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Vol. 2 No. 2
Serial No. 8

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and the Second Instalment of

EDGAR LEE MASTERS' "MITCH MILLER"
PART I

SUPPOSIN' you was lyin' in a room and was asleep or pretty near asleep; and bein' asleep you could hear people talkin' but it didn't mean nothin' to you—just talk; and you kind of knew things was goin' on around you, but still you was way off in your sleep and belonged to yourself as a sleeper, and what was goin' on didn't make any difference to you; and really, supposin' you was tryin' to get back into deeper sleep before you heard these things. And then, supposin' now and then as your eyes rolled back into your head while sleepin' you saw through the lids—not tryin' to look, but your eyes just saw as they rolled past the open place between the lids—and you saw squares of light and dark, or maybe roundish blurs. And then supposin' sometimes you heard a noise, and as it turned out it was somebody goin' in and out of the room, or somebody closin' or openin' a door. And supposin' these people were not tip-toin' exactly, but were kind of watchin' and laughin' a little maybe to see what you would do when you woke up. And finally one of your eyes kind of opened and you saw your ma sittin' in the corner, sewin', or peelin' apples maybe; and you saw your pa goin' out of a door, and your sister came up to you and looked clos'to see when you was goin' to wake up. And supposin' after a bit you sat up and rubbed your eyes, and looked around and you was in a room, and the room was in your ma's house, and your ma sat there, sure enough, and your pa was goin' out of the door, and your sister was lookin' at you. And supposin' then you went out-doors and there was a yard and you saw the house from the outside, and there was a house near
and other houses, and a fence in front, and wagons goin' by and people. And then supposin' by and by you found out that a railroad ran right by the side fence, and a great big black thing makin' a noise and blowin' out smoke cane close to the fence sometimes, and a man would be ridin' in a little house on top of this big black thing, who talked to you, and laughed when you showed him a pipe made out of a cork and a match, and a cherry-seed put in a hollow place of the cork for tobacco.

And then supposin' other children came around, and finally you went out on to a side-walk and saw lots of houses, and by and by ran away and saw stores all around a lovely square and a great court house in the center. And supposin' you found out that there was a river just under the hills you could see beyond the railroad, and by and by you heard your folks say Petersburg; and by and by you knew that was the name of this town. And sometimes you could see more of the town, because your grandpa and grandma came with a carriage and drove clear through the town so as to get to the country and out to the farm where they lived.

And then supposin' one day all the things in the house was loaded on a wagon and you rode with your ma up the hill to a better house and a bigger yard with oak trees, and the things were put in the house and you began to live here, and saw different houses around, and different children came to play; and supposin' there was a girl named Cooster McCoy that used to come to the fence and make faces and say awful words which your ma told you was wicked and would make God punish you if you said 'em, and then supposin' you began to hear your pa and ma talk of Mr. Miller and what a wonderful man he was, and Mrs. Miller and what a good woman she was, and about the Miller girls, how funny and smart they was, and about Mitch Miller, the wonderfullest boy in town. And supposin' you went with your ma to visit 'em and when you got there you saw Mr. Miller readin' to Mrs. Miller, and you saw the Miller girls playin', and you saw Mitch Miller chewin' gum and readin' a book, and was so taken with the book he wouldn't play with you, but finally said he'd read to you, and so began to read from a book which he said was Tom Sawyer, which was all about a boy just our age. And supposin' he let you take the book after a while and you read it too, but you understood it only because after a while Mitch explained it to you.

Well, this is the way it began: first the room, then the house—then the town in a way—and then Mitch—but I got acquainted with him really and he became my friend as I tell about after a while. Only now I just tell how things began to clear up as I came out of sleep, as you might say.

And onct when I was up to Mr. Miller's and he was readin' from Shakespeare to Mrs. Miller he came to a place where it says, "Our little life is rounded by a sleep." I remember this because Mr. Miller stopped and began to talk about it; and Mitch looked up from readin' Tom Sawyer, and I began to think about the sleep I came out of, and how things at first seemed kind of double and like you had taken so-and-so's cure for consumption which ma says has opium in it. For when I took it for a cold, things kind of swum around me like a circular looking-glass, that you could see through somehow, and everything seemed kind of way off and somethin' to laugh at and not treat as real.

Well, at first, too, everything seemed alive—even sticks and stones, and the broom stick I made into a gun seemed to have a life or kind of a memory of somethin'. And when I told Mr. Miller this, he says, you're a savage, or you've been one in some other life, or else maybe you're repeatin' the life of a savage, and he called it filogeneshis, or somethin' like that.

But anyway, your town comes to you at last; at least the town as it is then and seems to you then with all the folks in it, and your relatives, and all their ways and all the stories about 'em. And you get your place and find your friends, and you find one friend as I found Mitch. And so you're awake, or as much awake, we'll say, as you are at first in the morning when you first stretch out of bed. And so you get ready for the day and the next sleep—

CHAPTER I

I GOT acquainted with Mitch this way: In the first place when we moved to Petersburg and got into our house and was settled, one day Bob Pendleton came to see me. He said he'd come
to call—that's the word he used. You see right in front of our house was Mr. Montgomery's house—an awful big brick house, with a big yard; and the back of it was in front of our house with a tall hedge; but there was a place to go through the hedge, through a grape arbor up to the house, and around to the front yard. Next to Mr. Montgomery's yard was Bucky Gunn's pasture where he kept his cows. But if you stood down by the pasture away from Mr. Montgomery's hedge, you could look across and see Mr. Pendleton's fine brick house where Bob, this boy, lived. Mr. Pendleton kept a store and a bank and was awful rich; and when Bob came to call on me my ma was tickled most to death. She wanted me to have nice friends, boys who would grow up and be prominent in the world. And when Bob first came she went to the door and let him in and then came to me and made me wash and comb my hair. So I went in and here was Bob.

He had on a new suit and shiny shoes and a bow necktie, and he had a little ring on his finger. But he was so thin that he had to stand up twice to make a shadow. So he set there and nothin' much was said. I was afraid to ask him to swing, or to go to the barn, or anything. By and by he asked me if I had read "Little Men." I said no. Then he asked me if I had read the Pansy series. I said no to that; then he asked me if I subscribed to "Our Youth," which was a boys' paper full of good stories about nice girls and boys. I'd never heard of it. Then he asked me if I liked to play ball, and of course I did. And he said he had a ball ground in his orchard and to come over some time. Myrtle, my sister, liked nice boys, but she thought Bob was not the right kind of nice. But ma urged the friendship on me. And so it began.

And I must say Bob was a good boy, and I have no complaints to make; but I didn't know Mitch then, and so didn't see the difference so much. Well, Bob liked me and he kept havin' me over to his house. He had a big yard with trees in it, and a fountain with a stone figure of a little boy, not much clothes on, holdin' an urn. Bob's pa was the leadin' member of the Baptist Church and awful strict; and as Mitch's father was a Congregational preacher, Mr. Pendleton didn't like him on account of differin' with him about baptism.

Bob's house was just full of fine things—oil paintings of his father and mother, his sisters and himself; fine furniture all in horse-hair; lots of silver for the table, and they kept two girls and had had 'em for years; and Mrs. Pendleton watched Bob very careful so he wouldn't catch cold or anything, because he had a weak chest. And Bob would take me down to his father's store where we got raisins and candy and we played ball in the orchard.

Everything Bob had was brand new, and you had to be careful of it. He had a new ball; and on the day I met Mitch we was pitchin' ball—Bob and me, in the orchard—and Bob kept saying to be careful and not let it roll in the grass or get in the mud, that he wanted to keep it white and clean. Well, of course I missed now and then and Bob seemed displeased. And when it rolled into the mud he came up and took the ball and wiped it off and looked mad. Just then he said: "There comes that Mitch Miller, and I think we'd better quit playin' anyway." I knew Mitch's name and had seen him, but we hadn't run together yet.

Mitch climbed over the fence into the orchard, and Bob began to kind a move away. I could see that Bob didn't want him, for he said, "Come on, Arthur." Everybody called me Skeet, though my name was Arthur, which I hated. Bob always called me Arthur and made me call him Robert, though his nickname was "Shadder." When Bob said to come on to me, Mitch says, "Wait a minute, Skeet, I've somethin' to tell you." So I said to Bob, "Wait a minute, Robert," and Bob said "You're comin' now or not at all." That made me mad, so I stood there. Bob went on and Mitch came up.

"Let him go," said Mitch. "You don't care, do you?"

"Not much," says I.

"Well, I hope not," says Mitch. "He's a sissy—spoiled by his ma. And you don't call this any fun, do you, pitchin' ball with a ball so good that you dassn't let it roll on the ground? Now, I've seen you around, Skeet, and I like you, and if you like me, we'll be chums, and go havers on everything, and, if anybody fights you he'll have to fight me, and the same way with me, and I'll bet we'll have more fun together in a day than you could have with Shadder Pendleton in a year. Do you
agree?” I said, “Yes, I agree,” for I liked Mitch—I liked his name, I liked his way, and his face, his voice, everything about him right then; and I knew what I was promisin’.

Mitch says, “Do you want to have some fun?” I says, “You bet I do.”

“Well,” Mitch says, “There’s more goin’ on in this town than you ever saw, if you only keep your eyes open. But I’ll bet Shadder never hears of it, and if you run with him you’ll never hear of it either. Do you know what’s goin’ to happen today?” “No,” says I.

“Well,” says Mitch, “Jack Plunkett, who was town Marshall here once and Ruddy Hedgpeth are goin’ to have a fight to see which can whip the other.”

“Where?” says I.

“Down near Old Salem,” says Mitch, “On the flat sand by the river, close to the mill. And I want to see it, and so do you.”

“You bet I want to see it,” I said.

So Mitch went on to tell me that Jack Plunkett had never been whipped and neither had Ruddy Hedgpeth. They had whipped everybody but each other. And each said he could whip the other. And last Saturday Ruddy was in town and went around the square sayin’ he could whip Jack, and Jack heard it and sent back word he’d fight him a week off, on a Saturday, and this is the Saturday. And Mitch said we’d better hurry so as to get there before the fight was over, Old Salem bein’ about a mile from town.

By this time Shadder had walked out of the orchard and was pretty near to the house and Mitch said, “Now he’s gone, let him go, and come on. If he ever says you left him, you can say he left you, for he did.”

It was a spring day—it was April, and we walked as fast as we could, runnin’ part of the time. Mitch was wild about the country, about trees, birds, the river and the fields. And he whistled and sang. On the way out he began to talk to me about Tom Sawyer, and asked me if I had read the book. This was one of the books I had read; so I said so. And Mitch says “Do you know we can do exactly what Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn did?”

“What’s that?” I said.

“Why, find treasure. It’s just as surely here as anything. Of course there ain’t no caves around here, at least I don’t know of any. But think of the old houses—look at that old house down there by the ravine that goes into the river across from Mr. Morris wagon shop. Think of those old houses close to the Baptist Church; and think of the dead limbs on the trees in Montgomery’s woods. But of course if we go into this, no one must know what we are doin’. We must keep still and if they catch us diggin’, we must lie. If you don’t know how to lie very well, Skeet, just listen to me and foller the story I tell.”

I agreed to this. And Mitch went on, “And by and by, we’ll find treasure and divide it, for I have taken you for my chum and half of mine is yours, and a half of yours is mine.”

By this time we had come to a pretty high bank about a hundred yards from the mill. We heard voices and looked down on the sand bank, and there were about fifty men sittin’ or standin’ around. And there was my pa. So I says “I can’t go down there, Mitch, my pa will whip me or drive me away. I know for certain he wouldn’t want me to see this.” “Well,” says Mitch, “What’s the difference. We’re not more’n 75 feet away from ’em and can see everything and hear everything if there’s anything to hear. So let’s just lie down here in the grass and take it easy, and look down on ’em and watch it.” So we did. There seemed to be some arrangin’ of things. My pa seemed to be standin’ close to Ruddy Hedgpeth and talkin’ to him and kind of advisin’ him or takin’ care of him. And George Montgomery was doin’ the same for Jack Plunkett. Mitch says “They’re the seconds.”

“What’s that?” says I.

“Why,” says Mitch, “seconds see that everything is fair, and no foolin’.”

We could hear almost everything they said, and they were talkin’ about whether Jack Plunkett could choke Ruddy Hedgpeth if he got him. My pa said not; and Jack Plunkett said it was a fight to see who could whip the other, and if he got Ruddy, so he could lay his hands on him and choke him until he gave up, that was fair and he insisted on it. Then Ruddy and my pa stepped to one side and talked secret; and then my pa said out loud that it was all right, and shokin’ would not be barred; but of course what one could do, the other could. Jack Plunkett laughed at
this an awful mockin’ laugh, because he
was the most terrible choker in the county
and felt he could get the best of anybody in
a chokin’ match.

Then Jack and Ruddy began to undress, that is, they took off everything but
their pants. Jack had a beard and a big
square face, and a chest as thick as a
horse and arms as big as a man’s legs. And
Ruddy was about as big only a little
shorter, but he wore no beard, but his face
and chest looked clean and slick and he was
known to be an awful hard hitter. Then
they got out on a flat place, level and
hard sand, and began, my pa and George
Montgomery takin’ care of them and about
fifty others watchin’ as I said.

They stood and eyed each other and
walked around and watched for a chance.
Pretty soon Ruddy hit Jack on the chin
and sent his head back and Jack rushed on
Ruddy and got his hands on him, but
Ruddy slipped away. Then Jack hit
Ruddy, and Ruddy kind of wheeled around;
and Jack rushed for Ruddy again,
and again got his hands on him, but they
slipped off. Then they seemed to get close
together and just pound each other; and
pretty soon Ruddy hit Jack and knocked
him down. But Jack got right up and
grabbed Ruddy and got an awful grip on
him. “He’s goin’ to choke him now. He’ll
get him now, sure.” And they tussled for
a while, Jack tryin’ to get Ruddy’s throat,
but Ruddy always keepin’ away, though
pretty near gettin’ it. Finally Ruddy
broke clear loose and hit Jack an awful
blow right in the chest. Then Jack went
crazy mad. He rushed on Ruddy and got
him by the throat and began to choke him.
Meanwhile Ruddy was fightin’ Jack’s
hands away and finally slipped ‘em off
again and as Jack came for him, Ruddy
hit him and knocked Jack down again.
Then he rushed on Jack and was about to
choke him too, but Jack hopped up and
kind of run off a little, then turned around
and made for Ruddy again and struck
Ruddy and knocked him into a heap. This
was the first time for him, and he got right
up and as Jack came up, he just rained the
blows on Jack until Jack began to wilt and
finally he came up with a regular sledge
hammer and Jack fell over on the sand flat
on his back, and lay there, his big white
chest just goin’ up and down like a bellows.
I forgot to say that Harold Carman was
there; and every time one was knocked
down, he began to count. Mitch said if
they counted 25 and you didn’t get up,
you was whipped. Well, this time Harold
Carman counted 25 and then went on and
counted 50 and still Jack didn’t get up,
but lay there his breast goin’ up and down
for air. Then everybody began to laugh.
And the fight was given to Ruddy Hedg-
peth; and when it was, Jack got up and
picked up a club and started for Ruddy
to kill him. So all the men pitched on to
Jack and began to hold him; and Jack
was bloody and was swearin’ and sayin’ he
had been tricked and that he could lick
Ruddy with one hand in a fair fight.
“Ruddy Hedgpeth is a coward,” says Jack;
“he put sweet oil on his chest and throat
so I couldn’t choke him when I got my
hands on him. He’s a coward and I’ve
been tricked.”

My pa was not a very big man, but he
warrant afraid of no one. And he says:
“Anythin’ was fair, so as to whip, and
you’re whipped and you’d better shut up.”
So Jack made for my pa and pa stooped
down and picked up a rock and stood his
ground. The other men interfered; and
George Montgomery said the sweet oil
was fair and they all turned on Jack and
he had to take his medicine. Then they
broke up and started to climb the bank;
and Mitch and me ran into the woods at
the side of the road and waited until they
went.

“How was that?” said Mitch.
“That was wonderful,” says I.

“Well, you stick with me, and I’ll show
you a lot of things. Do you want to dig
for treasure with me?” I said, “Of
course”; and Mitch says: “We’ll begin
right away in Montgomery’s woods. For
I’ve been over there lots, and there are
sloughs of dead limbs and we’re bound to
find it. I’ve got something on to-night.
Mr. Bennett’s daughter Nellie is goin’ to
be married and we can get under the win-
dow and see it. It’s the grandest thing
ever happened here. The wedding cake
has diamonds on it, and everybody that
comes, that’s invited, of course, is given
some kind of a gift, and Nellie has solid
silver buckles on her shoes and a veil that
cost $50. I’ll come for you,” says Mitch.
And so a little after supper Mitch whistled
for me, and we went to the Bennett house
and fooled around waiting.
CHAPTER II

NOW Mr. Bennett had traded his farm for a store in town and was now a merchant prince, my pa said. And he had built him a wonderful stone house on a hill with a big yard around it. There was a house there before, and of course lots of trees, bushes around, and walks; and he had built a fine barn with lightning rods all over it with silver balls that just glittered. And he had a span of horses that cost $1000 and a wonderful carriage. He was awful rich. And Nellie was goin’ to marry a man which was from Chicago. Pa and ma were goin’ to the wedding; and ma could hardly get ready it took her so long to dress. She wore her silk dress which her sister had given her, and looked prettier than I ever saw her. Mitch and me had to sneak off because I was supposed to stay with Myrtle and Little Billie, as Delia, our girl, wanted to go out. Because I went, Delia had to stay, and she was as mad as hops.

But on the way over to Mr. Bennett’s, Mitch told me that they had brought colored waiters from Chicago, from the Palmer House, the finest hotel in the world, where they had silver dollars in the floor. I couldn’t believe this, but he said he had talked to Harold Carman, who had seen ‘em with his own eyes, and counted ‘em till he got tired. Mitch said that they had an orchestra from Chicago and were goin’ to dance, that the wedding would cost $5000 which Mr. Bennett had offered to Nellie in money, or to take it for the cost of the wedding; and she took it for the wedding.

We climbed over the picket fence near the barn and dodged around past the bushes until we got up to a window where we kind of scrouched down and looked through the lace curtains. There we saw everybody—all dressed up and talkin’ and laughin’; and there was my pa and ma. Ma was holdin’ her fan and talkin’ to a man in a long black coat with all his white shirt showin’, and diamonds in the shirt and a white tie. She looked very smilin’ and different than when she talked to pa. Mitch’s pa and ma warn’t there, not bein’ invited. The orchestra was playin’ wonderful music; and finally all the people quit talkin’; the room got still, and the orchestra began to play somethin’ very beauti-

ful and pretty soon Nellie Bennett came in holdin’ the arm of Mr. Bennett, all in her veil and white satin, but I couldn’t see the buckles on her shoes. And then the man she was goin’ to marry—his name was Richard Hedges from Chicago—stepped out, and they both stepped in front of the minister, who was from Jacksonville, wearin’ a black robe with white sash around his neck; and the orchestra stopped playin’. But just then we heard a twig or somethin’ snap and we looked around quick and there was Doc Lyon who read the Bible all the time and acted queer. My pa thought he was crazy. And he began to say: “She doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians, her neighbors, which were clothed with blue, governors and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses. I will take away thy nose and thy ears; and thy residue shall fail by the sword. They shall also strip thee of thy clothes and take away thy fair jewels.”

Doc Lyon’s voice sounded like he was talkin’ out of a cistern, and I grew sick at my stomach I was so scared. But both Mitch and me forgot the wedding for the time and turned our heads. And pretty soon we saw Doc Lyon kind of rolling a pistol over in his hand. We could see it. It glittered in the light; but Mitch and me were lyin’ in the shadow there, and I don’t believe he knew we were there. At least until I kind of lost my balance and fell over against Mitch and bumped him against the house, makin’ a noise. We were scared to death, for we was afraid Doc Lyon could now see us, and know us, and would come over to us, and do something to us. Everybody was afraid of him, especially the boys. Well, probably he didn’t know who it was, or but maybe it was a big dog. So he stood a minute and then began to back off and finally turned and ran away into the darkness. Then we looked in again, and by now the minister was readin’ from a book; and finally Mr. Hedges put a ring on Nellie’s finger; then they knelt down and the minister prayed. Then they got up and kissed and the music started; and everybody stood in line to shake Nellie’s hand and Mr. Hedges’ hand, and kiss Nellie. And there was a lot of talk and laughin’ and they began to dance. And Mitch whispered to me we’d better go; that we’d seen
it and we could get to my house so as to let Delia go out and maybe square everything. So we took a different way from what Doc Lyon did, and ran as fast as we could, lookin' out for corners we turned, and got home. Delia was awful mad; it was about 9 o'clock now and she couldn't go out. She said this wedding was no wedding anyway; that Nellie Bennett was a heathen, havin' never been baptized and that people that got married without bein' baptized committed a sin. She was mad; but we edged around her, and finally she made some butter scotch for us and promised not to tell on us; and so did Myrtle and Little Billie.

Then Mitch and me began to talk about Doc Lyon and whether I shouldn't tell my pa so as to have him arrested; that he was a dangerous character. But how could I tell him without lettin' him know that we had been to the weddin', and our havin' Delia fixed. Then Mitch thought if we told and got my pa to arrest Doc Lyon and he got out, he would come for us, or maybe do somethin' to my pa. Anyhow Myrtle broke her word and told; but pa didn't say nothin' or do nothin'; he didn't talk much sometimes and nobody knew what he was thinkin' about.

Well, finally Delia took Myrtle and Little Billie up to bed, and Mitch began to ask me if I knew about marriage. I had never seen anybody married before, but I knew about it because when I was only 6, the first day I went to school, a boy told me all about it, and it made me so shamed I didn't know what to do. And I didn't believe it; and when I told my ma, she said not to let boys tell me dirty lies, and to walk away from 'em. But since that time I had thought about it, and heard other things. I had heard my pa and ma say that Mrs. Rainey was in love with Temple Scott and wanted to marry him, although already married to Joe Rainey, her husband; and then you saw a lot of writin' on fences and sidewalks and on the school house walls; and some of the girls and boys said funny things sometimes. All the time it was plain enough that there couldn't be a family without a father as well as a mother; the father havin' to earn money, and the mother havin' to take care of the children, and of course no children where there were no father and mother, except orphans and things like that.

Mitch and me talked this over and he said that if any boy said any dirty thing to me, to hit him one; and that if I'd come up some night, his pa would explain to me about flowers and plants and show me what a wonderful thing flowers are and how they mean everything when understood. And then he began to talk of Zueline Hasson, and how she made him feel so happy and so in love with everything, just because she was so beautiful, and her friendship was so beautiful to him.

Then Mitch wanted to know if I'd heard that this Mr. Hedges was marryin' Nellie Bennett for her money, and had come down from Chicago to get her for her pa's money. I had heard my pa say that; and Mitch said "I believe it—there was too much splurge over there, and why wasn't some man right here in this town good enough for Nellie?" After a while pa and ma came home, and Mitch hearin' 'em slipped out, and I was up-stairs by the time they came up, with my light out. So I heard pa and ma talk in the next room.

Pa said: "Yep, you'll see it before six months. Mr. Bennett don't know any more about runnin' a store than the man who got his farm knows about runnin' a farm, which is nothin'. When men change their game, this way, they always lose. And that ain't all. Mr. Bennett is topplin' now. His house is mortgaged and he's hard up. But a fine house is always a bait to young men; and old folks always put out a bait in order to marry their daughters off."

Ma said: "Nothin' of the kind. They don't have to put out any bait. Look at you—was there any bait about me?"

"No," says pa.

"Of course there wasn't," said ma.

"And you went around sayin' it would kill you if I didn't marry you—and besides I have your letters for it."

"Oh, well," says pa, "A fellow always does that."

"Yes," ma said, "You're right, a fellow always does that, bait or no bait. And I think the way you talk about marriage sometimes is just awful, and if the children heard you, you'd be raisin' up children that suspicious marriage and every holy thing." And she went on to say that there was something wrong with pa and with lots of men, who went around cryin'
and pretendin' to die and then after they got the girl, talked about baits, and about bein' fooled.

And pa said: "Do you know what a woman is?"

And ma said: "I don't know what you think she is."

"A woman," says pa, "is a bottle of wine. If you look at it and leave it alone, never open it, the wine is as harmless as water. And if you leave a woman alone, she can't do nothin' to you. She's just there on the table or the shelf—harmless and just a woman, just like the bottle of wine is just a bottle of wine. But if you get in love with her, that's like drinkin' the wine; she gets hold of you, and you begin to talk and tell your secrets, and make promises, and give your money away, just like a drunk man. Then if you marry her, that's like getting over the wine; you wake up and find you've been drunk and you wonder what you've said, and if you remember, you smile at yourself, and your wife throws up to you what you said and that you wrote her letters. And the man who put wine, women and song together, put three things that was just the same together."

And ma says: "No, a woman ain't a bottle of wine at all; a woman is a bird."

"What kind?" says pa.

And ma says: "I don't know the name of the bird, but it roosts on the back of the hippopotamus. The hippopotamus is big and clumsy like a man and can't see very well, just like a man, and has lots of enemies like a man; so when enemies come this here bird sets up an awful clatter and squawkin' and that warns the hippopotamus and so he can run or defend himself. And if it wasn't for women, men couldn't get along, because they have to be warned and told things all the time, and given pointers what to do and how to act, and what is goin' on around—and the fact is women is brains, and men is just muscle."

And pa says, "How does this bird live, if it's on the back of the hippopotamus all the time?" That kind of got ma for she knew if the bird got off the back of the hippopotamus to eat, it couldn't warn the hippopotamus, and as the bird has to live, ma was kind of stumped, and she says—"Oh, well the bird lives all right, it catches things that flies by."

"It does?" says pa. "You don't know your botany—that bird feeds off of the delicious insects that is on the back of the hippopotamus. So it don't have to get off for food, the same as a woman. And that ain't all," says pa, "Men are performers and women is the audience; and women just sit and look and criticise, or maybe applaud if they like the performer; and men have to act their best, write the best books, and make the best speeches, and get the most money so as to please women which is the audience—and a woman can't do nothin' but applaud or criticise, and stir up the men to do their best—just because men, until they know better, want to please the women so as to get them for wives or somethin'."

And so pa went on till ma said: "I've heard enough of this—" and she went into the next room and slept with Little Billie.

And pa called out and said, "You ain't mad, are you?" And ma called back, "Just keep to your own self and shut up."

But as I can't come back to this again, I'll say that Mr. Bennett did fail and lose everything; and in about a year Nellie came back, her husband havin' left her after her pa failed; and she began to clerk in one of the stores, and is yet.

CHAPTER III

AFTER I met Mitch and after we saw the fight and the wedding, we went out to Montgomery's woods a few times in the afternoon when school was over. But we couldn't do much, because first we read Tom Sawyer along settin' on stumps and logs. We had to get the idea into our heads better; at least I did, because now we was about to carry out what Tom had done and wrote about—or what Mark Twain had wrote about for him. So we'd no sooner dig a few spadefulls than it would be gettin' dark, and we'd have to go home.

One evening it began to rain and then thunder and lightnin', and we stood in a kind of shed for a bit, when all of a sudden I felt creepy and tingly, and saw a flash, followed by awful thunder; and of course I knew I had got a shock. Perry Strickland had been killed the summer before just this a way; and it seemed like once in a while God just launched out like you'd сват a fly, and took somebody; and of course you couldn't tell who He was goin' to come after next. Things like this, be-
sides lots of other things, my grandpa's prayers and other things, had made me think a lot of religion, so as to be ready if I was to be took by lightnin' or drownin' or anything sudden. And some of the boys said that if you was drowned and didn't have nothin' on, you'd be kept out of heaven, and sent to a place of punishment. So it began to look like they was a lot of things to think about and be careful of.

I hadn't told Mitch because I didn't know just how he'd take it, even if he was a preacher's son; but I'd been goin' at nights sometimes down at a revival or protracted meeting at the church, not Mr. Miller's, but another church, a Baptist I believe, or maybe Campbellite. And I had listened to the revivalist and heard the singin' and the experience speeches. And heard the revivalist say that you had to be immersed, that baptized meant to be put clear under, and that sprinklin' wouldn't do.

So I got Mitch to go the next night after the wedding, to see what he thought, but also to pay him back a little for takin' me to the fight and to the wedding. We went in together and sat down pretty fur back, and the meeting began. A man got up pretty fat and good natured, with a voice that just went into you like when you push one key of the organ down and keep pumpin'. And he said a long prayer and asked for light and help, and for light to shine in the hearts of the people present, so as to show 'em their sin; and to save people from death, and from sudden death, and if they died, then that they might be ready and be saved. And he asked for power to preach the gospel and for humbleness and understanding to receive the gospel after it was preached. And so on for a good while. And a good many said amen. And then they sang "Angel Voices Ever Singing." Then the revivalist asked for songs and somebody called out "Away in a Manger, No Crib for a Bed;" and they sang that. He asked for another one—and somebody called out, "There Were Ninety and Nine that Safely Lay." And somebody else wanted "I Was a Wandering Sheep." And so it went till you could kind of feel things workin' up like when the lightning made me tingle. Then this revivalist preached a bit and talked about salvation and baptism, and about believin' and being baptized in order to be saved. Then they had another song "Work for the Night Is Coming," and then the revivalist called for experience speeches. And old John Doud, the photographer, got up first, right away. He was bald and one of his eyes was out; he was fat and his mouth watered. And he began to tell what religion had done for him; how before he got religion nobody could live with him, he was so selfish and cross; how he was mean to his wife, and how he drank sometimes. And now he was all different; he was happy all the day and agreeable to everybody and had been good to his wife before she died, and generous to everybody and didn't care whether he had a dollar in his pocket or a coat on his back so long as he could help somebody; and how he hated drink now—couldn't bear the sight of it; and he was thankful and ready to die any minute and go to the blest in heaven and meet his wife, who was there. Lots of people talked right out loud while he was speakin' and said "Yes," "That's it," "That's what it does for you," and such like. And he sat down, but popped right up again and said there was a man in town who needed the prayers of the church and he says, "You all know him—Joe Pink." Of course we all knew Joe Pink, who was the honorariest man in town, and a good deal in jail.

Then Harry Bailey got up. He'd had religion before several times. Every winter he got it if there was a revival; and if somebody had a new way of being baptized, he'd try it. He went on to say that he'd been sprinkled and dipped; that he'd had the double baptism of bein' sprinkled and dipped, but he'd never been really immered—baptized; and now he knew it was the only thing and he'd been livin' in sin all these years. They said halleluyah to that, and everybody began to shake his hand and pat him on the back, till pretty soon he keeled over in a fit like he had sometimes, and the revivalist said—"Just stand back—he may have the gift of tongues and begin to prophesy." But Harry just laid there kind a kickin' like a chicken with its head off and finally got up and sat down ready to be received into the church when they had the general baptism. They had a kind of tank under the pulpit, and when they got enough to make it worth while, the revivalist put on rubber boots and stepped down into this here
tank and received 'em as they came to him, puttin' 'em clear under and then takin' 'em out.

After Harry Bailey talked, Mrs. Penny talked. She said she could do more washin' since she got into the church than ever, and that it had been the makin' of her. John Cruzan, a fighter, said he hadn't wanted to hurt a livin' soul since he was baptized. And so it went.

Mitch was settin' on the end of the seat next the aisle, and I was on the inside. Pretty soon the revivalist came down and spied Mitch. He just saw him as a boy, and didn't know who he was. Just then they were singin' "Knockin', Knockin', Who is There?" And it was dreadful solemn, some were moanin', others crying out, some were clappin' their hands, and lots were being talked to to bring 'em over. So this revivalist kneeled down and says to Mitch:

"Are you saved, my little friend?"

Mitch says, "Maybe, I don't know."

"Maybe," says he, "Well don't you want to be certain to escape the condemnation?"

"I'd like to," says Mitch.

"This is the accepted time, and you can't afford to say maybe, you must say I am sure—I know it. What is your name?"

"Mitch Miller."

"Well, Mitch, have you had the advantages of a Bible training?"

"Yes, sir."

"You've read it a little?"

"All of it."

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, why don't you stand up right now and say I believe it and come into the church?"

"I'd like to hear more about it."

"What part of it?"

"Baptism."

"There's nothing more to say, Mitch. The Bible says believe and be baptized. Baptized means to be immersed. The Bible doesn't say believe and be sprinkled, or believe and be dipped. It says believe and be baptized. You have it plain, and the duty is plain. You can come in now while you are young and before the grasshopper is a burden, or you can wait until the days of sin come about you, and your eyes are blinded with scales and then try to come in. And maybe by that time you will have lost interest and be hardened; or you may die in sin while saying 'maybe' and not 'I'm sure.' Now what do you say?"

And Mitch says, "I won't tonight anyway."

Then the revivalist said "Do you remember the rich man to whom the Lord said, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.'"

Mitch says, "Yes, he was braggin' about his barns and that he had food laid up for many days. I'm not braggin' about anything; I'm not rich or grown up, and that part of the Bible don't apply to me."

"Ah," said the revivalist, just like that, "it all applies to you and to me—and it's Satan that tells it doesn't; and here you are a bright boy that has read the Bible and you hesitate and argue while Jesus is waitin'. But the time will come when Jesus won't wait—when the gates will be shut. And Jesus will be in heaven with his own, and all the rest will be in the pit, burning with eternal fire. Don't you believe this?"

Mitch says, "No."

"Then you don't believe the Bible. Who have you heard talk these subjects?"

"My pa."

"What does he do, Mitchie?"

"He's a preacher."

The revivalist was stunned, and he looked at Mitch and kind of started to get away from him. Then Mitch says: "My pa debated baptism with another preacher last winter and beat him. I believe in sprinklin'. I've been sprinkled, and I will let it stay that way until I'm convinced."

Then the revivalist says: "Take your chance, my little friend," and went away. The meeting ended and we went home. Tomorrow was Saturday, and we were going to dig for treasure.

CHAPTER IV

MITCH and I had dug under pretty near every dead limb in Montgomery's woods and hadn't found a trace of any treasure. We began in April when the winds sang as they did in March. There were black-birds around then and that bird that sings Spring day, Mitch's father knew the names of all the birds; but outside of crows, robins, jay-birds and things like that we didn't know 'em—neither Mitch nor I. We didn't care, for what's the use of knowing names of things? You
can't pronounce 'em anyway, and I've noticed people get queer studying such things, like Homer Jones who gathered weeds and flowers and pinned long names on 'em.

When we began to dig, the sap was flowing out of the maple trees. And once George Montgomery saw us digging. He had come over to empty his buckets of sap to make some maple sugar. And he said—"What are you boys doing?" and laughed and said—"don't bother my buckets. If you want a taste of sap take it, but don't get the buckets askew so they will spill."

Mitch called back to him, "What do you say, George, if we find a tea-kettle of money buried here summers, buried by old Nancy Allen?" And George said, "Take it along—but you'll dig the whole world up before you do."

You see Mitch was foolin' because we didn't think Nancy Allen had left her money there, if she had any. But Mitch didn't want to say that we was followin' the direction of Tom Sawyer for treasure. We kept the book hid under a log, and every now and then would take it out and read it to see if we missed any of the points. If we had told George Montgomery what we was doin', he would have laughed at us and told everybody, and had the whole town laughin' at us. Because we knew nobody but us had any faith in such things. But Mitch had faith and so had I. We agreed that there was treasure to be found, and if we worked we believed we could get it.

It was a good thing that Nancy Allen died that winter and that Mitch said that, because it threw George off. Nobody believed in Tom Sawyer as a real person but us—we did. We knew he was real. Mitch had written a letter to him and sent it to Hannibal, Missouri, for Mitch's dad said there was no town of St. Petersburn in Missouri—and that Mark Twain had used that name as a blind. Well, sure enough, a letter came back to Mitch signed by Tom Sawyer, and so we knew he was real.

And just about then this here Nancy Allen disappeared. She was a funny little woman about as big as a 'leven year old girl, and wore a shawl around her head, and carried a cane and smoked a pipe. She allus came to town with Old Bender and his wife which was a friend or somethin' of Nancy, and a boy with a mouth as big as a colt's and as trembly, which was Old Bender's boy. They all lived together near town, and used to come in, first Old Bender, then his wife, then Nancy, then this boy walkin' in file, and they'd go to the grocery store and set around all day, and go home with bacon, tobacco and things.

I said Nancy disappeared in the winter. But there was snow and they didn't come to town—so just when she died nobody knows. But as I said, Mitch and I found her body right near a creek in Montgomery's woods in April. The snow was gone, and there she lay, what was left of her, wrapped up in her shawl. And no one knew how she got there or anything about it.

Mitch was the most curious boy you ever saw. He had read summers about a singing bone—that if you take the bone of a person that has died like this, and hollow it out so as to make it into kind of a horn, and blow through it, a voice will come out of it and tell you how the person died and where the money is that's left and everything. So when we found her, Mitch was just about to take her arm bone which was stickin' through her shawl to make a horn of when I says, "Don't, Mitch, you'll get into trouble. That body must lie right there 'till the Corner comes." You see my father was States Attorney and I'd heard him say that. So we left Nancy just as she was and ran into town. I told my father, and the Corner went out and took us along, and we told what we knew. Then they took her body into town and got a jury and Mitch and I told about it, and our names were printed in the paper.

There was a story around that Nancy Allen was a miser, and of course they wondered how she died. And my pa got Old Bender in and cross-questioned him a whole day, with Mitch and me hid on top of a closet in the room. But Old Bender stuck to his story, that Nancy had started out to visit one of the Watkins near Montgomery's woods, and probably got cold, or fainted or somethin'. Anyway, they let Old Bender go, and after that he came into town walkin' first, then his wife, then their boy, and Nancy gone.

They didn't find any money or anything. But George Montgomery was throw clean off when Mitch said we're diggin' for Nancy's treasure. For Mitch went on and said: "What was she doin' here in the woods? Goin' to see the Wat-
kinses? That’s pretty thin. She was here to get her money, that’s what it was. And she fainted and froze to death. It’s as plain as day. My pa thinks so, and that ain’t all, the States Attorney thinks so too, doesn’t he, Skeeters?” Of course I had to say yes, though I’d never heard my pa say any such thing. George left us and went about his buckets, and we went on diggin’. We saw George walk away and climb the rail fence and disappear. Then Mitch flung down his spade and sat on the log where we had Tom Sawyer hid and began to talk.

“Skeeters,” he said, “just look how everything tallies. Tom’s town was St. Petersburg, and ours here is Petersburg. His town was on a river. So is this town. We ain’t got no Injun Joe, but how about Doc Lyon? Ain’t he just as mysterious and dangerous as Injun Joe? Then if these woods don’t look just like the woods Tom and Huck dug in, I’ll eat my hat. Look here!” Mitch pulled the book out and showed me, and sure enough they were alike. “Then look at Old Taylor, the school teacher—aunt be the livin’ image of Tom’s teacher? And our school house looks alike. And we ain’t got any Aunt Polly, but look at your grandmother—she’s the livin’ image of Aunt Polly and just like her. Things can’t be just alike, if they was they wouldn’t be two things, but only one. And I can go through this town and pick out every character. I’ve thought it over. The Welshman—that’s George Montgomery’s father. Nigger Jim—how about Nigger Dick? He’s older and drinks, but you must expect some differences. And Mary—my sister Anne is just the same. Muff Potter—how about Joe Pink—allus in trouble and in jail and looks like Muff. And the Sunday School’s just the same, superintendent and all. And the circus comes to town just as it did in Tom’s town. And the County Judge—no difference.”

“Yes, but,” I said, “Your girl ain’t the daughter of the County Judge like Becky Thatcher was. And her name is Zueline and that sounds like something beautiful not belonging to any town—but to some place I keep dreamin’ about.”

“Skeeters,” said Mitch, “You make me mad sometimes. As I told you, it can’t be all alike. Now there’s you—you ain’t any more like Huckleberry Finn than the Sun-

day School superintendent is, not sayin’ that you’re him, for you’re not. But it can’t be all alike. I only say when it goes this far that it means something. And while I think I’m just like Tom Sawyer, for I can do everything he did, swim, fight, fish and hook sugar, and read detective stories, you’re not Huck, and because you’re not, it will be different in the end. We’ll go along up to a certain point, and then it will be you, maybe, that’ll give it a different turn. Maybe we’ll get bigger treasure or somethin’ better.”

“I don’t want no better luck than Tom and Huck had,” said I. “But I believe it will be different, for you’re different from Tom, Mitch. For one thing, you’ve read different things: The Arabian Nights, and Grimm’s Stories, and there’s your father who’s a preacher and all your sisters and your mother who’s so good natured and fat. These things will count too. So I say, if I’m not Huck, you’re not Tom, though we can go on for treasure, and I see your argument mostly and believe in it.”

Mitch grew awful serious and was still for a long while. Finally he said: “Skeeters, I just live Tom Sawyer and dream about him. I don’t seem to think of anything else—and somehow I act him, and before I die, I mean to see him. Yes, sir, this very summer you and I, if you’re game, will look on Tom Sawyer’s face and take him by the hand.”

“Why, Mitch,” I said, “How can you do it? It must be more’n a hundred miles from here to where Tom lives.”

“You bet it is,” said Mitch. “It’s near two hundred miles. I looked it up. But it’s as easy as pie to get there. Look here—we can bum our way or walk to Havaner—then we can get a job on a steamboat and go to St. Louis—then we can bum or walk our way to Hannibal—and some fine mornin’ you and I will be standin’ on the shore of the Mississippi—and there’ll be Tom and Huck, and you and me. And I’ll say, ‘Tom Sawyer, I’m Mitch Miller, and this here is Skeeters Kirby.’ How’s that for fun? Just think of it. I dream about this every night. And we’ll strip and go swimmin’, and fish and all go up to McDougall’s Cave. And what would you say if we persuaded them to come back with us for a visit? Tom and Huck, you and me all walkin’ arm in arm down the streets here? Why, the town’d go wild. And
we'd go out to your grandmother's and stay all summer and just roll in pie and cake and good things—and ride horses, and fly kites. My—I just can't wait!"

So Mitch went on this way for quite a spell and then he switched and said: "Skeeters, what do you dream about?" "Flyin'," says I. "No!" said Mitch, "Do you really?" "As sure as you're livin'," I says. "Well, ain't that funny," said Mitch, "so do I. But how do you do it, with wings or how?" "No," I says, "I seem to reach up my hands and pull myself up, by rounds on a ladder, ropes or somethin'; and I'm always trying to get away from somethin'—like bears or sometimes it's a lion. But pa says it means I'm an aspirin' nature and born to pull up in the world. But," says I to Mitch, "Do you ever dream of the Judgment Day?"

"Do I?" says Mitch. "You can better believe I do—and that's where my flyin' comes in, only I drift like one of these here prairie chickens about to light—I seem to be goin' down. And it was just last night I dreamed of the Judgment Day.

First everything was mixed: here was Injun Joe and Doc Lyon, Joe Pink and Muff Potter, Aunt Polly and your grandma—everybody in these two towns all together. And Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, Joe Harper, Becky, Zueline, and your folks and me—all of us was together. And then suddenly we seemed to be close to Bucky Gum's pasture; the well became a kind of pipe stuck up out of the ground and began to spout fire; and there was a great light in the sky and I saw Jesus coming down out of the sky, and there was thunder. Then I began to fly—drift down, and all of a sudden, kerplunk, I fell out of bed. And pa says—"Hey, Mitch, what's the matter?" "It's the Judgment Day," I says. "Judgment nothin'," says pa— "You've fallen out of bed. Get back in bed and go to sleep—you were hollerin' like an Indian." Then I heard ma say to pa after a bit, "Pa, you oughtn't to read so much of the Bible before the children. It makes 'em nervous." Now, Skeeters, what do you dream about the Judgment Day?"

I was just about to tell him when I heard someone comin'. I looked up. It was Kit O'Brien and Mike Kelly comin' from the slaughter house. They had some liver and a bladder; and before we could square around Kit O'Brien came up and knocked Tom Sawyer out of Mitch's hand. And then it began. These boys belonged to a gang over the hill back of where old Moody lived, and we was always fightin'. Mitch and Kit had fit before—and so had Mike and me. Mike licked me once and I licked him once. But Mitch had given Kit an awful lickin' with no come back. So now he thought his chance had come with Mike to help after disposin' of me. So what did they do, both of 'em, but go quick for Mitch, thinkin'. I guess, to get rid of him and then lick me.

"No you don't," says I; and I grabbed both of Mike's arms with my arms and held him out for to wrestle. I was awful strong in the back and arms and rangy, and nobody could trip me, and I could back up until I got a feller comin' good and then give a swing and land him. So there we was at it—I holdin' Mike, and Mitch and Kit squared off boxin' like mad. I gave Mike the swing and tumbled him, and then lay on him and held him down. But it was awful hard and he was gradually gettin' away from me, and strikin' me in the chest and sometimes in the face. He had big fists and an awful punch. Mean- time I was watchin' Mitch and Kit as much as I could and neither of 'em seemed to have much the best of it, when all of a sudden I heard a voice say "Stop that," and there was Henry Hill, the town mar- shal, drivin' a lot of kids ahead of him. Well, we all stopped fightin'. And what do you suppose? Jerry Sharp who had a garden near Fillmore Creek had complained about the boys goin' in swimmin' where his girls settin' out tomato plants could see. So the marshal had come down and arrested 'em and was drivin' 'em into town.

He just added Mitch and me and Kit and Mike to the crowd and took us all in. When we got to the calaboose, he unlocked the door and started to put us in. Then he laughed and said, "Now go home." And so we hustled away.

CHAPTER V

IT WARN'T more'n a day or two after this that my pa said that Old Bender's house had burned down the night before, and he thought maybe the old feller had set it afire. You see the story still clung about Nancy Allen, and maybe he'd killed
her, and my pa bein' the States Attorney started to look into it.

Mitch and me and little Billie were sittin' on the steps listenin' to Mitch readin' Tom Sawyer, and my sister was there too. She always seemed in the way somehow, because she looked so steady with big eyes and every now and then would ask questions that Mitch couldn't answer or no one. While we was sittin' there my pa drove up in a rig, and said he was drivin' out to Bender's house that was burned, and wanted ma to go. She couldn't, and so I spoke up and asked him to take Mitch and me, and he said get in. Then little Billie began to cry to go—but pa said no, and I did. But when we got on the way, I saw tears in Mitch's eyes, and he said, "I'll never go again and leave little Billie. It ain't fair and I can't stand it." Mitch was the tenderest hearted boy you ever see.

By and by we got out there, and sure enough the house was burned down, all fallen into the cellar. And Old Bender was pokin' around, and his wife and the boy with the big mouth. Nigger Dick was there cleanin' things away. My pa had sent him out to do it. We began to fuss around too and pa was askin' Old Bender how the fire started and all that.

Well, sir, what do you suppose? I got down in the cellar and began to scrape around and kick ashes and sticks around; and all at once I struck iron or something, and I scraped off the ashes and things and there was a soap kettle turned upside down, and sunk like in the dirt floor of the cellar. I leaned down and tugged and pulled it up and inside was a lot of cans, four or five, and inside the cans the greatest lot of money you ever see. Great big copper coins and silver dollars and paper dollars. Well, I was just paralyzed. I couldn't believe my eyes. Struck it, I says to myself—struck it without any more trouble or worry, and no need to see Tom Sawyer and find out how to find treasure. Here it was before my eyes. After a bit I called out, "Oh, Mitch"—but he was around somers and didn't come till I called again. Then he pecked over into the cellar and I just pointed and couldn't speak. Mitch slid down into the cellar and bent over lookin' at the money, and turned to me and said, "Well, Skeeters, this is all right for you—but not for me. You found it, and I didn't. You've won out, but I've got to go on and find some for my own self."

"Not on your life," says I, "What's mine is yours. And besides we came here together—we've been working together; if we hadn't, you wouldn't have been here, and I wouldn't. It's all because we've been chums and huntin' together—and half of this is yours, just the same as half of it would be mine if you'd happened to get in the cellar first."

Just then Mitch found a piece of paper with Nancy Allen written on it, and a little bundle which he unwrapped and found inside a breast pin with the initials N. A. on it, which showed that the money was Nancy Allen's, saved from sellin' rags and paper. For we remembered when she used to go about with a gunny sack pickin' up old rags, bottles and things.

I was just puttin' the cans into the kettle when pa came up and saw me, and says, "What you got?" Then he saw what it was. And Nigger Dick came up and says, "Bless my soul!" And pa took the kettle up on the ground and began to count the money. "That's mine," I said to pa; but he didn't notice me, just went on countin' till he found out there was about $2000.00. Then he said this money goes to the county. Nancy Allen didn't have any relatives, and it goes to the county. Well, I began to perk up and I said, "Ain't Mrs. Bender her sister—and if it ain't mine for findin' it, why don't it go to her sister?" Pa said: "No, Mrs. Bender ain't her sister, and I know she didn't have any relatives. Anyway, we'll advertise and if no relatives claim the money, it goes to the county."

I began to snuffle. And Mitch says: "Tell me, then, how Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn got to keep what they found. Injun Joe had no relatives, and Judge Thatcher knew the law, or was supposed to; and why didn't that money go to the County?"

"Why, Mitch," said pa, "Don't you know that's just a story? You don't take that for true. You mustn't let a yarn like that get into your head and fix your ideas about things. And it's a good lesson to both of you. You'll find when you grow up that there'll be lots of prizes that are just about to fall in your hands when some superior right takes 'em away. And you'll find that everything that happens in boyhood and on the school yard happens when
you grow up, only on a bigger scale, and
hurts more. And you'll see that every-
thing in life when your grown is just a
repetition of what happens on the school
yard—friendship, games, battles, politics,
everything.”

By this time Nigger Dick had come up
again and he said he'd found some foot-
prints coming to and going away from the
house. It had rained the night before and
the marks had staid. So pa got Old Ben-
der and made him walk and compared the
prints, but they wasn’t the same. And pa
said that was a clue. For Old Bender
claimed he woke up and found the house on
fire. So they took a box and turned it up-
side down over some of the prints and then
pa took the kettle and put it in the rig, and
Old Bender came up and said that he knew
Nancy Allen had some money, but
he didn’t know where she kept it. Then
we drove away.

Pa was quiet, like he was thinkin’. But
I could see Mitch was mad, not that he
expected any of the money, but because he
wanted me to have it and thought I de-
served it.

We drove past the Old Salem mill com-
in’ home. We’d fished there lots of times,
Mitch and I—not this summer yet, but
other summers. We used to sit on the dam
and fish. And pa hadn’t hardly said a
word till we came to the mill. Then he
said, “If you boys are lookin’ for treasure,
why don’t you come here?” He knew we’d
been diggin’ in Montgomery’s woods, but
didn’t say nothin’. Then Mitch says,
“Where would you dig—along the shore
or where? Or is there a cave around
here?” Pa said whoa and stopped the
horses. He said “Look up there. Don’t
that look like Cardiff’s hill in Tom Saw-
ker?” “Well, it does,” said Mitch.

Here was a high hill hanging right over
the road and about twict as high as the
mill, or maybe more, with a road winding
up to the top. And pa says: “More
treasure was found on the top of that hill
than anywhere in the world, and who
knows, maybe some is left there yet. Now
I’m goin’ to take Nancy Allen’s money and
put it in my vault in the court house. You
boys can’t have it. It’s against the law.
But I promise you that any treasure you
find here, I’ll let you keep.”

I felt better now, and Mitch’s eyes were
standin’ out of his head. Then pa said,
“Get up” to the horse, and we drove into
Petersburg about a mile. Mitch tried to
get pa to say where it was best to dig; but
pa said: “You boys go out there—see
what you can find, dig around too, if you
want to, and tell me what you find.”

We got into town after a while and pa
took the kettle with all the cans out of the
rig and we followed him into his office and
saw him put ‘em into the vault and close
the door and turn the knob. It was worse
than buryin’ a pet dog to see this. It took
away our hopes. But there was no help
for it. So we walked out and Mitch said,
“If you’ll come up to supper, I’ll come
back to your house and stay all night.”
“That’s a go,” I said, “And besides to-
morrow is Saturday, and you promised to
help me make garden, if I’d help you.”
And Mitch said all right, and so we went
to his house.

The Miller family was awful big, five
girls and Mitch, and all the healthiest
children you ever saw, fat and rosy and
full of fun; and we had the best times
there you ever knew of. And Mr. Miller
was always reading to Mrs. Miller, with all
the children racin’ through the house and
laughin’. It made no difference—he read
right on; but sometimes Mrs. Miller would
look up from her sewin’ and say, “Read
that over, Robert, I lost that,” and that
would be when the children made such a
noise you couldn’t hear nothin’. So when
we got to the house, there was Mr. Miller,
readin’ English history to Mrs. Miller, and
the children already playin’ blind man’s
buff, and makin’ a terrible noise, though
it was before supper. Zueline Hasson had
come over and was goin’ to stay to supper
too. She was Angela Miller’s friend be-
sides bein’ Mitch’s sweetheart. You ought
to have seen Mitch look when he saw
Zueline. He just stood a minute like he
was lookin’ at an angel he was afraid of.

Pretty soon Mrs. Miller said she had to
have a bucket of water, and Mitch went
to pump it, and Zueline went with him.
The sun was down now, but it was bright
day, and the robins were singin’ their heads
off, and the air smelt of grass and flowers.
I stood at the kitchen window and watched
Mitch pump a cup of water for Zueline
and hand it to her. And I knew what it
meant; for Mitch had told me that he
couldn’t be near her without a lump comin’
into his throat. He said it was like re-
ligion, for Mitch had got religion too, and he'd seen lots of people get it, and he knew what it was. And as for Zueline, she thought Mitch was the finest boy in town, which he was.

By and by we set down to supper. There was nine of us, and the awfulest giggin' and talkin' you ever heard, even before Mr. Miller had hardly finished sayin' grace. We had oat-meal and eggs and biscuits and jam and milk; and Mr. Miller was talkin' English history to Mrs. Miller, no more disturbed by us children than if we wasn't there. After that we played blind man's buff. And every time Mitch could find Zueline, and trace her about the room, though she didn't make any noise at all, and I knew he couldn't see. It was almost spooky.

Before we started to go Mitch said he had to feed Fanny, which was his dog that he loved most to death. Fanny was about to have some puppies, and he kept her in the barn. So we made up a dish of things and went out to the barn, Mitch whistlin' all the way and callin' to her. "That's funny," said Mitch, "She doesn't answer. I wonder why." We got to the barn and opened the door and he called again, but no Fanny. Then he went in and tramped around the stalls but couldn't find her. So Mitch went back to the house for a lantern and we looked all through the barn and finally all around the barn. And pretty soon he saw her lyin' by the barn. She was dead—all over blood. Somebody had run a great knife like a scythe or a corn-cutter through her. And I never see a boy cry like Mitch did. He ran back and told Zueline and she and all the children came out and most of us cried. Then Mr. Miller came out and Mrs. Miller, and Mr. Miller said he believed Doc Lyon had done it—that he had seen him in the alley in the afternoon. And Mitch said he'd kill Doc Lyon. And that scared Mrs. Miller, and she said, "Keep away from him, Mitchie, he's gone crazy over religion and he'll kill you." "It's a good day," said Mitch, "Skeet loses his treasure, and my dog's killed—it's a good day." Then Zueline took Mitch's hand and said, "Never mind, my pa's goin' to get me an Ayrdale and I'll make him get two, one for you." So we threw a blanket over Fanny and Mitch took Zueline home, and I went home and waited for Mitch to come.

When he did come he was in better spirits. Zueline had cheered him up. He said he worshipped her—that he'd kill anyone who spoke a bad word about her, and that he intended to protect her as long as he lived.

Then Mitch and me went to my house. It was now about ten o'clock, and pa hadn't come home. There seemed to be a lot stirrin' someway, and ma said, "Your father is very busy, and we'll all go to bed and not wait for him. He has a key of his own." So pretty soon we were all in bed with the lights out. And in about a minute we heard the latch in the stairway door begin to rattle, and ma says "What's that?" and called down and said, "Is that you, pa?" No answer, just the rattlin'. Well, ma had bolted the door-on the inside, and whoever it was couldn't open the door at once, but kept up the rattlin'. Then ma turned white and said, "One of you boys must go for George Montgomery. I'll let one of you out of the window and the other must stay here and help to fight." Mitch said, "You go, Skeet, you're a faster runner than me, and maybe he'll hop after you, whoever he is. I'll stay here and take a bed-slat and brain him as he comes up the stairway." "No," says I, "I think it's more dangerous to stay than to go—let's draw straws to see who goes." Mean-time ma took a sheet off the bed. We drew straws and the lot fell to me to go. So ma let me down by the sheet. No sooner did I reach the ground than bang went the dining room window and the man was after me.

I went over the first fence like a deer, the man after me. I ran up the road, took the back fence of Montgomery's place, and ran up the arbor way. I knew the land, the feller after me didn't. I lost him somewhere. In a minute I was under George's window, calling. He was still up and he came right down with his walking stick and a pistol, just as good natured and comfortin' as he could be.

George went all through the house, but found no one. Then we went to the barn, but found nothing. As we were coming back, I saw someone drop down behind the raspberry bushes. George saw it too, and made for the fellow. He fired at us. The bullet whizzed past Mitch's head, and we dropped in the grass. But George went on, shooting as he went, and finally got up.
to the fellow and struck his arm down as he was about to fire. Then he grabbed him and took away his pistol. And there was Doc Lyon.

CHAPTER VI

THE next mornin' Nigger Dick came to beat carpets, for ma was cleanin' house; and Mitch and me were makin' garden, and talkin' to Nigger Dick. He was the funniest nigger you ever saw and the best hearted, except when he was drunk, then he was cross and mumbled to himself. His wife was Dinah who wore circle ear-rings and used to cook for the Bransons when they had lots of company. The Bransons were the richest people in town and had lots of parrots and poodles, and Mrs. Branson et snuff. They was from Virginia, ma said; and Mitch and I used to talk to Dinah over the back fence when she was cookin' there. She wore a red bandanna around her head, and she used to say, "Look heah, you boys, if you see that nigger drinkin', you come and tell me, cuz I ain't goin' to live with him no more if he drinks." Then she'd hand us out cookies or somethin', and say go along.

Nigger Dick was singin':

Nicolaeus was a slave of African birth,  
Who was bought for a purse full of gold.  
and beaten' carpets, and doin' whatever ma told him. She kept changing her mind and would say: "Here, Dick, help me with this picture. Now you can leave that and set out this geranium. Here, Dick, that can go for a while, go down to the barn and bring up that barrel there and put this stuff in it."

Dick knew ma, and bein' disorderly himself, didn't care what he did, or whether he finished anything. So he kept saying "Yes'm," "Yes'm," and workin' away. So every time Dick got near us, we'd talk to him and get him to tell us about his father which was a slave, or about Kentucky. Little Billie was playin' near us, for Mitch was makin' him a little onion bed, and Dick was ridin' little Billie on his shoulder, and he was as gay as a gay-bird and singin'. One of his songs was:

Oh, said a wood-pecker settin' on a tree,  
I once courted a fair ladee.  
She proved fickle and from me fled,  
And ever since then my head's been red.

And Babylon is fallin' was another of his songs, and Angel Gabriel. Mitch would rather be around where Nigger Dick was than anyone. He almost laughed himself sick that mornin'.

Well, we told Nigger Dick about catchin' Doc Lyon, and we took him around to where I had been let down by the sheet, and showed him how I had run and jumped the fence to get away. Nigger Dick began to act awful mysterious and say, "You can't fool this nigger," and he kept goin' back and forth from the window to the fence, lookin' at the ground. And by and by he went and asked ma if he could go down town. He wanted to see my pa about somethin'. So he went off, and Mitch and I went on makin' garden, till ma came and set us to work buildin' a flower bed. That was one trouble with ma, you no sooner got started on one thing than she changed her mind and wanted you to do somethin' else. "Never mind," said Mitch, "we're havin' fun, whatever it is.- But what do you suppose your pa meant by sayin' that that hill above the Old Salem Mill had given up more treasure than any place in the world? Who got it? Now pa says that Linkern lived there once and kept store, but he didn't get it. He was so poor that he used to have welts on his legs from wearin' the same buckskin pants. That's what pa says. So if he didn't get the treasure, who did? It couldn't be Mr. Branson, for he got his start raisin' onions and peddlin' 'em here in town. All the same, your pa must have meant somethin'. But I tell you, Skeet, we've lost this Saturday, and it's too far to go after school. So I say let's go out there next Saturday—start early and prospect around as they say—look the land over. And keep goin' till we clean the place up, like we did Montgomery's woods."

Just then pa and Nigger Dick drove up. Pa had a shoe in his hand and went and began to put the shoe in the prints where Doc Lyon had run from the window to the fence. "It fits," says Dick, and laughed, and I said to pa, "What you got, Doc Lyon's shoe?" And pa said, kind of gruff and absent minded, "Yes." "Well," says I, "You don't need any shoe to tell it was Doc Lyon that chased me." Pa didn't answer me. He said, "Come on, Dick," and they started for the buggy. Ma came runnin' to the door and said, "Where you
goin’, Dick? The carpets must be cleaned and laid.” “I don’t know,” says Dick, “I’m in the hands of the law.” “Back after while,” said pa, as he gave the horse a tap with the whip and drove off.

Ma stood in the door and said: “No order, no system, never anything done. It’s just too discouraging. Just as I get Dick and have him well started at work, your pa comes and takes him off.” Then she turned to us and said, “Don’t work any more on the flower bed. Come with me. I want you boys to build a chicken coop. The old hen must be shut up tonight, and you must hurry.” Mitch smiled a little, but we went into the back yard and got some lath and made the coop.

Well, after while Nigger Dick came back. They had driven out to Bender’s place and put the shoe in the foot-prints out there, and sure enough they fit and pa had gone to the jail and quizzed Doc Lyon about the fire and he had confessed and told everything. And that wasn’t all. “Why,” said Nigger Dick, “That Doc Lyon is the devil himself. He killed Nancy Allen—Yes, he did. He says so. And that ain’t all. He killed your dog, Mitch. And even that ain’t all; all these cows that got cut so they couldn’t give milk, he cut ‘em—yes sir, that devil cut ‘em. And your pa is goin’ to have him hanged. And that ain’t all. If he’d got up stairs last night, he’d a killed your ma. Yes, sir. He’s the awtulest devil in this county. And you see where he used to go to Sunday school and walk the streets readin’ the Bible, he was just playin’ possum. He’d sold himself to the devil and he was tryin’ to hide it.”

I said to Mitch, “Was Injun Joe ever in jail?” Mitch said “Skeet, you don’t act like sense sometimes. You know dern well he was in jail. How could he get into court if he wasn’t in jail? Don’t you remember when Tom was testifyin’ agin him that he broke loose and jumped through the court house window and escaped, and nobody ever saw him again until Tom found his body at the door of McDougal’s cave?”

“Well,” says I, “he might have been out on bail.” “What’s that?” said Mitch. “I don’t know,” says I, “it’s a way to keep from goin’ to jail, and since the book don’t say that Injun Joe was in jail, I’ll bet you he never was. Poor old Muff Potter was in jail after the murder and he didn’t kill anybody. It was Injun Joe that did the killin’. And don’t you remember that Tom and Huck went to the jail one night and stood on each other’s backs so they could talk to Muff through the bars?” “I have an idea,” says Mitch, “let’s go to the jail tonight and talk to Doc Lyon. Your pa and Jasper Rutledge, the sheriff, are friends, and he knows us. And besides, Joe Pink is in jail. Look at it: Joe Pink is Muff Potter and Doc Lyon is Injun Joe, and we’ll go to see ’em just like Tom and Huck went to see Muff Potter. Only, as I said before, Skeet, you’re no more like Huck than my pa is like Nigger Dick.”

“Well,” says I, “it makes no difference. We’ll go. For you can bet Doc Lyon will never be free again, and we can look at him and ask him questions, and see what he has to say.”

We got down to the jail about dusk, and Mitch insisted on rollin’ a barrel up to the window and climbin’ up on it, so as to make it as much like Tom Sawyer as possible. The window was too high for us to stand on each other’s backs. Just as we got the barl up, along comes Jasper Rutledge, the sheriff, and he says, “Hey, what you boys doin’?” “We want to talk to Doc Lyon,” says I. “What about?” says he. “About my dog,” says Mitch. The sheriff looked at us curious for a minute and says, “If I let you talk to him, will you promise not to tease him or get him mad?” “Yes, Mr. Rutledge,” both of us said. “Well then,” said the sheriff, “don’t fool around with that barl; I’ll let you inside the jail and you can stand comfortable and talk to him.” Mitch didn’t know what to say to this. He just toed the ground with his toe, and finally said, “We’d rather stand on the barl, Mr. Rutledge.” I knew what he meant. It wouldn’t be like Tom Sawyer to go inside. And the sheriff laughed and said, “Well, I’ll swan, have it your way. But mind you, I’m going to hide and hear what is said, for I want to hear what he says about all this devilish work. But if you tease him or say anything out of the way, I’ll stop it and drive you off.”

So we promised and Mitch rolled the barl up to the winder and we both stood on it and looked in. First thing we see was Joe Pink. He was in there for bein’ drunk, and beatin’ his wife. And he went
on to tell about his life, how he'd most worked himself to death tryin' to support her and the children, and how she couldn't cook, and how she never had the meals ready, and how he'd come home so hungry he could eat glue, and she'd be talkin' over the back fence with Laura Bates, and how he didn't like her any more anyway, because she had lost most of her teeth, and spluttered her words. Then he'd get drunk, he said, to forget. And just then a voice said, "No drunkard shall enter the kingdom of heaven." It was Doc Lyon in a separate place, behind another iron door. And Joe Pink turned on him and said: "I suppose dog killers and house burners and cow-cutters and murderers get in. They do, do they? Well, you can send Joe Pink down to the devil. I don't want to go nowhere where you go—you can bet on that."

By this time we could see clear into the dark, and there stood Doc Lyon, quiet like, his hands holding the bars, awful white hands, and his eyes bright like a snake's when it raises up to strike. Then Doc Lyon began to talk. First he was talking about Mitch's dog. He said it wasn't decent to have that dog around where children could see her, and that he had killed her because God told him to. Then he began to talk the Bible and talk about Oholibah and say: "She doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians, her neighbors, which were clothed with blue, governors and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses. And I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal with thee in fury; they shall take away thy nose and thine ears; and thy residue shall fall by the sword. They shall also strip thee of thy clothes and take away thy fair jewels." And so he went on for a long time. And Mitch whispered to me, "he's quoting from Ezekiel"—Mitch had heard his pa read it to his ma and he knew it.

Then Doc Lyon went on to talk about my ma, and to say that he didn't mean to kill her, but only to cut off her ears and her nose, because she was too pretty, and was an abomination to the Lord because she was so pretty, and the Lord had told him to do it. And then he said the Lord had told him to remove Nancy Allen because she lived with Old Bender and his wife, and it wasn't right. He was awful crazy; for if ever there was a harmless old couple and a harmless old woman, it was the Benders and Nancy Allen. And why did he want to kill her for livin' with the Benders? She had to live sommers, and didn't have any home of her own.

We didn't have to say hardly a word—Doc Lyon just went on and told about settin' Bender's house on fire to purify the abomination of the dwelling, he said, where Nancy Allen had lived.

We heard enough and slid off the bar. Then Jasper Rutledge came out and said: "Can you boys remember what he said? For that's a free confession he made, and you must testify, and I will. There'll be a hangin' in this jail, before the snow flies."

I was so scared and shook up that I was afraid to sleep alone. So as we went by, I asked ma if I could stay all night with Mitch. She said yes. So when we got to Mitch's home, Mr. Miller was readin' to Mrs. Miller about Linkern and the girls were playing like mad. We forgot everything, until finally Mitch motioned to me and we went out doors. Mitch said: "I was goin' to have a funeral over Fanny, but I can't stand it, Skeet. Let's just you and I bury her, here by the barn." So we dug a grave and buried Fanny, and Mitch cried. And then we went into the house and went to bed.

CHAPTER VII

THE next day was Sunday, and the wonderfulest day you ever saw. We had an early breakfast, for Mr. Miller was drivin' into the country that day to preach, and Mrs. Miller was goin' with him and the girls had to get the dinner. So nobody had to go to Sunday school, and I could keep out of it by not goin' home in time. A thought came to me and I said to Mitch, "You never saw my grandpa's farm—we can walk out there before noon and have dinner, and maybe get a lift on the way. And maybe grandpa or someone will drive us in in the morning in time for school." Mitch was crazy to go and see the farm; so we struck out, down through the town, under the trestle bridge, up the hill, past Bucky Gum's big brick house, past the fair grounds, and along the straight road between the wheat fields. It was wonder-ful, and we sang and threw clods at birds.
and talked over plans about goin' to see Tom Sawyer. For Mitch said: "We'll try this Old Salem place, and if that doesn't pan out, then we'll go to Hannibal. Tom'll tell us; and if he can't, we'll see his crowd anyway and have a good time. And besides, I'm lookin' forward now to somethin'. I'm goin' to lose Zueline—I feel it all through. And if I do, it's time to get away from here and forget."

"What do you mean by lose her?" says I, "You'll always be in the same town and in the same school, and you'll always be friends."

"Oh, yes," said Mitch, "but that's just the trouble—to be in the same town and the same school and not to have her the same. I've got a funny feelin', Skeet—it's bound to happen. And anyway, if it don't, we must be up and doin' and get the treasure and then square off for somethin' else. And if I get it and all goes well, maybe Zueline and me will marry and be happy here. That's the way I want it."

It must have been two hours before we got to the edge of the wood where Joe Gordon lived. And I showed Mitch the oak tree where Joe had peeled off the bark to make tea for the rheumatism or somethin'. My grandma had told me. Finally we crossed the bridge over the creek, and climbed the hill. "There," I said to Mitch, "that's my grandpa's house. Ain't it beautiful—and look at the red barn—and over there, there's the hills of Mason County right by Salt Creek." Mitch's eyes fairly glowed; so then we hurried on to get to the house, which was about half a mile.

There wasn't a soul at home but Willie Wallace, the hired man. He was shavin' himself, goin' to see his girl, and he let us play on his Jews harp and smell the cigars he had in his trunk, which he had perfumed with cinnamon or somethin'. Grandpa and grandma had gone to Concord to church, and Uncle Henry was in town seein' his girl, and the hired girl was off for the day. We were hungry as wolves, so I took Mitch into the pantry where we found a blackberry pie, and a crock of milk, rich with cream. We ate the pie and drank the milk. Then I showed Mitch the barn and the houses, and my saddle. I took him into the work house where the tools were. I showed him the telephone I made which ran down to the tenant's house. And we got out my uncle's wagon and played engine; and went up into the attic to look for books. Mitch found a novel by Scott and began to read; and that was the last of him. I went back to the work house and pulled a kite I had made from the rafters and got it ready to fly.

After while grandpa and grandma came from church and when grandma came out of her room where she had changed her silk dress for a calico dress in order to get dinner, I stepped out from a door and said "Hello, Grandma." "Why, child," she said, "You almost scared me to pieces. What are you doin' here? Where's your popie and your momie?" Then I told her Mitch and I had walked out, and she took me into the kitchen and made me help her. By and by she went into the pantry for somethin' and when she came out she said: "Do you like blackberry pie, Skeet?" "Yes'm," I said. "Well, I guess you do—and you like milk too. And now you go down to the cellar and get another crock of milk—do you hear? And if I hadn't put the other pies in the cupboard in the dining room, there'd be no pie for dinner." "No, grandma, we wouldn't eat more'n one—Mitch and I wouldn't, honest we wouldn't."

Mitch came in, then, and grandma looked at him kind of close and laughed, and asked him if he was goin' to be a preacher like his pa. Well, a funny thing came out. Mr. Miller had preached at Concord that morning, and grandma began to talk about the sermon and say it was the most beautiful she ever heard. Pretty soon she went out of the room for somethin', and Mitch said: "She's the livin' image of Aunt Polly—and so she should be my grandma and not yours; for I'm Tom if anybody is, even if you're not much like Huck."

Then we had dinner, and Mitch was readin' that novel while eatin', and grandma kept sayin', "Eat your dinner Mitch." He did eat, but he was behind the rest of us.

We helped grandma with the dishes. Then she said, "You boys clear out while I take a rest. And after while I'll show you some things." She always took a nap after dinner, lying on a little couch under the two windows in the settin' room, where the fire-place was, and the old clock, and the mahogany chest that had come from North Carolina, given her by her grandmother, and her red-bird in a cage.
Grandpa always fell asleep in his chair while reading the Petersburg Observer, which came the day before.

So Mitch and I walked through the orchard, and when we came back, I showed him the carriage with glass windows and the blue silk curtain; and the white horses which grandpa always drove. But we didn’t put in the time very well, because we wanted grandma to wake up.

We went in the house at last, and they were talking together. I heard grandpa say something about Doc Lyon. We’d almost forgot that by now. But when we came in the room, grandma said, "Well, here you are," and went over and got out her drawer that had her trinkets in it. She had the greatest lot of pictures in rubber cases you ever saw; soldiers which were dead, and folks who had married and moved away or had died; and a watch which belonged to her son who was drowned before Mitch and I was born; and a ribbon with Linker’s picture on it; and bread pins with hair in ‘em; and sticks of cinnamon. And by and by she went to her closet and got some peach leather, which Mitch had never seen before. And he thought it the best stuff he ever et. You make it by rolling peaches into a thin leather and dryin’ it, and puttin’ sugar and things in it. It’s waxy like gum and chews awful well.

Then she got down her scrap book and read little things that Ben Franklin said, about temperance and work, and study, and savin’ money. She asked Mitch if he had read the Bible through, and Mitch said yes, for he had. “You haven’t,” she said to me—"if you’ll read it through, I’ll give you five dollars." So I promised. “Now,” she said, “You can do it by fall if you’re industrious. Work and play—play hard and work hard, for the night cometh when no man can work.” I never saw Mitch happier than he was this afternoon. The time slipped by, and finally grandma said to me to bring in the cows, she was goin’ to milk. We began to wonder how we’d get back to town. But we went for the cows just the same and watched grandma milk, and helped her with the buckets, and watched her feed her cats. Then we said we must go, at least after supper. “How can you go?” said grandma, “you can’t walk tonight. It’s too far. Willie Wallace is going in town early with a load of corn, and you can ride.” That suited us. So we had supper, fried mush and eggs and milk. Then we had prayers; and grandma put us in the west room up stairs where there was a picture of Alfaratta, the Indian maid. And I think we would be sleepin’ yet if she hadn’t come in to wake us.

We rode in with Willie Wallace and got to the school yard before eight o’clock. Mitch and I agreed that this was the longest school day we ever spent.

CHAPTER VIII

School interfered a good deal with huntin’ treasure, but things happened now and then to let us out. The professor looked exactly like Tom Sawyer’s teacher, except ours wore a beard. He seemed awful old and kind of knotty and twisty. I think he must have been near sixty, and he had been a preacher, and lost his pulpit and so turned to teachin’. We could see he was pretty rusty about a lot of things. You can’t fool boys much, and you couldn’t fool Mitch and me.

The professor’s name was Professor Taylor. He had a low forehead with his hair lyin’ flat like a wig—and creases across his forehead where he had been worryin’. And one of his shoulders was kind of humped up and to one side, and one of his hands had a stuff thumb. He couldn’t keep order in the school at all, because some of the big boys like Charley King and George Heigold kept somethin’ goin’ all the time. And these big boys got the rest of us into things like throwin’ chalk and sometimes erasers, or all together droppin’ our geographies of a sudden. Then the professor would tap the bell and say, “The tap of the bell is the voice of the teacher—who dropped their geographies, who was it?” Then things would get worse and there would be a noise like a political meetin’. Pa said he war’n’t fit to run a school, but the directors kept him in because he was related to the president of the board. And most every mornin’ for exercises he would read the 19th psalm, which says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple,” generally lookin’ at me when he said simple, because I couldn’t learn very well. Then he would start the song with a tuning
fork, "Too-do" and generally somebody would cough like he had an awful cold and so start the noise. Then lots would cough and he'd have to wait before singin' "The Shades of Night Was Falling Fast." Then he would talk to us about bein' good. And onct when Ella Stephens died over at Springfield, where she had been for some kind of an operation, you couldn't find out what, because nobody would say, he got up and said that God would forgive Ella and all of us should pray for her. Most of us cried, rememberin' Ella's red cheeks and how she used to laugh when she came in the school room. She was about 16.

And one mornin' school seemed to go all to pieces. This George Heigold was studyin' geometry and he came to me and says, before school took up: "When I go to the blackboard to demonstrate in geometry, I'll wink at you and then you drop your reader or somethin', Mitch will do the same, and then I'll get through, I'll show you. For I ain't studied the lesson." I said all right.

So when the geometry class was recitin', there was four in it, George and Charley King, and Bertha Whitney and Mary Pitkin, the girls bein' awful smart, and always havin' their lessons. The professor turned to George Heigold and says: "George, you may demonstrate proposition three." Then the professor gave Bertha proposition four, and Mary proposition five, and Charley proposition six. But meantime George didn't get up to draw his figure, on the black board, though the rest did. He was lookin' in the book so he could draw it; and finally the professor said, "Did you hear me, George?" "Yes, sir," said George, "but I was tryin' to think out a different way to demonstrate this here proposition from the way the book says." And the professor says: "If you demonstrate it the way the book does, that will be very well, and I'll give you a hundred." So then George hopped right up and drew a fine figure on the board and lettered it, and was just about to set down and study the book, as I could see, because he was eyein' the professor and expectin' that some of the others would be called on first, and while the professor was watchin' somebody else demonstrate, he could study up. But it happened wrong: George was called on first. So he got up, lookin' at me to give me the wink, and he began: "Supposin' A-B is a straight line, and supposin' B-C is a straight line, and supposin' C-D is a straight line, and supposin' these here lines are all joined so as to make a triangle." Then the professor got to his side and made it so George couldn't see me to wink, and he says: "No, no, George." And George says, "Very well, I have an original demonstration." And the professor says: "Original, original—just follow the book, just follow the book." Of course, George couldn't, and so he stepped back and gave me the wink, and I dropped my reader, Mitch dropped his reader. Percy Guyer, an awful nervous boy, started like, and flung his ink well off. Then there was a lot of coughin' and some laughin', and the professor went wild and says, "What is the matter? What can be the matter now?" And he turned to George and says, in a mad way, "Take your seat." So George did, and began to study the demonstration. And after while it got quiet and the professor went on with Mary and Bertha who got a hundred. Charley King got through fair, and probably got 75. And there sat George and the class was about to be dismissed without George recitin', when George raised his hand and said: "I'll do my best to demonstrate the way you want me to. I don't want to lose my chance." So the professor just smiled awful friendly on George and says all right. And George got up and recited perfect, according to the book and got 100. I never saw such a boy as George Heigold; for once the professor got up an astronomy class—the whole school mostly was in it—and he was teachin' us general things about the stars and what they was made of. So one day the professor called out quick as a test of what he had told us before: "What element is found on the planet Mars that is not found anywhere else in the universe?" And George Heigold who was sittin' way back yelled out "Sapolio"—and the whole school went wild, into a roar of laugh. While the professor marched up and down flippin' his coat tails with his hands and sayin', "Who said Sapolio? Who said Sapolio?" But no one told and he couldn't find out.

So on this day when George Heigold got a hundred in geometry, somethin' else happened. It was a warm day and you could hear bees out-side, and the trees was beginnin' to show green. All of us was so sleepy we could hardly stay awake, and I
could look out of the window and see the river and the hills on the other side, and I could even see people fishin'. Well, near noon we all began to smell somethin' like onions, and it got worse and worse, and seemed to come up from the registers, for Jas Walker, the janitor was keepin' a little fire yet, or had for early mornin'. And the professor got over the register and smelt and he says, "Who put asoefetida in the furnace—who did such a cowherd thing as that?" Nobody said nothin'. It was a surprise to me, and to Mitch, but we were tickled for we could see what was comin'. The smell got worse and worse, and Jas Walker came runnin' through the room and lookin' in registers. Then everybody began to cough in earnest, only George Heigold coughed louder than a cow, and Bertha Whitney, bein' delicate, fainted and there was a lot of runnin' to her, pickin' her up and fetchin' her water. And the school room went wild. The professor lost hold of everything and got white and walked back and forth flappin' his coat tails with his hands. Till finally he said, "School's dismissed for the day." Then we all got up and busted out, singing and laughing. So Mitch and me went to dinner and then hurried off to Old Salem to dig for treasure.

When we got to the mill, Jim Lally was already there and was fishin' and had caught a big cat. They was bitin' good. And he says: "How did you boys like the asoefetida?" We said pretty well. And then he said, "If anybody says I did that and you tell it, I'll lick you both, so you can't stand up." Jim was 16 or 17 and big and we knew he meant it. But Mitch laughed and said: "Why would we tell it? Ain't we off for the afternoon the same as you?"

So we went up and dug, but didn't find nothin'. And finally while we was diggin' away, all of a sudden I saw a big snake in the weeds, all coiled, and Mitch didn't see it at first. For all of a sudden it kind of sprang out like a spring you let loose and bit Mitch on the hand. Mitch gave an awful cry and began to suck the place where the snake bit him. I says, "Don't do that, Mitch, you have a tooth out, and the pisen will get in you there. What's the use of takin' it out one place and puttin'
it in another?" I grabbed a stick then and killed the snake. Mitch got pale and began to be sickish and I was scared to death. And we ran down to the road as fast as we could. Just then a wagon came along, and I hollered to the man; so he came over and lifted Mitch into the wagon and laid him down, and we put the snake into the wagon too, for I had carried it along; and the man whipped up his horses fast so as to get into town for a doctor.

Mitch's hand didn't swell, but he kept gettin' sicker and sicker, and was moanin' and about to die; and the man drove faster and faster, for he said the snake was one of the most pisen. When we got to the square, Mr. Miller happened to be walkin' along. And the man drew up and said to Mr. Miller, "Here's your boy; bit by a snake." "What kind?" says Mr. Miller, all excited. "Here he is," said the man, and held up the snake. Mr. Miller says, "Oh, fiddlesticks! That's a blue racer, as harmless as the peck of a chicken." Then he took hold of Mitch and shook him and says: "Here, Mitch, this is all foolishness—you're just scart; that snake ain't pisen. He can't hurt you more than a chicken." So Mitch sat right up and looked at his hand which wasn't swelled. And he says: "I am pisened, I'm sick." "Oh, shucks," said Mr. Miller, "It's just imagination. Come into the drug store and get a soda."

Mitch climbed out of the wagon, kind of pale yet, but more sheepish and went in and drank his soda and began to laugh. And Mr. Miller said: "Where was you?" And Mitch said "down by the mill." And Mr. Miller said, "Now, listen; you've had a scare, but there is only two snakes around here that is pisen. One is the copperhead. You can tell him by his bright copper colored head and his strawberry body; the other is the rattlesnake. You can tell him by his rattle. But if you don't be careful foolin' around in the woods and dreamin' and not watchin' what you're doin', one of them will bite you. Now look here, you go home and get in the wood and help around the house." So Mitch says, "Come on, Skeet, and help me, and for company." So I went and helped Mitch with his work.

TO BE CONTINUED

ROMANCE
Dr. Owen Francis felt a sudden wave of pleasure and admiration sweep over him as he saw her enter the room. He was in the act of going out; in fact he had already said good-by to his hostess, glad to make his escape from the chattering throng, when the tall and graceful young woman glided past him. Her carriage was superb; she had black eyes with a twinkling happiness in them; her mouth was exquisite. Round her neck, in spite of the warm afternoon, she wore a soft thing of fur or feathers; and as she brushed by to shake the hand he had just shaken himself, the tail of this touched his very cheek. Their eyes met fair and square. He felt as though her eyes also touched him.

Changing his mind he lingered another ten minutes, chatting with various ladies he did not in the least remember, but who remembered him. He did not, of course, desire to exchange banalities with these other ladies, yet did so gallantly enough. If they found him absent-minded, they excused him, since he was the famous mental specialist whom everybody was proud to know. And all the time his eyes never left the tall graceful figure that allured him almost to the point of casting a spell upon him.

His first impression deepened as he watched. He was aware of excitement, curiosity, longing; there was a touch even of exaltation in him; yet he took no steps to seek the introduction which was easily enough procurable. He checked himself, if with an effort. Several times their eyes met across the crowded room, he dared to believe—he felt instinctively that his interest was returned. Indeed it was more than instinct, for she was certainly aware of his presence and he even caught her indicating him to a woman she spoke with, and evidently asking who he was. Once he half bowed, and once, in spite of himself, he went so far as to smile, and there came, he was sure, a faint delicious brightening of the eyes in answer. There was, he fancied, a look of yearning in the face. The young woman charmed him inexpressibly; the very way she moved delighted him. Yet at last he slipped out of the room without a word, without an introduction, without even knowing her name. He chose his moment when her back was turned. It was characteristic of him.

For Owen Francis had ever regarded marriage, for himself at least, as a disaster that could be avoided. He was in love with his work, and his work was necessary to humanity. Others might perpetuate the race, but he must heal it. He had come to regard love as the bait wherewith Nature
lays her trap to fulfil her own ends. A man in love was a man enjoying a delusion, a deluded man. In his case, and he was nearing forty-five, the theory had worked admirably, and the dangerous exception that proved it had as yet not troubled him.

"It's come at last, I do believe," he thought to himself as he walked home, a new tumultuous emotion in his blood; "the exception, quite possibly, has come at last. I wonder."

And it seemed he said it to the tall graceful figure by his side, who turned up dark eyes smilingly to meet his own, and whose lips repeated softly his last two words "I wonder."

The experience, being new to him, was baffling. A part of his nature, long dormant, received the authentic thrill that pertains actually to youth. He was a man of chaste, abstemious custom. The reaction was vehement. That dormant part of him became obstreperous. He thought of his age, his appearance, his prospects; he looked twenty-eight, he was not unhandsome, his position was secure, even remarkable. That gorgeous young woman—he called her gorgeous—haunted him. Never could he forget that face, those eyes. It was extraordinary—he had left her there unspoken to, unknown, when an introduction would have been the simplest thing in the world.

"But it still is," he reflected. And the reflection filled his being with a flood of joy.

He checked himself again. Not so easily is established habit routed. He felt instinctively that, at last, he had met his mate; if he followed it up he was a man in love, a lost man enjoying a delusion, a deluded man. By the way she had looked at him! That air of intuitive invitation which not even the sweetest modesty could conceal! He felt an immense confidence in himself; also he felt sure of her.

He read and tossed aside the letters; only one interested him, from Edward Farque, whose journey to China had interrupted a friendship of long standing. Edward Farque's work on Eastern art and philosophy, on Chinese painting and Chinese thought in particular, had made their mark. He was an authority. He was to be back about this time, and his friend smiled with pleasure.

"Dear old unpractical dreamer, as I used to call him," he mused. "He's a success anyhow!"

And as he mused, the presence that sat beside him came a little closer, yet at the same time faded. Not that he forgot her—that was impossible—but that just before opening the letter from his friend, he had come to a decision. He had definitely made up his mind to seek acquaintance. The reality replaced the remembered substitute.

"As the newspapers may have warned you," ran the familiar and kingly writing, "I am back in England after what the scribes term 'ten years of exile in Cathay.' I have taken a little house in Hampstead for six months, and am just settling it. Come to us tomorrow night and let me prove it to you. Come to dinner. We shall have much to say; we both are ten years wiser. You know how glad I shall be to see my old-time critic and disparager, but let me add frankly that I want to ask you a few professional, or rather technical, questions. So prepare yourself to come as doctor and as friend. I am writing, as the papers said truthfully, a treatise on Chinese thought. But don't shy—It is about Chinese Magic that I want your technical advice (the last two words were substituted for 'professional wisdom,' which had been crossed out) and the benefit of your vast experience. So come, old friend, come quickly, and come hungry. I'll feed your body as you shall feed my mind.

Yours,

Edward Farque,

P. S. The coming of a friend from a far-off land—is not this true joy?

Dr. Francis laid down the letter with a pleased anticipatory chuckle, and it was the touch in the final sentence that amused him. In spite of being an authority, Farque was clearly the same fanciful, poetic dreamer as of old. He quoted Confucius as in other days. The firm but kingly writing had not altered, either. The only sign of novelty he noticed was the use of scented paper, for a faint and pungent aroma clung to the big quarto sheet.

"A Chinese habit, doubtless," he decided, sniffing it with a puzzled air of dis-
approval. Yet it had nothing in common with the scented cachets some ladies use too lavishly, so that even the air of the street is polluted by their passing for a dozen yards. He was familiar with every kind of perfumed note-paper used in London, Paris and Constantinople. This one was different. It was delicate and penetrating for all its faintness, pleasurable too. He rather liked it, and while annoyed that he could not name it, he sniffed at the letter several times as though it were a flower.

"I'll go," he decided at once, and wrote an acceptance then and there. He went out and posted it. He meant to prolong his walk into the park, taking his chief preoccupation, the face, the eyes, the figure, with him. Already he was composing the note of enquiry to Mrs. Malleson, his hostess of the tea-party, the note whose willing answer should give him the name, the address, the means of introduction he had now determined to secure. He visualized that note of enquiry, seeing it in his mind's eye; only, for some odd reason, he saw the kingly writing of Farque instead of his own more elegant script. Association of ideas and emotions readily explained this. Two new and unexpected interests had entered his life on the same day and within half an hour of each other. What he could not so readily explain, however, was that two words in his friend's ridiculous letter, and in that kingly writing, stood out sharply from the rest. As he slipped his envelope into the mouth of the red-pillar box, they shone vividly in his mind. These two words were "Chinese Magic."

II

It was the warmth of his friend's invitation as much as his own state of inward excitement that decided him suddenly to anticipate his visit by twenty-four hours. It would clear his judgment and help his mind if he spent the evening at Hampstead rather than alone with his own thoughts. "A dose of China," he thought with a smile, "will do me good. Edward won't mind. I'll telephone."

He left the park soon after six o'clock and acted upon his impulse. The connection was bad, the wire buzzed and popped and crackled; talk was difficult; he did not hear properly. The professor had not yet come in, apparently. Francis said he would come up anyhow on the chance.

"Velly pleased," said the voice in his ear, as he rang off.

Going into his study, he drafted the note that should result in the introduction that was now, it appeared, the chief object of his life. The way this woman with the black twinkling eyes obsessed him was— he admitted it with joy—extraordinary. The draft he put in his pocket, intending to rewrite it next morning, and all the way up to Hampstead Heath, the gracious figure glided silently beside him: the eyes were ever present, his cheek still glowing where the feather boa had touched his skin.

Edward Farque remained in the background. In fact, it was on the very doorstep, having rung the bell, that Francis realized he must pull himself together. "I've come to see old Farque," he reminded himself with a smile. "I've got to be interested in him and his, and, probably for an hour or two, to talk Chinese—" when the door opened noiselessly and he saw facing him with a grin of celestial welcome on his yellow face, a Chinaman.

"Oh!" he said with a start. He had not expected a Chinese servant.

"Velly pleased," the man bowed him in.

Dr. Francis stared round him with astonishment he could not conceal. A great golden idol faced him in the hall, its gleaming visage blazing out of a sort of miniature golden palanquin, with a grin half-dignified, half-cruel. Fully double human size, it blocked the way, looking so life-like that it might have moved to meet him without too great a shock to what seemed possible. It rested on a throne with four massive legs, carved, the doctor saw, with serpents, dragons, and mythical monsters generally. Round it on every side were things in keeping. Name them he could not, describe them he did not try. He summed them up in one word—China; pictures, weapons, cloths and tapestries, bells, gongs and figures of every sort and kind imaginable.

Being ignorant of Chinese matters, Dr. Francis stood and looked about him in a mental state of some confusion. He had the feeling that he had entered a Chinese temple, for there was a faint smell of incense hanging about the house that was, to say the least, un-English. Nothing
English, in fact, was visible at all. The matting on the floor, the swinging curtains of bamboo beads that replaced the customary doors, the silk draperies and pictured cushions, the bronze and ivory, the bareness hung with fantastic embroideries, everything was Chinese. Hampstead vanished from his thoughts. The very lamps were in keeping, the ancient lacquered furniture as well. The value of what he saw, an expert could have told him, was considerable.

"You like?" queried the voice at his side.

He had forgotten the servant. He turned sharply.

"Very much; it is wonderfully done," he said. "Makes you feel at home, John, eh?" he added tactfully with a smile, and was going to ask how long this preparation had taken, when a voice sounded on the stairs beyond. It was a voice he knew, a note of hearty welcome in its deep notes.

"The coming of a friend from a far-off land, even from Harley Street—is not this true joy?" he heard, and the next minute he was shaking the hand of his old and valued friend. The intimacy between them had always been of the truest.

"I almost expected a pigtail," observed Francis, looking him up and down affectionately, "but really—why, you've hardly changed at all."

"Outwardly, not as much, perhaps, as Time expects," was the happy reply, "but inwardly!" He scanned appreciatively the burly figure of the doctor in his turn. "And I can say the same of you," he declared, still holding his hand tight. "This is a real pleasure, Owen," he went on in his deep voice. "To see you again is a joy to me. Old friends meeting again—there's nothing like it in life, I believe, nothing." He gave the hand another squeeze before he let it go. "And we," he added, leading the way into a room across the hall, "neither of us are fugitives from life. We take what we can, I mean."

The doctor smiled as he noted the un-English turn of language, and together they entered a sitting-room that was, again, more like some inner chamber of a Chinese temple than a back room in a rented Hampstead house.

"I only knew ten minutes ago that you were coming, my dear fellow," the scholar was saying, as his friend gazed around him with increased astonishment, "or I would have prepared more suitably for your reception. I was out till late. All this—" he waved his hands—"surprises you, of course, but the fact is I have been home ten days already, and most of what you see was arranged for me in advance of my arrival. Hence its apparent completion. I say 'apparent,' because, actually, it is far from faithfully carried out. Yet to exceed," he added, "is as bad as to fall short."

The doctor watched him while he listened to a somewhat lengthy explanation of the various articles surrounding him. The speaker, he confirmed his first impression, had changed little during the long interval; the same enthusiasm was in him as before, the same fire and dreaminess alternately in the fine grey eyes, the same humor and passion about the mouth, the same free gestures, and the same big voice. Only the lines had deepened on the forehead, and on the fine face the air of thoughtfulness was also deeper. It was Edward Farque as of old, scholar, poet, dreamer and enthusiast, despiser of Western civilization, contemptuous of money, generous and upright, a type of venus, an individual.

"You've done well, done splendidly, Edward, old man," said his friend presently, after hearing of Chinese wonders that took him somewhat beyond his depth perhaps. "No one is more pleased than I. I've watched your books. You haven't regretted England, I'll be bound!"

"The philosopher has no country, in any case," was the reply, steadily given. "But out there, I confess I've found my home." He leaned forward, a deeper earnestness in his tone and expression. And into his face, as he spoke, came a glow of happiness. "My heart," he said softly, "is in China."

"I see it is, I see it is," put in the other, conscious that he could not honestly share his friend's enthusiasm. "And you're fortunate to be free to live where your treasure is," he added, after a moment's pause. "You must be a happy man. Your passion amounts to nostalgia, I suspect. Already yearning to get back there probably?"

Farque gazed at him for some seconds with shining eyes. "You remember the Persian saying, I'm sure," he said: "'You
see a man drink, but you do not see his thirst?' Well,' he added, laughing happily, "you may see me off in six months' time, but you will not see my happiness."

While he went on talking, the doctor glanced round the room, marveling still at the exquisite taste of everything, the neat arrangement, the perfect matching of form and color. That a woman might have done this thing occurred to him, as the haunting figure shifted deliciously into the foreground of his mind again. The thought of her had been momentarily displaced by all he now heard and saw. She now returned, filling him with joy, anticipation and enthusiasm. Presently, when it was his turn to talk, he would tell his friend about this new, unimagined happiness that had burst upon him like a sunrise. Presently, but not just yet. He remembered, too, with a passing twinge of possible bittersweetness, that there must be some delay before his own heart could unburden itself in turn. Farque wanted to ask some professional questions, of course. He had for the moment forgotten that part of his letter in his general interest and astonishment.

"Happiness, yes," he murmured, aware that his thoughts had wandered, and catching at the last word he remembered hearing "As you said just now in your own queer way—you haven't changed a bit, let me tell you, in your picturesqueness of quotation, Edward—one must not be fugitive from life; one must seize happiness when and where it offers."

He said it lightly enough, hugging internally his own sweet secret; but he was a little surprised at the earnestness of his friend's rejoinder. "Both of us, I see," came the deep voice, backed by the flash of the far-seeing gray eyes, "have made some progress in the doctrines of life and death." He paused gazing at the other with sight that was obviously turned inwards upon his own thoughts. "Beauty," he went on presently, his tone even more serious, "has been my lure; yours, reality."

"You don't flatter either of us, Edward. That's too exclusive a statement," put in the doctor. He was becoming every minute more and more interested in the workings of his friend's mind. Something about the signs offered eluded his understanding. "Explain yourself, old scholar-poet. I'm dull, practical mind, remember, and can't keep pace with Chinese subtleties."

"You've left out beauty," was the quiet rejoinder, "while I left out reality. That's neither Chinese nor subtle. It's simply true."

"A bit wholesome, isn't it?" laughed Francis. "A big generalization, rather."

A bright light seemed to illumine the scholar's face. It was as though an inner lamp was suddenly lit. At the same moment the sound of a soft gong floated in from the hall outside, so soft that the actual strokes were not distinguishable in the wave of musical vibration that reached the ear.

Farque rose to lead the way in to dinner. "What if I," he whispered, "have combined the two?" And upon his face was a look of joy that reached down into the other's own full heart with its unexpectedness and wonder. It was the last remark in the world he had looked for. He wondered for a moment whether he interpreted it correctly.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Edward, what d'you mean?"

"You shall hear—after dinner," said Farque, his voice mysterious, his eyes still shining with his inner joy. "I told you I had some questions to ask you—professionally."

And they took their seats round an ancient, marvellous table, lit by two shining lamps of soft green jade, while the Chinese servant waited on them with the silent movements and daintiness of his own imperceptible race.

III

To say that he was bored during the meal were an overstatement of Dr. Francis' mental condition, but to say that he was half bored seemed the literal truth; for one-half of him, while he ate his steak and savoury and watched Farque manipulating chou suey and chow om dong most cleverly with chop-sticks, was too preoccupied with his own new romance to allow the other half to give its full attention to the conversation.

He had entered the room, however, with a distinct quickening of what may be termed his instinctive and infallible sense of diagnosis. That last remark of his friend's had stimulated him. He was aware of surprise, curiosity, and im-
patience. Willy-nilly he began automatically to study him with a profounder interest. Something, he gathered, was not quite as it should be in Edward Farque's mental composition. There was what might be called loosely an elusive emotional disturbance. He began to wonder.

They talked, naturally, of China and of things Chinese, for the scholar responded to little else, and Francis listened with what sympathy and patience he could muster. Of art and beauty he had hitherto known little; his mind was practical and utilitarian. He now learned that all art was derived from China, where a high, fine, subtle culture had reigned since time immemorial. Older than Egypt was their wisdom. When the Western races were eating one another, before Greece was even heard of, the Chinese had reached a level of knowledge and achievement that few realized. Never had they, even in earliest times, been deluded by anthropomorphic conceptions of the Deity, but perceived in everything the expressions of a single Whole whose giant activities they reverently worshiped. Their contempt for the Western scurry after knowledge, wealth, machinery, was justified, if Farque was worthy of belief. He seemed saturated with Chinese thought, art, philosophy, and his natural bias towards the Celestial race had hardened into an attitude of life, that had now become ineradicable.

“They deal, as it were, in essences,” he declared. “They discern the essence of everything, leaving out the superfluous, the unessential, the trivial. Their pictures alone prove it. Come with me,” he concluded; “and see the ‘Earthly Paradise,’ now in the British Museum. It is like Botticelli, but better than anything—Botticelli ever did. It was painted,”—he paused for emphasis—“600 years B.C.”

The wonder of this quiet, ancient civilization, a sense of its depth, its wisdom, grew upon his listener as the enthusiastic poet described its charm and influence upon himself. He willingly allowed the enchantment of the other’s paradise to steal upon his own awakened heart. There was a good deal Francis might have offered by way of criticism and objection, but he preferred on the whole to heap his views to himself and to let his friend wander unhindered through the mazes of his passionate avocation. All men, he well knew, needed a dream to carry them through life’s disappointments, a dream that they could enter at will and find peace, contentment, happiness. Farque’s dream was China. Why not? It was as good as another, and a man like Farque was entitled to what dream he pleased.

“And their women?” he inquired at last, letting both halves of his mind speak together for the first time.

But he was not prepared for the expression that leaped up on his friend’s face at the simple question. Nor for his method of reply. It was no reply, in point of fact. It was simply an attack upon all other types of women, and upon the white, the English in particular—their emptiness, their triviality, their want of intuitive imagination, of spiritual grace, of everything in a word that should constitute woman a meet companion for man, and a little higher than the angels into the bargain. The doctor listened spell-bound. Too humorous to be shocked, he was, at any rate, disturbed by what he heard, disdained a little, too. It threatened too directly his own now tender dream.

Only with the utmost self-restraint did he keep his temper under and prevent hot words he would have regretted later from tearing his friend’s absurd claim into ragged shreds. He was wounded personally as well. Never could he bring himself to tell his own secret to him. The outburst chilled and disappointed him. But it had another effect—it cooled his judgment. His sense of diagnosis pierced. He divined an idea fixe, a mania possibly. His interest deepened abruptly. He watched. He began to look about him with more weary eyes, and a sense of uneasiness, once the anger passed, stirred in his friendly and affectionate heart.

They had been sitting alone over their port for some considerable time, the servant having long since left the room. The doctor had sought to change the subject many times without much success, when suddenly Farque changed it for him.

“Now,” he announced, “I’ll tell you something,” and Francis guessed that the professional questions were on the way at last. “We must pity the living, remember, and part with the dead. Have you forgotten old Shan-Yu?”

The forgotten name came back to him,
the picturesque East End dealer of many years ago.

"The old merchant who taught you your first Chinese? I do recall him dimly, now you mention it. You made quite a friend of him, didn’t you? He thought very highly of you—ah, it comes back to me now—he offered something or other very wonderful in his gratitude, unless my memory fails me."

"His most valuable possession," Farque went on, a strange look deepening on his face, an expression of mysterious rapture, as it were, and one that Francis recognized and swiftly pigeon-holed in his now attentive mind.

"Which was?" he asked sympathetically.

"You told me once, but so long ago that it’s really slipped my mind. Something magical, wasn’t it?" He watched closely for his friend’s reply.

Farque lowered his voice to a whisper almost devotional.

"The Perfume of the Garden of Happiness," he murmured, with an expression in his eyes as though the mere recollection gave him joy. "’Burn it,’ he told me, ‘in a brazier; then inhale. You will enter the Valley of a Thousand Temples wherein lies the Garden of Happiness, and there you will meet your love. You will have seven years of happiness with your love before the Waters of Separation flow between you. I give this to you who alone of men have appreciated the wisdom of my land. Follow my body toward the sunrise. You, an Eastern soul in a barbarian body, will meet your destiny.’"

The doctor’s interest—such is the power of self-interest—quickened amazingly as he heard. His own romance flamed up with power. His friend, it dawned upon him suddenly, loved a woman.

"Come," said Farque, rising quietly, "we will go into the other room, and I will show you what I have shown to but one other in the world before. You are a doctor," he continued as he led the way to the silk-covered divan where golden dragons swallowed crimson suns and wonderfully shaded horses hovered near. "You understand the mind and nerves. States of consciousness you also can explain, and the effect of drugs is, doubtless, known to you." He swung to the heavy curtains that took the place of a door, handed a lacquered box of cigarettes to his friend and lit one himself.

"Perfumes, too," he added, "you probably have studied, with their extraordinary evocative power." He stood in the middle of the room, the green light falling on his interesting and thoughtful face, and for a passing second Francis, watching keenly, observed a change flit over it and vanish. The eyes grew narrow and slid tilted upwards, the skin wore a shade of yellow underneath the green from the lamp of jade, the nose slipped back a little, the cheekbones forward.

"Perfumes," said the doctor, "no. Of perfumes I know nothing, beyond their interesting effect upon the memory. I can not help you there. But you, I suspect," and he looked up with an inviting sympathy that concealed the close observation underneath, "you, yourself, I feel sure, can tell me something of value about them."

"Perhaps," was the calm reply. "Perhaps, for I have smelt the Perfume of the Garden of Happiness and I have been in the Valley of a Thousand Temples." He spoke with a glow of reverence and joy almost devotional.

The doctor waited in some suspense, while his friend moved towards an inlaid cabinet across the room. More than broad-minded, he was that much rarer thing, an open-minded man, ready at a moment’s notice to discard all preconceived ideas, provided new knowledge that necessitated the holocaust were shown to him. At present, none the less, he held very definite views of his own. "Please ask me any questions you like," he added. "All I know is entirely yours, as always." He was aware of suppressed excitement in his friend that betrayed itself in every word and look and gesture, an excitement so intense, and not as yet explained by anything he had seen or heard.

The scholar, meanwhile, had opened a drawer in the cabinet and taken from it a neat little packet tied up with purple silk. He held it with tender, almost loving care, as he came and sat down on the divan beside his friend.

"This," he said in a tone of something between reverence and devotion, "contains what I have to show you first." He slowly unrolled it, disclosing a yet smaller silken bag within, colored a deep rich orange. There were two vertical columns of writing on it, painted in Chinese characters. The
doctor leaned forward to examine them. His friend translated:

“The Perfume of the Garden of Happiness,” he read aloud, tracing the letters of the first column with his finger. “The Destroyer of Honorable Homes,” he finished, passing to the second, and then proceeded to unwrap the little silken bag. Before it was actually open, however, and the pale shredded material resembling the colored chaff visible to the eyes, the doctor's nostrils had recognized the strange aroma he had first noticed about his friend's letter received earlier in the day. The same soft, penetrating odor, sharply piercing, sweet and delicate, rose to his brain. Having come to him first when he was aglow with his own unexpected romance, his mind and heart full with the woman he had just left, that delicious, torturing state revived in him quite naturally. The evocative power of perfume with regard to memory is compelling. A livelier sympathy toward his friend, and toward what he was about to hear, awoke in him spontaneously.

He did not mention the letter, however. He merely leaned over to smell the delicious perfume more easily.

Farque drew back the open packet instantly, at the same time holding out a warning hand. “Careful,” he said gravely, “be careful, old friend—unless you desire to share the rapture and the risk that have been mine. To enjoy its full effect, true, this dust must be burned in a brazier and its smoke inhaled; but even sniffed, as you would now sniff it, and you are in danger—”

“Of what?” asked Francis, impressed by the other's extraordinary intensity of voice and manner.

“Of heaven; but, possibly, of heaven before your time.”

IV

The tale that Farque unfolded then had certainly a strange celestial flavor, a glory not of this dull world; and while his friend listened, his interest deepened with every minute, while his bewilderment increased. He watched closely, expert that he was, for clues that might guide his deductions aright, but for all his keen observation and experience he could detect no inconsistency, no weakness, nothing that betrayed the smallest mental aberration.

The origin and nature of what he already decided was an _idée fixée_, a mania, evaded him entirely. This evasion piqued him and vexed him; he had heard a thousand tales of similar type before; that this one in particular should baffle his unusual skill touched his pride. Yet he faced the position honestly; he confessed himself baffled until the end of the evening. When he went away, however, he went away satisfied, even forgetful—because a new problem of yet greater interest had replaced the first.

“It was after three years out there,” said Farque, “that a sense of loneliness came upon me. It came upon me bitterly. My work had not then been recognized; obstacles and difficulties had increased; I felt a failure; I had accomplished nothing. And it seemed to me that I had misjudged my capacities, taken a wrong direction, and wasted life accordingly. For my move to China, remember, was a radical move, and my boats were burnt behind me. This sense of loneliness was really devastating.”

Francis, already fidgeting, put up his hand.

“One question, if I may,” he said, “and I'll not interrupt again.”

“By all means,” said the other patiently.

“What is it?”

“Were you—we are such old friends—”

he apologized—“were you still celibate as ever?”

Farque looked surprised, then smiled.

“My habits had not changed,” he replied.

“I was, as always, celibate—”

“Ah!” murmured the doctor, and settled down to listen.

“And I think now,” his friend went on, “that it was the lack of companionship that first turned my thoughts toward conscious disappointment. However that may be, it was one evening, as I walked homeward to my little house, that I caught my imagination lingering upon English memories, though chiefly, I admit, upon my old Chinese tutor, the dead Shan-Yü.

“It was dusk; the stars were coming out in the pale blue evening air, and the orchards, as I passed them, stood like wavering ghosts of unbelievable beauty. The effect of thousands upon thousands of these trees, flooding the twilight of a Spring evening with their sea of blossoms, is almost unearthly. They seem transparencies, their color hangs sheets of color upon the
very sky. I crossed a small wooden bridge that joined two of these orchards above a stream, and in the dark water I watched a moment the mingled reflection of stars and flowering branches in the quiet surface. It seemed too exquisite to belong to earth, this fairy garden of stars and blossoms, shining faintly in the crystal depths, and my thoughts, as I gazed, dived suddenly down the little avenue that memory opened into former days. I remembered Shan-Yu's present, given to me when he died. His very words came back to me: the Garden of Happiness in the Valley of the Thousand Temples, with its promise of love, of seven years of happiness, and the prophecy that I should follow his body toward the sunrise and meet my destiny.

"This memory I took home with me into my lonely little one-story house upon the hill. My servants did not sleep there. There was no one near. I sat by the open window with my thoughts, and you may easily guess that before very long I had unearthed the long forgotten packet from among my things, spread a portion of its contents on a metal tray above a lighted brazier, and was comfortably seated before it, inhaling the light blue smoke with its exquisite fragrance and perfume.

"A light air entered through the window; the distant orchards below me trembled, rose and floated through the air, and I found myself, almost at once, in a pavilion of flowers; a blue river lay shining in the sun before me, as it wandered through a lovely valley where I saw groves of flowering trees among a thousand scattered temples. Drenched in light and color the valley lay dreaming amid a peaceful loveliness that woke what seemed impossible, unrealizable longings in my heart. I yearned toward its groves and temples; I would bathe my soul in that flood of tender lights, and my body in the blue coolness of that winding river. In a thousand temples I must worship. Yet these impossible yearnings instantly were satisfied. I found myself there at once, and the time that passed over my head you may reckon in centuries, if not in ages. I was in the Garden of Happiness and its marvelous perfume banished time and sorrow; there was no end to chill the soul, nor any beginning, which is its foolish counterpart.

"Nor was there loneliness." The speaker clasped his thin hands, and closed his eyes, a moment in what was evidently an ecstasy of the sweetest memory man may ever know. A slight trembling ran through his frame, communicating itself to his friend upon the divan beside him—this understanding, listening, sympathetic friend, whose eyes had never once yet withdrawn their attentive gaze from the narrator's face.

"I was not alone," the scholar resumed, opening his eyes again, and smiling out of some deep inner joy. "Shan-Yu came down the steps of the first temple and took my hand, while the great golden figures in the dim interior turned their splendid shining hands to watch. Then, breathing the soul of his ancient wisdom in my ear, he led me through all the perfumed ways of that enchanted garden, worshiping with me at an hundred deathless shrines, led me, I tell you, to the sound of soft gongs and gentle bells, by fragrant groves and sparkling streams, mid a million gorgeous flowers, until, beneath that unsetting sun, we reached the heart of the valley, where the source of the blue river gushed forth beneath the lighted mountains. He stopped and pointed across the narrow waters. I saw the woman—"

"The woman," his listener murmured beneath his breath, though Farque seemed unaware of interruption.

"She smiled at me and held her hands out, and while she did so, even before I could express my joy and wonder in response Shan-Yu, I saw, had crossed the narrow stream and stood beside her. I made to follow then, my heart burning with inexpressible delight. But Shan-Yu held up his hand, as they began to move down the flowered bank together, making a sign that I should keep pace with them, though on my side.

"Thus, side by side, yet with the blue sparkling stream between us, we followed back along its winding course, through the heart of that enchanted valley, my hands stretched out toward the radiant figure of my love, and hers stretched out toward me. They did not touch, but our eyes, our smiles, our thoughts, these met and mingled in a sweet union of unimagined bliss, so that absence of physical contact was unnoticed and laid no injury on our marvellous joy. It was a spirit union, and our kiss a spirit kiss. Therein lay the subtlety and glory of the Chinese wonder,
for it was our essence that met, and for such union there is no satoriety and, equally, no possible end. The Perfume of the Garden of Happiness is an essence. We were in eternity.

"The stream, meanwhile, widened between us, and as it widened my love grew further from me in space, smaller, less visibly defined, yet ever essentially more perfect, and never once with a sense of distance that made our union less divinely close. Across the widening reaches of blue, sunlit water I still knew her smile, her eyes, the gestures of her radiant being; I saw her exquisite reflection in the stream; and, mid the music of those soft gongs and gentle bells, the voice of Shan-Yu came like a melody to my ears:

"'You have followed me into the sunrise, and have found your destiny. Behold now your love. In this Valley of a Thousand Temples you have known the Garden of Happiness, and its perfume your soul now inhales.'

"'I am bathed,' I answered, 'in a happiness divine. It is forever.'

"'The Waters of Separation,' his answer floated like a bell, 'lie widening between you.'

"I moved nearer to the bank, impelled by the pain in his words to take my love and hold her to my breast.

"'But I would cross to her,' I cried, and saw that, as I moved, Shan-Yu and my love came likewise closer to the water's edge across the widening river. They both obeyed, I was aware, my slightest wish.

"'Seven years of happiness you may know,' he sang in his gentle tones across the brimming flood, 'if you would cross to her. Yet the Destroyer of Honorable Homes lies in the shadows that you must cast outside.'

"I heard his words; I noticed for the first time that in the blaze of this radiant sunshine we cast no shadows on the sea of flowers at our feet and—I stretched out my arms toward my love across the river.

"'I accept my destiny,' I cried. 'I will have my seven years of bliss,' and stepped forward into the running flood. As the cool water took my feet, my love's hands stretched out both to hold me and to bid me stay. There was acceptance in her gesture, but there was warning, too.

"I did not falter. I advanced until the water bathed my knees, and my love, too, came to meet me, the stream already at her waist, and our arms stretched forth above the running flood toward each other.

"The change came suddenly. Shan-Yu first faded behind her advancing figure into air; there stole a chill upon the sunlight; a cool mist rose from the water, hiding the garden and the hills beyond; our fingers touched, I gazed into her eyes, our lips lay level with the water—and the room was dark and cold about me. The brazier stood extinguished at my side. The dust had burnt out, and no smoke rose. I slowly left my chair and closed the window, for the air was chill.'

V

I t was difficult at first to return to Hampstead and the details of ordinary life about him. Francis looked around him, slowly, freeing himself gradually from the spell his friend's words had laid even upon his analytical temperament. The transition was helped, however, by the details that everywhere met his eye. The Chinese atmosphere remained. More, its effect had gained, if anything. The embroideries of yellow gold, the pictures, the lacquered stools and inlaid cabinets, above all, the exquisite figures in green jade upon the shelf beside him, all this, in the shimmering pale olive light the lamps shed everywhere, helped his puzzled mind to bridge the gulf from the Garden of Happiness into the decorated villa upon Hampstead Heath.

There was silence between the two men for several minutes. Far was it from the doctor's desire to injure his old friend's delightful fantasy. For he called it fantasy, although something in him trembled. He remained, therefore, silent. Truth to tell, perhaps, he knew not exactly what to say.

Farque broke the silence himself. He had not moved since his story ended; he sat motionless, his hands tightly clasped, his eyes alight with the memory of his strange imagined joy, his face rapt and almost luminous, as though he still wandered through the groves of the Enchanted Garden and inhaled the perfume of its perfect happiness in the Valley of the Thousand Temples.

"It was two days later," he went on sud-
denly in his quiet voice, "only two days afterwards, that I met her."

"You met her? You met the woman of your dreams?" Francis' eyes opened very wide.

"In that little harbor town," repeated Farque calmly, "I met her in the flesh. She had just landed in a steamer from up the coast. The details are of no particular interest. She knew me, of course, at once. And, naturally, I knew her."

The doctor's tongue refused to act as he heard. It dawned upon him suddenly that his friend was married. He remembered the woman's touch about the house; he recalled, too, for the first time that the letter of invitation to dinner had said "come to us." He was full of bewildered astonishment.

The reaction upon himself was odd, yet wholly natural. His heart warmed toward his imaginative friend. He could not tell him his own new strange romance. The woman who haunted him crept back into the room and sat between them. Yet he found his tongue.

"You married her, Edward?" he exclaimed.

"She is my wife," was the reply, in a gentle, happy voice.

"A Ch—" he could not bring himself to say the word. "A foreigner?"

"My wife is Chinese?" Farque helped him easily, with a delighted smile.

So great was the other's absorption in the actual moment that he had not heard the step in the passage that his host had heard. The latter stood up suddenly.

"I hear her," he said. "I'm so glad she's come back before you left." He stepped toward the door.

Just before he reached it, the door was opened and in came the woman herself. Francis tried to rise, but something had happened to him. His heart missed the beat. Something, it seemed, broke in him. He faced a tall, graceful young English woman with black eyes of sparkling happiness, the woman of his own romance! She still wore the feather boa around her neck. She was no more Chinese than he was.

"My wife," he heard Farque introducing them, as he struggled to his feet, searching feverishly for words of congratulation, normal, every-day words he ought to use. "I'm so pleased, oh, so pleased." Farque was saying—he heard the sound from a distance; his sight was blurred as well—"my two best friends in the world, my English comrade and my Chinese wife." His voice was absolutely sincere with conviction and belief.

"But we have already met," came the woman's delightful voice, her eyes full upon his face with smiling pleasure. "I saw you at Mrs. Malleson's tea only today."

And Francis remembered suddenly that the Mallesons were old acquaintances of Farque's as well as of himself. "And I even dared to ask who you were," the voice went on, floating from some other space to his ears. "I had you pointed out to me. I had heard of you from Edward, of course. But you vanished before I could be introduced."

The doctor mumbled something or other polite and, he hoped, adequate. But the truth had flashed upon him with remorseless suddenness. She had "heard of" him—the famous mental specialist. Her interest in him was cruelly explained, cruelly both for himself and for his friend. Farque's delusion lay clear before his eyes. An awakening to reality might involve dislocation of the mind. She too, moreover, knew the truth. She was involved as well. And her interest in himself was—consultation.

"Seven years we've been married, seven years today," Farque was saying thoughtfully, as he looked at them. "Curious, rather, isn't it?"

"Very," said Francis, turning his regard from the black eyes to the gray.

Thus it was that Owen Francis left the house a little later with a mind in a measure satisfied, yet in a measure forgetful, too—forgetful of his own deep problem, because another of even greater interest had replaced it.

"Why undeceive him?" ran his thought. "He need never know. It's harmless anyhow—I can tell her that."

But side by side with this reflection, ran another that was oddly haunting, considering his type of mind; "Destroyer of Honorable Homes," was the form of words it took. And with a sigh he added—"Chinese Magic!"
"Call the turn, gentlemen!"

The voice of the dealer was wholly impersonal, without inflection or emphasis, like the game itself. Nine-Men Morris had repeated the formula in that same impassive tone many, many times during the past twenty-five or more years.

The players about the oblong green-clothed table, gave no other sign of having heard the words than to renew the nervous fingering of their red or white or blue or other colored checks—round markers which represented the money of the game.

A fat, drafty man, who sat at the end of the table, played pink checks. It seemed a very inconsequential color for such a big, ponderous person. He enveloped a stack of twenty of those pink checks in his right hand, his thumb and four fingers closing on the stack like five prongs. He allowed the pink checks to slither through his fingers, and again and again picked them up and repeated the rhythmic, clicking harmony. The other players slithered and shuffled their checks, each one in his own way, silently and thoughtfully.

A strange, simple game—faro, older almost than time. The supreme game of chance!

The words, "Call the turn, gentlemen," signified that there remained in the box only the last three cards of the deck, that the last turn of the deal was to be made. Having announced the fact, Nine-Men Morris took no further immediate interest in the proceeding. When a man has been dealing faro for twenty-five years or more, he ceases to care how a big fat man may bet five pink checks at nine-fifteen o'clock in the evening. That is a most dull and uninteresting hour of the night, under any circumstances.

The fat man came at last to a decision. He very gently pushed his stack of pink checks over the table, allowing it to come to rest finally on the corner of the king of spades. "Trey—king," he murmured. He was betting that the first of the three cards in the box would be the trey, the second one the king.
Nine-Men Morris glanced up at the lookout in his high chair to the right. The latter indicated with a slight nod that he had heard the bet. Other players pushed their checks onto the table; each one, as he did so, murmuring his call of the turn.

On the far side of the smoke-filled room many men stood before the rough bar, drinking little drinks and talking big talk. Nine-Men observed them in the same impersonal and disinterested manner as he watched the game before him. He looked at the men at the bar because he must look in some direction. He would as lief have looked at the raw board wall beyond them.

A sudden and fleeting glint of light in the depths of his shaded eyes betokened that he had seen something of more than usual interest. He glanced up meaningly at the lookout, and with a slight nod indicated one of the drinkers. It was Jack Lynch, one of the day bartenders, off duty.

"Jack is goin' after the stuff again," the lookout remarked after a casual glance at the bar.

Nine-Men dropped a look over the table, to make certain that all bets were properly placed. Then he raised his left hand over the little nickel-plated box in which were the last three cards of the deck. His thumb and third and fourth fingers were closed, the first two fingers extended straight out and side by side; and the whole hand was delicately poised as if it were about to caress the shy petals of a particularly young and innocent violet. It was said of Nine-Men Morris that merely to watch him deal faro was a liberal education in manners and deportment.

All those about him, the players at the table and the spectators banked solidly behind them—all waited for that hand to descend and move the cards, waited hopefully.

The hand, steady and firm, continued delicately poised.

"Yes," Nine-Men observed thoughtfully, and with an upward side glance at the lookout, "and that very same chuckle-headed Jack Lynch has been on the water wagon for two months—saving up to go to 'Frisco for a trip."

"Sure!" the lookout added. "Jack figured to go out on the mornin' stage—bought the outside seat. And now he'll blow everything he's got over the bar."

The lookout shook his head sadly.

If any of the players or spectators were impatient, they gave no sign. Faro is a dignified game. There is something about it, the gleam of the little nickel-plated box, the deliberation with which the case-keeper moves the little white ivory buttons on their wires, or the melancholy of the suite of spades, from ace to king, which adorns the green table—there is something about it that discourages frivolity, or hurry, or impatience.

Again Nine-Men Morris submitted the table to an observing glance. The poised hand, with its two gracefully extended fingers, hovered over the little box threateningly, only to pause again in mid-descent.

"I'll have just one little drink," Jack says to himself, and then it is all over. Good-by roll and good-by trip to 'Frisco!"

The lookout nodded his agreement.

"And Jack does that every two months—regular."


The poised hand descended with all gentleness. The two extended fingers pushed the top card sideways out of the box; then the next card and the next.

"Trey—king—Jack," Nine-Men murmured. Unhurriedly he picked up from the table all the checks which had not been winning ones and returned them to the rack at his right hand. Then he took from the rack two stacks of pink checks and set them down beside that one pile which the fat drafty man had placed on the corner of the king.

The latter pondered his winnings for some moments. Away off in the distance of his vasty—or vesty—deep, a surge of pride stirred some one of his organs. Wisdom had been justified of her children. He drew the three stacks of checks to him and added them to the others which he had accumulated.

Meanwhile Nine-Men Morris had turned the little box on its side. He shuffled and re-shuffled the cards, until he was certain that no two of them could by any chance remain unseparated. Carefully he replaced them in the little box. The man who kept the cases half folded the wired frames to allow the ivory buttons on the wires to slide back into place.

The turn had been called.
The game was set for a new deal.

It was about eleven P. M. when Col. Joe MacMasters surged gloriously into the Last Chance, a half-dozen or more men following him like the waving tail to a particularly brilliant and high-powered comet.

"This drink is on me!" the colonel shouted. "The house is invited!" Followed the solid thud of gold pieces on the bar. Col. Joe's personal satellites clustered about him. The hundred odd others in the saloon elbowed to the bar; all except the dealers and the players at the games. They played on.

Every one in the room knew what had happened. Col. Joe MacMasters had landed in the Big Money—again. This day had witnessed the culmination of several years of successful mine promoting and stock jobbing on his part. To be sure, it was nowhere recorded that Col. Joe had ever promoted or sold stock in a successful mine, but that very fact showed how much greater had been his success. Any fool could sell stock in a good mine! It required a Col. Joe MacMasters to sell the Laughing Lizzie to an Eastern syndicate for $750,000.

This was the fourth time that Col. Joe MacMasters had been in the Big Money. After each of the other three times, when he had had to come back broke and begin again, he had set his teeth and stiffened the muscles in his shoulders, and gone to work. He had learned his lesson. He had—

"All set!" the bartenders shouted.

The hundred or more men at the Last Chance bar raised glasses.

"Good luck, colonel!" "Here's hoping!" "How!" "You've earned it, old-timer!" These and many other fair wishes were shouted at him. They drank.

More drinks were ordered. Col. Joe was warmed with the fire of success. He expanded.

"Old Eden is consider'ble too small a place for me," he confided to the thirsty crowd which swarmed about him. "I've got cap'tal now, an' all a man like me needs is cap'tal. New York ain't any too big for a man like me, and it won't be any trouble at all to turn my 'seven-fifty' into an even million. Then it'll be me for the bright lights of Paree. Give the boys another drink!"

Jack Lynch had listened quite solemnly to these remarks. He hiccupped. Then he made as if to speak, but found that he must first steady himself against the bar. That done, he opened his mouth again. This time words came.

"The poor fish!" Jack gloomed with a sad shake of his head. "Won't this here MacMasters never learn no sense?"

New dealers came on duty at midnight. At one minute before twelve, and for the last time that evening, Nine-Men Morris shuffled the cards and put them carefully into the little nickel-plated box; but this time he left the box sitting on its edge. It was a sign that for the moment the game was not open for business. He reached into the cash-drawer underneath the table and counted out eight silver dollars for the lookout and the same number for his own day's wages. Then he removed his eyeshade, put on his coat, and took his way slowly and thoughtfully toward the front of the busy room, where was located the cashier's office.

The new dealer sat down—laid the box in its proper position. The new lookout climbed into the high chair. The game went on.

In the cashier's office—a little fenced-off enclosure near the front entrance to the Last Chance—sat the owner of these games, he whom men called Lord George. Night after night, at this hour, Lord George had sat there awaiting Nine-Men Morris, and watching his leisurely approach down the long room.

They two were bosom friends, friends so close that neither ever thought to give the other advice, which is the very height of friendship. Tonight something in the slow and thoughtful demeanor of the dealer as he came down the length of the room brought a little frown of worry to Lord George's brow. It would have been evident, indeed, to the most casual observer, that Nine-Men Morris had something on his mind, a problem which was in the very throes of decision.

Arrived at the fence which marked the bounds of the cashier's office, Nine-Men leaned gracefully against it and pondered for some minutes before speaking.

"How much does the book show, George?" he demanded at the conclusion of his pondering. It was an unnecessary
query. Both knew exactly what the book showed. However, as friends should, each treated the query with all possible respect.

Lord George drew the little account-book from a pigeon-hole of his desk. His other hand extended toward Nine-Man Morris, as if by habit it expected the latter to hand it something—the eight silver dollars, perhaps. The hand was disappointed.

Lord George opened the book. "Eighteen hundred and twelve dollars, Nine-Man—and it is just eleven months since you commenced to save—this time," he answered.

"As much as that, George?" Nine-Man observed with an air of surprise. "Then I don't expect I will be putting any more in. Eighteen hundred I said I would make it, and then go back home and see my folks. It is twenty-five years since I've been home." He paused to consider this statement, then continued with an air of renewed decision: "I will cash in, George, and take the morning stage out of here. I'll be obliged to you, George, for the money."

Lord George hesitated for an instant. Then he counted out the money, eighteen hundred and twelve dollars, and handed it to Nine-Man Morris.

"I hope you have a good trip, old man." There was much of friendliness in his deep, calm eyes; and along with the friendliness a shade of repressed sadness. He might have said more, but at the instant his ear was caught by the raw tones of a voice shouting from the bar, the voice of Jack Lynch, the bartender off duty:

"Hey! Lord George! Nine-Man! Jus' a minute—"

The two men watched Jack Lynch come toward them. He was making desperate efforts to appear sober, to play the master of his own soul—and feet. His mouth worked spasmodically and he moistened his lips one over the other. At the end of the perilous passage he steadied himself against the office fence, and after a moment in which to gather his ideas, he spoke:

"Lord George, I've sort o' changed my mind 'bout goin' out in th' mornin'. I'm goin' to work." His voice took on a tone of added determination. "I'm goin' to work, an' I'm goin' to get on the water wagon, an' I'm goin' to save all my money; an' then I'll take a trip out, maybe in two months or so." While he muttered he had been fumbling about in one after another of his pockets. At last he found what he had been seeking, a ticket. "D'you say you was goin' out on the stage, Nine-Man? Well, here's a ticket I won't be usin'—the outside seat."

Lynch paused. Wearily and awkwardly he passed his fingers over his drooping eyes. "I guess I'll be gettin' to bed now. I'm tired, an' I'll be needin' a rest before it's time to get to work."

Before Nine-Man Morris had a chance to thank him for the ticket, the giver had stumbled and lurched out through the front door. Nine-Man turned back to Lord George.

"I will be going to my room now, George, to pack up. I will see you before the stage leaves."

He turned to take one last look at the hectic room; then moved away toward the door. Once there, he paused and turned to look again. His hand, which had been extended to push open the door, he allowed to fall to his side. Nonchalantly he strolled over to where some noisy miners were banked about the crap table. He watched the play for a time with indifference, and then with disdain. He moved on to the "twenty-one" game, and in a little while to the roulette wheel. He soon turned from the roulette wheel in disgust, again moved toward the door—and again changed his mind.

Almost imperceptibly, and as if he would not admit it even to his own feet, he approached closer and closer to the faro layout. He stood among the spectators and watched the cards coming out of the box, saw the losing bets being taken by the dealer, saw the winning bets being paid.

His indifference was very apparent. Very carelessly he tossed a dollar to the table. It rolled this way and that, then settled on the nine-spot. The nine won. He moved the two dollars to the trey. The trey lost. He reached into his pocket, where lay his eighteen hundred and eighteen dollars.

\[THE\] earliest gray streaks of dawn struggled patiently through the dirty leaden windows of the Last Chance Saloon. The crowd of the evening hours had dwindled. A few persistent wooers of Fortune lingered at the various games. The dice rolled methodically around the half-
bowl of the crap table. When the players there spoke, it was in tones gruff and low; muttered mechanical curses instead of the joyous chanting shouts of the early evening.

At the roulette wheel the dealer rolled his little white marble and spun his wheel to an empty table. Roulette is a game that will seldom last through the night. It is too short and sharp-tempered. Dame Fortune at the roulette wheel turns shrewish with the suddenness of a South Sea storm.

At the far end of the room a silent group had banked itself about the faro layout; roustabouts, idlers, men who might better have been in their beds, and men who had no beds to be in. From his seat inside the cashier's office Lord George watched the backs of this crowd across the length of the room. He could see the lookout, perched in his elevated chair, and he noted the deep intenstness with which the lookout followed the play. Lord George could see also the top of the dealer's head, and that part of his face which was not under the eyeshade.

The dealer's hands, moving liquidly from the nickel-plated box to the stacks of checks on the table, to the check-rack at the right, to the little box again, these movements Lord George could not see for the close-packed circle of watchers.

Nor could he see Nine-Men Morris, who sat opposite the dealer and played, played without word, or smile, or frown.

It was as if a magician, wielding some terribly charmed rod, had drawn tight the vibrant chords of life itself. Lord George, used as he was to the thing, felt himself surrendering to the deep power of it. The silence of the room was accented by the staccato mutterings from the crap table. He was sharply aroused by the sound of an almost soundless sigh at his left hand.

Col. Joe MacMasters stood there, his eyes bent down the length of the room, his heavy jaw fallen slack. For the moment he too had fallen victim to the mesmeric lust focused there in the little nickel-plated box beneath the dealer's hand.

The big man recovered himself with a jerk. "Nine-Men Morris is at it again!" he observed in a half-questioning tone.

Lord George nodded. "I thought Nine-Men made it his rule never to buck the game," the big man went on.

"Yes," Lord George answered. "Nine-Men makes that his rule—often."

Nothing was said for some moments, while the two men continued to watch the subdued action about the faro layout. Lord George spoke first. "I suppose, first and last, Nine-Men Morris has made that rule sixteen times in the past sixteen years. Nothing seems to discourage him."

The big stock broker shrugged his heavy shoulders. "No brains, that's all; no brains." He flapped his big hands with the air of a philosopher, and as if to dismiss the matter from his mind and conversation. "I'll be going out on the morning stage, George. I'm through with this little old camp of Old Eden. A flier or two in Wall Street—just enough to turn my $750,—000 into an even million—and then I'll settle down to enjoy life."

Even while he listened to the colonel, Lord George's eyes had been on the scene at the other end of the room. Apparently the game was finished. The spectators came straggling from their places about the table. The lookout descended from his perch. The dealer was removing his eyeshade. Singly or in little groups they all approached the bar. The last man from the table was Nine-Men Morris.

He came toward the cashier's office in that peculiar calm way of his, utterly careless of time. One would never have thought that he could have been the center of the game which had just come to its end. He leaned gracefully against the fence of the cashier's office.

"George," he remarked after a period of detached thought, and as if announcing a new and very remarkable discovery, "it is not right for a man to go away from home and not go back in twenty-five years."

"I think you are right, Nine-Men," Lord George answered seriously. "A man ought to go home and see his folks—every so often."

"Yes, sir!" Nine-Men agreed. "And next year I'm going to do it. I'm going to start right in now and save every cent of my wages until I get eighteen hundred dollars together—and then I'm going back."

Quite deliberately, Nine-Men felt in one pocket after another. At length he found what he was seeking. He turned to MacMasters.
"Some one said you were going out on the morning stage, MacMasters. I will not be using this. You can have it—it is the outside seat."

He handed the ticket to Col. Joe. Then wearily he stroked his tired eyelids with the tips of his fingers. "I feel rather tired, George," he admitted. "I will be going to bed."

He had turned to go when big Col. Joe called him back. "I'm much obliged to you, Nine-Men, for the ticket. And now that I think of it, I can do something worth while for you."

Col. Joe MacMasters was again in his expansive mood. He was conscious of success, and doubly conscious of it in the presence of failure. He was in a mood to be generous, magnificently generous. He raised his voice that he might be heard of many people, and that his gift might be the more convincing.

"I've got a nice little house here, Nine-Men, and I won't ever be needing it any more. When I pull out of Old Eden—on the outside seat—I'll have my last look at the old camp. New York or Paris, none of them places is too big for me. So you can have my house, for I'm never coming back."

Nine-Men was some moments finding words in which to reply to the magnificent gift. Once having found them, he was oddly hesitant about speaking them.

"Er—you had better not give the house away, MacMasters; maybe—when you come back from——"

"But I'm just through telling you that I—will—not—be—back." Col. Joe exclaimed forcibly, "You understand, I will not be back!"

"Certainly," Nine-Men answered, smoothly and agreeably, "I understand, I know you will not be back; but when you do come back——"

There was a rattle and clatter of hoofs outside the door. "All aboard!" shouted the driver of the stage.

The Last Chance emptied itself onto the sidewalk. "Get a move on, gents!" the driver urged. "Start a-climbin', whoever's got the outside seat!"

Col. Joe MacMasters mounted by hub and rim to his airy perch beside the driver. There was much bustle and noise about the starting of the morning stage, but through all the hubbub and bustle and noise he could not escape the calm, certain tones of Nine-Men Morris.

"When you do come back, MacMasters, you will be very tired—so you had better keep your house."

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**First Love**

The noisy cheerful robin
That sings by the garden wall,
The butterflies, and the cherry-tree—
They do not know at all;

Nor even the bluebells and mignonette
That edge my foxglove row—
But the silent stars that at twilight rise,
I think perhaps they know!

*Muna Lee*
The Doom's-Day Envelope

BY HORACE FISH

A Complete Novelette

O Domine Deus, speravi in te!
Nunc cense mi Jesu, o libera me!
In misera poena,
Et dura catena,
Longuendo,
Gemendo,
Et gemenfaciendo,
Adoro!
Imploro
Ut liberes me!

Prayer of Queen Mary Stuart, in prison.

This very intimate story would not be, save for a persisting and increasing state of the bishop's mind, upon the arrival of his declivitous years, wherein he suddenly discovered himself inclining, by instinctive taste and a new frequency of impulses, toward excursions into Sycamore Street as against quiet stoppage at nights in Eightieth Avenue. It was but the discovery that was sudden with the bishop; the inclination had been long at work.

The bishop was a cleric of singular character and a man of double life. Indeed this latter phrase might well, perhaps, be substituted for, by the keener one "two lives," so distinct were the natures of his existence in Eightieth Avenue and his living in Sycamore Street. These had but one common quality: their occupation by the bishop; and their alternate safe-conduct by one stately gentleman could have been the achievement of but genius, if it can be considered genius that fulfills itself in mere preciousness of personality and the fine active minutiae of a professionally spiritual life and a private one.

In Eightieth Avenue, within his house, a rearward part of the tall religious Gothic pile that crowns with reverential granite thorns the utmost of New York's strange architecture, the bishop, in material as in all suggestive things, was surrounded by the pompous: the red and the purple, the mahogany and the dignity, of lucre-costly trappings; the revering attitudes, the mental incense of those who came for easing of body or comforting of soul, and who paid in symbols of bowed head or bended knee, gold glance or silver tear; while his home in Sycamore Street, the middle story of a small decadent house, exactly centered, in height as in the square, a neighborhood of brawls and thefts and loves-gone-wrong, of ladies in liquor and gentlemen not in jail.

The bishop has been labeled singular, but any one of his deeply earnest devotees at Eightieth Avenue who had glimpsed him, by design or chance, deliberately sip-
horace fish

ping his chosen wine of life in Sycamore Street, or else any poor nasty wretch who had thought—and then dared—to follow him thence up to Eightieth Avenue and by means of climbed wall, craned neck and a disordered curtain seen his hand raised and its jewel caressed by an ecstatic of that part of town, would have had to go carefully and fairly far through a dictionary to be sure of one word fully to explain and qualify a character thus remarkable. And that word come upon would prove to be a verbal stigmata so profound, a word so pregnant, and so undeserved by almost every one, an adjective so amazing when it is true, that its attachment even to the bishop should be made with huge conviction, or not made at all. It is in common, constant, inexcusable use; and as to him whom it most justly places, it ends as simple a sentence as can be, and which only a child should be expected to credit: The bishop was good.

Now in his elderly time of his allotted but somehow not yet granted relaxation of body and peacefulness of soul, his bordering on disquietude of mind was due to inward looking, a habit formed before he thought of priesthood, and which had crystallized with that estate, and magnified with the generations which his grave truth-seeking eyes had watched, his virile stout heart felt, his ardent rich brain studied. The eyes had never wavered or shut; the heart had variously sobbed and smiled; the brain had translated for both heart and eyes whatever they had met of heaven and the world and hell with a miniature of God’s own great instrument, dispassion. Nowhere within the whole big tower of his being did the bishop willingly admit any form of morbidity, form fear to martyrdom; and yet the question now at odd times disturbing him partook of the nature of an overpartiality of conscience.

He had used to handle this hateful slum, even for years after he had ceased to be its pastor, as an expert handles a billiard-cue, and as he himself, with beneficial palms, handled Eightieth Avenue. He had known how to wheedle gin out of a female constitution as effectively as he could obviate a brass-knuckle with a tongue of brass. Yet just now he had mixed his two provinces, had heard himself, on the corner of Sycamore Street, shouting—

“Stop it, or I will land you one on the jaw in Christ’s name, my dear!”

As he let himself in from the noisome externals of the square, a train of thought started by this painful speech ran heavy in his mind; but with the flooding of the room with light by the electric switch beside the doorway, his looks became in one swift moment almost unimpaired.

The bishop’s beauty was of the kind seen rarely and then usually in thin, poetical, ascetic men, with eyes of that darkest brown akin to black, fine slender features (in his case tinted like old ivory) and suited only by hair close-molded to the head, and either very black or very white.

His superfine splendor of person was such that to an appreciator it would have seemed wasteful for him thus to expend it, through long evenings such as this, upon the four simple tenement walls, with their several blind eyes of inexpensive pictures; and it became the more vivid as he stood gratefully, deeply drinking in the presence of loved objects, for the last hint of furrow in wax-like brow, of droop in imperious shoulder, ceased to be. The red and golden lonely panoply of Eightieth Avenue was far away; he was in the brick solitude of Sycamore Street, and happy.

As the queer room in its few striking articles of furniture was marked by dominant characteristics in the bishop, so was his history in episodic deeds, and in certain general results, achievements; and room and history in some degree bespoke each other. The bishop had been wealthy in his youth; now, in his age, he was rich. And while this his chosen refuge was so outrageous in its situation and so homely in its outlines and its manner, it held some matters, too, which told of money. Beside the electric lights and telephone, so inappropriate in such a house, a thick and soft-toned carpet warmed the floor, and it was velours of mellow tint that at the windows excluded the stealth and murk of Sycamore Street.

A book-case of plain painted boards interrupted the end wall, while cornered, but encroaching on the body of the room, was a magnificent piano. On the piano, which the bishop was now too old to play with extravagant pleasure even to himself, was a phonograph; and in the book-case were “Treasure Island,” “Mansfield Park,” and a black-leathered volume whose title had

romance
been corrected with gilt letters and carrot by its owner: the King James version of the Bible—for next to graphic adventure and good manners, the bishop loved the poetry of the English tongue; while, too tall to fit with neatness in the rack, three piles of bulky books lay underneath it—many in Latin, many more in Greek, and manlier still in Hebrew, for despite the deep faith demanding child-likeness of him, the bishop was a well-educated man.

Then, placed down open on a chair and there forgotten, a book on wireless, and one on apes lay reminiscent of the sweeping breadth of his mind, which had never found harm in the thought that God had been gradual in His making of man, or harbored the notion that reaches of science spelled His non-existence. It had been characteristic of the prelate long ago, as indeed such an action would have been tonight, that he had given a large sum of money to a wild- visioned Portuguese priest to help him invent an explosive so terrific that its gruesome power to rend the world in two— or three, or four— would put an end to warfare; and that whenever he had recalled the episode, he had not regretted his money or his attitude, although but one important war had been put a stop to since, and that one not by Portugal.

But of all the matters in this, the bishop's curious pleasure-ground, and of all the chance episodes of his long years of vivacious living, the most representative of a rare and precious taste were his phonographic stock, and how he had got it.

If there was in this great man one earthly passion, or approach to one, such reckless love, or such approximation of an inordinacy, was for music. He preferred solitude for its enjoyment, for he knew no one who loved it in his way, if indeed as much as he. In his earlier phonographic days, with the sensation of the instrument new, he had suffered acutely from its one grave weakness, which was so very irritating to his own—the necessity put upon him to jump up so often, after so brief an ecstasy; and latterly, by the goodness of God and his own courteous disposition, his life with his machine in Sycamore Street had been made perfection, for his eager and affectionate zeal in a matter of ancient chants, to help a huge and helpless corporation, had been paid for in an appreciative and special way.

The simple oak machine on the great piano was of casual size and met the eye as of ordinary constitution; but the discs hidden yonder in their cabinet were as exaggerated in dimension as the advertisements of their marketed kin. They were music, as it were, in dressing-gown and slippers— each record spun, according to its proper tempo, through ten minutes' to fifteen minutes' time. No other "layman," so he understood, possessed them; only the discretion of a bishop—and a good one—could be trusted with a secret so dangerous to trade conditions.

Periodic amplifications of his collection came most jealously sealed—and in weighty crates, for the corporation loved to surprize the bishop, whose consequent delight was apt to surprize, in turn, some priceless Hallelujah from an old-book shop or a forgotten archive. And with a connoisseur's teasing of appetite the bishop would modicum his tasting of new records, spinning their baptisms out, if he could, from one crate to another. He seldom looked at their names before he had played them, in a rare fear of prejudice. He desired his own translations of all music, and, listened to untagged, the records could indulge his tastes—a tango could be the whirl of a soul to heaven. His eye last week had fallen by the wayside—he knew there was a tango in the cabinet. There might be such a whirl of soul tonight.

WITH hat, stick, cloak laid by, with outer Sycamore Street forgotten and inward Sycamore Street surrounding him as by indulgent arms, he crossed the room. But he stopped at the piano. The silent mentor lately urging him had spoken troublingly in his mind once more. This good man knew that he had tried to be good; but he was wondering whether he had been good enough; and more especially, whether he was good enough now.

These multiplying desires for Sycamore Street, as if God could not live in vast velvet curtains shone upon from sconces, as poignantly as in this almost rude, this arbitrarily appointed room, had been dwelling problematically on his soul; as for the past, could he be sure, as he stared down its almost interminable corridors, that his satisfaction in it was deserved? And multitudinously, sharp questions rushed upon
him: if, in his anxious but fallible vision, his *omissions* might not have become dim in those long dim halls; if his career, so quietly brilliant in his churchly rise, so readily great in ecclesiastical achievement, had demanded effort and pain of him; if, though no imperious duties called him beyond those many he so easily filled, he was justified in so much pleasure now; if he *deserved* the peace he craved and sought; if he deserved—his phonograph, for instance. And as he stood with a frail hand upon it, his upright figure tense against the rich piano, all the embryo conscience-questioning of busier, hastier years, accumulate and swiftly imaginative, roused a sudden fierce desire of commune with God in him, a thirsty need of prayer, a longing and determination for an understanding of this point with his final Judge before he should hear that music waiting dumbly in the cabinet, and the bishop fell passionately to his knees, his voice rose ardent in the queer, silent room:

"Test me, O Lord! It has been my priesthood-long desire—test Thou me! Destroy my complaisance, to perfect it! Wherein can be the virtue of me, one little tempted? Wherein desert for me, so little suffering? Then with temptation scourge Thou me! My years decline. O Lord, before the end, that the very last may be of restful peace, that I may prove me to myself, test me O Lord! Yea, though it be New Gethsemane, test Thou me!"

When he rose to his feet, his burden was in flight; his heart was lightened, his conscience unbeset; the joy of life in a fair mood rushed fully upon him; his hand reached toward the cabinet; and there was a knock at his door.

The bishop was startled. But it was with the startlement of pleasure, for in this seclusion, his whereabouts presumably unknown, such a sound presupposed the unusual, and in his alert, short pause before he answered it, his mind leapt on from music to romance, for such a knock at his Sycamore door was indeed an adventure-suggesting thing.

Several elect of his friends knew of that door, which in turn occasionally knew their knuckles; but as they seldom could depend upon his presence behind it, and Sycamore Street was far from near to the very respectable places where they lived, their visits unasked were always unlikely. Occasionally, too, there would be something in the nature of a thud with a screech, or a pound with a yell, against it, by some personage either pitched down the stairs or escaping from some one up them. But this had been a quiet, deliberate, almost timid knock.

The bishop felt as if it were a response to his prayer—but only as such thoughts usually go, without weighty reliance on the visitor's having been fetched some miraculous distance there since the prayer began, or on God's thus instantly taking him up in bargain. In fact, the mild summons to his hospitality had cleared all danger of brooding from his mind and filled it with young curiosity, rosy expectation. His whole mood was banished, and a delightful successor to it throned within him, during the space of his four paces across the carpet. He was old and doubtful of himself no longer. The bishop opened the door.

What it was that sent the first shiver of omen through him, as had an angel pointed out a soul in hell, it was some time before the bishop knew. It was not face, or threadbare suit, or posture, nor was it the silent pause, or voice, or words.

His caller was but an elderly, smallish man, and all he had said, with a nervous cough, was "How do you do?"

"I am very well," answered the bishop. "Please come in," and as he stood courteously back, one hand to the welcoming door and the other indicating his pleasantest chair, he watched, quite fascinated, the transit of his tall, modest guest from shadowy hallway into the mellow light, which defined the awkward, hesitating outlines to those of a gentleman in work-shop clothes, with so simple, yet so awful a property under one arm that again the bishop's heart stood still, and he knew at last, after these few long seconds, what had stabbed his imagination to the quick when he first glimpsed the man.

The visitor was standing, ablack, in the center of the room, with the portentous, dreadful thing still clutched beneath his taut-held arm, not having yet ventured into the proffered chair; and noting his very embarrassing nervousness, the bishop did not urge him, but suiting prompt action to his next words, walking across to his closet:
"May I suggest to you a glass of wine? Whatever your tastes, tonight has been truly cold, and when I am not alone, I quite often take it."

"Indeed," said his friend—for so shaken a man could seem no man's enemy—"I will welcome it as you have welcomed me. I must dispense with taste tonight, as you have done, for certainly such a man as I could not be to your taste. So though I intensely disapprove of wine, I now need some and want some."

The bishop extended a reddened glass to the man's free left hand, and with a silent bow for toast, took a sip of wine.

"If I disapproved of you at all," he smiled, "it would not, I am sure, be intensely; nor must you feel so, if you can help it, to my favorite liquor. I will set it in readiness for you, there beside your chair." And having supplied him, in his standing posture, for the second time with delicate Beaujolais, he suited these words, too, with consistent action. But through these actions, words, and their brief passing time, he had been fastened, in mind completely, and with eyes whenever feasible, spiritually breathless on the man's horrible treasure, whose whole mystery lay in its vast simplicity.

It was an envelope.

In all but one of its intrinsic qualities, it was an envelope so plain, so ordinary, so humdrum from its construction of paper and glue, so replete with an air of fit choosing for whatever its beautiful or evil purpose, that the bishop's swift mind had already fixed upon its power of terror, and the element that made this power: its most grotesque, unprecedented size, straining the length of tremulous arm that hoarded it, for the thing looked two feet square; and the more grotesque fact that it should be an envelope at all.

For whatever it held, a box would surely have done as well; and most natural of all would have been a portion of string, and the same very large piece of brown paper from which it had been so arduously, neatly cut. From the back of it, which was outward to the bishop's sight, displaying its slant-wise seams and down-glued top, he could see that it was the fine amateur work of hands and a mind attuned to precision of thought, and the whole huge article seemed to bespeak the wasteful time and pains of its unnecessary manufacture.

In all other ways and characters to these, it was an envelope of every-day—so that it seemed like some unfortunate average creature turned suddenly giant; whose contents equally might be, ran the bishop's thoughts, a miraculous, an overwhelming love-letter, or the warning of some vast, fierce creditor. And further, whether by reason or by intuition, he felt that its message must concern himself.

And this proved to be the case, for as its gray-haired bearer now placed it carefully upon the piano, its face disclosed, in great black paint-brush writing, the bishop's title, and his name in full, family and Christian, and his exact address in the dirty slum of Sycamore Street; and in the upper right-hand corner, where its exorbitant postage might have been, and squarely framed like the portrait on a stamp, was a rude, cadaverous drawing of a skull.

Once more the bishop had a sinking thrill of heart, a sense of something imminently awful. Then, suddenly, the bishop was ashamed.

To find this simple envelope uncanny, merely because of its abnormal size, and the assumed lack of necessity for its being just what it was instead of a package, was certainly childish, and he realized that his one and poor excuse lay in the attitude toward it, and the general aspect, of its bearer himself—his whole effect of one with nerves scraped raw, of a creature whelmed by a spiritual burden whose torture was summed up in the envelope. As he let it cautiously on to the piano, a sigh had escaped him, the taut arm fallen to his side as if freed of a manacle, and the bishop, with all his room for dread filled up by pity, and the rest of his eager mind with child-like instead of childish inquisitiveness, sank into a chair as an object-lesson to his hesitant guest, and regarded him, when indeed he had sat down beside the wine, with expectant eyes. He had decided not to speak again until the man had spoken. Thus far, the knock at his door had brought him an adventure; he was certain now it would prove a thrilling one, whether of soul or mundane things or merely talk. Positive from long experience in Eightieth Avenue that he would comfort the anxious man before he left, he proffered no further helpful word, but gave himself up to pleasurable interest,
subtle, sympathetic calm. He had no intention of entertaining an angel unaware.

But his guest's next speech was almost as surprizing as his knock had been. Just as the bishop's eyes had been whenever possibly on the envelope, the gentleman's had been similarly examining the room, and now he said:

"I see you have a telephone. I am glad of that."

"I share your pleasure," said the bishop courteously. "Though my trust in God's care of me is absolute, it was He put doctors in the world for us to use, and telephones too; and as I am elderly and my presence here is usually unknown, I have a 'phone. I am glad to say I have never yet made use of it, except to ask the time. My watch is as well as I am, but I forget to wind it."

"I am inclined to think," said the man, "that you will surely use the telephone tonight."

"Can you mean," smiled the bishop, "that you intend to make me ill?"

"My thought when I spoke," replied his guest, "was far from that, but as you mention it, I am sure you will feel very sick before I leave. Unless," he added in a low, tremulous voice, "you kick me out with my purpose unfulfilled."

"Why, I never kick anybody!" cried the bishop; but so very humble, even to huskiness, had been the man's words that he hastened on: "This has reminded me—I have a new physician, and for a week have plagued myself with an unwritten telephone number. I suppose it is in the book, but you know that fiendish new New York telephone book! I must put it on that memo-pad on the wall—a Christmas present that till now I have thought abominable." And he rose and did so, thereby giving himself, too, a few seconds' swift reflection. He had begun to fear for the keen interest of his evening. If the man had merely come there to blow him up for being a Christian, or to capture him thus alone and demand ten thousand dollars for postage for that enormous envelope, the adventure was bound to have a disappointing end—either death for himself or incarceration for his poor threadbare friend.

As he turned again, however, to his chair, the pale visitor's words were of new and more cheerful tenor, and suggested that he was not a fanatic, but either a mind-reader or an acute detective. "You are adept at languages," he remarked.

"As you favor me by mentioning it," said the bishop, bowing, "I read the Bible in all reasonable tongues—except French. I admire French, but assuredly not for the Bible. It lends Christ a dapper personality. It makes Him speak with a lorgnon," and his voice suddenly seemed to picture one: 'Je suis—l'esprit—et—la vie? I do not like it!'"

The delicate enunciation that would have made the bishop a delightful actor brought the pale guest excitedly forward in his chair.

"You love Christ's words in Hebrew best!" he declared eagerly. "Am I right? Tell me—quickly—do you speak Hebrew?"

"No," said the bishop, "never." But the man's sharp exclamation, its wrenched "Oh" dragging into a groan as he sank back into the depth of his seat, brought a hasty explanation from the cleric.

"My words were too particular. I never speak Hebrew because none of my Jewish friends can understand it—and because I am not yet so old as to talk aloud to myself. But I read it fluently, if that will help you."

"Thank God!" breathed his guest, and then he suddenly laughed—not like a maniac in the least, yet so inappropriate did laughter from this man seem that the bishop felt he would prefer a lunatic's, and the fellow's apology did not mend its grim effect. "I am not amused, but for me to hear myself, tonight, instinctively thanking God, was so satirical I could not help it! And by the way, I have concluded that you do not recognize me."

"I have realized," said the bishop, trembling in the maze of successive questions and comments so crazily unconnected, and making his voice as steady as he could, "from your coming to me here in Sycamore Street, that you had some acquaintance of my life and habits, but a personal acquaintance with yourself I have no memory of. You must excuse my age."

"It is just that—age," replied the younger but yet gray-haired man. "Though it can not be said, for that matter, that we ever have met before. Leaving by the soul, the body changes every seven years, and it is forty, since in this very
room in Sycamore Street, you handed the young man from whom I have developed, a sum of money which has since ruled our lives, and brought me here tonight to break your heart."

WITH the beginning of the amazing speech in which his strange companion declared himself no stranger, the prelate had seemed to have a flash of memory, but it was so swiftly evanescent that even as he stared the harder at the white, unduly furrowed face, there remained in it no hint of identity for him, and it was fully gone with no purpose served unless that of carrying his thought, for the moment, beyond the astonishing concluding words. And all the confused priest stammered was—

"Wha—who are you?"

"My name," said the man, "is unfortunately such that it might convey nothing instead of everything to you, so I will answer not 'who,' but 'what.' I am the greatest inventor in the world."

"Indeed?" said the bishop, so very surprised that his question seemed quite rude.

"Yes," answered the inventor quietly, "if only one, but that the very greatest of inventions, can so entitle me. Did you ever know that there was an envelope around the world?"

The bishop started violently. His eyes, as if by their own volition, swept to the piano. And the instinctive words which, in his detestation of foolishness, he strove to stem, blurted helplessly forth—

"Do you mean to say you have the world in that?"

He was blushing before the speech was fully out, and expecting to hear his guest’s dreadfully ironic laugh again. But the inventor’s words were as solemn, and as steadily placed, as his quietly burning eyes.

"No—friend. Be practical. That envelope could not contain the world. But it contains—for you—a ghastly interpretation of it."

The idea of some huge letter—now fully horrible in its suggested import—swept back to the bishop’s mind. "Invention" might certainly well apply to written words; "inventor" to their author! Again, he had had a glimmer of half-remembrance, this time in the man’s voice in his last grim sentence, which linked back to his seeming threat to break his old host’s heart; and if it was a letter from some ghost of the past, it might easily enough have taken forty years to write it! Perhaps his thoughts were readable, for the author of his confusion demanded abruptly—

"Tell me this: have you imagination?"

It wrenched the prelate back to the rational, to the kindred of a smile.

"Indeed, my friend, I am imaginative! In all modesty I think I surpass the beloved disciple. Though I am not the poet that he, even in the Greek, so noticeably is, and much less that he is through the lyrical doctors of King James, I think that I have often distanced him in reaches of picture. Imagination? Sometimes I have thought that I would die of it!"

"Ah!" cried his guest. "Then all is well—for me, though ill for you—except one thing! Friend, friend, do you know music? I know you love it, next to God, adore it, for though you haven’t recognized me yet, remember I knew you well when we were young. But have your love, your study, understanding grown—till you’ve possessed its essence, come to feel it primally, basically, interpreting it first of all not as melody, or harmony, but as sounds? Do you know music as a man knows his wife?"

"I do not like the comparison," faltered the bishop, "but I suppose I do."

"Of course you do!" cried the thin trembling man. "I was sure you would have thrashed it down to its elements, its innate significances, yet not sure! My questions must be maddening, by the way, but in this preliminary I am as keyed as you. I was so very thankful, when I came in, to see that you kept your machine for the big discs down here in Sycamore Street. I had depended on it only from your character, for I knew the crates of records were delivered on Eightieth Avenue."

The bishop slowly rose from his chair, his face as slowly growing red, and then as gradually very white. His mind suddenly seemed to him desolately clear; this was no fanatic he was dealing with, but something worse, a despicable thing. His pallor and posture magnified his looks; a regal something glittered in the dignity of his voice.

"I have been culpably careless, sir," he said. "I should have covered that machine
upon your knock. But what I first noted of you as you crossed my sill was that you were gentleman, and as my guest you will, I trust, consider the question and the phonograph covered now."

His mentor smiled.

"I have never thought, although so concerned with inventions, whether I was a gentleman or not. But I am convinced, on the whole, that I am not a blackguard. In fact, my coming here to you tonight is the most supreme example of morbid fanatic honesty ever made."

"Your words continue mysterious," said the bishop, "but I am to understand that I am to consider my phonograph sacred, am I not?"

"Sacred? No, quite the reverse," replied the man, "but safe, so far as concerns your honor with your friends. I am on better terms with them than you. I invented that little rod that makes the big discs feasible for the standard present millions of machines the public can afford. Without my permission you would never have got it."

"What?" cried the bishop; but the man did not pause for enjoyment of his surprise—his subject had gripped him, he had pushed away the wine impatiently, his timid nerve-worn manner had vanished and his voice grown hot.

"Oh, it was a miserable, nasty, contemptible little invention that took two years out of my life when I might have been storing up health and cheerfulness of mind that would have backed me in my legitimate work and kept me away from morbid thoughts of honesty to you, that have brought me here to desolate your life, and probably my career! Oh... to be back at work, with the question settled! I tell you, when this horrible night is done, and you have cast the die of peace or torment for the whole civilized world, I shall go straight home to my hut on the Palisades, and invent a thing for housekeepers—a silly little half-a-pound machine that helps her find the scissors. It's built on keytones, and is keyed to all the things she's apt to lose. When she starts to do crochet in the dining-room, instead of slapping her child she slaps "E" on the key-board, and the needle sings out 'Ee-ye-yee-yee!' from the attic!"

His voice, his manner were bitterly passionate, but their excitement did not equal that of the cleric's. From the updrawn, severe ecclesiastic, the bishop had become a simple, human, boyish man, bent agitated forward with lit eyes staring searchingly into his visitor's face.

"At last," he cried, "I know who you are—or were, though to say I recognized one feature even—yet, yes, I now begin even to recognize! Though by your bodily theory of change you are five times and a fraction altered from that boy, there is something of him—is it lines or lights? My friend, my well-loved friend of long ago, it was that invention, that fanciful ingenious thing for housewives, that I gave you that most welcome money for! I remember now the day you came to me—I was there at the piano—the subject, of vibration and of scale—your face, its eagerness more poignant than my music! Oh—" and the old man of suddenly reawakened affection threw forth his trembling hands toward his friend—"why have you been so ominous? Tell me everything! I now see why you said your name was useless. Once more I welcome you to Sycamore Street, John Smith!"

But the still more trembling inventor shrank from him.

"No, no!" he cried. "I cannot take your hands! Your well-loved friend? Before tonight is out your brutally lacerated soul will hate me—if its nature can hold hate! I've come on a hideous errand! Did I not tell you I would break your heart?"

"But," cried the wounded and bewildered priest, "how can you break my heart? I am as blest, as fortunate a man as God has ever frocked! John, John, I confess it hurts me to the quick to find the eager, golden boy of you turned to old silver—that pain may turn to pleasure, after the fashion of forty years ago, in my helping you!"

"Your helping me," cried John Smith, shuddering, but with eyes steady on the bishop's face, "is just what I have come for, and will place on you the most awful responsibility man has borne since nineteen hundred years! I know you well, and know you will not shirk it! You helped me forty years ago, and because you did, your life for forty years, and more than that, will turn to husks tonight! I am not a fool—I know what heartbreak is—it differs with your man! In your life, for
instance, there is no woman to snatch out
—although, as it happens, I shall prove
every contention with which I come to you
by a comment of your own upon a woman,
and the way she dressed her hair. And I
know, too, quite naturally, that no pain
for me could break your heart. You may
break mine—we cannot tell as yet! But
yours will break, so much is definite! You
are a good man—good, straight through
and through. And when, tonight, in your
pitiful old age you begin to wish you had
never believed in God, your heart will
break, and your heartbreak lies in that!"
And John Smith pointed to the envelope.

Once more all its dread suggestive poss-
sibilities rushed ominously through
the bishop's mind, but once more, too, his
stature seemed to magnify in height, and
though his eyes, simultaneous with a
tremor through his frame, followed the
man's fierce gesture to the thing, they
swpt back, full of austere light, to his
face.

"John Smith," he said, "as, forty years
ago, when you came trembling to me for
my aid, you would not have disturbed my
faith in God, so now you can not. Despite
your wild questions and your wilder state-
ments, I believe in you, believe the years
have made you what you say—a great in-
vventor. You have a weird, convincing
quality of the hypernatural. But though
you have filled me with a sense of dread,
of awe and terror and the ominous, should
you let loose very devils from that en-
velope, they might increase my priest's be-
ief in hell, but how so, I ask you, how
so diminish my belief in God? Whatever
amazing instrument you have made, built
on the breadth and power of my early
money, it was He that put its properties
in the universe, and He that gave you
brains to find them out. As for respon-
sibility, I choose it! Though you seem to
force it at me, I do not shrink from it!"

"Tell me this," cried Smith, his voice
shaking, "you gave me the money not
necessarily for that little invention— it was
for the chances of my whole career?"

"It was," said the bishop. "There were
no restrictions."

"Well," gasped the man, "your respon-
sibility tonight is to decide whether the
secret of my huge discovery, whose proof
is there, tangible, physical in that en-
velope, shall be or not be given to the
world! To destroy my achievement, lit-
erally shatter it as with an ax, and my
heart with it, is your right, your privilege,
because your money made it! My ludic-
rus sense of honesty compelled me to
come to you—and yet in that very honesty
I victimise you, for whatever my fate at
your hands, yours, thus at mine, is the de-
struction of abomination!"

"That could not be!" cried the bishop
desperately. "I have had enough of dread-
ful thoughts and phrases! You torment
me! Come to the crux of this! Though
your words have rapped my nerves, John
Smith, however great and marvelous your
achievement, you have no invention that
can frighten me."

The inventor laughed hysterically.

"I pity you. Beware of boastfulness! Your
generous gifts of money seem ill-
fated! Having supplied him, as you for-
got me so you probably forgot your other
friend! I do not wish to be satirical, but
your Portuguese priest only blew himself
into eternity, and war went on. When his
folks looked for him, there wasn't a piece
of him that side of France! Yes! Yes!
And as for me"—with hectic eyes he leaned
nearer to the responsive gaze of the hor-
rified shaken prelate—"with the essence of
your money I have invented a machine
that disproves Christianity!"

In the still room, across the little space of
it whose two paces seemed now like a
great gulf fixed, priest and inventor gazed,
eyes as symbolically fixed on eyes, tense
bodies motionless, till after one long in-
stant of deep pregnant silence the bishop
drew scarcely back as from the edge of the
gulf, fearless but cautious.

His one gesture, conscious but replete
with unconscious grandeur, was the sweep-
ing lift of one thin waxen hand to his hip,
and the flash of its carven jewel through
the light curved with it like the glitter of
a sword across the ice-cold colors of the
figure opposing him—for to the dark de-
vout eyes ablaze with the gold of battle,
the whole person and spirit of this gray-
clothed, silver-haired man were pictured
in the steel tones of his deep, frigid power:
magnetism. If his terrific words, like the
blow of a flail to which the bishop's ring,
so used to kisses, had answered like a
flaming sword, were true, or even founded
in a chance of truth, the fiercely silent
room in Sycamore Street held casually tonight a flawless tableau, done in human pigments, of Fetish and Truth. For to the majesty of the slight bishop's person, drawn and regal with his spiritual summons to it, here in the slum, of all the pomp of Eightieth Avenue, indeed, of somewhere further, more magnificent still, across wide seas, so that only the rich hangings of this place pertained to his portrait now, just as potently his visitor's bright gray eyes shot back a merciless challenge. Save in their bodies they appeared men no longer. Face to face, across the separation of long, brilliant and irreconcilable lives, they seemed Religion and Science. And whatever their weapons, these in their gazing eyes seemed drawn for battle—a battle to death, and the definite article of death.

The silence broke with a brief inclination of the bishop's head.

"As the representative of Christ," he said, "and of His church, I must answer you. His church declares but little, and never that until she is attacked. I question your sanity, not your sincerity. You are no liar, but what you have told me I do not believe."

"You will," replied Smith quietly, and with his rejoinder to the first quiet thrust, the room seemed real to them again, to be tenanted once more by simple men; and as a simple gentleman the bishop listened.

"When I mentioned an envelope around the world, I meant atmosphere—an envelope of air. That envelope, on the piano there, is only the part of my immense achievement that pertains to you. It began with wireless—from that book you've been reading you think that wireless is in its infancy. It is, to every one in the world but me! It was even to me, when you gave me that money to support myself. And that very subject started it—a man I asked about it, a grown man, who worked it, and who should have known, said to me 'No one knows. The thing is in its cradle.' And that intelligent remark was spur enough to me. I told myself, with scorn for that man in my soul, that when the time came I could tell of wireless! And I can. I cradled it! I grant you that though forty years have passed, it's not of age as yet—but this child of mine has told me of the ages!"

With the fond, exclamatory, but sane, practical speech, the man's horribleness had vanished for the listening prelate, and slowly absorbed into the further swift, eager words, he sank to his chair again, and sat forward, attentive, lost gradually to all recent sense of defamation.

"As you were forty years ago—your spirit, not your body—so you are now—but your dominant qualities increased, intensified. Such is the soul. As you are more devout, more faithful to your God, so you are too more truth-loving, unhasty, just to fellow-men. You broadly, bravely gave me money then to support, to marry Science, the possible enemy of your Love. I have married it, and as you listen with forty-years-greater sweep and bravery tonight, at the marvel of my achievement you will marvel that I have voluntarily come to you for its fulfillment, or destruction at your word—or rather, your literal silence, on the telephone."

"John," said the bishop quietly, "I will do my duty, if such a double duty can be done, to you, and to my God."

"I know you will," said Smith. "That envelope is fifteen miles in depth—the one around the world, I mean, though the one your eyes dart at is as deep as hell—for you. Soon after that—going back to wireless, I mean, and your glorious money—I found that operators were being disturbed by interruptions, unaccountable ones, and still more unaccountable tangible sounds. I—well, with all due deference to your kind of brains, I must put this whole thing in a primer for you. With the first dawn upon me of the possible huge significance of those sounds, supposedly inexplicable, in the stupid hired ears at wireless stations, the dim noises of music, of trampling feet, of human voices, I knew, in one moment of mammoth vision, what might be for the world, and what my life-work must be. Beyond that envelope of fifteen miles is no vibration. Do you begin to feel what I have done? After forty years I do not know—or care—whether I have discovered the secret of perpetual movement, whether vibration is perpetual motion or not. But I do know that somewhere within that envelope of air is imprisoned all sound ever made inside it since the beginning of the world—yes, every fated whisper or roar of noises is imprisoned there for life, from its articulation until Doom's-Day! And I know too, what I have come tonight to prove to you,
who paid the mere money and must now pay the price, that my invention, my machine, has captured for me, first, at random chance the sounds of centuries unknown to man, and afterward, at my will, my direction, all the voices of the past that I chose to hear! And my proof I have right with me?"

With slender lips apart, and dark eyes lit as they were always lit, like a beautiful child's, at anything wonderful or mysterious, the bishop sat fascinated staring at his friend.

"Without proof," he said, with something of an eager child's credulity, "though I shall demand it of you if you have it here, I concede you, John—John Smith—the greatest inventor in the world!"

"I told you just that," said Smith. "But you do not realize yet—quick as you are, you haven't yet had time—how very great. Do you get it now? I have within the possible clutch of my machine the whole of history! It can prove or disprove anything I like! I tell you, I have heard the music of the spheres! I have satisfied all the first curiosities in my list of doubts and inquisitivenesses! A child's brain can refute the religion of the Greeks, but as for the sake of mere detail and accuracy, my machine has thrown it out! I have heard the battle of Bümpitz, which you with all your learning never heard of, probably, but whose tactics always had a thrill for me. And I have heard the voices sub rosa from the sealed chambers of the damned Inquisition, I have heard louder than Carlyle ever did the rush of that fiendish mob to the Bastille, I have heard the queer swish of the Titanic going down—"

"God! God!" breathed the bishop, romance and reverence mingling strangely, characteristically in his bated word.

"But," cried John Smith, and he rose swiftly, excitedly from his chair, "don't let mere admiration sweep you away, for a moment even! Your child's dread of my parcel tonight were better than a momentary joy, and my warning words are merciful! Ah, pitying and pitiable old friend of mine, have you not understood? Though in all my forty years of living with my theory and my building of my present mechanism I have heard not one lisp of Venus or one yell of Medusa, I have the voice of Christ in that envelope, and you shall hear it in this room tonight!"

And once more John Smith pointed, this time with a gesture terrible in its hungry triumph of paternity, to the thing on the piano.

A LITTLE sound came from the bishop—low, but sharp, and he sank back in his chair, his white hands trembling on its ebony arms, and his eyes, even in their bewilderment, following, as if helplessly nailed to it, the inventor's figure as it switched from its defiant posture over him and strode to the piano. And as the man's lean, desirous hands picked up the great envelope and holding it toward the prelate at its flap, another small gasp, sharper, more painful, wrenched from him. After the long night colloquy of omen, its bearing out seemed fatally, roughly swift. His guest, his friend, was the owner of this thing; he himself had no rights in it, earthly or ethical, yet his reverence seemed attacked as with a hatchet, and with the harsh rending of the envelope the very cuticle of his soul seemed torn. He knew not what to expect, and not knowing, all the strangeness of the night repeated its terror, and he gazed quivering at the quivering thing in the man's hands as if, forewarned but impotent, he beheld the dire opening of Pandora's chest—worse: as if in this a frightful Passion Play, his own God in person were to issue forth from the machine.

But as his waxen fingers ineffectually strove to raise themselves and a great gasp broke from him, all that the fervid figure of gray drew out of the Doom's-Day envelope to his sight was three black mammoth phonograph discs, in exactitude like his own.

Smith turned to the piano, placed the empty envelope down with the discs upon it, then adjusted the topmost one in the phonograph.

"You are wondering, I suppose," he said over his shoulder, "why I did these up in this particular way, this envelope, and pretense of a stamp, and so on. I must explain that I have a rare lightness, considering the gravity of my work; that I have, especially in my most tremendous moments, an irresistible sense of the funny, or humorous, and I confess that I did that in a playful turn. Now, in this first
record"— But a thud behind him cut his sentence off, and switched him about.

With the appearance from the suggestive envelope of the big simple canny discs, all the mysterious depression of the night had left the bishop, and in its place came a greater, more awful thing. This forthright, literal combination of the sacredly miraculous and the materially practical, with its externals there before his eyes, and its wonders imminent, had realized to him, with a great thrill through his being, the huge opposed forces in his room as had not been before from any pregnant word of Smith's, or thought of his, and his frail form had slipped forward to the floor and he was kneeling with crossed arms, uplifted face, a vast fear possessing him—not cowardly, but the holy fear of God.

Without one sound from the property, and in his wonder forgetful of its owner's first terrible claim for it, the bishop in that moment believed John Smith, and the inventor read that belief in the praying figure and as though with an effort near to a human tenderness as the remnants of his life could compass, he reached forth uplifting hands to his awestruck friend.

"Although you are certainly to hear more awful music than any living man but me has known, let me assure you that in this first disc there is no history to make you kneel—it is the sort to make me kneel instead, for what I bow to is the universe, the marvel of mere fact-of-existence! As I told you of my machine in primer-talk, so I have made these records just for you, a little concentrated history out of the volumes I have heard read aloud, and from this you shall judge the fitness for mankind of all of those, and of the thousands more that my machine and I can drag from the ages buried alive in ether! All of your knowledge, brain, and intuition, you must give to this, for unless this proves itself to you, your judgment against my glory in the world would be unfair. When we get to your real test, your emotional prejudice will be worse than that of any other man I have ever known, but so will your sympathy be the most sensitive, keenest! I questioned you as to Hebrew, imagination, music. With your love of sheer sound I know you will picture what you hear. And if this is a tremendous test for you, you must think of my side—so it is for me! I have been, in my way, a priest. You have given your celibacy to your faith, and I to mine—my life force to my work! Ah, ah, the years! It was twenty of them, before I knew the paths of sound in the map of time, and half that many more before I could send the soul of my machine intelligently out along those paths to capture this with a date on it, or that with a name to its back! While you could intone your life and love in the market-place, I must be secret—oh, that secrecy, and my nagging lacks of your kinds of knowledge! What you will instantly recognize tonight, I had to scrape word by word from dictionaries, and with only my ears to look for them—and while, till five years ago, the sounds were dim, or thick, or, even after I perfected the phonograph for them, scratched—well, it's been work, and priestly work! And now, when I am sixty-one years old, not a half of it is done, not a tenth, not a hundredth, and may never be, even what I might live to do, for you may not let me! I see you trembling at its greatness now, but we are both suffering tonight—for think of me, with that verdict of yours to face as yet, and before it, the horrible shape that I am in at the thought of sharing my secret for the first time with any one!"

The bishop's answering voice was very quiet. Through the man's mounting fervor he had as gradually, increasingly gripped himself, and his body was now erect, his grave face calm.

"Am I to listen only to your discs? Sound, as you have aptly said, is in my case another word for music. Something deep in me goes to it, vibrates to it, finding some splendor, if that of meaning only, even in the primally ugly. According to my own mind, own instincts, I interpret—picture, as you assume. Let us understand. Will this very tendency in me carry me too far? Or in the other scale, will your 'little concentrated history' need your key—your explanation? Save with rogues, I am no stickler, and hideous as have been to me some of your words tonight, I trust you."

"I am glad—but do not trust too far," said John Smith simply. "The discs need something from me, but not much, even the first one. It begins with what I believe the beginning of the world. I have never been certain, but it's of small importance—the time when those sounds were made is plenty far enough away, thank
G—goodness! Then, there are breaks—in
tervals—and it leaps on with history that
surely voice of mine sha'n't interrupt, for
I want you to recognize it, thereby con-
firming me! Ah, but I share with you, as
the first and possibly the only human be-
ing, a thrilling secret!"

The bishop drew a long, deep, quiver-
ing breath.

"If I am to share it, let me share it
now!" And after one protracted mutual
look between them, Smith stepped to the
piano.

The bishop's eyes followed him, saw his
fingers lift the rod, push the lever, lower
the needle to the disc; and saw the disc be-
gin to move. Then, as in instinctive re-
spect from a scene not right for them to
view, his eyes looked away, to the oppo-
site richly curtained corner, and became
not closed, but fixed and distant, like a
crystal-gazer's, as the whirl of the yet un-
speaking instrument spoke through the
silence of the Sycamore Street room.

THE fragmentary rush through space
of sudden glittering bodies; the clash-
ing of vast frantic jewels and the shattered
scattering pitch and star-fall of their mas-
todonian chips were things so visual to the
listening old man that where the spherical
hum of the earth's song grew first audible
from the whir of the disc, he never knew.
After a few seconds, incalculable in their
effect of time upon his racing mind and
trembling body, and with the breaking
through the echo-like subtle noise by
stone-like crash before stone could have
been, and wind-like moan before the naked
earth had trees, and planetary roar before
the earth was round, he felt that he had
heard the fierce birth of atomic com-
position, the first imaginable miracle. It was
comprehensible only as one infinite State
parting, with the illimitable writh of all
existence, into spirit and matter—its last
shriek, the nameless yell of universe that
for one instant filled and agonized the
room, having knifed its way into the
new-created air envelope of the one
little world on which he stood as it
jolted to its small, lonely whizzing stop
in its destined place, and for himself, and
his companion in the room, grew silent, los-
ing its humming song where it had begun
—in the mere whir of the machine.

He did not stir. He devined that aeons
were to pass with the slight whirling in-
terval, and through the fine rasp of the
needle he imagined, with a shiver, that the
ice-age came, and went; and now, out of
the indecipherable sounds that fainted into
the room with the subtlety of the maturing
of a flower, sounds just enough in delicate
strength to spell a brooding silence, he
sensed the coming of some tangible noise
made possible only by the nature and dread
power of heat. Inevitable, thrilling
through his hearing every sensitivity of his
body and his whole visual faculty of mind,
it rose from the disc, huge in suggestion—
a fleshly thing, for an instant curiously
familiar, flashing to his memory a day of
long ago when he was quagmired by one
foot in the Springtide gutter of Sycamore
Street. It was the sick sound of his over-
shoe, as his boot slowly drew it out of the
mud, but a hundred times magnified. And
the long-drawn thing strugglingly repeated
itself—three times. Then there was a
splintering crash of branches, as of a crude
crushing power arisen from a fetid earth.
To the rigid priest, in the following deep
moment of utter silence and stillness, it
was imaged, in magnitude, the unknown,
and awfulness, as fit for Apocalypse, save
that it was hideous; and then, as he felt
it gazing about more and more conscious
of itself and life, came its voice—its roar,
not the voice of earth, but of all that in it
was, its ghastly desire belowing spasmod-
ically lower and lower into piteous whim-
per as it lunged forward into the dim-lit
loneliness of horizon.

Again the bishop did not move or speak
through the short scraping interval of the
disc. But as the next sounds grew intelli-
gible, their thick confusion evolving into
syllables, guttural but human, to a harsh
tune of stone on stone and rough imple-
mant gouging earth, he started, and turned
wide questioning eyes upon his guest; and
for the first time the voice of a living
creature cut across the voices of past cen-
turies.

"That," whispered the machinist, "is my
Adam—as your Bible itself has him, in
Genesis V, 2—a race, not a man."

The bishop did not answer. Another in-
terval was whirling out its arbitrary whirl
of centuries, and from the eager intent-
ness of the inventor's eyes on his, he real-
ized that the strange remainder of the disc
demanded not question but judgment of
him. And as it burst suddenly into a fulsome paean of clanging, rich, clamorous and trampling noise, it swept his brain on to the speech of books, the color of conscious living, to time and place of developed existence, of organized movement and directed form. He was indeed near home—only five centuries before Christ; and presently over the voice of multitude chorusing murmuroously from the disc sounded one voice superimposed like a figure of crystal forward in perspective against a far curtain of mingled tones—in a long sigh, beautiful in light musical cadence like a fine chain depending several gems minutely carved—Greek words hung on the sigh and luminently gorgeous to the listening man who believed he recognized them. Silence . . . the spinning disc . . . the spin of centuries . . . and through his swift imagination of new lands of barbarous tongue sprang the golden blare and march of invasion and the white loveliness of marble villas upsprung in wide stretches of green fields, green hills, green silver-ribboned meadows, green islands 'blue-embrased, as three triumphant simple Latin words, potent to rule the muscles of a living body long after their own was dead, clenched the frail waxen fingers of the bishop's hands . . . Silence . . . the rushed passing of the needle and of centuries . . . and the slum room which had strangely known the whiz of arrows and the hot bubble of hurtled caldrons, doomed now with cannon—rang with dissenting cries of panicky military, and then seemed to rock with the cheers that rose with all the glory of reenlivened battle-faith upon one clarion, brie, commanding call in which there lived the whole glittering essence of the tongue of France. And as the trembling inventor's hand lifted up the needle, lifted away the disc, the room was still.

But for a moment only. Vibrant with emotions, the bishop's hands and voice reached in one vivid impulse toward the inventor:

"Eloi! I say Eloi because our English does not seem to hold what I would express to Him, to you! Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon! Those voices, those three voices, actual, out of the centuries, to my own ears! That sigh—on top of India, home in Macedonia—that sigh—God!—langorous, almost humorous, for more worlds to conquer! Then, that message, in almost contemptuous though triumphant tones, from conquered Britain; those three words in Latin, with their rich greatness in six syllables, 'I came, I saw, I conquered!'

To know—to know—that these were laughed almost as those Greek words were sighed! And oh, that great last of the great world heroes, he of Corsica! At the first cannon-shot I thought of Waterloo, but you chose Wagam, and I was waiting for that cry, and I, in this room, obeyed it as those long-dead soldiers did, for I saw as heard that wondrous, scornful thing of folded arms: 'Behold, behold the Son of Austerlitz!''

In this moment of his host's excited tribute, there shone something of all three heroes, of their common element of the triumphant, in John Smith, the American inventor; but in this small, gray, great man there was an added quality of greatness—a willingness, in his very anxiety to be believed, to hold his eager confidence in leash, to taste with reticence the wine of such faith thus far aroused; and he said with simplicity and quietness:

"If those three unnamed voices spoke to you for themselves, for their owners' selves, I am glad, for then the voice greatest, to you, in all earthly time, will prove itself surely as quickly and as well without urge of mine."

To the prelate, swept away from the early threatening nature of the night by the glitter and color and trumpet-call of fascinating ages in his room, the words came as a weapon-thrust that froze the wondering praise upon his lips, and he grew white with mingled memory and presage as Smith's voice sounded its casual, deadly practicality again—"How high was the cross?"

The bishop bent his head. His answering voice was low.

"The feet of Him were scarce above the ground. A yard, no more."

"I trusted pictures in my youth," continued Smith, "but I would rather trust you, now, than any painter. It is a pity that Rembrandt, in thrilling the world, had not your knowledge. And I wish you'd help my own listening of this—next—by telling me now, accurately, what you will doubtless see. I mean, oi—him."

The very emphasis of the word seemed to tell the bishop, as if it had been written, that
John Smith spoke it with no capital, yet he spoke with reverence; and the old priest's voice as he answered the simple request of his miracle-worker was almost a whisper in its humility:

"You touch a subject dearly loved of me, John. In your turn, do not trust me too far. But I believe that in my garnering here, I have been selective, cautious—yes, accurate. I may not know just where I use others' words, and where my own, but I know I shall color from a letter sent by Lentalus, President of Judea, to the Roman Senate." Again the prelate's eyes left the black discs and the gray figure of their master, and became fixed, a regal though a modern seer's, as his slender figure drew itself without his consciousness to its full dominant height.

"I see a man whose person is tall and elegantly shaped, whose aspect, amiable, reverent. His hair is flowing in those beautiful shades which can be matched by no united colors, falling into graceful curls below his ears, and agreeably resting on his shoulders, and parting upon the crown of his head like the head-dress of the sect of the Nazarites. His forehead is large, smooth, his cheek without spot, save that of a lovely red, the nose and mouth are formed with exquisite symmetry, his beard is thick and suitable to his curling hair, and reaching a little below his chin and parting in the middle like a fork. His eyes are bright, clear, serene, his whole visage is one that has not been seen to laugh, but whose tears have been often seen, and as often infectious—indeed, they are the eyes, the visage, these have been the tears, of one of totally excellent beauty beyond that of the most surpassing children of men."

"Thank you," said John Smith quietly, and he as quietly placed the second disc in the wooden box. But a gesture of the bishop's hand stayed his.

"First, tell me what this is,"

"The last shall be first, for a purpose," said John Smith. "It begins with The Skull."

With the man's speaking of the plain, grim English word, a great awe overcame the white-faced priest—deeper, more darkly engulfing to his anticipating soul than would have come to him from any resonant articulation of Aramaic Golgotha or Latin Calvary.

It swept upon him the full strangeness of the austere night, in its suggestion of his own colloquial time, forced in upon him the vivid modernity of this, his room, in which history had queerly, marvelously repeated itself, and whose weirdly assailed acoustics, if his gray visitor was real, and right, were now to know the most awful of all earthly chronicle in the voice ineffable of Christ. His instinct was to kneel; but he felt throughout his spirit as with a physical shock the approach of moments more terrible in ordeal that the full of all great moments in his life, and a new impulse seized him: to stand, through the possible six minutes that would be six hours to him, as one with a burden enjoyed, even for its pain—for the gray figure of John Smith now meant to him that of a messenger, sent from his God to an elect, one chosen, indeed beyond desert, for the vouchsafement of a rapturous agony. And though he was already, in the whirring silence, trembling as only age can tremble, he determined that his responding spirit should deserve, if the old body could uphold it, and after one wrenching start of torture as the room filled with loud passion-colored voices, his stature became erect, unmoving as some statue on the way, as the cries, the curses, the charitable, mercy-tinted calls and the trampling august march passed fatally northward through Jerusalem and its inner wall into Akra. Here came suddenly the sound of heavy wood falling upon stones, and the noises of a halt, of four ruthless Roman voices speaking Greek, one answering protesting voice in Hebrew; the thick piteous clamor of the Cyrenese Jew, fortuitous, unfortunate... an instant's struggle, and the march went on, along the Via Dolorosa, its incumbent crowd swelling, and with it, swelling the high voices of women; and at what seemed, abruptly, an answer to their grieved outcry, the very soul and whole body of the bishop gasped in breathless listening, for it had struck upon his vibrant sense as the most exquisite and deep of music. But the phrases of it were fragmentary, indistinguishable, swiftly drowned in the stream of the conflicting emotional march and invective and dolor as the ever-northward pressure forced the tragedy through the second wall into Bezetha; and with the sudden hush and stare of that multitude thus loosed from
the narrower confines of the Tyropoeon valley, the bishop gazed upon what they gazed upon: a little skull-shaped knoll. So real was the insignificant rise of ground, so awful the work upon it of the four possessing soldiers, so hateful the watching expectancy of grouped hierarchy and people, that he closed his eyes, as if so doing could expel these things from so near by him, enable him the better to prepare for the full of that sovereign music whose but hint he had heard. And instead, the bright sunshine so brought figures forward that he could discern the pitying motions of the society of women who tremulous, suavely hctic brought forth from the crowd their merciful cup of anesthetic, their shiver of dismay at its rejection, their faint shrinking back as one sound smote through all others of the valley, the turmoiled city and the knoll, to smite, if this was real tonight, through all the ages while the earth had air.

It was the sound of a nail.

And, as the bishop swayed to it and to the sickening moaning of sick women, the music came, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

The old man, as he stood, was unconscious for a moment. There was a slight thud. After the sublimity of the few Greek words, the Latin cross had jolted into the ground.

It was now sometime after nine o’clock; and the next voice that the old man distinguished was one so mocking, virulent from the agony it wrrenched out of, that he covered his ears from it, for he knew its words by heart: “Art thou not the Christ? Then save thyself and us!” But he as swiftly dropped his palms for the hearing of the other thief: “... when Thou comest into Thy kingdom,” and all the anguish of past moments momentarily left him at the musical ecstasy of the rejoining words: “Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

So vastly and irrevocably great was the glory of it that it swept him on, with the whirling of the disc, above its sense of multitude and torture till a stir in the crowd brought forward a new, a sweepingly undulant, a searching, overwhelming sound—of weeping, more terrible than any woman’s weeping life had shown him, the sobbing of a voice lesser only in heart-thrilling vibrant splendor to the one that it had given, was now relinquishing, to the jagged world; and it sang terribly on in his being even as it was led tenderly away, mingling with the echo through his soul of the rich-colored phrases that had replied to its heartbeat: “Behold, thy son!... Behold, thy mother!”

Again the bishop neither saw nor heard, and now, for a long time—perhaps through one revolution of the disc—for he had felt that the darkness descendant upon him was that of the high noon in which the gold sun had covered its face from Jerusalem ... and now it must be nearly three o’clock, for his new consciousness was of the electrifying voice loud, and in a tongue unused before since the beginning of the horror—in Hebrew, and with his own word of earlier tonight, “Elői, lama sabachthani?” seemed to rock the heavens, writhing their gray to indigo, and to rock the agonized listening old man so that his whole world seemed full only of sound, through whose thunder came swooningly the few Greek and Latin syllables for which with sweat and with bitten lips he strained the full power of his hearing: “I thirst... It is finished. Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.”

Though the lights of the room, and the room itself, came softly about him again, the bishop stood on, unmoving, as in a waking sleep, until, across the scratch, scratch of the needle on the disc, came the low voice of his companion, and then he sank, instantly, utterly, as if under judgment, to his knees, with clasped hands, bended neck, at its one whispered Hebrew word: “The oil-press!”

The soft suggested tones of a heavy night, of almost silent nature, now and then warm gust-stirred, barely otherwise breathing, came gently to him ... the quiet fall of footsteps winding a customary way; he seemed to see a temple, and a city’s eastern gate, and then a deep ravine of cedar-trees, dim figures passing through it to the press—a small walled place where olives from the rich surrounding orchards were crushed to pulp. And after some few words at the entrance spoken by the now familiar marvelous voice, he felt the going of one figure for-
ward alone, through scarce-brushed shrubbery and untouched flowering plants, and its falling to the earth in his own posture. "Oh my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless not my will but thine be done." Two prayers, in one substance, rose through the Sycamore Street room; it was the lips of the bishop's living body that moved, it was the voice of Christ that spoke the words aloud. . . . And then, in Hebrew, prayers never heard before on earth, except to one of the two men hearing now, were heard, in broken phrases, breaking the worn strength of the older man whose spirit was all-willing but whose flesh grew weak, by word and word, by inarticulate sound on sound, until the last syllables of the spinning disc: "It is enough. The hour of betrayal is come!"

Fatal, terrible with their prophecy of doom long-since fulfilled, they seemed to ring on in the room, after the disc was lifted and put quietly by, as if creating a new prophecy. But as reality closed in once more, warm with the colored hangings and the mechanical light, and the old man rose tottering to his feet, there were no gloom, no horror in his face. It was in a very tremor of sudden, rushing, inspired joyousness that, aged and shaking, but with smoldering fire suddenly aflame and his person even in its bent posture magnificent and lofty, he flung his white hands toward the silently watching master of the machine.

"John, John, all of this night, and of its meaning, floods upon me now! Why have you been ominous, threatening—why your frightful words that your discovery disproved my God? The long, cruel nature of your work, vast work, has for a little phase distorted you! I understand all of your strange questions now, your preparations for my full belief in a short, a probably incredible time, and my belief you have. That 'most awful music' is a part of me now, indubitable through my whole being while I shall live—yes, live now as live hereafter! But where you depress and threaten, I rejoice, I thank you with all my soul, in the two names of the whole faithful and whole doubting world, for your machine, for it "crowns" what you say it undermines, it places jewels there where thorns have been, it "proves" the existence and the truth of Jesus Christ!"

The voice from the old shaking body rang with virile triumph; but the gray figure of the inventor, deep-breathing and leaning against the piano, opposite him, stepped one short pace toward him, and in the swift instant of its doing so all of the man's hesitancy and passivity and gentleness seemed to sweep away from him: all of his insignificant personality save its gray color, which intensified him now to a thing of unintentional but all-powerful menace, and its quiet, which as he gazed not malignantly but with dire suggestion into the wide eyes of the ardor-lit theologian, seemed to concentrate in his graphic gesture to the third big black disc, and in his brief, hard words.

"There was another garden!" said John Smith.

**W**ithout sound, but every line of it articulate of abhorrence, the prelate's figure slowly drew back, and upward. His slim shoulders seemed those of a young, angry man, his eyes to combine the flames of a righteous zealot's and those of a fierce animal's they might have been striving to hypnotize. But as the inventor merely gazed motionlessly, silently on at the man he had stabbed, it was the bishop's voice that at last shattered the pregnant silence.

"John Smith," he said, "your implication has been as insinuating as it has been nameless. I will not charge you, upon the few words of a fanatical genius, with the right wrath invested to my will by my church. But: you said in your category of strange speech tonight that my machine should not be termed sacred, and said it, I remember now, with innuendo; and let me tell you, sir, that if that third disc has desecration in it, my house is hereupon closed to you, for I will not listen!"

"I am sorry," said John Smith, "but only at this parley and delay, for you are not a shirk! Dare you yourself say you are? Do you demand all the supernatural of your God, and fear the natural? Are you, whom I can see through, and with veneration, to the bone of the soul, a coward?"

The wrathful shoulders drooped. The old body seemed to shiver in its armor. The bishop was remembering his prayer. And it was with hands stretched almost as if in prayer to his visitor now that he answered him:
“You accuse me of truthfulness! Yes, I am truthful. I believe in your machine. But, John, I read an impossible horror in your speech—your words ‘another garden’ were hideous, as you spoke them!”

“I know they were—to you,” said Smith, excitedly. “Didn’t I tell you I would break your heart? Not that it should break, but it will, for you are exactly different to me—you can’t be satisfied with simple God—three Gods in One must be divine to you, and to find one third—”

“Oh! Oh!” gasped the bishop, from the twist of the knife, but with command of his pain a surge of after-strength filled his voice: “I believe all that has taken place here tonight, but there is some mistake; it is another voice, if in another garden words are said whereby you read that He denies Himself! Is that your meaning? I suffer unnecessarily—does He? Does He?”

Again Smith gazed at him, gray and ominous, and now in a kind of horrible dispassion, equally unmalignant and unmerciful in posture and in words.

“He deny his divinity? No. But his mother does!”

The room, awhirl with light, seemed to the old man to reel round for an instant, as it should have done, the next, to the inventor, for where the host of Sycamore Street had before been suddenly stately, he now was regal; where priestly, now princely. It was with exquisite violence that, superb and towering, his frame heightened to its full magnificence, as if, had that body been dead, it would at this challenge of the man have thus arisen; and the flash upward of the rich jewel on his left hand was now like the barbarous motion of a hari-kari in its abandoned zigzag through the air, where it hovered shuddering toward the inventor as if its underlying relic, its splinter of the actual cross, real as his belief in its reality, were sending forth darts of lightning to carry the vibrant thunder of his voice—

“Blasphemer!”

Ringing out of him with the full strength of his faith, it shot like a word of exorcize at the gray figure, which stood opposing him like that of a demon in its potentiability and vividly, yet without a fiend’s loveliness—whose only beauty was the splendor of arithmetic, whose only colors those of a slate-pencil and a slate.

“Blasphemer?” The word seemed to echo back from the stone figure it had struck, twisted into an ironic shade of interrogation. “To me, it is your whole faith that seems blasphemous! But that is a side-issue. You have told me you believe in my machine.”

“I now believe,” cried the righteously quivering old man, “that you are a devil incarnate!”

“No, I am not a devil,” said John Smith. And he added with simple practicality: “Nor am I any more incarnate than you are. As for your belief, I told you your emotional prejudice would be supreme, and I am prepared for it. At the beginning of this disc—”

The bishop shivered, but his voice was swift.

“I do not call you an intentional devil; I do not think you came here to assault and trick me. But I am realizing now that you have made madman comments here tonight—such as that you would substantiate your horrible contentions by my own fancy for some particular woman! You may be absolute in your sincerity. But I tell you, I will hear no more unless, as I am now convinced you can not do, you prove that amazing, that incredible instrument to me!”

The quiet confidence with which Smith met his gaze made his answering words seem quite the most outlandish of the night.

“Next to Christ,” he said, “your favorite historical character is Marie Stuart.”

The bishop stared at him. His astonishment almost wiped their battle-ground from his thoughts, and dazzled beyond question and even expression of wonder he answered, simply:

“She is. I pray to her every night. She is not a saint as yet, in the eyes of the church, but there is no harm in it, and I pray to her just the same. I love her for—”

“You need not finish that sentence,” said John Smith. “You have called for proof of my machine, and you shall have it. I’ve barely suggested its possibilities to you, and in fact you’ve yet to know what I can already do with it! These discs were all prepared for you, but this last one specially, most especially! I now can send the power of my machine to definite places joined to definite times. To prepare for this night, it has been many a night to
Eightieth Avenue. Ah, what a solitary life you have been leading there! Many a time it has brought me nothing home, after long hours' vigil, but your lonely sigh! But you had in friends, last Thursday night, to dine—ecclesiastical ones—and afterward, in an intimate, friendly way, you were joked about your love for Marie Stuart. And one of them asked, if, in event of her attempted election, and provided your being at Rome and chosen to act in her case as the devil's proctor, and assuming for you prerogative to refuse, you would accept. And—"

"And—you—you have a record of that—on that?" stammered the bishop, and his gesture faltered toward the piano.

"It opens the last record," said John Smith. "Do you ask more authoritative credential of my machine? Will your own voice convince you?"

There was a tremor through the old body, a tremor in that voice.

"Play it," he said, and turned, with white, furrowed face, away.

There was the familiar whirr. And from the third disc out of the Doom's-Day envelope, came sounds more familiar still—the rustling of rich hangings at Eightieth Avenue, the murmur of the voices of his friends, louder, fully recognizable as they passed in from room to room . . . .

the pause, by the tapestry curtains, with its genial dispute, and then, with all the weird strangeness of the sudden embarrassing stare of a mirror, his own resonant, delicate laugh: " . . . for I love her as instinctively for the way she dressed her hair as I do for her martyrdom! . . . .

the jovial, abrupt thrust of question from his special intimate, as to the devil's proc- tor: "Would you?" . . . .

the hushed silence, as he paused for his habitual inward looking; and at last, astonishingly louder than he had supposed he had spoken, his answer, positive, reverberant, "No!" And John Smith lifted the needle from the disc.

"Well," he demanded, "do you now believe in my machine, or do you not?"

His victim's face was lowered, hidden; its deep furrows deepened.

"I believe," he whispered, simply as if he were beginning the creed.

"Now," said Smith, his homely manner reverting him to the practicality of a lecturer, "this is a garden in Nazareth. And the first voice—hers—I'm certain you'll recognize, for I saw you shivering all over—as for that matter I thought you would—when you heard it there at The Skull, and here, in spite of its youth—"

"Yes," interrupted the bishop, his words again very low, "though that voice laughed or lisped I would recognize it."

"That is well," said Smith, "though I am so sorry for you. Naturally, as to your credence here his has troubled me, for it's now, you see, the high voice of a child of only a few years old—eight, nine—"

"O—oh!" cried the bishop, exclamatory as his huskiness would allow. "Then it is she and—He?" His face had lifted eagerly and for the instant a great hopeful light was in it; but the machinist's prompt words snuffed it out:

"Of course. She could lie to her husband—that gigantic lie. But she could not lie to her Son. Her magnificence of courage failed her there. That is the exquisite part of it—to me?"

"Is it—long?" faltered the old man's weakening voice.

"No. Mercifully short. If you care to thank God for anything when we are done, it will be for its brevity."

"O—oh," cried the bishop again, his voice now forced by very anguish into loud resonance, and his hands as he cried flung shudderingly forth, "I dare not even pray! I feel not fit, for I have prayed once tonight, and I have been horribly, yes, excruciatingly answered! My prayer—oh, God!—was the exact opposite of the Lord's own prayer: 'Though it be New Gethsemane, tempt Thou me!'"

"Shall I begin?" said Smith.

The bishop drew his sunken body up once more—to the full of posture possible to it now, as if, if he were to be shot, he would be shot standing. Though he had knelt through Christ's Gethsemane, through his own, the new Gethsemane, he would stand.

He nodded. His jewel was smoulder- ing, tight against his heart.

His guest's hand trembled in replacing the needle, and the old man heard again his own voice boom forth its resonant "No! It seemed to him like an official seal, before the opening of a letter. . . .

Through the interval his brain was ringing with the last words of the first garden in their torturing prophecy: "The hour of
betrayal is come!” Then with the coming of sound seemed the coming of a Satan—
his own translation like that of Christ in
dream or miracle to a distant place, from
which his vision could be distant, clear.
The noises were the pounding of hammers,
the rich scrape through timber of a single-
headed saw of bronze. Soon the song of
the carpenter-shop ceased; and as the song
of a blue thrush, ravishing in its loneliness,
thrilled into being after it, there seemed
with its note upon note to grow up to his
sight an orange-tree—a pomegranate—and
intermingling in a gnarled haphazard
cluster, olives, and figs . . . while
beyond the low, rough mortared wall
stretched downward the cultivated luxuri-
ance of early-ripened grain-fields into the
Esdraelon plain . . . and yonder,
yonder, the ridges of Lebanon, and the
blue bay of Akra . . . A soft, mild
wind swept from the high snows of Her-
mon, stirring the leaves of the scented
garden, as the song stirred the throat of
the blue thrush, whose voice was joined
by a linnet’s voice. And then, over there,
two other voices rose over the bronze
clang of the down-thrown saw, and the
music ceased in the trees.
“It is she and Joseph, quarreling.” The
interrupting words whispered across the
room to the bishop as in the gray voice of
a devil, like a shadow across the sunlight
of the garden. “Their perennial quarrel,
ten years after the lie was told!”

They were indeed the voices of a con-
tending man and woman; his, elderly,
grave, colored even with dignity though
thus raised in contest; and the other, first
anxious, pleading then defensive, high,
close upon tears, now full of them, pitiable,
choking. It might, thought the deeply-
breathing listener, even now in its exquisi-
tite timbre of vigorous youth, be fitly the
voice of the mother of all sorrow. . . .
It broke . . . and he saw her running
from the small shop and through the gar-
den, her scarlet cape aflutter against the
fair blue sky, her deeper blue skirt rich
with gold sunlight; and now her sobs fell
lower and lower under the tree of the blue
thrush, where she leant—terrible young
music, to her precursor, to him the echo,
of her helpless outcry in the crowd at Cal-
vary. Then, suddenly, he felt, as if in
neither sense of sound nor sense of sight,
but as though from perfumes brushed from
the shrubs of the garden, the approach of
another listener. He heard the woman’s
smothered last sob as her outflung arms
gathered her own to her; felt—saw the
great eyes, blue as her dress and as the
thrush and as the sky, uplifted to her eyes,
the golden head clasped, smoothed, crushed
against the crimson of her cape, shimmer-
ing with sunlight shining through the
mottling leafy branches of the tree; and
at last, heard again, and yet not again,
for the wondering of its innocent young
tones was but the silver of the rich jewel
that had flashed forth from the cross—
the dreaded lovely music—

“Mother, whose child am I?”

As the child waited, through the whir-
ring, sunlit leaf-flutter of the disc, for her
reply, so the old bishop waited in the gar-
den. And he felt, as the child could not,
the anguish saturating her long desperate
silence upon the question for which she
had waited through moments that had built
the sum of years, anguish that at last
found voice in her cry as she crushed Him
again to her now: “Oh, my all, my
darling, my lamb, even in sorrow blessed
am I among women! All that I have suf-
f ered I would suffer again for thee, and
more—yea, even a sword piercing through
mine own soul! When I gaze upon thee,
my soul doth magnify the Lord! Mine
own, mine own!”

And the unconscious sword of music
pierced her soul again:

“I am yours, mother! But whose else?
Whose son am I?”

And her voice, quivering, brave after
desperate silence, after long tremulous
gazing into the heavenly questioning eyes,
answered him soft, golden with truthful-
ness, low with passionate reverence—

“My own, my own, you are the child—
of Love.”

A silence . . . marvelous silence
. . . and once more the innocent sword
pierced her with question—

“And—what is Love, mother?”

The trembling old man unknown of
them in the garden felt the very lifting of
her eyelids and her eyes, the movement of
her lips in silent prayer; her trembling
seemed to him, like his, part with the
trumbling of the breeze-stirred leaves, and
her answer, as she placed her hands upon
the small tender shoulders, the rhapsodic
articulation of an ecstatic soul—
“My darling—Love is God!”

The leaves stirred gently on, the sound of wood nailed upon wood came faintly from the carpenter-shop, before the child broke his long silence with his wondering voice—

“Then—then I am the son of God!”

He said no more. The unseen old man saw the light of his child-face, as he turned marveling away, the instinctive stiffening of the little shoulders, the young majesty of his tread, as he walked slowly, dazedly through the garden. There were the rustle of the flowering shrubs along his path, the woman’s wide, quivering, silent gaze after him, the song of the blue thrush. The great faith of the ages was begun. The disc was finished.

As he stood motionless, the color of the bishop’s face, the expression of his eyes, did not fall upon his guest, for Smith was behind him, and the old man was staring straight across the room, at the shadow of his tormentor’s forlorn arms, hovering like a bat upon his own shadow.

“Are you satisfied?” cried the inventor.

“Are you satisfied?”

The bishop did not answer, and the gray voice, now hot and shot full of burning colors from its owner’s passion, poured on over his bent shoulders:

“You are! Though I can’t see your face I know you are, as I knew you would be!”

In a desperate movement the old man threw his shoulders up, his arms back, as if to hurl off a sucking vampire, but the arms fell again, the shoulders sank; and the voice poured on exultingly:

“Yes, my responsibility now is done. It is yours, now! For you know! Ah, you can’t deny it, with hands and shoulders any more than with words! Can you?”

With his own merciless hands he seized the pitable shoulders, swerved the old figure about, gazed triumphant into the hollowed eyes.

“Your own conscience tells you the truth as clearly as my machine! That only told you what your own brain has been telling you for years and years and years!”

“Dare you?” breathed the old man.

“Dare you?”

“Yes, yes, I dare,” cried Smith, “for it’s mere child’s-play to read a mind and character like yours. This has been the one thing that’s come to stand between you and your God like a shadow first and then like a gray granite wall, built year by year as your faith crumbled and your brain matured and your study deepened and your rigorous, righteous mind demanded more and more of rational, of truth, and your worst torment at the show-down now is conscience, conscience, conscience! Oh, I pity you, but truth is inexorable when you light it, as you have fought and fought and fought, and your heart breaks as much from the triumph of your feared, hated ogre as it does from the tumbling of your sixty years of faith!”

“Take your hands from me!” whispered the gasping bishop. “They bite me! Let me think.”

“Yes! Yes!” cried Smith hectically.

“It is time for you to think, and to think as you have never thought before. I have told you why I came to you! Ironically, on you lies the fate for me and for the world of my life-work, as great a work as man has ever done! Because of your money, it is your right, your privilege, to smash my machine to splinters where it stands in my shop—yes, because of that money I’m so damned morbid over, and because of one greater thing: whether the world is ready for this yet, a fierce human question that I freely grant you fitter for than I. Do you see now what rests upon your shoulders instead of in my hands that ‘bit’ you? I am fair, tell you, suggest to you, everything, and as I am so must you be, totally fair! That child’s idea of mine, that key-tone thing for housewives, was no joke. Do you know how you can wreck my life-time work as I have wrecked your faith? I’ve made no record of how to make my machine, except in my head, and I am too old to make another one. I could go on, with the years that I have left, to wonders only suggested by it now—but if this instrument is shattered, so am I! Well, in my loneliness across the river there, hung on the cliff in the middle of my secret like you—with yours—down here in Sycamore Street, I have needed utter solitude, but I have lately had a telephone, and one, like your, for a single purpose only. I have had power over you tonight—do you sense your power, now? Remember the housewife! That machine of mine I’ve keyed in every last minutest atom to the key-tone of the ring of that telephone, and my telephone, like yours,
has never yet been used except for the asking of the time! Go to that ‘phone of yours there on the wall, ask for my number, and listen—and as compensation for all you heard tonight, you’ll hear, along with the distant unanswered ringing of mine, the filtered crash of my machine to ten thousand pieces! Ah, there are other marvels than hearts in this world to break! But first, be fair. Consider, that what just now was hideous to you, can be noble, beautiful unto very sublimity to millions and millions outside of your faith. My view of it is the view of only one of multitudes. I said tonight ‘the peace or torment of the whole civilized world’; and I meant your notion of peace or torment, your notion of ‘civilized.’ But there are countless people in the world like me, who can feel God, though they don’t believe in your version of Him, or in the absurd demand you make upon Him! I understand the aspiration of your faith; I was never atheist, I was only agnostic always, and I confess that when I knew it wasn’t true, I longed for it. But that, though I suppose it started my nonsense of conscience in regard to you, and your money, was itself nonsense. Can you not reverence love? That has been always the weakness of your ethics—their unnaturalness. In that respect you have smirched—well, the universe! Can you intelligently suffer from the contemplation of the very heart-flower of human history—her love, that could create that child, the sublimest character of the recorded world? If you let that telephone alone tonight and let my work go on, you will hurt the feelings of only five hundred million people! And what will they be a few years from now, and what of the possibilities of my machine for their own coming billions? Though you and I would never live long enough to know the full marvels of it, those possibilities we can see tonight, as it sits at home and your telephone hangs here! Consider them, oh, consider! You, with all the two strengths of your office and your character, have striven to end war. Did you end it? Your early, your first effort was when that Portuguese came to you—like me—and you put the nickel in the slot that blew him up. And your very last, with all the matured force of your faith and the high voice of your achieved pinnacled church position, got the back page of a newspaper! But would my ma-

chine end it? If it could go to Eightieth Avenue last Thursday and listen to your private colloquy, behind closed doors, could it, perfected, have gone to Germany, could it have gone to France, could it have gone to England? First of all, could it go to Japan—tomorrow? If any one asked you what made you, you’d say God—primarily, even now. But secondarily, didn’t your country? No one on earth more intelligently loves his country than you do—I know that! Oh, I can’t help pleading for the thing that I have made, so I appeal to your personal love! You’re a patriot—every member of your vast congregations knows that—and if your country is what you think it and preach it, do you not wish her power? Think of it, think of it! For these suggestions suggest only the beginnings of chances! For instance, if I, or a successor (for surely I could still live long enough, thank God, to train one) could hitch photography to it! Oh, good God, though I’ve spoken a doubt myself as to the fitness of the world for it, there was no sincerity in me when I spoke it! Think of all humanity! Ah, it’s the truth that humanity needs, and all it needs, and forever needs, and——”

“Stop!” said the bishop.

His voice seemed to come straight from dry throat, though it had the motion of dry lips.

“Let me decide without further sound

... It is enough.”

It was with laboredly, barely lifted hand that he spoke the first words of the prophetic last speech of the garden of the oil-press.

“Very well,” replied John Smith, his voice dropping, and his tremulous hands too, into grim quietude. “Do you destroy my machine? As it was at Eightieth Avenue last Thursday night, it is here now, listening to you, waiting for its fate! Does it carry you down the centuries as a brave infidel, or do we smash together, it and I? Answer us, yes or no! You are a just man. Here is my number on the envelope. There is your telephone. Do you destroy us?”

And through the room fell the silence of Gethsemane, while without, the noisome slum of late-awake Sycamore Street, like the apostles, slept.

It was as if Doom’s-Day hung there over the two, for Smith, filled with the silence
about to shriek in the dissolution of his machine; for the prelate, full of horrible noise already, for the terror of all the three big black discs was ringing in his brain. And when, at last, he turned to the inventor, his face was as the face of a skull, with a dim light inside it, flickering the misery of his soul outwardly upon its sepulcher, and his voice as he once more drew his body upward, was likewise ghostly in its very strength, for it reverberated through the room as if it were sounding again from the phonograph—

"No!"

A ringing cry came from John Smith.

"Ah! Ah! Good man! The seeking of truth is all God asks of any one—it is that that is religion!" But a gasp followed his words. He had flung his face and arms upward with the triumph of the cry, and had not seen, or heard, the bishop fall. The old man, weakly breathing, was lying propped against the seat of his big chair as if he had slid helplessly out of it to the floor. And with another cry, one full of pity, the author of his downfall bent over him, strove ineffectually to lift him.

"Friend, friend, I did not come here to murder you! Friend, if I’ve seemed to rob you of your heaven, haven’t I also taken from you all fear of hell? You think of that, don’t you? That means something to you, doesn’t it?"

With strong effort the bishop succeeded in shaking his head, a weak, desolate little movement on Smith’s supporting arm, and from the inventor wrung a cry of choking admiration—

"Friend, life-long friend, hold your strength!"

At the words, a small noise came from the bishop. His thought was that Smith, in his sudden overmastering pity, had sprung to the telephone, perhaps to call the doctor, or, perhaps, even the fatal number on the envelope.

But through the phrases of the discs whirring in his ears he could not hear, and through the desperate strain of the confusing noises and pictures in his brain, he felt that Smith must have switched off the electric lights, for the place had grown black to him. Was the creature going cowardly away, deserting him helpless in the dark, alone and fetching off all marks of his frightful visit, fearful of its consequence? With hands that should have snapped at the wrists upon the fierce effort of even so frail a weight, he raised himself high enough to peer across the arm of the chair.

And Smith had not gone. He was standing there, and speaking—and not through the telephone, but to him. His figure seemed lit only by the pale dawn of Sycamore Street, shot through the darkened curtains, and its gray clothes to be of a different though kindred color—a silver softly so glittering that it made a path across the carpet between them.

The bishop wondered confusedly why he had never before thought John Smith beautiful, so strangely effulgent was the face gazing down upon him, and he marveled, with all the pitiably wondering of the aged, how through this terrible night he had been able to entertain so beautiful a creature so unaware—indeed, how so through the years, for as he peered the more yearningly to understand, he realized that John Smith was not a passer-by of tonight, or of the day when he had given him the money, but some one somehow forever in his life. Could there, he strivingly wondered, have been a mistake about the name “Smith?” Had it not been mentioned, and accepted, between them tonight? And if this was his most-loved friend, why could he not remember who that friend was? Why had he not recognized him when he came in tonight, in answer to his prayer? Were, indeed, mistake and confusion as to the great human love of his life to be the last drops of bloody sweat of God’s swiftly answering test of him?

But he let go the agonizing reflection in his supreme endeavor to learn what his radiant guest was saying. He was sure that the voice, could he but hear it, would answer his manifold question. Indeed, he felt that that voice, so golden would it be as the rich figure was silver, would wipe out all that hideous din of records in his brain, could and would, if need were, answer all the questions of the whole world.

In a supreme abandon to effort he brought himself upon his knees, and flung forth his arms across the path of light, pleadingly to urge the figure nearer him, that pleadingly he might beg it, if he could but find a little of his own lost voice, not
to leave him now, nor even tomorrow, nor ever again; and as if out of the pandemonium of the discs, yet reaching him in golden tones straight through the silver light, came articulate and unmistakable from the living lips as it had come from The Skull—

"Today thou shalt be with me in paradise!"

It was today. And in the quiet of it, and of the Sycamore Street room, lay the bishop's form—that of a finely wrought crucifix, its deserted old ivory wonderfully smiling.

The Crossways

there is a two-forked road leads from Today;
One path curls backward through the sun-shot vale
Of Yesteryear; and one path marks the way
To forests unexplored and towering cliffs where trail
Enshrouding clouds and fog-wreaths dank and pale.

Some men there are whose footsteps fain would turn
Into the valley's well-remembered shade;
They haunt once more the mossy bank and fern,
The cooling streams, the flowered hill and glade,
The little lanes through which the sunlight played.

And there are timid souls who dare not seek
Highways ahead nor tread those of the Past;
They fear the forest, shun that gray-swathed peak
And jagged stones like those they tripped on last;
The crossroads, safe, wide-spaced, these hold them fast.

But there are some who would adventuring go—
Stout woodsmen, pioneers with axes bright;
Staunch mountain-climbers searching out the bow
Of promise on the rugged, mist-draped height;
And women bearing torches through the night.

These hold remembrance dear—yet not too dear;
The Past is but a fragrance, not a ghost
Dogging Today; they see the Future clear:
The untried ways are where God needs man most,
Hewing new paths for Truth's all-conquering host.

Anna Blake Mesquida
That Spring is a fairy—a dainty, laughing, madcap sort of fairy, capable of almost any delightful treachery—all authorities unanimously concede. But that Spring is a temptress beneath her elfin cloak, a temptress as blandishing and as inexorable in her demands as the gentleman named Lucifer who contracted for the soul of Mr. Faust and later exacted its payment—this is not so generally understood. Yet it is fact. Sooner or later, usually sooner, Spring comes as temptress to every member of the human race. In some form or other she offers her bargain; in payment, like Lucifer, she demands the soul.

Many, many people—most people, perhaps—never come to know what it is that Spring, the smiling Circe, really has to offer. They hesitate to yield up their souls, or at best they yield them ungraciously, with secret provisos and if's and buts. Yet Spring requires full payment, and unlike Lucifer she requires it in advance; cash in hand, making absolutely no promise—beyond glittering generalities—of what she is going to do by way of recompense. This is the reason why so few persons sell their souls to Spring. It takes nerve. More than that, it takes youth.

It was on a certain Saturday morning in early May that Spring, the temptress, came to Carter Harlan. He was sitting at his desk in his office, making a determined effort, as every young lawyer should, to keep his eyes and his mind upon his work, while his six feet of bone and muscle and sound young flesh balked stubbornly at the task. Outdoors it was warm and sunny, and from the hazy southwest across the city and the harbor beyond there flowed a soft, caressing breeze that in some way or other seemed charged with a nameless power of unhappiness. It was a most disconcerting breeze. It did things, for instance, to the ordinary street noises—the rattle of trucks, the roar of street cars, the shouts of newsboys—so that they came up from below in the guise of an incessant clarion call for Carter Harlan to get up, put on his hat and go somewhere. He couldn't tell just where.

For a long, long time—possibly fifteen minutes—he held his eyes to the law reports in front of him. Then, just as he was beginning to realize that no matter where he held his eyes his mind was apparently free to wander as it chose, he became aware of what seemed to be a presence in the room. He slammed his papers down and turned in his chair.

He recognized her immediately. She was dressed in a filmy garment of sky blue and grass green, and her hair was the color of sunlight. She bowed deeply, mischief in her eyes.

"I came through the window," she informed him. "I'm Spring."
"I know that all right," muttered Harlan. "I shouldn't have left it open. Asinine thing to do—today."

"Oh, I could have got in all right!" said Spring. She came closer to him. "You can't work with me here in the room, can you?" she asked.

"No," snapped the man. "I can't. And I've got an important case to clean up too."

"Want me to go?" mocked Spring, moving toward the window. Harlan groaned—

"No, I don't."

"Well, then, drop your work."

"I have," said the man. "What do you want me to do—tear it up?"

"Oh, no!" said Spring. "Just drop it, put it away, forget it. She paused a moment, then leaned close, so close that the gold of her hair seemed to envelop him. "Come on out," she whispered. "Come on out."

Harlan scowled, thinking.

"I'd like to," he finally replied, "but honestly, I can't. I've got a date to play tennis this afternoon at the club, and tomorrow—"

Spring drew back.

"Oh well," she pouted, "if that's the way you feel! I suppose I might as well be going."

"No, no—don't," he insisted quickly. "Please don't go. I'm game—honestly I am. I'll do anything you want—anything. Please stay."

"Will you come with me?" asked Spring.

"Where?"

"I can't tell you," she said. "Perhaps I don't know myself. I wouldn't tell you anyhow, so there. But if you'll give up everything else—this minute, right now—and follow me, I'll promise you something."

"What?" he demanded.

"Don't ask," cautioned Spring, "just come. Leave everything to me. Will you?"

Carter Harlan stared fixedly at his visitor. She moved toward the open window with its background of blue sky, and as she moved she beckoned to him.

"Aren't you coming?" he thought he heard her say.

"Am I coming?" he cried. "You bet I am!" He sprang to his feet, jamming his papers into the top drawer of his desk.

"Oh, I'm sick of all this," he exclaimed, "the city—work—monotony—always knowing just what you're going to do next."

He made a sweeping gesture to the desk. "I'm through," he announced. "Do you hear me, you slave-driver, you? I'm through. I'm going. I don't know where I'm going, and I don't much care, as long as it's somewhere else. I'm off!"

He turned toward the window, an exultant light in his eyes.

Spring still hovered there, beaming.

"Toss a coin," she prompted. "Take a train for somewhere—somewhere you never heard of. Then get off. Leave the rest to me."

So it came to pass that less than two hours later Carter Harlan swung off a dusty, dirty, cindery three-car train at a meadow-encircled crossroads hamlet in the heart of the Rockland County hills. He had picked the railroad by tossing a coin.

He had selected the train because it ran on an out-of-the-way little division of whose existence he had never even heard. He had chosen the station by asking the conductor for the smallest town on the road. As the train puffed away, leaving him standing alone on the tiny platform, Harlan realized that his faith in the conductor had not been misplaced. It was the smallest town he had ever seen.

There was the station itself, an east and west road cutting across the railroad track, an old dilapidated shed, an assortment of fences, fields, bushes, trees and tumbling hills—and that was all.

From the recess of the station came a tall, bent-over individual wearing a uniform cap.

"Expectin' some one to meet ye?" inquired the individual affably.

"No," said the young man, "I just got off here for—well, I just got off." He hesitated, then, "Where does the road go?" he asked.

"Which way?" inquired the man with the uniform cap.

Harlan grinned.

"Back there," the station agent jerked his head, "it runs to the village. T'other direction it runs somewheres into the hills." He pointed to the west.

"Is there any place—any hotel or inn—where I could spend the night if I walk west?" Harlan asked.
"If you go far enough, about a dozen miles or so, I believe there’s place they call the Pineolock Inn. There’s nothin’ between here an’ there, so I’m told, but the Spanish folks in Fleetbrook Valley. They ain’t got no hotel though. They keep by themselves —unsociable-like."

"Spanish folks?" echoed the younger man. "Who are they?"

"Don’t know. There’s quite a gang of ‘em. They come here to market sometimes. Quality folks, too, a lot of ‘em are s’posed to be. The men are quite decent, but the women and girls aren’t worth a darn. Too many airs about nothin’, I say."

"What are Spanish people doing ‘way out here?" Harlan wanted to know.

"Wal," said the agent, "I don’t take much stock in ‘em, but I believe they come here on account of bein’ unpopular durin’ the Spanish-American war. Some folks calls ‘em the Spanish colony. As long as they don’t trouble me, though, I don’t care what they are. Got any chewin’ tobacco?"

CARTER HARLAN walked west.

By the time the afternoon shadows had begun to stretch coolly across the soft Spring green, the road had wound its way upward into a tangle of wooded hills and dells—hills such as Harlan had never dreamed could exist so unbelievably close to the brick and steel and turmoil of the greatest city in the world. In his three brief hours of swinging along, with dawdles and roadside rests interspersed, the young lawyer had made a number of additional discoveries as well. He had discovered, for instance, that growing grass has a scent ever so much more thrilling than the perfume of any bunch of violets a florist ever sold. He had discovered that birds really do sing songs. And he had tracked to its lair, after painstaking thought and analysis, the temporarily baffling identity of the one thing lacking to make the road and the hills and the trees transcendentally perfect in their beauty. She would need to be young, he decided, and sparkling and quite easy to look at. Also she would need to be the sort of personage who—well, he couldn’t exactly make up his mind about that.

It didn’t matter anyway.

The road turned sharply to the right, dipped into a wooded hollow snarled with leafy underbrush, bore to the left, climbed the flank of a steep foothill spur, dropped over the other side and opened out abruptly into a tiny glade, cupped between close-pressing slopes. Through a defile, almost a ravine, that cut into this glade from the north there splashed and tumbled a brook, turning precipitously at this very point to follow the course of the main road toward the west. Across the weather-beaten bridge and up by the bank of this brook, disappearing in the shadows of the little ravine, there ran what seemed at first to be a wood road. On second look, however, it proved to be a highway of a kind, for a sign-post with a pointing hand bore the legend, "Fleetbrook Valley."

Carter Harlan stopped. He scratched his head. He peered first up the ravine and then to the west, forward along the road he had been traveling. He scratched his head again. Then he pulled out his watch. It was past four o’clock.

"Himm!" he meditated.

He twirled his new straw hat around his forefinger. He tried the edge of the brim meditatively between his teeth. Then abruptly he turned across the bridge and up the little road into the ravine.

For perhaps a mile the track ascended steeply between its two sheer-rising, thickly wooded banks, with the brook splashing and churning alongside. Presently, however, the grade became easier, the hills opened out, and little by little the unbroken trees gave place to fields and pasture lands. Harlan had just decided that both he and the day were warm enough to warrant his stripping down and trying a plunge in a certain sunny pool that appealed to him, when suddenly the sunlight was wiped out, as if an invisible sponge had rubbed the gold from the landscape. At the same instant came a distant warning growl of thunder.

Harlan looked up in surprise and started to walk faster. A great bank of clouds was rising like a blue-gray curtain in the western sky. The curtain reached the zenith, the thunder growled again, there came a distant flash—and Harlan began to run. A few big drops sprinkled down. Harlan ran harder. Ahead of him he saw what appeared to be a hamlet of little white houses; even as he noted them the houses were blotted out by a sheet of blinding, driving rain, and the storm broke all about him. By the time he had blundered up on
the porch of the nearest dwelling, he was drenched.

The door opened and a little old man looked out at him. The young lawyer tried to mumble a word of explanation and apology.

"Come in," said the old man courteously but without a smile. "You are wet. It is a storm." He closed the door behind his visitor, looking nervously, uncertainly about him. Harlan took the occasion to notice that he was stoutish, that he had iron-gray hair and a black mustache, and that his whole appearance, even his clothing, seemed to have an air of being foreign. The little man cleared his throat. "I am sorry," he said, "It is unfortunate." He seemed at a loss.

"I am very sorry to break in on you in this fashion," essayed Harlan. "I am really very sorry. I came this way by accident. I am not familiar with the neighborhood. Is there any hotel, perhaps—-?"

The older man shook his head.

"I don't want to inconvenience you," the young lawyer went on, "but the storm will soon be over. Then I can go on my way."

"Impossible," declared the little old man. He put the tip of his forefinger to his cheek. "Hmm! I am in a dilemma." He gave a sudden, searching look into Harlan's eyes, then, "You are a gentleman," he said.

"Well—er—I try," Harlan began stammering, in a state of mind between embarrassment and annoyance. But the older man held up his hand.

"Tut-tut!" he interrupted, "I asked no question. I simply made a statement. Please pardon me for voicing my thought aloud." Harlan inclined his head, and the other continued, speaking rapidly, "But now I should like to ask, may I know your name?"

"Carter Harlan."

The little man repeated the syllables. Then he spoke again—

"Your occupation?"

Harlan, for some reason no longer irritated, gave a brief synopsis of what struck him as the more important facts in the hitherto not remarkably exceptional career. He mentioned his profession, his firm, his law school and college, and even went so far as to sketch out a few points in regard to his family and his ancestry. There was something about the little old man, about his house, about the whole atmosphere of the scene, that made him not only willing but almost anxious to establish an identity for himself which would have a quality of being something more than casual. The longer he talked the more keenly he felt it. And throughout his recital the little old man gave grave and careful attention.

When Harlan finished, the latter nodded his head.

"I thank you," he said simply, "I am relieved. And now you will please me by coming into the kitchen where it is warm and drying yourself by the stove. You must remove your coat and shoes. Perhaps I can find something dry for you to wear. My older brother was almost as large as you." As he discoursed, the little man led the way through a door into a long hallway and then through another door into the kitchen itself.

A dark-haired girl, mixing dough in a bowl at the center table, looked up from her work as they entered. She wore a garden smock of deep yellow and her sleeves were rolled up to the elbow. Her figure was against the light and Harlan could make out little except that she was slim and apparently young. The older man stopped.

"Señor Harlan," he said, "my daughter, Mariquita! Señor Harlan, my dear, has been caught by the storm. He is very wet."

The girl and the young lawyer bowed to each other. Then the little man said something to his daughter in a foreign tongue. She answered in kind, smiled and went out of the room. The little man motioned Harlan closer to the stove.

"Now at last," he began, "I may be permitted to apologize for my tardy hospitality. I am a Spaniard, sir—Señor Felipe Bernetto, my name. We are all Spanish here; perhaps you may have heard of our colony. For certain reasons we have kept much to ourselves. Few strangers come here. We do not welcome intrusion. I speak frankly because you, Señor Harlan, are now no more a stranger. You are my guest."

Harlan smiled inwardly, a smile of intense satisfaction. Perhaps this was going to be an adventure after all.

"As you perhaps know," the older man was saying, "we Spanish are known as the most hospitable race in the world. It is a
matter of pride with us—a thing we never lose. Perhaps now you will begin to understand the dilemma in which your appearance first placed me. I was torn, if I may say so, between my caution and my truer instinct. I am glad that the latter was victorious. I—"I apologize deeply, señor, for my failure to extend to you at once that open hospitality upon which every man of my blood prides himself."

Haran felt as if he were acting in a play. It was all so far from the world he knew. He found himself bowing gravely. "Sir," he said, "I appreciate deeply both your hospitality and your confidence. I am flattered. I can say nothing more. I thank you."

"Tut-tut!" the little man beamed. "As you Americans say in your slang, kindly ignore it."

There came a tapping of light footsteps on unseen stairs, the door opened, and the girl in the yellow smock once more was in the room. Her hair seemed to have been rearranged, for now it was piled high on top of her head, while before, as Harlan vaguely remembered, it had hung down over her back in a thick long braid. Harlan observed too that her dark eyes were shadowed by exceedingly long lashes. He liked them.

"The room is prepared, and I have laid out what garments there are," she announced to her father with a smile. Harlan added that smile to the eyes and lashes as a thing to be liked. Her voice went on the list as well; it was soft and rather deep, almost barytone in its quality.

The little man hastily rose.
"You will go to your chamber, señor," he said with a deep bow. Harlan’s jaw dropped in amazement. He stood stupefied for a moment, then he tried to speak. But the older man lifted his hand.
"We have prepared a room for you, señor," he went on. "You will find there dry attire and such other comforts as our small establishment affords. By the morrow your own clothing will have been made dry again. You will dine with us, if it is your pleasure, and spend the night of course. No guest may leave my roof and fare out into these roads of ours after such a storm as this."

Haran could only sputter a feeble protest.
"Tut-tut!" said the little man. "You are my guest."

Without further ado he briskly led the way out of the kitchen, up a narrow flight of stairs and into a tiny white bedroom on the floor above. There, spread out on the bed itself, lay a motley selection of masculine garments. The young lawyer noted a bathrobe, several shirts, a pair of riding breeches and boots, a pair of dark green trousers with red stripes down the sides, and what seemed to be a military uniform jacket of lighter green with deep red facings. The older man smiled as he saw this array.

"They belonged to my brother," he explained. "He was as tall as you, señor, and as slender. His uniforms, they are all we have kept. I am sure you will find here that which will fit you. It is all we have. Please do not mind your appearance. Come down when you are ready. Your own clothes will be cared for." He bowed himself out of the room and shut the door.

LEFT to himself Carter Harlan started to paw his way through the pile of clothing on the bed. Then he looked at himself in the mirror and grinned. If he was going to have to dress up, he suddenly decided, he would do the job thoroughly.

A half-hour later he walked down the stairs. He had clad himself in the tight-fitting green tunic, dark red breeches and soft black boots of a Spanish army officer, and he possessed the feeling—if the glass in his room were to be relied upon—that there had been times in his life when he had looked worse. Mariquita came forward to meet him at the bottom of the staircase and as she saw him she gave a little cry of approbation.
"You are adorable," she said. "Those are the very things I hoped you would pick out. Why did you?"

"Partly," said Harlan, "partly because I liked their looks myself, and partly because I wanted to make myself appear as romantic as possible when I came downstairs to you. This is all so romantic anyway—I’d hate not to take every possible advantage of it." He laughed lightly.
"Do you really think it is romantic?" she asked.

Haran began to feel bolder.
"Don’t you think so?" he countered.
"Yes," she said artlessly, "I do. It is very romantic for me. Señor Harlan—is that it? It may sound absurd to you, but
you are the first American, the first American gentleman, to whom I have ever spoken alone.

She eyed him a moment. Then—

"Do you love dancing?" she queried.

"Why—er—yes. Why?"

"Perhaps," said the girl breathlessly, "perhaps—oh, I wonder if it would be possible! Would you wish to go to the *mascarada* here tonight—the masquerade of the Springtime? We have it every year and it is very wonderful—for us. Would you go?"

"Of course. I'd love to—if I could go with you. Would it be all right? Haven't you got somebody...?"

"No—not—not tonight, " she flushed and looked at the floor. "Only my father, " she went on. "He was going. It is tiresome for him and I—I should prefer to have you. Oh it would be so wonderful! I will ask him after dinner. It will be safer then. Oh aren't you excited, señor!"

Carter Harlan was excited now. The spirit of adventure had caught him bodily. He found himself unable to keep his eyes from this dark-haired, dark-lashed, radiantly lovely girl belonging to this strange world of which he had never even heard until today. The meal that was presently announced by the little old man seemed hours and ages long.

It was softly dark by the time the girl had put away the dinner things and joined the two men on the little veranda. The sky had cleared, the stars were new-washed and the only trace of the storm was the fresh, moist sweetness of fast-growing green things all about. Down in a hollow below the house the brook was laughing prattlingly to itself as it raced along. Harlan felt himself quiver as Mariquita's dusky shadow came closer and sank into a chair next his hand. There followed a silence.

"Padre, " the girl finally began, speaking slowly, as if she were choosing her words, "father, do you not think that perhaps Señor Harlan would care to go to the *mascarada* tonight? It would be so easy."

The little man coughed, then turned to his guest.

"It is only a little dance," he said apologetically, "a foolish little dance, and you undoubtedly would not enjoy..."

"It is not a foolish dance," Mariquita sprang to her feet. "It is a glorious dance. How can you say that, padre?"

"I am sorry," amended the older man. "I only thought that perhaps Señor Harlan might assent rather out of politeness than from desire."

"Why, I'd really love to go," the lawyer managed to say. "That is, I should love to go if Señor Berneto would consider it proper for one who is almost a stranger—"

"Well spoken," the little man put in. "No señor, there is no such question. You are my guest and I place in such a one my every confidence." He turned to his daughter and lowered his voice. "But how about Guido?" he asked. "I thought that he—"

An uncomfortable feeling started up Harlan's spine, but at Mariquita's next word it vanished.

"Guido!" she sniffed. "There never was anything with Guido, and what there was is past. Besides it will do him good."

"Very well," said her father. "You and Señor Harlan will go. I shall stay at home and read. To be truthful, I am getting old and I sometimes prefer my books."

Mariquita clapped her hands.

"Now, " she said to Harlan, "we must make you a mask. And I will get you a sword and a hat."

"Great guns! " ejaculated the lawyer, "you don't expect me to wear this, do you—somebody else's uniform? It is all right here—but in public!"

"Oh, you must! " she implored. "It is so handsome, and no one has ever seen it here."

"It is an honorable uniform," observed the little man. "It was my brother's. It is of many, many years ago. You could well be proud, señor!"

Harlan stammered an apology. At all events, he reflected, the costume became him well. And that was something. Mariquita was already inside the house.

"I shall place the hat and sword-belt in your room, " she called out. "Then you must come up and get ready. It is almost time. I must dress. Adios, señor."

CARTER HARLAN, bootied and plumed, a cavalry sabre hanging by his side, was waiting for her an hour later when she came down the stairs. She was dressed in green and gold; a deep, rich green overskirt and bodice, a many-ruffled silk underskirt of golden yellow, and stock-
ings and high-heeled slippers of gold. A scarf of filmy green tulle clung about her shoulders, and a soft-folded band of the same gauzy material was somehow woven through the masses of her high-piled hair.

Harlan gasped, then removed his plumed cap, drew his heels together and bowed low.

“My lady,” he saluted. She made him a deep curtsy at the foot of the steps.

“Mi caballero,” she returned, “my knight.”

Then they both laughed gaily. But there was something in the laughter.

Her father came into the room and held her off from him admiringly. She kissed him. “We are late,” she said. “We must go.” The old man grasped Harlan’s hand.

“Look!” she commanded.

The sky to the east was blue with a growing effulgence of light. They stood silent; only the tree toads and night insects seemed to be unaware of the impending miracle. Then a glint of gold flickered just on the crest of the eastern hill; for a moment the trees stood out black against a climbing arc of light; then, big and red, the moon flooded the valley with a radiance that on the instant transformed it into a fairyland. Harlan’s hand, led by some primitive instinct of the days when humanity found its worship in the lights of the sky, met the girl’s and for an unconscious moment clung to it. Presently they started forward once more.

Now they had reached the little brook that tumbled down through the rolling valley. The girl spoke again:

“Here the path is wider. You may walk beside me, if you like. And we must mask. Others pass here and we are close to the place.” As they rounded a corner of the slope there came to them from up the little vale the sound of music and the glimmering of lights through the uneasy leaves of the brookside aspens.

“Hear it,” the girl cried, “hear it! They must be dancing. Let us hurry. Shh! Here, señor, help me with my mask, and I will then help you. Thank you. Stoop lower, please. There—now it is right.” They raced ahead. “Ah,” she panted, stopping for a moment in a patch of dark shade, “the fragrance of the arbutus!” She breathed deeply. “It is almost a shame to go indoors on a night like this. Yet the moon will come again.”

“This night won’t,” muttered her companion grimly.

He saw her eyes flash up at him through the holes in her mask as they passed through the wide-open doors of what appeared to be a hall or casino. Mariquita held tight to his arm as they swung into the whirl of masks. Perhaps Harlan imagined it, but he thought he felt her tremble.

“They will not know you,” she whispered.

“They’ll certainly know you,” he replied. “Oh—I am afraid so!” The music was playing and they spun out on the floor. “I can not speak, you see,” she breathed as they swept around a corner, “or they would surely know my voice. I must try—oh, there is Guido! He is looking at me.”

A tall man, masked and mustachioed, clad in a military helmet and a red and white uniform, was standing at the side of the room, standing with head lowered, intently watching the dancers. Harlan noticed uncomfortably that the man’s eyes were now following Mariquita. Yet the stranger gave no sign.

“He does not know me,” laughed the girl.

But at the end of the dance he strode up to her and bowed. The girl looked down, slowly shook her head, then glanced quickly up and pointed to the young American at her side. The man flushed beneath his mask, then glanced again and turned abruptly away.

Harlan and Mariquita went on dancing as the music began, but once more at the end of the dance the man in the red and white uniform came striding up to them. This time he spoke.

“May I have the honor?” he insisted.

Mariquita hesitated, then inclined her head. The man put his arm about her and swept her away. Harlan withdrew to the side of the room to watch the eddying crowd—and to think. He saw Mariquita and the tall stranger weaving in and out through the motley of costumes and colors, the man talking intently, the girl with her head bowed, saying nothing. For the moment he was tempted to go over and cut in on the couple; a wave of sudden jealousy caught him. Then he laughed aloud at his own feeling. The music ceased; with a resolution not to be a fool Harlan left
his post to accost a blue-clad shepherdess standing near. But a detaining hand fell upon his shoulder from behind.

He turned, astonished, confounded. And found himself looking straight into the masked face of the tall man in the helmet and uniform of red and white.

"FOREIGNER," said the man in crisp, quick English, "I do not know you, but I must ask you to desist from your marked attentions to the Señorita Bernetto. I have watched you. I saw you on your way to this place."

Harlan was speechless.

"Do you think," the man went on, "do you think, although she has not spoken, that I could fail to recognize her? Do you think I would not recognize her even if she came in a black cowl and robe? Who you are I do not care. It is enough that I ask you to desist. The rest of the house is yours—and welcome."

The young lawyer was brick red; then he went white with anger.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "And what business is it of yours, I'd like to know? When I want advice from you I'll come to you—and I don't intend to have it before."

"I am Señor Guido Hernandez," he announced. "You are the vagabond who came up the valley this afternoon. That is enough. You heard what I said about the señorita. Now remember."

Harlan laughed. Then he turned abruptly on his heel and walked straight over to where Mariquita stood talking with the shepherdess in blue. The girl looked down as he approached and tapped the floor nervously with the golden toe of her slipper. Her masked face was pale.

"May I have this dance?" Harlan asked, trembling.

She inclined her head. As they swung off she broke the silence.

"Guido danced with me and tried to get me to speak, but I would not. Nevertheless he knows me and is angry—very angry. But it will do him good. He—he said he was going to speak to you."

"He did," put in Harlan dryly. "Is it the custom here to allow no other man to dance with one's friends?"

"No," she said, "it is not. But he—Guido is very jealous. And—perhaps it is because you are a stranger."

As Harlan left the girl at the finish of the dance he found himself once more confronted by the man called Guido.

"You heard me," the Spaniard muttered. "I cannot bear with this." Again the young lawyer laughed. Again he danced with Mariquita. The girl was trembling, and he himself was angry through and through.

"This is no fun," he suggested. "Let's go out and cool off."

They made their way to the cool recess of a little balcony which hung low over the brook. The moon was high in the heavens now and shone white and clear through the shadows of the ever-shifting leaves. From down the glade a gentle breeze brought the heavy night scent of the arbutus.

"It is so warm inside—and so confusing," the girl began, her voice so low that it seemed part of the night, "and out here it is so cool and comforting—and wonderful." She was standing close beside him and he could have put his arms about her. "You have been so fine," she breathed, "oh, my comrade! You are so kind—and quiet. All this is so beautiful—and to have it spoiled!"

"There are many, many nights ahead," said Harlan gently. "I wish that every night of my life could be as wonderful as this." He reached for her hand and found it. "Mariquita," he began, "Mariquita—"

A shadow darkened the doorway behind them and a long arm shot out for Harlan's neck. Surprized, he turned blindly. It was the man Guido. Quick as a flash Harlan struck him full between the eyes with his fist, and with the other arm tried to loosen the stranger's hold on his throat. There was no sound. Again the American struck, and the grip at his throat tore away. Instantly there glinted a flash of steel in the right hand of the Spaniard. On the second the girl sprang between the two men, her arms spread apart, her eyes flaring.

"Guido," she said slowly, "if you should ever strike a coward's blow like that, be eternally cursed by me. You fool! Know you not that I was playing with you? Now I despise you. Go!" She stamped her foot. "Go, I say!"

The man wavered, his arms dropping limp at his sides. His mouth opened wide.
Then without a word he turned and passed back into the building. As he disappeared the girl sank back, her face gray-white in the light of the moon.

"Hold me, señor," she murmured weakly, "hold me. I—I am not well. Could—would you take me home—to my father?"

In silence Harlan picked her up and stepped off the low little balcony into the grass. Her body was soft and drooping, almost nothing in his arms. Not until they had reached the place where they had masked did she speak.

"Thank you. I think I can walk now."

He set her down and she smoothed her rumpled skirts and her hair. Then they proceeded together slowly. Silently they followed the path which a short time before they had so bravely descended, and silently they climbed the hill. As they gained the house she turned to him.

"I thank you, señor," she said. "I can say no more—now. I am unstrung, upset—I hardly know what I am doing. It was all so awful." She held out her hand.

"Let this be my good night."

Harlan bent and kissed it.

The old man was still reading when they entered the house. The girl somehow managed to come in laughing. Harlan did his best to chatter unconcernedly along.

"Is it not early, my angel?" the father asked. "It is scarcely midnight."

"Yes, padre, it is early—but it was warm and crowded—and not like other years. So I—I thought we had best return."

LATE that night, as Harlan lay sleeplessly in bed, he could hear the girl sobbing in some near-by room, sobbing as if her heart would break. It was so needless, he repeated to himself, so needlessly cruel. The young lawyer clenched his teeth.

"If I could only do something," he muttered. "The scoundrel! He ought to be horse-whipped."

For what seemed endless time the sobbing went on, while Harlan tossed restlessly and swore. Then suddenly there sounded a whistle from somewhere outside, low but clear—three notes once repeated. The sobbing ceased. The whistle sounded again. Harlan raised himself on his elbow. In the room near-by he heard a quiet step and the tug of an opening window.

Then, abruptly, Harlan found himself sitting bolt upright. For somebody was speaking—and it was Mariquita.

"O Guido mio!" the girl breathed, all the joy of utter happiness in her words. "O Guido!—I knew you would come."

"Mariquita!" called a man's voice softly from the darkness below, "my blessed and only Mariquita! I hoped against hope you would be here for me—and you are! You are!"

Carter Harlan sat rigid, his jaw helplessly open.

"You have been so long," the girl sighed, "so very, very long. O Guido, I do love you so?"

"But the stranger?" rasped the man's voice huskily.

"He is nothing," she avowed. "It was but the confusion of an evening—and you, Guido mio, you had been so distant. I did not know—till now."

"Forgive me, Mariquita," came the voice again.

"No, my dearest one, it is for you to forgive me," said the girl passionately.

Carter Harlan sank back on his pillow, still open-mouthed.

"The drinks are certainly on me," he finally pronounced. "Hmm! I wonder whom I forgive?"

A fresh breeze wafted in through the moonlit window, bringing with it the heavy fragrance of the arbutus from the little valley below. From the luminous darkness came the ceaseless calling of the night insects and treetoads, with its soft rustling accompaniment of swaying, shifting, nodding green leaves and lush grasses. The scent of the arbutus presently seemed to resolve itself into a greater, all-embracing perfume, of which it itself was merely a part, a fragrance such as only a rain-washed, moonlit night of May can so wonderfully distill.

Something stirred within Harlan's breast and he sniffed appraisingly, a new light in his eyes. He even smiled. For he recognized again a familiar presence in his room. She was clad in shadowy, lavender-gray, but he knew her none the less. She was seated, it seemed, on the footboard of his bed.

"Well," said Spring tenderly, "if you must forgive some one, you may forgive me. But let me ask you," her smile expanded genially: "have I kept my bargain or haven't I?"
The
"Printed Book"

BY JENNIE HARRIS OLIVER

THE Burgess cabin, with its cautious face squinted toward the timber, hunched a pine-log back against Devil Mountain. Dim trails, fringed with ferns and fluted with lilies cut out from the white-sand dooryard—trails frequented most by the girl of the cabin, Leafy Ca’line. The spirit of mystery clung about the girl. You have seen a little wild animal, busily loping in the silences, stop of a sudden to listen. She made you think of that. Some hunger that was not physical; something in the blood, called.

Leafy Ca’line never approached the yard without a sweeping glance around. The day Jepson the tin-peddler came rattling up the trail, she hid, with two empty jugs she carried, behind a clump of dogwood. A sack of old rags swayed from the corner of the cabin. It was Jepson’s business to weigh the rags and hang in their place some article of kitchenware. The day he enters these pages, he hung up a long-handled dipper.

The girl watched him paw over the contents of a huge sack, making room for her little bunch. He was a splinter of a man with ridiculous chin-whiskers, immense ears and the habit of humming doggerel like this:

“There was an old bum,
And he had a wooden leg.
If he didn’t have tobacco—why,
Tobacco he would beg.”

He usually left for Leafy Ca’line something that had been palmed off on him as rags. Once it was a perfectly good china-doll. A dog-eared Bible was today’s offering. He had his doubts about the latter; but he was fond of reading and a book is a book.

It is a pity he could not have seen Leafy Ca’line as she ran and looked. It was the first book she had ever seen, and she went perfectly white. A printed book! *Her* book! She glanced around lest some one should slip up and snatch it from her.
When a peculiar whistle sounded near, she flung the volume away into the bushes.

“Howdy, Kitten!”

A man red of face and hair, and huge of shoulder appeared suddenly from the abrupt trail. “Heard old Jep jest a-leavin’.”

“Uh-huh. He left a dipper, pap. Thar ’tis, hangin’ tuh the eaves.”

Red Burgess walked across the white-sand yard and tested the dipper from a water-bucket beside the door. As he straightened and wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy hand, he seemed a giant. Summing him up, he was the richest moonshiner in the hills, the slickest timber-thief, the hardest with his fist, the quickest with a gun. The girl seldom saw him that he wasn’t savagely hungry, unless when he was leaving on one of his silent trips. There was wild turkey for supper, flanked by corn-pone, strawberry preserves, spiced cucumber, strong black coffee. Leafy Ca’line led the way right in.

THE Burgesses always occupied their own sides of the table, the girl facing the stone fireplace with the rough cupboard beside it, and her father eyeing the door. Not that Red’s eyes were more dependable than Leafy Ca’line’s, only he fancied they were. Besides the table, there was not much else in the room: a few home-made benches, the stuffed chair Mrs. Burgess had occupied during the two years she was dying of creeping paralysis; a bunk and some cleats nailed to the logs up which Leafy Ca’line scrambled her way to bed in the loft.

“I got tuh go down tuh the junction,” Red remarked, when the meal was about over. “Got tuh mark out a carload o’ black walnut.” He paused, meeting his daughter’s eye.

“They’s a ‘revener’ over from Little Rock—Litson, Steel Litson. Black Embry saw him down tuh the post-office, talkin’ with Cub Munsen.”

The girl smiled unpleasantly. “Mebbe he’ll wish he’d stayed where he was at.”


“Kitten, mind that picture man that loaded around, inlarging old tin-type fer a dollar; the one that got pore old Bill Embry?”

“Uh-huh!” Kitten did remember.

“And the patent-medicine one that played a m’cordium and turned out tuh be a hoss-thief deetective?”

“Uh-huh.”

Red took the last piece of turkey. “Mind the sang-digger, Kitten, that got the still over tuh Sawtooth?”

“I shore do.”

“One o’ them pizen skunks slips up on yuh—”

“Ef he totes a gun,” Leafy took the words out of his mouth, “I’ll shoot that first. Then—” she lifted her right hand, thumb and fingers curled, left eye squinted.

“That’s hit, Kitten,” Red commended. “Shoot high. Don’t take no chances! Not that I’m fer killing men,” he explained. “But ‘reveners’ hain’t men. They’re skunks, snakes, coyotes—things that ort tuh be killed.”

Leafy Ca’line propped her chin on her hands. “Yuh needn’t tuh waste yore breath,” her hot eyes signaled.

“And ef hit should come tuh a hand-tuh-hand,” Red stated, proudly, “yo’re five-foot-six, Kitten, and a Burgess.”

Leafy Ca’line nodded. She could fight like a Burgess, and had.

“A right.” Red shoved away and took his hat from its peg. “Be back whin I git back,” he said, and went out, the floor shaking under him.

FOR some time the girl sat at the table, watching the low sun paint strange pictures on the wall. Her thoughts were like that—hot. Hot with suspicion and revenge. She had loved “pore old Bill Embry” next to her father, and the “revener” had got him. Some day one would get her pap. She could not look beyond that.

Suddenly she sprang up. Snatching the water-bucket from its bench by the door she hunted in the underbrush for Jepson’s gift, and found it.

Among the trails that slipped here and there like groping fingers, one led down to a never-failing spring cupped in rock, fringed with maiden-hair under pines that leaned to the lure of water. This path, bending right and left among the boulders, held out exquisite entertainment at this time of the year. A red-bird practised there its scales of fine-drawn silver; a thrush bugled to the silences. There were purple and white lady-slipers to examine
and wonder over. Mandrakes were ripe. Leafy Ca'line was usually all eyes and nose and palate, but this evening she did not stop.

At the spring she filled her bucket and set it on a shelf of rock. Then picking her way down to where every foothold dropped over into seeming air, she stepped off and found a shelf that slanted still downward, made a turn and disappeared in a tangle of frost-reddened sumac. Entering here, Leafy Ca'line was in a clean space walled and floored with rock. Light came boldly through a chimney-like hole at the top, where crimson foliage was seen to bend against the cupping sky.

The cave explained itself at a glance to be a play or work room for a girl of any size. On a shelf of rock a china-doll stared fixedly out between bunches of jetty curls. A dark blue blouse with needle sticking in it lay on a bunk of pine-needles. Along the wall acorn cups were ranged as if for a party. A milk-crock filled with rhododendrons lighted a corner.

Seated on the bunk, Leafy Ca'line opened the Bible and turned the pages, searching them with the rapt look of one hunting in a strange crowd for one familiar face. Even after the sun had withdrawn itself entirely from Devil Mountain, she continued to peer at the mystery of it. But at last she hid her treasure under the braided rug that covered the needles. It would be safe there until she came again. And because she must, she took the up-trail to the cabin.

Leafy Ca'line was the cleverest moonshine girl within the purple rim of the Slashlands. She had an exceptional hiding-place; for the cupboard beside the fireplace really was a door into it. She had only to pull the rough framework back on its great hinges, go down two stone steps, and there she was. Her still was primitive—a rusty stove supporting a tub of "mash" crooked an elbow of pipe through a passage into the fireplace of the room beyond. From the tub a coil twisting over into a barrel of icy spring-water made another bend and condensed in a tightly-covered stone jar.

Sacks of bran and corn, heaps of assorted apples and rows of jugs bulked against the dirt walls. Rats ran about. Spider-webs clouded the walls. A black kitten peered little eye-lamps from under a bench. Today Leafy Ca'line had planned to slip a few jugs out to their hiding-places and bring back the empties, with certain coins concealed beneath them. Possibly, though, her mind wandered to the "printed Book." At any rate, when, after a lonely breakfast she entered her fastness without dropping the bolt behind her, the unexpected happened. A board over which she had just passed, creaked again. The door she had drawn to slid back.

Leafy Ca'line knew, as she wheeled, snatching at the gun in her belt, that the "revenuer" from Little Rock was behind her. She could not have explained why, when she had made good part of her boast, she lowered the weapon instead of raising it. Something had telegraphed to her brain, as pictures glimpse through the mind of a drowning man. Something said, "Do thus," and she did it. Then, standing back in the dimness, she looked at the amazed revenue officer, at the stain spreading on his right legging. She saw amazement vanish; the wounded man lunged at her, reaching for her gun.

All things being equal, the "revenuer" was much the stronger. The thing was to keep her gun hand beyond his groping fingers, to hold him off till loss of blood made him weak; but it seemed hours before she felt his knees give and that she dared to fling the weapon behind her and bend her strength to getting him up the stone steps into the cabin.

"He'p yoreself a little," she gritted, forcing him backward through the opening. "Mebbe yuh want tuh be dragged out by the hair."

"I wasn't looking for a fight," Steel Litsom muttered, still struggling for the mastery. "I could have shot first. I guess you've broken my leg."

"I aimed tuh." Leafy Ca'line managed to get him by and to close the door. "Whin yuh git ready tuh set down," she added hatefully, "yuh better set on the bunk. Hold up till I spread an old quilt down. I don't want blood over everything."

A few minutes later the girl had stripped the wound and examined it with capable fingers. "Hit's broke," she exulted. "The big bone. Jest stop flouncing around and I'll git a bandage."

"You will?" The "revenuer" laughed, gratingly.
Leafy Ca’line ran and set a pan of water on the coals. “I set a hoss’s laig, onct,” she boasted, “and cut off a dog’s paw that had got itself fast in a b’ar-trap.”

Deftly she snatched white clothes, a roll of cotton and a bottle of carbolic acid from the cupboard. She even found splints in a drawer. Litson, looking at her with sudden respect, gave in.

“Yuh’ve got a little sense, ef yuh air a sneak,” Leafy Ca’line remarked, making every move count. “And a good thing, too. Pap is liable tuh step in, and he’d finish yuh.”

“You must have something up your sleeve,” Litson fumed.

“Mebbe I have.”

Leafy Ca’line snatched curious glances at her captive. He was different from any other “revener” she had seen; from any other man she had ever known. His gray eyes were quizzical under upcurled lashes, his young lips clean. His brown hair, rumpled from the struggle, was barbered in a strange fashion. When her fingers brushed his shirt-sleeve, she thrilled at the touch of cloth finer than she had imagined cloth could be. But what impressed the girl most in the big venture, was his different use of familiar words.

Where he had said, “I think you have broken my leg,” Cub Munsen would have snarled, “Yuh’ve cracked muh shin; blast yuh!” or something stronger.

Considering the girl’s shrewd remark that her “pap” was liable to step in, Litson lent himself readily to her help in getting away the minute he was bandaged. With a hand on her shoulder he hopped across the white-sand yard and painfully mounted a bur-crusted pony that she led around from the thicket. In no time Leafy Ca’line had sped back for her gun and to obliterate every trace of the tragedy; then the painful journey downward to the spring and the hidden cave had begun. The “revener” did not know his destination, but anything was better than meeting Red Burgess just then. He simply gritted his teeth and lurchéd silently to wherever this girl that could shoot and fight like a man saw fit to take him.

There are portions of the Ozarks where a secret service man’s life is of no moment at all; where any rock or tree, any cañon, or bend in a cañon, may spell danger and sudden death. Steel Litson had known this; but he had all a born fighter’s appetite for taking a chance. Moreover, he had just emerged from the world struggle with a questionable lung, and the medical force had suggested a resin-scented height.

Litson had been in the shadow of Devil Mountain some time before Cub Munsen betrayed what he suspected of the hidden still. With only a girl to guard the fastness, Litson had expected an easy surrender. There was an instant, before the first attack stung his fingers, when he might have saved himself. That moment had been wasted in staring at Leafy Ca’line. It had been like finding a red lily blooming in the desert.

“Still,” he fumed, tossing on the pine-needle bunk where he had been left in the silence, “I might have kept my head, blame it! I’m one fine fool, if ever there was one!”

He was raging like that when Leafy Ca’line reappeared and emptied her arms of a considerable load. “How do yuh feel?” she questioned, flatly.

“Fine,” jeered Litson. “Like dancing a jig.”

“Set up, then.” The girl took the lid from a bucket and poured something into a tin cup. “Drink this broth. Keerful,” she cautioned him, lowering the cup. “Hit’s awful hot.”

“Poison, I suppose.”

“Hit hain’t, no sech. Yuh yuh suppose I got yuh hyar fer?—going tuh all that trouble!”

“Satan knows! Why did you?”

“Drink first. One thing—you’re all right ef yuh keep still. Yuh better not try tuh git away.”

“I couldn’t, unless I crawled. I wish you’d out with it—what you’re up to.”

Leafy Ca’line wasted no words. “Move a little,” she ordered, after he had finished the broth. Groping under him she found a dog-eared, leather-bound volume.

“Yuh read printed books, don’t yuh—iny of ’em?”

Litson saw light. “Any I ever tried. I haven’t read the Bible much, though, since I lost my mother.”

“Is this a Bible?”

“Yes. Didn’t you know?”

“How’s I tuh know? Hit’s the first printed book I ever see.”
“You want me to read to you?”
Leafy Caline trembled. “I want,” she murmured, huskily, “yuh should l’arn me tuh read.”
Litson’s disgusted face underwent a change. He didn’t speak, but he nodded. The girl turned away swiftly. “They’s things I got tuh do, first,” she said. “Yuh try tuh sleep. They ca’n’t nuthin’ git yuh whilst I’m gone.”

Leafy Caline found her father waiting. “Hustle supper,” he ordered. “I hain’t had a bite tuh-day. I got tuh go tuh the city with them logs. Be gone a week, most likely. Mebbe longer. Yuh keep yore eye peeled.”

“Shore.” The girl’s eyes were excited, but Burgess did not notice. It was some time before he knew that the child he had brought up to obey the unwritten code of the hills had turned traitor and become a law to herself.

In the beginning,” Litson read, slowly, “God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.”

In the smoky lantern light, Leafy Caline crouched by the reader’s shoulder, facing the “printed Book.” Litson felt the nearness of her as one senses the tremble of a harp-string. A strand of blue-black hair curling down made a dusk mist before him when she leaned close.

“Of course hit—hit hain’t so—what yuh read,” she breathed, as he paused. “Hit’s—jest words.”

“No, more than words. It is the story of God creating the earth.”

“So where is the printed word ‘God’ at?”
Slyly she studied where Litson’s finger pointed.

“I’d know hit innywheres,” she exulted. And so it was that the first “printed word” the young hill-savage made her own was “God.”

Litson had fine dramatic instinct. Seeing how the mystery of creation took hold, he lingered over it, digging up from his school days pictures of the ages with their monster inhabitants. And Leafy Caline remembered every word, as something to dream over when she had left the lantern and the Book, and had gone back up the dark trail.

Morning brought certain things that had to be done first. A trip or two here and there, her own breakfast and Litson’s, bandages to be examined and changed. But the Book was ready, opened at this passage:

The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

“Day unto day uttereth speech,” repeated Leafy Caline. “That is like the hills talking across the canons tuh each other.” She laid hold of the “printed Book.”

“Where is ‘day’ at?” she wanted to know. “And ‘night,’ and ‘firmament’?”

So the miracle was wrought in fine sweeps, as pictures are flashed on a dark curtain by a powerful light. It would have taken a full year of her childhood to grasp what thus became Leafy Caline’s in a few hours.

Without realizing it, the girl worked like a slave. The gun-wound swelled horribly, and had to be reduced with wet compresses. Suitable food had to be cooked and slipped down the trail; fresh water was a necessity, both at the cave and the still. Fortunately Burgess was gone this week, and more—days of glory and anxiety, rapture and suspense. Leafy Caline still loathed the “reveren,” but as he was the means to an end, that didn’t matter. Life had become one thing, to read the “printed Book,” and for that she would even touch hands with the “pizen coyote,” bathe his face and bend all her skill to the mending of him.

Litson knew just how it was, and her scorn had a charm that stung. Against odds, he exerted himself to implant with the “printed words” a personal appeal.

“Is not God in the heavens?” he asked, softly. “Behold the height of the stars, how high they are! And thou sayest, How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace; thereby shall all good come to thee.”

Slipping along the pages, he brought...
other gems to sparkle before the mind’s eye of his listener:

“He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing. . . . He overturneth mountains by the roots. He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth He forth to light. . . . He has made everything beautiful in His time; also He hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. The sun ariseth—Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labor until the evening. The day goeth away, for the shadows of evening are stretched out.”

“Tain’t sense,” Leafy Ca’line resisted. “Tain’t sense that they’d be iny one as big as God, lessen he could be seen. Cain’t nobody he’p seeing the sun, lessen he’s blind; then he kin feel hit!”

“Some people have felt God,” Litson asserted, solemnly.

That night the girl risked taking the Book home, leaving the black kitten, that had tagged down the rocks, for company. Steel was fond of cats. He dubbed this one “Scrapper,” and while Leafy Ca’line tended still with the open Book beside her, taught the beastie to box. The next morning the Bible came back with this marked:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

A few more lessons, and the girl read alone:

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.”

Leafy Ca’line closed the “printed Book.” She was sitting on the floor, a little apart, facing Litson. When she did not speak, he asked—

“What are you thinking, Leafy Ca’line?”

“Bout old Bill Embry.”

Litson turned on the bunk, his eyes level with hers. He sympathized with her swiftness in covering real thought with something aside. “What about Bill Embry?” he asked, soberly.

“Bill was always fer taking me with him and pap. One time we wint tuh a show-parade. And hit rained, and we ran in what they was an organ—a pipe-organ, Bill said. And some one was in that playing the ‘Creation.’ Though of course, I didn’t know hit, then. Where the spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, was whispering sounds, like leaves talking in a still, dark night. Then light run up and up, making white pictures on the water. I saw the saurians stand up tuh fight—crashing and turrible, like trees splitting in the sky.

“Whin the light begun tuh look peen, like morning, come a little sweet sound, so high up I couldn’t breathe, listening—the first bird was making up a song. And a warm wind came by tuh meet another warm wind, and they touched like lilacs nod together—”

“And that?” asked Litson, telling himself he had always known she was like that. “And that—?”

“That was the first—the very first kiss!”

“You darling!” breathed Steel Litson. And at the passionate sound Leafy Ca’line flinched, growing in one tragic moment from girl to woman. In horrible embarrassment she sprang to her feet, crimson to the roots of her hair.

“Oh,” she choked—“you!”

Litson undid the healing of days by the suddenness with which he caught and held her clenched hand.

“Turn loose,” the girl told him, awfully. “Don’t look at me like that. I know what you’re thinking. Now listen—onct Cub Munsen kissed me, and I cut his lip till hit bled.”

“But I—I love you, Leafy Ca’line!”

“I don’t want hit,” with scorn. “Yuh hain’t as fitten as Cub Munsen. Yuh hain’t no man—you’re a ‘revenor.’”

Exerting his strength, Litson made the girl look at him. “You just don’t understand, Leafy Ca’line. You believe in me as you believe in God. We were created for each other. You are going to be my wife. I knew it that day in the still—that is why I couldn’t defend myself. If I were as I was then, I’d take the kiss that is mine.”

“Yuh wouldn’t, no sech,” the girl declared savagely. “But I’d ought tuh suffer—saying the thing I did. ‘Oh, I hate yuh, Steel Litson, ‘revenor.’ I wish I’d killed yuh!”

“Yuh just want to hate me,” Litson touched the truth relentlessly. “But I say you’re mine. God made you for me.”

“They hain’t no God.” Shame urged her on. “The ‘printed Book’s’ a lie. I be’n a fool. I be’n a turncoat tuh the best pap
that ever was." Twisting herself free, she faced her lover.

"And now," she lifted her clenched hand, "I'll have him come and finish yuh."

WHEN a Munsen went around smiling, Devil Mountain asked itself "Who's he got hit in fer now?" Cub had smiled the day Leafy Cal'line cut his lips with the flat of her hand. A Munsen bided his time. The forenoon Red Burgess dropped off at the junction, having disposed of his walnut logs, Cub had a talk with him. Cub was surprised that the revenue man from Little Rock hadn't been seen since he started up Devil Mountain toward Red's cabin. Shore was funny.

"Why funny?" Burgess put it to him straight. That a man started for a place was no sign he reached hit! What was funny?

Burgess faced Cub evenly, but the shot told. When the old man stood before Leafy Cal'line, he breathed heavily as if he had been running. It occurred to him that she had killed the "revenuer"—killed him, or what?

"Leafy Cal'line," he asked, quietly, "has they be'n any hyar sence Monday week?"

The girl lied. "No," she said.

Burgess looked hard at his daughter, as if he had never, until this moment, seen her. For that matter, he never had. It was a new Leafy Cal'line, though how, was not for words to explain. Not in her dress; that as usual was a dark blue skirt and blouse, with a gun-belt of leather. Her sweeping blue-black hair was braided and wound twice around her head, a scarlet ribbon, that tied the end, flaunting low down like a heavy flower.

Red's gaze traveled to her thick-soled, high-laced shoes, and up again, passing the long, beautiful hands holding two empty jugs of the still, her warm column of throat, delicately bold chin and ripe lips to her dark eyes, going far back into the shining depth of them.

"'Ne mind, Kitten," he laughed, finally. "Jest one o' Cub's lies. 'Doughtin't tuh a-listened. Hustle supper. I got tuh go back."

BURGESS' daughter put on the food mechanically. Why had she lied? She kept asking herself that. Why had she not sent her father to the cave? It had been long since he called her "Leafy Cal'line," like that. From the doorway, she finally watched him cross the white-sand yard. Her knees weakened under her, and she sank down resting her chin in her palms.

Two spirits were struggling for mastery of her. Intermingled with the apparent justice of her training, and at last a thing apart from it, overshadowing it, was the something that had always spoken.

"This you is not the real Leafy Cal'line. There is another."

She had been drawn on to tell the 'revenuer' about the voice that had called. She thought of Litson now—of the type of man he was. Little things came surging back; quaint intimacies that had been shrugged aside before her consuming hunger to know the "printed Book." A hot blush deepened the rose of her cheeks recalling the day a branch had torn away her hair-pins and ribbon, and she had hastened on to the cave, because every moment counted. How he had exclaimed over her unbraided hair, burying his face in a strand of it and saying that it made him think of pansies!

What light he had come to make of his imprisonment! Was it not ahead of the trenches? Why, once, even, she had found him playing with acorn cups and pitching a fight between Scrapper and the china-doll! They had compared ages—Litson was twenty-five. They had talked about their mothers and loneliness.

Suddenly thought swung around. Cub Munsen! Cub had sent Steel Litson up Devil Mountain! And what else? Had her father believed the lie, or only given her a chance to hold fast her trust? Had he gone back to town, or had he already been to the cave? White and trembling Leafy Cal'line lifted herself and crossed the white sand. The low sun, blazing old Sawtooth to westward, flooded down the spring-trail until she dropped into it as in a sea of flame. The bell-like flute of the thrush, shedding nuts, the silk of wings overhead, what monstrous sounds! Leafy Cal'line broke into a run, stumbling unseeingly down the rocks.

Litson was in the cave—she noted that first on entering. He was gray and spent from a night of pain, but he was alive. The girl crossed the rock floor into the
arms that lifted for her. Like souls entering
heaven, their lips found each other.

"But I got tuh go," Leafy Ca'line whispered with sobbing. "I got tuh shet yuh
in hyar. Pap, he know's!"

Blindly the girl stumbled out into the
bruised and flattened sumac, but she had
no time to hide the mouth of the cave save
with her own body. Red Burgess looked
at the tense straight figure.

"Leafy Ca'line," he asked, almost gently.
"Is the 'revener' hyarabouts?"

The girl hesitated. "Yes," she an-
swered, finally.

"Leafy Ca'line, is the 'revener' daid, or
is he alive?"

"His laig is broke."

"I'm sorry fer yuh, Leafy Ca'line," Red
said, pityingly. "The meanest skunk in
the hills wouldn't a done what yuh done.
But—yo're a womin. Come away now.
I'm hyar tuh finish him."

Leafy Ca'line stood still. "I got some-
ting tuh say. Yuh listen, I hain't what
I was whin yuh wint off tuh the city. I
know what has called tuh me, ever since I
could riccollict—hit was God."

"I know what hit was," Red sneered,
better then yuh do. Hit's what speaks
tuh every womin-thing, telling 'em tuh stab
in the back the man that's stood by. I
thought yuh—was different, Leafy Ca'-
line." He made a downward gesture with
his hands, final.

"I see," he added, "that I got tuh git
yuh, first."

Leafy Ca'line made a move then. More
than words eloquent it was. She took
the gun from her belt and turned the muzzle
toward her young breast, pressing hard.

"Yuh come a step," she threatened, "and
I'll shoot, right thar. I got a right tuh
speak," she hurried on. "I see things like
they be, now; I see yuh, the way yuh air,
ef yuh be my pap. They is a God. They
is a law agin moonshining and agin mur-
der. Yuh hain't going tuh murder the
man in that, lessen I die first. I hain't
going tuh break the law no more."

"Yuh fool!" yelled Burgess, beside him-
self. "Yuh cain't pull off no bluff on me.
Come away."

Really the old man was scared out of
his senses. Better than life he loved Leafy
Ca'line; better even than his ill-gotten
wealth. In silence father and daughter
eyed each other, both Burgesses. Stub-
born. Red moved a foot and the girl's
hand closed—he marked the tensed
muscles, the white line on bended thumb.

His forehead grew wet, his eyes clouded.
Something crooked in his being snapped as
he screamed:

"Don't do hit, Leafy Ca'line. I gin in.
They hain't no other way!"

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Sea-Call

My old love for the water has come back
again;
I had forgotten its surging, so long, so long
away;
Sapphire-blue in the sunlight and green-gray in
the rain,
And the same waves cresting, and the same
sharp spray:

There was left a wave in my heart when I went
to the inland towns;
Something that moved and murmured through
the days when I forgot—
Vivid flowers in the gardens or thick long grass
of the downs—
What were the sweets of the Summer days,
where the calling waves were not?

My old love for the water has come back once
more;
The wave of the deep draws full, and the wave
in my heart leaps high—
This is my own old country, and my own wild
shore;
And I can not leave the water till the day I die.
Margaret Widdemer.
The Limit of Conquest

BY S. B. H. HURST

A Complete Novelette

SINCLAIR stared dreamily at the chess-board, his mind, far from the intricacies of the game, hovering over a puzzle, the profundity of which made chess seem simple, yet so intangible that at times it appeared to be non-existent—a veritable "causeless enigma."

His assistant, Sesson—a typical sailing-ship mate, thirty years old, of fair intelligence, a man of courage, loyalty and obedience—watched the face of his master, wondering if he were really only seventy-five. For the wisdom which actually jutted from that lined face limned an ancient quality, a depth of experience, with something in the eyes that hinted of having watched through the centuries the rise and fall of nations, the course of the stream of history; with a thought-provoked smile graven about the mouth which one associates with a sphinx.

Even his mistakes—not failures, because he never considered any matter settled until he had reached success—were not like the mistakes of other great men. They appeared to be intentional; as if, tired of being a super-mind, he dabbled in the common errors of humanity, seeking amusement.

An Englishman, he had lived in India for more than fifty years; and for the greater number of those years he had been that seething country's unofficial guardian, with the Government-conferred freedom and authority beyond the questioning of any official. Yet he was not responsible to the Government, made no report to it—except as it seemed to him expedient to give advice—and received no orders; albeit some requests when occasion called.
This arrangement was beneficial to both; the Government not being responsible for his acts and officially ignorant of his existence, could not be implicated by a foreign power should Sinclair’s activities disturb any spy concert, while truly unable to return to their Governments such spies as mysteriously vanished; at the same time, Sinclair was uninhibited by thick-headed bureaucracy, and so enabled to face himself that his very existence—the existence, that is, of a mysterious but very efficient organization which in reality was Sinclair—was considered by many to be a myth, and the wonderful results he obtained were credited to accidental genius on the part of the police or secret service, which these ultra-modest forces considered it undiplomatic to admit. Yet many an official in both these services had tried to create the impression he was the “Muggins”—the uncouth name which, when attached to any order, was honored as if signed by the viceroy himself.

All this was known to Mr. Sesson. He also knew that Sinclair could give him a piece. Consequently, even without other indications, the fact of his winning the evening’s chess-game told him that the mind of his mighty opponent was engaged upon more serious thoughts than defending a Ruy Lopez. But he asked no questions. In good time he would be told all that it was well for him to know. And one of his virtues was the ability to wait.

“‘I see,’” suddenly remarked Sinclair with curious irreverence, “‘that a French doctor has published a paper upon what he calls ‘supernormal physiology.’”

“Indeed,” replied Sesson, whose admitted knowledge of the subject extended only to a belief that the blood circulated.

“Yes.” He remained silent for a minute or two, then added—“But they’ve got me guessing, as the Americans put it.”

“Who has?” queried the justifiably mystified Sesson.

“That’s what I don’t know. I have nothing to go on. I don’t even know the nature of the problem I have to solve.”

“Then,” said Sesson, who had good grounds for wondering what Sinclair was talking about, “‘how do you know there is a problem?”

“Instinct—the something a man develops in himself as the result of experience. My experience of India tells me that some-thing very important is about to happen, but for the life of me I can not imagine what it is.”

Sesson became apprehensive—

“It may be a plot to assassinate you?”

“No—I doubt if there is any one who knows I am a real person, who would have any reason for killing me. I am too much of a myth. Besides, what would they gain which would make it worth taking the chance? It’s true, there might be some one—but I can not think of any,” Sinclair answered vaguely, almost as if attempted assassination could not rise to the dignity of a problem.

He looked up from the chess-board, smiling. Still smiling, he struck a match and lit his pipe—carelessly throwing the match away. A sudden sound, not loud—it might have been the echo of the match’s rubbing against the box—startled both men. One look, and they were on their feet, their minds groping for possible weapons, escape impossible. For between the chess-table and the door curtain, barring the only exit, was a large cobra, fully five and a half feet in length, its beautiful, wretched head arched menacingly, its tongue forking rapidly in and out, its rippling coils winding into the moment for striking.

Neither man had moved a second time. To pass by the snake was impossible. The curtain was only four feet wide, the walls were bare of ornament. In the place, in which in an American house the window would have been, was a strong wire netting, to cut which would require heavy shears. The burning match had been flung straight at the head of the snake, irritating further an anger already cunningly aroused by whoever had introduced it under the curtain.

The passing seconds seemed hours. Then Sinclair’s voice reached his assistant, his lips barely moving.

“You will obey me. Understand! I have had my share of life. This is your one chance. When I give the word, I will step to the left of the cobra, drawing its attention to myself. Watch closely, and the instant it strikes at me try to slip past on its right. Throw yourself through the curtain and look out for another snake. Get ready!”

Sesson would have protested, but an imperative look silenced him. For a few moments they stood like statues. Then, at
a warning hiss, Sinclair tensed for his splendid suicide.

With a tear that sounded like thunder to their strained nerves, the curtain was torn aside. A sword flashed in the lamp-light, and the cobra fell in two wriggling halves. The tall, bearded Sikh retainer stepped nonchalantly into the room.

“I could have done it more neatly in my youth,” he remarked, with what he considered just the right amount of annoyance in his voice.

“Ah!”

Sesson’s relief brought the involuntary exclamation, but Sinclair made no sound. Like a man starting a race, he wasted no time or words. One look—expressive with gratitude and pregnant with the promise of reward—he had given to the debonair Sikh, who bowed, smiling and stroking his great beard, then his mind had gripped at the problem. There were two things to be done at once. First, discover how the snake had been introduced into that carefully guarded house; second, to find out who had done it. After that, the larger, implied problem could be looked into. There was, of course, the possibility of its having got in itself, unaided, in some manner; and as the search went on Sinclair tried to make himself believe this last, while all his instincts cried out against the belief. Because, the more he looked into the matter, the more certain did it appear that one of his trusted adherents was implicated.

For there was no clue—the snake had appeared under the curtain without leaving any more traces than if it had materialized on the spot. The thing seemed impossible, unless one of his men had helped. All the doors were locked and barred. The window nettings were intact. Sesson’s suggestion regarding some wonderful Indian conjurer was too fanciful to be entertained. Besides, what conjurer could have designs on Sinclair’s life?

Meanwhile, the Sikh had been examining the dead cobra. Now, sheathing his sword, he straightened to his full height, a very curious expression on his dark face.

“It was quite harmless,” he remarked quietly, “its poison had been taken away from it before it came here.”

“Sol?”

Sinclair’s single word held a world of meaning, the significance of which Sesson grasped immediately. A moment before it had seemed that whoever had introduced the snake had intended murder. The fact of its being harmless meant much more. The unseen enemy had deliberately intended to show that Sinclair’s life was in his hands—that he could play with his intended victim as a cat does with a mouse. This was obviously his intent. But Sinclair was no mouse.

For a moment the insult of the thing annoyed him, as did the apparent end of his existence as a myth. His elaborately built-up “non-existence,” which signed itself “Muggins,” might, for anything he knew, be now a child’s tale from one end of India to the other. And that meant his life-work.

He lit a pipe and thought carefully, admitting only the commonplace. And again and again he reached the same conclusion—one of his men had been bought by the unseen enemy, who had showed his power, his ability, as he imagined, to kill Sinclair whenever he wished. It was, after all, a typically native trick. But the real horror of the affair lay in finding that one, or more, of the men he trusted as he trusted himself was a traitor.

Which one was it? Thousands of men all over India worked for Sinclair, forming lines of mouth to ear communication from every part of it, but only five knew for whom they worked. One of the five must be the traitor. Logic demanded it. The five were: a native youth, Sinclair’s bearer, or valet; a Chinese cook; the Sikh gatekeeper, who had killed the snake; a very stout babu, who was that evening out of the city, and Sesson the young Englishman.

Sinclair’s face showed the pain he felt. He knew now who was the traitor, who had brought the snake into the house. But that meant little. Behind this was the reason, and the reason for the poison being absent. What was this main problem? Think as he would, Sinclair could find nothing that pointed to a clue to this. And there was nothing to be gained by questioning his immediate retainers, including the man he knew to be disloyal.

It would be better to pretend ignorance—and, indeed, the traitor part meant nothing to the real problem, as it was certain that whoever had seduced Sinclair’s man would never trust him with his own plans.
Sinclair determined to act as if he believed the snake had found its way into the house through some hidden hole, and that its harmless state proved it had escaped from some snake charmer’s outfit. He would be on his guard, mentally alert, for something told him that this was going to be the greatest problem of his life.

In spite of his swordsmanship the Sikh was deeply chagrined. He was the keeper of the gate, and by him all who entered the house must pass. He had not left his post, as he explained, until he had made all fast for the night—coming to report to Sinclair just in time to kill the cobra. How the snake got in he could not think. Even an airship—and he had heard none—could not find a way of entering through the roof; no, not a hole small enough for a snake. Of that he was sure. It was a mystery.

“Well, it’s no use troubling any more,” remarked Sinclair at length. “Let’s go to bed.”

He tried to yawn naturally, but was compelled to turn his head to hide his lamentable failure. A traitor, a traitor—it seemed as impossible as it would be for Sinclair to betray himself. But there was no doubt about it. Snakes neither fly nor materialize out of the atmosphere.

Nothing happened during the night, but next morning Sinclair admitted to himself that his nerves—chilled steel though they were—were shaken. The thing was so horrible, so impossible, and it gave him a wholesome respect for his unseen adversary. No better way could have been found for piercing the armor of his self-confidence. A harmless snake, hinting at the coming of more deadly things and the treachery of one of his men.

This, and the fact of there being no clue to the identity of the mysterious enemy was enough to trouble any one. But, slightly shaken though he was, Sinclair felt himself rising to the problem, as he had risen to problems for nearly sixty years.

He had waited for morning before taking action, hoping for word of some native excitement which would give a hint to his trained touch. But nothing came. His filaments—lines of humanity stretching to remote places never heard of by the best informed European—brought nothing. No new prophet had sprung up to provoke religious convulsion; none of the many descendants of long dead kings had roused again to attempt the seizure of a non-existent throne; political muggumps, with vast mouths and microcephalic minds, were unusually quiet; even bazaar murders were conspicuous by their absence.

From the hills of Afghanistan to Point de Galle, no word of any disturbance or novelty came to Sinclair that morning at his breakfast table. The country had never been more happy or contented.

But it was never his policy to wait for the enemy to strike and Sinclair looked about him for action.

To question the man he knew for a traitor would be a mistake, for two reasons. First, it would give warning to the unseen enemy, and second, nothing but an indignant denial would be forthcoming. To pretend non-suspicion, in the hope that the traitor would further commit himself, was the best thing to do. But where, then, could he find action? To draw a bow at a venture would be unwise, to allow the enemy another chance—whatever his motive—were equally foolish.

Yet what could he do? There was nothing to work upon. The situation was unbearable, and from mouth to mouth, by telegram—in every possible way—the irritation of Sinclair ran along his lines of communication, causing distress and perturbation to many a native gentleman who drew pay for working for a master whom he had never seen.

II

At a small telegraph office, some distance north of Simla, this cool Winter morning, one of these myriad helpers, who was also a Government telegraph clerk—and who, by the way, labored under the weird belief that whatever information he transmitted to his next in line went to assist that particular political party which was doing all it could to bring about the downfall of British rule—swore with a picturesque ness calculated to make ordinary men jealous.

For why had this word come? Did the fool, who by good luck had the honor to give him occasional instruction—not order—doubt his loyalty, doubt his loathing of all things pertaining to the Raj? Why, then, this question, this insult?
What had he ever done to merit this doubt of his sincerity? It was true although the sender of the question could not possibly be aware of it—that he had once accepted a small sum of money for his services in connection with the census. Also—and of this neither could his correspondent have heard—he had done some work during the war which had remotely assisted the British. But had he not a family to support? He had not, but then the other fellow could hardly be sure of that, either. And one hundred rupees is a very substantial sum. Not that the money payment had been his real motive in working for the hated Raj. Only a short-sighted fool could say that. For the work had given him an insight into the workings of the Government which would be useful when the time came.

Indeed, he flattered himself, he had actually undertaken the dangerous job of spying, only possible to a brave man. What things had he noted—all for the cause! And now he was doubted! As a matter of fact the indignant babu had, during a part of the war, merely sat at a window and taken down the names of men who were anxious to enlist, while a British sergeant, who was vague about the language, had sat at his elbow.

The process of mind which succeeded in imagining this to be a dangerous form of spying upon the British Government is only possible to a transplanted Bengali babu—one who, accustomed to the fascinating lies of his kind, must, when away from them, manufacture his own.

He snapped back to the other operator, asking him why he had sent the question.

"Because you are under grave suspicion," was the reply.

The recipient of this nearly choked—then he shivered with apprehension.

"Suspicion of which?" he wired back.

"I know not," came the stilted reply.

"The word came from higher up. And—you must no longer use the Government property telegraph wires for private message. If you do—" for the babu was about to answer—"it will be charged against your salary."

That was sufficient. The babu left his key, and looked through his window. It was not a cheering view. Empty fields, with mist-shrouded, snow-topped hills in the far distance. It was chilly, too, to one accustomed to warmer lands. Taking it altogether, the babu was not enjoying his morning.

Presently, as he stared aimlessly through the window, he noticed a very old man, who was making his painful way in the direction of the telegraph office, leaning heavily on a staff. For a few minutes the old man remained an uninteresting part of the landscape—he would hardly be likely to have any business at the office; but as he drew nearer the babu—well used to the manners of those natives about to send a telegram, since it was a great and unusual undertaking with most of them—saw that the ancient was really headed his way.

He brightened. There might be something doing. Such an old man would certainly be ignorant of the ways of the world, be ignorant of telegrams, of writing the English language by which only could a telegram be transmitted, and entirely ignorant of the proper tills. Of course, if he asked the babu to write the message, it was only right and legal that he should pay for the accommodation.

The Government rule was that the clerk could not and must not accept a fee for his services; but the Government was a far away, shadowy sort of thing, which the babu often ignored. The old man would not know the law. If he did, doubtless some other method could be found for cheating him. The babu became more cheerful as the old man approached; and when the ancient one, panting heavily, leaned partly against the window-ledge and partly upon his staff, the stout gentleman from Bengal rubbed his hands together unectually. Here would be pickings!

"Babuji," the old man wheezed, "I want to send a telegram. How much will it cost?"

The babu assumed an air of benign wisdom—

"To where will it go?"

"To my son's son at Amaritzar. My son is dead, and his son waits word from me. This one is the son of my third son, by my fourth wife. He was born in Peshawa, and he is a horse-thief. He—"

The babu interrupted with the rudeness of which only Government clerks are capable—

"Can you write the English?"

"No, babuji, but I will pay you to write for me."

ROMANCE
The stout one produced a telegraph form and a pencil—

"Now, what do you want to tell your son's son?"

The old man clung for support to the window-ledge—he was evidently very old and feeble:

"Babuji, I know it is against the law to allow me inside the office. But I am very old, and very weary. If you would allow me to sit down and rest inside, I will give you a rupee—there is no one in sight to see me do it."

The babu shook his head. He was exceedingly virtuous, and he frowned at the old man's suggestion. He was an honest man—he said so—and he could not be bribed to break the law. At least—not by one rupee.

"How much—to rest my old bones while you write my telegram?" the old man very civilly came to the point at once.

The babu calculated. How much would the old fellow stand for? He must be very tired—and wealthy—to offer money to be allowed to sit down. Why did he not squat on his haunches, in the native manner? Ah, the babu understood. The old man was too stiff—he could not rest as a younger man would rest. He, the babu had heard of such things.

"Two rupees, six annas—my fine if I am caught allowing any one inside; and one rupee for the writing. Give me three rupees six annas, and I will oblige you."

The old man nodded, as if talking required too much effort. Then—apparently not hearing the babu's request that he pay in advance—he hobbled round to the office door, pushing it open with, a sudden re-crudescence of strength before the babu could prevent him. It was seldom locked, except at night, because the average native was afraid both of its mysteries and of the Government, as represented by the person of the clerk. With a courtesy which only three rupees—or more—could arouse, the babu brought forward a chair for his guest, and placed it carefully—carefully closing the door to prevent any casual passer-by from observing what he had done.

"And the window," the old man was wheezing. "Look through the window, and make sure there is nobody in sight."

The babu—keeping up his pretense of observing the pretended law—obeyed. The bare fields were deserted except for a couple of small buffaloes. He turned from the window to collect the three rupees six annas before proceeding further, and—found himself staring into the barrel of an automatic, held in a hand which was wonderfully steady for one so old.

"Shut the window, so people will believe this place is empty. If you make a sound, or call for help, I will shoot you dead. I really ought to shoot you as it is—no one will know I did it. Do you see, babuji, any particular reason why I should allow you to continue encumbering the earth?"

The babu might have many excellent qualities—he often talked about them—but he lacked courage. At the present moment he was stricken dumb, but the menace of the pistol spurred him into activity sufficient to close and lock the window. This done, and with the consequent half-dark making the situation all the more terrifying, he again turned to the old gentleman.

"You have not answered my question, babuji," suggested the old man softly, all trace of the wheeze having disappeared. The babu gurgled in a frantic effort to become articulate.

"Ah, so you can not see any reason why I should allow you to continue living eh? Well, I quite agree with you. Have you any choice? You see, I always endeavor to accommodate the individual I am about to kill. In what manner do you desire to die?"

The babu made certain movements with his lips indicative of an intense desire to speak. Unfortunately, just as words were about to issue, he made the mistake of meeting the glaring eyes of the terrible old man, like a wild animal's, greenish in the gloom. The next moment, in an ecstasy of terror, he was groveling on the floor of the office, making sounds which were meant to placate and conjure sympathy, but which, in truth, were merely disgusting.

"Hum! So, I take it, you have no burning wish to meet whatever god you pretend to believe in. Are all your caste afraid to go to heaven? Answer me, sooa cabutcher."

"Ohe, sah—be good—to me—I am—not—feeling veree well this marving."

"I congratulate you," drawled the old man. "You have told the truth—the first time, no doubt, in a long and evil career.

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ROMANCE
You are not feeling very well. Poor fellow! I wonder what is the matter? What do you think has made you feel unwell?"

The babu squirmed. The easy answer to that last question would undoubtedly offend the cause of his sickness. Whatever he had done to deserve all this?

The old man prodded him with the staff—cunningly finding tender spots with its iron-shod end:

"Get up, filthy brute of low caste, whose mother was too unclean for the bazaars. Get up, and send my telegram. And—don't call for assistance, or you will die rather rapidly. I understand Morse as well as you do."

The babu, stimulated by what was uncommonly like a reprieve, struggled to his feet—his girth was too great for sudden rising—and stumbled into his chair.

"Can you see to write in this light?" asked the old man.

"Oh, yes, sahib. The babu, touching familiar things, became more nearly his usual self.

"So, it speaks—at last! Why, babuji, I had almost believed you dumb," and the old man chuckled.

"Ha, ha," the babu laughed, as he thought, diplomatically.

"Who gave you permission to make that disgusting noise?" roared the old man.

"Oh, sahib, your joke was so excellent," groaned the unfortunate wretch.

"Well, I'll forgive you this time," replied the old man, no doubt feeling that he had bullied the babu into a satisfactory condition. "Write this:

"To Sinclair sahib, 13 Chowringhee Road, Calcutta:

"Knowing you are interested in evolution, will you kindly let me have your opinion as to how the snake family developed poison glands—why some have them, and others do not. Also, do you think the snakes developed their venom as a means of offense or defense?"

"Sign that, babuji, C. O. 'Bra;,' but before you send it listen to me a moment. Have you received any peculiar order or question during the past twelve hours?"

The babu was thrilled, galvanized. He became himself again. The subject of his morning's imprecations came to his mind with revivifying eagerness. Had he received any sort of telegram, annoying to himself, as well as puzzling? He had. And forthwith he poured forth a torrent of mangled words, spitting his soul through his lips in his anxiety both to answer the question of the terrible old man, and to revert again to the anger he had so thoroughly enjoyed before that old man's advent.

Picking the essential words from the foaming cataract:

"Ohe, yes, sahib, the—well, the something or other dam fool—if you understand what I mean—being a religious gentleman, I do not like to sully my fair lips with the foul language of the lower classes, sahib, who thrive on such feehly emanations, but, sahib, if you will be so veerie kind as to listen to what did happen, from the sour—I beg your honor's pardon for using the word pig in your honor's presence, but my feelings became far too much for my strength of self-restraint, as happens now and then, sahib, to the best of us. But, you see, your honor—"

"What, in the name of ten thousand devils, did happen?" shouted the old man, effectually damming the stream.

"He asked me, sahib, did the man just ahead of me, if I was still in favor of self-government," the babu gasped, and checked himself. What if the old man were one of those awful Punjabi's—and he looked rather like one—who were loyal to the Raj?

"Well—go on, fool," the old man suggested.

"Yes, sir, but I could not understand why the question was asked me."

"So you are one of those small-brained, fat fools who believe the British can be overthrown by a Bengali who shouts from a box, eh?"

"Oh, no, sahib!"

"If you wish to continue to live, don't lie to me. Now, go on."

Thus stimulated, the babu went on to tell of his morning's annoyance, of his inability to understand what it all meant; all about his various activities during the war—speaking now as a loyal British subject—and spluttering about the other operators telling him that he was under suspicion. He really did not know what it all meant.

The old man grinned. Then, sotto voce:

"I expected it—fishing, eh."

"Sah?"

"Shut up—I'm thinking."
The babu whose eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, watched, his terror increasing, if that were possible. What connection had this dreadful old man with the morning’s message? Oh why, and indeed, oh why had he ever become a telegraph operator for the Government, when there were streets to sweep in comfort and happiness—caste or no caste?

But the old man now appeared pleased, and his unhappy victim plucked up a sort of imitation courage.

“Send that telegram!”

The babu turned to his key and obeyed.

“Will you leave your address in case an answer comes?” he asked, after clicking out the words.

“There will be no answer,” replied the old man, grimly. “Here is the correct charge, and the three rupees six annas, as I promised.”

The babu was more than surprised. That a man who held his life in his hand should pay him, not only for sending the telegram but also the promised tip, was too astonishing. If he himself had been in the old man’s place—if it were possible to imagine anything being afraid of the babu—he knew he would have forced the clerk to pay the toll. As for the three rupees six annas he had promised—well, three kicks, more likely.

The old man seemed to know what was passing through the babu’s mind:

“Can not understand why I am honest, when I need not be, can you babu? That’s the way with the small thief—he can never be honest.” After these enigmatic words he paused to stare his terrifying stare. Then he continued: “Now, babuji, if you want to live you must swear that the telegram I sent was sent by an Englishman, a man who was traveling with two native servants. Say he told you he was going on a shooting trip, and that he seemed to be about thirty years of age and wore a light mustache. Can you remember all that?”

“Oh, yes, sir. If I am asked who sent your wire, I am to say that it was an Englishman, age thirty, with two servants, going shooting. If I am asked, I will be sure to say that.”

“You will be asked, don’t make any mistake about that. And if you want to live, don’t make any mistake about what I told you to say. I am going now, but don’t open your window for ten minutes. If you do, you may find me in front of it, and if I am, I will shoot you.” And, with a final significant shake of his automatic, the old man went out of the office, closing the door carefully, and leaving behind a perfect example of a native gentleman of India in a state of complete collapse.

III

That telegram gave Sinclair perhaps as much thought as any other inanimate thing in all his experience. It seemed to mean so much, and yet so little—like the introduction of the cobra into his room; there was about it a baffling lack of anything he could grasp. There was the annoying repetition of the shattering of his mythical personality—he was known as Sinclair. The telegraph operator could be brought to Calcutta and questioned about the sender. But the telegraph clerk’s description would be a hazy one at the best—would be a tenuous clue to the finding of one man in a population of two hundred millions.

Besides, if the sender of the wire did not wish to be known—which was more than likely—he would have been careful to bribe, or in some manner silence the clerk so that that individual would be prone to forget who had sent the telegram, and answer all questions with vague words, more clouding than illuminating. To attempt to elucidate the message were a waste of time—similar to trying to find the meaning of the harmless snake; and the obvious relation between the telegraph sender and the snake introducer, while it hinted at a gang, held a bafflement of its own.

Yet the affair was growing, and the more it grew the less possible would concealment be from a man as clever as Sinclair. Meanwhile he would request the Government to send the baby to him for examination, and inform his friend the viceroy of what had occurred—keeping to himself, however, his discovery of a traitor in his camp, while on the lookout for others, since treachery is infectious.

The viceroy was amused. That any one should play jokes on Sinclair did appear unlikely, but that the snake and the telegram were all a practical joke his excellency did not doubt. There was much to prove this idea. First, the knowledge of
Sinclair's name and address—hardly possible to a native; second, the harmlessness of both manifestations—what native would take so much trouble without gaining anything?

Besides, the country was so contented and prosperous. Never before had business been so good, or the British Raj more secure. The viceroy reminded Sinclair of a certain young army officer who had been associated with him during a certain adventure—an officer notorious for practical jokes. But the telegraph clerk would be forthcoming.

And Sinclair felt relieved. It did look like a joke. Indeed, the more he thought of the notion of the viceroy, the more did he lean to it. Perhaps because it all at once made a traitor a true man, if rather an impertinent one. Acting for the jocular army officer, in the matter of the snake, while showing a lack of respect, was certainly not treachery. But the babu would either confirm or disprove this notion when he arrived, under Sinclair's skilful questioning.

Thus the stout babu in his lonely office received notice of "promotion" and increase of pay with a singular delight. Money was his one true god, but the greater cause for joy was his removal from the vicinity of the horrible old man. In fact, the babu had seriously thought of resigning and only his fear of the old man coming to kill him before his resignation became effective had kept him to his post. The journey to Calcutta was an anticipatory delight. Then, rather to his surprise, he was met at the depot by another—but different—stout babu and taken in an automobile to Sinclair—surprise giving way to terror when he was informed that he was to finish the drive blindfolded. But he submitted, as was his habit.

It was Sinclair's custom to interview all strangers wearing a black mask, which not only hid his identity but had a valuable effect upon the native mind. When the babu from the lonely office saw this mask, he began to wonder if its wearer and the old man who had sent the telegram might not be one and the same. Both men had about them a sort of power, a personality. The more he thought about this, the more sure did the babu become that they were the same. Consequently, he was greatly disturbed.

The man in the mask said—
"Tell the truth, or suffer."
"The old man who had sent the telegram had said, "Say that a young Englishman, age thirty, sent this."
"The babu counted his fingers and decided to obey the first old man.
"The telegram, sahib, was sent by an English sahib, who was going shooting, with two servants and a light mustache age thirty," he answered Sinclair's question rapidly.

For a moment Sinclair stared. To the ordinary man this answer would have been a confirmation of the practical joke theory—the description fitted the young army officer very well. But Sinclair was not the ordinary man.

"Who told you to say that?" he suggested, insinuatingly.
"You did, bot burra sahib," the babu now felt sure of the masked one's identity, and believed it best to recognize him.
"I did?" queried Sinclair, his tone silky, wondering if all his unknown agents were as awful liars as this one.

"Yes, sahib," but the babu's laugh was tremulous. "Does not the sahib remember?"

His easy fear, together with the undoubted similarity of the two old men, had tripped the babu into an unpleasant position—the entire nastiness of which he was as yet unaware.

"So," Sinclair appeared to be thinking hard, "and how was I dressed—and did I wear this?" He touched the black mask.
"The sahib knows," and thereupon the babu, in questioning tones, recited the adventure of the telegraph office. There is nothing in the world like the Bengali babu. Generally fat, about one in every hundred thousand is exceptionally brave; the remainder are as the rabbits in the open—hard, threatening eyes, looking into theirs, will force them to disclose their soul's most cherished secrets as if they were hypnotized.

And Sinclair glowed. This unfortunate, indiscreet person was as a searchlight thrown upon the problem. At the conclusion of his story, Sinclair presented the babu with twenty rupees (boxes—tip) and bade him go, laughing heartily at his bewilderment.

At the babu's first words, which seemed to confirm the joke theory, Sinclair had
believed that the matter was no joke. When he dismissed the babu, he felt sure it was a joke, and that the young officer had disguised himself as an old man, and given the babu his correct description. The snake affair had been arranged before he left Calcutta. For even the bullying of the babu pointed to lack of serious import; for, as the viceroy had argued, no native would go to so much trouble for nothing, let alone spend so much money.

The whole affair had been gotten up with the view of causing Sinclair to think a great problem confronted him. Thus Sinclair saw it and so he wired the viceroy, who agreed. Looked at from every angle, there was no other solution—Captain Dayas had sustained his reputation. And while the merry captain was on his shooting expedition, two grave gentlemen—the viceroy of India and Sinclair—told one another they "would get even," laughingly, like two schoolboys.

Next morning, although an uneasy shadow hung over his mind, Sinclair still held to the joke theory, and he went to breakfast determined afterward to question the man whom he had believed at one time to be a traitor—the man who, acting for Captain Dayas, had introduced the snake into the room. For while a joke was a joke, this was bad for discipline, and must be stopped. He well knew the persuasive powers of the captain and how cleverly he would contrive to make the man who brought in the snake believe that Sinclair would enjoy the proceeding. But it must not occur again. To be good-natured was all very well but too much of it was weakness.

Now the tradesmen of Calcutta believed that Sinclair’s house was inhabited by a Mr. Johnson, in whose name the necessary stores were ordered and paid for. During breakfast a tradesman’s cart arrived at the gate which left certain packages with the Sikh gatekeeper, one of which was marked “Perishable, open at once.”

Able to read English, the Sikh took this package up-stairs immediately, placing it upon the table in front of Sinclair. It was a square box, made of teak-wood, and measured about a foot each way. Sesson, who had visions of a favorite dish, exclaimed rapturously—“Elephant’s foot, eh?”

“Looks like it,” remarked Sinclair carelessly. Then, startled—
“Why, it’s addressed to me!”
“To you?”
“Yes, to Sinclair, not Johnson. How did it get on the cart?”

The mental shadow of the morning was becoming a full-grown apprehension.

“I don’t know,” Sesson spoke truthfully, if not helpfully. “Better open it—maybe there’s a note inside.”

“I’ll bet it’s another phase of Dayas’s joke,” Sinclair spoke hopefully.

“Let’s hope we can eat it, anyway,” replied Sesson.

Meanwhile, the Chinese cook had arrived, on the supposition that the box belonged to his department, bringing with him a screwdriver. The top being removed, the box was seen to be lined with straw, and when a mass of this was lifted out something wrapped in clean white linen was revealed.

“I was right—elephant’s foot,” Sesson, chortled.

“It does seem about the shape and size of a small foot,” agreed Sinclair, somewhat doubtfully. “Lift it out, Li.”

The Chinaman obeyed, placing the object on a dish. Then he cut away the voluminous wrappings—finishing this job with sudden haste. For, surrounded by the linen, was the head of the unfortunate babu from the lonely telegraph office, to whom Sinclair had given twenty rupees the previous day!

For some moments no one spoke. Then, very quietly:

“It was not a joke and I made myself believe it was,” said Sinclair. “Poor devil, why didn’t I—but what’s the use?”

It was a hideous breakfast visitor, effectually preventing further eating and filling Sinclair with the self-contempt only possible to a thinker who has allowed his emotions to influence his reasoning. For while the facts, or lack of them, had pointed to a joke, his every intuition had told him otherwise. But his keen and natural desire to deny the possibility of real treachery in his official family had turned the scale against logic.

And now, with the joke theory exploded, what did it all mean, and why this murderous termination to a series of harmless, almost amusing events? From only one of the many agents of Sinclair had come any-
thing which had the remotest bearing on the affair. To none of the others had anything occurred worth reporting. And lying on the breakfast table was the head of the one agent.

But how had the vengeance of the old man reached him so swiftly? The babu had been ordered to say that an Englishman had sent the wire. He had admitted it to have been sent by an old man. For that admittance he had died. But how had the enemy learned that the babu had told Sinclair about the old man sending the telegram? Again the traitor, again the man who had acted in the matter of the snake. Every word of the interview between Sinclair and the babu had been at once reported to the enemy, since it was absurd to imagine the babu had told about it himself.

But, at least, the unseen enemy had shown intention. No longer were his acts aimless, harmless. Here was a deadly worker to be combatted, not a foolish joker. And, gnawing at his vitals was Sinclair's knowledge of the traitor and the fear that there were others.

Therefore, as usual, but more particularly now, he must tackle the affair alone. To Sesson he would give carte blanche, to act as he saw fit; but the real work would be Sinclair's, without any assistance. It might be his last adventure, for apart from his age and his inability to trust an assistant, he felt that this was the most involved task he had ever attempted to solve and the most dangerous to his person. Two men there were on the other side, and Sinclair had a horrid suspicion that the second man was the traitor in his own immediate retinue, acting in Calcutta for the old man.

And back of all was the "why?" What was the object of all these manifestations? Even the murder of the babu was as lacking in objectivity as the telegram and the harmless snake. For what possible harm to the old man could be done by the babu's vague description of him? Surely it was not "frightfulness." It couldn't be that the snake, the wire, the killing of the babu, were merely Germanic attempts to terrify Sinclair into retiring, in order that some future effort of the enemy would be more likely to succeed. After breakfast, which finished abruptly, Sinclair told Sesson to take charge. Receiving another telegram, he ordered out his automobile, and disappeared in it, with a native policeman for driver—a man picked at random, lest the world were all traitors, among whom to choose were folly.

**IV**

**MEANWHILE,** a day or two after the change of operators, the fierce old man had returned to the isolated telegraph office. But it was in the guise of a bent old woman that he tottered to the open window to ask the new and very officious babu if he had seen anything of a small boy, "her grandson," who had the evil habit of wandering away alone.

- No, the babu had seen no chota cabucher. In fact he had other things to do. Did the old cow imagine he took notice of every child that ran about naked? The seeming old woman read this person as easily as an open page. Further, he deduced that he had received no instructions regarding himself—if only for the reason that Sinclair would never use such a fool on so important a matter.

Therefore the other babu had not yet told Sinclair that an old man had sent the telegram. Analyzing his reasoning, the old man saw that the babu had not yet had time to get to Calcutta and tell Sinclair—for he felt sure Sinclair would squeeze the truth out of such a rabbit. But even when Sinclair did get the truth, he would trust no babu. If he sent any one to the lonely office, it would be himself. Not for nothing had that old man studied Sinclair for years.

"You are not the babu who was here when I passed this way before—where is he?" wheezed the ancient.

"I do not know."

"Liar," whispered the old one.

The babu was momentarily staggered, but he quickly recovered.

"Did you refer to me?" he asked loftily.

"You know who I called a liar—why pretend, fool?"

It was not usual for a poverty-stricken old hag to so address a native gentleman, and the gentleman was doubtful as to the correct method of administering punishment. However, something must be done—even if the old woman were not sane—because the dignity of the babu had been rather muddled.

He shut the window with a bang, intending to go outside and severely beat...
the old woman with his Malacca cane. He was very proud of that cane and swaggered when he went out walking with it; consequently, he was vastly disturbed when—just as he reached for it—the office door opened, admitting the old woman, who, with unexpected agility, shut the door behind her, leveled an automatic, and reaching the babu's side, seized the cane—all this apparently in a moment.

"Now, babuji," she was wheezing again, "you and I are going to have some fun."

The babu, whose courage, if possible, was even less than that of his predecessor, collapsed in his chair, staring with an expression of agony at the pistol.

"I do not understand," he gasped, while coming to the conclusion that the old woman really was insane—dangerously so.

He remembered having heard that one must humor the mad. "Oh, mem sahib, but if you desire the cane I am onlee too glad to give it to you—for a present," he managed desperately to say.

"How kind you are, babuji—how sweet and kind. Are you always so?"

"Oh, yes—I am a generous."

"Dear me! And I suppose you call every old woman 'mem sahib' who comes along seeking her grandson, do you?"

"Yes—I was taught in my extreme youth to be polite to the aged."

"Then, darling, why did you call me an old cow?"

"Mere—mere pleasantry, I do assure you."

"So! Then consider this beating to be 'mere pleasantry,' will you? Because I intend to enjoy it."

The ruthless old person then proceeded to thrash the babu with scientific thoroughness, while the thrashed, rolling about the floor in pain, was constrained to silence by the threat of something far worse. However, when he could no longer contain his groans, the punishment ceased.

"Send me a telegram, babu."

The babu dragged his bruised body to the table, while the old man again went over his plans. He wanted to telegraph Sinclair again, if the first babu told that gentleman the truth—that an old native, and not a young Englishman had sent the first telegram. But by that time it might not be healthy for him to be seen at the lonely office—Sinclair would in all probability have set a trap for him. The wire he now intended to dictate to the weeping babu must, therefore, not be sent immediately, but be held until the proper time arrived.

"Babuji," he spoke with seeming kindness, "I have been unkind to you, and I am sorry. I am going to give you a hundred rupees with which to heal your bruises, and, if you will carry out my orders correctly, I will add another fifty to the hundred. Listen carefully."

The babu, still in a dreadfully confused state of mind as a result of the brutal activities of the seeming old woman, endeavored to assume a listening attitude. He would have done his utmost to stand on his head, had he been so ordered.

"I am going to have you write a telegram," the old man spoke slowly and clearly, "which you will not send until you receive by wire a question about a certain old man—my husband. This question may come tomorrow or the day after, or it may not come at all. If it never comes, the money I will leave with you for the sending of my telegram must be returned to me by you, but the 'boxes' you may keep. I have means of discovering whether you are asked that question or not, so don't try to play any tricks.

"Understand, the instant a question is asked you concerning an old man, you must send the telegram I am now going to dictate to you. If no question, send no telegram, but give it back to me with the money when I come again. First"—he found a leather purse among his clothes—"here is your hundred. I will give you the fifty when you have earned it. One thing more: if you are asked who sent this telegram, tell the truth, and say it was sent by an old maharanee." The old man sniggered at his weird jest. "If I can not come here again, I will send a messenger. Take this and hold it until you are asked that question."

"To Sinclair sahib, Chowringhee Road Calcutta:

"Your wisdom is very young. Compared to mine it is like that of a child. So I give you advice. Do not play with fire, or you will be burned. You know by now that I have a long arm."

"Now, babuji, tell me what it will cost to send that, and I will leave the money with you. But if you send it before you
are asked a question about an old man being in your office, I will kill you. Remember, also, that you are my man—that it will pay you to be on my side, while it will be dangerous not to be."

He gave the dazed operator the money for the telegram charge and left him without further words—hobbling away, an ancient crone. But, as far as it was possible for the babu to think at all, that individual believed he had been visited by a cross between a devil and a witch.

And when the wire began to hum with questions concerning a certain old man, the babu became certain that no human being had worn the old woman's rags. He was even a bit afraid of the hundred rupees, and decided to change it slowly for other money before hoarding it as was his wont. But he sent the telegram to Sinclair, who read it with a grim smile of satisfaction.

"Now," Sinclair mused, "if the sender of this had not been so proud of himself, my job would have been much more difficult. But they will do it—they always overdo it, that is."

And so, as already noted, he left Calcutta in his car, alone with his problem and a native chauffeur. According to the babu operator, the second telegram had been sent by "a very old but beautiful woman." Asked if he had seen anything of an old man, he had said, "No, but the maharani who sent the telegram spoke about one." Which was quite babuesque.

Came some days of peace to that babu, during which he received no visitors at his office. A relaying station, on the old system, he usually had few telegrams to send that were brought by the sender to his office. Thus he had lots of time to speculate concerning the next visit of the unpleasant but pecuniarily satisfactory old woman. At night—for the office had no relief and the operator was compelled to sleep in it—he barricaded the place as well as he could for reasons of supernatural caution; and he was very glad when daylight came.

Hence his agonized condition when a loud knocking aroused him about midnight, perhaps a week after the old woman's visit.

He lay very still, pretending that he did not hear. He fully appreciated his isolated position. Outside, as he well knew, would be the lonely fields and the long ghostly shadows made by an old moon. He began to wish he had bought—a dog, for while the Government supplied a revolver, he was more afraid of it than otherwise.

The knocking was repeated—more loudly, if possible. And in that midnight sound the babu discovered sinister meanings.

It was the sore memory of the beating which eventually "awoke" him; for it occurred to him that, while he had obeyed instructions, the irascible old woman—with whom he was beginning to connect the knocking—might feel called upon to repeat it if he kept her waiting. So, with a great fuss of pretended rousing, he got off his bed and lit the lamp, calling—"Coming, coming—as soon as I can dress."

"Hurry up," was shouted in Hindustani. "Yes, madam, sir, your honor, mem sahib."

Then, all atremble, he opened the door, and an old man—native—entered hurriedly.

The babu blinked. Since his chastisement at the hands of the seeming old woman the suspicion had grown that—unusual though it was—the "old woman" had been a man. This notion had never taken actual shape because of the witch and devil theory. The question now confronting him—and such a midnight visit implied matters of importance—was whether the old man his lamp revealed was the old woman rightly clothed or another person.

The poor babu was frightfully mixed, but his reasoning was propped up by the fact of there being no other person in the world but the "old woman" who could possibly have any business with him of such importance as to cause a midnight visit—unless this person had urgent need of sending a telegram. This last idea gave the babu his course—along which he could safely steer until he discovered whether or no the old man was the old woman who owed him fifty rupees.

"If you want to send a telegram," he began in his official tone, "you must wait. This office does not open until eight o'clock."

"I do not desire to send any telegram,
babuji, and you know it,” the other wheezed, as most old natives wheeze.

The babu smiled politely, if timidly, closed the door and brought forward a chair.

“You see, your honor,” he explained insinuatingly, “I had to make sure it was you. You have chosen to change your appearance since your last visit. But I obeyed you and held the telegram until they asked the question—then I sent it.” He rubbed his hands unctuously, his expression a question-mark concerning fifty rupees.

Sinclair, for it was he disguised in his favorite manner, and almost the double of the old man he was trailing, thought rapidly. The babu had declared he had seen no old man, but that the telegram had been sent by an old woman. Something had caused him to believe the old woman had not been female but male.

There had never been any doubt in Sinclair’s mind about the sex of the telegram sender; indeed, the second telegram had admitted this identity. But what had caused the babu to suspect it? He was probably innocent of any wrong but he obviously expected some reward—for holding the telegram. So his anxiety to obtain that reward and the similarity of Sinclair’s and the old man’s personalities had led him to believe this midnight visit had been made expressly for the purpose of paying it—believing Sinclair to be the person who had promised it.

“So, you were expecting me, babuji?”

“Your honor’s humble servant knows you to be an honorable man, sir—one who will reward his faithful servant promptly.”

“Oh, yes—and how much did I promise you, babu?”

“Your honor chooses to make fun with me.”

“Not at all.” Sinclair sat down. “But I wish to test your memory. I may have further need of you, and, for that reason, I desire to learn if you are a man of intelligence, as you are a person of obedience. Just to test that, tell me what you remember of my last visit to you at this place. How was I dressed—when I did not look as I now look. If you can do that correctly, I will give you the money, and have further work for you, which, also, will be paid generously.”

Thus stimulated, the babu gave a succinct account of the visit of the old woman—whom, of course, as he said, he had known all along was a man in disguise—smiling deprecatingly when he recounted the many blows of the Malacca cane and ending with the writing of the telegram, the payment of the charge, the hundred rupees, and the promise of fifty more.

And as Sinclair listened his wonderment grew. What on earth was the meaning of it all? The trail was so clear, so simple, so easy to follow. But why? If the old man had deliberately intended that Sinclair should progress thus far he could not have made things easier for him. And, contrariwise, all the cunning in the world could not have more effectually hidden the motive of the whole affair, from the harmless snake to the second telegram.

There was more than one man, and they were in constant communication. This was obvious. But how did they communicate? But it was no use theorizing. All Sinclair could do was follow out the plan he had made—and look out. And as he thought thus there came over him a sense of danger, and an unpleasant realization of the hazardous nature of his midnight expedition.

He shook this off—all his life he had taken chances, and he was too old to change his ways. Next day he would have the main wire tapped, and a short wire led to a concealed place, where several men would be lying in waiting—as near to the lonely office as possible. To arrange the bait for that short wire had been another reason for his visit.

“Babuji,” he said to the expectant babu, “here is your fifty rupees. I am sorry I beat you, for you are a valuable man. But your rewards will make you forget your beating, if you continue to obey. If you fail—but you have too much sense to fail, eh?”

“I am the slave of your honor,” whined the babu.

“Good. Now listen. Do as I tell you and another hundred rupees will be paid to you. It may be tomorrow, or the day after, or the day after that—I am not sure yet. But on one of those days I will come again to see you. Keep a good lookout for my coming, and the moment you see me—coming toward you in the distance—send this telegram:

ROMANCE
"To Sinclair, sahib, Chowringhee Road, Calcutta.
"Buy custard apples, they are now cheap.

"Send that, as I told you, the moment I appear in sight, because I intend to wait here for an answer, and I don't want to wait too long. My coming will mean that the telegram is to be sent—do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," the babu wrote carefully.

"Very well," replied Sinclair, exceedingly glad the babu had been well beaten, for otherwise he might have looked too carefully into the trick—and there was none other possible.

"Oh, one other thing. When I come again I may have a lot to think about, so don't trouble me by telling me you have sent the telegram. Just send it, and don't bother me about it. I am paying you to take my place, as it were. Can I trust you?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"All right," Sinclair rose to leave, having done all he could to lay a trap for the old native whom he hoped would again visit the telegraph office, and who was the head of some gang whose plan was a mystery.

If the babu only did his part, the old villain would be caught, since the telegram about the custard apples would be heard at the end of the short wire, where Sinclair's policemen would lie concealed, and they would be able to rush to the office in less than five minutes. After that—well, time enough to plan when they caught the old man.

To lie in wait in the office would be foolish, for the reason that the old man would be almost sure to send some one to see if the coast was clear before he came himself. Besides, it would not do to arouse the suspicions of the babu, and to remove him would be a danger-signal to the old man.

It was a lonely scene that met Sinclair when he left the office. The moon had set, and what little light obtained on the flat, desolate fields only served to make the shadows more fantastically suggestive. Even Sinclair, accustomed to danger and strange adventure as he was, was affected, and when a distant dog howled mournfully he could not prevent a violent start.

About two miles away—for the trunk road, thousands of years old, was only that far from the telegraph office, the existence of which was not even suspected by the millions of travelers journeying on foot and in weird conveyances—Sinclair had left his auto, in charge of the native driver. Alone, as he had not been for years, unable to trust his own men, since the treachery of one might mean the treachery of all, this midnight visit, based on his likeness to the man he wanted, had been the only plan. His age did not count with him—the danger, and he knew there was danger, would have been as great when he was young.

He could take no one with him to the office because there was only a slim chance that the babu would take him for the "old woman," and a guard would have sent that chance glimmering. Besides—who could he take, when he could trust no one? For the clumsy work of arresting the old man when he next went to the telegraph office, the local police were all right; but it would not have done to take them into his confidence at this time. For all he knew, the old man of the telegrams might have the entire force bought. And that was another chance.

So Sinclair had, as usual, acted alone, but he felt the loneliness. To add to his sense of oppression and to encourage the haunting touch of fear, a light waving wind had risen, which just rustled the sparse vegetation sufficiently to cause that creepy notion of whispering, unseen, ghostly beings, which is ever a concomitant of a lonely walk at such an hour. Naturally then, Sinclair hurried. Suddenly turning the corner of a low mound he stood still, shivering, with a muttered exclamation. Then he laughed, although his heart still pounded violently.

"A scarecrow," he exclaimed, as he realized the truth of the apparition in its weird application of native artistry. "I must be getting nervous."

He walked on around the mound—perhaps the burial-place of men dead these many thousand years—and turned to his right, toward the road where his car waited.

He never heard a sound, but he found himself tearing desperately at the rapidly tightening noose around his neck—knowing only too well his helplessness, and visioning only too surely his doom. He, of course, had a pistol, but, had he tried to draw it, the rope would have choked him
into insensibility before he could have got it out of his pocket, let alone use it effectively.

Many thoughts flashed like meteors through his dimming brain. Amongst these was a strange hope whereby he wondered at himself for so hoping. For he hoped that he had been attacked by thuggee—just robbers, dacoits, Burmans, driven from their own country. Then came that sudden end of thought, between consciousness and which one can not find a dividing-line.

V

THE UTTER disappearance of Sinclair caused perhaps the greatest subsurface commotion India has ever seen, and that is saying a good deal. Subsurface in that while the waters of humanity were stirred frantically by the order of Sinclair's intimate friend, the viceroy, it was deemed best to allow nothing to get into print, offer any reward publicly for his recovery, or allow any of the hundreds engaged in searching for some trace of him to mention the matter.

To safeguard this last the men were in general given separate tasks leading to the one end.

For the viceroy felt only too sure that while his captors would be aware that everything possible was being done to find him, public discussion of the case might cause them to put him out of existence. In the meantime the viceroy tried not to think of the horror of the torture to which Sinclair might be put in the hope of his revealing some secret he was supposed to hold. For no other reason could be adduced for his disappearance than that his captors desired certain information, for no ransom had been asked.

The trail was clear up to a certain point. His chauffeur reported waiting until noon of the day after the midnight Sinclair had left his car. The telegraph operator—for while Sinclair had told no one of his nocturnal destination, every native in the vicinity that could be laid hands on had been interviewed—had told of his being visited in the night by an old native, claiming, however, that the same old man had been before to see him in the guise of an old woman.

The auto driver told of Sinclair's dis-

guise. That Sinclair had been the "old native" who had visited the office was therefore obvious, when it was remembered that the dead babu had been an operator at the same place. The babu, again carefully interviewed, told his whole tale—of the rupees, the beating, etc.—but still stuck to his idea that the old woman and the midnight visitor were one and the same.

But Sesson—whom the viceroy, knowing nothing of Sinclair's knowledge of the traitor or his suspicions of the others, had placed in charge of the investigation—brought up the first babu's story of the old man, which, taken together with the living babu's story of the order left by Sinclair, seemed to prove that Sinclair had laid a trap for that old man, who in turn had trapped Sinclair.

Thus the problem remained exactly as it was before. There was a mysterious old man who sent strange telegrams, who had a confederate in Calcutta. His motive in all this was another mystery. Apparently Sinclair had been removed because he had got in the old man's way. But, again, what on earth was the old man trying to do—what was his conspiracy? It was all very baffling.

And why kidnap Sinclair when he could have been easily killed, and why send a harmless snake? That Sinclair was supposed to have information which the old man desired seemed to be the most reasonable answer to the riddle. But it failed to cover all the known facts. Again, as Sesson rather caustically suggested, what information could Sinclair possess which could be of any possible value to this mysterious old man or to the organization to which he perhaps belonged?

And the pulse of the country remained normal; indeed, India seemed to have entered an era of peace and prosperity which bade fair to cause doubt of the continued existence of the perennial famine, to relieve which Britain spends more than the revenue.

Sesson took charge in much the same fashion as he would have relieved the watch, with, however, a sense of responsibility greater than he had before known. It had been Sinclair's idea to train the sailor to succeed him when he died, but the training did not lessen the task. But Mr. Sesson would tackle anything, and, with all the resources of the State behind
him, he set to work—rather wondering, as the old wives say, "at which end he would begin."

Now Sesson, also, had seen no other explanation for the sudden appearance of the snake than that a certain individual had betrayed his trust. But, unlike Sinclair, he was not troubled by doubts as regards the faithfulness of Sesson. Sinclair, to be logical, had to consider the possibility of five men being traitors; Sesson had to concern himself with but four. Two of these—the cook and valet—he put out of his mind. There remained the stout Bengali babu, who had served Sinclair for twenty-two years, and the Sikh, who had served faithfully for seventeen.

Just why Sesson limited the possibility of treachery to these two he could not have told at first, except to explain that he had "a hunch." Later, when he saw further, he realized on what his intuition had been based. Obviously, then, if the treachery of one individual could be established, a confession would lead to some member of the mysterious old man's gang.

To make sure of this traitor, and compel him to tell all, was the first thing to be done. But that was difficult, if only because the traitor was a native of unusually strong character—one who would perhaps hang by his thumbs until he died, without breathing a word. And hanging men by their thumbs was not in Mr. Sesson's category of accomplishments.

But—and unlike Sinclair, who was peculiar in some ways—he had no sentimental scruples to contend with, although he had all the refined Englishman's horror of hurting another's feelings; so he began to consider the lines of least resistance presented by the stout babu and the Sikh.

The babu loved money for money's sake; was, in fact, like so many of his kind, a miser; while the Sikh's ruling passion was diamonds—to be exact, one diamond, which he invariably wore in the front of his spotless white turban. Beginning with a small stone, by saving and judicious trading he had managed to acquire a very fine one.

Would his izzat (honor) stand the lure of a finer gem, if diplomatically offered as the price of his treachery? That was the question, and when, some little time after Sinclair's disappearance, Sesson saw blazing in the Sikh's turban a diamond of such wonderful color and size that even his slight knowledge of gems told him could not be worth less than a hundred and fifty thousand rupees, he felt that, at last, a slight clue to the solution of the problem had been found.

But it was one thing to he satisfied that the Sikh was a traitor, and another to prove it in such a way that the proof could be used to help find Sinclair. Even if there were anything really criminal in his treachery, legal prosecution would be worse than a waste of time. The thing to do, apparently, was to question him, appeal to his feelings, his regard for Sinclair. But—against this—if his regard for Sinclair had become so blunted that it was less than his fondness for diamonds, it would be a waste of time to appeal to him.

Again, suppose he admitted the treachery and refused to betray the man who had paid him? No doubt the Sikh had been warned that if he told who had given him the diamond he would not only lose the diamond but also his life. Think as he might, Sesson could imagine no lever so potent that it would force the Sikh to talk, if he decided not to. In short, he could admit his treachery, throw up his job as gatekeeper, and tell Sesson to go to the devil.

Of course he could be put in jail on some trumped-up charge for a while; but what good would that do? Only put Sinclair in danger—if he still lived—because the Sikh's arrest might scare his captors into the belief that the Sikh had told all he knew, and they themselves might fear capture with Sinclair in their possession, which would mean a life sentence. Added to this was the likelihood of the Sikh's knowing nothing of value, nothing which would help to find Sinclair; in which case to either question him or arrest him would be not only dangerous but valueless.

There was nothing for it, then, but to watch the Sikh carefully, in the hope of catching him in company with the member of the mysterious gang who had seduced him. After which would come the tremendous task of shadowing the gang-member, in the hope of his leading to Sinclair's hiding-place. And to this task Sesson set himself.

But he was beset with doubt. The Sikh appeared to be so upright, so honest, and
his expressed love for the *burra sahib*, as he called Sinclair, so sincere; while his daily curses on the heads of whoever had captured him seemed impossible to a man who had betrayed him. No man in Sesson's command worked with such apparent energy as did the Sikh. And, thinking back, his actions on the night the snake had been introduced into the house had not seemed like those of a man burdened with guilty knowledge of its coming. Reason mocked reason, logic flaunted logic; but the diamond, which twenty-five years of the Sikh's salary could not have bought, and intuition loudly voiced his guilt.

But time passed without any progress being made. Systematic search the length and breadth of India failed to find a trace of the missing man, and never did the Sikh appear to meet any suspicious character.

True, Sesson could not watch him all the time but he deputed the task to men he felt he could trust whenever his own work intervened. Yet, as there was bound to, there came a time when, with frazzled nerves and worn-out body, Sesson doubted everything—from the theories he had woven to his belief in the Sikh's treachery; from his own ability to the faith of the men he set to watch the Sikh when he himself was absent.

Was the stout *babu*, then, the man? But on the night the snake had made its appearance the *babu* had been two hundred miles from Calcutta, and since then he had never made a suspicious move.

Yet, as Sesson remembered, on that fateful evening he had been absolutely certain that not until he had examined the snake after its death had the Sikh known it was harmless. And he was no nearer the solution of the main mystery—what did it all mean, who was the old man of the telegrams, and why had Sinclair been abducted? To prove the Sikh a traitor would be no nearer the solution of the mystery than would a grain of sand to the weight of the world.

It was in this hopeless frame of mind that Sesson crossed the Hugli one evening, went to his room at the Great Eastern Hotel, and, afterward, had his dinner. His work had become a nightmare, from which it seemed he would never awaken. He craved relaxation, and various tempting dissipations were calling him. Half-way giving in and half-way fighting these, his indecision drove him to the unusual course of aimlessly walking the streets.

It was cool for Calcutta, and he wore a light overcoat over his dress-suit. Indifferent to direction, he walked toward the river, thinking of Sinclair's wonderful ability and pondering on his captivity—for the men who prevented Sinclair from escaping must be abnormally clever themselves.

Presently, meeting a motley crowd, he realized that the band concert in the Eden Gardens was over, and that it would be quiet and peaceful under the deserted trees; so he turned in at one of the entrances and found a seat where a myriad insects made musical carnival, and hosts of bats performed dizzy gyrations. So, and for the first time since the evening of the game of chess, which now seemed very long ago, the problem drifted into the background of his mind, and he felt at peace.

As a matter of fact, his tired brain had unconsciously dropped the matter, just as a tired hand will drop a heavy burden. Thus he sat there, the bats passing and repassing like swallows of the night, the luring odor of the evening fires soothing him like some wonderful incense, the voice of Calcutta rising and falling like the sound of a distant cataract—all occasionally punctuated by the scream of some dismal night-bird. Slipping out on the tide which moves between sleep and consciousness, Sesson forgot his surroundings and lost thought of time.

He was aroused by a voice; yet, strange to say, the voice was pitched so low that it only just reached him. Indeed, strain his ears as he might, he could not hear what was said! It flashed to his mind that something in the mental atmosphere was responsible for his waking, while he gradually became aware that the voice came from under a tree to his right, where a man was talking to another in a tone of absolute command—the silent man standing stiffly, listening obediently.

Suddenly Sesson was astonished to discover that he was breathing as if he had just finished a hard race, his heart beating in sympathy. He knew enough to understand that he had been violently disturbed subconsciously by something his conscious senses could not reach—something which had to do with the two men under the tree.

For years Sinclair had instructed him
in the wonders of psychology, particularly in that he knew that branch of the science in which India leads the world; consequently, if the two men were so violently affecting him, something connected with them was of vast importance to himself, and to allow them to become aware of his presence by trying to get nearer, so he could hear what was being said, would be fatal. He was hidden by a tree trunk, and there was nothing else to do but wait for the chance of something happening of which he could take advantage.

Presently the voice ceased. The man who had done all the talking turned and disappeared among the trees, while the other began to walk in Sesson’s direction.

As he drew nearer, the Englishman saw he was a tall man with a white turban. He was walking in a curiously stiff, stilted manner. And now Sesson felt more than ever the rapid beating of his heart, and the quick breathing he could not control. There was not much light, for there was no moon and the garden lights had been extinguished.

Still walking stiffly and slowly, the tall man came along the path which led past Sesson’s seat. As he came abreast, it was all Sesson could do to stifle an exclamation. For the tall man was the bearded Sikh—the confidential gate-keeper of Sinclair’s house—and in his turban the great diamond gleamed, as it seemed to Sesson, like some evil star.

Apparentlv he did not observe Sesson, who was now wondering why he had been so startled. A curious numbness was overcoming his faculties. There was no reason why the Sikh should not meet a friend in the Eden Garden, to enjoy a confidential chat, and the darkness was sufficient excuse for his failure to notice Sesson. Why should Sesson concern himself?

To pry into another man’s business showed ill-breeding; besides, it was very comfortable under the tree and he was so tired—that he not earned a rest? Rest—rest. Yes, of course. But in what way had he earned that rest?

The automatic question saved him. With a violent effort, and some bad language, Sesson realized, just in time, what was happening to him. Some words of Sinclair’s—repeated over and over—were drumming up his clouded faculties, rousing him to action.

“Pay no attention to the European or American psychologists except in so far as their mechanistic action and reaction principles are warranted, for they are bigotedly ignorant of the real science of the soul. For I tell you, hypnosis is virulently infectious.” One hypnotized man will affect a score of others. And why not, when it is an emotional condition?

“Did you ever attend a ‘revival meeting,’ and observe how one penitent will rouse the entire congregation to a pitch of intense religious enthusiasm; have you not noticed how fear is communicated from one individual to another, until a thousand men and women will trample one another in senseless panic? Watch how a mob will react to the mental state of one man; notice in a dozen ways how emotion spreads, and then explain, if you can, why hypnosis should not follow the law.

“India has known this for centuries. Her conjurers practise the principle—although their knowledge is trivial compared to that of some others I could mention—and the famous ‘rope trick,’ in which, as you know, a boy appears to climb a rope thrown up into the air, which a moment before was wound around the performer’s waist, is but an instance of ‘group hypnosis.’

“You have been told that the consent of the hypnotized is required before he can be affected, that no one can be hypnotized against his will, etc. But who tries to work that way? If you wish to hit a man you try to catch him off his guard, do you not? So with hypnotism.

“The late Professor Münsterberg allowed his preconceived ideas to keep him silent when he stumbled upon a truth—old to India. I refer to his famous case, in which he proved a self-confessed murderer to be innocent—to have been hypnotized by the flash of a light on a nickel revolver, held by a detective who told the man he was guilty. The man was caught off his guard, and but for Münsterberg would have gone to the chair.”

All this, and much more, flashed through Sesson’s mind as the Sikh slowly passed him. And as he jumped to his feet a great light was thrown on the problem by the corollary arising from what he had just escaped. The Sikh was hypnotized, and in that condition, unaware of what he did, had acted the traitor.
The man who had just left him was the hypnotist, who gave him his post-hypnotic orders, as decided upon by the gang that had captured Sinclair. At last Sesson was on the right trail. Working, under hypnosis, on his line of least resistance, they had lured the Sikh with the wonderful diamond, stolen his honor and reduced him to the condition of humility and obedience shown a moment before under the trees.

In a few minutes he would "wake up," forgetting what had just occurred, and at the ordered time do exactly what he had been ordered by the other man. And their cunning was shown by their not attempting to go too far. For the hypnotized man, like the normal man, can only be persuaded to go against his moral principles to a definite degree. But, with repeated hypnosis, his moral stamina breaks, until he becomes the slave of the operator's will. And a moment before, the silent, deadly menace had thrown its will-sucking tentacles over Sesson, as it had passed him, clinging to the personality of the unconscious Sikh!

Now the Englishman, walking hurriedly, caught up with the gate-keeper, saying in his usual friendly tone—

"Good evening—out for a walk?"

The Sikh stopped, his stilted walk ceasing with a queer suddenness—as if he had been shot, so it seemed to Sesson—turning slowly to the voice. What light obtained shone clearly across the men's faces, making recognition easy, but the Sikh stared at Sesson blankly, with no more apparent knowledge of him than if he then saw him for the first time.

"Salaam, sahib," he spoke slowly, like a man learning a language and doubtful of his pronunciation, "it is indeed a fine night."

Sesson stared, for the Sikh by this time should have been functioning in his normal consciousness. And then the Englishman realized that in order to compel him, if needed, to do something repugnant to his nature in a far greater degree than anything that had gone before he had been plunged very deeply into hypnosis.

"You do not seem to remember me?" said Sesson quietly.

The Sikh frowned in puzzled bewilderment. Obviously there was something that told him Sesson was no stranger, and his frown indicated a prodigious effort to remember. Yet he failed. Shaking his head, his brow clearing—

"The sahib must be mistaken—we have never, to my belief, met before."

"Sorry," replied Sesson, "it must have been a close resemblance which caused my error."

"Yes, sahib," still in the hesitating way, "good evening," and the Sikh turned and walked along.

What was Sesson to do? He did not realize the terrible import of the Sikh's failure to recognize him, because, to tell the truth, the psychology lessons had bored him and he had forgotten much which he ought to have remembered. There was no question about the sincerity of the Sikh's "forgetfulness," but along the dark lane it indicated, and which Sesson would have to travel, he did not see very far.

But he did see that he, one man of limited intelligence, with resolution his only weapon, had to combat the result of the combined best intellects of India, working to one end for centuries. Being English, he did not know how to quit; but he breathed a quizzical prayer to the god of the chances.

Meanwhile he followed the Sikh. It was easy enough to avoid being observed, for there were plenty of people on the streets, and, indeed, the Sikh never turned to look back. But he led Sesson to no adventure. Walking slowly and stiffly, in the course of time he turned into the narrow lane which led past the back door of Sinclair's house—continuing till he reached the door. There he paused, evidently puzzled.

Then Sesson considered it time to act. He touched the Sikh on the shoulder—careless of etiquette.

"What are you doing here?" he asked roughly, for Sinclair had left orders that the house was to be avoided.

The Sikh turned like a flash—like a man suddenly wakened—his old self.

"Why, Sesson sahib—I—I don't know—I must have walked in my sleep."

"Come with me," commanded Sesson. Walking back to the Great Eastern Hotel, they spoke little. The Sikh was evidently trying to account to himself for what he believed to be his sleep-walking, and his unconscious disobedience in going to the house, which greatly troubled him, as did also Sesson's discovery of it. Once
or twice he seemed to be about to attempt an explanation, but stopped himself before the words came.

In this way they reached the hotel, and Sesson led the way to his room. He had determined fully upon his course. This was no time for considering the Sikh’s feelings. Indeed, he now felt it would have been better to have cross-examined the gate-keeper long before—even if everything had pointed to barrenness of result, and obstinate refusal to speak. But it was too late to regret. What had been missed had been missed. He tried to console himself that this was the right time for questions, the first logical opportunity—and he was probably right.

“Sit down,” he ordered.

The Sikh obeyed the somewhat unusual order—unusual in that it brought them into terms of equality in the native mind.

“Now,” Sesson cleared his throat and went into action, “this is no time for beating about the bush. The life and the happiness of the burra sahib (Sinclair) may depend on what happens between us in this room tonight. So—tell me where, and how, you got that big diamond which I see glittering in your turban.”

The Sikh’s face had been fairly normal in appearance, except for the slight surprise it expressed when Sesson told him to take a seat, but now it changed. Amid a variety of feelings, it seemed that bewilderment predominated.

“I—I bought it, sahib.”

“Where did you get the money?” demanded Sesson inexorably, slipping his hand into the pocket where he carried a small automatic.

This question was an insult, and one does not insult such a man as the gate-keeper with impunity.

But the Sikh apparently lost sight of insult in his effort to remember.

“I—I bought it, sahib,” he again answered, still as if trying to solve a riddle.

“Tell me,” Sesson raised his voice sharply, “tell me where you got the money.”

“I—I saved my wages, and—rain-gambled, sahib.” The last came like an inspiration.

“Did you bet it would rain, or that it would not rain?” pressed Sesson; and as the Sikh seemed to be trying to think, he repeated the question.

“I wagered that it would rain, sahib,” still hesitating.

“How much?”

“A—half an inch in the dish, sahib.”

“When was that?”

“About six weeks ago.”

“How much did you bet—because you must have won much?”

“I—just what my savings were.”

Sesson did not dwell upon the obvious impossibility of the Sikh’s savings being sufficient to enable him to win the immense value of the diamond at odds of seldom better than three to one, and generally less than two to one. He pressed for the date of the alleged winning.

“About six weeks ago,” persisted the Sikh.

Now it happened that Sesson had heard a babu bewailing his losses some six weeks before—he was sure of the date, because he had taken the train to Dhjarjeeling—the babu having bet a hundred rupees on the coming of an inch of rain, at the odds (for that meant much rain) of two to one; and he also remembered the exceptionally dry weather experienced during that period.

“It did not rain,” Sesson spoke slowly and impressively, his fingers tightening on the pistol, “so, if you bet it would rain, you must have lost. Where did you get the money for the diamond?” he shouted the last words suddenly.

The Sikh flushed through his dark skin. He knew that practically he had been called a liar, but the matter of the diamond was now so troublesome and puzzling to him that he had room for no other thought. Where had he got it?

Its coming had at first seemed natural enough, but gradually—during the weeks since Sinclair’s disappearance—it’s value had given birth to wonder, until he could only believe that he had got drunk, gambled, won, and traded, with his old diamond. But this explanation had not satisfied. It was one of the finest diamonds he, a lover of gems, had ever seen. And Sesson, watching his countenance closely, could almost read his mind—so ingeniously did his puzzled face reflect it.

“You do not remember buying it?” Sesson hazarded.

The Sikh raised his now haggard face. Then, with a sudden movement, he drew his sword. Sesson half-drew his pistol,
then replaced it in his pocket. For the Sikh was on his knees, the hilt of his sword offered to Sesson—

“Strike, sahib,” he said gravely. “I know not what I have done during my bewitchment, but it seems I have forgotten the salt I have eaten. I can see it in the sahib’s face and hear it in his words. I can feel in the seams of my soul that I am dishonored, and that I am a dog. But I do not know how it all came about. Also, the face of the sahib tells me that my bewitchment has caused me to do harm to Sinclair sahib, whom I love more greatly than ever son loved his father. Strike, sahib, and rid the earth of my unworthy presence.”

“Get up,” said Sesson gently. “I think I know what has been done to you, and, with your help I will right that wrong. But your death will not help the burra sahib, will not help us to find him. I know you desire to help in that regard. So try—and then we will seek the burra sahib together—try hard and remember what you can concerning the diamond in your turban. I can see in your face—a light of sudden understanding had come into the Sikh’s eyes—that some little memory has come to you. Try to remember all you can. Think of what occurred the day before you obtained the diamond, of what happened the day you got it. Think all around that happening—until you first discovered it in your turban.”

There was silence in the room for a few minutes—silence but for the eternal voice of Calcutta, coming through the wire netting which did duty for a window. Then the Sikh began to speak very slowly:

“It was before Sinclair sahib—before he went away. I met a man.”

He paused, as if again trying desperately to see the elusive face of this man among the stream of his memories.

“Go on,” prompted Sesson. “Tell me about this man, and why you should remember him so particularly among the many men you have seen.”

Apparently Sesson had hit upon the words which—in the marvelous way of association—awoke another stream of recollection; for the face of the Sikh became less puzzled. Indeed, he broke in eagerly:

“Because, sahib—but only now does this thing come to me in this manner—because now I remember meeting this man several times, but I can not remember what we did or said together; there are wide gaps, as if a devil had plucked little pieces out of my mind. It is only now, for the first time, that I see the strangeness of this forgetfulness, and it makes me afraid—afraid that I did something with this man which brought trouble to Sinclair sahib. This fear I knew, though not so clearly, just now when I offered the sahib my sword.”

“So then, putting aside all supposition, this man compelled you to forget what took place when you were together?”

“Yes, sahib, and—afterward. There are blanks in my life, like clouds upon the sky.”

“I understand. This man hypnotized you and made you forget he had done it. Then he ordered you to do certain things—without knowing you were doing them—which you forgot after you had done them. But that does not help us. What I want you to do is to think hard and try to remember the first time you met him. Did he talk about diamonds?”

The Sikh made another effort. His face contorted with the strain, and the perspiration stood out in great drops. But he kept at it, showing a magnificent effort of will, while Sesson—although not sure of the efficacy of this—tried to help all he could by concentrating his own thought upon the diamond in the Sikh’s turban.

Suddenly the big man’s face showed a very different emotion—anger, hatred, desire for revenge plowed across his furrowed countenance; his beard actually bristled, his fists were clenched, and for a full minute he could not speak. Then, solemnly, as if taking an oath—his voice dropping to a reverential undertone:

“I remember, Sesson sahib. I will find him—for we have a meeting arranged—and I will kill him. Very slowly and deliciously will I kill him. Into small pieces will I carve his loathly body, and daily will I feed it to the dogs, until even the pariahs turn from the stink of it. This will I do, Huzor—then will I fall upon my sword, so that it may pierce my dishonored entrails.”

Sesson turned away his face, for he could not bear to look upon the agony of the man—made traitor after many years of faithful service, a man to whom honor
was still far more valuable than life. That he had been hypnotized did not alter the Sikh’s view of the affair. He saw in hypnotism only the other man’s weapon, which he was as entitled to use as if it had been a sword. He also saw that the weapon had caught him off his guard, by taking advantage of his mania for diamonds. He had no excuse, and, in all the world, he knew of nothing so low as himself. In spite of the claims of European psychologists, a hypnotized person can be made to act against his moral conceptions—he may be tempted to his fall exactly as a person not hypnotized, only more, far more easily.

After a little while Sesson forced himself to turn round and speak:

“Again let me tell you that your dying will not help the burra sahib,” he spoke as if to an erring child, his voice filled with sympathy. “Tell me, now that you have overcome the restraint, everything that occurred at your first meeting with this man. Sit down and make yourself comfortable.”

But he knew that the Sikh would have to wait for another life before he would again know comfort. Nevertheless, he obeyed and sat down.

“It happened this way, sahib,” he began, “and I wish that my mother had strangled me at my birth—me, who until now believed myself an honorable man. I had been talking with the babu who works the lines of communication for Sinclair sahib, and he had laughed at me until I was enraged. He said that he would not wear a diamond at all unless he could afford a better one than mine. Then the fat fool waddled away, still laughing. Nay, nay, he is an honorable man, and what am I to call him fool?”

“Take comfort,” said Sesson, “and remember you acted as sick men act—in delirium, not knowing.”

“The sahib means well, but—I acted, that is enough. If a madman kills himself, does the fact of his being mad bring him back to life? Nay, nay, sahib—and you know it! Then—for a man has but one honor even as he has but one life—does my honor come back to me because I lost it when I was mad, just as the madman lost his life, not knowing? No, no, sahib—I am the dirt of the earth.”

He was silent again, and while Sesson was in a hurry to learn all he could he knew that he had to let the other take his own gait. So he waited until the Sikh went on:

“So, sahib, as I said the babu went away laughing. It was the evening hour, after the sahib’s dinner, and I stood in the cool, watching the flying foxes making argument just outside the door of Sinclair sahib’s compound. The babu went away among the shadows, leaving me, as I believed, alone. A big yellow moon was just rising over the opposite wall—I can see it now, sahib, quite clearly—and it looked like the face of a man, staring over the wall at me. So funny did this moon seem that I laughed. And when I laughed, I heard another laugh.

“For a moment I was startled, sahib, and then I believed I had heard an echo. But when ever did an echo live in that lane? No, it was another man who had laughed, and I looked to find him. Then he came out of the shadows opposite to the direction in which the babu had walked away from me, walking slowly—an old, bent man, sahib, whom I could crush between my fingers. Yes, an old man, whom I could tear as the sahib could tear a paper chit—but he tore the honor from my soul as a gardener plucks a flower, the one flower in his garden. Ai—but he shall know the plucking of my fingers at his throat, sahib. Did I tell you that we have a meeting arranged—that old shitan and me?”

“You must not touch this man. Indeed, you must act exactly as you have hitherto acted—pretending to be hypnotized, and obeying him.”

“But, sahib, what of my honor’s revenge? Must this dog live on to flaunt me?”

“After we have used this man,” explained Sesson patiently, “after he has been made to show us where the burra sahib is restrained, and not until then, you may do with him as it seems best to you. Am I understood in this?”

“Yes, sahib—but is there no other way of finding the burra sahib?”

“If there were, would I not have used it? Now I warn you that unless you do as I tell you in this matter I will shoot you myself—and then you will never get your revenge. Go on with the tale!”

The Sikh hesitated as if seeking further argument—some reason why instant re-
venge would help Sinclair. Finding none he continued:

"Then this old devil, sahib, who had come to me out of the dark places of the night, said to me, 'What is this I hear, big man? What little diamond is this you wear in your turban? Such a tiny stone for so large a man. Why do you not purchase a stone which will do you honor? The one you are wearing now is but a thing for laughter—such an one as a child might use as a toy.'

"Thus did he speak, sahib, and, because he was such an old man I could not beat him as he deserved to be beaten for the insult. Instead, I talked back at him—Ai, for then I did not know him for the master-jaw-smith that he was—such a wonderful tinker of words; I talked back at him; as children talk back, mocking one another. But he, being cunning, remained silent, after I had answered his rudeness in kind.

"Then he changed his tune, sahib. Altogether did he change, apologizing and playing upon the trumpet of flattery, the sound of which fills a man's ears until he becomes deaf to all common sense. Ai, Ai, he was a wondrous cunning man, sahib, saying, 'Pardon, big man, and thanks for your good nature, in that you did not take advantage of my age and weakness to beat me, as a common fellow would have beaten me. 'Twas but a test of you—a test of your good blood. For, maybe, being old and rich and without kin, I can show you a way to earn enough to buy a fair large diamond—an easy way—a diamond such as all men will covet, which it will take a brave man to defend from robbers. Thinkest thou, O big man, that thou hast enough courage to defend a wonderful diamond with your life, if need be?"

"Then I laughed like a fool, sahib, saying, 'Show me such a diamond, for I warrant you that you can not show me one so big that I can not defend it from the biggest man in the world.'

"He laughed softly at this, sahib, saying, 'Draw near, O big man, lover of bright things, of things that shine, of diamonds in which lives the living fire of the gods. Draw near, and I will even now show you a diamond which will rival the brightest star. And—for I am old and have no kin—for some small service this wonderful stone shall be thine. Hold thy breath, lover of bright things, and prepare to be dazzled.' And then, sahib—with many more words of the like—he flashed on a sudden such a marvelous diamond that the moon paled in looking at it. I stared and stared, drinking in the flashing, wonderful colors which the stone threw all about. And while I gazed, fascinated, there came over me a gloat for the stone which made me forget all else, together with a numbness of sense which made me the thing of that old man.

"Oh, he was cunning, sahib, for he made me believe inside myself that the great stone was to be mine. And then—after I had—after I—oh, sahib, I can not utter the words, but the sahib understands—after, he gave me this stone, this—"

Suddenly, the Sikh plucked the diamond from his turban. He was about to throw it away when Sesson caught his wrist—speaking in anger for the first time.

"Fool, puggle, black crow, bramlykite—almost am I persuaded that you have no desire to give assistance to Sinclair sahib. Would you tell that old man—our only hope—that you have remembered all he did to you? Would you go to him without the diamond and so tell him that you no longer are his slave? Fool, put it back in your turban, so that the old man will continue to believe you are still his slave—and in the end your revenge may be made complete."

Very humbly the Sikh obeyed. He would never again be his real self, except in momentary flashes under great excitement, for the hypnosis of India disintegrates the higher centers as certain drugs are known to do.

"Go on," commanded Sesson, wishing he had the ability to hypnotize the man himself.

"Ai, sahib, it was this way. The old man made me his, paying me with the stone I wear, but making me believe the greater stone would be mine. I now see that, for the first time."

He paused as if bemoaning the loss of the greater stone. No wonder, as Sesson thought, the old man had got him so easily. Diamonds were an obsession with the man, the need of them a habit, just as the need of drugs or alcohol may become. He really worshiped Sinclair, but he would sell him—under hypnosis, that is—for a stone. Again Sesson spoke sharply, re-
calling him to the sense of duty to be done.

"Yes, sahib, and then the cunning devil—ai, I remember now how he did it—began to undertalk Sinclair sahib. But he began very quietly while appealing to my pride. It was me that let the cobra into the room, sahib, knowing it was harmless when I did it, but forgetting, as the old man told me to forget, the moment I had slain it. Oh, sahib, I can not understand why I did it, but it seemed just the natural thing to do to let the snake under the curtain—have you ever wanted to sneeze very badly, sahib, yet did not want to annoy by so doing? You know how you struggle—until you call yourself a fool, and sneeze to ease nature. Just as natural was it for me to do as I did with the cobra. I did try not to, but where was the harm in the thing? Do you see the cunning of the old man, sahib? How he began with harmless things, knowing that at first I would struggle not to obey? Ai, sahib, I can not talk more—you can see, and, seeing, understand."

The big man buried his face in his hands, sobbing weakly like a tired and very small child.

And Sesson waited in silence. There was nothing to be gained in forcing confession of his carrying word of what the unfortunate babu telegraph operator had told Sinclair, or of how he carried the head to the house in the teak box. He had no hand in the killing—that was obvious. So there was nothing to be gained by asking for more of the story and something might be lost. For it would not be wise to push the man too far. To irritate him might cause him to turn on the old man at their next meeting and so spoil all, lose every chance of finding Sinclair.

"You will sleep across my door tonight," commanded Sesson, "so that we may the better guard one another," which was a diplomatic way of putting it. "Tomorrow I will tell you how we will make that old man take us to Sinclair sahib—after which he will be given over to you, that you may work your will on him."

VI

Sesson did not sleep that night. Confidently as he had spoken concerning the using of the old hypnotist to find the place of Sinclair's concealment—a confidence necessary to a forlorn hope—it was another matter to dovetail the many details of a successful plan of action.

For, as the thoughtful hours passed, one particular impossibility presented itself at every turn; and that was the impossibility of Sesson's participation in any plan necessitating the Sikh's cooperation.

It would be sufficiently difficult for the Sikh to simulate hypnotism until, as the result of either force or guile, the old man revealed the place of Sinclair's hiding—if he ever did—without Sesson endangering the whole scheme by hanging about in their vicinity, risking discovery. Therefore, as the least worst, with hope of success going glimmering, it became obvious that the entire affair must be entrusted to the Sikh. Grave as were the doubts concerning his ability, no other course offered.

Realizing, then, that the Sikh and himself must not again risk the chance of being seen together, Sesson wakened him just before dawn, most devoutly wishing that he had the old reliable keeper of the gate to deal with instead of this weakened parody of what had once been a man of strong personality.

"Pretend to be hypnotized and very gradually lead the old man to believe that you are more than content to be his servant. Hint at your delight in the diamond and compare it to the small salary Sinclair sahib paid you. Presently, I hope, you will make him trust you, until he believes there is no longer any need to hypnotize you. But whatever you do, don't let him find out that you are pretending to be hypnotized. Then, when you feel sure he trusts you, begin to curse the time you wasted working for so penurious a master as Sinclair sahib. This will not be nice but it must be done.

"Everything depends upon your gaining the old man's confidence. It will take time because to attempt to go too fast will rouse his suspicions. You see the plan. And, unless it becomes absolutely necessary, do not attempt to communicate with me. Get to where the burra sahib is confined and rescue him. If you learn, by chance, the place of confinement, wire me where it is. But make very sure you are not observed.

"If it seems best, write down the name of the place and mail it to me. But do that only if you should learn where the
place is without being able to get to it. For I think it better to risk failure than to risk suspicion. It is difficult to give you instructions, but you understand what is to be done. Now go, and God be with you! And remember, not until Sinclair sahib is rescued must you think of the avenging of your honor."

Apart from his real affection for Sinclair, nothing could have so spurred the Sikh to extraordinary effort as the thought of his final revenge. Dwelling upon what he had lost at the hands of the old man would stimulate him, while the need of restraint would develop cunning. He gripped his sword-hilt with something of his old confidence, salaamed low and went out into the chill of early morning.

The dew lay in glittering drops, simulating frost so successfully that it has often been mistaken for it. The early life of Calcutta had awakened as the Sikh walked through the still, shadowy streets, his brain throbbing with hatred of the old man, with whom he had an appointment for the evening. But his hatred did not affect his appetite, so he took the direction of a native eating-place, owned by a co-religionist.

To his astonishment the first person he saw when he entered was the old man who had given him the diamond. He stared, his hands clenching with anger. Then, recollecting himself, he approached with well-acted servility.

The old man chuckled, for he had been thinking hard about the Sikh in order to make him come to him. Whether the Sikh's arrival was due to hunger, coincidence or the power of the old man's will is a matter of opinion. The old man believed it was caused by his intent thinking, and perhaps he was right. He chuckled, for it seemed to him that the Sikh's coming proved he no longer possessed any volition of his own; was, in fact, an automaton moving as the old man willed.

And this brought about a certain self-satisfaction, which was the beginning of carelessness; for why trouble to hypnotize a man who obeys one's thought? But, as they talked, the Sikh realized that it would take far more than carelessness on the old man's part to enable him to rescue Sinclair; and, thinking thus, the task appeared so difficult that it made the satisfaction of his honor a remote possibility.

The urge to kill and have done with it became so strong that only by a great effort did he manage to make an excuse to leave the room until the craving passed.

AND Sinclair, a prisoner, could see little chance of being rescued. Great luck, the possible laxity of his captors and his own desperate effort seemed to offer the only combination that would give him a chance, and years might elapse before such a combination resulted. In the meanwhile, he was a very old man. Also, if any of his friends were to discover his place of concealment, and there was a decided likelihood of his captors being arrested, his painless death would be a prelude to their escape; for a reason which will presently develop. His courteous captors had emphasized the "painlessness."

And while Sinclair had been rather careless, his capture had come as a surprise. Carelessness had been a fault of his all his life, but he had seen no need of unusual caution when he made his midnight visit to the telegraph office. So far as he knew there was only one old man to deal with, and Sinclair was armed. It seemed unlikely that there would be more than the one old man to contend with, since the only manifestation had been the telegrams, which was one man's job.

When the noose tightened around his neck he had found himself curiously hoping he was attacked by ordinary thuggee—but he had an intuitive understanding that it was not so. He recovered consciousness in a comfortable bed, a taste in his mouth telling him that the strangling had not gone very far before it was supplemented by some drug—some mixture containing chloroform.

Where was he? Lying as still as he could, he sufficiently opened his eyes to look about without his consciousness being apparent. But his precaution was unnecessary. He was quite alone.

He stared about the room. He sat up and stared harder. Was he dreaming? Like a child he pinched himself. But—and the joke idea again cropped up in this extraordinary adventure—the whole thing might be a hoax, the room arranged, like a stage set for a comedy. Then he realized that this was not so—it was too real, and no man even if he possessed the knowledge, could have successfully counterfeited the
appearance, the age, the—the everything. Besides, what reason could be found for going to the trouble such an innitation would involve?

No living man knew that Sinclair would recognize the place. It was real! Sinclair had regained consciousness in the private bedroom of Alexander the Great! In a place long supposed to be a lost ruin, a heap of dust—the tale of which had wandered down the ages, from mouth to ear, doubted, believed, scoffed at, sworn by, a myth to the British authorities, the cause of argument which the disputants could never hope to settle, the cause—of too many things to enumerate.

And then—for Sinclair’s mind was working feverishly—into whose hands had he fallen? What manner of men were the cause of this baffling problem? After many years, Sinclair had come in contact with something of which he was ignorant, with some strange organization of which he had never heard—to find himself in a place he had not believed existed, described to him long before by a now dead hermit.

The dying hermit had sworn to having seen the place, and Sinclair had pretended to believe, thinking to comfort the aged man. For Sinclair had bumped into the story all the way from Afghanistan to Ceylon; although the hermit was the only man he had met who claimed to have personal knowledge. And now Sinclair saw that his description had been accurate.

There had been something else—some sort of warning—which, trembling on the dying tongue, had drifted into space with his soul, the words unspoken. If the hermit had lived a few minutes longer—well, Sinclair would learn now what he would have told him.

It was truly wonderful. Blasé with regard to India, he had found something new. But, in spite of her age, India is always young.

He lay down again—there would be ample time to examine the place, no doubt—and went back over the ground systematically. It had begun with intuition—with his strange feeling that something unusual was about to happen. Then the cobra, the telegram, the babu, his death and his head on the breakfast table and so on. Truly, if this were his last adventure, it was worthy of so adventurous a career. And the problem would be solved—the cost to himself did not matter.

He was underground—as the old hermit had told him—and from the stone ceiling a large, ancient lamp threw a subdued, rose-colored light. The bed, as he turned to observe, was the same unbelievable, marvelously intricate arrangement of huge elephants’ tusks, carved into patterns representing various attitudes of fighting men. It was covered with the finest tiger-skins he had ever seen, with a pillow of down, stuffed in old silk, on which rare lace—or what appeared to be a form of lace—was woven.

All of it was scented elusively. On the walls were all sorts of weapons and armor, but the door—as the hermit had told him—was invisible, a secret touch causing a part of the wall to revolve. It was in this place, then, that the great captain had sighed for other worlds to conquer and sought to pass the time with the light love of an hour.

The silence was absolute, while the purity of the air indicated some source of ventilation. It was a wonderful situation for such a man as Sinclair; but tempting as was its history, he could only try to solve the puzzle of his being there, could only struggle with the weird problem, in spite of the fact of its presently solving itself—unless he had been put there to die, which was too unlikely a supposition to entertain.

How long had he been unconscious? Had he been carried far? At that moment he became aware that he was no longer alone. The secret door had swung without noise and some one was watching him.

He again closed his eyes. There was nothing to fear—or, rather, it was useless to take precautions, to consider ways of defending himself. If his captors meant to harm him, the least troublesome way out was to submit. He could hear nothing, but he was subtly aware that the other was softly walking toward the bed. Probably the old man of the queer telegrams, thought Sinclair, or else some sort of servant or guard—although to set a guard over him seemed absurd, considering his situation.

It was a magnificent exhibition of self-control that Sinclair gave. To lie absolutely quiet in such a weird situation with an unseen stranger who has proved to be
an enemy stealthily approaching is something a few men can accomplish—even if defense does appear a useless effort. For the instinct of self-preservation clutches at straws, mocking the will which would restrain it. But Sinclair never made a movement nor gave a sign that he was aware of the other's presence.

"Excellent." The voice was gentle, melodious, cultivated. "You have acted up to your reputation, Sinclair sahib. It is indeed a pleasure to have you for our guest."

Sinclair did not move. He was trying to find a trace of mockery in the last word spoken by the other man, but curiously enough, he could not do so. To nearly strangle a man in order to make him your guest is a dubious proceeding—a satiric, even satanic, sort of hospitality. Sinclair could only accept it as another phase of this most remarkable problem and wait for developments.

"You are as nearly surprised as it is possible for you to be," went on the other, as if he had expected no answer to his previous remark, "but, I assure you, the element of surprise has as yet hardly entered into this adventure of yours. I mean, of course, that you are only at the outer gate of the unusual. Once you enter what I may call 'The City of the Unexpected,' then, indeed, will you be surprised—and interested.

"And I am sure you will pardon our method of invitation when you realize the treat, the intellectual treat we have in store for you. But we have done little harm. Our invitation, as you have doubtless deduced, began with the harmless cobra, and ended with the also harmless thuggee. If we had written to you asking you to join us, you might not have accepted. Besides, we could not adopt usual ways without betraying our place of abode.

"To rouse your singular interest by weird jests—every one of which hinted at a conspiracy, at a problem which had to be solved—so that you would eventually follow our trail until we could conveniently meet you and lead you to our place of concealment—all this circumambulation was needed.

"We greatly regret the enforced loss of consciousness; and we were as gentle as possible. And we are all agreed that the greatest honor we could wish for is to have you with us. Therefore, Sinclair sahib, pardon our methods which, in the main, were as harmless as the games of little children."

Sinclair's sudden realization that the motive of all that had occurred had been his capture was annoying. A more conceited man would have perhaps seen that this was the raison d'être of the curious manifestations, but the idea had never entered Sinclair's head. Try as he would, he could see no answer to the "why" of the problem, and now he knew the reason of his blindness. But what on earth did they want with him? He opened his eyes, turned and faced the other man—an old man who might or might not be the sender of the telegrams.

"I presume that you include among your other 'harmless' jests—as a word in your 'harmless' invitation—the murder of the unfortunate telegraph baboo and the sending of his head to my breakfast table?" remarked Sinclair caustically.

The old native stroked his white beard and smiled benevolently:

"We much dislike giving you a bad impression, Sinclair sahib, but the element of tragedy was necessary. Had we continued our harmless, silly-seeming jests, it is doubtful if you would have entered the lists against us. So we sent you the head of a dead man. It was necessary to alter it somewhat, although the heads of two dead babus are much alike. But we did not kill the 'unfortunate telegraph baboo,' as you call him. Indeed, we find him most useful as a recorder of certain experiments. He expresses himself as being happier than ever before."

Sinclair did not answer. Once before—in a minor matter that had to do with a convict at the Andaman Islands—had he erred in his judgment of a problem. But at that time he had been unwell. Yet no living man could have deduced the truth from the cobra, the head or the telegrams—no man, that is, but an exceedingly conceited one, and vanity is not a concomitant of greatness.

Yes, once before Sinclair had been very much mistaken; but in the end he had won. And such was his self-confidence that in that apparently hopeless situation he was at that moment thinking upon the certain downfall of his captors, of his own eventual victory.

"But why remain enemies, Sinclair

ROMANCE
sahib?” The old man’s tone held a hint of pleading. “We have much to show you which will give you pleasure.”

“The Eastern mind can never understand,” answered Sinclair, “that liberty is more precious than wealth and that without liberty happiness is impossible.” He paused, looking significantly at the old native. “Liberty of the individual is a trait of the Anglo-Saxon—and they rule the world.”

“At present,” the old man inclined his head courteously, “but only for some years longer. It is because we have so far advanced toward the conquest of the Anglo-Saxon race that we needed you with us. To have made another step while you remained at liberty would have been dangerous to our plan. You are the one man in all the world whom we feared.

“At any moment—what with your own perspicacity and your well-organized intelligence department—you were likely to become aware of our attempt. Now with you where you can not work against us, we feel safe. Pardon our final jest. For here in this place where a great fighter sighed for other conquest, I will reveal to you how we intend to conquer the world.

“Failure is impossible now. No white man knows India sufficiently well to notice the working of our plan but yourself. And you are—pardon me—helpless. This final war will not be a war of bloodshed, yet its conclusion, our final victory, will be the enslavement of the world’s people—including the liberty-loving Anglo-Saxon race.”

He ended in a solemn tone, as if visioning that end of which he spoke.

And in a flash Sinclair understood. Meeting the eyes of the grave old native, Sinclair saw the deadly artillery against which the Anglo-Saxon race was powerless, which would defeat the world. And clenching his fists he realized that he, a captive, was the only man who could save the world from the slavery the old man referred to. Furthermore, one of his own wildest theories—an apparently fanciful supposition upon which he had often mused—had now taken life, standing starkly revealed as the menace of all which true men hold dear.

No need for the old, benevolent-looking man to explain to Sinclair what he meant by a bloodless war; neither was it necessary to mention the awful weapon which would be used. Schemes of conquest hitherto evolved were clumsy, inefficient brutishness compared to this—hit or miss uncertainties, noisy pain-inflicting blows of clownish minds. Here was the final triumph of mind over matter—the subtle, irresistible movement toward victory of truly great brains, devilish in their ambition yet firmly believing that in their success lay the world’s betterment!

No body-shattering bullets, poison gas or other hideous wound-inflicting devices. But instead, something worse. Better by far to die a maimed wreck, a sightless, armless and legless cripple, than to live in the condition which this frightful, final war would make universal. Universal—for the battle would not be limited to the picked fighting men. Men, women and little children would be the objects of this subtle enemy’s attack. And the end!

The end would see the human race—except this organization which had captured Sinclair—reduced to the level of the cattle of the fields. Without volition or ambition—slaves of the minds controlling them—Sinclair saw his fellow men and women so many useful drudges under the control of this old native and others of his kind. And he knew the native idea. Even love would cease to be free—in its best sense of freedom. For, with a shudder, Sinclair realized that the world conquerors would even oversee the breeding of the world’s under-people.

And the subtle weapon was hypnotism. Hypnotism, of which the ignorant Caucasian psychologists prate with childish indifference and short-sightedness; which they now and then play with, as children play with fire, unable to visualize its properties or possibilities.

Sinclair sank back upon the luxurious bed, shivering with an actual physical sickness. But he was not beaten. The sickness was caused by imaginative reaction, by what he had seen mentally. And as he lay there, he realized that upon him lay a greater responsibility than had ever before lain on a human being. He saw—and there was no hint of blasphemy in his vision—that upon him depended the salvation of the world. And he was a prisoner, knowing not where he was imprisoned. The old native was watching him closely and Sinclair turned and smiled, although the effort was tremendous.
"You win," he said with diplomatic easiness. "And I realize that if I attempt to escape you will be compelled to kill me—your own safety depends upon my silence. So I may as well make up my mind to staying here, knowing you will treat me well. Perhaps you magnify my ability—imagine my hopeless task if I were free and tried to warn the world of what you were about to attempt! In all probability the world would thank me by putting me in an asylum. I know my world perhaps better than you do; and I don't think I could do you any harm if I were free—unless I could have you all arrested, that is.

"No one would believe such a tale, if I repeated what you have just told me. So between ourselves, I see no use in my worrying about the fate of the world's people. You believe they will be better off under your control—no fighting or trouble, and happy because they will not think over much.

"I may as well be frank with you. You have gone to a great deal of trouble on my account, because you overestimated my ability. But, now that I am here, I am vastly interested; and as long as you do not ask me actually to assist you in your attempt to conquer the world I will be delighted to study your methods as your guest. My life has almost run its race anyhow. By the way, where is this place—I have heard of it often, but its situation was always a different one?"

The old native bowed:

"I am not sure, of course, Sinclair sahib, just what you intend—but I will take you at your word. It will be a pleasure to entertain you and listen to your opinions regarding our experiments. But as you know, any suspicious action on your part will mean your painless death as will any attempt at rescue on the part of your friends which seems likely to succeed. I have ordered a meal for you. Do you remember a mound near the telegraph office?"

Sinclair smiled:

"So, that is the place, eh? A very cunning hiding-place—for I suppose we are a long way underground, and that old mound will remain as it is for ages—as it has for ages until now. Will you show me around?"

"As soon as you finish breakfast," the old native bowed, as a youthful kitmugar brought in a small table and began to lay a cloth. "We are quite a large family here, as you will see."

As he ate an excellent meal, Sinclair could not avoid thinking of the pyramids. At first, he accounted for this by supposing the antiquity of the room had roused other ancient associations. The polite old native had, of course, left him to himself, and presently, still in association with old Egypt, his long white beard and seaweed face became prominent in Sinclair's thought.

Patiently, as was his habit, he probed into the hinted relationship. It might mean nothing or it might mean a great deal. And then Sinclair recollected the story—the legendary history—of an ancient priesthood, standing Richelieu-like behind the history of all Eastern nations.

Back so far in the history of mankind that its origin is lost in the mists of the legend of the deluge—that great flood, the tale of which is common to all people, even the Japanese, and which probably caused the glacial period by changing the temperature of the poles (the sudden condensation of a protecting atmosphere) does the tale of this priesthood extend. Branches from the parent stem—with still the same system of magic—grew up all over the world, growing, decaying and dying.

A particularly strong branch existed in Egypt and supposedly fell with that country's fall. The story Sinclair had heard told of the wandering of certain priests of Egypt into India, there to mingle with another branch of the original stem and form an esoteric order of great learning, which kept to itself and sought very few disciples. The evil magic—hypnotism and the like—of the priests of Egypt was an historical fact. What then would be the "magic" of their descendants, when to the knowledge of Egypt's priests was added the accumulated wisdom of thousands of years of further study?

Thinking thus, Sinclair had no doubt but that he had fallen into the hands of the descendants of that ancient priesthood. And now, as the old man had admitted, they were ready to become more powerful than ever before. Not a bit had their methods changed. Just as in ancient days the old priests had conquered the minds and wills of princes and peoples by super-
tion and magic, so now were their descendants about to conquer the entire world—by slowly winning the minds and wills of the world's people by hypnotism!

And how prevent it—even if he were free? Sinclair imagined himself, say, telling the British Government that its navy was useless—that in the coming war it would be no-help. He could see the smile on the faces of his auditors as he told of the coming attempt to hypnotize the world. Then the sneers and the doubts regarding his sanity. And the newspapers! How the semi-educated scribblers would air their wit! And the “experts”—those “wonderful psychologists,” whose science is so inexact that, at a murder trial, both the State and the defendant can hire them to “testify” in opposite ways! How they would come out with long words and say he was crazy—that “a man can not be hypnotized against his will.” They say “against his will” in one breath and deny that a man has any “will” in the next. With a sigh, Sinclair almost believed that, for any help he could be to the doomed world, he might as well remain a prisoner.

The old native returned and smilingly confirmed Sinclair’s deductions concerning the descendants of the old priests. But even Sinclair had not guessed at the progress of their knowledge—mental science being only a part of it.

For instance, the system of ventilation was chemical, and not mechanical, as he had expected—with manufactured ozone permitting exhilarating “sea” breezes at will. But most fascinating—even if it did seem definitely to make impossible any attempt at escape or rescue—was the underground place itself. Leading to the outer world were a series of grottoes, each so exquisitely camouflaged, and with their openings so naturally concealed, that a stranger standing in one of them would never have guessed it had a neighbor exactly similar to itself; while the outer doors were of bronze, so carefully covered with the natural strata of the district that they were undetectable.

Nothing was hidden, for it appeared to be the object of his captors to so interest Sinclair that he would lend his assistance in one of their numerous branches of scientific research. For while this marvelous organization was bent on bringing the people of the world under its will—firmly believing that if it did not do so the conflict between labor and capital would eventually result in the dissolution of civilization—it had only undertaken world-conquest as a necessary and on the whole, distasteful duty—its more congenial occupation being the conquest of nature, along the lines of scientific discovery.

And merely to catalogue its activities would require a volume. But, to give an idea of how far ahead of the western world the organization was scientifically, let it be remembered that only a few hundred years ago the church was successful in preventing the spread of knowledge in England by burning alive the men who attempted it, while the studies in the underground laboratories of The Order Which Needeth No Name—the official title of the organization—had been prosecuted without interruption for several thousand years.

Their illuminating method of keeping track of how far ahead they were, was a large chart upon which two men were kept continually employed. Upon this chart were marked important discoveries, in chronological order, against the years on the margin. Whenever the outer world made the same discovery it was also noted on the chart. The thing reminded Sinclair of the race-game of childhood—with every tenth of an inch representing a hundred years—with the marks of the underground workers winning, and the marks of the outer world scientists just starting the race!

That curious physiological phenomenon, which has long been mistaken for spiritual, causing levitation and the like, had been advanced to such mechanical perfection that the elevators of the establishment were run by the power derived from the operators themselves, thrown by hypnosis into the condition of the medium in the seance room. But the greatest marvels are far too technical for ordinary explanation. Only in one direction the outer world was ahead—in flying; the reason of course being that the underground scientists had no need of airplanes.

As the days went by and Sinclair maintained his attitude of interested spectator, without manifesting any intention of offering to assist, his relations with his captors became somewhat strained. The respect in which they held his intelligence was flattering but annoying, in that they never gave...
him an opportunity to attempt escape. Withal, a feeling of loneliness coupled with gloom when he visioned the fate of the world, became active entities with which he was compelled to contend.

For amusement he had all the newspapers and magazines he required—the organization having means of obtaining anything it desired through its outer affiliations—but the perusal of those only served to make more clear the picture of an unconscious world drifting to its doom. And then—one morning during his fifth month of captivity—the thing he had expected but sought in vain occurred: a falling-out among the heads of the organization. Such quarrels had taken place in the past and had operated like spanners thrown into the wheels of progress. Because of this, a law had been made which made personal differences subservient to the good of the order, but since no efficient form of penalty had seemed possible, quarrels had always loomed like the chances of bad weather, in spite of appeals to experience and everything that could be done to prevent them.

Therefore, though his face showed no sign, Sinclair’s heart beat somewhat more rapidly when the old native who had first greeted him came into his room—the room that had been Alexander’s—wearing an expression of intense irritation.

“Sinclair sahib,” he spoke jerkily, “why is it that the wisest men are sometimes more foolish than the most ignorant?”

“Through pride fell Lucifer,” suggested Sinclair, with apparent indifference.

“Knowing he would fall—why the deliberate mental suicide?”

“The enjoyment of the moment—failure to appreciate its eventual cost in misery.”

“In other words, plain foolishness?”

“Which is no answer. But why the question?”

“Oh, one of us—perhaps our most expert hypnotist—became exceedingly proud of a certain achievement,” the old native looked at Sinclair searchingly, as if trying to determine how much he would deduce from what he was telling him, “so proud, indeed, that he decided to go further along the same lines—before the plans of our organization were sufficiently matured. In spite of what we told him, he kept on—until now his obstinacy threatens, if he continues, to jeopardize our present successes. What would you do in such a case?”

“I never had such a case to contend with,” replied Sinclair dryly, “but it would seem best to prevent him doing further harm.”

The native frowned, while Sinclair wondered what his reason was in asking such a question. It was no doubt true that a discord had arisen, but the old native’s asking Sinclair for advice on such a simple matter argued that the asking was merely a cloak for something else. It was one of those “simple” problems which are so very difficult. That the affair had in some way to do with himself, Sinclair felt sure—but in what way? He tried a suggestion—

“Why not send for him—make him come and explain himself?”

“If I do that, will you act for us? A word from you would influence the man greatly.”

So, that was it—the connection with himself was becoming clearer.

“It depends,” he parried diplomatically.

“I can not say offhand just how I would act. Send for him, while I consider the matter.”

“I will,” the old native agreed, “and thanks for the suggestion,” and with that he bowed himself out.

Always beware the subtlety of the apparently obvious had been one of Sinclair’s life-long rules, obedience to which was now needed more than ever before. But being careful does not solve puzzles—and here was a puzzle seriously involving Sinclair’s self. He understood the workings of the native mind better than any Englishman, living or dead; and the old native’s coming to him for advice spelt menace. But what form of menace? Not his life—if they wished to kill him it were an easy matter to poison his food or even shoot him. What was it, then—for never would the native change his tactics, never would he cease to believe that treachery can be hidden under assumed frankness or that assassination can be successfully consummated without the kiss of Judas?

Five days later the old native announced the arrival of the alleged mutineer and asked Sinclair when it would be convenient to introduce him. And Sinclair—who had narrowed the solution of the puzzle down to two possibilities, neither of which, however, seemed conclusive—answered that one time was as convenient as another. Then he looked at his watch,
as if calculating—it was then eight in the evening.

"Suppose we say eleven tomorrow morning?" he suggested carelessly, and the native agreed with readiness.

And upon that careless glance at his watch, with his really indifferent suggestion of eleven next morning, instead of that evening, as had at first come into his mind, lay the safety of the people of the world.

VII

WHAT are dreams? Freud has evolved a working hypothesis, in which one may pick flaws; but even if it were sound, his explanation would be like the explanation of a man who had never heard of coal "explaining" the working of a steam engine. In an age when materialism has been proved childish, "psychologists" persist in remaining materialists, in a science which should be the least materialistic. So thought Sinclair that night, waking time after time from weird dreams—inexplicable, either by some "suppressed wish," or by any other theory.

At length he awakened from a dream wherein an atavistic deity was playing chess with human beings for men. His opponent was Alexander of Macedon, who appeared quite natural in spite of his wearing a modern top hat and smoking a short clay pipe. What awoke Sinclair was the atavistic deity's calling him "sahib," in such a loud tone that the chess-men fell off the table. Thus in a dissolving vision in which he saw Alexander with the hat on the back of his head puffing great clouds from the pipe and vainly trying to pick up the chess-men, Sinclair awoke.

"Sahib!" the word was repeated, but the voice was not so loud, neither was it that of the weird deity.

The darkness in the room was absolute. Sinclair did not move, beginning to believe that he had dreamed he had heard the word again—

"Sahib!"

This time he recognized the voice, and knew that its whispering was not a dream.

"Yes," he answered softly.

"Get up and dress, Sinclair sahib. We must hurry away from here."

The voice was the voice of the Sikh gate-keeper, about whom the old native, his captor—otherwise very communicative—had denied any knowledge.

"What are you doing here?" Sinclair was dressing as he asked.

"I was hypnotized, sahib—"

"I guessed that after I came here, although the people here denied using you—I wonder why? But what brings you here?"

"To save you, sahib, from an appointment the sahib has for the morning."

"But, man, if they wanted to hurt me why should they make an appointment?"

"It is all arranged, sahib—I listened. For a long time I have been myself, pretending to be hypnotized so they would consider me helpless. They have lied to you again, sahib. True, they were afraid to allow you to remain at liberty, but that they meant you no harm was all a lie. Very carefully have they worked up to this, sahib—slowly pruning away all your suspicions. Then the old devil, who is the chief of this brew of hell's nastiness, came to you—asking advice, because of one whom he said was making trouble.

"Ai, ai, sahib, all this I have heard; for they talked before me as if I were but a dog—even a dog that had forgotten how to bark and bite—which once I was, sahib, in the matter of the snake and other things, but which I am no longer. But it was infinite trouble, thus to obey Sesson sahib, and act like a dumb dog—with all the time my fingers itching for the throat of the beast with whom your honor has an appointment for the morning.

"Ai, listen, sahib—and may I be forgiven what I unknowingly did in what I am doing now—bit by bit they made you believe they meant you no harm, but only were afraid to leave you at liberty. Then—I heard it all—they arranged the appointment. I have been here two weeks—brought by the man you were told was making trouble, as his dog—so he imagined. But it was not wise to try to get to you sooner, sahib—not until I knew what they intended to do with your honor, and I had made certain arrangements.

"See, sahib, such a dumb dog did they think me that—only for the dark would your honor observe—they have even left me my sword. And then the head devil came to you. They had your honor as far off your guard as they believed possible—what with flattery and kind attention—so
in the morning your honor would have kept this appointment, and—with their asking advice, which is the best way to throw a man off his guard—the old devil who got me would have flashed a light in the sahib's eyes and the sahib would have become even as I was when I acted in the matter of the snake.”

“Ah—so that was it!”

Sinclair’s voice sounded like a stifled whistle. The subtlety of their simplicity. They would have taken him into a specially prepared room, and—off his guard giving advice, as the Sikh had said—he would have been suddenly hypnotized. After that, further hypnosis would have made him a slave; the only chance of saving the people of the world would have gone, with the man who might have saved them the first victim of the enemy, and, no doubt, turned as the Sikh had been turned into one of the enemy’s best weapons. From the first, from the introduction of the snake into his room to his capture, this hypnotizing of him had been the plan—and very cleverly had they gone about it.

“I thank you for the warning, and for whatever harm you did unconsciously you have atoned. I will be prepared and will pretend to be hypnotized.”

“The sahib will not,” said the Sikh.

“What?” Sinclair’s voice rose slightly.

“Does the sahib think that his friends have been idle? Did not Sesson sahib give me certain orders? True, I could not communicate with Sesson sahib, because I was afraid of being observed, but I did chance to get a word with the driver of the sahib’s automobile. He is a dull fellow, and I dare not chance giving him a message—he would be just as like to give it to the wrong man.

“All I could do was to tell him to take the sahib’s car to where he took the sahib the night he was captured, and then drive to the old mound. Nothing else could I do, burra sahib. To try to get word to Sesson sahib by the driver would have been folly—he would have made a mess of it all. It took me a longer time than I liked to make him understand he had to have the car here tonight at midnight—he, if he understood, has been waiting now for two hours. Let us go, sahib.”

“But how are we to get out?” Sinclair, now fully dressed, was thinking of the many doors.

It was a long time since the Sikh had chuckled, but he chuckled at the question in all his old manner.

“To be a hypnotized dog has its advantages, sahib—when one is not the breed of dog one is thought to be! Before I came to the sahib I made certain arrangements—even now my sword is not dry—and the way is clear. At about eight, the old devil told me to lie down and sleep—as he has done every night for a long time—and to not move until he came for me. I obeyed, just as if I had no will of my own. He will not find me there when he comes. But, when the sahib is safe, I will return—in the matter of a certain debt; I owe that old devil something I desire to pay. Ai sahib, it will be a pleasurable payment!”

Sinclair understood, and for the first time in his life he gripped the hand of his faithful retainer. Stooping, the Sikh kissed his hand.

“Let us go, sahib,” he said, straightening to his full height and with a sudden motion plucking the diamond from his turban—throwing the badge of his dishonor into a corner of that wonderful old room, which had seen so much.

“How did you manage to get word to my driver?” asked Sinclair.

“By chance, sahib. Until they brought me here I never got an opportunity to communicate with any one. They watched me too well, even though they believed me hypnotized. But after they got me here, they seemed so sure of me that they began to send me on errands outside this place—just as they do their other servants, whom they pull back to them just by thinking. In a village near here I chanced to meet the driver, who had been hanging around since the sahib went away. I said nothing at first, only making sure he was not going away. Then yesterday, after I heard about the appointment, I was sent out again, and told the driver to be here to-night. It was just pure luck, sahib. Now will the sahib be pleased to follow?”

Sinclair was pleased. They walked cautiously, the Sikh in the lead. The sometimes annoying methodical lack of initiative of the mind of the low-caste native had for once been of value. The auto driver, taken from the police on special duty by Sinclair, not having received orders from Sinclair to go anywhere else, had remained. The babu clerk, on the books
at the police office, had looked at the affair in the same way. Consequently with Sesson, too busy to trouble himself, the auto and its driver had waited for Sinclair, exactly as if he had left it for a few minutes.

Fearful and wonderful are the ways of the native mind, although on this occasion Sinclair’s unquestioned authority, coupled with the fact of there being no one who felt like taking on himself the changing of his order “Wait till I return,” given on the night he was captured, had had a powerful effect.

The eternal silence of the underground passages seemed accentuated—in spite of every care, their footsteps echoed far too loudly for comfort. Dim lamps, burning at some distance from one another, served to make their way possible.

The passage which led from Alexander’s room took them to the center of things—an open place, from which branched off many passages, leading to the different laboratories, kitchens, rooms for servants, etc., with an elevator which descended to other and lower offices. So far, Sinclair could find his way, but he was doubtful about the passage which led to the outer labyrinth, and, so on, to the free world. But the Sikh was never in doubt. For two weeks he had done little else but survey the place, and his knowledge had been furthered by his being sent outside on errands. He led the way confidently.

The entire place seemed asleep, and in truth the Sikh’s reference to the condition of his sword spoke of sleep where, otherwise, wakeful guards would have probably prevailed. Across the open space they stepped cautiously, Sinclair with a growing confidence in what had seemed an impossible enterprise, and with a warm feeling of gratitude toward this retainer of his, whose unconscious treachery had led to such disaster but who was now redeeming himself beyond the need of forgiveness.

They entered the passage of the labyrinth of grottoes. Ten yards further a dead guard lay revealed in the dim light, with further progress seemingly barred by the solid earth. Without hesitation the Sikh pressed a stone to the right, and the wall of earth swung slowly and noiselessly open, closing automatically as they passed through into another grotto, so similar as to be indistinguishable to the uninitiated.

For some distance this process and progress continued—with Sinclair wondering as to how the Sikh had accomplished his wholesale destruction of the guards, suddenly understanding that the automatically closing doors had allowed him to work without the guard in the adjoining grotto being aware of what he was doing. Thus the very system that had been devised for safety had made escape possible.

How their movements were discovered Sinclair never learned, although it was likely that some sort of electric wiring connected with the doors of the grottoes conveyed the alarm. And very swift was the effort to capture them. As the door of one of the last grottoes swung behind them, their pursuers poured into the grotto they had just left—armed men, led by the old native who had talked so much with Sinclair and the one who had hypnotized the Sikh.

It was a weird race—through the dim underground places—a matter of which could open the door ahead the more quickly, with Sinclair dreading the Sikh’s sudden failure. But the once traitor had made mechanically certain of his job. Stimulated by the hope of redeeming himself in the eyes of the man he almost worshiped—which had assumed a greater importance than even the killing of the man who had hypnotized, him—he had made sure of the door-openings, and now he worked with frantic energy, swearing strange fighting oaths.

Once, rushing ahead of his fellows, one of the pursuers managed to get through a door before it closed. Some guttural words, the clash of meeting blades, a grunt, and the pursuer fell.

“Hold my sword, burra sahib, while I open this den of devils,” and the Sikh flung himself upon the door.

Through this grotto they rushed, with no pursuer in sight. But—for some unknown reason—the next door stuck on its hinges, opening only a foot or so, not wide enough for a man to pass through. It looked like the end.

In vain did Sinclair and the Sikh use their strength to move the door. Weighing tons, their efforts were impotent. Not an inch further would the door move. Behind them, the other door began to swing open.
“Sahib,” the Sikh indicated the stone which, pressed upon, caused the door to swing, “will you press on this bewitched thing of evil while I take the sword and hold this cattle back?”

Sinclair pressed, but nothing happened, the door remaining open only enough to make the next grotto visible. And Sinclair was not armed. His automatic had been taken away the night of his capture, and he had not cared to risk refusal by asking for it. Neither had the Sikh been able to obtain any other weapon—it was indeed remarkably lucky that he had been allowed to retain his sword, which was as much a part of him as one of his hands. Then the door through which they had just passed opened wide and they were trapped.

But their pursuers did not at once advance. With a motion of his hand the old native held them back.

“Really, Sinclair sahib,” he said quietly, “you surprise me—allowing your common fellow to lead you away like a criminal breaking jail—disturbing the well-earned rest of so many of us, as well as your own. Surely you know that escape is impossible. To the last grotto you may possibly get, but beyond that you can not go. We knew your fellow meant mischief but did not warn our guards because we desired to test their ability. Your fellow has killed them—they deserved death, which indeed their negligence courted, and for which your Sikh shall be rewarded. But at the outer grotto is a barrier arranged which a much more intelligent man than your Sikh might well have failed to observe. Through that barrier the entire British army would fail to make a way. I suggest, therefore, that you return to your room—you are somewhat old for such nocturnal adventure, and so am I. What do you think?”

Sinclair’s heart sank—not because of his own situation but because of what it meant. Too well he knew the native mind to believe that anything but a peculiarly painful death would be the Sikh’s “reward” for the night’s work; while the warning he hoped to convey to the world would remain unsaid—forever. Never again would such an opportunity arise. Never again would escape be so near. Even in the doubtful event of his either pretending to be hypnotized, or resisting it, his freedom was at an end. And all because a door had refused to open—the devilish malignity of the inanimate—for he did not for a moment believe the old native’s story of an insurmountable barrier at the last grotto.

He looked at the Sikh, who stood tensed for battle, grinning his fighting grin. The Sikh’s attitude was best—better die fighting. But how was he to fight without a weapon? Besides, the old native would never allow him to be killed. Suddenly, with a sort of scream, the Sikh cut at the nearest enemy—

“The door, sahib—the door!”

For in some way—Sinclair felt that Providence had interfered in his behalf—the stalled mechanism of the door had gone to work, and the door was swinging open.

“I will hold them while you get through,” the Sikh cried. Then with an afterthought, “Devils of hell—the burra sahib does not know the trick of the other doors!”

A sibilant jumble of words—anger replacing sarcasm—had broken from the old native leader. Crashes, curses, a few shrieks. There being nothing else for him to do, Sinclair stepped into the next grotto, making rapidly for where he fancied the opening of the other door might be. From the noise behind him he might have deduced that twenty men were fighting twenty, instead of one marvelous swordsman, holding back a dozen. Pressing impotent fingers upon every likely place—trying every combination he could think of to open the door—oblivious to all but this and the discordant noise of the fight—Sinclair was startled by a sudden silence. The door behind had closed automatically. Where—or rather what had happened to the valiant Sikh?

“Has the sahib a handkerchief?”

This somewhat prosaic question sounded as out of place as a funny story at a funeral. Sinclair could not suppress a laugh, yet he felt ashamed of that laugh. The Sikh and he were alone in the grotto—the former holding out a bleeding hand, which Sinclair rapidly and skillfully wrapped in his handkerchief.

“How did it happen?” he asked, as the Sikh began to fumble clumsily at the next door-opening.

“They—whom I left alive—nearly had me. They held my arm—with my body through the door, and the door closing.
Some of the rats gripped my fingers over-tightly.

"There was nothing else for it, sahib—and it is not my sword hand—either my arm was to be crushed by the closing door, or I had to cut off certain of my fingers. The sahib knows what I did. Pray the gods that damned door has jammed again, and the rats will not be able to get through. I did not tell the sahib that they have another way out?"

"No—but have those fingers stopped bleeding? It hardly seems possible."

"Never mind my unworthy fingers, sahib; here swings the door, and there is but one more left."

Had it not been for the other exit, their troubles would have been over—for the mechanism of the misbehaving door remained sullen. But that other exit constituted a serious menace. Could they reach the auto before the old native could lead his crew around to the labyrinth opening? And would the auto be waiting? The auto was waiting; with its fatalistic driver asleep at the wheel—waking to a genealogical diatribe most eloquently delivered by the Sikh.

For there was need of haste—with a yelling horde of natives, led by frantic men who saw a world-scheme that had been brewing for centuries threatened by the self-starting invention of an alien race. If Sinclair escaped, it seemed that their carefully erected palace of mental achievement would fall like a mud hut in a cyclone. Little wonder they were furious. Yet in the perfection of their own weapons lay their weakness. Never needing guns, they had none—except Sinclair's, which the old hypnotist fired aimlessly—and their guards had swords only. For even their wonderful hypnotism could not affect men who were flying for their lives.

The motor, loudly and rhythmically, voiced the music of freedom, as the Sikh helped Sinclair—exhausted and out of breath—into the car, shouting to the driver to act as the eighth avatar of Vishnu, and drive the car of Juggernaut over all who got in the way; for by this time, obeying the shouts of the old native, the auto was surrounded by the guards.

But, drive as he might, the driver could not prevent some of the men throwing themselves into the car; and among these—with an uncanny activity for one so old—was the Sikh's enemy, the hypnotist. Thus, with the car gathering speed, a fearful fight was taking place on board.

Besides the old hypnotist four powerful men were struggling with the Sikh, whom Sinclair was powerless to aid—all of them trying to reach the steering-wheel. The remainder had either been shaken off or crushed under the flying wheels—now bumping over the uneven ground at fully forty miles an hour. And the Sikh fought magnificently—like a great stag brought to bay by hounds—his swordsmanship in that narrow space being marvelous. A full moon lighted the scene incuriously.

To Sinclair, cursing his helplessness and jammed into a corner, it seemed that the fight lasted a long time, but as a matter of fact not more than three minutes had passed before two of the enemy were groaning and dying on the car-floor; one, howling with terror that the Sikh was a devil, had jumped overboard, to his death; and the old hypnotist, his strength gone, had collapsed on a seat. The other man—a fighter of parts—had dropped his weapon and grappled the Sikh with his hands, compelling the gate-keeper to do likewise.

All over the car they wrestled, both swearing voluminously and neither gaining any apparent advantage. Then Sinclair, who had recovered his breath, picked up the Sikh's sword, just in time to prevent the old hypnotist going to the assistance of his servant.

Sinclair did not intend to kill the man—he wanted him a prisoner—but the other's frenzied rush was his own undoing. For, as Sinclair brought the sword to the point, the hypnotist, who had climbed on one of the seats, jumped at him—and the wonderful piece of steel, so long the Sikh's pride, as it had been his father's before him, under Roberts, went through him so easily that only the blood gushing over Sinclair's hand told him what he had done.

And at that moment the Sikh got the grip he had been trying for. Raising the other man to his breast, to his shoulder, and so over his head—balancing himself in the swaying car with a marvelous skill—he pitched him, howling, over the side. Then Sinclair ceased trying to withdraw the sword from the body of the dead hypnotist—catching the Sikh and easing him as gently as he could to a seat.

"It is finished, burra sahib," he gasped.
“No,” Sinclair did not realize what he meant for the moment, “they will have another hole prepared—but we will smoke them out.”

“Ai, sahib, who art my father and my mother, the sahib will no doubt smoke them out. But I will not be there to hold up the sahib’s arm—unless the gods give me leave to help him in the spirit.”

The driver had slowed down for orders, and Sinclair, understanding, told him to hurry to where he knew was a Government hospital; but the Sikh, hearing the order, interposed:

“If your honor pleases,” his voice was beginning to falter, “no dokatar can help me now—and I am not anxious that he should—will the sahib bid the driver go slowly, for I would die easily hearing the sahib’s voice, which I can not do if we travel fast.”

So Sinclair told the driver to stop—since there seemed no chance of their being overtaken, or even pursued—and tried to find out where the Sikh was hurt, and if he could stop the bleeding. But the man was so severely wounded that he seemed to be all wounds—beginning with the fingers he had lost in the grotto—and the marvel lay in his fighting so long, upborne by his will to conquer.

“I see the sahib has avenged my honor—only I would he had killed the dog with another weapon. Ai, but what does it matter, when in a few minutes I will meet the old swine and have all eternity to get even with him. Think, sahib, is it not well I should die—for how I would mourn, if I were to live, with that old devil having all the time of my living to hide himself among the rocks of hell?

“Now—since I am the more active—he will not be able to get very far before I get out of this body of mine, and give chase. Ai, sahib, think what a merry chase that will be—with the old pig howling through hell and me running after him with the ghost of my sword in my hand—see that it goes with me, sahib—and all the devils looking on and laughing as at a game.

“Ai, it is a good thing to have such a pleasant time to look forward to when dying. Only I am sorry to leave the sahib, for none can love him as I do. Does the sahib forgive me for what I did in the matter of the snake and other things—not knowing?”

“I have nothing to forgive,” replied Sinclair huskily. “Indeed, I am thy debtor, and will be so forever. More, the whole world will owe something to thy devotion—as I will see to.”

He pressed the dying hand and for a little while there was silence. Then:

“Will the sahib say farewell for me to the fat babu, who is a good man, and to the others?”

“Yes,” Sinclair promised.

Raising his voice with an effort the Sikh told the driver to throw the body of the old hypnotist out of the car, sighing contentedly when this was done.

“I feel more clean, sahib,” he explained.

A cloud came over the moon, and the stunted trees loomed spectrally upon the waste fields. Sinclair heard the Sikh chuckle, as he was accustomed to do at some joke. He turned slightly, as if to explain better to Sinclair what amused him. Then he lay still, while the moon came out from behind the cloud, showing that he would laugh no more.
Chubbies

BY NAN MOULTON

It was one January morning that Celia turned her braids up for the first time around her seventeen-year-old head and took dismayed counsel with herself in her mirror.

"I'm starting to be a teacher today," she said. "I don't want to be a teacher."

Her mind flitted back in review of the masters and mistresses who had sign-posted her presumably upward way. There was a tall red-haired spinster with an astringent humor who had all one day pinned up Celia's spotted copy-book on the blackboard to the contumely of her peers. There was a weary, restrained woman with curls, who laughed unwillingly, who seemed inseparable from the multiplication table and who was always correcting one's speech.

"Children," she insisted to Celia, "not 'young ones,'" the only "young ones" a sufficiently direct expression of her intentions.

There was an old man, long on whiskers and history and short on authority, whom the big boys put periodically in the wood-box. There was the dear master with his power of satire, the drawling music of whose voice had led to the fairy world of literature, the master the one bright spot since little O'Flynn, away back at the threshold of school-life—little, laughing O'Flynn who used to give Celia her flowers to take home because Celia was four and fat and funny. But little O'Flynn had been married in a few months. Marriage was of a vagueness to Celia turning up her braids, remote like gray hair and death and the equator.

Now how, she mused, had she, Celia Driscoll, come among this long, foot-dragging procession? That had begun away back in another January, she remembered. It had begun her way of slipping up at school from one "book" to another that had begun her undoing. "Passed," was her customary laconic report on arriving home the first day of each term. When she passed the entrance examination to the grammar school at but ten years of age and brought honor to the house of Driscoll,
she was given another wish, although it was Christmas week and her full stocking had held a candy heart in the heel and a gold locket in the toe, and she promptly wished skates.

It was the custom of the town to assemble at the river on New Year’s Day. The mayor, standing about in his overshoes and beaming, noted the Driscolls and went forward in spacious congratulation. To have her hand seized in spacious mayoral felicitation would have been a sufficiently new and trying experience to Celia shod in rubber, but with new skates and on glazed ice, minding her manners and seeking her balance ended in her seeing all the stars in the firmament, biting her tongue painfully and assaulting the mayor’s calves in the most uncitizenly fashion.

“Oh, darn passin’,” she breathed as she scrambled scarlet to her knees and pushed out on the ice with the support of Rosy’s cutter, leaving her parents and the mayor to their insane complimenting.

“What are you thinking of making her?” queried his worship, spaciously forgiving the assault on his calves.

The Driscolls had not thought.

“She’s clever,” mused his worship. “She’s quick at the learnin’, herself,” agreed Mother Driscoll.

“Let her go on for a teacher. We’ll get her a place here on the town staff,” advised his worship, spacious with the future as with all else.

In this wise was Celia marked for captivity. And Grandmother Driscoll wrote from her farm in County Wicklow in her beautiful old hand:

“I’m glad Celia will be able to teach school. It is a nice clean life, and I see by the papers they get good pay.”

And Grandmother Driscoll was quite serious over those last two words, bless her heart! And she hoped this would find them all well, as she was at present, thank God, and trusted she would meet them all in heaven.

There was a little twist in the smile with which Celia came back to her mirror and into her new brown dress whose length of skirt and highness of neck she loathed afresh.

As Celia walked thoughtfully to her new school, the weary ghosts she had evoked weighing on her steps, she met the head.

“I won’t be a good teacher,” she told him mournfully.

The head had seen her through training school and held different views.

“I’m crazy about kids, you see,” she explained.

“That’s an argument the other way,” he said, disregarding her unacademic manner of speech.

He could not know what lay behind the sudden wistfulness of Celia’s candid young eyes, the sweet ghosts she had further evoked on her brooding way to school, lawless, tumbling days when she and babes had met on equal terms.

Celia had never been maternal. It was not so much the mothering instinct that sent her eager face burrowing into the soft backs of necks that were no necks at all, but just delicious creases between rolls of darling, scented baby-flesh—it was more of Pan and pagan and pride-of-life. Good babies and very regular babies held little appeal for her, but a moral obliquity, a physical unusualness, a shout of joy or a spirit of revolt and there was Celia in their midst, a vagabond Celia who cared no whet for the infants in her immediate family.

“Rosy’s poky,” she confided to Fritz’s inviting ear the last blessed Saturday morning she pushed his high black pram into the crowds around the market-place. Fritz’s curls were of a whiteness so extreme as to hold for Celia some magic shade of blue. His tastes ran to blue clay, undiscouraged even by a dressing of coal-oil. His mutual sweetness was clad in glamorous laces and tucks so that Celia desired to be seen of men when’er she took his pram abroad. Now he puckered his willful rose of a mouth at the gravity and premonition of Celia’s face. Celia had never seen fit to mention Rosy’s existence before, but her mother, that morning, had spoken words of portent concerning the elder sister, Ann Olivia, about to learn the millinery, and the change in store for the free-footed Celia. Ann Olivia had domestic tastes and loved the poky Rosy. A shadow lay over Celia’s day.

The episode with Rosy occurred the following Saturday.

“You’re a run-a-gate, Celia Driscoll,” affirmed her mother, standing before her, hands on hips: “a run-a-gate and a gad-
about and the tramp of the world, so you are! But you'll stay at home this morning and mind your sister Rosy and not a word out of you either!"

So Celia huddled the hapless Rosy to the front steps where she plumped her down and surveyed her with distaste. Rosy was dull. Her hair was stubby, her face moon-round, her eyes guileless; she was placid to exasperation.

"Pudden-face!" snapped Celia insultingly. "All you can do is sit. Stand up!" Rosy was accustomed to Ann Olivia's cajoling "Tanny-uppy—n-i-i-cel!" But she only grrrrrrr'ed pleasantly as Celia pulled her up on fat legs that bowed disgustingly.

"You—you hoop!" scorned Celia. "Sit down then!" Rosy sat.

She did not protest even when Celia flung from her a fat cream and tan caterpillar she was preparing to devour, and Celia, appalled at such poorness of spirit and gazing off across the wide common where butterflies wavered and freedom and gipsying lay in the tangles of the grass, was tempted so that she fell. She knew that her mother was too busy with her slashing before-Sunday campaign to appear for anything less than Rosy screaming murder, and Rosy never looked further from screaming murder. So Celia made Rosy safe with a board across the front of the steps, happy with votive flowers forbidden to Celia's predatory fingers, insured against boredom by the neighborhood of all residue of toys to Celia's hand and stayed with pillows to induce sleep.

"I'll tell ma I watched her from the commons," Celia told herself. "Rosy'd sit there without a thing."

Then she skipped scornfully across the ditch that bounded the jade Duty at her back and the Elysian Fields before her. But she had not counted on Father Driscoll's newly-painted shiny gray steps on which the sun shone hotter and hotter until heat called to heat unmercifully and the drowsy Rosy, finding no rest for the palm of her hand nor the heel of her foot nor the place whereon she sat with such perfection, lifted up her voice and yelled bloody murder, while Celia, afar on the common, was catching bumble-bees in a bottle by means of a shingle applied adroitly to the gay pink and purple heads of thistles. Fritz was always entertained by the buzzing of the captives.

Judgment came duly, that particular form of judgment called of her father, "dusting your jacket," but she preferred it to her mother's admonition to prayer and repentance, which she followed out in this wise, as, steeped in sun and sodden with wo, she fell heavily asleep:

"Bless Fritz's blue curls, dear God. Fergive Rosy fer yellin' bloody-murder so all the street could hear. Prevent us in all our doings—or mother will. Lighten, lighten our darkness. Thine is—kingdom—dangers—and—perils—and—Rosy—frevrrrrr." And a last drowsy murmur, "A-men, and make—lots—lots—of babies—O, God. A-men! And—I had—a good—day. A-men!"

Shadowy memories like these were behind Celia's eyes that January morning as she explained a bit sorrowfully to the head, "I'm crazy about kids, you see.

"Then I don't like teachers," she confided, and unfolded to him the roll-call of the earlier morning at the mirror,

"What about me?" he asked, a faint twinkle at the back of a gray eye.

"But I never thought of you in the terms of a teacher; just as the head and a dear. Then—then there's—this!" She held out shrinkingly a parcel in her hand.

"What is it?" puzzled the head.

"Feel," invited Celia.

The head felt and his face tightened.

"When we went around to the rooms for our practise lessons," Celia said, "there was always one in the drawer of the desk. Sometimes—her chin quivered—sometimes I heard it in the halls and little children crying. They said I had to have one, as though it were a seal of office. The harness-maker cut it for me. Do I have to have a strap?"

"You might—sometime," sighed the head. "Tuck it away in your drawer, far back, and forget it if you can. I'll be around to your room later in the day. Good luck to you!"

**II**

**THE STRAP** went as a burnt offering in the end. It was on a day that had been very bad all along for Celia. She had wanted the babies to teach, had pleaded hard for the beginners, but a wise and lovely woman presided at the receipt of buds and Celia had had to take a class a few grades higher up. They weren't small enough to be darling. Celia said, nor
big enough to be human. Redeemingly
though, they furnished her much gaiety.
But on this day the censorious world had
invaded her portion of peace.
“My mother says you are a gambler,”
announced a child of evangelical ancestry.
Celia gasped.
“I told her you played marbles with the
boys for keeps, and that’s gambling,” she
says.”
“Go on with your subtraction, Anna,”
chided Celia with hot cheeks.
A rather portentous knock at the door
called Reggie Armstrong from his seat to
open it.
“A parent to see you,” he announced.
Every child grinned. A parent usually
meant reproach. This one had come about
elimination from certain prayers and did
not accept explanation in a spirit of amity.
Celia came in at last with weary dignity to
find Alex Rogers, whom she had left with
his mischievous face in a corner, standing
on his hands on her platform and Billy
Myers and Sandy MacAllister fighting fur-
iously across an aisle.
Before the afternoon was over, Celia had
nerves for the first time in her young life
and the class of forty was nearly in chaos.
A big, shambling, mild-eyed habitant boy,
André Gauthier, caught the spirit of aban-
don and, 1—ate an apple, 2—pulled Marion
Blake’s curls that she wept, 3—knocked a
bottle of ink over his new copy-book and
4—talked three times without permission.
It happened to be André who finally sent
Celia snap. She felt in the back of her
drawer and brought out the forgotten
parcel.
“Come here, André,” she said sternly.
“I’ll have to punish you.”
André came forward amazed. He had
not meant to be bad. There was something
in the air that afternoon and he had
broken out unaccustomedly and had a lot
of fun. He adored teacher. And now—
He held out his hand. Then he rubbed it
on his trousers, his poor, old crumpled jean
trousers, and held it out again. Celia’s
sword-arm was young and muscular. Five
times he held out his hand, five times he
rubbed the smarting palm and five times
looked up with puzzled eyes into Celia’s
grim, frozen little face. Then he held out
the other hand and a slow tear gathered on
the edge of a big mild eye. Celia threw
down her strap.
“You may go, André,” she said. “I love
you and I’ve hurt you.” And she sud-
denly laid her own braid-crowned head
on her official desk in hysterical weeping.
“André will stay,” said teacher at four,
and the children slipped away in awe, not
even chattering as they put on their wraps,
the mob spirit shamefast and dead.
“Open the stove door, André,” said
Celia. “Now come and get that hateful
strap. Throw it in. I’m sorry, André.”
She stooped and kissed his heavy, puzzled
face, her eyes bright again with tears.
“Aw, don’ you care, teacher,” comforted
André, staring astounded at the writhing
strap. “My fader, he lick me lots. I t’ink
I was bad boy today, teacher. I won’ be
bad no more, me.”
“You won’t tell the others, André? That
I burnt it and that I have no strap?” begged Celia.
“You bet I won’, teacher,” he assured
her. “You can borry Missis Fielding’s
w’en you need one. That one is more thin
and long and sting more worse.”
Next morning the head dropped in on a
room working like one o’clock, a calm in-
spired teacher at the black-board. He
made a mental note underneath a graying
spot on his head and his face relaxed into
lines of peace. He had come to give a little
test examination in dictation. As he
marked the slates, he held up one very
tidy, very beautifully written, very per-
fectly spelled, and smiled at Celia.
“Oh, yes,” said Celia a little scornfully,
“Frederick’s always like that. Look at
him down there, a cross between a saucer
of cream and now-I-lay-me! I’m weary
of saying ‘Excellent’ to him in one fashion
or another.”
“Most teachers would thank God fasting
for a boy like that,” reproved the head.
“Whom do you like, Celia Driscoll?”
“Saul Saunders, because he’s so en-
gagingly and unconsciously impudent with
his funny tied-up tongue—Chaul Chan-
derson, he calls himself; Albert Dawson
for the way he reads, ’O—oh, vel-vet bee!
Yar a dus-tee fellooowh!’ Bonnie Ben-
ton——”
“But all her teachers have wept over
Bonnie and her lack of absorbent qual-
ities.”
“I know, but I love her chipmunk
cheeks and her straight yellow hair when
it sticks out and up like the halo of an
untidy saint. She mourns daily over the utter insolubility of her 'problems' in arithmetic, but when she picks up her bit of a bag and goes out of the door at four o'clock, half the boys in the room are waiting there to pull her home on her red sled. Bonnie won't ever know anything out of books, but she'll know everything a woman needs to know and she'll be very happy. She's about the only girl I like. The boys and I understand each other better.

"You know, you've some very boyish qualities yourself, Celia Driscoll," said the head.

Celia looked at him ponderingly. "Is that a compliment? I oughtn't to have, ought I? A man said to me the other day that I had an honest face and if he were choosing an office boy and I applied, he'd take me. That's no sort of thing to say to a girl, is it? It isn't what he'd say to Bonnie Benton by and by, is it?"

The head was a sad, grave man, but he had smiled often at Celia that morning. Now he laughed outright. Going, he laid a sad, grave hand on Celia's braids, for, when a man is a sad, grave man, his hand is always sad and grave, no matter how his lips my be beguiled into smiling. Going, he patted Celia's head.

"And yet you're very much a woman," he said, "very much a woman after all, little Celia Driscoll," and was gone, a smile and a sigh on his tired, grave lips, like an unaccustomed April or Ireland astray.

It was two years later, after the head had made many more mental notes underneath the spot that grew always a little more grey that he came one term-end to Celia and looked upon her so that she fidgeted.

"Is it a parent?" she guessed.

"Come with me," he invited.

They stopped at the babies' room. Celia found a new and luminous quality in the sweetness of the smile turned on them by the wise and lovely lady. Then the head hurried her down a hall and opened another door. There was an ebbing of noise as the head appeared, but the disorder of the room could not all at once become order. The floor was untidy with torn paper and fallen books, the desks were cut wickedly and destroyingly, the walls and ceiling were rubbed with balls of chewed paper. A huddle of big boys bent over any hurriedly caught-up exercise under the stern eye of the head. A tall, thin, harassed man stood at the blackboard and gloomed out of a head too high to be real. Celia shivered at the desolation of it all and stepped quickly back into the hall.

"He's going, so I may tell you," said the head. "He's drinking. You probably know."

"He beats the boys," nodded Celia, "and he writes gloomy verse."

"I want you to try that room next term, so I showed you just how bad it is."

"But you showed me the babies, too."

There was dismay edged with hope in Celia's voice.

"There are to be two vacancies. The wise and lovely lady will be married soon. It was only fair to show you both. Tell me what it is about the babies, Celia?"

psychologically probed the head.

"I don't know," confessed Celia. "I just don't know, unless it's their stubby toes and their helpless way with their mittens. I may have the darlings at last?"

"I want you to have the big, bad boys."

"There are older and more experienced women on the staff," Celia's voice was not very steady.

"But you have some odd unaccountable power of control, Celia. I've never been able to discover how in any way it belongs to you, unless it's just a gift. Doesn't one have to live up to gifts?"

"Oh, damn control!" gasped Celia, just as she had gasped, "Oh, damn passin'" that fateful New Year's Day on the ice. She was a teacher now and an example and shouldn't have, but "Damn control!" she said again and stamped her foot.

"Then you'll take the boys?" concluded the head.

"But must I?"

"But mustn't you?"

"Yes," said Celia with a sob as she fled for the cloak-room.

"God bless you!" breathed the head from a suddenly tight throat.

It was a year later again that he came into the boys' room to find Celia struggling with hiccoughs in the midst of an exciting passage from "Treasure Island," and Tommy Mackay, concern on his face, dashing in at the other door with a big tin dipper of cold water.
“Take six sips without breathing, Miss Driscoll,” he counseled, then saw the head, flushed tomato-red and spilled the water all over Celia. The hiccoughs stopped. The head mopped her up with his big handkerchief, a twinkle in his eye.

“Only disorderly, your honor,” pleaded Celia.

“Which is more than your room is,” admitted the head. “It’s Friday afternoon, teacher, and nearly four. Send them home.”

They wouldn’t go, though, until the end of the chapter and the solution of the mystery of “The Man of the Island.” Outside they piled hilariously on the first boy down the steps with a chorus of “Fifteen Men on the Dead Man’s Chest.” Celia waved her hand at the last of them and took off her hat from its nail.

“They’re fine healthy young savages and they’re eating out of your small hand, Miss Driscoll. How did you do it?”

“I didn’t,” denied Celia. “They’re just like that themselves.”

“But Tommy Mackay has always been a terror. How have you civilized him?”

“I haven’t,” answered Celia, demurely. “He sent me word by Mary Wilkins the other day that he was in love with me.” Then she flushed because the head was looking at her so queerly, and the head flushed and suddenly psychologically probed, “Have you ceased mourning the babies?”

“Never.” Celia’s face was wistful now. “You’ll let me have them soon?”

“No,” refused the head. “Don’t you find compensations among the boys?”

“Oh, yes,” shrugged Celia. “They sharpen my lead-pencils so beautifully.”

III

The years slipped along, soft-footed, swift-footed, as they do with us all—the thieves!—and we never noticing. Celia played a little and danced a little and mourned a little. The senior Driscolls were gathered to their fathers. Ann Olivia married a dapper merchant tailor and removed to a new city in the West. Rosy went with Uncle Padraic to visit the grandmother in County Wicklow and eventually settled down there with Mr. Rosy. So Celia’s family ties that had always held her lightly were not quite unknotted.

Here and there through the years a man touched her life, but Celia knew more about marriage now than on the morning she first turned up her braids for teaching. It was the thought of its endurance that always sent her flying to hide among the reeds of her work and her play, whimsical negatives echoing over her vanishing shoulder. Marriage, besides, was always shadowed by the head’s tragedy, for Celia came to know the source of his great, grave sadness, the young wife fled to the ends of the earth with an attractive daredevil mining engineer, and the head seeking no release from his tie lest one day she come back broken and need sanctuity. There had been silence around her now for years. Poor old head! He needed Celia, so she stood by. And the years stole past.

This way one missed babies, of course. No man, no baby, Nature had decreed it in the beginning. No man (i.e. legal husband), no baby. Society decreed it even unto this day.

But one might have wearied of the same baby, and they had a devastating way of growing up. And there were teeth and manners and morals. One could always borrow a baby. And the years stole past.

Then, one Saturday morning, after a blind, busy Winter with grown matriculation students, Celia, suddenly desiring the solace of a babe, found no longer a single one on her visiting-list. Somehow there weren’t so many babies any more and people moved away so heart-breakingly. Across the blankness consequent on her discovery, the telephone called. Mary Martin was in town over Sunday with Jimmy Martin, aged three. Might they come to Celia for Sunday? It was a direct answer to prayer. Celia was prepared to devour Jimmy Martin on sight.

But on sight, Jimmy Martin was not exactly devourable. He was adorably pink and white. He stood square and solid. His hair was uncompromising and his eyes full of wanting-to-know. You might minister to his thirst for information, but he did not desire to be hugged.

Celia sent Mary Martin away to rest and sat down in her window-seat, prepared to enjoy Jimmy. Jimmy, on his part, prepared to extract knowledge. After a half-hour Celia’s enjoyment was beginning to wane, while Jimmy was but settling into
his stride. After an hour Celia was battling to keep vexation from her replies and Jimmy was going strong. At the end of two hours Celia's door had been closed twice upon Jimmy, once gently and again with more urgency. But always Jimmy had urbanely returned bearing gifts, corn-popp and goo such as his soul loved, and proceeded with his litany that began with the "hat" of the reading-lamp and ended nowhere, for the room was fascinatingly full and the woman so much more ready with the information and response than his mother.

"If you'd only change your form of question!" Celia wailed.

"Yes. You tahred, Seelyuh?"

"Yes, darling," relenting at the sweetness of the small, concerned face.

"Do you rest when you're tahred, Seelyuh?"

"When I can," said poor Celia.

"Yes. D'you take off yours huhr when you go to bed, Seelyuh?"

"No dear. It grows on."

"Yes. Do it grows on, Seelyuh?"

"Auntie Celia, dear."

"Yes. Do it grows on, Auntie Seelyuh?"

"Yes, Jimmy."

"Wat you do wis lat grow-on, Auntie Seelyuh?"

"Don't you want to go and see if your mother is awake, dear?"

"Yes. Wat you do wis lat—?"

Celia groaned.

"Have you a pain in yours tummy?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, Jimmy."

"Are you hot in yours neck?"

"No dear. I think mother wants you."

Celia locked her door this time, cried a little, bathed her face in cold water, tied a handkerchief dipped in cologne around a throbbing head and lay down to compose herself before Mary Martin appeared. At six came Mary, rosy and rested. At six Celia smiled wanly at Mary, her body fighting amongst its members like Killkenny cats.

"I sent Jimmy back to you every time he came in," beamed Mary. "I want you to have all of him while we're here."

Celia's smile of gratitude was wry, but Mary had turned at the sound of Jimmy's treble floating up the stairs, he having followed his nose below.

"This cake tastes," he announced from a full interior. "Take me off my bib, moth-ur!"

He was very entertaining later over his prayers which he insisted on saying alone:

"My Father in heaven, Adam's Thy name. We need some blead. Wat's west, moth-ur?" But Celia decided Mary was too heavy on Bible history when Jimmy stated blandly that Cain was the first "Cristun murdr'r."

After a Sunday over whose martyrdom a curtain is best drawn, Celia saw them off on their train Monday morning on her way to school, after Jimmy had inquired why the street-cars were noising and what did Seelyuh do wis lose kitty-furs and wat was lat enchine doing and . . .

"Come out and see us," Called Mary from the car-steps.

"Come over and hear us," echoed Jimmy hospitably from her shoulder.

Whereafter Celia went on to school and told the head, "Heaven and lunatic asylums are full of mothers. Heaven is fullest, because "all the mothers from the lunatic asylums go there eventually, for just being mothers."

"You look dreary, Celia," protested a puzzled head. "You never looked dreary before."

"Why shouldn't I be dreary?" sighed Celia, "I who am at last too tired to play with babes?" and mused dully at her desk, not noting the hand the head put out to her in sudden yearning.

Out of her musing sprang suddenly the thought of the book with its gleam and its memories, its joy and its fun. It was the biggest scrap-book she could buy. She had some small gift of color and a pencil with a whimsical twist. On the cover she painted in curly letters of gold the title, "Chubbies." Within the book there came to be a riot of babes that filled her Saturdays without disturbing her peace, buttons of babies and roses of babies and a broth of a baby. Blue Curls had a page all to himself, his bud of a mouth all mutinous and sweet above the lifted pride of his chin.

At the top of a page full of stories was Brother of Three with care in his eyes and a velvet-headed blossom of no years at all and no care. "I'll lean an eye on her, Mummy," he had assured his mother on her way to the door-bell. Again, when the blossom lay coaxing comfort through a hygienic rubber nipple, Celia had twinkled,
“Where’s your bottle, brother?” And brother had replied with haste and dignity, “It’s—it’s got Baby.” And so it had, very much got Baby. Brother had a proper mind, too, and defined the unknown in terms of the known.

“I have a bweed,” he told his mother one day, after too intimate relations with the carving-knife. “What is bweed?”

His mother explained that it was what came through when skin was cut.

“What is skin, Munny?”

“Skin is what holds you in,” was the result of his mother’s mental effort.

“Oh!” It was brother’s turn to think. “Is skin my paper bag, Munny?”

There was the confident sunny-haired little devil, who, after he had eaten Celia’s lady-fingers with appreciation, announced with a pucker in his brow, “I—I yike—I yike—youngadies’ arrums.” There was the day when, with his sweet, wicked smile, he mixed the ashes with half a barrel of bran for the cow; and an evening when he disappeared and was found at bed-time with his small nose glued tight against the window of a notorious down-town pool-room.

The stories Celia wrote in with the pictures and sweet, sleepy little songs. Oftenest she just drew and colored until her own pale face was pink with pleasure and her tired eyes shone over the small things that frisked and bubbled and rolled and twinkled and gurgled and frolicked across her pages, a feast and a bewilderment, a medley and a carnival, seas of mischief. Lovely ways and days she caught, starry smiles, lips with a sleepy droop, until her book flowered into rapture and her heart ached exquisitely.

IV.

It was a very cold Saturday in a very white Winter that Celia’s head drooped over a little-lad page in her book. She had taken her “Chubbies” over to the warm quiet school as her landlady’s furnace was inopportune undergoing repairs. Kites and rocking-horses, blocks and buggies sprawled and brimmed under her quiet braids when Father Time came by.

“What’s on ye, Celia?” he asked in a cracked old voice that still held some quality of soothing. He spoke Irishly out of tribute to Celia’s folk whom he had known for centuries back in County Wicklow.

“I’m tired,” owned Celia, “chalk-tired.”

Father Time nodded. Many a chalk-tired teacher he had left gently away. Chalk-tired included being tired in your body, your mind and your human nature, tired in your faculty of laughter, tired in your nerves and your eyes and your ears and your sympathy, and very tired in your elbows from marking so many examination papers. He took Celia’s hand in his hand, the one disengaged from the scythe, and led her to a room where Saint Catherine nodded in the lazy sunshine, her wheel in the window, her martyr’s palm a bit old and dusty, her heavy royal crown hung petulantly on a projecting spoke of her wheel. A loose gown of gold and the jewels and rings covering her hands were as fine as in the days when she ruled over Egypt and defied the love of old Maximin.

“Howl, Catherin!” said Father Time.

“How’s everything?”

“Dull,” said Ste. Catherine, yawning at the dusty, sunny old room. “All the old girls that I am used to claim for my coifing have espoused causes and gone forth into the market-place. They didn’t see, they said, why one who had been beheaded should be so fussy about her coiffure, that an old sainte like Ste. Catherine should stay asleep in her tomb on Mount Sinai, and that, for themselves, they desired fuller self-expression.

“Then a lot of creatures with creased brows came along and insisted that I was the patron Saint of Philosophy and belles-lettres and wanted my advice on Collective Bargaining, Imagist Poetry and the scandal of Euclid. I pleaded my old girls, but they quoted this verse at me:

“Ste. Catherin favors learned men and gives them wisdom high
And teacheth to resolve the doubts, and always giveth aid
Unto the scolding sophisters, to make his reason staid.”

“How away, scolding sophisters,” I told them. ‘That must be another Ste. Kit. I'm going to sleep. Nobody’s reason could be staid with the like of you about.’

“I was just nicely asleep when a lot of shrill-voiced girls rushed in and knelt at me, chanting,
"A husband, Sainte Catherine,
A handsome one, Sainte Catherine,
A rich one, Sainte Catherine,
A nice one, Sainte Catherine,
And soon, Sainte Catherine."

"I gave them a lot of war statistics to take home. They think it's a charm. I'll have them all back one day to coif me, but in the meantime, look at my hair. I can't do a thing with it."

"Poor Cathern, you're het up!" soothed Father Time, who had not gone to school when he was young because there were no schools and there was very little time.

"You haven't talked as much as that, all told, in the last hundred years. I'll bring all those yammerers back one day. But here's Celia now. She'll do your hair nice. So long, girls!" And he held up his beard gracefully and swept away with his scythe.

So Celia laid down her book of "Chubbies" and, touching a finger to the golden mesh of Sainte Catherine's hair, inquired how it was to be coiffed.

"Each does it as she is moved," the sainte made drowsy answer and slept profoundly in her chair.

But when she later lifted heavy lids to the long mirror before which she always sat, she awoke fully to a rage so great that no words would come. For Celia, after her sort, had cut off and cast down all the long, golden rope of Sainte Catherine's hair and wet and combed and curled over her front finger the short edges and fluffs left until a halo of spit-curles and kiss-curles around the queenly head of the sainte made it like unto that of the most mother-fussed choir-boy at Sunday matins. Celia was just finishing the last curl near the medulla oblongata when the glare of the sainte's eye from the mirror halted her. The kiss-curles and spit-curles that Celia had made, as she moved more and more in a dream in the sunny room, rose now and writhed with the voiceless rage in the sainte below, and Celia, looking on the Medusa head, was frozen with horror so that she died.

There were light, dancing impulses along Celia's veins, a feeling of just-seventeen and a fragrance of apple-blossoms. And wasn't that a bee-hum she heard? Bumble-bees for all the world! "O-o-h, vel-vel bee!—Yar a dus-tee fel-loooow!" Hear them bump, bump against —thistles, Celia did believe, like the day she left Rosy on the hot steps and had her jacket dusted. Celia's old laugh rippled up and out across the bee-hum and thousands of little gurgles and chuckles and crows came tumbling back at her, with one big soft 'cello roar that brought her up leaning on an inquiring elbow.

The bees and thistles and a bit of amber brook were all there and great lumps of shining stone wherein Celia saw reflected a rosy, rounded girl with brown braids bound above a white brow. Against a wall of jade leaned a tall angel with a careless smile, his hair in an odd knot at the back of his head, the borders of his garments embroidered in trifoliate green. Among the apple-boughs, along the jade wall, dabbling in the amber brook, chasing the heavy bumble-bees, rolling after the butterflies and hiding in the grass were babies and babies and babies, in greater variety, numbers and alluringness than Celia had ever dreamed.

Celia laughed back at them again, and the babies chuckled and the angel beamed and suddenly Celia and angel and babies had all joined hands in the maddest, merriest dance that took them above the apple-blossoms and along the jade wall and over the amber brook and sent the old bumble-bees staggering more hopelessly than ever, and drifted the butterflies in bright circles around them.

Celia and the babies dropped breathless to the grass, while the angel leaned again against the jade wall, tucking up his hair.

"'Tis an old Irish way," said Celia.

"My father told me."

"'Tis so," agreed the angel. "'Tis the cousin."

"Then you're an Irish angel?" asked Celia.

"To be sure," answered the angel, "and for my elegant fighting, promoted to archangel."

"You're St. Michael?" whispered Celia.

"I am that," said the angel.

"Perhaps I ought to say, 'God save ye, St. Michael! Is that right?"

"'Tis right enough. God save ye kindly, Celia."

"You know my name?"

"I do indeed. 'Twas a bad trick ye played on poor Rosy yonder hot day. Did they give you the father of a beatin'?"

But he twinkled at her and she twinkled back at him and all the babies twinkled
too, like fireflies and dew-drops and stars and spray.

"Who are they?" asked Celia.

St. Michael told her. They were all the bad babies who wouldn't take their medicine without marshmallows, who fell into tubs of water, who rolled out of windows where they should not have leaned and down cellar-steps when their fathers went for coal and out of bed, prowling blindly about and over the edge, and so died. Some of them had toddled under cars, fleeing dull homes; some had splashed into rain-barrels, seeking knowledge about wrigglers; some had nibbled colored icing off the company cake; some had tasted of the apple before he was ripe; and these also had gathered up their toes and ceased to have breath. One had skipped one hundred on a hot day and expired—all little girls and their mothers knew about that one.

"They haven't any wings," said Celia.

"I'm so glad."

"This sort never have wings," said St. Michael.

He vaulted over the jade wall, then turned and leaned his chin a moment on its edge.

"Do you know where it is ye are at, Celia Driscoll?" he asked.

Celia caught several frisking babies and rolled them in the buttercups. She dimpled roguishly at St. Michael over a white shoulder from which her straight little blue robe was slipping, and gave him back his brogue: "Sure, your honor, I know. It is in paradise I am entirely."

But it was into the eyes of the head that she was looking, amused eyes that still were oddly tender.

"Did you see St. Michael?" she whispered.

"Only Sainte Cecilia," he smiled.

"Nor the babies?"

"Only the babies in your sleepy eyes," he teased, and laid a hand softly on her braids.

"Your hand," she gasped, suddenly all awake and aware, a little shaken, "your hand is different. It isn't sad and grave any more."

"No," he said. "I'll tell you soon. Where were you when I came in, Celia, to make you look so dewy and eager and yet wistful, as you looked that day I met you going soberly to the sacrifice of school-teaching?"

"It was in paradise I was entirely," she remembered with a ghost of a dimple, and across the open book she told him of her tiredness and her dream.

He knew of the book. He had opened it unwittingly one day as it lay upon her desk, then had closed the covers abruptly and gone quickly away. Every time it had pushed into his thoughts since, his throat had ached intolerably. But there was no ache in his throat today as he closed the book and pushed it away from between them to tell her why his hand lay differently on her head.

It was five years ago that little Doreen had died down in Patagonia. She had been happy, the mining engineer wrote, and he had been happy. And now he too was going out and he had written the head to tell him and to say they couldn't be sorry ever, except a little about the head.

It was when Celia and the head were going out together into the sparkling cold of the Saturday noon-day, the pale way that the one had gone and the lonely path of the other merging henceforward into one broader path of warmth and companionship, it was then that Celia slipped from the claiming arm of the head and back through the empty rooms of her bondage.

"What is it, Celia?" begged the head when he caught up to her in a room of diminutive seats and colorful pictures.

"I've never had the babies," she keened, as frustrate as the old French peasant who had not looked on Carcassonne.

But the head laughed and swept her into a tight hold.

"There are always," he promised, his eyes holding hers until abashed lashes swept the wild-rose wavering into her pale face, "there are always babies in the good God's gift."
Branwen
BY BRIAN HOOKER

In the days of William the Red, the kingdom of Brynblaw in Wales fell heritage to Branwen, that was daughter of Goryon and Rhona of the line of Caswallon. A kingdom they called it, seeing in those parts every lord of land must name himself no less than king; howbeit, here was indeed enough for some great one of William’s men, lying moreover in border country, and the maid herself reputed beautiful. Therefore while England lay momentarily in some sort of peace, the king sent armies under Gabriel Fitzwarren, that this land also might be added to the realm. Now the keep of Brynblaw sat high on a black rock, well stored of food and water, and the whole countryside one hornet-swarm of ragged Cymry with their bows of elm. So Fitzwarren sat down before it with his knights and the siege endured the best part of a year.

Of Branwen I tell the tale. She was a tall creamy creature, sharp-bosomed and dark-haired, and her eyes blue under heavy lashes; low-spoken also, and slow to scorn or smile. The air sweetened where she went. She had a still gaze at nothing while one spoke with her, so that folk said she had the dream. And every soul about Brynvel, from her father’s cousin that was man-lord of the place to the last starveling in the hills, was at once her kinsman and her slave; the lowest was of her blood, and she too high above the highest for him to be more. Now a woman need be old where all men will die for her and none dare drink her eyes. Branwen was twenty, the life in her like a tuned harp-string; and the long siege filled her full of emptiness. Love came no nearer than the singing of the bards in hall, whereto she listened nightly and looked at nothing; and as for her chance of going captive to England, a barony plucked for marrying, she was not one to think of that. She had the pride of her people, and there is no more to say than so.

In one matter she belied her seeming, that she was in all ways quicker than she seemed. One night at supper the kern that served her overset the wine. For another woman there had been a gown fouled; but Branwen moved even while the cup was falling. The fellow yet knelt when she stood over him, and his hair was yellow as corn and thicker and finer than her own. Before he moved, she had been angry and then scornful of her anger, and so gave order that he should not be beaten, seeing no harm was done. His eyes also were yellow, like hawk’s eyes, and his teeth white and strong. He grinned up at her shamefastly enough, and slunk away; and Evan the gray wolfhound stalked behind
him, snarling. So that was done and she
back in her chair by when the steward
could run with towels to wipe the wine.
She looked at nothing, and thought to
have seen that yellow head before; it was a
thing to note, by cause that few among her
folk were fair. He might have been a
month among them, haply a messenger that
came in from the King of Powys about that
time. She might ask the steward mopping
at her feet, but would not for scorn of
wondering at all. I would have you note
how she thought twice or thrice, and yet
moved sooner than another.
Also she could pass nothing by unseen;
and that gave her no rest. In the defend-
ing of the keep there must be daily a dozen
trifles found amiss; whereof she kept silent,
as hating a woman meddlesome in the af-
fairs of men. One of her maidens walked
duckwise, and another's nails were bitten.
She might not avoid her eyes from the
hands of this one nor the knees of that;
nor from the shock head of the fellow that
spilt her wine. He did naught other than
the rest; yet there was his yellow thatch
among the others, like a byzant among
pennies. By mid-Summer she chilled at
the sight of him, and then fretted that her
flesh would so single out an underling.
She spoke to him not more than twice: the
one time he fondled Evan the hound,
whereas none but herself should lay a hand
upon the beast; and again of a close August
afternoon upon the walls (for she feared
arrows as much as raindrops) where she
found him with a bow in his hand and his
hair flying, shooting and shouting with the
best. She bade him shortly be off to his
cookpots and leave fighting to his betters;
a small man, hardly of a height with her-
self, square-faced, and his back flat and
broad. She went to bed that night hot and
thirsty, and her maids had an evil time
thereof. The nail-biter wept long enough
to be well cursed for sobbing.

O

UT of black sleep came howls and
clashings and a flicker of light about
the castle. Before one might hush the
screaming girls, an ax bit the door thrice,
then broke it inward; and there came
swiftly a short man with yellow hair, hav-
ing a torch in his left hand held high and
in his right a dagger. The bound Evan
crouched apace, then sprang for his throat.
He parried the leap with his torch as a
sword puts aside a sword-thrust, and swung
crosswise with his dagger. No need to look
that way. His eyes found Branwen and
he laughed. While she caught breath, he
had flung the torch underfoot, and around
her a cloak from off the bed; and she was
over his left shoulder in the darkness half-
way down the stair. By then she had done
struggling, having not known before the
sheer strength of a man's arms: they were
two ropes of iron about her bosom and her
knees; and as for screaming, no one would
hear her through such a din. She waited
for a chance to throw him, but he went
swiftly, balancing like a dancer, out
through the north hall and the postern and
so down the rough path to the foot of the
rock. He dropped her there, and she
found words to say while he blew shrill
upon his fingers. Presently came a lad
with a great horse. That was the first time
the yellow man ever spoke to her, and he
said, "Behind or before, how will my lady
ride?"

He would have mounted her behind him,
but she fought away; whereupon without
more words he lifted her flatlong across the
saddle like a sack of meal, and so away
through gloom and crashing branches. He
saved her maybe what he might; but none
the less rode headlong while the boughs
swept her hair and the plunging gallop of
the great beast shook the breath out of
her; so that she thought to die a dozen
times, and in the end fell into what might
be sleep or swoon.

It was a sleep at last, certainly; for she
dreamed of her rose-garden in flames, and
no escape from it; and then of a rain that
drowned the fire. Out of that she shiv-
ered herself awake into clear morning; and
she lay in a brown glen among pines.
There were three ferns, the tallest of them
broken, and beyond that a gray horse
feeding; with reins of red leather hanging
down. That brought back memory like a
lump of stone; but when she looked there
was no man anywhere to be seen. She
wasted some time wondering; howbeit
there was the horse, and none to bid her
stay. She rose, sore from head to foot;
but then he came back singing and shak-
ing water from his yellow hair. And he
said, nodding, "There is a brook down
yonder, beyond sight."

She glared and went, wondering more;
for the brook was a good bow-shot off, be-
hind rocks. Horse or no horse, let her once turn aside through the forest and a score of men might seek in vain. Moreover it was pure chance but she had ridden clean away unhindered, and no use to follow. He might be watching; and she caught the cloak about her. Also he might now have no care whether she went or stayed. And with that she turned back biting her under lip; first of all, she would understand what had befallen. He gave her cheese and honey and white bread out of a napkin and a flask of wine. She stared at nothing, and saw how he stood straight and looked straight, and drank after her and ate with the two fingers. Of a sudden, she said—

"Thou art a Norman snake, and where is the messenger of Owen Powys?"

He laughed: "In your Welsh heaven, but I bore his message true enough. There was no help from there. So when I could, I let in my friends to your castle. The sign was when I showed myself upon the wall."

She said:

"I know that. Why am I here, and not among your people?"

"Because thou art Lady of Brynlaw, and I a third son with all mine earldom in my shoe. They would take thee to London, a king's ward, and the like of me might go howl for my lady moon. There it was; take now or want forever, and no more of it. See now!" He marked with a stick upon the ground. "Here we be, some twenty miles from Brynlaw keep, where by now they guess that we are gone together. That is at worst nine hours. North lies Powys, and south and west Fitzwarren's men, with a hue and cry after the thief who stole a queen; and your Welsh folk all hereabout, loving me as crows love a lost owl. Eastward then go we, by Gwent and Severn water, into Dene Forest. I shall be outlaw doubtless, when word goes to the king. But thereafter I am still to be caught." He spoke as a child stealing apples from a tree.

Branwen said only, "And the end here-of?"

"O, for that, a man does what he may, and the rest he leaves to Fortune."

"Is it fortune what I shall do?"

He nodded, smiling with his yellow eyes: "I cannot watch forever. Run away if it please thee, or slip a knife in me asleep. Meanwhile I have my good hour."

She looked at nothing, and presently he stood up and said—

"I am Francis Yvon Marie de la Roche-foret, and I make thee offer of marriage."

Branwen answered when she could hold her voice: "I will be a bitter bride for thee as ever Lyr's daughter was to the King of Ireland. Thou shalt not boast of me."

He did not frown, but thought gravely, drawing his mouth askew, and at last saying:

"Peradventure this also had to be. I have never carried off a maid before."

She said nothing to that, and he went to make the horse ready. By then she brought herself to say—

"Another matter: am I to be clothed fitly, or is that also fortune?"

He stared at her huddled in the cloak, then burst fairly into laughter:

"No, by all saints! That was pure blind babe's folly. Here have I planned and plotted, and beshrew me if ever in my life I thought how ladies array themselves to sleep!"

Then suddenly he grew very solemn, promising to amend that so soon as might be. Branwen was fain to mount and ride, lest she herself take charge of his beshrewing, and to that she would not unbend. Yet by times for a good hour thereafter she felt his shoulders shaking. Here was a ravisher and a blood-foe at once with a brat of a boy unbirthed; and she could have killed him but for longing to box his ears.

What was most strange of all, she found as it were behind wrath and danger a comfort of great peace. The sun warmed the soreness out of her. Her blood ran sweet, and the wind blew bird-song and fresh leaves. The horse was a huge dappled creature as great as any two in Wales, with a back broad as a bed; and the need for holding by the man before her she could not rightly loathe; her heart would hate him, not her hands. He was well born surely. As for his name, that meant nothing to her, whose name kings bore and beggars also. At least he had not held her lightly but rather himself, flinging away all for a few days of her. Plainly the end must lie with her own folk to avenge her or with the Normans to do justice upon him, and so no matter. Her concern was to be a daughter of Caswallon that must
not outlive her own worship, neither be wife to any enemy. Meanwhile they rode by blue sky and white clouds, and through green trees the sunlight falling, all bright as in a painted picture; and like that also, the colored wraith and semblance of adventure, made but for her to look upon.

**MID-AFTERNON,** while they rode under high cliffs along the left, she heard her own voice saying:

"Look—the birds! There be men in front of us?"

"I see." He reined up and laid ear to a tree-trunk. "Mounted, and there may be a dozen or more. O, a pest and a plague and a red murrain!"

She said, "We can turn away down-hill." He shook his head at her: "That way is all farm and village, clear country for a score of miles. Another hour had seen us fairly through, and saved a day's riding. . . . Well, there is yet one chance. Get you down here?"

He set her in a small open glade and rode off among the rocks. Branwen had scarce time to wonder before the Welsh came in sight, hill folk upon small shaggy horses. They cried her name and gathered round her chattering, and some dismounted while they spoke with her. Then out of the slant eye of the sun came five long arrows, and never a one in vain; and after that a huge horse headlong, that bore upon his back a sword and a shout and a flash of yellow hair. The shock flung down all before him. There were yells and horses' bellies, and hands clutching for their weapons. A dozen horses galloped riderless, and over them that stayed the gray beast ramped and trampled iron-footed, his rider swaying and striking and foaming with a blade that bore ten ways at once. Men scurried for shelter of the trees, bending their bows. And Branwen found herself swung to saddle and away upon their road, whither none followed them. If they were shot after, at least no shaft came near.

There was no thought while they rode hard out of the hills and clattered through running water, swinging at last a wide circle eastward around the hear of the vale. But that night Branwen lay long awake. For her delay she had been made, as it were, a decoy against her own people; and that shame she would not abide. The shadow beside her breathed more slowly. She knew not whether was the greater marvel, his force of hand among so many or his wit to plan between two breaths the one craft that might avail. He could scarce have hidden her unwilling, not fought well with her cumbering him; or if they had burst through suddenly, so must they have been followed, or brought down with arrows. Yet from ambush one man might peradventure set upon a score and so mishandle them as to escape while they were still amazed. All this that she saw now he had seen momentarily at need, even how she would unawares draw the Welsh around her, unhorsed and unready for his onset. Surely this was a great man of war.

She leaned over and slid out his dagger. Over his heart his sword-belt lay, and that might turn the blade; but presently the moon fell upon his face, and his throat below the sunburn was white and softer than her own. Yet it was not that withheld her, nor indeed any sort of fear, but the sheer weight of sleep upon him; as we know neither raven nor wolf nor serpent will harm a man asleep. If he sighed or stirred an eyelash, or so much as fell a-dreaming, that should have been his bane. For hate meanwhile, she thought upon her fame with her own people, that now not even vengeance might amend. Though he were slain, there would still be that debt to pay. Death could make that no better, nor life worse. She had become by him a thing that must not be, and therein willing or unwilling was no matter, nor whether she did or suffered wrong, for the wrong was against the blood of Caswallon running in her veins.

And out of that thought came another suddenly, like frost and fire. What it was I tell not as now, lest by dispute I spoil the tale; but ye shall hear truly what befell. She began to laugh softly and to nurse her folded hands. Presently she moved between him and the light, because if he slept so he might be struck with madness. Without awakening, he sighed and flung out an arm. And laughing still, she held him close upon her bosom, and so fell asleep under the moon.

In the morning he said:

"I have taken thought for thee to be well clothed. Yonder is a farmstead, and the men all gone into the fields; and here is money to buy of the women there."

She began then to ask if he thought her
altogether without shame, and he to swear
that no man was within eyeshot of her way,
but she would go among women alone.
Whereupon she railed upon him excep-
tingly, as though women were not the whole
matter, that she must show herself to them
in such guise, whereas all men were beasts
and naturals andblind blinking owls. So
he went himself, grinning, and was gone an
hour; and during that while she sang songs
and dressed her hair. When he came back
he said:

"It is now I that am shameless, and a
thousand Welsh devils also. But here is
their best."

She held the gown up between her
fingers, demanding whether that might be
the shape of her. But he answered, very
boastful—

"I took thought for that also."

And he drew forth shears and a great
needle; and as for thread, she might un-
ravel the hem. She had the better of him
nevertheless, in that her feet were of no
size with any cow-foddering farm wench.
The hosen would serve to keep her warm
o' nights. But she flung the shoon into a
fair green thorn-bush.

Later that day Francis said to her out
of a long silence:

"I was not to be beaten and I was not
to be slain; also thine eyes are like two
pools of deep water having the moon in
them."

She answered nothing, neither did he
turn to look. But there may have been
some truth in that saying.

THEREAFTER and for all their way
together, the manner of their fellow-
ship was changed. For without word or
rede, the hate between them, whether of
blood warfare or of their two selves, fell
as though it had never been; so that in all
sorts there was no grudge remaining, but
they went in laughter and good-will; yet
not lover-like, but rather as old friends
together, or as a pair long wedded whose
fire broadens into sunshine, the merry
company of man and wife. Most of all
were they changed as toward the end of
their adventure. For we know how, com-
monly a man runneth reckless in sorrow
or great joy, as in drinking of wine to-
ger they care naught, but rouse and
riot as if that night should last forever;
whereas women keep tryst rather with to-
morrow, riding the nightmare not un-
bridled; and though they buy dear, yet will
they count the cost.

But of these two it was now Francis who
schemed and forebode the more and left
to fortune less. Branwen had neither reck
nor care nor sign of brooding, but flung
berserk into life as the old heathen riding
into battle, blind against hope and fear.
Nor yet grimly neither, but making the
future a closed door, to stand with her
back against it upon the threshold laugh-
ing, and the key hidden in her bosom. For
the rest, she tried herself upon him in a
thousand ways, how he would answer this
or that, if she could lure him here or drive
him yonder, and how far cross him before
his will should waken. So a child does
always with its mother, and so peradven-
ture all of us with God. Their tongues
went all day long, speaking of many
things; but of themselves most, and least
of any plan or counsel. She learned of
him French until he no longer laughed
thereat, and a hundred tales of camp and
court and of his life before, and of the
Red King holding his crown among the
barons like a wolf lording over wolves,
while abroad Robert and at home Henry,
the younger brother, waited with dripping
tongues. Of her in turn he had the ges-
ts of Arthur and his chivalry, the wisdom
of the bards and of their worship (for she
was a very faithful heathen) and many songs
which they sang low together, lest any one
should hear.

Upon a day she asked what it was to be
an outlaw. He told her:

"Whoso avoideth justice and will not
come to judgment, he is adjudged outside
the law. Him any man may take or slay,
and none shall give him aid, so long as the
king's writ shall run. But if the king die,
then there is no law, because law cometh
of the king; and so all men alike live law-
less until they crown another."

Branwen answered—

"Then am I outlaw to mine own people,
so as for me no king's death shall avail;
but while I live shall no harm come upon
thee."

He thought well at this time to ask of
her forefathers and of her place and power.
But she pulled his hair and said that she
was no man's daughter, born of a drop of
milk upon an acorn like the White Lady.
of Penmawr, and she would turn into an oak-tree if he doubted her.

Of Fitzwarren's men they had no tidings that side of Dene Forest, haply because the whole border was on fire against the Norman, so that twenty spears must fight and feed and find the way to follow where they two could slip unseen. Yet they were scarce across Wye water before they saw far down the valley the flash of sunlight upon armor. By so little had Fortune turned upon their side. Nevertheless, they stood now in fair safety, having for hiding-place the whole sweep of forest between Wye and Severn and so northward, an ill place for man-hunting. They left the horse behind, having now more need of secrecy than swiftness; and there was none to spy or make report of them. They lived like the king's deer whereupon they fed, and of whose hide Branwen fashioned herself more seemly shoon. Sun and wind burnt her rosy brown, a ripe fruit for bloom and a young doe for wildness. She could never be weary. Their days and nights were free as the greenwood, their dwelling, and like Summer's own self the sweeter for wealth of that which might not long endure. Francis must plot and ponder till his eyes grew hollow, lest ill hap take them unawares. As for now all was well, but they could never bide the Winter, nor was it fitting for her, being what she was, to live beastly and beggarly for his sake.

"But we may yet win down-circling the hills to the New Forest and so to Normandy over-sea. The king's writ runneth not there, and Duke Robert will make us welcome. For my friends here, no force; I have naught to give why they should venture upon my quarrel, neither will Henry himself dare to outface the king."

To all such counsel Branwen was deaf and daft, laughing him out of thought or by times pleading with him to let their good hour abide, so that he knew not what to make of her.

Nevertheless, his will being set, she would not counter him outright. He bore her off at last, unwilling and wistful as a child led from play, and he sore troubled and forethoughtful. They crossed Severn by night under full moon. And it befell that Branwen, soon as the ripples lapped about her knees, halted and caught her breast, saying—

"I see my death in this water."

And to his comforting she said:

"Nay, it is not shadow I see nor stream nor moonlight, nor any certain thing, but the death of me in this water under the moon."

He carried her over, laughing, and she took no sort of harm. But by hours thereafter she grew evermore mad-merry, so as he could hardly move her out of dalliance nor hold her from wanton running into danger for a jest.

I have heard of this thing among the Bretons and the Irish also, how some having advision of their doom fall as it were under a glamour of eerie gladness until the coming of their time, being as their word is, "fey." But the truth of that matter no man knoweth. Certainly we be none the wiser through giving quaint names to a thing unknown.

Now when they came to the New Forest it was night, for their use was to fare by darkness. They woke late to find the deer running every way and enough smoke eastward for a great army. Thereat Francis grew black dismayed, cursing and pestling as his manner was in such case; seeing if they had come blind upon a king's hunt, the lines by then might be drawn circling half the forest, and they caught and driven like the deer. Branwen gave him no more help than laughter and tempting him to stay; but he bade her grimly to be still while he went forth to see, leaving her safe-hidden for the nonce.

Mark now that I say naught of women altogether, if they be thus or so, but this one at least abode maybe an hour, itching with eagerness. Then she set forth to spy for her own part. She lurked about some while seeing little, though all around she heard hounds baying. There was a wood-cutter gathering fagots into his cart, as though nothing was toward.

And once where she cowered breathless in a brake, a white-faced hairy rascal slunk by, muttering and shaking as with a fever. He was clad like a plowman, yet had a good bow and sticking under his belt, two arrows. After that she came upon a knoll overlooking a green glade wherein one oak-tree stood alone. She was minded to climb that and there hide; but of a sudden she heard horses and lay close.

Into the glade two men came riding richly habited, and stayed under the tree,
pointing hither and yon as if they disputed a matter. Branwen peering between fern-leaves held her breath; there was no doubting the arms and the red hair of that one, nor the bearing of the other toward him. Here was he whose death should yield her man his life. And even while she thought that, somewhere a bow twanged and a shaft struck him fairly through the back. He slid loose out of his saddle and lay coughing. The other never looked what way the shot had come but whirled his horse away southward, spurring as though the hounds of hell were on his trace.

Branwen bent over the king before he died. His eyes blinked at her, and he strove horribly to speak. While she leaned there, a second arrow buzzed in her ear and stung her shoulder; but none other followed, and there was no further sound nor sign.

The hurt was but small. She stood a moment with her hand to her side and looked at nothing. No law now until the new king should be crowned. That would be Henry, if he moved in time. In the end Robert might prevail by gathering behind him the power of the great lords. Meanwhile a man did what he might, and the rest he left to Fortune. She took the ring from off the Red King's finger, and turned eastward, toward the rising smoke. When the way was clear enough, she ran.

She came there not before dusk, yet with light enough still to read blazonry; whereby she made out the pavilion of Henry the Prince, and that he was there. So far her fortune held. The men before the door fell away from sight of the ring in her hand as though it had been black enchantment. Within was a still man with quiet eyes, not like his brother. He did not move, neither made any show of wonder, while she stood before him, saying—

“I am Branwen of Brymlaw, and I am here to drive a bargain with thee.”

He answered quietly:

“I know; no need to tell thy tale. But a bargain is where each hath what other wanteth. And thou hast naught to give, neither gold nor land nor hand, being a king's ward and lesson to an outlaw.” It seemed strange to her that he understood French of her speaking, because that tongue had been as it were a plaything between Francis and herself alone.

She gave him the ring. He grew red, even the eyes of him, but his voice did not change. Out of a silence he said, “Speak plain. What is thy news worth?” And she answered:

“To thee a kingdom; but the price is the life of a man. Give me Francis of Rochefort, his freedom and his wedding, and I tell all.”

He watched her, standing hot-faced while she looked at nothing and thought suddenly how he had spoken Welsh to try her and she had answered unawares. Presently he said in French:

“Thou hast my word. Now make good thine own.”

So she told him shortly what was done. Mid-way he stopped her, while he called in a page and said:

“Horses. We ride to Winchester in secret. I say, in secret.” And when the boy was gone, he asked her— “With good fortune truly I owe thee my crown; but why shall I owe this mad lover a bride and a barony?”

Branwen answered:

“Nay, rather what shall this lover owe thee? For if I wed some great one, that is his due only, and small thanks; but wed me Francis and so fast thou raisest up a small man to greatness; and by many such thou shalt make head against the great.”

Thereupon Henry snorted, saying he had himself some such thought, those many years. But while he spoke, suddenly the curtains flung aside and the men brought Francis, bound and with a smear of blood across his cheek. It was half dark in the tent by then, and she in shadow. And when she would have gone to him, strangely the shadow seemed to fill and swim with moonlight, and there were ghosts of trees and around her heart a chill like water rising; yet through that as it were very far away beyond a film of sickness, she could hear him say:

“Having lost her, I came for a last hope to beg your favor with the king. But she is here.”

Henry said, glaring at him:

“She is here, having fled to me. Thy life is twice forfeit, the second time to her, and I have promised her justice upon thee.”

Branwen would have spoken, but the faintness held her.

Francis answered:

“I am outlaw, and thou brother to the king. Nevertheless that is a lie. Man to
man, I would make thee swallow it." And he glared back again with his yellow eyes, more like a hawk than ever. With that as it were the veil broke, and Branwen ran to fall upon his shoulders, while Henry laughed quietly, bidding them set him free. Then he looked round upon them who stood there, saying—

"I see that ye be living men."

There was a silence, wherein they all gazed one at another. Henry went on softly:

"Therefore I see that ye forget the coming of this lady hither and all that hath passed since. For these things I will have no living man remember. Look ye to it." Then to Francis he said: "I will give thee back the lie. For thou art no longer outlaw, nor am I now the king's brother, but the king." Francis knelt then and swore his service; but Branwen hardly might speak or bear herself as was fitting, because of her sickness that was not yet quite gone.

Of their wedding at Winchester there is no need to tell, nor of their way back toward Brynlaw, whither they went slowly by the straight road with a rich following. For Henry bade them go make of Brynlaw a strong place and true, a bulwark of England upon the western side and a nest of good archers and spearmen against his need.

But the tale ends at Severn water, where they came at the end of a fair day's journeying; and that was by Avon mouth below Bristol, where Severn widens to the sea. Over against that lay the company from Brynlaw come to meet them, both Welsh and Norman, the bards and chiefstains with sundry of Fitzwarren's men. And on the morrow they would cross and go home together in all manner of gladness and merrymaking, because their queen was come back to her own.

Through the day Branwen was like a flame of laughter, harvesting as it were youth and Summer in her heart to fling broadcast the treasury thereof, and playing a thousand jests; in such wise that the train rode with song and joyance, a May-day in September. There was no man's heart but knelt to her, nor so much as a pursed mouth among her women; and even Francis that had seen the like in her a month long found cause of wonderment. She sang the sun down and the stars into the sky until the camp drowsed away to rest. Then after midnight when all slept, she slid alone out of the pavilion like a shadow, and down to the waterside, because it was come time to pay the price. This was that thought of hers the night of the moonlight and the dagger, whereof I told not aforetime. By her way of it, she was then made a shame to her own blood. And for that her life must pay. Though she had slain the man, that were no better; nor yet worse though she might love and serve and save him, because afterward her death should leave all clean. Ye have seen how she did, being already fain of him. I will not say but in this may have been some lure of martyrdom such as women seek; for they, being thrifty of all else, yet love to spend themselves; or having reason for sorrow, will glorify the more sorrow beyond reason. Howbeit, I tell the tale as it is told.

She sat upon a stone, looking out over the broad water that was dark along-shore and mid-way bright under a moon swimming between torn clouds. On the far side the fires of her own people twinkled like tiny stars. What they thought of her now she knew, for all the courtesy of their coming; but they should learn truth tomorrow. Melion would be there and Meredith and all the bards; they should make a song upon her name, to be sung last of the chronicles of Caswallon. As for Francis, he would not know then or ever; but there was no help for that. If he must doubt, she must die; and their two moons had been worth buying. A little more, and the cost thereof might grow too dear. Far away in the stillness a cock crew untimely, for it was yet long until dawn.

She rose and drew the three circles on the sand, and standing in the center spoke shortly with God. Then she went into the water. The coldness thereof startled her and set her shivering; it was like frozen fetters dragging at her knees. Howbeit, she pushed on until the ring of it closed round her breast, and then flung forward, swimming strongly. The far side might be two miles or three or four: she had only to go straight out beyond her strength. Presently she was no more cold; the stream upbore her, and the moon laid down a shimmering golden path for her guidance. Only that path was over-long. Her heart throbbed and within her was a sick fear

ROMANCE
growing, and therewith anger, as though it were not enough but she must have so long labor and unease to such an end. She could not sink deep nor yet breathe water.

Suddenly came a vile clutch of pain, and another worse, bending her like a bow and with that so bitter a crying out of life in her that she could scarce forbear calling. She set her teeth and choked and bit down her heart.

Then began a black struggle that would not end, whereof she knew only rage for the flesh of her fighting against her soul that would not let her rest. The world swelled and shrank, and the blackness boiled fever-like with foul dreams; and like that also she swung by times far off out of herself that fought there, and felt scorn thereof; and that should have been death, but was not, because herself could not break free. Her seemed she fell asleep momentarily, and woke again into more struggling, only now there were lights in it and voices leaving her no peace. And she had done enough, and it was not good nor fair that she must struggle any more. At last she lay quiet, fearing even to be aware of quietness. Her eyes opened upon light that was grayer than the moon; and where she was mattered not, alive or dead, be-

cause for this moment there was not any pain.

Thereafter she was in a fisher-hut, warm and restful, among certain of her own women; and the bards were there also, Melion and Meredith and Lot, the son of Gavarn. They told of her finding by the fisher folk, dead but for their skill to win back breath into her. Thereby they swore she had paid all, so that her life was now as though verily she had died and been reborn, a morrow that was yesterday washed clean, even as each new life shall be. And she told them also what remained out of that yesterday, for whose sake she was fain to live.

The air seemed like afternoon. She looked at nothing and heard knocking at the door and saw one of her maidens go duckwise to open it. And Francis came in very quietly. For a long time he sat by her without speech, because there was no more to tell, while she ruffled his yellow hair. At last he said—

"Hast thou made peace now, so that we all may live?" And Branwen answered slowly—

"I have done what I may; the rest I leave to Fortune."

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**The Romancer**

I DID not know until I saw your face
That all my days had been a search for you—
My wanderings in countries old and new
Only the zest to learn your hiding-place.
I did not know in following the trace
Of beauty down smooth seas of listless blue,
In towered city, dim cathedraled view—
I was but lighting shrines you were to grace.

With you I am as one at last come home—
Content to watch the twilights in your hair,
To marvel in your face, to touch your hands.

Yet looking in your eyes sometimes I stare
Further than I was ever known to roam—
On mysteries remote as unmade lands.

*Hazel Hall*
The Conqueror

BY SAMPSON RAPHAELSON

WHEN a certain great governor wants to feel the pulse of the nation's business, he invites David Burns for a personal talk. There always is a peg in the governor's mansion for David's hat, and there is a story about that peg.

The first time David called to see the governor, there was a misunderstanding. The attendant who first saw him wasn't impressed. David was just a tall, thin, pale-faced man with an indecisive manner. And when David spoke, the attendant became panic-stricken; how had this clerk, or piano-tuner, or whatever he was, been allowed through the front entrance? For David's voice was pitifully inadequate, it seemed to the attendant—colorless, in fact, and he became insolent. A new attendant appeared next day, and the governor, who has ideas of his own, had a peg set in the wall, underneath which was the typewritten inscription—"For David Burns' hat."

David Burns is beginning to get old now, but in the business world his name is still magic. Advertising men still talk of him as actors talk of Bernhardt, as engineers talk of Goethals. Not very long ago I was struck by the unusual character of a new advertising achievement of his, and I mentioned it to the governor.

"Burns?" said the governor. "David Burns? Of course—but he's a genius!" And to the governor that seemed to end the discussion.

I am surprised that it never seems to have occurred to the governor—or to any one else for that matter—that David Burns' greatest handicap in life was his genius. The governor seems to have forgotten those fifteen years during which David Burns' genius held him back, blocked him at every turn, brought failure after failure, made his heart bitter and his soul sick.

FROM the day when David Burns was graduated from a Middle Western university up to his fortieth year, his life was a series of brilliant mistakes, with one exception. The exception is that he married Mary Jane Ogden. Mary Jane was just the kind of wife David should have, and pretty.

David married her the day after graduation, and he took her to Chicago together with their marriage license, his diploma and nothing much else but a passionate interest in life. For six months he tried to satisfy that interest by reporting on a newspaper at twenty-five dollars a week.

At the end of the six months he came home with a bouquet of violets for his young wife.

"I've quit my job," he announced. "I'm going to start tomorrow as office boy to James Shoulder Tuttle at twelve dollars a week, and you'll have to go back to stenography for a while."

Mary Jane's eyes were not worried. She didn't say "Why?" which would have been
logical; she took the violets and buried her nose in them and smiled at David.

"I'll tell you why," said David. "I'm sick of the newspaper game. That's what it is—a game. No growth in it and no money—nothing but tobacco-spitting policemen and cigaret-clouded cynicism. I wasn't built for wheeling photographs from divorcees. It'll be different working with Tuttle. He's a big man. His advertising business is vital, and it is growing. I want to be near him. His only opening was for an office boy. I'll not be at twelve a week very long."

But he was—for a year. Then Tuttle called him into his office.

"Burns," the advertising executive said, "you've been here for a year, and you're the poorest office boy I ever had. At the end of this week you're fired."

David will never forget that interview.

The picture of James Shoulder Tuttle as he sat there branded itself fiercely into David's consciousness. Power, power incarnate, is what that face blazed. The great head with its shaggy black hair, the gray eyes, level and uncannily steady in their gaze, the hooked piratical nose and the long underslung jaw which drove with mighty impact into a chin as grim and uncompromising as a stone wall—every detail of that face leaped into David's spirit and frightened him into a consuming antagonism. In his waking moments and in his sleep David never lost the picture of that piratical head, the head of a fighter, and never escaped the intonation of that deep, booming voice—the voice of a conqueror.

David replied somewhat unsteadily, in that colorless voice of his.

"During this year," he stated, "I have given you about fourteen ideas. Figuring conservatively, they have saved you ten thousand dollars. How many other office boys could do that?"

"During this year," rumbled the answer, "my desk has not been dusted half the time. My inkwells have always run dry until I reminded you to fill them. My mail has never received efficient care. These are the things I hired you to do. These are the things you failed in."

David leaned across to the big desk.

"Good Lord!" he broke out, his thin voice cracking. "Any ten-year-old kid—"

A lift of Tuttle's shaggy brow shut him off. He hated himself for his instinctive obedience, and he hated Tuttle more.

"Show me a ten-year-old kid who can handle this job as I want it handled," Tuttle said deliberately, "and I'll show you a kid who will loom head and shoulders above the likes of you when he's grown up. One man in a thousand might have given me the ideas you gave, but one man in ten thousand is fitted to be a successful office boy. I have half a dozen men within thirty feet who are hired especially for ideas. I never raise their salaries. If they were worth more, they'd be out on their own, making it. If they find they're worth more, they'll leave us, anyway. My idea men are my only gamble. They have temperament. You can't build a business on mediocre men with temperament. If I had to cast off ballast in a crisis, I'd fire the idea men first.

"The rest of my force," Tuttle went on, "is as safe and as sure as life insurance. They grew up with me. Their lives have welded into this business. If I thought any one of them couldn't step in here and be a better office boy than you, I'd fire him—even if he had put forty years into this agency! . . . This isn't a diatribe. It is an expression of the principles on which my life and my business are built. Think it over. It may help you—but not with this organization. We're through with you."

When David told Mary Jane about it that evening, for once she miscalculated. She could see David as he was—as he had looked to Tuttle—a vital figure, razorlike in his leanness, with strange eyes which even then made him a potent personality—blue eyes, a very deep blue, eyes that might have been a woman's eyes or a child's eyes, but for the impression of vision which they somehow gave. They were not bold eyes; rather they seemed to hold a mild but absorbing curiosity—a sort of gentle illumination.

So when David ended the tale as he had begun it, with a groan at his own colorless, inadequate figure and voice, she did not sense the extent of his hurt. She sat up very straight.

"I don't think your voice is colorless," she told him. "And I don't think you're inadequate. And I don't think—" She stopped for he was not listening. His fists
only clenched tighter. *He* could not forget how feeble and inconsequent he had sounded in contrast to that man—like a child wailing against the roar of the ocean.

He spoke slowly:

"He cheated me out of a year—whole year. He cheated me, and he beat me today!"

DAVID went to see John Andrews. Andrews was a wizened little Scotchman who made a living from a diminutive advertising agency through his control over one healthy account—a low factory. A week before, Andrews had lost this one account to the Tuttle Agency.

The little man was making brave pretense at being busy when David came in.

"I know about Tuttle," David said without preliminaries. "I know something else, too. The United Biscuit Corporation is going to change its advertising connection. I'll get the account for you if you will give me a half-interest in this business."

Andrews smiled for the first time in a week.

"I'll give it all to you, laddie," he said; "and may I ask your name?"

But when David got through talking with him, he looked ten years younger.

David came home that evening carrying a large, awkward package. As he set it on the floor, Mary Jane flew toward him.

"Is it a surprise?" she demanded.

"You bet!" said David.

He opened it, and box after box of biscuits came tumbling out—dessert wafers, tea biscuits, soda crackers, oysterettes, cheese "sandwiches"—boxes of every size, of every color—several dozens of them.

David assumed an attitude. He was quite gleeful.

"The significance of these boxes," he said, gestulating impressively with his forefinger, "is that not one of them contains a product of the United Biscuit Corporation. Mary Jane, I bought only what the grocers recommended. And the surprise," continued David, "is that you're not going to be a stenographer any more."

The week that followed was a busy one for David and Andrews. Twenty thousand mimeographed copies of a certain letter were sent to grocers and grocery jobbers throughout the length and breadth of the land. Return post-cards were enclosed. Followed a few anxious days, and then the replies began coming in.

TWELVE men were waiting in the great office of the president of the United Biscuit Corporation. Eleven of these men had gone through a minor strategical campaign. When they had entered, each man had found a chair and, watching his neighbor to see just how near to the president's desk he was drawing, had adjusted his own point of vantage accordingly. This silent generalship had resulted in a semicircle of eleven men between the glistening mahogany desk of the executive and the beautifully paneled office walls. David, sitting far back by the door, seemed a most incongruous figure in this gathering.

Samuel Perkins sat at the left of the semicircle. Perkins was vice-president of the great Qued & Gaylord Agency, and was known to the advertising world as the "hundred-thousand-dollar beauty." He looked about him with suave interest. Most of the men in the room, conversing so genially yet with a certain nervous absent-mindedness, were old acquaintances, tempered in the fire of many a business battle.

There was Dick Butts, smoking a cigar, fat, self-satisfied, quick and resourceful as a panther. Yonder, his short body hunched up tensely, sat Algir Kirk, bulky, impatient, savagely brilliant. Sprawling in the middle of the semicircle, his long legs crossed, was Bob Armstrong, a huge, raw-boned man, silent, slow, deadly efficient. But who the devil was that near the door?

Perkins stared curiously at the unimpressive figure of David Burns. David was sitting modestly straight, idly gazing out of the window. By his side on the floor was a bulging suitcase. Perkins studied him keenly, but David's eyes were turned away.

The president came in with a bustling dignity. He walked about, shaking hands with the representatives of America's eleven biggest agencies, most of whom he knew. As he turned to David, a puzzled look came into his face, but the look quickly disappeared as he noted the suitcase. "Carrying baggage," he thought. He shook hands democratically with David.

"Glad to see you, Mr. —ah—"

"Burns," David supplied in his thin voice.
“Heh?” inquired the president. “Didn’t catch it.”

“Burns,” he repeated more loudly, but the president already had passed on.

Behind his desk, the executive leaned forward dramatically.

“Gentlemen,” he announced, a twinkle in his eye, “I have you at my mercy!”

He leaned back expansively and lighted a big black cigar. Big black cigars were a religion with the president—for the same reason that he wore white waistcoats. Second only to these was his love, at all times, in all places, upon the slightest provocation, of his little joke. His moment of greatest joy was when you recognized and admired the twinkle in his eye by twinkling back.

Ten of the eleven men smiled politely. Perkins twinkled back. David failed to smile at all and kept blandly studying the cornice of the model factory next door.

“Here’s the situation, gentlemen,” stated the president. “We’re spending a million a year on advertising, and we are doing a half million dollars less business than we should. Our advertising campaigns seem good, but they do not get the business. Our proposition to you is aboveboard and fair. I will have you taken through the works in a body. I will explain to you all the problems of our business—our market, our production, our methods—frankly and in detail. Then it’s up to you to present to me within one month a merchandising plan. The best plan wins; the best man wins. A fair field, gentlemen, and no favorites.”

Perkins arose to protest suavely. His face was ingratiating, with a most engaging touch of depreciation:

“One month is very little time for a thorough-going agency to go over carefully and accurately the problems of an immense organization like yours. I’m sure no conscientious agency would like to assume such responsibility with less than two solid months of investigation and preparation.”

He turned to the others. “Don’t you agree with me, boys?”

There was nothing left for them, apparently, but to agree.

“Two months, Mr. Perkins says,” announced the president. “Two months it is, then?”

A low murmur of assent rose from the semicircle.

“One hour is enough for me!”

They all turned toward the figure near the door. This quiet remark, made in the colorless voice of David Burns, had the explosive effect of a bomb. For an unreasoning second, panic gathered within Perkins.

Slowly David Burns rose to his full height. For the barest instant he turned his eyes on Perkins. David’s eyes were not the eyes of a whippersnapper, of a novice. Perkins suddenly became white-hot with mental acuteness.

David crossed the room, past the discreet bulwark of the eleven old-timers, straight up to the desk of the president.

“Nothing is wrong with your advertising,” he said. He seemed to have forgotten the presence of the other men. “You fall down in your merchandising. Your big loss is on the dessert wafers. In the first place the price is awkward. If they were ten cents or fifteen cents a box, they would sell more easily. But that is not the chief difficulty. The main trouble is that there are too many dessert wafers in that class—good ones, too. There is too much competition for the demand. Put your dessert wafers in a class by themselves. Raise the price to twenty-five cents. You will triple your sales and you will multiply your profits more than ten times.”

David stopped. The president gazed in contemplative silence at David for a few moments.

“I—don’t believe I got your name,” he finally said, and this time he leaned forward the better to hear. Then, twinkling, the president drummed with his fingers on the desk and turned to Perkins.

“What do you think of Mr. Burns’ idea?” he asked.

“I don’t think anything of it at all,” was the prompt reply. Acquiescent murmur came from the other men.

David turned to Perkins. “Why not?” he inquired mildly.

Perkins had decided against a contumacious manner. He leaned toward David in a very patient and sincere way.

“My dear young man,” he said, “if that is all there were to merchandising, any manufacturer with a difficult product to market could double its price and get rich! It takes the experience of years of investigation to understand the problem of marketing the simplest article. You can’t
make a statement as startling as yours and expect any responsible business man to act on it. It is an open secret that all the agencies represented here will spend two months working right down at the ground with the grocer and the jobber. And none of us would consider this idea of yours for a second, because we know this business well enough to realize that it is—well, to be frank, rather silly. Any jobber will confirm my opinion on your notion, and the jobber knows—he's at the heart of trade. It isn't what you may think in a situation like this one; it's what the grocer and the jobber know.

The president nodded in approval—

"Our business is built on the grocer's experience."

"That's what I thought," said David.

He went back to the suitcase, dragged it forward and opened it. An avalanche of post-cards fell to the floor.

"There," said David, "are about eight hundred post-cards from grocers and jobbers all over the country. They agree with me."

There was a dead silence as David laid a few of the cards on the president's desk.

The president glanced through it quickly.

In spite of the white waistcoat, the big black cigars and his propensity for his little joke, the president had a brain like lightning and an intelligence that had all the subtlety of directness, or he never would have been the president. He read the card through again and then looked up at David. He quite forgot to be expansive.

For young David Burns then began a career which staggered and blinded him with its swift succession of brilliant triumphs. But, high as he went in actuality, brilliant as were his achievements, in his mind he seemed to travel even higher, and his brilliancy seemed to him an incandescence which surely must dazzle all the world—a great quivering white light which made the light of all other men's achievements seem an anemic flicker, like the flicker of a match lighted in a typhoon.

He rose in a course of great zigzag perpendiculars, and he fell more than once. But each drop, for him, was softened by the billowy soft padding of his immense egoism—each drop, until that last one, when his egoism turned to ashes in one searing flash, and he dropped like a plum-

met through vacuum, miles and miles till he landed in a devastating crash. And even then he would have remained blind to everything but the white fire of his own genius and the red flame of his hatred for James Shoulder Tuttle if it had not been for Mary Jane.

With Andrews, the little Scotchman, one office boy, and a stenographer—the four of them at that time constituting the "agency"—he started business. One client they had—The United Biscuit Corporation; advertising appropriation, one million dollars. In a week they had hired twenty men to handle their business.

"Get clever young fellows—with ambition," David commanded. "Devil take experience! We want men to build roads, not men who are traveling ruts. We're not going to do things the way some one else did them. Do it our own way—my way—new ways all the time. We don't want system—system is the first step on the road to stagnation. System eliminates confusion, but we want life. It's life that we want, and where there's life, there's always some confusion. Young men, remember—not old fogies."

"Let's go slow, laddie," he cautioned. "You secured a big thing here, but it's harder to keep big things than to get them. We're starting wonderfully, but we've got to look ahead and see how we're going to finish. Young fellows are fine, but we must have the balance of old—-

Promptly, definitely, with an absoluteness that amounted to passion, David cut him off.

I think Mary Jane was compassionate more than anything else at this stage of David Burns' career. If David had not been so intensely bound up in himself, he would have observed it, surely, and there is no telling what might have happened, for David was not the man to tolerate pity, particularly when all the rest of his world was praising him. But Mary Jane was little more than a safety-valve for David at this time—a silent listener to the tale of his accomplishments and his resolves.

"I've accomplished the first thing," he told her. "I've made myself, on the very qualities Tuttle fired me for. Now I'm going to do the second thing: I'm going to use those qualities to break him."

"Shall we open a bank account, dear?" Mary Jane wanted to know.
“Not yet,” he told her. “I’m only making enough to spend. When I make twice as much, then we can afford to save.”

It took four years for the first fall to come. The magnet of their immense connection with the biscuit people had drawn to them prestige. Using this prestige, David secured half a dozen more accounts of solid dimensions. With his fertile brain—a brain curiously lazy in many ways, but alive with genius when it came to merchandising plans and advertising ideas—he had kept their clients and developed flourishing trade for them. But for every thousand dollars the agency took in, they spent, in spite of Andrews’ frantic efforts, more than a thousand.

“Oh, ladie, ladie, we’re hell-bent for failure!” the distraught Scotchman would cry whenever the figures, which did not lie, were brought to him. “Here’s Simpson, who will not give us another dollar of credit. And here’s a bill for advertising space that eats every cent of profit on this deal!”

David would dismiss such protests. “Devil take the bills!” he would throw back. “We don’t succeed in the bookkeeping department. It’s the sales department that’s the life of the business. This difficulty is only temporary, and I’ll prove it. By the end of this week I’ll land the Dayton Tire Company, hook, line and sinker.”

In such instances he was as good as his word. The new account would stem the tide; Andrews’ large weekly drawing salary continued, and all seemed well, outwardly.

WHEN the end came, new business was of no avail. The banks hitherto tolerant, became cold as ice—ruthless with the arm of the law behind them. A receiver was appointed. Andrews put every cent of the several thousand dollars he had saved into the business, in a final desperate effort. David had saved nothing and so had nothing to give. But it was all over, anyway.

That first fall came suddenly, with an unreality that clutched Andrews like a hand of terror but which hardly brushed the surface of David’s cloak of self-sufficiency. And many beside himself still believed.

“We’re with you, Burns, stronger than ever!” business men told him. “You’re free now—no old dead weight to hold you down. You’ll be the biggest advertising man in America, and we’re going to put you there! Good business all around.”

David told Mary Jane about it, boyishly aglow.

“And we’re going to move to New York,” he announced. “Jay Strang’s nephew has half a million that he doesn’t know what to do with. I’m going to use his money to start a new agency, and he gets half the profits.”

Mary Jane, put her hands on his shoulders. Her eyes looked very steadily, very sweetly into his.

“What is Mr. Strang’s nephew going to do besides share the profits?” she asked.

“I believe he has a yacht,” David grinned; “and I hear that he is an excellent dancer.”

“I’m sorry,” said Mary Jane.

“Sorry,” said David; “why?”

“I wish,” said Mary Jane, and her eyes were steadier, sweeter than before, “that you took one plodding, systematic executive—a man like Mr. Tuttle—into the business.”

David did not move, but his face got white, and for a second madness leaped into his eyes.

When he came out of his room an hour later he took Mary Jane’s hands very gently and kissed her lips. The next morning he wired Perkins in New York: “Do you want vice-presidency at $125,000 a year in David Burns Agency?”

The answer came: “Salary O. K. Understanding is that you boss outside and I boss inside.” To which David agreed.

“For you—to make you happy,” he told Mary Jane, and wondered that her eyes did not brighten as much as he expected.

But for a time David was cautious. He consulted with Perkins religiously over every project. And then Mary Jane suddenly became an eager, vivid butterfly that dragged David to theaters and restaurants in the evening.

Business grew. Perkins, with that giant appetite of his for detail, made the new David Burns Agency a marvelous machine, silent-running, accurate and economical. It was a combination that swept things before it like a sharp straight north wind.

At the end of a year, when they incorporated at a million, David wanted to
make it a million and a half, but Perkins advised against it. They wrangled over it for a week, and Perkins won. David didn't like it.

He told Mary Jane about it one evening when they were getting ready for theater.

"By Jove, I wish I could find just one man with vision and nerve—just one!" he told her. "Why, I'll get another three hundred thousand dollars' worth of business in the next six months as sure as you're alive. How can we handle it all on our present capital? I am beginning to dislike that man Perkins. . . . Wear your white evening gown tonight, dear; it becomes you marvelously."

"I don't think I care to go out tonight," Mary Jane said. "I'm feeling tired."

THERE came a day when David rushed triumphantly into Perkins' private office.

"Landed the Imperial Automobile!" he announced. "Ways and means conference tomorrow!"

"We can't handle it," Perkins stated abruptly.

"Can't—" David stared his amazement. "Can't handle it?"

"No. We have more than we can take care of right now. This year should be a year of assimilating with the business we have. If I had my way, I'd drop two or three accounts. We must leave new business alone."

"You're crazy," said David, flatly. He was red with anger.

"I don't think I am," responded Perkins very quietly.

"We can handle it, and we will!" declared David.

David looked at him searchingly for a while.

"I'll resign as soon as you can arrange to replace me," Perkins said at last.

David looked at him searchingly for a moment.

"I can replace you tomorrow morning," he said.

David took the Imperial Automobile account and he worked with a new vigor. And to answer the look in Mary Jane's eyes he tried to be cautious.

But Jay Strang, who was responsible for his nephew's money, began to watch carefully. One day he came to David very quietly—for Strang even then retained a powerful liking and respect for the younger man. They talked for two solid hours and when Strang left, David had sold out his share in the agency.

It was Summer, and David was nervously worn out from the years of unceasing work, so he took Mary Jane West. They spent two outdoor months that were happy. That is, David was happy, and Mary Jane helped him to be. He mentioned his last business experience but once. He talked about Jay Strang then and labeled him a rotter and a fool. And he talked about the mediocrity of business men and their narrowness of vision. He told her of his desire to be in absolute command.

To be boss—absolute boss! During the year that followed this became an obsession with him. To be in full control; to command with a gesture; to set great wheels in motion with a word! The knowledge that his personal manner was hopelessly unimpressive, that his voice was like that of a pale-faced clerk, only made his desire for authority all the more intense, for it brought all the more poignantly to him the memory of that humiliating scene with James Shoulder Tuttle. Alone in his room, he practised low, deep tones by the hour—only to have them fizzle into his ineffectual, colorless speech in the presence of others. It is evidence of a strange streak of boyish vanity in the man that to be able to impress important men with manner and tone meant more to him than the actual potency of his brain.

DURING that year he obeyed the dictates of prudence sufficiently to take a position with Queen & Gaylord as chief merchandising man. They had wired him the offer when he was out West. David had intended to refuse to be an "employee," but Mary Jane pleaded with him—for the only time in her life—and he accepted.

Balanced by the keen, sober men of the organization, David's mind, alive with scores of ideas, was worth a fortune to his employers. His salary was immense, but not as vast as his egoism. Greater than all was his ignorance, which had been preserved intact in its totality ever since he had ceased to be James Shoulder Tuttle's office boy. For, above all things, David Burns scorned a knowledge of detail. De-
tail, he maintained irrevocably, whenever he troubled to talk about it, was for the "organization." The man higher up should be divinely immune from it. "The ship's captain doesn't have to know how to row a boat; that's what the sailors are for!"

There was the time when Gaylord came, amazed, into David's office with a stack of sheets.

"You didn't mean this seriously, surely," he stated, placing the papers before David. "Here you lay out plans for four-color work. The idea, beyond question, is remarkable—great! But you know the appropriation—"

"I don't," David calmly interrupted.

Gaylord paused an instant.

"Oh, that's too bad!" he said then. "I asked Simpkins to go over the figures with you. But regardless of that, you know what four-color work costs—"

"I haven't the slightest idea," in a bored tone.

"What?"

"My dear Mr. Gaylord," David stated with some heat, "I don't know what four-color work costs, or what one-color work costs. You have twelve-dollar-a-week clerks, I believe, who take care of that. Simpkins did come in to me with a stack of figures a mile high, and I kicked him out. I'm not here to fiddle with nickels and dimes. I'm paid for sales ideas and that's what I'm producing."

It was with a sigh of relief that every executive in the organization welcomed the news that David had bought out a small agency which was on the skids, and was to leave—a sigh of relief in spite of his tremendous mental fertility and his undoubted genius.

His own master at last! Lavishly he began. And any doubts that intruded he answered as he had always answered them—"I landed a million-dollar account one week after I was fired as office boy. I can do it again."

And always, subtly but surely in the undercurrent of his feelings, was the hatred for James Shoulder Tuttle. If asked what was the driving-force of his life, he would have answered frankly, "Ambition." But if the egoism that clouded his sight would have cleared away so that he could have seen the truth, he would have answered: "I hate Tuttle. Hate him—hate him and the horror of drudgery he stands for. I want to be bigger than he is—and stay bigger! I want to beat him at his own game. Then I want to break him, and sneer straight into that pirate's face of his with those eyes of ice. I want to hear that voice of his stumble, and falter, and break."

With the great good fortune that now came to him, he became something of a figure among New York's business men. It was an age of clean-shaven men, and David, his vanity craving distinction of appearance, had taken to wearing a Van Dyke beard. With his long, lean body, his pale face with its dark, pointed beard, and his strange, cadenced, colorless voice, he was an unusual and striking figure. But though people pronounced him "interesting," they never called him powerful.

Although the hatred David bore James Shoulder Tuttle was in a way a mania, it might have died away at this stage of his career, but for a certain incident. It was a silly little affair—childish, if you will, but it went to the roots of David Burns' vanity, and so it wounded his soul.

A girl cousin came from California. They took her to dinner at the Vanderbilt. She was frankly thrilled by her first taste of New York. She was in a veritable frenzy of observation and comment.

Important-looking men would pass their table. David would nod to them.

"One of my clients," he would say, and the young woman would look properly impressed.

During dessert the girl suddenly leaned forward excitedly.

"What a wonderful-looking man!" she exclaimed. "Who is he—do you know, Cousin David?"

David and Mary Jane turned to look, and David's face got white.

"He must be somebody terrifically important," the girl chattered on. "Doesn't he look solid—like a rock? Who is—" she turned toward David and stopped short, scared by the look in his face.

It was Mary Jane later who told her Tuttle's name.

David sat back dreamily before the great glass-topped desk in his private office. The sun streamed on the rich reds and blues of the Baluchistan rug. David smiled and told himself that he was happy. The great pressure on his existence was
about to be relieved, and he knew happiness only as an exquisite sensation of relief.

That afternoon would see the beginning of the end. After six years David’s great day had come. The Hubbard Automobile Company, an account that was now the bulwark of the Tuttle Agency, was ripe for capitulation into David’s hands. The next day was to be his fortieth birthday. It would be a fitting celebration. That afternoon he was going to have the final interview with old man Hubbard. Before him on the glass-top desk lay a sheaf of papers, neatly typewritten, which outlined a series of merchandising and advertising plans that would revolutionize automobile selling. David glanced idly through the sheets. His smile deepened in approval.

And then the door opened, and his secretary came in and put a letter on his desk. If he had read the financial reports which had been lying untouched on his side-table for weeks, he would have known before the deadening news which the letter told—that he was bankrupt.

“What are you going to do?” asked Mary Jane.

The crushed look left David’s face. His shoulders stiffened and his eyes burned.

“Oh, I’ll beat him yet,” he said. “And I’ll do it alone—my way!”

She arose without show of emotion and put on her hat and coat. Then she came to David and in that comradely way of hers put her hands on his shoulders. She looked at him for a while in silence.

As David gazed back, he realized for the first time the quality of the light in her eyes. “Good God, it’s compassion,” he told himself; "companion!”

“I’m going away, David,” she told him.

“I won’t be far from you, but I don’t want you to try to find me. You are not a man. I have given you a fair chance to make one of yourself. When you succeed, I’ll come back to you.”

Very sweet and kind and young she was as she stood there for one tearful moment; then she went.

He stepped quietly into the deep-carpeted waiting-room of the Chicago branch of the Tuttle Agency. The room was deserted, except for the blonde young woman at the information desk. Slowly he moved toward the polished mahogany railing which austerely guarded the squatting desk at the furthest end of the long, narrow room. His gait was not decisive, but there was a rhythm in it. His head emerged querulously from his shoulders; it was cocked at an angle; but there was none of the jut of authority in its poise. His face was clear, with the steel-blue color on the chin and jowls from shaving a heavy stubble. His clothes were an indifferent part of the man, except that they seemed to accentuate his leanness and his height.

His eyes were blue—a very deep blue. They might have been a woman’s eyes or a child’s eyes but for the impression of vision which somehow they gave. They were not bold eyes. In fact, there was a sort of mildness about them. Not the mildness of timidity or of failure. It was a mildness, let us say, of eyes which after forty years still can look upon life with trembling curiosity, great humility and an intelligence which comes from a mind that is unafraid.

The blonde at the information desk looked upon him with a cold and preoccupied manner.

“I—” The man hesitated, as a poised person who can afford to be slow might hesitate.

“I should like to see the chief of the copy department.”

His voice was medium in pitch. Ninety-nine men and twenty-five women out of a hundred would have called it colorless.

The girl, fingering a cheap magazine with her right hand, shoved a printed blank toward him with her left. He filled it in.

MR. John Smith DESIRES TO SEE Chief of Copy Staff WITH REFERENCE TO A Job

Young Chatfield glanced up impatiently from the papers before him.

“Sit down, Mr. Smith,” he said crisply. "Talk to you in a minute.”

It was ten minutes before Chatfield’s gaze again took in the presence of the applicant. During those ten minutes John Smith had sat in a rather lost way, his legs timidly crossed, his eyes staring out of the window, apparently in reverie. Leaning back in his swivel-chair, Chatfield regarded John Smith with an air of patronage.

“We have two openings, Mr. Smith,” he
said, drumming with his fingers on the desk. "One for a man in our engraving department, and one for a copy-writer. Which are you applying for?"

It seemed difficult for Mr. Smith to lower his eyes from their contemplation of the building across the street.

"Er—the copy-writer's job, I believe," he pronounced slowly.

"Have you experience writing advertising?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I prefer not to say."

Chatfield's eyes narrowed, and a smile flickered about his lips. He regarded the man more carefully.

"You are pretty well advanced in years to be looking for work without references."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Smith in his diffident way; "I am."

Chatfield stared at him, somewhat amused.

"This isn't getting us anywhere, is it?"

For a second Smith looked at him squarely, and a vague uneasiness came upon the younger man. Smith leaned over so little toward him.

"If I prove to you," he said, "that I can write better copy than any man in Chicago, will you hire me, no questions asked, at forty dollars a week?"

"Mr. Smith," said the other bombastically, "any man at your age who isn't worth more than forty dollars a week isn't worth a cent!"

The older man, whose gaze had wandered again toward the window, did not appear to be moved by this statement. He remained quiet for a while, and Chatfield became annoyed. He did not have whole mornings to waste on elderly incompetents. Just as he was about to speak this thought flatly, Mr. Smith turned that strange gaze upon him again.

"I see," he said hesitantly, "that you are trying to land the account of the American Collar Corporation."

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"There is very little in the field of advertising in this country that is a secret to me," said Mr. Smith in the same hesitating manner, and then looked embarrassed, as if sorry he had said it. He paused. "Mr. Chatfield, if I land that account in fifteen minutes by conversation over the 'phone, will you give me the job?"

That peculiar uneasiness struggled with contempt in Chatfield's manner as he replied—

"If you can, I certainly will."

"Could I be alone for a while, please?" he asked.

Chatfield rose. "I'll be two doors down. Tell the operator to call me when you're through."

Smith got the American Collar Corporation on Long Distance and asked for the advertising manager.

"Jim? This is Dave Burns. Listen, Jim—why don't you people tie up with Tuttle?"

"Hard to decide," came the reply. "We don't really know, ourselves."

"Where's the rub?"

"We-ell—no imaginative force, I'd say."

"Would you say I had imaginative force?"

"You. Gawd, yes!"

"Well, I'm giving the Tuttle people a merchandising plan for you. My only condition is that you don't let on to them that you know where they got it. Don't even mention my name. It's a special favor on my part—personal. How about it?"

"I'm on!"

"Well, good-by and good luck to you, Jim. I'm leaving for several years in the Orient. Going tonight."

"Good-by, Dave. Thanks a thousand times!"

JOHN Smith was an excellent copy-writer, Chatfield admitted freely.

There was nothing startling about his work; it was fresh, lucid, effective, of course—but still it was conventional. No big sweep to it; no striking, new conceptions. Just the sort of work that any good hundred-dollar-a-week man could do. No doubt that John Smith was a find at forty dollars.

The one exception, of course, had been in the amazing plan Smith had presented for the collar people. To Chatfield's credit be it said that he would have told gladly to whoever would listen that John Smith had secured the great collar account. But Smith pleaded with him, begged him with a fervor that was not to be denied, to keep the secret, to take the credit to himself.

Things went on smoothly.

"Reliability," Chatfield told himself comfortably one day as he thought of the
other; "that's the outstanding quality in this chap. Steady, hard worker. Never makes a mistake and never bothers me with blue-sky million-dollar plans. Good thing to have a middle-aged man in the office. Thank Heaven, though," he added, piously, "I'm not like him!"

One day Smith was called into a conference with the representatives of an important client for whom he was writing copy. Difficulties, which with every passing moment became more complex, arose to perplex and confound those present. The situation became embarrassing for the Tuttle staff.

Smith had been reticent throughout the conference, almost to the point of self-effacement. As the embarrassment rose to a climax, however, a light came in his eyes. Suddenly he began to talk. Depreciatingly at first, elucidating his points as he went along by references to the various data and memoranda on the "big round table."

The visitors regarded him with annoyance at first; somehow his manner did not impress them. But as he went on, they eyed him with a respect which steadily mounted to something like amazement.

When Chatfield came into Smith's office sometime later, exultant, congratulatory, he found Smith huddled over his desk. All the fire was gone. Unnoticing, Chatfield whacked him on the back and burst forth in a flood of praise. Smith did not look up while Chatfield told him that he was a "wonder," a "demon," a "genius." His hand clutched his pencil with sudden tenseness and his body became rigid. And when Chatfield grasped his hand and told him that he would be the greatest advertising man in the country, he slowly turned toward the beaming youth. His face was sharp and peaked, hard and grim, as if a writhing were going on underneath the surface. Chatfield stopped short, held by that look.

Pain, indubitable, naked, ineffably dignified in its utter exposure, lay a stark, living thing, in Smith's eyes. "Mr. Chatfield, will you do me a favor?" The colorless voice came from a throat that was visibly working.

The young copy chief nodded in assent. "Is—is the job in the engraving department still open?"

Chatfield nodded again.

"I—I want that job!"

STORIES have been told about the travail of men in the wastes of the North, but love, or that steadier and more unrelenting passion, hate, has never exacted from such men a toll greater than that which David Burns paid in the five years of his life during which he was known as John Smith. No epic of adventure in the lands of ice, no drama of tropic torture is grander or more poignant than that of David Burns' adventures with his soul during those five years. And no melodrama has offered as its villain's motive a feeling more malevolent, more petty, more eternally persisting than the feeling which drove David Burns through the torture of humility self-inflicted. Drunk with vanity, drugged with egoism, he consigned himself for five years to drudgery and obscurity and to the despised labor of learning. For the lesson Mary Jane had taught him came to mean only this, that to beat James Shoulder Tuttle, he must be a man.

Five years after he had applied for a job to young Chatfield, David Burns was again in New York—and again he was David Burns. He was still with the Tuttle Agency. He did not know why he had been called to see James Shoulder Tuttle, but for the second time in his life he stood opposite the great desk.

A white-haired Tuttle it was. The great figure had shrunk. There was an occasional quaver in the deep voice—the quaver of age. But the same glow was in the eyes, and the nose still grappled out from the face like a hook, with weird piratical effect.

"Sit down, Burns. I didn't know that you were Smith of our Chicago office. I have sent for you to tell you that I'm going to resign from active work within a month. The presidency of this agency is yours if you want it."

Burns' face went white. He was mortally wounded.

"You're the most capable advertising man living today," Tuttle told him. "The job's yours if you want it. Salary no object. Answer: yes or no?"

David leaped to his feet.

"No!" he cried. "No—by God, no! I'll be boss here, but not because you want me to be. I'll force you to quit, and I'll break you while I'm doing it!"
He stopped, breathless. The expression of amazement on Tuttle's face incited him to further furious speech.

"You can't play with the years of a man's life. You fired me once. You used my brains, my energies, my youth—a year of them. Then you fired me, because I couldn't fill inkwells. You filled my life with utter, downright hell. I have lived in a nightmare ever since. You put a fever into my life to take the place of every natural impulse. You'll pay! I'll make you pay!"

Tuttle looked deep into those raving eyes, and what he saw there drew a great pity from that iron nature of his. He saw the bitterness of a lifetime, great passions misused, a spirit charged with richness, yet poverty-stricken.

"Sit down Burns," he said kindly.

"Hell!" David spat his malevolence.

"Not for you! Who are you, to be kind to me? Who are you, to tell me what to do? I'm bigger than you. I've got more brains, more soul, more character. I'll prove it. I'll break you!"

His expression blazed the arrogance, the vanity, the hatred and misery which had dwelt, unvented, in his soul so long. Having loosed it, he had his first great feeling of relief. At the moment he did not quite realize this, but it was characteristic of the man he had become in the last five years that his quick, subtle sense of the fitness of things should straighten him out—with incredible suddenness. He strode to the window and silently stared out.

Tuttle had not moved from his chair. Erect, still suggestive of the hulk of a man he once was, he sat quiet in deep thought. He sensed with great shrewdness what David was passing through.

After a long minute he spoke. His voice came with an impersonal intonation.

"Burns, if you had things your own way, what would you want right now?"

David turned about slowly and went back to his seat across the desk. He looked straight into Tuttle's eyes. There he saw a look of sympathy, of tenderness and a volatile potentiality for comprehension—a look so unexpected in this man that it upset him totally.

He spoke in his old way, hesitating, deliberate:

"First, I should want you to be fifteen years younger—in the prime of your strength and at the height of your experience. My victory would mean more, then."

Too much sympathy, too much arrogance, too much dulness—any or all of these on the part of Tuttle would have spoiled everything. Tuttle did not err.

"It is better this way," he stated. "I am not so young in years, but my experience is far more full—and I have built up an organization far more nearly impregnable than the one I had fifteen years ago. I'm harder to beat today. Is there anything else?"

"Yes. In the second place, I should want a voice with more of an animal growl than yours."

His eyes never left Tuttle's. His expression was intensely, illuminatingly curious—almost wistful.

"Is that all?" asked Tuttle, with less astonishment in his manner than he felt.

"That's all. I don't need to wish for the ability to beat you. I have that ability. I could do it within a year; and I shall do it."

"You could do it in less than a year," said Tuttle. "You could do it in six months. You're a bigger man today than I ever was or will be. But—if you do it, you will not win. You will lose, and it will be a loss utterly irreparable."

"I don't understand," said David.

"The big fight of your life, even if you did not know it," said Tuttle, "was against yourself, not against me. You won a tremendous victory in what you did during the last five years. When you break me, you are losing to yourself, not conquering me. Your great hour of victory is now, if you but will it see. Your splendid training makes you a man—and the only living man I am glad to give this business to. You have everything I ever had, plus one thing. You have genius."

There was a long silence. Then David spoke. His voice was colorless as usual, but its cadence was pronounced.

"I'll be down in the morning to talk things over. I can step in in a month," he said.

Tuttle had not seemed to hear. He talked as if continuing the former strain.

"About your voice. I don't know why
you should want a bull's voice like mine," he mused gravely. "Yours is the most remarkable voice I have ever heard. It has a queer quality. Somehow I can't help but think of it as the voice of a man who wins—of a conqueror." And then—but I have said that this is not Mary Jane's story.

Old San Antone

IN Texas town of San Antone the Rose of Alvarado grew
From bud to early Southern bloom; her sire's delight, a lissome flame;
Each splendid suitor for his own her beauty and her laughter knew,
But none her heart till from the North the blue-eyed caballero came.

His broad sombrero, twinkling spur, his reins chains ringing silver-sweet,
She knew along the morning way. And he, light-hearted, lithe and tall,
Beheld the Rose and smiled at her. Day long she viewed an empty street,
But evening found his pony tied near Alvarado's garden wall.

Old San Antone beneath the moon slow creeping past the portal white.
"Ah, mi amor! Mi corazon!" so Alvarado's daughter sang,
An Andalusian lover's tune. So clear the stars, so still the night!
When, tinkling to an alien stride a rowel on the pathway rang.

"Ah, mi amor! Mi corazon!" Twain shadows through the garden passed,
The belted rider of the North, a stranger in forbidden land,
And she, the Rose of San Antone. A whisper, "You have come at last!"
And from the dark mantilla's fold the flutter of a little hand.

None but the stars were there to hear. Her caballero bowed his head
As she, on tiptoe, trembling up, in instant fire of rapture yearned,
He laughed away her uttered fear, and gave a promise in its stead,
While softly over San Antone the moon of Summer midnight burned.

Faint grew the stars, and they were gone. The hidden roses slowly drew
From shadowy trellis to the light, as though they sought a vanished face;
Peering across the limpid dawn and listening for a voice they knew,
While gray old Alvarado mourned within his silent garden-place.

Vanished the Rose long years ago; vanished the garden of delight;
Forgotten is the lover's tune; the dusk-red roses are no more!
Sand drifts across the patio. . . . So clear the stars, so still the night!
Old San Antone beneath the moon: "Mi corazon! Ah, mi amor!"

Henry Herbert Knibbs
Red Gold
BY JACKSON GREGORY
A Three-Part Story
Part II

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

MARK KING, the Mark King who made history in the Klondike, came one night to Castle Romaine in the wilderness of the Sierra to keep an appointment with Bigelow Romaine, his former partner of the gold fields. It was here nearly a year before at what was known as the Summer home of “millionaire Romaine” that King first met Gloria, his friend’s beautiful daughter.

As time dragged on and Romaine did not come, King telephoned to Abbot, his friend’s private secretary in San Francisco. Mark King learned to his horror that Romaine had committed suicide because of bankruptcy.

“Mr. Romaine left a message,” Abbot had continued. “It says: ‘Tell Mark King to go on with the thing. Gloria has the full information. Tell him they’re apt to kill him but to go on with it. It’s fifty-fifty.’”

Hearing noises overhead King rushed upstairs, to find Gloria Romaine confronted by Gratton, a San Francisco lawyer.

“Papa lost everything. Wild speculation. Mr. Gratton knows just what, since he persuaded papa into it. I’m afraid he’s dead,” she said.

“Killed himself,” said Gratton concisely, “when the blow came. And Miss Gloria is mistaken; I did not persuade him into this investment.”

Gratton added that Gloria had said she would marry him. The priest was already on the way to perform the ceremony. King sized up the situation and, at Gloria’s request, threw Gratton out of the house.

Just then the telephone rang, and King heard the voice of Romaine himself on the wire. He told them that he was on his way to New York to forestall the plan that Gratton was tightening about him. He made King promise to help him.

“Gloria has the dope,” he said. “It’s a job for you if you’re willing to gamble your life for a friend.”

GLORIA and King, alone in the great house, discussed the search which her father wished King to undertake at once. She gave him a package and a sealed envelope. In the package King found an old Bible in which Gus Ingle, an unschooled miner, had scribbled the story of the gold that he and his pals found back in the mountains in the days of the gold rush. The letter was from Romaine and told him to beware of Gratton and to start out at once in search of the gold. “Beat Gratton to it!” it read.

A few moments later the priest, who had been called by Gratton, entered the house and married Gloria and King.

“We’ll travel light,” he told her the next morning as they started on their search for the gold.
"Go in quick and out the same way. It's getting late in the year and I've no notion for a Winter's honeymoon snowbound in those mountains."

That first evening of their journey, when King tried to caress her she drew away and cried:

"I was half mad and there was no way to turn and you knew that man Gratton was driving me to desperation and you came and—and took advantage of me. And—oh, I wish I were dead!"

"Did you marry me without love and just to save yourself from possible gossip of being alone in the house all night with a man? Is that why you married me? Yes or no?"

"Yes," she answered defiantly.

Suddenly her horse fell. Impatiently King waited for her to take his horse. He would walk on. But as Gloria made no move to start, he said curtly:

"You can do as you please. I am going on."

Almost at the end of her strength, Gloria struggled on to his horse alone and followed him. The storm clouds glowered above them.

VIII

The storm caught them as it has caught so many a wayfarer before and since. The Wintry season was not due for a full four weeks, but the Winter had shaved sign and season aside and made his regal entry after his own ancient fashion. There came a crash of reverberating thunder, a scurry in the thickening mass of black clouds, a drenching downpour of rain. For twenty minutes they crouched in the shelter of a grove.

Then the wind went ripping off through the tree-tops, exacting its toll of flying twigs and was hushed. Through the still air fell scattering flakes of snow, big and unbroken and feathery. King's eyes were filled with concern; his face was ominous like the face of the world about him.

Again Gloria's tired body was assured of rest; again King said expressionlessly, "Come on." This time he helped her into the saddle, being in haste and of no mind to wait for trifles. He hurried on ahead; she followed on Buck listlessly.

For an hour it snowed. Though there was no sun, it was not dark save in the deeper canyons. Nor was it as cold as Gloria had thought it must be. Or else she was too tired to feel the pinch of the sharp air. But presently the flakes grew fewer and then ceased utterly. Those that lay on the ground or clung to branches melted swiftly. And with their departure the last light of the day was gone; now King led the horse and Gloria followed through an all but impenetrable darkness. She wanted to ask why they did not turn back but lacked the spirit.

At last it was pitch dark and was beginning to rain again. King had stopped and was helping her down. The rain hardened into a rattle of hail. Thereafter the air softened and filled with swirling snow. Gloria could not see if they were in an open valley or shut in by cañon walls or upon the slope of a mountain. Nor did she greatly care. She waited until King prepared some kind of shelter and then went wordlessly to it; she felt for boughs under her aching body and was in pure animal fashion conscious of blanket and canvas over her and a grateful warmth.

Through a tangle of bushes she saw the flicker of a small fire; she smelled coffee; she drank half of the hot cup which he brought to her. Then she let go her grip upon a wretched world and passed like a child into a heavy sleep.

By his fire of little cheer Mark King sat, his heart as black as the night, his soul possessed by ravaging blue demons. At the end of a fool's day came a fool's night. He should have paid heed to the first threat of a thin film across the sky; he should have turned back with Gloria the first thing this morning; he should have done anything in the world save exactly whatever he had done.

He should not have married her; he should not have brought her with him; it was even sheer idiocy to come after this blind fashion upon Bigelow Romaine's quest. Though the season was early, the hour was ominous. The storm might pass before dawn; remained the equal likelihood that it would not. Were he alone or had he a man or, yes by thunder, a real woman with him, things would not be so bad. The wind jeered at him through the trees; the storm drenched his fire; he cursed back at both.

"One thing," he thought when his pipe brought him a solitary instant of peace; "I won't be worried with Chalky-Face and his double-dealing crowd. He's too cursed cowardly or too wise to stick to this sort of a trail. If he ever started he's turned back long ago."

After the cold, wet night came a sodden morning. King stood up and looked about
him curiously; his first thought was to make sure that they had really camped upon the edge of that particular upland valley which he had striven for. And a glint of satisfaction came into his eyes; it is something to have followed such a trail aright upon such a night. Down yonder, a crooked black line in a white field, was the stream which many miles further on flowed into the North Fork. Rising abrupt beyond it were the cliffs, such as beetle above the mountain tributaries of the American. The rocks, like the river, were black and looked far colder than the white world which extended in all directions.

If in truth there existed heaps of raw, red gold somewhere in a cave in these mountains and there had been any exactness in the description in Gus Ingle's Bible, then the spot was not more than three or four miles away. That was one consideration, that and his promise to his friend. It was still snowing. Here was a second consideration. King turned moody eyes to Gloria's canvas and fir shelter in the lee of a little bit of cliff; there lay the third. He prepared breakfast without delay but without enthusiasm. He felt a tired man with shackled limbs dragging a dead weight.

When he went to wake Gloria he first stood over her looking queerly down upon her sleep. She showed little enough trace of the hard day and wild night; his preparations for her comfort, instinctive and thorough, had been made with the cunning skill of a man familiar with situations like the present. She had rested well; she lay curled up snug and warm under the covers upon which a thin layer of fluffy snow had gathered. Her face was against a curved arm and the sweetness of it in its tranquil repose was a bitter-sweet to him. Her lashes against her cheek stirred and flew apart under his steady gaze.

"Time to be up," he said.

He turned on his heel and went back to his fire.

Gloria's first emotion was born of a sensation of hunger. She came sooner than he had expected, setting the wild disarray of her hair in order. Her eyes were wide open and curious as she looked up at him. She shrugged her shoulders behind his back and extended her hands to the small windblown blaze.

"Are we going back?" she asked.

"No," he returned as indifferently. "It's about four miles to the cave. We'll be there in a couple of hours. Then we'll see what we see."

Gloria cast a long, searching and awe-struck look across the broken country. Then she drew closer to the fire, closer to her companion, as if to shrink back, half-frightened, from the menace of the mountains.

"Is it going to keep on snowing?" she asked.

This time he shrugged. That was his only answer. She stared at him, a slow flush came into her cheeks, her eyes hardened.

"Oh, very well," she said coldly.

That was the whole of their conversation save for one curt remark and an impudent laugh in answer at the end of the scanty meal. Gloria tossed a piece of bacon into the fire. King looked at her sternly and said:

"Young lady, we may be up against the real thing now. Nobody but a fool will do a trick like that."

The laugh was Gloria's.

Once on their way they climbed almost steadily. The air grew rarer and colder. The snow-flakes became smaller, at last a fine sifting-like sand-particles that cut at hands and face viciously. No longer were there groves to shelter them; on all sides bare, hostile rocks and only occasionally a sparse growth of sprawling, earth hugging dwarf pine and cedar over which King strode as over so much low, tangled brush. Came a long ridge, a spine from which the world dropped almost sheer on both sides with the wind raging so that it seemed Buck must be blown off his feet or the girl torn from the saddle and borne far out like a thistledown.

With frightened eyes, which she strove vainly to keep closed, she saw long, broken slopes; occasionally when the air cleared, a frothing torrent; and once, at the end of a couple of hours, far down in a distant level land, a growth of giant timber. She thought that King was making his way down there. But his purpose soon became plain even to her; he was keeping high on the ridges, going about the head of the ravine which lower down cut like a knife across the timbered tract, headed for what he took to be Gus Ingle's cave. A mile away she saw it: a great, ragged, black
hole in a high mass of rock, close to the crest of the next ridge.

She was wrapped warmly and yet here the icy breath of the wind pierced the fabric of her wrappings and hurt her to the bone. She watched King wonderingly as he hastened on; did the man have no sense of bodily discomfort? Certainly he gave no sign. He was like an animal; she found room for a flash of scorn in the thought. For so she was pleased to consider him lower in the scale than herself.

The grandeur of the world about her did not appeal to her; its near-summity was utterly lost. It was a ravening beast, an ugly thing, big and brutal and—like King. Oh, how she hated it and him!

When at last he waited for her and told her to get down, she had the suspicion that he had gone mad. Certainly here was no spot to tarry; it was on her lips to demur. But she looked at his face and slipped stiffly from the saddle. They were high up on the ridge; Gloria, on foot beside him, clutched at the wind-twisted branch of one of the sprawling cliff-growths, in sudden panic that she was being swept from her feet.

Just below them was the deepening cleft in the mountainside which, further down, widened and descended into a steep-walled gorge. Through it shot a mad frothy stream. A hundred yards further on was the yawning hole in the rocks. King, holding Buck's bridle, looked about him and sharply at the sky. Gloria read in his manner a hint of uncertainty. Hoping to alter his decision she said quickly—

"Hadn't we better turn back now?" he looked at her steadily before answering.

"In what," he replied in that impersonal way which maddened her, "have you so altered as to be worth a man's broken promise?"

And then she knew that no thought of going back had had any part in his brief indecision. He was going forward, would go forward in anything he undertook; that was a part of his make-up. He was merely seeking the best place to unpack and a convenient spot to tether Buck. They were going to make camp either right here or nearer the cave, perhaps in it. She looked at the uninviting hole and shivered. She would know his decision when King saw fit to enlighten her.

Now he merely dumped at her feet the roll from the horse's back, setting the rifles down against it. Then he led Buck away, zigzagging tediously, at last passing from sight beyond an outjutting monster crag. Gloria crouched, seeking to shield herself from the whip-lashes of the wind. She listened to it as it shrieked about the slabs and boulders of granite; the sound was indescribably eerie, filled with unrest eloquent of the brutal contempt of the eternal for the feeble and transient. The universe grew utterly lonely; the wind was a whining thing, cutting through the silence. And King was so long in coming back—

The terrifying thought electrified her: "What if he had deserted her? What if he had no intention of coming back?" She should have known better; perhaps, deep down within her, she did know better. But the suspicion brought its wild flutter; she sprang up and grew rigid in her tense fright; felt a strange glad rush of joy as she saw his hat bobbing up and toward her along the winding trail. When he rejoined her she was staring off at nothingness, her back to him.

He gathered up everything except the smaller rifle and cartridge-belt.

"You'd better take those," he told her, in a tone which added further that the matter was utterly without moment to him.

"There's no telling what is in the cards."

He went on along the knife-edge of the ridge, down into a little depression, up beyond. She hesitated, saw that he had not looked, bit her lip angrily and snatched up the gun and cartridges. Then she followed him, stooping against the wind.

When she came up with him he had thrown down his pack at the base of the line of cliffs and was looking up. Plainly it was his purpose to clamber up there. She sat down and again bit at her lip; but this time it was to keep the tears back. The world was so cold and stern and brutal; this man was so much like the environment; she was so wofully, desperately heart-sick. From this lofty crest of a devil-tossed land she could look out across ridge after ridge, into an unending distance, obscured at the last only because of the faint snow-particles. She felt the insignificance of a fly clinging to the brow of an abyss.

King went about his task methodically.
Glória watched him rather than look across the rocky gorges. Slowly and with difficulty he made his way up the steep wall of rocks, dragging and pulling the roll of bedding and provisions after him with the tie-rope which he had brought from Blackie’s neck. It required perhaps twenty minutes for him to clamber thus to the mouth of the cave which was some seventy or eighty feet above the spot where Glória was. She saw him stoop, gather his bundle into his arms and enter the irregular opening. He was gone from her eyes some little time, emerging at last to stand upon the sloping ledge which was like a rude threshold to a rude abode. So long did he stand stock still, staring off into the western distance, that she began to wonder what he could be looking at.

From his higher vantage-place he had seen something hidden from her by the tree-tops. His look traveled across the spray-filled gorge and thus he saw a line of five laboring figures, each with a pack on his shoulders, tediously making a steep way down the ridge to the northwest. Yonder would be Gratton and such men as he would hire. King frowned. But still he watched them; at first he thought that surely they must see him. But their way was hard and they had known fatigue and so, with heads down, plowed on. Further, while they stood out in sheer relief against the snow, his own body, pressed against the rocks, would scarcely attract attention at such a distance.

The five men in their single-file procession had come down the slope and the last of them passed out of sight behind a timbered bit of bench-land. King estimated that they would pitch camp down there somewhere since the trail upward from the spot to which they had gone was hard and steep. Later Gratton alone or with such of his companions as he chose would come up here. It would be a full hour, perhaps two, before Gratton’s soft-muscled body could achieve the climb. King looked at his watch. It was now close to eleven. Hence the likelihood was that the men would lunch where they were and that he need not count upon being troubled with them until about one o’clock.

He came down to Glória, bringing the rope with him.

“I am going to spend the day up there,” he told her in his studied aloof manner, “to see if there is any truth in the story about the hidden gold. There’s room in the cave to sleep. Tomorrow morning, if I find nothing, I’ll start back with you. If you care to come up now I’ll help you.”

“What else is there to do?” cried Glória, with the first flash of passion. “What else do you leave me?”

He took the two rifles, slipped a loop of the rope about her waist, taking slow pains not to touch her with his hands, and turned upward again. She followed, filled with sudden fear when they had climbed ten feet, obeying him hastily when he commanded her to stand still or to climb, feeling her fear grow mightily as they progressed. The wind, strengthening abruptly, tore at her in angry gusts. She was panting and shaking visibly when finally she reached his side at the cave’s mouth. She passed in hurriedly, pushing by him, dizzied by the outlook from the ledge. The bleak gloomy interior, which otherwise seemed might have repelled now welcomed and protected. She sank down with a long sigh upon the blankets which he had thrown down. King left her and went down over the cliff-edge.

IX

“MORE like a mid-Winter blizzard than it’s got any business being this early in the season,” King muttered when again he stood at the base of the cliff. “This whole cursed episode seems all loaded to the guards with bad luck.”

From where he stood he could look down into the gorge and harken to the smothered bcom and dash of white water. Also he could glimpse here and there the way which Gratton must come when he left his camp and sought to mount to these heights. No Gratton in sight. King glanced up again; no Gloria in sight. With the sense of enforced haste upon him he turned to his present task. Less than a score of steps away, and almost directly beneath the cave where Glória was, he came to a second yawning cavern. He crouched and entered.

Of this second cave King knew little. Before now, in idle curiosity, he had entered it with lighted torch and prowled around briefly and with no stimulation of interest. The higher cave, to which he had taken Glória, was larger, loftier and in
all particulars more desirable as a retreat from the storm. It was a more cheerful sort of place because of its greater light and better air and for sake of the extended view it offered when one cared to look out across the ridges. But now, because of what a long-dead adventurer had scrawled on the fly-leaf of a book, making mention of "caives," this place took on a fresh importance. The gold might be hidden here.

In his pocket he carried a fagot of pine, brought down with him. He lighted it when he had advanced a few paces into the gloom and lifted the improvised torch above his head. Now he could stand upright. He moved on with what speed he could; Gratton or some of his men might come before they were expected.

For half an hour his search was fruitless. The cave opened and closed about him as he went on; he came to the rock walls everywhere, skirted them and found nothing. Then, attracted by a pile of rubbish in a dark corner, he stooped to explore. There came his first hint of excitement; as he kicked at the loose dirt heaped against the rock, he found a small box under it. He dragged it out. It seemed to be filled with the same dirt. He examined it closely, to make sure. Lifting it he was impressed by its weight; going down on his knees beside it, the torch held low, he made his swift appraisal. And he knew on the instant that not entirely had Gus Ingle lied. For here was gold.

He ran the finer siftings through his fingers; he studied one after another the lumps and bits of rock; he found that there were imbedded streaks in them that he could cut into with his thumb-nail. One fragment he carried to the light of day. It was rich with ore and that ore was raw, red gold. He put the thing into his pocket, came back with his torch and began a feverish search for the rest of the hoard. For surely this could not be all. The value of the box he could not closely estimate; its contents might be worth anywhere from a hundred to a thousand dollars. But surely this was not enough so to stir a lot of old veteran miners, such as made early history in California, as to send them like a pack of beasts at one another's throats. Not enough to warrant such an expedition as Bigelow Romaine had ordered, as Gratton was making. There must be more or Gus Ingle's tale was a hoax. And Ingle had written: "I guess there was enough for everybody in all the world." No; there must be more. Unless already some other man had been before him?

He began again, seeking painstakingly. He hid the box in a dark corner. Another half-hour passed. Then, on the verge of giving up, he remarked something that drew his attention. At a point near the middle of the cave there caught his eye a little heap of dirt on the floor, conical like a pile of sand a child has let dribble from its little bucket, the whole thing not over six or eight inches high. He stirred it with his foot, then stooped and examined it. No; there was nothing of value in it. And yet, he thought, some one must have piled it there, it was so neatly coned. Some one had piled it or—or it had dribbled slowly down from above. He looked up suddenly, lifted his torch, and thus found the doorway to Gus Ingle's treasure chamber! He was certain of it from the instant.

Above him the uneven roof of the cave was lifted some ten or twelve feet from the uneven floor; the torch shone on downward knobs and indicated withdrawn hollows. Upon one of these seeming knobs, blacker than its fellows, King's eyes were fixed. Significantly, this spot was directly above the small mound of dirt and gravel. And, as King had guessed, here in the roof was the hole which led to a cavern above, a third cave, scooped in the mountain between the cave where Gloria was, and the one where he now stood. And this third cave was Gus Ingle's treasure chamber.

He extinguished his torch, stuck it into his belt, crouched and sprang upward, his hands seeking to clutch the ragged rim of the hole. The first time he missed and dropped back with bruised fingers. He tried again and with better luck; this time his right hand caught and held. He swung a moment, put up his other hand, found a hand-hold and like a boy in an apple-tree, "chinned" himself. He got his head into the opening, found that it was none too big for his bulk of body, lifted himself and shifted his hand, drew himself up a little higher and so got his shoulders through. In another moment he pulled his legs up and turned and squirmed so that he sat
upon a sloping, unseen surface of rock. His sense was first of satisfaction that he had his legs up where he was and where he could look out for them; he had had the foolish feeling as he swung there that somebody or some thing was going to grab him.

Again he lighted his torch. The air was better than he had expected air could be in a place like this; no doubt a draft from the hole through which he had come found its escape through some other fissures. He looked around with interest. And what he saw as he groped here and there filled him with amazement and a slow-coming but now almost feverish interest. He was looking upon gold, much gold, and the dull gleaming metal, even though the eyes measuring it are those of a man beyond its urgent need, breeds its own fever. King knelt and took up a small soap box; it was by no means full and yet the weight was a surprise even to him. Had there been another than himself watching there just then he must have noted how the light of the torch showed a strange glitter in King's eyes.

"We have here," he mused, "the magic lamp to rub; a palace where we please and an ocean-going yacht and the newest in motor-cars and a trip around the world and a presentation to royalty and all that even Gloria finds precious! We have here a fragment of heaven and a very large slice of hell. We have ambition fulfilled and love consumed and hate born; we have Bigelow Romaine made whole and full of power again. And it happens to be all that is left of Gus Ingle and his friends."

But there he was wrong. When he had stood up and moved about and had taken swift stock of bulging gunnysack and heaping coffee can and even an old cooking-pot, and had stumbled over the pile of dirt, shot through with particles of free gold from which the sifting on the floor below had fallen, his eye was caught by a gleam of white issuing from the shadows. He stuck his torch down to it and for a little, after the first shock, stood staring thoughtfully. The sprawling skeleton was like a dash of water on his new fever.

"And that," decided King, "is all that is left of Gus Ingle who killed Tom Lingo and the Spaniard that in the end his might be the high privilege of bare, stripped bones sepulchered here among his gold.

"Paugh," he grunted and turned away.

In another mood he sought to finish the work in hand. There was no chance of carrying all this away before Gratton and the others came; the one hope was to hide it. He believed the concealment could be managed easily and completely. He rummaged about him seeking a block of loose stone; the irregular cavern with upsloping floor was some ten or twelve feet wide and perhaps twice that distance long. Then there were off-shoots, tunnel-like fingers which might run to any distance; he had not the time to explore. In one of them he found what he sought, a big rock which he managed to roll down to the main chamber into which he had entered. He set it by the hole and saw that it would cover the opening. He drew it close up, turned it over, got it nicely balanced upon a little knob of rock. Then he stirred it gently with his foot; it behaved properly and rolled down over the top of the hole.

"It ought to work like that from below," was his decision. So again he balanced the rock as before and then, dropping his torch to the lowest cave, let himself down after it, as cautious as might be as he took the risk of the rock toppling and crushing his fingers for him.

The rest was easy. He found a dead branch of a pine, trimmed off all of the limbs save one at the larger end which he left six or eight inches long, making a crude hook. With this he snared at the block of granite; he got it toppling and then, with a quick jerk and twist, withdrew the branch. The rock slipped slowly into place. He lighted his torch and held it above his head. By any such light as this no man, who did not know the secret and its exact location, would guess it. King put out his torch and went back toward the light and open air.

GLORIA, trembling with a new excitement, was down on her knees before the pack in the cave when King came in. She was eagerly seeking her own little personal effects; a tiny parcel of pink, silken things and a hair-brush were in her hands.

"It's here!" were King's explosive words. "By thunder, it's here!"

ROMANCE
In the small light of the cavern and with his back to the outside Wintry world, she could not at first make out his expression. But in his voice was an excitement no less than her own.

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Gloria coldly. “And I don’t care to know. I have tolerated as much of you as I have any idea of tolerating of any man.”

Then King noticed the things in her hands. He threw down the dry firewood he had brought.

“You saw those men?” he demanded. “You plan on going to them?”

“Yes,” cried Gloria, springing up and confronting him angrily. “Yes to both questions.”

“You know who they are then?”

“No, but that doesn’t matter.”

“Which means as plain as print,” he said thoughtfully, “that you would go to any man to be rid of me.”

He laughed unpleasantly and Gloria’s anger flared the higher.

“Do you know,” he said presently, “that that is probably Gratton?”

“What of it?” asked Gloria aloofly.

“You know that he has just trimmed your father? That he’s a double-dealing skunk? That he’s hardly the sort for a girl to trust herself to in a place like this?”

“I am not given much choice,” Gloria informed him with high insolence.

“That’s a fact,” he conceded with a grunt.

He’d give a thousand dollars right now to be well rid of her; yes, and have Gratton and his low-browed gang come on looking for any sort of row that suited their ilk. But was this the chance for such riddance? Could he let her go?

“Before I go,” said Gloria when she thought that he had nothing further to add, “I want to say just one thing: Father has always considered you his best friend. I shall lose no time in telling him what you really are.”

Gloria’s remark, coming just when it did in King’s perplexity, was what settled his decision firmly for him. The girl was a vicious little fool; so he thought of her unequivocally. But she was, after all, Romaine’s daughter and furthermore the apple of Romaine’s eye. She was in King’s keeping; he had been eminently to blame for bringing her here, his was the respon-
sibility. Gratton’s eye was the sort that soils a woman.

“You are not going,” he said suddenly, turning upon her. “I won’t allow you to put yourself in Gratton’s dirty hands.”

A quick light was in her eyes, a quick spurt of satisfaction in her heart. In King’s decision she read the assurance that he was still madly in love with her, that now his jealousy stirred him. She lifted her chin and with her little bundle under her arm came forward, walking confidently.

“Stand aside, please,” she commanded.

“I am going, I tell you.”

Again sensing the familiarity of the battle-field she felt an almost serene confidence, believing herself easily mistress of the situation. So much must have been plain to King from that, “Stand aside, please,” which Miss Gloria Romaine of last week might have addressed to a porter, were it not that just now King’s thought was not bended to trifles. When she came to his side and he did not stir, she sought to brush by him. There was no hesitation in the way in which he put out his hand and thrust her back.

“There can be only one captain to an expedition in adventure,” he told her curiously. “I have been elected to the job. You’ll pardon me if I put matters into one-syllable words? Until we are well out of this, if we are ever out at all, you will have to do what I tell you. You are not going to desert ship for that white-livered scoundrel.”

She stared at him speechlessly. Then—

“By what right do you issue orders to me?” she cried.

“Let us say,” he returned in the coin of her own harshness, “the old right of a husband. If that isn’t sufficient you can add to it by the time-honored right of the lord and master! For that is just precisely what I intend being until I can turn you over to your damn, dawdling set in the city again. Wait a minute,” he added sternly, as he saw her lips opening to a rush of words. “I would be glad to have you go were conditions less exacting. New I have thought matters over and it appears essential that certain of our marriage vows be remembered. You don’t have to love or honor, but by thunder you are going to obey! Reversion to an ancient order of things, eh? Well, the world was better then largely in that women were worth a
man's while. Further, for my part, I fully intend to keep my obligation of protecting you against your own foolishness, the storm and Gratton and the devil himself. And, finally, I mean to keep my promise to your father. He sent me to get Gus Ingle's gold; it's here. So is Gratton with four of his cutthroat crowd. I will in all probability have my hands full. But, once and for all, you stick with me. Where," he concluded with the last jeer, "the wife's place should be!"

Gloria tried to stare him down, to wither him with the fire of her scorn, to brave by him. But the man, all emotion having receded from his eyes, was once more like so much rock, but rock endowed with dormant power of aggression. She began by wondering if she had mistaken his look just now when she had leaped to the triumphant decision that he loved her; she ended by feeling hopeless and tired and uncertain of all things. To keep him from noting how she was trembling, she went hastily back to the roll of bedding and dropped down to it. On the instant it became clear to her that physically King was the master. To her, before whom difficulties had heretofore invariably melted, it seemed equally clear that there must be a way out of an unbearable situation. So now, for the first time, she began a certain, logical line of thought, seeking to shape her own plans.

"Please listen to me seriously," King said quietly to her. "I won't talk long to you. Your father is on the edge of bankruptcy. He is off to New York to save what he can. He counts on me for what is in Gus Ingle's caves. I have found at least a part of it and I honestly believe that it is in your hands and mind to pull Romaine through and leave him a rich man on top of it. Gratton is down there with his gang. They'll clean us out if they can. The stake is big enough for them to stop at nothing short of murder and I am not over-sure they'd stop there. Gus Ingle's crowd didn't, and I don't know that men have changed much in half a hundred years."

"I am listening," said Gloria coolly when he paused.

"Here's the point: This is treasure trove; we got here first. It is up to us to hold it. Can I count on you? You don't happen to have any love for me; well, you shouldn't have any for Gratton, either. And you know that you can trust yourself to me. Can I count on you sticking on the job, your father's and your own job more than mine, until we make a go of it?"

Gloria's logical thinking had barely begun and, as yet, had not had time to progress. Her spite was lively and bitter. In her distorted vision, blurred by her thwarted anger, she cried out quickly:

"So, now that the odds are against you you come cringing to me, do you?" Again she was misled into fancying that she held a whip-hand over him. "Answering your question, I would trust Mr. Gratton any day rather than you. He, at least, is a gentleman and not a brute and a bully."

King was hardly disappointed.

"At least you have given a straight answer," he muttered. "That is something."

Now he shaped his plans swiftly and carefully, knowing where she stood. It was characteristic of him that, once having seen clearly his own responsibility toward a foolish girl, he did not seek to simplify his own difficulty by ridding himself of her. Henceforth he would merely consider her his chief handicap, with him but against him. He consoled himself with the whimsical thought that there was never a proper treasure hunt that did not carry traitorous mutineers on the questing ship. He improvised a smoky, windblown torch from a resinous fagot and passed by Gloria toward the deeper darkness of the cave.

"I want to look around a bit," he told her briefly. "You'd better come with me."

She began a curt refusal but at his look, as he wheeled about, she rose swiftly and followed. Already she regretted her hasty words; the part of wisdom would have been to let him think that he could depend on her and then, when the opportunity arose, slip away. But before they had gone a dozen steps she forgot all considerations save those of their fearsome surroundings. For terrifying the endless black tunnel was to her. Her lively imagination peopled it with the formless menace of the unknown.

Stepping into a shallow unguessed hollow she clutched wildly at King's arm, her heart in her throat as she pictured a yawning cleft in the rock floor to which one might drop to a hideous death. The torch flickered, filled her eyes with its smoke, made wavering shadows each one of which she more than half-expected momentarily
to take the tangible existence of some physical menace, she knew not what. A terrifying thought of bears and wolves, in fair from the storm, surged upon her with panicry force. Step by step she drew closer to King, less aware of her hatred at this moment than of a comforting sense of the man’s bigness and assurance.

When abruptly the cavern widened and lifted loftier ceiling so that the rude chamber was of such goodly proportions that the poor light of his torch failed to reach from wall to wall, he stopped and began a slow shuffling with his feet which attracted the girl’s wondering notice. He moved as if he sought to uncover something with his boots; she could not but ask herself, what? Under her own feet she felt that the solid rock floor had given place to smaller fragments of stone and dirt heaped up. Where, as for her this phenomenon was meaningless, to him it was significant.

“And to think that I’ve stood right here and never guessed!” was his thought. To her he said briefly: “The air is none too good and getting worse. We’ll go back.”

 XI

Before looking to see if Gratton were coming yet, King’s first concern was with the weather outlook. What he saw when again he stood in the open merely caused him to shake his head and draw his flapping coat closer about him. There was always a chance that this, the first storm of the season, would speedily blow itself out and give place to a fortnight of fine, clear weather before the real Winter came on. But that chance, steadily diminishing through the last few hours, seemed to be creeping down toward zero with the thermometer. The skies were thicker and grayer than when he had seen them last only a few minutes ago; the wind bore in ever-increasing violence from the southwest; on the ground, in cracks and crevices and hollows everywhere there was accumulating a fine, white siftin of snow.

A searching look down the steep cañon showed him no sign of Gratton or any of his following. Upon the lower steps, where the timber was, he fancied that he made out a smudge of smoke; but of this he could not be sure. The sky was too dim and too gray already for certainty. Well, he could gamble pretty well that Gratton would do one of three things: He would go methodically about making camp, prepared to outweather the storm, let it rage as long as it might; or he would make haste to come to the caves, hoping to start back at the earliest possible moment; or he would turn tail, like the white rabbit he was, and run from it all without delay.

Again, and with stern interest and a hint of anxiety, King studied the storm; and again he shook his head. He did not like it; he did not like the job it was shoving, willy-nilly, into his hands.

“If you can whip up enough stick-to-it for the work ahead of us,” he announced impersonally, “we stand a good chance of getting out of this. Otherwise we stand a whole lot better show of getting caught here and freezing and starving to death.”

Gloria shook visibly. Nervousness and fear and the cold were combined and merciless. Her look spied from King’s face to what she could see of the snow-storm.

“But we’ll wait,” she asked in utter, weary meekness, “until this horrible storm is over?”

“One never knows about a storm like this,” he told her. “It may blow itself out soon and it may keep on for a long time. Now it’s beginning to pile up in the drifts, to hide the trails, to make going harder every minute. As it is we’ll have our work cut out for us; if this keeps up all afternoon and all night,” he shrugged.

“You mean that then we couldn’t get out at all?” she asked sharply.

He looked down on her thoughtfully.

“I don’t know,” he replied slowly, “whether you could make it then or not. I am more or less used to this sort of thing and you are not. I figure that we ought to take no more long shots than we have to. If we start right now and have any luck we can make several miles before night and camp in some of the thick timber on the edge of the Gold Hill country. We’d be as well off there as we are here and just that much nearer the outside. If the weather allowed us to travel at all we could be back at your father’s place in four or five days at the longest. And,” he added significantly, “we have food to last us just about that long.”

Gloria sprang up hastily.

“Quick!” she cried. “Let’s hurry.”

King nodded and began his prepara-
tions. Into the squares of canvas he rolled everything they were to take with them and he took no single article which he judged was not absolutely necessary. One small frying-pan and one light aluminum pot, with single knife, fork, and spoon, constituted all in the way of cooking utensils. With jealous eye he judged the weight, bulk and worth of every other article, whether it be a tin of fruit or a slab of bacon. Those delicacies which his love for Gloria had prompted him to bring with them he now placed at one side, to be left behind. Bacon, to the last small scrap and fat-lined rind, coffee to the once boiled dregs in the coffee pot, he packed carefully. Then, his roll made and drawn tight, he took the discarded articles, Gloria's rifle and cartridges with them, and hid them under some loose dirt in a far-back, black corner of the cave. Ten minutes later he had gotten first his pack, then Gloria, safely down the cliffs and they started.

From the first step despair filled the girl's heart. She was terribly afraid to go on, but on she went doggedly at his heels only because she was even more terribly afraid not to go. He led the way along the rocky ridge where the snow was blown clear and where the wind tore at them viciously. She bent her body against the cutting gusts and felt her girl's strength all inadequate and fast oozing out of her. The world was unutterably fearsome and harsh and threatening; she could have screamed with every breath were not every breath needed by her panting lungs that she might draw still another and push on. Head down, silent, like two grotesque automatons, they trudged on.

Several times King turned. But she soon saw it was not to look at her; his glance passed down the long cañon toward the spot where Gratton and his men had disappeared. She had come near forgetting them; she had no interest in them now. King had brought her here; King was so used to this wretched sort of existence that he appeared to her as actually a part of the mountains and the storm; King, of course, would take her safely back to the world which she had forsaken so stupidly. The obligation was plainly his; the power seemed his no less.

As Gloria fought her way along she was upborne at every step by the expectation of coming presently to their horse, of being placed in the saddle and of having nothing to do from then on but hold to the pommel and have King lead her on to an ultimate safety. The progress would be long and the way little less than an adventure in hell to her; but at least hers would have become a slightly more passive part and she would be moving on toward the luxury of four walls and a maid and warm comforts. So when they came to the spot where King had tethered his horse and there was no horse there, Gloria looked her blank, stupefied bewilderment and then simply collapsed. She dropped down in the snow, her face in her hands, too weary and heartbroken to sob aloud. King stared about him with an almost equal consternation.

Leaving Gloria where she lay inert in the snow, King put down rifle and pack and hurried down into the hollow where he had tethered his horse. Five minutes of reading the signs in the snow told him the story. He had been right; his venture from the beginning had been loaded to the guards with bad luck. There was the end of the broken tie-rope; there the tracks showing the way Buck had gone, in full, headlong flight. The rope was stout and would have broken only were the animal terrified. If frightened, then there had been something to cause fright. Again, since the horse fled straight down the slope, that something startling it would have been at some point directly above.

King turned and mounted to the ridge-top again. Here were other tracks, all but wiped out. A bear had come up over the ridge; had frightened the horse into breaking its tether and running. And the equally startled bear had turned tail and raced off the other way. Both animals were probably a dozen miles off by now; the bear, perhaps twice that distance.

King came back slowly and sat down on his pack. From Gloria's dejected figure he looked to his watch, from his watch again to the four points of the compass. His lips tightened. The afternoon was passing and the dark would come early.

"Are you up to crowding on on foot?" he called to Gloria. "If you have the nerve we can really make better time that way, anyhow, from now on. Can you do it?"

At first she did not try to answer. But
when he shouted to her again, his voice hard with anger, she moaned miserably:

"I am sick; I am dying, I think. I can't go on."

"Oh, hell," grunted King disgustedly.

He let Gloria lie where she was until she had rested. Then he went to her and put his hands under her armpits and lifted her to her feet. She was limp and pale, her eyes shut, her lashes looking unusually black against the pallor of her pinched cheeks.

"We'll go back to the cave for the night after all," he told her quietly. "It's the inevitable and that's one thing there's no sense bucking against. Stand up!"

But the slight figure in its boyish garb drooped against him; Gloria's head moved the slightest bit in sidewise negation, her pale lips stirred soundlessly.

"What?" asked King.

"I can't," came her whisper.

He judged that here was no time for foolishness but rather the time for each one to do his part if the two of them were to live to make all of this an unpleasant memory.

"You've got to," he informed her crisply. "I can't carry you and the pack and rifle and everything, can I? I am going back; the rest is up to you. Do you want to lie here and die tonight?"

"I don't care," said Gloria listlessly.

He looked at her curiously. As he drew his hands away she slipped down and lay as she had lain before. He turned away, took up his pack and gun, set his back square upon her and trudged off toward the only shelter that was theirs. Along the ridge, buffeted by the wind, half-blind with the furries of stinging hail with which that wind lashed him as with countless bits of broken glass, he did not turn to look behind him. Not until he had gone fully half of the way to the cave; then did he turn. He could not see her following as he had pictured her. He dropped his luggage and went back to her. She lay as he had left her, her face a trifle whiter, he thought, her eyes shut, certain small blue veins making a delicate tracery across the lids.

He had meant to storm at her, to stir her into activity by the lashings of his rage. But instead he stooped and gathered her up into his arms and carried her through the storm, shielding her body all that he could. And as he stooped and as he moved off, he was growling deep down in his throat like a disgruntled old bear. When it came to clambering back up the cliff Gloria obeyed his commands listlessly and as in a dream, lending the certain small aid that was necessary. Even so, the climb was hard and slow and more than ever before filled with danger. But in the end it was done.

King built a fire; left Gloria lying by it and returned for his pack. When he reentered the cave she had not moved. He made a bed for her, placed her on it so that her feet were toward his fire and covered her with his own blanket. Then he boiled some coffee and made her drink it. She obeyed again, neither thanked him nor upbraided him, and dropped back upon her hard bed and shut her eyes.

Here was a new Gloria, a Gloria who did not care whether she lived or died. With a quickening alarm in his eyes he stood by the smoky fire, staring at her. Uninured to her hardship, her delicate body was already beaten, with still further hardship to come; might she not, in sober truth, die? And what would Mark King say to Bigelow Romaine, even if he brought back much raw, red gold, if it had cost the life of Bigelow Romaine's daughter?

She did not stir when he came to her and knelt and put his hand against her cheek. He was shocked to learn how cold she was. Lightly he set his fingers against her softly pulsing throat; it was cold, like ice. Plainly she was chilled through; the blankets and his poor, smoking, draft-tossed fire could not warm her fast enough. As he began unlacing her boots a curious, bitter thought came to him. She was his; the priest had given her to him with her own willingness—his wife. And now he was doing for her the first intimate little thing. He drew off her boots and stockings and found that her feet were terribly cold. He wrapped them in a hot blanket and hastened to set a pot of water on the coals. While the water warmed he knelt and chafed her feet between his palms, afraid for a moment that they were frozen. Finally while he bathed them in steaming water, the dead white began to give place to a faint pinkness like a blush and again he put the blanket about them.

She had not moved. When a second time he laid his hand against her throat
the cold of it alarmed him. He hesitated a moment; then, the urgent need being more than evident, he began swiftly to undo her outer garments. The boyish shirt he unbuttoned and managed to remove; it was wet through and stiff with frost. He noted her under-garments, silked and foolish little things, with amazement; she had known no better than to wear such nonsensical affairs on a trip like this! Good God, what did she know? But he did not pause in his labors until he had slipped off the wet clothing. Then he wrapped her in another warm blanket and placed her on her bed, her feet still to the blaze. All of the time she had seemed, and probably was, hardly conscious. Now only she opened her eyes.

"I can't have you playing the fool and getting pneumonia," he growled at her. "We've got our hands full as it is. Don't you know enough to——"

But she was not listening. She stirred slightly, eased herself into a new position, cuddled her face against a bare arm, sighed and went to sleep.

XII

ALL night King kept his fire blazing. With several long sticks and a piece of the canvas, drawing deeply upon his ingenuity and almost to the dregs of his patience, he contrived a rude barrier to the cold across the mouth of the cave. Countless times he rolled out of his own bunk, heavy-eyed and stiff, to readjust the screen when it had blown down, to put more wood on his fire, to make sure that Gloria was covered and warm, sleeping heavily and not dead. His nerves were frayed. In the long night his fears grew, misshapen and grotesque. Within his soul he prayed mutely that when morning came Gloria would be alive. When with the first sickly streaks of dawn he went to put fresh fuel upon the dying embers, he found that there was but a handful of wood left. He came to stoop over the girl and listen to her breathing. Then he descended the cliffs for more wood.

During the night the Winter had set the white seal of his sovereignty upon the world. Long ago the snarling wind had died in its own fierceness, giving over to a still, calm air through which steadily the big flakes fell. Now they clung to bush and tree everywhere; the limbs had grown thick and heavy, drooping like countless plumes. Fat mats of snow lay on the level spaces, upon flat rocks, curling over and down at the edges. Where he stood King sank ankle-deep in the fluffy stuff. As he moved along the cliffs and down the slope toward a dead tree he stepped now and then into drifts where the snow was gathering swiftly. As he looked up, seeking to penetrate the skies above him and judge their import, he saw only myriads of gray particles high up, swirling but slightly in some softly stirring air current, for the most part dropping, floating, falling almost vertically. Nowhere was there a hint or hope of likely cessation. The Winter, a full three weeks early, had come.

In the noose of his rope he dragged up the cliff much dead wood, riven from a fallen pine. Throughout the noise of his comings and goings the girl slept heavily. He got a big fire blazing without waking her and set about getting breakfast. While he waited for the coffee to boil he took careful stock of provisions. For people there was enough for some twenty meals, food for about a week. Time to conserve the grease from the frying-pan; to hoard the smallest bit of bacon rind. He even counted his rounds of ammunition; here alone he was affluent. He had in the neighborhood of a hundred and fifty cartridges for the two rifles. While he was setting the guns aside he felt Gloria's eyes upon him.

During the night and now, during this inventory, he had been granted both ample time and cause for his decision. He addressed her with prompt frankness:

"Inside fifteen minutes we've got to be on our way out. As we go we'll look for the horse. But, find it or not, we're going."

She lay looking up at him thoughtfully. She had rested; she resented his coolly assumed mastery; she had not forgotten that there were other men near-by. But she merely said, by way of beginning——

"The storm is over then?"

"No. But we are not going to wait. We have food for only six or seven days at the most."

She let her eyes droop to the fire so that the lids hid them from him. It was not yet full day; it was still snowing. Gratton and the men with him would of course have ample supplies. She yearned fever-
ishly to be rid of King and his intolerable commanding. She estimated swiftly that, paradoxically, her only power over him was that of powerlessness; while she lay here hers was in a way the advantage. On her feet, following her, he would be again to her the brute he had been coming in.

"I am tired out," she said faintly, still not looking up. "I am sick. I have a pain here." She moved her hand to her side where in reality she was conscious of a trifling soreness. "I can't go on."

He stared at her. She was pale. Now that she lifted her eyes for a brief reading of his look, he marked that they appeared unusually large and luminous. There was a flush on her cheeks. His old fear surged back on him: Gloria was going to die! So he did what Gloria had counted on having him do: put milk and sugar in her coffee and brought the cup to her; he hastened to serve her a piping hot breakfast of crisp bacon, hot cakes and jam. He urged her to eat and made his own meal of unsweetened black coffee and cakes without jam. Triumphantly and covertly Gloria observed all of this. Hers was the victory. Mark King was again waiting on her, hand and foot, sacrificing for her.

He allowed himself a half a pipe of tobacco—to tobacco like food was going to run out soon—and smoked somberly. Here already was the thing to be dreaded more than aught else—Gloria threatened with illness. As Bigelow Romaine's daughter, never as his own beloved wife, she had become his responsibility. She was a parcel marked "Fragile—Handle With Care" which he had undertaken to deliver safely to a friend. Just now, though the parcel itself had in his eyes little intrinsic value, the consideration became the matter of his friend's fondness.

"I am going to look for the horse," he told her. She got to his feet and took up his rifle. "But don't count too much on my success. All the chances are that Buck is a long way on the trail back to his stable. Blackie has probably limped back into White Rock by now. Another thing: If I don't get Buck today he'd be no use to us, that is if the snow keeps on. But I'll do what I can."

But before leaving, he did what he could to make for her comfort during his absence. He brought up fir boughs, making them into a bed for her. He readjusted his canvas screen, securing it more carefully, making the cave somewhat more cozy. And at the last he dropped a little, much worn book at her side; she did not know he had it with him. She did not appear to note it until he had gone. Then she took it up curiously. A volume of Kipling's poems, compact and companionable, in India paper between worn red covers. With a little sniff she put the book down; just the sort of thing for Mark King to read, she thought with fine scorn, and utterly stupid to Gloria. What had she to do with "The Explorer" and "Snarleyow" and "Boots" and "The Feet of The Young Men?" Less than nothing, in sheer, regrettable fact. She knew he had one other book with him, Gus Ingle's Bible! The profane volume of a murderous, long dead scoundrel. What a library for a dainty lady! Gloria suddenly found that she could have screamed.

She scrambled up and went to peer out around the canvas screen. No sound out there, for the wind was dead and the snow dropped noiselessly; the creek in the gorge, because what little draft there was in the air bore down the cañon, sent no sound to her ears. The wilderness of crag and peak and distant forest was hostile, pitiless. She sought eagerly for some sign of Gratton. There was none; no smoke to mark his camp, no longed-for figure toiled upward toward her. But he would come soon, he must. King had found the gold here; Gratton would know and come. She would wait, hoping for Gratton's coming before King's return.

Meanwhile King, making his way down the mountain-slope, found that his estimate of the storm was cheerlessly correct; the fluffy stuff under-foot was in places already knee-deep and mounting steadily higher. He shook himself and growled in his throat and plowed through it vigorously.

"A pair of webs would look like wings before long," he muttered. "Well, we'll make 'em since we can't buy 'em."

Making his way back to the point where Buck had broken his tether King overlooked no precaution; since he did not care to have his and Gloria's hiding-place known unnecessarily to Gratton and his following, he forsook the natural pathway and made slower, hardly progress along the gorge where others would be less likely
to chance upon his tracks and where the tracks themselves would sooner fill with drifting snow. Passing about many a grove he came at last to the place whence Buck had fled. He knew that in the general direction indicated by the line of flight, beyond two ridges, was the valley of the giant Sequoias. There a horse would find water, shelter and grass. If he failed to find the animal there—well then, Buck was well on the trail to White Rock or lost to King in any one of a hundred places.

And always as he went, panting up and plowing down the steep slopes, his eyes were keen for meat, be it Douglas squirrel or bear. But the woods seemed deserted and empty; only those cheerful, impudent little bundles of feathers of snowbirds and an occasional darting water ouzel along the creeks. These he let alone but with the mental reservation that the time might well be at hand when even such as they must be called on to keep life within him and Gloria.

He had taken on a man's-sized contract for his morning's work and drove his big body at it relentlessly. And he took his own sort of joy from it, the joy of a fight against odds, the joy of action in the open. His body was wet with sweat but neither his ardor nor optimism was dampened; his foot came perilously near frost-bite after he had slipped into the hidden water of a small stream but he considered the accident but a part of the day's work. So, prepared by common sense for disappointment, he looked hopefully to finding the horse. And as he pushed on he set his mind to suggesting other likely spots to seek this afternoon or tomorrow if he did not find the animal in the Sequoias.

Here he was among old friends. But he knew almost as soon as he came among them that they had no word for him today. On his wedding morning he had planned how he would bring Gloria here, taking it for granted in his blind infatuation that they would mean to her what they had meant to him. Now he passed swiftly like a noiseless shadow between the gigantic boles; he did not lift his head to look at old Vulcan's lightning-blasted crest, two hundred feet in air, all but lost up there in the falling snow; he gave no thought to the thousands of years which were Majesty's and Thor's. He went with his eyes on the ground, seeking tracks of a horse.

And as he had more than half expected, he found nothing. The magnificent vistas, carpeted in snow, filled with snow, gave him no view of anything but snow.

Later, he must cudgel his brains and seek elsewhere. Now, with other work to be done, he should go back the shortest, quickest way. So he set his feet into the trail which they had made and turned his back upon the grove. Where he crossed streams he took stock of pools; there were trout there if a man could take them. This was another matter to see about. Oh, he would be busy enough. And yet he did not loiter and stopped only briefly and infrequently to rest.

Before returning to Gloria, King meant to look in on Gratton's camp if only from a distance. As matters stood now there was no telling what bearing Gratton's actions might have later upon his own affairs. It would be well to note if the men were preparing to fight the storm out or to pack up and leave rather than take prolonged chances with the season. So a mile below his own camp, he slipped into a grove of firs and made his unseen way toward the fringe whence he counted upon seeing what Gratton was about. He was still moving on slowly and had had no glimpse of the men, when he heard them. He stopped abruptly and listened.

The men were down there, against the cañon wall. Words came to him indistinctly, muffled by the thick air. The tone of the voices was unmistakable. Three voices there were, each with its own peculiarity, none of them Gratton's—first a big, booming voice; then a sharp staccato-quick voice; thereafter a high-pitched, querulous utterance, nervous and irritable. Disagreement if not out-and-out quarrel had already come to camp. King moved a few paces nearer, pushed aside a low branch from which the snow dropped with little thuds, and saw the men.

There were four of them in an excited group and, slightly drawn apart, one hand at his mouth, Gratton. The four paid no attention to him, but formed a group exclusively self-interested. Of these four one held his own council, his attitude alert, his hands in his pockets, his head turning swiftly, so that his eyes were now on one speaker, now on another. Across the brief distance, King could see the puffs of smoke from the pipe in his teeth. The man wore
a red handkerchief knotted about his throat; its color was as bright as fresh-spilled blood. It and his black hair and beard were vivid in the white background.

Now and then as a voice was lifted King caught a word; repeated several times he heard the word “bacon.” Here, doubtless, was the matter under discussion. One man, he of the thin, querulous voice, swung his nervous arm widely and fairly shrieked his message; it came in little puffs and was lost between. King heard him shout “bacon” and “snow” and “hell.” The three expressions, so oddly connected and yet disjointed, were significant.

Gratton stood apart and gnawed at his hands; though he could not see the bulging eyes King could imagine the look in them. The man of the black beard and red neckerchief puffed regularly at his pipe and watched and listened intently.

Abruptly the wrangling knot of men resolved itself into two definite factions. His fellows had turned upon the shrill-voiced man, plainly in some sort of denunciation or accusation. He was the smallest of the lot and drew back hastily, step after step, offering the knife-edge of his curses as the others clubbed their fists.

“—a lie!” he shrieked. “Fools——”

Gratton gnawed at his knuckles, “Black-Beard” puffed steadily and the two aggressors accepted windy denial as sign of guilt. One of them sprang forward and struck; the little man whipped out a revolver and fired. The shot sounded dull and muffled; a puff of smoke hung for a moment like the smoke from the pipe which kept on methodically between the passive onlooker’s teeth; the man who had struck stopped dead in his tracks. There came a second shot with its smoke, another and another until a six-shooter was empty. Before the last the balancing body had sagged limply and sprawled in the snow.

King’s caution of the day, assumed because of circumstance and never a part of the man’s headlong nature, was forgotten in a flash. Obeying the first natural impulse now he broke through the brush and ran forward. As he came into full view the man with the pipe spoke abruptly.

“Benny’s right; you’re two damned fools,” he called sharply. “What would we want to cut our own throats for? There’s King; you know what he’s come in here for. Ask him who got it!”

Benny, chattering wildly to himself, was filling his emptied cylinder. The man he had shot lay quiet, as good as dead already, his blood staining the snow and congealing rapidly. King came to a halt, his eyes for the eyes of the man who had just spoken.

“If there’s been anything stolen,” he said in quick answer, “it would be like your work, Royal.”

For he knew the man and was not surprised to find him here in this company. He was as evil as a man can be and still be in the least human—a ruffian by heredity, environment and preference who only last year had been suspected of the brutal murder of his own wife and had come close to paying the penalty for the deed whether his or another’s. And, oddly enough, King knew slightly or by repute each of the other men with the single exception of the sprawling body in the snow. Benny, who had done the killing, was a dope-fiend and a thorough-going scoundrel; the other man of the group was the high-stepping, burly timberjack—he of the big, bony frame and little pig-eyes who had been the sole witness of King’s marriage with Gloria.

“I’d be apt to do a job like that, wouldn’t I!” rumbled Royal. “Steal grub from my own crowd!”

“By God, yes you would!” It was the high-stepper’s quick decision. “It’s just your kind of play, Jed Royal!”

Royal puffed on calmly, taking trouble for neither shrug nor spoken answer. King eyed him keenly; Royal, only his eyes moving, seemed bound not to lose an instant’s sight of either King or his latest accuser or of Benny. Even upon the more distant Gratton he sent now and then a swift, sidelong glance.

King came closer and stooped over the fallen man. The others drew nearer with him. When he lifted his head even Gratton had drawn a few dragging steps nearer; King could have put out his hand and touched big Jed Royal.

“Dead, ain’t he?” querrated Benny, half-coughing over his words.

King nodded and stepped back. Then he turned to Gratton.

“You and your murderous crowd keep a good distance from my camp,” he said coldly. “Understand?”

Gratton’s eyes were wild, void of purpose; the chalky white of his face had
turned a sickly greenish tinge. As he had been drawn closer, step by step, so now again he began to draw back, step by step, his heels making long furrows in the snow.

"Come over here, King," he said at last, his voice harsh and shaken. "I—I want to talk——"

He choked up and his words were lost. King shook his head.

"I have nothing to do with you, Gratton," he announced sternly, "now or later."

"I want to make you a proposition," cried Gratton. "You and I—at least we have known each other, we are of the same class——"

"My first and last word to you," he returned curtly, "is this: Clear out of this as fast as God will let you. You don't belong here."

Then he turned to Benny: "If you've got any brains left, you won't lose any time looking up the sheriff at White Rock. I'll report what I have seen. They'll get you soon or late. If you've got your side of it to tell it won't hurt your cause to tell it quick!"

"Self-defense," said Benny coolly.

Now that there was ample cause for nervousness the situation seemed to have left him like a rock. He put his gun back into his pocket and spat into the snow.

XIII

The mere fact of being absolutely alone from midday to dark would have been for Gloria an experience at any time and in any environment. Of her kind and class there are more who have never in a lifetime known what it was to spend half a dozen daytime, waking hours in perfect solitude, catching not so much as a fleeting glimpse of a servant, a policeman, a nurse, of a street-car conductor in the echoing street. Solitude made rippleless by an absence of any human-made sound; neither the whisper of a maid's broom, the clang of a telephone bell, the buzz of motors or the slamming of doors.

At those intervals when King thought of her, it was to realize that she might quite naturally find discomfort in her bleak surroundings, being denied coal grate and upholstered chair; it did not suggest itself to him that the chief discomfort to one like her would be a spirit-crushing, terrifying loneliness.

She told herself that she was glad to be alone when he had gone. Five minutes later she began to fidget; another five minutes and already she was listening for his return. Never once during the day was there a sudden or unexpected sound, whether the snapping of a burning fagot or the scratching against the rock of a log rolling apart, or the flap of her canvas, that she did not look expectantly toward the rude door through which she thought to see him returning.

Once that her restlessness came upon her she could not remain quiet. She drew on her boots and walked up and down, casting fearsome glances toward the darkest portion of the cavern, shunning it, keeping the fire between it and herself. When she peered out across the desolate world she drew back from its bleak menace shuddering, returning to crouch miserably by her fire, shut in between two frightful things: the black unknown of the bowels of the cave, the white horror of the brutal, insensate wilderness. And, in her almost hysterical emotional frenzy she saw back of each of them the man, Mark King, as if they were but the expressions of his own brutality.

After an hour she felt that she would scream unless she found something to hold her mind back from those hideous channels into which it slipped so readily. She snatched up King's red-covered book and forced herself to read. Pages eluded her but here and there single lines or words caught her attention as a thorny cope catches the garments of one going blindly through it. So she was arrested by the line—

"In simpleness and gentleness and honor and clean mirth."

And here was one of the times when she threw the book down and got up and walked back and forth impatiently. It was almost as if King had left the wretched tome behind to be his spokesman in his absence; she told herself angrily that he was not like that, had never been like that. He was a mere brute of a man, not—

"—such as fought and sailed and ruled and loved and made our world."

He was, rather, unthinkably crude and boorish and detestable.

But, rebelling at utter loneliness, she
was forced again and again to the only companion at hand. She read “The Explorer,” fascinated in a shivery, uncanny way by the first line, as if a ghostly voice were whispering to her from the black corners of the cave—

“There’s no sense in going further—it’s the edge of cultivation.”

And later—

“I faced the sheer main-ranges, whipping up and leading down.”

Others than she had gone into the last solitudes. Others who had joyed in it and sung of it! It was as if the dead shades of those others squatted at the edges of her fire and mocked at her. Then she could fancy that it was King himself jeering, and that he cried—

“Then He chose me for His Whisper, and I’ve found it, and it’s yours!”

She snapped the book shut. Then she opened it to the tale of “Tomlinson.” She did not entirely grasp it but she could not entirely miss what it said. She hurried on; she wondered vaguely at the call of the red gods: here again, seeking distraction, she was whipped back to reality. There were the lines, as if King had rewritten Kipling in red, staring at her:

“Who hath smelt wood-smoke at twilight? Who hath heard the birch log burning? Who is quick to read the noises of the night?”

And the answer was—“Mark King.” Even now it was a torturous twilight in the cave, even now she smelled wood-smoke burning; even now she was like one starting at the noises of the night.

“Man-stuff,” she thought contemptuously.

She had heard such a definition of this uncouth scribe. It did not strike her that man-stuff might well enough be woman-stuff, also, being one or the other or both for the sheer reason that it was human. She chose to consider it merely the sort of coarse food for male mental digestion. A man’s nature was not fine and intricate; rather his emotional qualities must be like stubby, blunt, callous fingers, unskilled and not highly sentient. A man lacked the psychical and spiritual and intellectual development which was that of a maid like Gloria; his joys were chiefly physical. So he cared to blaze trails like the explorer; the impact of a storm’s buffeting and the low appreciation of a full stomach drew limits, marking his possibilities of expansion. He was a beast and she hated the whole sex sweepingly and superbly. In great surges of genuine sympathy her heart went out to herself.

But after all, the moments, in which her thoughts were snared away from her fears and the oppressiveness of her aloofness, were few and short. From wondering what kept King she passed to bitter anger that he should desert her so; she concluded that he was doing it with malicious intent.

Repeatedly she was tempted to go forth and seek Gratton; to hunt up and down until at last she came to him. Again and again she went to the mouth of the cave and looked down. But each time she drew back, terrified at the thought of making her way unaided down the sheer cliff-wall. She sought to tell herself that she was not afraid of the snow, of being lost, of being unable to find Gratton. But she could not climb down the cliff; she knew that she would fall. Dizzy and sick, shivering with dread and cold, she turned back always.

She let her fire die down, not noticing it. Then the cold reminded her and she worked long building another. She did not even know how to get a fire going. She knew where a block of matches was; she had seen King set it carefully away. In her excitement she struck dozens of matches, dropping the burnt ends about her.

At last her fire blazed up and she warmed herself. Then she was conscious of a strange faintness and realized that she was hungry. She went to their food cache and ransacked it hastily. She opened a tin of sardines and came back to the fire with it in her hands. She had no clear conception of the deed when, half of the fish consumed, she was struck with revulsion for the smelly stuff and buried the remaining part down into the coals.

KING stamped the loose snow from his boots and came in. Gloria stood confronting him, tense, rigid, white-faced, her hands stiff at her sides. She wanted to cry out, all of her fear of the day turned
into molten anger, to lash at him with the whips of her vituperation, but at the moment her strength failed strangely, her heart seemed to be stopping, she choked up. The surge of her relief, like a suddenly released current, impacting with that other current of her unleashed anger, made of her consciousness a sort of wild, fuming whirlpool. Nothing was clear to her just then, save that Mark King had come back and that no doubt his heart was filled with jeers; she could not read the expression of his shadowed face but knew within her soul that it was distorted with mockery.

King was tired throughout every muscle of his body. He set down his rifle, tossed his hat aside and slumped down by the fire. Coming in from the storm-cleansed open he sniffed at the closeness of the cave. It was not alone the smell of smoke; his first thought was that Gloria had been cooking something. Then he noted the sardine can. With a stick he raked it out of the coals. And now Gloria could read his expression well enough as he jerked his head up.

"In God's name," he demanded, "what do you mean by a thing like that? Are you stark, raving mad?"

For a moment she was at a loss to understand what had enraged him. The act of tossing a distasteful food into the fire had been purely involuntary; her conscious mind had hardly taken cognizance of the fact. When it dawned upon her what he meant, her own anger was still greater than her sense of her act's significance. She had meant to blaze out upon him on his return; instead he was the first to criticize. And now she had no answer to make. She was not without reason; in their present predicament she was a fool to have done a thing like that; she could hardly believe that she had done it. And so she stared impudently at him in silence and then, with an elaborate shrug of disdainful shoulders, she turned her back on him.

But King flung to his feet and set his hands on her two shoulders and swung her about. Her eyes opened widely.

"Listen to me," he said angrily. "I am going to talk plain to you. You are a fool, a downright, empty-headed, silly fool. What you have destroyed in wanton carelessness would have kept the life in a man a whole day. Haven't you sense enough to see it's going to be nip and tuck if we ever get out of this? You've shown yourself from start to finish a miserable cheat; there's no trust to be put in either your judgment or your intentions. Be still," he commanded as she sought to wriggle out of his grasp, to avoid the direct blaze of his eyes. "I am going to do what I can for you; to see you safe through this, if I can. Not because you are anything to me, just because you are Bigelow Romaine's and he is my friend. Understand?"

"You are hurting me," she said in defiance. "Take your dirty hands off."

"When I am done," he returned curtly. "I am going to stick to you and see you through, I tell you. But I am not going to have you throw all of our chances away by dumping grub into the fire. If you do one other brainless thing like that and I catch you at it, I am going to tie you up, hand and foot, and keep you out of mischief."

"You wouldn't dare—"

But she knew better; he would dare anything. He was of the type that fought and sailed and ruled. Now, when he flung her hands down and away from him, she stared after him and watched him as he dropped back by the fire. Then she went slowly to her bed, to hide her trembling, and lay down.

Presently she heard him stirring. She did not turn her head to look at him. But she knew that he was busied with supper. She smelled coffee, heard the clash of tin cup and plate and realized that he was eating. She wondered if he had forgotten her. After a while she moved just a trifle and furtively; he had put away his dishes and was filling his pipe. And he had noted that she was watching him.

"No," he said to her unspoken question, "I am not going to cook for you any more. I have had a hard day of it, doing the man's work. Were you any earthly good you would have done the woman's; you would have had supper ready for me."

He lighted his pipe with a splinter of burning pine. Then for the first time he saw the waste of scattered matches on the floor. From them he looked to her in an amazement so sheer that it left him no word of expostulation. The suspicion actually came to him: Was the girl mentally subnormal? It was scarcely conceivable that a perfectly sane individual could do the things which she had done.
She saw him get up and begin gathering up all of the food-stuff. He carried it to the back of the cave where he passed out of her sight in one of the crooked fingers of the main cave. He was gone ten minutes and came back empty-handed. He made the second trip, after which there was left on a shelf of rock only half a dozen matches and enough food for one scanty meal. This Gloria ignored.

"Do you think," she said contemptuously, "that what you have hidden back there I couldn't find?"

"You could find it but you won't," he returned with quiet assurance that jerked the question from her:

"Why?"

"Because you are, with the rest of your charming characteristics, too much of a coward to go back there to look for it."

And in her heart she knew that there was but the mere truth. For why was she not already in Gratton's camp? Her opportunity had come and gone—because she had been afraid.

XIV

KING awoke, filled with resolve and definite purpose. It was pitch-dark but he sensed the coming of Wintry dawn. He drew on his boots and went to look out at the cave's mouth. It was still snowing heavily, steadily, implacably. He kicked the loose, fluffy stuff from underfoot.

"The biggest storm in twenty years," he told himself. "And if any of us come out of this alive we'll have something to talk about. It's the real thing."

He went grimly about his fire-making, fixed purpose crystallizing to the smallest detail. Again he must seek immediately to locate his horse; one could eat horse-flesh if driven to it. He must try to get game of some sort. And every lost hour meant lessened chances of his killing forest meat; deer and bear; and the smaller folk if they had been caught napping would be scurrying out of the mountains long before now; soon the solitudes would be utterly barren and empty. He went to Gloria's bed.

"Get up," he said briefly. "Time to start the day. While we eat I want to talk with you."

She awoke slowly, blinked at him and only drew her blanket higher above her chin.

"I am tired," she answered petulantly. "Don't you realize that a girl—"

"I realize," he cut into her sleepy ex-postulation, "that you are weak and frightened and useless. And that those are three of the many things you've got to get over the shortest way if you don't want to die here."

"I don't know that I care to live," she began, turning with her old instinct toward an attitude which she expected would rob him of his harshness.

But his plan was set in cold determination like iron in hardened concrete, and he cut her short again.

"If you don't care, I do. And I am going to pull you through with me, if for no other reason simply because I have set out to do it and am not a quitter. What's more, you've got to do your share. I have builded the fire; will you get up?"

"No," she flashed out at him, thoroughly awake now. "I won't!"

He stooped and took the corner of her blankets and whipped them off. Instinctively she sought to draw the under bedding over her, forgetting that she had not undressed.

"You brute—" she screamed at him.

"Get up," he told her sternly, "or by God, I'll make you!"

She saw his face plainly now as his crackling fire burned higher. It was hard, his eyes were ominous. She hesitated and saw in his eyes and in a stir of his body that he was going to jerk her to her feet. She flung out of bed at that and upon the far side from him.

"Get your boots on," he ordered. "I don't want you catching cold from idiotic carelessness and I won't have you going sick on my hands. For the first and last time I'll admit that I don't enjoy driving you like a cursed galley-slave. But I'll do it and do a thorough job of it if you force me to it."

She drew on her boots hastily and came to the fire and laced them. He was a new man this morning and relentless. She was afraid of him.

"I never saw a storm worse than this," he told her. He had cooked the breakfast because he was in a hurry and did not care to trust her wasteful fingers with their already precious food. "There must be two
or three feet on the level places by now; plowing through snow like that is killing work for a man and you wouldn’t last at it ten minutes.” He had no intention of speaking contemptuously; she knew that his thought was not trifling with such matters as her feelings. He was merely indulging in plain talk. “We have enough grub for a few days. After that, if we stuck on here and did not find food somehow, we’d die like dogs. Therefore we are going to get ready to beat it out the first chance we get.”

“But if I wouldn’t last ten minutes, as you so elegantly put it?” she broke in nastily.

“Not as you are; not as the snow is. But I’m hoping that before it’s too late we’ll get clear weather, a sun, a thaw and freezing nights. Then we could tackle it on what crust there was. And your job is to get yourself ready for that one chance.”

“By getting ready, I suppose you mean for me to pack my trunk and order the expressman at the door?”

He looked at her with a long, impersonal stare which bewilder her; she was at utter loss to read its meaning until he spoke:

“You are to pack what endurance you’ve got into your flabby muscles. You are to make up your mind to call up all of the grit that’s in you. You’ll need both. And you are to quit lying around and getting weaker every day; you’ve got little enough time to harden yourself, so you are going to take on the job right now.”

She gasped, incredulous. He nodded sternly.

“Gloria Romaine,” he said tersely, “I am going to do all that I can for both of us. You are going to do all that you can. That is final.”

She bit her lips and gave him her scornful silence. The blood was red and hot in her cheeks.

She ignored him when he called crisply that breakfast was ready. There were limits to her obedience, she thought rebelliously. To be told to do this, do that, to arise when this man’s body was rested, to eat when his stomach was empty, was intolerable. King looked at her and had the understanding to grasp something of her thought. So he explained:

“I want you to come outside with me. You’ll find it hard work. It would be a first-rate idea if you’d fortify your strength by the little bit of nourishment which we can afford to take.” He offered her the pieces of a sack he had cut in two for her. “Tie those about your feet to keep them from freezing,” he said.

“When I want your advice, I’ll ask for it,” she retorted icily.

“Very well,” he answered. “And I can’t very well make you eat if you don’t want to. And perhaps you are not hungry.” He set aside her portion. “You’ll have the appetite for that when we get back.”

She had the appetite now. But she would prefer to starve, she honestly thought at the moment, than eat when he told her to eat. Now he finished in silence. She saw him glance at his watch. Her heart seemed scarcely to stir in her breast; then slowly it began to beat, swifter, swifter, hammering wildly. He had said that she was going out with him; what he promised to do she realized again that he would do if it were humanly possible. She wanted to scream out; to run, run anywhere just to be lost to him. And yet she stood stock-still and rigid, while her heart hastened and leaped and her mind sought to grasp the thing to do. She must go with him, do what he told her like a slave as he had said, or he would make her. Her reason said directly: “You will go without a word.” And yet, when he arose to his feet and knocked his pipe out and looked at her, her reason fled before the flood of the passionate wilfulness of the old Gloria, and she cried shrilly:

“I won’t! I won’t! You can’t make me; you shan’t make me. I won’t!”

He had hoped for better than this, but as in his fruitless quest of the morning, he had been prepared for anything. He came closer and looked intently into her eyes, seeking to measure what endurance and steadfastness and stubbornness were hers. But her eyes showed him only glimpses of a storm-tossed soul within her.

“I will make you,” he said harshly. “So help me God, Gloria, I will make you. And I am through talking; I am sick of talk. Come with me.”

She drew back and back in white-lipped fury.

“You don’t dare—”

Her tortured heart surged up in wild triumph as he turned; it sank sickly as
he came back. He had a piece of rope in his hand, the heavy, half-inch rope which had served to tie a horse.

"You would tie me!" she gasped.

"Me!"

"No," he said tersely. "As if you were any other fractious animal refusing discipline when refusal means death, I am going to whip you!"

"God!" screamed Gloria. "Oh, my God!"

For again he but said simply the thing which he meant to do. And she knew. Yet the consummation was monstrous, unthinkable. She would not believe it; at the last minute his lifted arm would fail him; God Himself, would wither it; undreamed rescuers would come; the earth would open—something would save her from this humiliation which would kill her.

"While I count three," said King. And steadily, though there was a pallor on his own face, which should have told her the terrible relentlessness of his intention, he counted, "One, two, three."

She put her face into her hands and shivered and felt the fear of one under the flashing guillotine. She wished to move, to obey, at this tardy second but something within her stronger than herself held her back. The blow fell swiftly. The rope cut through the air with vicious sibilance, and fell across the stooped shoulders. The pain was immediate, hot and searing, and Gloria shrieked—once only—and grew still. She dropped her hands and looked at him, her face as white as a dead girl’s, her eyes as unfathomable as a maniac’s. He lifted the rope to strike again. Not just to frighten her, but to strike a second time.

"I can’t stand it," she said. "I will do what you tell me to do."

She stooped for the pieces of barley-sack to tie about her boots. He threw the rope from him and ran his palm across his forehead, wiping off the sweat. Then he went for his gun and hat. He did not speak, did not so much as command her with a look. She followed him.

XV

HE LED, she followed. They did not look at each other. They were like strangers and in their souls they were strangers. A colossal moment, during which life itself had stood still, had visited them. King set his mind stoically to the line of duty before him. Gloria made her lagging way at his heels. When they were down the cliffs they kept along the ridge until a gradual slope invited them and they went down on the far side. Thus they came in a few minutes to a lap of fairly level land there, the further side of which was marked by a line of sturdy red willows and the black of a stream of water. King stopped and forced himself to turn toward Gloria while he spoke.

Their attitude was like that of bored instructor and dull pupil. He began methodically at the beginning; already, though following on the snow which his feet had somewhat trampled down and packed for hers, she showed signs of fatigue. Her muscles were soft. They must be hardened. Not all at once, since that was impossible. But little by little and daily. Also there was a knack in conserving one’s power. She should watch how he walked, not flounder wildly. It was hard work at best; there was no sense in making it harder. Lift your feet, so; place them, so; when they begin to drag and plow and your will is not sufficiently master to lift them, then stop a moment to rest and go to it again. So should she exercise her muscles and so save what little power and endurance she had. Now he was going to the line of willows; today she could follow in his trail. Next time she would make her own way over the un trodden snow.

He turned and went on and she followed. After a dozen steps, though his was the handicap, she began to drop back. When he had crossed the open space she was in the middle of it. But on she came in a sort of stupor. She saw that he was cutting willow withes, stripping them of the lesser branches, gathering a bundle under his arm. When she came closer he explained; he was going to make snow-shoes; "webs" he called them. Also he was looking for tracks of a snow-shoe rabbit; she did not know whether the article suggested the animal or if this were a likely place for rabbits. At the same time he was considering the possibility of fish in some of the pools. For he was going to set traps and snares; from now on, as he put it, "We’re not going to miss a single bet."

During the whole, hideous adventure she
had not once spoken. For the first time in her life she had been whipped. Her body, even now incased in the finest of silken undergarments, had known the abhorrence of a physical blow. A man had beaten her. He would beat her again if she did not obey him. She who had never obeyed any one in all of her life must obey now. If he said, “Come,” she must come or he would whip her and in the end make her come. If he said, “Go,” when he had done with her, she must go. She was utterly his slave. He left her no initiative. Absolutely, he was the master.

Not that she did not rebel somewhere in her writhing spirit. But that rebellion bore no fruit in actual deed. She hated him; she wished that he were dead; she feared him; but for all that, she obeyed him. She was like one dying who did not want to die, who feared death and yet whose strength had been stolen away and who knew that death was inevitable.

She was not broken utterly in spirit; rather she was stunned. All of her life she had taken it for granted that she was precious, inviolable. Hers had been a life of silks and perfumes and flowers and music and always adulation; all of this, like a fine curtain, had hung between her and the hard facts of existence. Now her shoulders burned, a common rope had been laid across them; the curtain had been snapped aside. Aghast with humiliation she was crushed by the weight of the stupefaction upon her; her bewilderment was greater than her shame.

Since her spirit was essentially fiery, it was not long before it began to pierce the black smother which clouded it. The fresh air revived her; the breeze on the highlands began to whip away something of the fog into which her dazed mind had stumbled. Her muscles tensed spasmodically; she looked at King with eyes which grew bright and calculating and filled with active malice. To her was arriving a new emotion; the primal instinct which in quarreling children urges them to “get even” and which in child-like peoples sends them to the swift, headlong deed of a knife in an enemy’s back. Her mind quickened; she fancied a red line across her back and yearned hotly for the utter undoing of a man she hated intensely.

But soon this emotion was in turn gone, or at least blanketed, like a burning coal under dead ashes. For she had been walking on, dragging her feet wearily, and suddenly her little physical strength went out of her and her muscles slacked and she slumped and settled down, the world turning from painful white to dizzy, reeling black. Where she fell she lay with her eyes shut, on the verge of unconsciousness. Snowflakes in her face were at first unnoticed, then they became the first vaguely grateful sense of pleasure; they were so cool, like gentle comforting hands and her face was so hot. She put out a slow hand and brushed up some loose snow and laid it against her forehead and cheeks. Her throat was dry; she put some between her lips.

“You mustn’t do that, you know.” King’s approach she had not heard but she felt him standing over her. “It will give you sore throat. And that snow is wet; you’ll catch cold. A drink at the creek will do you good.”

She got up and went on, conscious of that sense of dual personality which comes to one when laboring on into exhaustion; there were two of her, one urging her to stop, the other commanding her to go on. Almost the duality grew into a trinity; these two who gave the orders, she, the third, who did as they made her do, she who listened and obeyed. A few steps brought her to the creek; she lay down and put her face into the cold, black rushing water and drank. Then she sighed and got up and wiped her mouth and turned again to King—again for orders.

“We’ll go back now,” he said. “I want to figure out a rabbit-snare. I saw tracks down there.”

They returned as they had come, in heavy silence. He had to help her climb the cliffs. Once past the canvas barrier she went to her couch and lay down. He kicked the embers together and made a fire. Then she heard his voice.

“Take off your wet clothes or you’ll catch cold. At least your jacket and shoes and stockings. You have other stockings; put them on. We’ll have to fix you up with some sort of slippers; when you dry your boots don’t set them too close to the fire; that would ruin the leather. And don’t put your feet too close until you work the chill out or you’ll get chillblains.”

She was too tired to move or answer. Further she was faint from hunger. He
changed to dry socks, set his boots to dry and then stood looking at her. She might be trying him; she might be defying him. He knew that she was tired, very tired—far, far wearier than she had ever been before. And he knew, too, that she was not utterly exhausted; one never absolutely reached the limit of endurance provided the proper stimulus were at hand. A man dying in the desert could always wriggle another yard to a spring. King had commanded; he should not have done so unless he was prepared and in a position to exact obedience.

He stepped across the cave. Twigs breaking under his stockinged feet told of his moving; she watched him with dull eyes. She saw him stoop. He was bending over the pile of dishes and cooking utensils; across them lay the rope he had thrown aside. He put out his hand. She wondered in a strangely aloof way if he would straighten up with the frying-pan in his hand or the rope.

He took up neither but started erect and whirled, listening. And now Gloria sprang to her feet. The stimulus had come from the unexpected source. Muffled and yet distinct from without came Gratton’s voice calling:

“King! Oh, King!”

Gloria ran by King before he grasped her purpose and to the cave’s door. Gratton was down below, staring up at the wall of cliff.

“Help!” she screamed wildly. “Help me. The gold is here; he has found it. You can have——”

King’s hand on her shoulder jerked her back. She looked up into his stern face, her eyes triumphant. He thrust her behind him and stepped forward and looked down. Gratton’s bulging eyes and open mouth were turned up toward him. King pondered the new situation briefly. Then he said to Gloria:

“This is the biggest fool thing you have done yet. That man is absolutely no good. His hangers-on are as bad or worse. A woman couldn’t trust herself with one of them in Golden Gate Park at noonday. Out here—haven’t you any imagination? Yesterday Benny Rudge—he’s the most harmless of the crowd too—killed one of their crowd. Shot six holes in him. There’s likely to be more blood-letting before they are through, for they are a crowd of treacherous devils, double-crossing one another from the start. I am going to have a word with Gratton.” He paused and looked at her significantly. “You stay right here until I come back.”

And without waiting for an answer he went down the cliffs.

Gratton watched him, waiting eagerly and anxiously. For realization had come to him like a flash of light that he had made a colossal and perhaps a fatal blunder.

Now, abruptly, he found himself confronted by an old order of things. The threat of the snow unnerved him. Then he saw a man killed, the fallen body violated by unnecessary leaden stabs. The other men who looked on seemed strangely unmoved, scarcely surprised. He himself went sick. In that moment while the world went black about him he had called to King:

“We are at least the same type, you and I. The same class.”

Since then he had scarcely slept or eaten. Benny and Royal and “High-Step” looked on him with different eyes now than when they had agreed to take his wages in White Rock. Then he had had the advantage in assurance, clothing, the strength of the man of means. Now he was afraid and they knew it; now he did not know how to build a fire or cook a meal. The three men consorted by themselves, talked in low tones or played cards with the dead man’s dirty deck or smoked in a silence which embraced them and shut him out. He had gone with them to a cave; there was nothing in it but a few tumbled picked bones and dirt and rubbish. They had never been a cheerful lot from the jump; now they were openly sullen.

Hence Gratton, shrewd where he was not heroic, patient where he was no woodsman, set out to find King and succeeded. From a lookout point upon a peak he had watched the world about him for hours. And so his reward came and he found more than he counted on. It was his first inkling of Gloria’s presence here. Already, before King had come down to him, his evil little mind was engaged with fresh schemings; how could he turn this condition of things to the advantage of one Gratton? He had caught the drift of her words; that the gold was here did not stir his pulse as it might have done at another time.
He was prepared for this as soon as he had seen that King and that other figure he took for a boy's had gone into a cave; the matter which engaged his speculation was the fact that Gloria was with King and was calling out for help against him. Swiftly Gratton's mind sensed here something of conditions so frequently met in his own city-jungle; he might get a grip on King, Gloria, and Bigelow Romaine all at once. Scandal was a weapon fitting his hand better than gun or knife.

"Well?" demanded King. "Talk short and to the point. What do you want?"

Again Gratton made a mistake, though in this case the result of his call could not be changed by what he said or did. And though he be crafty, it is but natural if a man's fingers curve involuntarily about a familiar weapon falling into his hands. He had come prepared for humble talk; now his eyes brightened in his look of insinuation and he said:

"So Miss Romaine is hiding out with you, eh? Hardly supposed her so unconventional."

"Is that what you came to say?" asked King.

Gratton hesitated, lifted the whitish lines of his brows and pondered. Chilled feet through wet boots prompted another opening.

"We have never been friends, King," he said smoothly. "But anyway, we are both human. Those men with me are not; they are fiends. You saw one of them killed—just for nothing. The first second they smell what we are both after, they'll kill again. I can see it in their damned sullen eyes all the time. Food is short; they'll kill for that. Royal and Parker both claimed the five-spot in a game of Pedro last night; I thought the killing was going to start again."

"Well?" said King again. "What about it? They are your dogs, not mine."

Gratton stuck to his pleading tone.

"Can't you understand," he insisted, "what is apt to happen? I did not know that there were men left in the world like these; they think nothing of murder. And they'll go beyond murder; their eyes show it." All of the time his white face was growing whiter; he began to pluck at a shirt-button with restless fingers. "Last night we were all hungry and cold; the fire burned down and nobody would get more wood. They looked at me; they were going to make me go for it. I could tell it in their looks. Then Royal, curse him, began to talk. He did it for me, of course. He told a lot of miserable yarns about the Donner party; how they died; how—how they ate dead bodies!"

His voice broke. King studied him curiously. Into his vast contempt crept a little pity.

"You've got to take me in with you," broke out Gratton desperately. "Anything might happen if you didn't; it would be like murder, like throwing a man out for wolves to tear to pieces. You have got to take me in with you. Listen, I tell you." His hand pawed at King and hung tenaciously to his shirt-sleeve. His voice grew suddenly lowered and confidential. "You have found the gold; there's plenty of it. It's nobody's, anybody's, yours as well as mine, mine as well as yours. We'll stick together; we'll split it two ways between us. It's either that or Benny and Parker and Royal will hog it all. And what will happen to you and me? Why man, they'd kill us both like dogs."

"Before we get through with this," said King sternly, "you may be in luck if you get a bullet in the head. There are worse deaths. And, if you don't look out, you're headed for one of them now. Look at your feet; they are soaking wet. Next thing you know they'll freeze. And then you'll be a gone goose."

"You see," cried Gratton. "I don't know this sort of life; I am as helpless as a baby; it would be inhuman if you refused to help a man, any man in my fix. You couldn't treat a dog that way!"

"Ordinarily," answered King steadily, "I couldn't drive a dog out when he came to me with his tail between his legs as you do. But this is no ordinary mess we're in; if a dog came to me now I'd simply be obliged to shoot him and eat him. Look at things in the face, Gratton. We've got precious little grub with us. In a few days we are going to be starving unless I can get something to eat. I've got my hands full as it is. I can't take you on. Further, I can't trust you; you're a double-dealing, treacherous scoundrel and we both know it. You brought this on your own head through your infernal crookedness; it's up to you to see it through."
Gratton looked at him wonderingly and helplessly.

"I'll add just this," King went on. "You know where we are. If you keep that knowledge to yourself and, in a few days, when they don't know what you are doing, you'll slip up here, I'll talk with you again. Not," he explained swiftly, "that I'll take you in; I won't do that. But if I do get meat and can spare you any I'll do it. And that's absolutely everything I can or will do for you."

Gratton felt that a stubborn door was ajar, that he had his fingers in the opening, that he might force it clean back on its hinges. And so he argued and pleaded eagerly. But King remained firm.

"I have said all that I am going to say," he said at the end. "The rest is up to you."

He went back up the cliffs, giving deaf ears to Gratton's lifted voice. It struck him that with things as they were his own hands were as full as Gratton's. For Gratton had no Gloria to contend with.

XVI

FOUR implacable days passed somehow, with hardly as many hours in which the snow did not continue steadily. King had hoped and expected that before now there would have been a shifting of air-currents and a change in temperature that would bring rain; no rain came.

He had yearned for bright sun and thaw, followed by cold nights and a hardening crust; no sun shone and no crust formed. It required no great flight of fancy to imagine that somehow the world had swung out of its accustomed orbit, plunging into a swirling universe of eternal Winter.

During these four days King had no sight of Gratton, who was playing his own game in his own way. Gloria was almost his constant companion. He manufactured strange unwieldy snow-shoes from what material was to be had, shaping willow wands, interlacing them with leather thongs cut from the saddle which had been left behind when Buck had fled.

He taught the girl how to walk with them; slow, heavy work at the best. He watched the color in her face and the look in her eyes and stopped each lesson before she was exhausted. And he found that she did better than he had expected; though almost flower-like in the matter of bodily tenderness, still she was young, vital, healthy and of a lusty stock. It was something to know that training was all that she needed. But it was not much, he admitted to himself over and over again. For time was short, she had a long way to go before she was fit for a hard trail, and every day the food supply ran lower, like sands slipping relentlessly through the glass.

From the darkness before day to the darkness after sunset King lived strenuously. He hunted for the vanished horse and found no sign; he overlooked not a single possible hiding-place within the limited radius which his judgment established. While seeking the saddle-animal he was diligent in game-hunting. He knew that somewhere in these still, white mountains there must be a belated bear here or a straggling buck there that now would be seeking Winter quarters and he pinned his hope upon finding such a meat-provider. For it was a part of Mark King to hope faithfully in time of need that even the long shot would come home. But at the end of this fourth day, as he sat wet and chilled by the cave fire, there was an unwonted grimness about his mouth and in his eyes.

He had snared one rabbit; the snare had been clumsy; he had baited it somewhat humorously with a few tinned green-peas, strung like an emerald necklace on a bit of fishing-line, and had wondered whether snow-shoe rabbits included petits pois in their menu. His loop of string at the end of a bowed sapling had through much good fortune jerked the foolish little animal up into the air.

But the good fortune had scarcely been King's. For when he arrived at the spot in the morning he found only the sprung trap and a bit of fur, together with certain faint, quickly obliterated traces of the shrewd prowler who had eluded him and taken his prey. And, so meager was the writing in the loose snow, he did not have even the satisfaction of knowing whether the rabbit had gone into the belly of wolf, bobcat or fox.

"At any rate," he decided, "rabbits do like canned peas and there are a few four-footed dwellers left in the forest."

So he set his trap again and gave Gloria her morning lesson and devoted the rest of
the day to placing all of his hooks on various lines in the more likely pools. Bait being scarce he used bits of cloth, the brightest he could find. Thus he used some of Gloria’s flauting ribbons.

This night, having dried and warmed himself, he very carefully reviewed the situation. Now he and Gloria had been six days in the cave. They had come to distrust, dislike and despise each other with sweeping heartiness; hence they spoke little, not at all when speech was not necessary.

But Gloria had learned something; she no longer threw away the smallest particle of food; she ate slowly even when very hungry, understanding that her system must be given every opportunity and aid to subtract every last iota of sustenance from the smallest morsel of flour or meat. And she had learned a little better how to take care of herself in the snow and had at last come to the place where she began summoning up her latent endurance and hardening herself. She had had long desperate hours for reflection; hence she saw that unless she strove as well as King there was no escape from the white menace and hideous starvation.

They had made their scanty supper; after it both were hungry. They had been hungry thus for four days. There remained coffee and sugar enough for another half-dozen meals; here the affluence ended. The bacon was down to a piece of fat two inches thick and some seven inches long; there was bacon grease a couple of inches deep in a tomato can; there was a tea cup of flour; there was one small tin of sardines and a smaller one of deviled meat. Today they were hungry, tomorrow they would be a great deal hungrier, the next day they would begin to starve.

"Gloria," said King abruptly.

He put aside his small hoard and came back to the fire and lighted the half-bowl of tobacco he was allowing himself after each meal.

"Well?" said Gloria heavily.

"You are going to begin a new régime tomorrow. I don't want you to come out with me for your exercise. You can lie here by the fire all day. And you had better. Understand?"

Yes, she understood. The less one exercised, the less food was required to keep life burning. They had come to that.

King waited a moment, accepted her significant silence as his answer and continued. His voice was steady and matter-of-fact; there was no sound of despondency in it; he did not seek to make gloomier an already fearsome matter. Nor had he himself given up hope. He had seen too many games won by the man down to his last chip.

"First thing in the morning," he told her, "I'll look at the fish-lines. There is always the chance that there's a fish in any hole, anywhere and any time. There's always the chance he's a fool fish and big and fat. A big trout now would do a lot of good. Next I'm going over the ridge and to the headwaters of the other fork. I have been thinking of that country a good deal; it's a little far and hard going and I'll burn up a good deal of fuel making the trip, but I've got a hunch a bear's in there. The one that stampeded Buck may have circled around that way. And I'm going to play every hunch I get, good and strong. It will probably be dark before I get back."

He smoked thoughtfully, half of his mind upon the morrow's work, the other set to a full appreciation of the rare taste of tobacco when it is low in the sack. Presently he added:

"I may even be gone all night. If I am, it will be because it is unavoidable or strikes me as wise; I may run on a track and want to stick to it. If I do that you will have to keep yourself dry, warm and still. Understand, don't you?"

Again she understood and her silence told him so.

WHEN in the early, dark morning he left the cave, Gloria was still asleep. He had taught her how to shoot the Savage; now he placed it significantly by her couch of boughs. He did not like to leave her alone a whole day and possibly a whole night, but the necessity was imperative. Besides, she should be as safe here as at home. That he had had no sight of Gratton for four full days encouraged him to the belief that Gratton had stolen more than his share of food from his companions and was making his way outside.

There was always the chance that the other men had gone, too; there was also the chance that they might find his hiding-place. He preferred not to dwell upon the probabilities of that; he could not take
Gloria with him and he could not tarry eternally with her. But he went determined to make what haste he could and to exhaust every effort to return by nightfall.

His day began suspiciously. Taking the way that would lead by the pools where he had set his lines, his eye was caught by a sudden whipping and jerking of an alder-top. He floundered on, his heart in his mouth. It seemed a year before he could come to it; another year before he could put his hands upon the line. There was a fish on his hook, a fish that pulled and ran and jerked like the very devil. Never did fisherman play his game with a wilder excitement. And when his catch was slapping safely in the snow, he stared at it with eyes grown almost incredulous. A trout like the one of which he had dreamed last night, big and lusty and fat. And the hook, sunk into the lashing tail, came out and the trout flapped free. But for only a moment. There sat King in the deep snow, his two big hands clutching the unlucky fish, his face radiant.

He was tempted to return post-haste to Gloria with it. But he realized that his catch was almost entirely accident, that there might not be another, that while this handful of meat would help, there must be more. He went on therefore, his hook again in the water, the trout at his belt with a bit of string through the gills.

"And now for a bear," he cried within him. "A fat bear to grease my boots and to feed two people until they can make a run for the open."

All of his lines and snares he visited on his way. But no other game was his this morning. He told himself that this did not matter, not so long as a trout hung at his belt and the hunting-fields were ahead of him. He kept to the ridges all that he could, for there where the snow was harder his clumsy snow-shoes aided a swifter progress. But he must forsake one ridge for another presently, and down in the hollows and drifts it was killing work to plow on. Once in a pine grove he thought that he saw something move in the tree-tops; it might have been a squirrel or a bird. He never knew; it was but a flash, gone before he could be certain that it was other than a branch lifting as some of its gathered snow slipped and fell.

A man less fortunate than Mark King in matters of physical and mental strength must have been heart-broken to keep pace with him for he drew to the last ounce of his endurance that morning. But at last he came into his selected hunting-grounds and lay down and rested and thereafter partook of his little lunch. He looked with hungry eyes at his trout. But, having swallowed the last crumb of his allotted fare, he thrust the fish around so that it was behind him and sought to put it out of his mind. And yet many a time that afternoon a tantalizing but pleasant vision shaped itself for him: a blazing fire, a trout sizzling... He could almost smell the cooking!

When he went on it was down into the narrow gorge confining the headwaters of Rocky Ford. Here and there the over-head rocks beetled so that underneath there were spots of bare ground. There was a little tufty grass; there were dry logs, there were a few stunted bushes. In the rocks themselves were cracks and fissures which might snugly house a storm-driven animal. King walked warily, peering about boulders and tree-trunks, stopping to examine every open spot before he went on for a view of the next. And yet when he saw just exactly that for which he had been looking so many a day, he could at first scarcely believe his staring eyes. Squatting in the lee of an outjutting crag, tearing at the dead wood of an upstanding stump, the small eyes in busy search of slugs, was a two or three-year-old brown bear. And not over a hundred yards away.

Slowly King raised his rifle, a hunter's calm upon him. He had the left side toward him; he selected the spot just under and back of the left shoulder. There was no excuse for missing so easy a target. And yet there was always a chance of a miss though a man puzzled over the "why" of it the rest of his life. King must not miss now; he might as well run a knife across his own throat. And if he made a kill... Why, then, he would make his vision of cooking trout come true. God, he was hungry...

The bear stirred slightly, ever so slightly. King's finger hardened to the trigger, pressed firmly. The explosion boomed dully in the gorge. He felt the wild fear that he had missed. Automatically the cartridge was ejected, another
thrown into the barrel. The bear lurched forward, on all fours. King fired again. The bear was down, struggling. He knew then that both bullets had found their target. He ran forward and stopped and sent two more bullets into the struggling body. There was no sense taking the smallest chance in the world and he had ammunition in plenty.

Later he found that one bullet had done the business and believed it was the first. It had driven clean through the heart.

"And right now, Mark, old boy," said King aloud, "I don't mind telling you something. You were just as near the end of your tether as it's comfortable to be. But you played a hunch and won out on it. And there's the dry wood for a fire—"

But he did not loiter. He had been long enough away from camp. While a bit of meat sizzled over his fire he got the rudely-dressed carcass swung clear of the ground from a bending young pine. Soon, eating as he went, carrying on his shoulders a chunk of fresh meat, he turned back toward Gloria.

XVII

Gloria awoke, sat up quickly and looked about her. It was full day; she was used to sleeping late and today, with no sound to break the heavy silence, she had slept until noon. She saw that she was alone. She got up hastily; King's rifle was missing. Here was her chance and this time she meant to take it. She was not afraid of the cliff descent any longer; she had gone down unaided at King's command and now could go again for her own salvation.

She was feverish in her preparations, nibbling at scraps of food while she laced her boots hurriedly. Gratton had four men with him, hired men, "servants" as she thought of them. He had food. He could command and his men would make a litter with stripped poles and a blanket and carry her when she was tired. Of course she would have her father pay for all of this later. Her progress out of the wilderness would be like the journeying of a young queen. Her excitement grew with the limning of the picture.

It did not occur to her to be afraid of Gratton; King had erred in his estimate of the man. Gratton was not of the wild but of the city. She knew his type or thought that she did. She had with one cunning glance withered many of his kind. She had made them fetch and carry; a smile had been ample reward, a frown had set them fawning. The evil that was in Gratton was the gloved and non-violent evil which she understood. He would not whip her; he would but attack her reputation, using slander as his knife or bludgeon. Slander and gossip, too, she understood. And right here and now what tongues wagging could matter to her?

In a few moments Gloria would have been ready to go to Gratton. And yet it happened that it was Gratton who came to her. When he put his chalky face in by the canvas flap she welcomed him with an eagerness which she had no desire and saw no need to mask. A joyous cry broke from her. Gratton entered briskly. His movements were furtive; perhaps within him, too, environment had stirred some old, sleeping instinct. He sidled; he might have been a reincarnated wolf, predatory yet cowardly.

"I can come in then?" asked Gratton.

He came forward promptly and stood warming his nervous hands at her fire, his eyes everywhere at once. He marked the ship-shape air of the cavern, the parcels which were tonight's supper and tomorrow's three poor little meals, each set carefully apart from the others on the rock shelf. He saw how the firewood was piled in its place, not scattered; how Gloria's bed and King's looked almost comfortable because of the fir boughs; how the clean pots and pans were in their places. Then he turned his full eyes like searchlights upon the girl.

"And you," he said marveling, "you actually came with a man like King into a place like this!"

"I was a fool," cried Gloria. "A pitiful little fool. Oh!"

Had she been thinking less of Gloria and more of this other man with whom she was now to cope, she must have marked a certain, swift change in his attitude. It became less furtive, more assured. His eyes left her to rove again, lingered with the two couches and returned to her.

"You found King wasn't your kind," he announced. "You have quarreled."

"From the very beginning," she replied
quickly. "He is unthinkible. I would have left him long ago only——"

"Only there was no place to go," Gratton finished it for her.

"And he would not let me," she added with a flash of her eyes. "He is brute clean through."

Gratton bit at his pale lips and let his fancies leap as they listed.

"And now," he said slowly, studying her, "you would come with me? I have a shelter as warm and dry as this. I will share my food with you."

"Yes," she told him unhesitatingly. "But let us hurry. If he came back before we left——"

"But," he offered musingly, "you refused me once and turned to him."

"Haven't I told you I was a fool? I didn't know then quite what men were—some men."

She was not measuring every word now. She meant simply that she was afraid of King in a way of clean fear and that she hated him; that she had no such fear of Gratton, whose masculinity was subdued and whom she believed she fully knew. Yet he had time to weigh her words and draw from each one his own significance. She whisked away and ran to her bed, dragging off her blankets and tumbling them to the floor.

"Take those!" she commanded.

He hesitated but complied. His eyes followed her as she gathered up her few personal and intimate possessions. She gave him her snow-shoes to carry and called, "Hurry."

"He is out hunting, isn't he?" asked Gratton. "You don't expect him to return so soon?"

"He said he might not be back until dark, maybe not until tomorrow morning. But one never knows what will happen."

She was passing him to go out when she saw the look in his eyes. She stared at him wonderingly.

"What is it?" she asked, her voice puzzled.

"What is what?" Gratton laughed, and the look was still there.

His eyes did not laugh.

"What makes you look like that? What are you thinking?"

Now he was vaguely puzzled. Then he shrugged.

"I was just thinking how superb you are," he replied, not entirely untruthfully.

The compliment was too much like thousands she had received in her life to alarm her. Rather, it pleased; what word of praise had she heard during these latter days? She passed on and Gratton followed. At the base of the cliffs she turned to him.

"Which way?" she asked.

"Not so far." He gathered up the blankets he had spilled down the rock wall and went ahead. "There is another cave here, right under King's."

"But," asked Gloria, hesitating, "will we be far enough away to be safe?"

"I think so," he told her. "Come on. Let us hurry."

Already eagerness for haste was his no less than hers. They went the few steps along the steep slope, Gratton leading the way. When he stopped she saw before him only a dark, uninviting hole in the snowbank.

"In there," he said. "Doesn't look very inviting, does it? But it's not so bad inside."

Gloria stooped, stooped further and crawled in. Close behind her came Gratton. For a moment it was pitch-dark. Then she saw the glimmer of coals and a circle of pale light. She went to it and put some twigs upon the coals. The fire blazed up brightly.

Gratton dropped the blankets and snowshoes and lifted his hands, putting them out toward her. She saw again the strange look in his eyes.

"God," he said hoarsely, "you are wonderful! And you have come to me!"

Gloria met his rather too ardent admiration with that cool little laugh which had been her weapon in other days. She was not afraid of Gratton. She had commanded him to carry her blankets; he had obeyed. It was a pleasant change from King's masterfulness and she fully intended to hold Gratton well in hand.

"I have come to you," she said frankly, "because I was a woman in distress and knew that you were a gentleman. That there has ever been any unpleasantness between us does not alter that fact. You understand me, don't you? And you will be the friend I have counted upon finding?"

He hardly heard her. To his mind the situation was clearness itself. He came
a step closer and the firelight showed how the muscles of his throat were working. Gloria's eyes widened. But not yet did she fully understand and not yet did she fear.

"Mr. Gratton," she began.

"Gloria!" he cried out. "Gloria! You have come to me!"

His hands, suddenly flung out, were upon her. She tore them away, wrenched herself free from him and started back.

Her cheeks flamed red with hot anger. There was a flutter in her heart, a wild tremor in her blood. He followed, his arms out. She was amazed, for the moment shocked into consternation. And yet she knew no such terror as had been hers when King had advanced on her, rope in hand. Her contempt of Gratton was too high for that. Now she marked the small stature, no taller, no stronger than her own—the pale face, the sunken chest, the spindling body.

She burst out scathingly—

"Why, you wretched little beast!"

But Gratton, beside himself, came on. His arms groped for her. Gloria swept up a dead pine limb that lay by the fire and swung it in both hands and struck him full across the face. He reeled back and stood, half in the shadow, his shoulders to the rock wall, his hands to his face.

"You dirty beast!" she panted. "You miserable, dirty beast."

From the way in which he brought his hand down and looked at it and laid it back upon his lips she knew that his mouth was bleeding. And she read in the gesture and in the man's whole cringing attitude that the danger of any physical violence from him was past and done with. In the grip of his passion, ugly as it was, he had risen somewhat from his essential weakness; in the moment he had at least thought of himself as a conqueror. Now he was again what he—always really was, a contemptible little coward.

An absolutely new sense of elation sang through Gloria's blood. She was fully mistress of the situation and had found within her an unguessed strength. Superb at all times because Nature had richly gifted her, now she was magnificent.

"Mr. Gratton," she said, swiftly, "you have made a mistake. Mr. King has never offered me violence of that sort. You owe me an apology. But we shall just call it a mistake. Remember that, though we are alone and in the mountains, I am the same Gloria Romaine that you have known. And be sure that you treat me as such."

He nursed his battered lips and stared at her. The blow had dazed him. Slowly as his mind cleared there dawned in it the realization that he had made a mistake. The stick was still in her hands; a shiver ran through him.

"I wish to God I had never seen you," he groaned.

She had meant from the first to take the upper hand. Now she was almost glad that this had happened. For she was very sure of herself; Gratton had merely been bold like other young men who had sought to presume; he had been cruder simply because the situation seemed to his mind to offer the opportunity; now a blow from her had accomplished the work of a haughty look in drawing-room encounters with those other young men whom King had catalogued as fresh puppy-dogs. She dropped the stick and wiped her hands.

"We have other things to think of," she said, adopting the grand manner. She might have been a young queen who had punished a subject and now from her exalted place condescended to consider that the indignity offered her royal person had never occurred. "By now you have made your plans. How are we going to get out? Where are your men?"

"I don't know," said Gratton miserably. "I have left those friends. I slipped away from their camp last night."

Gloria pondered this information wondering. She had meant to be free from King and his protection but she had counted on Gratton's men. She looked about her to see what Gratton's larder was. It was not hard to find. A crash sack, half-filled, lay near the fire. She tumbled the contents out on the floor. There were sugar, flour, potatoes, a whole side of bacon; altogether such a wealth of provision as she had not seen for many a day.

"At least," she said, "you were wiser than Mr. King in the matter of food. You brought more than he."

"Oh, that," he rejoined dispiritedly. "I brought that away from camp when I left those demons."

She made him explain. He told how the men had passed from stage to stage of ugly temper; how they snarled at one an-
other continuously and like so many grunting beasts. To Gratton it had seemed that in the end they would—either kill one another or come to agree upon one point only; he feared that if they agreed upon anything it would be upon dropping the mad venture and making a dash for the outside. In another day or two they would come to that and Gratton knew that on their way they would tarry for no laggard. They would curse him and pass by him and leave him.

He had slipped away in the dark before the dawn, while it was snowing heaviest, and had pretty well robbed their food supply. Oh, he knew there was danger; but danger lay everywhere. Already they were on pinched rations, apportioning him less than themselves because they said his smaller body required less nourishment and because they argued that he was altogether useless and would die anyhow and no one cared if he did. So he had taken what he could and had gone, in the dark smother.

"But," came her quick alarm, "they will track you here."

No; he was sure they would not. He had taken a direction that led toward the lowlands. At first they would not miss the food; they, like King, had set aside the portion for the next meal and he had taken cunningly from the main cache. When they did discover the loss they would think he had gone on a desperate attempt to get back to civilization. He had dropped hints the day before that that was the wise step. And the storm would obliterate his tracks.

Gratton cooled his mouth and stopped the blood-flow with snow. All ardor gone from him, he came back to look at Gloria with lack-luster eyes. He did not know what to do.

"Why," he told her brokenly, "it was all I could do to get here. Another hour plowing through that cursed stuff and I'd drop dead. I wasn't made for this sort of thing; I am not used to it. It's a horse's work, not a man's." He scraped some broken wood together and heaped it on the fire. Gloria could see that his face was puckered and worried. "You had better go back, up to the other cave," he said.

"To Mark King?" she demanded, amazed. "Why?"

"Can't you see?" he snapped. "When he comes in and finds that you have gone, what will he think? If he guesses you have come to me, what will he say to that? Suppose he has killed meat, what will he do? He'll pack it on his back and go! And what will happen to me? Yes, and to you?" His ready voice rose into a stifled scream. "We'll lie here and starve and freeze to death."

Always Gloria had considered a man as at least strong and capable. Gratton's cowardice and inefficiency, though she might have foreseen both, came to her with a shock. And thereafter came a vast disgust. She herself, girl that she was, was less weakling than he.

Gratton's nervous excitement was growing as his thoughts ran on in this channel.

"King promised me meat if he made a kill, I tell you," he insisted. "And he'll get meat; you see. If anybody can save us it's King. You've got to go back."

She hated King; she would not go back. She loathed Gratton; he could not help himself, let alone help her. She stood bewildered, her heart sinking. And while she struggled with a situation which seemed to have no solution, she caught a faint sound of voices. She jerked her head up and looked to Gratton.

"My God!" she choked. "It's Royal and the others. They have tracked me. They will kill me, just as they killed the other man!"

He was cringing back, he was shaking from head to foot, his teeth were chattering. Gloria turned from him and watched as a man thrust his head in at the hole from the outside.

"Come on, boys," came a deep, truculent voice. "I've trapped the white rat."

TO BE CONTINUED

ROMANCE
The Meeting-Place

FEW books by American authors have created so much discussion, praise and condemnation as Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology." Its publication a few years ago made Mr. Masters at once the foremost living American poet—"the only poet with true Americanism in his bones," as one prominent critic called him. Everything that he has written since then has added to his reputation. Today no one in the English-speaking world denies him a place among the great creative writers of the Twentieth Century.

"Mitch Miller," which begins in this issue, is Mr. Masters' first long work in prose. In many respects it is just as original in scheme and execution as "Spoon River" and it will, in all probability, stir up as much comment as that remarkable book. It is interesting to learn from Mr. Masters himself how "Mitch Miller" came to be written.

THERE was a boy named Mitch Miller and a boy named Skeeters Kirby. They read "Tom Sawyer" and acted it out in their boyhood lives in the town of Petersburg, Illinois, a mile from the hill where stood the village of New Salem in the days of Lincoln. The idea of writing "Mitch Miller" was first concerned with tracing the psychology of "Tom Sawyer" through the minds of two boys who believed it to be real up to the point where it loses its effect, and changes into the individual life of the boys, through from that starting-point. I was at a luncheon in New York in November, 1919, when I told my plan for the story and my disinclination to attempt it, since I do not write stories. A friend at this luncheon begged me to try to write it. When I returned to Chicago I still thought it, and on Thanksgiving Day I began as if extemporizing or experimenting. I wrote 5000 words before leaving my desk, and so in two weeks, day by day, the story ran out of my pencil on to the paper.

The next story will be about Skeeters Kirby.

EDGAR LEE MASTERS.

The friend that Mr. Masters mentions in his letter is none other than Mrs. Corinne Roosevelt Robinson, the sister of Theodore Roosevelt. Mrs. Robinson was kind enough to send us the following letter when she learned that we were going to publish "Mitch Miller." I can well imagine how Colonel Roosevelt himself would have enjoyed Mr. Masters' story.

MR. MASTERS was lunching with me, and we began to discuss the powers exercised over the minds of boys by Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, and I said I thought it was because every boy had a period of being Tom Sawyer or Huck.

I said I remembered perfectly when as children in the country my brother Theodore Roosevelt used to lead my brother Elliott and myself to a certain wood, where we became Indians—I never shall forget a stain on a stone in that wood, which we vaguely but firmly connected with a murder which we ourselves had committed apparently. There was no limit to our potential crimes as Indians!

We were talking of such reminiscences when Mr. Masters spoke of the boys Mitch Miller and Skeeters Kirby, and his sketch of them and the psychology of their incarnations made me urge him to write their story.

I am delighted to have Mr. Masters use my name in any connection with the impetus to write his tale.

CORINNE ROOSEVELT ROBINSON.

As you read into "Mitch Miller" many of you, especially if you are from the Illinois country, will be struck by the fact that Mr. Masters has made no attempt to disguise the towns and places of the story.
In some instances, even, he has given the characters their real names, and pictured them as they actually were when he knew them. Because Mr. Masters has done this, I haven't a doubt that some of you, if you know the country at all, will be reminded of episodes in your own lives that are connected, either remotely or directly, with the towns and villages that make up the background for “Mitch Miller.” Some of you may even remember the characters themselves, or recall from your youth an interesting bit of rumor or gossip that will corroborate the actuality of Mr. Masters’ story. It would certainly be a pity if you didn’t send these recollections which “Mitch Miller” inspires to The Meeting-Place!

As a proof of how deeply rooted in personal and historic facts Mr. Masters’ story is, here is his own statement about the scenes and people of “Mitch Miller.”

To those who do not know the Illinois country it may be interesting to say that the southern and central parts of Illinois were settled long ago, in the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, by people who came from Kentucky and Tennessee, Virginia, and to some extent from Indiana. Lincoln, who was born in Hardin County, Kentucky, came from there to Gentryville, Indiana, and thence, with his father and stepmother, to a clearing of land about ten miles from Decatur, in Macon County, not far from the Sangamon River. And when he was about twenty-one years of age he left his father and family at this place near Decatur and came to the village of New Salem, which was located on a hill overlooking the Sangamon River. And here he lived until he was elected to the legislature in 1834, afterwards returning briefly and then moving to Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln surveyed the town of Petersburg, then located in Sangamon County. Petersburg is now the county seat of Menard County. In writing the story of “Mitch Miller,” I have drawn literally upon authentic material. For example, I use the episode that in surveying the town of Petersburg, Lincoln jogged a line in order to save the house of the widow of his friend, with whom he was in the Black Hawk War. The town of Petersburg was named after Peter Lukins, who ran a cobbler’s shop at New Salem; and the name was decided at a game of cards played between him and a man named George Harns, it being understood that if George won the game the town should be called Georgetown, and if Lukins won the game the town should be called Petersburgh. My grandfather and grandmother came from Tennessee and eventually located, in 1847, on a large farm five and a half miles north of Petersburg. My grandfather was well acquainted with Lincoln and employed him in some legal business which he once had. This country, though very friendly to Lincoln as a man, did not sympathize with the war. The population was too much made up of Kentuckians and Tennesseians, who had grown up amidst the institution of slavery and who had definite ideas as to the powers of the States in this and all other matters. And one of the results of the war was to fill up these various towns in Central Illinois with various colorful and reckless characters, who had come up from the South, sometimes to escape the war and on errands of adventure or otherwise.

In writing the story of “Mitch Miller,” I have used the real names of towns, for example: Petersburg, Havana, Springfield, Bobtown, Oakford, Atterberry, etc., and in a few instances I have used the names of real persons; and I have also drawn upon the knowledge that I have of this part of Illinois and of its people, as they were when I lived there as a boy. My attempt has been to portray these people, the country and the events used in utmost fidelity and to put into them the feelings of a boy, the knowledge and understanding of a boy, perhaps somewhat emphasized, but through the method of quotation from older people who spoke in the presence of these boys and whose words impressed them. No boy who ever wrote has had a deeper impression upon the boys of America than Mark Twain’s “Tom Sawyer,” and it is true that many boys tried to follow the example of Tom Sawyer in hunting for treasure, just as other boysimitated the adventures of detectives and cowboys. The psychology of “Mitch Miller” traces the influence of “Tom Sawyer” upon two boys who read the book, who had lived in a community where the people were much the same as they were in Missouri, and where there were many accidental things to remind these boys of a similarity of situation and personality.

After the story is thus started it is carried on into events that are supposed to have actually happened in the lives of Mitch Miller and Skeeters Kirby. The influence of “Tom Sawyer” upon these boys in their own life and environment and through the events which happened to them constitutes this story.

EDGAR LEE MASTERS.

This letter from Horace Fish is almost as interesting as “The Doom’s-Day Envelope.”

PHILADELPHIA, PENN.

It seems to me that one of the most attractive elements in Romance is The Meeting-Place. Of course to the love-lorn that has been always true. But just now I mean it as applied to the magazine which has chosen that very happy and long so strangely neglected title, and the department which I think is a most valuable part of its theory and already to a fair extent of its practice. By valuable, I mean to the writer whose trade is product appears more worth the value of The Meeting-Place to readers; who are asked to become writers of letters, I am not concerned, anyway not now, because for this first time at least I come up the road from the opposite direction, and from this view of approach it seems very clear to me that the scheme and purpose of the undertaking hit squarely a truth about writers—any “art-craft” workers for
known to a story-writer's life, the invariable question—"What major think of it?"

This time it happens to be easy and enjoyable to answer, for it's rather ridiculously far afield, like Bob McNutt; and what major think of this story was the extraordinary little Latin prayer which preludes the little tale, that wonderful passionate outcry in prison of Mary Stuart, great queen, great woman, great student, wonderful sinner and wondrous saint. It is so literally most to English throughout that it seems to need for almost any one no translation, which in turn would but rob it of the amazing quantity of musical sound compassed in its handful of syllables. From my earliest knowledge of it, it seemed always to me the most sheerly musical thing, in mere words, of my acquaintance. Then one evening its almost wild cry of pain suggested drama—some situation of dramatic impasse. (I got fresh with French myself, that time, you see. We all do it.) Naturally the first associate idea of music persisted; a situation, then, of torment, and barrier, and with music in some vital manner buckling to it, perhaps solving it, perhaps making it worse. Afterward, of course, came far other added thoughts as much as if it occurred to me that if a story wanted to be, as it seemed to want, something more than some pleasant people and an episode, it should try to concern something important in our lives, an institution, say, or a current thought not fully articulated. And finally, "The Doom's-Day Envelope" posted itself along.

And where it got to after all, for all its little prayer and its churchly demeanor, was Romance—to my thought, a good-enough wind-up for any story.

Horace Fish.

Perhaps it is safe to say that most magazines, no matter how high an estimate they placed upon "The Doom's-Day Envelope" as a story, would have declined to publish it because of its daring use of sacred subjects. We, too, were confronted with the apparition of aroused and outraged readers—and trembled. But we felt that there was not only no irreverence in the story, but, on the other hand, a very sincere reverence of the highest kind. We had no hesitation on that score; what we feared was the irreverence that might be read into it by those whose religious zeal exceeded their real understanding of the story's meaning. Sad experience has taught editors that even one seemingly innocent little touching upon a religious subject is more than likely to create indignant readers.

Nevertheless, "The Doom's-Day Envelope" seemed far too good a piece of work to be lost. If we had had any doubts as to the absence of real offense they would have been dispelled after a personal talk with the author who had established beyond any possible doubt the reverent sincerity of his
own attitude and intent. Also, *Romance* had from the first reached out after the kind of audience who would read with understanding and independent judgment; we felt that our belief in our readers might as well be put to the test first as last. For here was a plain case—Shall we deprive all our readers of what seems to us a story very much worth the reading through fear that some of them may find in it offense that is not there?

We wished to be sure of our ground. If there were real irreverence in the story, no one would be more likely to find it than would Catholics. So we asked Mr. Fish, himself a devout Catholic, to get the judgment of a well-known member of his own clergy. He did so and brought to us his résumé of that clergyman’s opinion after reading the story very carefully and thoughtfully. It follows and seems to us sufficient guarantee:

**THE** best way for me to give you an opinion of this story from the Catholic point of view is to describe literally the reactions I get from it. There is nothing in the whole story that is either un-Christian or un-Catholic, because the only question as to Christianity raised, that of a factional invention representing science, is fully and unequivocally answered. This reply is unmistakable, leaving no possible doubt as to the triumph of faith over subtlety and apparently irrevocable logic. The bishop, in sincere but over-zealous arbor, has prayed for a test of his strength of faith, and God allows that test to come. Not recognizing that test as temptation, he survives it nobly, righteously, at the cost of heartbreak to himself, the literal penalty of his life-blood, but with the fulsome return of his fail before his death, because even in his dissolution from his loss his struggle for light, his indifference to everything except Christ, the meekness of him of even safety from hell, reveals Christ to him more clearly, more unmistakably, than ever before.

To speak specifically of the premises and religious logic of the story, the machine’s denial of the divine origin of Christ is a point of negligible importance, because the existence and potentiality of such a machine would basically deny revelation, and this more vital issue is clearly defined and answered by the very revelation of Christ himself to the bishop after his cruel ordeal.

It appears plainly to me that the whole terrible vision and experience of the blest are matters evolving from his own thought at which his own righteous horror and fear drive him to morbidity and torture. As much is said by his figurative tempter, the inventor, but the story’s whole interpretation to me is consistently that anyway. And this would unmistakably be the interpretation of any Catholic, because we know that temptation cannot come from God Himself. He permits, as in this case. And from the start the bishop’s pitiably struggle is between his own hecking visionary thoughts and the spirit of Christ there with him, seeking to save him, in the very moment of his death succeeding in doing so.

And this struggle of the beautiful and righteous bishop is singularly true to life. It could happen to any one of us, and it does happen, again and again. Famous Catholic prelates have had this pitiably struggle, and their very death bore witness that it had been.

I will be glad to see this story see the light in print, for one of the greatest lacks of contemporary so-called letters is the absence of religious and other profound questions and subjects. It is high time for these things to enter the literature of today and vitalize it. The great trouble with our Catholic Church is that our whole education in its professions and most important aspects is in Latin, and we are not trained to purvey our theology and our most helpful thought in a capable and inspiring way in the vernacular. And in the times in which we live, with the whole world reading as it has never read before, the writer is the greatest direct public influence, and I would be thankful to see this story read as many as possible like it upon kindred subjects—kind of similar spirituality entering our daily reading-material for the masses.

**HAVING** just joined the editorial staff of *Romance*, I feel that part of what Mr. Hoffman says here applies to me as much as it does to you.

**WHEN YOU** are close to a thing, used to it, naturally you lose your outside point of view and many phases of it are no longer fresh with interest. I remember my first days in a magazine office, my first glimpse of real manuscripts really submitted by real authors to a real magazine, how they lay about in baskets on desks, and that they were neither handled as if sacred nor tossed carelessly into the waste-basket à la the comic papers. I remember, too, my amazement at seeing jokes come in, usually twenty-five, fifty or more from one person, on small sheets of paper—sometimes like a deck of playing-cards, and my further amazement on learning that a large majority of all jokes published are turned out by a dozen or two people.

It set me thinking. I recalled the many questions people ask us about various phases of magazines and magazine making, their interest in these matters that have become to us in the office part of a familiar routine. Then, by a tremendous feat of the imagination in me, summering sense, almost, I might say, by a stroke of laboring genius, I arrived at the perfectly obvious conclusion that since those not on magazines are sufficiently interested to ask questions about the workings thereof, they naturally would like to be told. So, now and then, in modest doses, we’ll try to tell at *Meeting-Place* various editorial matters in which people have shown by constructive sense.

First, though, I beg of you, we in the office are not blasé. There is never-ceasing interest in making a magazine. It is only that, as one continues in it, one’s interest shifts from certain phases to certain others. How could it be dull when the material bought and handled is human life in all its variety, a selection of its most interesting
phases? And when the people who select and send it to you are, in the nature of things, rather particularly interesting themselves? And when, out of all of these selections, you are trying to combine certain of them into a bunch of paper with ink on it, to make that selection of selections such that it will please a certain audience of people, and to make that bunch of paper with ink on it such that it will come to have an individuality and character of its own, a living thing sufficiently developed to make its own demands and laws?

No, we are not biased. But some of the things that interest us intensely would bore you to death, while some of the things that have become routine to us will have the same interest for you that they once had for us. Isn’t it exactly the same in your own work?

So from time to time at our Meeting-Place we’ll try to tell you about editorial matters that may interest you. Some “inside dope,” if you will. And very gladly; we not only wish to interest you but we very particularly wish to have no secrets from you, to be on as friendly and informal a basis as you will allow, and to have something of the feeling that you are not merely readers of our text, but interested and helping in the making of the magazine and therefore entitled to know all we can tell you about it.

Questions asked in the past give some guidance as to which things should be told, but it will be infinitely more to the point if, any time you find yourself curious about some phase of magazine making, you will just drop us a letter or postcard. We don’t know everything, but we’ll do the best we can. Of course we mean questions pertaining to our editorial department, not to the business, advertising and circulation departments, and of course the personal affairs of our writers are not ours to discuss. You already know that we welcome all suggestions and criticisms.

Having talked so long, I’ll not attempt to take up any of these things until some of our next meetings, and that will give time for any questions to come to us. Incidentally, I might mention that there is no “editorial use” used in this magazine; “we,” when used, means we of the staff; if one of us has anything to say on his own hook, he uses “I” quite flatly.

A. S. H.

This from G. B. Lancaster, whose story of Australia, “Man’s Love,” appeared last month.

The editor has suggested that I should tell you about the writing of “Man’s Love” and other stories. It simply grew out of observation. I have lived in the lonely places and seen how often that which is delight to the man is tragedy to the woman. Temperamental differences in the sexes are naturally great, but isolation magnifies them out of all proportion, and I like to remind ourselves of the fact now and again. It may help somebody somewhere.

As to how I came to write, that must go into tabloids. Australian-born. Youth spent on New Zealand sheep-station. Local paper offered prize of three pounds for story. I wanted the money, so wrote my first story and sent it in. It was about India, Christmas and vampires—naturally—and it seemed more civil to let the editor put it into pars. Won prize, which so staggered me that I held off writing until paper offered five pounds next Christmas. Won that with my second story, and thought, “This is a happy coincidence.” Began scribbling a little in my few odd hours. New Zealand magazine offered prize of five pounds, open to all Australasia. When I won that I thought, “This looks more like habit than coincidence,” and I went to work on brown paper, stump-ends of station-diaries—anything I could get—and bombarded Australia.

It was kind, and so I started on England. To my eternal pride America asked me first—Harper’s Magazine. I never met any one who’d written so much as an ad, and just got along, somehow. It was a rocky road, but I’ve enjoyed it immensely, and paid my way round the world a bit—New Zealand, Australia, Canada, America, England and the Continent. I did little writing through the war but some Victory Loan articles for America and sketches of hospital life, etc., in France and England. Now I’m off to the Yukon and possibly Alaska.

A publisher asked for my first book before it was written, which was stupendous luck, of course. And two more have lately been filmed in California. I don’t think you can want to know any more about me. But a writer’s life has a queer romance of its own, you know—peopled with visions he has never seen and a public he never will see. I find invisible friends waiting to tell me things wherever I go—and many good visible ones, too.

And I am extremely grateful to my public and very glad of the courteous permission of the editor to tell them so.

G. B. LANCASTER.

There is a challenge to you in this letter from Gerald Mygatt, whose “Leave It to Springtime” appears in this issue.

New York City.

The Meeting Place is a bully idea, and I'm for it, enthusiastically, just as I'm for a magazine of the type and caliber of Romance. But haven't you misnamed it? In the language of our friends, the "movies," shouldn't it really be called "The Projection Room"—because you have the author projecting himself straight at the poor defenseless reader while the reader can't for the life of him project back?

I'm about four hundred times more anxious to meet the reader personally than I am to have him or her meet me; and probably about the same number of times more anxious than the reader himself—or herself—is.

If friend reader says, "That story's splendid," I should like to blow myself to the pleasure of hearing him say it, and then thrilling to it and acting modest and all that sort of thing. If friend reader says, "That's punk," I should like to argue with him and find out what's punk and
why, and thus see to it that I never perpetrated just that form of punkness again. But instead of that, after writing a story which, God knows, ought to be able to stand on its own feet even if you and I know it doesn’t, I’m supposed to stuff some further philosophy about it down the speechless reader’s gullet.

No sirree! You’ve given the authors about two hundred pages in which to get at the readers. Why not give the readers a couple of dozen pages in which to get at the authors? As I’m a reader much more often than I am an author this appeals to my fine sense of justice as well as to my selfish desire to get the reader’s come-back, if any.

But I’ll be good, and go my half-way, with my right mitt neatly extended for a handshake—and my left held in readiness for a quick parray.

If a commuter, a suburbanie, coming in to his business office every morning on the S.20 (which generally means the 8.35 or the 8.57), is a romantic figure, then I’m a romantic figure. If a staid and ever-so-sedate married citizen, with two aching legs in a car and no one in it, a player-piano, and all the other adjuncts of strict respectability—if said gent is a romantic figure, then I’m it. Nevertheless I must confess to pleasant backslidings, some of which I hope will ultimately creep out in the literature of this generation. Haiti and San Domingo and Central America—I’ve managed to nose around these parts a bit, as well as around a fair section of the United States. I’ve been a freight clerk, a newspaper reporter, an advertising writer and a field artillerist. There’s only one thing, however, that makes me think there’s a faint chance of my becoming a real writer some day in the far future—I’ve never been able to save any money.

All right now, friend reader, speak up for yourself.

GERALD MYGATT.

DOESN’T Warwick Deeping’s letter itself make you feel again the glamour of his story, “Mellis,” in the May Romance?

“Eastlands,” WAREBIDGE, ENGLAND.

If you ask me how the tale came to be written, well—like many tales—it just grew out of a mood—an atmosphere.

To be personal, I was back from the war; it was over. My wife and I took the English Spring into our hearts, our first happy Spring together for four years.

We buried ourselves in a little country inn deep in English woodlands. We went back years and years, and just wandered and dreamed.

In the golden haze of a May morning I saw Mellis in the woods. Just irresponsible romance—notthing more. For this was the country of romance, the country of Astolat, Lancelot and Elaine. And across the valley—along the chalk downs—the old ribbon’s way to Canterbury.

We wandered in the woods and saw pictures.

It always seems to me that those who tell me that romance is dead are blind folk calling Life a corpse.

WARWICK DEEPING.

THERE is a problem in something or other arithmetic about how long will it take a fox to get out of a well if he climbs two feet every day and drops back three feet each night. I guess that is quite old, but nearly, I think I never worked so hard in my life as I did to have Leafy Cal’ine learn to read in a wolf-pen, with a wolf snuffling up and Red Burgess down in the cabin sleeping off a “potion”—sleeping doubtfully, with his hand on his holster. Thrills! Gr-r-r! And—I worked. I even went to one R. Y. Morrison, Bookworm of Falls, and asked him and his music-mad wife how about it? They didn’t laugh. You see, they had named one of their sons “Kipling.”

Came school meeting, with a bond-fight on hand. As an auto stopped and honked, the “reverend” was teaching Leafy Cal’ine:
"Oh, at morn the sky's a rose; at eve, an
amethyst.
All the roads that lead to life, gaily wind and
twist.
The old road to paradise, easy it is missed."
Two more autos honked, or maybe the same
one; three times. Finally a little pink-checked,
crinkly-haired neighbor clattered up to my den,
looked over and asked—
"Are you deaf, or what?"
"Yes," I cried, almost in tears. "Go away
from here!"
That evening I chucked the wolf-pen under
my type-machine, where itulked for many
weeks. Then one day, when I had a fit of
"clearin' up," I raked it out and tore it to bits.
It was like uncooking a certain bottle. Freed
from paper the story stood up and confronted
me. It squelched me there.
"All right," I snapped, "since you're so smart,
bring on your cage."
And my sakes, how that story hustled around!
It made Leafy Ca'line shoot the "revener." It
tumbled a Bible out of the tin-peddler's pack and
gave me the description of creation in a dream.
It was one upstart of a yarn, and doesn't belong
to me at all. Never mind. That was a perfectly
gorgeous wolf-pen, and I shall keep it. You may
have the "Printed Book."

JENNIE HARRIS OLIVER.

HERE'S a joke at our expense:

LEWISTON, MAINE.

"WELL, gee whiz!" This was from an-
other sixteen-year-old boy, deep in the
pages of "Baya Cay," Ralph Henry Barbour's
thrilling tale, in December Romance. He sat on
the edge of his chair, tense as though he were
the hero himself. But near the end of the story
he looked up puzzled. He re-read Chapter XX,
then again Chapter XXII; this didn't bring him
any nearer a solution, so he went over Chapter
XXI. And then he said:
"That was a corking tale, but the boy had his
hands tied so tight he couldn't unfasten 'em
and the next thing he does is to throw his arms
around his father. Do you suppose the Meeting-
Place editor will ask Mr. Barbour who unbound
the hero's hands?"

L. N. FLINT.

Of course, we in the office here should
have caught the error, but somehow it got
by—which only goes to make Mr. Bar-
bour's explanation all the more generous.

MANCHESTER, MASS.

THERE are exactly nine explanations of how
my hero, having his hands tightly bound
behind him at one moment, throws them about
his father's next the neck—I mean, neck the
next. But since none of the nine is in the least
plausible, I shan't bother to give them. Some
authors would invent a long, devious rigmarole
showing that the hero had once taken a ten
weeks' correspondence course of Samson, the
Handcuff King, or explain that, owing to the
war—what a faintly familiar sound that has!—
the rope with which the hero's wrists were bound
was of a cheap and inferior quality and parted
at the first paroxysm of joy. But in me you
discover an honest writer. Very frankly I
acknowledge that, like Jove, I nodded. It doesn't
do for a writer to nod. Just as sure as he does,
one or another of his characters will put some-
thing over on him. Or if it isn't a character,
then it's a property. I recall that some years
ago a seemingly innocent young crescent moon
got me into difficulties by rising above the hori-
zon of evening. This brought me a curt note
from an editor to the effect that crescent moons
don't rise, that they're always on the job, so to
speak. I suppose he was right. I confess I
never looked into the matter. But since then,
rather than call down another condemnation, I
concern myself only with large, mature moons.
My compliments to the young reader who dis-
covered my faux pas, and to him my cheerful
apologies.

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR.

UP TO the very last moment we hoped
to include in this issue a new long
poem by John Masefield. But, unfortu-
nately, various details of copyright and the
uncertainty of the English publication date
forced us to give up the idea of using it
in this issue, though the manuscript was
ready to go to the printer. There is a
chance, however, that we may be able to
print this highly interesting poem in a
later number of Romance. The title, "The
Hounds of Hell," coupled with John Mase-
field's name is enough to suggest its exci-
ting quality.

S. M.
How I Found My Fortune in a Magazine

An Inspiring Story of How One Girl Solved the Money Troubles for Her Whole Family

By Alice Forman

"I guess you can't get your shoes this week, Mary," said Father. There was a choky little catch in his voice, for he knew that Mother needed the shoes.

The fact was that Father's salary and my salary combined would not stretch to the limit of our needs. There were three dear little hungry mouths to feed besides our own, and the six of us to clothe.

And the cost of living does keep fearfully high.

I used to lie awake at nights wondering whether something couldn't be done to make things go better. Poor Father could do nothing, I knew. Years and worry had weighed down his spirit. But I kept thinking that there must be something that I could do to increase my stenographer salary so that Mother would not have to walk about with patched shoes, and so that the children could all have Sunday dresses.

Sunday dresses for the children! The thought was so delicious that, although I didn't have enough money in my purse to buy even half of one dress, I picked up a fashion magazine one day to look for little styles that the darlings could wear if they only had some one to buy dresses for them.

A page of costumes designed by Emil Alvin Hartman caught my eye. Beautiful costumes they were, graceful, fanciful, illuy things. Oh, if they were only for me! I choked down a little lump, for I knew they were beyond my reach.

But oh, how I was tempted to picture myself in each of the dresses, walking about with grand airs at gay parties!

Poor me! For a moment I pitied myself. Then I remembered suddenly that it was designs for the little girls that I had opened the magazine to find. I quickly turned the page.

Curiously enough, I saw the name of Emil Alvin Hartman on the very next page. He told a story that made me hope for better things. He told of the work of Fashion Academy, a school of Costume Design in New York. In three months, he said, absolute beginners were learning costume design easily and pleasantly during their leisure hours at their own homes.

He mentioned names of former students, girls, middle-aged women and even elderly women who have written to Fashion Academy to report their wonderful success as professional costume designers. One young woman, for instance, three months after her graduation from Fashion Academy earned $125 a week, working at her own convenience for different people. Another, two months after her graduation, earned $100 a week.

And these girls, Mr. Hartman said, were only two of a great many who have had almost immediately won marvelous success in the fascinating profession of costume design.

Stories like these were hard for a twenty-seven dollar a week stenographer like me to believe. But Mr. Hartman invited me to investigate. That same night, although I had no knowledge at all of costume design, I wrote for the booklet sent out free on request by Fashion Academy. It contained not only information about the wonderful opportunities in costume design, and beautiful costumes designed by Fashion Academy students, but also enthusiastic letters from former students who gave full credit for their success in the designer's profession to Fashion Academy.

Names were signed, and addresses given. So, to feel absolutely certain, I wrote to the writers of some of the letters. From them personally I received the same enthusiastic recommendations of Fashion Academy. In nearly every case, the writer had been a novice at the time of her enrollment in Fashion Academy.

* * * * *

It is a whole year since I first looked through the inspiring Fashion Academy booklet. I have already lost my speed on the typewriter, for I haven't been a stenographer for eight months. Almost a year ago I enrolled for the Fashion Academy Home Study Course in Costume Design. After only three months of easy, fascinating work during my leisure hours at home, I received my certificate from Fashion Academy.

Two weeks later I began work as a professional costume designer at $30 a week. Now I am earning $80. And Father no longer has to worry about Mother's shoes or my little sisters' dresses. We have everything we need to make us comfortable now, and my employer tells me that my $30 a week is little more than a beginning.

You, too, can learn this profession easily in your leisure hours at home. Fill in and mail the coupon or send a letter asking for FREE Art Booklet 38A.

Fashion Academy, Inc.

103 East 57th St. New York City

FASHION ACADEMY:

Please send me FREE Art Booklet 38A containing information regarding your Home Study Course in Costume Design.

Name: ___________________________

Address: _________________________
“Now we can dance”

In thousands of pleasant places this scene is repeated every year, with this Vacation Model equipped with the exclusive Columbia Non-Set Automatic Stop, which operates on any record, long or short. Nothing to move or set or measure. Just put on your record and the Grafonola plays and stops itself.

Sweet and clear of tone, light, compact, and easily carried, this wonderful little Grafonola is a never-failing entertainer for vacation days.

Columbia Grafonola: Standard Models up to $5.00. Period Designs up to $20.00.

COLUMBIA GRAPHOPHONE COMPANY, New York
Canadian Factory: Toronto