They got on their feet all right, but had no chance to get their guns before their hands were busy in an attempt to stay our attack.

They had been sleeping close together under a blanket. They wore trousers and shirts, but their shoes and coats were off. Their guns were in their coats, which lay behind them.

I selected Throgg, and knew at the outset that my work would soon be done. Masters hadn't yelled the second time, for Brakely had him by the throat.

Throgg was lean and not overly strong. His cadaverous face was twisted with fright. It was almost a shame to hit him, but it had to be done. I took one clean crack at him while his hands were raised feebly, and he went down in a lurching tumble. I sprang on top of him; searched his trousers pockets for a gun, found none, then rolled him off the coats on which he had fallen. From them I got two guns. Throgg was insensible.

I turned toward Brakely and his victim. Mention of Brakely's speed in a fight has already been made, and he was fighting now with hate in his heart. He had his hands on a crook who had double crossed him and one who had designs on a girl whom it was certain Brakely loved.

No matter what Brakely's game had been, no matter what lay at the bottom of the mystery, he did love Mary Lee, and his game included no design on her.

Looking at the awful thing going on there, I knew how futile it would be for me to utter a protest. I couldn't hazard the welfare of the besieged company in the cove by fighting in defense of Barney Master's life.

The thugs from the cliffs might swarm down on us at any moment. It was a miracle that they weren't there now. I couldn't stay Brakely's hands without fighting him, so I turned my face toward the cliffs, to fight off attack from that quarter.

When Julius Brakely came to my side I knew that Barney Masters was dead.

Brakely looked into my eyes without saying a word, and then turned toward Throgg. But I certainly didn't mean to stand by and let him commit murder by the wholesale. I followed him.

"Don't worry," Brakely said, divining my fears; "I'm just taking a look at him. This one isn't worth the trouble."

I hauled a blanket over the body on the ground.

Brakely took one of the guns. I held the other.

"I guess they didn't hear him yell," he said, pointing to the cliffs. "They don't seem to be coming."

It was strange, and still the yell might have sounded extraordinarily loud to us and be inaudible on the cliffs, if the men there were sheltered by rocks. It had been a husky cry that came from Masters's throat. Anyhow there was as yet no response from the cliffs.

We turned to Throgg. He was conscious, but laid there whimpering in terror. Brakely kicked him in the ribs, not very hard.

"Get up," he said.

Throgg got up, and stood cringing.

My eyes were on him. The pistol was in my right hand, hanging down. Brakely stood at my right, too. Suddenly he snatched the gun away from me, turned the muzzles of both my way and said:

"Back up, George."

Of course, I backed up. Rage seized me, too, for he was going back on his bargain.

"Stand right where you are," Brakely said, "and listen. The Lees are out of danger, with that rat dead. I can promise you they won't be harmed. I'll take charge of things here now, and these fellows will be glad to knuckle to me. Won't they, Throgg?"

Throgg rolled his eyes toward the bulging blanket.

"Y-yes, sir!" he answered warmly.

"This gang likes a winner," Brakely went on. "As soon as they see me with a brace of guns in my hands, and one of them pulls back the flap of that blanket and takes a look, they'll grovel on the ground in front of me, and beg me to get them off this God-forsaken island. I know.

"I'm so sure of it that I'm going to send Throgg up the hill to tell them what's happened. I've kept my bargain with you, George. I've lifted the danger off the Lees. I promise you that I'll do nothing worse than perhaps set them ashore on the island here. I want the Seabird, and I think I can easily capture it without injuring the Lees.

"After we're gone, you have the island to yourselves. You have the raft, and the two boats from the Angela Lee must be somewhere about. You can go over to the big island, or out to the lighthouses, and get help. I won't care then. We'll be at sea—and I'm sport enough to be willing to take my chances there. It's a race, but I've already got my plans laid for winning it."

He smiled at me.

"Once again you and I are enemies," he continued. "Thank you for all the help you've given me, and don't blame me because I'm trying to fight my way out of a hole that's worse than death. There's been an awful crash in my life, George. I'm trying to save what I can out of the wreckage.

"I ask nothing of any one except a chance to make a race for it. I'll fight for that chance. Now I'm going to let you go. I know you're my enemy and I know that you'll start right in to get the best of me as soon as you're out of sight—but I'm going to let you go. I'm responsible for you being in this mess, and I'm going to give you a chance. If things had gone as I intended, you would have been sent on your way with a big pile of money, and been no wiser.

"But you know too much now, George. I've got to get a start before I let you get where you can spread the news. Now here's the idea. You have my promise that the Lees won't be harmed. They'll be put ashore on this island—that's all—and there will be no great hardship in that. You'll soon be taken away.

"You have your watch, George. Look at it."

I accommodated him. He looked at his own watch.

"Note the time," he went on. "You have ten minutes to get off into the woods. At the end of ten minutes, if I catch you prowling around, I may have to kill you. I won't kill you unless I have to, and that's

one job I certainly don't want—but if you try to spoil my plans, it's your life or mine. That's the way it shapes up. Good-by, George—and for God's sake, don't make me kill you!"

I could tell by the look of him that he meant what he said. As he saw it, his back was to the wall. Brakely was fighting for his life, and there had been a melancholy ring in his words.

At that he was giving me a chance that a crook like Barney Masters wouldn't give. I could see his point of view. I didn't doubt his word in respect to the Lees. Brakely's game had shaped up now so that all he wanted was a chance to race for his life.

"Can I ask Throgg a question?" I said.

"Go ahead."

"What became of Jean Vernet, that French sailor off the yacht?"

Throgg looked at Brakely. "Tell him," Brakely ordered.

"He got away from us, last night on the cliffs," Throgg told me. "He made Barney think he'd be one of us, if we paid him big. We turned him loose, but didn't give him no gun. He sneaked off. He's on the island some place, if he didn't swim out to the Seabird."

Brakely made a motion with his guns. He'd been watching the hills leading up to the cliffs.

"I hear some of them coming, George," he said to me. "Beat it!" He called after me: "I give you ten minutes from now. Don't attempt to show yourself after that, George."

I didn't answer him. When I got out of his sight, I turned off at an angle and started on a run for Hippolyte's cave.

CHAPTER XXXII

PARLEYING FOR HIGH STAKES



T took me maybe half an hour to get there, and I was so weak from the trial of running, coming as it did on top of the excitement and hard-

ships of several days, that I sank to the floor the instant I got inside the cave.

Hippolyte wasn't there. The ashes in

his rude stove were cold, as though there hadn't been a fire there in a long time. I crawled over to the big hollow stone into which the water eaved down from the wall. The bowl was running over, and I drank deeply of the cool water.

Had Barney Masters and his crowd finished the deaf mute? Had they caught him prowling around the island, and made a quick job of it with their guns? Hippolyte,

I knew, had no firearms.

I didn't think that I was physically able to make the uphill and downhill trip to Marble Cove, and then to put up any kind of a fight. I didn't think that the Lees were in much danger now, yet I couldn't give up this other job—that of trapping the crooks.

But I was so weak that my legs wobbled when I stood up. The cave was chilly. I laid down on Hippolyte's grass bed and pulled his rush blanket over me, to rest and think.

A man's purpose is no good if he hasn't got the strength to carry it out. When I looked back at what I'd been through, I didn't wonder that my condition now verged on collapse. The last real sleep I had had was in this very cave.

I had gone out of this to a series of struggles and excitements. While held prisoner aboard the Angela Lee, in irons, unable to struggle, it might seem that I had nothing else to do but sleep—but my slumbers there were just a long series of dozes from which I would emerge with a start.

The excitement and the danger were never off my mind altogether. My nerves had been taut for several days, and I had worked hard physically in getting off the Angela Lee, and to this island, to say nothing of the exactions since arrival. No wonder I dropped asleep there in Hippolyte's cave.

When I woke up Julius Brakely was standing in the doorway, and there was a movement of men and boats in the cove below.

I could see the warm sunlight through the vines at the door, and didn't think I had slept long. I got to my feet as Brakely advanced a step. His eyes, accustomed now to the gloom, bored into mine. I stood waiting for some sign of his purpose, preparing to fight my way out, no matter what the odds. There was no way of retreat.

"George," he said, "how did you know about this cave?"

"I found it," I told him.

- "Found it, eh?" The line of his white teeth appeared as his lips curled in a mirthless smile. His voice was low, and I got an idea that he didn't want the men in the cave to hear. "Just stumbled across it, eh?" folding his arms and looking at me doubtfully. "That's a lie," he asserted evenly. "You fled to this cave from the Seabird, after the scrape over Radd. Who told you about this cave?"
 - "No one. I just found it."
 "Is Le Gorille on this island?"

"What're you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about," he rejoined, wagging his head. "I've learned a few things since we parted. The first time you made a break on the yacht, you had a French army pistol. The brainless boob you flashed it on never thought of that until this morning. He told me. Did you get that pistol from Vernet? Did he pass it down to you from the boat deck, that first night out?"

" No."

"But you had a French army pistol. That was the gun the gendarme got off you at Monte Carlo. It was the Gorilla's gun."

"I don't know the Gorilla. Where would I meet him?"

Brakely meditated. I saw that he was very tired and unstrung, too. He was as strong a man as myself, and as young, but he had begun to break under the strain of what we had been through together. If he was unarmed, it would be an even match—if we were permitted to fight it out between ourselves.

There was no sound from the cove now except the restless stir of the water.

"Tell you what I'm going to do," Brakely informed me. "I've got work to do around this cove. You know more than I thought you did. I'm afraid of you, but I'm going to spare you once more. I'm simply going to tie you up, so you can't sneak up behind me."

I didn't mean to submit to that.

"Tie you up, and plant you somewhere in the woods," he went on. "Got to do it. I can't find Vernet; don't know whether he's on the island or on the Seabird. I never paid much attention to that fellow, but he's got me worried now. If he gave you Le Gorille's pistol, he's a little too wise to be at large. If you found the gun here in this cave—well, George, I wish you'd come clean about that."

"I'll tell you nothing."

"All right. I didn't think you would. That's why I'm glad I found you. I didn't know about this cave myself." His eyes had been busy ever since he stepped in. "It's very cleverly concealed. I sent some of the boys around to the cove in the boats—the boats off the Angela Lee. We had a conference after you went away.

"They're my men again. They took a look at the twisted face under that blanket, and groveled, as I said they would. I took a look at things over at the other cove, and left some men to watch the crowd on the Seabird. Sent the others around here.

"I thought I'd walk across the island, and see if I could find you and Vernet. I've got to fix you fellows so you can't make a move against me. I need sleep, and I can't sleep with you and Vernet running loose—now that you know more than I thought you did. I'm going to tie you up. I may handle Vernet in a different way."

I began to get the idea. Some of Brakely's gang had come to the cove in boats. He had walked to the cliffs above, and, searching, had found the path leading down to Hippolyte's cave. The gang had business of some sort in the caves below. Did Brakely's men know that he was in the cave above?

Had he some reason for concealing this cave from them? Would he attempt to dispose of me quietly, and not let them know he had found this cave? A man could come down to it from the cliffs without being seen from the cove. They were waiting for him to show up.

Le Gorille, the Paris Apache—Hippolyte—was more than an incident in this game, too. Brakely was deeply concerned over the possibility of the Gorilla being on the

island. He must have seen that this cave bore numerous signs of long occupation.

Indeed, there was a bright gleam in Brakely's eyes—a gleam that comes in the eyes of a man scenting victory. He had penetrated a secret that had long baffled him.

Did this cave hold treasure?

"You've got pretty good sense, George," Brakely was saying. "You've nothing but your bare hands to fight with. I've got two guns on me. I have a gang in the cove below. I've got to tie you up. For God's sake, don't make me kill you!"

He really dreaded that thought. Brakely wanted the thing he had come here for. He wanted to get it quietly, if possible—but I labored under no delusions that his aversion to killing me would stop him if he thought such a job offered the only chance of winning out.

"If you'll lie down quietly," he told me, "I'll fix these ropes on you so you'll be comfortable." He had brought ropes along in the expectation of running across me somewhere. "I'll protect you, if you'll be reasonable and—"

CHAPTER XXXIII

TO THE DEATH

SPRANG on him.



I was surprised at my own strength and ferocity. It seemed that I realized this was to be a fight for a final

decision, and the weakness of nerve and muscle I felt before I fell asleep had utterly vanished.

Yet so intent did Brakely seem to be on keeping the secret of this cave from the men below that he emitted no cry for reenforcements nor made any effort to get at his guns.

He fought off my attempts to get one of the guns, however.

And I guess he thought that he could handle me alone and with bare hands. He was the kind of a man who would think that, for he didn't know what fear was, and he had whipped me to a standstill in my cabin aboard the Seabird, while we were still in Marseilles harbor.

Anyhow, we fought man to man in the gloom of the cave.

The surprise of my sudden leap gave me an advantage, and I banged my fist into Brakely's face before we fell into a clinch. I threw him against the rock wall, and with a back-handed blow knocked his head against that surface. These setbacks fogged Brakely's brain, but they warned him, too, that he had a tough job on his hands.

He summoned all his strength, clung to me until he got his head back, then tore into me. Then I learned again what a wonderful fighting man he was. He laid me on the floor with a blow that seemed to shatter my brain into a thousand pieces, but I fought off insensibility.

I give him credit for not leaping on me then and there and finishing his job. His instinct for fair play ruled him even then. I got slowly to my feet, and for a few seconds, seeking a respite, kept Hippolyte's big stone water bowl between us. My brain cleared in those few seconds.

Brakely, in a pinch, could resort to his guns or summon help from below. This strengthened his confidence as he came after me with a grin on his bleeding face.

We punched each other, but neither went down. The walls saved both of us from that several times. We fought, clinched for breathing spells, and fought again. Neither sought to use anything but the weapons nature had given him. I knocked him down, and sprang on top.

Over and over we rolled. Each of us suffered in that encounter, and I know I was glad to get out of reach for a moment. We broke apart and struggled to our feet. It's a funny thing, but neither of us bit or clawed. I was fighting for my life, but something in the way he fought induced similar instincts within myself.

Our last clinch came to a finish with Brakely's arms around my body. He lifted me. I beat him on the head and shoulders with my fists while in the air. All his strength was in the movement that now engaged him. He flung me. I went down across the stone water bowl.

My left leg was curled underneath. It snapped, below the knee.

I felt a sickened sensation in the pit of my stomach, and, endeavoring to rise, collapsed helplessly on the rock floor. The leg was broken.

Brakely stood over me, breathing furiously.

I never learned what he intended to do, for suddenly the cave grew lighter as the vines parted at the door.

Brakely wheeled to face Hippolyte.

"Le Gorille!" he cried, with a ring of dread in his tone.

The deaf mute came at him with a snarl. The style of the Gorilla's attack gave Brakely no chance to employ his guns. Two blows landed by Brakely fell off the deaf mute's head like drops of rain water. He never paused. In an instant he was close in, and his long, powerful arms encircled his victim.

Brakely struggled like a wild man, but his arms were pinioned. All he could do was drag Hippolyte to and fro. The embrace of *Le Gorille* tightened. They surged this way and that. I kept out of the way as much as I could, dragging my broken leg from place to place, but never for a moment at rest.

A foot came into violent contact with my injured limb, and I shut my eyes in a spasm of pain. When I looked again Brakely was gouging the deaf mute's bare feet with his shoe heels, and trying to fasten his teeth in his neck. Hippolyte squeezed harder.

"Don't kill him!" I yelled.

Then I thought of Hippolyte's affliction, and thereafter held my tongue.

Brakely was shouting for help now—weakly, so tight was the embrace—and pounding at the bare feet of his tormentor. I heard a bone crack, then another. Brakely's body sagged. Hippolyte peered with a fiendish grin into the bulging eyes close to his own, saw something there, and let his victim slip to the floor. Brakely groaned, but did not stir.

There were sounds of excitement from the cove now. Hippolyte looked down at me. I pointed to the door. He raced out before I could tell him of the guns in Brakely's pockets.

I crawled to Brakely's side, got the pis-

tols, and, despite the pain, dragged myself to the door.

It was then that I learned of Hippolyte's preparations for defense, in case of an attack from the cove.

On top of a ledge that ran above the path, and under still another ledge that formed the brow of the cliffs, he had strewn bowlders. He was up there now, darting about and chattering like a creature of the jungles in the strange throaty gurgles that escaped him in moments of excitement.

And he was turning loose the bowlders on the men trying to get up the cliffs in answer to Brakely's cries. It was a furious bombardment, and Hippolyte alternated his attack with the bowlders with smaller rocks flung with unerring accuracy. Two of the thugs fell senseless to the beach below.

I began firing. I hit only one man— Throgg, in the shoulder. He dropped like a wounded muskrat down the cliffs.

The sound of my guns must have taken the heart out of the thugs, for sight of me peering down at them was sufficient notice that Brakely, whose cries they had heard, was out of commission. Our fortress was impregnable from below. They scuttled for cover in the nooks and crannies of the cliffs.

I realized that we had them now, for no man could stick his head out without exposing it to my fire. Hippolyte continued to send his bowlders crashing down. He gurgled gleefully, though the rocks plunged harmlessly into the cove.

"Brakely's dead!" I shouted. "If you fellows surrender and toss your guns into the water, I won't shoot again! If you don't, I'll kill every man who sticks his head out!"

I knew their positions must be highly uncomfortable, and of course they didn't know that I lay above with a broken leg. They seemed to be considering my proposal.

Charles Throgg, wounded, whined an appeal to his mates to surrender. Three others lying injured on the beach, one with his leg in the water, said nothing. One of them, when he did speak, cursed Throgg.

I continued to shout at them, but they refused to answer. Then I remembered the caves at the waterline. Their position wasn't so uncomfortable as I first thought.

Hippolyte was up to something. He crawled around to one side of the cliffs, on precarious footing at times, until he stood directly above the lifeboats from the Angela Lee—the boats in which the crooks had come to the island and to Foamy Cove.

He sent a shower of big rocks toward the boats. Most of the rocks fell in the water, but presently his work told. The bottoms of both boats were smashed out. The boats lay half out and half submerged in the water—useless.

The net was tightening.

Brakely stirred behind me, but he was too weak and the agony of his broken ribs too intense to permit of attack. I didn't expose myself to a shot by peering out at the caves below, and Hippolyte showed remarkable skill in keeping under cover on the ledges.

The men below began to answer my questions. We were still parleying on the terms of surrender when John Vernon shouted at me from overhead.

I looked up, but all I could see was Hippolyte's beard waving at me from the ledge and his grinning face. I answered Vernon, telling him the situation in as few words as possible.

I was suffering terrible agony from the broken leg. The foot had got twisted and I couldn't straighten it. I was talking to John Vernon when merciful insensibility overtook me.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AFTER THE BATTLE



HEN I came into full consciousness the cave was crowded. I had had moments of half-sensibility, but all that happened meanwhile

came to me from the lips of others.

John Vernon took word to the Seabird that their besiegers had suffered a severe reverse. He shouted it from a cliff, and then attacked the two men left on the cliffs to watch the craft. Those on the Seabird hadn't known so few men remained there. Vernon was armed with one of the pistols he took from me in the cave, but, of course, I don't remember him taking it.

Matters were cleaned up at Marble Cove, and then the company from there moved against the stragglers in the caves of Foamy Cove. There were only three unwounded men among the crooks ashore, as two of them were still suffering from wounds I inflicted on them aboard the Angela Lee—one with a broken jaw and the other with a shattered arm.

John Vernon, after his escape, had encountered Hippolyte, with whom he made friends. Hippolyte abandoned his cave after Barney Masters and some of his men made a trip into Foamy Cove, and had been living in the woods. He was hungry. So was John Vernon.

They hadn't see Brakely and me on the island until Hippolyte, wandering about, saw the men in the cove and crept down to his cave in time to save me from whatever fate Brakely meant to deal out. Vernon appeared from the woods after he heard the shots in Foamy Cove.

At any rate, Barney Masters lay in a grave on the island of Querolle, the three unwounded crooks were in irons in the brig of the Seabird, together with Captain Fawcett, who had been taken prisoner soon after the Angela Lee made her flight. Splinters, the galley boy, had become a trusted member of the company commanded by Captain Lee.

The wounded were being cared for on the cliffs above Hippolyte's cave, and Miss' Mary Lee, Captain Lee, John Vernon, and a sailor off the yacht were in the cave with Brakely and me. Lamps had been fetched from the Seabird, and Captain Lee was setting my broken leg.

It was the pain of that operation that brought me out of the stupor.

Mary Lee's face floated above me in the lamplight. It was still and calm and beautiful, and that alone told me that our struggles were over. She was watching her father's operation on my leg, and occasionally she winced with sympathy for the pain she knew I must feel. She saw that my eyes were open, and she bathed my forehead with a damp cloth. Julius Brakely lay near by, and he seemed to be sleeping.

They told me not to talk, but I persisted in asking questions, when I wasn't grating

my teeth in agony. The story of what had happened came to me in fragments.

When Brakely opened his eyes he stared at John Vernon, and I knew he understood now. This was the man Mary Lee loved, and who had for several years left his work in a studio in Paris to pose as a Frenchman and a sailor merely to be near the girl. Alonzo Lee understood too, and all his objections had vanished under the stress of this adventure.

The man he trusted and admired, the man he favored as a son-in-law had turned out to be a crook who lived a double life—and why shouldn't he let Mary Lee pick her own husband after such a miserable failure as he had made of it?

There was a kind of a grim smile on Julius Brakely's face. He had lost at all points, but he was a man who would smile at it. John Vernon was working on him, bandaging his chest. Mary Lee did the same to Brakely that she did to me—bathed his forehead at intervals. I noticed that every time her face hung over his own he closed his eyes, and didn't open them again until she turned away.

They worked with stuff from the medicine and surgery chest of the Seabird.

"Where is the deaf mute?" I asked.

"Up on the cliffs—helping," Mary Lee replied. "You mustn't talk. You need rest very badly."

"Do you know who he is?" I persisted.

"Yes," she told me.

"I'll bet he'll run away."

"No—I've had a talk with him. I've assured him that no harm will come to him. He will be forgiven, I'm sure—when we tell our story, and when his war record is made known. I speak French and the sign language too. I made him understand."

"How did you know who he is?"

"We have a full confession from Captain Fawcett," the girl replied. "And Charles Throgg has been bursting to tell all he knows too. It's a sensational story—"

She broke off suddenly, with a quick glance toward Brakely; and remembering, too, I suppose, that she was going against her own admonitions for quiet on my part.

"Say, Miss Lee," I said, "Is Captain Fawcett—is that his right name?"

- "You really must be quiet, George!"
- "Tell me that much, please."

"No, his name isn't Fawcett."

"I knew it! In the beginning I ought to've known something was wrong. I know a Captain Albert Fawcett—"

She motioned her head toward Brakely, and, out of consideration for his feelings,

I kept my mouth shut.

It was long after dark, and I suffered the tortures of the damned from the trip across the island, it being a difficult job for the men who carried me in a blanket, when I dropped asleep. It was a peaceful sleep too, for all hands were safe aboard the Seabird.

CHAPTER XXXV

PLOTS AND KILLERS



HE confession of the man we had known as Captain Albert Fawcett, after it was all written out by Miss Mary Lee and in response to ques-

tions from Captain Lee, read:

"My name is Asa Joles. I am fifty-eight years old, and my home is in New York City. Up to the time I was forty-five I was a sailor, the last three years being master of several coastwise vessels.

"I was a heavy drinker, and got in with a crowd of smugglers in the West Indies. Later I mixed up with thieves and burglars in New York, and left the sea. I have been arrested several times, under various

names, but never convicted.

"I met the man I later knew as Julius Brakely in the company of other crooks in New York. We got friendly when he learned I had been a seafaring man. As confidence grew in each other he let me know more about himself and a certain job he had in mind.

"He was known in New York society as Julius Brakely, and from what I learned he came of a very fine family. He had spent all the money he inherited, and for two or three years had been stealing, being known to crooks as 'The Bobber,' due to his habit of disappearing for weeks at a time and then bobbing up in our hang outs.

"He told me he lived the life of a society man until his money was gone, then he would come back to us and get more by stealing. He was known among crooks in London and Paris too.

"The job he told me about was digging up the 'plant,' as crooks call buried money and jewelry, of a Paris thief known as the Gorilla. In Paris he had met the Gorilla, and had wormed his secrets out of him. He and the Gorilla had had trouble, but I never did know rightly just what it was, except that it was serious and that the Gorilla would kill him if they met.

"He thought the Gorilla was dead though, it being said among the thieves of Paris that he had gone into the army and was never seen since. Brakely told me that this man had a fortune in stolen money and jewels planted on an island in the Mediterranean, the little island of Querolle, near the island where the Gorilla originally came from. He thought it worth while to go hunt for it, but was broke.

"The details he gave looked good. We talked it over with other crooks, some of whom had been to sea, mainly Barney Masters and Charlie Throgg, who both had engineer's papers. We got them in it, and then bamboozled "—that's the word Asa Joles insisted on using—"a ship captain named Albert Fawcett, master of his own vessel, the Seabird, into going off on a

treasure voyage.

"Julius Brakely told Captain Fawcett a clever story of pirates, and the captain got excited about it. Captain Fawcett had no family, and the adventure appealed to him. We worked it so that we picked the crew, all crooks except a cook named Radd, and a galley boy called Splinters, both of whom Captain Fawcett insisted on taking along. We all sailed from New York in the Seabird.

"In a drunken fight three days out of New York, Barney Masters killed Captain Fawcett. Julius Brakely nor no one else of us had anything to do with that, and it frightened most of us—but we were in it, and had to go through with it. We buried Captain Fawcett at sea.

"Then I took Captain Fawcett's name and posed as him after that, so that we

didn't have to change the ship's papers. By threats and promises of big money we got Radd and Splinters to say they would join us—made them swear to it with their hands on a dagger.

"The stories we told of getting most of the crew in Mediterranean ports were lies. Every man of them came aboard in New York, and as sailors they were a scurvy lot."

Mary Lee told me that Captain Fawcett insisted on putting things in that maybe weren't important, and they thought too that that would make it more legal. The confession went on:

"But as crooks, this crew was wise and capable. On the way across to Gibraltar we got to talking of what we could do with that gang if we had them ashore on the Riviera. To land them there in the regular way was dangerous, as we had no passports. The only way to be safe about it was to take them in as sailors.

"Then Julius Brakely said that the Seabird would be a suspicious looking craft to take into ports like Monte Carlo and Nice. It wasn't long before Julius Brakely had a plan to get a yacht. He knew Captain Alonzo Lee, and they were close friends. Captain Lee had a yacht tied up at Marseilles.

"It seems that Brakely had told Captain Lee that pirate story, so it wasn't hard to get Captain Lee in on it when we got to Marseilles. His plan was to get Captain Lee to take the Angela Lee to Querolle, and then for him and his crew to borrow the yacht for one or two trips to the Riviera.

"Brakely thought he could do this without exciting Captain Lee's suspicions, leaving him there on the island with his own crew to hunt for the supposed pirate treasure. The idea was to pull off a few jobs in banks and hotels on the Riviera, so that the trip wouldn't be a dead loss if we failed to find the treasure of the Gorilla.

"I swear that Julius Brakely had no intention of harming Captain Lee, and he did not know that Miss Mary Lee was coming along until we were almost ready to sail from Marseilles. He planned to deceive them, but not to harm them. We

intended to keep them with us until we no longer needed the yacht and then to send them away with a story that the hunt for the pirate treasure was a failure.

"Then we would hunt for the Gorilla's plant. If things went well we would have that and whatever money the gang got in its raids on the Riviera.

"We were bad off for navigators. We needed at least one more. It was too hard for a man of my age, the only navigator aboard. We would need one for the yacht trips up to the Riviera, as if trouble came up there it was important to have navigators who could make a clean and swift sailing job of it. We thought maybe we could pick up a sailor who knew something about navigation and get him in with us by a promise of big money.

"That is how we came to ship George Ranholm, in Marseilles. Things began to happen from that minute. Ranholm, we saw, wouldn't consent to deceit even as to his rights to become a mate. But we made up our minds that he must be brought along, for fear that even what little he had learned might set him to talking.

"Ranholm was suspicious from the first, but we had him aboard and meant to keep him until we finished our jobs in those waters. Things went wrong from the time we learned Miss Lee was coming along on the yacht, and also on account of the sailor Ranholm.

"It turned out that we had to make a new set of plans, with a lot of lies and excuses, but we never gave up our intention of putting through everything we had planned. Julius Brakely got impatient and reckless, and began to fear that maybe he would finish with no money at all.

"Then we rushed things. I knew the game was up when Captain Lee got suspicious, after the yacht was taken out of the cove at Querolle, but Brakely was gone then and I couldn't warn him.

"Brakely did not want Barney Masters to kill Captain Fawcett or Radd the cook. Masters did that on his own responsibility. Masters was plotting all the while to get command of things away from Brakely, and wanted to get rid of every man that stood in his way. If Masters had got the

upper hand there would have been more killings, as he didn't have the cool nerve of Julius Brakely, and thought of murder

as the only way to beat a man."

The confession went on in detail, telling of what Asa Joles knew about the siege: how Captain Lee acted after John Vernon dropped the hint that first aroused his suspicion, and how he took the commander of the Seabird into custody. Of the watch maintained for the reappearance of the crooks, and of the fight, with the Seabird's company below decks, watching and shooting out the ports, none being able, on account of the crooks on the cliffs, to go on deck, haul up the anchors and steam away.

Miss Mary Lee read this confession to me as I lay on my bunk, my splintered leg propped up. She was acting as nurse to every wounded man aboard, including the The Seabird was out in the Mediterranean bound for Marseilles.

"This confession," she said, "and the one I'm preparing from Throgg will reveal the whole plot. It will show too that the Angela Lee was stolen and destroyed, and father will collect his insurance."

She meditated.

"Mr. Brakely didn't plan murders," she "I was sure of that from the first moment we suspected him of crooked work, and Asa Joles and Throgg bear me out. Mr. Brakely's plot got out of his hands. He couldn't control the things he set afoot. I'm very sorry for him."

"He's not a killer," I agreed. " The thing he did to Barney Masters wasn't because Masters had tricked him. It-"

I didn't finish, and was sorry I even hinted at the truth until I learned she understood.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE SEA RECEIVES HER DEAD



ES, I know," she said. "I'm very sorry for him."

She shuddered, I suppose at thought of that killing and also at thought of the

way Barney Masters used to look at her.

"I am also grateful to Brakely," she added.

Hippolyte, still barefooted, for a pair of shoes couldn't be found aboard ship to fit him, but shaved and dressed in clean clothes, walked past the open door.

"That man," Mary Lee informed me, "never killed any one in his crimes. Mr. Brakely did him an injury in some way in Paris, after posing as his friend and getting his secrets, but we haven't got to the bottom of that yet. Mr. Brakely, of course, won't talk at all. But Hippolyte spared him in the cave, when he realized that he was on the brink of his first murder. You told me how he dropped him to the floor."

She shuddered again.

"No," she went on, "Hippolyte isn't a killer. And he hasn't committed a crime since he went into the French army. From what he tells me of his experiences at Verdun he must be rated as one of the heroes of the war-though he doesn't wish to be heroic about it. I get his stories only by keeping at him. He is one of the casualties of war-shell shock.

" If we can find his company commander and add to his story our account of how Hippolyte helped us at Ouerolle, I'm sure that the thefts of Le Gorille will be forgiven. He ran away from a military convalescent camp in southern France, and went to his old home on the other island.

"Then he slipped over to Querolle, no doubt to get the treasure he'd been hoarding up there for years. No one knows why he remained at Querolle. No one knows what went on in his mind during the terrible upheaval of nerves that left him a deaf mute. The man is sick, and shouldn't be treated as a criminal.

"Father has the loot Hippolyte buried in his cave, and that will be turned over to the authorities with the money we recovered from the crooks, the proceeds of the robberies they committed during those few nights at Monte Carlo.

"We ought to receive some consideration for bringing in the gang and their stolen goods, and any influence that gives us will be exerted in behalf of Hippolyte and any of the others who appear deserving of Father has been counting Hippolyte's treasure. He said he wanted you to see-"

Just then Captain Lee came in with a big dishpan out of the galley in his arms. He placed it on a chair.

Stacks of paper money, mounds of gold coins, and a heap of jewels—the toll taken from society by *Le Gorille*.

"The treasure of Caricar the Pirate," I said with a grin.

The Lees laughed.

"I wonder if there ever was a pirate named Caricar?" I asked.

"I don't know," Captain Lee replied.

"That's one of the things I must look up when I get ashore. Brakely won't tell me. He simply grins when I ask him. Well, whether Caricar ever lived or not, it was a good story."

"It certainly was," I admitted; "and Brakely could tell it with a flourish."

"Yes, indeed!"

Captain Lee took the dishpan and went away. Something came up a minute or so later that caused Mary Lee to repeat:

"I'm so sorry for him," meaning Brakely—" so sorry!"

Brakely was just passing the door at the time.

His injuries consisted of a couple of broken ribs, and he had been squeezed in such a way that his breathing hadn't been right since. We thought the ribs must be pressing against his lungs some way, but we wouldn't know just what ailed him until we got to a port and a doctor. He occupied a room near mine, in the 'midship house.

He was able to walk about a little at a slow and painful gait, but a fight for him was out of the question. The other prisoners were secure in their quarters, and things had been fixed so that Brakely could not communicate with them.

Every one of the ship's company had been warned to watch him, mainly to see that he inflicted no harm on himself. He hadn't shown the slightest sign of anything like that. He held his head high and proud despite his injuries. When he and Hippolyte met they simply looked at each other mildly, with no sign that their ancient grudge would ever again burst into flame.

Brakely paused at my door, and looked

intently at Mary Lee. Since things had gone wrong with him, the few times he addressed her he had given no hint that he was thinking of his love for her and the days when he was her suitor.

"Miss Lee," he said now, very quietly, "I wish you hadn't said that. Sympathy is the last thing I wish for. I am on my way to face a charge of having committed one murder with my own hands and of being an accomplice in two others.

"My head hasn't been lowered a peg by that. I played a game and lost, and I'm man enough not to squeal nor to dodge my responsibility for everything that happened in the game I myself started. For the first time I feel a little disheartened and wilted. Pity! I can stand anything but that—"

He stopped speaking suddenly, bowed, and passed on, as though regretting this display of emotion, the first I had ever seen in Julius Brakely. The life seemed to have gone out of him.

The girl stared at the empty doorway.

Julius Brakely came up missing. None saw him take the leap. He had been very clever and stealthy about it, on such a little ship, where we thought it impossible for him to try a thing like that without being intercepted by some one in the space to which his movements were restricted.

But he was gone. He simply wasn't on the ship when a search was started for him, nor did they find him or any written word of explanation. But I thought I understood. One word of pity from the girl he loved and who did not love him—

The Seabird was manned by sailors off the lost Angela Lee. That night I told one of them to ask Miss Mary Lee if she minded coming in and reading to me a few minutes. I was nervous and unstrung. The sailor returned to me presently.

"M'sieur," he said in his precise English, "I have found Mlle. Lee, but I did not think that you would wish for her to be disturbed. She is standing with M. Vernon on the quarter-deck, and they are staring back at the sea—very quiet and very solemn. I did not think—"

"Thanks," I assured him. "You did right in not disturbing her."



"Is he always the same person-always a fur salesman?"

THE BROWN-EYED LADY

By Emily Callaway

A GREAT BLIGHTING SORROW HOVERED OVER HER LIFE, AND SHE SOUGHT TO LIFT IT BY THE STRANGEST OF WAYS



T means everything in life to me—everything."

Convulsively, the girl rolled her lacy handkerchief into a wet little ball. Her brown eyes

were filled with unshed tears, her mouth trembling.

"You say he's had these attacks for the last year?"

The girl nodded. The great doctor looked keenly into her exquisite face.

"Tell me everything again, quietly."

A nurse stood hesitatingly at the door. The doctor waved her back and she promptly vanished, closing the heavy oak doors noiselessly. The doctor concentrated on the slight figure before him.

With a palpable effort at control, the girl settled back into her chair. Her small figure seemed almost childlike from the depths of its upholstered luxury.

"We live in Chicago, as I told you, doctor. You said you had heard of my husband?"

The doctor nodded encouragingly.

"You know then of his enormous business interests, of how much he has on his shoulders."

The doctor nodded. He was making notes on a pad at his elbow.

"Doctor, you must take this case. You can't refuse to help me, you must let me bring him to you—you must."

The girl's color was rising, her voice was high and hysterical.

"My dear little lady, try to be calm. Try to tell me again, quietly, everything that has happened."

The doctor's voice was soothing. With another tearful little smile, the girl tried to pull herself together.

"We've always been so close-my husband and I." "How long have you been married?"
The four years that she confessed to, seemed impossible. In her clinging gray gown, she seemed scarcely more than a child

"It was just a year ago, doctor, the first time my husband came home and didn't know me. When I kissed him as usual, he drew back, as though I were a total stranger. He told me he was a clerk in a fur store and had been sent to show me a neck-piece. Of course, I thought it was a joke and tried to fall in with it. But he kept it up, looked astounded when I asked him if he were ready for dinner—and tore out of the house.

"I was nearly frantic. It was two days before he came home. He ignored his absence, thought I was fooling when I asked him where he'd been. I didn't know what to do. He seemed to think I was crazy when I tried to get him to see a doctor."

Again the tears welled up in her eyes. Patiently the doctor waited.

"I went to my family doctor. He said that all we could do was to watch if another spell came on. For six weeks my husband was his old self, loving, attentive as he always was. Then one day as we were walking along Michigan Boulevard, we passed a fur store. My husband seemed to change before my very eyes. He became a total stranger, a clerk trying to sell me a wrap that was displayed in the window.

"'Isn't it beautiful, madam?' he said.
'Let us take it out of the window for you, so that you can try it on.'

"I humored him. I went in the store with him, determined that he shouldn't get out of my sight again. How to get him home was my chief thought. I managed to get the proprietor of the store aside and explain to him. I think he thought we were both mad. However, he obliged me by giving my husband an imaginary errand at my house. So I got him into a taxi and home. All the way there he treated me politely, but as a perfect stranger. Somehow I managed to lock him in a room while the butler got the doctor. For three days he raved. Then he was completely himself again, with no memory at all of those three days."

"Interesting," murmured the doctor. "Most interesting."

Nervously the girl's hands interlocked. She seemed to be keeping them from trembling by a supreme effort of will. Her great brown eyes followed the doctor's every movement.

"To whom did you finally take him?" asked the doctor.

"I couldn't 'take' him to any one. He wouldn't go. All I could do was to consult specialists myself." She named the two big specialists she had been to.

"Every one says that you are the only man who can help us. If you won't take the case, I—I don't know what to do."

The tears seemed very close to the surface. The great doctor leaned over and patted her reassuringly.

"There, there, child, it isn't hopeless, you know. How many of these dual personality attacks has your husband had?"

"Oh, seven or eight, doctor. Sometimes it only lasts a few hours, sometimes it's days."

"Is he always the same person—always a fur salesman?"

"No, doctor. Once he thought he was a cousin of mine, another time he was an automobile salesman. But nearly always it's the fur salesman."

"And is it the sight of furs that starts him?"

"I can't answer that, doctor. Twice I know it was—when I was with him. But at other times he has just suddenly ceased to be himself—once when we were dining quietly at home together. Oh, it's all so dreadful."

Again the tears started. The doctor continued making notes on his pad.

"Can't you explain this all to your husband, now that he is normal? Can't you get him to come here for a quiet talk with me of his own free will?"

"Doctor, I'll try again, if you think it best. But the last two times that I tried to get him to see a doctor, it seemed to excite him terribly, and both times it brought on another attack."

"In that case, of course, it is best not to mention it. We can only wait for another attack." The girl's face flushed with eagerness.

"Then you will take him? You will let me bring him to you?"

The doctor hesitated.

"I do not generally take cases without the consent of the patient himself, but in this case—"

"Yes, doctor?" The tear-filled eyes were hanging on his words.

"In this case, I don't see what else I can do."

"Oh, doctor, how can I ever thank you?"

"Just take care of yourself, little girl. That's the best way to help me cure my patient. I refuse to take you as a patient, young lady, so remember that."

The girl's face broke into a tremulous

"You won't have to, doctor. Half my worries are gone already. I'm sure you can cure him. Oh, I'm sure you can!"

A nurse had glided quietly into the room. The girl rose and began to pull her wrap around her.

"You know, doctor, I may not have time to notify you the next time it happens. I may have to bring him right to you, even if it should be in the night."

"That will be all right. The attendants are always here. Just send word that you are here and must see me at once."

The girl seemed alive again. Her face was sparkling with hope and animation.

"Oh, I hope it will happen soon. The quicker you can see him, the sooner will he be himself again. You know, doctor, the fee doesn't matter. We are quite able to pay—and so happy to."

"I thank you."

Gravely, the great specialist was bowing her out. The interview was over.

II



LIMOUSINE drew out of the traffic on Fifth Avenue and stopped in front of Dunbar's.

There were two men on the box, a fact that was noted by the doorman and the head-salesman who happened to be looking out of the door at the moment. Needless to say, the door was opened wide for the occupant of the limousine.

She was a slight little thing, with big brown eyes and a tremulous mouth. The head-salesman decided to wait on her himself.

Madam was pleased to look at evening wraps. The name she gave was a well-known one, and she called for nothing less than the most luxurious wraps in that most luxurious store. The clerks were all attention.

"I can't decide," she hesitated, as she stroked the delicate fur of the house's most expensive chinchilla. There was an imported ermine equally becoming and equally costly.

"Well, why not both?"

It was the head-salesman himself. What was a matter of fifty thousand dollars to her husband.

The lady laughed.

"It's a birthday present from him. Of course, he said 'an' evening wrap. But they are both becoming, aren't they—and so different."

"They are ravishing on you, madam. If your husband could only see them on you—"

"That's it," she agreed eagerly. "Once he sees things on me, he always says take it, but I can't ever get him to go shopping with me—he detests it."

" Just a moment, madam."

The head-salesman stepped away a moment. He spoke to Mr. Dunbar himself. It wasn't every day that such expensive wraps were sold.

When he returned Mr. Dunbar came with him.

"I would be very glad to send one of my salesmen with madam, with the two wraps, for your husband to see."

"Oh, could you?"

Her exquisite face flushed with excitement. She almost clapped her hands in childish delight.

"I'm sure he'll take both, when he sees them on me. I'm sure of it."

Mr. Dunbar was bowing before her.

"Of course, I do not usually do this, madam, but under the circumstances I shall be most happy to oblige your husband—and yourself. When would it be convenient to send the wraps?"

Madam thought. She consulted a dainty watch.

"How lucky. My husband is meeting me for luncheon at the house of a friend in half an hour. My car is outside. I could take the salesman right along with me and he can bring back a certified check—for both wraps, I hope."

It was the head-salesman himself who accompanied the lady to her car. He carried the two wraps in a cardboard box.

The car drove slowly up Park Avenue. The day was glorious, the lady wholly charming, and the young salesman was thoroughly enjoying himself. There was an alluring depth to her brown eyes. The man began to wish that the drive would last for hours. She was treating him quite as an equal, and the young man found himself basking in the sunshine of her approval. He realized that it is only real aristocracy that can afford to be so simple and unpretentious.

They stopped in front of a handsome graystone house in the East Seventies.

"Wait," she said to the footman.

"My car will take you back to the store," she smiled at the young man as they ascended the steps together.

A butler opened the door and motioned them into a quiet drawing-room. She gave her name to the butler, who disappeared.

The salesman sat with his back to the door. He had kept the box with the furs close beside him. He did not see the great specialist enter the room, with two attendants close behind him.

"My husband, doctor," was all the girl with the brown eyes said.

The fur salesman got to his feet, not quite understanding. Evidently this man with hand outstretched was her husband.

"How do you do, Mr. Beale?"

The man was undoubtedly addressing him. The young salesman felt himself going crimson. His eyes sought the eyes of the lovely lady most apologetically. Then he turned back to the big man whom she had addressed as "doctor."

"You've misunderstood, sir. I'm not Mr. Beale. I am a salesman from Dunbar's."

"Glad to see you just the same," the doctor's hand was grasping his. "Won't you step into my library a minute, sir?"

The young man was plainly perplexed.

"But I'm to show the coats to-"

"That's all right." It was the browneyed lady. "I'll show them myself. Please wait with this gentleman."

Somehow the doctor had him by the arm. Somehow the lady had picked up the box and had started for the door. The young man was crimson with embarrassment.

"Really, Mrs. Beale," he stammered, "I'm frightfully sorry. But as a fur salesman, I'm not allowed—I mean I will have to come with you to show the furs myself."

But two attendants had moved quietly forward, and gently but firmly the young man found himself being propelled down a dark hall. The beautiful lady was saying a few sobbing words to the doctor.

"I-I just can't stand it, doctor. It breaks my heart to hear him."

The unfortunate salesman's protests were far from silent. Suddenly they ceased. The door of a padded room had closed behind him.

"Shall I go home?" The girl was anxiously searching the doctor's face.

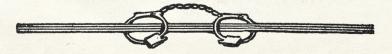
"Right straight home, young lady," was all he said.

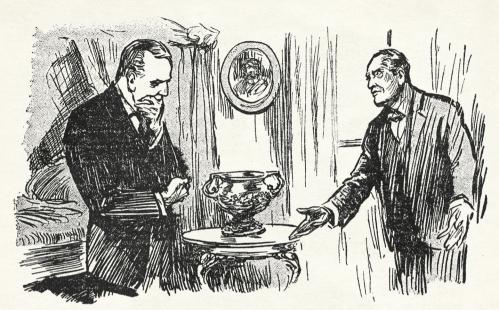
The great doctor himself escorted the lady and the box of furs to her limousine.

"I'm at the Warburton, you know, doctor; Suite 705, if you want me." But the address she quietly spoke into the speaking tube was the Grand Central station. There she dismissed the car, paying the chauffeur ten dollars for an hour's service.

The lady and the furs disappeared into the station and then were lost in the subway.

Chinchilla and ermine cannot be traced like jewels. To be sure the limousine had cost ten dollars, but it had been worth it. The brown-eyed lady called it a good day.





Crook crossed to the table to examine the silver cup

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

By J. Jefferson Farjeon

DETECTIVE X. CROOK REMEMBERS THE CRIME LORE OF HIS EARLIER DAYS TOO WELL TO BE DECEIVED BY THE BARONET'S QUEER ACTIONS



H, good morning, Detective Crook," exclaimed Sir Arthur Trentby, extending his hand cordially. "It's very good of you to have come so

promptly after my SOS. Will you arrest me?"

The detective looked keenly into the gray eyes that smiled into his, and he noted the trouble behind the smile. This did not surprise him, for people only sent for him when they were in trouble.

"I'll be happy to arrest you, Sir Arthur," he responded also smiling, "when you've proved your guilt."

"Oh, but that's perfectly easy," answered Sir Arthur. "Just come along to my bedroom, and you shall see the evidence."

Trentby Hall was, humanly speaking, a

lopsided affair. From one side, as they crossed the spacious lounge, emanated the warmth of home, but from the other side—the larger, last wing—came the chill of emptiness and disuse. Sir Arthur glanced at his guest and explained:

"The penalty of inheriting a place too big for one, Mr. Crook," he observed. "We have made one side cozy, but the other side we leave rigidly to itself."

"We?" queried Crook.

"Myself and my niece. She has lately come to look after me, to keep house for me, and to minister to me." The light tone still dominated, but the shadows were there. "As a matter of fact—well, well, the bedroom will tell you everything."

A few seconds later, they reached it, and Sir Arthur threw the door open. Instinctively, the detective's eyes flashed round the room and fastened on the most significant object—a massive silver cup of beautiful design and workmanship, standing somewhat incongruously on a small table by the bed.

"Right first time," murmured the baronet, following the detective's gaze. "I see you know your job."

"That's a fine piece," commented Crook.

"Where did you get it?"

"God knows!" replied Sir Arthur. "I woke up yesterday morning, and there it was."

"It sounds like kleptomania," said Crook.

"Coupled with loss of memory, and, one prays, a guiltless soul," added Sir Arthur. "But the medical and moral sides of this needn't worry you. I believe I had a greatgrandfather who was a bit of a rascal, and I myself got shell-shock in the war. It's the practical side, however, I want you to help me with. Who does that belong to? And what the devil can I do in the future to keep myself out of trouble?"

Crook crossed to the table, took up the

silver cup and examined it.

"It's really a lovely thing," he said. "I should imagine the owner will soon be after it!"

"Damn it, I hope so," retorted the unfortunate kleptomaniac. "But I can't expect him to be as lenient as the last."

"Oh! Who was the last?"

"A new neighbor of mine, who lives across the park. I dined there a fortnight ago, and came away with a golf snuff-box. Louis Quinze-most valuable."

"Yes, it sounds valuable," nodded Crook.

"What did your neighbor say?"

"He was a sportsman!" exclaimed Sir Arthur enthusiastically. "I should never have known it was his if he hadn't mentioned the loss casually a few days later. I wish you could have seen his eyes when I produced the missing article! plained my little habit, and he refused to accept any apology. Yes, George Tappan's a sportsman. Well, Doanes, what is it?"

A butler was hovering in the passage outside.

"Mr. Tappan, sir," said the butler.

"Eh? Oh-tell him I'll be down in a minute," jerked Sir Arthur, and, as the butler disappeared, turned back to Crook with a wry laugh. "Looks as though I don't need you, after all," he grunted. "At least-not for this case!"

They descended to the hall. Mr. Tappan was a large, jovial man, with ruddy cheeks and leather gaiters, and he responded to the introductions affably. He looked a little awkward immediately afterward, however, and asked whether if Sir Arthur were busy, he should call again a little later.

"No-come into my study," replied the baronet. "I've an idea I know your business-and I've just confided my little-er -weakness to my friend Mr. Crook here."

Mr. Tappan's awkwardness did not de-

part.

"Look here-I'd better come back later,"

he murmured.

"No, you won't!" retorted Sir Arthur, as he opened his study door and almost pushed his visitor in. "I want to get this over!" When the door was closed, he inquired bluntly: "Well, have you lost anything?"

"I have," answered Mr. Tappan, with a glance at Crook. "You want me to

speak of it?"

"Yes," nodded Sir Arthur. "And I'll help you on your way. Is it a silver cup?"

"Yes-an Elizabethan silver cup," answered Mr. Tappan, his ruddiness increas-

ing slightly.

"There you are!" exclaimed Sir Arthur almost triumphantly. "What did I tell you? I've got your cup in my bedroom, Tappan. Am I to be arrested this time?"

"Don't be a fool!" growled the other.

"Of course, not."

"I said he was a sportsman, Mr. Crook!" Crook smiled, but the sportsman shook

his head protestingly.

"That's nonsense," he remarked. "How could I act any differently? Kleptomania's a fairly common disease—only some of 'em try to get away with it!" He smiled at his little joke.

"Besides, I've not proved that the cup is mine yet. It's got to be fourteen and one-half inches high, it's got to have a sort of acorn device around it, and the hall-mark's got to be 1585. Otherwise, I make no claim."

"Now you're talking nonsense," retorted the baronet. "It's hardly likely that you'd lose a silver cup on the same day that I took one from somebody else, is it? However, I'll bring the confounded thing down, and then we can see whether it tallies."

It did tally. It stood fourteen and onehalf inches from the polished desk surface on which it was stood, acorns and oak leaves bulged ingeniously around its upper part, and the hall-mark said, 1585.

After Mr. Tappan had departed, Sir Arthur looked at the detective blankly.

"Now you see how it goes," he remarked. "If I can't check this habit—if it gains on me—what's going to be the outcome? It isn't likely I'll confine my attentions to Tappan. I'll do something bad, and at best there'll be a scandal. At worst—well, I dare say you know better than I what the worst will be!"

Detective X. Crook nodded gravely. He well knew what the worst was like. The baronet suddenly flushed.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed. "I didn't mean—"

"You needn't worry," interposed Crook smiling. "I never run away from my memories, but like to have them before me. They keep me human, which is a quality one is apt to lose too quickly in my work. Can you put me up for the night, Sir Arthur?"

"Why, of course," responded the baronet cordially. "And for as many more nights as you want. Alice, my dear," he called, as a girl came out of a room. "This is Mr. Crook. Will you have a room got ready for him? He's spending the night with us. Mr. Crook—my niece, Miss Hone."

II



HE detective did not remain for lunch. He wished to get away and think, and there were also several things he wanted to do.

The first of these was to note the exact position of Sir Arthur's bedroom, to ex-

amine the ground beneath the window, and then to walk across the park to the boundary of Mr. George Tappan's property. Then, inquiring the way to the police station, he had a chat with the local inspector.

After that, he thought of lunch; and, when the meal was over, he bought a local guide and spent quite a considerable time studying it on a seat. Next he called on a house agent.

It was just on four o'clock before he returned to Trentby Hall.

Doanes, the butler, met him as he entered, and announced that tea was being served in the drawing-room. Crook removed the traces of his wanderings, and then sought the welcome refreshment. He found Miss Hone alone. This did not displease him.

She looked up as he entered, and apologized for her uncle's absence.

"He's got a headache," she said. "He often gets them."

"A war legacy?" asked Crook as he sat down.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Isn't it a shame? Uncle's not fifty yet, but sometimes he seems just like an old man—trying hard not to be old."

"Yes, when we try hard not to be old, that's an ominous sign," replied Crook. "No sugar, please. I've learned to do without."

"Another war legacy?" she smiled, passing him his cup.

" No-a prison one," said Crook.

She stared at him, but he was smiling so gently that, in some strange way, both the oppression and the awkwardness which should have followed such a statement evaporated.

"That's not really—true?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. Quite true. And prison is so unpleasant an experience that—" he paused, and she nodded, understandingly.

"I know," she murmured. "Uncle's told me why he's sent for you."

"Good! I'm glad! That eases matters immensely," replied the detective. "Then I can ask you questions—and I can also finish my unfinished sentence. I was about to say, Miss Hone, that prison is so unpleasant an experience that we must see your uncle does not endure it."

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed. "Poor uncle! Isn't it a rotten—affliction?"

"It's embarrassing," agreed Crook, watching her. "Tell me, has Sir Arthur got better or worse since you came to look after him?"

"Worse—at least, lately," she returned. "When I first came, it was just—general unwellness, you know, and headaches—"

"But not kleptomania?" interposed

Crook rather eagerly.

"No-o, not then," she said slowly. "At least, he'd had the trouble a bit during the war and just after it—he was invalided out—and he used to explain it, half humorously, by saying that soldiers lost all their respect for property!

"Poor old uncle! But then he got better," continued the girl. "It seemed as though the kleptomania had left him, and only the headaches and general nervousness

remained-I wonder-"

She paused.

"What do you wonder?" asked the detective.

"I wonder if coming to live in this queer old place has had anything to do with it?"

"What is 'it'?"

"The return of the kleptomania, I mean," she explained. "I love it here, but it's a bit—well, gloomy, in a way. Half the house shut up, you know."

"Yet you stick it?" he remarked.

"Oh, I'm all right," she laughed. "A poor sad orphan, and all that, is only too glad to find an ailing uncle to look after! It seemed ridiculous, when he was so ill, and I was all alone, not to come to him."

"He asked you to then?"

"Broad hints," she answered smiling.

"Very broad ones. The war took most of his money as well as most of his health, and when he inherited this place, he thought he'd be glad to bury himself here, and there was just enough money to keep one end of it going! But he got horribly lonely—some of his letters were really quite tragic—so, naturally, I came along." She shot a sudden, half challenging glance at him.

"Are you wondering whether I'm mercenary? Because I'm not! Uncle and I have only each other, and we're jolly good pals. Besides, though he *did* tell me before

I came that he was going to leave me all he had, I don't believe it will be much more than debts!"

"I'm quite sure you're not mercenary," Crook assured her. "I believe you'd even help your uncle to pay some of those debts, if it were necessary, and if you could."

"Good guess," she nodded, and he liked

her for her frankness.

"Then we'll take each other's good faith for granted," responded Crook, "which I think we've really done from the start. Some detectives love fencing, but I hate it, unless I've got to do it. I can nearly always tell whether I've got to fence with a person or not—by his eyes."

"That's suspiciously like a compliment!" she exclaimed with a sudden smile.

"Thanks awfully!"

For just a moment, an odd sensation shot through the detective—a sensation he had not experienced for many a day. It was a sensation of youth and gayety, gloriously and richly irresponsible, hovering in the confused borderland between creation and destruction. Something he had once been—countless years ago—rose and gripped him. But the moment passed, and his grave expression gave no clew to its passage. So often will a girl unconsciously speak to a man, and unconsciously receive his reply.

III

AN you recall," said the detective prosaically, "the first time your uncle's kleptomania returned?"

"Oh, yes—quite distinctly," answered the girl. "It wasn't so long ago. We'd been in the town, and when we got back, uncle found a brand-new leather letter case in his coat pocket. He didn't know how it had got there, till he suddenly remembered his old habit. We guessed the shop he'd taken it from, and returned it next day."

"And, after that-"

"Yes, then it began again. He didn't believe it would, but it did. He's taken things three times, now—but, luckily, the last two from Mr. Tappan's. We're simply dreading when he'll take something from somewhere else."

Crook frowned, and was silent for a few seconds. Then he asked:

"When does he take them? Does he know?"

" No."

"Do you?"

"How could I? But I believe it's been in the night lately. That's what makes it so awful. It looks like real stealing."

"You mean he walks in his sleep?"

"Oh, I don't know! It's merely guessing."

"You've never found him walking in his

sleep, then?"

"Not lately. But he used to. So he might easily have begun again, mightn't he?"

"But how would he get into Mr. Tap-

pan's house?"

"That beats me. Anyway, even if he doesn't go there in the night, he often pays visits, and dines there. Mr. Tappan's frightfully decent about it."

"Let's get back to the suggested sleepwalking. Have you tried locking him in

his room?"

"I've suggested it. But then he might get out of the window."

"That could be fastened, too."

"And make him a prisoner? No—he'd simply hate the idea! He'd die if he didn't have air. And, then "—she shrugged her shoulders—" what's the good of living at all if you're going to make a prisoner of yourself. Much best take your chance, I say."

"And you're right," murmured Crook. "It's better to be dead than to be only half

alive."

She looked at him quickly.

"And yet," she said, "people who are only half alive can show wonderful pluck sometimes—can't they?"

"That's even truer," agreed Crook, and rose. "Miss Hone, you've helped me immensely. I believe we're going to find a solution."

"Solution?" she repeated, in hopeful bewilderment. "I don't see how there can be any solution—unless you can cure him?"

"I might even do that," answered Crook; and somewhat abruptly excusing himself, left the room.

Neither Miss Home nor her uncle saw any more of their guest until dinner. Then they met him with serious faces.

"We've either got a burglar or a ghost in the house," announced Sir Arthur

bluntly.

"Are you speaking seriously?" inquired Crook.

"Quite seriously. One of the maids saw a light in the east wing while she was returning from the town. The silly girl was so frightened she ran away again, and by the time she came back, the light had gone."

"It might have been her imagination."

"Doanes says it probably was," interposed Miss Hone, "and, you know, Rose is terribly nervy, uncle."

"Yes, but she's so absolutely certain, my dear," retorted Sir Arthur, "that one can't disbelieve her."

"Have you been over the east wing?" asked Crook.

"Of course. But all we found were rats."

"We might make a second tour, after dinner—"

The butler's voice behind him intervened respectfully:

"I've just been over it again myself, sir," he said. "I didn't find anything."

"H-m. Well, it's odd," grunted **Sir** Henry, and glanced grimly at the detective. "But these are odd times, eh? Do you suppose human oddity's contagious?"

They switched off to other topics, and, led by Miss Hone, the conversation assumed a lighter tone. After dinner, however, the shadows crept up quietly in the drawing-room, though Miss Hone again did her best to dispel them at the piano.

Toward ten o'clock, Sir Arthur pulled his chair close beside the detective's, and asked him, while his niece played softly:

"Am I making you waste your time here?"

"I'm sure I'm not wasting my time," answered Crook, and smiled toward the piano.

"Ah—that's nice of you. Nor are we, for that matter. But I'm speaking—well, professionally. Are you getting near any solution of my problem?"

"I'm so near," replied the detective,

"that I'm afraid I shall not be enjoying your hospitality after to-night."

"By Jove," murmured Sir Arthur, astonished. "That sounds rather like a fairy tale!"

"Well, we'll try and materialize it, Sir Arthur," answered Crook. "Did I notice you yawning a few moments ago?"

The baronet laughed, and confessed that it might have been so. Late hours were not kept at Trentby Hall. As he spoke, his niece rose from the piano and came toward them.

"Ten o'clock, uncle," she announced, and added, with a glance at Crook: "We never stand on ceremony with guests."

The evening broke up, and they retired to their respective bedrooms. Crook, having spent a busy day, soon closed his eyes and fell asleep, but his host was not so fortunate, and tossed and turned till after midnight. Then he, too, fell into a doze, but it was a troubled one, full of vague shadows and disturbing fancies.

Once he imagined he was walking through the park, and could even feel the grass against his ankles, and the night air upon his temples; but, when he opened his eyes with a start, he discovered that he was still in his room, staring at the bedpost. In the distance a church clock was striking the hour. Six.

He turned impatiently on his side, and, as he did so, flung out his arm. Something unfamiliar impressed itself upon him. Some new sensation — in his arm — no — his hand.

He sat up abruptly, and switched on the light. On the little finger of his left hand was a gold signet ring.

A greatly distressed baronet sat down to breakfast three hours later. He was bursting with annoyance and humiliation, and declared to his niece and his guest that he would never be able to face Mr. Tappan again.

"I don't think you'll have to face him much longer," remarked Crook. "I hear he's leaving the neighborhood in a day or two."

"No—is he?" exclaimed Sir Arthur, opening his eyes wide. "He never mentioned it."

"I heard so yesterday, from the local house agent," said Crook. "If you don't like to face him, why not send the ring across to him by Doanes?"

"But it mightn't be his," interposed Miss

Hone.

"In that case, he'll send it back," responded Crook.

"Of course," nodded the baronet. "It's a good idea." And he called the butler to him. "Doanes," he said, "I want you to take this ring across to Mr. Tappan at once. Give it to him with my compliments, and tell him—er—that I believe he left it here yesterday, when he called."

"Very good, sir," replied the butler; and

departed.

IV



WENTY minutes later, Doanes returned, and was again summoned to his master's presence. Sir Arthur was pulling, with nervous, jerky puffs, at

his pipe in the morning room, watched sympathetically by his niece and his guest.

"Well? Did you give Mr. Tappan the ring?" demanded Sir Arthur.

"Yes, sir," replied the butler. "He sent his compliments and thanks."

"Ah-then it was his?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's odd," interposed Detective Crook. "Because, as it happens, it's mine."

"What?" shouted the baronet, while his niece stared at Crook, and the butler looked frankly astounded.

"Yes, I've worn that ring for six months—ever since a grateful client gave it to me," continued the detective. "I'll tell you how it found its way into Mr. Tappan's possession, if you like. No, don't go, Doanes—it's really quite an interesting story."

"If you'll excuse me, sir," murmured the butler, but Sir Arthur suddenly looked at him, noticed his pallor, and ordered him sharply to remain. Then he turned to Crook, and, looking thoroughly bewildered, begged for an explanation.

"When I left you yesterday morning, Sir Arthur," replied the detective, "various thoughts revolved in my mind, but uppermost was one which you may have considered rather absurdly trivial. It was the accuracy with which Mr. Tappan described the height of the Elizabethan cup—fourteen and a half inches."

"But collectors always know the measurements of their things—" began the but-

ler, and stopped abruptly.

"I rather anticipated that suggestion from you," said Crook dryly, "for I can understand your interest. That was one reason why I referred to my absurdly trivial thought." The butler said nothing, and Crook turned back to the others and continued:

"I made various investigations, two of which are of special interest. Firstly, I found out, at the police station, that none of Mr. Tappan's losses had been notified to them. Now, it was, perhaps, logical that Mr. Tappan should have come to you first, Sir Arthur, about the Elizabethan cup, even though its value is about a thousand pounds—"

"A thousand pounds!" exclaimed the baronet.

"Yes, at a guess. But why did he let a week go by in the belief that his valuable gold snuffbox had been stolen without mentioning the matter to anybody? The second investigation was made in the pages of a local guide. Trentby Hall is a very interesting old place. Did you know that one of your ancestors—possibly the greatgrandfather who you told me was a bit of a rascal—was also a bit of an antiquary, and

collected quite a lot of valuable stuff? Now —where is that stuff?"

"How should I know?" murmured Sir Arthur, shaking his head.

"Well, I'll tell you where some of it is," responded Crook. "It's in an old, dilapidated chest in an attic in the east wing." The baronet by this time was speechless. "What isn't there is in the temporary possession of Mr. George Tappan. I made an exhaustive tour of the east wing yesterday afternoon—scaring, I fear, one of your maids—and when I discovered the chest, it occurred to me to add my ring in the hope that it might appear again. It did appear again—not by your bedside, as I imagined, but actually on your finger. Doanes is an audacious rascal—"

"It's not true!" cried the butler.

"Why waste time, Doanes?" asked the detective sternly. "I don't know how you discovered the chest, or whether Mr. Tappan discovered it, and you discovered him. But I gather that you hadn't the courage for direct burglary, or the strength of mind to forego your share.

"So this scheme was invented by which your master should apparently steal his own property to be passed on to a new owner—but only you and Mr. Tappan knew it was your master's property, and only you knew that he never touched it until he found it on waking by his bedside."

Doanes dropped his eyes, and Crook's tone grew a little gentler. "I'm sorry, Doanes—very sorry," he said. "But I'm afraid you'll have to come with me."

" PIDER'S TAVERN," by Mansfield Scott, begins next week.

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They saw that Stuyvesant trembled violently-

THE PLAGUE OF CATS

By Jack Bechdolt

FROM EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE THEY CAME, LED BY A SCAR-FACED, RUSTY, BLACK TOM CALLED "LIGHTNING"

CHAPTER I

AS QUEER AS A CAT



ILLY CANBY was ten minutes late at the office of the Argus Detective Agency. Such a thing never had happened before.

Milly pushed open the door and Henry Rood, president, manager and detective force of the agency, stared at her in mild surprise.

Milly's cheeks were highly colored by her haste.

Her eyes shone with a mysterious excitement. She fairly radiated mystery, but mystery of a delightful sort.

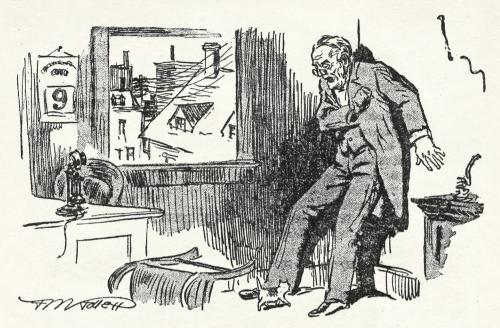
Henry Rood, who would have forgiven Milly his own murder, forgave her her tardiness, the second he saw her so pretty and so excited about something.

Milly held her coat wrapped in an unusual fashion. She now opened it wide and revealed the mystery.

"Look, 'Enry!" she said breathlessly. "Look what I found! We'll keep it, won't we, 'Enry? He won't be a bit of trouble around the office. And we'll name him Argus—unless, of course, he turns out to be a lady. He'll be awfully useful on our staff, 'Enry. You know there are mice in this office and Argus can handle all our mouse cases—especially if he turns out a Tabby!"

Milly set a small kitten on Henry's desk. It was a very young kitten, so young that its legs were uncertain. Its coat was a sort of Jacob's coat of many colors and

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-and still the kitten perversely approached him

proclaimed a very scrambled family tree. And it was pitifully thin.

The kitten advanced uncertainly over Henry's desk and opened its pink mouth wide in a voiceless cry.

"The poor little thing!" Milly's eyes grew moist. "Think, 'Enry, it was wandering right in the midst of traffic. Absolutely lost. And terrified. I rescued it from under a truck. And it's starved almost to death. Wait, I'll run down to the lunch counter and get it milk—" Milly broke off to demand again: "We will keep it, won't we?"

Henry nodded. "I guess we can take him on, if you say so, Milly—hey, get out out of my ink, Argus!" He chuckled as Argus began investigating with his paw and sent penholders and pencils rolling off the desk.

"They say cats bring good luck," Henry mused. "Or is that only black cats? Well, never mind."

Argus proved the adage within the hour. Milly brought word to Henry that a client had called. A client of any sort was still a great event in the office of the Argus Agency, for the agency was young and struggling hard to keep alive.

The client's name was Matthew Hallock Stuyvesant, as his neat visiting card in old-fashioned script proclaimed. Henry seated him in the visitor's chair and excusing himself a minute with a number of papers kept ready on his desk to look impressive, studied Mr. Stuyvesant with secret glances.

Henry saw a man of more than sixty years, a slender, old maidish-looking man in well brushed, threadbare clothes of dark gray, wearing very starchy white linen, spats, and a carnation in his buttonhole, and carrying a gold-headed stick. He looked a fussy man, a fastidious man, a sickly man—for his skin had a waxy transparency—and a badly scared man.

"Mr. Stuyvesant, what can I do for you?" Henry asked when he had observed these things.

"Gracious, I scarcely know!" Mr. Stuyvesant spoke with a slight lisp. "I suppose you are used to solving all sorts of mysteries, Mr. Rood?"

Henry nodded serenely. The only mystery which had baffled him so far was the mystery of why he had so few mysteries to exercise his talents upon.

"I don't know how to begin," Stuyvesant went on. "I'm afraid you're going to laugh."

o F W

Then the client leaped from his chair with a jerk and a shriek. Kicking aside the overturned chair he retreated flat against the wall and began to stare with wild eyes at the floor. Henry saw that he trembled violently.

Across the floor toddled Argus, the newest member of the agency staff, his fat tail erect, his sides bulging with breakfast, drops of milk still adhering untidily to his questing whiskers. Argus spied the nice man in the corner and Argus, kitten that he was, must have sensed that the nice man was afraid of cats. With a cat's perversity he went directly to the client and rubbed his shoe lovingly.

Matthew Hallock Stuyvesant turned white.

Before Henry could come to his rescue, Milly had pushed open the private office door and swooped down on the kitten. "I'm so sorry I forgot to latch the door!" she apologized breathlessly. "I think he's started looking for that mouse already, 'Enry."

Henry righted the overturned chair and Stuyvesant sank into it. He unfolded a large, very clean handkerchief and passed it over his face.

"I really beg your pardon, Mr. Rood," he said, trying to force a smile. "I am terrified of cats. I have been afraid of cats all my life. My old nurse once told me that even as a baby I was afraid of them. I suppose this seems very silly to you—"

"Not at all," Henry hastened to assure him. "And I'm extremely sorry this happened to upset you."

The new client shuddered violently.

"I thought—" he began, then shuddered again before he could resume—"I thought—it was one of them—haunting me. I thought perhaps—I was—going mad."

"One of what?" Henry asked.

"One of the cats. One of those damned cats that have made my house a madhouse, that have upset my life, that haunt me day and night in spite of everything I do—one of the cats that are making the house I was born in a howling wilderness! Mr. Rood, I have been to the police and I have been to two other detective agencies and

been laughed at for my pains. I ask you

—I beg of you—can you put aside professional dignity and undertake my case? If
you will, name your own fee."

"Just what is the case?"

"Mr. Rood, I need a detective to rid my house of a plague of cats and I assure you, to me, a plague of cats is no laughing matter!"

CHAPTER II

WHY THE CATS?



ENRY ROOD looked again and more thoughtfully at Mr. Stuyvesant.

The client was perfectly sane, he was sure of that.

Also he seemed to be a man of means. And the case he mentioned had its unusual features.

Just to make sure that he was not wasting too much time, Henry rang for Milly and secretly handed her the client's name. Before the conference had proceeded five minutes Milly returned with a memorandum, which Henry glanced over while Stuyvesant told his story.

The memorandum said:

Matthew H. Stuyvesant—Bachelor. Owns majority of block in old West Side and scattered lots, all parts of old village section once fashionable. Vice-president and former president local Philatelist's Society. Family first settled here 1801. He looks good to me!

Mr. Stuyvesant looked good to Henry also. A rich and pardonably eccentric old stamp collector offering him a first rate mystery and inviting him to name his own fee! What more could he ask?

While this was going on in Henry's mind the client was saying earnestly: "Mr. Rood, I have lived in that house for sixtytwo years. I was born in it, you see. It was my father's residence when Chelsea was fashionable and his father's before that. It was one of the first fine dwellings in the district and once had a considerable lawn and a view of the river. I have been very happy in that house and I hope to die there when time comes that I must die.

"I am a simple man with few wants. My hobby is philately, and I have one of the most notable collections of stamps in this section. I entertain scarcely at all and then only a few old friends also interested in philately. My servants consist only of Mrs. Loos, my housekeeper, who has been with me more than twenty years, a maid and a furnace man, Doran, who also looks after several other houses I own. I said I have few friends and I am equally sure I have no enemies. How could I have? Dear God, I hope in all my life I have never done harm to any human being!"

Stuyvesant blinked rapidly at Henry. His exclamation was obviously direct from his innocent old heart.

"You have seen that I fear and loathe cats," he resumed earnestly. "It's something in my blood—inherited, I suppose.

A cat, just the sight of one, its presence near me, puts me into a panic.

"Imagine then how I felt when two weeks ago cats began to haunt my house!"

"They came into your house?" Henry asked.

"Into it and around it. Dozens of cats, great, savage stray cats from the alleys, gaunt old cats, terrible cats. They howl and fight under my windows, they cluster on the steps where I stumble over them if I venture out, and they everlastingly sneak in somehow, though I give you my word we have locked every window and every door and stopped every hole they could crawl through.

"Yet they get in! They roam the house. They come into my very bedroom. Last night I found a great black Tom in my dressing room. This morning I woke to find him curled up on my bed, sitting on my chest, Mr. Rood! The same cat—and last night, I myself accompanied Doran when he carried that cat in a sack ten blocks

from my house!"

"This annoyance has been going on for two weeks, you say?"

"Yes, Mr. Rood."

"You were never bothered by cats before?"

"Never, thank Heaven!"

Another person might have found amusement in Mr. Stuyvesant's vehemence. Not Henry. He addressed his client with added gravity that amounted to rebuke. "Mr.

Stuyvesant, you are holding something back! It is not the matter of cats alone that brings you to a detective agency. What is it?"

The color of embarrassment came into Stuyvesant's cheeks. He frowned, avoiding Henry's eyes. Then it came out of him with a little burst like the popping of a cork from a bottle.

"Heavens, Mr. Rood, I don't see how you guessed that! The police and the other detectives never saw it—"

Henry smiled mysteriously.

"Yes, there is more," Stuyvesant went on. "The cats are an annoyance. They are nearly driving me mad, but that alone is not why I am seeking your professional advice, Mr. Rood." The older man's voice sank mysteriously and he hitched forward in his chair. "I believe that to-day an attempt was made to poison me!"

"Very good," said Henry, eying his rich client composedly, his round face properly grave. "Now we are getting at the meat of the thing. You are a thrifty man, Mr. Stuyvesant. I was right in thinking you would not hire a detective merely to get rid of stray cats. You believe an attempt was made on your life. How?"

"Something was put into my tea,"
Stuyvesant murmured, drawing even closer
and sinking his voice even lower. "That
was this morning. I came at once to get

help.

"When I wake in the morning I am served with a cup of hot tea, Mr. Rood. I thought there was something queer about this morning's breakfast cup. It didn't taste like the good China tea I am used to, and I know good tea! My father and his father were tea importers.

"I took one sip from the cup and knew at once that my tea had been tampered with. I jumped out of bed and hurried to my bath and spat out the tea and washed my mouth thoroughly. Mr. Rood, I give you my word, that was an awful moment!"

"Did you save the rest of this tea?"

Stuyvesant shook his head. Henry sighed regretfully.

"I fear I made a mistake," Stuyvesant said. "At the moment the only idea in my mind was inspired by terror. I poured

out the tea and said nothing, lest any complaint might inform my enemy that the plot was known and provoke worse attempts."

"How did this tea taste-in what way was it different from the usual tea?"

Stuyvesant reflected, smacking his lips thoughtfully. "It was bitter-and slightly sour-and not like tea. I can't describe it any better-"

"There was no ill effect?"

"Not yet!" The client rolled his eyes apprehensively. He seemed to be holding his breath. "Perhaps my getting rid of it and washing my mouth saved me," he added hopefully.

"Yes, I'm sure it did. But I wish you had saved a sample! Who prepares your

morning tea?"

"Sometimes Mrs. Loos, my housekeeper. Sometimes Gertie, the maid. I think it was Gertie this morning."

"You are making a very serious charge," Henry said, suddenly severe. "In effect, you are casting a grave suspicion upon two women, both of whom I understand you to say, have been with you a long time-"

"A long time, yes-"

"Then why should either of them wish

to put poison in your tea?"

Matthew Stuyvesant considered the abrupt question and a little gleam of cunning came into his eyes. "I have made a will, Mr. Rood. The three servants are down in that will for a substantial remembrance-Heavens, Mr. Rood! I don't charge this against any of them-but suppose one or more of them were to think too much of that money and desire my death!"

"I suppose you have paid them good

wages during your lifetime?"

"All three have been adequately taken care of," Stuyvesant murmured.

Henry detected an evasion in the answer. "How adequately, Mr. Stuyvesant?"

"They've had a good home," Stuyvesant answered rather sourly. "They've had the best to eat and an allowance for clothes. Yes—and pocket money, too! And they know I mean to do the handsome thing by them in my will."

"Ah," said Henry.

Henry thought he knew his client fairly

well by this interview. He had a definite picture of a timid, conservative man of much property, a bachelor with the inherited tendencies toward thrift common to long lines of property holders, now exaggerated into stinginess.

He saw a quiet household of three servants lingering on in that bachelor's employment because of the hope of substantial legacies; putting up with little wages because of that same hope. And he saw Matthew Stuyvesant terrified by unexplained events for which, perhaps, his own parsimony was directly to blame.

"I'll take your case, if you wish," Henry said then. "But you understand my services cost money, cost rather dearly in fact?"

"Name your own figure, Mr. Rood," Stuyvesant declared, clasping his thin hands together. "I am quite content to trust to your sense of fair dealing-and generosity. If you can clear up these things that are upsetting me I'll pay gladly."

"No," Henry interrupted. "I'll have to insist that I be paid, regardless of success.

Those are my terms."

"Oh, I'm sure you won't ask too much!" the client gasped. "Oh, I trust to your generosity. Name your fee."

Henry named it.

Stuyvesant gasped afresh. For a moment he looked like a man inclined to bargain. Then he sighed prodigiously. "Very well, I agree. Only in goodness' name get to the bottom of this terrible affair!"

CHAPTER III

A RUSTY, BLACK TOM



ENRY and his client neared Matthew Stuyvesant's home. They had ridden across the city by street car.

When they boarded the car Matthew Stuyvesant fumbled nervously in his change pocket and seemed to have difficulty finding any money.

"Allow me," said Henry, and paid both fares.

Stuyvesant thanked him warmly, and Henry noted that he sighed with obvious relief, a cunning, sly little gleam in his eyes. But Henry considered the nickel well invested, since it further proved Stuyvesant's hereditary objection to parting with money.

When they left the car Henry instructed his client, "Please make no reference of any sort to the attempt to poison your morning tea. To do so might provoke a further attack and put you in danger I could not handle."

Stuyvesant promised hastily.

"Just tell your servants that you have hired me to get rid of the plague of cats," Henry said further. "That is sufficient excuse for my visiting you."

As they entered by an old iron gate Stuyvesant grasped Henry's arm. "Look!" he bleated. "You see?"

It was an old brick house they faced, one of a row of old dwellings mostly used as boarding houses now. A little cement paved yard and area stood before the house, and on the brownstone steps they beheld three slinking forms—cats.

All three were those gaunt, half savage unfortunates common to cities, alley cats, marauders of ash cans, and disturbers of midnight peace. Ordinarily the theme for the jokesmith and the humorous artist, these cats did not strike Henry as humorous at the moment. Rather they were a little weird and distressing as they sat immobile, their greenish yellow eyes turned on the two men, their glances half scared, half defiant.

Not until Henry set foot on the bottom step did the three cats move. Suddenly all three uncurled their folded limbs and rose. One rusty black Tom bristled at the intruders, opened his wicked mouth and spat, baring fangs and claws big enough to make even a man thoughtful.

Then all three slipped noiselessly and sinuously off the stone steps and made way. "You see?" Stuyvesant cried. "Day

and night they haunt my house."

A woman past middle age opened the door before Stuyvesant could use his key. Henry was introduced to Mrs. Loos, the housekeeper. She had a shrewd, rather kindly face, and was evidently a woman of practical common sense. When she learned Henry's business there, Mrs. Loos rolled her eyes and declared it her heartfelt wish that he might succeed without loss of time.

Matthew Stuyvesant led the way to his own quarters, a study sitting room, and opening off it, through a wide arch, a bedroom. The two rooms made up the second floor accommodations.

Henry glanced about the sitting room, noted its wide, hospitable open hearth, in which a fire was laid, but not burning; its large windows, walnut furniture and figured carpet. The bedroom beyond was furnished in walnut also, walnut of a design more popular seventy years ago. The general effect was of quiet conservatism; comfort without fashion.

"I suppose this has been your home many years?" he remarked.

"All of my life—nearly. The rooms were my mother's, first. I took them after her death."

"And you own other houses in the row, beside this one?"

"Five," Stuyvesant said. "The first five from the street corner."

"Quite valuable property, I should think? I notice most of the rest of the block is built into large apartments."

"But not my property," Stuyvesant answered promptly. "My grandfather built these houses. He lived in this one and added the others later. My father lived here. Perhaps I'm a little old fashioned, like they were, but I dislike changes. While I live this property will remain as it is."

"Rather an expensive taste," Henry smiled. "I dare say for hotel or apartment use the land would bring a good price?"

"Not while I'm alive," Stuyvesant's mouth tightened a little. A stubborn look came into his face. "The rentals pay taxes and earn me two or three per cent over. I am content."

"But you have had offers, no doubt?"

"Oh, offers!" A shrug. "But I really don't see why you—"

A slight noise, just the ghost of a sound, caused both men to turn about. Stuyvesant began to retreat hastily across the room, his mouth open and his eyes staring.

Even Henry's nerves jumped with the surprise.

A rusty, black Tom cat—Henry would have sworn it was the same he had seen on

the steps as he entered—crouched on the carpet, glaring at them as though about to spring.

It had not been there a moment before, Henry could have sworn to that.

And it had not entered by the hall door, because Henry had closed the hall door carefully as he entered.

There was another door to the hall from the bedroom beyond, but he and Stuyvesant were facing that room as they talked, so the cat had not come in that way, even if it could have opened a closed door.

But there it was now, glaring at them, half crouched, the hair of its back stirring, and a low, menacing snarl rumbling in its throat.

"Stand perfectly still," Henry said to Stuyvesant. He began to remove his own coat. It was the coat of Henry's best suit of clothes, and he regretted having to use it so badly. But he stripped it off deftly and held it poised.

Henry took one delicate step, then another toward the cat, his eyes keenly fixed on its baleful glare.

A sudden spring and a swoop and Henry pounced with the coat outspread. The cat was a second too late in its retreat. Henry had it imprisoned in the folds of his coat.

Matthew Stuyvesant gave a shrill little cry and retreated shakily into the bedroom. His white face peeped out at Henry as the head of the Argus agency tucked the kicking, squirming bundle under his arm and let himself out into the hall.

CHAPTER IV

CAUSE OF THE CATS



HE basement front room was used by Mrs. Loos and the two other servants for their dining and sitting room. Off it opened a butler's pantry,

and then an old fashioned kitchen.

The basement room was rather pleasant and homey, and the four who visited in it were getting quite at ease.

There was Mrs. Loos in an old wicker chair, stitching busily at something held in an embroidery hoop. Next her sat Gertie, the general maid, a woman almost as old as the housekeeper, but thin, where Mrs. Loos was plump, short sighted and not beautiful.

In a third chair, rather upright and uncomfortably suspicious, Alf Doran, the furnace man and all-work man, lingered, smoking one of Henry Rood's cigars with enjoyment, but not lulled into entire security despite that gift.

As for Henry, he was doing his best to be good company and establish himself on friendly terms with the three who made up Stuyvesant's household staff. His youth and pink cheeks and round, innocent face were in Henry's favor. He did not look like a detective, and he let drop hints that he was less detective than a handy man called in to rid the house of cats. In fact he had just finished relating a somewhat imaginary account of finding the black cat in Matthew Stuyvesant's study.

"He seemed to hold it against me," Henry complained. "Gosh, he's got to give me a little time, hasn't he? Believe me, I want to get the cats out of the house, because I took this job on the no-cure-no-pay basis."

"Then you'd better kiss your money good-by," Doran said, sourly. "I've been trying to get the cats out of here for two weeks. I catch the devil from the old man every day! I can't keep 'em out, and I don't believe anybody else can."

"Well, maybe Mr. Stuyvesant will pay me something, even if I fail." I guess that's only fair," Henry mused hopefully,

Doran snorted. The two women glanced at each other, and a cynical smile passed.

"No?" Henry asked, observing this.

"I wouldn't count on it, young man," said Mrs. Loos.

"Any time!" Doran jeered. "His pockets are sewed up tighter than a drum."

Gertie the maid giggled and shook her head.

"Well, you ought to know," Henry said mournfully. "You've been with him quite awhile, I suppose?"

"Eighteen years for me," Doran said. "Nineteen for you, eh, Mrs. Loos?"

"No, indeed, twenty!" Mrs. Loos corrected.

"Twenty years, Mr. Rood, every day of them spent in this very house working for Mr. Stuyvesant. And if I was to tell you the amount in wages I was paid for those twenty years."

Mrs. Loos raised her eyes to heaven and her hands also.

The thin maid, Gertie, rolled up her blue eyes behind her thick lensed spectacles and sighed.

"Wages!" Doran snorted.

"Would you believe it, Mr. Rood," Gertie chimed in shrilly, "I've been twenty-three years here, longer than any of 'em, and I get the same wages to-day I did the day I started. And if you want to know how much wages that is, I say it's board and room and five dollars a month. And I can prove it."

Gertie glanced at her fellow servants and both nodded earnestly, watching Henry to enjoy his astonishment. Henry looked

properly astonished.

"Goodness knows, I do little better," said Mrs. Loos. "A mere matter of fifteen a month, I do assure you, Mr. Rood."

"Yes, and twelve a month for me," Doran grumbled. "The old tightwad!"

"Ah," said Henry, "but Mr. Stuyvesant will do the handsome thing by you in his will, I know!"

The three exchanged silent looks. Doran said reluctantly: "Well, providing he ever dies. I give him more years than I'll ever see."

"It's not the money with me, Mr. Rood," the housekeeper explained, confidentially. "I'm not one to set money above everything. It's living in this old house I mind. When I came here as a young woman this house was all well enough, but time hasn't mended it any, and the neighborhood is not what it was, I assure you."

"It's nothing but a slum!" said Gertie.

"A dump," said Doran.

"Well, for my part, I could stand it, though it's not what I'm used to," Mrs. Loos reasoned. "But it's bad for Mr. Stuyvesant. A man of his wealth and position! His old friends laugh at him for living here! Why doesn't he go out to the country like a sensible person?"

"Ah, why!" Gertie exclaimed.

"I'll tell you why," the furnace man volunteered, hitching his chair forward.

"He's too stingy, that's why! Too tight with his money. Afraid to spend a cent."

"And him with an elegant place on Long Island. A fine country place, if ever there was one," said the housekeeper. "But no, he'd rather take the rent from it."

"He makes me so mad!" Gertie burst out. "Why don't he sell these houses? Goodness knows he can get any price he asks. Why, he's been offered—"

Mrs. Loos coughed sharply. Gertie

stopped and bit her lip.

Doran pushed back his chair. "I'm off," he declared.

"Yes, we gossip too much, goodness knows," Mrs. Loos agreed. "A person would think we had nothing better to do. Would you like a bite of lunch, young man?"

"Thank you," Henry smiled. "I breakfasted late, but I would enjoy a cup of hot tea."

Henry watched to note if this innocent remark had any effect upon them.

It had no effect except to bring a hospitable nod from Mrs. Loos. Gertie rose. "I'll get it for the gentleman," she offered.

Doran gave Henry a nod and went through the butler's pantry toward the rear of the house. The two women followed him.

The door between the dining and sitting room and the kitchen was a swing door. When they were gone Henry stepped to it and peered through the crack.

Gertie had started water to boil, and the three servants had their heads close together. They talked in whispers Henry could not distinguish, and their eyes turned toward the room he was in. They were discussing him.

The water boiled. Gertie made tea.

"I'll take a cup myself," Doran offered, in his natural voice. He suited the action to the word by reaching down a cup from the closet and pouring for himself.

He raised his cup, sipped noisily and sputtered like a geyser. Doran bounded to the sink, seized a glass and washed his mouth with water.

"Is that nice?" said Mrs. Loos.

Over his shoulder Doran demanded: "Say, what's the big idea? Trying to poison me?"

"What's the matter with the man?" Gertie and Mrs. Loos chorused together.

"Matter!" Doran cried angrily. "That stuff ain't tea. My God, maybe it's poison!" He applied his head to the water that was streaming out of the faucet, gulping noisily.

"For evermore!" the housekeeper gasped. "Here, Gertie." She poured herself a taste from the teapot and sipped. She passed the cup to Gertie, who tasted and shuddered.

"Where's that tea caddy?" Mrs. Loos exclaimed. "I thought so! Look here."

The three clustered about the tea caddy. "I declare, Gertie, you're getting blind as an owl," Mrs. Loos snapped. "You got the two caddies mixed."

"Well, what in the nation did you go put it in a tea caddy for?" Gertie mourned. "A person would think you'd know better. Oh, misery! I made up a potful of this for Mr. Stuyvesant this morning! He never said a word. Drank every drop!"

Mrs. Loos began to laugh. "I always said the man never knows what's in his mouth!"

"But what is it?" Doran persisted. Henry saw him taste a leaf. He began to laugh, too. "Catnip!" he exclaimed.

"Shush your mouth and get out of here," Mrs. Loos snapped. Her eyes rolled toward the room where they had left Henry. "Get out," said Mrs. Loos, "and hold your tongue. Do you want him to hear and to spoil everything?"

Henry had seen and heard enough to throw a great light on his activities.

Catnip!

Then it was catnip tea that had been served to Matthew Stuyvesant for breakfast. The shortsighted Gertie had confused the caddy containing tea with the tin containing that contraband.

And why catnip in Matthew Stuyvesant's house?

Why, but to lure cats to that house!

The three servants were in the conspiracy to haunt Matthew Stuyvesant with cats. Henry Rood still had to find out the motive behind that conspiracy.

Henry thought he already had a definite clew, one that he could follow up speedily. So far as he could see into the future,

the great cat mystery was turning the corner toward its successful conclusion.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST CAT



ENRY finished his cup of tea, borrowed a latchkey from the housekeeper, and put on his hat and coat, making an excuse for leaving.

He wanted to telephone to Milly and he did not care to have Stuyvesant's servants overhear his instructions. He meant to put Milly on the trail of catnip. Catnip in the city comes from drug stores, and Henry did not expect much difficulty in tracing the purchaser of an herb for which there is not much demand.

On Matthew Stuyvesant's brownstone steps the gaunt black Tom cat crouched as Henry opened the door.

The slinking beast turned its baleful green eyes on Henry and hissed.

An hour before Henry had ejected it unceremoniously, but it lingered and he no longer wondered at that.

The black alley cat had associated that house with the drug for which a cat will dare greatly.

Henry closed the door behind him and stood regarding the cat, not three feet away from it. Properly nourished, it would have been rather a handsome cat, except for a diagonal black scar across its head, a scar that looked oddly like a streak of lightning against an inky midnight sky.

"Well, Lightnin', old boy," said Henry, sore at me?"

The cat regarded him with no more malevolence than it had for any of the human race. It kept out of reach and it swore softly and warningly, but that was its habit. "I treated you rough, cat," Henry grinned. "I guess I owe you an apology. Seems to me I saw a liver shop in the next block."

Ten cents' worth of liver and a little patience put Henry and Lightnin' on good terms. When Henry reëntered Stuyvesant's house, he carried Lightnin' concealed beneath his overcoat. "If I know where this cat is, he can't fool me another time," Henry reasoned wisely.

During the afternoon Henry spent several busy hours on the roof of Matthew Stuyvesant's house in company with a tinsmith. After he had washed away the traces of that sooty adventure, he called again on the second floor study and asked Stuyvesant to send for his three servants. He said to them when they assembled, all curiosity: "I have just assured Mr. Stuyvesant that there will be no more cats in this house. I'm sure you all will be glad to know that."

Three heads nodded enthusiastically. But they nodded without conviction.

Henry went on: "I've had the Humane Society agent round up the strays. Of course, that may not dispose of every cat about here, but it will help. I've had strong screens put in all the windows. And when any of you enter or leave the house, I want you to be very careful that no cat gets in. Mr. Stuyvesant has been made seriously unwell by this disturbance, as you can see for yourselves. He must not be disturbed again."

Matthew Stuyvesant did look ill. Two weeks of living in a cat-haunted house undoubtedly had worn down his natural

powers of resistance.

"I hope your scheme works," Doran said reluctantly. "But I'm blessed if I can see that you've done anything we didn't do for the last two weeks, except Mr. Stuyvesant didn't want to spend the money for them screens."

"Well, I do hope it succeeds," Mrs. Loos echoed with palpable doubt.

" My, yes!" said Gertie.

"Oh, yes, another precaution I forgot to mention," Henry said blandly. "I had the tinner put strong wire screens over the tops of both chimneys of this house. The chimney flues lead into open grate fire-places, you know. Just supposing a person wanted to scare Mr. Stuyvesant with cats, he might introduce a cat now and then by lowering him in a basket from the chimney top, don't you see? So now I think we are really quite catproof!"

The three servants looked straight before them. Not a word was said. The silence was distinctly audible.

Mrs. Loos's nervous fingers twisted up

the gold fringe of a chair. Gertie clasped her hands until the knuckles turned white. Doran's hands were on his knees, his gaze fixed on the carpet. He seemed to be holding his breath.

When Henry added genially: "Well, that's all. I just wanted you to know what I have done," the tension was suddenly released. The three exchanged quick glances.

"Yes, that's all," Matthew Stuyvesant lisped wearily. "And now I really think I shall lie down and try to get some rest. My sleep has been so broken!"

"Do," his housekeeper urged. "You haven't eaten a bite to-day, either. Just a snack now? No? Well then, a nice cup of hot tea?"

Henry had thoughtfully given the elderly man his arm and was able to whisper to him: "Take it, if you want it. Your poison mystery is solved. I give you my word, tea is safe."

"Not tea," Stuyvesant answered. "But I wish you would fix me up some of my sedative, Mrs. Loos. Just a few drops in a glass of water. I don't trust my nervous hand to pour it."

"Now, Mr. Stuyvesant, really!" Mrs. Loos shook her head with a frown.

"That doctor's a fool!" Stuyvesant said angrily.

"That doctor is not a fool," his house-keeper contradicted. "He says those drops are bad for your heart—and you know you have a weak heart!"

Stuyvesant cried out: "I tell you I've got to sleep and I can't sleep without my drops. I've got to sleep or I'll go mad!"

"Well, it isn't right, and I tell you so," Mrs. Loos grumbled. "But I'll fix the drops."

Stuyvesant walked wearily into his bedroom and threw himself down. Mrs. Loos lingered to answer Henry's silent questions.

"He's got a bad heart," she whispered. "The doctor says if he doesn't stop using those drops it will kill him. But don't you worry, Mr. Young Man!" She chuckled. She favored Henry with a wink. "I mix his drops for him now," she explained. "He thinks he's getting his medicine, but it's just pure water! And it makes him sleep like a baby!"

"Imagination is a wonderful thing," Henry smiled.

"Yes, indeed it is," Mrs. Loos agreed. She added in a louder tone: "I'll get the bottle and bring you your dose, Mr. Stuyvesant."

"Well, I must be on my way," Henry said. "I've got to see some people, especially a certain real estate agent who handles property in this district."

But Henry contrived to delay his going long enough to observe that Mrs. Loos, Gertie and Doran were consulting with their heads together in the basement hallway. They were discussing a secret and discussing it with angry emphasis. Henry did not try to eavesdrop. He knew what they were discussing. After the hints he had let drop, Henry did not anticipate any more visits from mysterious cats.

A moment later, in hat and coat, he passed the trio with a cheerful smile and a good-by. For answer he received the combined glare of three pairs of eyes.

It was almost six o'clock when Henry walked back toward Stuyvesant's house. He walked briskly, and as he walked he whistled a little tune.

Ahead of him, walking briskly in the same direction, Henry recognized an acquaintance and sometimes rival, Police Captain De Kane. De Kane was in a hurry. His red face glowed like a ripe tomato and the plume of smoke from his cigar trailed out behind him.

Henry quickened his steps and greeted De Kane jubilantly.

"Where the deuce you bound for?" De Kane frowned.

"Just a little case I'm winding up," Henry chuckled. "Queer old chap with a lot of money who's been haunted by cats. Been following a catnip trail all day, cap, but I've got it all straight and figured out now. I guess Matthew Stuyvesant won't be bothered by any more feline ghosts in his house."

"Matthew Stuyvesant?" De Kane barked. He stopped short to glare at Henry, still puffing hard from his hurry.

"Yes, you know him?"

"Stuyvesant!" De Kene cried. "No, I guess he won't be troubled by any more

cats, Rood. Not him." Henry had the uneasy feeling that De Kane was reveling in hidden sarcasm.

"Not Stuyvesant!" said De Kane. "If he's your client, you'd better know about it. Matthew Stuyvesant has just been found murdered. Some hysterical woman called up headquarters and she was babbling about a big black cat sitting on Matthew Stuyvesant's chest."

CHAPTER VI

MURDERED BY A TOM



HE quiet old home of Matthew Stuyvesant was more quiet than ever. But it lacked the atmosphere of security and well being it had held

these many years.

The quiet of the house was the hushed, breathless first impulse of awe and terror.

The three scared servants sat stiffly in the reception room under the guardianship of two police patrolmen, who had come off their beats to take charge, pending De Kane's arrival.

In the second story bedroom Matthew Stuyvesant's body lay as it had been found, stretched on the cover of his bed. Stuyvesant had removed his coat, vest and linen collar and slipped on a light dressing gown before he lay down to sleep.

The neck of this gown gaped open, exposing the dead man's throat and chest. Henry Rood pointed silently to three red marks or punctures at the base of the throat.

"Scratches," he murmured, keeping his voice low, as though the dead man might waken. "Scratches, like a cat might make with its claws."

"Look at his face!" De Kane growled. "Looks like a man that was scared to death. If what I heard by telephone is so, I guess he was. You say he was scared of cats, Henry?"

Henry nodded. He went into Stuyve-sant's bath which opened off the bedroom. The door of the white enamel medicine closet was closed, but not locked. Henry looked for and found the bottle of sedative about which Stuyvesant and Mrs. Loos

had disputed. The bottle was about half filled. Henry dropped it into his coat pocket. "I'll tell you later," he said in answer to De Kane's stare of inquiry.

The news of his client's death had been a violent shock to Henry. But he was not wasting any time on his own emotions. Shocks might jolt him, but they only served to make him think harder.

"I've seen all I want," De Kane said. "Shall we go downstairs and question the servants?"

Matthew Stuyvesant's death had been discovered about an hour and a half after Henry Rood left the house last. Alf Doran, the furnace man, was the discoverer.

"I had been up to my own room on the third floor," Doran said. "I went up just after Mr. Rood left and I was there quite awhile, reading a book. Don't get much leisure to do that in this house, and I was interested in that story. I don't know where Mrs. Loos and Gertie was. Didn't see 'em, didn't hear 'em, so I guess they was down in the basement. I saw it was half past five and time to be looking after my fires, so I put on my hat and come down.

"I was just stepping off the stair onto this floor when I heard kind of a snarllike—or a yowl. The house was dead still up to then and it gave me an awful start!"

Doran shuddered in spite of himself and apologized with a grim smile. "Those damn cats," he said. "They got on my nerves something awful the last two weeks!

"So I was standing there, surprisedlike and listening, and I hear that yowling or snarling again and it seems to come out of Mr. Stuyvesant's room. My slithers, I says aloud, one of 'em has got in again—"

"One moment, Doran," Henry interrupted here. "Was the hall door to Mr. Stuyvesant's room closed?"

"Closed," Doran answered, "but when I put my hand on it I see it had been left off the latch. Like somebody closed it and was careless about the latch."

"I closed that door myself," Mrs. Loos spoke up. "I guess I was the last one in that room before Doran. I was giving Mr. Stuyvesant his sleeping drops. I latched it, too. I always latch doors."

"It was off the latch," Doran went on steadily. "I pushed it open. I was hoping if a cat had got in there, I could shoo it out without waking the boss. I looked in. There was Mr. Stuyvesant lying just like he is now, dead. And on his chest, flattened low and snarling into his face, was that damned black cat!"

Doran's voice shook. He wiped his face and hands with a handkerchief. "God!" he cried suddenly.

Gertie gasped a pious ejaculation.

Police Captain De Kane scowled from one face to another. De Kane was a practical man and anything not readily explained, anything that verged on the weird, annoyed him.

"Now, your story." De Kane pointed at the housekeeper.

"The last I saw of Mr. Stuyvesant I gave him his drops," Mrs. Loos began. "Mr. Rood knows about that—"

"I heard you speak to him about it," Henry corrected.

"Well, I gave him the dose just after you left the house—say a matter of five minutes after. Mr. Stuyvesant went to sleep like a baby and I came back downstairs. I was in the basement sitting room going over household accounts. Gertie was out in the kitchen, getting things ready for dinner. She came and asked me about things two times and I heard her moving around, too.

"Nothing happened until just before Doran yelled for us to come. Maybe it was three or four minutes before or maybe a little less, I heard a cat yowling. I couldn't make out where the yowling came from. I called to Gertie to listen and we both stood in the basement hall."

Mrs. Loos, whose voice had been steady and manner composed, exhibited the first signs of hysteria as her mind reviewed that moment.

"Well?" De Kane questioned impatiently, for the housekeeper seemed unable to go on.

"Well—well, nothing came of it. We just stood there listening. Gertie was pretty rattled—"

"No more than you, Mrs. Loos!" Gertie interposed tartly.

"We heard that cat yowl a couple of times and we couldn't locate the sound. It was a very distant sound, muffled and faint. Then Doran yelled from upstairs, and the way he yelled, we both knew something awful had happened. We ran up to the second story and saw Mr. Stuyvesant lying dead."

"Did you see a black cat on his breast —or anywhere in the room?" De Kane asked.

Both women shook their heads.

"The window screen was pushed open," Mrs. Loos said. "It is one of those slide screens that fit any window and it had been hit a blow—you can see the dent in the wire—and was jarred out of the frame. Doran said the black cat jumped at the screen, knocked it loose and went out over the porch roof."

"That is quite correct," Doran agreed. Gertie's statement was merely a corroboration of the housekeeper's account.

De Kane asked: "What do you know about this, Henry?"

Henry detailed his day with Matthew Stuyvesant.

"Stuyvesant, we know, had an inherited fear of cats, one of those fears that you can't cure," Henry summed up. "For more than two weeks his house has been haunted by cats. Stuyvesant also had a bad heart. His nervousness disturbed his rest and his condition became dangerous. from excitement and heart strain. natural conclusion from the story of these witnesses is that Matthew Stuyvesant came out of his sleep this afternoon to find one of those uncanny cats lying on his breast, snarling into his face. The shock of that horrible waking stopped his weak heart forever. In other words, Matthew Stuyvesant died of acute fright."

"Sounds reasonable," De Kane agreed.
"Our police surgeon says shock and a bad heart. Damn weird kind of case. And it doesn't look any too good for you, Henry. You being hired to keep cats out of his house!"

"No," Henry said humbly. "It looks bad for me, I'm afraid."

There was a rather awkward silence. Doran stirred uneasily after a few minutes. "Saints alive!" he muttered. "I'll never forget that old devil cat so long as I live!"

CHAPTER VII

THE CAT MYSTERY CLEARS



HEY all stared solemnly at Doran.

Henry asked absently: "Did you get a good look at that cat, Doran?"

"I certainly did!"

"Could you describe it?"

"I certainly could. It's that ugly black Tom that's been haunting our house for two weeks. A devil if there ever was one. I'd know him any place by the crooked white scar across his head."

"I'd give a lot to know how he got into

this house," Henry puzzled.

"Tell you what I think, Mr. Rood," Doran volunteered. "Not meaning to criticize or nothing, but I think that cat slipped in past you when you went out. Stands to reason, because you was the last person that left the house. That's how he slipped in."

"God forbid!" Henry cried. "I could never forgive myself if that were true."

The doorbell rang.

"I think," said Henry, "perhaps that is some people I sent for. Will you have your man send them in, captain?"

"Sure," De Kane agreed wonderingly. "Anything that will help this case along!"

A patrolman ushered in two visitors. The first was Milly Canby, whose eyes flew to Henry. Henry smiled wearily. "Please sit down and wait a minute, Milly," he said.

The advent of the second visitor produced a noticeable awkwardness. The three servants stiffened and stared hard.

The newcomer was a round, conservatively dressed man of middle age. He had a sly, sober face with long nose and closeset little eyes. He bore an ultra conservative, church vestryman look about him, a look somehow belied by the sly twinkle of his eyes and a slight redness of his nose.

"Captain De Kane," Henry said, "this is Mr. James Topping, a realty broker. I took the liberty of sending for him to

help clear up some matters about Mr. Stuyvesant." Henry explained rapidly to Topping the details of Stuyvesant's death.

"Mr. Topping," he said then, "you deal extensively in property in this locality?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know these five houses in this block owned by Mr. Stuyvesant?"

"Very well, indeed."

"Very well, indeed! So well, in fact, that you have made numerous offers to purchase them from Mr. Stuyvesant? These offers were made on behalf of a realty syndicate which hoped to build a large apartment hotel on this property?"

"I don't deny it," Topping said, grow-

ing a little uneasy.

"No, you don't deny it. I'm glad to hear that," Henry agreed gravely. "In fact, Mr. Topping, your client, the realty syndicate, was so anxious to get hold of Stuyvesant's land that a handsome bonus was promised in addition to the usual broker's commission?"

"I don't deny it," the broker answered.

"Then I shall tell you something else, Mr. Topping. First, you received a call from me late this afternoon?"

"Yes, I did-"

"I represented myself as hopeful of influencing Mr. Stuyvesant to sell to your syndicate?"

" Correct-"

"And I bargained with you about what I would be paid if I swung this deal. Your final offer was a commission of twenty thousand dollars."

"Correct," Topping nodded. "Nothing criminal about that, I hope?" he demanded.

"Not at all," Henry agreed. "You also informed me that others had been trying to influence Mr. Stuyvesant toward this sale, didn't you? You informed me that the three servants in this house had been working for you for some time?"

"Correct again!"

"And that the servants had been promised a like reward, twenty thousand dollars, if they could induce their employer to sell out?"

"Why not? Nothing wrong about that. Just the usual way in our business," Topping retorted uneasily.

"That's all then, and thank you for your frankly given testimony," Henry answered. "I don't think we need any more of your valuable time."

James Topping, with De Kane's added permission, took himself out of the house.

Matthew Stuyvesant's three servants had turned red and white during this examination. Gertie looked on the point of a shrill outburst. Mrs. Loos was biting her lips angrily. Doran sneered his defiance, being obviously tempered by qualms of uneasy doubt.

"Well, what are you getting at?" De Kane asked.

"Just a minute more," Henry begged.
"I hope to get somewhere. I'd like to speak to my assistant in private."

Milly's eyes had been signaling for

Henry's attention.

Watched by the others, Henry and Milly talked briefly in whispers. In the midst of this colloquy Henry uttered one audible gasp of surprise which he turned into a cough.

Presently Henry and Milly turned back to the group. "You know Miss Canby, my assistant, Captain De Kane? I want you to hear some testimony from her. But first I'll tell you what I am driving at."

Henry's round, youthful face was very serious. He let his gaze dwell on Stuyvesant's three servants.

"I think what Topping told us clears up the mystery of the cats which haunted this house, captain. These three people, Mrs. Loos, Gertie, and Doran, worked for Matthew Stuyvesant many years. They were paid starvation wages. But they lingered on because Mr. Stuyvesant put them down for a handsome remembrance in his will, provided they did not leave his employ.

"But Mr. Stuyvesant remained in good health and their expectations of a reward seemed very remote. And then another source of income appeared. That was the proposition—I won't say how ethical it was—made by Topping. Topping's customer wants this property badly. Topping was able to offer a small fortune to anybody who could induce Stuyvesant to make the sale. And three people who knew Stuyvesant like a book hit upon the plan of

making his house so uncomfortable that he would be driven to sell out and move away. Do I make it clear?"

De Kane nodded, keenly interested. The three servants made no denial.

"So long as it appeared to me that Mr. Stuyvesant's death was due to fright, when he waked to find a cat on his bed, I realized that we could never bring a case against any person here," Henry went on sternly. "To be quite frank with you, while I knew that these three actually conspired to haunt this house with cats, I was not sure but it was my own carelessness that was responsible for that cat which scared Stuyvesant into heart failure. But now I know something of far greater importance!"

Henry's voice took on a stronger vehemence.

"Matthew Stuyvesant's death was not caused by fear," he said firmly. "Matthew Stuyvesant was murdered. And that murder was accomplished not by frightening a man with a weak heart, but by a deliberate, poisonous overdose of sleeping drops that would kill a horse. And one of these three old servants of Mr. Stuyvesant's is the murderer!"

CHAPTER VIII

NOT CATS, BUT CATNIP



FTER a moment of stupefied silence Mrs. Loos sprang to her feet. "I want to say—" she began.

Captain De Kane roared:

"Sit down, and keep quiet!"

The housekeeper subsided. De Kane ordered one of the patrolmen to watch the three of them. "Go ahead, Henry," he said, "you've got the floor. But you'll have to prove what you say a lot better than you have so far!"

"I'll try to, captain," he said and took from his coat pocket the bottle of sedative he had found in the medicine closet. "This is the medicine which was used to kill Stuyvesant. A harmless sedative, unless the dose is too large—"

"Oh, is it?" Mrs. Loos cried. "Is it, indeed? I guess you don't remember very well, young man! That's the bottle I gave

Mr. Stuyvesant his dose from, yes. And I'll tell you what's in it. Plain water! Just common, pure water!"

The housekeeper looked at them in grim

triumph.

"I told you that myself, in this very house this afternoon, young man," Mrs. Loos declared.

Henry said to De Kane: "There is a registered pharmacist just around the corner. Ask one of the boys to have the contents of this bottle identified, captain. It won't take long, I think."

When a man had gone on that errand Henry spoke to Mrs. Loos. "You did tell me about the water this afternoon, Mrs. Loos. You told me that Mr. Stuyvesant's doctor forbade his using the sedative because of his weak heart. You said that you were fooling him by substituting water for the drops."

"Well, I'm glad you have the decency to remember!"

"And you kept just pure water in that bottle?" Henry prompted.

"Yes," Mrs. Loos snapped. "I poured the medicine down the sink three weeks ago, and put in water out of the faucet. It was water I gave him to-day—a good, stiff dose of it. It fooled him like it always did and he went to sleep."

They waited in silence for the return of the messenger. He was soon back, bring-

ing the pharmacist in person.

"The contents of this bottle," said the pharmacist, gravely returning it, "is used commonly for sleeping drops or sedative."

"Safe to take?" De Kane asked.

"If the patient takes the prescribed dose—and his heart is normal."

"An overdose—say, for a man with a very bad heart?"

"If it was much of an overdose," the pharmacist answered gravely, "it would kill a man like a bullet, supposing he had a bad heart."

Mrs. Loos sprang from her chair at the words. The scream she gave was so wild and despairing it brought them all from their chairs. Then the housekeeper crumpled up in a faint.

"Shame on you, to accuse her!" Gertie cried at Henry, her face red, her lean,

stringy neck stretched forward angrily. Gertie's short-sighted blue eyes glittered.

"Mrs. Loos is an innocent woman. I say it, who have worked beside her all these years and know her heart."

"Then maybe it was you gave the old man an overdose of his dope?" De Kane suggested brutally.

"It was not," Gertie snapped. "I don't say I never had such an idea in my head, mind you. But I never did it."

"Very well," said Henry. "But you can tell us one thing. After we left Mr. Stuyvesant's room this afternoon, and before Mrs. Loos gave him medicine, you three got together in the basement hall and talked about something. What was it you talked about?"

" About you," Gertie answered promptly.

"Mrs. Loos said it was plain you had found out about the cats. And since you had stopped up all the ways of getting them into the house and had got wise to us, we would have to stop that business."

"Correct," Doran volunteered. "Just what we agreed."

Mrs. Loos nodded weakly.

"What I am getting at," Henry said to De Kane, "is that these three conspirators saw they were beaten in their hope to earn Topping's bribe. Now, what I expect to prove is that one of them, cheated of that expectation and more desperate for money than the others, went on to murder. I want you to listen to Milly Canby, captain."

Milly began: "'Enry—Mr. Rood—telephoned me this afternoon. His orders were to visit drug stores about this neighborhood and try to trace the purchase of catnip. He wanted the names or descriptions of any persons buying catnip during the last few weeks. Altogether I visited twenty-six stores. Five of them had sold catnip during that time, and I got a couple of descriptions.

"In the last store I visited, the druggist took me back of the store partition to talk confidentially. While we were talking a man came in. The druggist peeped out of the little hole in the ground glass.

"He said to me: 'That's the man! He bought some catnip three weeks ago!'

"I peeped through the spy hole and saw

the customer. The druggist went out to wait on him. When he came behind the partition, I asked if the man wanted more catnip.

"'No,' the druggist said, 'it's a prescription this time. He's after a sedative. It's dangerous stuff, and I have to be careful.'

"The druggist showed me that prescription. I saw the doctor's name. I saw the druggist fill it and sell the bottle to the man—"

"Identify the man," Henry prompted. Milly turned and pointed at Alf Doran.

De Kane and his two patrolmen tensed their muscles and prepared for an outburst of denial or defiance. They all expected a scene. And they were cheated.

Doran raised his head and stared.

"Absolutely correct," he said calmly. "I had that prescription filled this afternoon. It was the prescription Mr. Stuyvesant's doctor made out for him. Mrs. Loos sent me to get it filled. She said the bottle was empty and Stuyvesant couldn't sleep without the drops. She gave me the money to pay for it. I brought the bottle back and gave it to her. Then I went up to my own room, like I told you before."

Again Mrs. Loos sprang to her feet, her accusing finger stabbing at the furnace man. She gasped haltingly: "Then—it was—you! You murdered him."

"I deny that," Doran said composedly.

CHAPTER IX

SCAR-FACED TOM



E KANE turned on Doran, his manner threatening. "You," he growled. "Be mighty careful now. You deny this woman's charge?"

" Certainly."

"But you admit you lied. You concealed that errand to the drug store!"

"Correct. If you ask me why, I'll tell you why. I thought that old girl was up to something. That's God's truth—"

"You mean to say you suspected this murder and concealed your knowledge?" Henry gasped.

"Correct," Doran nodded, calm and de-

fiant. "Why? Well, two reasons. I was kind of sorry for Mrs. Loos, knowing how she banked on getting rich if we swung the sale of the house. Second, I could have used some money myself—and if Stuyve-sant was dead I stood to get a couple thousand by his will."

There was something about this revelation of cold-blooded complicity that had De Kane convinced. It left that choleric captain sputtering, but satisfied.

Henry Rood looked badly shaken.

But Henry persisted: "Then just for the sake of the record, I ask you again, your story is correct about finding Mr. Stuyvesant dead?"

"Absolutely," Doran agreed. "1 cameout of my room at half past five. I heard a cat yowl. I went into his room looking for the cat and there he lay on the bed, dead. The black cat was flattened out across him and snarling into his face—"

"The black cat with the scarred head?"

Henry asked.

"The black cat with the scarred head, yes, sir. I got a good look at it when it made a bolt for the window and knocked the screen loose."

"Very good," said Henry quietly. "Will you all come downstairs with me?"

"What now?" De Kane growled suspiciously.

"Something to show you," Henry promised. "All of you."

They made a queer little procession toward the basement, the patrolmen bringing up the rear to keep an eye on the suspects.

In the dimly lighted basement hall they all stopped suddenly and listened.

Gertie screamed aloud: "Oh, my heaven-ly faith!"

Mrs. Loos gasped: "There it is again!"

De Kane glared a question at Henry, and Milly clutched his arm in her fright. Even Doran turned white.

"Sounds like a cat, doesn't it?" Henry remarked placidly. "Yes, I should say it is a cat."

It certainly was the yowl of a cat, a long drawn, deep-toned snarling cry, faint and muffled.

"Come along," said Henry, and led the

way to the stair that communicated with the cellar below.

At the stair head was a small closet. Henry took a key from his pocket. "Try the door, captain," he invited.

"It's locked," De Kane announced.

Just then the yowling came again, louder, more insistent. It came from behind the locked door.

"The door is locked," Henry agreed.
"I locked it. That was about three o'clock this afternoon. You see, I have the key."

Henry used the key and opened the door a crack.

"Lightnin'!" he whispered through the crack. "Hey, puss, puss! Hey, boy!"

Something black and slinking tried to force itself through the crack of the door.

"Look him over carefully," Henry invited, holding the door against the cat. "Examine that head, will you? See anything?"

"Anything!" De Kane shouted. "It's the black cat with the crooked white scar. The black cat Doran says he saw on Stuyvesant's bed!"

De Kane wheeled on the furnace man.

"You lied," he roared. "You lied from start to finish. You and your mysterious black cat. You went out and bought that dope and gave it to the old man yourself. When he died, you scarred his throat to bear out your damned lie about the cat scaring him to death. And when that lie wouldn't hold water, you tried to blame murder on an innocent woman. Answer me, Doran! Was it you who killed Matthew Stuyvesant?"

Doran's wandering eye turned back to the gaunt black cat. He shuddered. "Yes," he snarled. "Yes, I did."

"Well," said Henry Rood, drawing a deep breath of relief, "nobody would ever have proved it if you hadn't been too artistic with that story about the cat. But when you asked me to believe that Lightnin' let himself out of a locked door and ran upstairs and scared the old man to death, then ran back and locked himself in again, you asked for something beyond belief. Even a cat can't do impossible things, Doran."



He reached the shadow of the tree before Calhoun's clubbed gun dropped him

ONE GOOD MAN

By Edward Parrish Ware

"IF YOU DO FIND 'EM," SNARLED LUNDSFORD, "BETTER SLIP AWAY WITHOUT LETTIN' 'EM KNOW IT—THEY'RE BAD MEDICINE!"



HERE the Jonesboro, Lake City and Eastern Railroad spans Lake St. Francis, that body of water is a mile wide. The railway trestle describes a long curve, be-

ginning immediately it leaves the west bank, and an eastbound train becomes invisible from Lake City, the village at the head of the trestle, almost at once. There is no town on the eastern bank of the lake. Nothing, for miles, but wilderness.

Lake St. Francis is something of a wilderness in appearance itself. The channel of the river from which it takes its name is but a narrow ribbon, flanked on the east by cypress trees, mud banks, flags and other growths—a paradise for fishermen. A stranger, however, would need a guide to find his way about in the eastern portion.

Just after dark, one September night, two long dugouts glided up the lake, crossing occasional areas of moonlit water, but invisible from the town because of the character of the place. Each craft held two men, and they were silent; even the dip of their paddles in the water made not the slightest ripple. Reaching a tree-clad mudbank a hundred yards below the juncture of railway trestle and shore, both boats found the shadowed side and laid against it. There was no conversation, no smoking—nothing, in fine, that might have betrayed a presence there.

After half an hour's wait, a tall man in the first dugout, who appeared to be leading the expedition, silently nosed his boat away, and slipped through the growth to a landing on the east shore. The second craft followed as noiselessly.

Fifteen minutes later, the night train for Barfield's Point left Lake City for the eastern terminus. It consisted of two coaches and a combination express, baggage

10 F W

and mail car, the latter having two men aboard. The engineer felt his way carefully over the long trestle, for the unstable foundations of the piers made caution imperative; until the low ground of the lake region should be left behind, he would proceed under close control, a sharp lookout for bad track.

The last coach had barely cleared the approach on the east side, and the engineer was cautiously giving his cylinders more steam, when a red lantern seemed to leap out of the night, ahead, describing frantic revolutions, as though the bearer were in a high state of excitement.

The engine driver applied the air, and the train slid to a screeching stop; then he stepped to the cab door and called out:

"What's wrong? Track dropped down?"
That was the bit of roadbed nuisance causing the greater part of trouble on the line.

"No—but you'll drop down, and out, if you don't obey orders, and hustle about it, too!"

The voice came from directly below, and the engineman looked down into the muzzle of a revolver. A second later, a tall man, completely masked, swung up into the cab and another boarded the engine from the fireman's side.

A shrill whistle sounded from the rear, and the tall man swung his gun on the engineer.

"Pull ahead until I tell you to stop—and give her steam!" he ordered.

The engineer, too astonished to use his tongue—for no such thing had ever before been perpetrated on the little road—obeyed.

When the train came to a stop, Morris Brake, the mail messenger, opened the door of the car and looked ahead—to find himself caught by the ankles and brought to the floor with a thud. An instant later two men crawled over his prostrate body into the car. They were armed, and wore masks. One seized the messenger and drew him inside, then closed the door. At that moment the car, cut loose from the rest of the train, began moving rapidly ahead.

"Open your safe!" came the command from one of the bandits, while his mate held the baggage man helpless under his gun. Brake got to his feet, and turned to the safe. He was a man of high courage, and there was an unusually large sum of money in the safe—used jointly by the mail service and the express company. He manipulated the combination, swung the door open, seized a revolver which lay inside and wheeled—to meet instant death at the hands of the bandit.

The whistle of the locomotive sounded a short blast—evidently a signal to the men in the car. Paying no attention to the dead messenger, the bandit took a grain sack from beneath his coat and scooped the contents of the safe into it, then turned to the door as the train slowed to a stop.

"All right, Bud!" he exclaimed.

The man called Bud swung his clubbed gun, and the baggageman dropped heavily to the floor.

In the engine cab, both the driver and the fireman had been rendered unconscious in a like manner, and, ten minutes after the holdup began, the four thieves were racing to where their boats lay hidden. Racing for Lake St. Francis, to lose themselves in the great swamp to the south—trackless, wild, almost impenetrable save to those in the know.

In the sack carried by the bandit who had slain the mail messenger reposed the sum of ten thousand dollars—funds of the express company and the government.

II



ACK CALHOUN, United States Ranger stationed at Hell Hole, in the Sunken Land region of Arkansas, dropped the boot he was

polishing and gave entire attention to the telegraph instrument clicking on a table in his cabin. His call had been sounded.

"Headquarters. Wheeler sending," came the message. "Train number two, J. L. C. and E., held up at east end trestle on Lake St. Francis, last night. Four men, possibly more. Express safe robbed. Mail looted, and messenger killed. Possible aids in identification: Leader a tall, spare man. Two others medium height. Fourth, who shot Brake, short, heavy-set, red hair. All masked. Escaped by boat. Bloodhounds

followed trail to lake. Blair, of Craighead, and posse combing lake country north of railway. Lundsford, of Poinsette, and posse of ten just passed here in motor boats to search south. Advise not joining them, but go on your own. Communicate when possible."

"Got it," was Calhoun's reply.

He resumed polishing the boot. The hour was two in the afternoon of the day succeeding the robbery, and the ranger was putting a bit of spare time to good use by burnishing his equipment. He was in no great hurry even now, and for a very good reason.

Wheeler had said that Sheriff Lundsford was on his was upriver with a big posse. Therefore Calhoun would wait until they had come and gone, before taking to the wilderness.

"I'll find out where they are going, and then go an entirely different way," he was thinking. "Wheeler needn't advise me not to join the sheriff's gang. Man-hunting in a motor boat!"

There was scorn in the ranger's voice, and a look of disgust on his face. His contacts with the sheriff from Poinsette County had been of a character calculated to arouse just such feelings.

"Lundsford never played a solo hand in his whole term of office," Cal soliloquized. "Always has to have his posse. I actually believe he brings his armed gang into the swamp for his own protection, more than for any other reason. A good enough office sheriff—but worse than useless on a trail. No, Wheeler need not have told me to lay off him and his gang!"

The surface of the boot now shone like new copper, and Calhoun laid it aside. From a locked cupboard he took a roll of stiff blue print paper; spreading it out on a table, he fastened the corners down with thumb tacks and sat down to consider it.

The thing before the ranger was a map of the Sunken Land Country. Not the official one, but a comprehensive, painstaking plat made by Cal himself. On that paper, carefully traced, was the record of the ranger's explorations in the district. Every creek, slough, bayou, no matter how small and unimportant; every island, lake and

donnick was there in its proper place. Distances were faithfully recorded. Little dots here and there showed the exact locations of the cabins of the natives—and the name of the occupant appeared in tiny letters below each cabin. With the map, Calhoun had the country before him as it really was, and not as it was rather vaguely depicted upon official plats of the region. He had more than once found it of inestimable value.

The scene of the train robbers' operations was sixty miles north of Hell Hole, at the head of Lake St. Francis, which was eighteen miles from end to end, and as many as four miles wide in some places. The ranger considered the lay of the land in and around that portion of the district.

"They would not go north," he reflected. "Two good reasons for not doing so. One, that way lies civilization. Secondly, they'd have a current to buck, after leaving the lake, and consequently make slow progress. No. They'd likely follow the lake down, get into the current of the river as soon as possible, and take advantage of that in their get-away. Blair, of Craighead, is a good man and a fine officer—but he's wasting his time in the territory north. Now, where would they be liable to leave the lake?"

He followed the outline of the big body of water closely, noting the many small streams leading from it to the interior.

"None of those would likely attract them," was his conclusion. "They lead nowhere."

Near the foot of the lake, Big Bayou takes off in a southeasterly course for some fifteen miles, then straightens out due east for five miles and finally angles northeast to Reed Lake. The ranger gave that course very close attention.

Following the line of the bayou, Calhoun's glance wavered and stopped at a point where an arm of the larger stream takes off nearly south and joins Little Bear River. Little Bear has its origin in Swan Lake, and runs a fifty mile course straight to the Mississippi.

"I wouldn't be surprised, now, if that is the route they'll take. It's the logical one. I can't imagine four crooks with ten

thousand dollars cash split up among them, lingering in the swamp any longer than they have to. Nothing to spend money for here. The old Murel Route, part of the once used underground system used in running slaves South, would naturally be known to them.

A direct outlet to the Big River—and never a foot upon the ground. Once on the Mississippi, it would be easy to mingle with the roustabouts of a steamboat at a small village or woodyard, and get away north or south with little chance of detection. Moreover, Little Bear traverses a wilderness—cane-brakes, flags, river-grass line its shores. Plenty of cover in case of pursuit. At any rate, I'm going to proceed on the theory that they would seek that particular outlet—and try and grab them there."

He returned the map to its cupboard, and began leisurely gathering his kit for the trip. He was in no hurry. The bandits would be somewhere west of the junction of Beaver Creek and Little Bear, and there was ample time for him to travel down the river to the point where it absorbed the creek, before they could possibly reach it. Lundsford out of the way, he would start.

Two hours later the put-put-put of a pair of motor boats announced the coming of the sheriff and his posse.

"Noise enough to wake a graveyard full of dead people," Cal commented as he went to the landing to meet the party. "Must be a dozen men all told," he estimated, as the two motor boats came to anchor.

"Well, Cal, I guess you've heard the news?" Lundsford called, stepping ashore. "Why ain't you out in the timber?"

"I've heard the news, yes," Calhoun replied. "And I'm getting ready to strike out. What are you holding—a convention of some kind?" he queried, eying the escort.

Lundsford flashed him a hard look.

"I'm out to get those train robbers—and get 'em right!" he exclaimed heatedly. "Stopped at Oak Donnick and consulted with Wheeler—invited him to send some of his men along. What you reckon he said?"

Calhoun shook his head. "Haven't any

idea what the chief said," he replied, a glint of humor in his eyes. "There are so many things he might have, you know. Suppose you tell me."

"He put out the same old stuff!" Lundsford declared. "'One good man,' he said, 'is worth more than a dozen, in such a search. The dozen are, by reason of the noise and confusion of their number, fore-doomed to failure. Calhoun is at Hell Hole, and he'll take care of any bandits who come his way!' That's the line of talk he handed me!"

Calhoun grinned. "The chief isn't very strong on the gab," he told Lundsford. "Reckon he must have believed the way he talked, else he wouldn't have so expressed himself."

"Believe it!" the sheriff exploded. "Why, hell, the man is plumb rotten with confidence. Thinks he's got an unbeatable organization, and while I'll admit you boys are doing very well, nobody is unbeatable! Here's something else he handed me. I says to him: 'What could Cal do by himself, if he was to run smack onto the four?'

"'In the first place, Cal isn't going to run smack onto them,' he replied. 'He's too careful for that. But if he locates them, he'll bring 'em in—dead or alive. One good man, working on the side of the law, is more than a match for half a dozen crooks.'

"Stuck on himself and his bunch? Well, I'll say he is!"

Lundsford's red face and angry eyes testified to his wrought up condition. Calhoun, secretly amused, changed the topic, directing the sheriff's mind back to the business in hand.

"Where you headed for now, sheriff?" he wanted to know.

"To the most likely place in the swamp to catch that gang," Lundsford told him. "Swan Lake. What better place in the whole region for them to hide out? A lake fourteen miles in circumference, and chock full of islands, big and little, and water growths of all kinds, couldn't be beat for a hideout. We're going to comb that lake from end to end—and we're going to bring out our men! Want to come along and see us do it?"

"Well, no," the ranger answered.

"Thank you just the same. I'll cover another part of the swamp. Got an idea they might not come down as far as Swan Lake—and I'm going to test it out."

"One man stunt!" Lundsford exclaimed derisively, as he returned to his boat. "Well, take my advice, Cal, and if you do happen onto that gang, slip away without letting 'em know it. They're bad medicine—take it from me! Bad!"

Calhoun watched them depart, then took to the river in his bateau.

It was exactly ten miles from Hell Hole Settlement to the foot of Swan Lake, and the ranger reached the place at five o'clock—a wilderness of water, studded thickly with trees and small islands, through which the St. Francis traces its course. The distant put-put-put of Lundsford's motor boats advertised the presence of his party in the vicinity.

III



AL followed the shore line on the east, and found his way to the source of Little Bear River. There he nosed his bateau onto a mudbank and

considered his next move.

"If the thieves are not together," he thought, "my chance of picking them up is almost nil. They may have split, of course, but such a thing is unlikely; they would, in all probability, stick together until out of the swamp. That, in case of pursuit and battle. According to my calculations, they should now be somewhere between the junction of Big Bayou and Beaver Creek, and the junction of Beaver and Little Bear. I'll run the river to-night, and ought to get below the mouth of Beaver before they do."

He swung his boat into Little Bear, and plied his paddle with strong, steady, distance-eating strokes. He did not waste any time planning what to do in case he should locate the thieves. To locate them was the paramount thing; after that, he'd consider ways and means of taking them.

Now that he was actually on the old Murel Route to the Mississippi, the conviction became stronger than ever that the bandits would make for that outlet to the river. They would have to travel by boat, since the vast wilderness spreading eastward to the Big River was so crisscrossed by sloughs and bayous, to say nothing of immense areas of treacherous marshland, as to render overland travel practically impossible. Furthermore, so long as they kept to the water, hounds could not trail them.

It was a thousand to one that they were following some stream in the swamp, and Calhoun was guessing at which one. He felt that, given his exhaustive knowledge of the country, his choice was something better than a guess. It was a well-based calculation.

The channel of Little Bear River is not more than one hundred feet at its widest; on each side the wilderness walls it in; having no banks, the stream spreads out through crane-brakes, cypress swamps and flats, sometimes for miles into the timber. The dead water back of the brakes can be navigated by boatmen who know the stream, and it is possible to travel the whole length of the river without ever showing up in the channel. Slow progress, certainly, but safe, since to find a craft in the tangle is virtually impossible. Whisky runners know the ins and outs of such trails well, and make good use of them.

When Calhoun reached the juncture of Beaver Creek and Little Bear he was, according to his calculations, at least six hours ahead of the quarry. He knew the distance they would have to cover to get there, and he knew the maximum speed they would be able to make in their boats. At the outside, he had six hours the advantage.

The hour was nine in the evening, and a late moon was silvering the water, showing up objects in the channel, but intensifying the darkness of the shore lines. Cal continued downstream for half an hour longer, then steered his bateau out of the channel and back of a screen of cane on the left hand side of the river. He took a spool of black sewing thread from his pocket, attached one end to a stalk of cane about three inches above the surface of the water, then crossed in a straight line into

the cover on the right hand side, unwinding the thread from the spool at he went. There he secured the free end of the thread to a second stalk of cane, anchored the bateau and spread his blankets in it. That done he untied the thread and fastened it around the thumb of his left hand.

"A boat can't pass without striking the thread," he said to himself as he stretched out, "and I've got a sensitive thumb."

Two minutes later he was sleeping.

Whether it was the jerking of the thread or the rocking of the bateau that awakened him Cal did not know. Dawn was just breaking when he became dimly conscious that the weather had changed during the night, and a wind storm was brewing. He sat up, and at that instant the thread suddenly tightened about his thumb, then released suddenly as the bow of a boat clove it in two.

Calhoun was wide awake on the instant, peering through the opening in his screen at the stretch of water immediately within his vision.

A long dugout, carrying two paddlers, slipped by, followed by another a moment later. It also carried two men. Cal waited, scarcely breathing. There were no more.

"I guessed right!" he exclaimed mentally, a pleased grin on his face. "Now I know where they are, and their probable objective—what?"

"That was a matter demanding most careful consideration. Cal settled back in his bateau, and did some swift thinking. He could easily have picked off the bandits with his rifle, had that been his desire. At least he could have gotten the two in the first boat that way, and probably captured the remaining two. But Calhoun was never a man to shoot unless it became absolutely necessary. It was not his nature to do so. Furthermore, the Government wants its culprits taken alive. An officer who has to kill his man to get him does not last long in the service. He is dropped, and should be. Calhoun kept his gun in its holster, and used his head.

"They are making for the Mississippi," he argued. "Of that I am certain, because there is nowhere else they could be headed. Now, if I follow them until the Big River is

reached I will have the aid of the officers of the boat they select to escape on. That, if I have luck. On the other hand, they may give me the slip, since I will necessarily have to remain at least an hour behind them. A boat may be just in the act of clearing when they arrive. If so, good-by. They looked fresh enough this morning, so they probably slept a good part of last night, and will go far to-day. Half the distance, probably. So I've got to-day, to-night and to-morrow in which to think up a scheme that will work." He looked off through the timber to where dry land showed. "A bit of breakfast will help the thinking along," he decided, and struck out for the shore.

While he cooked and ate breakfast he continued to canvas the meager possibilities the situation presented. When he took to the river again the problem had narrowed down to this:

"I'll follow an hour behind, then when the Mississippi is near I'll crowd them as closely as I can with safety," he decided. "I've got to get there right on their heels, that's certain. Morgan's wood yard will probably have a steamer or two taking on fuel, and a steamer is their only chance. If they get aboard and away before I can stop them I'll follow in a motor boat—commandeer a steam boat if I have to. Anyhow, Wheeler has said that one good man working on the side of the law is more than a match for a dozen crooks—and I'm not going to be the one to make him eat his words!"

The storm, threatening since before day-break, suddenly broke, and for the next hour the ranger had all he could do to make headway in the terrific wind, to say nothing of the necessity of bailing almost constantly. The rain fell in torrents, and Calhoun soon had evidence that the region about Swan Lake had suffered a deluge. Drift began to show on the river, logs from drifts disturbed by a sudden rise. That, he knew, would constitute a hazard for night traveling.

"If drifting logs delay me, they will also delay the quarry," he argued. With that thought he was content.

The danger of rounding a bend and coming suddenly upon the quartette was

ever present—a possibility fraught with disaster for the lone pursuer. Whether or not they would lie in frequent ambush depended upon how safe they felt against pursuit—depended, also, Calhoun's life. He knew that, and took all turns with infinite caution, usually dropping into the cover of the backwater and returning to the current well below the bend. In that way he might easily become the pursued rather than the pursuer, but it was a chance he had to take.

The day wore on, the storm finally abated, but the drifting trees and logs increased in numbers. About five o'clock Cal, coming to a sharp bend, suddenly scented wood smoke, and took cover instantly.

"They've stopped to cook supper," he reasoned. "Want to avoid a night fire. That looks as though they are going to run the river, logs and all, after dark."

Tying up to the tallest tree he could find, the ranger climbed to the top and scanned the shore line below. At length a thin wisp of smoke, whirling above the tree tops, betrayed the location of the camp. It was less than a quarter of a mile distant.

Cal remained in the tree. The river channel was visible to a point several hundred yards beyond the camp's location, and he meant to make sure that the campers were really the men he sought. A hunter might possibly be the builder of that fire, but there was not much likelihood of one being in that particular part of the forest. It was a bit too remote even for hunters.

Half an hour passed, and two dugouts crept out of the cane and headed downstream. Each was manned by two oarsmen—undoubtedly the same party Cal had seen at daybreak.

The ranger descended to his boat, waited three-quarters of an hour, then took up the trail again. Reaching the point where the camp had been, he paddled through the cane and stepped ashore beside the dying embers of a fire. Replenishing it, he boiled a pot of coffee, cooked supper, and fed heartily. While he ate he examined the ground about the fire. Tracks, a few burned matches, cigarette stubs, and the refuse from the meal of which the crooks had partaken was all he found.

After eating, it occurred to him that it might be well to scout among the bushes with which the ground was all but choked in the vicinity of the camp. Painstakingly he covered it and, just before nightfall, had his reward.

In the center of a clump of buckrush he located a small leather bag—such a one as mail messengers use for carrying registered matter. It had been gutted with a knife, and the contents removed.

"That argues that a divvy was made at this point," Cal reflected. "Means, too, that they are going to split right away. Hell—suppose two go down the Mississippi and two go up? The question then will be: Which two shall I take first? The redhead, of course, since he is the man I'm after more than the others. He did the killing."

Then another thought struck him.

"Suppose they mean to split before they reach the Mississippi. There are many small streams branching off from Little Bear, between here and its mouth. Against that, though, is this: They can't get far, by boat, on any of those streams—and the going afoot is bad, gets worse the closer one comes to the Big River. No, I'm still betting they're making for a get-away by steamboat, and that, for safety's sake, they'll stick together."

Concealing the bag under his pack, he set out again. Night had come, and extreme precaution would be necessary until the moon rose, which was due to occur about nine thirty. The storm clouds of the day had dispersed, and the sky was studded with stars. There would be a moon.

The hour passed slowly, and slowly also went Cal's bateau—barely moving at times. At length there was a sudden stir in the forest—as palpable as a gust of wind, but hardly as easily defined. An owl screeched weirdly off in the timber, and was answered from half a dozen leafy hiding places. The plop-plop-plop of a 'coon's feet, splashing through shallow water; the startled leap of a larger animal—a deer, probably—which, disturbed by the ranger, went crashing off into silence; the high-keyed wail of a panther, somewhere close at hand on the left—all told Cal that the

moon was up, and that presently it would rise above the tree line and whiten the waters of the river. The denizens of the forest were astir.

IV



OMETHING else was astir, too. Cal rounded a bend just as the moon thrust itself above the trees and spilled its rays over the river. It

revealed a moving object on shore in the bend, a quarter mile away, and glinted upon the polished metal of a rifle barrel. The revelation was kaleidoscopic, passing almost before Cal's eyes had caught and identified the impression.

It was enough, however. The ranger slipped silently into cover, and cast his painter around a cypress tree.

"They've made a night camp," he told himself. "Three sleeping, while one guards. Thanks to whoever it is that hangs out the moon, I'm still alive! Five minutes later—but why speculate? I'm here, and they're there. Question is, does that fact mean anything, or doesn't it?"

He knew the utter impossibility of sneaking up on that camp from the shore. Too much brush, and the exact location of the bit of high ground they occupied unknown. It was really as impossible to gain the camp from the river. The man on guard would shoot him the moment he nosed his bateau into the moonlight. That was certain.

"Yet they are there—and three of them no doubt asleep," the ranger argued. "Now, if I can't take four men, while three are dead to the world, what becomes of the chief's boast about one good man? Hell—"

A big log drifted along in the current just outside the cover Cal was in, and an idea came to him. A possible method of gathering in the whole party—but one entailing immeasurable risk. A hundred-to-one shot it was. But, Cal argued, hundred-to-one shots sometimes win.

He removed his boots and, standing up, stripped to the skin. Then he buckled his gun-belt about his neck, allowing his sixshooter, in its waterproof holster, to swing between his shoulders. To that he attached his hunting knife, and four pairs of handcuffs, then, crouching in the bateau, he glued his eyes to the river.

Logs floated along occasionally, but none were to his liking. After a bit a big cotton-wood drifted slowly into view, and Cal slipped overside into the water, making no more splash than a swimming fish would have done. The log came abreast of him and he let it pass, then swam silently until he over took it, and was covered by it from view of the man on shore. At the log's stern he clung with one hand, his face barely above water.

The current carried the floater slowly downriver, Calhoun keeping its bow pointed not too directly toward the spot where he had caught a flash of the guard. Presently the outlines of two dugouts showed indistinctly along shore, and he steered the log closer in.

A movement at the water's edge told him that the guard had seen the object in the water and was examining it. There was no challenge, however, and Cal rightly concluded that the log had been recognized for what it was—a harmless drifter. Treading water, he held it motionless while he eased it gently, inch by inch, now toward the nearest dugout, then he let it drift again.

Another movement on shore, this time accompanied by a low oath, as the guard, concerned for the safety of the bateau which the floater menaced, stepped into the shallow water and prepared to shove it off.

Cal, peering from behind the log's stern, saw him set his boot upon its bow and thrust outward. It eased off a bit, then, manipulated by the ranger, it perversely sloughed about and crept toward the dugout.

Again the guard raised a foot and set it upon the log—this time at the stern, for the bow was almost against the boat.

Cal released his hold, seized the man by the ankle in a powerful grasp, and jerked him down into the water—his attempted cry of alarm cut short by a sudden and complete immersion. The log drifted on, and the ranger, astride the guard, brought all the terrific pressure of his sinewy fingers to bear upon his windpipe. When his captive became limp beneath him, Cal took him in his arms and crept ashore.

When the prisoner finally gasped and opened his eyes, it was to find himself stripped to his underwear, his hands shackled, ankles bound with his own belt, and his captor dressed in the clothing he had worn.

Cal's left hand instantly closed about the prisoner's throat, while his right, armed with a long knife, menaced him.

"Make the slightest unnecessary noise and I'll drive this into your gullet!" he whispered grimly. "When I give you air enough to do so, I want you to answer my questions—truthfully, understand. If you make a mistake, unintentional or otherwise, you are going to die, and die quick! Get it?"

He released the pressure on the guard's windpipe, and the man gurgled and nodded.

"Where is your camp—how far ashore?" Cal demanded.

The answer was wheezed out with difficulty, but it came:

"About three hundred yards inland—straight up from here."

"Were you to be relieved?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"About half an hour from now."

"Who is to relieve you?"

" Bud."

"Bud's asleep, eh-along with the rest?"

"Of course."

"How was he to know when to relieve you?"

"I was to slip up and wake him."

"Sure of that? Remember, any mistake you make will spell the end for you. Sure about it?"

"How you reckon he'd know when to come?" demanded the prisoner. "Think we carry an alarm clock?"

Cal laughed softly. "Good enough," he replied. "Guess an alarm clock would be excess baggage on a trip like this. Where is Bud lying; in what position, with reference to the others?"

"Well, he's the nearest one—the others are beyond him."

"You're just to wake him quietly, tell him to come on, then turn in in his place? That the racket?"

"Yeah." The answer was delayed—came hesitantly.

Cal's knife pricked the tender skin at the base of the prone man's throat.

"Take that blade away!" came in a fierce growl.

"Listen," Cal told him, increasing the pressure until the needlelike point pricked the skin, "I'm going to gag you, roll you into the brush, where you'll be hidden from all but me. If I make a mistake, due to you, I'm going to break for you—and kill you. No matter what happens to me later, I'm going to see to it that you don't benefit. Get that?"

"Yeah," was the surly reply.

"Now-tell me the truth."

"Well, I'm to wake Bud, then come back here until he has a chance to heat some coffee—we've got a bit of fire farther back in the brush, hid by logs. I'm to watch here until he comes down. And now, damn you, take that knife off my gullet!"

Cal took the knife away, and with it cut off the tail of the shirt he wore. Then, before the prisoner realized what was taking place, he stuffed the cloth into his mouth.

"That'll keep you quiet, I reckon," Cal told him, as he lifted the guard and carried him twenty feet down the bank, depositing him where the river grass made an excellent screen. "I'm taking a chance—but you're taking a longer one than I am!"

He returned to the point where the dugouts lay, got into one and paddled across the stream, towing the other and his own bateau. When he returned, he came in his own boat, leaving the others.

"If anything starts that I can't handle," he reflected, "I may be able to get away—and leave them marooned."

He anchored in the shadows near where the prisoner lay, then crept inland toward the camp—almost as noiselessly as a watermoccasin would have crawled. Every few feet he paused, held his breath and listened. At the fourth or fifth pause, he caught the sound of some one snoring lightly—and knew the camp was at hand.

V



ITH his six-gun in hand he crept onward, and halted beside a blanketed form on the ground. A moment he hesitated, then reached out and

caught the sleeper by a shoulder.

"Bud!" he said gruffly, under his breath.
"Bud!"

The sleeper stirred. "Huh?" came drowsily from the blanket.

"Come on! It's your turn!" Cal whis-

"Hell!" The man called Bud yawned.
"All right, Becker. Soon's I git some coffee inside me. All quiet?"

"Sure! Nothin' stirrin'!" Cal answered.

"Hurry-I'm dead for sleep!"

He faded away toward the river—breathing heavily from the strain. Reaching the shore, he sought a place to hide, and found it behind a big gum which grew beside the path Bud would have to follow when he came down.

The relief was not long in coming. He reached the shadow of the tree—and did not pass out of it. He dropped without a groan, as Calhoun's clubbed gun crashed against his skull.

To bind and gag Bud required perhaps five minutes, and he was still unconscious when the ranger slipped back toward the camp—and the most dangerous part of the

job he had set for himself.

Inch by inch, pausing frequently to listen for the slightest sound which might warn him that his men were awake, he crept upon the camp, until he found himself beside a long figure, tightly rolled in a blanket. Calhoun was not squeamish—besides, his own life hung by a hair. He clubbed his gun.

Suddenly the sleeper stirred, opened his eyes; his jaw dropped in consternation, then snapped shut, and he made a wild

scramble to sit up.

Cal swung swiftly, putting power behind the blow, and the blanketed figure dropped back and lay still.

The noise of the scuffle, however, was

sufficient to wake the second man, who threw aside his blanket and called out:

"Rhodes! I say, Rhodes, what's going on?"

Then his glance fell upon Calhoun, who crouched ready to leap. His hand flashed down and came up with a gun, as he got to his knees.

Cal's weapon spurted fire, there was an oath of agony from the man on the blanket, and the next instant his shattered right wrist was bound to his left with steel.

The man called Rhodes was stirring, and Cal took the precaution of rendering him harmless with the remaining pair of cuffs. Then he turned to the man he had shot.

"Well, Red," he remarked quietly, "I ought to let you bleed to death, but since the Government prefers to have you die by the rope, I'll patch you up temporarily. Hold out your hands!"

In late afternoon of the day after the storm, Sheriff Lundsford and his bedraggled, disgruntled posse returned to Hell Hole. They were a wornout crew. Cal was still absent, but they made themselves at home in his cabin; fed themselves and, night coming on, occupied the bunks with which the ranger's quarters was plentifully equipped. It was Lundsford's intention to use Hell Hole as a base, and work out of that place until all the surrounding territory had been covered.

"Cal will come moseying in about tomorrow," he told his men. "And maybe he'll have some information of value. A good man, Cal—but awfully stuck on himself, just as Wheeler is. Still, he does have good luck getting his man when he starts out for him; no doubt about that. These grandstanders generally do have luck—else they'd soon cease to be in position to grandstand!"

Having thus delivered himself, Lundsford turned in. Shortly after daylight he awoke, stretched himself, wincing at the soreness in his limbs, and looked out the window at the head of the bunk. He sat up suddenly—then, a minute later, though only partly dressed, was streaking it for the landing.

Three craft—two dugouts and a bateau,

were there ahead of him. In the bow of the first dugout to land sat a short, redheaded man, his right arm in a sling; manning the stern paddle was a tall, spare man, his head enveloped in a bloody bandage. The second canoe held two men, one of whom had seemingly rammed his head into something solid, for he, too, displayed a blood-stained bandage.

In the bateau, watchful as a hawk, sat Calhoun.

Lundsford's eyes dropped to the feet of the prisoners, and noted that each man was secured by a pair of handcuffs about his ankles.

"Make yourself useful, Lundsford," Cal called out, tossing a bunch of keys ashore. "They've been on a forced march, and are too tired to run!"

Members of the posse now came upon the scene. Cal made no answer to their inquiries until the last prisoner was ashore and stretching his legs leisurely, then he spoke:

"I ran onto them in a night camp," he stated, "and brought 'em in. That's all."

The crowd fell silent. Then Lunsford spoke:

"I know you done just that, Cal," he said dazedly, "because they're here! And now you've fetched 'em this far, I'll just

relieve you of them and take 'em along with me."

Cal eyed the sheriff for a long moment. "Ever observe the conduct of buzzards, Lundsford?" he asked. "They hang around until some other bird makes a kill, then try to hog it. Some birds, though, won't stand for it. I'm that kind of bird."

He turned to his prisoners.

"Get over to my cabin, men," he ordered.

In silence they obeyed, leaving Lundsford more disgruntled than ever, wondering just what the ranger had meant by his reference to buzzards, and whether or not it called for a reply.

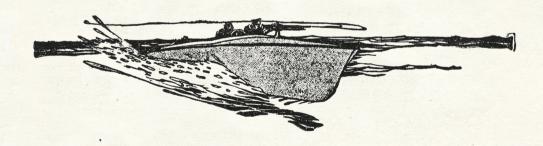
Inside, Cal replaced the handcuffs on the prisoners, then made his report to Wheeler.

"Calhoun sending. Found the train bandits in a night camp on Little Bear, a day's journey from the Mississippi. Brought them to Hell Hole this morning. Had to bung three of them up, and they should have medical attention soon. The loot is in my possession. Am holding them here, pending your arrival."

He signed off, then cocked an ear for the chief's reply. After a moment it came —a laconic:

"O. K."

"Beneficial Fires," by Edward Parrish Ware, in an early issue





FINGER-PRINT DEPARTMENT

Edited by M. E. Toevs

POE IDENTIFIED MARIE ROGET WITHOUT HER FINGER-PRINTS, BUT HERE'S WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF HE HAD HAD THEM

Had M. Beauvais, in his search for the body of Marie, discovered a corpse corresponding in general size and appearance to the missing girl, he would have been warranted . . . in forming an opinion that his search had been successful. If, in addition to the point of general size and contour, he had found upon the arm a peculiar hairy appearance, which he had observed upon the living Marie, his opinion might have been justly strengthened . . .

If, the feet of Marie being small, those of the corpse were also small, the increase of probability that the body was that of Marie would not be an increase in ratio merely arithmetical, but in one highly geometrical, or accumulative. Add to all this, shoes she had been known to wear upon the day of her disappearance, and . . . you so far augment the probability as to verge upon the certain.

What of itself would be no evidence of identity, becomes through its corroborative position proof most sure. Give us, then, flowers in the hat corresponding to those worn by the missing girl, and we seek for nothing further. If only One flower, we seek for nothing further—what, then, if two, or three, or more? Each successive one is multiple evidence—proof not Added to proof, but Multiplied by hundreds of thousands

Edgar Allan Poe: "The Mystery of Marie Roget."



the identity of a person can be established beyond all question by comparison of a sufficient number of bodily characteristics and the application of ordinary

reason, in what way may the same principle be applied to, and the same result achieved by, finger-prints? Probably it will be well here to scrutinize, more carefully than we have until now had occasion to, a finger-print; to see what it consists of and how much detail it has.

We know that prints are of different "patterns." There is the Loop, the Whorl, and the Arch. The Loop may slant to the left or to the right; its ridge count will vary. Whorls will show entirely different formations in various prints and will trace differently, some in and some out.

But, while these differences account for many combinations when distributed over complete sets of ten fingers, enabling the utilization of a wonderful system of classification, the combinations, after all, are the result of the number and distribution of the various patterns and not the make-up of any individual one.

It would be asinine to say that two prints of the right middle finger are necessarily of the *same* finger because both are loops. Let them both be loops with the slant to the right and show the same ridge count, it would still be the height of folly to say they are identical.

At a glance two such prints do look very much alike. Even a close examination, with the naked eye, might fail to show distinct points of difference unless they are extraordinarily apparent.

But when the magnifying glass is used, then we see the print as it really is, at once dissimilarity is noted, even by the eye unused to such a scrutiny. Nor need the power of magnification be great. That afforded by the ordinary pocket folding reading glass, two or three times normal, is sufficient to enable a thorough comparison of impressions with no strain on the eye.

Reproduced here is a pattern actually taken from the left index finger of a former convict enlarged approximately seven times or, more technically, seven diameters.



It is an ulnar loop and has a ridge count of fourteen. It will be noted that a ridge—black line—seldom enters the pattern area, or field of vision, as it were, and describes its course uninterruptedly till it makes its exit.

On the contrary, before tracing almost any single ridge line far, it will be found to do any one of a number of things. It may go so far and abruptly terminate. It may form a fork by merging with the line next to it or, depending on the direction traced, may do the opposite and, forming a fork by splitting, thereafter proceed as two separate lines.

A line may be found that both begins and ends abruptly within the scope of the pattern area. Such a line may be so short as to hardly deserve the term "line," rather be more in the nature of a dot. Technically, such a characteristic is called an "island." Again a line may "break," that is,

come to an end, but, unlike a true end, recommence following a short interval and continue on.

Each such occurrence is termed a characteristic point or detail or simply a "characteristic." And any clear reproduction of the ridge formation of a finger will be found to have from fifty to a hundred easily distinguishable characteristics, if it is sufficiently enlarged by a magnifying glass or by photography.

In the print here shown twenty-eight characteristics are indicated. Numbers nineteen and nine are the delta and core, respectively. These are the two points between which the familiar "count" is found. Note the straight line drawn through them; the number of ridges crossed by this line between these two points and exclusive of them gives the count—in this case fourteen.

No. I shows a short ridge, both ends being indicated. Not only is this a characteristic detail of this particular impression, in that it is found in the pattern, but it is located at a certain place, namely, exactly its own length below the delta-core line and between lines 7 and 8, counting from the delta.

No. 17 is an island, merely a dot between lines 6 and 7. It seems to be there accidentally, or rather temporarily. Actually it would have shown exactly the same had an impression of the finger been taken immediately after the subject's birth.

Nos. 4, 12, 14, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, and 28 show abrupt line endings. Nos. 2, 3, 10, 11, and 13 show forks, "bifurcations," opening in the direction we are tracing if we start up on the left of the print and come around and down on the right. In a similar trace bifurcations opening in the direction from which we are tracing are indicated by Nos. 5 and 8.

Note in particular No. 6; a line which opens and closes, two forks close together. This is called an "eye." No. 7 is another, nearly twice as long.

While only twenty-eight characteristics are marked in this print, a close examination will disclose more. And our print is not a complete one, either, but is cut off on both sides and at the top with a view to neatness of presentation.

Further, it should be borne in mind that this pattern, a loop, comprises approximately sixty per cent of all patterns, and our test is, therefore, more severe than if we were using either a whorl, arch or tent.

Now, each one of the twenty-eight details marked is an individual character and it is doubtful if a single one of the twenty-eight could be duplicated in another print. Because it is not enough that a fork be found in two separate prints anywhere; the duplication of a characteristic in one print must require the same characteristic identically located in the other.

Certainly such a duplication could not be found nor expected in a hundred prints selected at random. Study and analysis of hundreds of thousands of impressions by the foremost members of the profession over a period of a hundred years has shown that such an expectation would be extremely unreasonable.

Should a single such detail in one impression be found to correspond to one in another the immediate suggestion is that they are of the same finger. A second characteristic also coinciding in the two prints greatly strengthens the supposition that they are of the same finger.

Three such points of agreement leave no doubt as to the prints being identical, and any one doubting this in the slightest has but to try to find two finger impressions of the same pattern and ridge count with the exact coöccurrence of but a *single* characteristic point.

Of course, any one having an entire lack of knowledge of the subject, could not be expected offhand to place as much significance in the fact that lines eleven and twelve merge and form a fork exactly four ridges to the left of a double break in line six as he would in the fact that the two upper front teeth of a man were of gold.

Yet the former is of infinitely greater value as a mark of identification than the latter. In the preceding article the details on which we based our identification of the wanted man were: Color, sex, age, height, weight, eyes and hair, teeth, missing finger, scar and tattoo, eleven in number.

We were content with that number; could well be. Yet the simplest finger-print of

the most common type contains from three to eight times as many distinct details, each of which is immeasurably harder to duplicate than any of the more noticeable characteristics of the person.

And there is the additional point that, unlike such a detail as a gold tooth or a tattoo mark, either of which may be intentionally duplicated or even removed at will, no single detail of a finger-print can be altered one iota, except by whole or partial destruction of the finger surface.

But in order that we may not at once jump into figures beyond our understanding, let us assume that a given characteristic will be found duplicated once in ten prints. Thus, in a manner similar to that by which we calculated the chances of duplication in identifying our man by anatomical markings, we are, in the absence of known data, placing our estimate well on the safe side. On that assumption, let us see what the possibility of duplicating an entire print would be.

First, our pattern is a left-slant loop. If we did not know whether it was made by a right or left hand finger, we wouldn't, of course, be able to classify it as either radial or ulnar. But that makes no difference.

Approximately sixty per cent of all patterns are loops and half of them, or about thirty per cent of all, are loops with the slant to the left whether they be left-hand ulnars or right-hand radials. So that our print, to be duplicated according to pattern, has one chance in three, represented by the fraction 1/3.

Second, a loop pattern has a core-delta count of from one to twenty-five, frequently more. They are fairly equally divided in this respect; that is, a goodly collection of loop patterns would be found to consist of about an equal number of 1-count, 2-count, 3-count loops, et cetera, up to 25-count.

As the chance of duplicating our print as to ridge count would be, then, one in twenty-five prints, to duplicate it both as to pattern and ridge count, the chance would be 1/3x1/25 or 1/75. In other words, on the basis of what has actually been demonstrated time and time again, we can expect to, and over a number of tests will, find

one left-slant loop pattern of 14-ridge count in approximately seventy-five single finger impressions picked at random.

So far we have been reasonable. Now we become unreasonable in using the ratio of one-in-ten as the probable recurrence of characteristics in prints. Having one chance of duplicating characteristic number one in ten random prints, duplicating it in a pattern which *in itself* is one of seventy-five gives us I/IOXI/75 or I/750.

A second characteristic added is seen to reduce the chance of duplication to 1/7500 or one chance in seven thousand five hundred prints. And it would be progressively more difficult to find a pattern with a third point coinciding, a fourth, and so on, as each added detail makes the possibility of duplication less probable in direct geometrical series.

Carrying our calculation to the extent of duplicating the entire twenty-eight points indicated in our illustration, and using the "one chance in ten-" ratio, we find that by the doctrine of chances, we would have to have a number of prints represented by the figures 75, followed by twenty-eight ciphers, a number which is utterly beyond the power of the human mind to conceive, in order to have one reasonable chance for duplication.

If our print had but eleven characteristics defined with sufficient clarity as to afford a comparison instead of twenty-eight as we have marked here—and no competent identification man would think of going into court with an impression prepared to show less than this number—the chance of duplicating the pattern to that extent alone would be but one in seven trillion five hundred billion, which is 3,750 times the estimated population of the earth and 375 times the number of human fingers in existence.

Suppose we had assumed that any given characteristic would, on the average, duplicate itself once in each five instead of ten prints picked at random. Yet, allowing for ten fingers to each of the estimated two billion persons on the earth, simple mathematics shows that but twelve distinct characteristics would have to be shown in our left-slant-fourteen-count loop to give one

reasonable chance of duplication in the prints of every finger in the world.

What, then, would be the chance of duplicating a print by basing our computation on a more reasonable percentage of occurrence, one in a hundred? Our print as to pattern and ridge count is one in seventy-five; one characteristic reduces our chance to one in 7,500; a second to one in 750,000; a third to one in seventy-five million; and a fourth detail added brings us to a point of safety in that seven billion five hundred million individual finger-prints would furnish but one reasonable chance of duplication.

As has been said, and as can plainly be seen from the accompanying illustration, by no means is it necessary to base a comparison of impressions on such a small number of characteristics.

For the assurance of himself, the experienced identification man will look no further. But when the decision of others is to be based on, or influenced by, his testimony, he should indicate and explain everything. However, from five to eight distinct points of agreement in two prints should be sufficient to convince any one that they are identical and could have been made by but one finger, regardless of the elements of distance or time involved.

It is a psychological fact that impressions are conveyed with greater force to the minds of some people by means of the eye than by the auditory organs. That is, the sense of sight causes impressions to be registered much more clearly than does the sense of hearing.

Others, entirely subconsciously of course, and probably in most cases unrealized, are so constructed mentally that the sense of hearing is distinctly favored.

For this reason the psychological effect on the jury in a criminal case is never lost sight of by opposing counsel during the progress of the trial. Reënactment of a scene in the matter at issue is, therefore, resorted to when possible. Supplementing verbal testimony, the jurors are often conducted to the actual scene of the crime, that they may see what is being talked about.

Photographs, letters, maps and charts are used, all with the purpose of adding to, or

detracting from the force of testimony given by word of mouth.

Where the result of a trial depends on the ability of either side to establish identity by finger-prints, this human trait seldom is, and never should be, overlooked.

Verbal testimony of the identification expert—if he is an expert, as only too few of them professing to be actually are—will convince almost any intelligent juror that a finger-print is an infallible identification mark.

Then, in order that the jury may see that he knows what he has been talking about, a demonstration is staged.

Counsel opens up with a hypothetical question something like this:

"Assuming that the finger-prints of each of the members of this jury, for instance, were available for comparison, and that one of them, unknown to you, should grasp in an ordinary manner a common drinking glass, do you mean that by finger-prints alone you could designate that gentleman?"

" I do."

"Within what length of time?"

"Within two to three minutes."

"With what degree of accuracy?"

"With absolute accuracy."

The court is requested to permit the demonstration and usually will do so. Each juror is printed in the regular manner on a blank finger-print card by an identification man other than the witness. Each also writes his name or, if he prefers, makes a secret identification mark of some kind on his card. The twelve cards are placed on the witness table.

During this procedure the witness is absent from the court room.

Next, a plain tumbler, thoroughly wiped to efface all traces of previous handling, is placed on a table in the jury room. The twelve men file out, close the door, and select one of their number to make the test. In accordance with the testimony he has heard, this gentleman lifts the glass in a normal way, neither by tightly squeezing it nor by holding it loosely by the finger tips. He sets it down and releases his grasp without pulling or smudging his prints.

The jury again seated in the jury box, the witness is recalled, develops the prints on the glass with black powder, affords contrast for facility of comparison by placing a white handkerchief or sheet of paper inside, examines the prints with a pocket magnifier, compares their pattern formation and characteristic detail with those of each of the twelve cards in turn and selects the proper one.

This card he hands without remark to the attorney, who instigated the demonstration, then takes his seat. The attorney asks if these are the prints of the man who handled the glass and is told: "They are."

The attorney hands the card to the judge. The latter asks that the juror who handled the glass in the jury room stand. When that gentleman does so, he is in turn given the card, asked to examine it and to advise the court whether or not it bears his name or secret identification mark. His reply in the affirmative concludes the demonstration.

We have been asked what the result would be if the juror said the card was not his. In this event the case would in all probability be lost as it should be. Because, no credence should be paid the testimony of any person representing himself as an identification expert who cannot stand proof against such a simple test as this.

Indeed, in any legal procedure involving disputed identity and finger-print evidence, this test or one similar might very well be given the prospective "expert witness" along with, and as a part of, the preliminary questioning tending to qualify him as such.





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