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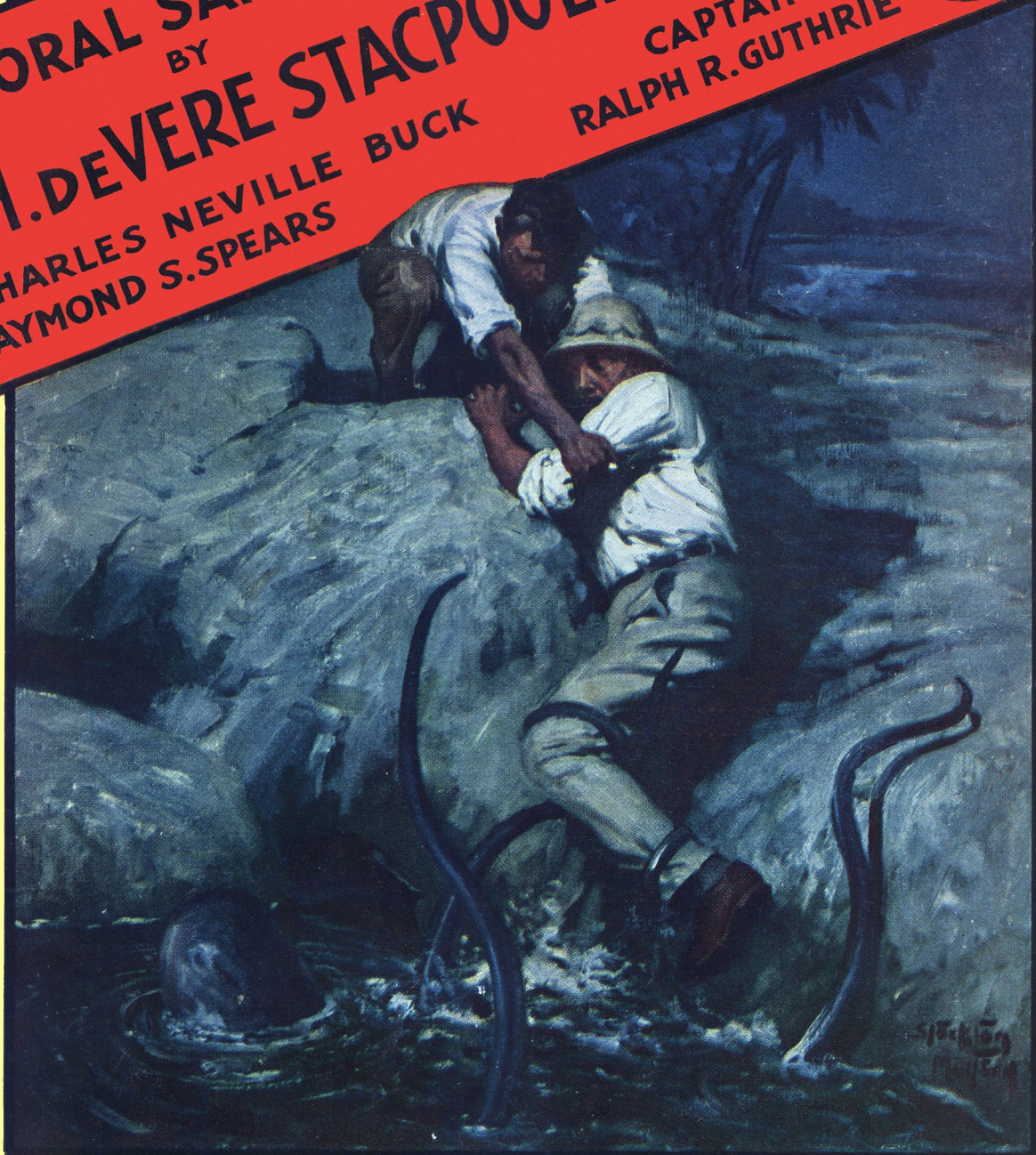


CORAL SANDS  
BY

H. DEVERE STACPOOLE

CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK  
RAYMOND S. SPEARS

CAPTAIN  
RALPH R. GUTHRIE





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Volume LXXXVII

Number 1

# WEEKLY *The Popular* Stories

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# Coral Sands

By  
*H. de Vere  
Stacpoole*



*Author of "Cabin No. 5,"*

Mr. Stacpoole proves in this splendid tale that a story of the South Seas, in order penetrates here to the heart of a tiny community hidden away in an obscure coral

## CHAPTER I.

### A SOUTH SEA PARASITE.

FROM where Yakoff was standing in the blaze of the sun the beach ran away like a white road—miles and miles and miles away, to be lost in the blue and haze of distance. To the left of the beach lay the calm waters of the lagoon, to the right the rough coral beaten by the outer sea.

Nowhere in the world except in the low islands could you find a beach like that—just a ring of coral—sand and rock inclosing a lake so big that in the great storms from the southwest it could build six-foot waves.

If Yakoff had started to follow the road before him, leaving the houses of the native village at whose entrance he

stood, he would have passed the long line of coconut trees immediately to the west, the extraordinary little gardens where vegetables were grown, the fowl pens belonging to old Lipi, the net-maker, and the deep-cut water tanks made to receive the rains.

He would have passed canoe shelters and dozens of beached canoes, some old and broken and waiting to be destroyed or mended, some new and ready to take the sea, for here was the navy yard of Arafura and the docking place of the pearling fleet.

He would have passed the second coconut grove and then, leaving men and trees behind him, he would have gone on with the sea to the right, with the lagoon to the left through a world where there was nothing but sun blaze and





*"The Tomb of the Elephants," Etc.*

to be interesting, does not have to concern people stranded upon a desert island. He island, and builds, bit by bit, a beautiful and dramatic novel of that life.

blueness, the fume and thunder of the breakers and the crying of the gulls.

He would have gone on and on through the same changeless, singing, blinding vacancy, the gulls crying to him to get away and the waves calling to him, "There is nothing here," and noon would have turned to afternoon and afternoon to night, and under Canopus and the Cross he would have gone on and on to the break of day and his journey far from finished. For from the break, the reef of Araffura Lagoon is forty miles round.

But Yakoff was fat and the most unlikely person in the world to start on a journey without an object. Fat and fifty years of age and with a face that did not inspire confidence even when half hidden by his sun helmet.

Yet it was a face with a smile that rarely came off, even when the mind of Yakoff was moving in the direction of wrath or revolving in the orbits of cunning.

A man to deal with cautiously in business, or, better, not at all. Born at Archangel, educated by an uncle in a large way of trade, Yakoff Abrahamovitch, always known as Yakoff, went to the East as his uncle's correspondent in Shanghai. Here he did a deal for himself that damaged his uncle, and the result was separation. He prospered for a while in Shanghai and then somehow he had to leave. This was the beginning of a long career which carried him in zigzags from Borneo to New York and New York to Samarkand, and during which he had met and dealt with



many men and picked up an American accent.

During the last few years he had taken to the Pacific, and among other things had made a specialty of pearls.

He was one of the buyers who come from all quarters of the world when the Paumotan pearling season begins.

The Paumotas belong to the French, and French law gives the right of pearling to the natives and to no one else. You must have been born at Araffura if you want to fish there and take the pearls—you may be a pure Kanaka if there is such a thing left to-day, or a half-caste or quarter-caste or a pure white; it doesn't matter; right of birth alone gives you the right to take shell and pearls.

But French law does not stop white men like Yakoff or Chinese like Ah Sin from coming to the pearling ground and robbing the fishers—that is to say, trading with them.

Yakoff, who had landed a month ago, before the opening of the season, had brought ashore boxes and boxes of "trade," that is to say, goods to swap for pearls or shell—and such trade! it would have made an old Pacific trader's eyes open could he have seen the contents of Yakoff's boxes. Cigarettes, and the very best cigarettes at that, striped silk pajamas, socks and what not, white flannels, tennis shoes, shirts, photographic apparatus, silver-plated safety razors, eau de Cologne.

And the contents of the old Pacific schooners' trade room in the old days, what were they? Tin looking-glasses, bolts of gaudily printed cotton, dud Barlow knives and clay tobacco pipes, not to mention twist.

All the same, in a compartment of one of Yakoff's boxes there were some articles akin to these—mouth organs, a five-dollar phonograph, chewing gum and so forth, for Yakoff had learned from experience that the native mind refuses sometimes the most expensive

lure and jumps to the cheapest, though it is never the cheapest for the native.

In this way, for a concertina with asthma but silvered and varnished to shine with the best, he had got a four-hundred-pound golden pearl from Tipu, the son of Lipi. Tipu had refused a twenty-dollar kodak, also a suit of flannels with a dollar watch thrown in, but the concertina got him.

Yakoff, standing now by the last of the native houses that lined the beach, saw Tipu going toward a beached canoe that lay near by. He pushed off and then, coming along also to take to his canoe, Yakoff saw Fernand Diaz.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE DEADLY INSULT.

THIS was the strangest person in that home of strange people, Araffura Lagoon. Unclothed but for a loin cloth, straight as an arrow, beautiful as a god and young as the Indian Bacchus, Fernand Diaz showed not a trace of the Kanaka. The ruin of the Kanaka face is the spread nose. Fernand's nose was high-bridged, thin-nostriled, sensitive. He looked at you straight and right to the back of your skull and his eyes when roving the lagoon had in them a look of distance and daring born of the great sea spaces and battles with the Paumotan winds.

He was unclothed now for the fishing, but in his house away back there you would have found the clothes he had just put off.

Yakoff was his tailor and outfitter, and never did a tailor get such money as Yakoff, for Fernand paid with pearls and shell.

"Six silk shirts, a hundred and twenty dollars; two white-drill suits, two hundred dollars; one hundred dollars for them silk socks, thrown in at the price. Them two white pearls will make me dollars out of pocket. Throw in that baroque to make things even."



And the Arafura dandy would throw in the baroque. He never haggled with Yakoff. There were other things, eau de Cologne, white shoes, cigarettes; he paid for all and never went in debt, whereas his diving partner Topi was always up to the eyes, for Topi drank in the off season and Topi took opium when he could get it and was always after the girls—a Polynesian with a Melanesian taint, wild as a kittiwake, yet at work honest and the best partner man could have.

Fernand never looked at a girl.

His Spanish ancestry—his father had been wrecked here twenty-two years ago—was strong in him. Maybe it was just coldness born of the sea and winds, but he never looked at a girl.

It wasn't religion. Seguer, the French missionary who had taught him French and English so that he could talk either language fluently, could not teach him religion.

"I can understand here," said Fernand, putting his hand to his brow, "but not here," putting his hand to his heart. "I have been too deep in the sea, driven too often by the winds, seen too many stars. Death has held me too often in the hollow of his hand. I cannot think as you think, or feel as you feel."

Yet he had helped to build the tiny coral church and had given a twenty-grain pearl to the mission of St. Francis, and he loved Seguer and had once saved him from drowning at the risk of his own life.

"The best Christian in the islands, though an absolute pagan," had said Seguer.

Fernand stopped now to speak to Yakoff.

"Yakoff," said Fernand, speaking in English, "you have sold my partner Topi opium again, and at the beginning of the season."

"I?" said Yakoff. "Never."

"You *have* sold him the opium. I found the parcel; he confessed to me,

and I flung it to the lagoon. There I will fling you also should you sell him it again."

"You will have your jest," said Yakoff, foolishly unable to stand the gaze of the other.

"Yakoff, a man who carries opium to the islands carries death; he is a brother of the tiger shark and should die. It is the same with the man who brings samshu, like the Chinaman, Ah Sin. You are a bad man, Yakoff, and no more goods will I take from you. No, never. Topi is in your debt. How much does he owe you?"

"But a few dollars, and that for goods supplied."

"He owes you a thousand dollars, less fifty, and five hundred of those for the opium which I have flung away."

Now Yakoff was in with the French commissioner of the island, he felt safe from personal violence. He knew men and he knew that he had lost Fernand as a customer, and his greasy soul hated the clean, bright spirit it was facing.

The face under the sun hat changed and he broke out, his voice suddenly taking the American tang:

"Aw, stand away from me—don't crowd *me*. You and your partner and be hanged to you both. Go on, take yourself off to your canoe, you damned Kanaka."

Before this deadly insult Fernand drew slightly back. He would have killed Yakoff had he let himself loose. He just stood and looked, and Yakoff before that gaze lost his tongue and his assurance, shuffled his feet and went off.

### CHAPTER III.

#### AN UNKNOWN SCHOONER

THE boy turned to the lagoon side where his partner Topi was waiting by their beached canoe. It was an outrigger. Far too narrow to sit the water, it was stabilized by a long skate-shaped piece of wood connected to the body



of the canoe by a bridge of rattan. This bridge served also as a deck on which to stand. A mast-and-mat sail completed the outfit, and when they had pushed off Topi ran up the sail and the east wind blowing from the lagoon mouth took them like a feather.

The push-off, the outflung sail and the drive toward the west were beautiful to watch. It was like a water bird taking to the water, or a dragon fly to the air. Heading now for the pearling grounds, steering paddle in hand, Fernand kept the canoe on her course, mechanically, without thought, all his mind centered on one red spot round the insult of Yakoff.

"You damned Kanaka."

It was the grain of truth that hit. His mother had been half Kanaka. He, Fernand, was all white in soul only for just that.

And he couldn't kill Yakoff.

Deep in his heart the craving to kill Yakoff was like the desire of the drunkard for drink, but he could not kill him. He was too mean, too contemptible, and the insult would remain unkilld—yet some day, some way, he would satisfy his hatred of the trader. Yes, some day.

He flung the steering paddle down. Topi was brailing up the sail; they had reached the pearling ground and the pearling fleet lay all around and beyond.

All across the blue, wind-dusked water it lay anchored, canoe on canoe, with the brown divers dripping in the sun or dropping like stones to the depths.

Topi let the anchor fall, glanced over and then, taking the net bag, fastened it round him. Then he slipped into the water like a seal and sank.

Fernand, looking over, watched his diving mate wandering about like a brown shadow amid the long coach-whip oyster fucus, picking the oysters here and there and filling the bag, unhurried as a man ashore picking mushrooms.

Colored fish cut across the vision and a great globed jellyfish went rolling by a fathom deep like a crystal ball, followed by a young whip ray no bigger than a saucer and a shoal of tiny silver fry. Then Topi rose and, with hand on gunnel, gave over the bag to be emptied. He had been down nearly three minutes.

Now the law of Araffura Lagoon—as, indeed, of all the Paumotan lagoons—is that no oysters may be rotted out on the beaches; all shells must be opened in the canoes and the meat, having been searched for pearls, flung overboard.

Fernand did the opening and searching to-day, stacking the empty shells, big as soup plates, in the bottom of the canoe. Not a pearl, nothing but a few seeds. He worked with an appearance of absolute indifference. He was used to the business, this business that seems to the uninitiated so romantic, so filled with the excitement of the treasure hunt, yet which in reality and with the novelty gone is monotonous as bottle washing.

For you may open a thousand oysters without finding a pearl, and a thousand more may only give you a bouton, yet in the very first oyster of the day's catch you may feel something round and hard in the flesh of the mantle, and gently working may squeeze to light a beautiful milky bubble, a perfect round worth maybe a thousand dollars or maybe five.

There was nothing to-day—only the shell worth a few dollars and carefully cleaned and stacked.

But there were cigarettes to be smoked as they were drying off in the almost setting sun, while the canoe strained gently to its rope against the swell of the incoming tide.

Topi, who was forward and about to haul in the anchor, suddenly paused in that business and called out to Fernand who turned, shaded his eyes and looked away toward the reef break.

Between the piers of coral the sheet-



ing azure of the outer sea was rumpling toward the lagoon waters and lifting against the coral piers in foam.

The tide was coming in strong now, preceded by a bore like a ruler running under silk, and with the tide was coming a ship.

A topsail schooner, wind and tide with her, white hull, white sails, hard against the blue as though cut from Pentelic marble.

A ship, but unlike any other ship they had ever seen. This was no frowzy trader, no mail brigantine, no cockroach trap laden with pearl buyers from Papeete, this white ghost from the sea.

Fernand, gazing, fell into a rapture of mind; all his sea instincts stood abashed and worshipping before this vision of whiteness and grace undreamed of and suddenly revealed. It was as though he were gazing at a spirit, a spirit that was nothing more than the million-dollar, two-hundred-ton auxiliary schooner yacht *California*, the property of Cyrus Hardanger of San Francisco.

They watched the sails shrivel off her and the white hull turning broadside toward them as she swung toward the northern beach. They heard the rumble of the anchor chain.

Then Topi hauled in the killick and they broke out the sail and steered to inspect the stranger.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### JUNE.

THIS boat, the *California*, whose anchor had just fallen in fourteen fathoms by the north beach of Arafura was the last word in sea-going yachts. Built by Simons of Benicia and engined by Dowsett, she could stand a hurricane and make fun of a dead calm. She had a thousand miles of petrol in her and had only used two hundred since leaving the Golden Gate, for Cyrus Hardanger, who had made ten million

dollars five years ago at a stroke, as you may say, in one vast deal, was a sailor at heart and by origin.

He had worked before the mast as a young man, he had got a mate's certificate and then a master's, all of which implied brains, and he had educated himself by book reading. One thing only had pulled him back at times, the tendency to be violent if he took drink. But he had overcome that.

He had been captain of a Seattle boat when the great phosphate deal which made his fortune came along, and he had celebrated his acquisition of wealth by marrying a widow, Mrs. Mallory of Oakland, an amazingly good-looking woman with an amazingly pretty daughter of fourteen years. June was the name of this child "taken over" by Hardanger with his wife and the name suited her.

She was the apple of his eye, and when Mrs. Hardanger died two years after marriage, it was June who saved him from flying to drink or taking a dive into Frisco harbor.

Hardanger, six foot two and with a fighting jaw, looked like a strong man. June, slight, graceful and without a trace of the masculine in her composition, was stronger. This girl with gray eyes and phosphor-bronze hair descended from the Mallorys who, in the old days of the covered wagon, had literally fought their way across the plains and the Rockies. She had in her something of the spirit of the pioneers, something of the daring and dash of the eagle.

When Hardanger, wanting a holiday in a hurry, had bought the *California* off the slips at Simons' and literally shoved her to sea with the fitters and riggers clinging to her till the last moment, June had been hand and fist with the dockyard mateys. This feminine creature had little use for women; she preferred the stancher companionship of men. Railway men, boatmen, the



ferryman of Frisco harbor, where she owned and ran a little power boat of her own—they all knew Cy Hardanger's daughter. She was a character in her way but without a trace of pose.

On board the *California* she found herself for the first time under the magic of sticks and sails. She was one of the crew and discovered in herself the properties of a faultless steersman. The steersman is born, not made. To hold the *California* on her course without a tremble of the canvas was a business without any effort on her part.

It had been her privilege to bring the schooner in through the break, handing over the wheel to Sellers, the bos'n, only when the auxiliary was taking charge.

She came forward to the bow when the fellows were getting ready to lower the anchor and stood looking for the first time in her life at the wonders of an atoll island.

The wind that had brought them through the break had fallen to a gentle breathing that made cat's-paws on the mirror of the lagoon; across the still water in the sunset light lay the pearling fleet, some still anchored, some beating up against the dying wind to inspect the newcomer.

The reef ran away into the golden west and the voice of the outer sea beating on it came loud from the near stretches, low from the far, while great flights of birds that had pursued the pearling fleet all day showed like a strew of rosy-and-golden spangles blown on the evening wind.

Now and again their voices came, challenging, and were answered by the voices of the reef birds. Nothing more. Nothing but the sense of vast sea spaces and a silence scarcely broken by the murmur of the reef.

Now as the anchor fell and the *California*, swinging to her moorings, turned her nose to the reef against the tide, the girl left the bow and came aft to the landing stage.

Several canoes had put off from the shore and were paddling about, holding off and on, the fellows in them holding up drinking nuts for sale and ornaments made of shell, whip-ray walking sticks, coral lumps and conches, all the dust traps in fact that the low islands vie with the high islands in producing. But they couldn't trade till Porges, the French superintendent of the fisheries, had come on board to give a clean bill of health.

June, standing by her father, looked over the side, watching the canoe men. Then, when the stage was lowered and Porges had come aboard and gone down to the cabin, she continued watching, wondering at this new life which she had never seen before.

In one of the canoes that had put off from the beach she saw a stout white man. It was Yakoff, who had been rowed off to inspect the newcomer.

Yakoff looked at the girl and took in the yacht. He saw at once that there was no business for him to do there, nothing to buy, nothing to sell, as yet. He gave orders to the paddle men of his canoe to take him right round the *California* and then back to shore. In his tour of inspection he noted everything—the large ports, some with silk curtains drawn against the last rays of the sun; the steam pinnace swung at the davits; the crew still busy on deck and aloft, and a large French cook in white and wearing a white paper cap, who had come up for a moment's breath of air.

Dollars, dollars, dollars, millions of dollars—that is what the yacht said to Yakoff as he rowed round it, and the soul of Yakoff revolted.

All his life he had been after the dollars, all his life he had dreamed of wealth like this, and he had never succeeded. He had made out, that was all.

Here he was, fifty years of age and more, in this rotten place, selling shirts and concertinas to Kanakas, making a bit, it is true, but less than many a small



tradesman makes in Frisco or New Orleans—and here was this man rolling in the stuff. Inherited, most likely, won without a turn of the wrist.

Yakoff, as he stepped onto the beach, felt bitter; he could have wrecked the *California* and drowned the unknown man who owned her. Fortunately, he had not the powers of Prospero, but he had a thirst which took him off a way down the beach to Carlon's shack, where the best beer from Papeete could be had at a dollar a bottle.

Meanwhile the girl, leaning on the rail above the boat stake, looked at the canoes as they came and went.

Some of the pearling fleet had turned toward the *California* and she saw Taori, the son of Lipi, and his partner, Tapu, the laziest pair of scamps in Arafura, who had been only too glad to break away from the pearling ground on any pretense.

They had spent the day mostly smoking cigarettes, playing knucklebones, diving only when the spirit moved them, but like most idlers they were pleasant people, and Taori, having sighted June, waved his paddle as to an old acquaintance, and smiled. June did ditto, waving her hand, and the canoe passed on.

Taori and Tapu might be idlers, but they were gentlefolk and they would not hang about staring at the girl.

Then came along another canoe.

It was Fernand's.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE WORLD OF DREAMS.

THE sail was brailed up and Topi was paddling while Fernand stood, one foot on the bridge, one hand on the mast, his eyes fixed on the *California*.

Then, as he came close, his eyes rested on the girl.

June drew slightly back. The fact that he was not a native and the sudden statuesque picture of him there in the

last rays of the sun came together to her as a surprise. But June was not the person to be long surprised or to refrain from questions, even had the great god Pan risen from the sea to greet the *California*.

She watched the canoe come closer and then she went right down the steps and stood on the grating of the landing stage.

The canoe came boldly alongside, Fernand raising his hand to the girl in salutation. Then, with a touch of the paddle on the gratings of the stage, he kept it in position.

"That is an outrigger," said June.

She had seen an outrigger in a drawing, but never in reality till she saw the pearling fleet, for the *California* in coming down had touched at no islands, her course being from San Francisco to Lima and from Lima west by south to Arafura.

"Yes," said Fernand, answering in English. "She is outrigger. She belongs to me and my partner here; we are pearlers." He touched with his naked foot the heap of shell—and June, standing on the landing grating, her eyes on the heaving canoe, Fernand, the heap of shell and the dripping paddle, the whole picture was caught away for the fraction of a moment into a world absolutely beyond the world of civilization—at least of ours. She might have been on the sea steps of the Piræus in the days of the triremes two thousand years away from the world that holds New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

But this eminently practical person ungiven to dream states was not long in returning to reality.

"Yours is not the same as those little canoes from the beach," said she. "Yours is bigger and has a mast; is that because she is a pearler?"

"Yes," said Fernand.

"And the one that has just passed and waved to me, that also is a pearler?"

"Yes," said Fernand. "She belongs



to Lipi, the one who waved his paddle to you."

"I like yours the best," said June. "It is better found, better altogether."

She did not speak in the spirit of compliment; her eyes had taken in the differences between the two craft, between the slack and slovenly and the clean and taut and trim.

Fernand smiled. He understood. Topi, crouching near the mast, smiled too; he did not understand, but he sensed the friendliness of the strange woman who was talking to his pearling mate.

The three of them were at ease at once, and to June, after the first moment, there was no young Greek god, no crouching savage by the shell in the canoe, but two sea workers capable and surely full of lore of which she knew nothing, and there was the canoe, a dream and a wonder to look upon.

The canoe appealed to her more than its occupants. She had fallen in love with it at first sight. She determined to know it better, to sail it and feel its response under the steering paddle.

"To-morrow," said she, "I would like to see how your canoe sails and I would like to see the pearling beds in her. Will you take me?"

"Oh, yes," said Fernand. "I will have her cleaned to-night, and to-morrow—at what time?"

"In the morning, any time," said she, and as she spoke a violet fan of shadow swept across the lagoon. The sun had set.

"When you are ready will be our time," said Fernand, and as he spoke the rising dusk took the reef and the sea.

"Good night."

"Good night," replied Fernand. The canoe was away. She heard the splash of paddles and saw the receding craft vanishing as the sail rose to the wind that had freshened with the coming of night.

Fernand steered for the shore and beached the canoe, helped by Topi.

It was just before the rising of the moon, and the sky, one living mass of stars, showed the palm trees at the break and, farther in, the masts of the yacht whose anchor light had been raised.

Through the warm, sea-perfumed night the outer beach spoke, miles and miles of it answering to the eternal thunder of the breakers, and on the reef against the sea line lights showed—the torches of the fish spearers searching the pools.

Topi went off, but Fernand hung by the canoe. The moon would be up in a minute and give him all the light he wanted for the cleaning of his craft.

In the ordinary way he would have made Topi stop to help, but somehow, in this particular matter, he preferred to work single-handed.

He lit a cigarette.

I have said that in all his life Fernand had never looked at a girl. Well, he had looked at one that evening and, as he stood now smoking and waiting for the moon to rise, he was looking at her again.

## CHAPTER VI.

### KANAKA.

HE had never before come across a white woman of this kind. There was Autonna, the wife of Tari, three parts white, and Le Paru, the half-Portuguese; all sorts of others, some half Chinese, some nearly English, but never before had he come across the white woman of high civilization.

The effect of the vision on Fernand was curious in the extreme. He was attracted yet repelled.

The attraction came from June—lithe, young, good to look upon, dressed by Roberts of Frisco. The repulsion came from the sore that Yakoff had hit that afternoon:

"You damned Kanaka."

The Kanaka spot in Fernand was



only a spot, only a drop of blood that was not European, and yet it was the spoiling thing in his life. A grit is a small thing, but when it gets in a man's eye, it is no longer small.

The missionary had once unconsciously dropped a word that had made Fernand see the gulf between the half-caste and the pure white. Channen, the beach comber, had let himself go freely one afternoon on the same subject, and to-day Yakoff the trader had spoken the thing full out when, turning to Fernand, he flung the fact in his face with an oath.

Then, as if to complete matters, the *California* had come in, bringing this strange white girl, a creature that appealed at once to his heart and his senses, seized him with all the power of the new and strange, yet repelled him through his pride and imagination.

"She is white," said his pride, "and you, yes, you are white, white as she is—only for that drop that does not show at all, yet which is there, and which she would sneer at did she know."

He wished now he had not promised to bring the canoe to the yacht in the morning. She wanted to see it and sail in it and feel how it went under the steering paddle. Just so, but was he a common canoe man that she should make such a suggestion to him? Why had he not said to her: "If you wish to sail one of our canoes, I will tell Lipi to bring his for you in the morning?" Why not do that anyhow? Yes, to-morrow morning, instead of going himself, he would send Lipi. Lipi's canoe was old and dirty—no matter. Why should he bother?

Now, as he stood there smoking and thinking things like this, the moon began to rise above the eastern reef line. She broke clear of the sea and reef, giving every palm tree a shadow on the white sand and showing the schooner clearly as she lay, the lights of her ports and deck house casting amber

dribbles on the moon-silvered lagoon waters.

Fernand flung his cigarette end away and, turning, began to clean the canoe. As a rule the shell of the day's catch would have been left in her till next morning, but he began to-night by taking it out and stacking it on the beach. He would send Topi to fetch it when he had finished with the canoe.

Why was he cleaning her? If he had determined not to go on the morrow but to send Lipi instead, why was he preparing the canoe?

The job finished, he came along toward the village to find Topi and send him back for the shell.

Fernand's house was near the entrance to the village. Anything with a roof to it is a house at Arafura, and "shack" would have been a better name for the dwelling place of Fernand. All the same, it had two rooms and a kitchen at the back; a native woman kept it clean and did the cooking. She had even left to-night a lamp half on in the front room, the light showing through the slats of the shutters.

He did not go in but went on to find Topi. Topi lived in the last house, a palmetto-thatched shack that he shared with three others, and when Fernand reached it, Jalu, one of Topi's house mates, was sitting outside with knees up, smoking a pipe and contemplating the moon.

When Jalu saw Fernand he made a hurried effort to rise and scatter. Fernand saw at once that something was wrong and came close to the other.

"Jalu, where is Topi?"

"Topi has gone to the fishing on the reef," said Jalu.

"Then what is that noise I hear?" asked Fernand.

"What noise?"

"That—listen!"

"I hear nothing but the speaking of the reef," said Jalu.

Fernand came to the shack door and



opened it, and there lay Topi, his arms extended and snoring.

It was always like that when he got hold of the cursed opium, and now he would be no use next day.

"He must have come back," said Jalu, quite unabashed. "He is weary."

"Jalu," said Fernand, "who gave him the dope?"

"Which?" asked Jalu.

"Don't fool with me. Who gave him the opium?"

"He had no money," said Jalu.

"I am not asking you that. Who gave him the opium?"

"Well," said Jalu, hesitating like a little child, "it was Yakoff, the trader."

"Oh, he gave him the opium and got no payment for it?"

"No," said Jalu, "he was paid nothing. It was to spite you for stopping his selling opium and to spoil your fishing on the morrow. Yakoff is like the monkey they brought on the trading schooner from Papeete. He is full of mischief and never forgets an enemy."

"I will break his neck if I hear much more of him," said Fernand, hot wrath surging up in him against the scoundrel who thought nothing of damning men's bodies and souls for the sake of a few dollars and who had insulted him in so deadly a fashion that morning.

"I will break his neck and then the devil will take him where he is overdue. Well, there lies Topi and I had wanted him to-morrow as I have a special business to perform."

"He will not be right to-morrow," said Jalu, a fact that required no demonstration.

Fernand returned to his house.

He had decided even while cleaning the canoe that he would keep his promise to the white girl in the morning. If there had been anything wanting to keep the decision firm, the action of Yakoff would have supplied it.

Yakoff knew nothing of the girl. He only wanted to serve Fernand a nasty

turn, and he had done so. Put up an obstacle in his path, and an obstacle to Fernand was the one thing needed to stimulate him to action.

Topi being out of count, he would take the canoe to her single-handed. He returned to his house and, not bothering to fetch the shell he had left on the beach, went in and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A PRESENTIMENT OF DANGER.

AND meanwhile, on board the *California*, dinner had been served. Nothing could be more striking than the difference between the desolation and half savagery of the island beach and the saloon of the yacht—the table sparkling with crystal and silver, the darky steward, all in white, assisted by the second steward, a Javanese, turbaned and sandaled, the girl in evening clothes, and the man, the owner of this floating mansion, also in evening dress.

It might have been Delmonico's before the prohibition era, or Sherry's, and yet through the open ports and half-open skylight came, like the sound of a distant train, the roar of the reef to the breakers, a ceaseless sound that had filled the air before the Conqueror had landed on English soil, before Moses had given laws to the Israelites, before the Pharaohs ruled.

"Such a lovely boatman," said June. "He's like a picture and he's promised to bring his canoe to-morrow morning for me to try."

"Well, mind the sharks," said her father. "Those outriggers will spill you like quicksilver if you're not careful with them. I remember——"

He checked himself.

"Yes?" said June.

"Oh, it was nothing—only a business out in the East and it was a catamaran that capsized."

"What was the business?" asked she. Cyrus had an irritating habit of be-



ginning a story, intriguing the imagination and then drying up. He would start a yarn about his past experiences and then suddenly the story would wilt. It was as though there were something in his past life that had a chilling effect when remembered.

June knew next to nothing about her stepfather's past. He had been a sailor, he had made his money in phosphates, he had been good to her mother, he was himself, the great, burly, four-square Cyrus Hardanger, that was all she knew and all she wanted to know. Yet her instinct for a story prompted her now to try and make him talk.

"What was the business?" she asked.

Cyrus laughed. Perhaps it was the wildness of the place outside and the sense of the distance of civilization that loosened his tongue, perhaps the champagne.

"What was the business? Smuggling. Yes, you'd never think your old stepdad had been a smuggler. It was guns."

"What sort of guns?" asked June, vastly interested and quite unshocked.

"Rifles. Remington rifles. Automatics and the ammunition for them."

"And where were you smuggling them to?" asked June.

"It was this way," said he. "A little tin-pot South American state was due to have a revolution; they hadn't had one for five years. So my partner went nosing down, looking for the head of the revolutionaries, and found him and contracted to land ten thousand Winchester with ammunition for fifty thousand American dollars, gold coin. We did. But while prospecting in the business, I had a spill from that boat I've called a catamaran. It was three logs with a mast to it."

"What became of your partner?"

Cyrus, who had been toying with his wineglass, gazing at the tablecloth with a far-away look as he talked, turned his eyes on June.

The question seemed to have startled him out of himself and thrown him off his balance.

"What became of who? Oh, him? I don't know. We went to Australia and had a quarrel and parted."

He pushed the glass away and took the box of cigars that had been placed by his side, selected one and lit it.

Then he went up on deck to smoke.

June noticed that he had not taken the band off the cigar, an invariable act never omitted, to her knowledge, till now.

The girl felt disturbed. She was absolutely without care for convention, and still it came to her with an after shock, this fact that Cyrus had been running once outside the law. She had not minded while he was telling the story, but now he was gone the after taste came.

Smuggling guns to revolutionaries. And his partner—why had the question disturbed him so?

June loved Cyrus. He was everything and everybody to her—mother, father, brother and sister, all rolled into one. She loved him like that, and she loved him also as a protector. Anything threatening him, anything derogatory to him, touched her soul.

She wished now that she had not asked that question. A man must have many things in his life, not all of them admirable. Why had she asked? Why had he told her? It was nothing, yet somehow it seemed a stain.

She went up on deck.

June had a highly strung temperament; she was hypersensitive to the personality of others and she was instinctive. On deck, she could not see her father; he was in the deck house which was used as a smoking room, smoking. Having ascertained this by looking through the deck-house porthole, she went to the starboard rail and leaned on it looking at the shore.

The *California* swinging to the tide



was broadside onto the reef, and she could see the lights of the little houses, and far away to the west the torches of the fish spearers on the outer coral.

The moon which had risen showed the beached canoes on the inner beach and the flare where Lipi, the netmaker and canoe mender, was at work melting pitch.

From the village came the tangling of a banjo and a harsh, raucous voice singing an American darky song.

It was just in this moment, as though winged by the banjo notes, that a sense of impending danger came to June. Not danger to herself but to Cyrus.

Suddenly and all at once Arafura Lagoon became for her malignant; there was something here crouching in the darkness and ready to spring, something that frightened her. The sound of the reef seemed its voice and those twinkling lights its eyes. Absurd! She tried to fight against it, and, turning, came to the deck-house door. She came into the house and closed the door.

Cyrus, in an armchair, was reading a book. The steward had just put coffee by his side.

"No, thanks," said June. "I don't feel I want coffee to-night. Dad, I don't like this place."

"Why, what on earth is wrong with the place?" asked Cyrus. "You mean the island, of course."

"Yes. I don't like it. Will you come right away from it to-morrow?"

Cyrus laughed.

"I've got to wait here till the mail brigantine is in from Papeete, and there's a cable coming by her and letters and stores. MacAlister fixed it all up in Frisco for me. Then, the auxiliary has to be taken down and cleaned and tinkered, and one of the spars is sprung. No, Ju, I can't take her out to-morrow. Nor next day, nor for a full week. Now what ails you, little girl?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said June. "Only

—only—as I was standing on deck just now a feeling came to me that danger was here and coming to us—to you."

"Lord bless your soul," said Cyrus. "Danger has been coming to me all my life, and, what's more, it has arrived time and again, and I've met it. I reckon danger is everywhere, and if it don't hit you with a tornado it's just as likely to hit you with a slate on your head coming down Market Street. Danger don't trouble me; don't let it trouble you."

"I couldn't help speaking," said June. "Maybe it's all foolishness. I hope so, anyway."

She went off after having kissed him good night.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CANOE RIDE.

WHEN she awoke in the morning the brooding sense of danger was gone, or, at least, had withdrawn.

It was seven o'clock, and she came on deck nearly an hour before breakfast to find a fresh wind blowing and sea gulls clanging and fishing, the coconut palms bending to the merry wind and the foam of the outer reef flashing high. The world seemed new made, new minted, youth everywhere hand in hand with morning.

The wind brought the smell of the beach. Some storm beyond the Marquesas was sending a heavy run of sea, strewing the outer beach with still-living seaweed, breaking the coral that would soon be renewed. The whole forty-mile ring of Arafura Lagoon is living; at least, it is protected from the sea by a living reef that grows again when broken.

June breathed in the scent of the reef. She was worth looking at as she stood all in white, her hand on the rail and her eyes on the shore where the early-morning life of the village had begun.

Children were playing by the water-



side, and on the strip of canoe beach the pearl fishers were gathering, pushing off or tinkering at their canoes. The sound of a concertina came on the breeze—the concertina Yakoff had sold to Tipu for a pearl worth several hundred—and here and there, arising, twisted by the wind, could be seen the smoke from the fires of the cooking places where the fish caught overnight were being cooked.

She had almost forgotten Fernand and his promise of bringing the canoe.

At half past nine, however, just as Cyrus was lighting his first cigar of the day and the darky steward was clearing the breakfast things, a quartermaster dropped below to say that a canoe had come off, and could Miss June please to come up and look at it?

"That's him," said June, forgetting her grammar, but remembering the canoe man of the night before. "I'll be up in a minute. Dad, I'm going to try and sail an outrigger."

"Well, you can swim," said Cyrus, "and there's no fear of sharks after what they've been doing to them, so the bos'n told me."

"What did he tell you?"

"Oh, it's just done to frighten the others. At the beginning of the pearling season they catch half a dozen tiger sharks and cut off their fins and blind them and let them loose in the lagoon. They go cruising about, and that frightens the other sharks so that they keep clear of the place."

"Oh, the cruel beasts!" cried June. "How can human beings do such things?"

"Well, I expect if you'd seen a human being after a tiger shark had taken a piece off him, you wouldn't be asking that," said Cyrus, sitting down to his bureau and the letters which were due to be dispatched when the mail brigantine left for Papeete.

On deck June got a surprise. Wabbling in the swell beside the landing-

stage gratings lay the canoe, but the canoeman was not the nearly unclad Apollo of the night before. Fernand was not diving to-day, and he had put on white flannels and a white shirt. He wore neither shoes nor stockings; all the same, the change was startling for a moment, but only for a moment; after that the canoe took all her attention.

"My partner is not well," said Fernand, "so I brought her out alone."

"Thanks," said June.

In the full light of morning the canoe lay before her in all its strangeness. The body seemed cut from a single tree trunk, so narrow was it; the outrigger was just a long slip of wood and the rattan bridge between canoe and outrigger was so open-worked that she could see the water through it as she gazed down.

Fernand explained that nearly every other canoe was connected with the outrigger by two curved wooden rails, and that the broad bridge of rattan was the work of a canoe maker who had brought the idea from somewhere else.

"It is good to stand on," said he, "and to tie things to." He pointed with his bare right foot to some green coconuts in a net bag tied to the bridge. "Drinking nuts," said Fernand, "if one is thirsty."

"It's wonderful," said June; "wonderful that it floats at all without upsetting. Have you brought a paddle for me?"

Fernand said that there were three paddles on board. He pointed them out, lying aft all in a bunch; but would she not prefer putting off the business till Topi was well and able to accompany them to help in the paddling? He would be well to-morrow.

No, June wanted to go then and there, and she guessed she could paddle as well as Topi; she was used to a Canadian canoe, and any one who could paddle a Canadian canoe could paddle anything.



Fernand, with a grave smile but without a word, brought the little craft close up to the gratings and held her there while the girl stepped in.

Woof! but this was different from a Canadian canoe or a Rob Roy. Why, this was crazy, plumb crazy.

She had forgotten the outrigger, whose weight kept the thing from turning turtle when she leaned to port, and whose resistance kept it from doing ditto when she leaned to starboard. Then, with a push, they were out on the glittering water, a river of looking-glass stretched between her and the *California*.

Fernand courteously handed her a paddle and showed her how to use it.

"When we get a bit farther away," said he, "I will break out the sail. Would you care to see the pearling grounds?"

For a moment the one desire of June was to get back to the yacht and safety. She had been utterly fearless up to this; canoes, motor boats, yachts of all sizes, she was used to them, perhaps through heredity, but this thing was perfectly new; there was no ancestral experience to meet it. But she would far rather have drowned than confessed to this.

"Yes, certainly," she said. "I am longing to see the pearling grounds."

Fernand turned the canoe's head to the west. Then he broke out the sail. The run was short; he dropped the anchor, and June, used to the business now and unafraid, looked round her at the pearling fleet. Far and wide it lay spread, the pearlers idling and smoking or busy as beavers in the water. The pearler takes his own time and will not be hurried; he may idle half a day or a whole day or he may nearly kill himself with work.

Fernand explained this to the girl.

"Do you dive?" she asked.

"I am a diver," he replied. "I was born here, and there is nothing else to do, but I am not of these people."

"Oh, no," she said, "of course not. I could see that at once."

"My father was wrecked here many years ago," said Fernand. "His name was the same as mine, Fernand Diaz. He was from Seville. He married my mother, who was not pure white. Both my father and mother are dead. My mother was half French." He stopped.

June guessed what was at his heart. He did not say what the other half of his mother was. Native, of course, and he was ashamed of it. Though he showed nothing of this fact outwardly, she knew, just as though she were reading his thoughts.

"I would never have thought you anything but English or French," said she.

"Yet it remains," said Fernand. "It is a barrier between me and you people."

"Only a barrier for fools," said she indignantly, and infinitely touched by the way he had said, "you people," as though he were cut out, a lost sheep through no fault of his own. "Only a barrier for fools. Forget it, or, at least, don't let the remembrance of it worry you. Now, tell me. How is it that you come to speak English so well, seeing that you were Spanish?"

"Oh, I talk French as well as English," said he. "It was our missionary who taught me, and I am one of those who pick up languages easily."

He was looking away toward the *California*.

A canoe was putting off from the shore for the yacht, and even at that great distance Fernand recognized it as the canoe of Yakoff, or, rather, the canoe that Yakoff always hired for the season.

Fernand's sight was keen as that of the sea hawks; besides, Yakoff, out of some whim, always fixed a dugong skull at the bow of his canoe as a mascot.

"What are you looking at?" asked the girl.

"Oh, it is only a canoe putting out



to your boat," he replied. "Yakoff, the trader. A bad man."

"How, bad?"

"He sells the men opium. My partner is ill to-day because of the opium Yakoff sold him or gave him, and now he is going to your boat."

"I will tell father when I get back," said she.

"Yes," said Fernand; "it would be well."

The sight of Yakoff's boat putting out to the yacht had touched him in a strange manner; it was as though he sensed some danger to June and her father. Perhaps it was just his knowledge that the trader was an eighteen-carat bad man, joined with a suddenly awakened feeling for this girl who was the first person who had ever sympathized with him. Be that as it may, the premonition remained.

June, leaning on the canoe gunwale, was looking overboard. She had forgotten Yakoff and everything else. A huge sea bream was passing beneath the boat, moving without swiftness and without effort; it vanished and another appeared, passed and vanished. Then another, which suddenly bent on itself and flicked away while a gray, rushing shape, that had aimed at the bream and missed, passed with a trail of bubbles.

"It is a fish shark," said Fernand. "Not dangerous—or only to the fish. See, there are oysters."

The girl, looking down through the water now clear and undisturbed, saw the huge shells half tilted on their sides; amid the long, conch whip-oyster fucus a little to the right and almost out of the line of vision, she saw another shell pile, enormous, looking at least four feet in breadth.

"That," said Fernand, "is something worse than any shark. '*Mayama*,' we call it. But the Americans call it a clam. See, it is open. Should a diver put his foot into it or a hand, it would close. He would never escape."

The girl shuddered. Under and through all this beauty Death showed himself lurking, as in that picture of Albrecht Dürer's. Last night the Frenchman who came on board had warned the yacht not to fish, as the lagoon fish just at that season were poisonous. She mentioned this fact now and Fernand nodded.

"Yes," cried Fernand; "one can easily die at Araffura if one is not careful."

He stood up and unbrailed the sail; then he pulled in the anchor.

"But you have not yet seen the lagoon," said he.

She looked up at him, wondering what he meant; the lagoon was all around them, yet she had not seen it. He guessed by her look what was in her mind.

"I will show you," said he.

He gave her the sheet to hold and took the steering paddle.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE.

THE sail tugged at the sheet and the canoe headed away from the beach. Fernand, steering, talked of the lagoon currents, of the variable winds and the squalls that sprang sometimes from a clear sky. He told of a big spiral current in the lagoon center that twisted this way and that at the dictation of the tides, and he found he was talking to a person who understood—to a practical sailor whose experiences were even broader than his.

She told him about San Francisco Bay, that vast stretch of water of which St. Pablo and Susun Bays are part, of the wonders of the Golden Gate through which the white fogs came rolling in from the Pacific and through which all shapes and forms of ships have come, from the ships of the early Spaniards to the iron grain ships and tankers of to-day.

He knew nothing of these things and



San Francisco—well, he had never seen a city. He couldn't imagine a city. He had never seen any houses other than the shacks on the beach. He had seen pictures of houses, but he couldn't visualize streets full of roaring traffic, street cars, crowds.

June, when this fact had been fully borne in on her, was astonished. It could not be otherwise, yet she had not realized it before. Fernand seemed to her a man adrift, cut off, stranger even than Robinson Crusoe, for in Crusoe's days there were no steamships, no telegraphs, no railways, and this talk, as it were across a great abyss, drew them both closer together than a week of ordinary acquaintanceship would have done. Besides that, there was the fact of their youth and their equal love of the sea, powerful bonds made even more powerful by the fact that each was a perfect specimen of humanity.

"Look!" said Fernand.

The sail spilling the wind flapped loose against the mast, and June, turning her head, gazed round her. She knew now what he meant when he had said that about her not having yet seen the lagoon.

To right and left, forward and astern there was nothing but sea. Not a trace of land, not even a palm top. Yet they were still in the lagoon, and around them still stretched the ring of the great reef, yet so far as to be invisible from their low elevation. With a glass they might have made out the topmasts of the *California* in the sea-shimmer of the far north, but to the naked eye these were invisible.

One thing alone showed firm in that waste of water—a white line to starboard down which gulls were flying swiftly.

"Sand bank," said Fernand. "The tide is running out. It will be covered again at full tide. All around here the current is running that I told you of; it goes round and round, then when the

tide turns it goes round and round the other way about. See?"

He pointed to a log floating near them, half submerged.

"That has been here maybe years; anything caught in the current cannot get away. If we were to lose our oars and our sail, we would be like that log."

June glanced at the log, at the bits of floating seaweed, evidently prisoners like the log, and at the line of sand bank. Smiling and sinister, the lagoon was showing her another aspect of itself, saying to her: "Well, how would you like to be here with me forever, a prisoner? Mine?"

Suddenly Fernand, half rising, seized a paddle. Something had taken the water to port, something vicious and rushing like a torpedo just released.

"Blind shark!" he cried. "Look out! No—it's gone." He held for a moment without breathing, paddle in hand, then, turning the canoe, he shook out the sail.

"One of the tiger sharks they blinded last week; it can't steer. No fin. Take the paddle and keep her to the wind. It's playing about right in the current and we had better get away from here."

June took the paddle. She had scarcely dipped the blade when *crash!* the canoe was stove as if hit by a bomb-shell, and she was struggling in the water.

Fernand was holding her up, and she still grasped the paddle; he took it from her, and as they swam, making for the line of the sand bank, he struck the water with it. The blinded brute that had dashed into them and wrecked them had vanished, but there might be others in his wake. As for the canoe, it was a hopeless wreck, half submerged, and to cling to it would be useless.

June felt something hit her knee; it was a ridge of the sand. Another stroke brought them into two-foot water, and Fernand, rising, helped her to her feet.



## CHAPTER X.

## THE NEW LIGHT.

HE cast the paddle down and they stood exhausted, without a word for a moment, their eyes fixed on the wreck of the canoe. They could see the brown sail flat on the water. The mast had been unstepped by the shock and the canoe body smashed just abaft the mast; the body was submerged, but the outrigger showed tilted up, and on the bridge they could still see the drinking nuts secured in their net bag. Even as they looked, they could see the work of the current.

The wreckage was being carried east and it was going quicker than a man could walk.

Fernand broke the silence.

"It was my fault for bringing you out so far," said he. "Oh, yes, it was my fault—and now, see? *Nom de nom!*—what have I brought you to?"

"It was no one's fault," said June, "or only the fault of the men who blinded that shark. There is no use at all in thinking about what has been. The question is, what are we to do now?"

Fernand sighed deeply. It is the situation without precedent that tries the nerve of a man, be he ever so strong.

Fernand had met storm and disaster in his life, he had lived through the great hurricane of five years before when the northern reef was swept, the houses destroyed and half the coconut trees flattened; but that was nothing to him beside this absolutely unimagined happening.

They were without food, without water and at full flood, hours hence, they would be submerged. The water would only be a foot or two high on the back of the bank, but if there was any wind the waves would sweep them.

When they were missed there would be a search, but they might not be missed for hours and the search might

go the wrong way. And it was his act that had brought her to this. He ought never to have done it. Leaving other things aside, there was always the chance of squalls. But he had not thought of that; starting from the pearling grounds she had not been to him what now she had suddenly become at the touch of danger, something more precious to him than life itself.

From where they stood the sand bank, white as salt, ran east and west for twenty or thirty yards; it was twenty yards broad, and the wind, gently blowing, passed over it with a sigh like the rustling of silk. Beyond on every side lay an infinite expanse of water, and on the water, growing momentarily less, the wreck of the canoe.

The gulls had flown away, frightened by the presence of the humans on that unfrequented spot, though on the reef they showed far less regard for man—a curious fact illustrating the power of the perplexing to stimulate fear.

The girl was the first to speak. She had kicked off her shoes.

"They'll dry quick," said she, "in this sun. Fortunate I kept my hat. Oh, I'm all right. I'm almost dry already, and salt water doesn't hurt; but I can't stand soggy shoes. But you have lost your hat."

"It doesn't matter," said he. "I'm used to the sun, and, besides, the wind has taken the heat away; it has changed a bit."

The wind, in fact, had shifted a point and strengthened, blowing now from the south and bringing the cool of the outer sea.

The girl sat down, her feet almost touching the ripples, and, after another glance round, he took his place beside her.

Seen from a distance, they might have been a holiday couple on a white summer beach. It only wanted children digging in the sand to complete the picture. But here there were no children,



here there was nothing but the sand and the sea and the wind blowing the sand, and sure death if there were not swift release.

And they knew it, and they could do nothing. They talked a little while of the possibilities.

"Lipi," said Fernand, "saw us leave the pearling grounds; he saw the direction we took. When we don't come back he will be able to tell them—if he remembers."

This implied doubt of the mental powers of Lipi did not soothe the girl, but she dared not speak of the subject nor make inquiries. Then came the visions of the *California* and of Cyrus, absolutely unconscious of her position. What would he do if she never came back, if the wind strengthened that night with the tide and the waves swept them away?

For a moment she almost broke down under this thought. She turned her head away, and Fernand knew. He took her hand as he might have taken the hand of a child and held it in his. Then, as she leaned toward him, he put his arm about her as if to protect her from the brooding Death that stood there, viewless in the brilliant sunlight, yet voiceful in the wind and the silky whisper of the wind-blown sand.

A stray gull in passing hailed them as if in mockery. The girl moved and withdrew her hand, and Fernand rose, standing and looking far and wide across the lagoon. Nothing. Yet stay—what was that? That brown speck away to the west carried as the log had been carried on the sinister current that had taken their broken craft.

He stood, his eyes sheltered by his hand, and the girl, who had risen and was standing beside him, gazed, too.

In the dazzle of the water the thing showed long and narrow and now, as it shifted and bobbed on the little waves that the south wind was creating, it showed—no—yes, there, sure enough,

were the curved outrigger bars—a canoe.

Some fishing canoe drifted away from the beach, maybe weeks, maybe months ago, drifted out, caught in the mazy current and held, always moving, always drifting, yet unable to escape.

It was coming toward them, but it would not ground on the sand bank; it would pass a cable-length away. But that was nothing; Fernand could swim.

Plainly visible now, it was a small canoe, different from the one just wrecked in the connection with the outrigger.

There was no bridge. Just two curved sticks, and there was no trace of mast; but she was big enough to hold two—that was the main thing.

"She comes!" said Fernand at last. "I'll have to strike out against the current and meet her, taking the paddle with me. It's well we brought it ashore; it is likely there is not a paddle in her."

He gazed for a moment, judging the distance and speed of the oncoming canoe. Then, paddle in hand, he waded in and struck out.

June watched him, scarcely breathing, her lips dry. The thought of being left here alone, should anything happen to him, gripped her literally by the throat. Should the current be too strong for him, should a shark—

His head vanished for a moment—no!—it had reappeared and now the canoe was bearing down on him, it was over him, it had run him down, he was lost. No, the canoe was rotating; driving stern first it was twisting round to an opposite position with regard to the run of swell and a hand was clinging to the gunwale.

He had dived to get to the opposite side from the outrigger, that was all.

Now she saw him working his way aft a bit and then getting on board, a delicate job but nothing to such a practiced canoe man.



He waved the paddle to her and she cried out in answer, hailing him across the wind-swept water. A month of companionship could not have joined them together more firmly than those few hours of tense life, with Death fishing for them and Thirst standing before them with his grim smile and empty jug.

She could have flung her arms around Fernand as he brought the canoe's nose onto the sands and, helping her on board, pushed off again, but her arms were required for other work.

There was a spare paddle and an unstepped mast in the derelict, but no sail. She was, in fact, as Fernand had imagined, the property of some fisherman, drifted off from either the northern beach or the village that lay on the southern. However that may have been, the spare paddle was a godsend; it gave them two arms instead of only one; also, the wind was with them. The steadily blowing south wind had increased into a strong sailing breeze, and between breeze and paddles they were making a full four knots.

June, on the sand bank, had begun to feel the first threatening pangs of thirst. She felt thirsty no longer and said so.

"It is the mind," said Fernand. "Men's minds get thirsty before their bodies. Look! It will not be long now." He pointed to where the palm tops were showing, and a bit to starboard to where the masts of the *California* were clearly visible.

It was only a matter of an hour or so now and she would be on board again, and this thought, acting upon the practical mind of June, brought the material side of the adventure uppermost before her.

Fernand had lost his canoe.

Also he had a partner and the partner would have had a share in the craft.

Neither of them could afford to lose over this business, yet she did not like to offer him money. After all that had

happened, how could she bring up the subject of dollars? She felt his arm about her still, that strong, protecting arm; she saw again his form swimming out, fearless of sharks, heedless of all things but her rescue. How could she offer to pay him for that canoe? No, she couldn't.

But Cyrus could. Cyrus could put the matter right—yes, if she told her stepfather, he could in his business way make everything good. And yet, curiously enough, the idea of speaking to Cyrus on the matter at all was repugnant to her. She would have to speak of Fernand as though he were an ordinary common boatman.

He was not that. Not that to her. Her heart had gone out to him. He was the only man who ever had made her feel like that. The only man who had ever tied a string round her heart, a string that distance could not break nor the shears of Atropos sever.

And they had known each other only a few hours, but it was as though all their lives they had been coming one toward the other, each incomplete, each bearing something that the other lacked.

Fernand knew this just as she did, but he said nothing and she said nothing.

As a matter of fact, it was not the hour for speech. The handling of the canoe had become more difficult, owing to a slight cross sea made by the wind piling against a streak of rapidly flowing current. And when they had reached the smoother-going shore water and were almost in hail of the *California*, there was no time.

The landing stage was still down and Fernand brought them alongside it and held fast while she stepped onto the gratings.

"I want to see you again to-morrow, to thank you," said she, leaning down slightly toward him and dropping her voice ever so little. "But I never can thank you enough."



Fernand looked up and into her eyes and told her everything that was in his heart without uttering a word.

"To-morrow, yes, to-morrow," he said. "But there is nothing to thank me for. To-morrow——"

He glanced up again and pushed off and she watched him go, and as she watched him the world was filled with a new light more strange and wonderful than the light of the sun.

## CHAPTER XI.

### TWO MEN MEET.

FERNAND was not deceived when he thought that he saw Yakoff being rowed off to the *California* that morning. The dealer had determined on a visit to the yacht to see whether any business could be done with the owner. He took some pearls with him on the chance of a sale. Now sales of this sort are very ticklish affairs. Generally good prices can be got from a yacht owner in a foreign port, a monkey, a parrot or a pearl often fetching more under these circumstances than in London or Paris, but the difficult part of the business is the payment of any large sum. Gold or dollar notes must be paid, unless the seller is a fool, and it is not often that a yacht carries with her more than the necessary ship money.

However, one never could tell, and Yakoff, when he clawed alongside the *California*, had hopes of a good deal.

He didn't ask for the owner—he wasn't such a fool—but got his canoe-man to bring the canoe along the stage, and, before the quartermaster on duty could run down, he came up the grated steps and onto the deck.

The deck of the *California* intrigued Yakoff; it was white as the beach, showing on either side the rails and the boats swung at their davits.

Why, the man who owned this must be a millionaire many times over! The deck house took his eye with its pol-

ished paneling, and beyond the deck house he could see just the top of the jackstaff from which the Stars and Stripes was curling and uncurling on the breeze.

"I want to see the owner," said Yakoff to the Yankee quartermaster.

"And what do you want to see the owner about?" asked the latter, looking the newcomer up and down and not with favor.

"Pearls," said Yakoff. "Tell the owner that Mr. Yakoff Abrahamovitch has come on board with some pearls to show him, and you'd better be moving quick, mister, for my time is not my own this morning. Your owner expects me."

"What's that?" said Cyrus Hardanger, who was writing a letter in the deck house and who looked up as the quartermaster delivered the message. "Guy come on board to sell pearls by appointment? I never made any appointment. No, keep him; I'll be out when I've finished this letter and have a talk to him."

When he came out he found Yakoff meekly waiting.

"Well," said Cyrus, "what can I do for you?"

Yakoff at the full sight of the other—he had only glimpsed him at a distance till now—started slightly. He had seen Cyrus before, but where, for the moment, he could not tell. His vulturelike mind was for a moment at fault. He had seen Cyrus years ago, surely, but where?

"I have come," said Yakoff, "to show you some Araffura pearls."

"You said you came by appointment?"

"You see," replied Yakoff, "I am a salesman."

The impudence of the other amused Cyrus.

"That is to say, a liar."

"The truth is the pearls are very fine and a bargain. I was only pushing the



truth," said Yakoff. "Moreover, they will be a memento of your visit to Araffura island. Will you not look at them?"

"Come in," said Cyrus. He led the way into the deck house, and Yakoff, putting his hand into his pocket, produced a small white box. He opened it and, raising a layer of cotton wool, exposed two pearls, perfect rounds, one pure white, one pink.

Now ninety per cent of pink pearls are irregular in shape. Yakoff stated this fact which Cyrus already knew, then he went on:

"This pearl was not taken from an oyster but from a great conch; that is the true home of the pink pearl, and to get the conch out of its shell without injuring the pearl is a difficult matter. We hang the shell up and fasten a weight by a hook to the meat and it is slowly drawn out——"

"How much do you want for the two?" cut in Cyrus.

"Four hundred for the pink, two hundred for the white."

"Dollars?"

"Pounds."

Cyrus replaced the cotton wool and closed the box, handing it back. As he did so Yakoff saw that the last phalanx of the little finger of Cyrus' left hand was missing. It was not a noticeable mutilation, the finger being nearly always bent into the palm, but it was enough for Yakoff. He knew now where he had seen Cyrus before and under what tragic circumstances—twenty years and more ago when he, Yakoff, was a young man, thin and cadaverous and utterly unlike the Yakoff of to-day, while Cyrus had altered, but not so much altered, and become a millionaire.

Yakoff hugged the suddenly found remembrance that might be worth so much to him if properly exploited, but he showed no sign either in face or manner.

"Take them," said Cyrus. "I can't trade at that price."

The other took the box.

"What price, then, would you be prepared to offer for these pearls?"

"Two thousand dollars," said Cyrus; "not a cent more. I don't want the things, specially. Still, I'll give you two thousand. You won't get more in the market; they're good grade, but they're small."

"I'll think about it," said the dealer, putting the box in his pocket.

"Or I'll toss you double or quits," said Cyrus. "Four thousand or nothing." He meant what he said and produced a coin to prove it, but the other only smiled.

"I'll consider that, too," said he. "If you will permit me, I'll come on board again to talk it over."

"Oh, you can come on board," replied the owner of the *California*, "but don't come unless you are prepared to trade on my terms. A glass of wine? No? Well, good day to you."

"Good day," said Yakoff.

He went out on deck, got into the canoe and pushed off for shore.

On the beach he turned and looked back at the graceful white yacht. Wealth at last. Wealth at last, if he could only work this new-found knowledge without making a slip. No more trade without sufficient capital to trade with, no more scraping about the world for a living. No more work, and nothing to do for it all but just take Cyrus Hardanger by the throat and squeeze him.

Yakoff's house was set back a bit from the others, roofed with palmetto leaves and with only two rooms. It was less a house than a habitation. It just did him for the trading season, and he paid Nari the owner ten dollars for the rent and Nari's daughter did the cooking and kept the place clean. A case of gin, a native-made bed, an old table and a couple of chairs were the



chief movables. There was no strong box. He kept all his money and wealth on him.

Going in and shutting the door, he lay down on the bed to think this matter over and gloat on it, and as he lay he became aware of the fact that Nari's daughter, careful though she might be in household matters, was careless of the outside. Everything went onto the rubbish heap by the side wall, and he could hear now the rustle of the robber crabs and the click of them exploring old tins and pulling them about; also he could hear the wind and the rainy patter of palm fronds and behind all the speaking of the reef, that eternal voice which is the background of all other sounds at Arafura.

Lying on his back and listening to these things, Yakoff contemplated the business before him. Was he certain that the man he met to-day was the man of long ago? Certain. The name was changed, but that was nothing; the man was the same. The very fact that the name was changed was, if anything, an additional proof, for the man of years ago had evidently been going under an alias. No, there was no doubt as to the quarry; the only doubt was as to the hunting.

Yakoff was one of those cowards who become savagely brave when cornered or in extremity. The idea of tackling this man in cold blood and threatening him with his past frightened him, now that he came to consider it as a working proposition and a thing that had to be done.

It was most unpleasant.

He had been party to all sorts of swindles in his life, but this was blackmail. He felt as a cur dog would feel, used to rabbit poaching and petty theft but suddenly required to tackle a badger in a barrel.

Would Cyrus bite?

How could he bite to hurt? Alone on the reef with him there was no say-

ing, but on board the yacht violence was out of the question. There were too many witnesses about—the sailors, the stewards, to say nothing of the canoe-men who were always paddling round. There was no danger unless Cyrus went suddenly mad and drew a six-gun or used a knife, but that was absurd. He was sane and not the type of man to go wild; he didn't drink, by the look of him. No, the thing was safe.

And yet Yakoff did not feel happy.

In fact, he felt so unhappy that he determined to pull another man into the job to help him.

It was too big for one man.

He got off the bed, poured himself out a gin. Then he started out to find Chales.

Chales did not live in the village; he lived beyond the canoe beach in a house at the end of the second line of palms. He was married to a native woman and he was a fixture, not one of the floating population that came and went with the pearling seasons.

He was a small, sun-dried, quiet man, gone native; content to live on fish and bananas, and all he seemed to demand of life was native food, a wife to do the little work that was to be done, and an occasional drunk. He often went fishing—he liked fishing, but he did no pearling. For one thing, he was too lazy to dive, for another, not being a native born, he was debarred from it.

He did jobs for Yakoff in return for gin. Yakoff, like many another scoundrel, had defects of vision as regards the character of other men. Chales had always seemed to him a "poor fish," a man ready and fit for any dirty job, but a man with no backbone or bite about him. A gin soaker and without initiative.

He felt safe in pulling Chales into this business. He wanted help; it was too big and dangerous a burden for one man to carry. Chales would come off with him in the canoe when the hour



had struck for the tackling of Cyrus. Without coming on board, even he could render moral if not material support. Chales need not be told too much, and at worst he could always be silenced.

This last sinister thought slipped into Yakoff's mind and out again as he crossed from the village to the canoe beach and on to the palm grove beyond which lay Chales' house.

The native wife was at home, but Chales was fishing. Not in the lagoon where the fish just then were unfit for food, but beyond the reef. He would not be back till evening.

"Tell him," said Yakoff, "that I wish to see him on a matter that will not wait. Let him come to me directly on his return."

"I will tell him," replied the woman.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A PEST AND A MENACE.

**FERNAND**, when he left the girl that afternoon, did not row directly ashore; he paddled a bit to the west and grounded the canoe on the canoe beach near the spot from which he had started that morning.

It was a bad day's work for himself and his partner. Canoe and gear, including an anchor and twenty fathoms of manila rope, were gone. These things not only cost money, but were hard to replace, especially in the pearling season when every craft was in commission and no man willing to hire or sell. The canoe he had brought back was sure to be claimed by some one either here or over on the other beach.

Fernand was hungry and thirsty, but he did not want to go to his house. He got some water from the wife of Lipi, also some bananas and a piece of cold fried palu, and, going off to the outer beach, took his seat in the shade of a huge overjetting lump of coral.

The last great storm had smashed the

reef here like a hammer; great slabs of living coral with the worms hanging from the fractured surfaces had been tossed here and there and piled to die and dry in the sun, and the reef had gone on, rebuilding, remaking itself just as flesh remakes itself after a wound.

Fernand, when he had finished the food he had brought with him, rested, contemplating the sea.

Here on the outer reef the world was a different world from that of the lagoon beach.

Near and far the breakers were coming in, and above the breakers the spray hung in the wind and the spume drifted.

A frigate bird passing high overhead hailed the reef with a cry, and from far and near came the voices of gulls, creaking, complaining, lamenting like the souls of lost sailormen.

A huge crab, lifting itself from a pothole of the coral, rustied and clicked away, to be lost to sight behind a boulder. It was as though the reef had spoken and said: "Look, I am full of life. My very rocks are the homes of worms; the bass and schrapper lurk in my low-tide pools with the great eels and worse. The lagoon has its sharks, but the safe and solid reef has its tigers and jackals. Beware!"

But Fernand was used to the reef and deaf to its voices, and he was thinking of something far remote from death.

He who never looked at a girl was gazing at the vision of one now. Woman had taken her revenge.

It seemed to Fernand that this woman who had suddenly come into his life had always been part of his life. His love for her, newly grown and of tropical growth, had obscured memory, or doped it or done something to it in a magical way, for she lent a tinge to his past as well as a light to his present.

And yesterday morning he had known nothing about her. Yesterday



morning he had been pearling with Topi and the *California* had not even entered the lagoon.

The *California* had brought him a terrible gift. Should this woman go away and leave him, he would die. She was the only thing in the whole world desirable; she was the only thing in the world; she *was* the world. All else, singing reef and speaking sea and colored coral—what were they? Nothing—only a sound and a picture. All else, pearls and money and clothes and cigarettes—what were they? Nothing—everything but her was dead, or, at least, would be dead if she were to go away. And he had no means of keeping her and he knew in his heart that a great gulf lay between them, the gulf of wealth no less than of race and station.

He was only a pearl fisher, a man absolutely without hold on the world. He knew nothing. It was true he could read and he had read books, but of the life of the world he knew nothing. She had tried to explain San Francisco to him as though he were a child. That is really what he was, a child without station or money or power in the world and marked forever with the stain of caste.

All the same, and despite all this, there was in the mind of Fernand a fixed determination away behind everything, a determination that belonged perhaps more to his subconscious than to his conscious mind. She would be his. Let her come or let her go, let him live or let him die, she would be his.

He watched the sun setting away along the reef and the gulls turning golden against the blue of twilight and the sudden passing of twilight to dark and a sky all spangled with stars.

Then he rose up and went toward the village. He wanted to find Topi and see how he was doing after his opium debauch. He went along to the house of Jalu and found the latter sitting out-

side just as he had sat on the preceding evening.

"Jalu," said Fernand, "how is Topi?"

"Topi is still unwell," replied the other, speaking in the native tongue. "No good for anything more."

Fernand pushed his way into the shack and there lay Topi. He was unconscious. Either he had got at more opium, or he had gorged an overdose yesterday. It didn't matter which; he had taken too much. He was no good for anything more, to judge by the look of him, and there was no doctor on Arafura nor on board the *California*. The missionary was the only doctor now and he was away.

Growing anger filled the mind of Fernand as he looked at his unfortunate pearling mate and thought of Yakoff. This was Yakoff's work, done for a few dollars. Even in this lonely bit of the world the truth of that saying, "The love of money is the root of all evil," stood out in big letters.

It was always standing out here in big letters, above the Chinese who sold samshu or dope, and the whites who sold whisky and gin faked from potato spirit, and the half-breeds who come, as they would come later that season, to run gambling shops; it was always standing out and Fernand was sick of reading it.

He wanted now to find Yakoff and face him with his work. Wring his neck, law or no law. The Spanish blood at the heart of Fernand was hot and boiling, yet his mind had not lost control.

Yakoff was a pest and a danger. Yakoff had insulted him by calling him a Kanaka and had all but killed his partner by selling him or giving him dope. All the same, Yakoff must not be killed.

A thrashing—that was it. He turned away and, picking from the beach a piece of stick seaweed three feet long, an inch thick at the base and flexible as rubber, he made for Yakoff's house.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE BLACKMAILERS.

THE beach was lighting up. Ah Sin, the Chinaman's, showed, casting an oblong of yellow light on the white sands. Here you could have drinks of sorts or play at dominoes; he sold coffee and he sold other things as well. A rival shop had just opened, run by a Mexican, and away along toward the break a glimmer showed, where native talent had erected a sort of coconut shy lit by two flare lamps.

But all this was nothing to what it would be in a week or so when the season was fully opened and the Papeete schooner came in with its pearl buyers and junk sellers, riffraff from the four corners of the earth.

The beach was quiet to-night and Fernand, as he passed between the houses toward the house of Yakoff, was unobserved.

The house of Yakoff was closed—at least, the door was, but through the Chinaman's lamplight was visible, and as Fernand paused for a moment before knocking, he heard Yakoff's voice and a voice which he knew to be that of Chales.

The two bad characters of Araffura talking together and with the door shut!

Doors here were used to keep out the wind when it was blowing the sand or the rain; on a warm, windless night like this, doors were generally left open.

Fernand paused for a moment in thought. He had not the least compunction about listening; there are no rules of the game in shark fishing. He moved away from the door and came along round the eastern side of the house where there was a small window space without glass, railed across with thick, white muslin.

Here the voices could be heard much clearer.

Putting his ear to the thin wall was like coming right into the room where

they were talking. He could hear everything.

"No, you just wait a moment," Yakoff was saying. "One more gin you'll have and that's the last to-night, and you won't have it till you're going, and you won't have any more till the job's through. After that you'll have as much as you want and five hundred dollars for keeps. Here, take a cigarette."

"It's not the gin I'm botherin' about, but the job," said Chales.

"And what's the job? Nothing. You've only to row off with me and keep the canoe alongside while I'm on board. If the man should try to scrag me and you hear me shout, you'll lay aboard and call the crew—but there'll be nothing of that. When I tell him I have a pal alongside who's in the know, it will be enough for him. He'll pay up without squealing."

"Yes," said Chales, "but I'm not in the know. That's the bother. You say you've got a grip on this chap Hardanger for something he's done way back years ago, and you're going to squeeze him and make him pay up on condition you keep mum. You've seen him face to face and talked to him, yet you say he didn't recognize you—how's that for a story?"

"I tell you he didn't. I'm changed in looks since then and I wasn't much mixed in that affair; when he did the killing I wasn't along with him."

"Oh, so it was killing," said Chales, with a laugh. "I thought I'd get it out of you."

There was silence for a moment.

Yakoff had evidently miscalculated the abilities of Chales. The simple drunkard and beach comber, ready to do any dirty job to satisfy his gin lust, was something more than a waster and a fool.

The silence was broken by a laugh from Yakoff.

"And a lot you've got," said he. "What does it matter whether it was



one thing or another. I've put the proposition before you fair and square—five hundred dollars and free drinks for doing nothing but sitting quiet and keeping the ring, calling for help if you hear me shout. You can chuck it if you like."

"Oh, I ain't going to chuck it," said Chales. "It's a lot too good a thing to chuck, and, as for killing, it matters a lot. Killing means swinging. The chap Hardanger is busting with dollars; maybe he's worth a million, maybe he's worth ten. With that hanging onto him he'll part with half his money—and you offer me a measly five hundred dollars."

"Well, I take the offer back," said Yakoff.

"Then I'll crab your deal," said Chales, with beautiful simplicity.

"You won't," said Yakoff. "You're a damn cuttlefish, and sooner than have you hanging onto me, I'll chuck the job."

"Chuck it, then," said Chales. "I'll take it on meself, with what I know and a bit of bluff—"

"Now, don't you be a fool," said Yakoff. "There's no sense in your talk. We're getting all crooked in this business; let's sit down to it as man to man, and if you want another drink to make things go easy, there's the bottle."

"Not me," said Chales. "I'm done with that stuff till I'll be able to pay for my own drinks. Look at me. Down and out, ain't I, living native, no good for nothing. 'Oh, Chales, he's no good for nothing but fishing and drinking and lazing; no brain, no kick.' Well, you'll see. Do you think I ain't got the stuff in me to make a man of? Do you think I've always been like this, on my back for chaps like you to wipe your boots on? Oh, Lord, you'll see. No, sir, I've been a man in my time, bigger than you."

"I've lived flash and like a gentleman. It was, 'What's your drink, Mr. Chales?' in half the bars of N'Orleans,

and Henry Clay cigars and Clicquot champagne by the bucket. Rolling in my carriage on the shell road and dinin' with opera girls at Lafanes I was when you was what you were—pinchin' natives for cents and sellin' peanuts from a 'barra.' No, b'gosh, I've done with the beach and poor times, and it's half and half with the swag, and not a cent under."

This amazing outburst of greed, hate and energy produced a dead silence. Yakoff seemed to have been annihilated as though by a burst bombshell. Then came his voice:

"You are wrong. My boots have never been wiped on any man. I am just a trader. I have been your friend—also, it seems to me you have been in New Orleans—"

"Now cut that out," said Chales. "I have, but I've never done anything there I could be logged for, and I wasn't moving under the name of 'Chales.' You thought you had me, didn't you? Well, I tell you, straight; there's no kinks in the past of Billy Chales that aren't buried deeper than your scratching will ever find."

"I meant nothing," said Yakoff. "Let us bring this to a conclusion. We will share half and half. Better no partner than an unwilling one. Half and half. You have my word."

"I have better than that," said Chales. "You can't move an inch without me now. When do you propose to do the squeezing?"

"That," replied Yakoff, "is the question I have been putting to myself. Perhaps to-morrow evening, perhaps the evening after. The yacht will not put out for some days yet."

"Gimme another cig," said Chales.

Fernand drew away from the wall.

He had seen roguery and villainy enough in the last few years, but this thing left him stunned. He knew nothing of blackmail, but even a child could have understood what was going for-



ward here. Cyrus Hardanger had killed a man years ago and had evidently evaded the law, changed his name and made good. Yakoff had been mixed up in the affair, but had evidently had nothing to do with the killing. He had been left behind, so to speak, when Hardanger made his escape. And now he proposed to rob Hardanger of his fortune under threat of the law.

June had told him that Cyrus Hardanger was not her real but her stepfather; all the same, she loved him just as much as if he had been her real father.

And both June and Cyrus were there on the yacht, absolutely ignorant of what was going forward against them.

Should he take a canoe and go on board, even at this late hour, and warn them? Impossible. How could he speak to Cyrus before her? She knew nothing of the business, he was certain of that. It was Hardanger's secret, and had been for years.

Fernand remembered a man who had come to Arafura three years before, a quiet, likable man who had landed from the Papeete mail schooner and settled down, living on money that came to him from the outside world in remittances from a woman, so gossips said. Jameson was the name of this man, and one day as Jameson was going fishing in the lagoon an officer of the French police who had come from Papeete arrested him and took him off. He was wanted for some crime committed many years ago.

So would it be with Cyrus Hardanger, unless something happened to paralyze the arm of Yakoff and muzzle Chales.

Fernand had never spoken to Cyrus, and just seen him at a distance. All the same, he was everything to the girl; what hit him would hit her. He had to be saved.

Fernand walked away along the beach, leaving the village and its lights

behind him. He came to where the canoes were lying, the canoes of the pearlers whose day's work was done. The moon had risen and by her light he could see lying on the white beach the canoe of Lipi. Others were in the shelter of the canoe houses, but Lipi's lay there as if left on purpose to speak to him and remind him of his own canoe and of the fate of Topi, his pearling partner killed or nearly killed by the opium of Yakoff.

Then a great blaze of wrath shot up in the bosom of Fernand. Yakoff—Yakoff—always Yakoff. His southern blood boiled in him and his hand went to the knife he always carried. Yakoff deserved death. Yakoff must die. In fair fight. Yes, he would give him a knife to defend himself with, but he would die just the same, even if he, Fernand, were to die also.

Then of a sudden arose before the mind of Fernand—Chales!

Of what use would the death of Yakoff be if Chales were left? Fernand felt that, bad as Yakoff was, Chales was equally bad or maybe worse. He could not kill them both!

He sat down, resting on a lump of coral to brood over this matter. His simple and ingenuous mind was utterly at fault; he could imagine nothing possible to be done.

Cyrus might be warned, but it was of no use. What could he do? If he were to put out from the island, Yakoff's hold on him would not be lessened. Yakoff, once having found him, would follow him.

Then, as he sat like this thinking or trying to think, something stirred in his mind and the recollection of Ona came to the surface.

Ona was the witch woman of Arafura; she could tell the future for one and put on spells. She had wrecked Le Noan's canoe because the girl had laughed at her—at least, a small water-spout in the lagoon had wrecked the



canoe. She was also held to be familiar with the spirits of the dead.

It seemed to Fernand that this woman, of all the people of Araffura, alone could help him. She would want her price, but he could pay it. He rose up and went to his house and lit the small oil lamp that served him as a light. Raising a board in the flooring, he came upon a tin box and, opening it, took out a Swedish match box.

He replaced the tin box and covered it with the board, then he brought the match box to the light of the lamp, opened it, and, lifting the cotton wool it contained, exposed a pearl.

It was his reserve fund, something he had kept for a rainy day. He had found it when fishing alone before he had entered into partnership with Topi, and he had been tempted to realize on it several times. He could have got enough for it to have taken him for a trip to Papeete or even to San Francisco, or enough to build the best house on Araffura, but he had always resisted the promptings to cash it. He put the cotton wool over it again, put the box in his pocket, turned down the light and left the house.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### ONA, THE WITCH WOMAN.

THE moon was now high above the reef and all the lights in the village were out, all but the light of the house where Topi lay in the clutch of Yakoff's opium.

Fernand turned to Topi's house where he found his partner lying just the same. His pupils were like pin points and he was still unconscious. If a white man had swallowed a similar dose he would have been dead by this, but among some of the islanders, and especially those with a Melanesian strain in them, there is tremendous power of resistance to the drug. All the same, it seemed to Fernand that Topi was hopeless. He turned away from the house,

more than ever determined to use all means possible against Yakoff.

It now wanted an hour of midnight; the wind had fallen and the breakers on the outer beach spoke less loud, while the moon, swinging high, made a ghostly daze on the white sands that stretched from the village into the far, star-sprinkled distance.

Fernand, leaving the canoes behind him and the palm grove and Chales' house to the westward of the grove, struck into the night.

He had a long walk before him.

Ona did not live with her kind. She lived and fished alone far away along the reef, where nothing came but the wind and the voices of the waves and the spirits of the dead. Here she had her shack by an island of the reef.

These reef islands occur here and there on nearly all atoll reefs. They are simply enlargements of the canal, swellings where the coral spreads, and on them there are generally trees.

Fernand, as he walked, kept close to the lagoon edge—the outer reef at night, like the edge of a forest, is a place to be avoided. One never knows what may be lurking there or what may come in under the moon, even if it is nothing worse than a bigger lump of swell.

Crabs scuttled away before the night walker, and had he paused and turned he might have seen crabs gazing at him amid the coral rocks to the right, "spirit crabs," white as ivory on stiltlike legs, with eyes like ruby points.

But he did not turn, not even when, suddenly, far out on the lagoon water a jet of foam showed, followed by a concussion like the report of a big gun. One might have fancied that a battleship out at sea was making a target of the lagoon.

But Fernand knew it was only a big ray jumping, a huge, flat fish weighing a ton or more. There were two of them in the lagoon. Sometimes a school of



them would come in, and should they take to playing, the noise would be heard miles out at sea; but to-night there were only two, and after a few minutes they ceased play and the night resumed its silence.

Now, far ahead, Fernand could see the clump of trees where Ona lived, and now he could make out the shack where the old woman slept and the canoe drawn up under its little shelter house, and now a spark showed which turned out to be the light of a tiny smudge fire, beside which the old woman was crouching as though waiting for him.

She was in reality watching something hung to dry from a tripod of sticks above the smudge fire. Ona carried on three businesses. She fished, she collected beach curios such as conch shells and sold them in the rush season, and she did a side line in magic.

The Chinese often came to her if out of luck, just as people go to a doctor to get a tonic if out of health. She sold charms, and she could undoubtedly "do things."

Selincourt, the lieutenant of the French gunboat that visited the island, could have told a good deal about the doings of Ona before he died. He was a superstitious Frenchman and legend said he had bought luck from her; anyhow, he became chief officer in the station shortly after the supposed bargain, but he died shortly after that.

There was also the case of the Dutchman, Poll, who was very thick with her and who prospered for a while, only to wilt. As a matter of fact, though this woman was sought after considerably, people came to her more for peeps into the future and spells against drowning and so forth than for aid in getting rich, for it was felt that the luck she brought, though a thing of fast and furious growth, was sure to wither like a fairy plant and bring disaster, perhaps, in the withering.

Fernand quite believed in her. His

simple and almost childlike mind accepted her as genuine. He rather feared her. This was the first time he had ever sought her advice or assistance, and he would never have done so for his own sake.

He stood before her as she crouched beside her fire, and as he stood a flaw of the wind brought a wreath of the smoke against his face, making him catch his breath and cough.

"I knew you were coming," said Ona, glancing up at him without raising her head.

"How knew you that?" asked he.

"I saw you when you were yet far away," she replied, with a little laugh.

This seeming disparagement of her own powers did not ease Fernand's mind a bit.

"You have come to me for help and advice," said Ona, throwing a bit of dried seaweed and a morsel of hibiscus stick on the embers of the little fire. "Make known what you want, for it is late and my cooking is near done and I must sleep."

Fernand looked at the thing round which the smoke was curling in the moonlight. It was a head, but too small even for a baby's head, possibly the head of some sea creature—who could tell?

The drying in the smoke every night, assisted by the sun during the day, must have taken a long time, perhaps a week; but time was nothing to Ona.

"Yes," he said at last, "I have come to you for help. You know Yakoff?"

"Yes," replied Ona. "Sit down beside me."

He sat down beside her on the coral.

"Now take my hand," said she, "that I may read your thoughts."

He took her hand.

The sea spoke loud on the outer reef and the wind curled the smoke of the smudge fire beneath the moon, and a cry came from some night fishing gull beyond the reef.



"One—two," said Ona, as if counting. "Yakoff—and another; there is another in your mind."

"Yes, the man Chales."

"And there is another."

"Yes, the man who came in the white ship that lies off the village," Fernand answered.

"And there is another?"

"Yes, there is another," replied Fernand. He was thinking of June. "There are four people in my mind, Ona. Yakoff and Chales, and the man of the white ship and a woman that is with him. Yakoff and Chales are set to destroy the man and the woman. That is why I have come to you for help. I have brought you that which I value most in payment for your help." He released her hand and produced the box with the pearl.

Ona looked at the pearl, but she did not touch it. She knew its value at a glance.

"Here," said she, "are all things desirable that a young man can want, yet you would give them to the winds so that those two may be held safe. Yours is a clean heart—but I—I can do nothing. I have no power over death or destruction. I can only say, 'Do this,' or, 'Do that.' Put it away. Now give me your hand and let me get into to-morrow."

She took his hand, held it, and, crouching into herself, fell silent. She seemed asleep. A minute passed and then, with a little shudder and releasing his hand, she spoke:

"I have seen. To-morrow, shall Yakoff come to me to ask me for a spell to give him luck in the business he has on hand, and this he may do, for he is a believer in these things. I will give it to him."

"You would help him?"

"Surely. For in that way only can he and the other man, his companion in his business, be brought to nothing and their plans made waste."

"You would help him to destroy the man and woman."

"No," said Ona. "I would leave him to destroy himself. Let this thing be as I have said. Take no hand in it. The Dark People are working to make Yakoff's path easy, but they have prepared a hole for him like that in the coral by the four trees. Now go."

Fernand sprang to his feet as she rose. She went to the tripod and took the head, wrapping it in a piece of sennit. She seemed to have forgotten Fernand's presence, and, turning, he went off taking his way back to the village.

He felt like a swimmer being swept out to sea in the grip of the current. His simple and straightforward mind could not understand the subtleties of Ona; he had grasped at her for help and she failed him.

Where an old, lone coco palm had fallen in the storm of last year he paused and, taking his seat on the trunk, plunged into thought, his head between his closed fists. The dawn was coming into the sky when he rose, grasping a newly formed plan. He had a weapon at last—Topi. If Topi died in the night from the effects of the opium procured from Yakoff, he would go to the French authority and denounce Yakoff, also Chales as being party to Yakoff's business transactions.

They would both be taken off to Papeete and tried. Fernand had seen several bad whites taken off to Papeete for trial before the courts and for offenses less than this.

He rose up, buoyed by this plan. It was sunrise when he reached the village, and behold!—nearly the first person he met was Topi, not dead, but sitting outside his house in the rays of the newly risen sun.

The opium that would have killed two other men had failed to kill Topi. As a matter of fact, he was as tough as an alligator, but to Fernand it seemed that the Dark People mentioned by Ona



had brought him back to life, thus clearing Yakoff's path of an obstacle that might have blocked it.

He forgot that Topi was his friend and partner, and turned and walked away with scarcely a greeting. Coming down to the lagoon edge he stood and looked at the yacht swinging at her moorings and with her bow to the incoming tide.

A white figure stood at the taffrail. It was June, and she was sweeping the beach to westward with a pair of glasses. Then her eye caught Fernand's figure and she leveled the glasses in his direction, recognized him and raised a hand in greeting.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CYRUS HEARS THE NEWS.

**N**OW yesterday, when June stepped on board the yacht, having parted from Fernand, she found her stepfather seated in a cane chair under the shadow of the awning, an iced drink at his elbow, a cigar in his mouth and *The Pacific Magazine* in his hand.

"Been having a good time?" asked Cyrus.

"Rather," said she. "Been wrecked, nearly drowned—look at my shoes; they'll never be right again—and only escaped from death by thirst and starvation though the narrowest squeak."

He thought she spoke in jest. Her long absence had not alarmed him, for he was used to her going off for days alone, either in the bay or at Santa Barbara or Santa Catalina, where he sometimes went for the tuna fishing.

At Santa Catalina she had once been away for a whole night with old Jake Tranter, the boatman, on the west side where the kelp forests are. Their engine had broken down. Cyrus never worried; the weather was good like today, and he knew her capacity for taking care of herself.

"Sit down," said he, "and tell us of

it. But aren't you hungry? You've missed your luncheon."

"No, I'm not hungry." She dropped into a chair beside him as she spoke. "But I'm thirsty."

He called the steward for another glass, and she went on:

"You saw us start off this morning. Fernand——"

"That young Kanaka boatman chap in flannels?"

"He's not a Kanaka—he's Spanish. And he's not a boatman—he's a gentleman."

"Oh, is he?" said Cyrus, amused at the tone of the other. "But I don't see why he couldn't be both; some of the Avalon longshore crowd are the best gentlemen I know."

"I meant," said June, "that he is not a common man. Of course, you are right; Arkansas Joe and old Jake Tranter, for instance, are gentlemen, but they are rough diamonds."

"And this one is polished. Go ahead!"

"No, thank goodness, he's not polished. I loathe polished men. He's just himself with a mind and a personality of his own, not an imitation mind and an imitation personality got from college and society. Well, anyhow, we went first to see the pearling grounds and then we pushed off to see the lagoon. We went so far out there toward the center that we lost sight of the shore. There was a sand bank near us. Out there in the middle there is a sort of circular current, and driftwood and stuff that gets caught in it; can't get out. He was telling me this when a blind shark ran into us and smashed the canoe."

"A blind what?"

"Shark. They mutilate sharks here so as to frighten the others away when pearling is going on. Why, you remember; you first told me about them. Well, we had to swim to the sand bank, and there we were without food or wa-



ter, out of sight of shore, and we might have been there still only an old derelict canoe that was trapped in the current came along, and Fernand swam out to it at the risk of his life and brought it ashore."

"Risk of *his* life, confound the chap! He risked *yours*."

"How?"

"Taking you to such a place in a damn dugout. Blind shark, rot! He ran you on a reef."

"No," said June, "he didn't. I saw the shark."

"Shark or no shark, there's always the chance of squalls. These islands are the most treacherous in the whole Pacific."

"But you didn't bother about that when we started."

"No, for I thought a native boatman would have savvy enough to keep out of danger."

June was silent for a moment. She sensed the fact that Cyrus was less up against the supposed dangers of the place than against Fernand. She had managed to put him in some way against Fernand.

"Well, anyhow," she said, "he did what he could and he risked his life by swimming off when there were sharks about and bringing the canoe ashore."

"I'm not saying anything against the fellow but that he was a fool to get out so far with you in that dough dish of an outrigger," replied Cyrus. "Let's talk sense, and don't make heroes out of nothing. He'd got to get away himself from that sand bank, hadn't he? Well, there you are. Anyhow, you're back safe and there's an end of the business."

He took to his magazine again while she rose and went below.

"An end of the business!" Those words came to her strangely. No, indeed, it was not the end of the business.

It seemed to her as though she had

started from the old track of life onto a line leading her into an entirely new country. Nothing was the same, nothing would ever be the same, since—when? Was it last night at almost first sight, or away there out on the lagoon, or just now when he had looked up at her before pushing off back to shore in the canoe?

She could not tell.

Just as Fernand had never looked at a woman before seeing her, so she had never looked at a man before seeing Fernand.

Men had been companions or just society figures. The young men of Pacific Avenue and the clubs had been different from the men of the bay, the sailors, boatmen and oyster fishers. She preferred the latter, that was all.

Fernand had come upon her as something absolutely and entirely new, yet all the same it was as though she had been waiting for him ever since she was born—aye, and before that.

Dressing for dinner that night it seemed extraordinary to her that he should be there on the beach, maybe cooking his own food, living in one of those little hutlike houses; and at dinner the glitter of glass and silver, the white-coated stewards, the elegance of the surroundings, all struck her strangely, seeming to demarcate her position in the scheme of things, a position separated by a deep gulf from that of the man whose image had become part of her mind.

There is no barrier more severe than that of class distinction, none more absurd if the separated people match in mind—and as for class, what difference was there really between herself and this man? What had Cyrus been? Just a sailor before he had made his pile, a rover about the world who, according to his own laughing confession, had sometimes run very close to windward of the law.

Fernand was a pearler, a worker, it



is true, but perhaps of a nobler type than even Cyrus.

These thoughts came through her head with no trace of disloyalty toward the man she had loved best in the world up to this, and she showed nothing of them.

She did not mention Fernand any more; she knew instinctively that her stepfather had a dislike to the new man who had suddenly entered their world, a dislike based, perhaps, on some vague subconscious suspicion that here was the man who would take June away from him.

Her talk that afternoon had, perhaps, betrayed her mind.

Next morning, as we have seen, up soon after sunrise, the girl went to the taffrail to watch the pearlers put out. She was sweeping the canoe beach with the glasses when, seeing Fernand standing on the beach, she waved her hand in recognition, and he returned the greeting.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### FERNAND'S WARNING.

**T**HEN, yielding to a sudden impulse, he made a sign that he was coming over to speak to her.

A fishing canoe lay close to him on the sands. It belonged to Sru, the son of Lipi, and it was waiting for its owner. Fernand pushed it off and got into it and paddled toward the yacht. Canoes were often borrowed like this on the beach, and Sru would not mind so long as it was brought back quickly.

But Fernand was not thinking of that. He had come to a sudden decision. The girl must be warned about Yakoff and the danger to Cyrus. It was a prompting of the heart, not of the head. Even if Cyrus were frightened into action of some sort against Yakoff, what could he do? Yakoff had not yet declared himself, and when he did, it would be secretly in the presence of Cyrus and with no witnesses. Then

there was Chales. Chales was in the business and ready to carry on if anything happened to the other.

Even if Cyrus were to put out and run away from the island, would not these men be able to follow him at their leisure, go to San Francisco and blackmail him there? The owner of the *California* would be a man of mark in Frisco; the very wharf rats would know his address.

No, Cyrus was held by what he had done in the past. These wretches alone knew the fact. Unless they were destroyed they would use their knowledge, and Fernand could not destroy them. Any warning would be useless.

Absolutely Ona's advice to let them alone to work their plan, trusting in the Dark People to trip them up, seemed the best advice possible—the Dark People, maybe, being her symbol of their own wickedness.

But Fernand, having made up his mind, was not to be stopped.

He brought the canoe up to the stage that had been lowered. June, seeing him putting off, had come down the steps and was standing on the grating as he came alongside.

"Yesterday," said Fernand, after he had given her greeting, "when I told you of the rock pools on the outer beach and when you said you would like to see them, I did not tell you the best time. The best time is just when the tide is half out. That would be this afternoon, at three o'clock."

"Oh," said June, "I'll see if I can come."

"I wish very much for you to come," said he. "It is important. It has to do with your ship."

June saw at once that Fernand was holding something back, also that whatever his object was it had little to do with her, personally. Something to do with the ship—what could that be? Some instinct told her that whatever it might be, it was important; it seemed to



her for a moment as though danger were hiding somewhere, danger to the *California* and Cyrus and herself, danger behind that veil of sapphire sky, that picture of blue water, white beach and waving palm trees.

"What is it?" she asked.

"There are bad men at Araftura. I cannot tell you more here in this place." He glanced up at the yacht's side. A quartermaster was leaning on the rail, and a fellow in a bos'n's chair had been lowered to touch up some paint at the bow. From below came the sound of metal striking metal; the auxiliary engine had been taken down and was being repaired, and from the galley came the clatter of pots and pans. No, it was not the place for a confidential conversation.

"Shall I bring father?" she asked—she always called Cyrus "father."

Fernand shook his head.

"No," he said. "I cannot tell what I have to tell if there is more than you. It is another man's secret I am dealing with."

This happy flash of inspiration saved the situation. June saw that under those circumstances it would not do to press any inquiries. She nodded.

"Yes, I'll come. I will row ashore at three."

"At three," said Fernand. He saluted her and pushed off with the paddle, making for the beach.

June followed him with her eyes. She knew that he loved her; that glance up at her last night as he pushed off had told her not of love but of sudden adoration. Just so. Well, why was he changed this morning—all his brightness gone, no smile for her, almost abrupt in his departure? He seemed like a man under some heavy weight of care. What could have happened to change him so?

Something had happened and it had to do with the *California* and with "bad men," or, rather, something was going

to happen. If there was any meaning in what Fernand had said, there was danger to be countered. Yet why did he ask her not to bring Cyrus to the meeting?

Ought she to tell Cyrus, right away?

No. Of one thing she was quite sure—she could trust Fernand. He told her to come alone and he had, no doubt, his reason. She could trust him; she who had let him take her heart could give him also her confidence in this matter.

All the same, she was disturbed in mind. It seemed to her that ever since coming to this place it had been disclosing itself to her, always bringing the unexpected to match the unexpected and death and terror into contrast with beauty and peace.

She never could have dreamed of this great lake of water so full of color, of peace and of loveliness. Neither could she have dreamed of the blinded shark, that revelation of ferocity mutilated by ferocity.

Leaning on the rail now and looking over she could see sand patches and brain coral and flights of colored fish.

Such a pretty sea garden, the fish shadows flitting from flower to path—yet there, tilted and agape, she could see a vast shellfish, the twin brother of the great clam Fernand had showed her on the pearling grounds, an iron trap that could take a man by the foot or by the hand and hold him till he was drowned.

Then there was the circular current, another trap for the canoe man who should lose his paddle or his sail. And now there was this hinted warning of Fernand's about bad men, a whisper from that beach so placid looking and sunny, with the children playing in the morning light, the cooking fires sending their smoke to the flower-blue sky and the palms waving to their shadows on the sand.

All these things seen and hinted at



and remembered were belonging to Araftura, a complex and terrible little world that yet at sight seemed only just a small ring of coral and a strew of trees.

At breakfast she spoke little, in contrast with Cyrus. She had never seen him more bright of mind, more filled with the joy of life. He seemed fey. He had been ashore for a while yesterday morning and he talked of the possibilities of the place. He said he would like to buy it, buy it for a bathing beach, put up a big hotel and run a special steamer to connect it with San Francisco and Santa Barbara.

June shuddered at the thought.

"You would only want sky signs and advertisements of chewing gum and cigarettes to complete it," said she. "Dad, how can you say such things?"

"It wouldn't be worse than what it is," replied he. "This is nothing now to what it will be in a few weeks' time when the pearling season is fully open; that beach will be like a fair then, with half the scalawags and ruffians of Europe and America come to bicker for the pearls these chaps will be having for sale."

June thought of the bad man mentioned by Fernand.

"Does that sort of person come here?" she asked.

"Come here? Of course they come here. Wherever there's easy money you'll find them—pearls or gold or diamonds, it's all the same—or phosphates," he finished with a laugh.

It was out of phosphates he had made his own fortune, and June knew it, and somehow now the mention of the word and the laugh which came with it jarred on her. He seemed to be connecting himself mentally with those scalawags of Europe and America who were to be found always where money was easy and to be had for the handling of gold or pearls or diamonds—or phosphates.

But she said nothing.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### FIERY SPANISH BLOOD.

SHE occupied her morning by doing needlework, seated under the double awning, aft. Needlework to her was a time killer, better than gum chewing or patience, or the working of acrostics. Anyhow, it was at least useful. This heiress to the millions of Cyrus Hardanger worked for the poor with her needle; garments she had cut and sewn covered many an unfortunate child in San Francisco. You might say that she might easily have given a check; yes, she might easily have given a check—and many a check she had extracted from Cyrus for her charities—but, you see, a check is not the same thing as personal work. It is like touching the poor with a barge pole, not with one's hand.

At a quarter to three she fetched her sun hat and, calling a quartermaster, ordered him to tell off a man to take her ashore in the dinghy.

Cyrus was asleep in a hammock swung beneath the awning. She did not wake him but told the quartermaster that she would be back by half past four, in time for tea. Then she went down the steps to the boat stage, against which the little white dinghy was nuzzling and rubbing its fenders.

"Take it back," said she to the man when she landed. "You can row off for me when you see me signal. Tell the quartermaster to keep a lookout."

Then she turned to the left, going along by the houses in the direction where she saw Fernand waiting for her.

They met as if by accident. To an onlooker it was just as though she had come ashore for a walk and had met him by chance. More especially as he stood by her for a while, pointing here and there as if showing her places of interest.

"It was better for me not to come down to the boat to meet you," said he.



"One does not know what eyes are watching; even now they may be on us, so we will stand for a moment as if I were showing you the place, pointing so and so. And now we can go on; but walk slowly. Follow me onto the coral and take care that you do not slip."

She followed him.

The tide was going out and the outer beach was showing exposed rock glittering in the sun. The world here was quite different from the world of the inner beach; here there was sand and movement and the fume of the sea, the thunder of the breakers and the cry of the gull on the wind.

Here, too, were reef pools left by the retreating tide, great baths, some of them, where a man might swim, others quite small, but all of them strange and beautiful with colored life.

Fernand for a little while said nothing of the business in hand, but led the way across the coral, stopping here and there to point out things. In one of the newly formed pools something gray and narrow was moving with vicious darts and plunges, now here, now there. It was a baby shark, separated from its mother by one of the chances of the sea. In another a great frilled eel made the water boil as their shadows disturbed it.

They were beyond the reach of human eye now and Fernand, as if suddenly made sure of his environment, broke the silence.

"I told you," said he, "that there are bad men here in Araffura who might do you and your father an injury, but I could not tell you all."

He stopped, embarrassed. He had not reckoned on the difficulty of the job he had taken in hand. How was he to tell this girl that Cyrus Hardanger, the man who had protected her from childhood, the man who was both father and mother to her—how was he to tell her that this man had broken the law, that he had killed a man, and that those men

who were pursuing him could perhaps put him in prison were they balked and not bought off?

"Yes?" she said tentatively. Then, as he hesitated: "Go on. Why do you hold back? These men may do us an injury. How?"

"In this way," said he. "But first of all I must tell you how it happened that I know anything of this matter. When your ship came into the lagoon the other evening, I left the pearling grounds with my partner. I wanted to see your ship close, and then as we drew near I saw you. I spoke to you and promised to come for you in the morning to show you the pearling grounds."

"Yes?" There was a ledge of smooth coral here and she sat down. He took his place beside her.

"Well," he said, "I had seen you only once, but I was to see you forever. Whatever happens to me or to you, I shall see you in my mind just as you were then."

He took her hand and she let him hold it. He was not talking of love, he was just telling her the truth, and it applied to herself as well as to him. Whatever happened to her or to him, his picture would always be with her—though not if he died. In that event she would die, too.

"When I went ashore," he said, "I found my partner ill from opium given him by a man, Yakoff, the trader. I went to Yakoff's house to beat him, and drawing near I heard Yakoff's voice. He was talking to a man who lives on the beach—Chales is his name—bad just as Yakoff is bad—and I heard your ship spoken of, and listened."

"Yes," said June.

He seemed to find it difficult to go on talking.

"It is hard to say to you what these two men were talking of. It was about your father."

"My father?"

"Your stepfather."



"Don't mind that," said June. "He has always been to me my real father. These men were talking about him. What did they say?"

"This is where I find it hard. Yakoff said to the other: 'I know him; many years ago he killed a man. No one else knows but me, and I will make him pay me money not to tell.'"

"Killed a man?"

"Yes. Those were Yakoff's words."

"Father—why, what nonsense. He could never kill any one, unless it was accident. I know him. I tell you, I know him; he is the best of all the people who were ever born. What do you mean by telling me such things? I know! Forgive me. It's not your fault; it's what you heard. Well——"

She sat for a moment, looking before her at the falling breakers now drawn farther out. Her mind was in confusion. The image of Cyrus was there, but blurred as if by smoke clouds.

A trader here called Yakoff had said that Cyrus away in the past had killed a man and that he, Yakoff, was going to make him pay; otherwise he would talk.

June had a clear-thinking brain, and even shaken as it was just now she could perceive one thing clearly. This charge could have nothing to do with accidental killing. If the thing had been an accident, there would be nothing to hide.

But of course it was all absurd—all absurd. Yakoff had made a mistake.

And yet combating this consoling thought came the remembrance of the fact that Cyrus half in jest had once or twice indicated that his past had been not altogether on visiting terms with the law.

He had told her he had done gun running, but it was less what he had told than what he had left untold that was the trouble now.

As a matter of fact, she knew next to nothing of his life. He was not a communicative man; all the same, he

might have told much more to the girl whose life was so bound up with his, the girl who would be his heiress, the girl who, though not related to him by blood, was considered by him and talked of by him as his daughter.

He always called her his daughter, not his stepdaughter, and she always spoke of him as her father. She knew next to nothing of his past out of which this thunderbolt had suddenly sprung to hit her.

As a matter of fact, June's position was not unique. Among the ranks of the newly rich and the millionaires who were nobodies the day before yesterday, the pasts of the fathers don't always bear raking up before the eyes of their children; but her position was none the less painful.

"Of course," she burst out at last, "all this is nonsense. Has father seen this man?"

"Yes. I believe Yakoff went on board to sell pearls to him and so came to recognize him."

"Well, didn't my father recognize him in return?"

"No. Yakoff said that he himself had altered in the years—it was twenty years ago—but that your father had not altered much. It is so with men; some change more than others."

She was silent for a minute.

"But how about the name?" she said at last.

"Yakoff said that your father was living under a different name then—Excuse me for saying these things; they hurt me to say them."

He retook her hand which she had drawn away, and she let him hold it, but it was unresponsive as a thing dead. Love for the moment had flown far away.

"The thing now," said he, "is what we can do against Yakoff. I would kill him just as I would kill a shark, only he is not alone. There is the other man, Chales."



"We must tell father at once."

"I don't know," said Fernand. "I think perhaps it would be better for us not. Last night I went to consult with Ona."

"Who is Ona?"

"The wise woman who lives on the reef. All the people here go to her if the fishing is bad or if they are sick or if they wish to know the future. It took me all night to reach her and get back, for Ona lives far away. I gave her my pearl to get her help against Yakoff, but she would not take it; she gave me it back. But she gave me advice."

He took the little box from his pocket and, opening it, showed the pearl in its nest of wool as if he wished it to be a witness and a corroboration of his statement.

"She said to me: 'Let this thing to itself. Do not interfere with Yakoff and the other. Leave them to the Dark People who have prepared a path for them with a pit at its end so that they may fall in and be lost.'"

"But," said June, "he ought to be told so that he may fight this thing."

"How?" asked Fernand. "Yes. I felt as you feel when this morning I came to your ship to give you warning, but during the day I have been thinking of Ona's words, and I am pulled this way and that, till now I feel that she spoke the truth. It is sometimes better to run before the storm than to try and paddle against it. There is a God who hates the wicked."

June said nothing for a moment. She was deep in thought.

How could she speak of this thing to Cyrus. How could she say to him: "There are two men here who are going to attack you for something you did years ago and try and get money out of you on account of it."

Put in any other way it would have been just as bad. "Did you kill a man years ago? Do you know anything of a man called Yakoff?" No, it was im-

possible—at least, impossible without wounding herself as much as Cyrus. And besides, what would be the use?

Cyrus couldn't kill Yakoff and Chales, yet killing alone would stop their mouths.

If there was truth in this story of Yakoff's, one course of action alone seemed open to Cyrus. Effacement. He would have to disappear from San Francisco, drop everything, become another man with another name. For if the story were true and the law could be evoked, she saw quite clearly that these men would destroy Cyrus.

June had received a good education at the Pinkerton Academy at Monterey. But the best and cheapest education you can give any person is to teach him or her to read, and besides the academic subjects taught at the Pinkerton Academy she had by reading picked up a good deal of knowledge of the world.

The vast San Francisco daily and Sunday newspapers had told her a lot about life, enough anyhow to make her aware of the true facts of this position.

"I'll think of what is to be done," said she. "You may be right, but, all the same, it is impossible to sit and do nothing."

"If you will let me," said Fernand, "I will keep watch on these men. Stay!—an idea has come to me. Why not—why not—"

"Make them fight," said he, a dark flash coming into his face and a light that June had never seen before in his eyes.

"Yakoff insulted me," he went on, "the very day your ship came into the lagoon. I will make him fight. It shall be man to man and I will kill him because I am the better man. Chales I will also make fight; him, too, will I kill, in fair fight—but I must get them separate and alone."

It was the Spaniard speaking—The fiery spirit that inspired the conquistadors, the desperate indifference to life



that one still may find even beneath the orange trees of Seville.

"At all events," said he, "leave me to fight this thing. Do nothing till you hear from me."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### JUNE AND CYRUS QUARREL.

THEY came back along the coral, scarcely speaking a word. The yacht lying out on the blue water showed the dinghy streamed astern on a line, but June had forgotten that it was waiting there to be rowed off for her. The old derelict canoe that they had salved yesterday was lying on the beach. Fernand got it afloat, and she stepped in and they paddled for the yacht.

Cyrus was leaning on the rail, puffing a cigar and watching them as they drew near. As they pulled along the landing stage and June stepped from the canoe onto the gratings, they felt his eyes on them.

They could say nothing to each other without being overheard, and the canoe pushed off, the girl turning for a momentary glance at it. Then she came up the companionway.

Cyrus had left the rail and walked aft, taking a chair under the awning. Not a word to her.

Was he angry with her? What had happened? She came and sat down close to him.

"So you're back," said he.

"Yes, I'm back," she replied. "I went to look at the reef pools."

He flung away his cigar stump and proceeded to light another cigar. Then he picked up a magazine he had been reading and engaged himself with it.

The girl noticed the curious fact that he was reading it upside down. Then she rose and went below. Cyrus was angry with her.

As a matter of fact, he was. June had become to him not only a daughter but a chum, a necessity.

The thought of a man taking her away from him had troubled him at times, but never much. She wasn't the marrying sort, so he fancied; anyhow, he knew her opinion of the young society men she had come in contact with and her predilection for the men who did things with their hands as well as their heads. She was a sensible girl—as though sense had anything to do with the heart. If at some future date she ever did marry, it would be with some serious and sensible man, wealthy of course, and of good repute, and it would be a long time hence, when he, Cyrus, would be older and caring less for things, and maybe she would have children, and he would be a grandfather to them—and they would all live together.

In this manner he had doped himself when the thought of June and marriage came together in his mind. No particular man had ever given him much uneasiness, a young American had shown her attention, but there was nothing in it, and an Englishman had proposed to her and been turned down. June had told him of the business. "I'm not going to marry any one ever," she said. "I want to be free." And he believed her.

Well, all of a sudden into her life had come disturbance. Just as an animal scents danger, or sees fate in the form of a distant hunter, so of a sudden yesterday and without any very apparent reason, he had taken fright.

The thing was absolutely preposterous. Yet something in her manner, something in the way she spoke of Fernand—this scamp who had taken her into danger—something perhaps telepathic had turned him against the very name of this man.

And to-day, awakening from his siesta, he had found her gone ashore, and she had come back with Fernand!

"Been to see the reef pools with him." And she had never said she was going ashore for such a purpose. She must



have arranged it yesterday—and not said a word!

Cyrus, with the real truth of the situation hidden from him, had some cause to grumble. On top of everything else, there was the personal appearance of Fernand. There was no denying that the chap was good looking—one of those good-looking scamps that women run after. He ought to have been a film star.

He was a boatman—worse, a canoe-man; fished for his living. Why, great Scott!—the idea that there might perchance be any love between him and June made Cyrus drop his magazine.

What would San Francisco say? "Cy Hardanger's girl has gone and married a Kanaka boatman." That is what Frisco would say, what Milligan and White and Delmage and the rest at the club would say.

However, there was no use in his losing his hair prematurely; there might be absolutely nothing in it. So, calling the steward for a cocktail, he took his magazine and began reading it, this time right side up.

Dinner passed off that evening as if nothing had happened. June was strung up; she talked and chatted with the surface of her mind, while deep down her subconscious and semisubconscious self was brooding on the events that might be taking place on shore.

Had she done wrong in not trying to stop Fernand in his design to fight these two men, these two evil creatures worse than any beasts, but still men? Suppose now, Fernand were to kill two tigers that threatened Cyrus—would that be wrong? No. Yet these men were worse than tigers, and he was going to use fair play and give each a fighting chance. Was that wrong? No—and yet—and yet—so strong is the effect on the civilized mind of the sophistry that, bred of the law, differentiates between crimes that in the sight of Heaven must be equal, she felt a doubt.

These men were not out to kill Cyrus, but to rob him. Death was being loosed on them because they were robbers, blackmailers—death! Well, were they not merciless? Were they not indeed threatening Cyrus with what was as bad as death? So she argued with herself while talking to the other about indifferent matters.

Curiously, she never said to herself: "What if they kill Fernand?" So absolute was her confidence in the power and personality of the man she loved, that fear for his safety did not trouble her. He was the sea eagle pursuing the fish. The hawk pursuing the carrion crow.

After dinner they passed to the deck-house smoking room where coffee was served.

When they were alone, Cyrus, who had been holding himself back all dinner time, turned to June.

"Say," said he, "I didn't know you were going on the reef this afternoon. Woke up and found you gone. Did that young chap ask you to go with him?"

"Yes."

"Asked you yesterday?"

"No, this morning."

"But he wasn't here this morning."

"Yes, he was, before you were up. I was on deck and he came along in his canoe and asked me."

"I think you might have told me."

June did not reply. How could she? How could she say: "He asked me to go because he wanted to tell me about two men who are threatening you." To tell that would be to reveal everything, and this business was now Fernand's; she had acquiesced in his determination; he was risking all, and she had no right to tell any one, not even Cyrus.

"I want to be straight with you," said Cyrus. "You know I never bother how you come and go, but seems to me—seems to me——"

"Yes?"



"Seems to me—well, not to put too fine a point on it, this young chap would be better attending to his fishing than coming round the yacht like this."

"Like what?"

"Like this—taking you off and risking your life. You and he were all day yesterday together and you come back praising him up. See here, June; you're young and I'm old and I've seen a lot of the world—and men are men and women are women, and I've been worried lest you'd suddenly taken a liking for this boy. There, it's out."

"I have," said June calmly.

Cyrus got up, then he sat down with his hands on his knees, gave a laugh and, turning sidewise in his easy-chair, sought in his pocket for the little cigar cutter he always carried. He chose a cigar from the box at his elbow and lit it and blew a cloud of smoke.

"June," said he, "if you mean what you say, this is pure craziness."

"How?"

"Oh, how! You know very well that I've never worried about you, given you a free hand, trusting to your sense, and you've never disappointed me."

"And how have I disappointed you now?" asked she.

"How! Well, look at him."

"Who?"

"This chap."

"Yes."

"He's harpooned you. You admit it, and I say again, look at him, a common boatman."

"He is not common and he is not a boatman," said June, "and he hasn't harpooned me. He is a man different from any other man I have ever met. You needn't go on like that. Dad, I'm going to talk and you've got to listen. Only it's you, I'd say you'd insulted me by talking about my being harpooned. I have eyes and I have sense. Fernand is not a modern man; he is a being who has grown up outside the world of men here where there is little else than sea.

He is simple and straight, primitive and honest. I've heard you say yourself that one grain of honesty was worth a ton of cleverness."

"I was talking of politicians."

"No matter; it's true of all men. There is nothing else to a man in my opinion——"

"But heavens above!" broke in Cyrus—"you've only known this fellow a few hours. This is your impression, but what do you really know about him, after all?"

"I know that he is capable of risking his life to save another man from injury."

"He told you that?"

"Never mind. I know it."

Cyrus smoked for a moment in silence. Then he said:

"I stand to you in the place of father and mother. I have a right to interfere all I can if I see things shaping against your future interests and happiness. Unless you get a clutch on this, you will be carried away. A momentary infatuation may damn a whole life. Granted that this man may be everything you say, you have known him only a few hours. Leaving that aside, the whole position is monstrous. He is not of our class. I reckon I'm no snob, but there's no getting away from class. I'd be a fool and a fathead and unfaithful to the trust your mother placed in me if I did not put my foot down now, definitely. I will never consent to this folly."

June rose up, paused for a moment as if about to speak, and then, without a word, left the smoke room and went below to her own cabin.

It was their first semblance of a quarrel. Cyrus, left to himself, sat with a frown on his forehead, deep in meditation.

It had to be done. This insanity had to be met and fought. She would get over it in time, and better to hurt her now than to let her injure herself beyond recovery. That canoeman! That



confounded reef-scraping scalawag! Was there ever such a complication?

A knock came to the door and a quartermaster entered.

"If you please, sir, there's a man come on board by name of Yakoff. He says it's by appointment about some pearls."

Cyrus remembered the pearl man. He hesitated a moment, half disinclined to be bothered by the matter. Then he said:

"Show him in."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### TO KILL OR NOT TO KILL!

WHEN Fernand left June that evening and reached the shore, he turned to his house, went in and lay down on his bed to think. He had not slept the night before; he was tired and the business before him lay like a mountain to be climbed.

Would he have undertaken this business which meant a fight to the death between himself and two men if Yakoff had not flung that insult at him the other day? Leaving aside the hatred he had for Yakoff and Chales on account of their threatened attack on Cyrus, he hated Yakoff personally.

We have all our weak spots, and the weak spot—or shall we call it the red spot in the character of Fernand?—was a fine, full-blown Spanish capacity to hate another man to the knifing point. I have said, full blown. A week ago it was not in the bud. The insult when Yakoff had said to him, "You damned Kanaka," had brought it to bud. The threat to the woman he loved and her father had brought it to blossom.

He lay on his bed now, thinking:

He would get Yakoff by himself that night on the reef, get him on some pretext away to a flat of coral that lay beyond the canoe beach and there make him fight it out. Two shark knives lay in the locker by his door; he would give

Yakoff one and take the other himself. If he was the winner, the tide would take Yakoff's body away. If he was the loser Yakoff would proceed to the ruin of Cyrus and the girl.

But he would not be the loser.

Now, as to Chales, was it necessary to treat Chales in the same fashion? It was here that now, calmly thinking of the matter, his mind drew slightly back.

Chales knew a good deal, but he did not know the absolutely essential facts that would enable him to attack Cyrus. Yakoff out of the way, Chales would be a poor fish.

He was chiefly dangerous to Yakoff. If Yakoff were to squeeze Cyrus for money, Chales would be sure to squeeze Yakoff.

No. Chales, once the other was out of the way, might be disregarded; he felt sure of that, and glad of it. Loathing the creature, he still had no desire to kill him.

At this point in his meditations he fell asleep, sleeping for several hours and awaking to find that it was night and the moon above the reef. He took the knives from the locker and, placing one in each pocket of the flannel coat he was wearing, went out, closing the door behind him.

The village was still awake, and the *California* out on the lagoon lay with her anchor and port lights making amber dribbles on the water.

A guitar sounded from somewhere in the village and a light wind stirred the palm leaves, a warm wind sea scented and caressing as the breath of a woman on the cheek of her lover. Fernand was turning to the left to make for the house of Yakoff when his eye was caught by a canoe putting off. There were two men in her and she was heading for the *California*.

Now what canoe could that be putting out at this hour for the yacht? Had Yakoff decided to do the business to-night?



He remembered the plan he had heard Yakoff unfolding to Chales. They were to go together, and while Yakoff went on board to do his business, Chales was to hang on in the canoe as a support and witness in case Cyrus should turn dangerous.

He watched the canoe come to the side of the yacht. Then, turning, he ran to the house of Yakoff. There was no one there.

Yes. The business was on hand to-night; he was too late to stop them from threatening Cyrus. There was nothing to be done but wait till their return, and for this purpose he came to the last house in the village and lay down in its shadow, his eyes fixed on the *California* where at that moment Yakoff was being shown into the smoke room.

## CHAPTER XX.

### GHOST OF THE PAST.

CYRUS did not rise at the sight of the pearl man. "Well," said he, "you've come back. Thought you would, yesterday. Got the pearls?"

"Yes, captain," said Yakoff, "I have got the pearls, and I have thought better of the price I asked you."

"Let's see them again," said Cyrus.

Yakoff produced the box and Cyrus took it and opened it.

"Beautiful, aren't they, captain?"

"You needn't call me 'captain.' I'm the owner. Well, Mr. What's-your-name, they're not bad pearls, but two thousand is all I can offer. I told you so, and I haven't changed my figure."

"But I have," said Yakoff.

"I beg your pardon," said Cyrus. "What are you getting at?"

"I couldn't take two thousand for those pearls."

Cyrus looked at the other. Was he mad? No, he did not seem mad. Yakoff, standing with the lamplight on his fat, greasy face, did not look mad—he looked evil. He was smiling.

"I couldn't take fifty thousand or a hundred thousand dollars for those pearls. No, captain—I beg your pardon—Mr.—I couldn't take less than half a million dollars, and they're cheap at that."

A cold wind, ghostly, almost imperceptible, seemed suddenly to blow upon the mind of Cyrus.

He did not know Yakoff, could not remember ever having seen the man before, but this talk, which was evidently not the talk of madness, had about it something personal to himself; that was the first fleeting impression, followed by the recognition of the fact that Yakoff was asking him for half a million dollars.

Cyrus put the cotton wool in its place and handed the box back to the other.

"Bunk!" said he, indicating the smoke room door with his thumb. "Get off the ship before you're kicked."

Yakoff put the box in his pocket and turned to the door.

"Very well, Brown," said he. "Kicked! That's how you talk to a gentleman. Kicked—well, we will see. We will see—we will see who will do the kicking. You wait, Mr. Brown."

The name "Brown" was Yakoff's test. It all depended how Cyrus took it. Yakoff watched closely.

"Stand there!" cried Cyrus.

The smoke room of the *California* possessed a stand of rifles, six Winchester's, most useful even in these days, especially should one visit the Melanesian islands that were in the *California's* itinerary. Cyrus at the name "Brown" had spread his chest wide. As Yakoff finished, Cyrus wheeled, seized a rifle and leveled it at the chest of the pearl merchant—to hold him from moving from the room.

Yakoff laughed.

It was now that his wisdom in having secured Chales as a partner in this business showed itself.

"No," he said, "I am not Leeson,



to be shot like a dog over a deal of cards. I'm Yakoff Abrahamovitch, a man who goes cautious and never gives himself away. My partner is outside in a canoe. At the sound of that gun he'd give the alarm to the French authorities; then you'd be hanged for me as well as Leeson."

Cyrus laid the rifle on the table.

"Come away from that door," said he. "Sit down. Who are you?"

"I am Yakoff Abrahamovitch, the friend of Goldberg and Leeson, and I was with them at Port Denison, twenty-one years ago. Goldberg went north and you were partner with Leeson, had been for years, gun running and such. You had lost all your money, but he had not lost his. You remember a young chap that used to do the cooking? That was me. It's a long time ago, Cy Brown, and I have changed since then, but my memory has not changed. Nor you. Look at your finger; look at your face.

"You were staying at the Black Farm some miles from the town. I had gone to the town for a jamboree. I came back to find Leeson dead. He was lying on the floor in the sitting room, his pistol in his hand. It hadn't been fired, a bullet was through his heart and your pistol was on the floor with one chamber discharged, and, by the way Leeson fell, it was clear how he'd been shot. And there was no signs of Brown. Right inland we followed his pugs, but he'd got clear away—and the reward of five hundred pounds was out against him—five hundred pounds, dead or alive."

"Finished?" asked Cyrus. "Well, if you have, allow me to tell you that the killing of Leeson was an act of self-defense. As you say, Brown had lost all his money. Yes, but that night he sat down to écarté with Leeson and won all Leeson's; pretty near two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount. Then Leeson tried to shoot him. Would have

done so only his revolver missed fire; that gave Brown time to whip out his, only just time. If he hadn't fired, Leeson would have drilled him. When you say Leeson's pistol hadn't been fired, you are a damn liar. It had been fired, but it hadn't gone off. The police are experts at that sort of thing and they would have examined his pistol and found the truth. Then, again, there was no money taken."

"How do you mean?" asked Yakoff.

"I mean that Brown left the place. He was no killer. He was pretty well bowled over to see a man lie dead to his hand, and he'd been drinking and his nerve wasn't what it might have been. He left the place and left the country, for next morning when he saw things clear he saw too late he'd been a fool not to stick it out. But, as I was saying, he could have proved his story and he can prove it still."

"In what way?" asked Yakoff.

"This way. There was no money taken. He left that house just as it was, with the fellow lying dead on the floor and the cards and money on the table.

"The money was stacked on the table by his chair. He was dead broke that night as he could and can prove, so he must have won the money from Leeson. Any quarrel must have come from Leeson, see? A man doesn't shoot a man because he has won money from him."

"You're talking wild," said Yakoff. "There was no money on the table or cards. When I got there after day-break, Leeson was lying done in, your pistol was on the floor, and Leeson's strong box was open with his keys in the lock. He'd been killed for his keys and his money."

Yakoff took a cigar from the box on the table, bit it and lit it and blew a cloud of smoke. The act was scarcely noticed by Cyrus.

He saw now the pit into which he



had fallen. He recalled again that terrible night. Horrified by what had happened, shaken with alcohol, he had left cards, money, dead man and everything in his sudden flight from the scene. Yakoff must have come and instantly made his profit, taken the money, put the cards away, taken the dead man's keys, opened the safe, left it open. Then he would have gone for the police, with absolute safety to himself for everything pointed to Brown.

Brown had killed Leeson for his money; the fool had actually left his pistol behind with one chamber discharged.

Murderers are often accused of doing very stupid things that lead to their arrest. They do these stupid things, not because they are more stupid than other men, but because their minds are upset by the act they are committing or have committed.

Brown was not a murderer; all the same, his mind had been turned topsyturvy by the stress of this business, helped, of course, by alcohol. It was not till several hours later that he discovered the loss of the pistol, the fact that he hadn't put it back in his pocket and that it must be lying there as evidence against him. It was then too late to go back.

Cyrus recalled all this. He saw the whole thing *en bloc*, just as a drowning man sees his life. He saw also that if Yakoff moved against him, there was no escape.

Once the law took the matter in hand it would probe back through his past. It would establish the fact that he was really Brown who had changed his name to Cyrus Hardanger, and it could do this quite easily, for he could not account for his movements over twenty years ago without disclosing the fact that he was Brown.

He had always felt safe up to this. The time was so long ago, the scene so far away there in Australia, and in those

days he had been a man of no account; also, he was innocent of murder and sure in his mind that if he were ever held for this thing he could prove his innocence.

But Yakoff had upset all that. Cyrus had reckoned without this man of supreme wickedness. This man who already had profited to the extent of two thousand five hundred pounds, and was out now for a fortune of half a million dollars.

For a moment the impulse to throttle the reptile there and then, regardless of the confederate waiting outside in the canoe, seized Cyrus like an insanity. Then he conquered it.

He said to Yakoff:

"You stole that money and fixed up things so that it looked as if I had killed that guy for his coin."

"That for a tale!" said Yakoff. "I'm telling you when I got there I found the safe bust, the man dead and you gone. I'm not a hard man and I've no grudge against you, see, but it's this way. I'm in the know of this thing, see? I'm, so to speak, an accomplice after the fact if I don't tell, see, and I'm a poor man. I'm clean putting myself in a hole if I keep my mouth shut, knowing what I do. See all that? Well, there you are—I'm not going to do you a service for nothing. You're a rich man; this boat of yours is your credentials. I'm not asking how you made your pile; it's there. I'm putting my services to you at half. I'm taking a big risk holding my tongue, knowing what I know. See here. I was talking of half. Well, now, see here. I'm no squeezer. This is a business deal and two hundred thousand dollars down will close it. You'll never hear another word of the matter. But that's my ultimatum."

Cyrus, who had been standing all the time, took a seat.

"Two hundred thousand dollars," said he, as if he were talking to himself.



"That's the amount," said Yakoff, "and the pearls are thrown in."

There was a tantalus case and a syphon on a table near the door, and Yakoff looked at them.

"If it's all the same to you," said he, "it's thirsty weather."

"Help yourself," said Cyrus.

He sat with his finger tips together like a man engaged in figuring out something.

One of the worst positions in the world is stalemate. You are a prisoner yet not a prisoner. There is no move on the entire board open to you but surrender.

Cyrus was held not only by the bare facts we know, but by the extra fact that, leaving everything else aside, the raking up of his past would bring all sorts of minor things to light. He had been a free lance in a doubtful commercial world; he had told June about the gun running long ago, but he had no wish to tell the world. He knew quite well that if his affairs were raked into, there would be enough to make a scandal. He would fall socially and June would suffer.

That was the least that might eventuate from this business. The worst was hanging or life.

An extradition order, a trial and Yakoff's evidence. That was all that was wanted.

He awoke from his reverie.

"I've got to think on the whole of this matter," said he. "You must come again in the morning; it's too big to decide on to-night."

"As you please," said Yakoff.

He saw that he had won, but he showed no sign of triumph. As a matter of fact, he was exhausted; the nerve tension of the business had been tremendous. There had been the chance of Cyrus going wild and killing him out of hand despite Chales being alongside in the canoe; there was the huge sum he was gambling for and there was

the excitement of holding another man, so to speak, at the pistol point.

He had not taken the whisky out of bravado or from impudence but from necessity.

He put down the glass and prepared to go.

"At what time shall I come?" he asked.

"Make it eleven o'clock," replied Cyrus.

Then, without another word, he accompanied him outside, saw him go down the companionway where the canoe was waiting, and push off.

The night was perfect and the moon ripple of the canoe showed broad in its track. Lights showed on the shore and the wind brought the far-off tanging of a guitar from the native houses. The sound of the sea on the reef came like the breathing of the ocean in its sleep.

Cyrus turned back to the smoking room.

An hour ago he had been a free man, careless, happy and with years of happiness before him. That was all gone.

Well he knew that if he paid Yakoff this money it would not be the end of the business. The leech would attack him again. He was hopelessly involved, tied up.

Ten dollars paid to Yakoff in hard money would be as bad as two hundred thousand. Even if Yakoff were to hold his hand, he would always be in fear. Never easy. There was only one way out.

Milligan & Harper of San Francisco held his will, leaving everything to June. That was all right. Yakoff would come on board in the morning at eleven o'clock. Yakoff would be paid.

No, that would not do. Nothing must take place on board the yacht on account of June. He would go ashore with Yakoff to his house to make the payment there.

He opened a drawer in the bureau near the door and took out a heavy navy



revolver, opened the breech, took out the cartridges and replaced them. Then he put the thing back.

Then he rang for the steward and told him to ask June to come to the smoke room.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### CYRUS GETS ANOTHER SHOCK.

**A**LONE and waiting for the coming of the girl, Cyrus' mind suddenly changed. It was as though a mist charged with electricity had split, giving him for a moment a clear view of the world, himself and his position.

No, he couldn't kill Yakoff and then commit suicide. A moment ago the plan was clear in his head, even to the vision of Yakoff being held before the pistol point, shuddering, white, gibbering with terror, suffering agonies of mind before the pull of the trigger sent him to the devil.

That vision, begotten of fury and the desire for revenge, had vanished. Cyrus was not a killer, and the easy years had sapped his daring and the vital energy which finds its expression in recklessness.

No, he could not kill his tormentor and then commit suicide. There was another way out of the whole business—social extinction. To disappear again as he had disappeared after the killing of Leeson, only this time with money to spare tucked away and with June for a companion. Was it possible? Quite, if he carefully made his plans, and if June acquiesced.

He was thinking this when the door opened and the girl came in; she had not retired when the steward gave her the message and she was in the same dress in which she had dined. When the message came to her that Cyrus wanted to see her, she could not imagine what it could be. They had parted almost in anger over the business of Fernand. Could it be possible that

Cyrus was on it still—wanted to chew the rag?

She was quite prepared for battle, but the sight of him as she came into the room calmed her mind.

Cyrus was standing sidewise to her with his hand on the bureau top, looking down at a paper opened on the flap. He looked tired, and as he turned to her she noticed that he was somehow changed.

"Sit down, June," said he. "I've sent for you to have a moment's chat. I've got to tell you something I have always held back. Sit down—sit down. No, I'm all right, and if I look a bit shaken up it's only from thinking and worrying over a business that comes up to me now and then from the past.

"After all it's only my own affair. I never told your mother. There are things in a man's life that can't very well be told and are better left covered. Well, it's short work to tell what this thing was—just a man killed.

"I killed a man once; it was in my own defense, but the circumstances would be read against me. Things happen like that."

He stopped and looked at the girl and was surprised at her calmness.

"You understand me," said he. "Away years ago, it was. I shot him over the card table because he'd already drawn a six-gun on me—the thing misfired and before he could raise the hammer again, I'd drilled him. If I hadn't, he'd have drilled me. You see, I'd won all his money and he wanted it back."

June sighed deeply. It was as though a weight had been taken off her shoulders.

Cyrus was innocent of murder. Yakoff's threat against him would lose its power.

But why had Cyrus sent for her to tell her this? The answer came on the heels of the thought.

"I sent for you to tell you this," said Cyrus, "because there is a man here on



this atoll who has recognized me, and who has threatened me. He threatened to give information about that old happening if I don't hand him over two hundred thousand dollars as hush money. His name is——"

"Yakoff," she replied.

Cyrus drew back sharply as though some one had struck at him.

"Good Lord!" said he. "Who told you that? How did you know anything of this business? How——"

"Dad," said she, "I've known it since this afternoon."

"And who told you?"

"Fernand."

"That young chap?"

"Yes, the man we nearly fought over an hour or so ago."

"But—great Scott! How did *he* know?"

"He overheard Yakoff telling a man named Chales; he overheard the whole thing. That was yesterday. To-day early and before you were up he saw me on deck and took a canoe off. He wanted to tell me the whole business, and that is why he asked me to come in the afternoon onto the reef. You accused me a little while ago of making an appointment to go on the reef with Fernand without telling you. Well, that was why I made it."

"But why couldn't he come and tell me?"

"Dad, think! He has never spoken to you; he doesn't know you. How would you like to go to a dead stranger and break the news that some one was going to attack him for something done in his past? But Fernand knows me and he told me all. He was in great distress of mind.

"You don't know him and you can scarcely imagine him. He is so primitive and so innocent and so free from any double motive that anything like this hits him hard. It isn't only that he cares for me; if you were an absolute stranger—that is to say, if he didn't

care for me—he would still be out to try and stop Yakoff."

Cyrus was silent for a moment. Here was a new complexity. This scamp of a Fernand as a defender! Could irony rise higher than that? Only a couple of hours ago he had been telling June that Fernand was not good enough for her, that Fernand was socially below them, and all that time she must have known that he, Cyrus, was a man outside the law and that Fernand was trying to help him.

A momentary irritation threw him off his balance.

"But how can the chap do anything?" he asked. "How on earth can he help? I sent for you because I wanted to put before you the position of things and tell you what is in my mind. The only thing for me to do is to dive under, quit everything, change my name——"

"But why?" cut in June. "Why not stand up to him and fight? You are innocent."

"Because, little girl," said Cyrus, "Yakoff has fixed things so that, though I am innocent, my best friend, if he knew the facts as Yakoff has fixed them, would say that I was guilty. He came into the room where I had left that man dead, boned the money I had left on the table and made it appear that I had killed the chap for his money and done a bunk. He didn't do this out of simple devilishness, but for profit. He nailed two thousand five hundred pounds and threw the blame on me."

"And now," said June, "he wants to repeat the business."

"That is so."

"Well," said the girl, "I believe there is a Providence."

"There seems to be for chaps like Yakoff."

"No, for people like us."

Cyrus was silent. He was pouring himself out some soda water.

"There's one thing, thank Heaven," said he. "Your poor mother has been



saved this trouble. Well, well, who knows; it may be all for the best, though it's hard to see it."

"If you can't stand up to him and fight," said June, "perhaps something will happen to help. You asked me what Fernand could do. Perhaps he can do a lot. Perhaps he can do a lot. It's this way: First of all, Yakoff insulted him the day we came in here, then again Yakoff has nearly killed his diving partner by selling him opium, then again there is this vile attack on you, and again there is the fact that Fernand cares for me. Fernand told me he was going to make Yakoff fight a fair fight with equal weapons."

"A duel?"

"Yes."

"To kill. Why did you not tell me all this before?"

"Because," said June, "it was not mine to tell. I should not have told you now, but I could not help doing so—my mind is so upset—and you had to know the truth about Fernand."

Cyrus stood looking at the girl without a word. This amazing business had been sprung on him only a couple of hours ago, yet for several days it had been brewing. Unknown to him people had been plotting and counterplotting, plotting to destroy him and plotting to save him.

Here in this outlandish place, where, above all places in the world, one might fancy oneself disregarded and unknown, his fate had been decided—was being decided, perhaps at this very minute, out there in the moonlit night that was sending its sounds and sea scents through the open portholes.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### TREACHERY.

**W**HEN Yakoff left the smoke room, so sure was he of success that he could feel the two hundred thousand dollars in his pocket. Yakoff knew men.

In that interview he had summed Cyrus up.

Cyrus was just an ordinary individual; there was no danger in him, and it was perfectly unnecessary to have brought Chales as a backer and standby.

As Yakoff came down the companionway to the canoe, this fact hit him hard. If he had only had the courage to come alone on this business, all the profit would have been his, but now that he had Chales tacked on to him, he would have to share. Not only that, but Chales, once he had spent his money, would be sure to want more.

This was a nuisance.

He stepped into the waiting canoe and they pushed off, Chales working the paddle and asking no questions.

Only when they reached the beach did he speak.

"Well," he said, "what luck?"

"I'll tell you up at the house," said Yakoff. "No use talking here. Haul her up a bit higher—there, that will do. Come along."

He led the way, passing the house in whose shadow Fernand was lying, watching them, and on past the houses of the village, unconscious that Fernand was following.

Arrived at his own house, he led the way in, shut the door and lit the kerosene lamp in the living room. Then he fetched a bottle of gin from the case in the corner, pulled the cork and poured himself out a tot.

"Have a drink," said he.

"I've told you once and I've told you for good, I'm off the stuff till this thing is pulled through," replied the drunkard. "Come; don't be up to any of your funny tricks. Have you touched the chap or haven't you?"

Yakoff put the glass down and took a seat. The other followed suit.

"Touched him," said Yakoff. "The way you talk! As if he was the Bank of California and me going in with a



check to be cashed. I've given him his ultimatum, and he's to see me in the morning; that's as far as I've got."

"Then if you've got that far," said Chales, "the thing is done. If there'd been any kick in him he'd have bottled you right away and sent ashore for the French authorities. The thing's done."

"Is it?" said Yakoff. "I'm not so sure of that—and now before I go an inch farther, Billy Chales, I want things straightened out with you. Half shares, you said."

"Half shares and not a dollar under."

"Well, it's not worth it. I've figured it out. From what I've seen of that chap, I'm taking a big risk. I tell you I've got cold feet. How do I know if I tackle him again to-morrow morning he won't bottle me as you said and call in the Frenchman? No, if it's half shares you want, I'm off. Five thousand dollars I'm not saying—and then I'd want a paper from you acknowledging receipt so's you wouldn't be playing any games with me after. If that won't do you, I'm through with this business."

"But I'm not," said Chales. "I'm not going to lose making money through any of your damn foolishness. You've got to go on with this business. You've started running and you've got to run, see? If you don't, I'll split. I'll go to this chap myself——"

"You've got no hold on him; there's nothing you can do against him."

"You shut up. It's you I've got the hold on. I'll tell him your game, that's all. I'll turn evidence that you come inducin' me to help squeeze him. With me at his elbow and that story, where'll you be? Yes, you did, you blighter, comin' inducin' me with a promise of half shares and then turning your back on your promise——"

"There you go," cut in Yakoff, "running away with things. I've got all the risk, haven't I? Well, there's no use arguing. I've got to swallow it——"

"You bet you have."

"And having swallowed it, it's done with."

He rose and went toward the door, Chales following him. They both went out.

The village now was wrapped in sleep and the moon held the night. The *California*, lying out on the lagoon, showed the deck house still alight and several ports like amber eyes that seemed to watch the reef.

"Come," said Yakoff. "I'll walk a bit of the way to your place." He closed the house door. They started off and Fernand, who had been crouching by the rubbish heap that lay by the eastern wall of the house, came from his hiding place.

Clad as he was in white, he would not be easily seen standing close against the coral-lime-washed wall of the house.

But the two did not look back; they went on their way, and Fernand, holding back till they were nearly level with the canoe beach, cautiously followed.

They were going in the direction of Chales' house, evidently having a last word together on the business of the morrow.

Having seen Chales home, Yakoff would return. Fernand would meet Yakoff, get him in conversation, induce him to walk to the big flat of coral beyond the last of the trees and straddling the outer beach. Then he would make him fight.

It was a curious psychological fact that what was uppermost in his mind now was not the safety of the woman he loved and her father, but his hatred of Yakoff as Yakoff; his desire to wipe out that insult:

"You damn Kanaka!"

The words rose in him now, transmuting themselves into blind fury and the lust to kill. Yakoff should not have said those words to a Spaniard. Yakoff, having said them, had forgotten them. Just as a man might forget a



seed he has planted in the ground. They had been growing in the mind of Fernand, and what had brought them to a sudden and furious blossom was his love for June.

"You damn Kanaka!" It was like a knife in his newly awakened pride of manhood.

Truly, as Ona had said, the Dark People were concerning themselves with the affairs of Yakoff. Hatred was following him in the form of Fernand, but there were others on the reef that night besides Fernand.

Near Chales' shack, Yakoff paused; he made a movement with his arms as if pointing out something to the west, and then the two went on. Fernand followed. He had not reckoned on this. Why had not Chales turned in?

He reached the last of the trees and paused beside a palm, watching the figures that had now crossed the flat of coral and were negotiating the rough coral that ran down to where the breakers of the outer sea were bursting in spray beneath the moon.

Here were great reef pools just uncovered by the ebbing tide and showing like mirrors in the silvery light.

Chales was slightly in front of his companion. Suddenly he fell as if tripped up from behind and as suddenly fell Yakoff on top of him.

What happened then was difficult to see. The two forms heaved as though locked and struggling. A voice came on the wind.

The forms ceased to struggle. One rose up. It was the form of Yakoff.

Fernand could tell that at once.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HORRIBLE AND SUBLIME.

**Y**AKOFF, standing above the body of the man he had tripped and strangled, drew his sleeve across his forehead.

Well, that was done, without fuss or

bother. That trick he had learned at Hakodate was hard to beat, and the fool had only himself to thank. Let him split now if he could.

He looked around him. He could not see Fernand because Fernand had cast himself down by the tree under which he had been standing. He could see nothing but the trees and a hint of the village beyond them, the reef, the moon-lit sea.

Then, bending, he seized the body of Chales by the heels and began to drag it across the rough coral to a great reef pool twenty or thirty yards away to the west.

Around this pool, newly uncovered by the tide, the coral lay fairly flat, and here near the pool edge he straightened himself for a moment, wiped his forehead again with his coat sleeve and turned to look for some loose rocks to weight the body with.

He saw a man—a man coming toward him across the coral, a man moving swiftly.

Yakoff's fingers spread open and his flesh crawled on his bones. He turned as if to run and found himself facing the pool.

The vast, deep pool leading to caverns in the under coral seemed of a sudden to be boiling. He turned to dash along its side when, just as Chales had been tripped, he was tripped and fell.

Something had got a purchase on his right ankle. He knew and, screaming, he clung to a projection of the coral while the something got a purchase on his knee and left foot.

Fernand saw it all, and everything was wiped from his mind but the sight before him.

He saw in the boiling pool the balloonlike form of the great squid whose black, snakelike tentacles were rushing and rippling over the coral, making a purchase here, seeking one there preparatory to the great haul on the trapped man.



Without a moment's thought he flung himself on Yakoff to drag him back, an act as mad as the act of a man flinging himself into a furnace to save another.

He had a shark knife in each pocket but no time to seize or use one. He clung, and as he clung he felt Yakoff's hold torn from the coral as a tooth is torn from a jaw.

He cast himself sidewise; he was free. Yakoff's outflung clutching hand had come on the leg of Chales' body, and seized it just as the great twitch came that carried the murderer clinging to the murdered into the grip of the mechanism now sunk from sight beneath the heaving water.

The pool lipped and coughed and sighed, and died to ripples that turned to a mirror reflecting the moon.

On board the *California* the clock of the smoke room pointed to quarter past three. Cyrus had not retired to rest; neither had the girl.

They had been talking.

This tragedy suddenly sprung on them had brought them closer together than they ever had been. Never before had he opened up his life to her, telling her all sorts of details of his past. His early struggles, the hand-to-mouth existence he had led, always driven from post to pillar by want of money till the grand coup came and the phosphates that had saved him and made him.

"And there you are," said he, "all spoiled not by my own fault, Heaven knows. Though maybe a bit—if I hadn't gone in for gambling I wouldn't have won Leeson's money, and he wouldn't have tried to kill me, and I wouldn't have killed him—but I've paid. Lord knows I've paid. But what's the use of talking? Life seems all accident as far as I can see. A man goes along the street and slips on an orange peel

and kills himself or gets smashed in a railway accident through some railway man's fault—and they talk of a Deity looking after things—where is He?"

"Listen," said the girl.

The anchor watch was hailing some one—a voice came from alongside. Cyrus rose up and went out, and the girl sat waiting, listening.

She heard voices—Fernand's voice—and as she rose to her feet, the door opened and Cyrus came in, followed by Fernand. The young man was pale and he looked ten years older than when she had seen him last, and as he stood before her he had to put his finger tips on the table to steady himself.

"Those men are gone," said Fernand. "No one will ever see them again. No. I did not kill them. Heaven did."

He sat down on a chair and Cyrus poured him out some brandy which he drank neat as if it were water. Then he told the whole story.

"You would have done the same," said he, covering his eyes with his hand. "If you had seen—if you had seen——"

Cyrus sat for a moment, looking at the man who had brought him the news that he was saved. The man who had worked for him and done his best and who would have fought for him—only Providence had taken the business into Its own supreme hands.

"Son," said he, "I can't talk to you now or make you know what I feel. She'll tell you." He rose and went out, leaving them together, and, crossing the deck, stood with his hands on the rail, looking across at the sleeping village, and the long, white beach.

A world of phantasy where no sign of life or sound was but the never-ceasing sound of the breakers—a voice that came to Cyrus as that of the living God who slumbers not nor sleeps.

*The novel in next week's POPULAR STORIES, "Moots," by W. R. Hoefer, is a tale of smuggling, fighting, and love, laid in a setting that really is glamorous and colorful—old New Orleans.*



# The Grinning Goddess OF Kiangsu



By

## Herbert C. Arliss

*Author of "The Paper Tiger," "In the Devil Pagoda," Etc.*

This time the Chinese radicals get Dick Holloway into a jam there doesn't seem to be *any* way out of. But if you know Dick, you'll know that he thought otherwise.

AT the water front all was commotion. A ship's siren was blowing raucously, and grunting coolies were scurrying hither and yon, while husky stevedores made ready to haul down the gangways and cast off hawsers.

All foreign women and children had been ordered to leave Nanking immediately and were hurrying aboard the *S. S. Heung Shaan* which was about to sail for Shanghai. Some of the foreign men were also going. Among these latter was Mark Hopkins, manager of the Nanking branch of the firm of Buttercup & Squire. Dick Holloway was remaining, but had come down to the boat to bid his friends bon voyage.

The two men were conversing in

Hopkins' stateroom when a couple of panting coolies appeared, carrying between them a large black-and-gold image which, at Hopkins' direction, they placed hastily on a small table.

Holloway laughed.

"So the precious goddess has to go too, eh?—you old pagan!"

"Bet your life," grinned Hopkins. "I don't intend to let her get out of my sight. Not in this wild and wooly country, anyhow."

And after a few words of farewell, he was left alone with his goddess.

It was almost an obsession with Hopkins—his attachment to this image. From the standpoint of a connoisseur in curios and *objets d'art* one could hardly blame him. It surely was a



beauty—three feet in height, of solid ebony, exquisitely decorated with gold paint and inlaid mother-of-pearl. Its face was set in a most peculiar expression. It wasn't exactly a smile; it was a grin, and not a very pleasant one. Suggestive, it was, of a sort of malicious satisfaction over the destruction of an enemy. Because of this it was called "The Grinning Goddess of Kiangsu." Hopkins had secured it at a fancy price from a renegade monk, who had assured him that there was no other like it in all China. For more than a year the image had been enshrined in the library of the Hopkins' home at Nanking. And now, though his other treasures had been hastily packed up and stowed away in the hold—some were even left behind—the Grinning Goddess, as he had decided, must go with him.

As the *Heung Shaan* headed downstream toward her destination, Holloway, who stood watching her, turned to find an officer of the Nationalist army standing beside him. The man saluted and handed him a letter. Holloway at once recognized the officer as Major Lee, whom he had met on several former occasions.

The letter was in Chinese. It was written upon the official stationery of the Nationalist military government, and bore the personal seal of General Chiang Kai-shek. There was certain information which the general wished to convey to the United States government, the letter explained, but which it would be advisable to transmit through the regular diplomatic channels. He was therefore sending, as bearer of this message, his trusted officer, Major Lee Shau Yan, who would escort the Honorable American in safety to a certain spot where the general would secretly await him. It would not be best for him to pass through the lines wearing his American attire, therefore his escort would first lead him to a place

where he would be provided with the uniform of a Russian military adviser to the Nationalist army. Finally, it was of the utmost importance that the worthy "friend-of-the-Nationalist cause" make all possible haste in accompanying Major Lee to the appointed rendezvous.

Holloway turned to the officer and shot at him a few rapid-fire questions in Chinese. Lee's answers left no doubt in his mind that this was a bona fide letter from Chiang, and that the general was himself waiting to impart to him information of a highly significant nature. Likely enough it had something to do with the growing activities of the Red element in the Kuomintang which was causing the moderate Nationalists so much embarrassment. Holloway knew that Chiang had already been accused, by some of the more radical Nationalists, of playing into the hands of the foreigners. It was, therefore, not surprising that the general should be employing secrecy in this case.

He looked at his wrist watch.

"I can join you in half an hour," he said. "Where will you await me?"

The officer lowered his voice and spoke rapidly.

"At the *hong* of Lau Poy, dealer in kingfisher feathers, on Lower Temple Street. To Lau Poy you will give this sign." Lee placed the tips of the thumb and the middle finger of his right hand together and quickly flicked two imaginary specks of dust from his left sleeve. "I shall be waiting for you in a rear room."

Holloway made his way through the foreign concessions, and entered his quarters. There was apparently not the least doubt about everything being all right, but after his recent experience with Colonel Wong, he thought it just as well to take no chances. From a bureau drawer he took a Colt, several clips of cartridges, a cigarette case and a small metal box.



Ah Ling, his trusted servant, watched these preparations with keen interest. He knew something of the nature of his employer's present occupation, and of the dangers involved in it.

"I think that honorable master would better take this, too," he said in musical Cantonese, as he handed to Holloway a large and heavy-appearing meerschau pipe. "And," he continued in velvet tones, "may the courageous one think not that his unworthy servant is presuming if he reminds him that the illustrious sage once said: 'He who rides a tiger must sit very tight and dismount with great caution.'"

At the *hong* on Lower Temple Street, a sleek, corpulent Chinese, wearing the habiliments of a prosperous merchant, sat placidly pulling on a long-stemmed pipe, his eyes puckered wisely against the ascending tobacco smoke. Assuming that this pacific-looking gentleman was Lau Poy, the proprietor, Holloway gave the prearranged signal. The placid one's only response was to remove the pipe stem a fraction of an inch from his lips, slightly elevate his double chin, and turn it in the direction of the rear of the store. In a back room Lee was waiting. He ushered the American into another, smaller room, and retired, closing the door behind him. The promised uniform lay upon a table—an officer's uniform without insignia. Holloway lost no time in making the change, bestowing about his person the various articles with which he had fortified himself.

A short trip in sedan chairs brought them to the temple of the Seven-armed Goddess, in the street of Celestial Fragrance. This sacred edifice, which had been closed to the public since the Nationalists had occupied Nanking, was hidden from the street by a high brick wall and a heavy-timbered gate. At a signal from Lee the pair alighted. The chair coolies were dismissed. Lee took from his pocket a small piece of

metal with which he bridged the space between two innocent-appearing rivet heads on the face of the gate. There was a little click, as of a lock shot back by electricity. Instantly the gate swung open, and closed again the moment they were on the other side.

Traversing a flag-paved courtyard, they entered the silent and deserted temple.

Lee, quickening his steps, led the way to the rear of the altar of the Seven-armed Goddess, unceremoniously pulled aside the faded draperies and revealed a secret door, which opened to his touch. A narrow stairway led into a brightly illuminated room below, the entrance to which, alone, was visible from the top of the stairs.

"General Chiang awaits the honorable American below," said Lee obsequiously, and motioned to Holloway to precede him. Holloway descended the stairs; and as he crossed the threshold of this room he found himself looking down the barrels of a brace of ugly Mauser pistols, and, beyond them he gazed into the diabolical countenance of the arrogant Colonel Lensky Wong. At the same instant he felt the cold muzzle of Lee's revolver pressed against the back of his head.

Wong smiled triumphantly.

"Welcome to our unworthy abode, inquisitive one," he jeered. "So good of you not to keep me waiting. Your new uniform is really quite becoming. Won't you be seated?" His English was perfect, but had a slightly European flavor.

Holloway continued to stand. For a moment he was so completely taken by surprise as to be speechless. Automatically his hand moved in the direction of his hip pocket where he had concealed his Colt; but the added pressure of cold steel at the back of his head warned him to be careful; while the major, promptly following the lead, relieved him of the weapon. There swept over



him a wave of hot indignation and chagrin which brought the color to his cheeks, as he realized how completely he had been fooled.

"The honorable Mister Holloway must pardon my resorting to a little Oriental strategy; but when one is dealing with so illustrious and crafty a *spy* one must, of course, stoop to meet him on his own level. As we Chinese say, 'He who would win success at the gaming table must practice the trickery of the gambler.'"

There was stinging, biting sarcasm in every word; but Holloway was scarcely hearing him, for his eyes had traveled around the room, and come to rest incredulously upon an object which caused him still greater surprise. A puzzled frown puckered his brow, and an expression of extreme bewilderment crept into his eyes.

Wong laughed insolently, and returned his pistols to their holsters.

"Ha!" he exclaimed in derision. "I see that our esteemed guest recognizes an old friend." He waved a hand facetiously in the direction of an image that reposed upon a small table near by. "See!" he snickered, "'The Grinning Goddess of Kiangsu also smiles her welcome to the illustrious American meddler.'"

When, after the affair of a few weeks before, Holloway had reported to General Chiang Kai-shek the matter and manner of his kidnaping and imprisonment, and had expressed his conviction that Colonel Wong had been an accessory to the outrage, the general had made a most sincere apology, but had regretted that it was impossible to bring the miscreant to punishment just then, owing to the fact that he had deserted to the radical Hankow faction, and was for the present beyond his jurisdiction. He promised, however, that a record of the offense would be kept, and adequate punishment administered when the day of reckoning came.

Holloway was not surprised, therefore, to find Wong in his present role; but he was astonished beyond measure to find the hitherto-impeccable Major Lee involved. Evidently there was in the ranks of the moderates treason far greater than the generalissimo dreamed of.

The first shock of surprise over, he now found words with which to address his captor.

"May I ask what is the meaning of this burlesque?" he said stiffly. "And by what means you justify yourself in detaining in this outrageous fashion a citizen of the United States of America?"

Wong gave him a look of the utmost contempt, as he seated himself upon the edge of the table, beside the Grinning Goddess.

"Certainly you may ask," he sneered, "but before we get through with you, you will find out damn well that this is no burlesque—you dirty Yankee skunk."

Holloway flushed with anger, and took a step in Wong's direction; but the latter's hand went to his holster, and Lee's gun again became menacing.

"You're a pretty clever spy all right, Holloway," Wong continued sarcastically, "but this time you have, as we Chinese say, put your head into the mouth of a tiger; and of course you have lived long enough in China to know what that means. Even you 'civilized' Americans have but one way of dealing with a spy when he is caught."

Holloway did understand; and moreover he was quick to catch the cold Oriental glitter in the deep-set, hostile eyes of his captor. "But," he thought to himself, "even the tiger has its naps." He must play for time. Caustically he parried.

"At least we make sure that he is a spy."

Wong shrugged.

"Not much doubt about the honor-



able Mister Holloway, I imagine. You foreigners have always taken us Chinese for a bunch of fools. But, things are different now. You can't get away with what you used to. You think you are superior; and we used to think so; but now we know better. Why, Holloway, you damned fool, I'll think no more of killing you, when the time comes, than I do of eating a bowl of rice."

As he delivered this speech he sat on the edge of the table, cradling one knee in his hands, while the shoe of his other foot lightly tapped the floor. He was a living embodiment of native Oriental cunning coupled with acquired Occidental arrogance.

Holloway regarded him intently, with difficulty restraining his burning anger.

"Well, Wong," he said, in well-affected calm as he stepped forward, and, uninvited, helped himself to a cigarette from a tin box that reposed before the statue, "you seem to have me distinctly at a disadvantage; and if you must kill me, you must, I suppose. But I should think you would be at least a good enough sport to tell me what it's all about."

Wong, whose hand had quickly gone to his belt when Holloway had approached the table, sought to cover his lack of poise by producing a box of matches from his pocket and handing them to him.

"Be seated," he said, motioning to a bamboo stool a few feet away.

Holloway lit his cigarette, and puffed a cloud of smoke into the air above his head.

"Thank you, colonel," he replied, bowing, "I prefer to stand."

"I prefer to have you seated, Holloway. Unless, of course, you wish to be bound. You are permitted to take your choice."

Holloway shrugged, and took the proffered stool.

"And, now," leered Wong, as he took a cigarette from the tin box and lit it,

"I shall, as you say, be a good sport, and tell you what it's all about."

Holloway's eyes were again upon the image. An astonishingly faithful reproduction of the Grinning Goddess of Kiangsu, he thought.

Wong noticed his preoccupation.

"Oh, yes!" he said mockingly. "Your old friend, the Grinning Goddess. We shall come to her after a while. And then perhaps, later, we shall permit you to say your prayers to her before we dispatch you to join our comrades whom you so cleverly sent to their destruction in the Devil Pagoda."

Holloway started. He opened his mouth to speak, but Wong waved him into silence.

"Never mind about explaining," he snarled. "We understand well enough that it was not your brains or strategy that destroyed them. We know all about your part in it. *You* are nothing but a dirty spy." He paused and glared at his victim, cruel, burning hate flashing in his shifty eyes. "My Lord Holloway," he went on, "once before, I had you in my power; and if I had known then what I know now I would have killed you outright for the sneaking, meddling dog that you are. But, by my father's idols, this time you do not escape me!"

Holloway displayed a coolness that he was far from feeling. He removed his Russian kepi, and tossed it carelessly upon the bed beside Lee. Laconically he asked.

"When is all this going to take place, Wong?"

"Soon enough; but not yet. First we are going to have the satisfaction of seeing you eat bitterness as the friends of Koskavin, Sing Ling Jo and Penang Charlie did."

Holloway smiled inwardly at the idea of anybody suffering over the demise of that trio.

"And then," continued Wong, with a devilish smirk, "after I have removed



the honorable uniform you are wearing, I shall have the supreme pleasure of killing you myself, instead of having somebody do the dirty work for me."

Holloway swallowed.

Wong rose from the table, and stepped over to a niche in the wall, from which an idol had apparently been removed to make way for a powerful radio-receiving set. He plugged in and adjusted the phones to his ears.

"All set," he said, grinning back over his shoulder at his captive. "And presently we shall permit the illustrious Mister Holloway to listen in and enjoy the *music*, as half a hundred of his fellow-countrymen and the foreign-devil steamship *Heung Shaan* share the same fate as was meted out to our unfortunate comrades and the historic Devil Pagoda."

Holloway gasped.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this; that we are in direct radio communication with the Communist gunboat, *Kaak Ming*, which is fitted up with a powerful broadcasting set, and which, ostensibly as an escort, is following the *Heung Shaan*." He smiled sardonically, and consulted his watch. "It is now almost three o'clock. Precisely at five o'clock the *Heung Shaan* will be blown to smithereens. It is unfortunate that we cannot afford you the privilege of witnessing the affair, as you did at Shanghai, but here, in our quiet little rendezvous, we shall at least have, as you Americans say, the pleasure of listening to the fireworks."

Masterfully checking the fury that was taking possession of him, Holloway indifferently dropped the butt of his cigarette to the floor, and leisurely killed it with the sole of his shoe. He little doubted that this fellow was telling the truth. Such a dastardly outrage was thoroughly in keeping with the policy of the extreme and fanatical radicals. However, he must draw him

on further, while in his own mind he sought to work out a plan of action.

"Wong," he said slowly, almost indifferently, as he quietly rose and helped himself to another cigarette, "you are either a consummate liar or a damned fool."

The Chinese laughed tolerantly.

"Perhaps I am both—perhaps neither. But so far as you are concerned, after five o'clock it will not matter which."

"You are mad!" ejaculated the American. "You must know that there are women and children on that boat. It will mean certain war with the powers; and that, of course, will be the beginning of the end for you and your bunch of cutthroats."

Wong grimaced.

"The beginning—yes; but not the end. War with the powers we shall welcome under such circumstances. There being no positive evidence of China's guilt in the matter we shall have little difficulty in proving to the Soviet world that it is another capitalistic war."

"No matter what the Soviet world may think or do," returned Holloway, "you know that you cannot hope to hold out against an enraged public opinion of the civilized world and the combined forces of the powers."

Wong snapped his fingers in his captive's face.

"Bah! How little you know! We Chinese may be fighting among ourselves now; but war with the powers will cement us as nothing else could; and a united China can put more than four million trained soldiers in the field. Already Russian-educated Chinese students are scattered all over the world enlisting their white comrades for just such an event. Two millions of Russia's choicest youth are ready and waiting to cross the border and throw in their lot with the downtrodden masses of China. Millions of our comrades in Europe and America are pledged to our



cause! And an attack on China by the foreign nations will be just the torch that is needed to set ablaze the fires of world revolution. Yah, Holloway! You thwarted us in our plans at Shanghai; but this time your dirty hands are tied."

He laughed devilishly, dropped his English, and went off into a string of bloodcurdling Chinese oaths.

It was evident to Holloway that this man was fanatic almost to the point of insanity. His diabolical scheme for inflicting slow mental torture upon his captive was second only to his insane and almost unbelievable plan for drenching the whole world with blood. That this plan for world revolution was not in the least likely to succeed was of no great immediate comfort. The thing that concerned Holloway was the practical certainty that unless he could find some way out, and that before long, dozens of innocent foreigners would be sent to their deaths in perfectly cold blood.

Unobtrusively he slipped his hand into the pocket of his tunic, snapped open the tiny metal box and procured a small white tablet which, under the cover of a yawn, he placed upon his tongue. While listening to the ravings of this maniac he had been studying his surroundings, and sizing up the situation. A fight would be out of the question, for Lee kept him constantly covered; and Wong was heavily armed. The room in which they were, however, was a sort of catacomb beneath the temple. The ceiling was very low and there was almost no ventilation. That would be an advantage in carrying out the desperate and dangerous plan which he had decided was the only way out, and which he was already beginning to put into operation.

Much would depend upon his ability to keep Wong engaged in animated conversation while he smoked one of his "specials." He produced his cigarette

case, lit a cigarette and blew the smoke impudently in Wong's direction.

"A pretty little plot, Wong," he drawled, "but as you Chinese say, '*Sheen chaak may pit nang hang*'—Though you have a plan you cannot be quite sure of carrying it out. Suppose your friends on the *Kaak Ming* fail in their effort to blow up the *Heung Shaan*?"

Wong laughed outright.

"Impossible to fail, since they will not try. It is not given to our comrades to carry out this execution, but to your own friend, the Grinning Goddess."

Holloway's heart gave a thump. Here was a new angle that he could not just figure out. What had the image to do with it? His face registered the bewilderment he felt.

Wong was now thoroughly enjoying the situation. He turned and placed his hand affectionately upon the image.

"You see," he said, grinning rather sleepily, "as our English brothers say, 'It's the way.' This is the real Grinning Goddess of Kiangsu, the patron deity of your friend Mark Hopkins. The image which you saw placed safely on board the *Heung Shaan* was a dummy, but a damned good dummy at that. She contains enough explosive to blow sky-high the biggest battleship afloat. After she does her little trick there will not be enough left of that foreign-devil tub to make a decent bonfire."

Holloway gasped inwardly; not so much at the devilishness of this plot, as from the realization of how nearly he had come to missing the most important part of the whole scheme. It was well indeed that he had not started his countermove earlier, for signs of sleepiness on the part of the two Chinese already gave evidence that the deadly fumes of his cigarette were taking effect. Had he started to smoke sooner he might not have secured this last bit of information. It was now,



however, time for drastic action. Not a moment was to be lost if he was to avert the catastrophe; and, furthermore, the chemical reactions that were taking place within his own body were causing him a horrible nausea. He was not sure how long the antidotal effect of the tablet he had dissolved in his mouth would hold out.

Now, for the first time, luck favored him. His raids on Wong's smoke box bore fruit. Wong yawned and reached for another cigarette; but the box was empty.

"Here," Holloway said, in affected unconcern, "have one on me." And he passed over his case to his captor.

The Chinese languidly took a cigarette, noted that it bore the name of a familiar American brand, lit it, and inhaled deeply. Instantly he was seized with a paroxysm of coughing.

With a supreme effort to overcome his nausea, Holloway, who had been maneuvering for position, now sprang at the sleepy and unsuspecting Lee, landing a terrific blow on his chin. He keeled over. Snatching both guns—his own and Lee's—Holloway whirled to face Wong. There was, however, no need to fire. The colonel had gone into a convulsion before he had even time to draw.

Holloway threw his guns upon the table and bent over Wong's prostrate form. It was obvious that the fellow was good for several hours' sleep; but he would take no chances, for there was no telling how long it would be before he could get back to this place. Better bind him.

Even as he came to this conclusion there was a swift movement behind him, and Lee sprang upon his back with the agility of a tiger. Holloway bucked and jerked. Lee shot over his head and fell with a thud to the floor. He was up again in an instant, and came at Holloway with a head-on rush, snarling with the ferocity of a wild beast.

Holloway met him with a granite fist; and Lee's head went back with a snap. Holloway followed up with a swift kick to the solar plexus; and Lee collapsed in a heap.

It did not take many minutes to tear up the bedding, and securely bind and gag the pair. Then he snatched the insignia of rank from Wong's shoulder straps, fixed them to his own, pocketed the guns, jammed his kepi on his head, and bolted up the stairs leading to the temple.

The door at the top of the stairs proved no obstacle; and he passed quickly through the temple and across the courtyard. The heavy-timbered gate, however, was a different matter. It refused resolutely to yield to his efforts; and there were no rivet heads, such as he had seen on the other side. It would not be difficult to scale the wall and drop to the street on the other side; but at that hour of the day such an act might arouse suspicion and lead to further complications and delay. Examination disclosed the fact that the door was held secure by a heavy lock; but there was no keyhole visible. Holloway bit his lip—then started. "Ye gods!" he ejaculated, as he suddenly bethought himself of the pipe Ah Ling had put into his hands. He retrieved it from a pocket and, unscrewing the stem, pulled out an exceedingly fine steel gimlet and several steel fret saws. Feverishly he set to work, noting as he did so that according to the dial of his wrist watch he had but little more than an hour to go.

Fifteen precious minutes flashed by before he was able quietly to let himself out onto the street. In the meantime he had planned definitely his course of action. Any attempt to get into touch with the *Heung Shaan* by radio, either through the consulates or through Chinese sources, would he had decided, be too uncertain. There was one way, and one way only, he figured, by which



he could accomplish his purpose. He smiled grimly as he thought of how the uniform provided by his enemies would now serve him in good stead. Hurrying to the nearest chair stand he engaged a chair and four coolies, instructing them to take him, with all possible speed, to the Nationist flying field. As he alighted at the hangar several mechanics were preparing to put away a fine two-seated De Havilland, while a pilot in aviation rig stood conversing with a flying corps major. The major noticed the insignia on Holloway's shoulder straps, and came quickly to attention, saluting. In clear, snappy Cantonese, Holloway demanded the services of a machine and pilot to take him upon a reconnaissance over the enemy's lines. The major hesitated, then glancing again at the insignia of superior rank turned and gave instructions to the pilot.

The pilot called to the mechanics who in response swung the plane back into position.

Holloway climbed over the fuselage, threw himself into the cushioned rear-cockpit seat, and buckled on the safety belt.

Quickly the pilot took his post in front, and cast an experienced eye over the layout of the dials. Advancing the spark he gave the engine the gun, grasped the joystick; and the plane trundled easily forward across the field. The roar of the propeller was music to Holloway's ears. He breathed deeply, and relaxed in his seat, as the plane quivered and commenced to rise.

The pilot circled once over the field, climbing swiftly as he did so. Then he headed his machine due north; and with a roar they were off toward the enemy's lines.

Holloway leaned forward in the seat and shouted into the man's ears a quick command in Chinese.

"Turn east, follow the Yangtze, and give her the limit!"

For a moment it seemed that the fellow had not heard; then he looked slowly over his shoulder and momentarily regarded Holloway through his goggles.

Holloway repeated his command, almost splitting his throat in an effort to be heard above the roar of the propeller and the rush of the wind.

Slowly the machine commenced to circle to the east; and Holloway relaxed again in his rear seat. A few moments later, looking over the fuselage side he endeavored to pick out the course of the Yangtze below. His eyes found it, winding its tortuous way like a huge serpent. Then suddenly he became conscious that the plane was diving. He rose in his seat just as the pilot brought her out of the dive and commenced to circle her back again in the direction of the hangars.

Instantly Holloway appraised the situation. He recalled the look the pilot had given him a few moments before. He had evidently smelled a rat. Whipping out his Colt Holloway leaned forward and brought it close to the helmeted head of the Chinese, at the same instant snapping out his command at the top of his voice.

For a moment the fellow seemed to hesitate; then, apparently having decided that it was pleasanter to live with his passenger than to die with him, he slowly headed his plane again to the east, picked up the course of the river, and gave his engine the limit.

As the machine raced forward through the cloudy sky, Holloway continued to lean forward, gun in hand, nervously watching the dial instrument on the dashboard before the pilot. The speed mounted from fifty to sixty, seventy, eighty and then ninety miles an hour. Onward they rushed, the roar of the propeller combining with the shriek of the air through the flying wires and struts in a wild tumult which Holloway knew might turn out to be



either a song of victory or a chant of death.

Still keeping his man covered he stared again over the fuselage. Straight ahead the river, some ten or twelve miles away, the *Heung Shaan* came into view. A short distance behind her another dark object was visible. It was now four thirty. Holloway felt as though the blood in his veins was turning to ice water. Again he yelled into the man's ear.

"If I do not board that steamer in less than thirty minutes great disaster will befall the Nationalist cause."

The man seemed to understand the situation, and nodded his helmeted head. A moment later he shoved the stick forward, and dove the plane sharply.

There was no longer any need for Holloway to cover his man. Instead he kept his eye upon the rapidly rising landscape below. On the south side of the river were orchards and hilly country. To the north were rice fields. The pilot had evidently chosen the latter. Holloway wondered what kind of a landing they would make.

With a roar and a scream the plane had dropped swiftly to earth. Then in a flash the pilot had her out of the dive again; and for a moment she swept majestically forward over green waving rice fields. Suddenly, then, in some unaccountable way, the man became unable to work his controls. The plane gave a sudden dive; there was a tearing, hissing crash and a sickening jolt. Something struck Holloway on the side of the head. He fought off dizziness as he unbuckled the safety strap, clambered over the side of the plane and dropped to earth. The pale-faced pilot crawled out of the wreck at the same instant. Staggering through the lush grain both men sped from the already burning machine.

Holloway raced to the bank of the river and waved his arms frantically

to attract the attention of those on board. This was not difficult to do, for the mishap had been witnessed by a number of the passengers and crew.

Blood was streaming from the wound on the side of his head and bespattering his uniform. His wrist watch had been broken in the fall, but he knew that he could not possibly have more than fifteen minutes to spare. He stripped off his tunic and dived. The water was cold; and he was already numbed by his flight; but he struck out desperately.

The *Heung Shaan* slowed down. A boat was lowered. He felt himself dragged out of the water. He seemed slipping, slipping—sinking away from everything. He made a tremendous effort to pull himself together. Somebody put a flask to his lips. He took a big swallow.

"Get me aboard," he gasped frantically, hoarsely.

As he staggered up the gangway between two sailors he feverishly asked:

"What time is it?"

Somebody said: "Nearly five o'clock."

The words steeled him against exhaustion, while the brandy was putting new fire into him.

A ship's officer met him at the head of the gangplank and at once recognized him. Holloway grabbed him by the arm.

"Quick," he exploded. "Mark Hopkins' stateroom. For God's sake, hurry!"

He literally dragged the astonished man after him, trying to explain as he ran.

"Get that image overboard," he yelled, as the two burst in upon the startled Hopkins. "She's loaded. Get her overboard, or in a few minutes we shall all be blown to hell!"

Holloway and Hopkins seized the statue and dragged her from her resting place just as Ah Sam, the latter's house servant, appeared at the door of



the stateroom. The old fellow's eyes popped with surprise as he beheld the two men with the image clutched between them.

"Wha se malla?" he piped up in his shrill voice.

"Get out of the way, damn you," yelled the ship's officer giving him a vicious shove.

The old man fell to the floor, but scrambled again to his feet as the two men pushed hurriedly past him with the image.

"No, no!" he squealed. "You fellows damn crazy. No have got big pow in dat joss. Ah Sam, he fool em damn Bolshee fellow. Me change'm over. Sojer man he take devil joss have got plenty pow. By-m-by he find out aw lite."

Holloway looked at the old man in astonishment. One glance was sufficient to convince him that he was telling the truth. No Chinaman would stand there glibly lying, knowing that the next minute he would be blown to fragments. He addressed Ah Sam in Chinese, and the old man, now grinning explained how he had overheard Hopkins' "number two boy" plotting with Wong's agents to make the exchange of images, and had undertaken to beat them at their own game. He had, he said, pretended to enter into the

plot when approached by 'number two boy,' and had been on hand when the change was made. Then, inviting the conspirators into the kitchen to drink a little of his master's whisky, he had slipped out and again changed the images.

"But how could you do that single-handed?" asked Hopkins who knew something of the weight of the image.

Ah Sam grinned.

"Me olo man," he croaked, "just same some time olo man pletty stlong. Maybe smiling lady joss she help Ah Sam little bit, eh?"

"But why did you not tell somebody about it, Sam?" asked Holloway.

The old man shrugged.

"What foh me tell'm? Devil joss him go away. No more tlouble. Ebely ting aw lite. What foh me tell'm?"

Holloway turned to Hopkins and inquired what time it was.

It was exactly one minute after five.

With a shudder he wondered what was taking place in the catacomb beneath the Temple of the Seven-armed Goddess, in the street of Celestial Fragrance. Aghast, he gazed in the direction of the silent, mocking image, now reposing once more upon the table. She was grinning back at him—that awful, sardonic grin. Perhaps she knew.

## THE BEST OF ALL SPORTS

**P**RIZE FIGHTING is, from one not unreasonable point of view, the best of all sports. In every athletic contest one party or team is trying to show itself superior in that particular form of physical endeavor to another party or team. And when a man shows himself superior to another in a boxing match he has demonstrated his superiority in the most fundamental, the most direct of all games. This struggle is nearest to the state-of-nature struggle.

The state of nature. That is the state we hark back to when we get excited about a fight. And that is *why* we get so excited about it. We can't go around knocking the blazes out of every one whose mustache gives us a pain. But don't ever think we wouldn't *like* to! That is one of our heart's desires. And whenever we watch a prize fight, *we* are one of the fighters, and the other one is a man whose mustache we don't like.

*Kill him, Big Boy!*



# THE Milk'sop



## Captain Ralph R. Guthrie In Six Parts-Part II

*Author of "The Boy from Tekuhlik," "The High Price of Bangles," Etc.*

Hollis Pembleton, the narrator, was sheltered from the world by two old-maid aunts. When he was nineteen his Uncle Cyrus, financier, proposed that Hollis go out West on his own for two years. He was to court every sort of adventure and get into fights. He took the train for Plum Creek, Nebraska, carrying a canteen containing a mysterious amulet given him by Mammy Rose, an old colored servant. On the train he was attracted to a Miss Dean. She and others knew his name and seemed to think he was on some mysterious mission. In the Bowman House bar a bully named Monswick insulted the memory of Hollis' father, and his anger momentarily overcoming his craven fear, Hollis laid the fellow out with a beer stein. Protected from the crowd by Tony Morino, the bouncer, and called a coward by all, he left the hotel in the night, resolved to continue his journey.

### CHAPTER VI.

#### A VISIT TO THE JONES FAMILY.

I HAD no specific thing I wanted to do at that hour of the night, no particular place I wanted to go. I had landed in a heap from my fall, and as I gathered myself together my first thought was: "What now?"

If I really must leave, then the road made by the wood wagon had to be followed. This led toward the country, but seemed to stop all of a sudden at the wood wagon itself. It loomed up before my face, a sprawling, infernal thing lying in wait in a pool of shadows under the poplars. I just had time to put up one hand to keep



from being impaled on a jutting timber. My nerves were in a jangle from what I had been through only a few minutes before, and I paused for a moment, listening intently, my heart thumping wildly, like that of a newly captured rabbit. Then, also like a rabbit, I swung under the low-hanging reach to lie flat on the ground.

Some one was treading softly up the path behind me, and, if my ears were to be credited, some one likewise was hastening lightly down the path from the opposite direction. Both evidently were in a hurry and were endeavoring not to be overheard. So I judged instantly that my flight had been observed and that these people were hot on the trail and had me in a cul-de-sac. The footsteps from behind grew closer, and finally a pair of shadowy legs showed up at the side of the wagon and stopped there, so close to my elbow that I could have tweaked the sturdy chin nearest me by merely stretching out my hand. Soon there was the rustle of a skirt, and then:

"Mr. Denby?" called a soft, thrilling voice. "Oh, I was so afraid you wouldn't be here."

My heart, which until that moment had been plunging with fright and consternation, now fairly leaped to my throat.

The voice was that of Miss Dean.

The feet at my elbow began to shuffle in an embarrassed fashion.

"I just this minute got here, little lady," answered the person addressed as "Mr. Denby." "Air ye scared?"

"A little—yes!" breathed Miss Dean. "Is everything ready?"

"All set as purty as you please, little lady."

"I haven't anything new to report," the girl declared in the same hushed voice. "Nothing! There are others looking for the drawing. Forgive me if I seem to have been timid, but it

would have been death to go back to the old place and rummage around, on account of the two bad ones."

"Where are *they* now?"

"Coming here. They were following somebody of importance. That and the other thing made me hasten. Oh, Mr. Denby, I am in mortal terror of this other thing. Yet it is a tremendous climax to what has happened before. I could faint at the thought, but I dare not refuse. It means so much—more than gold or good name, or love or even life.

"Have you seen Tony?" she interrupted herself suddenly.

"Yes. He says nothing must change this here scheme a whit. I'm sorry, little lady, but it can't be helped."

"But *you*, Mr. Denby? You know Red and his friends believe you have been a messenger before. They saw you bring in this wood, and they know I just arrived in town. They will put two and two together. Perhaps they will think I have intrusted you with the chart. They will kill you if they get the chance, Mr. Denby, and then what would your poor, dear wife and little Tillie and the rest do?"

"Oh, I reckon my old woman and the kids will be took keer of. Tony will look arter 'em, I suppose. But law! I'll be all right. I'll have to keep my eyes open, is all."

"Well! You can depend on me. Do I get a chance to see him to-morrow?"

"No; better not. He's hidin' and mustn't be disturbed. However"—and here a jealous pang went through my body—"he misses you more 'n' more every day."

"Does he?" I heard her palms meet in a little pat of joyous applause. "Bless him! Mr. Denby, when you go to where he is, will you whisper in his ear that I love him just ten times more than he can ever love me, and that we will be together very, very soon, and that my life will be in his keeping.



Will you remember to whisper that, exactly as I said it, Mr. Denby? He'll understand."

"Yes," returned Mr. Denby. "And he ought to be mighty proud to have such a little sweetheart as you, little lady, and no gainsayin' that—not by a damn sight!"

"Now we must go," declared the girl in sudden nervousness. "Is there anything else I should know?"

"No, except Tony thinks he had better mighty near give away his pony to the stranger, to get him out of town. He might blunder around and spoil something."

"Good!"

"And Red Monswick, I just heard, had an awful fight down in the Bowman House bar. I'm just aching to see Tony and find out what happened. I heard he was knocked plumb out through the folding doors and ain't come back ter consciousness yit. The hotel clerk was first to him, and found a pair of knucks tied to his wrists."

Again I heard the girl's little palms strike together in ecstatic acclaim. And, as they walked away and their voices died out into nothingness, I brought my left hand over and felt admiringly of the taut biceps of my right arm. Knowing that Red was dangerously armed at the time put an effective quietus on my conscience.

"Uncle Pem," I whispered gleefully to an imaginary personality looking down upon me with astonishment and admiration, "you've got a better nephew than you thought you had!"

After lying idly beneath the wagon for another half hour, thinking dark thoughts of the man Miss Dean loved, and who soon would have her life in his keeping, I got up at last and struck briskly up the road, following the girl and Mr. Denby. However, I did not catch up with them. The trail took me to the suburbs of the town, and then half a mile into the country.

There I saw a light and the dim outlines of a cottage. As I drew near, the thought came to me that it was nearly midnight and that it was rather odd, this light, considering that folks living in the country usually retire about nine o'clock.

I walked up the neat gravel path. From the porch I saw that some sort of family council was in progress, and that he who presided at the head of the homy dining table, over which was draped a shiny oilcloth cover, was none other than the Reverend Mr. Jones. Moreover, at his right, with eyes downcast and hands meekly folded in her lap, sat the preacher's plump wife, and beside her—Miss Dean, looking cool and cozy enough in an organdie dress.

My sharp rap on the door must have startled this serene little family group, for there was an instantaneous scraping of chairs and an impatient ejaculation from the preacher himself. Then the door opened wide, and the Reverend Mr. Jones stood framed therein with the stereotyped and, in this case, cherubic smile of the patient missionary.

"Why, it is Mr. Pembleton!" he exclaimed with an intonation which seemed to mingle welcome and curiosity. "So you found us out, did you? Walk right in. You have met Miss Dean, I believe. I will now take the pleasure to present you to my wife."

I met the good lady and accepted a chair which, to my delight, was right across the table from Miss Dean. She merely nodded, gravely and without undue warmth.

"I always refer to Miss Dean as my niece," declared Mr. Jones, beaming on her affectionately, "but she is not quite that. I like to think of her as a daughter, but that again would not be strictly true. She really is no relation, but we have known her a long time and we are very good friends indeed."



I had an excuse here to look at her better, finding it both easy and delightful. Such eyes and hair! Such wonderful skin and rosebud lips! My nerves still tingle at the mental picture her very name calls to mind. And yet she seemed, that night, cold and mysterious as an iceberg, and just as unapproachable and dangerous.

As it was long past the conventional retiring hour, for the tired-looking Mrs. Jones, at least, I felt that I should state my business at once and have done with it. So I said:

"Mr. Jones, I have a question to ask before I spend another day in this town. I came West on a peculiar quest, but one that has nothing at all to do with the good or ill of Plum Creek or its inhabitants. Nevertheless," I told him bombastically, "from the moment I got off the train here, yesterday afternoon, my treatment by your fellow villagers has been such as to cause me acute apprehension, to say the least. Not an hour ago, for instance, I was publicly assaulted by a gang of cutthroats in the barroom of the Bowman House. I have no reason to suspect you of having anything to do with this particular episode, but when we met at the train you seemed to have doubts about my mission here, and I think you can tell me why I am subjected to suspicion and indignity—if you only will."

"Quite a speech, young man," quoth the preacher, glancing humorously at his wife.

When I mentioned the barroom attack, the minister's wife and Miss Dean exchanged looks, and the girl drew down the corners of her pretty mouth, indicating her supreme contempt. I wished then that I had left personalities out of my conversation. Mr. Jones had stiffened slightly.

"I am sorry to hear that you have taken up with our rougher element," he observed dryly. "Besides, it is ex-

tremely dangerous, on account of your being a stranger in our midst. Do you drink?"

"I am not a drinking man," I replied hastily. "I took my second drink to-night—because I had to."

Again that interchange of significant glances. Those women! They cannot overlook exterior appearances to save their lives. The Reverend Mr. Jones, I am glad to say, was inclined to accept the statement for some part of its face value and let it go at that.

"You have come to me for advice, Mr. Pembleton," he reminded me. "I must claim a moiety of your confidence if I am to help you. What is the object of your coming to Plum Creek?"

"That is a fair question," I replied, after a moment's reflection. "But I am afraid that I cannot go into details. As I said, it in no way concerns anybody but myself. I am a peaceful man who came here, so far as I know, by chance." (The women were exchanging glances again.) "However, it seems that my coming is resented both by Red Monswick and his gang, as well as by better people like yourself, and, if I may say so, by this young lady, whose bag I unwittingly and innocently picked up by mistake when we changed trains at Grand Island."

So far as I can recall now, my beautiful vis-à-vis had not previously given vent to a single word. Now she leaned eagerly forward and fixed her eyes meditatively on mine.

"What do you know about Red Monswick?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Nothing."

"Yet you just mentioned his name as a possible enemy?"

"He burst into the saloon and caused quite a flurry by essaying an attack on my person while I was docilely sipping my first brew," I replied, grinning.

"And then——"



"I knocked him through the folding doors, into oblivion, using, absent-mindedly, a common beer mug. I haven't seen him since. His gang was with him, but a young man named Tony stepped forth in behalf of the management. Then I came away."

"You knocked down Red Monswick?" This from the Reverend Mr. Jones. There was in his voice incredulity plus a subtle note of genuine pleasure, strange, under the circumstances, from a minister.

The girl's eyes widened suddenly into curious pools of light, while the shapely hands lying before her on the table clenched with some secret emotion.

"That is too bad," deplored the preacher. "Now you *are* in for it! Red Monswick is a bad character. Where do you intend to go from here, if that is not asking too much again?"

"Out into the sand hills, toward the Bad Lands."

"Afoot?"

"Yes."

"You had better go back to the place you came from," he advised me earnestly. "It is an eerie waste, owned mostly by the cattle barons, who do not care for strangers or homesteaders. Strange tales drift out of there. Stories of lynchings and outlawry. And in one section," he went on, smiling, "not many miles from here, few cowboys or trappers care to wander alone at this particular time of year. The superstitious say that in April, at the full of the moon, an Indian princess, despised by her people and finally slain by them because she had taken up with the white invaders many years ago, gallops along the ridges on her black stallion, and that all who look upon her figure are smitten with a black curse."

"You don't expect me to believe that?"

"I don't believe in ghosts, myself,"

he replied, laughing. "But there are hundreds of white men and Indians who swear it is the truth. And the Indians particularly are most restless at this time."

"Nevertheless, I shall do what I have set out to do," I replied, with a show of humorous spirit. "I am unmarried and otherwise unattached. Perhaps I will fall in love with the lady, and then you shall see us, some fine day, Mr. Jones, galloping into Plum Creek together on her charger, to request your good offices as a clergyman. Besides, since so many appear to have been taken in by this foolish story, perhaps it would be well to investigate it. That's all I seem to have on my mind these days—just investigating."

Reasonably enough I expected a smile at that sally, but the result was far different. The minister relaxed in his chair with a discouraged shrug. His wife sniffed. The girl exclaimed excitedly:

"No! You shall turn back or hurry on to wherever you are going!"

"I shall go on as I planned."

"But it is my dearest wish that you give up this crazy and mysterious venture which might bring ruin to—to many people's cherished hopes and ambitions."

"Not unless you tell me why, will I give it up for an instant. I am determined," I countered doggedly, enjoying the transient spotlight.

"I will not tell you why," she retorted firmly.

Then, turning a wearied gaze on the clergyman, she concluded somewhat haughtily:

"I think if Mr. Pembleton has finished his questionnaire, he should leave us now to resume our discussion of the Word. At any rate, I think I shall ask your permission to retire. It has been a long and cheerless trip from the East, and there were at least two un-



pleasant incidents. I have not yet recovered from them. Good night."

She swept past me.

And so, with an apology for the intrusion, I took my hat from the antlers and left, the Reverend Mr. Jones following me to the porch.

"Don't do it!" he urged solemnly as he took my hand. "But if you must go on, keep going until you are out of the sand hills. This advice, if you heed it, may save your life. You did a very dangerous thing to-night when you got the best of Red Monswick!"

"Does Miss Dean live here?" I asked, and instantly wished I could withdraw the question. But the preacher replied promptly, though enjoining secrecy with a tap on his lips with his chubby forefinger.

"No," he answered. "Good night."

I mustered my courage and returned to the hotel, finding it dark and the bar closed.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TONY SELLS A HORSE.

I WAS standing on the porch of the post office and general store when a cowboy galloped up to the place, threw the reins over his broncho's head, and alighted in a flying leap beside the worn hitching post which sat askew in the sandy street. I recognized him at once as Tony Morino, my savior of the night before.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed cheerily.

"Hello, yourself," I responded, thrilled because I had been recognized publicly by such a prominent character around town. "How are you to-day?"

"I am mighty pert, stranger," he said, heaving his heavy starboard pistol off the point of his hip. "Going to camp at the settlement a bit, or mosey on?"

"Going to move on," I replied.

Seen in daylight, he was a likable soul who would be quick to make friends and loath to let one go. I could

imagine, though, that Tony would be like lightning on the trigger in case some one imposed on his friendship.

"I didn't see much of you the other night, stranger. Things shore moseyed along fast. It happened the barkeep got next to old Red and his gang and had me in to give you a fair shake."

"That was pretty decent of him," I remarked.

"Yeh! He's a square Dutchman. I sometimes sing songs in that there saloon—when I'm not out at the Campstool, where I live. Other times I just drop in on a bid to clean up bad messes."

"I want to tell you right now that I appreciate your timely intervention," I said. "I've got to give you credit for plenty of good nerve. By the way, what would you have done if they had all jumped onto you at once?" I demanded, smiling.

"You don't know Tony, or you wouldn't ask that," he replied good-humoredly, evidently feeling that he was introducing me to a well-known fact which, somehow, had been left out of my education. "Real he-men fight me sometimes, but no scum like that there you saw. They know that there are only four men in this here neck of the woods that Tony Morino can't whip."

"And who are they?" I asked curiously.

"Waal," he drawled, modestly fingering his quirt, "it don't make much difference to a stranger who they are, and I don't want to give out their names—but them four could lick me all right, if they'd train up a little and jump on me at the same time. But the hell of it is"—and he smiled at me boyishly—"they ain't nobody but me knows what four I mean. Speaking of hard times," he diverged suddenly, "got any notion why them hellions wanted to mop the floor with you?"

"Not an idea in the world."



"Huh!" ruminated Tony. "How you going to move on, Mr. Pembleton—foot or horseback?"

"Afoot."

"I'll tell you something important, then. A lot of people around here seem to think you might know where the Fullhardt gold is hidden. That's why so many here don't 'pear to have much of a hankerin' for you. They are not all interested in the gold, but there are complications that takes in nearly everybody from here to the Dismal River."

"Who was, or is, this man Fullhardt?"

"Just an old man who lived up in the sand hills beyond the mesa they call the Table. Never heard of him?"

"No."

"Waal, that lets you out, then."

"I am thinking," I said, "that I had better go up to the sand hills and see if I can't find it, not having anything better to do."

"Better not."

"Why?"

"You shore'll get murdered—that's why."

"I'll risk it."

"All right then. You're warned. Red Monswick'll be on your trail in a minit. He's heard there's two other yaps on the trail, too, and he's red-hot after them. Ever meet Dorothy Dean?"

"Yes, but not intimately. I met her on the train and again last night. What about her?"

"You're going to hear lots about her, too, up there. She's the daughter of old man Fullhardt. Folks say she's queer on some subjects, like Injuns and buried gold. Pretty as a picture."

"That's what I think, too!"

"Waal, I know her mighty well. In fact, I'm one of the few that have known her all her life. There's only two things about her I don't savvy yet."

"And they are what?"

"Why she gallivants around the hills all the time with a Pawnee medicine man that ain't got no call to be seen with a white gal, nohow; and then again, why is she so durned set on finding her father's money? It may not be hers when she finds it. In fact, I understand it ain't."

"Maybe to defeat the efforts of Red Monswick, whom she hates," I guessed.

"Looks like you made a bull's-eye, there, but I ain't certain. It may be revenge. Most everybody thinks it was Red who killed her father."

"Tell me some more about him," I urged.

"He's a bad egg. Got a good eddycation, too, only don't aim to show it, none. Can figger better'n anybody else around here. Keeps books out at Allen Brothers' ranch. Tough hombre. Say, you sure did settle his hash, last night! Did you know your beer mug left a welt on his chin as big as a tin cup?"

"I'm glad of it, then," I observed. "He jumped on me without reason. I had it to do. It was just as well that I did it well."

"Yeh, I reckon that's so," acquiesced my new-found friend. "I liked the way you did it, a heap, not knowing you had seen the 'knucks' he was coward enough to bring with him."

"How much money you got?" he queried abruptly, looking me straight in the eye.

"Something less than a hundred dollars," I parried.

"How much less?"

"I have ninety-two dollars and forty-six cents."

"Too much to take into the sand hills with you, stranger. Besides, you need a horse. Just what I come to see you about. How'd you like to buy an extra of mine, named Rattler? Can you ride?"



"I'm afraid not."

"Then you kin both learn together, as the saying is. He's not good and broke yet. That's him tied to the hitching post yonder. Sell him to you for twenty-five dollars, as he is, on the hoof. The old saddle with the roll cantle goes along. Louie said you'd be safer if you rode."

I didn't like the looks of the scrawny, evil-eyed creature he pointed out to me, but I felt inclined to take him at the owner's appraisal, resolving to lead him until well out of sight before I essayed to mount. I paid him the twenty-five dollars, and he swung back into his saddle.

"Well, I must be going," he called back, as he gently prodded his broncho with a malignant-looking spur. "If you get near the Campstool, look me up."

He was off, leaving me standing in front of the post office regarding with apprehensive eyes the most precarious purchase a man ever made. Then I strolled over to Rattler and led him away, wondering at my own gigantic assinnity in buying a mount that I knew nothing about, further than that he was a pinto with one watch-eye and a white nose.

The same fever to get started which went thrilling through my blood the moment I had cast my die, obligating myself to my uncle's adventure, takes hold of me again. Beyond the town are the great, rolling prairies, treeless, sun-gilded, superlatively inviting to the imagination. Across them a white, sandy road trails its sinuous length, in and out, over and around, seeking the course of least resistance to some mysterious destination beyond the serrated sky line. Where does it go? What adventure, romance, danger lies along its milky-white way. What sort of people are to be met at the end of a day's journey? I look appealingly at Rattler, who undoubtedly knows every crook

and turn in that road, and Rattler merely bows his head meekly and begins to smell my boots for traces of the tenderfoot. I decide to begin by leading him.

The sun is now midway in the heavens, and I remember that I have been hungry for over an hour, so I hobble Rattler and unpack my bundle. There is a sandwich or two, which I fish out and begin to eat, washing them down with frequent drafts from the canteen.

My mind is full of wonderful thoughts, this beautiful day, the first spent alone on the great American desert. It is still May, but the air overhead and the ground beneath seem astir with awakening life. Mottled lizards, the size of my middle finger and as long as my hand, with whiplike tails, glide along the warm bed of the trail or stop, sheer, with curious finality, to regard me out of glassy, serpentine eyes. A crumb thrown to one of them is disdained, although it falls directly under his jaundiced chops. Soon, I fall asleep.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THREE ROUNDS WITH RATTLER.

I AWOKE to find Tony standing a few feet away by his broncho, throwing pebbles at me.

"I thought it might be my duty to see this here thing out with you and Rattler—since I sold you the nag," he explained. "A little advice now and then goes a good way."

"What am I to expect, then?" I came back smilingly. "A broken neck?"

"Waal, I can't say as to that"—reflectively—"but he's bound to pitch you off, if that's what you mean. However, the boys say, 'They ain't no hoss that cain't be rode and they ain't no rider that cain't be throwed!' That is a pretty general rule, but it works specially, too. I'd like to see you throw a leg over him while I'm here, if you don't mind."

I did mind, but couldn't think of any



excuse for putting off the ordeal longer. I had acquired a horse and something had to be done about it. So I walked over to Rattler and adjusted the reins, trying to make a brave show, but with my heart in my mouth. Mustering up all my courage I seized the pommel and vaulted toward the saddle.

It was none too neatly done. The high cantle stopped me abruptly in my flight, causing me to settle down behind it and clinch my feet into the animal's sensitive flanks. Instinct told me this was a contretemps. I had an awful feeling that I was a pitiable and ridiculous spectacle, with small consolation in the probability that the situation would quickly change for the worse.

Without moving perceptibly from the spot, the atrocious animal doubled his spare form into a tight knot and let loose with the propellent energy of a catapult. I met the earth, which was rushing to embrace me with open arms, and buried my face in its bosom. Rattler, snorting disdainfully, returned to his browsing. Tony, who at his worst seemed only a good-natured ruminant, grinned out of one corner of his wide mouth and spat on the ground.

"You did better'n anybody had any reason to expect," he observed judiciously.

I couldn't guess what he meant. I was still lying on the ground. Hot and cold flashes were chasing each other in a vicious circle in the middle regions of my back, and there was the taste of stewed apricots in my mouth. I thought I'd like to sell the animal back to him.

"What to do, now?" I inquired without getting up, hoping that he would advise me not to do anything. Indeed I had quite made up my mind in the matter.

"Get up and get on," he commanded with a note in his voice subtly reminiscent of that first night in the barroom. I groaned and turned over. My gaze

sought his and met the cold menacing barrel of a revolver.

"Get up and get on," he repeated, his thumb toying with the hammer of his weapon.

"Put it up," I implored, my cheeks burning with a fever of shame. "You don't have to bully me. Besides, I understand what you mean. My moment of fear is passing away."

Stiffly I got up and slowly I approached my truculent steed. This time I took another method. Rubbing my left hand along his sleek neck and speaking to him in a cajoling tone, I managed nicely to get a hold on his shaggy mane. Then, like a flash, I lifted my foot to the stirrup and swung into place.

This was planned to be a poser for Rattler, and there is no doubt that it caused him to reestimate the situation and draft new plans of action. He stood for a few seconds shivering all over as though with a chill, his head lowered, his forefeet wide apart. Then he began to whirl and buck at the same time. At the third convulsion I left my seat, grabbed frantically for his mane and laid hold of a bunch of blue-stem, thrust into it by a deceitful natural law. For the second time I was unhorsed. Sir Rattler stood over my prostrate form, triumphant, but also disgusted, because I lay across a particularly inviting bit of herbage.

This time I felt that I had broken a bone somewhere, but there were so many that ached I couldn't locate the seat of the trouble. My hand involuntarily caressed my shin and found a torn trouser leg. There was skin missing on my elbow.

"Get on him again?" I inquired piteously.

"Yep!"—sternly.

At that moment from somewhere near, came a ironical peal of laughter. I looked sharply around. Seated on a spirited bay colt sat the Dean girl, re-



garding me laughingly, and with an obvious inclination to jeer at my forlorn appearance and dejected mien. I leaped to my feet, furious.

"Tony," I accused bitterly, "you did this!"

"Yep! Told her she might come along and have some fun. She's a friend of mine, as I told you afore. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to show you the blood of the Pembletons," I retorted hotly. "Look on, if you want to be so damnablely impertinent. I'll break this horse, or I'll break his neck. I'll show you!"

"We have already observed the insolence of a Pembleton, the temerity of a Pembleton, and his bad breeding. We have seen a Pembleton forced to get on a broken-down cow pony at the point of a pistol," she said, with cold sarcasm. "Well?"

"What more can we ask?"

"You are as cruel as you are unjust," I replied, my face stinging. "I can't answer you, because—because you are only a woman." And I return to my task.

There is a saying on the ranches that the third time is a charm with bronchos. I don't know whether this always is true, or whom the charm favors—probably it alternates. At any rate, the third time I landed on Rattler's unsteady and eccentric hurricane deck I stayed there, and all his efforts to remove my obnoxious person from his vicinity fell flat. In ten minutes it began to look like a conquest.

"Now," shouted Tony, "take off your hat and hit him with it."

I did so.

He essayed a couple of perfunctory pitches and settled down to a jolty trot. We had up to this time kept fairly busy describing a circle.

"Throw your leg over the horn!"

I did this and weathered the results with difficulty.

"Now poke him with your spurs!"

This, too, was done successfully. I looked for the girl, but she had gone.

"I reckon she was plum disappointed, the way you carried out your contract," observed my mentor, expectorating carelessly on his boot. "Leastwise, she left at a lope when you began to do that trick stuff. For my part, I say you've got mettle in you, old man.

"What's the matter 'tween you and Miss Dean?" he branched off suddenly. "She don't appear to have much of a hankerin' for you, nohow."

"I don't know," I gasped, out of breath from my unusual exertions. "That's a mystery that gives me little concern. I don't care if I never see her again. I've swept her completely out of my mind.

"Tony," I demanded suddenly, "is this a broken-down cow pony?"

"Waal," he replied pensively, "not as I knows of. I reckon the gal was just mad when she said it was. You done passing well, stranger, passing well! And say! You're some little forgetter, too, ain't you? I mean about pretty gals, like Dorothy Dean!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LEGEND OF WIIHAKE.

**G**OING on to-night or turning back?" inquired Tony.

"Going on."

"Might I ride along with you?"

"I should be very glad indeed to have the benefit of your company and plains experience, not only part, but all of the way," I replied, much mollified. "But isn't it putting you to a good deal of trouble, just to accommodate a stranger? I shall manage some way, I am sure."

"It's so late now that you might have to sleep under the stars," observed Tony. "I brought some chuck an' a gulp or two of lick and some more coffee, so I could see you safely as far as the South Loup River."



"Is traveling alone as dangerous as that?"

Tony snickered.

"You're as safe as if you'd never left your mother's arms," he assured me. "Safer 'n that, for she might drop you, while the prairie will hold you tight on a lap that never tires, no matter how much you twist and turn. However, Miss Dean asked me to see you safe to the Table, so there you are. Let's ride."

Miss Dean again! She was giving me a lot of attention, that girl. But I couldn't imagine her doing it to flatter me. She had given every indication that she hated me, even at first sight. What was her object in showing so much solicitude, now? Was it a subterfuge of some kind? Was Tony a spy and did she merely desire to make sure I wouldn't do some unheard-of thing to thwart some hidden plan? If that was true, then the question arose inevitably—what could I possibly do to thwart anybody?

I felt it would be futile to question my companion, so I gave it up, and we rode at a swinging gallop along the silvery ribbon of road, Tony easily, I balancing with difficulty and holding on to the cantle.

At dusk we were at least fifteen miles from our noon camp, so we dismounted and prepared to spend the night close to a sizable but shallow stream. I could see beyond the far bank the lacy profile of a plum thicket and the road wandering on into the gloom. Tony pointed out that we were within another day's ride of the Table, which is the dividing line, partitioning off the sand hills from the grassy prairies of the Loup and Platte Rivers.

The place selected for temporary encampment by my self-appointed guide, was the near bank of the turgid South Loup. There we stretched our blankets on the warm sand, boiled our coffee with river water and enjoyed our sup-

per, for both of us were hungry and—I, particularly—worn out by the unaccustomed exertion of riding.

"We won't unsaddle—yet," Tony said, while the pot was boiling. "Maybe we might think of a better spot for our bunks. I don't aim to bunk within rifle range of where I have a fire."

I was quite satisfied I told him crossly; but he only grinned back at me as he strolled down to the edge of the gurgling stream to reconnoiter.

"Look here, Mister Pembleton," he called finally. "That there island in the center of the current looks all right to me. We'll ride over, after a bit, and make our camp there."

I got the impression somehow that he had known of this location all along.

"What are you afraid of?" I chided him, hating to stir my aching body another step.

"Not afraid of nothing in these here parts," he shot back. "A man can take precautions without being skeered, can't he? I reckon he can."

"Indians?"

"There's a few hereabout. Just thieves. Up the river, nigh that island, there's a ford, and nigh it no Injun dares to come in the light of the moon fer fear of Wihake, who's a spirit. I'll tell you about this Injun gal when we get all settled for the night. It's a good yarn for tenderfeet to begin on. If you happen to believe it, you go in the same class as the old-timers."

So, after supper we mounted again and rode upstream a quarter of a mile to a shallow crossing. There we breasted the current at an angle without swimming our horses and so, slowly, made our way to the island. Here we unsaddled, hobbled our ponies and spread out our blankets on the tall slough grass.

"Here's as far as I'm going, with you," announced Tony then, lighting his pipe and drawing his knees up under his chin, boyishly.



"The trail is safe from here on," he explained. "You must keep on it and bear to your left as you come to the next road fork, five miles from the far bank. By doing that you keep within the pertected zone, where Injuns won't hurt nobody."

The moon was in its final brilliant quarter, lighting up the desolate hills and valleys beyond the Loup with fantastic streaks of pale cream and mauve. On the bosom of the river swung a pendant of silver filigree, pointing, like the finger of a compass, at our bivouac. Tony began to play on a nickel-plated mouth organ, but after a while he put the instrument away in his shirt pocket and sang me a song of the ranches. He had an untrained but highly colorful voice. He sang:

"One day I was ridin' down by Tim Dolan's,  
Tim Dolan's saloon, one mornin' in May.  
I saw there a cowboy, all dressed in white  
linen,

    Ah dressed in white linen, though cold was  
    the day."

There were ten stanzas telling of the hard luck which had befallen a lonely cow-puncher, who had gone from bad to worse, and finally,

"Got into a fight and got killed in the fray."

When he had finished, I applauded earnestly from my couch. He accepted the compliment with a pleased grin but did not offer the encore I expected. Instead, he fell into silent reverie, watching the moon.

"Tony," I broke out at last, "you told me earlier in the evening that there is a spirit who keeps the Indians off the warpath on certain neutral ground. Have you ever seen her?"

"I never have, personally," he drawled meditatively, relighting his odorous black brier, "but there's a heap of whites what has. Or, at least, so they say. Injuns, too, though their word don't count. When the moon's plum full an' at its height, she crosses

this here ford, or one farther up, and rides through the sand hills without stopping until she arrives at the Dismal. Her horse is a big black stallion without a fleck of white on him. Travels like the wind, and the gal ain't got bit nor saddle, nor more'n enough clothes to cover her body. Likewise, she has two great white swan's feathers in her hair, which is most unusual for an Injun gal; but this one's a spirit and can do as she pleases."

"How do the Indians account for her wild rides?" I inquired. "I believe you said there was a legend concerning her, among the tribes."

"They do have a legend," went on my companion solemnly. "They do have; but I don't take no stock in it, nohow, even if some of the old trappers, including old man Demeritt, do say it's every word true."

"Them Injun legends," declared Tony. "are mostly about the things that an Injun wants in this life or the life to come. The squaws weave 'em around such things as how come the corn to grow on cobs, and how come the mountains to turn purple and gray, 'long about night, and how come there be certain springs and rivers here and there with red clay on one bank and white sand on the other. Such things stir up their curiosity and gets their imagination to working, after a big pow-wow in the lodge, with the little papooses standing round with their mouths wide open, taking it all in."

"This here legend is not much different from the others. The Pawnees under Wild Horse, and the Sioux, under Crazy Horse, have lived so long side by side that they don't neighbor no more, but they tell the same kind of yarns about why this, that and the other thing happened to happen, and when and how it did. One of their stories is about the gal who rides the black stallion."

"These here Injun tribes is peculiar, inasmuch as they both came from down



near Texas originally, and they have wandered here and there for a good, long, time, trying to locate the best meat supply, and have taken their spirits and saints and hoodoos right along. Most of these varmint tell of havin' seen white men long before any was here that we know of. They were small dark men, they say, with iron shirts and big plumes in their hats and they were always looking fer a yellow stone they called 'oro.' The squaws say it happened up here, but Father Haley sticks to it that they must have brought the idea with 'em. It don't make much difference to the yarn, one way or the other.

"I'm not saying there ever was such men, but the Injuns seem tolerably sure there was, and that they camped once where Victoria Springs is now, four miles from the settlement at Anselmo.

"There wasn't any Victoria Springs there then, and the strangers were starving and hankering fer drink. It appears like the boss of this party had taken up with a Injun gal named Wihake, the daughter of a Pawnee chief, and he took her along with him as a sort of mouthpiece in dealing with the other redskins.

"This Wihake was really a close kin to the Great Spirit, they say, and when she found that her tribe wouldn't help the strangers but intended to make war on 'em, she laid her two moccasins at some distance from each other, on the sand, and two springs showed up right where they sat. She was mighty angry at her father for his not being any too good to her sweetheart, so she put a ring of buffalo bones around the place causing the water to sink and run underground for twelve miles. That was so her paw couldn't get any drink for his braves."

"Are the springs there yet, and does the stream still run underground?" I inquired curiously.

"They are and it do," replied Tony.

"Some day you can ride over to Victoria Springs and see for yourself, providing old Crazy Horse'll let you."

"Then what happened?"

"Just this happened," he pursued. "The white boss moved on to where we are sitting now, about. Then he was surrounded by the Sioux, and Wihake was sent by him as a messenger to the Pawnee. She rode a big, black stallion belonging to her sweetheart."

"Yes?"

"She started in the full of the moon, from this island, and rode clean across the West Table to the sand hills, where she was ketched and skun alive by her own people. Before she died she told her father she would come back regularly and set a curse on the country she rode through that night, not allowing neither fighting nor hunting in this strip, which is in the very heart of the game country."

"And you say she rides still?"

Tony looked at me a full minute before he answered, and I did not understand that look.

"I don't care to say, Mr. Pempleton. She might and she might not. I'm telling you just what I've heard. Old man Demeritt says she does it regular and that the Injuns all know it. What I know is that they won't hunt nor fight in the neutral strip and won't touch the settlers who have taken claims there so long as they *think* she rides."

Thus ended the legend of Wihake. Soon after this my companion and I rolled ourself up in our blankets to sleep, as Tony had promised, under the stars.

As tired as I was, excitement kept me awake for hours. Once I began to doze, and then sat up with my heart thumping, thinking I had heard voices. I was mistaken.

The air was cool with river vapors; the moon, a pale, bronze disk, soared like a kingly courier amid pavilions of silvery fleece. Around us, in the night,



the shallow, sand-bottomed river gushed and gurgled on its strenuous journey to meet the mighty Platte.

Some day I should like to witness that embrace, and laugh with the two tumbling currents, as they leap joyously into each other's arms. So often, since, have I seen them separately, on the way to their liaison!

Placid moon and restless stream conspired to keep my eyes staring up into the leafy canopy of the cottonwoods. Once a beaver gnawed somewhere near; again, a trout leaped. Once more I sat up in alarm as my ears were assailed by a fierce crackling of dry twigs. Several tiny shadows blundered along near the whispering brink. While I was trying to classify them in my tired mind, they arose with a noisy whirl and vanished into the night. "Only quail," I murmured, and wrapped myself up again in my dew-soaked blankets.

"Wihake!" I thought. "What a curious name, but rather euphonious." I tried to conjure up a mental picture of this Indian maiden of rare beauty, whose spirit dominated the neutral strip. I closed my eyes and could see her very well indeed. She was somewhat slender, for a wild creature of the plains, and carried herself like a queen of the drawing room, which was even more wonderful. Then I realized, with annoyance, that what I saw was, in reality, Miss Dean.

"Bah!" I exclaimed disgustedly. "I'll get up in a minute and not try to sleep." And promptly I lost consciousness.

But long before sunup I was awake and stirring with breakfast on the fire. My companion, who had snored happily all night long, awoke only when I called to him that coffee and bacon were ready. In a few minutes he had joined me at the morning meal.

"Which way are you going?" I asked him, after we had finished.

"North and west," he replied shortly. "Going to see my gal."

"Why that's the way I'm going. We can travel together," I replied with enthusiasm, for I had managed to become inordinately fond of this raw son of the buttes.

"Naw," he retorted in a decisive tone. "You bear to the right while I bear to the left."

"But I don't care which way I go; I'd much rather travel with you, if you don't object."

"Don't object, personally," he returned amicably. "Miss Dean says, though, that you bear to the right. She has her reasons, I reckon."

"Look here," I exclaimed. "What has that girl got to do with my route, anyway? She was mighty contemptuous when I saw her last. I don't see how she can expect me to take orders from her."

"I dunno. She said if you kicked on bearing to the right, I was to tell you it was a purty dear wish of hern that you do the same. I reckon she thinks Red Monswick will get you if you go too nigh Allen Brothers'. Wimmen are peculiar."

There was nothing to be said to that, so, in silence, we rode across the ford to the north side and up the slanting, gravelly bank onto an apparently well-traveled ranch road. Later we came to a fork, where we shook hands and parted with a promise to meet again, somehow. Still later I doubled on my trail, came back to, and followed, the same branch of the road taken by Tony. It happened to be the specific charge of my uncle that I look for trouble in any form that it might take in that wild country.

High, treeless hills of gypsum clay now marked the landscape on all sides. Following his nose like a good cow pony, Rattler plunged first into a ravine or gulch where bare cliffs frowned down upon us, and later, as the shadows lengthened, plodded deep into forbidding canyons where the road burrowed



its way through plum thickets festooned with wild grape and poison ivy.

Late in the afternoon we approached the foothills of the West Table, and I saw that gigantic mesa stretching its massive precipices across our path, ten miles farther on. I had been riding slowly, due to saddle soreness, so gave up finally and decided to camp somewhere short of my original destination. The Table could wait until sunup, I decided.

But at nightfall I was still searching for a place to sleep, and so, after resting for an hour to eat a cold supper, resumed my journey.

## CHAPTER X.

### A DATE FOR A DANCE.

**H**ILLS with blue-gray peaks, swathed round with mantles fabricated of sprouting blue-stem and buffalo grass; heat devils swirling through shallow canyons, like revolving clouds of iridescent dust; a warm and steady wind fanning the sumac and filling the valleys with an aromatic and melancholy haze which reacted on the senses with that peculiar enervating effect common, also, to the mistral and the sirocco of other lands—such were the foothills of the Table, as I found them that late afternoon.

Into this land had I come as a stranger, without a guiding impulse other than that to seek out adventure wherever it might be found. Some one had called me a sissy and challenged me to do this thing. I was not, at heart, never had been a sissy—yet. I had accepted this challenge, glad to break away from a life of monotonous and persistent coddling. What could the uninitiated tenderfoot do in such a country? Nothing worth mentioning, it seemed. The whole territory long before had been split up into vast feudal tracts over which the cattle barons held despotic power. The seignorial estates

of the Middle Ages were not half so exclusive and forbidding to wandering strangers.

I decided, as I jogged along, that I would proceed with my crazy notion to locate the Fullhardt treasure, since so many other people out here seemed intensely interested in it.

"At any rate," I sighed, "it is something to do; and it bids fair to be very, very dangerous."

A moment later the plan was in the process of being mercilessly deleted by sober second thought. A voice like Aunt Fidelia's whispered that I could do quite as well if I sidled off out of the Bad Lands and established camp near some friendly settlement.

While I was still mentally arguing with the tempter, Rattler turned sharply into a crooked by-trail of glazed clay and broke into a canter. Shortly after this I hauled him up at the very door of a rickety frame cabin, perched on a precipitous slope, with two lean-tos on the flank and a squat barn sprawling in an odorous cattle corral in the rear. Seven or eight dogs, of all varieties of mongrelism, swarmed around me, leaping, yelping, fanning the air with tails that talked endlessly of canine friendliness and yearning for special recognition.

"Hello!" I shouted joyously. "You people inside! Hello!"

Instantly the front door flew open and a gaunt plains woman smoking a cob pipe appeared, wiping her hands under her apron on a torn and soiled skirt. Several children peeped bashfully around her silhouetted form.

"'Lo!" she hailed me. "Wanta put up?"

"Yes."

"Bobbie, she screamed to a tow-headed boy of twelve who was almost at her elbow, "take the stranger's horse and put him up in the barn!"

The boy sidled past his mother and reached a tentative hand for the reins.



I turned them over and showed him where to get the feed out of the bags.

"We got plenty of corn and hay," he replied in a soft lisp. "Ain't no need of using you'n."

A side door was now opened, and out of it issued a cloud of dust. Some other member of the household evidently was setting the house in order for the unexpected guest, while the mother engaged me in light conversation, cunningly blocking the door with her body.

"I'd better watch thet child fer a minit, Mr. Stranger. Mought put the hoss in the cattle side of the barn," she explained, then added apologetically, "if yeh don't mind waitin' a minit."

The side door slammed and from the interior drifted the smell of newly awakened dust.

"My name is Pembleton and I am on my way west and north," I introduced myself, following the simple procedure of the country. "May I ask your hospitality for the night?"

"Yo' shore may," she replied promptly. "My name's Mrs. Denby. My husband's down ter Plum Crick lookin' ter buy some shoats. Come right in, stranger."

This is the "dear Mrs. Denby," I thought.

In I marched and found myself in a pleasant place indeed, though it comprised only one dirt-floored room sparsely furnished with such few articles as might be transported in a prairie schooner modernly known as a covered wagon—two patched-up chairs, a diminutive cookstove and three or four faded lithographs. The table was hand made, and seats for the children had been constructed by nailing pieces of boards on the back of soap boxes. Nevertheless, a fire was going and, judging by the smell, fat pork and corn bread were in the oven. I felt tremendously at home and just as hungry as if I had not already eaten.

"Tillie," screamed Mrs. Denby, "come an' meet this stranger! Mister Pembleton, Miss Tillie, my darter."

I took the soft brown hand extended toward me and gazed feelingly down into the depth of two lovely brown eyes. Tillie essayed an awkward curtsy.

"Glad ter meet yer, Mister Pembleton," she exclaimed, as if reading from a book. "Make yerself at home."

Then she found me the better of the two chairs and I sat down.

Tillie was a likable little person, not over sixteen, unkempt, as are most ranch women surprised in their loneliness, inclined to plumpness. She was not at all like her mother, so I decided that Mr. Denby must be a fairly handsome fellow of the Tennessee mountain type—stocky, muscular and dark from distant intermingling of Scotch with Indian blood. Not much culture or refinement here, as city mannerisms go, but downright hospitality and kindliness.

Mrs. Denby turned to her incomplete household tasks, setting the table, withdrawing from the stove skillets and dripping pans smoking hot and appetizing in their odor of baked pork and corn cake, while two of the youngsters helped by placing the chairs around the family board.

"Miss Tillie," I began by way of starting conversation, "have you lived here very long?"

"Not very long," she replied simply. "Hit ain't bin more'n a year since we-all moved up here from Tennessee an' tuk this claim. Paw says hit's a mistake, 'cause the piece he got war sot on end by the Almighty and you hafter put props under the watermelons to keep 'em from rollin' downhill into the hog lot."

"Ever been to Plum Creek?"

"Nope. Come through Kearney, though. Hit's a big town; bigger'n Plum Crick."

"It's pretty lonesome out here for a young girl," I ventured.



"Oh, I don't know."

"Do you ever leave the place to attend parties or dances?"

"Suttin'ly. Hit's only ten mile to the Campstool. They have dances regular over there. There's one at the Campstool to-morrow night, but I had a racket with my beau to-day and he won't take me. Expect I'll just ride over on my horse, instead of taking the buckboard."

"Paw won't be here ter put his foot down and I kin manage maw," she concluded sententiously. "Do you dance, Mister Pembleton?"

"Yes," I answered. "And I think I'd like to go with you in the buckboard."

Probably I should have inquired who the beau was, but my mind was busy with other things. I was young. "Why not?" I philosophized. "No hurry about the remainder of the journey. I certainly *am* tempted."

Nevertheless it did seem a long trip for just a few frivolous hours spent in dancing.

"Supper's ready," proclaimed Mrs. Denby. "Hit's not very good but hit's the best we've got, Mister Pembleton."

I took my place at the table. Several times during the meal I felt the brown eyes of the girl searching my face wistfully, but her mother, who hitherto had devoted her entire attention to the dinner getting, now kept up a rattling fire of conversation, leaving me little opportunity to cultivate the budding friendship. From every side of the board children gaped at me, curiously following the movements of my hand as I conveyed each morsel from plate to mouth. My skill with a fork amused and astonished them. The constant surveillance made me self-conscious to the point of embarrassment. I would have preferred a tête-à-tête dinner with just Tillie for a companion.

"I hear tell that the Sioux and Pawnees are getting restless like," observed Mrs. Denby, making conversation.

"Don't put much stock this year on the gal rider. She ain't ridden fer a long time and some of the Pawnee medicine men tells 'em she's taken back her cuss."

"Is that so?"

"Ye-e-s, that's so. Leastwise Darky Jim, who fixes saddles and things over at the Campstool, an' once an' a while at Allen Brothers, was here yestiddy and said so. Jim had heard the Sioux and Pawnees had a battle near the Springs over some swiped ponies and that Crazy Hoss chased 'em clean through the Sand Flats inter the forbidden deestricht. Settlers are all alarmed up in the sand hills and 'low thar'll be trouble onless the gal rides this full moon. This is the durnedest country I ever seen fer things breakin' loose. Everybuddy here's plottin' 'gainst everybuddy else, 'pears like."

"I wonder why the big ranchers like Allen Brothers don't get together and talk business with those redskins," I observed.

"They ain't goin' ter do nothing," snorted Mrs. Denby contemptuously. "The ins and outs of the sichewation 's past all onderstandin'. The ranchmen more'n half hope the settlers'll all get wiped clean off'n the map. Why, last year there war two men from Mishygin tuk claims in Allen Brothers' range. Their names war Mitchell and Ketchum. One night the boys from Allen Brothers rode down on 'em, 'cause of their bein' settlers an' nothin' else, and Ketchum killed one of 'em. Then the boys got mad and burned the shanty—hit war log with a thatch roof—an' tuk the two men out in Hell's Canyon an' burned 'em, too. Darky Jim and Red Monswick war with them and others I know of—up ter their eyes. *They* ain't goin' ter tell the Injuns ter lay off us settlers. Not them! Hit's jest what they want."

"That was a severe punishment—burning alive!"

"Law! don't yer go an' tell I said they



war burnt alive," exclaimed my hostess in alarm. "I don't say no sich thing. All I say is they war burnt, an' their bones is thar yit, lyin' around a burnt tree in Hell's Canyon. Some say they war shot fust. Allen Brothers and the Campstool—they war both mixed up in it—tells us settlers the men from Mishygin had bin stealin' calves. We never mention hit much. Hit's too dangerous."

This seemed to be as good a chance as any to gather information as to what I might expect when I had plunged farther into the wilderness. If the thing was exceedingly hazardous, for any reason, I thought, it would be well to know it now, and this garrulous old pioneer woman might tell me.

"I'm going to travel across the Table into the sand hills, in a day or two," I observed. "Would you advise me to attempt it alone?"

"Inter the sand hills?" screeched Mrs. Denby, throwing up her hands in dismay. "Tillie, do yer jus' listen to that thar! Why, stranger," she exclaimed, fastening her gray eyes on me, "yer goin' right inter the devil's own country."

"I dunno what yer arter, but hit won't pay ye ter travel further than the West Table, if ye value yer life. There's only a few settlers here and thar in the sand hills; the Injuns are on the war-path and Red Monswick and a good many others are warnin' folks they'll be killed if they try ter git the gold that's hidden in them hills."

"So you, too, know about the gold," I exclaimed, keenly interested. "Tell me something about it, then."

"There's a heap o' it out thar," she explained. "Everybuddy knowed it war thar, even before ol' man Fullhardt war killed. Some say Red Monswick brung hit ter the sand hills and Fullhardt got it away from him. My man knowed a

heap about hit, but he don't talk much ter anybuddy. I do gather, though, that Red had no right ter have the gold in the fust place—that hit war Fullhardt's before he came West. Ag'in, some say it war stolen and Fullhardt wanted to turn hit over to the man Red tuk it away from, but never had the chance, fer he wuz murdered one mornin' when he went ter take out the ashes and dump 'em behind the house—struck down from behind.

"If my ol' man war here he mought tell yer more about hit; he's mixed up in these here sand hill deals some way, but he's so dummed close-mouthed, I can't get nothin' out of him, nohow."

The old plainswoman stopped short, to help Bobbie with some more grease for his corn cake, leaving me with my thoughts. I was beginning to see daylight at last. That, then, was the reason for the peculiar attitude of the people of Plum Creek toward me; the reason why Red Monswick had selected me for bullying that night in the Bowman House bar. The story of the gold also might account for the distinctly annoyed demeanor of Preaching Jones and the mysterious and lovely Dorothy.

"Your daughter tells me there is to be a dance at the Campstool to-morrow night," I remarked. "She said she thought she would ride over by herself. I should like very much to see a ranch dance. May I accompany her?"

Mrs. Denby looked up from her food, suspiciously.

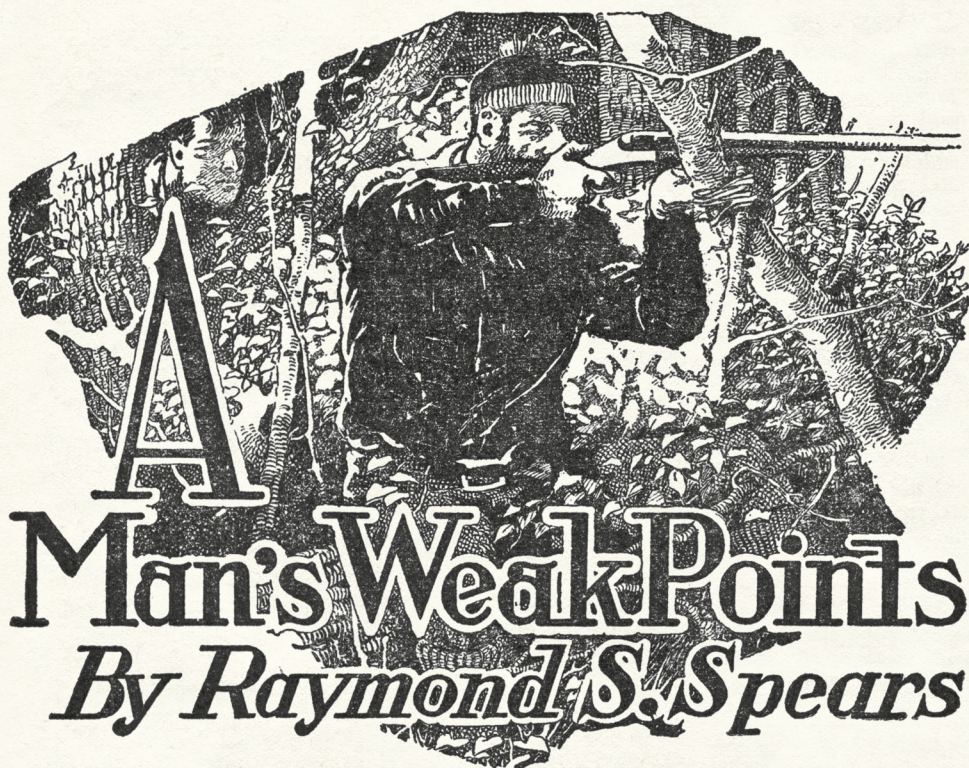
"Yo're none of these here highfalutin' city fellers?" she demanded sharply, laying down her knife.

"I am not," I denied. "Your daughter will be safe with me, I am sure."

"Waal, she's mighty young and impressionable. I don't want nobuddy foolin' the pore chile. Ontil this arternoon she war as good as engaged. Take her and welcome, though."

*To be continued next week.*





# A Man's Weak Points

*By Raymond S. Spears*

*Author of "The Arrest," "The Volunteer Ranger," Etc.*

No one could ask greater smoothness and dispatch than were shown by Ranger Captain Rusk in clearing up an ugly killing spell around a remote east Texas lumber mill.

**E**AST Texas is a great pine wilderness, interspersed with clearings and old choppings. Where trails and roads lead through this there is exposed a thin, gray layer of humus and red, brick-red clay. Where streams wash down the valleys, the caving banks are red. The very rivers flow in bright red hues, with green reflections amid royal-purple shadows when the days are clear, the sunshine crystalline.

And it was to this country that Captain Jeff Rusk of the Rangers was called to investigate some killings in the Rio Muerto Basin. Captain Rusk had heard about the east Texas country. He had been down in the nearly tropical jungles of the lower Rio Grande, and he was a mesquite-country cowboy

in origin, so he knew something about thick and middling open-country work.

The governor, state attorney, and President Rufus J. Dickwer of the Pine Belts Products, Inc., talked to the Ranger as man to man. The situation in the Rio Muerto Basin was very serious. Dickwer stated the proposition rather briefly, but to the point.

"Captain," he said, "we've been clearing up our cutovers down the valley and on the adjacent levels. The land is rich. Cotton, grapes, corn, sorghum, sweet potatoes, watermelons and other fruits, vegetables—everything'll grow there. Cattle and hogs feed themselves, and if you salt-lick them, they come in any time. It's just naturally a garden, a pasture, a farm—and good standing



forest. Unfortunately, difficulties do occur there. You understand how that is. Independent, high-spirited, naturally sensitive men are reluctant in the face of insult or opposition, to leave the matter to officials and courts. I'm frank to say that I myself hesitated a long time before coming here to Austin to ask for outside interference. But lately conditions have pretty much outgrown the influence of the respectable element.

"About three years ago my brother, Culby Dickwer, had trouble with a foreman in our upper mill. The fellow was a hard man—had to be, understand, to manage the sawyer and yard crew. His name was Basco—Dubious Basco. He picked up an ax and showed his violent streak. Of course, Culby just had to shoot him, but he did it easy in the left shoulder, disabling him. Basco had been drinking. Afterward he came around and apologized, and as soon as he healed he went to work again, perfectly friendly. But Dubious had a brother by the name of Kirby. Kirby never was reconciled; at the same time, as long as Dubious was satisfied, Kirby minded his own business. One night Culby was riding down the trace from the upper mill when somebody opened on him from one side, but shot over, missing him. Then one day, Kirby was impudent to me, and I killed him.

"Since then, you know, a man's life hasn't been safe. Culby was killed, finally, a year ago last winter, the time of the rains. Our timekeeper, at the upper mill, had trouble with one of the yard hands who cut him all to pieces. Now perhaps that was just an ordinary killing, understand. At the same time, maybe it wasn't. I just don't know. Anyhow, now it's as much as a man's life is worth to go along any of those roads and traces around the upper mill. Besides Culby, three of our men have been bushwhacked, murdered. Several have been wounded, and many reputable citizens have been shot at—I don't

know if by mistake or not. Two were killed, and I feel quite sure the expectation was to get me, on at least one of these occasions. I'd stopped to cut a watermelon with a lady friend, about half a mile back, and heard the shooting. And I found the victim, a Mr. Darling, a good farmer, and peaceable.

"Now, that's just a general account. Course, I'm prejudiced. At the same time, I want to be fair. You see," he sighed, "never knowing when somebody's going to unload a double-barreled shotgun with buckshot into your back, or when somebody's going to draw on you and shoot you down with a .45, unexpectedly, gets on your nerves. You get jumpy. I thought that if a Ranger'd go up there and investigate, we could somehow pacify whoever or whatever's wrong. I don't accuse anybody; I don't blame any one in particular. But, you see, I just don't know what else to do. There's been other killings, besides. I'm just remarking on things relating to me—us, personally."

Captain Rusk glanced around at the other listeners. His chief in command nodded. The matter seemed to be of Ranger importance. Nothing had been said about the local sheriff and deputies, but apparently the situation was beyond local control.

"Course," Rush said, as a man of few words, "I'll go look over the country."

An hour later he loaded his saddle and war bag on a baggage car, to take passage with an open mind and lively curiosity into the pine belt. He obtained a good, acclimated horse at Duel, the tap-line fork leading into the domain of the Pine Belts Products, Inc., and for the first time headed out on the red-rut roadway in the shadow of an east Texas pine-timber canopy. It was raining a heavy drizzle. There was little wind. His eyes were accustomed to the bright, gemlike flashes of the sunlit



deserts out in the Davis Mountains and Guadaloupes. Under those spreading green branches, the drip falling noisily, now and then a wandering zephyr shook showers of falling streaks all around him. The native horse was a single-footer in the squashy red mud—lifting one foot at a time with methodical reaching ahead, the sounds those of splash and suck.

"Good thing I brought my oilskin," Rusk grumbled.

But presently he ceased his profane commentaries as the "Rangers' warning" came.

Rusk had been for twenty years in the service. Hate of outlawry—cattle thieves had killed his father—made a policeman of an unusually high-minded, sensitive-spirited man. Good schooling had trained a keen, practical brain. When he had crossed the railroad-clearing ribbon of farms and entered the forest a quickening of his perceptions surpassed the ordinary metes and bounds of sight, sound, touch, smell and the taste of the pine in the air. A sixth, inexplicable sensation, of which great and successful Rangers know—but generally refuse to admit, let alone discuss—came like a chilly breath through the dense timber stand, affecting him like raw wisps of creeping fog.

Time had been, in the impulsive agnosticism of youth, when he would have dismissed his mystic emotion. Now he pulled out under a specially thick treetop, to one side of the roadway, and stopped his horse. Within five minutes another horseman came plowing along, a hunchback with a ghastly yellow, grimacing face, his bulging brown eyes staring sharply ahead from under a lumpy, wide-brimmed black hat. In his teeth he held a message or note of some kind. Rusk had watched too many trailers, been too often a tracker himself, not to recognize the cripple's anxiety. Falling in behind the fellow, Rusk slipped along after him, much

easier in his thoughts than when he did not know what his sixth sense was agitated about. He reckoned that this time his ears had detected sounds too light for his normal aural sense to recognize.

Five miles farther on the hunchback darted straight ahead to where the roadway made a right bend—a short cut, Rusk guessed, following. The Ranger noted that the man could not read the age of tracks in the muck of his own terrain. Shimmering reflections from the sky made all the prints of horse, cattle, hog and human look alike. But the upstanding mud, the cloudiness of the water, the freshness or the rain-wash, all indicated how many minutes, hours, even days, old the tracks were. In half an hour the Ranger could read pine-belt sign. He tracked the dark, fresh tracks of the hunchback's horse straight through the thick timber and saved himself a six-mile circuit around a steep-banked wash gully by going only a mile. He heard the hunchback's horse galloping in the roadway ahead. Rusk drove swiftly, too, but only for about three miles.

Here and there were turn-outs, roads to off-side clearings in the forests. He passed through two forty or fifty-acre abandoned openings, where shacks were sagging into swift decay among uprising growths of weeds, shrubs and young, scrawny pines. He heard a drove of hogs snuffling along, but did not see them. When he pulled out again to think things over, he found himself suddenly looking over a steaming herd of branded cattle. The animals were dwarfed and gaunt, big-eyed, long-horned, with wide nostrils and sunken cheeks—strange, deerlike and runty, in contrast to the curly rumps, the big white faces, the tall, red, bred-up pedigrees of the open or mesquite ranges. The wild fire in the purple eyes gave the timber-belt cows a demented look, as they uneasily spread



their fore hoofs apart, swaying from side to side, circling their tails around. That look of maniacal and suspicious cunning was known to Rusk—in humans. He did not ride in the roadway any more. Instead, he kept along thirty yards or so to one side, just in sight of the pale streak of light which marked the highway course.

When he came to a little clearing, he rode around in the edge of the woods. When he reached a deep, ugly-looking bayou, he did not cross the bridge but swam his horse across, out of sight around the bend. Word had gone ahead that a stranger was coming. Possibly it had been recognized that at last a Ranger had arrived. People all over Texas knew that if there was enough mussing and fussing, trouble and misery, presently would come a Ranger, who was unafraid, who would be friendly, who would ask questions, who would be persistent—who would learn the truth. The basin of the Rio Muerto must by this time be in an expectant mood.

Captain Rusk presently arrived on the edge of a new chopping. Here a forest had been cut away, leaving stumps. Across the opening the road led to the north, into a valley nearly a mile wide, down which flowed the Muerto River, coiling and eddying along. A sawmill was on a bench, with a well-stocked lumber yard around the end of the tap-line rails. On the slope up from the mill were long piles of pine logs. The wilderness silences were broken by the shrieking of saws and the rumbling tumult of heavy machinery. Some scores of shacks and cabins, several well-built cottages and the company commissary were huddled in groups amid the stumps. This was the upper mill, sure enough.

The horse that the hunchback had ridden was in front of one of the bungalows. Almost immediately, while the Ranger gazed on the gray, wet scene,

the crippled rider came out, bobbed up into the saddle like a monkey and rode trotting along the roadway, heading back toward Duel, the railroad village. As he passed by the fellow was grinning a fantastic, death's-head kind of smile. As he reached the edge of the clearing, another man left the bungalow and ran at a trot up a path across the chopping toward the woods. This fellow was a gaunt, small-headed, long-bodied woodsman. He had an arm in a sling, but when he reached the edge of the clearing, he jerked the arm out of the cloth which held it, impatiently, and hurried in and out along the roadway, keeping just within the edge of the pine trees.

Rusk naturally wondered what he was going to do, so he followed after in the manner of a Ranger whose curiosity is aroused. He saw the fellow circle around into the tops of a windfall, where several treetops had fallen in a clump. In this heap he sat down on one of the logs and leveled his double-barreled shotgun in a fork which had been made by tying two limbs of pine together. His back was toward Duel, and the gun was aimed along the road toward the upper mill settlement. A horseman would thus present his back to those evil tubes of death.

"You son of a gun!" Rusk said in his throat. "You wa'n't even going to let me get to town, was you, Dubious Basco?"

Long after his wound had fully healed, Basco had continued to pretend his arm was still crippled. As superintendent of the upper mill, he had kept things running with excellent judgment—had been too good a man to remove from his job. Cunningly, he had engaged spies to keep him informed. He had never been able to kill President Rufus J. Dickwer, but he or his fellow conspirators—if any—had been making inroads on the particular favorites of Dickwer and had killed his brother, of



course. It just hadn't come right, yet, to kill the president of the company. Of course, if Rangers were allowed in that country, there was no telling what those persistent, relentless scoundrels would do. Better scotch the first one, right away!

Rusk worked in close. He, too, chose a comfortable seat. To his delight, Basco was talking to himself, telling in a sibilant, audible, distinct whispering about killing Culby Dickwer and nagging one of the boys into picking a row with the timekeeper. Then he talked about two or three other killings—what a good job he and Truller had made of one fellow whom they had thought was a spy and traitor. Presently he took out a sheet of paper, the message the hunchback had delivered. Rusk was close enough to read:

Captain Rusk of the Rangers came in on train and started on bay horse for upper mill. Sent in special when Dickwer asked for investigation. Riding in now on the Duel trace, so you better look out for him. C. D. M.

Some one was coming along the roadway and Basco dropped the paper. With a long stick he had picked up, Rusk speared the paper, while Basco was eagerly peering to see who was coming. The bushwhacker grunted angrily. It was just an old darky on a gray mule plodding by, moaning and wailing a song of religion and misery. Then Basco felt for the message again. He began to look around.

Thus his glance came in contact with the red-clay-stained boots of the other man. With dropped jaw and bulging, pitiless cat eyes of greenish pink, Basco jerked up his head like a startled panther, and froze in amazed fury at the look of imperturbable interest in the Ranger's eyes.

He was bad, that treacherous killer. From surprise he changed to shrewd,

calculating estimate of chances. Rusk watched him gather and shift, change and decide. Bold, perhaps insane—no one would ever be sure—Basco edged and made slow, almost invisible turns and moves. He was caught; the pen at Huntsville waited for him; years of imprisonment loomed before him, if not hanging itself. On his left side, butt forward, was a big .45 Colt. His hand went for it like the open jaws of a cottonmouth snake, pale on the inside, fretted brown over the back—almost invisible in the dusky gloom.

It was close—Basco was fast-trained, but Rusk beat him. The killer-from-behind could, if cornered, also face a good man. But he died right there. The Ranger then went into the upper mill and telephoned to the proper officials. They all rode out on the following day, examined the scene and took notes of the evidence, heard Captain Rusk's account, and accepted it without reserve. He was absolved of murder on the ground of having obviously done his exact duty.

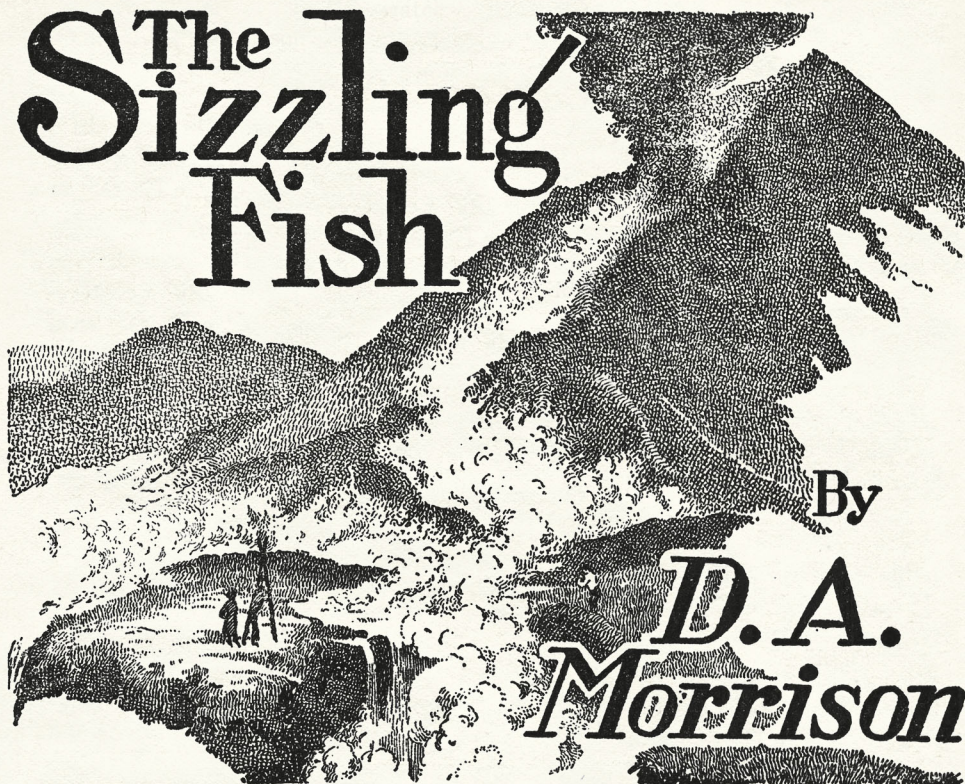
President Dickwer could hardly find terms sufficient to praise the efficiency, certitude, and promptness with which the case had been taken up, investigated and closed.

"At the same time, you know," Mr. Dickwer sighed, "I was sorry to lose that man. Of course, under the circumstances, he just *had* to be killed. I never did really trust him absolutely, myself. He wasn't the kind you could. Still, he's going to be mighty hard to replace—yes, sir. To tell the truth, I don't know where I'm going to find any one able to keep logs rolling, saws turning and cut lumber moving like Dubious Basco—that's a fact. Did you ever notice, cap'n, that you always find even good workers have their weak points?"





# The Sizzling Fish



By

**D. A.  
Morrison**

*Author of "The Morning's Morning," Etc.*

Steaming, sizzling-hot lava, oozing down the mountainside to spill over into the sea. Deadly, irresistible, the sluggish, hellish stream moved down the side of the volcano of Mauna Loa, on the island of Hawaii, and hissed its menace at the lives of a man and girl, who were trapped!

I WAS standing in Saki's bar on Queen Street, Honolulu, talking to "Red" Kiley one dull afternoon, when a postman walked in and handed Red a letter.

"The income tax catches up with the worst of us," I wisecracked.

"I paid mine last month, being a dollar and forty-three cents all told," Red replied. "I haven't heard yet whether it's legitimate to charge off fines, but if it ain't, I'll be stuck plenty."

It was a very official-looking envelope, addressed to Mr. Harry Kiley, Hon. Mem., American Society of Ichthyologists, and up in the corner it said: "Semiannual Bulletin."

"How come?" I remarked, perching myself on a barrel.

Red grinned. The corners of Red's mouth spread out and turn up when he grins, and all the wrinkles at the corners of his blue eyes leap into action simultaneously. Red has too many freckles, and his hair is too sand colored, and his chin is too prominently outthrust for him to be called exactly an Adonis. But there is something infectious about his grin.

He mopped up and down the bar and polished a dozen glasses or so before replying to me.

"How come?" he finally replied. "Oh, just one of them things. They



send me this here book a couple of times a year, and also I get letters about meetings and conventions of them highbrow scientists. And all on account of some fish that I was savin' to eat, and didn't get around to it.

"Eb Gidd, from over at Kawaihae, was in here one afternoon three or four years ago. You must know Eb; he monkeys around in politics and I think he come over here once to the legislature or something. He runs a meat boat over from Hawaii once in a while with a cargo of beef from the big ranch, and hauls back supplies for folks that live in the Konas. Owns that little scow, the *Niihau*, that you see tied up over on the water front every once in a while."

"Sure, I know Eb. What about him?"

"Well, he was in here lifting them one afternoon, and I happened to remark to him that I had seen the carcass of a horse layin' in the street down in Kakaako, and wonderin' why, if Johnny Wilson was mayor all the way from here to the Bird Islands, including Midway, Yap and Kamchatka, he couldn't have a crew of his boys clean up a dead horse quicker.

"That give Eb an idea. He says: 'I'll collect that carcass myself, if it's still there, and hitch it onto the tail end of my scow, and you and I will have some shark fishin' on the way home, if you'll come along.'

"I was feeling like a few days off, and that idea sounded pretty good to me. So, after nine o'clock, when I'd closed up shop for the night and give Saki the keys, I went down and climbed on board of Eb's little *Niihau*.

"She was no speed monster, that craft, but she was cozy and comfortable, with rather better than an average assortment of peculiar smells about her, from carryin' so many different kinds of cargo, human and otherwise. She'll amble along at seven or eight knots in

ordinary weather, which is plenty fast enough for Eb to make an overnight trip between his ports of call. Originally, she'd been a sailing schooner, and Eb could still bend a sheet of canvas on her big enough to get him wherever he was going in case her auxiliaries got disabled. He carried a crew of two Kanakas and an engineer and could stow away about a hundred ton in her hold if he felt like crowding her.

"I thought I would take along a demijohn, but Eb says he didn't think we'd need it. Turned out he was right. He had three kegs on board that had been stowed down in the bottom of the hold three months before by Jock Aitchison for an experiment. I guess you don't know Jock. He's a big, rawboned Scotchman who at that time was head luna, or overseer, of that big Cameron plantation over on Hawaii, and a near neighbor of Eb's around Kawaihae.

"Well, it seems like Jock Aitchison come from Glasgow, and had lived as roommate with a fellow who had an important job with the Johnny Walker distillery people there. He had learned quite a lot about making whisky by just picking it up from this fellow's conversation, and after the prohibition law hit us, he began to put some of his knowledge into effect.

"One of the things Jock had learned, apparently, was how to use a still, and another was how to age the product properly after he had made it. The bird who had worked for the Johnny Walker outfit had told him how, in the old days, they would ballast a ship that was starting on a voyage around the Horn, with barrels of green whisky. By the time the ship got back to port, six months or so later, the stuff would be as ripe and mellow as if it had stood in a barrel in the warehouse for five or six years. So Jock had made him a mash out of sugar cane and loaded the result onto Eb's boat for an experiment.

"It was a good experiment, as we dis-



covered in the course of the night. So good that, by sunrise, when it was time to start shark fishing, me and Eb had it all schemed out how we were going to get rich in the next couple of years and retire.

"Well, the shark-fishing part of this here ichthyology stunt did not amount to much, so I will not waste time telling about it. We were too tired and sleepy. However, we did slice up the dead horse into quarters and rig him on a line that strung back fifty years or so astern of us. And the hammerheads were sure bitin'. Eb had a couple of rifles, but we couldn't shoot straight enough to be sure whether we were hitting the Pacific Ocean. The chief engineer had been sampling some of Jock's stuff and he was seeing double, too, but Ike Kekio, Eb's chief mate, finally potted one hammerhead and brought it up to the surface with its white belly showing, and we put about and gathered him in.

"Through the night, we could see the red glare from Kilauea, and Eb remarked that it looked a lot brighter than usual. The papers were full of how high the volcano was, and how the professor up there thought maybe there would be a big show pretty soon. But when you live close to it for as many years as Eb had, you don't pay much attention to such rumors."

I will just explain briefly here that Kilauea is the active crater of the great volcano of Mauna Loa, on the island of Hawaii. The fire pit of Kilauea, known as Halemaumau, or the House of Everlasting Fire, is the principal point of interest for tourists who visit the Territory, and it is one grand sight, being a lake of fire shaped roughly like a circle, and eleven hundred feet across. It is the mysterious abode of the goddess known to the old Hawaiians as Madame Pele. When the fiery madame gets put out by the foolish ways of the people, she throws a good scare into

them by running over at the top and throwing a trail of incandescent lava down the hillside.

"We found out when we arrived at Kawaihae," Red resumed, "that Kilauea had started on one of her very best rampages. She had flowed over the top the day before and had started running down toward Kona like a house afire.

"Jock Aitchison was at the dock to tell us the news. The lava was shooting down in a stream that was thirty feet wide in spots. Every time it would hit anything, from a cane field to a town, there was nothing left. Here and there, the molten mass would cool on top, and harden, and the lava would flow on through it like water through a pipe. That would have the effect of confining the gases which the incandescence was constantly forming, and they would explode every little while, making it dangerous to approach too near.

"Jock told us that two villages in the path of the flow already had been wiped out, and the natives were scared stiff. The lava had struck a comparatively level part of the country, and would have stopped if it hadn't been for the pressure behind it of more molten stuff pouring out of the crater. As it was, it was moving at a rate of about four miles an hour, and seemed certain to reach the seashore along about noon. Just where it would hit, nobody knew, but it would cause plenty of commotion. Quite a large part of the coast is high and rocky, where the island rises sheer out of the ocean fifty or sixty feet. If the molten lava plopped down off of one of them high places, that would make a show worth going a good many miles to see. And did I see it? I'll tell the world!

"Jock Aitchison says to Eb: 'You better get that old *Niihau* out of the way somewhere before the lava hits the water.'

"Eb is the kind of fellow who can't see the use of worrying over something



he can't help and don't know anything about. So he invited me and Jock over to his house for breakfast and says we would make up a party to go up *mauka* to take a look at the flow afterward.

"Eb's daughter, Christina, was over at the house when we dragged in. Her hair was bobbed and she had a sassy, peppy way about her that had her old man buffaloed all the time. She was standing in the doorway with her hands on her hips. Jock yelled to her:

"'Hello, Giddy!'

"'Watch your step, you big Scotch scone, or I'll gie ye yer heid in her hands an' yer lugs to play wi',' says Christina.

"'Clamp your jaws, the two o' ye, now,' says Eb Gidd. 'An' you, Chris, have you got anything to eat? Mr. Kiley and myself have been up the whole night in terrible weather through Molokai Channel.'

"Christina looked us over and sniffed.

"'From the look of you, I'd say you found your bad weather by looking through the neck of a bottle,' she remarked. 'I know you, dad. You've been living in the cane so long you think you're a sugar daddy every time you get up to Honolulu.'

"'Now, Chris, be a good feller,' Eb coaxed. His daughter laughed and called through the house:

"'Kuualoha! A gallon of black java and three plates of ham and eggs! *Wikiwiki*, hurry up, before these hungry hobos pass out on us.'

"After breakfast Eb and me got a little sleep, and along about eleven o'clock we started up *mauka* in his old lizzie to see the flow. By that time, the lava had come to within five or six miles of the sea and had plowed through three more villages. We ran into excited natives, scared stiff, all along the road. Up near a town called Nakopopo, we got our first sight of the stream.

"It was running very slowly through

the flats there and had spread out until it was from seventy-five to a hundred feet wide. Talk about fireworks! Say, there was a regular Fourth of July show free of charge, and better than anything you ever saw. I wouldn't have missed it.

"The lava stream was mostly dark red, the color of a coke fire that's burned pretty low. And hot! If you come within twenty feet of it and the wind was right, you almost sizzled and choked on the gases. The stream was smoking and hissing and shooting up jets of steam here and there. You could look back and follow its course with your eye, and it looked like the trail of a huge fire snake.

"Once in a while, you could see an undercurrent of lava flowing along under the main crust, like watching an ostrich swallow something round so you can see it sliding all the way down its neck. The compressed gases formed by the burning of the molten mass would explode, throwing glowing particles twenty or thirty yards in all directions. We were all anxious for night to come, when the show would be magnificent.

"Eb and Christina and Jock and myself went up and down the flow for about an hour in Eb's flivver, and got a grand view of it. In fact, we drove almost all the way back as far as Kilauea, and saw where the lava had destroyed cane fields and had gone right through a big grove of coconut palms and killed every tree it struck.

"A couple of the smaller ones, in fact, were burned clear through the boles and fell down. I guess the least damage of all had been done in the villages that were knocked down, although that probably sounded the worst to people outside reading about it. All those villages amounted to was a few grass houses, and it don't cost much to build them.

"Nobody had been hurt, although



there had been some narrow escapes. The flow had a funny way of separating when it came to an obstacle, and coming together again after it got past, forming a sort of island, which would then gradually fill up with lava. We heard that an old woman had almost been caught in one of those islands, but had been dragged out in time.

"Well, we started back *makai* way in the old flivver, figuring to get to the seashore in plenty of time to watch the lava reach the water. Eb thought he would try to keep his *Niihau* out of danger, if possible. When we arrived at the shore, the lava flow had about half a mile to go, and was creeping slowly toward a cliff that dropped off fifty feet or so into the water.

"Eb and me got a skiff and rowed out to the *Niihau* to steer her out of the danger zone, while Christina and Jock stood around and watched the show. We would have got back right away, expecting to find the chief engineer and Ike Kekio on board of her. Well, the chief was there, all right, but he was dead to the world, and Ike had ducked off to see the excitement. There was no use trying to do anything with the chief, so the job of getting the *Niihau* out of danger fell onto Eb and me, and I, as you know, am not an expert authority in the handling of boats.

"Well, a job that should have taken about five minutes, with the right kind of help, dragged out to about twenty. We had to pull up the anchor, start the engine, and maneuver the *Niihau* about two hundred yards down the coast out of the way, and then let the anchor drop again. We had just got through and were getting ready to shove off for shore, when we heard Christina shout.

"We both looked at once, and in that moment we saw the lava stream break off the cliff and into the ocean. Boy, what a sight that was! There was a roar, like five hundred blast furnaces

being doused all at once, as the hot lava struck the sea. Then there was a hissing sound, like all the big snakes in the world practicing on the letter 'S,' and a column of steam like a hundred geysers spouting at the same time leaped up from the sea.

"The noise was something tremendous, but we got used to it in a minute. Then my eye happened to light on something that gave me an awful shock. I grabbed Eb by the arm and says: 'My Lord, Eb, look! There's something wrong!'

"What scared me was Jock Aitchison. I saw him turn and I could tell he was yelling at us, but you couldn't hear a thing but the roar of the sea and the hissing of steam. But he was waving his hands like a wild man, and pointing in the direction of the flow.

"'Can you see Chris anywhere?' Eb asked me.

"'No, I can't,' I told him.

"Well, we didn't need to talk any further. Both of us jumped into the skiff, and I pulled back those two hundred yards as fast as I ever pulled a boat in my life. We scrambled up on shore to where Jock was. He was laying there on the ground, with one leg burned so bad he couldn't stand on it. Eb helped him to stand up, and he pointed out over the lava flow, where the steam was pretty thick.

"'Look!' he yelled. 'There's Chris over there! How are we going to get her out?'

"The girl had been trapped on one of those islands. It wasn't her fault. She had been watching the flow, which was creeping toward the sea so slow that it fooled her. The trouble was that, while she was watching the visible lava stream, it had separated, and one branch had slid around to the left of her and the other to the right before she knew what was happening. Even then, she could have run on ahead and got out of the way, but before she real-



ized that she was in a dangerous spot, the flow had reached the edge of the cliff and cut off her retreat from that side.

"The way it stood then, there was no way that Christina could have herself. She couldn't jump into the sea, though a fifty-foot jump would have been nothing for her, because the water was so hot that it would have cooked her in a jiffy. She couldn't get across the lava flow because it was a couple of feet deep in places, and she would have burned her legs off in three steps. That's what almost happened to Jock Aitchison. When he first caught sight of the girl trapped there, he had stepped right into the molten river to get to her. He had torn off his shoe and sock, but he had a leg that he wouldn't walk on for a good many months, and maybe never again. The red-hot *pahoehoe* had seared through his flesh.

"Christina was in no immediate danger unless there should be an explosion, or a series of explosions, shooting burning lava at her so that she could not get out of its way, or unless there was a sudden increase in the pressure of the lava flow behind her that would cause the island she stood in to shrink up and become a part of the main stream.

"When I say 'immediate,' I mean that maybe she could last there half an hour or so. You can think up lots of schemes in half an hour. Well, I took one look, and saw that there was no chance to head off the lava stream or divert the flow any, at least, in time to do any good. That girl was in a very bad spot.

"The only way we can get to her is via the water,' I told Eb. He was as white as a ghost, twice as scared as Jock had been, it seemed to me, and four times as scared as the girl herself, who stood there, hardly twenty feet away from us, looking much cooler than you could expect under the circumstances.

"When are you going to get me out of here?" she sang out to us. 'Do you realize that it's hotter 'n a beehive where I'm standing?"

"Game, wasn't she? You tell 'em. She was the gamest I ever saw. There was no time to lose, so I says to Eb:

"You've got stanchions and a length of strong chain, haven't you?"

"Sure, I've got all kinds of chain in the tool house,' he says. 'Why?"

"Well, you run and get 'em and bring 'em to me down to the little boat. We'll get Christina out of there in a couple of minutes.'

"I didn't feel near as confident as I talked. But I ran down to the boat, and Eb came hurrying along with the stanchions and chain, which I attached together. There was a flange at the top of the stanchions that kept the chain from slipping down.

"Eb says: 'What are you going to do?' I told him I was going to pull the boat around and shin up the cliff and get Chris out. He says: 'I'm going with you.'

"You better not,' I told him. 'You're a lot older than I am and not such a good climber, and besides, I'll need a good man on this side of the lava to set the other stanchion in.'

"Eb could see the force of that argument, and I pushed off alone before he could change his mind. I'm here to tell you that in about ten seconds I got myself into the hottest spot I ever been in my life.

"When I pulled around near where the lava was sitting the water, the heat was something terrific, and the water was boiling up so hard that I could hardly keep moving. There was a good, long painter rope on the skiff. Eb sometimes used to tie the boat onto the stern of the *Niihau* and let it trail along astern, serving as a lifeboat in case of need, because he had no davits on his ship. I lashed one end of this rope onto a mooring post on shore and took a cou-



ple of bights in it so it would hold, and in case I couldn't get back to shore, they could haul me in.

"Well, I had to pass between the two columns of lava, which were falling into the sea about a hundred feet apart. The strangest thing I saw while I was in the hottest part of the water were dozens and dozens of dead fish, that had been cooked alive and brought up to the surface by the heat. There was a lot of funny-looking fish that I had never seen before, but I paid very little attention to them at the time.

"I pulled that skiff ashore as fast as I could between the two columns of molten lava and scrambled around for a way to climb on up to the top. It was tough going because of the steam, which was so thick I could hardly see what I was doing. But I had to grab hold of that rock and go on up because as quick as I had jumped out of the boat it got away from me and there was nothing else for me to do. I couldn't have turned back if I'd wanted to.

"It seemed as if I'd never make it. But I kept gaining a little bit all the time, catching hold and holding on wherever I could. My stanchions were lashed tight to me and there were a help in the climb. I used them for footholds in places where my feet were too big a grab on. About halfway up it got easier. The cliff wasn't so sheer. I found that I could loosen one stanchion and use it as a pike pole.

"I was pretty well blown by the time I made the top and took a couple of minutes to get my wind back. When Chris saw me come scrambling over the top, she waved and shouted at me and I waved back. She must have been mightily relieved but she didn't show any signs of excitement.

"She had been trapped about a hundred feet from the edge of the cliff. When I reached her she wasn't in any greater danger than before, but now the two lava streams were slowly

converging. I figured they'd come together in fifteen or twenty more minutes. If we weren't out of there by that time, good night!

"Where do we go from here?" Chris asked when I hauled up beside her with my rig. "You look like a mountain climber."

"If we are plenty lucky, we're going right back where we came from and then to some nice, cool spot," I told her. "The important thing right now is, can you hang onto this clothesline after Eb and me get it rigged up?"

"I could walk a tight rope from here to Hilo to get out of this place," she says. "But what about you?"

"While I was kidding with her I suddenly observed something that gave me another big scare. The ground where we were standing was so all-fired hard that I didn't see how I was going to plant my stanchion solid enough to hold Christina's weight, to say nothing of my own. It was nearly all hard, brittle lava rock, with only a few places here and there where soil had formed deposits.

"Eb was on the other side of the lava stream, waiting for me. I had about thirty foot of chain attached to my two stanchions. I tossed one of them across to Eb, using it like a javelin, and then started looking in earnest for a place to dig in. Eb had no trouble at all with his end. He drove it in and had it braced in a few minutes, working like a wild man to get done in a hurry. Seeing I wasn't getting anywhere, he yells: 'What's the matter?'

"The two streams were coming closer and closer. Chris was smiling and doing her best to encourage me, but I could see she was getting pale and worried. Something had to be done and done pretty quick.

"I yelled at Eb: 'Run down to your tool house and get me an inch auger!' I knew he had several of 'em around the place that he'd used at one time or



another for digging wells. He got the idea right away and was back in a couple of jiffies with the auger and a sledge, which he tossed across the stream.

"By that time the lava on each side of us had narrowed into a stream maybe ten or twelve feet in breadth. At the same time they had crept closer and closer together until there was not more than ten feet of clear space between them. Any moment a sudden increase in the pressure up above might catch us right in the grip of those closing jaws of fire. I was none too comfortable.

"Well, seein' how things were, I grabbed Eb's old auger and put it through some of the quickest exercise it had ever been through. Fortunately, Eb kept all his tools in tiptop shape, well oiled and greased. I found a spot about midway between the streams where it looked like there was deep soil, and set her in. Chris did the best she could to help, but there wasn't room for more than one to work.

"'You better get ready to get across this here span,' I told her. 'Better see that your hands are protected or you won't be able to hold onto the chain.' It was plenty hot from rolling in the lava.

"While I was boring, she tore a couple of yards out of her skirt and wrapped it around her hands good and thick for a bandage. I got a hole an inch wide dug down two feet or so and slammed my stanchion into it. There was practically no give to it at all; that stanchion was stuck in there good and tight.

"'I'm comin', dad!' Chris sang out to Eb.

"Even then it took nerve for a girl like her to do what she did. If she hadn't been as strong as an acrobat from the outdoor life she led and swimming in the surf every day, she never could have made it. I'd like to see one of these newfangled gin-swinging flappers get away with it.

"She didn't look up nor down, but grabbed hold of that chain and pulled herself on across, holding her feet up as far as she could.

"'Better hold your breath if you can, Chris,' I warned her. 'Them lava gases are more'n likely to knock you out and make you lose your hold.'

"Eb watched her from the other side. He held his stanchion as taut as he could and I held mine. Even at that the chain sagged under her weight. I could see right away what it meant to me. If it sagged under her with two men holding it, what would it do with me and nobody on my side to support it? I outweighed the girl by maybe forty or fifty pounds.

"The actual business of Chris getting across didn't take any more than a half a minute. When she got clear of the lava she sort of dropped in a little heap, and Eb rushed over and picked her up. He was for helping her over to the house right away, but she couldn't see it that way.

"'Do you think I'm going to move an inch until Mr. Kiley gets out?' she says."

"How did you get yourself out, Red?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "it was just like I was afraid it was going to be. Eb got onto his end of the chain and bore down the best he could, but the first test I give her was enough to show me that I'd land in the middle of the stream if I tried to pull off the same stunt that Chris had. And I was not going to take to chance on clambering down the cliff again and finding the skiff. It was hot enough where I was.

"However, I saw that I was up against something that kept looking worse and worse. The distance between the streams had shrunk to about eight feet. So I pulled that stanchion of mine out of the ground and done as pretty a piece of ground vaulting as you ever saw in your life. The stream wasn't so



deep, you see; only about two feet in the center and considerably less at the sides. Deep enough, of course, to do considerable damage to any one walking in it.

"I didn't have much room for a take-off. But I grabbed that ten-foot stanchion up toward the top. Eb saw what I was up to and pulled his out of the ground so as to give me all the play I needed with the chain. That was one vault that I had to make without no practice.

"I measured the distance the best I could with my eye. Then I give a little run and slammed my stanchion into the lava stream and hoisted myself right on across. I cleared the other side by a couple of inches, but that was enough. And I kept right on going, landing on my nose and chin and ears. Eb and Chris hauled me on out of harm's way."

"What's all that got to do with you being a member of the American Society of Ichthyologists, Red?"

"Oh, yeh, I was gonna tell you. You see, when all the excitement was over I went down to the beach and hauled that skiff ashore by the painter rope. It was half full of boiling-hot water and there was a couple dozen fish floating around in it, all cooked to a turn.

"Eb was against it. He says they might be poisonous and probably wouldn't agree with me. He examined them but couldn't peg 'em off at all. A few days later a highbrow lawyer come over from Hilo to look at the flow and he seen them fish. He says they were remarkable specimens and had me tell him the whole story.

"Well, it seems like this lawyer knows a wise bird back in California and this bird can call all the fishes in the ocean by their first and last names. Three or four of the fish that I found in the boat spend their whole lives a thousand feet or so below the surface. When the hot lava hit the water, it just kept on going down and cooking alive everything that was near there. So these fish were cooked and brought on up to the surface by this hot lava.

"Nobody had ever seen or heard of them before, and, because as far as any one could find out, I was the first that ever laid eyes on them, they named 'em after me. Come up to the room some time and I'll show you a medal and badge they sent me, too."

"What's the name of those fish?"

"Oh, how in hell do I know? Ask some ichthy-what's-its-name. What'll you have?"

## FUNNY

SOMETIMES it seems strange, the things people regard as funny. The other day one of the New York papers carried an item about a young gypsy woman who attempted to commit suicide by throwing herself under the wheels of passing automobiles. She tried several different cars, but each time the driver managed to swerve the vehicle so that the girl was unharmed. After her first unsuccessful effort, a crowd gathered on the sidewalk and watched her continued attempts, without any move toward intervening. Instead, they laughed at her.

What horribly callous people! We wonder if they really were. The reason those people did not try to stop the girl probably was that they were afraid—afraid not so much of getting run over, as of making themselves conspicuous. And they laughed because there was actually something funny about the situation. The girl was not hit; they probably felt that she was not going to be hit. But she was trying to do something very dramatic and making an awkward mess of it. And that is the very essence of humor. Go see Harry Langdon in the movies.



# Fool's Paradise

By  
Charles  
Neville

Buck  
In Six Parts  
Part III



*Author of "Sandollar," "All the King's Horses," Etc.*

Bruce Raleigh, badly shot up in the World War, returned to his Kentucky home to find that his uncle, Walter Raleigh, had mismanaged the family affairs—including the racing affairs, for the Raleighs had been racing men for generations. One stanch friend, though, welcomed Bruce—Colonel Davidson, father of the girl Bruce loved. Disgusted with the condition of his estate, Bruce resolved to restore it—and the family reputation. This would be a difficult task, for he was now poor. His high hopes were shattered when he learned that Lucile, whom he loved, was engaged to a Captain Evans. She would not, however, let him sink too deep in his despair, but persuaded him to put his energies into the work of rehabilitation—and so Bruce looked forward to the day of the Latonia Derby, when his horse, Sir Walter, would have an opportunity to clear the Raleigh name of its unsavory reputation.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BITTEREST OF ALL.

THE broadly spacious plant at Churchill Downs, cut to the measure of the Derby, swallows into its maw the crowds of all lesser days and leaves a sense of emptiness.

The ample barns that housed Colonel Davidson's string were busy throughout the meet and on almost

every afternoon some candidate carried his silks to the post, but his two major champions remained placidly and aloofly in their stalls, valeted and guarded as befits royalty. They would not again be seen under colors until the bugle sounded for the Latonia Derby, and after that they would again be reserved for the notable stakes at Belmont Park and Saratoga. Their lesser stable mates, however, were bred and trained



by the same hand, and many astute sharpshooters, studying their "dope" with assiduous pains, had come as a regular policy to play those starters which carried the cherry and white.

But, in the handling of these less vital affairs, Colonel Davidson trusted to the judgment of trainers selected with such meticulous care that they were reflections of himself, and he had motored back to Waverly Farm, a few miles from Lexington.

Raleigh, too, had resigned to his uncle the reins of superintendency at the Downs, and had retreated to Tecumseh. He went much as a hurt animal goes to earth in its lair to lick its wounds unseen.

Before leaving, and on the night when Lucile and Captain Evans had been dancing at the country club, the young man just back from France had sat in the tack room of his barn and had listened while his uncle talked. It had not been exhilarating.

There was no particular good, and therefore no point in chiding or blaming. This man with the bold demeanor of a cavalier and the distinguished face of a prime minister, talked as egoists must talk, with no realization of his pitiful weakness. As the boy listened, he heard a narrative of keen and diligent effort which, by the sheer perversity of ill luck, had come to loss and misfortune.

Never once, as the older man told of the shrinkage of what had recently been a splendid property to a threadbare and debt-encumbered remnant, was there any admission of heavy-handed ineptness. Never was there the confession of that chronic misjudgment which had chosen the wrong turning at every fork of the road. This narrator did not see himself at all for what he was, an oversanguine and bungling steward who had wrecked a productive prosperity.

Bruce did not criticize. There was no longer any use in that. As he lis-

tened, he seemed to be hearing the refrain of a Greek tragedy—something pitiful, yet inevitable. So entire was the narrator's complacency in blaming his stars for everything and himself for nothing, that had one been able to break through the tight armor of his conceit, it would have been a needless cruelty.

"I've felt like the fellow in 'The Raven,'" declared Walter Raleigh, at the end of his sorry summary. "You know——

"Some unhappy master, whom unmerciful  
disaster  
Followed fast and followed faster, till his  
song one burden bore."

He paused, leaning back in his straight-backed chair, and laced his fingers behind his head. He gazed upward, with an almost childlike expression of aggrieved misfortune.

"When I had to sell more than half of your pasture land—land that's never been touched by a plowshare—it almost broke my heart," he announced, but immediately upon that admission followed the light of hope which is native to the improvident spirit of the gambler and the dreamer.

"However," he added, "I sold it to Colonel Davidson, and, between ourselves, I felt that it wasn't irreparably lost to you. I know Colonel Davidson thinks of you as a future son-in-law."

"Suppose we cut that out," suggested Bruce, with an ominously edged voice. "What became of the money you got from that sale?"

Sir Walter spread his hands in a vague gesture.

"It went," he said, with a pained and injured tone, "it went like all the rest."

Bruce rose at last to leave the place, with a face drawn and frosted to a realization of ruin, but at the door he paused to demand:

"When did this last money go?"

"Three months ago," his uncle made answer. "It was an oil proposition that



looked like picking up bank notes on the street."

Suddenly Bruce broke into a queer and wholly mirthless laugh, and, wheeling, went off into the starlight. To himself he was thinking that those were the months he had spent in plaster—after a crap game in which he, too, had sought to pick up bank notes from the street. What right had he, he demanded bitterly of himself, to chide others?

Back at the farm again he wandered about the boundaries that had so miserably shrunk from the spacious acreage which he had inherited. He found himself like a dispossessed lord, relegated to a vassal's portion. The new boundary of Waverly had so encroached on Tecumseh that less than half was left of the older estate.

The mighty woodland of oak and hickory and black walnut, where once had sounded the oratory of Henry Clay and John C. Breckenridge, now belonged to Colonel Davidson. On the other side, the farm of "Shorty" Sanders was as large again as Tecumseh—and Shorty was an upstart to whom horses were gambling tools rather than beloved personalities. All traditional landmarks seemed overthrown and all former values turned topsy-turvy.

Bruce had been home a day and a night when he next saw Lucile. Captain Evans, he learned, had gone back East, but before his departure he had found time to buy a ring. Now Lucile wore it. It was while he was walking around his shrunken boundaries that Bruce looked up to see the girl sitting lance straight on a gray saddle horse just across the fence.

Hastily, forcing a smile of welcome which was genuine enough, despite the pang of despair in his heart, he went over and let down the bars by which her horse stood delicately pawing.

"Enter upon my domain," he invited, with a smile of mock ceremony. "Don't stand there across the way, looking

down aloofly on me from your own land."

The girl flushed a little, and her eyes clouded with a touch of pain.

"It oughtn't to be our land," she made quick reply. "It ought to be yours. It's a sin and disgrace the way your uncle let all your affairs go to the dogs while you were away at the war."

Bruce shrugged his shoulders with a fatalistic acceptance of facts.

"It seems to have been a strange time at home as well as abroad," he answered, "with uncommon opportunities to make and lose money. Uncle Walter was on the losing end."

"He ought not to have been," she declared with a subdued vehemence. "It was only because he wouldn't take advice."

Lucile had ridden through the breached fence and had slipped from her saddle to the ground. With a rein looped over her arm, she laid a hand for a moment on his elbow—and his elbow shook.

Along the fence row went a line of locusts. Just now they were bloom laden and the warm air was freighted with their honeyed sweetness.

"Now that you are home," she assured him eagerly, "you'll mend all the damage. Tecumseh will come up again like a flame out of ashes. Your father once had a great horse named Phoenix. Maybe his spirit isn't dead."

He was standing looking at her and a wave of adoration swept him. The thought which scalded him at the quick of his being was one to which he could not, in decency, give expression. He could only hurt her needlessly by announcing that a man may undertake herculean labors with the fine zest of combat so long as hope burns strong in his heart—but that the effort may become vain and impossible when that hope has turned to ash. There must be hot will and not chill despair back of forlorn-hope battles.



When the audience of one, to which every human soul plays, no longer sits in the theater—though every other seat be filled and every other voice acclaims—for him the house is empty. That was what, above all else, he felt, and it was what he had definitely resolved not to tell her.

The girl seemed almost ethereal in the delicacy of her beauty as she stood near him, pliantly straight in her breeches and riding coat. In feature and coloring and the childlike simplicity of her sweet gravity, she appeared all softness. Yet he knew that back of this physical slightness dwelt an elastic strength and an indomitable spirit.

Colonel Davidson had told him only yesterday that, among all the horsemen he knew, he valued no opinion on breeding or training more highly than that of his daughter.

"If I were to die to-morrow," the father had enthusiastically borne witness, "Lucile could carry on here almost as capably as myself. She loves horses and she knows them from their foaling to their last breath."

Now Bruce tried to answer her and found his emotions swirling with a torrential confusion. So he nodded, gulped at the tight constriction in his throat and finally managed to agree tonelessly: "I hope so."

She stood there, with the clear loveliness of apple blossoms in her face, but in her eyes gathered a deep seriousness as she noted the dispirited lukewarmness with which he responded to the challenge of taking up his fight. Speaking earnestly, and with a trace of embarrassment, she went on again:

"You've come back to many discouragements. It's like getting home to find your house burned down; but you have genius with horses and you know it. The colt, Sir Walter, has only to live down a reputation that's not his fault to be acknowledged as a great cup horse, and then there's the two year old, Nau-

tilus. Has your uncle said anything about him?"

"Only," responded Bruce, "that he started once at Lexington, ran very greenly and finished outside the money."

An indignant blaze of anger leaped in the blue-gray eyes, but Lucile stifled it.

"Nautilus was sent into that race," she declared hotly, "before he had been schooled enough at the barrier. He was practically left at the post because it was all new to him. But you never had a lovelier baby on your farm, Bruce. I know the colt and I adore him. He's as beautiful a picture of thoroughbred class as ever looked through a bridle. He has the eagle eye and the courage of a lion. As for speed, I've ridden him myself two furlongs in twenty-six—on a farm training track. With proper handling, he might turn out to be this summer's two-year-old champion."

The young man raised his brows incredulously and Lucile laughed at her own impetuous ardor, but she went steadfastly on.

"You've heard enough of your liabilities," she told him. "I want you to take some thought of your assets, of what you have to begin over with. Nautilus is a rare asset. I don't often make wild predictions about maiden colts, but then, you don't often see one like Nautilus."

"I suppose Uncle Walter nominated him for the more important produce stakes," he said, and, in spite of his dejection, his voice took on a new ring. "If he's as good as you think him—and I know your judgment—he ought to be pointed for the Futurities—both Belmont and Pimlico."

He wondered why she fell so suddenly silent at the mention of these rich stakes, which are battled for by two year olds—two year olds that have been nominated before birth and in the names of their sires and dams only. But she did not speak, and as she let her eyes



drop a mingled look of pain and anger had flooded them.

"You're holding something back, Lucile," he smilingly accused. "Out with it."

"I'd rather you asked your uncle about Nautilus," she replied evasively, and because Bruce knew his uncle, his smile faded to a wintrier dimness.

"Perhaps I can guess it—what you are too charitable to tell me," he suggested. "Perhaps my uncle didn't nominate this youngster for the Produce or Stallion stakes. Still he always fancied that breeding. This is a sky-sweeper colt."

The girl nodded her head and spoke reluctantly. "Yes, he nominated him," she said, "but——" There she broke off, realizing that she could go no farther without accusing a man who was absent.

Bruce's lips tightened and his eyes narrowed.

"All right, I'll guess again," he said. "He nominated this colt—then let his payments lapse."

Sorrowfully the girl nodded her head once more.

"So this rare asset of which you speak," he summarized, "is a colt of first-class stake caliber, with no great fixtures open to him, no prizes to contend for except cheap overnight purses—because my precious uncle failed to keep him eligible. For the matter of a few dollars, he let a great opportunity slip."

"But Bruce," she argued hopefully, "that doesn't make him any less a great colt. Charge this year up to the general calamity and think of next. He has the Derby and all the major three-year-old stakes before him, then, with all their rewards—and this year you have Sir Walter."

"I have both Sir Walters," the young man made ironic rejoinder and shrugged his shoulders. "After all, what does it matter?"

"It matters everything, and you've got to fight," she made militant declaration. "You've had beastly hard luck, but you aren't the sort to lie down under the rod. You're the sort that goes on fighting. To see you succeed splendidly, is all I need now to make me completely happy."

"Thank you," he said, and wondered if she had caught the strain of his voice. Then he added, guarding his words as he ventured onto dangerous ground: "There's one question I want to ask. When did you—when did you discover that you loved Captain Evans?"

Her eyes lighted to the soft glow of ardor, and as she looked off over the green fields and woodlands a rich throb came into her voice.

"It came about rather suddenly," she told him. "Not by gradual steps—but with a positive burst of discovery and joy. It was at a dance on Long Island—on the evening of Washington's birthday."

She paused, startled because her companion's cheeks had become so abruptly gray.

"I—I thought of you that night, Bruce," she assured him impetuously. "It was just after I'd gotten your letter saying your home-coming had been delayed—that you'd broken your leg again. I was very happy for myself just then, but I was miserable because of your calamity. I was anxious—and wondering how it had happened—the new fracture."

Suddenly something snapped like a broken spring in the man's brain and explosively his self-command was shattered into débris as he had seen buildings shattered under shell fire. His voice was hoarse and his words broke from his lips with a harsh rancor.

"It happened," he declared savagely, "in a crap game, on a back street of a French town. I was gambling with an outfit from Archangel. I won too much money and they manhandled me."



Lucile gave a little gasp of shocked amazement, both at the words and the tone and, as suddenly as he had been swept from his feet by the tempest of his emotion, the man was caught back to a self-contemptuous realization of how brutally and coarsely he had flared out.

The girl stood there for an instant, as though he had struck her, and it was his own intuition and no word or expression of hers that told him of the underlying contempt she was concealing.

People who are "sitting pretty on top of the world" find it hard to condone a supine weakness. She worshiped strength and steadfastness of character, and Bruce had just blurted out, with the heat of flowing lava, the announcement that he had let his one clearly recognized and besetting sin make tragic sport of his manhood. He had declared it with a defiant resentment, almost as if with the calculated intent to shock and affront her.

For just a moment she had no answer. In the momentary savagery that had blazed through his utterance and brutalized his eyes, she had seemed to see a repellent stranger.

The man stepped back and spread his hands in the gesture of one who, in blind passion, has undone himself. The fiery wildness had run out of him and left him wretchedly self-accusing.

"Lucile, dear," he pleaded in a contrite voice, "you must forgive me if you can. It was a coincidence of dates that made a lunatic of me for a moment. You know the bane that's in my blood—you know what scorn I have for that weakness. When I discover that my greatest disasters might have been averted if I'd been here sooner—well, hell breaks out in me, that's all."

She nodded and her eyes were soft with pity again.

"But you couldn't possibly have guessed," she sought to persuade him, "that it would turn out so. And your

affairs were already in bad shape by that time."

He had drawn himself into a stiff erectness and clasped his hands behind his back so that she might not see the tightness of their clenching. The heavy fragrance of the locust bloom was in his nostrils and, bringing the torture of old memories, it seemed to steep him with an insupportable anguish of loss.

"You don't understand yet," he made bleak assertion. "God knows I'd resolved not to poison your happiness by parading my own misery before you. But in one moment I let all my resolve slip—and now you must know it all—or you can't help hating me."

He drew a step farther away because he could feel her breath on his face and that unsteady him.

"You've exhorted me to take up my fight for rehabilitation again," he said. "You found me slack of resolve and tepid of spirit. I know your disdain of the quitter just as I know your hot scorn for my gambling weakness, even if you've never expressed it. But you don't think I'm sitting down in the ruins of my life and crying my heart out over the spilled milk of money reverses, do you? Even if I'm a gambler, I'm a better gambler than that. No loss of money could make a ruin of my life. It wasn't the expectation of coming home to some petty wealth that I kept before my eyes over there when—when things were unpleasant. It wasn't that, before my eyes, which made me refuse to die when the doctors said I must. It was a face—one face—your face—Now I've lost it and there's nothing left. You talk about fighting. What have I to fight for?"

The girl's face had clouded to a deep distress, and she stood for a moment shaken and miserably silent. There at the track she had been speciously reassured by his smile. She thought he had come back as a friend and not a lover, and her own happiness had been ratified



by his seeming acceptance of conditions. Now he stood before her in the stricken guise of a man mortally hurt, and taking his death wound before her eyes.

"I thought—I thought," she faltered, "that you'd come to see it as I had—that it had just been a boy-and-girl fancy—and that we'd both grown up."

"A boy-and-girl fancy!" he echoed. "To me it is the one immortal thing in life."

He drew a step farther back and shook his head in dogged resignation.

"I hadn't meant to tell you," he assured her. "Now it's too late—by three months, and those three months I owe to a crap game and a broken leg."

She yearned to comfort him, but comfort lay only in the one thing she could not offer. After a moment, in a gravely gentle voice, she said:

"Bruce, dear, I'm terribly sorry. What can I say? But don't reproach yourself for being too late. If you'd been here, it would have been the same—no one could have changed it, neither you nor I. It just happened. I guess it was written from the first."

He nodded a grim and miserable head.

"At least," he answered, "I could have gone down fighting."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE KENTUCKY HANDICAP.

THE meadow larks spring up from the green infield of Churchill Downs on May mornings with a throb of tune-fulness in their golden throats. At that hour the stands are empty, but across the track is sprinkled a sizable crowd holding stop watches and making notes. Here are the clockers and their brothers, the rail birds, who watch with hawk-keen vigilance the work of exercising horses and who are the intelligence agents of the hand-book men.

Here are the representatives of the sporting pages who print what they

learn for the general public. Here, too, are the trainers, except those who have slipped, in the first daylight, over to the empty track of Douglas Park, with some charge whose speed they hope to keep under cover long enough to cash handsomely on the long-priced odds which flower from public ignorance.

This morning the air and sunlight were genial with a spiced warmth, but, as Bruce waited by the wide gate through which his exercise boys would soon ride, his Uncle Walter drew away from him and stood aloof, and in his uncle's eyes brooded a resentful displeasure.

Something was being done here of which the elder Raleigh disapproved, and to which he refused the countenance of his participation.

Presently two magnificent young chestnuts came dancin' out to the track with such a light-footed delicacy of tread that it seemed they might have trod eggshells and left them unbroken.

The bystanders were quick to recognize the colt that had been so tardily withdrawn from the Derby, but there were a few who did not so readily place his stable mate.

"That's Sir Walter, the crawfish horse that never goes to the post unless the mud oozes up to his fetlocks," observed a heavy-chested ducky with an insolent, scarred face, who stood fingering his split-second timepiece. "I hear they aim ter run him Satiddy in the Kentucky Handicap. I don't jest seem ter reckonize the pacemaker. He's a big, eye-fillin' chunk of hoss, though. I'd call him a classy-lookin' tool."

"That's the two-year-old maiden, Nautilus," a bystander enlightened him. "He started once at Lexington and came home in the dark."

"So it is, so it is," agreed the ducky, who did not like to admit that any horse came to the track which he did not know. "He's as filled out an' as big boned as most four year olds, though."



He's a sizable hoss fer his age an' a good looker. Maybe they didn't try with him at Lexington."

Bruce Raleigh waved his hand and the exercise boys reined up with their charges and waited instructions. Bruce was not alone. Three newspaper men were standing at his elbow, and now he turned to them.

"Gentlemen," he made the unusual announcement, "I am going to set these two colts down for a stiff workout this morning. I'd be glad to have you time them and print anything you like about them, if their performances happen to impress you."

"What's the idea?" inquired one of the reporters perplexedly. "We're more used to having owners try to throw us off the scent on fast work than to volunteer information about it. What's the joker in your outspokenness?"

Bruce ignored that question and went evenly on:

"These horses are Sir Walter, which starts in the Kentucky Handicap on Saturday, and Nautilus, a maiden two year old. I am going to work Sir Walter the full handicap distance of a mile and a quarter and the youngster is going to carry him as fast as he can for five eighths." The owner paused, and the scribes waited with puzzled faces.

"I expect Sir Walter to win the Kentucky Handicap by a length or more, whether the track be soft or hard," continued Bruce. "And I expect the two year old to spread-eagle his field in the maiden race on that same card. If that prophecy interests you, you are at liberty to quote me."

"I think I get your drift, so far as Sir Walter is concerned," volunteered one of the sporting writers thoughtfully, "but that's as far as I follow you. The three year old drew a suspension for your colors by erratic reversals last fall, and I understand your wanting to declare yourself plainly about him in advance. You want him to prove honest.

If he wins, he'll pull down ten thousand on that stake anyhow. But the two year old will go to the post a maiden. That purse will be worth only eight hundred. If you keep his work dark and he cops, he'll pay as good as twenty to one in the betting shed. If he works sensationally in public, he'll be short priced. It looks like your chance here lies in making a nice plunge on him. Again I ask, what's the idea?"

"The idea is just this," asserted Bruce crisply. "For generations the Tecumseh stud held an unbroken and enviable record. The public could trust it. Recently the Tecumseh stable has suffered suspension—and has fallen under suspicion. That was while I was overseas, and I'm here to undo that damage. In that two year old, I am uncorking what I believe to be a sensational colt. I choose to tell the public just what my belief is in advance. I am not concerned with what odds the pari-mutuels pay on him."

He turned and spoke to the boys.

"Jog them to the turn home," he ordered tersely. "Canter them through the stretch and break at the finish line. Then send them both as fast as they can go." He paused, and then added to the lad on the younger colt: "Pull Nautilus up at the end of five eighths, but over that distance call for the best he has."

Then to the boy on Sir Walter he said: "Work that one out the mile and a quarter and show us what he's got."

The two chestnuts went off at a trot which presently slipped into an easy canter, and when just before the judges' stand they broke eruptively into racing stride the stop watches of the three reporters clicked in unison.

Sir Walter, with his more seasoned experience, bolted into the lead, reeling off his furlongs close to twelve flat with his head hard held and his ears pricked forward. His long and frictionless stride was as rhythmic as verse, and at



first his younger stable mate struggled desperately behind him.

"The pacemaker's trailing," laughed a facetious rail bird. "They ought to've give him a good start." But at the end of the first quarter many practiced eyes were following the pair. The baby had begun creeping up relentlessly on an older horse which was stepping twelve-second furlongs. He had thrust his muzzle insistently close to his companion's throat latch, and then he had forced it to the front. The boy on Sir Walter let out a wrap and shook his mount up sharply—but the baby kept his nose a few inches in front, and held it there doggedly until, at the end of five eighths, he was pulled up, still fighting for his head.

"Mr. Raleigh," announced one of the news writers, in a less matter-of-fact voice than he was accustomed to employ, "your youngster is a stand-out. I remember just once before seeing a two year old work as impressively and that was George C. Bennett, more than twenty years ago."

Another reporter nodded as he snapped the cover of his watch.

"He went along about as fast as horses race hereabouts," this observer offered corroboration. "On a cuppy track that was dead rather than fast, he did five eighths in nothing."

Bruce nodded. In the vernacular of the elect, to do "five eighths in nothing" is to accomplish the feat in one minute flat, plus no fraction of seconds. On Churchill Downs the track record is fifty-nine seconds, and that had been hung up ten years before in actual racing.

But as they walked away from the rail, one of the sports writers made cynical comment:

"He's a poor sap, at that. The purse will bring him a measly eight hundred, and if he'd kept that trick under cover and bet a grand, he'd have pulled down twenty thousand. After the papers

come out, the price about this Nautilus ought to be odds-on."

"Yeah," grinned his companion, "and no man realizes it any better than that old war horse, his uncle. Look at him. He's sulking over there by himself like a rattlesnake with the colic. As for me, I don't blame him."

Saturday came clear skied on a track which was lightening fast. Bruce sat in Colonel Davidson's box and with him sat the colonel and his daughter. There was no Captain Evans on hand to-day. The crowds were blithe. Lucile's eyes were glowing, too, for this afternoon she confidently expected to see the baby thoroughbred she loved prove himself, and write the first chapter of a victorious story.

There were moments when Bruce, looking at her, realized only her nearness and almost forgot the ache of his heart.

The five-furlong race for maidens would call ten green performers to the barrier, and there was a flush of excitement on Lucile's cheek when she hurried with Bruce from paddock to clubhouse as the bugle blared the post call. She watched, with an eagerness that was almost stage fright, the long queue of juveniles dancing out to the parade, and her eyes fondly followed the big chestnut under his orange-and-blue silks.

That congregation of juveniles milled and kicked and plunged at the barrier across the track, after the petulant fashion of undisciplined youth. They tangled themselves up like a mass of fishing worms and disgracefully delayed the start with excitement and tantrums. Then suddenly they fell into momentary alignment and the webbing snapped up. The whole fractious crew was away straining, this half score, none of which had yet won a race.

Lucile gave a low moaning exclamation and the smile died on her lips. Among the last to break, among the



slowest to settle into his racing stride, Nautilus was floundering along as greenly and as though he did not know what he was there for. He had swerved to the outside and was running near the middle of the track, where the route was longer than near the rail.

But Bruce smiled with a calm serenity.

"It's at the other end that the race is decided," he made laconic observation.

Then, as though with an abrupt realization of all that was bred into his heart and bone, the Tecumseh colt turned on full force his great jet of speed. Still content with his place on the outside, he settled into an amazingly long and steady stride. It carried him with incredible fleetness up past the tail-enders, up toward the first division, and while they struggled and crowded close to the rail, seeking the shortest way home, he ran as if in a race of his own, well outside them. It was as if he cared nothing for added distance, and was concerned only in finding room to extend himself.

Out there, at the middle of the track, he had it and most amazingly he used it. A half furlong from home he swept royally and effortlessly into the lead. Seventy yards from the wire he was galloping with two lengths of open daylight between his streaming tail and the nearest pair of distended nostrils. In the grace of his smooth action was no evidence of effort. He did not run. He seemed to flow like quicksilver.

Lucile had not cried out as men howled and women shrieked about her during those demoniac moments that mark every stretch run. She had stood trancelike with her breath hard held, and now there were sudden tears in her eyes, tears of emotion and gladness. Then, with abrupt impulsiveness, she caught both Bruce's hands and her voice shook as she demanded breathlessly:

"Did I say too much about him? Did I overrate him? If he lives and trains

on, there stands the winner of next year's Derby."

The colt's owner was trembling, not with the agitation of victory, but at her touch, and with his gaze on the eyes that were tear misted and the lips that smiled, he shook his head.

"You're a true horseman," he assured her, "and but for you my uncle would have worked him in the dark and slipped him over for one big killing in the ring—and the Tecumseh colors would need dry cleaning once more."

A fresh roar rose on that which had begun to dwindle, and the girl, who could not see over the crowd, asked: "What is it now?"

"They've hung out the time," Bruce said quietly. "It's a new track record."

Though Bruce Raleigh had taken the public into his full confidence, with his declaration that he expected to win the Kentucky Handicap with Sir Walter, the public had preferred to remain aloof and skeptical.

This, said the form students, with categorical assertiveness, was a nickel horse except in the mud and to-day the track was bone dry. In the betting shed they passed him by and the wise money flowed in on last year's Derby winner and a horse which had not this year tasted defeat.

When the ten-thousand-dollar feature of the holiday program had brought out the classy field of "three year olds and upward" in parade, the stands cheered their favorite and ignored the rest. The redoubtable Front Royal stepped at once to the fore, with unflinching of the webbing, and so swift was his get-away that it seemed almost as if he had been given a step at the gate. He took the track and went winging away from the struggling mass behind him, as though they had been there only to bestow upon him the compliment of a rear guard while he himself raced against time.

Sir Walter, interfered with and knocked back at the start, found it need-



ful to draw up and weave his way painstakingly out of close and somewhat dangerous quarters.

Past the judges for the first time, in the mile-and-a-quarter journey he flaunted his orange and blue nearer the tail end of the hunt than its van, but he saved ground on the first turn and through the back stretch he was steadily moving up. Already the more practiced eye could see that the supposed mud lark awaited only his jockey's call to take command of all save the fine four year old that breezed arrogantly on ahead of the rest.

Front Royal, though, was still flying his pennant of victory out there in solitary glory, and he galloped as though he could hold his pace all day.

Then they had turned and straightened for home and now it was a two-horse race, with the rest nowhere. The lad on the favorite let his bat rise and fall in a single stroke, with the sting of stern command and the favorite leaped away. But pounding after him with an even more resolute stride came Sir Walter, whose flank had not yet felt any flick of the lash nor his sides any touch of the rowel.

Front Royal's jockey was riding now with whip and spur and his mount responded gallantly, but gallantry was not enough.

The chestnut colt from Tecumseh had collared him a hundred yards from home, had taken his measure by a good length with fifty yards to go, and then had put a length of daylight between. With that conclusive margin, he crossed the wire.

The girl was smiling up at Bruce again as the stands rocked with noise.

"There's almost eleven thousand dollars for a nest egg," she was telling him with a gayety that sought to kindle his own. "Eleven thousand in one day toward the new start—and an assurance of good faith that the public won't forget." She paused, then added enthusi-

astically: "But it's that blessed baby, Nautilus, that I'm proudest of."

## CHAPTER X.

### A STRUGGLE.

CALUMET was a name of a great racing establishment which the turf had long known and revered. To most men who followed the daily record of thoroughbred racing, the name of Nicholas Severance, its present master, was less familiar than that of his most cherished toy. But in other circles it was otherwise.

Wall Street, for instance, knew the man whose rapid growth from mediocrity to undeniable power had been spectacular to the verge of melodrama. Out of the West he had come with a record of adventurous vicissitudes to fling his hat into the ring of mightier enterprise. Cynical lips had twisted into prophetic smiles at his hardihood, and back of the welcome accorded him was a hint of the wolf's cordiality to the lamb.

"If he must needs try a game he doesn't know," ruled the consensus of opinion among the veterans of the market, "if he isn't content with being a Western millionaire, he must take his chances in his effort to become an eastern multimillionaire. On his own head be the consequences."

That had been fifteen years ago. The history of certain companies concerned in wire and nails which had meanwhile gathered and coalesced into a suspicion of monopoly, was now well enough known. The general public innocently spoke of those concerns as this or that company. The more knowing lumped them all under the label of Nick Severance. Yet the man himself had somehow avoided conspicuous or frequent entries into newspaper notice. The outcome of his handiwork was patent. Who was doing it all, and how, was much less so.

It was common report on the turf



that no price was too great for Calumet to pay for a sire or a matron that struck its fancy; that the establishment combed the country for the ablest trainers and invited them to write their own contracts; that the jockeys who rode under Calumet contracts were picked from the top and paid at the top. And these were all the facts the turf world required.

This June day, Nicholas Severance's private car stood on a spur near the Latonia track, and, though he had a starter in the race, he entertained no undue illusions. Lord Calumet, which would carry his cap and jacket, had not been ready for the Kentucky Derby and even in this later race he would respond to the bugle call as a forlorn hope. But before this, Nicholas Severance had seen forlorn hopes win stake races, and if any of a dozen possible mischances occurred to overturn form calculations, he might always rely on something savoring of miracle in the performance of Jerry Pennant. Jerry was the first-string jockey who drew from him a salary which many bank presidents might have envied—and who earned it all.

It was into this private car that Colonel Davidson went, early in the forenoon of Derby day, and because they had driven to Cincinnati from the bluegrass together, he took Bruce along.

The young man, standing modestly in the background, could not help comparing these two men with each other and himself. Neither had sprung from any such aristocracy as had nurtured the stem of his own family. Yet now one was a millionaire and the other a multimillionaire. One was the son of a professional gambler, and the other only knew he had ever had a father at all, because men must have had fathers to exist.

"When you telephoned me, I was just leaving the farm," began Davidson, "and my friend, Mr. Raleigh, was with me. I brought him along."

Severance measured the gaunt young giant from head to foot, and shook his hand heartily.

"I know the racing reputation of your stud," he said, "and I'm glad to shake hands with you."

"Bruce's colt, Sir Walter, may trim us both this afternoon," Davidson commented. "He's a better horse than the form sheet shows."

"I can hear that without heartache," laughed Severance. "I'm sending Lord Calumet to the post rather in compliment to the Association than because I cherish any great hope. If I can't win, I shall hope to congratulate one or the other of you." After a moment he went on: "However, Davidson, my reason for asking you to call here this morning has nothing to do with racing."

Bruce Raleigh felt himself a superfluous figure on this stage, and interposed quietly:

"Perhaps I'd better wait for you outside, colonel."

But Severance shook his head.

"Just wait here and smoke a cigar," he said. "If you'll excuse us for a moment or two, we'll soon be done."

Then he led the colonel to the far end of the car where on his desk was strewn a litter of papers. To Bruce the voices of the other two came only in an unintelligible confusion of sound.

"Davidson," began Severance, with a crisp directness, "I understand you are leaving in a day or two for the East and mean to stop at Washington."

"Yes. I suppose you are going East, too, after the race, aren't you?"

Severance nodded.

"I'd like you to undertake an errand for me in Washington. I want to go straight through to New York."

Davidson's eyes narrowed ever so little, then he made courteous response:

"Naturally, I shall be glad to assist you in any way I can, Severance."

"There is a package I want delivered



directly into the hands of Senator Collingsworth, and I'd like you to take a receipt for it."

"A package?" repeated the colonel in obvious perplexity. "But why not mail it and have his registered receipt?"

Severance smiled.

"This package contains a considerable sum of money—in cash," he said. "It has to do with a personal transaction which, I hope I need hardly assure you, is in every way legitimate. Yet—" There was a pause and into it Davidson interpolated an inquiring echo of the last word:

"Yet?"

"Yet," continued Severance composedly, "since Collingsworth may perhaps be a member of the investigating board which is impending to make inquiry into our alleged verging on illegal combination—it might raise a false implication, if it were known that he and I were engaged in personal dealings of any sort."

Unconsciously Davidson raised his voice and his next words carried to where Bruce Raleigh stood awaiting him.

"It's been my invariable rule, Severance," he said bluntly, "to touch no transaction which, for any reason whatever, might be difficult to explain. Secret messengers carrying money to senators—"

He broke off and Severance laughed.

"I give you my personal assurance, my dear fellow," he announced, with a disarming front of candor, "that this matter is not loaded or devious in any way whatsoever. The only misadventure I seek to avoid is putting Collingsworth in an embarrassing position by having the payment of this money a matter of record at this particular time. You have my word that the matter is entirely on the 'up and up.'"

"All right. Your word is good enough for me," asserted Davidson, after a momentary hesitation. "If it

wasn't, we couldn't go in double harness; but whether your parcel contains money or iris bulbs or Russian caviar is no concern of mine."

"Quite so," smiled Severance; "except that it is to be somewhat more carefully guarded than bulbs—or even caviar."

"Am I to carry this wad of money around the race track with me?" inquired the colonel, and the weightier financier shook his head.

"You are to give yourself no present concern about it," he responded. "On the morning of your leaving for the East, I shall come to your house and put the package in your hands. That is all."

Davidson stood for a moment looking out of the window, then he suggested thoughtfully:

"Severance, I might as well ask you a question now as at another time. It's through your persuasion that I've gone into this wire-and-nail business—in a concern which is ostensibly independent and competitive. As a matter of fact, we both know that the prosperity of my branch of the industry depends on coöperation, practically on affiliation, with your own group. The stock has soared dizzily because of the merger prospect. Thrown into warfare with you, we could not survive. I want your most frank opinion as to whether the government is likely to drive us into separate camps—and competition. My friends have followed me. I must protect them."

"That is a prudent question and a reasonable one," responded the magnate soberly. "I'm glad that I can reassure you. The investigation, if it ever develops, will be a congressional maneuver and nothing more. Our legal diagnosis has been most complete. We have taken nothing for granted, and we are as safe as wheat in the mill."

"Very well, I'm willing to take your word for that, too."



The Latonia Derby is a great race, and it makes the first demand of the season on three-year-old stamina to carry its speed for the original Derby distance of a mile and a half.

Less ancient and hallowed in tradition than the Kentucky Derby and rewarding the winner with a smaller purse, it none the less attracts the cream of Derby form. That extra quarter of a mile adds a new element of uncertainty, eating more acidly into the staying qualities of the youngsters that contend, and sometimes the Churchill Downs victor bows there in defeat to some contender that labored behind him at Louisville.

To-day, on the beautiful but smaller course, the congestion seemed as great as that which had cumbered the Downs less than a month before, and to the bugle call most of the prominent starters of the earlier classic would respond as to an encore. Rendezvous, Sickie Moon and Leatherneck would all be there, as well as the Davidson pair, and besides them there would be new uncertainties in Lord Calumet and Sir Walter.

For Bruce the day was already flawed. Lucile had planned to be of the party, and she had warned the young master of Tecumseh that to-day she would be an inveterate enemy, rooting for the cherry and white against the orange and blue.

But she had not come.

Last night, a royally bred weanling had fallen sick at Waverly, and to-day the girl was nursing it with eyes of brooding anxiety. No persuasion could shake her, and the car had purred away with her seat empty.

Besides that depressing fact, there had been another. Bruce's eyes were more blackly ringed than usual, for he had been through a spirit-trying Golgotha of his own.

Young Raleigh had spent two sleepless nights and two days of sorely har-

ried spirit. He himself alone had known the poignancy of that struggle.

There are periodic drunkards who feel their appetites mounting with the swelling force of a burning passion. Such men may struggle and conquer or they may struggle and almost conquer—and then go down.

Bruce told himself categorically and unequivocally that for him the gaming mania spelled disaster, and that this lesson had been borne home by trial of fire and catastrophe.

Yet he had seen his colt's final work and, unless his watch had lied, to-day's race ought to be Sir Walter's paramount chance. Over the mile-and-a-half journey, his stout and dogged stamina should wear down and conquer the mile-and-a-quarter speed merchants—if only young Martel, who would be in the saddle, rode his best.

It was when Bruce had watched his colt's final trial that the thirst of his gaming mania leaped in him with a scalding flame of obsession. He was almost a pauper, but he had won ten thousand on the Kentucky Handicap, and the price about Sir Walter to-day would be a long one. A substantial coup in the betting ring would more than retrieve the disaster of the Kentucky Derby.

He had resolutely put that temptation behind him, scornfully acknowledging the insidiousness of its appeal. He had blazed with mortification to realize that, after all his crushing punishment, he could still be so shaken by the blatant allure of the vice he had recognized and renounced.

Yet, except when he was with Lucile, he could not put the persistent thing away from him. Somehow, in her presence, it lay torpid, like a snake which has been frosted. It had not troubled him on the day when Nautilus had won. Now it was a torture.

Over and over again, he had told himself that there was only one secure



course. He would take with him to Latonia only enough money for actual expenses. The pari-mutuel betting machines are called the "iron men," and they are iron men in that they extend no credit. To go to the track empty handed would be to go safeguarded.

But on the morning of that Derby day, Colonel Davidson had stopped his car at the bank in Lexington and had gone, for a few minutes, into a directors' room. Almost as though under the spell of hypnotism, Bruce Raleigh had found himself writing and cashing a check for five thousand dollars.

"I'm not going to win this fight by refusing to face it," he told himself doggedly. "I'm not going to refrain just because my pockets are empty. I'll take this money, but I won't bet it."

But a still voice whispered deep in his consciousness: "You are a liar, and you know it."

Now, at the beautiful course that looks across an infield broken by an artificial lake, before the first race had been run, Bruce stood on the lawn indolently inspecting the announcement board. The "morning line" of estimated odds for the Derby quoted those prices which the handicappers had computed in advance. The figures were not conclusive, but they were indicative.

Bruce found himself growing clammy moist, and his knees felt unsteady under him. There would be an even dozen, and the handicappers figured that Colonel Davidson's entry would rule favorite at three to two. About his own colt, if the "morning line" was to be credited, a man could get twelve to one. Even the Kentucky Handicap had failed to make people take Sir Walter seriously.

"Twelve to one," mused Bruce, as he reached for his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. "Five thousand at twelve to one is sixty thousand dollars—and sixty thousand dollars, plus the stake is almost eighty thousand—"

All the sophistries of the gambler's avid eagerness assailed him and for the febrile moment seemed persuasive and conclusive with logic.

Some one touched his elbow and he started violently as he turned to face an elderly man with burning eyes who had accosted him. The man's clothes were shabby, but he carried himself with a pitiful remnant of tarnished distinction.

This tall gentleman, Bruce remembered, who was still impressive in spite of the seediness of his apparel and the stamp of ruin on his face, had once been a brilliant lawyer. Now he was a specter, whom, though he had never owned a running horse, the race track had sucked dry and destroyed.

"How do you feel about your colt to-day, Mr. Raleigh?" the elderly man inquired, with an elaborate courtesy. "The price is attractive."

Bruce Raleigh gulped back the knot that had gathered in his throat.

It seemed to him that he had seen the figure through a mirror of the years to come; had seen his own future forecast, unless he conquered and throttled this unaccountable, insidious craving in himself. The thought palsied him as though with an ague.

"I'm not betting on my colt, Mr. Ellis," he said quietly. He felt that this man had, unintentionally, caught him back from the brink of a precipice. "I'm not betting on him—but I have a strong hope of winning the stake."

Standing on the steps of the clubhouse, with his eyes still on the board, Bruce reacted to a positive nausea of self-disgust. Like a cold shower, the object lesson of another who had traveled the road to destruction which was alluring himself, had chilled his fever into a clammy perspiration. For the moment, he was safe again—safe but as weak as though he had risen from a sick bed.

After all, his colt was by no means a certainty. The lad who was to have



the leg up was meeting the cream of his profession, and that lad had one serious fault. In a hard finish, when he had to shift his reins from two hands to one and draw his bat, he sometimes let his mount's head drop. Sir Walter would need his head firmly held this afternoon. Bruce wrenched his eyes from the dangerous fascination of the announcement board and began walking energetically toward the stables. There at least he would be across the track from the magnetic lure of the iron men.

In his stall, with his head high and his fierily kindled eyes, stood Sir Walter, and, as though he knew full well that this was to be a day of supreme effort, his satin coat of bright chestnut was wet and vein marked, and his withers were atremble with excitement.

"He's as fit as any horse I ever saddled," commented Walter Raleigh briefly. "I only wish I had ten thousand to play on him. I'd gamble my life if they'd accept that currency over there in the shed. I hope you don't fail, Bruce, to take advantage of such a chance as comes once in a lifetime."

Bruce wheeled without a word and walked stiffly away. Afresh he felt the fever rising through his veins. Already he had forgotten the man with the stamp of destruction on his face. Already the thick roll of crisp bills in his pocket began to burn him anew, as if it had taken fire. After all, that five thousand dollars was velvet. Sir Walter had won it and Sir Walter deserved to have it played back on him as a tribute of confidence. Surely it was only common sense to capitalize an unusual opportunity. He had settled on a policy of refraining from gambling, as mandatory in general, but every sound law should be elastic enough to meet the demands of intelligence.

He began walking toward the infield again, but as he crossed its grassy breadth his impatience spurred him almost to a trot and he had to hold him-

self down to a dignified deliberation with a stout effort. He would need to distribute his money into several parcels in order to avoid the open making of too heavy a plunge. Otherwise he would start a run of play on his colt by many among the gullible who are always ready to follow an owner's confidence with sheeplike imitation.

But, back again beyond the palings, he halted and shook his head. He seemed to see Lucile's blue-gray eyes looking at him with their grave and childlike seriousness, and that seriousness masked a stifled scorn for his incorrigible weakness. At that moment of his vacillating struggle, sixty thousand dollars did not seem worth Lucile's scorn.

He went and sat down on the grass beyond the artificial lake. He knew that his madness was on him. He had tasted its penalties to their dregs and he was yet consumed with a burning thirst to drink afresh from the same poisoned goblet.

The one cooling restraint that did not lose its steadying force was the thought of a girl's eyes. And that was unaccountable and absurd, he told himself bitterly. It was a strange and absurd thing that a girl's ideas should constitute a compelling law, when he had already lost the girl herself and the girl's love.

Races to which he paid no attention were run while he sat there. He was near enough to the back-stretch turn and far enough away from the clamorous crowd to hear all the exciting sounds that the grand stand misses. As those fields thundered by him, they brought to his ears the blended roar of quick-beating hoofs, the straining of leathers, the snapping silks in the wind and the staccato shouts of the boys in the saddles.

But he marked none of these things, and it was only when he recognized other horses being led along the infield



paths and knew that the Derby starters were going to the paddock, that he rose and ploddingly followed them. In his heart he knew he had lost his fight. He knew that he meant to stop in the betting shed and stake his five thousand before he went to Sir Walter's stall.

He moved with a heavy lassitude now, burdened by the stress of those emotional charges and retreats across a battlefield of inherited tendency. Yet, as he drew near the wicket of the pari-mutuel machine which handled the bets of largest caliber, he halted abruptly and for a moment it seemed to him that he had taken a blow in the face.

There, struggling to keep his feet in the excited crowding, was a tall, emaciated young man with one empty trouser leg. The young man wore a veteran's button in his lapel, and between his teeth, because his hands were busy with his crutches, he gripped a yellow-backed bank note. Bruce's own hand was in his trousers pocket, clamped on a thick wad of bills—five thousand dollars.

"Five thousand," he found himself muttering. "That was what I won in the crap game. And that"—his eyes dwelt with a fascination of horror on the empty trouser leg of the other young man—"and that was what I came near getting out of it."

He spun savagely as if to face an enemy from behind, and a few moments later he was standing on the cool, clean tanbark which carpeted his colt's stall in the paddock. The thick roll of bills in his pocket no longer burned him, but he knew his deliverance had come out of an accident, that it had been due to no inherent strength of his own.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE LATONIA DERBY.

WHEN the jingle of the gong called the jockeys to the paddock, the crowds that pressed against the rail seemed more eager for a glimpse of

the Davidson's gelding than of his stallion. Double-wraps had been crowned king in the Kentucky Derby, and again to-day Skeet Tompkins was to pilot him. The public is quick to forget even those things it has known, and the public had never fully known how untruly the classic had been run when a second best had stolen a march on his superior.

Now, as the boys appeared, the on-lookers turned from the horses for a moment to survey them, and, when Jerry Pennant came to Lord Calumet's stall, a wave of applause went with him.

"There goes the best horse in the Calumet stable," shouted a bystander, and Jerry smiled quietly. Here was a race rider whose skill transcended craft and became true art. His alert, intelligent eyes were hawk clear, and he carried himself with no touch of boastfulness, yet with the air of one who knew that he merited the plaudits of crowds. He was to ride an outsider to-day, and if he won this Derby, it must be a victory of horsemanship rather than of horseflesh. Yet he had done such things before—and doubtless would do them again.

Bruce could not avoid a mental comparison, as little Martel came into his own stall and stood with his tufted whip stuck in his boot top by the side of the bright chestnut he was to ride.

In contrast with Pennant, little Martel looked discouragingly small and inefficient—yet he was a boy who ranked well in ordinary riding company. After all, there was only one Jerry Pennant.

"Break with him quick and keep him clear of early interference," instructed Bruce crisply, holding the boy's eyes urgently with his own. "Then rate him just off the pace for the first mile and ride him out to his last ounce through the stretch."

The boy was attending sharply, and he nodded with energetic response.

"Above all," directed the owner, "keep a strong hold on his head. He



may waver and bore in if you let his head drop. Don't draw your bat unless you have to, and use it as sparingly as you can. Remember this, though, above all else: keep his head up and drive him straight through the last quarter."

The fanfare of the bugle sounded again. The boys were being tossed to their saddles and were knotting their reins.

"Lead out," came the command of the paddock judge, and the red-coated marshal took his place at the head of the procession. The march had begun to the track

The lottery for post positions had given the envied place on the rail to Lord Calumet, with Leatherneck second, but Sir Walter had been lucky enough to draw number three. Both those others were swift breakers, and Bruce hardly ventured to hope that Martel could wing his way from the barrier ahead of either. Still, if he did not permit those other boys on his right to outjockey him and shut him off in that first wild scramble, he might be off with the vanguard.

The Davidson pair were fifth and sixth and Rendezvous, also a lightning-fast horse on the start, was still farther out. To reach freedom from interference, he must have the speed to cross the charging front.

As the line of youngsters paraded past the judges and as the crowd stood up and bellowed its acclaim, Bruce unslung and focused his glasses.

The dozen young contenders made their way to the barrier at the half pole, and took position for the line-up. As chance would have it, they fell almost at once into as fair a front as a starter could ask. Unaccountably, Leatherneck, who was usually savage at the post, was in an amiable mood to-day, and, as the field walked gingerly toward the webbing, it jerked skyward.

The Derby field was away to a start which gave no cause for complaint.

Bruce saw Jerry Pennant shoot Lord Calumet forward on the rail a good length ahead of the rest, but he sighed contentedly as he caught a glimpse of his orange-and-blue cap flashing near, and realized that little Martel had not been caught napping. Both the Davidson colts were off well, too, and from far out toward center track the lad on Rendezvous was cutting flashlike across the fronts of his slower companions and making for the rail.

Pennant had drawn clear of the congestion, and under him the Severance candidate was winging away in front with Sir Walter attending him closely, as the Davidson pair and Rendezvous thundered upon them. All the others were in the second platoon.

Bruce knew that over such a distance none of those lads was anxious to assume the thankless task of setting the early pace. Yet none of them dared to ease back until the first turn was rounded and the danger of being shut into a wax-tight pocket was averted. Lord Calumet had a world of early speed, but Pennant would not be apt to let him burn it up too fast. Just now he was scudding along like spindrift before a gale with a track of his own. Sir Walter, Lapful and Rendezvous ran so closely grouped behind him that the boots of the boys rubbed dangerously as they banked to the turn. Bruce drew a long breath and took down his glasses. So far, so good. His colt was in fair position and there was yet a mile and a quarter to go.

Then they were passing the stand for the first time with a fast half mile already run, and Jerry Pennant was offering the heart-burning post of pacemaker to some other aspirant. Little Martel was also easing off the pace and, as four dozen lightly plated hoofs roared past the judges, it was Tompkins on Double-wraps who was showing the way.

"There comes the winner!" a hys-



terical voice lifted itself to make announcement, as the victor of the Kentucky Derby took the track; but Bruce smiled to himself with tolerant amusement. The assertion, he thought, was premature.

They were pelting through the back stretch in unchanged order, when Pennant, who had let Lord Calumet drop back to third, behind Double-wraps and Rendezvous, made his move and began creeping up. Lapful in fourth place and Sir Walter in fifth moved at the same time and positions began to change like shuffled cards.

The curve of the track end foreshortened them into a scrambled mass of color and strain, and with them traveled a light cloud of yellow dust. Then they were straightened again and settled into the run home. Now stamina would begin telling its story. Bruce was outwardly imperturbable, but his pulses were throbbing fast. His boy was still fifth, but he was lapped on Lapful, and Lapful was coming fast.

Lord Calumet had faltered and shortened his stride, yet as Bruce looked to see him chuck the race he came valiantly on again with an amazing burst of renewed vigor. The magic of his jockey was lifting him and throwing him forward. The clairvoyant determination of Jerry Pennant was infusing fresh courage and fresh speed into the tiring thing under him. Perhaps it might last long enough.

Tompkins was already plying his bat on Double-wraps, but to-day the gelding that had won the Kentucky Derby was, for some reason, failing to respond. The pace of the first stages had been consuming and this colt had borne its early brunt. He was giving back now, like a selling plater, under some mood of sulkiness, and soon he would be defeated. Abruptly, too, Rendezvous, which had thus far seemed exuberantly charged with reserve strength, cracked and threw up his tail. Within the fur-

long pole, shifts of position were confusingly rapid.

Lapful had forged into the lead now, close on the rail, with little Scallers sitting as still as a sawdust doll, but hand-riding him to the last ounce. Lord Calumet, fast tiring, yet being held to his task by the magic of the hands that nursed his head, was second, and Sir Walter raced at his saddle skirts to the outside. All three could have been shot through between shoulder and hind quarter by a single bullet.

The stands rocked tumultuously, because this *was* a horse race. Within the sixteenth, this trio fought it out hammer and tongs, matching stride for stride, as if they were yoked in triple harness. It looked like a dead heat among three horses, and alternately each seemed to lead by just so much as his nose nodded up or down.

Until they were close on the wire, no judge could have split them apart.

Then it was that Martel, fearing more the uncanny wizardry of Jerry Pennant than the splendid stamina and speed of Lapful, shifted his reins from two hands to one and drew his bat. He used it sparingly, raising it only once and bringing it down with a sharp sting, but in that moment Sir Walter's head dropped. He wavered and veered inward. Then he plunged forward again, as Lord Calumet lost inches, and the Tecumseh colt thrust his nose ahead of Lapful's. He had won the Latonia by a head from Colonel Davidson's black stallion, and Pennant's consummate ability had brought in the flagging Lord Calumet third, with a lead of two lengths over Double-wraps.

Such a close and desperately fought victory, achieved by a horse that had come gamely from behind, loosened the thunders of the stands and shook the timbers with its reverberation. The crowd had gone mad and when the black numbers were hung out, 3-5-1, it roared afresh.



But the black numbers which record the order of passing the post are not the red numbers, and until the red numbers replace them the result is not official.

It is the etiquette of a Derby that the winning jockey shall be the last to return and dismount. This custom permits the triumphant lad to have an unencumbered stage for his ovation when he rides his mount into the white semicircle of victory.

But before the flushed and excited face of little Martel was lifted in salute, Jerry Pennant had slid from his saddle and gone to the scales. Then, instead of walking out and back to the paddock, he ascended the winding stairs to the eyrie where the judges preside. The thousands knew what that meant. The rider of the show horse—a show horse which, until the final strides had been at the head of the pack, was claiming a foul, and Jerry Pennant did not claim fouls lightly.

About the elevated place the crowds surged, and toward it Bruce was elbowing his way. His own heart had sunk to a sickening fear when he had seen his boy's whip rise and fall to that one stroke.

Then Martel rode back and, instead of being at once photographed and acclaimed, he was summoned before the judges.

The color flowed out of his flushed cheeks, leaving them almost ashen as he climbed the winding stairs.

"The boy on Sir Walter let his mount swing in against me," declared Pennant seriously. "He knocked Lord Calumet off his stride, and I had trouble keeping him from caroming into Lapful. It almost put the two of us over the fence."

Martel stammered. It was clearly an accident, but an accident due to misjudgment and one which might have caused death. Moreover, the judges had seen it for themselves.

The crowd still surged and eddied, bellowing in sudden partisanship. Then the black figures came down from the board across the home stretch and red numbers went up.

Those red figures did not contain the 3 which had been on Sir Walter's saddle cloth. The claim of a foul had been allowed. Sir Walter had been disqualified, and a disqualified horse is not moved back one place, but is put entirely out of the money.

The red numerals were 5-1-6, and they awarded the race to Lapful with Lord Calumet second and Double-wraps third.

Bruce's eye fell on one figure standing in the swirl of humanity that eddied about the judges' stand. It was the figure of a one-legged man with a veteran's button in his lapel, and, in the excited jostling, it maintained its uprightness precariously on the propping crutches. The man was tearing up a bunch of pari-mutuel tickets and his face was bleak with wintry gloom.

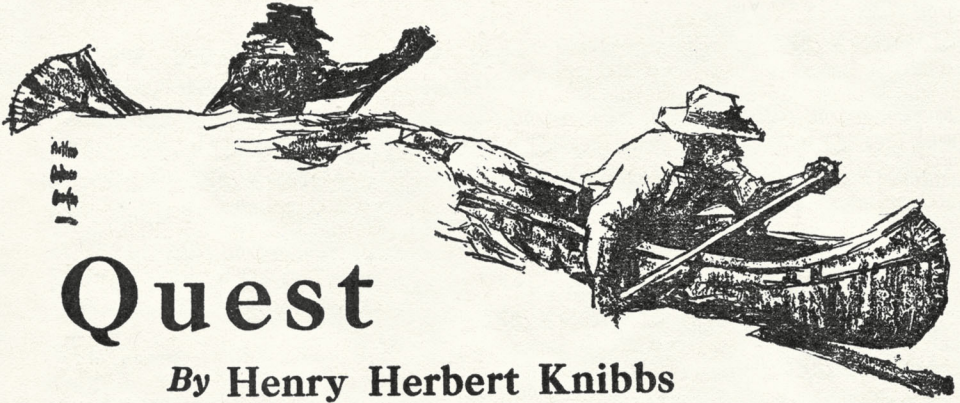
*To be continued next week.*



## DID YOU READ THAT—

**I**N Massachusetts, a workman was trapped under a collapsing wall of granite blocks, and escaped injury. Twelve tons of blocks, there were—enough to crush the life out of a mastodon. But a surgeon who examined the man found no serious injuries. The temptation is strong to call that a miracle.





# Quest

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

WE had dreamed a nameless river,  
    Dreamed an undiscovered shore,  
And we left our homes forever,  
    Ai! to wander evermore!  
Mad with longing for a haven  
    Never man had seen before.

Drear the dark'ning forest arches,  
    Fierce the toil and scant the bread;  
Breasting dank and sunless marches,  
    With a song to cheat the dread,  
Till we found a wild green meadow,  
    Where a nameless river spread.

Stripped the birch, and cedar bending,  
    Shaped the rib and wrought the craft,  
Labored stubborn hours unending,  
    Fashioned maple-blade and haft,  
Launched upon the nameless river,  
    Mad with longing, and we laughed.

And we drifted down the river,  
    Peered at phantoms overside—  
Down the silvery winding river



To a white and quick'ning tide—  
Fought the turmoil and the terror,  
Rode the wave as warriors ride.

Kindled fire on many beaches,  
Snared the otter, slew the deer;  
While the unknown river reaches  
Called us and we needs must hear—  
In the twilight, in the dawning—  
Called us on from year to year.

Naked skies and skies of thunder  
Sang or threatened—naught were they;  
Nights resplendent, shores of wonder  
Bade us from our toil and stay;  
But our dream was of a haven,  
Fairer still and far away.

And we drifted down the river,  
Mad with longing, fey were we;  
Down the silvery winding river,  
Doomed to journey endlessly,  
Ever dreaming of a haven  
Never man was born to see.







By Don McGrew

# Shell Shock

*A La*

# Mademoiselle

Author of "The Broadening Trail," "For the Good of the Service," Etc.

Two former doughboys go back to France for a little fun and meet a couple of American girls. Well, they turned out to be *some* girls.

**B**EEF" BLANCHARD and "Zoop" Kennedy, veterans of the A. E. F., had looked forward eagerly to their visit in Liffol le Grande. Their regiment had been billeted there in the training period of '17. They had counted on playing lavish hosts to some of those kindly old matrons who had once scolded them sincerely for preferring cognac to mild wines, and who had repeatedly urged them to write often to the folks at home.

But on the train their position had changed. While the diminutive Zoop slept, Beef had engaged in a crap game with several touring members of the old Rainbow Division. All the partners' ready cash was en route to somewhere else in France.

"At that, though," the giant remarked, with his slow smile, "we're here with our shoes on. I left you your ole rocks, too. So when do we eat?"

Zoop snorted ironically. He had only recently been awakened. He assured himself that the little chamois bag, with its diamonds within, was in an inner pocket, and rubbed vigorously at his misshapen nose. He knew that Beef supposed all the stones in that little bag to be bona fide gems.

"Maybe you think it would be easy to shove up one o' them rocks in this little burg!" he snorted.

"Oh, well, you'll think of something, anyway."

"Give a listen to this big stiff, Mohammed!" the little man appealed. "Al-



ways pickin' at me about my morals, but every time he bankrupts us, he expects me to lead him to manna." He surveyed his partner reprovingly. "Simply because you wanted to get back what you had lost, why did you have to frisk *my* roll while I slept? Not but what's mine is yours, Beef; but why didn't yuh wake me?"

"Because you would have palmed your phony dice on them, yuh little crook, and they was white guys."

When Zoop swore disgustedly at Beef's scruples, the giant added:

"If ole 'K-leg's' still alive, you might paint him another sign."

At this Zoop's irritation passed, and he chuckled joyously.

"There's a thought in that," he declared, quickening his step.

They had little difficulty in finding the way to M'sieu' K-leg's café. There had been no radical changes in the village since their last visit to it in 1918. They wended their way through twisting streets, without sidewalks, flanked on either side by close-packed, unbroken rows of stone buildings, with the stables immediately adjoining the dwellings; and shortly they were entering the old triangular "square."

"There she is," Zoop exclaimed, nodding at the sign over the café. "The old Cheval Blanc. There ain't a thing changed."

A huge sight-seeing bus was parked beside the café.

"That means Americans, I betcha," Zoop declared.

"Yeah," said Beef. "And say—I see that bus before the Bar Americaine in Paris the other day. Fellow told me about her. She ain't no common rubberneck wagon, you notice. Fellow says there's a couple American girls got her chartered."

"Zat so? Coupla hard-boiled eggs, I'll betcha. Yeah, a coupla hard-boiled eggs. Would wallflowers be runnin' a sight-seein' bus, Beef? Not so's you

could notice it. Don't you figure on tellin' *them* any hard-luck story, Beef. I'll tackle ole madam first—and *she* used to charge us even for the matches."

"Well, I hope ole K-leg has forgotten that there sign, anyway."

K-leg's establishment was quiet that morning. Of American tourists there apparently were none. Only a faint murmur of voices came to them from the little private dining room just off the cuisine.

"*Rum chaud*, madam!" Zoop shouted.

Recognition was not instantaneous; but when Zoop pointed at a patched hole in the ceiling, and removed his hat, mademoiselle shrieked. While cleaning his lieutenant's pistol, back in '17, Zoop had accidentally fired a shot through that ceiling from the room directly above. The bullet had knocked from the coiffure of mademoiselle an elaborately decorated comb, worth at least fifteen francs. Shrieks of merriment now came from mademoiselle; madam chattered and laughed and wiped tears; old M'sieu' K-leg even forgot himself so far as to grin; shoulders rose to ear points; hands gesticulated wildly; the kitchen was in an uproar.

"Le terrible Zoop!" gasped madam, weak with merriment.

At this juncture, with his two unbidden guests choking joyfully over his hot rum, M'sieu' K-leg growled and departed for his wine cellar. It only served to increase the merriment of his wife and the maid. And, simultaneously, Zoop became aware of something which he classified immediately as "a sight for sore eyes," standing in the doorway which opened into the private dining room.

Zoop was taken aback. The young woman did not appear to be hard boiled. Doubtless she could be businesslike, but never hard boiled. How could a young dame with laughing eyes—yes, how could a young dame who was so disconcertingly easy to look at—be classified



among eggs that have been left overlong in hot water?

Her voice further substantiated his impression. In a musical lilt she inquired of madam, in French:

"Do you actually mean that this is the young American you were telling me about last night?"

"*Ah, oui, oui, oui!*"

The young woman regarded Zoop merrily.

"You'll padron me, I hope, but it appears that the story of the sign has become something of a legend here. They tell tourists about it. Won't you tell me how it really happened?"

"Why, I guess they probably gave it to you straight, miss," said Zoop, with unaccustomed reluctance.

"I'll tell you, miss," Beef unexpectedly volunteered. "This modest buddy of mine, he agreed back there in '17 to paint a guy in a phaëton on ole K'leg's sign. The guy was to be driving a white horse, see? Well, after that the café was to be called the Cheval Blanc. Ole K-leg, he was suspicious of Zoop."

"Aw, soldier, he suspected everybody!"

"Well, miss, he described every detail, he thought, and Zoop, here—Chester Kennedy they named him, but Zoop is what we call him—Zoop, he was to get twenty-five francs when the pitcher was done, see? So he started to paint it, and K-leg had to go to Neufchâteau. While he was gone Zoop finished it, and called madam——"

"Who was near-sighted!" gurgled the young woman.

"That's it, near-sighted. She didn't notice that Zoop didn't paint in any lines. She paid the twenty-five francs. But ole K-leg noticed. How he roared when he got back! Well, Zoop says that K-leg forgot to mention any lines, and if he wanted lines painted in he could fork over ten more francs."

"Which of course he wouldn't pay," the girl laughed.

"Not him. An' that night the rain went and washed off a lot of the paint, before it set right, and K-leg roared. So Zoop he says, 'Well,' he says, 'if you'd let me paint in them lines, the horse wouldn't have run away!'"

Even while she laughed, Zoop knew that the girl was secretly appraising him. He was glad that his clothes were designed to plast muster, even if his face might not.

"Of course it was all by way of a job," he hastily interjected.

"Of course you boys were all terrible over here in '17," the girl assured Zoop. Then she became very serious and very appealing. "Could it be possible that either one of you is able to repair a car?"

Zoop rose instantly to the occasion.

"Can a cow give milk, lady, can a cow give milk?"

With a cry of delight she invited the two ex-service men into the little dining room. There they became formally acquainted with Marion Johnston, the spokesman, and Alice Woodall, her quiet, observant companion.

"You won't think us forward when we tell you," said Miss Johnston; and she explained.

The pretentious bus had been brought over by a young man from Detroit, she said, with an original idea. He believed that there were many tourists who hated to be made conspicuous in "rubberneck wagons," but who would likewise balk on paying the outrageous prices asked for private touring cars. The new bus, inclosed as it was, fitted their needs. It was equipped to carry private parties on tours of the battlefields.

"Something in the nature of a private car on the railroads, you see," said Miss Johnston. "Then the owner took sick, and we chartered it—on a shoe string."

The rest was quickly told. This was their first trip. Their chauffeur had brought them this far, and then de-



manded a simply exorbitant raise in salary. Being refused, he had secretly drained all the gasoline from the tank, and departed, with two of the plugs. He had also stolen Miss Johnston's hand bag, containing all but a small part of their funds. Their irate party of tourists had departed in high dudgeon, some of them threatening suit and attachment and what not because they had not received a refund for an uncompleted trip.

"So you see we're in a perfectly *dreadful* pickle," said Miss Johnston, frankly and appealingly. "We were teachers at home—New York, you know—and were in Paris studying art. Well, you just have to have money, so we thought——"

"You needn't apologize," Zoop assured her grandly. "A coupla brave girls, if you ask me, chartering a bus that way. What you want now is that engine fixed, and jack for gas to get back to Paris. That's it, ain't it?"

"Oh, I just hate to ask—but if you only could——"

"Consider it done, miss. Now, this is the way of it—we're busted, too. But don't let that worry you."

Miss Johnston's face fell.

"Don't let it worry you," Zoop hurried on. "Wasn't the war ended the same year I went in the trenches? That proves who won it, don't it?" He reached over and deftly extracted Beef's watch. "Here's the bozo that got this firm into a state of bankruptcy, pro tem," said he, tendering Miss Johnston the watch. "If you'll hold that for security, and have got enough to pay for them hot rums we just had, I'll get busy."

Both girls looked incredulous for a second, and then laughed heartily.

"I'll just do that," Miss Johnston assured him. "Yes, we have enough left for that. My goodness, and—let's see." She hurriedly counted her few francs. "Why, you must be hungry,

too. Order your breakfast." And she pushed back the watch. "No, really," she assured Zoop, laughing into his disconcerted eyes, "I'm perfectly willing to take a chance on the painter of that sign."

Warmed by both food and the smiling eyes, Zoop sauntered forth to inspect the car. While the girls had sufficient money to purchase new spark plugs, it appeared that the threads were U. S. standard, in this engine. But Zoop was far from dismayed.

"It may take a day, but I can fix it," he declared.

"Oh, *can* you?" Miss Johnston cried. Mixed joy and apprehension were in her voice. A deep anxiety threatened to undermine what had heretofore appealed to Zoop as admirable and philosophic poise in the face of her catastrophe. She clutched his arm. "We've just *got* to be back in Paris for the first of the week. We've contracted to take out a party for a whole two-week tour."

"We'll be there, miss."

"We? Oh, then you'll——"

"Drive for you? Sure, miss, unless you've lined up another shuffer."

"Why, we wired—but yes, of course, I'd rather have you. We *know* you're an ex-service man. Why, it will be just splendid. You can tell them about the actual places you fought, and—oh, everything. Goodness, though, where *will* you get the money to buy the gas, and all?" And she tried to joke. "You won't flimflam any one with another sign?"

"Nothing like that, miss, nothing like that." Zoop blushed shamed facedly, for the first time in ages. "You just sit back and leave it to me."

When he and Beef were walking across the square, Beef eyed him quizzically.

"You ain't got anything phony in the back of your mind, have you, Zoop?"

"Phony? Me? With them dames mixed in? G'wan."



"Well, I just thought I'd ask," Beef growled.

"I'm just gona try to shove up one of my rocks," Zoop explained. He had never taken Beef wholly into his confidence in the matter of the diamonds. He was slow, and easy-going, and could wink his eye at some things, could Beef; but he wouldn't stand for what Zoop now planned to do.

Zoop didn't find any great happiness in the transaction himself. He wanted, from now on, to keep everything on the best side of life's ledger. He would only borrow the money; he wouldn't use this old emergency trick this trip in the form of a final sale. He would return the money, and the man who took the stone would never know the difference.

The transaction was consummated with the town's mayor, who could readily see that Zoop's diamond was worth at least a thousand dollars. He demurred, as a matter of course, on a loan of one fifth its value; but finally agreed to loan a tenth. Then he took the stone. That is, he thought he took it, and so did Beef. Zoop knew better. He had only one good diamond. The others, not displayed on this occasion, were paste imitations of the bona fide gem. He merely palmed the honest gem and left its worthless replica to be deposited carefully in the cautious mayor's safe.

The repairs were conducted with more labor. Zoop directed the work, and paid the garage men.

"Step aboard," he said, then. "Doctor Zoop, M. E., that's me."

"I could never, never thank you enough," cried Miss Johnston.

The arch look which accompanied this fervent statement brought the color flooding into Zoop's rather pallid cheeks; he was walking on air. What did he care if that freckled and rather plain Miss Woodall seemed to be quietly amused by the way his feelings were being revealed? He was sure she

had exchanged a glance with Beef; he was sure she was laughing at him behind those glasses which shielded her dark eyes; but Zoop had already decided that he could stand a lot of kidding in connection with this Johnston dame.

It did not occur to him that Beef had been unusually silent until they were skimming along on their way back to Paris, in the big bus. He stole a look at the big fellow. Could it be that Beef thought there was something phony about the song and dance these dames had given them? With his good-natured, heavy face, his sleepy smile, and his slow, deep bass, some people might size up Beef as a big, easy-going dumb-bell; but Zoop could have informed the cock-eyed world that these goofs would have been quite surprised, had they played Beef for fish. Square, he was, but no fish. He was like this quiet dame, Miss Woodall, always sitting back and letting some one else have the spotlight, but sizing everything up as it came along. Well, he'd like to know what was going on in Beef's mind now.

He decided almost at once that Beef couldn't really doubt these dames. Zoop knew class when he saw it. He knew English when he heard it, too. This here Miss Woodall hadn't even bobbed her hair; she might have stepped out of a New England schoolroom only an hour ago, in so far as appearances went. Oh, they weren't prim; they knew their way about, all right, all right; they were both sure-enough good fellows. Why, any goof with an ounce of brains could see that here were just two square-shooting girls, trying to get along.

"Old Beef is maybe thinkin' that things wouldn't be the same for him and me if a skirt come in, serious like," thought Zoop.

When they arrived in Paris the girls directed his course to a perfectly respectable neighborhood, as any one



could see. He noted that the concierge was quite polite to them. Arrangements were made for their own quarters in a room near by; and then Zoop made for the door, telling Beef he could expect him back some time that evening.

"Stepping out with that Johnston dame?" ventured Beef. "Or is it a state secret?"

"Tell yuh when I get back."

It was late when he returned. They sojourned to a little café near by.

"Beef," Zoop blurted out presently, "I ain't been shootin' exactly on the square with yuh."

"Well," Beef said mildly, "get it off your chest."

Haltingly, shamefacedly, Zoop confessed to the subterfuge whereby he had left the mayor of Liffol in possession of a worthless bit of glass. "Only, it's all fixed now," he hastened on. He had gone to the Café of the *Lame Duck*, frequented by various Americans whose finger prints are to be found on other than army records.

"Wise birds!" Zoop snorted contemptuously. "It didn't hurt my conscience none to take them for a gallop with the bones. Give this roll the once over. Well, I wired the mayor his dough, and it's all jake."

"Gimme those phony stones till I chuck 'em into the Seine," Beef ordered.

"I can't, Beef. I give 'em to Mar—to Miss Johnston."

"You what?"

"Yeah, I gave 'em to her, Beef, I gave 'em to her." Zoop made many more rapid circles, and blushed furiously. "I just went an' told her the whole yarn, Beef—about how you picked me out've the street long ago, and tried to straighten me out—the whole works, Beef, the whole works. Oh, I came clean. I told her to take and throw them glass stones away."

"So?" Beef drawled, in his heavy bass, after an awkward pause. He

peered through half-shut eyes at his crony, dreamily blowing out a smoke ring. "I suppose that means you're willing to play Andy Gump to her Min, eh?"

"Beef," Zoop exploded, "that dame could bawl me out every day of her life for bein' late to dinner, and would I take it with a grin? I didn't right out an' tell her so, but Beef, is she dumb? Not her. She was right nice about it, Beef. And say—what do you think about it all, ole-timer?"

"Why, if this is all on the up and up with you——"

"Absolutely!"

"Then maybe it's the best thing could happen to yuh—yuh little crook."

Zoop beamed.

"Shake, ole-timer. And say—there's somethin' else. This tour, now—it's an old dame, stoppin' in that sort of family hotel across the way, who's chartered the bus from the girls for this trip. An old dame from Indiana. Miss Johnston, she gave me a peep at her. The old lady was maybe handsome in her day but Geronimo never looked no fiercer than what she can look, I betcha. Well, she's got kale, and she's kind of arranged this party, with friends she met on the boat, and some others to fill in, which are stoppin' at the hotel and appear to be all right. Only, she insists on seein' the shuffer who's to drive 'em to all these strange out-of-the-way places."

"So you gotta pass inspection, eh?"

"Yeah, that's it, Beef, that's it. Say, if that ole gimlet-eye lamps my mug, *alone*—and say, Beef, I've got it fixed with Miss Johnston, too, to help make this trip a *good* one. You know, to show 'em how the trenches looked at night, with Very pistols, and so on—her idea. Smart, eh? And *could* I hand 'em a spiel? Oh, boy! Well, now——"

"What do you want me to do?"

"You go with me, Beef, you go with



me. If the old lady is some doubtful about passin' the time in *my* company, well, now, I'm out a job, Beef, I'm out a job. But when she sees *you*, Beef—well, folks always do have confidence in that homely map o' yours."

Beef's hesitation was only momentary. "I'll do anything once," was his way of assenting.

The trip started—thanks to Beef—with Zoop as chauffeur. The two girls and Beef rode beside him.

That old lady, Mrs. McAndrews, had proven to be something of a tartar. Beef quite believed Miss Carmody, the granddaughter, when she said that grandma had all the rest of the family hunting for the highest limbs. Once she had suffered a broken hip in a railroad wreck, but had chopped her way out of the overturned, burning car with the emergency ax. Then she had crawled back to rescue three children. Resembled Geronimo somewhat, did she? Beef was certain that, if she had married that fierce old chieftain, Geronimo would have been late to meals not more than once.

"When I told her about your war medals the old fire-eater said you might have bought them," Miss Johnston confided in an intimate whisper to Zoop. Then she turned to Beef. "When she saw *you*, though— Tell me, Mr. Blanchard, how do you do it? She said she'd trust you anywhere."

"It's a gift, miss."

"I'll say. Why, she's virtually made you custodian."

"Something like that," said Beef, looking straight ahead. He didn't add: "And I'll see her through," but Miss Johnston may have read something to that effect in the strong lines of his profile. That old lady appealed to Beef. His own great-grandmother had been forced to kill a drunken Indian with an ax. Mrs. McAndrews, he was sure, would also have scalped the pelican.

Zoop, in the meantime, was in his element, beside Miss Johnston, with her flashing teeth, and eloquent eyes. And he was passing through a country rich with memories. Why, he didn't even have to tap his fertile imagination to keep these passengers interested.

"Right there," he told them at one stop, "we were hikin' up toward the front with the old thirty-sevens, when—oh, boy! We heard something roaring toward us through the air that had all the earmarks of a Jack Johnson. And did we sunfish for that ditch? Ask me!"

"Then," Grandma McAndrews sarcastically remarked, "I suppose the shell landed, and blew you two hundred feet into the air, where you landed safely on the wing of a passing airplane. Make it a good one, son, while you're at it."

"Yes, ma'am. We'd just hit the ditch when—*blam!*—around that there corner yonder zoomed the brigadier general's car. It wasn't no shell a-tall—just the brigadier general's car!"

"Now you see, grandmother!" reproved Miss Carmody.

"Young man," Grandma McAndrews conceded, "I'm commencing to believe that I can swallow at least half of what you say, anyhow."

Her mental reservations had been materially reduced below the fifty-percent mark before they reached the Apremont Forest. They motored up to this spot from Boncourt just before dark, for they had planned to show the party something of trench life as it had appeared at night to the boys in '18.

In these lonely woods, standing shattered and grim upon a dark plateau, the dugouts had been excavated from rock. Their roofs of elephant iron and rocks and heavy logs still remained intact.

"Folks," Miss Johnston said, her eyes sparkling in the half light, "it will soon be dark, and then we'll endeavor to show you how the trenches looked at



night. Mr. Kennedy, couldn't you reminisce a bit?"

"Well," said Zoop, "this road, right here—Fritz used to strafe it pretty regularly, in the evenings, particular, about the time the ration and supply carts and so on were comin' up. Skinner was wounded one night when the colonel was up, and Beef, he took the team of mules to get 'em back out of the way. Of course the team balked, and of course Fritz was due to shell any minute, and of course ole Beef he had to talk some to them derved mules."

"I'll say he would," breathed grandma.

"So about then the colonel he up and says, 'Beef,' he says, 'don't you know that General Grant went clear through the Civil War without swearin' once?' And Beef, he says, 'That may be, colonel, but I'll tell the cock-eyed world he never tried to drive out from under no shell fire with a lot o' gol-danged mu-els!'"

The laugh which this created was cut short by one of the men.

"Let's have something with a real kick in it now, Zoop."

"That's it," grandma urged. "Some real fireworks, son. I want to hear about legs and arms flying through the air, and shells and scrap iron and——"

"Grandma!" shrieked Miss Carmody. She was really alarmed by now.

"Tut, tut! You know what Sherman said. I reckon we can stand a little of it, secondhand. Son," she appealed to Zoop, "wasn't there any *heads* blown off when you were here?"

"Once in a while a Plattsburg second lieutenant's dome got took off," Zoop solemnly assured her. "And they was such solid ivory they caromed off the tree trunks, like billiard balls."

Then, while darkness was falling, and Miss Carmody stood with her fingers in her ears, Zoop gave the breathless listeners a word picture of a raid in which the scarred Madagascar shock

troops figured both gruesomely and effectively.

Before these colored men had gone over the top on the Americans' left, there had commenced an alternating preparatory bombardment along a four-sector front. Fieldpieces, thirty-seven millimeter guns, trench mortars and machine guns had participated in it. But, in the dark morning hours, Fritz had launched a surprise gas attack. Twenty-five hundred gas shells had been fired into D Company's front, and all within the space of three minutes. High explosive shells had followed. These had bashed in parapets, smashed dugout doors, filled the night with whistling bits of jagged metal, turned the whole front into a roaring, madman's inferno.

"With our guns whanging away," said Zoop, "and all them flares in the air, it was as light as day. Only, it was an ugly, ghostly light, and the red stabbing up through it in big fan flares, back o' the German lines. There were minenwurfers comin' through the air, tumblin' slow and easy, over and over, and the cordite rings on 'em kind of glowing; and there was eighty-eights that came with a *psst-bang!* and there was them two-hundred-and-twenty shells, the big boys that came through the air like a runaway freight train through a tunnel. And when they landed—*wow!*"

"And how many of D Company was lost?" grandma demanded.

"One hundred and fourteen died that night. But the next thing them Germans knew, them Madagascar tar babies was goin' over the top, stripped right down to the skin, and them crooked trench knives caught in their white teeth."

"And did they bring back prisoners, son?"

"Prisoners, ma'am? Prisoners? About every one o' them tar babies came back with human ears for souvenirs."



This satisfied even Grandma McAndrews. More details were insisted upon by the men, and by the time darkness had wholly come, several of the women in the party were gasping with horror.

The flare demonstration was therefore a complete success. Miss Johnston had secured a few of these soaring lights, and some flash-light powder. She asked Beef to ignite the flares at intervals, while Zoop talked. When these rose, with their ghastly, dazzling light, the broken tree trunks and the awed group were illuminated in startling clarity. But when the flares suddenly died, blackness swooped upon them, dense and impenetrable. Sudden illuminations of flash-light powder were equally startling.

"Why, its just gruesome and grand," breathed grandma. "I just wish you could bust a shell or two to let me hear how they sounded."

"I'll show you one of the dugouts we were in," Zoop suggested. They wanted thrills, did they? He'd give them thrills.

With little urging the party trooped after him into the old musty dugout. Even though partially lighted by flash lights, it was as inviting as some dank, underground prison.

"Those rats," Zoop began, "would never bother us when the candles were lit. You let 'em go out, though, and out they came."

"Goodness!" cried Miss Woodall, shuddering. "Suppose some are here yet?"

All the women shrieked in apprehension; but Grandma McAndrews' shriek rose above all the others.

"I might have known there was something behind blinding us that way out there. My diamonds are gone!"

When Grandma McAndrews made this startling announcement, Beef was standing on the lower step of the dug-out entrance. He was in position not

only to block exit from the place, but to note the reaction of every one within it. In the glow of the spotlights the members of the group were more or less clearly revealed; and in that thick instant Beef's eyes were busy.

He saw Zoop's right hand flash instinctively to the spot over the inner vest pocket where he always carried his diamond, wrapped in chamois. Others reacted similarly. Men's hands clapped the pocket wherein their bill folds lay; women hurriedly opened hand bags. But Miss Johnston and Miss Woodall made no such moves. They stood absolutely still, their pale faces turned toward Mrs. McAndrews.

"Grandma," Miss Carmody cried then, "you never should have carried that necklace in your hand bag. I told you, but you never *will* listen. See? They've cut the bag."

"Yes, cut the side of this bag while it was right in my hand!" Grandma declared, her blazing eyes fixed on Zoop. "That's what those lights did for us—blinded us, just as he knew they would."

Zoop appeared to be thunderstruck. He gazed piteously at Miss Johnston, and then indignantly at grandma.

"What do you mean by that crack, lady?" he cried hoarsely.

"I mean you, young man! I said you looked like a crook at first and I'd almost got to believing maybe I was wrong, but I'll bet now I was right."

"Oh, Mrs. McAndrews, it just *can't* be!" cried Miss Johnston. "Why, he's a veteran. He just wouldn't, couldn't serve us a trick like that. He——"

"He's a slick talker and he took you in, dearie, that's all!" grandma declared.

"Oh, no, I can't believe——"

"Apple sauce!" It was Miss Woodall who interrupted Miss Johnston so scornfully. "Marion, you're so sympathetic you're actually gullible. You swallowed all that story of his reformation——"



"Alice, I confided in you, and I think it's perfectly horrid of you to——"

"I don't care if it is breaking confidence, Marion. See what it's come to! Mrs. McAndrews, that man there confessed to Marion before we started that he deliberately cheated the mayor of Liffol with a paste diamond." And Miss Woodall indignantly described the transaction, continuing scornfully: "He pretended that he was filled with remorse, and reformed, and all that rot!"

"But he did pay back the mayor!" declared Miss Johnston. "He showed me the telegraph receipt."

"I don't care what he showed you, Marion, I say he ought to be searched right now!"

"That's it!" seconded grandma. "If some one else don't, I will."

"You can come right ahead!" Zoop stridently challenged. The veins stood out upon his damp forehead. "Come right ahead, that's all I say!"

"Very well, then, I'll do it," Miss Johnston suddenly decided. She moved swiftly to the unresisting Zoop, remarking as she went, "It's an injustice, and I'll just show you, Alice. I won't believe—oh—my—gracious!"

Her eyes distended in horror. For, plunging her hand into a side pocket of Zoop's coat, she had withdrawn a diamond necklace.

A sardonic laugh came from one of the men, and Zoop, staring in dumfounded fascination at the damning evidence, found frantic tongue.

"It's a plant, Miss Marion, it's a plant. So help me, I never——"

"You mean you didn't have time to hide it somewhere," Mrs. McAndrews interrupted him. She took the necklace from the stunned Miss Johnston's fingers. "This is certainly it!" she announced, peering at the sparkling stones. "If some of you gentlemen will oblige me, we'll take this young man to the first station."

"As you were, there, gentlemen!"

boomed a heavy, determined bass from the entrance.

The men who had moved toward Zoop now stopped and turned their heads. They had forgotten Beef. He stood there, leaning almost carelessly against a sill beam, but holding in his brown hand a huge and ugly automatic.

"Don't no one lay a hand on that buddy of mine," he warned.

"So you're a crook, too!" gasped grandma.

"No, Mother, I'm not," came the gentle response. "Nor neither did my buddy take your stones."

"Ha-ha!"

"You can laugh, Mother, but in the first place my buddy ain't that kind of a jasper. When he told Miss Marion here he'd pull no more phony moves he meant it."

"Interesting, if true!"

"It's true enough. In the second place, he never was a fish. He'd never leave no stones that way in a side pocket, to be found on him so easy."

"I'll admit he doesn't look like anybody's fool. Still——"

"He isn't, either, Mother. And in the third place, I think I can prove to you that he was picked for a plant because he *looks* tough—you'll have to admit it, Zoop! That was it, Mother—he was picked for a plant, so the real dip could get away with the hot ice. That's what crooks would call the real diamonds they stole, Mother. By the time you discovered the differ——"

"Why, what are you *talking* about? Haven't I got the diamonds here?"

"Maybe you have, but if you have, then what I had figured for the fourth place is all wet. Because, in the fourth place, I don't think you've got anything in your hand but a paste imitation of your necklace."

"Ridiculous!" snorted Miss Woodall.

Mrs. McAndrews was staring fixedly through her glasses at the stones.

"You've got a nail file with you,



Mother, I don't doubt," Beef said quietly. "See will it cut one of them stones. If it does, it's glass—as I'll bet you know."

"Young man," said Mrs. McAndrew, in a changed tone, "you're smart." Quickly she secured a nail file and scratched at one of the sparkling gems. "It's glass!" she cried.

Miss Johnston cried out in delight, and others exclaimed in bewilderment. All were confused.

Beef gave to the astounded and grateful Zoop but a glance before adding:

"The game now is like—button, button, who's got the button? Only it's the real necklace." His voice acquired an edge. "Mother, I reckon old folks that has chopped their way out of burning wrecks has a right to do as they darned please. Still, it's come pretty near bein' a serious mess for my buddy, account of you carrying them diamonds around that way—now ain't it?"

"Son, I'll own up for once some one else is right."

"Then you'll let me work out my idea, Mother?"

"Yes. You would anyway, blocking the door the way you are."

"That's it, Mother. No one gets out, just yet, without I say so. Now, you don't know *every one* in this party, do you, Mother?"

"No, that's right."

"Well, *some one* here has them diamonds—or knows where they are. Any one who objects to being searched——"

"They simply wouldn't dare!" Miss Johnston sharply interposed. "You can commence right now on me. I'm responsible for Mrs. McAndrews' being here, and I want this cleared up."

"I thought you'd be that way," said Beef. "Step right out here. Mother, you keep a sharp eye on the rest of the folks."

Beef retreated up the entrance way to the top, Miss Johnston following.

There he paused and spoke in lowered tones.

"You're a fast worker, Miss Whatever-in-hell-your name-is. No, I ain't going to search you. You either slipped them stones to your four-eyed partner, that Woodall dame, or you laid 'em away in the straw of that old bunk. I think you laid 'em in the old bunk the time everybody else, but me, was watching the old lady nick those glass stones with her nail file."

"What outrageous talk is this?" gasped the girl.

"Cut it, sister. You're a good actor, but you're too smart to play it out when the jig's up. You knew it was about up when I called the turn on them phony stones. That's why you dropped the good necklace in the bunk. Yes, I'm sure now you dropped 'em in the bunk."

"If you were so sure," she hissed now in venomous tones, "why didn't you sing out and show me up?"

"Because I got a reason for not wanting to show you up. That buddy o' mine has *faith* in you, d'y' see? If you want an out, you agree right now to do what I say."

The astute young woman surrendered with a gesture.

"And I had you figured for a boob!" she said. "Well, what's the big idea?"

"You leave them stones in that bunk—get me? It's low down to throw suspicion on some one else in the party, but you're going to let Zoop down so he don't lose faith in human nature—hear me?" He hurriedly whispered some further instructions and then accompanied her back into the dugout.

"Miss Johnston hasn't got them," he answered. "I'll take one of you men next."

After searching the man, without results, Beef spoke to Mrs. McAndrews.

"Mother, I think we might hurry this some. It might be that the dip got rid of your real necklace when I guessed



the play on those glass gems. You do the hunting your own self with a spotlight while I search the next one. Miss Carmody will watch the bunch while you look round the dugout."

"Young man," the grateful Mrs. McAndrews reiterated, "I'll say you *are* smart!"

And, as Beef expected, the necklace was found by Mrs. McAndrews, lying in the moldy straw of an upper bunk, while the giant was conducting his search of the last man.

"It was tough on them girls, the party breakin' up the way it did," Zoop commented, back in Paris.

"Yeah, it was tough," Beef agreed.

"It made me feel bad, when they pulled out for London, even if we are sitting pretty, now, with our charter of the bus, Beef."

"Yeah, it was tough, the breaks they got."

"But they'll be all right now, with Marion's own aunt. Say, when that four-eyed dame opened up, and then

Marion found that phony necklace in my pocket, I thought—say, Beef, I actually thought for a minute that *she* helped to frame me. Marion, I mean. Can you imagine it?"

"Yeah, I can imagine it."

"God, it made me sick. Then I got a look at her eyes, and—why I'd just as soon distrust— Aw, hell! I didn't blame that Woodall dame, distrustin' me. But Beef, it's all square now."

"I'm glad o' that, Zoop."

"Yep, all square." Zoop made several rapid circles with the bottom of his glass. "It hurts, but not the way it would have hurt if— Beef, she's married to an invalid husband, a poor, sick guy. She told me square when I up and laid my cards on the table." And then Zoop laughed a little at his own expense. "Well, Beef, I guess I let myself in for a case o' shell shock à la mademoiselle."

"Yeah," said Beef, gazing into the smoke through half-shut eyes, "that's what I'd call it—just a hard-luck case o' shell shock à la mademoiselle."

## SPORTSMANSHIP

WE do not know of any game which has a higher code of ethics, which better exemplifies the true spirit of sportsmanship, than tennis. In the absence of referees, as is usually the case, the players have to decide for themselves whether each ball played is in or out of the proper bounds. Usually one player is in a much better position than the other to make this decision. And the rule followed by the right sort of players is: if the decision is doubtful, the man calling the point will call it in favor of his opponent.

When we speak of this as a rule, we do not, of course, mean that it is formally so. It is simply a custom followed by the higher type of players. And this is typical of the whole spirit in which the game is conducted at its best.

When there is a referee and that official makes a decision which is plainly wrong, some players even go so far as to refuse to profit by that mistake; they simply deliberately throw the next point to the opponent.

This is perhaps a little extreme. Certainly there is much to be said on the other side. Gallantry may be sometimes carried to the point of quixotism, but gallantry is nevertheless a noble thing.

And this spirit of tennis ethics surely stands in most refreshing contrast to the unsportsmanlike spirit of certain other good games; for example, football. Here the almost universal custom of the players is to try to get by with anything the referee can't see.



## THE CHANGELESS LANDS

NO person who has ever packed across one of the vast American deserts—the Colorado, the Arizona, the Great Desert of the Southwest, the Mojave—will ever forget that experience. Nor will he ever forget the immensity, the barrenness, the insensate cruelty of those wastelands. He will remember them as “lands which never change.” And yet—

To every such man who once saw the desert and has not seen it for years must come the wondering: The great West—how much has civilization affected it? The railroad and radio, the automobile and telegraph—what have these done to the desert country?

The answer is terse: the deserts change not at all. True, the borders have been pressed in, the fringes civilized, and here and there across them roads may have been built. But the hearts of the great deserts, the cruel, sun-blasted hearts, are just as they have been for untold years. For hundreds of years more, at the present rate of progress, they will yet be cruel and hard.

Some of our writers make us see the great wastelands as they are. But even then it is difficult to realize the immensity of them. There are literally thousands and thousands of square miles of sand and rock, sage and greasewood; great sections which have never been surveyed, which are never seen except by the occasional prospector; uptilted mountains, bare and sun-reddened; the parched wastes, without water, without food, without life except for the brittle, sapless vegetation and the scurrying lizards or rattlesnakes. The heat, the limitless horizons, the cruel emptiness—these are as real to-day as they ever were. Prospectors? As long as the olden lure, the golden lure, leads men into the wilds they will be there. Men silent by habit, they are to-day—scores and hundreds of them trudging through the red dobe of the Navajo country or the white alkali of the Mojave, their bloodshot eyes seeking the mother lode.

Cowboys? Just as fearless as ever, just as adept with horses and guns. Civilization has not tamed them. They watch their cattle under the star-studded sky or the whitening sun; they round up their herds in the fall and spring; they ride line—in short they work just as they have always worked.

Rustlers? Far too many of them for the comfort of the cattlemen; rarely a week goes by but a deputy is sent out on their trail. This week it is Antelope Valley, California, where a gang is rounded up; next week it is the Big Pine Country; the next, perhaps, the Arizona. And so it goes.

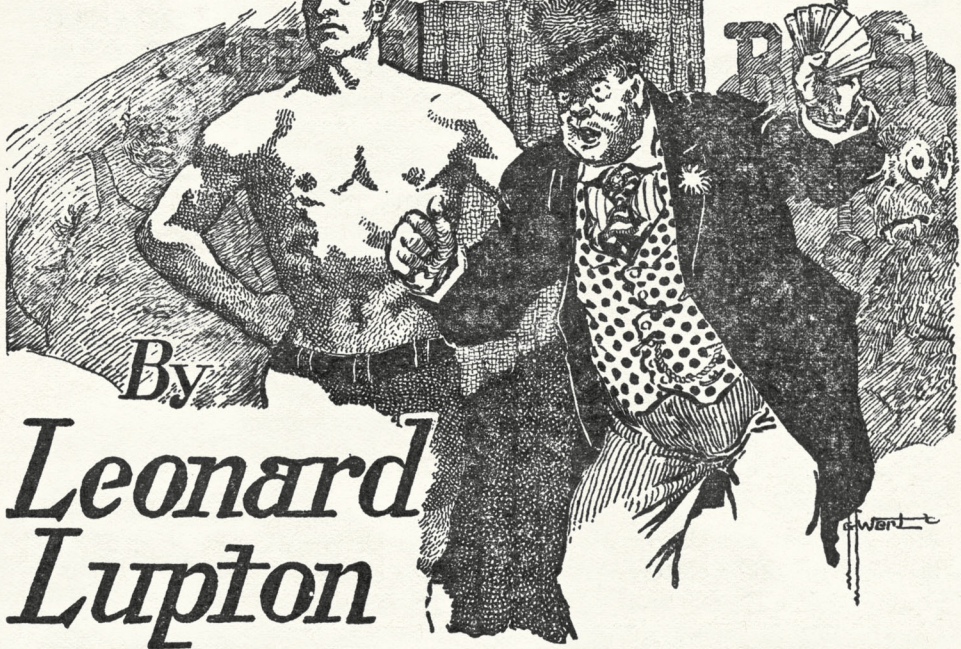
Gold rushes? About once a year the desert country seems to produce a great rush. This year it was Weepah; last year it was Kremer Hills, far out on the Mojave, where water was sold from a tank wagon and a city grew up overnight; where a dance hall was in operation within a week, and a single claim sold for over a hundred thousand dollars.

Yes, quite definitely, the great West has resisted civilization. It will be many generations before the wastelands are more than scratched. Meanwhile, it is a land of primitive struggles, great suffering, majestic beauty—a land of thrilling drama.

This drama is what makes the West a favorite theme with writers and readers. They appreciate the romance of the land, the charm of its very cruelty, the beauty of its barrenness, the titantic conflicts which go on day after day between man and Nature or man and man. There is the secret of the success of Western stories.



# He Could Take It



By  
*Leonard  
Lupton*

Little Egypt, the dancer, was right when she said that Tim knew how to take punishment. And, when his big chance came, he showed he had a punch, too.

**T**IMOTHY SPRIGGINS — the newspaper boys with their wag-gish humor later rechristened him "Little Tim"—was born on a farm, but he only stayed there long enough to develop the muscles that got him a job in the side show.

"Listen," the manager of the carnival said, looking him over that wonderful day, and rolling his cigar in his mouth as he talked, "you ain't so much, see? You're a big palooka, but you look like you got a lot of stren'th, and I guess mebbe you can take it. That's all that counts in this fight game, see, can you take it? Now it ain't as if you was going up against a regular pug. Them boys makes their money too easy to come around and try to lay out a carnival guy for a hundred bucks, see? All yer goin'

to have to do is take some hay-makers from these hicks in the little towns we play. I can learn you enough to stop most of 'em. Course, oncet in a while, mebbe they stays the full ten minutes with you, but so long's it don't happen too often, you can pull down yer fifty bucks a week pretty easy. Now put on these here tights, and get up in the ring wit' me, an' I'll show you a stall or two, before you go on for the afternoon performance."

It was already one o'clock and Timothy hadn't lunched yet, but he obediently stripped and climbed into the green tights. The manager removed his coat.

"Hey, Steve!" he called.

A colored lad came running.

"Git the mitts out the trunk," the manager ordered, "the big ones."



While Steve busied himself on the errand, McGuire stepped up on the floor of the ring.

"All right, you!" he called.

And Tim scrambled over the ropes in answer to the summons. It was the first time he had ever been in a ring.

Steve came running with the mitts, and McGuire tied a pair on Tim. Steve helped him with his own.

"Now, lookit here," he said. "This is the dope, farmer. You stick yer left mitt out like this, see?" He demonstrated. "Now you keep yer right in close to yer body, see? Now, when the other guy comes after you, you lift yer left, see, and counter. I mean you try to catch the blow on yer left arm and ease it up to yer shoulder. Then you watch, see, and shoot yer right in against the other guy, like this."

The manager of the carnival, sprang from his crouch, countered grotesquely with his left and thumped his right into the geometrical center of Tim Spriggins' face.

Tim blinked and shook his head a little.

"Say, now——" he said.

McGuire chewed his cigar.

"That's the stuff! Don't lay down on the canvas and get yer tights all dirt, the minute some one taps you on the pan. Jest shake yer head, see, and come back in again."

Tim nodded.

"Is that all there is to it?" he asked.

"Naw, it'd take you years to learn all there is to know about it, but that's all that lots of 'em ever learn. Now let's try it again. I'm gonna really sock you this time, unless yer good enough to counter the blow."

Tim Spriggins pushed back the lock of tawny hair that had fallen down over his eyes, and blinked at the manager.

"All right," he said.

The cigar stub in McGuire's mouth twitched violently. After all he was Irish. He crouched a little, and filled

his lungs with air. The buttons of his checked vest pulled tight. Of a sudden he danced toward Tim, who stood undecided. His left fist flicked toward Tim's jaw. Instinctively Tim flung both hands to his face, leaving his stomach unguarded. McGuire grinned as he sunk his right fist in to the wrist!

A mighty gust of air seemed to have been forced up between Tim's lips. He rocked there in a terrible ecstasy of pain. Then he shook his head, even as his legs wobbled under him, and suddenly his vision was clear. He saw before him the weaving figure of the manager. The checked vest and the ragged cigar seemed offensive, very offensive. He lunged forward, his left fist whistling through the air and sliding across the top of McGuire's shoulder. Instinctively Tim ducked, for he saw another left coming at him. Then—he never knew just how—his ham of a right was twisting through the air. It seemed to him that his fist was spinning, spinning, at the end of his wrist. Suddenly it stopped its spinning and jolted hard against something solid.

"Whooooosh!" McGuire said, and slipped to the floor. The cigar between his teeth had been neatly clipped in half.

Tim Spriggins opened his eyes and stared at the sprawled figure of the manager. He looked very pasty and fragile, there on the canvas. Tim turned his gaze away and blinked his big dumb eyes.

Steve, the colored boy, rocked back and forth in an agony of mirth. He clutched his stomach and howled aloud.

"I reckon," said Tim slowly, "that I must of hit him, after all."

At that, Steve went off into another spasm of mirth.

"Ah spec's you did, white boy!" he chortled. "Ah spec's you did!"

On the floor of the ring, McGuire quivered, and suddenly rolled over. After a moment he got his hands under him, and rose to his knees. He waited



that way a minute, then, making a wry face, spat out the end of the cigar, which he had bitten in half. A gleam of anger ricocheted through his eyes, but suddenly faded. He turned his gaze on Tim Spriggins and stood up.

"Kid," he said, dusting the resin from his checked vest, "you've just earned a ten-dollar-a-week raise!"

Tim's dumb look never changed.

The show went on. Afternoons, the sun beat down upon the canvas of the fight tent, and Tim stood there and battered away at his opponents, bathed in perspiration, which ran into his eyes, and made his back wet and glisteny. It splashed on the leather of his gloves, and he came to associate the smell of salty-wet leather with jolts and bruises and nights of terrible stiffness. The droning, singsong voice of McGuire, on the platform out front, deafened him. He hated the ballyhoo. He hated the necessity of going out front there, in his striped bath robe, to stand before the gaping audience. He felt like a bug with a pin through its middle, fastening it to a piece of cardboard. It was good training, though. It helped him, later on, to disregard the boos of the crowd, down in the Garden.

Sometimes, he laughed silently at McGuire's persistent drone, which went something like this:

"Here you are, gents! Step in close! Come on there, Si. You look like a fighting man—get up front here, where we can give you the once-over. Looook! Looook! Looook! Right this way, gents. Never mind the Little Egypt show—they'll be dancing yet when this fight is over! Hey, now! Looook! Looook! Looook!"

As the crowd closed in, McGuire would leave his seat behind the ticket box, and mount the platform beside Tim. That would be the signal for Tim to slip out of his robe and do a round of shadow boxing. If it was afternoon, and the sun was just right, his shadow

would loom against the painted backdrop in grotesque caricature.

McGuire, at the end of this session, would break into speech once more.

"Gather closer, folks, and look the champ over! Mauling Mulligan, that's his name, undefeated heavyweight champion of Siberia! Gather in now, you fighting men out there. Come closer! How's your nerve to-day, Si? Have you got yer courage with you? You look like a fighter, all right. You've got the right shape to your head, and yer face is intelligent. Come up here on the platform now, and see how you measure up alongside the champ! Come on!"

If the particular Si, of the moment, had a girl with him, it was generally easy to get him on the platform. Once he was there, McGuire would divest him of his coat, vest and shirt.

"Look at them muscles now, gentlemen," he would call. And Si, more embarrassed than he had ever been before in his life, would writhe and sweat and try to grin his way out of the clutches of McGuire.

"Look him over—this is gonna be a fight! Come on now, folks, you want to see the home-town boy beat the champ, doncha? And remember, folks, your man ain't asked to fight for nothin'! For every minute, after the first ten minutes in the ring, Si gets one dollar a minute, folks! Think of it, for every minute after the first ten, he gets one dollar! Why that's better than yer local bootlegger's doin'!"

At mention of the bootlegger men jabbed each other furtively in the ribs, and passed what they thought were sly glances. One or two even laughed raucously.

McGuire, with all his wiles, aroused their pride in Si, their natural curiosity, and finally, by casual mention of bets, their cupidity. When he had paved the way, he would make his final speech.

"The fighters are about to retire now, gents. They are about to go into the



ring and put on one of the greatest exhibitions of the manly art ever seen in this vicinity. Come on now, come along and see the big bout! For fifteen cents—ten to the children—you are about to witness a battle of the squared arena that will equal anything that Mr. Rickard can show you at his Madison Square Garden. Come on now, step right this way, the line forms at the right, and the big bout is about to begin!"

The two fighters, glaring at each other, would jump down from the platform and swagger into the tent. Mr. McGuire would slide behind his ticket box, and even as he shoved out the little red pieces of cardboard he would keep up a running fire of small talk.

With Si, inside, about to annihilate the champion of Siberia, the townsfolk pushed forward and relinquished their nickels and dimes. Inside, the early arrivals would wait patiently, their faces a little tense—a real thrill running over them. And when, at last, the final sucker had been bled of his fifteen cents, Mr. McGuire would lock the cash box, push the tent flap aside and enter the arena. Those people who were jammed around the ring, respectfully made an aisle for his approach.

By this time the local fighter had changed to tights, behind a screen of canvas, and, feeling about as naked and ashamed as any man had ever felt, was leaning awkwardly against one of the posts, exchanging whispers with the men who clustered at his corner.

In his corner Timothy Spriggins would be holding to the ropes and dancing lightly, as McGuire had instructed. He looked very big, very ferocious. Si was beginning to have doubts of his ability to stay the ten minutes, let alone earn a dollar a minute thereafter.

McGuire entered the ring and crossed to Tim.

"Now, champ," he said, "go easy on this boy. He looks like a nice lad, and remember we don't want to have to bail

you out of a charge of manslaughter, like we did in the last town we played."

The crowd never failed to boo this little speech. Nevertheless, it inspired many doubts. Most important of all, it sent little chills of doubt running up and down the "contender's" back.

McGuire acted as referee, while Steve rang the bell for the rounds, and kept time. It was generally short. Sometimes the challenger lasted all of five minutes. But about the third blow struck laid him out, as a general rule.

It was a hard life, for Tim, a rough life. But in time he came to love it. Little Egypt probably had something to do with that.

Little Egypt's real name was Mamie Cassidy, and the nearest she had ever been to the Old Nile was the River Shannon! She was pretty, in a hard little way, and she could dance. Man, she could dance! Aside from this ability she was noted for being able to take care of herself. None of the show folks ever bothered her, after she took up with Timothy Spriggins, and although once in a while some of the town yokels got fresh, a fist or a tent stake soon taught him reason.

Life moved on evenly enough, for the show folks. Children were born, and old men died, but this was all in the natural course of things—and anyway they would be playing another town next week. In the winter they traveled in the South. In the summer they traveled in the North and West. And in the due course of time, they learned that they were to play Bullville.

Now Bullville, hitherto, had been too small even for their attention. A dozen shacks or so, a tin hotel, three saloons, and plenty of ozone was all that Bullville could boast. It was in Montana, if that means anything to you, and all it needed to put it on the map was a boxing promoter from New York, with vision and luck—especially luck.

They got wind of the coming scrap



way down in the Carolinas. McGuire, via the papers, had an opportunity to watch a real ballyhoo expert do his stuff. The coming bout was not a championship affair. It was a scrap between two logical contenders, with the inevitable result of one of them being eliminated, thus manufacturing fodder for the champion to glut himself on.

Of these two contenders, one was very well liked. The other was a lemon, and got handed the raspberry at every appearance. It was a grudge fight, if one was to believe what the papers said, and the customers, it was generally held, were to get their money's worth.

Orders for tickets were already in, from as far south as Texas, and from as far north as Hudson Bay. It was generally conceded to be another "battle of the century."

Now, a battle of the century, in case you don't read the newspapers, is as big an event in the life of a fighter as a coming-out party is in the life of a *débutante*. It means that the boy's got the goods—that he's *there*!

This fight, to McGuire, was a big thing. The nearer the show got to Bullville, the more excited McGuire became.

At night, when the flap was down on the last show, the manager would sit on his trunk, mangling a cigar and reading every last scrap of news in the sporting pages about the coming battle.

"Kid," he would say, waving his cigar through a cloud of smoke for emphasis, "this is the racket—this fight game! We ain't in it, not with this little show we got. We're just a couple of pikers out trimming the suckers. Why, we don't even go after the suckers. What we're angling for, in this show, is the little sardines. Think of it! A three-quarter-million gate, and the bout 'way out there on the desert! Now, why in the hell did they do that? Why didn't they throw it in New Yawk or up in Chi? Answer me that. Well, I know why, if you don't! The railroads has

got a finger in it, and the promoters behind this fight are going to build a town and clean up everything in sight. The minute the referee counts ten, and the last news-hound makes a break for the telegraph office, Bullville will be ended. It won't even be what it is to-day. Jest a lot of shacks, rottin' in the desert, that's all—that and a reputation. An' I ask you, what is a reputation if you can't collect on it?

"If you don't savvy me, kid, here's the plot: By hook or crook, you an' me is gonna get in this big fight racket. We're gonna quit takin' in the minnows. We're goin' out in deep water after the suckers!"

Timothy Spriggins would lounge on his own trunk, and look at McGuire with curious eyes. Sometimes he tried to articulate the thoughts that were tumbling around in his big head, but he never made much progress. He was contented, really, just listening to McGuire talk.

McGuire didn't talk every night, of course. It was his habit, on his first night in town, to locate the town bootlegger; then, quite regularly, two nights a week, he went off on a bat after the show. These were the nights that Tim Spriggins met Little Egypt.

There are some women who can get on in the world in spite of their aversion to work. Little Egypt was one of them. There are those who will point out that dancing is work, but it didn't seem so to Little Egypt. She loved it, and that's no bunk. She knew, because she was a good trouser, that the fellows who swarmed into the tent to watch her do her stuff were not motivated by any desire to study the æsthetic quality of her art. But she was able to forget them sometimes, and she consoled herself with the thought that the best of them in her line had been forced to go through almost unendurable hardships to get to the top. She was willing to suffer a little, too.



The Lord knows what she saw in big, slow-thinking Tim Spriggins. It may have been that the dancer in her thrilled to his perfect muscles, his supple bigness. Or perhaps that feminine intuition that we hear so much about told her that there were depths to Tim Spriggins which could not be plumbed in a night, or a week—or, for that matter, a lifetime.

Sometimes he said funny things. Take this night for example. McGuire was off on a bat. He would be back in the morning, swollen-eyed, repentant. But in the meantime the coast was clear for a clandestine meeting. Fighters, McGuire maintained, should be in bed early and there was no room in their lives for women. What McGuire didn't know, though, they told each other, didn't hurt him, nor them either.

They were sitting on the trunk just inside her tent.

"McGuire's all het up over this fight at Bullville," said Tim.

"Yes?" said Mamie. "Well, McGuire's no fool. I've often wondered myself why he hasn't changed his racket before this. There's money in the game, and I imagine he's able to put some by, but there's a whole lot more in other fields. Why don't you suggest some time, Tim, that he branch out and try to place you in a regular bout? I hear the yellin' over under your canvas every night—you put on a real show, they say."

"We're playing a sure thing," Tim replied with a shrug.

"Yes"—she tugged at him in her impatience—"I'm playing a sure thing, too, but I hope to get out of it some day. I want to see my name in electrics. It's a long grind, a damn hard grind, kid, but I'm aimin' to get there just the same, some day."

"You will!" said Tim, as if he really knew something about it. "You—you can dance, what I mean!"

Her eyes filled a little at the blunt

praise and she stared through the open flap of the tent toward the sky on the horizon.

"I *will* get there," she said, "but now I want you to get there, too, Tim. It wouldn't mean so much to me—the other—if you didn't come up, too."

"I'm eatin' regular," said Tim, "I'm sleepin' good, and I got a little money. What more could a guy ask? It's better than pushin' a plow. I'd like to get on, too. I'd like to make the big bouts, I'd take my beatin's as they came. I don't believe I'd whimper. I'd train, I'd work, I'd do all the things a contender for the champ's crown has gotta do. But how?"

The girl shrugged.

"Leave it to McGuire. He'll get you there in time, if he gets interested right. He knows the racket. Maybe in Bullville you'll get the chance to meet some of the reporters, some of the big ballyhoo men. Maybe there you'll get the boost you need. That's what I'm looking forward to."

"I don't know about that. They'll all be too excited about the fight before it happens, for me to get acquainted among them, and after it's over they'll blow right out of town. McGuire says there'll be nothing left there after the fight. He says they moved it out there to help the railroads, and to build a town of their own so they can clean up. That's the racket all right!"

Her eyes shone.

"That's where the big money is, kid—that's where we belong, you and me, not with this little hick-town show. Take these Broadway stars now; as near as I can learn they ain't so much. They all had to start like we did, way down the ladder. Some of 'em slipped right into vaudeville, and then into the revues, but not all of 'em. Mostly, if they don't hang onto it when they get it, they go from the big time to the tent shows. But then again, once in a while, some one slips from the tent shows onto the big



time. Maybe we're due, kid. Maybe we can meet the right people and find the way *up*!"

Tim Spriggins edged nearer on the trunk.

"And what if we do, huh? Maybe we could get us one of these little places outside New York, on this here Long Island, huh? Lots of them actors and actresses live out there. I guess maybe some of the pugs do, too. If not there, then maybe out in Hollywood."

Mamie's eyes shone at the prospect, but the materialistic—which is just another name for practical—side of her nature intervened.

"Yeah," she admitted, "that would be lovely, but what good does it do us to moon around and dream of when we'll have those things. I've noticed that the people that always sit around and talk about what they're going to have and what they're going to do some day, never have anything, nor never get anything done."

Tim moved away a little, at what he fancied was a rebuff.

"Well," he pardoned his speech, "I wasn't saying anything about us having those things for *sure*. I was only saying if we did—then would you be willing to team up with me, huh?"

She pulled his head down on her shoulder and mussed his hair playfully. He hated that, but he didn't tell her so.

"Sure," she said, "you know I would!"

When McGuire sobered up the week was almost out and they were getting ready for the move which would carry them into Bullville. The excitement had been gradually working toward a climax for the past few weeks, and now the public was waiting avidly for the bout. Last-minute reports had come in from both fighters' training camps, and the verdict seemed to be about equal. The fight might go to either man.

One of them had been born Rapido-

witz, but for business purposes he called himself Shaugnessy. The other one was named Gallagher, and the writing boys had tacked "Galloping" on as a nickname.

Gallagher had a peculiar method of fighting. It may not have been ethical, but it was legal. He bounded about the ring. He would probably have been plastered against the resin long ago if he'd stood still and taken it. But to hit him you first had to catch him. He was a sober, intelligent, hard fighter, if you caught up with him. And he never talked about what he was going to do in the ring.

Shaugnessy was just the opposite. He bragged in his sleep. He was loose, irresponsible, waggish, devilish, and, more often than not, a downright fool! He did what he felt like doing, and regardless of what that was, he talked. He never shut up. You hated him, to read of him. And then, when you saw him, you like him in spite of yourself; for he was a big kid going to the circus. Life was one long laugh, and his manager's hair had turned a shade grayer since taking him over. Incidentally, Gallagher was as fearless as he claimed to be. Perhaps that's how the big ruckus came about.

The show was playing Bullville, and was cleaning up, too. For the first time in her career, Little Egypt danced to a metropolitan audience. They applauded her, they liked her, and they appreciated the grit of a girl who was doing what she was doing. McGuire's racket prospered, too. There were more men in the audience who thought that they could fight than there had ever been before. The cash rolled in, and every one was happy.

Tim Spriggins had improved. McGuire, himself, hadn't noticed the acquisition of ring technique, so much, but he did know that darn few men were earning a dollar a minute any more. Scarcely one in a dozen lasted five minutes, and



most of them got that old one-two about three seconds after the gong. McGuire even remonstrated with Tim.

"You got to string them along," he warned. "These people come in to see a fight, not to see a trained boxer flatten out a ham in two or three seconds. Make believe the other guy is good, even if he ain't."

But two days before the big fight, a fellow came along who didn't need to be kidded into believing he was good. He was.

There are men, hardened fight writers, who still bewail the fact that they missed that slaughter. Even now they will talk about it feelingly sometimes, at the ringside, while they're waiting for the tap of the gong to put them to work at their typewriters!

It was the day after McGuire's regular spree, and he wasn't feeling good, nor seeing good either, for that matter. He talked a little from the box, and then he got up on the platform. The sun was in his eyes, and he blinked rapidly. His mouth felt very dry, cottony, and every muscle in his body ached.

Dimly he was aware that a little group of maybe two or three were bunched about a man a little way off from the platform. He looked like a husky lad to McGuire, and yet he wasn't quite sober enough to be sure. Anyway he would do for the victim of this show. McGuire directed his ballyhoo at the lad. The latter listened grimly.

The laughter grew a little louder, and there was some urging, and some effort to hold the husky lad back. But all of a sudden the fellow was laughing boisterously himself, and was then abruptly up on the platform.

Tim Spriggins looked at him, noted his superb condition, and wondered where he had seen him before. He had fought so many men, though, that they all looked alike to him by now.

McGuire wasn't even looking. He went on with his spiel in a sort of a

daze, a little surprised at the crowd that was clamoring for tickets.

Before he left the platform for the tent, the young fellow called back to his friends:

"I'll be back with a hundred bucks from this scrap and it'll be all yours to spend on the shows."

Tim Spriggins grinned to himself as he went inside. They often talked like that.

They were soon ready and in the ring, and they sized each other up with shrewd glances. The young man was laughing. In fact, it might be no exaggeration to say that he was hilarious. His companions at the ringside seemed to be sharing the joke.

One of them yelled to him:

"You've beaten up enough poor hicks—now you're gonna get *yours*!"

But Tim had heard that song before and didn't think much of it. The bell clanged and they clashed together.

Tim knew, the moment they crossed arms, that here was no dub, but a trained fighter. He covered up and retreated before the rain of blows that showered all over his body. Only by a tremendous effort was he able to keep his jaw clear. Instinctively, after a few seconds more of it, he clinched.

McGuire broke them, and then, suddenly, comprehension came into his drunken face. He actually paled. The crowd noticed it. He was thinking just how many dollars he was about to lose if he kept his word and paid the young man one dollar a minute for every minute over the first ten that he stayed in the ring with Tim.

"Tim," he hissed, his throat dry, "Tim—you're fightin' Shaugnessy!"

Tim Spriggins felt his knees sag under him. He went down. Dimly, he heard McGuire counting.

So he was fighting Shaugnessy, was he? So the big palooka had come in here to have a little fun with a hick fighter? That was the kind of a joke he



was always playing. The newspapers would eat it up. Shaugnessy, the wisetracker, so sure of himself that the second day before his big fight he would risk his chances for the sake of beating up a carnival pug.

"Eight!" said McGuire, with a mournful note in his voice. "Nine!" He cheered a little now, for if Tim stayed there, he at least wouldn't have to pay out any good cash. They hadn't fought ten minutes. They hadn't fought two minutes yet.

But whatever hope McGuire had faded on the count of nine. Tim Spriggins came to his feet. He wobbled there, heavily. There was something in his eye, though, that wasn't heavy. A fire, it was, that flickered and danced.

So they were framin' him, huh? Well, he'd show them!

Shaugnessy was talking. He always talked when he fought. It rattled the other guy. But Tim Spriggins never heard him.

Tim Spriggins' rather slow brain was working. I've been fighting afternoon and evening, six days a week, for half a year, he thought. This guy's only been training for a month. I'm not stale. I'm hard. I'm harder than he is. He's got more skill maybe—but I can take it!

The thought thrilled him. It seemed to be all around him! He, Tim Spriggins, carnival pug, could take it!

Suddenly, Little Egypt, in her dancing costume, was just outside the ring, at his corner.

"Go get him, Tim," she called. "You can take it!"

So she was there! She knew! And hadn't McGuire told him once: "The main thing in this game is, can you take it, see?"

Well, he could take it! He waded in, the blows sliding up his left arm and over his shoulder. He went down, but bounced up again. A nasty left raked his ribs, and a right brought blood, but

he could take it! He gloried in the fact—*he could take it!*

A man pushed through the crowd. He had a press pass. He crouched at the ringside and his eyes were burning like fire. Presently some more men came and crouched behind him. They didn't say anything. They watched.

Inside that squared arena Tim Spriggins was taking it. He was taking it, for Little Egypt, and for McGuire, and for himself.

A right hooked him, and he forced back a groan. A short left jab raked his face and seemed to tear his ear.

He struggled with his memory, punching desperately, and gradually things came back to him. He remembered all the blows that had ever been tried on him. Suddenly he shoved out his left. It stayed there. Shaugnessy walked against it, and shook his head, and cursed. He tried to get under it, around it, over it, but it stayed there. His face was running against it all the time. It didn't seem to hit him. He just walked into it. He'd have to be careful. This carnival pug wasn't such a dumb bird after all.

He ducked and lashed in. But still the left was there. The right was there, too, now. The body was wide open. Tim had no guard. But, somehow, Shaugnessy couldn't reach it. That left was in the way, and that right kept feeling for his jaw.

He wished he'd trained a little harder. Why, this guy was as bad as Galloping Gallagher. Only he didn't gallop. He just kept pushing in and battering away.

Suddenly Shaugnessy felt very sick. He shook his head, rallied himself, and tried to bore in. He socked over a terrific right to the body, and by dumb luck he got past that left and hooked a left of his own to the carnival pug's jaw. But the carnival pug could take it.

He closed in. His fists were swinging harder. There wasn't any skill to the blows. Not skill, as Shaugnessy had



known skill, anyway. But they hit—they hurt.

Suddenly that left ceased to be motionless. It drew back. It wasn't in the way. Oh-ho! So he, the terrible Shaugnassy, had tired out this hick fighter at last. So the fellow was backing away. Well, he'd show him now! He'd teach him how to fight! He'd follow right in!

He did.

That left that had disappeared came into view. It was traveling fast. Somehow, Shaugnassy couldn't get his guard down fast enough. It caught him in the middle and hurled him across the ring. He felt the ropes against his back. Suddenly something hooked under his jaw. It was traveling fast when it hooked. The ropes seemed to slide under his back. His heels went up. He was out cold, before he ever hit the ground!

Tim Spriggins stood in the center of

the ring again, his legs sprawled apart. He was flinging wild blows on the air.

McGuire stopped him.

"Come, Tim," he said gently, "the fight is over."

Little Egypt fought her way through the crowd to him.

"Tim!" she said, "Tim—you're made! There'll be no stopping you now. And Tim—there were two theatrical men waiting to see me after the show!"

Tim put his arms around her.

"Long Island?" he said. "Or Hollywood?"

The little group of reporters looked on, and smiled, and sighed a little. Then, as their attention was drawn to the spectacle of Shaugnassy being carried feet first from the tent, they came to life.

Each one looked at his neighbor suspiciously, and then, to a man, they started on a run for the telegraph office.

And behind them, there was only dust—and happiness.

## PREDICTIONS

THERE is one thing about these predictions of the future which we would like to have explained. People say that within five years there will be a regular transatlantic air service. They say that within fifteen years airplanes will be going five hundred miles an hour. They say that in a hundred years we will all be eating food in the form of concentrated pills. Especially, though, we are wondering about the predictions concerning aviation. How do they estimate the number of years? Inventions that have not been thought of as yet will be needed to perfect a transatlantic service—as the steamship has been improved upon since Robert Fulton's day.

How can any one tell, even vaguely, what the future will bring? Some one may invent a new type of plane—hundreds of people have such ideas in their heads. Within the last few weeks three or four new types of aircraft have received newspaper comment. One man is experimenting with a plane that flaps its wings like a bird. Another one has tried out a plane propelled by the feet, like a bicycle.

We have only begun to discover new sources of power. Animal power, wind and water power gave way to steam, and steam to gasoline; gasoline is giving way to electricity; and already we see on the horizon the possibilities of radium, of the atom. We have not yet harnessed the tides.

No; ten or fifteen years will not bring about the greatest development in aviation, nor in anything else. We are just on the threshold of our age.

But—and here is a note to the predictors—go ahead and predict: it makes good reading.



## A Chat With You

**SOME** day some gifted essayist will write an absolutely authoritative and exhaustive article on clubs. Almost every one belongs or has belonged to a club. Who started the first club? Was it a swart Egyptian who rested in the shadow of Cheops' pyramid while it was building? Or was it long before that on the banks of the Ganges or where the Tigris and Euphrates flow? Or perhaps even earlier, apes in an African jungle drew up their codes of by-laws and decided how much fruit was required for an adequate initiation fee and how much for yearly dues. As for personal and social qualifications for membership in any club—they have always been a matter of taste and opinion and always will be. Some men, rather reprehensible than otherwise in the details of their private life, have been esteemed desirable as club members. And other men, mirrors of propriety in their behavior, may act like wet blankets when two or three of their fellows are gathered together for congenial conversation.

\* \* \* \*

**POLITICAL** clubs are numerous and not so bad. In New York they name themselves after tribes of Indians. Generally speaking, there is a social hall on one floor, a pool and billiard parlor on another and a stiff poker game on a third.

When women organize clubs they do it in a less carefree spirit than men. They feel they have a duty to perform, a good to accomplish. So, generally speaking, there must be a pretext for their clubs.

**THE** people who started the French Revolution met in clubs. So did the British Tories who fought Napoleon through so many long years. So the organizers of the American Revolution had their societies, and the participants in the famous Boston Tea Party were all clubmen in good standing.

\* \* \* \*

**THEN** there are the great London clubs, "grand, gloomy and peculiar," Thackeray has described them. The legend about these organizations is that for the best of them a man has to be put up the day he is born if he expects to be elected a member before middle age. Over here, while there are a few that follow the old tradition, most clubs are more democratic and it is easier to crash the gates.

\* \* \* \*

**WHAT** is the essence of a good club? We think it is natural and unalloyed good-fellowship, the feeling that one may relax and be himself, that here, for a season, is a refuge from the constraints and inhibitions of life. A good club should be a perfect democracy. Inside its walls every one should be equal, no matter how wealthy or how poor, how humble or how exalted. The understanding is that if you belong to a good club, you may act just about as you please without offending the other members, for you would not be elected unless you were that kind of a fellow. The palmiest days of most clubs have been when they were young and small, and when the members just got together because they liked to be in each other's society.



NOT every good man is good enough to belong to a good club. There was a club in London that Doctor Johnson belonged to. They met once a week, talked things over and ate supper. One of the members objected to paying for the supper. It was represented to him that, as he had eaten the supper, it was only reasonable to expect him to pay for it. "No," he said. "Had I stayed home and not come here, I should not have eaten any supper. I just ate this supper because it was served."

Doctor Johnson described him as an "unclubable man." A good adjective, even though you will not find it in the dictionaries. Not all the good words are in the sacred books.

CLUBS, at first glance, may seem like places encouraging idleness and self-indulgence. But like most other things that stubbornly persist among men, they have their purpose and their mission. There must be some place where one may rest and invite his soul, some place to sit and talk with other men. It may be the country store or the barber shop. Many a country store is a better clubhouse than city palaces with pompous names. Naturally, clubs grow larger with time. The best clubs of the future will not be the small ones. You are sitting in one of the biggest just now. It meets once a week, every Friday. We want to see you here the next time.

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## *The Popular Stories*

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*In the Next Issue, November 26, 1927*

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**Moota**

Novel.

**W. R. HOEFER**

**What Walks Beside Me?**

**EMMET F. HARTE**

**The Careless Ranger**

**RAYMOND S. SPEARS**

**The Milksop**

A Six-part Story—Part III.

**CAPTAIN RALPH R. GUTHRIE**

**The Cheating of Ching Wo**

**JOHN PIERCE BUTLER**

**Fool's Paradise**

A Six-part Story—Part IV.

**CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK**

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**THE EDITOR**



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