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ROMANCE



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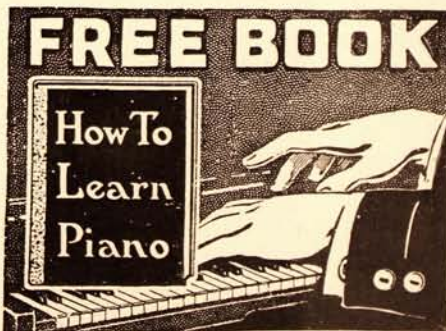


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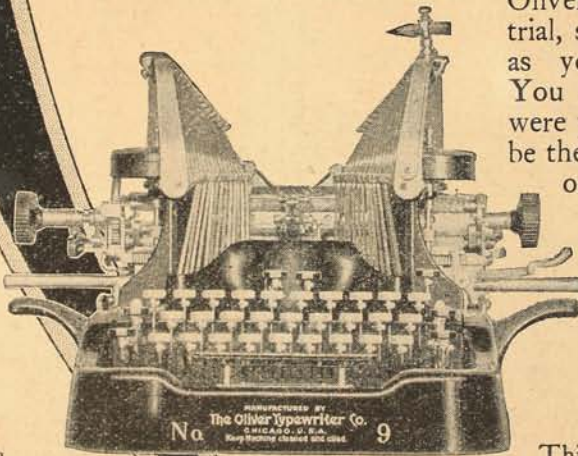
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OCTOBER, 1920

VOL. II
NO. 6



Published Monthly by The Ridgway Company

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Will you—the readers—tell the editor what you think of our authors? Especially the new ones—how do they compare with the old, and what promise have they of being great when they are old themselves?

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THE CHILD	H. C. BAILEY

And the conclusion of Beatrice Grimshaw's "THE TERRIBLE ISLAND."

Jimsie of Kilmack

BY NELL HANSON

NORAH BYRNE bent her head as she stepped through the cabin door into the sunlit street, drawing her shawl more closely round her as she did so, for the April winds were chilly on that western seacoast. She had barely gone twenty paces, when three or four young men separated themselves from the various groups lounging round the cabin doors in Sunday idleness, and joined her.

For Norah was the beauty of the village and always had her following of lads, whom she treated with exasperating impartiality, sending some moonstruck youth up to the seventh heaven of delight one day, and the next bestowing her favors on his most hated rival. Today Timothy Burke was in high favor, walking on air, for he had been into Ennis for a week and there had learned the waltz—a dance unknown in Kilmack in those days—and had been teaching it to Norah Byrne.

And now it transpired that Jimsie Brien, the hunchback fiddler, had somewhere learned the tune of one, listening outside the windows of the Honorable Mr. French's house, no doubt, and Norah and Timothy were to dance together at the cross-roads today, while the whole of the village looked on.

There would be many envious looks cast upon the pair; for Norah was graceful and supple as a young willow and her dancing was the pride of the whole countryside; while Timothy Burke was the handsomest lad in the village and the cause of many a heartache in many a maiden's breast.

The crowd had already assembled when they reached the cross-roads, and the men and girls were busily engaged in a jig, the girls dancing with downcast eyes, scarcely raising them to their partner's faces, their feet twinkling through the intricate steps, dancing as if this were part of the most serious business in life.

The music stopped suddenly as Norah appeared, and men and girls cleared off to



the sides of the road, clapping of hands and cries of:

"The waltz, Norah! Let's have the waltz!" proclaiming their interest in what was to come.

Jimsie Brien raised his fiddle, tucked it under his chin, and with a soft caressing movement, his eyes fixed steadily on the ground, began to play. Norah threw off her shawl, and with head held a little higher than usual and heightened color for—she was fully conscious of the admiring eyes fixed upon her—she advanced to meet her handsome partner, and the dance began.

Timothy's arm encircled her waist, and Timothy's ardent gaze never left her face, as they circled round and round to the swaying, dreamy music. But Norah's glance darted hither and thither, noting the envious glances of the girls and the unconcealed admiration of the men, and her heart beat quickly with excitement. Only Jimsie Brien fiddled on and never raised his eyes to look at her.

A strange feeling of irritation took possession of Norah. Because a man was hunchbacked, was he therefore insensible to youth and grace and loveliness?

"He *shall* look at me!" she said to herself, and a little pucker of vexation showed itself between her brows as she passed his bent head.

"Play slower, Jimsie," she said softly as they passed; and Jimsie played more slowly, but did not raise his head.

The music stopped; the waltz was over. Cries of: "Dance it again, Norah darlin'," came from all sides. But Norah shook her head, smiling. With the discernment of the true artist and coquette she realized that that which is not given too easily is best appreciated.

The applause continued. Suddenly the girl turned on her heel and crossing the open space toward Jimsie's corner:

"I'll dance ye a reel, by meself," she said. "Will you play for me, Jimsie?" she asked coaxingly, bending toward the little man.

Jimsie nodded his head and slowly raised his fiddle to his chin, but still he did not look at her.

With a scarcely perceptible shrug Norah walked out into the open space, and standing in full view of the fiddler, she began to dance. Faster, faster twinkled her feet;

her color grew brighter, her heart beat quickly, and a little gleam of excitement shone in her dark blue eyes as she danced, keeping her gaze riveted on the hunchback's head.

"Jimsie," she called at last, "Ye're playin' too fast. Ye must watch me, or ye can't tell the speed to be playin'."

Jimsie played more slowly, but did not raise his eyes.

"It's that slow now," she called imperiously. "Ye *must* look at me, Jimsie, or I can't dance at all."

Slowly the hunchback raised his head and his large dark eyes, full of that suffering, mental and physical, that had been his from babyhood, met Norah's laughing blue ones. For a long moment he looked at her—neither of them could have counted the time in seconds—while his fingers played mechanically and Norah's shapely feet kept time to the music. Her color faded, her breath came in little gasps, and a frightened look stole into her eyes.

The music stopped suddenly with a jarring discord, Jimsie rose from his seat with a little shudder, and tucking his violin under his arm, he walked away, leaving Norah staring after him, heedless of everything round her.

The indignant protests of the crowd roused her.

"Och Jimsie, come back, ye spalpeen! Ye promised ye'd play for us."

But he only shook his head and plodded on down the road that led to the sea.

"D'ye think is he mad because ye said he wasn't playin' right?" some one asked Norah.

The girl shook her head and walked over to Timothy Burke.

"Take me home, Timmy," she whispered. "I'm not wanting to dance any more."

THE sun was sinking making a blaze of color in the sky that was reflected in the gleaming bog-pools below him, as Jimsie Brien climbed the tiny hill that led to the Fairy Fort. Reaching the grassy, circular mound, built probably by some chief of ancient time, though the country-people prefer to think the Little People the architects, Jimsie seated himself against the side that faced the sea. On his right was a low clump of stunted bushes, while all round stretched flat fields with low hedges and bogland. No large trees of any kind could

stand the Winter gales on that Clare coast.

"Hello, Jimsie. You're late tonight," a fresh young voice greeted him, as a boy about twelve years old appeared from inside the fort.

"Am I that, Master Alec?" Jimsie asked.

"Indeed you are. Do hurry up and play for me or I'll have to go home. It'll soon be supper-time."

Jimsie sat for some time gazing out to sea, watching the changing colors of the sky reflected in purple and flame and orange in a strangely calm sea. And then he began to play. The boy had flung himself face downward on the grass and listened spellbound as the music climbed to heights of joy ineffable, making him long to cry out with the very gladness of being alive, and sinking suddenly to depths of pain and despair such as he could not even dimly understand, but which wrung his musical young heart almost beyond bearing. And then the sound would soar away again to that almost unearthly paradise of joy.

The playing ended suddenly with a wild, fierce sound, like the cry of some animal mortally wounded in the chase, and Jimsie sat tense and still, the shadow of pain and hunger in his deep gray eyes.

"Tell me what it's about, Jimsie," asked the boy after a long silence. Jimsie did not answer.

"Please, please tell me. I can't understand," pleaded the boy with the tactless persistence of youth.

After a little Jimsie answered him. He spoke in a low musical voice, his eyes fixed on the far horizon.

"It's about a gurl; a beautiful gurl; the most beautiful gurl in all Kilmack an' in the whole wurld. She's tall an' graceful as the reeds that grow in the bog yonder an' sway in the wind when it blows. An' her eyes are the sky of a Summer night, with the gay stars twinkling in the deep blue, so far away that ye can not come near them at all forever. An' her hair is the red-brown leaves in the woods in Autumn. An' round her the fairies dance in a circle always," he went on dreamily, drawing the mystic circle with the bow of his violin.

"They dance there always and always, wishin' her joy and the beauty of the whole wurld an' the love of a great prince; an' kapin' out annything that is sad an' ugly an' crooked. An' that's why I never can

come near her at all," he said, drawing in his breath with a shuddering sigh.

"You're not ugly, Jimsie." Alec French's indignant young voice broke in on his sad, spoken thoughts. "Mother says that no one who is good and kind can be ugly, and you are the kindest man in all Kilmack. The children all love you best, I know."

Jimsie shook his head mournfully.

"It's not the love of the child that'll satisfy a man's heart, Masther Alec. It's a woman with her sthrong white arrums about him holding him close to her breast an' lookin' deep in his eyes an' croonin' love-words softly, that'll satisfy a man's heart; an' it'll never be mine, avick."

Alec watched the red sun, now a slowly disappearing ball on the horizon.

"They say if you wish when the last bit of sun disappears, you'll get your wish," he said.

"It's not thru, Master Alec. I've tried it these many nights."

"I must be off to supper," said the boy, rising reluctantly. "Poor old Jimsie! Never mind," he said awkwardly, noting the pathetic lines of the hunchback's face, and stooping, he gave him a rough, shame-faced schoolboy peck on his pale cheek, then swung away down the hill to his waiting schoolroom supper.

WHEN he had gone, Jimsie raised his violin, and the rich full tones, rising now and then to a fierce harshness that was almost discord, despairing and sinking once more to exquisite tenderness, floated out over the bogland. So absorbed was he in the vision he interpreted that he did not notice a man and a girl, who crossed the bogland and presently, climbing the little hill, sat down not far from the fort.

"Whisht, Timmy," whispered Norah. "I want to hear Jimsie play."

"Och, why couldn't he be playin' for the dancin' today the way ye asked him?" whispered Timothy irritably.

The girl bit her lip and hot tears rose in her eyes, as she turned her head and gazed seaward. It was May, and the brilliant sunset coloring was slowly changing to the turquoise and gentle primrose of an early Summer twilight.

Four times in the last month she had gone to Jimsie and begged him to play again for the dancing, and each time he had refused her curtly, turning on his heel and



slouching away. And a curious little pain, for which she could find no name, had crept about her heart and would not be stilled, though she laughed with the gayest and footed it lightly to another fiddler's playing.

Jimsie played on, unheeding, and Timothy sat in restless silence beside the listening girl. But the music wrought on his emotions and he could be silent no longer.

"Och, Norah, will ye listen?" he broke out at last. "Doan't ye know why I got ye to come a walk with me darlin'?"

But Norah turned on him quickly.

"Whisht, I tell ye!" she whispered, covering his mouth with her little brown hand.

But it was too late. The music had stopped suddenly, and Jimsie had risen and was making off down the hill.

"Jimsie, come back and play."

There was entreaty in the girl's voice, but Jimsie did not even turn his head.

"Why wud ye be listenin' to thon old music, Norah darlin', when it's meself is longin' to hold ye in me warrum arrums and tell ye how I love ye, dear?" said Timothy, as his arm stole round the girl.

But Norah sat still as a stone.

"I've two cows, darlin', an' the hens and chickens, an' a good job at the hall beside. Ye'll want for nothing as long as I live," he said.

But Norah slowly, determinedly shook her head.

"I couldn't marry ye, Timmy, not if ye'd ten cows an' ten pigs an' all the chickens in Kilmack."

"Norah! Ye don't love me then?"

"I love no wan, an' I'll marry no wan, ever," said the girl with set face and all the note of finality in her voice.

Timothy rose unsteadily to his feet.

"D'ye mane that, Norah darlin'?" he asked, looking yearningly down at the still face.

"Yes, I mane it."

Then suddenly the set face relaxed and hot tears rose in her eyes.

"Och, Timmy, I'm sorry. I can't help meself," she cried, stretching out her arms to him helplessly.

"Doan't ye worrit yerself, darlin'," he said gently, turning away.

Walking to a low stone dike that bordered the bogland, he sat down, vainly trying to shape for himself a new world in which dwelt no Norah. By and by he came

back to her, and Norah watched him coming, deep pity in her dark blue eyes.

"It'll be aisiest to go to Ameriky, darlin'. Doan't fret. I'll be all right, an' maybe ye'll change some day," he declared bravely.

"Good-by for now. I'll get home by meself, I think," he said, as he crossed the little stone dike that led to the path through the bog.

Norah could only watch him dumbly, for tears of pity and of strange loneliness choked her. A long time she sat there, while before her eyes rose the vision that was with her night and day now, do what she would; the image of a little stunted man, misshapen, with bent head.

And all at once the image would raise its head and she would see a pale face, sensitive, delicate, with gray eyes, lustrous, immeasurably sad, that held hers and seemed to draw her whole soul into their depths.

By and by she crossed the turf to Jimsie's seat, and lying face downward there, her face pressed against the green, cool grass she sobbed as if her heart would break. After a while she rose and gave herself a little impatient shake.

"Bah! It's a fool-I am to be sure," she laughed harshly; and holding her head a little more proudly than usual, she went her way down to the cross-roads dancing.

AUGUST had come, and here and there across the countryside little patches of yellow were showing, where the farmer's small fields of grain were beginning to ripen. High in the blue sky the larks poured forth their song of joy. And night after night toward the set of sun Jimsie Brien climbed the little hill to the Fairy Fort and played his strange melodies of joy and pain.

And many a night Norah Byrne, mounting the hill before him, would hide herself in the little wind-tossed clump of bushes near the fort. Since the night when Timothy had asked her to marry him Jimsie had come alone, for Alec French had been carried off to Dublin and no one else cared to hear him play. On this August night, however, Jimsie had hardly seated himself when Alec's clear voice hailed him, coming up the hill.

"It's glad I am to see ye, Masther Alec," said the hunchback. "I've missed ye sorely."



"Me too," said the boy earnestly, and they chatted together, while Jimsie told the boy of his brother who had gone to be a soldier.

"An' if it wasn't for this ould hunch of mine, it's a soldyer I'd be meself," he said. "For me heart's there. An' they do say that before I had the fall that put me crooked, me an' me brother were the dead shpit of wan another," he finished wistfully.

"Well, you're a brave man anyway," declared the boy. "I heard that when the fever was here in June you were in and out to every one and never a bit afraid."

Jimsie shook his head.

"Maybe I'd be glad to have taken it. It wasn't very brave," he said.

Down in the little clump of trees great tears of pity stood in Norah's eyes.

"Play for me," Alec suddenly commanded.

Jimsie drew his bow and began a rollicking jig, but the boy put out his hand and stopped him.

"No, no!" he said. "Play me about the beautiful girl you love."

Cramped close in the little clump of bushes, a fierce pain caught at Norah's heart, and she shivered as with cold.

"Tell me about her again first. I forget it all, except that she had red-brown hair like the leaves in the Autumn forest."

"Yes, an' she's the most beautiful gurl in the whole of Kilmack an' in the whole wurld. An' her eyes are the blue of the sky on a Summer night with the stars shining. But sometimes lately they are gray and dark like a storm-sky."

"And she's tall and slender like the bog-

reeds that sway in the wind. I remember," shouted the boy. "And round her the fairies dance in a circle always," he went on excitedly, clapping his hands. "Go on, Jimsie. I forget the rest."

"Round her the fairies dance in a circle always," went on the dreamy, pathetic voice, "Wishin' her joy an' the beauty of the whole wurld an' love; an' kapin' out all things that are sinful an' ugly an' misshaped, that's why I can never come near her."

And so finishing, he began to play, while close by in the clump of bushes Norah Byrne strove desperately to remember whether in the whole of Kilmack there was any girl but herself who had red-brown hair and eyes like a Summer night.

And a queer little fluttering joy raised its head and pushed its way up through the misery in her heart.

Supper-time came soon and Alec trotted down the hill, leaving the fiddler alone. A long time he sat, his knees drawn up before him, staring out at the changing sky and the black shapes of the curraughs in the bay, where the fishermen hauled at their heavy nets. Then with a long, shuddering cry he bent his poor misshapen back until his pale face rested on his knees.

"Norah!" he cried once.

And then again, piteously. "Norah Byrne!"

A second and the girl was beside him, but he did not heed her.

"It's me, Jimsie—Norah," she whispered. "An' I'm lovin' ye this long, long while past," she crooned, as her strong young arms stole round him, drawing him close."



Whom the Lord Loveth

BY RAMSEY BENSON



YEAR after year, for four years Blackstock sowed wheat and nothing but wheat, and never once did he get so much as his seed back.

The long, cool Springs caused the grain to stool out till it covered the ground like a carpet; the short hot Summers sent the stalks shooting up to the height of a man's shoulders and filled out the heads in a manner to promise great things, but in the Fall—it was the Falls that played the mischief. Some sort of storm, perhaps only a trifling flurry of wind in itself but enough to clear the air; after that a crisp, brilliant night, beautiful as Lucifer and as wicked, and the wheat was gone.

Frost. Year after year for four years. Not only Blackstock but his neighbors as well. The calamity fell upon the just and the unjust alike.

In that corner of Saskatchewan you might plow over a thousand acres and never strike a rock as big as a pigeon's egg. You might dig fifty feet into the earth, or drive a drill that deep, and never encounter anything stiffer than clay.

But Blackstock had a rock on his farm, a massy boulder of granite which the glacial drift had freakishly perched on the highest knoll. He could stand on it and see every foot of his domain. He climbed up there often to look out over his wheat billowing and bowing in the wind.

He never slept much the night of the frost. He could foresee the calamity from the moment the sun went down, so cruel-white, and he rose from his restless bed a dozen times to scan the purple sky sown with stars that sparkled like points of flame. With the first glimmer of morning he was out on the rock, and there he stood like a figure cast in bronze and watched the day dawn. The sun came up, its touch turned the wheat black as ashes and when the breeze swept lightly over the field, the stalks rattled like dry bones.

Year after year, for four years.

Once upon a time he housed and fed some chance wayfarers and was curiously prompted, for he was a man of few words, to tell them about his wheat. They asked him why he didn't try farming farther south, where the frosts held off longer, but Blackstock shook his head.

"My ancestors lived in a bleak country. They might have gone farther south, where life was easier, but they didn't. They tarried in the land the Lord gave them and He blessed them and made them a great people," he declaimed.

They could guess what people he meant; nevertheless they asked him.

"Scotch!" answered Blackstock, proudly.

His call was to preach. It had been the call of every Blackstock for ten generations—in Scotland, in Ontario and now in Saskatchewan. They were a race of farmers who thought out their sermons, as with their own hands they till the stubborn glebe, and they asked no pay for expounding the Word.

Here the little neighborhood schoolhouse was a church on Sunday, and in it Blackstock held forth. He preached drearily enough and at prodigious length, but the neighbors came and listened dutifully. He preached as his forefathers had preached, and they listened as their forefathers had listened, for they were Scotch, too.

If Blackstock was ever touched with pentecostal fire, it was the Sunday after the frost. The neighbors came with the sense of the calamity strong upon them. They were poor folks, ill-prepared to weather such a storm. There were debts to pay and they hadn't the wherewithal to pay them. Even they might run short of food for themselves and their beasts. A sad and sober company.

Blackstock invariably chose for his text that day the verses from the Twelfth Chapter of Paul to the Hebrews.

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

"If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

The burden of his discourse was in keeping. So far from bemoaning the calamity

he exulted in it, and his voice was the voice of a prophet unto his people. They were lifted up with him. They came away awed but lifted up, as with the thunders of Sinai itself in their ears. Awed and solemnly glad. The Lord loved them, for he had chastened them.

Blackstock's little old wife sat silent and listened with the rest. He was a kindly man with her but silent, and to hear him speak out so was as wonderful and unwonted in her experience as in the neighbors'. She drank in his words. Her faith in him knew no limits.

BUT the long lane turned at last. The fifth year was very much like the others throughout the Spring and Summer—that is, everything a good year need be. Blackstock stood on his rock and watched the wheat grow big and beautiful. The harvest is late in that northern land and August was well spent when the grain began to show yellow. But it ripened fast and there was no frost to cut it off.

Everything favored, in fact. No frosts, no rain to hinder the work, only golden harvest-weather. The binders struck into the fields and tossed off the sheaves with scarcely an interval between—fat sheaves that made a man stagger with the weight of them.

Golden sunshine day after day, and right behind the binders came the thresher, swallowing the sheaves as fast as four men could pitch them into its greedy mouth and gushing forth a stream of plump kernels that was a very river of riches. The machine had a contrivance that tripped as often as a bushel came out and the sound of its tripping was like the music of a gay dance.

The yield ran better than fifty bushels to the acre. Blackstock's farm of one hundred sixty acres gave him about eight thousand bushels, and when he had hauled it to market and sold it and out of the proceeds paid his debts, there still lay a matter of ten thousand dollars to his credit in the bank. A vast sum, in his economy. No other Blackstock ever had so much. Quite likely his forefathers for ten generations back had together earned no such sum beyond their living.

The bank was at Epsom, four miles away. Blackstock came home with the cer-



tificates of deposit and handed them to his wife. They were made out to her.

She took them in her hand uncertainly—the hands which were eloquent testimony to the poverty she had always known. She read the figures and looked up at Blackstock with a helpless air.

"What shall we ever do with so much?" she faltered.

"Thee has always wanted a Paisley shawl," he answered weakly. Weak where she had never seen him anything but strong. With decision gone from him, to whom she had always looked to decide.

From that moment, in short, he was a different Blackstock. Not only his wife found him so but the neighbors as well. He moped from morning till night. He spent hours out on the rock, regardless of the weather. Neighbors saw him there in the rain and shook their heads sadly. He didn't start his plows or lift a finger toward the next year's crop. Neighbors were briskly and blithely busy turning the stubble, but Blackstock's fields lay fallow.

Nor did he preach. The word went up and down that there would be no preaching at the schoolhouse, and that was a sign more disquieting than the others. Neighbors whispered among themselves. Blackstock was an old man. He was breaking. He couldn't last forever.

IN THESE days there registered at the Epsom Hotel in Epsom a certain John Waldo Finch. He had come up into that country to sell stock in oil wells in Oklahoma. Good crops bring a number of things in their wake. Farmers so blessed are themselves a harvest white for the sickle and the laborers are never few. Like a flock of hungry buzzards the tribe of agents settled down on Saskatchewan that year, with anything and everything to sell from enlarged portraits to Florida lands.

Finch was smooth. He didn't go about in a lordy car. Neither did he wear a silk hat and kid gloves. He dressed and acted and talked like a farmer. He could tell tales likely to interest farmers, of ranchers in Nebraska who hogged down their corn to save the cost of husking it and of cattlemen in Texas and Arizona who found it paid to build up their stock by turning loose on the ranges thoroughbred sires costing as high as ten thousand dollars a head.

Of course he was leading up to his own

purpose but he led them so adroitly that when at length he opened out his maps and began to talk business, the neighbors were prejudiced in his favor.

He represented the Penguin Leases. The Penguin Leases had taken over some thousands of acres of land within sight of the famous Black Panther well. Black Panther was an established name—it had been much in the newspapers, and though the neighbors weren't greatly given to reading, they already knew about the well and its amazing record of production. Finch had with him the reports of experts to the effect that the geological formation under the property of the Penguin Leases was fully as promising as that from which the Black Panther poured forth its fabulous riches.

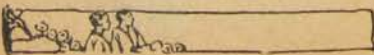
Finch wasn't lacking in originality. With homely eloquence he enlarged upon the risks of farming. That was a new string, and he harped upon it more than any other.

"Just once in five years," he pointed out, "you have had a crop. You don't know when you'll have another, and now is your chance to make your future secure by investing in good, sound oil stock. I will sell you stock in the Penguin Leases for one dollar a share. In a few years, perhaps in a few months, depending on the rapidity of development, it will be worth ten dollars a share—or twenty dollars—or even one hundred dollars—and all the while you will be drawing dividends.

"If you put your money back into your farms, you'll throw it away. Put it into oil and it will be like bread cast upon the waters. Mind you, I don't deny that there is money lost in oil but for every dollar lost in oil, there's ten dollars lost in farming—or more."

He was eloquent and adroit, but the neighbors were canny. They were impressed but not convinced. They recommended Finch to see Blackstock. It was a tradition of their race to put trust in the man whom the Lord had called to preach. To him they ascribed an insight beyond their own. If Blackstock thought the investment good, neighbors would be glad to consider it further.

Finch saw Blackstock, and the preacher so far shook off his apathy as to concern himself keenly with Penguin Leases. When Finch spread out his maps, Blackstock regarded him and them intently, and when



Finch opened the flood-gates of his eloquence, Blackstock listened without missing a word.

But his aspect was ominous and his inquiries were more so.

"If your project promises such profits, why," he asked, "do you come up here to sell stock? Why don't you go to New York or Montreal, where there are so many rich men wishful to invest?"

"We want to scatter our stock among the plain people—we don't want capitalists in our company," Finch replied.

"I should suppose one man's money is as good as another's."

"You're wrong there, Mr. Blackstock. We want to build up a company that will have the public confidence, and the way to do it is to scatter the stock among a great many small stockholders. The Pennsylvania Railway——"

"I dare say a great deal of money has been lost in oil."

"Not as much as has been lost in farming. Farmers in Saskatchewan have lost more money by frost in the last five years than was ever lost in oil."

"I have my doubts—I have my doubts."

"That's all right—there's always a doubt. The best investments in the world were doubtful investments in the first place—it's only where there's a doubt that you can make the lucky strike. If it wasn't for the risk that scares out the weak souls, there'd be no chance for the strong men to take it and get rich. You're a strong man, Mr. Blackstock, and if you'll go in with us, we'll make it worth your while."

That was a daring shot, but it fell short. Blackstock's verdict was adverse.

"I believe you are a swindler, Mr. Finch," he frankly declared, and to neighbors who came asking what he thought, he made answer—

"Any man who puts his money in that concern will never see it again."

Blackstock's wife never thrust herself into high councils such as these. It was much more like her to efface herself when men came to talk with her husband about affairs. But the house was small, she was busy in her kitchen with the door open and she couldn't help but overhear. Particularly, since he spoke out emphatically, she overheard her husband say—

"Any man who puts his money in that concern will never see it again."

Her faith in him was boundless.

AT THE Epsom Hotel in Epsom town John Waldo Finch waited moodily by the front window for the hour when his train should come and take him away from those parts. He had just paid his bill and it was so much money thrown away. For he was leaving those parts without having sold a solitary share of stock in the Penguin Leases.

He was sore and disgruntled.

"Do you know a parson out east of town by the name of Blackstock?" he asked the landlord.

The landlord had heard of such a person.

"I'm told he preaches sermons an hour long," he remarked.

Finch spat his disdain.

"Deliver me," he snarled, "from any man who tries to be a farmer and a parson and Scotch all at the same time. Of all the stubborn, stingy, penurious, narrow, selfish, clammy——"

He checked himself. A bell clanged loudly somewhere in the back part of the hotel and the landlord hurried away in answer to the summons. Finch flung himself back in his chair and stared sourly out of the window.

Presently, as he stared, a rickety old buggy drew up in front of the hotel and a bent little wisp of a woman alighted. She wore glasses, but even with their help seemed short of sight, so that she peered about her with an air of uncertainty and fumbled awkwardly at the straps as she hitched her dull and sleepy horse to a post.

When she had got the horse hitched, she fished an ancient leather wallet out from under the ragged cushion of the buggy and climbed up the steps to the hotel.

"I wish to speak with Mr. Finch," she announced from the doorway.

Finch was promptly on his feet. He wasn't so sore and disgruntled as to have forgotten his manners altogether.

"That's my name," he answered.

The woman came nearer and eyed him fixedly through her glasses.

"The Mr. Finch who sells shares in oil wells," she specified.

"I'm the man," he assured her.

"Well, I'd like to buy some shares."

"Certainly, ma'am. About how many shares would you like to buy?"



"What does a share cost?"

"The price today is one dollar."

"Well, I'll take ten thousand shares. Here's the money."

So saying, the woman unwound the strap of her old wallet and brought forth several certificates of deposit. These she handed to Finch.

"Count them," she directed.

Finch was visibly flustered but he made a quick recovery. He took the certificates, set down the sum of each on the landlord's blotter and cast up the figures, while the woman calmly studied the design of the wall-paper.

"They come to ten thousand, fifty six dollars and eighty cents," he informed her.

"Well, you may take ten thousand dollars and pay me the fifty six dollars and eighty cents—I've got to buy me a shawl and some things," she rejoined.

When the landlord came back to that part of the house, Finch and the woman were out on the sidewalk in front. Finch had unhitched the horse and was helping the woman into the buggy with considerable ceremony. Evidently something had come over him. He bowed and waved his hand genially as the woman drove away, and when he came back into the hotel, he overflowed with good-feeling and whistled an air under his breath.

He vouchsafed no explanation. The landlord didn't know who the woman was, and Finch hurried off to catch his train without enlightening him.

FOR four months there was no preaching in the little schoolhouse. Neighbors missed the sermons, for they were a pious folk. They kept up the Sunday-school and every Thursday night they got together for prayer, but no such devices, though they were good in their way, could take the place of the preaching.

There was quiet talk of having somebody else come out from Epsom. Neighbors weren't used to paying their pastor, but they felt rich these days and they wouldn't mind any reasonable expense.

But because it might look like an affront to Blackstock, nothing was done. Nobody had the heart to speak to him and ask his consent. Neighbors thought he was breaking up and would never preach any more, but not for the world would they let him know that they thought so.

It was a wonderfully mild, open Winter. Very little snow fell, the blizzards were few and far between and for weeks at a stretch there was never a cloud to hide the sun. The money which neighbors might have given to Finch they kept and spent for improvements about their farms, and the open weather greatly favored the work. The countryside resounded with the clatter of saws and hammers. A busy Winter, in short, and joyously only for the lack of preaching.

But there was no joy for Blackstock. He did nothing but mope. Neighbors passing by saw him out on the big rock sometimes after it had grown so dark they could barely make him out. They wondered if he stayed there all night. They pitied the woman and wished to help her with her burden, but the most they could do was to go over and call on the Blackstocks often.

Neighbors were astonished to see how well the woman bore up. She seemed to grow stronger under her trials and more cheerful. They could scarcely get a word out of Blackstock, but the woman talked and visited with them as if there were nothing amiss.

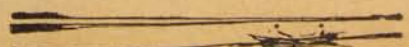
The Silsbys were nearest, and a glorious soft evening in February, with a full moon to light them on their way, they drove over to take supper and spend a few hours. Silsby, since the big crop, had been taking a daily newspaper from Winnipeg, and he was fairly bursting with the things he wanted to tell. Blackstock took no newspaper. He had books, but he had ceased to read them.

One thing especially lay heavy on Silsby's mind. The company were seated at the table and he could scarcely wait for the blessing to be asked before he was out with it.

"You remember the man Finch—he that had the oil stock to sell?" he asked.

The woman set her teapot down rather suddenly. Blackstock was like a graven image.

"Well, he's in jail—in Dakota," Silsby related, breathlessly. "It says in the paper they've got evidence that will send him to the penitentiary. He has swindled people out of more than a quarter of a million dollars all told. There's no such concern as the Penguin Leases—it's the worst kind of a fraud."



The woman picked up her teapot.

"Do have a cup, Mr. Silsby," she urged hospitably.

When the company were gone, though it was after ten o'clock, Blackstock put on his rough peajacket and fur cap. His wife asked him where he was going and he didn't answer. Then she bade him wait a moment—she had a confession to make.

She laid some papers in his hand, and he regarded them dully.

"What are these?" he inquired without interest.

"They are shares of stock in the Penguin Leases. They cost ten thousand dollars. I bought them with the certificates of deposit which you left in my keeping."

IT MADE a stir when the word went up and down that Blackstock would preach at the schoolhouse the next Sunday. Neighbors never thought of it as anything but a farewell sermon, however. They took the word to mean that Blackstock would preach just once more and bid them goodbye. They assembled as at a funeral.

But it was no such thing. Blackstock stood up before them and he was no more broken than a boy. He held his head high.

His eyes flashed. Though his rugged face couldn't be anything but sober, they beheld it radiant as never yet.



And as never yet they heard him preach. He took his text from Job but whereas Job had made his book an epic of resignation, Blackstock turned it into a song of victory and exultation.

"The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away—blessed be the name of the Lord!" he read out, and his voice rang like a trumpet.

Neighbors were greatly at a loss. The best they could make of it was that Blackstock's health had suddenly taken a turn for the better.

His wife was in her place down in front. She gazed up at him through her glasses in the accustomed way—steadfastly, respectfully. Neighbors weren't used to thinking that she understood her husband's sermons very clearly. They fancied that she listened and gave strict attention rather because, as the minister's wife, it was in an especial sense her duty to do so than because the discourse meant much to her. They regarded her as a simple soul—very good, but only ordinarily bright.

She wore a new shawl.

The Pawn-Shop

ABOVE ungardened alleys,
 What fairy fruits are these
 Dangling? The golden apples
 Of the Hesperides
 Were no more brightly burnished,
 Less gleamingly were tossed
 The shining trophies on the way
 That Atalanta lost.

No more beneath the brazen bough,
 Guarding the hoarded gold,
 There coils a scaly serpent;
 No longer, as of old,
 The path is set with perils;
 Perseus, his treasure spent,
 May here, beneath the triple balls,
 Borrow at six per cent.

Jean Batchelor



Jean Trouvé

BY NEVIL G. HENSHAW

A Two-Part Story

Conclusion

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH A YEAR IS MADE TO PASS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE

OF PAPA TON'S return, of the year that followed at Bayou Portage, it is neither easy nor pleasant to write. Also I fear that, as yet, my tale has held far more shadow than sunshine. Therefore, for the sake of those who have borne with me this far, as well as for my own, I will strive to be brief.

Three days after Christmas Papa Ton returned, disheveled, ill and empty-handed.

"Ah, Toinette, Toinette, what can I say to you?" he cried as he crept overside. "It was just like the last time, only worse. And through it all I thought of you so that I had to keep on to drown my shame.

"It is always your face that I see at the bottom of the glass, Toinette—your face, as it will look upon my return."

And Toinette, her eyes a blur of love and pity, could only grip him hard about his great neck and answer:

"*Bien*, Papa Ton. You are back again, at any rate. In with you now and to bed until you are yourself once more."

Slinking to the hut in silence, the big man lay as one dead for two nights and a day. At the end of this time he arose and, having gulped down an enormous meal, resumed the burden of the marsh.

At sight of my skins he was loud in his praises, declaring that he himself could have done no better. Also he insisted upon dividing equally with me, a thing which I stoutly refused to allow. In the end he gave in, turning his back that I might not witness the emotion born of his gratitude.

"Good Jean," he gulped. "Believe me, I will not soon forget this. And remember, we are partners once the debts are paid. It is your right."

Of his carouse he spoke to me but once, yet there was a sermon in his few words.

"You have seen?" he questioned the first moment that we were alone. "Then do not forget. If ever you would drink, fill your first glass with poison itself. That will be quicker for you and better for the ones you love."

For a time Papa Ton spared his broken spirit no single stroke from the twin scourges of remorse and shame. Never before had I know him so tender, so humble, so grateful for the slightest favor. He was

like a child who, having committed an unnoticed fault, is divided between wonder and gratitude at the punishment withheld.

Also, as in the case of his former defection, he performed prodigies of work, harrying the marsh until the last penny of his debt had been accounted for and the skins had gone up to the bridge, together with a second lot that was to replenish our larder and settle the score of borrowed supplies.

It is to these days of contrition and endeavor that I love best to look back when I think of Papa Ton. Childish always, he at this time became literally our charge. Indeed, so great was his bewilderment, his indecision, that had we not ordered him about, I doubt that he would have got beyond a vague and helpless groping after the solution of his many difficulties.

So the first weeks of the new year passed amid an atmosphere of love and pity which, despite our need, rendered them the happiest that I had known at Bayou Portage.

Then, his debts paid and his system cleansed of the poisons of the mainland, Papa Ton began to develop his old restlessness and instability of purpose. All along he had refrained religiously from any mention of the camp below. Now unconsciously his thoughts began to slip the leash of his determination.

"So, Jean," he observed one night, "I hear that we have a newcomer in the person of your friend, M'sieu Dugas."

A few days later he remarked:

"They say that it is quite a place at the lower camp. *Bien*, I must see for myself. Not as a customer, of course, but merely to look around."

These were warnings not to be disregarded, and in our despair we sent for Le Bossu. Had he come at once, it is possible that the danger might temporarily have been averted. But by the time the little man's answer arrived, telling of an expedition to Lake Tasse and the obligation of a newly formed partnership, Papa Ton had stolen off for a two days' stay at the lower camp.

Upon his return there was another debt, a debt that must be paid at once. This necessitated a second trip below and a subsequent stay of another two days. Toinette and I were aghast. It was even worse than we had feared.

After this we settled down to a hopeless fight against the rapacity of Monsieur

Dugas. Always was Toinette scrimping and saving. Always was I tramping the marsh for skins that melted away downstream. And always Monsieur Dugas reached out for more, grudging us the very food that went into our mouths.

At first Papa Ton held rigidly to our partnership, so that there was always my share of the skins to fall back upon. But so importunate a creditor was Monsieur Dugas and so piteous was the big man's need, that soon I began lending a skin or two to complete the required amount.

The result of this was inevitable. Each time the amount increased until the catch began to go as a whole.

Now if I have made it appear that Monsieur Dugas was solely responsible for our misfortune, I am fully justified. Each step of Papa Ton's downfall went further to convince me that it was not the big man's fault. As Toinette always said, he meant well and tried hard. Indeed, had Monsieur Dugas merely let him alone, I doubt that his case would have been so desperate.

But Monsieur Dugas had not served his secret bar for nothing. In the art of temptation he was a past master. Did Papa Ton, poisoned and repentant, stay away from below a week, up would come a present in the shape of a small bottle. Once that bottle had been drained, Papa Ton was beyond all power of persuasion.

As for Papa Ton, I can say of him that, through all this bitter time, never once did he cause our love for him to waver. Always he was kind and gentle, and the love that he returned us was like some living thing. That was the pity of it, the pity that well-nigh broke our hearts.

"Ah, Jean, Jean," Toinette would often cry. "If only he would beat us! Then we might hate him and it would not be so hard. What are skins and food compared to his love?"

Thus the year dragged itself out to hot weather and our departure for the bay.

This second Summer there were but three of us upon the *Toinette*, for Le Bossu was unable to join us. Again it was a partnership, the little man sending word that he would be occupied until the following Christmas, when we would see him without fail. As a consequence Papa Ton made a lonely, restless cruise, punctuated with visits to the coffee-house of the coast.

Upon our return to Bayou Portage long

in advance of cold weather, we faced a situation which promised to be even more serious than that of the season before. Early in the Summer young Pierre Valsan's wife had deserted him entirely and young Pierre, returning to the camp, had sought to drown his troubles in drink.

His companionship was the one thing needed to complete Papa Ton's ruin. If before the lower camp had been at the big man's elbow, Valsan's swift launch now placed it in his very hand. Always the two were slipping down the bayou, sometimes making a half-dozen trips in one day.

Soon our case became truly desperate. With the approach of Christmas there was no talk of the bridge. Never again, it seemed, would our skins find their way upstream. We could only hope that Le Bossu, learning of our plight, would bring down a stock of supplies.

So we struggled on through the last weeks of the old year and then, with Christmas but four days off and the little man's arrival a matter of hours, the end came—a terrible end that leaped upon us with all the swift cruelty of the wild.

It was late in the afternoon and, our day's work done, Toinette and I had gone down to the landing. Le Bossu had sent word that he would arrive either that night or the following morning, and Papa Ton, as usual, had gone with young Pierre to the lower camp.

We had pleaded particularly hard with him that day, reminding him of Le Bossu's arrival, but the big man had reached a stage where, if he fought temptation at all, he merely battled with weak excuses. He would be right back, he declared. This was not pleasure but business. Only let him settle a small account, and he would leave without lifting so much as a glass.

Thus, with two travelers to look out for, we kept watch both up and down-stream. Also we spoke brightly of the days to come, tasting a happiness which was all the sweeter in that it had been long delayed.

For the first time in many months we had found a rift in the dark clouds of the future. Le Bossu was coming, and this meant not only freedom from want but an influence that Papa Ton had ever been unable to withstand.

And even should the little man fail this time, we had a plan. It was a vague, nebulous plan which involved our removal

to some other camp, and as yet we had hardly dared to put it into words.

Of course it was unthinkable, but if the worst came to the worst, we meant to try it with the help of Le Bossu. In all the marsh there was no other who would have dared to suggest such a thing to Papa Ton.

"Come, Jean," said Toinette finally. "Why twist our heads off trying to look both ways at once? Let us make a game of it. I will look up and you will look down, and the first to see boat or launch will be the winner."

"*Bien*," I agreed.

And in the same breath I added—

"Your choice was bad, for you have lost already."

"But that is only a pirogue," objected Toinette as she turned to see.

"Look beyond," I ordered.

"But still it is not the launch," persisted keen-eyed Toinette. "It is a rowboat. No, there are two boats. See how the water glints between."

Rising to my feet, I shaded my eyes that they might the better pierce the gray of the approaching twilight. Now I could see that Toinette was right. There were two skiffs, moving side by side, and ahead of them, skimming at top speed, came the pirogue.

Indeed, so hard did the paddler drive his strokes that he was within hail of us before even I could comment on his haste.

"*Hola* you," he shouted. "Bring help. There has been an accident."

I started off obediently enough, but there was no need to follow his instruction. Other eyes had been watching the bayou, and already the partners were on the run, followed closely by Father Lasalle.

Turning to Toinette, I found that she had not moved. In her eyes was a look of agonized impatience, and the hand she had clutched to her heart was gripped so fiercely that the knuckles showed white through their tan.

"Ah, hurry, hurry," she begged. "Each moment will mean so much."

"And why?" I asked, bewildered.

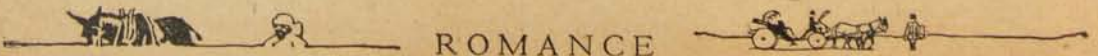
"It is Papa Ton," she answered dully.

"I know, Jean, I know."

Her hand rose and came back with a thud as she added—

"I can feel it here."

By now the pirogue had shot alongside and the partners had seized its occupant.



"Well?" they questioned.

"It is your two from here, Laval and Valsan," panted the man. "They were blind with drink. They were mad to try that launch. From what I heard, the engine would not start, and Valsan went forward for gasoline with which to prime it. He was smoking, and the tank exploded, not so as to blow out, but in a great spout of flame. Valsan fell stunned, and Laval plunged forward to save him. It was all over in a moment. We had put out and taken them off in less than five minutes after the first flash. Valsan is badly burned, but he will come out of it."

He paused and in the horror of that moment it was Toinette who first found voice to ask the already answered question.

"And Laval?" she demanded as though she feared the usual "Papa Ton" might be misunderstood.

The man looked away. Evidently he understood only too well.

"He is bad," he muttered. "Up there at the tank it was like a wall of flame. Not being himself, he swallowed a lot."

Dalfrey held out a kindly hand.

"Come, little one," said he. "You had best be inside."

But by then the boats had come, and it was too late to go.

In one young Pierre, smoked and singed beyond all recognition, hid his dreadful black face in the charred cover of his hands.

"Ah, Dieu, bon Dieu," he croaked in his returning consciousness as he slowly rocked from side to side.

In the other, face down between the thwarts, lay Papa Ton. He lay stiffly, with a great arm thrust out on either side to brace him, and, although he jerked and quivered in his agony, he made no sound.

Those who brought him said that he had been that way throughout the endless, tortured journey up-stream. Also he had spoken but once, and then only to explain.

"I must save myself for Toinette," he had said.

CHAPTER XII

PAPA TON SETS FORTH *au large*

THEY got Papa Ton to the hut and into his bunk, where he lay upon his back, panting in great, strangled gasps that tore

the very soul of him. At once Toinette sprang to his side, rubbing his head, patting his hands, striving frantically for some means to stay his pain.

As for myself, I could only drop down beside the bunk and sob my grief into the stiff folds of the rough blankets.

"Dieu," swore silent Borges. "This will not do. We must have a doctor."

Then Papa Ton spoke in a strange, cracked voice that seemed to come from a very great distance. He spoke slowly and with many pauses, bringing forth each word as if it had been achieved through some miracle of pain.

"It—is—no—use," he said. "I—am—through. Leave—me—with—my—own."

I arose as the men filed out, and thus I was enabled to see that, among those of our camp, there was not one whose eyes were dry. Somehow it was as if the true tragedy of the affair had been withheld until the moment of Papa Ton's speech. The flames had done their work well. Of the great, rumbling voice only a few sere ashes remained to be rustled by the breath of agony.

The men gone, Papa Ton spoke again, this time to rebuke our grief.

"No," he struggled. "No—tears. It—is—best—this—way. I—was—going—down. I—could—not—stop."

A pause, and he added:

"I—have—seen them—those—old—half—dead—men—of—the—coffee—houses. I—escape—that—at—all—events."

After this he seemed to doze, lying silent a long time, while Toinette sobbed softly and I wrenched uselessly at the twist of cover that I had seized in my despair. Tante Odile crept in and, after a look around, slipped quietly out again.

From beyond the door came a subdued murmur of voices and the grating of rough shoes upon the broken shell. The men were waiting at hand in case of need.

Unable longer to endure the inaction, I finally rose and mended the fire, blindly heaping on the driftwood until the whole room was aglow. At this Papa Ton roused himself, calling me to him, and beginning to speak in a pitifully weak and broken voice, yet with a clearness and steadiness that had been wholly denied him before. Thus at the very end his endurance earned its reward.

"Jean, you must look after Toinette,"

he began. "You must promise. There is my sister, but she will not be like you."

"Papa Ton, Papa Ton," I cried. "How can you ask such a thing of me?"

"*Bien*," he sighed. "I knew, but it is good to be sure. Also you must see that they put me here in the marsh. I could not lie easy elsewhere."

"For the rest, do not grieve, you and Toinette. It is not so bad, this death. I am setting forth *au large*, that is all. Always I have been the stay-at-home. My brothers, my sisters, they all went out in the world while I hugged this camp. Now it is my turn. *Au large*, Jean. *Au large*, Toinette. That is all."

He paused, and now there were tears in his own eyes, those tears of pity that alone could be wrung from his brave heart.

"Courage, *mes enfants*," he whispered. "I tell you it is for the best."

He broke off again to heave himself upright with a stifled gasp.

"Quick, your hand, Toinette," he choked. "This is a lonesome business after all."

And then, as Toinette gripped him, he eased suddenly back upon the blankets, releasing a deep, grateful breath, as does a thirsty man who has had his need of cool water.

"My little Toinette," he murmured and lay still.

Later, when we could not but be sure, Toinette found heart to speak.

"You will leave us, dear Jean," she begged. "I would like to be with him alone for just a little while."

And so I went out, where the men received me kindly, yet with that strange aloofness which had so impressed me upon the occasion of my father's death.

"He is gone?" asked several at once.

"Yes," I replied and, unable to bear more, I slipped away from them to the seclusion of the shed.

Here amid a litter of nets and ropes and broken oars I hid my grief, while the men still waited at the door, so near that now I could catch the words of their low-pitched conversation.

"You see," said Dalfrey. "It is what I predicted, and it is but the start. Who will be the next one?"

"Yes, it was Dugas' fault," muttered a strange voice. "He should not have let them go. And our camp is worse than this. Sometimes there is no trap set for days."

"He will ruin us all," growled a second stranger. "Myself, I can not keep away."

"Yet there is a remedy, a sure one," offered Dalfrey. "We have but to stick together."

"You mean—" began the first voice.

"Let us wait for more," interrupted Father Lasalle. "Bad news travels fast, and Papa Ton was well liked. There will be many who will not wait for morning."

"That is right," agreed Dalfrey. "It is a job for all the marsh. Come, let us go to the landings. Just now we can do nothing here."

I heard them go thankfully enough, nor did I give so much as a thought to the meaning of what they had said. For the moment I experienced a sense of desertion, of abandonment, such as I had never known.

It seemed that I must remain a derelict ever seeking an affection that would endure. Of the several who had offered me their love and protection not one remained. First there had been my father, then Madame Therese, and now Papa Ton.

Dear, blundering Papa Ton who, even beneath the grind of the marsh, had refused to grow old. As I thought of him, all the dross of his life slipped away, leaving only his heart of gold.

The care, the need, the toil of the past year, what did it all amount to now? Gladly would I go through it again and again for but one call of the big voice, one squeeze of the mighty arms.

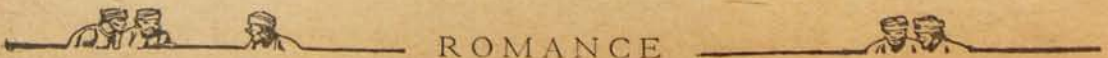
I knew true grief there in the shadow of the old shed, grief that ever grew beneath the lash of memory. And then, when it seemed that I could stand no more, there came a patter of light footsteps, a soft-called "Jean" that brought me out into the open with a rush.

"Ah, Bossu," I cried, while hope and gladness flooded back into my forsaken soul. "I knew that there must be some one after all."

CHAPTER XIII

LE BOSSU TALKS BENEATH THE STARS

LATER, when Toinette had finally submitted to the kindly ministrations of Tante Odile and had been led away, Le Bossu and I slipped out for a breath of air before the hut.



It was a wonderful night, still and cold, and the stars shone so brightly that it was as if each had trimmed its lamp to welcome the big man home. We sat long beneath the tiny beacon-lights, and as we sat, Le Bossu spoke of the past, telling of things at which he had but vaguely hinted before.

"We will miss him, Papa Ton," he began. "In all my life I have never seen his like. He was so true, so honest, so kindly to all save himself. Yet, as he told you, it was best for him to go. He had slipped far down in the well, and I doubt that we could have raised him again.

"Had I known his true plight, I would have come to him despite a dozen partnerships. You must believe that, you and Toinette. Otherwise I could not bear it. Yet, as I have said, my coming could hardly have sufficed.

"And another thing—Papa Ton died well and bravely. But for him, young Pierre would have roasted alive. You must always remember this. It was a good way to go."

Le Bossu paused, and when he spoke again, it was with the slow, absent words of one who gropes amid half-forgotten memories.

"Ah, but you should have known Papa Ton in the old days," he went on. "They were a big family, the Lavals, and they were proud with the pride of long standing. Of the many brothers and sisters Papa Ton was the only one whose ways were plain and simple. And for this he was the most loved, the best remembered of them all.

"What if, as a boy, he threw away his books to run wild in the fields and forests? What if, as a man, he refused to go out into the world, ever sticking to the old home like a rabbit to its burrow? What if later on he married unprofitably, picking out the daughter of a poor tenant farmer? These things do not count with humble folk. They look no farther than the generous heart, the kindly word, the willing hand.

"You should have seen Papa Ton as he used to ride into town. 'Here is Oton,' some one would cry, and all down the street the people would hurry out from their houses for a look and a word.

"It was the beginning of his ruin, this popularity. Each man must drink his health, and he was never the one to leave a treat unnoticed. True, in these days he

was the master of himself, but he had already forged those fetters which only awaited some moment of weakness to bind him.

"And then, with the death of his wife, the opportunity came. She was a good wife and she meant everything to Papa Ton. Also her end was too swift, too dreadful for his slow, heavy mind. One morning she was singing about the house. Before sunset she was gone, leaving Toinette to fill her place.

"After that Papa Ton gave up. It was too much for him. He could not understand. All he knew was that forgetfulness could be had for the drawing of a cork. His friends tried hard, but it was no use.

"Yet even in that dark hour he did not forget these friends. One day he rode into town and bade farewell to all.

"'I am going to the devil, and it is not a nice thing for you to see,' he said. 'Therefore I mean to find some spot where I will be alone.'

"That night he slept at the bridge. Next morning, having bought a boat, he put out for the coast with Toinette. For a time he drifted, finally coming to rest at this spot. Since then he has been as much a part of the marsh as the grass itself.

"So that is Papa Ton's story, and I have told it that you might hear it from one who knows."

The little man's voice died out, and for a while he sat musing.

"And now for the future, Jean," he continued, suddenly rousing himself. "Papa Ton's death will bring many changes. What you do is, of course, your own affair, but one thing I want you to know. At my camp a place is waiting for you. Come, what do you say? You will join me?"

"That is good of you, Bossu," I answered. "It is what I should like above all things. But I must stay with Toinette."

"So," said he. "It is what I expected. Nevertheless I would not act hastily. You are getting on, Jean. You are a man now in size and experience, and your future lies just before you. What you do now will perhaps determine the whole course of your life. Also, whereas you have done well with the skins, you were not born to be a trapper. Indeed, my offer of just now was made chiefly that you might know my love for you."



He waited for his words to sink in and then added quietly:

"No, Jean. You are not for the marsh. Your place is on the hill-top by the bridge. It is where you belong."

On the instant I had seized him, shaking him in my surprize and consternation.

"What!" I cried. "You know?"

"Most certainly," he smiled. "But you need not fear, Jean. I have told no one, nor will I do so without your permission."

"But how—" I began.

"Jean, Jean," he interrupted. "At least give me credit for a little sense. Did you look like the nephew of an Uncle Jules? Good blood can not be denied, even upon the marsh. Take Toinette, for example. I guessed from the very first. Afterward, knowing the story of your parents and hearing of your journey to the island, it was not hard to make sure."

"And my mother's people?" I questioned, speaking for the first time of a matter over which I had often puzzled.

The little man shook his head.

"There was only an old father, and he was not of this country," he replied. "Afterward he went away."

"So," said I, and for a space I could only stare at him, half-stupefied by my utter amazement.

It seemed incredible that for this little man my carefully guarded secret had been no secret at all.

"And so you knew," I muttered. "You knew all along."

"As I have said," agreed Le Bossu briskly. "There were a hundred things to give you away. Yet you set me one riddle to puzzle over, and that was your fear of being found out. Come now, what is the answer?"

"It was M'sieu Dugas," I answered. "I was afraid that he would take me away. And there is the general also. You do not know how hard and cruel he is. I do not like to think of what would happen if he were to get his hands upon me."

The little man chuckled, reaching out to shake me in turn—a long, comforting shake of kindly reassurance.

"Come, wake up, Jean," he ordered. "You are still frightened by the nightmare of your arrival. You are no longer the small runaway of two years ago. You are a big, strong youth, hard and quick and well able to look out for yourself.

"As for Dugas, he is of all men the one least able to harm you. They have driven him from the mainland and, if my ears have not failed me tonight, he will fare no better here.

"Also you need have no fear of M'sieu the General. Had he meant you ill, you would have heard from him long before now. Do you imagine that he has gone on in ignorance of his grandson's whereabouts? He has a long arm, that old M'sieu the General. Some day he will reach out for you, and it is of this that I am thinking. You are a fine youth, and it must be very lonely on that hill-top. Suppose you try again before laying your plans for the future?"

"Bossu," I flared. "How can you say such a thing? Would you have me creep back after having been driven away? Besides, if the general were to come for me himself, I would not go with him. What do I care for that hill-top? I want you and Toinette and all the other folk who have been good to me."

Again the little man's hand went out, this time in a clutch of silent approval.

"*Bien*," said he after a while. "You have made your choice and I love you for it. Nevertheless you are acting like the boy that you are. In this world riches and power are not to be despised. When you are older, you will know. For the rest, I feel that I have done my duty by you. It was not fair that you should go ahead with your eyes closed to the great chance that might be yours for the asking."

"You need not have troubled," I put in. "I will never ask. Even if I wished to, I could not leave Toinette."

"Then your future is easily arranged," said Le Bossu. "Since you mean to stay with Toinette, there is no need to consider you further. Where she goes, you go, and there is an end of it. As for Toinette's going, that is a matter to be settled by Madame Alcide, the sister of Papa Ton. Of all the Lavals she loved Papa Ton best, and she will be sure to come when I send for her."

Rising he added:

"And now in with you to Toinette's room, where you must get such rest as you can. I will keep watch until morning."

Rising also, I was about to go inside, when I noticed that Le Bossu had paused to stare intently down-stream. Following



the direction of his gaze, I saw that for a short distance the sky was all glowing and a-quivver with flame.

"The hunters," said I. "They grow more careless each year. Let the wind shift, and it will go hard with the lower camp."

"It is the lower camp, or rather the coffee-house," corrected Le Bossu. "They were preparing for it when I arrived. I would have gone myself, had there been any need."

"And M'sieu Dugàs?" I questioned.

The little man shrugged.

"That is his affair, although you may trust him to look out for himself," he replied. "If he is wise, he will take to the marsh, slipping out to safety by way of the bay. Peaceful though I am, I would not like to trust myself to keep finger from trigger were I to see him coming up the bayou."

We watched until the glow had faded out, leaving only a smudge of sullen red that glowered like some dull, evil eye across the shadowy reach of the grass.

"*Bien*," muttered Le Bossu as he turned away. "It will be a long time before this marsh sees a better night's work. The only pity is that it was not done before. For us it is like the springing of an empty trap."

CHAPTER XIV

MADAME ALCIDE

IN THE dawn of the following morning Le Bossu shook me awake and carried me off to breakfast with the Lasalles. For the present we would eat there, he explained, as we tramped the short distance through the brisk, morning air. Also Toinette would remain under the care of Tante Odile until her future had been provided for.

Arriving at the Lasalles, we found Toinette waiting for us in the doorway. She was very pale and very quiet and to our greetings she replied only with a low, mechanical:

"Well, Bossu? Well, Jean?"

Afterward she slipped back against the wall, standing rigidly in one spot until Tante Odile called her to table.

It was a cheery meal, that breakfast, for throughout its brief course it was enlivened

by the bright chatter of the little Lasalles. Ordinarily Toinette would have made the most of her opportunity, laughing and teasing until she had produced a perfect pandemonium of merriment.

Now she sat as if frozen, deaf even to the all-absorbing conversation of the elders.

As was natural, the talk turned upon the raid of the night before in which Father Lasalle had played a prominent part. It had all been as simple as it had been complete.

Led by Dalfrey, the trappers had slipped down the bayou and had surrounded the coffee-house without so much as a word of opposition. Having broken inside, they had smashed all the cases and bottles before setting fire to the building. Afterward they had stood by to see that the flames did not spread to the other huts or to the near-by marsh.

Each move had been carried out with the care and deliberation of a legal proceeding. There had been no noise, no rowdyism. Of the large stock of liquor destroyed, not one drop had been drunk by the invaders.

As for Monsieur Dugas, he had risked no chance on a wait in the marsh. Evidently he had been warned in advance, for he had taken to his boat and had escaped downstream some time before the arrival of the men from the upper camps.

"It was a lesson that will not soon be forgotten," observed Father Lasalle. "Now they will respect us here on the marsh. Of course there is still the chance that Dugas will make trouble for us. In that event we can only plead the necessity of our course."

"You may rest easy on that score," reassured Le Bossu. "If you have broken the law, Dugas has broken it also, and he will be forced to admit his guilt before he can even so much as mention yours."

Not until the last plate had been pushed aside did Toinette recover herself. Then, amid the clamor of the departing children, she suddenly arose.

"I am going home, Tante Odile," she announced. "You promised that I should go as soon as breakfast was over."

"And so you shall," began Tante Odile, when Le Bossu broke in upon her.

"A moment," he interposed. "Before we separate, we must consider our arrangements."

As if the little man's words had recast

her former spell, Toinette abruptly resumed her seat. She made no protest either by look or word. She was frozen again.

"You see," whispered Tante Odile from behind the cover of her battered coffee-pot. "She has been like that ever since she came. You must speak to her, Jean. You must make her cry. She can not go on like this."

"So, Toinette," continued Le Bossu. "That is a good girl. And now for the first thing, which is the informing of your father's family. To me it seems best that we should at once send a message to your aunt, Madame Alcide. As for the others, they are scattered wide, and there is little time. Also we can count upon Madame Alcide to notify them if she considers it worth while. You agree with me in this?"

Toinette answered without raising her eyes.

"You know best, Bossu," she muttered. "I only want to go home."

"Then, since you leave it to me, I will send to Bois Berard at once," said Le Bossu. "With a fast launch we should receive an answer before sundown. Also I will instruct Madame Alcide to put off her coming until tomorrow.

"It would be hard to make her comfortable overnight, and there is little that she could do. For the rest, we can delay our other arrangements until we hear from her, since their details will depend wholly upon her answer."

Rising, he added to me:

"You will take Toinette home, Jean. I will join you there, once I have arranged for the launch."

A little later, as I prepared to depart with Toinette, Tante Odile called me aside.

"Speak to her now, Jean," she urged. "You may not have a better chance."

Accordingly, once we were outside, I took firm hold upon my courage and spoke to Toinette. It was not an easy task, and it was rendered especially difficult by the consciousness that for the first time there was a sense of strain between us.

"Toinette," I began, "you must not grieve so. You must——"

I faltered to a standstill, and Toinette, abandoning her grief for pity, made haste to answer me.

"*Bien*, Jean," said she. "You need say no more. I understand, and I will do my best, if only for your sake. But do not expect too much. Just now there is some-

thing between me and everything. Perhaps it is my sorrow. Perhaps it is death itself. I do not know. When that something is gone, I will be myself again."

She broke off to relapse into her former attitude of silent misery, nor did she speak to me again throughout the dreary length of that endless day. Yet, now that I understood, I was strangely comforted. Somehow I knew that, once this nameless barrier was removed, we would come together again in perfect understanding.

Three hours before sunset the little man's messenger returned. He had made good time, and his news was highly satisfactory. Madame Alcide sent word that she would set out for Bayou Portage at daybreak the following morning.

Also she would bring with her the *cure* from Bois Berard. The funeral could be arranged for midday, as she would certainly have arrived before that hour.

Le Bossu received these tidings with evidence of gratitude and appreciation.

"It is what I expected," he declared. "She is like that, Madame Alcide. For years she has not seen or heard of her brother, yet the moment she is called upon, she does everything in her power. Now the funeral will be a success.

"Also we must put our best foot forward. It is not often that a place like Bayou Portage is visited by such a one as the widow of Alcide Berard."

That this impression became general was soon shown by the preparations that began and continued until sunset. Door-yards were swept. Drying sheds were cleaned of their litter and put in order. Landings were tested and, through the driving of a nail, were freed from the treachery of loosened boards.

Upon the Lasalles the burden fell especially hard, for in her capacity of sole hostess of the camp Tante Odile found it necessary to clean up inside as well as out. Long after dark she swept and scrubbed, assisted by Toinette, who alone remained indifferent to the general bustle and excitement.

"Those cobwebs, Toinette," Tante Odile would cry. "See, they are like a cast-net. Out with them, and do not forget the smoke behind. Remember it is your aunt who is coming."

And Toinette without a word would march woodenly to the attack. Like Tante



Odile she performed prodigies of cleanliness, but it was all done with the stolid unconsciousness of a well-regulated machine. Not once did she mention the coming of her aunt. This event like all else remained outside the strange barrier that had shut off her world.

Throughout the next morning the boats put in at Bayou Portage. They began to arrive with the first of the light, and from then on there was hardly a moment when some craft could not be sighted upon the bayou. In the night the word had gone forth, spreading from camp to camp with that mysterious swiftness which ever wings the tidings of disaster.

Now from each nook and corner of the coast the marsh-folk set out to pay a last tribute to Papa Ton. That the big man was well liked had been a matter of pride at our camp. Not until now, however, did we learn of the true esteem in which he had been held by all.

Indeed, we were hard put to it to look out for the visitors who arrived in an ever increasing throng. Beginning with those who lived near, the list extended until there was hardly a camp within striking-distance that did not have its representative.

Men came from Cypremort, from Onion Bay, from Isle Lapin, from the Hammocks, little and big. There were hunters, trappers, fishermen, oystermen; all the harriers of the coast, from those who matched their strength against the great fish of the bay to the aigrette-hunters—men who slew thousands of beautiful and defenseless birds for the sake of a single feather.

Having arrived and discussed the accident at the landings, they clambered up the bank to fall gravely silent before the door of the hut. Here their hats came off and many, upon going inside, made a slow and solemn sign of the cross.

Still silent, they paused for a moment beside the bunk where Papa Ton took his last rest upon the worn blankets. Then they passed out to draw a great breath, to swear softly, to demand of those who stood about if the big man had not been the best of them all.

Next, it was a visit to the last of the huts, where young Pierre had been left to the care of his father. Here old Valsan shuffled distractedly about, the one inhabitant to catch a glint of silver in the dark cloud that overhung the camp.

Indeed, in several ways it was a red-letter day for the old man. First, he had come into the public eye, an experience dear to the heart of even the humblest Cajun. Next, young Pierre had been well punished both for his desertion and intemperance. Finally, the old man felt that his son was returned to him permanently.

Immediately after the accident a message had been dispatched to Madame Pierre. She had replied by saying that if her husband were in need of her care, he could come to her. Otherwise he must trust to his friends, since under no circumstances would she leave the mainland.

Thus amid the general grief old Valsan approached a contentment that was wholly foreign to his crabbed nature. All day he held high court, now haranguing the visitors as to his son's mishap, now conducting them inside to where, incased in a huge cocoon of bandages, young Pierre twisted miserably beneath the sting of his burns.

Lastly the visitors repaired to the Lasselles, where Tante Odile, caught again in the vortex of entertainment, strove heroically to provide them all with the inevitable black coffee. It was a miracle, that filling of the endless procession of empty cups. Ten o'clock found the camp stripped down to its last handful of berries, but its reputation for hospitality had been sustained.

"*Bien*," sighed Tante Odile, when the final cup had rattled empty into its heavy saucer. "We have won, but it was a close thing. A little more and I should have been forced to give them bayou water."

Thus the morning passed, until word came from the bayou-bank that Madame Alcide's launch had been sighted up-stream. At once Tante Odile plunged into a frenzy of final preparation, while Le Bossu, calling to Toinette and myself, led the way to the landings. The little man was plainly excited and, as we waited, he admonished us earnestly as to our behavior.

"Do not forget your manners," he kept repeating. "You must show Madame Alcide that even though you are of the marsh, you know what is due such a visitor."

The effect of this was to throw me into a perfect torment of self-consciousness. For the first time I became aware of those awkward penalties that attend a sudden growth. At once I felt all legs and arms, and I further discovered that my clothes



were very old and ragged and were also several sizes too small for me.

Toinette alone was undisturbed. Clad in a white dress, over which Tante Odile had labored patiently the night before, she stared out over the water with the fixity of a statue.

"*Dieu*," muttered Le Bossu, interrupting his admonitions. "This is too much. Will nothing move her?"

As he spoke, the launch rounded the mud-flat and swung in toward the landing. In its stern, seated between the *curé* and a small brown-clothed stranger, was Madame Alcide.

Despite the disadvantages of her position, my first sight of Madame Alcide was an imposing one. She was a large woman, tall and broad, yet without a suggestion of stoutness. Also there was about her an air of stately repose, so that even on the narrow, backless seat of the launch she held herself comfortably erect. She was dressed in a plain black skirt, a loose black sacque, and upon her head she wore a black sunbonnet.

This sunbonnet was the crowning touch of her apparel. Not only did it proclaim her caste. It went further and made possible the dignity of her arrival. Seated in the launch in a bonnet or hat, she would merely have appeared ridiculous. In the sunbonnet she was mistress of the situation.

As the launch slid alongside, she made no movement of greeting or of recognition. Waiting quietly until the craft had been made fast, she arose at a word from her companions and allowed herself to be assisted on to the landing.

It was then that I had a look at her face, a strong yet placid face, finely molded, generously proportioned, and set with a pair of shrewd gray eyes. The mouth, firm and straight, betrayed the character and determination of its owner, and when Madame Alcide spoke, there was blended with the graciousness of her tone a well-defined note of authority.

"This is M'sieu Jean Le Bossu?" she questioned.

The little man made his best bow.

"At your service, *madame*."

"You have my thanks for all that you have done, *m'sieu*," said Madame Alcide simply. "And these, of course, are my niece and the boy of whom I have heard."

Bending, she kissed Toinette upon the brow, after which she studied her intently for a moment.

"Yes, you are Oton's child," was her verdict. "You are Laval all through."

In my case she contented herself with a pat upon the shoulder, yet I was well-nigh overcome. Done by Madame Alcide, it was like an accolade.

"You are a big boy, Jean Trouvé," said she. "They could have had but little trouble in finding you."

These greetings over, she bethought herself of her companions. They stood as they had sat, upon either side of her, while the visitors, drawn up in a rough semicircle upon the bayou-bank, regarded them with frank curiosity. Observing this, Madame Alcide embarked upon a general introduction.

"Père Parmentier is, of course, well known to you," she began, whereupon the *curé* stepped forward.

He was a small, wiry man, with vague blue eyes and a great shock of snow-white hair. As he advanced, he smiled as if in recognition of many well-remembered faces.

"M'sieu le Docteur Poussard," Madame Alcide next announced, and the brown stranger, clicking his heels together, performed a contortion that was half-bow and half-military salute.

Like the *curé* he was small and he was also wrinkled, as a fruit is wrinkled after long exposure to the elements.

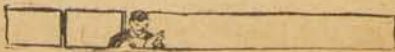
For the rest he was brown, in his dress, his complexion, in the coloring of his eyes and his scant thatch of hair. Even his voice gave one an impression of brownness, since it had the dry, crackling rasp of ancient leather. Yet, for all this, there was nothing vivid or startling about the doctor's appearance. He was as natural as a withered leaf in a Winter forest.

"I am honored, my friends," he declared. "Also, in my capacity of physician, I am here to do what I can."

"Come, Poussard," interrupted Madame Alcide. "My poor brother is dead. He has been dead for more than a day. A thousand doctors could not bring him back again."

She spoke without a trace of heat, nor did the doctor appear in any way to resent her rebuke.

Later I came to know that their friendship was of a kind where even the greatest



frankness failed to give offense. Also, whereas Madame Alcide always spoke to the doctor as Poussard, she invariably spoke of him as *m'sieu le docteur*.

Having completed her introduction, Madame Alcide turned to Le Bossu.

"I will see my brother first, *m'sieu*," she announced. "Afterward we had best go on with the burial. It is necessary that I return home tonight, and we have much before us."

At once Le Bossu led the way, Toinette and I following, and the *curé* and the doctor bringing up the rear. Passing through the ranks of the silent and staring visitors, we arrived at the hut where Madame Alcide knelt to a brief prayer beside the bunk before taking a last look at her brother.

It was a long look, and when Madame Alcide spoke, her words contained a pity beyond the power of expression.

"So this is what he ran away to," said she.

She choked silent, while two great tears gathered in her eyes and fell unheeded to the floor.

"Come," she murmured. "I have seen enough."

And she added as we left for Tante Odile's—

"Death is not so bad, after all."

Half an hour later the funeral started, a great affair that was the talk of the coast for many a day. I recall it as a long procession of bareheaded men, led by one of the little Lasalles who, clad in white robes, held proudly aloft a golden cross. Back of the huts a grave had been dug in the clayey soil, and here the partners, Father Lasalle and three chosen men from the upper camp lowered the rough box that they had carried so reverently.

It was a still, warm day, and only when the *curé* raised his voice in prayer did a little breeze spring up. Then, while the marsh-folk knelt in the sunlight, the whole great sweep of grass rustled slowly and solemnly, as if each tiny blade bowed its head in honor of a soul that was gone.

Of all the incidents of Papa Ton's funeral I remember best that swaying marsh and the rigid white face of Toinette, who to the very last preserved her stony calm.

"So," said Le Bossu, when it was all over and we had turned away. "It is right that he should be where he fought and won."

Then I understood why Papa Ton had

wished to lie in the marsh, holding in death the spot that marked his final victory over the ever encroaching grass.

CHAPTER XV

I MOVE ON

WE RETURNED to the Lasalles where Madame Alcide, refusing all offers of rest and refreshment, entered immediately upon a final adjustment of Papa Ton's affairs.

"I thank you, *madame*, but I seldom tire myself," said she in reply to Tante Odile's protestations. "As for food, I have neither the time nor the heart for it just now. It is necessary that I be home tonight, and there is much to attend to. With your permission and with the aid of yourself and the rest, I will make my arrangements."

Accordingly, once Madame Alcide was seated in the best of the few, ancient chairs, the others gathered round her—Tante Odile, Father Lasalle, Le Bossu, the *curé* and Doctor Poussard. I sat with Toinette upon one of the bunks, feeling very much as a prisoner must feel who awaits the finding of a jury.

It seemed a wholly unnecessary nuisance, this eternal settling of one's future. Why, I wondered, did they not let Toinette and me go on as before? We would miss Papa Ton terribly, but except for this we could manage as well as ever.

Some such thought must have troubled Toinette, for her hand crept into mine.

"You will not leave me, Jean? You will not let them take me away?" she begged.

This was reassuring, but by now Madame Alcide had begun to speak, and I could only squeeze the small, cold hand in reply.

"My brother, he left anything of value?" questioned Madame Alcide, addressing Le Bossu.

"That depends upon what you mean by 'of value,' *madame*," he replied. "He leaves a daughter and a boat, both of the name of Toinette. Also there are some skins, some traps and a few household effects. There is also the hut, but that must belong to the first one who cares to claim it. We know nothing of rent upon the marsh."

He paused, while the *curé* appeared a trifle dismayed, the doctor frankly be-



wildered. Madame Alcide, however, seemed capable of a full appreciation of the little man's quaint humor.

"Well spoken, *m'sieu*," said she. "You are as thorough as you are brief. That is the trouble with most of our people. They talk too much. As for what my brother has left, since you seem to consider the daughter named Toinette of chief value and since it is only human for one to desire the best of everything, I will take her myself."

"A wise choice, *madame*," commented Le Bossu. "Then she goes with you this afternoon?"

"She does," answered Madame Alcide. "I have already arranged a place for her in my home."

At this I felt Toinette's hand tighten in mine and a moment later she had risen, dragging me forward with her.

"I am sorry, *madame*, but I can not go with you," said she. "I must be here to look after Jean."

Madame Alcide received this announcement with a composure wholly uncomplimentary to Bayou Portage. One could see that, since arriving at the camp, she was prepared for anything.

"You must call me Tante Aurore, not *madame*, Toinette," she corrected. "As for your staying here with Jean, it is out of the question. It would not be right or proper, as Père Parmentier will tell you."

"Most certainly not," agreed the *curé*.

"And why is it not right that Jean and I should keep on as before?" questioned Toinette.

This proved too much for Madame Alcide's powers of endurance. Evidently she had remembered that, after all, Toinette was a Laval.

"Child, child," she remonstrated. "It is indeed time that you were with me. Can you not understand that you are almost grown and that, before, your father was alive to protect you?"

"But Jean will protect me just as well," persisted Toinette. "He is almost a man."

"That is just it," declared Madame Alcide, seizing upon this point with an eagerness that betrayed a close approach to verbal defeat. "Jean is almost a man, and he is of no kin to you. Neither is he your husband. Under these circumstances it is impossible for you two to go on living together."

"Then if that is the case, we will be married," said Toinette promptly. "You are willing, are you not, Jean?"

"Why, of course," I agreed. "Père Parmentier can marry us before he leaves."

Madame Alcide sighed patiently.

"You can not be married, you two," she explained. "You are too young."

"Then I am too young to marry, yet too old to live with Jean?" asked Toinette.

"Exactly," replied Madame Alcide, and now there was a hint of sharpness in her voice. "Later you will understand. But we are wasting time. You will go home with me, and there is an end of the matter."

Before replying, Toinette glanced appealingly at Le Bossu. The little man's face was sad, but his nod was unmistakable.

"*Bien*," gave in Toinette. "I will go then. But Jean must go with me."

"As you wish," temporized Madame Alcide. "I will see to it, once you are settled. It is probable that it can be arranged."

Toinette shook her head.

"Jean must go with me," she repeated. "He must go when I go and he must stay where I stay. Otherwise I will not leave."

Having spoken, Toinette released my hand and returned to the bunk, where she froze at once into her attitude of stark indifference. There was something so decisive, so wholly final about the action that Madame Alcide was impressed beyond the power of argument.

"Well?" she questioned a little breathlessly, turning to her advisers.

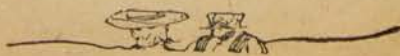
"Pardon, *madam*," put in Le Bossu. "It is this way with Toinette. She does not mean to be bad or stubborn. It is only that Jean here has become as a brother to her and she can not bear to be away from him. It would be kind of you to satisfy her in this. As for the boy, I myself will vouch for him in every respect."

As he spoke, the little man gave me a look that seemed to say:

"Now is the time for them to know who you really are. But if this is not your wish, you may count upon my silence."

There fell a brief pause during which Madame Alcide looked me carefully up and down. Evidently she found nothing to offend her, for when she spoke, her tone was one of frank capitulation.

"I do not wish to be unkind," she began. "On the other hand this is a matter de-



servicing of some thought. I had planned to take my niece into my home. If this boy comes with her, I must arrange all over again."

She considered a moment and then added, as if the thought had just occurred to her:

"But the boy himself has not been consulted. Perhaps he would rather remain. Come, what do you say, Jean?"

"I must go, *madame*," I replied. "I promised Papa Ton. I will work hard, I will live in the woods, if there is no place at your home. Only let me stay near Toinette and I will be satisfied."

"Well spoken again," said she. "You seem quiet and polite, Jean, and you have a good face."

She broke off, wavering, and turned to the *curé*.

"What do you think, Père Parmentier?" she questioned.

"You will make no mistake in taking him," came the reply. "You have room, and he will prove of help to you."

"And you, Poussard?" continued Madame Alcide.

"Père Parmentier is right," answered the doctor. "As for work, I will, if necessary, find him a place in my manufactory."

"That is settled then," decided Madame Alcide. "I will take him and will do the best that I can for him."

Abashed yet grateful, I started to mumble my thanks, but Madame Alcide waved them aside.

"Off with you and get ready," she ordered. "Also take Toinette. If, when you return, our business is finished, we will leave at once. We can not afford to lose the tide."

Thus I missed the rest of the council, although the disposal of Papa Ton's few effects was fully explained to me later on. The traps and the household goods were left with the Lasalles, who sold them to the new occupants of the hut. The skins, taken to the buyers by Le Bossu, were disposed of in the usual way.

Also the little man arranged for the sale of the *Toinette*, turning her over to a fisherman upon the lower coast. The money obtained from these various sources was spent wholly upon Toinette's education.

"He would never study, Oton," declared Madame Alcide. "Therefore he must do double duty by his daughter."

Of my last visit to the hut I retain only a memory of unfamiliarity. Dark, cold, curiously disordered by the many who had come and gone, the well-remembered room was like the abode of a stranger.

Somehow, as I looked about, I felt no sorrow at the thought of my departure. It was a shell, that hut, empty even of its memories. With the death of Papa Ton the soul had gone out of it.

Gathering together such garments as might be worthy of my new estate, I thrust into the bundle my mother's picture, and the gold-piece given me by Madame Therese. The picture, my one link with the past, I had kept in a sheltered spot.

Often I had turned to it in moments of misfortune to find the vague comfort of that first night upon the prairie. Toinette too never tired of gazing at the sweet, wistful face, although she always turned away from it with a light of reflected sadness in her eyes.

As for the gold-piece, despite our many necessities Toinette had never allowed me to part with this memento of the rue Bourbon.

"No, Jean," she had always replied when I pleaded the call of our empty larder. "Remember, it was the last gift of your dear *madame*."

Thus I left Bayou Portage as rich as I had arrived; nay, richer, for at the last moment, when Toinette had come from her little room, bundle in hand, I had a final thought.

"The gun," I asked. "You think that I might take it?"

"Of course," answered Toinette. "Were you not partners, you and Papa Ton?"

So I took down and shouldered the old muzzle-loader together with its bags of powder and shot. Also Toinette fondly considered her red-shaded lamp, finally moving it to a prominent place upon the shelf above the open fire.

Evidently, although she had decided to abandon this cherished possession of happier days, she did not mean to have its importance underestimated by the new occupants of the hut.

Then we passed out, and as I shut the door, Toinette put into words my feelings of the past few moments.

"It is not so hard to leave," she muttered half to herself. "It is no longer home. It is only a box of boards."

That was it and, now that I knew, I understood the wisdom of our going. Madame Alcide was right. Toinette and I could not have gone on together. There could have been no Bayou Portage for us without Papa Ton.

Reaching Tante Odile's, we found the council over and its participants engaged in considering a miraculously discovered pot of coffee. At sight of us Madame Alcide at once set down her cup.

"You are prompt, you two," she declared. "Also yours is a good example to follow. Come Père Parmentier. Come Poussard. Remember the tide."

At this came a bustle of leave-taking, during which I was kissed by Tante Odile, smacked upon the back by Father Lasalle and mauled by their swarming brood.

Also, at the landing there was a second outburst of farewells, in which I said good-bye to every one over again, this time receiving a silent hand-grip from the partners and a long and incoherent blessing from old Valsan, before Le Bossu called me aside.

The little man's eyes were suspiciously bright, and he spoke with a catch in his voice, for he had just taken leave of Toinette.

"*Adieu, Jean,*" he began. "*Adieu* and good luck."

"But Bossu," I exclaimed, alarmed by his choice of words. "You speak as if I am not to see you again. Will you not come to the woods?"

"Of course," he replied. "But Bois Berard is not Bayou Portage. It is out of my way, as it is out of the way of these other friends of yours. You will not see us often."

"Then I will come back," I cried. "I will come back as soon as I can."

The little man shook his head.

"No, Jean," said he. "You will not come back, nor will you wish to. You are through with the marsh. You have all that it can give you. It is time to move on."

"And that is another thing. Here the paths of our lives will separate, going different ways. For me it is the same old round of skins and game. For you——"

He paused, while his arms went around me in a final embrace.

"But we will see," he finished. "And now you must go, since the others are waiting."

So I left him and went down to the

launch where Toinette, her good-bys over, sat staring with unseeing eyes at the waving, calling group upon the bayou-bank. Even when we slipped out from the landing and headed up-stream, she maintained her air of mute detachment, although I noticed that the hands that held her bundle were resolutely clenched.

Only when we rounded the mud-flat did she betray any interest in our departure. Then, as the inhabitants and the few remaining visitors raised a final cheer, she waved with the rest of us, until a bend of the marsh hid the camp from view.

"Well, we are off," observed Doctor Poussard, as if in earnest of his readiness to take part in any conversation.

But Madame Alcide was deep in thought.

"As you see," she replied, after which she resumed her meditation, glancing repeatedly from Toinette to myself.

As for Père Parmentier, he had already begun to doze with his hat pulled over his eyes, so the little doctor, his duty done, hunched himself into a crumpled, brown ball and was immediately fast asleep.

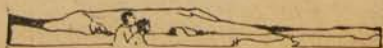
Thus we journeyed in silence, yet for me the short voyage was replete with interest and incident. Throughout my stay at Bayou Portage I had not been up as high as the bridge and, once the more familiar reaches of the bayou were passed, each bend of the twisting stream held some new vision for my well-trained eyes.

Now it was a ribbon of muddy beach, starred with tracks and littered with clean-scraped mussel-shells—a very El Dorado of 'coonskins. Now it was a tiny cove from which whirred frantically a flock of unsuspecting teal. Now it was a school of jumping mullet that glittered for an instant above the brown water, as if Nature in her prodigality had thrown aloft a handful of silver.

From the banks came the quaint chatter of the little brown sparrows, and the red-wings, those wantons of the marsh, flung themselves into the air again and again through very joy of life.

Then, as we approached the bridge, I found a fresh interest in the change that came over the marsh. Below, the grass had grown as thick and even as a well-trimmed hedge. There had been no break, no raggedness to mar the vast sweep of tiny blades that marched on to meet the horizon.

Now the banks became rough with scat-



tered hummocks and brush-clumps until, as we swung into the last reach below the bridge, the grass thinned out entirely, giving place to the dense, riotous growth of the conquering myrtle.

Mallows thrust their stiff spikes above the feathery myrtle-tops. Through the gaps in the brush I glimpsed a smudge of distant live oaks. And then, as we slipped past a clearing made by fishermen, the low hills of Marsh Island heaved themselves into view.

By now the sun had all but dropped below the marsh rim, and when we finally raised the weatherbeaten pile of the old warehouse and swung into its landing, the sky was touched with the grayish rose of the brief afterglow.

At once Madame Alcide abandoned her thoughts and, having paid the owner of the launch, resumed charge of the expedition.

"Poussard, you will fetch Achille," she ordered, as we scrambled ashore.

"You, Toinette and Jean, will wait here with me until all is ready. As for you, Père Parmentier, there is a place for you, if you will have it."

But Père Parmentier, although spoken of as the *curé* of Bois Berard, was in reality a resident of the prairie. His small church and still smaller *presbytère* lay some distance from the woods upon the road to St. Pierre, and he had accordingly ridden in alone, meeting the others at the bridge.

Having thanked Madame Alcide for her offer, he followed Doctor Poussard around the corner of the warehouse. Shortly after the two reappeared, the *curé* astride a small, wicked-looking pony, the doctor leading an ancient and enormous white horse that was hitched to a battered surry.

At sight of this equipage Madame Alcide saw fit to perform a species of equine introduction.

"My horse, Achille," she announced. "He is a prince of horses, although like his namesake he is somewhat uncertain about the heels. You know the story?"

I replied that I did not. Toinette merely shook her head.

"Then I will tell it to you at the first opportunity," continued Madame Alcide. "Without it you can not appreciate the beast at his true worth."

She broke off to give the horse a friendly pat upon the shoulder.

"He is all right, Poussard?" she demanded.

The doctor bowed, accompanying the movement with a grimace of pain.

"As right as he is heavy, *madame*," he answered ruefully.

"Then you have been careless, Poussard," chided Madame Alcide. "It is quite evident that he has stepped upon your foot again."

Having been assured of Achilles' condition, Madame Alcide allowed herself to be assisted to the driver's seat. Then, while the limping doctor climbed up beside her, she ordered Toinette and me to get in at the back.

All being ready, she picked up the reins and, having drawn them into two horizontal lines, suddenly brought them down with a resounding slap upon Achille's back.

The action was so abrupt, so vigorous, that I clutched instinctively for support. As at the crack of a starter's pistol, I expected that we would dash off at top speed.

Achille, however, was more accustomed to this demonstration. Save for a slight twitching of the flanks, he paid no heed to this signal, nor did several others, delivered in rapid succession, accomplish any better result.

Madame Alcide sighed, as she reached for the switch of peeled oak that did duty as a whip.

"It is your own fault, Achille," she pointed out, cutting under at some vulnerable spot that caused the old horse to rouse himself into a slow, elephantine movement that might be best described as a stumbling walk.

Thus we rolled ponderously off, crossing the bridge and causeway, while Père Parmentier followed beside us, his every energy bent to the restraining of his impatient pony. At the edge of the prairie he gave up the struggle. Bidding us good night, he loosened rein and at once shot away in the direction of his home.

After this we labored across the silent shadowy prairie until finally there loomed ahead a high, black bulwark of forest. Evidently Achille became seized with a longing for the comforts of his stable, for he now quickened his pace to such good purpose that the dark barrier of trees was picked out with a scatter of lights—very small and fitful, like the glow of fireflies.

Then, as we went on, and the soft swish

of the grass underwheel was rasped with a crackle of dead leaves, the lights became fixed and larger, until they developed into the orange squares of lamp-lighted windows.

"So," said Madame Alcide, pulling up before a line of fence that sprang wraith-like out of the darkness. "We have arrived."

All along Toinette had sat mute and rigid, her bundle clasped in her lap. To the trials of the day had been added a wearisome journey, yet she had uttered no word of complaint. Now, as Madame Alcide descended earthward with a word to us to follow, Toinette rose stiffly, dropping her bundle at my feet.

"Jean, Jean," she suddenly cried, and with the words she fairly threw herself into my arms.

In a moment I had her back upon the seat again, hugging her close to my breast. And there she lay, a limp, stricken bundle of despair, torn by the fierceness of her long pent-up grief.

"That is right," soothed Madame Alcide, leaning inside to comfort her with a caress. "When you have had it, out, you will be better."

And she added in an undertone:

"You must stay with her, Jean, until it is over. Poussard will watch the horse."

So I sat on, hugging Toinette close while she sobbed her heart out against the coarse stuff of my old jacket. And as I sat, it seemed as if the strange night-voices of the woods were raised in a hymn of triumphant joy.

I forgot my doubts, my perplexities, the unguessed future that lay ahead. For the long siege was over, the barrier was down, and Toinette had come back to me again.

BOOK III

BOIS BERARD

CHAPTER I

BOIS BERARD

BOIS BERARD, a brief thread of wooden structures strung along the leafy edge of the forest, seemed quite imposing after the stark desolation of the marsh. It was a small place, even for a

settlement, yet the scatter of rough buildings was so widely spaced that it conveyed the impression of being twice as populous as it really was.

Coming in from the prairie along a grassy, woodland road, one first encountered the store of N. Bonnemaïson, a truly wonderful emporium which was said to contain a stock unmatched between St. Pierre and the bay. The store-building was wide and deep, with a high, slanting roof, and a spacious front porch. Upon its right, set back behind a fence of fancy wire, was the storekeeper's home.

This home was the wonder of the prairie, for its owner had modeled it in miniature from a dwelling in St. Pierre. It was a square house of a story and a half, severe in its lines to the tops of the upper windows. Here began an elaborate contortion of scrollwork pendant from the eaves, and at one side bulged forth a bay-window with a round, peaked roof that resembled a huge dunce-cap.

Next to his business, which was founded upon long years of square dealing, Monsieur Bonnemaïson was proudest of his home. Always in going to and from his store, he paused for a final glance at it.

"You are surprized?" he would exult, when strangers came to view the marvel. "Well, it would be the same with me were I in your place."

And he always ended with the joke that had become a byword in that section.

"You see I am Good-House himself," he would chuckle. "Even though I am in the woods, I must live up to my name."

Beyond the store straggled a line of small cabins. In them dwelt the inhabitants of Bois Berard, wood-folk who followed no special calling, tending their small gardens, hunting or gathering moss in the forest, turning their hands to such odd bits of work as came along.

They were a cheery lot, indolent and care-free, keenly alive to all forms of amusement. Seldom was there a ball, a horse-race, or a cock-fight upon the prairie that could not boast of at least one representative from Bois Berard.

Following the cabins came the home of Madame Alcide, a modest structure in comparison with that of Monsieur Bonnemaïson, yet one far better suited to its environment. Dignified by age, weather-beaten to a uniform silvery gray, its squat



single story rambled into all sorts of unexpected and out of the way corners. As a house it had no definite design, nor indeed had such a thing been considered in its leisurely, haphazard construction.

In the days of Madame Alcide's prosperity her husband had often found it necessary to visit this portion of his holdings. Accordingly he had built a rough shelter to serve him when overtaken by night. Finding good hunting at this particular spot, he had added to the original hut that his friends might join him in the sport.

Later, when this edge of the forest had been given his name, he had shown his appreciation by adding still more, often coming to the woods for weeks at a time. Valued by Alcide Berard solely through reasons of sentiment, this forest retreat had proved to be a most welcome refuge to his widow upon his death and the melting away of his estate.

Before the house stretched a broad, ragged lawn, shaded by two huge live-oaks, and a sprinkling of smaller trees. At the back was a huddle of outbuildings, together with the prim, green rows of Madame Alcide's kitchen garden. Inside, the house was merely a succession of rooms that opened upon the broad galleries flanking the front and rear.

Reaching away from the farther limits of the yard was a pasture, its outer edge indented by a sagging line of barbed-wire fence. Inside the enclosure thus made stood a two-roomed outhouse, to which had been added a small lean-to. This outhouse, though dilapidated and sadly in need of whitewash, had about it an air of immaculate cleanliness, and to one of its pair of doors was nailed a neatly printed sign which read:

CHARLES ARISTIDE POUSSARD.
DOCTEUR EN MEDECINE.

Upon the door of the lean-to was a second sign, its letters larger and more straggly as became its humbler announcement. This time was proclaimed:

C. A. POUSSARD.
MANUFACTURE OF MATTRESSES.

As for the doctor himself, he was the sole mystery amid the frank, simple life of Bois Berard. Years before he had drifted in from somewhere out in the world, small,

brown, dingy, exactly as he had remained ever since.

Of his history nothing was known save a word dropped here and there at the time of his arrival. In France he had been a surgeon in the army. Then there had been some trouble, and he had resigned and come to America.

This was all, but at Bois Berard it was well understood that, in the trouble, Doctor Poussard had not been at fault. He had shielded some one, a relative or friend. Or perhaps the culprit had been married, while the doctor was a bachelor with no family to disgrace.

This was the legend woven by the wood-folk around Doctor Poussard's few words, and I, for one, accepted it without question. So gravely courteous, so utterly honest was the little doctor that one could not conceive of his having ever committed a wrong.

For the rest, the doctor eked out an existence that was made possible solely through the charity of his friends. Trusting him absolutely as a companion, they distrusted him wholly as a physician, sending outside for medical advice in all illnesses of a serious nature.

Only for slight hurts and simple ailments did they call him in, paying him in money or supplies according to their prosperity. Also they occasionally bought one of his mattresses—shapeless, lumpy affairs, in the manufacture of which he seemed never to improve.

"Poussard's is a hard case," said the wood-folk. "It is a miracle that he gets on."

Chiefly responsible for this miracle was Madame Alcide. From the very first she had taken the little doctor under her protection. Always she was having him in to meals, to Sunday dinners, to week-day suppers, to little feasts born of the arrival of some rare or unexpected delicacy.

Also she assisted him financially, consulting him about an invented disorder which she termed vaguely, "my *migraine*," buying his mattresses and presenting them in secret to the poor.

But of far more value than these material benefits was Madame Alcide's attitude toward the little doctor—the attitude which brought into his barren, pitiful life a sense of worth and usefulness. Let any question of importance arise, and Madame Alcide's first act was to send for the doc-

tor. Next, having stated her case in full, she would request his advice.

Then would follow a period of silent reflection, after which the doctor would cry, his face aglow with timid pride:

"But, *madame*, there is nothing that I can say. It is exactly as you yourself have said. I have considered it from all sides, and yours is the only way."

And Madame Alcide, exhibiting a truly remarkable surprize, would exclaim:

"But Poussard, you delight me. Even though I am a woman, it would seem that I am not wholly bereft of sense."

At other times she treated him with the utmost brusqueness, but this, she told me, was done through stern necessity.

"You see, like most unfortunates, Poussard is very sensitive," she explained. "Once let him receive the impression of patronage or of charity, and he would disappear immediately. Then too he must have faith in himself, and this can be accomplished in no other way."

"To defer to him entirely would either cause him to become suspicious or oversure of himself. To rebuff him continually would crush him and drive him away. A pat here, a slap there is the way to keep him going."

And she added defensively:

"But do not undervalue Poussard. I tell you that he is one in a thousand. He is never in the way, yet when you want him, he is always there."

And for all this the little doctor repaid his benefactress with a devotion which approached close to worship. Always he was at her command, appearing instantly upon her slightest need for him. Always he was ready to advise her, to look after Achille, to accompany her upon those occasions when she traveled abroad in state. And always he contrived an unobtrusiveness, a self-effacement that made him a very prince of attendants.

Beyond the doctor's cabin the settlement ended in a second row of cabins, the last of which posed fitfully as a store. Here a succession of ever failing proprietors sold tobacco, fruit, prize-packages of cheap candy, and the sticky red soda-pop that was known as "Rouge."

It was significant that Monsieur Bonne-maison's emporium was called the store, while this second, smaller place had no fixed designation. At the time of my ar-

rival it was known as Gilbeau's, in honor of the hardy soul who defied ruin through its management.

This then was Bois Berard, an oasis of wood-folk who, turning their backs upon the sunbaked prairie, had come gratefully into the shade of the trees.

CHAPTER II

A START IN LIFE

IT WAS wonderful how easily I slipped into the life of the woods. Following the first weeks of strangeness, it was as if I had lived always at Bois Berard.

Established at Madame Alcide's, I began by looking after such of her affairs as were not beyond my rather limited powers. I cared for Achille. I tended the garden. I chopped wood and hauled it in from the near-by forest.

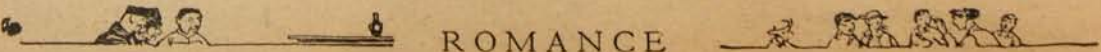
Also I spent many hours with rod and gun, so that the table seldom lacked its supply of fish and game. After the toil of the marsh it was like a holiday, and always my love of the soil increased.

I now found my chief delight in Madame Alcide's garden, and only when some in-bound traveler passed with his purple hoarding of seed-cane, did I lose my contentment. Then I thought of those vast, rustling acres beyond the prairie, so that I returned to my kitchen stuff with a mingled sense of longing and contempt.

As for Toinette, she at last found herself in one of those long-envied homes of the mainland. At first there had been some talk of the convent, but even then its Winter session was far advanced. Accordingly Toinette joined Madame Alcide in the care of the house. As yet she lacked her bright humor, her quaint fancy of former days, nor did she soon regain them. In their place came a quiet wistfulness to mark the memory of her loss.

Thus the weeks slipped by until, with the approach of Summer, I suddenly found myself at a standstill. The garden, fully planted, showed not an alien leaf. The care of Achille, formerly a dangerous adventure, had now developed into a tiresome routine. There was no game in the woods and, after the plentitude of the coast, the fishing became a bore.

All of a sudden I had nothing to do. I



had enjoyed my rest, but few are the holidays that can not last too long. I became dull and discontented, and to the irk of idleness was added one day the realization that, whereas Madame Alcide was doing everything for me, I was doing little for her in return.

The thought of this decided me. That night during the interval between supper and bed I spoke to Madame Alcide.

"I can not go on like this, *madame*," I began. "I am used to work, and I have nothing to do."

The old lady shot me a swift glance, sharp yet kindly. In her keen, forceful way she had already begun to show me an affection that I was only too eager to return.

"Nothing to do?" she echoed. "Let us see. The garden is ready?"

"As you know, *madame*."

"And Achille?"

"Achille is nothing," I retorted contemptuously. "I know him as well as I know his story and the story of the other Achille."

"He no longer stamps upon your foot occasionally?" persisted Madame Alcide.

"He never tries that now," I answered.

"He knows it is no use."

Madame Alcide sighed resignedly.

"Ah, you young folk," she observed. "You learn the secrets of everything. No wonder you come to find the world empty. When Achille hears my approach, he immediately begins to stamp. As for Pousard, let him hitch up, and he limps for a week."

"But I am glad to hear you speak this way, Jean," she continued, returning to the discussion. "It is not right that one of your age should be content with the garden and Achille. Had you gone on, I would have been disappointed in you. The time has come when you must make a start in life, and it is necessary that you be careful of your choice. You have thought of what you would like to do?"

"Ah, yes, *madame*," I answered promptly. "I wish to plant cane. I have always wished it. I will do anything, so that I come to it some day."

Madame Alcide considered this, staring at me intently the while. Although she had never so much as hinted at my past, her reply showed that she had entered upon a new train of thought.

"So, Jean," said she. "You aim high for one from the marsh. It is something to be a cane-planter. To a certain extent I might help you, since Achille can still draw a plow and I have many acres upon the prairie. But there are other things—the implements, the seed-cane——"

She broke off impatiently. With Madame Alcide half-way was no way at all.

"That is what I am thinking of, *madame*," said I. "If I begin now to work hard and save carefully, I will in time have money for those other things. Then I will plant my cane, using your land and sharing with you such luck as we may have."

"That is fine, Jean," put in Toinette, who all this time had been listening carefully. "And if your luck is very good, you may some day have a mill in which to grind the cane."

Madame Alcide, although not so sanguine, appeared quite satisfied with this proposal.

"*Bien*, Jean," said she. "It is agreed. You do your part, and you may count upon me to do mine. But first of all you must find work. You have decided what you will do?"

"I can trap, I can hunt," I began.

The old lady made a gesture of dissent.

"You are through with all that," she interrupted. "Go back to your skins, and in less than a year you will be a savage. No, Jean, you have chosen your goal, and from now on you must march toward it, not away from it."

"There are many things you must know before ever you put plow to earth, and you can not learn them in marsh or forest. If you would plant cane, your place is on the mainland where the cane is planted."

This was good advice, and it was something more—something that had been woefully lacking upon the marsh. For the first time in many months I harkened to the voice of ambition.

"Yes, *madame*," said I humbly. "You are right. My place is here, and I would like to stay. But what can I do?"

At this Madame Alcide smiled in benevolent appreciation. Now that I had become a petitioner, she was all indulgence.

"That is my affair, Jean," she replied. "While you have been thinking and planning, I have looked about me. Thus I found that your best chance is with Bonne-maison. He is getting old, and each month

his business increases. Also, in all the years he has been here he has never had a clerk—only some one to come in and help in time of necessity. Here is your opportunity and, as it happens, it should fit in very well with your ambition.

"At the store you will meet men of all kinds—planters, farmers, raisers of cattle and of horses. Talk to them, remember their words and, when you come to put in your own crop, you will have a store of knowledge that you could have gained in no other manner."

She paused, while I fairly shouted aloud in my enthusiasm.

"*Madame, madame,*" I cried. "It is the very thing. And you will let me stay on here with you?"

A soft, fond look shadowed for a moment the keenness of the old lady's eyes.

"Yes, Jean," she answered. "I had thought of that also. This Fall Toinette goes to the good sisters at St. Pierre. With both of you away, I should have felt very much alone."

And she added brusksly, as if to counteract this show of emotion:

"So that is settled, and now we will go to bed. In the morning I will arrange with Bonnemaison."

That night I enjoyed the luxury of Madame Alcide's sheets with a mind free from care. Never before had I known the strong, unerring force of such a guiding hand. Not only had a place been found for me. There had been something about Madame Alcide's attitude which suggested that, having made me worthy of the place, she would march with me shoulder to shoulder toward my far-distant goal.

"Wait, my friend," she had seemed to say. "I am not half-done with you."

The thought of this brought me a sense of security unknown since the days of the rue Bourbon. Somehow I felt that my drifting was over, that at last I had found a true haven amid the cool green reaches of Bois Berard.

CHAPTER III

MONSIEUR BONNEMAISON

TRUE to her promise, Madame Alcide lost no time in interviewing Monsieur Bonnemaison. Only waiting until break-

fast was over the following morning, she donned her sunbonnet and set out for the store. When she returned half an hour later, Toinette and I had already cooled our impatience for a good fifteen minutes outside the front gate. However, once she was in sight, it needed but a glance at her approaching figure to convince us of her success.

"It is all right, Jean," declared Toinette. "You can see from the way she walks. Had Tante Aurore failed, she would have come charging back as if she were going into a fight instead of leaving one."

"And see how calm she is," I added. "That is the best sign. *Madame* is only at peace when she has won."

So we waited, wholly confident, until Madame Alcide arrived and, with a brisk, shooing movement of her hands, urged us before her through the gate.

"In with you," she ordered in a sharp whisper that was wholly wasted upon the sunlit emptiness of the roadway.

And she added in explanation as she hurried us up the walk:

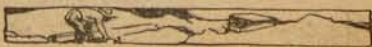
"What, would you undo all that I have accomplished? Here I have been convincing Bonnemaison of the greatness of my favor in furnishing him with an assistant, while you hang about as if you only awaited a word from him to jump down his throat."

But Madame Alcide was too well satisfied with her efforts to prolong this show of ill-humor. Upon reaching the gallery, she at once proceeded to relieve our curiosity.

"Yes," she began, "everything is arranged, but it was no easy task, I can tell you. He is a sharp one, that Bonnemaison, or at least he thinks he is, which is the same thing. You see, he has run for so long in a rut that the mere mention of a change would have thrown him into a panic. Had I said to him, 'I have come to request that you employ my Jean as a clerk,' he would have been scared out of his wits.

"Therefore I began with the weather, saying that it was warm and asking if it was not hard for one of his age and weight to get about. It was hard, he agreed, but what could he do?"

"When I suggested a helper, he threw up his hands. That was harder still, he declared. Alone, he at least had the time



between customers. With an assistant, this time was spent in useless instruction. He had neither the desire nor the patience to instruct a fool.

"By now I had made my purchases and was ready to go. Also I had opened the way for my attack.

"It was too bad, I said. Nevertheless, could he find some one who was not a fool, his task would be easy enough. There was my Jean, for example. With him one lesson would be enough.

"That might be so, he admitted. Jean seemed quick enough. Perhaps some day—

"But I did not let him finish. It was impossible, I declared. There was so much to do about the place, and I counted on Jean both for fish and game. I could not spare him for a day.

"At this Bonnemaïson began to argue. But I could try it, he insisted. Jean was almost a man. It was time he made a start at something beside working about my place. Things must be slow now anyway, and the hunting was over.

"After this I had only to refuse until Bonnemaïson ceased his argument for the wheedling tone with which he coaxes an obstinate customer. I must give Jean a trial, he urged. It was my duty. How else would the boy have his chance?

"Thus, when finally I gave in, it was with the understanding that I had conferred upon Bonnemaïson a very great favor."

Pausing for breath, Madame Alcide permitted herself one of her rare smiles. Although possessed of a keen sense of humor, it was of the sort that seldom expressed itself by means of any outward sign.

"So that is the way of the world," she finished, pointing the moral to her recital. "Refuse what you wish, and in the end it will be forced upon you. Only, of course, one must go about the matter with the utmost delicacy."

"It is like trapping," supplemented Toinette. "To be sure of a right catch, one must use the right bait and must hide it well."

Madame Alcide nodded sagely.

"Exactly," she agreed. "The bait is everything.

"But see that you do not disturb my trap, Jean," she went on, speaking directly to me. "As yet it is only half-sprung.

Bonnemaïson has not accepted you as his clerk. He means only to give you a trial. If you do well and he is satisfied, he will keep you on. Then people will speak of you as the clerk until it comes to Bonnemaïson's ears.

"At first he will be indignant. He will deny the whole affair. Later, when he finds it is no use, he will settle the matter with himself.

"Well, and what if I have a clerk?" he will say. 'Is it not my right, as it is the right of every storekeeper? *Bien*, if Jean is my clerk, he is my clerk, and there is an end of it.'

"After this you will be as much a fixture as the store itself."

Thus Madame Alcide arranged the matter, and next morning I presented myself at the store at opening time. Here I was received by Monsieur Bonnemaïson whom, through the magic of having become my employer, I viewed with far different eyes than those of the months before. For, judging him solely by his personal appearance, I had always considered the storekeeper with a species of mild contempt.

He was a small, stout man, and his stoutness was of such a round, puffy sort that he resembled nothing so much as a huge animated ball. Indeed, in moments of excitement Monsieur Bonnemaïson seemed fairly to bounce along, although at ordinary times he proceeded by means of a sedate waddle.

His head like his body was smooth and round, beginning with a perfectly bald crown and ending in a fat pink chin, like that of a baby. Between crown and chin appeared a small pair of pensive blue eyes, a button-like nose and a mouth that was forever set in an amiable smile. Whatever his mood, Monsieur Bonnemaïson never lost that smile.

Through long practise it had become as much a part of him as the lips that expressed it. His eyes might betray impatience, anger, even despair, but one had only to glance below them to be reassured of his amiability. Thus, to the country at large the storekeeper was ever more or less of a puzzle.

"He is a queer one, that Bonnemaïson," said the wood-folk. "You never know which part of his face to believe."

Summed up in a word, Monsieur Bonnemaïson was bland but, as I came to learn,

his blandness was of a sort peculiar to himself. Outwardly he might appear a mild, contemplative cherub. Inwardly he was as inscrutable as a Chinese god.

"Well, Jean," he greeted me. "And so you have come to help? *Bien*, you can begin by taking down the shutters. In no other way could you be of more assistance to one of my age."

This accomplished, he led the way indoors, where for a busy ten minutes he waddled up and down the two long counters that lined the store upon either side, pointing out the different articles and firing their prices at me with the rapidity and precision of a machine-gun.

"But, *m'sieu*," I protested, when finally his breath gave out. "It is too much to learn all at once. I could not keep half of it in my head."

Above his smile Monsieur Bonnemaïson evidenced a mild surprize.

"But it is not to be kept in one's head," he explained. "I could not do it myself. It comes when you need it, and the next moment it is gone. You understand? It is not that you must know the exact price of each unmarked article. It is that you must be able to *feel* what it is worth."

Even to one as ignorant of the ways of trade as myself, this reply was startling. However, I held my peace, and answered with a polite, "*Yes, m'sieu.*"

Throughout her coaching of the night before Madame Alcide had laid particular stress upon the fact that in all matters pertaining to his business the storekeeper was wholly impervious to argument.

Having made the round of the store, Monsieur Bonnemaïson went out to the porch, where he promptly lowered himself into the broad, cane-seated chair which in warm weather he was wont to occupy during his moments of leisure. Here he sat, smiling and staring out over the road, while I watched him from the doorway in an ever increasing agony of helplessness.

"And what must I do now, *m'sieu*?" I finally burst out, when I could stand it no longer.

Again Monsieur Bonnemaïson's eyes expressed a species of quiet astonishment.

"Why, wait upon the customers, of course," he replied and returned to his smiling and staring.

Utterly demoralized, I stumbled back inside, where I wandered aimlessly from one

counter to another. All along I had thought Monsieur Bonnemaïson peculiar. Now it appeared that he was undeniably mad. And here I was expected to look after the madman's customers.

Having never made a sale in my life, I was further handicapped by my complete ignorance of the prices and disposition of the stock in trade. I could only wait in impotent despair for the customers to come along.

When, however, the customers made their appearance, my difficulties vanished in a wholly unexpected manner. At that early hour the demand was solely for supplies, for flour and sugar and coffee, commodities of which I knew the prices by heart. To my delight I found that, having unearthed the stock of groceries, I had only to weigh out, to wrap up, to hand over my ill-bound packages and receive the money in exchange for them. As for salesmanship, I discovered that it played no part in the disposal of these simple necessities.

"No, Jean," Monsieur Bonnemaïson observed afterward. "If your supplies are good, they will sell themselves. Why waste your breath upon a bag of flour, when all the time its praises are being sung by the voice of hunger?"

Thus the first few hours passed successfully enough, although I was continually obsessed by the thought of what must occur when finally a customer demanded merchandise. But even here my fears were groundless, for when in due course this dreaded eventuality arrived, the problem was solved by Monsieur Bonnemaïson himself. Escorting his customer inside, the storekeeper conducted the sale, while I, following his directions, took down and displayed the goods.

Throughout the morning this same procedure was observed, though never once did Monsieur Bonnemaïson inquire the wants of his patrons. Rather he seemed always to know them beforehand, rising promptly as this one came into view, allowing that one to pass inside with only a nod and a word of greeting.

When at noon I hurried off to my dinner, I had decided that my employer was not quite so mad as I had thought him to be. Indeed, I could now find a certain method in his procedure.

All this I confided to Madame Alcide, who followed my recital with an air of



amused yet sympathetic understanding. Evidently she had been prepared for these peculiarities upon the part of my employer.

"That is all right, Jean," said she. "Stick it out and you will see. Bonnemaïson is far from being a madman."

The afternoon proved a repetition of the morning. Often I made mistakes, but I gained a knowledge of the stock of which I felt that I had some right to be proud. Having put up the shutters, I lingered about in hopes that my employer would comment on my progress. But Monsieur Bonnemaïson appeared thoroughly unappreciative.

With the closing of the store he retired to the small railed-off space in the rear which did duty as an office. Here, having warned me to be on time the following morning, he promptly lost himself in the engrossing occupation of counting the day's receipts.

Throughout the week that followed Monsieur Bonnemaïson maintained this perverse silence. I worked hard, learning the stock, and mastering quite a respectable number of prices. Yet for all my pains I received not so much as a single word of commendation.

True, upon all other subjects my employer was affability itself. In our leisure moments he discussed an endless variety of topics. Yet once let me lead up to the question of my progress, and he would at once discover some matter that demanded his immediate attention.

In the end I became thoroughly exasperated. Through my life on the marsh I had become used to a system of frank criticism or approval. I arrived at a state where it would have been a relief had the storekeeper condemned my efforts and sent me away.

And then, when, having closed up the seventh night, I was about to hurry off, Monsieur Bonnemaïson called me back into his little office. From his pocket he took five silver dollars, clinking them suggestively as he passed them out to me across the railing.

"Your wages, Jean," said he. "They are not bad for the woods, even though I who am paying them say it."

He paused, and after I had waited to make sure that nothing else was forthcoming, I mumbled my thanks in a voice dull with disappointment.

"Well?" he questioned, answering my tone. "And is it not enough?"

"Ah, yes, *m'sieu*," I answered. "Only——"

I broke off, while his smile expanded in a chuckle of amusement.

"Only you would like a little word of praise, eh?" he finished for me. "Well, you shall have it, for you have most certainly earned it. You have done well, Jean, so well that, having put you to a test, I have gone to the trouble of continuing it. You are honest, you are industrious, you are pleasant, you learn fast.

"But all these are as nothing compared to the great essential of patience. That you have it I am assured, and for it you must thank the training of the marsh. There, as you know well, rash haste spells either ill luck or disaster.

"That first day you amazed me. It seemed incredible that you should await the customers without complaint or question. Afterward I kept on, letting you learn for yourself. It is a good way, Jean. The lessons are never forgotten.

"Take, for example, the matter of the prices. You laughed to yourself when I said that one did not keep them in one's head, that they came and went. Now you see that I was right. So continue your patience, Jean, and trust me to know what is best. In that way we will get on together."

He fell silent, and on the instant he became the bland, inscrutable Monsieur Bonnemaïson of a while before.

"And so good night," he ended abruptly. "I must finish and go home."

After this there was never between Monsieur Bonnemaïson and myself so much as a shadow of misunderstanding. True, he continued peculiar and secretive, hiding eternally behind his smile, but never again did I find him lacking in appreciation.

Thus, when in the second week a trapper-friend stopped by for a pack of tobacco and at my solicitation laid in his whole stock of supplies, Monsieur Bonnemaïson was not only prompt with his praise but he even hinted at future advancement.

"That is good, Jean," said he. "Always has that one bought his stores at the bridge. You are beginning a new trade which, if continued, will put money into your pocket as well as mine."

By the end of the month all had fallen



out as Madame Alcide had predicted, even to Monsieur Bonnemaïson's acceptance of my title of clerk. He came to it slowly, with a vast deal of muttered argument, to which I, for one, paid little heed. This, I knew, was the storekeeper's way. Always he obscured with outward pettiness the inner shrewdness that had won his success.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONVENT

NOW that I had found regular employment, the time passed quickly enough at Bois Berard. Almost before I realized it, the Summer was gone.

One month we were in the midst of hot weather—fierce, blazing weather—in which the wood-folk drowsed away the long, bright hours beneath the leafy canopy of the forest; in which the very birds sought cover during the midday glare; in which travelers, inbound, gulped the shade in long, thankful gasps, their eyes all strained and blood-shot from the gauzy, dancing heat-waves of the prairie. The next, Fall had arrived—the brief, busy Fall of the mainland.

Now, as upon the marsh, there came from all sides a vast and incessant stir of endeavor. In the woods the furred creatures scurried furtively about, strengthening their defenses of food and lair against the onslaught of Winter. Above them the birds flitted unceasingly, shrilling their indignation against the first of the invading hordes of wax-wings and robins.

At the settlement the wood-folk bestirred themselves as from a long sleep, sharpening their axes, reaching down their moss-hooks, slipping away upon the various ventures that would see them through cold weather.

And beyond, in the wide, fertile stretch that rimmed the prairie, the very loafers rose unbidden to face three months of feverish labor. For the cane was ripe, the mills stood ready and throughout the land had rung the magic call to grinding.

At the store we were busy enough ourselves in outfitting this new-born industry. Often we worked late in the uncertain light of the swinging lamps, so that I would return home utterly weary through the endless handing out of goods and supplies. Then, one night when I sat down to a be-

lated supper, there came an event which I had all but forgotten in the rush of the season.

"You will need a day off next week," said Madame Alcide in the brusque tone with which she always heralded an unpleasant announcement. "You had best warn Bonnemaïson in the morning."

"But why, *madame?*" I questioned, puzzled by the request at such a time.

Madame Alcide answered with a name.

"Toinette," said she shortly.

"It is the convent, Jean," explained Toinette herself. "It opens on Tuesday. Of course you will wish to drive us in, and so see the last of me?"

"Of course," I replied, and after that my supper went untasted.

Toinette going away! Now that I viewed it squarely, the idea seemed preposterous. Why, I had come to the woods for the sole purpose of being with Toinette. And here she was going on Tuesday, to be gone at best until the following Summer.

Of course I had known that she was to go, but it had all been vague; something that I had thought of as existing in the far-distant future. And now it had occurred, swiftly, almost unexpectedly, like some sudden disaster.

"Toinette!" I cried aghast. "You must not go. I can not get on without you."

"Ah, yes but you can," she teased. "In less than a week you will have forgotten me entirely."

Then, realizing the genuineness of my dismay, she changed at once, hurrying around the table to comfort me.

"Come, Jean," she soothed. "It will be all right. At the camp, perhaps, it would have been hard. Here you will find it very different."

Afterward I thought often of Toinette's words, for through them she caused me for the first time to consider the change in our relationship. Now I realized that it was not with us as it had been upon the marsh. There the tie had been absolute. We had been partners, sharing each deed, each thought, each word in our struggle against the wild. Between us there had been no special distinction. Our tasks had been performed by one or the other according to the necessity of the moment.

At Bois Berard all this had been changed from the first day of our arrival. With Madame Alcide marriage was the one



possible partnership between the sexes. Thus Toinette and I now shared only our hours of leisure, hours which, through my work at the store, had come to mean meal-times and the brief space between supper and bed.

That this was as it should be I fully appreciated, yet whenever I considered my present attitude toward Toinette, it seemed somehow to savor of neglect.

Accordingly I did my best to make it up to her in the time before her departure, paying her countless small attentions, bringing her the choice of Monsieur Bonnemaïson's stock of trinkets and fancy articles of dress. All this Toinette accepted with a delight which caused me to redouble my efforts.

"But it is too much, Jean," she would protest. "I shall be so spoiled that the good sisters will refuse to take me."

Madame Alcide, vastly occupied in preparing Toinette's simple wardrobe, viewed my efforts with an air of amused understanding.

"It was really funny, Jean," she said to me long afterward. "No, you were not stupid. That is the way with you men. It is only when you wholly misunderstand such things that you imagine you know everything about them."

In the matter of the day off I found Monsieur Bonnemaïson all complaisance. Of course I must go. Also I must use his horse, an animal renowned for its gentleness and speed.

But here Madame Alcide interposed an objection. It was a family affair, she declared, and it must be carried out in proper fashion. She would as soon think of leaving Poussard behind as to refuse the services of her faithful Achille.

Accordingly early Tuesday morning, the four of us set out behind the old horse and plodded interminably across the prairie, until late in the forenoon we arrived at St. Pierre. Here we drove at once to the convent, a tall, square, many-pillared building, set snugly amid a grove of live oaks upon the far bank of the bayou that bordered the town.

And here we left Toinette with the sisters of Mount Carmel, who at once shut her in behind the barrier of their spreading, stiffly starched head-dresses, as if in immediate evidence of their determination to shield her henceforth from the profanations of the world.

The parting was brief, so brief in fact upon the part of Madame Alcide and myself as to suggest a grave doubt of self-control.

"Good-by, Toinette," I gulped, my mind a chaos of the things that I had planned to say upon the drive, and had until then wholly forgotten.

"Be patient," muttered Madame Alcide, as she stooped for her farewell kiss. "It is the best way."

"Adieu, *mademoiselle*," said Doctor Poussard with his best military bow.

And Toinette, smiling bravely despite her brimming eyes, could only keep repeating, "Good-by, Jean; good-by, Tante Aurore; good-by, M'sieu le Docteur," until we had passed out of the dim formality of the convent parlor and the heavy front door had swung to behind us.

Afterward we crossed back to the town where, having made Achille comfortable at a livery-stable, Madame Alcide departed upon a shopping-expedition, leaving the doctor and I to wander miserably about the streets, until such time as our ancient steed was fit to travel again.

We returned almost in silence and entered a house that for me was sadly reminiscent of my last visit to the hut at Bayou Portage. Toinette had spoken truly then, I told myself. For a time, at least, Madame Alcide's comfortable home would be no more to me than a box of boards.

If I brooded upon this during supper, I was not long allowed the luxury of my self-pity. Once the meal was over and the dishes cleared away, Madame Alcide produced from among her various purchases a square, heavy package done up in thick paper. I had noticed this package lying with the rest in the back of the surrey and had speculated mildly upon its probable contents.

Now, on its being opened, I found that it contained a half-dozen books. They were fat, scholarly books, very sober and business-like, and they seemed perfectly to express Madame Alcide's attitude as she spread them out before me.

"For you," she explained. "Or rather for us, since you are to read from them each night after supper."

"Yes, *madame*," said I, thinking that I understood. "Then it will not be so hard for us about Toinette."

The old lady's look became grim.

"On the contrary," she returned. "Then, perhaps, it will not be so hard for Toinette about ourselves."

She paused for a moment, as if to give weight to her words, and then went on:

"You see, Jean, it is this way. Each day now Toinette will go forward while we stand still. Once she has made her start, she will go fast, and we, with our duties, can not hope to keep up with her. Therefore we can only try by means of these books to limp along as best we can.

"Perhaps this may appear as nonsense to you now, but later on you will see that I am right. At all events I mean to keep my ears open to what you read. I would not like to have Toinette come back and find her old aunt behind her in every way."

So spoke Madame Alcide and, be it said to my credit, that I was able at once to understand. For of the books one dealt with agriculture in general and another with the growing of cane in particular, subjects as far removed from the curriculum of the good sisters as they were from the necessities of Madame Alcide herself.

And with understanding came appreciation, not only of all that Madame Alcide meant to do for me, but of the exquisite tact and kindness with which she had set forth her plans.

"*Madame,*" I muttered at a loss for words. "You are too good to me."

The old lady nodded approvingly. As a virtue, quickness of perception ranked high in her esteem.

"*Bien, Jean.* That is all right," said she. "Did you not begin by teaching Toinette? The score is far from being settled, I assure you. Tomorrow we will start."

After this I read aloud each night, while Madame Alcide sewed and listened and shot me brief comments during the pauses. At first it was hard after the long round at the store, but later, as my interest increased, it became for me the most pleasant hour of the day.

Also I learned, picking up many bits of agriculture, of history, of mythology, each of them spiced with the brisk yet mellow knowledge of Madame Alcide's long and busy life. She had wisdom as well as knowledge, had Madame Alcide, and many of her comments remain with me, although the lessons that inspired them have been long forgotten.

In particular I remember her words in the pause that followed the death of my beloved hero, M'sieu L'Empereur Napoleon.

"A great man, Jean," she observed. "Yet I can not help but think that your way is best. Is it not finer to bring live things out of the ground than to put dead men into it?"

So the Winter passed with its work, its saving, its efforts, upon the part of Madame Alcide, to continue my neglected education. Christmas brought disappointment for, at the approach of the feast, Madame Alcide announced that Toinette would not return.

It would be a break, and breaks were disastrous, she declared. Toinette had much to learn that only the unbroken round of daily habit could teach.

Thus I spent rather a lonely day, which began with mass at Père Parmentier's little prairie church and ended in my returning at dusk from a long hunt upon the near-by marsh.

Then came the Spring, a wondrous, fairy-like Spring, far removed from the drab rebirth of the marsh—a Spring of myriad tender leaves, alight and quivering against the wind-swept scatter of the sunshine.

And then, even as I marveled at the glory of the woods, Summer arrived, bringing Toinette's return.

CHAPTER V

TOINETTE COMES HOME

HAVING learned that Toinette would finish her term upon a Wednesday early in June, Madame Alcide departed the Monday before. She intended to visit certain relatives in St. Pierre, and she was further determined to miss no single detail of the convent's closing-exercises.

"Of course it will be the usual thing," said she. "They will recite and pound upon the piano. But that is not the point. Toinette will play her part, and in playing it will show me what she has accomplished. I will know perfectly well how far she has gone before I am back again."

Accordingly Madame Alcide departed alone behind Achilles, leaving me to three days of desolation in her empty house. True, I did not lack entirely for company,

as Doctor Poussard came over for a brief visit each night.

Whether this was due to the request of Madame Alcide or to the promptings of his own kindly nature I do not know, but from the first the little doctor gave evidence that he would prove anything but a cheerful companion.

Usually silent, his reticence was of the sort that needed but a friendly word to bring forth the true quality of his amiability. Just now, however, he preserved a puzzled muteness that was touched with a faint hint of injury.

To one less observant than myself the cause of this would have been plain; even had he denied himself the comfort of an occasional fragment of speech.

"A convent now, Jean," he observed the first night. "Naturally it is no place for men."

Later he muttered:

"Just the same 'St. Pierre' is not all convent. It is also a town, as every one knows quite well."

And in leaving, he said wholly to himself, his eyes turned toward the empty stable—

"I could at least have looked after Achille."

Poor Doctor Poussard! He understood, perhaps, but he could not reconcile himself to the situation. The convent might be wholly a feminine affair, yet it established a most unwelcome precedent. It was not easy for him to look into the future.

Thus it was with a very dejected doctor that I set out along the wood-road upon the afternoon of Toinette's return. Knowing the ways of Achille, I had delayed our departure until sunset. Yet even then we had waited long, and twilight had set in before we caught the surrey's dark bulk against the dim, misty reach of the prairie.

"You are there, Jean?" called Madame Alcide as we hurried forward.

"At your service, *madame*," cried the doctor, before I could even attempt an answer.

"Poussard, I have missed you," came back the reply. "Next time, convent or no convent, you will go along."

Through the dusk I could see the relief in the little doctor's face. Then I was abreast of the surrey, and a slender, vibrant figure had sprung down into my waiting arms.

"Jean, Jean," cried Toinette, clutching me in a way that brought back the bear-hug of Papa Ton. "It is so good to see you, to be home again. It did not seem so long while I was away, but now I know that it was a hundred years."

If in the days of waiting I had harbored uncertain, half-formed doubts as to this meeting, they were set at rest by the first touch of Toinette's reaching hands. There had been no change, I told myself. She was the same Toinette of the year before.

Later, as we went along in the back of the surrey, I decided that there had been a change—a change for the better. This eager, chattering Toinette was not the Toinette of Bois Berard. Rather she was the old Toinette of the marsh, the bright, elusive Toinette who had vanished that cruel night at Bayou Portage.

If I slammed Monsieur Bonnemaison's shutters in closing up a while later, it was only through the sheer exultation of my thoughts. If, after the last bolt was shot, I raced all the way to Madame Alcide's, it was only because I lacked a swifter means of progress. And then, when I had thrown open the door and come into the lamplight, I found still another Toinette—a Toinette of whom I could guess little save that she was different.

That she was taller, that her dress had been lengthened, that she had done something to her hair which caused her to appear no longer a small girl, I saw at a glance. All this had been denied me by the dusk, yet, in a way, I had expected it.

It was some inner, deeper change, sensed rather than seen, that checked my rising spirits with a touch of slow bewilderment. Dimly I realized that the vivid creature of a while before had been born solely of the excitement of our meeting.

Later, when Toinette had left the room upon some errand, Madame Alcide explained it all in a few crisp sentences.

"You see, Jean?" said she. "She is not sure yet. She is finding her way. But I have seen the exercises, and I know that it is all right. Next year it will be different."

That was it, I told myself, and from the moment I ceased my puzzling. For, after all, Toinette was Toinette, which was enough for any one. Besides, if she was not sure of herself, how could I possibly hope to understand her?

"Ah, Jean!" she would cry, when speak-

ing of the convent. "There is so much to do, so much to learn. Sometimes I think that I had best been left with the other wild creatures of the marsh. But it is not that I am unwilling to do my part. I would like to learn it all."

In proof of this she insisted upon a continuance of the nightly reading which we had determined to abandon during hot weather. She must have her share of our own particular learning, she declared. Also it would be like old times to have me teach her. As a consequence I kept on with my books, while Madame Alcide, frankly surrendering to the heat of the lamp, dozed upon the gallery, in the fond belief that she was listening through the opened window.

Then, the reading over, we would slip past the old lady to stroll about in the cool of the starlight, talking of the days at Bayou Portage.

Yet, for all the gossip about the store, I could give Toinette little news of the camp. Le Bossu had spoken truly in his farewell, and thus far I had seen nothing of our friends upon the marsh.

True, Toinette and I had planned to visit them, but this proved impossible. In Summer the camp was abandoned. With cool weather came the convent, my busy season at the store.

Of Le Bossu himself I had heard from time to time, since the little man was well known upon the mainland. Through the past season he had trapped and hunted along the Vermilion. Now he was upon the bay, from where he had sent a message that we would see him before he went back to his traps again.

And so, upon a long-remembered morning in mid-Summer, the little man made good his promise, coming to the woods for a whole day. It was a Sunday, chosen in view of my duties, and from noon until sunset Toinette and I plied our visitor with questions about the marsh.

He had seen them all, had Le Bossu. He had even put in at the camp, deserted now by all save old Pierre. The Lasalles were on the mainland. Young Pierre was busy with the fishing. The partners, methodical as usual, were established for the Summer at Anse Le Vert. All had sent us words of greeting. All had rejoiced at our good fortune.

"They are proud of you two," declared Le Bossu. "What, Jean with Bonne-

maison, and Toinette at the convent?" they said to me. "That speaks well for Bayou Portage."

In return we told the little man of ourselves, eager for his never failing sympathy and understanding. Toinette's fears he dismissed with a snap of his fingers.

"It will go like that—this uncertainty," he declared. "It is all right now, my little Toinette, only you do not know it. It is not fear to realize the difficulties of an undertaking. It is good sense, and with that all things are possible."

Of my own success he seemed equally assured, speaking to me quite frankly of his hopes, once we were alone together.

"It is what I expected, Jean," said he. "The cane is in your blood, and only when you have grown it and seen it go into the mill will you be satisfied. Not a little crop, but the great one that is your due.

"Your work at the store, your few acres upon the prairie, they are but little things leading up to a big one. Only on the hill-top out there will you find what you are after."

"For once you are wrong, Bossu," I declared. "What I told you that night on the marsh I meant and will always mean."

The little man smiled cryptically.

"*Bien*," he returned. "We shall see."

It was only when he was upon his way and Toinette and I were bidding him farewell at the rim of the prairie that Le Bossu spoke of Papa Ton.

"You thought that I had forgotten him?" he questioned. "Ah no, for he has been with us all day. And that was best. Had we spoken of him, we would have been sad, and he hated sadness. We have been happy in the thought of him.

"And one thing more. This season I will again be on the Vermilion, and with warm weather I have planned to go back to the swamps, my old home. Perhaps I will not see you for long, and I would say a word before I leave.

"You are going up, you two, far, far up beyond any hope Papa Ton may have had of you. Thus you may look back to him some day and see only a rough old man, as careless in ways as in speech. Should you do this, say to yourselves: 'That is not Papa Ton. It is Papa Ton as he would be now, perhaps, but not as he was.' Always remember this. It is what he was that counts."



Our protestations he dismissed with a smile.

"That is all right," said he. "I know how you feel, but you are young, and sometimes we are tricked by our thoughts. For the rest, just think of Papa Ton as being on the marsh. He is there, I tell you, just as much now as before."

Then he bade us good-by and departed, nor did I see him again for many a day. His stay in the swamps was a long one and upon his return it was my misfortune to miss him on his infrequent journeys across the prairie.

Yet the memory of his visit remained and, as we returned in the gray and gold of the afterglow, Toinette spoke to me of the simple peace that the little man's words had brought her.

"It was good to see Bossu," said she. "It was good to hear him. And best of all was what he said at parting. Always before, when I thought of Papa Ton, there was a hurt—a hurt so great that I could not speak of him.

"Now the hurt is gone. Bossu was right. Papa Ton *is* still on the marsh. It would not be the marsh without him."

After this we spoke often of the big man, treasuring his deeds of love and kindness. And with the peace of this came the old happiness—the happiness of perfect understanding.

Once more we were partners, Toinette and I, sharing our hoard of memories. If before Le Bossu's visit the weeks had passed quickly, they now flashed by with a most disconcerting swiftness. Hardly, it seemed, had I begun to know Toinette, before Fall was at hand, and preparations were going forward for her return to the convent.

It would have been a trying time for me but for the rush of the season and its consequent effect upon my employer. We sold much that year, so much that, considering his depleted stock, Monsieur Bonnemaïson arrived at a wholly unexpected determination. Always before he had ordered his goods by letter from New Orleans or from the dealers at St. Pierre. Now he decided that he would branch out a little.

"I will go to the city for the new stock, Jean," said he quite abruptly one night. "You are here to look after things, and the change will be good for me. Then I will get new ideas; I will see what I am buying

before I buy it. They are sharp, those city-folk. Often they have fooled me. *Bien*. For once they will have to do with N. Bonnemaïson in person."

All this, of course, was very gratifying. To be left in charge was the highest compliment possible upon the part of my employer. Nevertheless I viewed Monsieur Bonnemaïson's departure with an ever increasing uneasiness.

For the woods the store was an imposing affair, and its management involved a most uncomfortable responsibility. When finally Toinette returned to St. Pierre with Madame Alcide and the triumphant Poussard, her going was made easier by the problem that lay before me.

A week later Monsieur Bonnemaïson announced the morning of his departure, and in the days that followed, his going proved a source of endless discussion and speculation. Of course, being both Cajun and human, Monsieur Bonnemaïson had more than once surrendered to the seductions of the carnival, but in the eyes of Bois Berard this particular journey was fraught with a strange yet very genuine importance.

"They will be something, those new goods," said the inhabitants. "We shall have a Christmas to remember."

The psychology of this is perhaps best explained in the words of Monsieur Bonnemaïson himself.

"It is not the goods but the manner of their purchase," said he, when I asked him about it. "Take for example a knife, ordered by me from St. Pierre and sold to Hulin, the hunter. If asked where he got it, he will reply, 'At Bonnemaïson's,' and the matter is ended.

"But let Hulin go himself to St. Pierre and buy the same knife from the same store, and you will observe a difference. Now he will stop each acquaintance, to show the knife and hold forth upon its merits.

"How is that for a blade?' he will ask. 'No, it is none of Bonnemaïson's stuff. I bought it myself at St. Pierre.'

"Thus it is the same with these goods from the city. They can not go, Hulin and the rest. It is impossible. Therefore the next best thing is to have me go for them.

"Watch Hulin when he buys his next knife. For a week he will carry it about in his hand.

"Here is a real blade for you,' he will

say to every one. 'This is no St. Pierre pot-metal, I can tell you. Bonnemaïson bought it for me himself in the city.'

It was in the manner of his final instructions, however, that Monsieur Bonnemaïson displayed his true knowledge of human nature. He did not frighten me with useless commands. He did not confuse me with trifling details. Only in the matter of the mail, which was brought in each day from the prairie, and which he regarded with an awe closely bordering upon reverence, did he warn me to be particularly careful.

"To me you can explain a mistake, Jean. To the Government, never," he admonished. "And the Government is the law. It is the one thing that you must remember."

For the rest he merely told me to keep on as usual, an injunction that increased my confidence a thousandfold. As a consequence, the day of his departure found me divided between my regret at his leaving and my desire to show him how well I should do.

"*Au revoir*, Jean," said he, when his buggy was before the store and, valise in hand, he had come out of his tightly closed house. "In five days, a week perhaps, I shall be back again. Yes, I will remember to look for your Madame Therese, although from what you have said I fear that it is hopeless. No, I have nothing to tell you. You are in charge now and it is for you to say what shall or shall not be done."

This last, spoken loudly, was for the benefit of the small crowd that had gathered to see him off; a chuckling, muttering crowd from which exploded every now and then some witticism concerning the probable antics of an old man upon being faced with the perils and temptations of the city.

All this Monsieur Bonnemaïson took in good part, shaking hands right and left and making the most extravagant promises as to what he would order for each particular one. Then, climbing into his buggy, he waved his hand and was driven off amid a shouting of farewells.

When he had vanished beyond the trees, I reentered the store with a feeling almost of satisfaction. That the responsibility was great I still realized, but, thanks to Mon-

sieur Bonnemaïson's attitude, I now felt fully capable of accepting it.

As we sold only for cash and I knew the stock by heart, I had only to open and close the store and wait upon such customers as came along. After all, it was very simple.

True, certain shiftless folk, scenting their chance, approached me with tales of pressing need and of various employments that would fill their empty pockets by the end of the week. However, I not only knew them well, but I also understood perfectly how to deal with them. Having tried me out, they did not trouble me again.

In one case only did I make an exception. Of Doctor Poussard's dealing with the establishment I knew nothing, as he had always transacted his business with Monsieur Bonnemaïson himself. Now, when he came to me for his meager supplies, telling of a mattress that would certainly be finished and paid for in a few days, I served him without question.

His relief was as pitiful as it was sincere.

"I thank you, Jean," he quavered. "It would not have been nice to have had my credit impaired. And now, if you wish, I will stay a while, coming back from time to time. I can do nothing, perhaps, but I will be here in case of need."

Poor Doctor Poussard! The courage with which he had steeled himself against a possible refusal must have been great indeed. Now, in proof of his gratitude, he offered me the one remaining possession of his company.

Thus I came to know the little Doctor well, and in knowing him I was impressed more each day by the marvelous comfort of his society. Never have I known such a companion as Doctor Poussard. As Madame Alcide declared, he was only there when you had need of him.

CHAPTER VI

MONSIEUR DUGAS FIGURES IN ANOTHER CHRISTMAS

IN SIX days Monsieur Bonnemaïson was back again. He arrived quite unexpectedly, driving out in a hired buggy and entering the store with as little ceremony as if he had merely stepped over from his home. Indeed, I thought him a customer



until his quiet, "Well, here I am, Jean," brought me hurrying forward in welcome.

Later, after he had looked about, he spoke briefly of his journey. He had had good luck with his buying. Also he had enjoyed himself. He had seen many new and wonderful things, and it was always interesting to watch the crowds. Of Madame Therese he had inquired carefully but to no avail. She was already forgotten upon the rue Bourbon.

Finally he could see that I had done well, and in expectation of this he had brought me a little gift. It was a watch, and if I was pleased with it, I might consider my thanks as already said.

Nothing could have been more typical of Monsieur Bonnemaïson than his attitude upon this occasion. Had any other inhabitant of Bois Berard returned from such an outing, the recital of his adventures would have been a matter of months. True, the visit had impressed Monsieur Bonnemaïson, as was evidenced by the manner in which he commented upon it. It was his habit when interested to smile and talk glibly upon all subjects save the particular one that occupied his attention.

His treatment of the wood-folk was a marvel of diplomacy. When they hurried in, eager for each detail of his journey, he replied that he had had a good time and then plunged into a description of the forthcoming goods that drove all other thoughts from their minds. Thus he satisfied the public curiosity until, with the arrival of the goods themselves, the incident was considered closed.

They caused much excitement, those goods. Chosen carefully, they lived up to and even beyond the reputation established beforehand by their purchaser. Once they had been hauled out from the railroad, we enjoyed a trade such as Monsieur Bonnemaïson himself had not expected.

Women came from the farthest limits of the prairie for bonnets, for dress-goods, for the innumerable flashy trinkets with which we added life and color to the more solid merits of our display. That Winter, to be *à la mode*, was to have bought one's outfit of Bonnemaïson.

With the men it was merely a matter of taking down an article to have it accepted at once. That often it was the duplicate of a similar article recently bought made

no difference. The magic of "from the city" swept all doubts aside.

It was while we were at the very height of our success that news came to us of approaching competition. With the failure of Gilbeau, its proprietor, more than a year before, the little shop at the end of the settlement had remained closed and forgotten. Now we heard that it would be opened again and by no less a person than my old enemy, Monsieur Dugas.

Upon receiving this intelligence, Monsieur Bonnemaïson merely added a shrug to his smile, but later he displayed what was, for him, a truly remarkable ill-humor.

"It is too bad," he exploded once we were alone. "It is worse than too bad; it is a nuisance. Of course I had expected it. He has tried every place but here."

"Just the same he can hardly interfere with us," I answered, trying to draw him out. "So long as the city goods last, the trade will be ours."

My effort was wholly successful. For the first time since I had known him, Monsieur Bonnemaïson's small pensive eyes were touched with a glint of anger.

"Come, Jean, this is no time to joke," said he shortly. "Knowing Dugas as you do, you understand well what I mean. Of course you will advise me to stop him at once, but that is impossible. He will come with a small stock of supplies, and for a while there will be nothing to lay your finger on. It will all be hidden in that lean-to at the back. Only when trouble comes can we oust him, and then it will be too late."

"But why?" I questioned. "What is the use in going on that way?"

Monsieur Bonnemaïson spread out his hands.

"It is the man," he replied. "Perhaps he is mad, who can say? At all events it is his one desire, the thing that he lives for. As a merchant, even as the keeper of a decent coffee-house he would be a success. He is a close bargainer, and he knows how to save.

"But he is not satisfied with honest trade. Even the edge of the law is too good for him. Then too he must always play upon the weakness of another, not only for the gain but for the strange pleasure of doing so.

"You have seen the kind of man who, having started a toddling child, will allow

it to blunder off the porch for his own amusement? That is Dugas. He is mean, he is cruel, and always he whines when he is made to pay for his sport. The sooner he is through here, the better it will be for every one."

Two days later Monsieur Dugas descended upon us. He arrived in a battered, one-horse wagon, half-filled with supplies, and having unloaded and haggled with the driver, he drove back with him as far as Monsieur Bonnemaïson's store. Here he climbed over the wheel for what he was pleased to call a friendly understanding.

As I looked at him, I saw that the past two years had used him ill. He was thinner, he was more ragged, and his cringe now bent him almost double. His meager face bore a hunted look, and beyond the crooked twist of his furtive eyes one glimpsed the weariness that is born of constant dread.

He had come to explain, he said. In opening up he had no intention or desire of taking away any part of Monsieur Bonnemaïson's trade. Only let him serve the few humbler folk who were bewildered by the larger store's variety and assortment, and he would be satisfied. For the rest he stood ready to do anything that might advance the prosperity of both places.

It was all fairly said, but beyond the words one sensed the true meaning of Monsieur Dugas' visit. Fully aware that his reputation had traveled before him, he had come to find out just how much of this reputation was actually known.

Bois Berard, though remote, was within easy reach of the law. In this particular undertaking the element of time would prove a most important factor.

Having heard his competitor out in cold silence, Monsieur Bonnemaïson spoke briefly and to the point.

"The trade is yours if you can get it, Dugas," said he. "The woods are free to all. But mind that your business is carried on in front. That is all I have to say."

And he added to me, as without further words Monsieur Dugas shambled off—

"Now that he knows, he will work fast. It will not be long."

True to this prophecy, Monsieur Dugas pushed his secret business to the farthest possible limit. Shunning our place after that first visit, he worked feverishly, striv-

ing for the last penny that stood between him and the inevitable disaster.

At the store we could only watch while the blight of Monsieur Dugas' sinister influence spread wider day by day. In the trade of those unfortunates upon whom the storekeeper especially preyed was written the whole story of their downfall.

First they gave over the buying of trinkets and non-essentials. Next they denied themselves in the more important matter of implements and dress. And finally, as the vicious circle narrowed down, there came a stoppage of supplies, telling of hungry mouths left empty for the filling of a bottle.

Of Monsieur Dugas' several victims the most pitiful was Hulin, the hunter. A cheerful if intemperate soul, he had been contented with an occasional debauch upon the prairie. Now at the height of the season he ranged the woods by day, only that he might spend his nights in carousing. Soon his little ones went about pinched and wary, having in their eyes a wistful appeal for the smile that had become a blow.

It was as intolerable as it was hopeless. More than once I visited Monsieur Dugas in an effort to discover something to go upon. And always I found the same assortment of unsold tins, the half-sack of moldy flour, the pyramid of coconuts, worn smooth by age and much handling.

Always the storekeeper received me with a mock effusiveness that was maddening. I had come to buy? No? Then perhaps I would sit down and accept a bottle of *rouge*. Whereupon he would throw open the door of the lean-to, showing me that it contained only his pallet and a treasured crate or two of red pop.

He worked well this time, did Monsieur Dugas. Save the elect, none saw so much as the drawing of a cork. Had it been possible to raid him, we would have had only our trouble for our pains.

So I watched him uselessly, until with the approach of Christmas I turned my thoughts to the more pleasant prospect of Toinette's return. This year she was to be with us the best part of a week, and when she arrived two days before the feast, I greeted her with a gasp of consternation.

"Toinette!" I cried. "You have grown up."

"Not yet, Jean," she smiled. "It is only my long dress. Also, to please Tante



Aurore, I have piled my hair on top of my head."

This was reassuring, but even in those few days I learned that Toinette's growth went far beyond the long dress and piled-up hair. If, as she said, she had not grown up, she had at least found herself. Of this much I was sure even before Madame Alcide confirmed it. It was plain to see in the steady, untroubled look of her eyes, in the quiet decisiveness of her manner.

"It is all right now at the convent?" I asked her.

"It is more than all right, Jean," she replied. "It is like another home."

That was a long-remembered Christmas, with its presents from St. Pierre and the store and its late, monstrous dinner, attended not only by Doctor Poussard but by my employer himself. Unaccustomed though he was to dining out, Monsieur Bonnemaïson did not lack in gallantry.

"But this is fine, *madame*," he kept repeating between mouthfuls. "I did not think that anything so good could come out of my store."

To Toinette he declared:

"In your case, *mademoiselle*, the good sisters have accomplished a triumph. Besides teaching you, they have made of you a young lady such as these woods have never seen."

Dinner over and the day being mild, we sat out upon the gallery, from where, later in the afternoon, we heard sounds of disturbance at the far end of the settlement. There were muffled shouts and snatches of song, followed always by the roar and cackle of drunken laughter.

"You hear?" said Monsieur Bonnemaïson. "Dugas is getting bold. Either he depends upon the good-will of the day or he finds that he is near the end of his rope."

"Perhaps it is the strangers," ventured Doctor Poussard. "At my place I saw them come in from the marsh."

"So," answered Monsieur Bonnemaïson. "Then it is worse than I feared. They will not be easy to handle, those strangers, once they have had too much."

With the approach of dusk and the departure of our guests, the revelry increased. Then shortly after dark it rose into a sudden, furious outburst that was heard inside the house. Scenting trouble, I hurried outside to find that the uproar had been suc-

ceeded by a silence in which I caught very faintly the thud and rustle of swiftly departing feet. Then as I quickened my pace, there shrilled out upon the night the high, thin wail of a woman in fear.

At Monsieur Dugas' I found all that I had sought so long. Grown bold, the strangers had wrecked the place, leaving it a chaos of empty bottles and scattered supplies. The windows were smashed. The door had been wrenched away. And inside, amid the litter of broken glass and trampled food, lay Hulin, his chest a dark welter of blood.

To those who gathered about him he could only explain that he had been stabbed. There had been a general fight, in which the lights had been knocked over and knives had come into play.

When struck, he had screamed, whereupon all had rushed out bursting, so it seemed, through the very walls. At the time he had been the only inhabitant present. Long before the others had been scared away.

So ended Monsieur Dugas' venture at Bois Berard, for, escaping with the strangers, the storekeeper disappeared. Had Hulin's wound proved serious, he would have been searched for, but, when after a few days the hunter recovered from the wound in his shoulder, the wood-folk were content to let well enough alone.

"*Bien*," they said. "Hulin is out and we are rid of Dugas for all time. We should not complain."

In the excitement following Monsieur Dugas' flight, Toinette's visit passed quickly. It seemed that she came, that Hulin was wounded, that she was gone again, all in a few hours. Only after she had driven away did I realize how little I had seen of her.

Yet for all this I now became possessed of a thought of Toinette such as I had not entertained before. It began with a chance remark of Monsieur Bonnemaïson's.

"I miss her, your *mademoiselle*," said he one day. "It was good to see her about. Where before she was pretty, she is now beautiful."

"That is so," I agreed idly, but five minutes later Monsieur Bonnemaïson's words had taken complete possession of my mind.

Was Toinette beautiful? I asked myself. Was she even pretty? To my amazement I found that it had never occurred to

me to consider the matter in any way. Other girls, pretty and plain, I had noticed and commented on. Of this phase of Toinette I had not thought at all. I had been satisfied with the mere fact of her being Toinette.

Now, thanks to my employer, I discovered that Toinette was possessed of certain looks of her own. This much I grasped at once. But what of these looks? Here was a riddle to which I could find no satisfactory answer.

Pursuing my inquiry, I decided that I could not depend upon my own judgment. Viewing Toinette with the eyes of affection, I must find her beautiful in every way. Of course I had my employer's opinion, but Monsieur Bonnemaïson was ever a speaker of fair words. Perhaps he had been chiefly concerned with the memory of that Christmas dinner.

Thinking on, I dismissed Doctor Pousard, whose answer I already knew.

"Of course," he would say. "As beautiful as she is good."

Here I was forced to stop, since of the other inhabitants there was not one whom I would care to approach with so delicate a question.

Closing time found me obsessed by my inquiry. I felt that I could have no peace until this question of Toinette's looks was definitely settled. As I walked home, I considered an appeal to Madame Alcide, but in the end I shrank from the idea. She was a woman and she might not understand.

After supper I read so absently that more than once the old lady shot me an inquiring glance above her sewing. Then, the reading over, I could contain myself no longer.

"Madame?" I burst out. "Is Toinette beautiful?"

As she looked quickly up, Madame Alcide's gaze was strangely hostile.

"Who has said so?" she demanded sharply.

"M'sieu Bonnemaïson," I replied.

There fell a pause, during which Madame Alcide gave a little nod, as was her habit in moments of satisfaction.

"So," said she quietly. "And what do you think, Jean?"

"I can not think," I answered. "That is just the trouble."

Vague though this was, Madame Alcide seemed fully to understand.

"Then do not try," she advised. "If you have not troubled about this before, why do so now?"

And she added, returning to her needle: "Beauty is for outside, Jean. In one's home it is always uncomfortable."

Later, as we were closing up for the night, Madame Alcide broke in upon the returned calmness of my thoughts with one of her rare laughs.

"What is it, *madame*?" I inquired.

The old lady's smile held fondness together with its quaint humor.

"It is you, Jean," she returned. "You are truly amusing. Not only have you found out that Toinette is a woman, but you have made the further remarkable discovery that you yourself are a man."

CHAPTER VII

I APPROACH MY AMBITION

THAT Spring I put in the first of my cane. It was a small planting of a dozen acres, yet, having no work-animals or implements of my own, I was forced to go into partnership with Joe Vital, a market-gardener who owned a team. Of the forthcoming profits Vital was to receive one-half. The balance would be divided between Madame Alcide and myself, as the furnishers of the land and the seed-cane.

This arrangement promised me scant profits, yet I was well satisfied. Next year I would plant my own stubble and double my crop. Also, if I were successful, I would have proved the worth of my experiment.

But best of all was the thought that I approached my ambition. At last I was to reap the reward of those long months of work and saving.

Never will I forget that March morning when Vital turned up the first brown clods of the prairie. As they slid smoothly over, scattering their shower of dewdrops, I thought them the most wonderful clods in all the world. I could hardly have valued them more, had Nature provided true jewels for their adornment.

Standing beside me, Madame Alcide voiced her approval.



"You have done it, Jean," said she. "And in your own way."

"What do you mean, *madame*?" I questioned.

"With most of our folk the first planting and even the last is done between the handles of a plow," she returned. "It is not often that we can stand and look on."

"But how could I learn to plow while in the store?" I objected.

Before replying, the old lady surveyed me with a look of quiet comprehension.

"That is all right, Jean," said she. "I understand. I have understood all along. That is what I meant when at the very first I told you that you aimed high."

After this I treasured my leisure moments that I might spend them in watching the work go on. It fascinated me, that lumpy, irregular square which Vital was creating at the edge of the woods. Each day it lapped farther beyond the rim of encroaching sod, for all the world as if the prairie had been some huge, placid lake, upon which I had launched the frail bark of my endeavor.

Then, the plowing done, the seed-cane went in, until with the covering of the final joint Vital withdrew a while, leaving the torn earth to be quickened by the touch of Nature.

Yet even now I went each day to the field to dream of the myriad slender sprouts that would presently push up from the hidden eyes below. Those shoots would be stout and many, I told myself. They must be. It was unthinkable that this first crop would prove a failure.

And next year there would be many more shoots and in the years to come more again until— But I could not go beyond that "until." It represented the height of my achievement. When in their millions those final shoots stretched away beyond sight from the trees, I would have reached my goal and become a planter.

At the store I talked of cane to each small farmer who came along. Gravely I discussed the effects of heat and cold, of rain and drought. More gravely still I heard of the curse of weeds, the blight of the borer and the endless kindred evils, against which one must guard an infant crop. It was a time of fear as well as hope, and often when I considered the vast, malevolent forces against which I

must contend, it seemed impossible that I should ever succeed.

It was at these times that the sound common sense of Monsieur Bonnemaïson made short work of my dejection.

"Pay no attention to those croakers, Jean," he would advise. "That is their fun, to scare the newcomer with all those things of which they have ceased to be afraid. I am no farmer, but I have noticed that, despite the bugs and weeds, the new crops come up each year. Yours will do the same."

In the matter of my planting, Monsieur Bonnemaïson was kindness itself. He wished me well, and in return I saw to it that this new interest did not diminish my work at the store.

Rather it increased it as it increased the business, for, having aired their opinions, the small farmers came back from the prairie to enlarge upon them. Next, when true to Monsieur Bonnemaïson's predictions my crop was safely above ground, they returned to view it and to instruct me in those further efforts that would see it through hot weather.

All of this brought trade—new trade, wholly unexpected. As a consequence Monsieur Bonnemaïson developed an interest in my venture beyond his mere desire for my ultimate success.

"I am surprized, Jean," said he. "It is bringing us out, that little crop of yours. Already it has done as much as the goods from the city. They are talking far out in the prairie.

"You have heard?" says one. "They are putting in cane at Bois Berard." "So," says the other, and turning his back on those many acres about him, he rides here to see.

"You have done well, and next year you must do better. If necessary I shall help you."

Gradually the advent of these newcomers worked a change upon the placid existence of Monsieur Bonnemaïson. Where before he had been gratified by their custom, he now began to find an interest in their presence. He talked with them. He joked with them. He expanded visibly beneath their influence.

Soon, becoming tired of the eternal talk of crops, he took to discussing the no less important topic of politics. There would be several elections that Fall, and already



the prairie-folk were considering the merits of the various candidates.

Up to this time Monsieur Bonnemaïson's voting had been both blind and spasmodic. Upon those occasions, when the elections had not interfered with his work, he had gone to the polls and cast his ballot in accordance with the wishes of his friends.

Now he discovered that he was entitled to an opinion of his own. Nay, more—that, if he would prove himself a good citizen, it was his duty to form such an opinion and stick to it to the bitter end.

Accordingly Monsieur Bonnemaïson set about to inform himself through the medium of his neighbors. Beginning with an occasional hurried drive to the stores and homes of the prairie, he extended his visits until, with the ending of Spring, it was not uncommon for him to be absent a whole afternoon.

His delight in this new occupation was that of the toiler who, having achieved independence, discovers that he still has the desire and ability to play.

"*Dieu, Jean,*" he would say. "They are something, those politics. Where before I had one friend, I now have a dozen. And that is good for any one. All along I have been like a man in jail. Now that I am free, I mean to enjoy myself."

It was good to see Monsieur Bonnemaïson come out of his shell. Looking on, Bois Berard understood and applauded.

"Let him have his fun," said the wood-folk. "He has worked hard enough for it."

And the wise ones added:

"Bonnemaïson will play that game well. If we in all these years have failed to get behind his smile, how can those others expect to do so?"

What with my cane and Monsieur Bonnemaïson's politics, the Spring passed pleasantly. With the coming of June, however, I faced a bitter disappointment. Shortly before she departed for the convent's exercises, Madame Alcide informed me that Toinette would not return with her.

Upon her reasons for this decision Madame Alcide spoke at length. Toinette was now grown, she said, and it was high time that she knew her family. Therefore she would begin by visiting certain Lavals and Berards in and around St.

Pierre. Afterward she would return to the convent and employ such time as remained of her vacation in preparing herself for her all-important third year.

Madame Alcide laid particular stress upon that third year. It was the one that counted, she declared. Let Toinette pass through it safely, and she need not worry about the fourth year and graduation. Of course Toinette was smart, but she had started late and with only my scant teaching. She could not afford to take chances.

It was all so simple and convincing that I was at a loss to account for the manner in which Madame Alcide dwelt upon it. She seldom repeated herself, nor was it often necessary for her to do so. In the end I decided that she was fortifying herself against her approaching loneliness.

It was hard to have Toinette miss my first crop. Often at the camp, when I had spoken of my ambition, she had pointed out to the marsh-grass, saying:

"Look, Jean. Your cane will be like that some day."

And now that I had my cane—real, living, growing cane—she was not there to see. I could only console myself with the thought that next year she would behold it in all the impressiveness of my increased acreage.

So the Summer came, depriving me of Toinette yet bringing me new tasks that did much to atone for her absence. In the field my cane was well up and thriving, so that each spare moment found me assisting Vital in the work of cultivation. At the store my duties increased daily as Monsieur Bonnemaïson followed the inevitable course of his development. Urged on by his friends, he now fell a victim to political ambition.

For years the ward of which Bois Berard was a part had been represented upon the police jury by General Marsh. There had been no canvassing of votes, no contest in regard to this office. As the leader of his section, the general had been chosen unanimously.

Now he announced that, following his present term, he could serve no longer. Also he made no suggestion as to his successor.

This returned the office to the realm of politics. True, the election would not be held for nearly a year, but this merely increased the possibilities of the situation.



With so many months to work in, the prairie-folk could be depended upon to conduct a campaign that would make political history.

As a consequence Monsieur Bonnemaison departed from the first preliminary skirmish to find himself a candidate. His friends had asked him to run and, half-bewildered, he had given his consent.

That this bewilderment was due rather to Monsieur Bonnemaison's modesty than to any apprehension he might have felt at the prospect of holding office became quickly apparent. Once he had considered the matter and gotten his bearings, he fairly bubbled over with delight and appreciation.

"It is too much," he declared. "To think that I, the beginner, should be chosen. I could not answer when they asked me. I could only nod my agreement and get away as quickly as possible. But I will show them if I get in. Good roads and safe bridges will speak for me."

Following his elation, Monsieur Bonnemaison entered upon a more sober period, during which with the aid of his supporters he mapped out a campaign. This accomplished, he called me into his office one evening as I was preparing to leave the store.

"Next week I start my canvass," he began. "April is a long way off, but Daurive has come out, and it is said that Pesson will run also. This means a fight, and in a fight it is often the first blow that counts. Also, having struck my blow, I mean to keep on striking until the very day of the election. Thus you will be in charge again, Jean; this time for months, perhaps."

"That is all right, *m'sieu*," said I. "You can depend upon me to do my best."

Monsieur Bonnemaison waved this assurance aside.

"Of course, Jean," said he. "That is understood. The question is, how can I do *my* best? With your cane, the store will be too much even in Summer. You must have some one to help you."

He paused, leaving me fairly staggered by his suggestion. Monsieur Bonnemaison with two clerks! He was coming out indeed.

"That is good of you, *m'sieu*," said I. "If I could have help on Saturdays, it

would be easier. You have thought of any one?"

As he replied, Monsieur Bonnemaison's smile was touched with a fleeting kindness—kindness not only for myself but for the one he had in mind.

"What of Poussard?" he questioned. "Ever since my trip to the city he has been hanging about. If you are satisfied, I will speak to him."

Thus it was arranged, and upon the following Saturday the little doctor reported for duty at the store. So timidly pleased, so pitifully grateful was he that even Monsieur Bonnemaison was touched by the effect of his benevolence.

"*Dieu*, Jean," he said to me. "I am knowing Poussard for the first time. Only now can I appreciate how hard it has been for him."

The truth of this I appreciated myself in the weeks that followed. It had been hard for the little doctor, far harder than any of us would ever know. To his loneliness, his lack of true occupation, had been added a poverty that made a humiliation of the very food that went into his mouth. For Doctor Poussard had his pride, the fine pride of one who, scorning surrender, accepts and fights on in the hope of some day being able to repay.

In proof of this he refused to accept even a portion of the small amount that I offered him upon his first Saturday night.

"No, Jean," he said. "It must go upon my account. As you perhaps know, I have an arrangement with your employer. It is good to pay back. One can spend money in no pleasanter manner."

Once he had mastered the stock and prices, the little doctor proved an able assistant. Always quiet and considerate, he performed his duties with all the thoroughness and precision of his military training.

Also he served his customers with a grave courtesy hitherto unknown at our establishment. The wood-folk liked to be waited upon by Doctor Poussard. They left him with a most gratifying estimate of their own importance.

Soon there arose a demand for him which Monsieur Bonnemaison was only too willing to satisfy. Accordingly with the approach of midsummer he offered the little doctor a permanent place in the store.

Never will I forget the manner in which



Doctor Poussard accepted his promotion. If before we had been touched by his gratitude, his joy and relief was now enough to dim one's eyes. Perhaps that period of uncertainty had been harder for him than anything he had known.

Now that he was sure, the little doctor was like a man transformed. Gone from his eyes was the plaintive anxiety, and in its place came a look of peace. Through pride his stooped shoulders regained a hint of their former squareness. Touched by the warm glow of prosperity, his very brownness took on a mellow hue.

His medicine and his mattresses he gave up at once, taking down his signs upon the very afternoon of his talk with Monsieur Bonnemaïson.

"You see, Jean, it would not do for me to retain these outside affairs," he explained. "I could only attend to them by neglecting the interests of my employer. Thus my practise and my manufactory are things of the past. Now that the signs are down, my patrons will understand that I am done with them entirely.

Good Doctor Poussard! Even in his retirement he wrought a lasting cure upon his most profitable patient. For, following her enjoyment of his success, Madame Alcide achieved a state of health in which her *migraine* entirely disappeared.

Having established the little doctor, Monsieur Bonnemaïson removed his activities to the store-porch. He would be there to advise and to greet the customers. The rest we could attend to inside. Now that he had two clerks, he would make the most of them. Such time as was allowed him by his supporters he meant to take at his ease.

So said Monsieur Bonnemaïson, and so the word went round that when at Bois Berard he could always be found outside the store. Each day he held court in his old armchair. Each day he talked politics to an increasing audience, smiling his inscrutable smile.

And well might Monsieur Bonnemaïson smile, for it was very hot and he had solved the problem of his canvass. Where before he had gone to the voters, the voters now came to him.

Yet it was Monsieur Bonnemaïson's ill luck that of all these voters the most important should call at a moment when he was away from the store. Thus the

newcomer was received by Doctor Poussard, who called back to me in a voice shrill with excitement.

"Quick, Jean," he warned. "It is *M'sieu* the General."

Hurrying out, I found the general upon his horse at the edge of the porch. Since coming to the woods, I had caught sight of him, but always it had been from a distance. Now that I saw him closely, I found him little changed.

The years might have added new lines to his face—thin lines, infinitely fine and delicate, as became one of his position. His hair might now be more white than gray. Otherwise in his erectness, his chill aloofness, he was the same forbidding figure of that day of renunciation.

Upon his part, the general satisfied himself with a single glance in my direction. It was a brief glance, accomplished by a slight twist of the head, yet so searching, so all-embracing was it that I felt as if I had been stripped to the skin.

"Yes, *m'sieu*?" I stammered, conscious that my face was aflame.

As he replied, the general's gaze was fixed upon the far end of the wood-road. He spoke straight before him, as if he were addressing some one who stood at the head of his horse.

"I wish to leave a message for Bonnemaïson," said he. "Tell him that he may count upon my support."

"Yes, *m'sieu*," I replied after I had waited to make sure that he was through. "*M'sieu* Bonnemaïson will be pleased."

"Thank you," said the general and prepared to depart.

Then as his horse swung out from the porch, he suddenly wheeled him back again. Once more he looked at me, but this time there was nothing disturbing in his gaze. It passed through and beyond me, as if I were something wholly finished and appraised.

"I noticed some cane as I came in," began the general.

"It is mine, *m'sieu*," I answered.

"You have a fine stand."

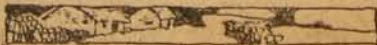
"I am pleased that you think so, *m'sieu*."

"To whom do you expect to sell it?"

"To you, *m'sieu*, if you are willing."

The general reached for his bridle.

"Very well," he agreed and ended the interview by trotting away amid the fast lengthening shadows of the trees.



"*Bien*," observed Doctor Poussard, speaking for this first time. "You are lucky, you and Bonnemaïson. Your wares have found a good market."

This was true, but at the moment my thoughts were far from my crop. I could only recall that first glance of the general's and wonder at what part it had played in his unexpected visit.

I was flushed again as I reentered the store. Somehow I felt as if I had been on exhibition.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GENERAL MAKES AN OFFER

THANKS to a good season and the fertility of the prairie, my cane proved a remarkable success. All through the Summer it increased in girth and richness, until with the coming of Fall a high, close-woven jungle of purple and green stood out against the dark line of the forest.

Once more the prairie-folk came to see and congratulate. They could not deny that jungle. Even the most pessimistic were forced to admit that I had done well.

At Bois Berard itself there was a diversity of opinion. Some few inhabitants of proved industry were frankly jubilant, declaring that my good fortune would bring a general prosperity. Their less thrifty neighbors viewed the future more darkly.

"What is money without comfort?" they demanded.

To dig up the ground was hard work, especially in Summer. No one but a simpleton would wish to exchange a gun for a hoe. If the planting kept on, all sensible folk would move farther inside.

Nevertheless I did not lack for labor when the time came to cut my crop. Bois Berard might grumble, but it could be depended upon to make the most of such an occasion.

On the appointed day I had my pick of the entire settlement. The wood-folk fairly fought for possession of the few cane-knives that I had ordered from St. Pierre.

Afterward they made a game of the work, some of them slashing in with the abandon of one repelling an attack; others, more delicately humored, pretending to engage in a duel with each separate stalk.

This, while fun for the onlookers, meant

ruin to the cane. Had I not interfered, my crop would have been speedily reduced to fragments.

Later, when the first cart was loaded and Vital had climbed aboard it, the wood-folk were outspoken in their pride.

"Show them what we are, Joe," they called. "Remember you are not peddling game at *M'sieu* the General's back door."

All along I had looked forward to the moment when I would make this first journey to Marsh Island. Now that it had arrived, I found that I must forego my small triumph. In the first place I was no handler of mules and would therefore prove merely an additional burden to Vital or the others whom I had engaged to move the crop. In the second it was necessary that I remain in the field to superintend the work of the cutters.

Vital must look after the weighing and collect the receipts, leaving me to make the final settlement.

It was disappointing to wait for the last loads, but when they were ready, I was recompensed for my delay by the thoughtfulness of Monsieur Bonnemaïson. I must use his driving-horse, he declared. Not only would it be more comfortable, but I would appear to better advantage.

After all, I was a planter despite my few acres. It would not do for me to arrive in a cart like any common laborer.

Thus I set out in style, trotting ahead of my small cavalcade upon the broad back of Monsieur Bonnemaïson's animal. The day was crisp and clear, and as I reached the causeway, a sudden breeze rippled in from the bay, spicing the air with a tang of saltiness. Beneath its touch the tall grass bowed gravely, while the myrtles fluttered their tiny leaves as if in mockery of such sedateness.

It was the same old marsh, and the sight of its waving grass brought back my last afternoon at Bayou Portage. Poor Papa Ton! What if he could see me now.

"Cane is for the rich, Jean," he had said. "Only with a trap can you get your fortune out of the ground."

Reaching the island, I took a different direction from the one adopted upon my journey with Monsieur Dugas. Now I turned off to the left, along a road that circled the base of a hill. Following this through a tangle of woodland, I came

finally to open ground. And here I drew up with a suddenness that brought a snort of protest from my indignant mount, for the cane-fields lay before me.

Long was I to remember my first view of these fields. Perhaps they were not as vast as those that encircled the great refineries of St. Pierre. Perhaps they lacked the network of rails, the puffing dummies that made for modern efficiency. Yet in the wide, free sweep of their level acres, in the flood of green that billowed from marsh to hillside, they expressed in the fullest degree all that for which I longed.

As I gazed at them, I felt a great and tender pity for my father. It was something to have lost those fields. No wonder he had been gray before his time.

Riding on between the tall ranks of the cane, I came presently to the mill, a squat affair of brick and plaster, topped by an ancient stack. From its low-pitched shed came the rich, heavy odor of the open kettles. About its narrow carrier the cane was piled in huge glistening mounds. Inside its worn rollers clanked and rattled as if in weary effort, while they crunched their way through the never ceasing stream of stalks.

It was small and old and hopelessly old-fashioned, yet about it there was something that had been wholly lacking in the refineries of St. Pierre. They were huge, those refineries, but they were also frankly commercial. Here one found in all its charm and fragrance the true enchantment of grinding.

It was not easy to leave this mill. Long after the carts had been unloaded and I had finished my business at the scales, I hung about, absorbed in the busy scene. Each detail was like a tonic to me; the roar of the boilers, the drip of the juice, the slap of the carrier that perhaps even then was carrying a load from Bois Berard.

When finally I rode off, I promised myself that some day I would have such a mill of my own. Already I could picture it nestled snugly amid the trees.

So I returned with my thoughts in the future, until near the edge of the fields I came upon the general. He trotted out upon me suddenly from a field-road, and at that moment it seemed a chance meeting. Only afterward did I understand that he had ridden there purposely to intercept me.

"Well?" he inquired, after I had saluted him. "Has everything been satisfactory?"

"Perfectly so, *m'sieu*," I replied. "I would like to sell to you next year."

"So you mean to keep on?" he questioned.

"Ah, yes, *m'sieu*," said I eagerly. "Next year I will have twice as much—perhaps more if *M'sieu Bonnemaison* helps me."

The general considered this a moment. He seemed almost impressed by my enthusiasm.

"Then you intend to be a farmer rather than a storekeeper?" he observed.

"That is it, *m'sieu*," I agreed. "I hope some day to be a planter."

Not until I had spoken did I realize my mistake. In a way I had corrected the general.

"Pardon, *m'sieu*," said I quickly. "I mean that I would like to become a farmer."

There fell a pause, during which the general eyed me absently. Then he spoke in a strangely detached voice, as if he were uttering his thoughts aloud.

"No," he mused. "You were right at first. You will never be a farmer. You will plant from the saddle or not at all."

He checked himself and added with a swift return to his usual tone—"How would you like to come here for the next crop?"

It was so sudden, so wholly unexpected, that I could only stammer in reply.

"You mean, *m'sieu*—you mean—" I began.

"Exactly," broke in the general. "I need a man in the field and I have heard you well spoken of. If you are willing, I can use you as soon as the crop is off."

His words restored my confidence. They held no kindness, no hint of good-will to justify my confusion. He needed a man, and he had heard me well spoken of. It was merely a matter of business.

Before answering him, I looked out over the wide sweep of the cane. Truly it was a temptation. A year at Marsh Island would be a priceless experience.

Then I thought of *Monsieur Bonnemaison*, of the store, of those useless acres of prairie that I might redeem for *Madame Alcide*.

"*M'sieu*," said I, "I am very grateful to you for your offer, but I can not accept



it. My duty lies in the woods. It would not be right for me to leave there."

The general's eyes were fierce as I finished. Evidently he was ill used to refusal. For an instant he appeared upon the point of bursting into angry speech. Then he resumed his cold indifference, wheeling about with a jerk of the bridle.

"As you wish," said he curtly and turned off into the field-road, leaving me to stare after him with a curiously mingled feeling of relief and disappointment.

Riding on, I reviewed our meeting until I reached the point where the general had seemed to speak his thoughts aloud.

"No," he had said. "You will never be a farmer. You will plant from the saddle or not at all."

Here was something to consider. Just what had the general meant? And now that I thought of it, Madame Alcide had made some similar remark upon the occasion of my first plowing.

First Madame Alcide, and now the general. Why should they comment upon the manner in which I had planted my crop?

The puzzle of this held me throughout the rest of my ride. So far as I could see, I was putting in my cane in the usual fashion. And if I were not, why should these two be so concerned at my going about the matter in my own particular way?

CHAPTER IX

AN EVENTFUL SPRING

THE Spring that followed was a famous one for Bois Berard. With March it found me planting, not twice, but a good four times the amount of my former acreage.

This increase, the work of my employer, was far beyond my highest expectations. True, Monsieur Bonnemaïson had offered to help me, but I had never thought that his assistance would take so substantial a form. In this case, however, his caution had been tempered by a fine sense of appreciation.

Upon my return from Marsh Island I had been careful to give no hint of my interview with the general. Nevertheless, in the mysterious fashion of such commu-

nicities, word of it had gone abroad. Upon its reaching the woods, Monsieur Bonnemaïson called me to him at once.

"So, Jean," said he. "I have just heard of M'sieu the General and yourself. You have behaved well, and you shall not be the loser by it. In the Spring you will see."

Thus Monsieur Bonnemaïson made good his words at planting time by doubling my expected crop. This meant much work and planning to meet the requirements of his added acres. Teams must be found. Implements must be bought, together with an extra supply of seed-cane. Also there was the problem of additional labor.

In this the wood-folk seemed little inclined to help me. For the most part they were content to look on with a virtuous indolence born of their efforts at grinding. They had cut my crop or they had offered to do so, which amounted to the same thing. Now they meant to rest until cool weather.

It was a difficult time and one in which I might have fared badly, had not Monsieur Bonnemaïson again come to my assistance. Owning several cabins, he gave their tenants the choice of going into the field or of making way for workers from outside.

This aroused a storm of protest, followed by the threat of a general exodus, but through it all Monsieur Bonnemaïson stood firm. In the end the wood-folk turned to their natural philosophy and shrugged a surrender.

"*Bien*," they said. "It is our crop anyway. Why should we leave it to these dirt-grubbers from the prairie?"

So the inhabitants went to work and so began a period of prosperity for Bois Berard. If at first there was grumbling and discontent, this soon disappeared through the magic of regular wages.

The wood-folk might love their ease, but they could not blind themselves to the advantages of a weekly pay-roll.

Before the crop was in, Hulin, the hunter, had taken his turn in the field. He had been wrong, he admitted. A hoe was surer than a gun. You never missed your dinner with a hoe.

In April cane gave place to politics. Now that the elections were close at hand, the question of votes became all-absorbing. Supported by the general, Monsieur



Bonnemaison had seemed certain of victory, but there was always the danger that his opponents would combine. This they did at the last moment, Pesson dropping out to give his support to the more promising Dautrive.

Then began a bitter fight that was waged to the casting of the final ballot. It was a contest to delight the Cajun heart, and when at its end Monsieur Bonnemaison was declared the winner, he was fairly overcome by his emotion. Called on for a speech, he could only utter a few broken words.

"Later, my friends," he choked. "Just now I can say nothing. But I will show you all what I feel."

This promise Monsieur Bonnemaison kept in May by holding a general celebration. Half-fete, half-barbecue, it was attended by friend and foe alike. From the farthest limits of the prairie the voters came to enjoy Monsieur Bonnemaison's boundless hospitality.

For a whole day there was eating and drinking, enlivened by various sports. Horses were run, chickens were fought, games were played of every kind. Also Monsieur Bonnemaison atoned for his former muteness by delivering a speech of thanks in the late afternoon.

Among the many guests was Monsieur Dugas. He crept in alone from the prairie, a vacant, imbecile-creature, with drooling lips and lifeless eyes. All through the merrymaking he stumbled about, babbling the tale of his wrongs.

It was M'sieu the General, he kept repeating. It had always been M'sieu the General. It would be like that until he, Dugas, had had a settlement. And so he went on, half-whining, half-threatening, wholly regardless of the haste with which his listeners hurried away from him.

Upon inquiry I learned that Monsieur Dugas had met disaster while hiding in the marsh. Some one had struck him from behind, and afterward he had become queer. Now he was back on the prairie, where he drifted about, existing precariously upon such crumbs of charity as were grudgingly thrown him.

He was quite harmless, but he was also very tiresome with his eternal arraignment of M'sieu the General. This was his one obsession. For all his trials and misfor-

tunes he blamed the owner of Marsh Island.

Poor Monsieur Dugas! His plight was pitiful, yet it earned him little sympathy. Those who took trouble to speak to him declared that he was justly punished for his evil deeds.

Following Monsieur Bonnemaison's speech, the guests departed, the late ones being lighted upon their way by a bonfire that had been kindled at the edge of the prairie. So ended the celebration, a fitting close to that memorable Spring.

With the arrival of June, Madame Alcide made ready for her annual pilgrimage to the convent. Once again she set out alone, for despite the offer of a well-earned holiday, Doctor Poussard could not be induced to leave his post.

"It is impossible," he said to us. "The business might suffer. Also *madame* would not allow it. I have explained, and she agrees with me in every way."

He was a far different Poussard from the forlorn creature of that former desertion. As he spoke, his voice held almost a note of authority. Well clothed and well fed, he had none of the officiousness that is often the outcome of unexpected prosperity. Rather he was quietly pleased that in his own simple way he had justified his existence.

As for Monsieur Bonnemaison and myself, we were well satisfied to have him remain. Through our outside duties the little doctor had become indispensable. Often he was left in charge for the best part of the day.

During Madame Alcide's absence I thought much of Toinette. Save for that brief visit at the second Christmas I had not seen her in two years. Would she be much changed, I wondered. Already I had thought her grown.

Now she was eighteen, and for Bois Berard eighteen meant a woman in every way. Often girls were married there at sixteen. But of course Toinette would not think of marrying. Did she not have Madame Alcide and myself? The idea was ridiculous.

To my surprise I found Toinette little different at first. Save that she was now undeniably grown, she seemed very much the same. In the matter of looks she was thoroughly convincing. One glance at her, and my problem of the months before was

definitely solved. Despite my prejudiced eyes I knew that Monsieur Bonnemaïson had spoken truly.

For a week Toinette was once more my comrade of the marsh. Indeed, she seemed to have become a girl again, as she followed me about through field and forest. Her delight at my cane was almost childish. Each detail must be explained to her, while she listened round-eyed with amazement.

"Jean, Jean," she would cry. "It is too much. However did you do it?"

In those days I felt immeasurably older and wiser than Toinette. It was the convent, I told myself. What else could one expect after being shut in for all those months.

Later, when the crop had become a matter of course and Toinette had settled down to the life of the woods, I began to have certain misgivings. Perhaps my first estimate had been slightly wrong. Perhaps Toinette had not been so childish as she had appeared. She was so calm, so direct, so quietly sure of herself. It was just possible that she had made the most of my achievement.

That would be like Toinette. Had she not done the same thing when Papa Ton had left me in charge?

Gradually these doubts became a certainty. Gradually I came to know that my twenty years were as nothing to Toinette's eighteen. If she had been shut in, it had been to good purpose. During those months she had gone far ahead of me in every way.

At this time I often recalled my days of convalescence at Bayou Portage. In her attitude Toinette seemed somehow to have gone back to them. It was as if I had become little Jean again and she had recommenced my instruction in the business of life.

Yet like little Jean I soon conquered my resentment. Once more I set myself to learn, and in learning I came to find that Toinette and I had reached a new perfection of companionship. Where before we had shared the present, we now had the future together—a wonderful golden future, impossible for the marsh.

With Toinette this future meant a life of teaching. From her first month at the convent she had hoped for it, but it had seemed too much. Now with the ending of her third year she was almost sure. Al-

ready she had taught the little children successfully. The good sisters declared that she had found her true vocation.

All this Toinette told me in confidence, exacting my promise that I would say nothing of it to Madame Alcide.

"Even now it is no more than a hope, Jean," she said to me. "Only after I have finished can I be certain. Then it will be time to tell Tante Aurore."

"If I told her now and failed, I could not stand it. Tante Aurore has been far too good to me to risk such a thing. But think of what it will mean, Jean. Think of all those little ones seeking the chance that I shall be able to give them."

This was Toinette grown. Always she had been generous with the few good things of her life. Now, having received this gift of education, she found her chief joy in her ability to share it with others.

That was a long-remembered June. Each of its sunlit days brought an added contentment. Looking ahead, I saw only the warm, drowsy peace of a perfect Summer.

Then a cloud appeared to mar this fair horizon.

CHAPTER X

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

RETURNING one afternoon from the field, I found a visitor at Madame Alcide's. It was young Latour of St. Pierre, and he sat upon the gallery, talking to Toinette. Always mindful of his appearance, Latour was dressed with especial care. His horse, tied to the rack in front, represented the last word in grooming and equipment.

This much I saw at a glance, yet it told me nothing. As the older Latour was a wholesale dealer much favored by Monsieur Bonnemaïson, I concluded that he had sent his son to the woods upon some matter of business.

Our greeting over, I waited for Latour to make known his errand. This he seemed little inclined to do, for after a few commonplace remarks he resumed his conversation with Toinette.

The talk now turned to that part of the Summer when Toinette had visited her relatives. Evidently the relatives had made



much of this occasion. There had been dances and other entertainments, to which Latour had replied by giving a picnic of his own.

All this Toinette had told me, touching upon it lightly. I had not been interested, and she had quickly passed on to something else. Now, assisted by Latour, she made it the subject of an animated discussion.

It was very gay and pleasant, yet I had the uncomfortable feeling of being an outsider. Also I became painfully aware of the roughness of my field-clothes. I wished that I had come in from the back or that Latour had waited until Sunday for his visit. That was the day for calls anyhow. Then you could be sure of meeting people upon more equal terms.

When finally I went into the house, I considered Latour with a distinct sense of injury. First he had fooled me in the matter of his visit. Next he had made me feel ashamed of my clothes.

Later Madame Alcide invited Latour to supper. When it was over, he delayed his departure until moonrise. This time Madame Alcide took her place upon the gallery, and the talk was both varied and interesting.

Nevertheless I felt that I had been cheated. Certain things had occurred in the field which I had wished to discuss with Toinette. Now they would be overshadowed by the work of another day. It had all been very tiresome and unsettling. As Latour trotted off, I hoped that he would take his own good time in coming again.

Following his visit, Toinette had other callers. Perhaps Latour had told the tale of a pretty girl at Bois Berard. Perhaps, knowing of it already, the others had merely waited for him to set an example. At all events the young men began to ride in from St. Pierre and the prairie to spend an hour or so upon Madame Alcide's front gallery. As for Latour, his visits increased until he seemed fairly to haunt the woods.

Disturbed myself, I had expected Madame Alcide to be the same. In the well-ordered life of her household there should have been no place for these bothersome strangers. Yet she accepted it all as a matter of course. She even went farther and discovered an advantage in the situation.

"You see," she would say to Toinette. "We are not wholly uncivilized. Also it is

nice to receive your friends in your own home."

Toinette I gave up in despair. It seemed incredible that she should submit to so stupid an experience. A little coldness upon her part, and the callers would have taken their attentions elsewhere. Then we could have returned to our interrupted companionship.

But Toinette bore with it patiently. At times she seemed genuinely pleased. Always she was so pleasant and cordial that the callers made haste to return. Yet she gave no hint of vanity. All her life she had won attention. She accepted it as her due.

At this time I suffered no pang of jealousy. I was troubled, perplexed, disgusted, perhaps, but my feelings went little farther. True, I knew only too well what this calling meant. Latour was deadly in earnest, as were several of the others.

Yet I viewed their efforts with a curious mixture of pity and contempt. It seemed wholly futile that these young men should ride so far and so often for a girl who would never have them.

Sure of Toinette before, I was doubly sure of her now. Did she not mean to teach? Then how could she do so with a home and family? The callers were merely wasting their time. They might be a nuisance, but I could find in them no cause for apprehension.

Thus I argued, fairly convinced that with the passing of time these foolish intruders would realize the hopelessness of their quest. But for all my assurance they continued to intrude. Always they were riding and driving in, either to call or to take Toinette to some entertainment outside.

Mid-Summer found me thoroughly exasperated. Toinette's vacation was now more than half over. Also it had developed into a constant source of irritation. True, the callers spent many evenings away, but I could never count upon them.

At the very moment when I wanted them least, they were certain to appear. If I complained, Madame Alcide was quick to remind me that Toinette was having a good time. This was so, perhaps, but I was having an exceedingly bad one.

It did not occur to me that I might be both stupid and selfish. I had been so busy in store and field that I knew nothing of even the crude social life of the woods.

I had paid no calls nor had I attended the occasional balls and dances. Thanks to Madame Alcide and her books, I had found my amusement at home.

Thus I was unable either to understand or accept the inevitable outcome of Toinette's attractiveness. Instead I sulked and gloomed like an ill-natured boy. It was all so trifling and useless. Why could they not leave Toinette alone?

And next Summer it would be the same. I knew that now. This much at least had been hammered into me by the persistency of the callers. It made no difference that Toinette did not intend to marry. As long as she remained young and pretty, she would be sought after.

Added to these annoyances was the talk that went about. Ever eager for gossip, the wood-folk made the most of Toinette's popularity. Each week brought some new and startling rumor. Toinette had accepted Latour. She had made her choice, but she would not announce it until the day of her return to the convent. A dozen times she was reported to have eloped, and it was even said once that she was already secretly married.

That this talk was as silly as it was idle I knew only too well, yet in due time it had its effect. With every one predicting Toinette's speedy marriage, I began to doubt my former convictions. The wood-folk might be extravagant, but I had the wit to know that in the main they were discussing a very ordinary possibility.

Other girls married, leaving father and mother. Why should not Toinette, an orphan, do the same? True, there was her plan to teach, and to it I clung with the strength of despair. It remained for Doctor Poussard to shatter this final hope.

As loyal as he was punctilious, the little doctor had taken no part in the gossip. Always he had frowned upon it, uttering a sharp reprimand whenever the talk ran too freely at the store. Thus, when after such an outburst we found ourselves alone, he gave vent to his indignation.

"*Dieu*, these tongue-waggers!" he exclaimed. "Nothing is sacred to them, not even a young girl's name."

"That is so," I agreed. "They think that Toinette is like the rest. It is beyond them to see that she will never marry."

It happened that Doctor Poussard was engaged in arranging some goods upon a

shelf. I was thankful for this, for I knew that he would reply without looking up. Just then I was not anxious for the little doctor's regard. There had been an unspoken challenge in my words.

Accepting my challenge, Doctor Poussard made light of it.

"Come, Jean, that is a good one," he joked. "Toinette never marry? You are outgossiping the gossips."

"Just the same it is so," I persisted stubbornly.

This time the little doctor looked up before replying. Evidently he wished to make sure that I was in earnest. He spoke firmly yet kindly, his tone suggesting instruction rather than argument.

"No, Jean, you are wrong," said he. "Toinette will marry. The Toinettes of this world always marry. They must do so, if only to be let alone. You will be lucky if she is unpromised a year from now."

A question rushed to my lips, yet I could not put it fairly. I could only utter a vague compromise.

"But what if a girl has—has plans?" I demanded.

At this the little doctor smiled, not in mirth but with a stark bitterness that was terrible to see.

"Plans?" he echoed, and in his voice there was the weariness of one who has spanned the reach of endless barren years. "Ah, yes, we all have plans. That is what is called 'ambition.' We strive and hope, and then something comes along and we find ourselves concerned only with the necessity to keep going."

He paused and suddenly he was the old Doctor Poussard again, calm and gentle, gravely resigned to the tyranny of life.

"Plans will not do, Jean," he finished. "Each girl has plans until the right man comes along."

Following this talk, I reached a state of final desperation. Try as I might, I could not doubt the little doctor. He had made it all too unpleasantly plain.

Toinette would marry. There could be no doubt of that. Her ambition would be forgotten once the right man came along. And he would come. He always came. Otherwise there would be few marriages indeed.

It was dreadful to think of losing Toinette, but there seemed nothing that I



could do. It was life, nature, the way of the world. One could not stand out against such things. One could only accept them, patiently if possible, like Doctor Poussard.

So I tormented myself through the breathless days of August. Then, when the Summer had all but burned itself away, I had a sudden inspiration. In a flash I saw a way out—a simple, easy way that meant happiness for every one. Since Toinette must marry, I would marry her myself. That would settle the matter for all time.

Following the relief of this discovery came a vast amazement at my blindness and stupidity. It was incredible that I had not thought of this before. Why, it was only what I would have been forced to do in course of time. Toinette and I were not brother and sister. Once Madame Alcide was gone, we could no longer live together.

And I had not considered this. Absorbed in the store and my crop, I had blundered along with never a thought of the future. Now that I faced it, I was aghast at the risk I had run.

Madame Alcide was old. Toinette was young and desirable. Should the one die, the other marry, I would be left entirely alone.

This thought brought panic. What if I was too late? What if Toinette had already given her promise? There were Latour and the rest. They had been making their try, while I in my ignorance had looked on laughing.

It was plain that I had played the fool, yet like all who accomplish this feat I was little inclined to accept the consequences of my folly. If I had delayed, I would make up for it with immediate action. I promised myself that I would speak to Toinette that very night.

CHAPTER XI

THE WAY OF TOINETTE

FORTUNATELY there was no caller that evening, although, had one appeared, his stay would have been brief. So overwrought was I that I would have gone to any length to be rid of him.

Yet for all this I did not speak to Toinette immediately after supper. Instead I nursed my impatience until the sun was well down below the forest-rim. Then, when the woods were gray and shadowy with the mystery of the twilight, I prepared to act.

“Come,” said I. “We will go as far as the big oak.”

Walking along with Toinette at my side, I lost my fears for a sense of security. It now seemed that I had been the victim of my imagination.

Toinette was so natural, so wholly her usual self. Surely she could not be like that unless she were heart-whole. She must show the stress of a secret promise.

Each moment my confidence increased. I was in time, and I also felt that I was entitled to a certain preferment. Even if I were not the right man spoken of by Doctor Poussard, I was at least the first man in Toinette’s experience, and this must count for something.

So I went on, masking my thoughts behind a chatter of small talk, until the vast bulk of the big oak reared itself above its lesser neighbors. Beyond the ground was wet and boggy from the seepage of the near-by marsh, so that there was nothing for it but to turn back toward the settlement. Facing about, I gripped my courage hard.

“Toinette,” I began, “you remember that last day at the camp?”

“Of course,” she replied. “How can I ever forget it?”

“Then you have not forgotten the meeting at Tante Odile’s,” I went on. “You wished to stay, and when *madame* declared it impossible, you said that we would marry and keep on as before. You remember this also?”

“Yes,” answered Toinette. “I remember it well.”

“And you meant it?”

“As you know—every word.”

“And now?” I questioned. “What if it were to happen now? Would you say the same and mean it?”

Thus far Toinette had followed me with the half-idle interest of one who discusses a well-remembered past. Now at my last words she turned upon me with a startled swiftness that held almost a hint of fear.

“Come, Jean, what is it?” she demanded “Do you mean——”

“Yes, Toinette,” said I, answering her

unspoken thought. "That is what I mean. I want you to marry me."

For a space Toinette was silent as she stared at me through the dusk. Having spoken, I had looked away so that I could catch no glimpse of her features. Yet I knew that she stared. I could feel her eyes pass over me like carefully searching hands. Then came her voice, half-shy, half-glad, yet having about it a quiet insistence that was like a supplement to her gaze.

"But why, Jean?" she questioned.

Had she spoken in some foreign tongue, I would have found it easier to reply. "Why indeed?" I asked myself. True, I could have uttered some pretty speech but I knew that Toinette was not asking for pretty speeches. She wanted the truth. And what was the truth? For the life of me I could not say.

"Why?" I echoed lamely. "Why does any man ask a girl to marry him? Because he wishes her to be his wife."

"So," said Toinette and turned abruptly back again for all the world as if she had been fully answered. Anxious and bewildered, I fell into step beside her.

"Well?" I asked, after I had waited in vain for her to speak. "What have you to say, Toinette?"

"Why, what can I say but 'yes,' Jean," she replied. "Am I not yours as I have always been? Have we not belonged to each other since that Christmas Eve when, in spite of my warning, you cast your lot with ours? You knew what it meant to stay, yet you did not say no., How can I say 'no' now?"

Though her voice was flat and dead, I paid no heed. How could I know that it was the weariness of disappointment?

It was the memory of that Christmas Eve, of course. Her thoughts had gone back to a dark and bitter time. Then too I was fully occupied with my own sense of relief and satisfaction.

"Then that is all right, Toinette," said I. "You have taken a load from my mind. I have been worried, I can tell you."

Dim though the light was, I could catch the puzzled look that came into Toinette's face.

"Worried?" she questioned. "Why?"

"It was Latour," I explained, "Latour and the rest."

"Ah," exclaimed Toinette, and now she

was quick and eager. "Then you were jealous, Jean?"

"Perhaps," I answered vaguely. "I do not know."

"But if it was M'sieu Latour and the rest—"

She broke off and added smiling—

"Those boys! It was foolish of you, Jean."

"Just the same I was worried," I went on doggedly. "I feared that you might marry. And what would become of me then if anything happened to *madame*?"

Toinette considered this for what seemed a very long time.

"I see," said she finally. "Then it is not so much that you wish to marry me as that you do not wish me to marry some one else?"

This was rather complex for one in my state of mind.

"No," I struggled, "it is not that."

"Then what is it?" persisted Toinette mercilessly.

"*Dieu*," I exploded, at the end of my resources. "I am all mixed up. I want you, Toinette. That is all I know."

By now we had reached the clearing that bordered that end of the settlement. Just ahead loomed the vague outline of the little store, dark and deserted since the flight of Monsieur Dugas. Beyond the cabin lights stood out against the dusk like soft reflections of the stars.

We were almost back again, yet I did not halt. Instead I pushed blindly forward until Toinette, swinging in before me, laid a detaining hand upon my shoulder. Then came her other hand, and her eyes, troubled and penitent, looked into mine.

"Jean, Jean," she pleaded. "You must not go back like this. Why, it is almost a quarrel, the first that we have ever had. If I have teased you, I am sorry. But you were so serious, Jean. Now we will sit down and you will tell me what you do mean—that is, if you know yourself."

Releasing me, she seated herself upon one of the many stumps that dotted the clearing. She had finished lightly, yet her attitude was one of tenseness. I noticed that her hands were tightly clasped as I dropped down beside her.

"Now we will start all over again, Jean," she began. "You wish to marry me?"

"As I have said."

"And you love me?"

"Of course."

"But you have not told me so."

"Why should I, when you know it so well?"

"True," muttered Toinette, and in the pause that followed she relaxed, unclasping her hands.

"Well?" I urged, after I had waited, plucking at the grass.

Coming to herself with a little start, Toinette threw out her hands.

"But how can we, Jean?" she demanded. "It is something to dream of, that is all."

Here was complexity with a vengeance. Brief though it was, I had been unable to solve Toinette's reverie.

"You mean—" I began.

"Jean, Jean," she interrupted. "Can you not see? Have you not thought? Do you imagine that there is nothing to all this save your question and my answer? There are a dozen things that make it impossible. Why, I am not even out of the convent."

"I had thought of that," said I. "I can wait."

"Then there is my teaching."

"That also can be arranged."

"And your cane, Jean. What of that? You have just started, and you are doing well. How would it be with a wife?"

This obstacle I paused to consider, since it bulked far larger in my eyes than in those of Toinette herself. How, indeed, would it be with a wife? If I were to keep on as I had planned, each penny that I could scrape and save must go toward the crop. I would be hard put to it to look out for myself. And what if I had poor luck? Cane is tricky. With a bad year I might easily find myself in debt.

The fact that I had overlooked this only rendered my position the harder. To my shame was added a feeling of helplessness. Here I was insisting upon Toinette's marrying me, when I was not even sure that I could support a wife.

Evidently Toinette was more proficient than myself in the matter of solving reveries.

"You see," she observed. "We must be free for a while. Otherwise we can not go ahead. We have our chance, Jean, and we must make the most of it. We must not think of marrying now."

This seemed true enough. Following Toinette's reasoning, I found that I had no particular desire for an immediate marriage

myself. All my thoughts and hopes were fixed upon my plans for the future. Once they were realized, it would be time to think of settling down.

"You are right, Toinette," I agreed. "I have gone too fast. But I was worried, and I did not think."

Toinette accepted this with a smile, half-rising from her stump. It was only too plain that for her the discussion was ended.

"*Bien, Jean,*" said she. "Yet you worried for nothing. Those boys—"

She broke off abruptly, realizing her mistake, but already it was too late. With her words had returned the trials of that Summer to drive all thoughts of prudence from my mind.

What was my cane compared to the torment of the Summer to come? With Toinette free of the convent it would be worse than ever. There would be no peace for me, no rest. Always I would be thinking of what the little doctor had said.

It was too much. I could not stand it. We must marry and take our chance. And yet, even as I sprang to my feet, my mood held far less of jealousy than of final exasperation.

"Wait," began Toinette, but her words were lost in the violence of my outburst.

"No," I cried. "I can not wait. We must settle this here and now. Either you will marry me or refuse me. There is no other way."

In what followed, Toinette acted with a swiftness that told of impulse rather than thought. Indeed, I was hardly conscious that she had risen, before her hands were upon my shoulders again. This time they gripped me fiercely, while in the eyes upturned to mine was a look of quiet purpose such as I had not seen there before.

"No, Jean," said she. "There is a way. Even though we should not marry and you can not wait, there is still this way, if only you can trust me."

There could be but one answer to this.

"Trust you?" I echoed. "If I do not trust you, whom else can I trust?"

"So," said Toinette. "Then I give you my solemn promise that I will marry no one but yourself. Surely you will be willing to wait with that."

Again I was reduced to a single answer. Toinette had won. Yet, as I considered her offer, I did not feel that I had lost.



Come what might, I could count upon Toinette to be as good as her given word.

"That may do," I gave in grudgingly.

And I added after a moment—

"Then we are betrothed?"

Toinette's smile was enigmatic.

"Perhaps," she replied. "Who can say?"

At all events we understand each other."

Dropping her hands, she went on more seriously:

"But we must keep it to ourselves for the present, Jean. Otherwise it would be foolish. No one must know, not even Tante Aurore."

The wisdom of this could not be gained. Indeed, when I considered Madame Alcide's inevitable opinion of our agreement, my sensations were rather those of a naughty boy than of an accepted suitor.

"Of course," I consented hastily. "You can count upon me to say nothing."

After this there fell rather an awkward silence which lasted more or less throughout our return to the settlement. At the moment there seemed nothing to talk about. Having exhausted the present, we had arrived at a future far too indefinite to be of any particular interest.

Aside from this I was in no mood for speech. Just then I was experiencing the dazed confusion of one who has revolved rapidly in a mental circle.

Toinette had been too quick for me. So swiftly had she passed from one phase of the affair to another that I was still rather uncertain as to what had actually occurred. I felt that, if left to myself, it would all gradually straighten itself out in my mind. Therefore I was only too glad when, upon reaching the house, Madame Alcide declared that we had walked half the night, and promptly hurried us off to bed.

Later in the privacy of my room, I pieced together the events of the evening. The result, while promising a satisfactory conclusion, was far from gratifying. Indeed, I could only feel that, considered as a proposal, my effort had proved a pitiful failure.

Not only did it lack the joy and ardor demanded by such an occasion. It was even devoid of the usual pleasant after-consequences of announcement and congratulation.

In my musings of the afternoon I had spent some time in considering how I might best break the news to Bois Berard. Now

there would be no news to break. Monsieur Bonnemaïson would not pound me jovially upon the back. The little doctor would not shake me gravely by the hand.

And, worst of all, I was denied the pleasure of sending Latour and his friends about their business. True, I was now assured that their efforts were useless, but this mattered little when they did not know it themselves.

When at last I dropped off to sleep, it was with a most uncomfortable sense of defeat. Somehow I felt as if Toinette had tricked me.

Next day, being wholly dissatisfied, I waylaid Toinette and demanded a readjustment of the situation. This she refused, declining even to discuss the matter. It was all settled, she declared. There was no need to go into it again.

Throughout this brief interview Toinette was both gentle and patient, but she was also very firm. Afterward she kept me at arm's length, merely replying with a smile and a shrug to my frequent demands as to whether we were really betrothed.

I will never forget those few remaining weeks of Toinette's vacation. In their uncertainty and bewilderment they were worse even than the ones that had gone before. It was almost a relief when they finally ended and Toinette drove back to the convent again. I missed her, but with her departure I managed to regain some part of my peace of mind.

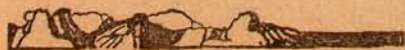
Then came the Fall to turn my thoughts to the all-important matter of grinding.

CHAPTER XII

MONSIEUR BONNEMAISON REVEALS HIMSELF

THAT year the taking off of the crop occupied my entire attention. It was a splendid crop, if not quite the equal of my first one, and, thanks to the increase of acreage, it promised an excellent profit. As a consequence Monsieur Bonnemaïson was little inclined to take any risks in the matter of its disposal.

"You must be with it from the cutting of the first stalk to the weighing of the final cart, Jean," said he. "Also I will give you what help I can. This is the important year, and we must make the most of our



opportunity. Once we have done so, our success is assured."

It was significant that Monsieur Bonnemaïson spoke in the plural. However, he had declared his attitude some time before. All through the Summer he had been about the field, watching the crop with an ever increasing interest.

In addition he had discussed the growing of cane with all of the enthusiasm that he had formerly bestowed upon his cherished politics. In brief, Monsieur Bonnemaïson had been quietly fitting himself for the profession of agriculture. His "our success" was merely his way of informing me that he had now reached a stage where he felt justified in sharing our joint responsibility.

His offer of assistance I accepted eagerly. I had hoped for it, nor indeed could I have done very well without it. In the art of managing men Monsieur Bonnemaïson was a master. During the trials of the Spring he had proved this upon more than one occasion.

"I thank you, *m'sieu*," said I. "It is good of you, especially your offer to help. But what of the store?"

"We can leave that to Poussard," answered Monsieur Bonnemaïson. "If necessary I will find him a clerk."

He paused as if in thought, while his smile took on a touch of whimsicality.

"It is curious about the store," he added. "It was once my world. Beyond it and my home I had nothing in view. But that was before I had looked about me."

Thus Doctor Poussard achieved the seventh heaven of being left wholly in charge. It was a tremendous event for him, and his pride was only equaled by his sense of responsibility. However, as he had conducted the business alone throughout the greater part of the Summer, his position was little changed save for the generous increase that Monsieur Bonnemaïson saw fit to make in his wages.

This arrangement, although highly satisfactory to the little doctor and myself, placed me in what I conceived to be an irregular position. Now that I had abandoned my work at the store, I could hardly consider myself in Monsieur Bonnemaïson's employment. As a consequence I felt that I was no longer entitled to my former pay.

Monsieur Bonnemaïson, however, made short work of this fine-spun theory. I was in his employment, he declared. He had

not dismissed me, and until he did so, I was under his orders. If he chose to put me in the field instead of the store, that was his affair.

This was true as far as it went, but being young and disposed to take a high stand in the matter, I accused Monsieur Bonnemaïson of padding his pay-roll in order to gratify his generosity. Thereupon he ceased his blustering and for the first time allowed me a glimpse of the far-seeing shrewdness that lay forever ambushed behind his smile.

"Are you blind, Jean?" he chided me. "Must I show you everything? But then I was blind myself. Like you I stuck in one place. My eyes were opened only through the politics, the talk outside."

He paused, checked by his usual caution, and when he went on, it was with a restraint that only lessened before his ever increasing interest.

"You spoke of the store," he continued. "As I have said, it was once my world. Now compare it with this new world of mine, a world of cane reaching from here to the refineries of St. Pierre. You may think this too much, but I tell you that it will come. Also it will not be in one great plantation or a dozen but in a hundred scattered farms."

He broke off, and one of his short arms went out as if to point a vision actually before us.

"You see, Jean? You see?" he demanded.

I saw, but it was not the vision of my dreams. Always they had shown me the broad acres of the planter.

"It is something to think of, but it will also be something to manage, *m'sieu*," said I. "How will you see after a hundred scattered farms?"

Before replying, Monsieur Bonnemaïson looked at me as if to make sure that I was not joking.

"*Dieu*, Jean," he exclaimed. "You are blinder than I thought. Can you see nothing but your crop? It is not the cane or even the farms. They are nothing. It is the land that counts, those acres out there that have been good only for cattle to walk over. What will they be worth when we have proved that they can make the best of cane?"

I saw now, but dimly. It was not easy to grasp it. The prairie was like the ocean.



It gave one the impression of an endless expanse.

"Then you mean—" I began.

"Most certainly," interrupted Monsieur Bonnemaïson.

And he added, reading my thoughts with the ease of one scanning a printed page:

"Yes, there is a lot of it, Jean. Even now I am not sure of my own acreage."

With his words came a new conception, a conception so fabulous that I almost feared to put it to the test of speech.

"But, *m'sieu*," I faltered. "Madame Alcide—she also has hundreds of acres—"

Rubbing his fat hands with relish, Monsieur Bonnemaïson uttered an undeniable chuckle. Despite my denseness he had at last driven home the point of his joke.

"Of course, Jean," said he. "Your *madame* will be rich some day, and all through you. At first I was like yourself, I saw only the cane. Then I began to look ahead. After your first year I was almost sure. Now I know. It may take time, but it will come. Good land is good land. You have only to make folk see."

As he finished, Monsieur Bonnemaïson's face flushed suddenly crimson. At the time I thought this the result of his vehemence. Now I know that he had just begun to realize the extent to which he had revealed himself. Yet it was proof of his fondness for me that, having done so, he allowed me to remain in his confidence. In all that followed his attitude was that of the partner rather than of the employer.

Just now, however, he returned to the latter rôle.

"*Bien*, Jean," said he bruskiy. "Let us have no more talk of unearned pay. I am playing for my greatest stake and you are my best card. You will do well to remember this."

Following Monsieur Bonnemaïson's disclosure I attacked my work with an eagerness that was tempered by an acute sense of responsibility. It was now no longer a question of my future, but of Madame Alcide's. If I failed, I could start again. For her it was the last chance of prosperity. Like Lafitte, Alcide Berard had left his treasure underground. It remained for me to bring it to the-light of day.

If I did so, what a joy it would be! Why, it would mean that I had made some return to Madame Alcide for her ceaseless care and affection. Repayment, even of

the slightest, would be a supreme satisfaction.

Although no mention had been made of the matter, I knew that my work at the store was definitely ended. Next year we would again increase our acreage, and already my employer was considering a scheme of small separate crops to be worked upon the tenant-system.

This meant a heavy increase of duty, for Monsieur Bonnemaïson, although wholly admirable as an executive, was of little use in the field. It was plain that I would have all, and perhaps more, than I would well attend to.

Evidently Monsieur Bonnemaïson was not without an appreciation of the task ahead of me, for soon after our talk he sent word to the field one afternoon that he must see me immediately at the store. Upon arriving there, I found him busily engaged in inspecting a bunch of ponies that had been driven in by a rider from the prairie. They were small wiry ponies of a type frankly Cajun, yet even to my untrained eyes they showed the results of careful breeding.

"Well?" questioned Monsieur Bonnemaïson. "What do you think of them? They are from old Lalandre."

After this there was no room for criticism, even had I been capable of it. The horses of Cyprien Lalandre, the patriarch of the prairie, were in a class by themselves.

"They are beauties, all of them, *m'sieu*," said I enthusiastically. "Any choice will be a wise one."

"True," agreed Monsieur Bonnemaïson. "Yet there must always be a preference. Come, Jean, what do you say?"

Thus questioned, I considered the ponies until finally I decided upon a tough little sorrel with markings of white about the head and forelegs.

"*Bien*," said Monsieur Bonnemaïson, and called the rider into the store, from which he presently emerged to tie the sorrel to the rack in front.

"This is Rouge," he announced before trotting away with his remaining charges.

Only waiting for him to start, I prepared to follow his example. I was both puzzled and irritated by this unexpected summons. That Monsieur Bonnemaïson should buy a new pony was all very well and good. That, however, he should call me in to make a choice for him was a different matter. I



knew little of horses, and just then the work in the field was particularly pressing.

"If you are through with me, *m'sieu*, I will go back again," said I. "There is much to be done before sunset."

Answering my tone, Monsieur Bonnemaison made a gesture of mock despair.

"Jean, you are hopeless," he cried. "Do you imagine that I sent for you on account of your knowledge of horseflesh? Come, use the sense that you show in other things. Here I have given you the pick of old Lalandre's best, and you have not the wit to see it."

For a moment I was unable to reply. All along I had desired a horse of my own. Only the stern necessities of my crop had prevented me from buying one months before. True, I had had the use of Monsieur Bonnemaison's animal, but he was a ponderous beast, ill-adapted to the saddle.

"For me, *m'sieu*?" I finally managed to ask. "For me?"

"Of course," smiled Monsieur Bonnemaison. "Also you need not thank me, since I am merely adding to our equipment. And now come inside for a saddle and bridle. The sooner you choose them, the quicker you can ride back to the field again."

Thus I came into possession of Rouge, whose equal I have yet to mount. True, he was often uncertain of temper. True also that despite every effort he remained unbroken to harness. These deficiencies were but the proof of his breeding. Without them he would not have been a Cajun pony.

For the rest, he lacked no single virtue of his kind. He was swift, he was willing, and his gaits lacked the usual pounding. In addition he seemed tireless. Though the road be long and the going heavy, his last mile was ever like his first one.

During the first flush of my gratitude I had determined to abolish the rather obvious Rouge in favor of the given name of my employer. But this Monsieur Bonnemaison refused to allow.

"But you can not do it," he objected. "He is already named. He is Rouge just as he is a horse. It is impossible."

Accordingly Rouge retained his original title, nor in afterdays did I greatly regret this arrangement. For, being blissfully ignorant of a sardonic future, Monsieur Bonnemaison's parents had seen fit to christen him "Narcisse."

Thanks to my employer's foresight, I now found little difficulty in looking after our crop. Mounted upon Rouge, it was an easy matter to follow the work in all parts of the field. Yet with the arrival of grinding I soon saw that it would be impossible for me to accompany the carts to the island. For us it was a large crop, and the labor was uncertain. Only through constant supervision could I be certain of the cutting and loading.

Accordingly we decided upon a division of labor. I would keep to the field and take off the crop. Joe Vital, promoted now to the position of head teamster, would attend to its hauling. At the island Monsieur Bonnemaison would look after the weights and prices and the various other matters pertaining to its disposal.

These latter duties were of a sort to appeal directly to the genius of Monsieur Bonnemaison. From the first he evidenced a wholly unconcealed delight in them. Each morning he drove off with the first of the carts. Each afternoon he stopped at the field to report the day's proceedings.

"It is the best of all, this cane," he would exclaim enthusiastically. "It is making a young man of me. I can not understand how I spent all those years behind my counter."

Of the general he spoke often, for the two had found a meeting-ground in the discussion of cane and politics.

"He is a sharp one, *M'sieu* the General," Monsieur Bonnemaison would declare. "As a planter he is an expert, and he has also told me some things about the police jury of which I had never so much as dreamed. I am only waiting for the next meeting. Believe me, there are one or two members who have a surprize in store for them."

And he would add as often as not:

"*M'sieu* the General is pleased with our effort. He says that we have done well, yourself in particular. Indeed, he has more than once inquired about you. This means something, Jean. The good-will of such a man will go far to help us."

Later, when the crop was off and grinding over, he became more explicit.

"You are lucky, Jean," said he one day when talking of the island. "*M'sieu* the General seems to have taken a real interest in you. Now that I think of it, he has asked everything about you. Not all at once, of course, but from time to time. It

is only since I have considered his questions together that I have realized their completeness."

This should have given me something to think of, but at the time I was absorbed in our plans for the coming year. Again the prairie-crop had proved a success, and Monsieur Bonnemaïson was preparing to branch out in a truly startling manner.

Not only had he decided to plant the last possible acre on his own account. He was already arranging a number of small crops upon his proposed tenant-system.

All this meant a tonnage of cane beyond the capacity of the general's antiquated mill. On the other hand, the long haul to the refineries of St. Pierre would prove prohibitive. Monsieur Bonnemaïson, however, seemed little annoyed by the difficulties of this situation.

"Wait and see," he had replied, when I pointed them out to him. "Is there not a railroad on the prairie, and am I not a member of the police jury? All I ask is that you grow the cane, Jean. I will guarantee that it gets to the mill."

Accordingly I had found no lack of work with the end of grinding. From dawn to dark I was in the saddle, arranging the details of this sudden expansion. Many acres of the prairie must be examined with an eye to cultivation.

Also there was the fresh accumulation of teams and carts and implements. For these I went to St. Pierre, so that I soon became a familiar figure upon the streets of the town.

And there one day I ran across Le Bossu, seeing him for the first time since his visit to the woods. We met upon the street, and the little man's delight and satisfaction were only equalled by my own.

"Jean, Jean," he cried as he gripped me. "So we have come together at last. All along we have been dodging each other like boats in a fog. And now we will have some coffee, and you will tell me all about Toinette and yourself. *Dieu!* It warms my heart to be with you again."

We sat long over the coffee-cups while I gave Le Bossu my news, telling him of all that had occurred save my betrothal. And this, in my joy of seeing him, I would have confided as well, had it not been for my promise to Toinette.

Afterward the little man spoke briefly of himself. He had enjoyed the swamp. In-

deed, once he had become accustomed to it, he had found it hard to leave. Since getting back, it had been the usual thing, and just now he was outfitting for an expedition to White Lake. Yes, it was far, but that was to be expected. One had to travel these days for good skins.

This time Le Bossu's farewell was more comforting.

"Good-by for a little while, Jean," said he at parting. "With the end of the season I will be back again. And you say that Toinette leaves the convent this year? *Bien!* You may tell her that despite my neglect she will see me then."

Thus with these various distractions I paid scant heed to Monsieur Bonnemaïson's talk of the general. If my grandfather had developed a sudden interest in me, it was no affair of mine. Our relationship had been definitely established upon the occasion of our first meeting. Five minutes after Monsieur Bonnemaïson had spoken to me, his words were completely forgotten.

As a consequence, I was wholly unprepared for an event that occurred near the end of Winter. Riding into St. Pierre one morning upon a matter of business, I was handed a note by Monsieur Gajan, the dealer from whom I bought my implements. Of the source of the note Monsieur Gajan knew nothing. He could only say that it had been left at his place for delivery.

Having read the note, which requested that I call at once on Judge Cestia upon a matter of importance, I had still no suspicion. For, as St. Pierre's leading lawyer, Judge Cestia had more than once looked after the interests of Monsieur Bonnemaïson.

Setting out in answer to his summons, I decided that it merely concerned some fresh ramification upon the part of my employer.

CHAPTER XIII

AN INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE CESTIA

AS BECAME one of his position, Judge Cestia occupied the entire lower floor of a small brick building near the courthouse. In front was a waiting-room furnished with the usual chairs and table and an orderly array of leather-backed volumes. Beyond this room and connected with it by



means of a heavy door was the private office in which the judge considered the affairs of his various clients.

Upon arriving in the waiting-room, I was received by a clerk to whom I gave my name, adding that as I was very busy, I should like to see the judge as soon as possible. Having looked me over with evident dissatisfaction, the clerk replied that the judge was busy also and I could come back in the afternoon.

Thereupon I thought of my note, which produced an immediate and satisfactory effect. One glance at it, and the clerk had popped into the inner office. A moment later he popped out again, requesting with the utmost politeness that I step inside.

Had I been versed in the way of law-offices, I might have been impressed by this sudden change of front. As it was, I merely congratulated myself upon not destroying the note and passed in all innocence into the other room.

Here were more leather-backed volumes, lining the walls and overflowing on to a large flat-topped desk at which the judge was waiting to receive me.

He was a small dapper man, very careful as to his dress and the waxing of his pointed white mustache. For the rest, in the suave assurance of his gaze, in the finely modulated tones of his voice, he was the very embodiment of the twin legal virtues of discretion and persuasion. One had but to look at Judge Cestia to know that he was discreet. One had only to hear him speak to realize the impossibility of refusing him.

As I entered, the judge bowed courteously and then looked beyond me to where his clerk was shutting the door. This accomplished, he turned back to me in swift apology.

"Pardon," said he in French. "It is necessary that the door be properly closed. Otherwise it is not sound-proof."

Motioning me to a chair he added—

"You are Monsieur Marsh, of course?"

I was startled and I showed it. I could see Judge Cestia's eyebrows go up in acknowledgment of my confusion.

"No, *m'sieu*," I replied. "I am afraid that you have made a mistake. I am Jean Trouvé."

The judge considered this, twisting a point of his mustache.

"I see," said he finally. "Then I will put

my question in a different manner. Were you not at one time John Marsh?"

This could not be denied. In addition my curiosity was now thoroughly aroused.

"Yes, *m'sieu*," I answered promptly.

"Then you are the grandson of General Marsh, of Marsh Island?"

"I was at that time, *m'sieu*."

Dismissing this distinction with a shrug, the judge settled back in his chair.

"Very good," said he. "We can now go ahead with the business in hand. But before doing so, I must tell you that it is an affair of the utmost delicacy. For this reason I addressed you at Gajan's rather than through the mail. I am sure that I can rely upon you to keep what is said here between ourselves?"

"Of course, *m'sieu*."

"Very good," repeated the judge and fell abruptly silent, as if marshaling his thoughts.

It was evident that, to him at least, the forthcoming disclosure was one of considerable importance.

"To begin with, there are certain points to be established," he resumed after a moment. "Once you have considered them and fixed them in your mind, you will the more readily grasp the full meaning of my proposal.

"In the first place your grandfather, General Marsh, is growing old. In the second he is possessed of a very considerable estate. In the third he has no heirs beyond some distant cousins. In the fourth, not only are you his grandson, but he has had some very good reports of you. These are the points to which I referred. I have made them clear to you?"

"Save in one respect," I answered. "If General Marsh wishes me to know these things, why does he not tell me of them himself?"

To me it seemed a perfectly natural question. Nevertheless the judge was visibly disturbed. It was not often that he was forced to submit to so direct and brutal an attack upon his discretion.

"Pardon," said he, "but you do not appreciate my position. As a lawyer I am not the master but the servant of my clients. They come to me with certain demands which I can only put into execution. It is not for me to question them as to their motives."

To this I replied with a nod, for by now

my thoughts were elsewhere. I knew what was coming and in knowing it I was filled with a vast and bitter resentment.

Evidently the judge misunderstood my nod, for he leaned forward in his chair to smile at me. It was a friendly, comforting, half-patronizing smile, plainly intended to set me at my ease.

"Be assured," it seemed to say. "What if great affairs are afoot? Am I not here to attend to them?"

Then Judge Cestia spoke, very quietly, almost solemnly, yet with an effectiveness that was a triumph of repression.

"*Monsieur*," said he, "it is my pleasure to inform you that General Marsh has decided to make you his heir. Not only this, but he requests you to come to him at Marsh Island. There you will take your proper place as his grandson."

He paused, glancing at me as if in expectation of another nod, but this time I was ready for him. Also, if in reply I answered him shortly, it was with no intention of giving offense. Put into words, the general's offer had further infuriated me by what I considered its calm effrontery.

He was a cool one, my grandfather. First he had driven me off when, helpless and alone, I had applied for his protection. Now, being in need of an heir and finding me better suited to his taste, he was ordering me back by means of his lawyer.

"*M'sieu*," said I, "I have heard your proposal, and here is my answer. You may tell the general that I have already found my proper place. Also that I intend to keep it."

That Judge Cestia expressed no surprise at this curt refusal was significant. Evidently he had been prepared for it. Still leaning forward in his chair, he surveyed me with a look in which was a curious blending of pity and distaste. His attitude was that of a connoisseur who observes the wilful rejection of some rare and priceless possession.

"So, *monsieur*," said he. "Then you refuse to consider the matter?"

"I have considered it," I replied. "Were I to think over it a month, my answer would be the same."

At this he eyed me with sudden suspicion. "If you think that you have any claim," he began. "Your father married under age and without consent——"

He broke off, as if reassured by my look, and went on in his former tone:

"Come, *monsieur*. You must be reasonable. At least you will admit that we are not discussing a trifle. Therefore you can hardly put me off with a word."

"True," I agreed. "Yet what else can I say? It must be either yes or no, and I have already said 'no.' If you wish my reasons——"

The judge held up his hand. Also he now abandoned his formal "*monsieur*." Thus he subtly indicated the gulf that must ever exist between a prospective John Marsh and an obdurate Jean Trouvé.

"No, my friend, no reasons," said he. "They relate to events long past and forgotten. Our business is with the present."

"So you know?" I questioned.

"I do," he replied. "It is my business to know. Therefore I can assure you that my reasons, which relate to your acceptance, are the only ones of consequence. Come, let us consider them. You are interested in cane, are you not?"

"I am, *m'sieu*."

"You desire to become a planter?"

"I do, *m'sieu*."

"You have begun at the bottom?"

"As you say, *m'sieu*."

"You have visited the fields at Marsh Island?"

"Several times, *m'sieu*."

"What do you think of them?"

"I have seen none better, *m'sieu*."

Throughout this questioning the judge had held me with the fixity of his gaze. Now all of a sudden he relaxed to survey me with the easy smile of one who has retired from some swift and simple victory.

"Well?" he demanded. "What more can you ask? You are after cane, and what do I offer you? Only a place at the top upon land which you yourself declare to be of the best. In addition you acquire a name, a position unequalled in this parish."

Opening a drawer of his desk, he drew from it a sheet of paper.

"You may see for yourself," he added, as he held it out to me.

Taking the paper, I read its few lines of precise penmanship which announced that a certain unnamed testator bequeathed and devised his entire estate to his grandson, John Marsh. Save for the omission of date and signature, it was the usual brief Louisiana will.

"This, of course, is a copy," explained the judge. "The original is in the possession of General Marsh. He will sign it immediately upon your coming to him. For the rest, you hold your future there in your hand. You are lucky, my friend. Few are offered such a chance."

He broke off, leaving me to the fascination of the will. And well might he do so, since it held for me the most tantalizing of prizes. I could see those broad, fertile acres sloping down to the old-fashioned mill. They were unequalled. They were ideal. All along they had stood for the height of achievement. And now I held them in my hand.

Watching me, the judge resumed his easy smile.

"Well?" he questioned.

"I do not know, *m'sieu*," I replied. "It is all as you say, and yet——"

"And yet you might do as well with Bonnemaison?" he finished for me.

"Perhaps so," said I. "He has been very kind."

"Of course," agreed the judge. "Bonne-maison is a good man. Any one will tell you that. But is he the man for you? He has told me of his plan of a hundred scattered farms, of a switch from the railroad linking the farms with the refineries of St. Pierre. This may come, but if it does, you will not be a planter. You will merely find yourself Bonnemaison's overseer."

This was true—so true, in fact, that it served to confirm certain doubts of my own. Ever since the day when Monsieur Bonnemaison had disclosed his plans, I had considered them with growing uncertainty.

I was for cane. Monsieur Bonnemaison was for the land. Once he had established his small farms, he would in all probability cease planting upon his own account. Thus I would have the choice of becoming his manager or overseer or of going ahead by myself.

It would be hard to keep on alone. Now that I had tried it, I knew. Without backing a single year might finish me. Also I was filled with youthful impatience. At best it would take a long time.

Again I looked down at the paper in my hand. Here was certainty of success, a future instantly achieved. It could be my future for the saying of a word. Nay, more—it could be Toinette's as well. Had

I the right to deny her this? Had I the reason?

One by one my objections had gone down before the remorseless logic of Judge Cestia. There remained only the memory of my grandfather's denial.

Yet it was not easy to renounce this memory. For years it had envenomed my secret thoughts. Even now its bitterness dulled the keen edge of my desire. As I brooded upon it, the paper crackled beneath the clench of my hand.

Observing this, Judge Cestia made a gesture of reproof.

"Look ahead, my friend," he advised. "It is not for you to trouble with the past. That is the occupation of age."

So calm were his words, so utterly assured, that only afterward did I realize that I had not spoken my thoughts aloud.

"Just the same it is hard to forget," I declared. "To be kicked out——"

But the judge was weary of my groping. "And what if you were kicked out?" he demanded sharply. "That is long over and done with, and your grandfather is doing his best to make it up to you."

He paused, reaching for his mustache, and added as if in afterthought—

"When hurt as a child, were you ever given something to dry your tears?"

I recalled certain efforts of Madame Therese.

"Why yes, *m'sieu*," I replied.

The judge's hand came down with a thump amid the papers of his desk.

"Then here is the biggest something that has ever been offered you," he cried. "Stop your whining and take it."

There was no withstanding Judge Cestia. He knew everything. He even read one's thoughts. Of a sudden I felt very young and foolish. I wondered at the presumption that had caused me to hold out against him.

Then I thought of the future, of my betrothal, of the long, harassed period of waiting that was inevitable if I kept on alone at Bois Berard. I pictured Latour and his fellow callers. I recalled the uncertainties of that past vacation.

One word, and all this would be forever behind me. Established at Marsh Island, I could marry Toinette as soon as her studies were over. We could begin our future together.

Rising, I laid the paper upon the judge's

desk very much as if it had been some document of surrender.

"*Bien, m'sieu,*" said I. "I accept your offer. When does my grandfather wish me to come to him?"

Had I looked for any expression of gratification upon the part of Judge Cestia, I would have been sorely disappointed. But then there was small cause for the judge to be gratified. Having been sure from the first, he had looked upon my wavering as a waste of valuable time.

True, he resumed his "*monsieur,*" but this was merely in token of my changed estate. It was in just such delicate points of formality that the judge excelled.

"Very good, *monsieur,*" said he. "Then we may consider the matter as settled. As for your going to your grandfather, the sooner the better. Winter is all but over and Spring planting will soon begin."

"But there is my employer," I objected. "I can not leave him all at once."

"Bonnemaison will understand," began the judge, but I broke in on him with an idea that had suddenly occurred to me.

"How would it be if I went to the island and looked out for M'sieu Bonnemaison from there?" I questioned. "It is not so far, and I can manage it until some one is found to take my place."

The judge was almost brusque in his dismissal of this plan.

"That would not do at all," said he vehemently. "General Marsh would not understand. Neither would he approve."

He paused and added in the calmer tone of explanation:

"You see, *monsieur,* you are about to make a great change. Once you leave the woods, you are done with them forever. You must consider your new life and forget the old one. The two will not mix. It can not be done."

To my ignorance this seemed reasonable enough. Placed in the general's position, Monsieur Bonnemaison would have felt the same.

"I see," said I. "You are right, *M'sieu.* One can not work for two people at the same time."

The judge shook his head.

"Pardon, *monsieur,*" said he patiently, "but you do not see. It is not only the work. It is everything else—the intimacies, the friendships, all the other ties that have bound you to your old life. When

you go to Marsh Island, you must break these ties. Also you will not be expected to attempt the impossible task of piecing them together again."

I began to understand now, though very vaguely. It was too much to take in all at once.

"But, *m'sieu,*" I stammered. "You mean—? Why, they are my friends, my people—they——"

"Exactly," interrupted the judge. "It is unfortunate, but it is the price of prominence. When you go up on the hill, you can not expect to take the valley with you. You will find General Marsh most particular upon this point, as he has every right to be. He is offering you all that he has. In return he merely asks that you start fresh with him in every way."

He paused, eyeing me expectantly, but I could only stare back at him in slow bewilderment. It was still too much. Madame Alcide, Monsieur Bonnemaison, the little doctor, give them all up? No, it was ridiculous. There must be some mistake.

Then I thought of another and found my tongue.

"*Toinette?*" I demanded. "What of her, *m'sieu?*"

The judge spread out his hands. Evidently as in all else he had been fully informed about *Toinette.*

"What can I say, *monsieur?*" he answered. "You must see for yourself that it is inevitable. Your positions will not be the same."

"But we are betrothed," I cried, forgetting all caution. "It was for her as much as for myself that I accepted."

With my words the judge was out of his chair. It was the "betrothed" that moved him, bringing him to his feet as swiftly and as unexpectedly as if he had been propelled by some hidden spring. One look he gave me of surprize, of consternation, of polite but unmistakable injury. Then, wheeling about, he fell nervously to pacing the room.

"So, so," he muttered to himself, 'before turning back to me again.

"Come, *monsieur,*" said he sternly. "This is serious. You should have told me of it at first. As it is, you must arrange the affair yourself or at best with such aid as I can give you. General Marsh must know nothing of it. It might ruin your chance entirely."



Recovering himself, he added in his precise, legal tone:

"And now let us get at the facts. You have announced this betrothal? You have made any mention of it in writing?"

Though my temper was rising, I answered him quietly.

"No, *m'sieu*," said I. "There has been no announcement. The affair is strictly between ourselves, and I had no right to mention it. Having done so, I can only count on your discretion."

The judge drew a quick breath of relief.

"Good, very good," he exclaimed. "Then a word from you will be enough. With no proof there can be no afterconsequences."

As I heard him, my anger changed to sudden disgust. All at once I was sick of the whole affair. I thought of Toinette and grew hot with shame. Then came the thought of my father to bring back my anger again. So this was what they had tried on him. And now they were trying it on me.

The judge had begun to speak, but I stopped him abruptly. I felt that the sooner it was over, the better it would be for both of us.

"Hold, *m'sieu*," said I. "You have said enough. If I have been dull, I am sorry, but we are not used to such things in the woods. There a promise is a promise, and I have given mine and would not break it for all the cane that has ever been grown. For the rest, I can only ask you again to keep this matter to yourself. It will be enough to tell the general that I have refused."

Bowing stiffly, the judge resumed his chair. He was beaten, perhaps, but he did not show it. Indeed, there was that about him as he closed the interview which suggested victory rather than defeat. He was like one who, having encountered an unexpected reverse, is upheld by the certainty of ultimate success.

"This is final?" he questioned.

"It is, *m'sieu*."

"You will not have another chance."

"I do not wish one, *m'sieu*."

Reaching out, he touched a bell upon his desk.

"Then I must bid you good morning," said he, and a moment later I had followed his clerk through the sound-proof door.

Thus, as they had begun, Judge Cestia's efforts ended in failure. Yet for me, at least, the experience was not unprofitable. True, I rode off in a rage, but once my anger had cooled, I came to look back on the interview with an ever increasing sense of enlightenment and relief. Gradually I discovered that, in his efforts to ensnare me, the judge had succeeded in setting me free.

For at last I realized the true meaning of those acres at Marsh Island. At last I knew that in some vague, half-conscious way I had made them my goal. All along they had tempted me. All along they had touched my work in the woods with the slow poison of discontent.

And this was not strange, since these acres had ever seemed to lie just beyond my grasp. Had not Le Bossu said that they were waiting for me? Had he not declared that night beneath the stars that I would have my chance at them some day? And the little man had been right.

In its own good time the long arm of the general had reached out for me to dangle this wondrous bribe before my eager eyes. For a space I had been caught and held, but in the end I had won free. Having offered its all to no purpose, the arm would not reach out again.

It was over, and no longer could I quarrel with my lot. I was free, wholly free, to finish the work that I had begun. I might not be a planter, but at least I would follow the way that I had chosen.

The thought of this brought peace, together with a new tenderness for my friends in the woods. Somehow it was as if they had been returned to me again. Madame Alcide, Monsieur Bonnemaïson, the little doctor—in the weeks that followed I bound them to me with fresh ties of love and appreciation.

As for Toinette, I could only wait impatiently for the day of her return. I longed for her as I had never longed before, but beyond this was merely a sense of uneasy confusion.

I only knew that, as upon that first Christmas Eve at the camp, I had received a lesson in values. On the one hand had been Toinette. On the other all the breadth and fertility of Marsh Island. And I had made my choice without one afterpang of regret. It was something to think about.

So I struggled blindly with these half-



guessed thoughts and desires, groping my way toward the light that was so soon to come.

CHAPTER XIV

I-MAKE THE GREAT DISCOVERY

WITH the ending of Spring the time approached for Toinette's graduation. To Bois Berard this was a memorable event, since never before had the settlement been represented at the convent. Now Toinette had come forward; not with a mere term, but with four full years and a diploma.

High and low the wood-folk were as proudly elated as if they had played a personal part in this achievement. Had it been possible, they would have attended the exercises in a body. But the convent was far away and was moreover wholly guarded against such an onslaught. Therefore the inhabitants turned to Madame Alcide with the gifts and good wishes that marked their appreciation.

Monsieur Bonnemaïson, impressed by the religious atmosphere of the convent, and possibly confusing the occasion with that of a First Communion, sent a prayer-book of ivory with a rosary to match.

Doctor Poussard, viewing the affair with more worldly eyes, had evidently been impressed by its educational aspect. His offering, a writing-set in a gaily painted box, was accompanied by a brief explanation.

He had meant to send a book, he said, but his employer had forestalled him. Of course a prayer-book was not exactly a book, but then in a way it was one. At all events it was something to read.

And Madame Alcide, touched into silence, had allowed this to pass unchallenged by a single, "Come, Poussard!"

In selecting my own gift, I had wholly ignored the demands of the occasion. Wishing for something that would suggest only the joy of possession, I had finally decided upon a small brooch. It was of gold set with tiny pearls; and I felt sure of Toinette's pleasure, since it would represent her first true ornament of value.

From the humbler folk came simpler tokens, a fan, a ribbon, a sacred picture or image, each of them delivered with a word

of praise and congratulation. Day by day they kept coming until Madame Alcide declared with a choke in her voice that Achille would never be able to bear such a burden across the prairie.

Looking on, I thought rather grimly of my interview with Judge Cestia. So these were the folk he would have had me spurn from my high place upon the hilltop!

Madame Alcide, of course, gave the graduation dress, an intricate affair that was the result of a prolonged study of some half-dozen fashion-books. Each fold and ruffle of this all-important garment had been carefully worked out, although at the last the old lady lacked the hardihood to attempt its actual creation.

It was too much for her, she said. She could not depend upon herself to have it all *à la mode*. There was but one thing to do, and that was to invoke the assistance of her relatives at St. Pierre. She would go to her sister-in-law, Madame Octave, who, of all the Lavals, held first place with her needle. She might be a little slow, but what was time in such an emergency? Give her a week, and she would produce a triumph.

Having arrived at this decision, Madame Alcide proceeded to arrange her plans with the thoroughness that was my chief comfort during these periods of desertion. If it was hard to lose her, I at least had the satisfaction of knowing exactly when she would be back again.

"You can expect me on the tenth day, Jean," said she. "There is the week for the dress and a day for the exercises. It is too bad that you can not see them, but it would be as uncomfortable for you as for the sisters. Afterward Toinette will wish to spend her last night at the convent, as is the custom. Then she must come for a day at Madame Octave's. Next morning we will be off as early as we can get away."

Following this announcement, Madame Alcide departed, leaving me to consider certain plans of my own. Fortified by my first and only visit to the convent, I was well content to miss the exercises, but I did not mean to miss Toinette. I was anxious to see her and to see her before she left St. Pierre.

My reasons for this were the outcome of long weeks of thought and anticipation. Always Toinette had returned a different being, and her present homecoming was

fraught with a particular importance. This time she was coming back to stay, to establish the relations that would endure until we announced our betrothal.

Thus I felt that I must see this new Toinette amid the environment that was responsible for her newness. Then, perhaps, I might glean some hint of the future. I might even learn the meaning of much that had puzzled me in the years before.

Thanks to Madame Alcide, I could be definite in my arrangements. Toinette, I knew, would spend the ninth day at Madame Octave's. I had only to ride in on that day and surprize her.

To this Monsieur Bonnemaïson agreed readily enough, declaring that it would save him the trouble of driving half-way to Davide's store. Some papers were to be delivered, and I could leave them there on my way home. At that hour Davide was sure to be in.

Accordingly I set out upon the appointed morning and rode directly to the home of Madame Octave, which, being upon the prairie end of the town, was sparsely shaded by a scatter of china-trees. The house was of two stories, and, as I drew up before it, I caught in one of the upper windows a brief glance of a girlish figure. Next moment it was gone, leaving me divided between the regret of my discovery and the satisfaction of losing my final doubt. Toinette was in, and she had evidently hurried down to welcome me. At the door, however, my knock was answered by Madame Alcide.

"Well, Jean," she greeted me. "So you could not stand my being away this time? Or did Bonnemaïson send you in?"

"Toinette?" I asked, my doubts returning. "She is here?"

At this the old lady smiled, although her eyes held a sudden look of inquiry.

"I see," said she. "So it was not myself or even Bonnemaïson. Yes, Toinette is here, and you will see her in a moment. But first you must meet Madame Octave."

Following her inside, I entered the parlor, a room furnished in red plush, and hung with heavy curtains to assist the half-hearted efforts of the china-trees. Here I was introduced to stout, placid Madame Octave, who blinked at me kindly through the heavy glasses to which she had been doomed by her fine and incessant needle-work.

Afterward I sat and listened to an account of the exercises, delivered in the main by Madame Alcide and in part by Madame Octave, who supplied innumerable small details.

It was wonderful how much Madame Octave had observed. One would never have guessed the power of those eyes behind their thick lenses.

Everything had gone off well. The bishop himself had been present. And now for a surprize. Toinette had been valedictorian. Knowing it for weeks, she had kept it secret until the very day itself. Think of it. It was incredible!

To all this I replied politely, if briefly, my eyes upon the door. I was glad that Toinette had been valedictorian, but I was not surprized. It was natural for her to lead. She had always done so.

And besides, I cared little for the exercises. I was there to see Toinette. What was keeping her, I wondered. It seemed that she would never come.

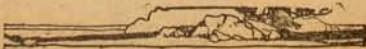
And then all at once she was there, framed in the shadows of the doorway with the suddenness of an apparition. She was dressed all in soft, billowy white, and at my look she sprang forward, reaching out eager hands.

"Jean, Jean," she cried. "This is the best of all. And if I kept you waiting, it was that you might see me as I was yesterday. This is the dress, Jean. Is it not lovely?"

It must have been lovely, that graduation-dress of fleecy muslin. I can not say. Despite the painstaking care of Madame Octave, I gave it not so much as a single glance. My eyes were all for Toinette, for the flush of her cheek, the light of her eyes, the dark, burnished glory of her hair.

That she was beautiful I know, far, far too beautiful for any words. And as I looked at her, I felt suddenly queer and dizzy, with a strange dryness about my mouth that prevented me from uttering a sound. For one age-long moment I was supremely happy. The next I was afraid.

Perhaps this is but a poor description of my awakening. At all events it is a true one. I can recall each sensation perfectly. I can picture the scene, the proud look of Madame Alcide, the abrupt upward glance of Madame Octave, the slim white figure of Toinette poised smiling before me, all



of it vague and shadowy in the half-light of the curtained room.

And this is how I came to love Toinette, instantly, violently, for all the world as if the meeting were our first one. The reason for this I know no more than others in like circumstances. Perhaps it was the dress, my weeks of longing. Who can say?

Yet I have always felt that despite our years of companionship mine was true love at first sight. It is said that love is blind. With me it was only through love that my eyes were opened to the real Toinette, a Toinette hitherto unguessed and unseen.

Striving desperately, I finally forced my dry throat to a word of greeting. Then I returned to my chair, while Toinette, seating herself across from me, took up the tale of her graduation.

With her it was the gifts over which she was as delighted as if they had arrived only that morning. My brooch was the best. She could never thank me for it. See, she had it on. And the other things from the woods! She wished for arms a mile long so that tomorrow she might embrace all Bois Berard in one great hug.

Then there was Le Bossu. Not only had he kept his promise by coming to see her, but he had brought with him a great bunch of yellowlegs as a remembrance from the marsh. Was not that like him? Yes, he was as at the bridge now, where he was overhauling his boat in preparation for the bay.

Here was good news, and I declared that I would ride out to see the little man at my first opportunity.

This done, I listened absently, while Toinette chattered on, helped out by her aunts from time to time. Somehow I did not object to the presence of the aunts. Just then I had no wish to have Toinette to myself. I wanted to be alone, to take, as it were, a mental stock of the situation.

It seemed that my visit would never end. Falling in love was a wholly strange and uncomfortable experience. Such replies as I made were confined to an occasional yes and no. My one wish was to get away.

And so, when I could stand it no longer, I arose, declaring that I must hurry off. There were the papers for Davide, to say nothing of certain commissions in St. Pierre. Begging the aunts not to rise, I bade them farewell. Then, followed by Toinette, I made for the door.

Outside in the hall Toinette turned away to reach my hat from the rack. It was an old hat, a special favorite, yet from that moment I disowned it. I must do better now, I told myself.

Then Toinette spoke, the hat held high in a gesture of mock ceremony.

"You have been so nice, Jean, that I will crown you," she began. "And to-morrow—"

She had faced about now to stare at me, the hat swinging wildly from the sudden drop of her hands.

"Why, Jean," she exclaimed in a voice that was almost a whisper.

The next moment her hands were in mine and I was crushing them, hat and all.

"Toinette! Toinette!" I gulped, unable to utter another word.

"Yes, Jean," said Toinette, and as she spoke, her eyes answered mine as truly and as fully as if they had cried their message aloud.

Then Madame Alcide appeared, calling to me from the parlor doorway.

"The flour, Jean," she directed. "You will see that there is enough? Remember, it will not be for one or two, but for three."

"Yes, *madame*," I replied, and after that there was nothing for it but to make good my haste of a while before.

So I departed, twisting about in my saddle that I might see to the last the white, sunlit figure that waved to me from Madame Octave's front gallery.

Once out of sight I swung back to the prairie, where I turned over all matters of route and speed to Rouge, that I might give myself entirely to the joy and wonder of the moment.

I had made the great discovery. I loved Toinette. And, what was of infinitely more importance, Toinette loved me. There could be no doubt of this. There was no misreading the message of her eyes.

Love was curious, I decided. It was so wholly unexpected. There it had come to me like a flash, despite the years, despite even the presence of the aunts. One would not have looked for it at such a moment. Now at the time of my proposal—

But I did not dwell upon this. I was not proud of that proposal. Through it I would be forced to explain many things to Toinette. It was better to go back to that brief parting in the hall.

And so I went on throughout the after-

noon, leaving a sorely puzzled Rouge to pick his way across the short grass of the prairie.

Near sunset I recalled my commission and set out in a definite direction. At Davide's I delivered the papers, refusing on account of the hour the inevitable offer of coffee. Then as I passed out to the store porch, there came a tug at my coat, accompanied by a voice that babbled in vague entreaty.

"You will help me, *m'sieu?*" it droned. "You will help me? I am no beggar. Once I had a place like this of my own."

The voice rose, sharpened to a sudden edge of hate.

"It was *M'sieu the General,*" it cried. "Always *M'sieu the General.* But it is near, my settlement."

Davide swore impatiently.

"You see," said he. "He gets worse, that one. His is no idle threat. He should be restrained. He is not the fool that he looks."

And he added, advancing upon the huddled figure:

"Get out Dugas, before I put you out. Would you drive away my trade?"

But I in my new-found happiness stepped in between. Also I slipped a coin into Monsieur Dugas' outthrust palm. For all his evil I could not deny him. Had he not played his unwilling part in bringing me to Toinette? Also he was terribly punished. As for his threats, they were ridiculous. What could he do against the general?

The general and Monsieur Dugas! Back in the saddle, I dismissed these ancient enemies with a confident smile. How I had feared them! And now they were helpless, the one denied by me in turn, the other touched by the hand of God.

With the thought came a sense of triumph. It seemed a fit ending for that glorious afternoon. The general and Monsieur Dugas! Now indeed was I free of them. They had had their day. Tomorrow was mine with Toinette.

CHAPTER XV

I COME TO JUDGMENT

NEXT day, when I awoke at sunrise, it was to a sense of gladness, very vague and elusive like the first pale hints of dawn.

For a space I was content to lie there, steeped in a drowsy joy. It was enough to know that all was well with me. Why seek for troublesome causes?

Then, as the light increased, my thoughts took shape—bright, eager thoughts, touched like the light with the golden promise of midday. Toinette was coming. I would see her at noon. Even now she must be up and making ready.

Thus I began a seemingly endless day. Though I added to my work the neglected duties of the day before, the hours dragged interminably. Having started with Toinette in my thoughts, I continued by attempting to follow her in her drive across the prairie.

Now she had left St. Pierre. Now, ages later, she was crossing the big coulée. And now, though she ought really to be in sight of the woods, she was probably half-way, at Davide's.

But upon looking at my watch, I would find that I was wrong. She could hardly have reached the coulée.

So it went throughout the morning. Then, when my round was all but finished, an event occurred that robbed me of my impatience. It was a runaway at a distant farm, the sudden bolting of a half-broken team. A cart was smashed, a horse was cut, a man badly bruised and shaken.

Then came the applying of remedies, the clearing of the wreck, the calming of the excited tenants. Once this was done, it was long past noon, and my problem was no longer one of killing time but of making the most of it.

Yet, when at last I raced back to the settlement, it was to find that the travelers had barely arrived. As I swung in to the wood-road, they were still plodding the last few yards of their journey.

"*Hola!*" I cried and dug in my spurs, bearing down upon the surrey from behind. Then, as I reached it, I stared aghast, for the seat beside Madame Alcide was empty.

"Toinette," I cried, all greetings forgotten. "Where is Toinette, *madame?*"

The old lady did not at once reply, as she was absorbed in making the turn into her stableyard.

"Wait," said she, when this was accomplished. "I will tell you inside."

She spoke shortly, almost gruffly, dropping the reins and allowing Achilles to come to a stop of his own free will. And this was

not Madame Alcide's way. Always she drew up with a flourish accompanied by her cheery, "We have arrived."

Slipping from the saddle, I helped her to the ground, where she stood in silence, waiting for her parcels to be taken out.

"What is it, *madame*?" I begged as I piled them into her arms, but she only shook her head before turning away.

In the unhitching that followed I made record time. Indeed, I fairly tore the harness from Achille's ancient frame, after which I set off at a run for the house.

Here I found no bustle and clatter of homecoming as in former days. In the dining-room Madame Alcide was waiting for me, sitting rigidly erect in her accustomed chair. She still wore her sunbonnet, and before her the parcels lay unopened upon the table.

"Sit down, Jean," she ordered as soon as I had come in. "Certain things have happened, and it is necessary that we consider them."

She spoke quietly now, yet her voice held a note of grimness that hinted at unpleasant things to come. When I seated myself across the table, it was upon the extreme edge of my chair. Already I felt as if I were on trial.

"And now to start," went on Madame Alcide. "We will begin with last Summer."

She waited as if for some word from me, and when this did not come, her voice rose in sharp interrogation.

"Why did you do it?" she demanded.

It was not easy to reply. I had come to judgment as I feared.

"Then—then Toinette had told you?" I floundered. "You mean my, my proposal?"

"Proposal!" echoed Madame Alcide, and her voice bit in like acid. "You call it a proposal to say to a girl, 'I wish you to marry me, but I do not know the reason why?'"

"And Toinette did not tell me this, or at least she did not think she did. It was hard enough to make her admit anything, even after she knew that I knew. She is that kind.

"But you, Jean! I am surprized at you. To think of your doing this just when she was having her good time."

"I am sorry, *madame*," said I. "I know that it is not much to say so, but I am.

And I am sorrier still that you object so much. I feared that you would."

I spoke with a sincerity that brought an instant reward. When Madame Alcide went on it was in a kindlier tone.

"*Bien*, Jean," said she. "If you say that you are sorry, and I believe you, it is the best that you can do now. Also you make too much of my objections. It would have been all right in time. I had hoped for it later on. But now, not knowing each other and with Toinette in the convent! Why, it was the one thing I feared, the one thing that I fought against.

"But I will tell you something. You remember that Winter when you asked me if Toinette was beautiful? It was then that I began to be afraid. I kept Toinette away the following Summer. It was not the lessons, as I said. It was you, Jean. And I would have kept her away last Summer had I not missed her so. I told myself that it would be all right.

"So now, perhaps, you understand. I wanted it, but in proper time. You were like brother and sister. It would not have lasted a year."

There fell a silence, during which I considered what Madame Alcide had said. All her thought and care made as nothing by my blind impatience.

But fortunately my mistake was not past mending. Though it was not easy, I hastened to set it right.

"I understand, *madame*," said I. "Also, although I love Toinette truly now, I will follow your wish. It will be hard to wait, yet if you say so——"

"A moment," interrupted Madame Alcide. "When I have finished, it will be time for you to plan. We have only dealt with thing number one. Now we come to thing number two which takes us back to your first days with me."

She paused, leaning forward, and added in a voice of stern accusation:

"Why did you hide behind a name then? Why did you not tell me who you really were?"

It was like the pointblank firing of a shot. For a space I could only gape at her foolishly. Now indeed had I come to judgment.

"So you knew?" I finally managed to ask.

"No," answered Madame Alcide grimly. "That is just it; I did not know. Of course

I saw at first glance that you were no marsh-rat. Otherwise you would not have come into my home. And later with your cane I saw clearer still. You wished to be a planter and you began as one. It opened my eyes.

"So," I said to myself. "The blood is better than I thought." I even hinted as much to you that first day in the field. But the grandson of M'sieu the General! It was too much. How could I have guessed it?

"But you knew, Jean, and you did not tell me. And why? That is what I want to know."

By now I had recovered some part of my composure, yet I could find no defense for my action. Viewed in the light of what Madame Alcide had said, it seemed wholly stupid and useless. Why had I not told her? Why had I not told all Bois Berard for that matter, since the need for secrecy had been long past?

It would have been the same anyway. Such things were bound to come out. It was like me to see this now when it was too late.

"It is hard to answer you, *madame*," said I at last. I do not know why I did this myself. At first it was necessary to have another name. I had run away and I was scared. Afterward I kept on. It was habit, perhaps, I can not say. It was not that I did not trust you. Had I thought of it, I would have told you gladly. But there seemed no need."

At this Madame Alcide laughed, a short, hard laugh in which there was no trace of merriment.

"No need?" she repeated. "So there seemed no need, Jean? Listen now to thing number three. Yesterday within half an hour of your departure we had a second visitor. It was Judge Cestia, and he asked for Toinette and myself. To us he told your story, ending it with his offer of last Winter—the offer that you refused.

"And afterward he made an appeal. He was very polite, but he was also very plain. He could do nothing with you, he said. He had tried his best and he had failed. It was not pleasant to say what he must say now, but he had no choice. It all rested with Toinette. Your grandfather needed you, and Marsh Island was a very great estate. If Toinette would only step aside——"

She halted, as if in sudden distaste, and her face flushed darkly beneath the shadow of the sunbonnet.

"But why say more?" she finished. "Surely you can see, Jean?"

And I did see through a dull haze of anger such as I had never known, of which I was almost afraid.

So that was it. Well might the old lady be upset. And Judge Cestia! How he had tricked using my confidence to shame the ones I loved. No wonder he had seemed assured in that moment of apparent defeat. Even then, like some clever gambler, he had held and hidden this final card.

And Toinette! Unconsciously I spoke the name aloud.

"Toinette had gone back to the convent," answered Madame Alcide promptly. "She will stay there until you are safe with your grandfather."

Again her words brought anger, but of a different kind.

"So," said I bitterly. "Then that is how she cares for me. She says that she loves me, and she runs away."

I would have gone on, but Madame Alcide turned upon me with the fierceness of utter exasperation.

"*Bon Dieu*," she cried. "Have you no sense at all, Jean? Do you imagine that it was easy for Toinette to go, for me to send her? Suppose you were in her place. Suppose you loved her as she loves you. Could you do anything else? Would there be any other way?"

"Just the same I will find a way," I persisted. "I will ride in at once——"

"And to what purpose?" challenged Madame Alcide. "You will not see Toinette, and if you did, it would be no use. She is not coming back. Even though she tried to, I would not allow it.

"For the rest, this has been forced upon me. I have no choice in the matter. If, as you do not deny, you are giving up Marsh Island for Toinette, what can I do but prevent it?"

"*Madame*——" I began, but the old lady paid no heed.

"See," she went on. "I will be frank with you. At first I was very angry. There was your betrothal, the hiding of your name, and Judge Cestia's offer. I thought that you had deceived me, that you had laughed at me. But I wished to make sure.

That is why I took my time, questioning you carefully.

"Now I believe that you meant no unfairness, that you were foolish, thoughtless, but nothing more. Yet the result is the same.

"And perhaps this is for the best. You are young, Jean; you do not know your own mind. Also, as Judge Cestia said, Marsh Island is a very great estate."

"I have thought of all that," I put in. "I have considered it carefully."

"*Bien*," agreed Madame Alcide. "We will let it pass then. We will say that you have gone on and married, that you have never repented your bargain. What then of Toinette?"

"Your mother tried this, and you have shown me her picture. Consider her eyes, their look that one never forgets. They puzzle me, those eyes. Only yesterday, when I heard her story, did I understand.

"It is regret, Jean—regret for what she cost your father. She could not help it. Women are like that. And what would you do to keep such a look from Toinette's eyes in the years to come?"

"The look will not come," said I doggedly. "What is greater than love?"

"There is duty," answered Madame Alcide, "my duty to see that you do not make this mistake, your duty to take that which your father lost. Then there is your duty to me. So long as you stay here, so long must Toinette keep away, and Toinette is my niece. It is not easy to say this, yet——"

Her voice broke and suddenly she rose to her feet, coming around the table to my chair. A moment she stood gazing down at me, and in her eyes was the same wistful yearning that had marked my last day with Madame Therese.

"This is hard, Jean," said she slowly, "harder for me, perhaps, than for you. You are young with much before you. I am old and the wound will take long to heal. For I will miss you, Jean. You have been like a son to me—a good son always.

"Yesterday, when Judge Cestia told me of your refusal, I was proud of you. It was foolish, yes, but I loved you for it as I ever will. And then there is what you have been doing with Bonnemaison. It is a secret, I know, but I am not blind. All along it has been for me. And now—to have you go——"

Words failed her and she turned abruptly, moving stiffly away to her room.

When she had gone, I sat for a long time staring vacantly at the scarred surface of the table. Slowly the first shock of my anger spent itself, allowing me to consider my position.

I was snared, I was trapped, and in my own home. The very members of my household had been turned against me. And all for a thoughtless omission, for a secrecy born, perhaps, of my lonely childhood.

Well, it only meant that I must fight, and I was used to fighting. I had done so before. I could do so again. But how?

Madame Alcide I dismissed immediately. There was no doubting the finality of what she had said. Judge Cestia had hurt her terribly, and to her pride was added her sense of duty. It would never be said of her that she had used her niece to despoil the grandson of M'sieu the General.

Toinette was still less promising. I could see that now. My anger cooled, I could even imagine her point of view. All her life she had been used to sacrifice, and she believed that she stood in my way. What else could she do? And even were it otherwise, she was helpless. Until she was of age she must obey Madame Alcide.

Thus but one course was left open to me. I must take the war into the enemy's camp. And that enemy was my grandfather. For all his cleverness, Judge Cestia did not count. He was merely an agent.

With the thought came inspiration. Since the general had done this thing, he could also undo it.

What if I went to him and convinced him that I would never return? What if afterward he spoke to Madame Alcide? Surely his word would be enough. Surely he could make her understand. Once she saw that Toinette could not deprive me of something that I had definitely refused, she would be forced to give in.

Perhaps, with my knowledge of the general, it was the sheerest madness. Perhaps, upon reflection, I would have realized the implied weakness of such an attack.

But it was a chance, and in the code of the woods chances called for action rather than thought. Also there was little time, if I would see it through that day.

Five minutes later I was pounding down the wood-road at a pace that would have

caused old Syprien Lalandre himself to stare in surprize.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GENERAL

THANKS to my talks with Monsieur Bonnemaïson, I knew something of the general's habits. It was his custom in the late afternoon to go over the affairs of his estate.

Thus upon reaching the island, I did not keep on to his house. Dismounting half-way up the hill, I tied Rouge to a live oak and made my second descent upon the vine-covered office.

When I had knocked and been bidden to enter, I found the single room wholly unchanged. There was the same film of dust, the same, orderly litter, the same prim arrangement of chairs, safe and table. The general was seated as before, but this time he straightened up at once from the book of accounts over which he had been bending. There was something in the movement that hinted at eagerness, almost at satisfaction, yet he spoke with his usual cold precision.

"Well, John," he began. "Have you come to your senses at last?"

I did not attempt to parley. Now that I was before him, I found that I must speak out at once if I were to speak at all.

"Yes, *m'sieu*," I replied. "I *have* come to my senses. That is why I am here to ask you to make amends."

At this the general stiffened, but he did not lose his level tone.

"If you will be so kind, I should like to know exactly what you mean," said he.

There was something in his words that stung me to instant anger.

"I mean what you have had Judge Cestia do—his going to my people, his driving them away from me," I answered hotly. "And for what? I am not coming back. You must understand this. No matter what happens, I will not come."

The general did not reply to this at once. For a time he merely stared at me as if I were some strange specimen about which he could not quite make up his mind. His tolerance was as unexpected as it was demoralizing. I had looked for anger, derision—anything save this calm appraisal.

"Your people," he mused finally. "You are a queer one, John. And your talk about not coming back is equally as original. How could you come back when you have never been here?"

He spoke without scorn or irony. Indeed, his attitude was one of interest, mild and half-amused. Having never known him in this mood, I was utterly unprepared to deal with him. I could reply only by reminding him that I had come to him once and that he had sent me away.

At this his look of inquiry gave place to one of enlightenment. It was as if he had classified his specimen at last.

"I see," said he. "So you have held this against me all these years?"

"How could I do otherwise?" I retorted.

A moment the general appeared to hesitate. The next he leaned forward as if in sudden resolution.

"Listen, John," said he. "Age brings wisdom, and wisdom brings regrets. Perhaps you feel that an explanation is due you. At all events you shall have one.

"When you came to me, I was still smarting from a half-healed wound. The sight of you reopened it. And so in a moment of anger I sent you away. Afterward, when I wanted you back, I found that you had gone. It took a long time to find you.

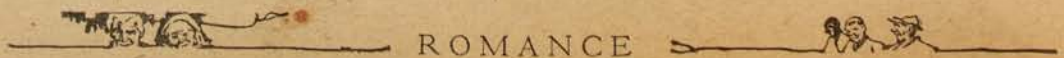
"In that time my interest waned. I am a busy man with few opportunities for sentiment. If you had stayed on the marsh, I would probably have forgotten you entirely. You see I am being perfectly frank with you.

"But you came to the woods and put in your cane, not with your hands, but from the saddle. That aroused my interest again. It appeared that you might be a Marsh after all.

"And so I rode in for a look at you that day at the store and found that you were the image of—your father."

He brought out the last words with an effort, wincing as if from some sharp thrust of memory. And at this moment he was a being far removed from the harsh autocrat of Marsh Island. He was merely a lonely old man, worn and harassed by the years' disillusion.

"After that I determined to have you," he continued. "If you had come to me as my manager, the arrangement would not have lasted a week. I only wanted to make sure.



"But you refused, and I went to Cestia. I was afraid to trust myself. I had tried it before unsuccessfully. The rest you know."

He paused, and once more his look was inquiring.

"Well?" he challenged. "My cards are on the table."

"I am sorry, *m'sieu*," said I. "After what you have said, I would come back gladly if it were possible. But there is Toinette. I am betrothed to her."

"And I am your grandfather," put in the general. "Is not your blood thicker than water?"

"You do not understand, *m'sieu*," I explained. "I love Toinette. We were brought up together. I could not go on without her."

"That is what you think now," said the general. "I have lived a long time, and I can promise you that in less than six months you will have changed your mind."

And he added generously:

"The girl is all right. I grant you that. According to Cestia she has beauty and refinement and she has behaved very well in this matter. But it will not do. I have other plans for you."

His calmness was wholly disarming. Why would he not lose his temper, allowing me to force my demands? Somehow I felt as if I had been removed a vast distance from my original intention. If this kept up, I would never be able to get back to it again.

"And what of my plans?" I demanded. "Are they not to be considered at all?"

For the first time the general's voice held a note of irony.

"Only in so far as you are able to carry them out."

"And if I do so?"

"That is impossible."

"And why?"

"Because you can not. Your very being here proves it."

He finished with open triumph. Evidently he was sure of himself now. Or perhaps he had become weary of his effort. It must have cost him something, this hard-won repression born of the promptings of experience. He had been very patient, and now he reaped his reward. Where I had meant to demand, I could only appeal.

"Then, if that is so, *m'sieu*," said I, "I can only throw myself upon your mercy.

Also, since I am not coming back, you will gain little by refusing me. You will lose me my friends, my home. It will mean nothing more.

"As for my coming here, I did so to ask you if you would not speak for me to Madame Berard. She will listen to you. You can convince her. A word from you will be enough."

The general accepted this with a gravity that was wholly misleading.

"And may I ask what I am to say to her?" he inquired.

"That I am not coming back. That it is useless to keep Toinette away," I explained eagerly. "Anything will do, just so it is said by yourself."

"And you expect me to do this," pursued the general.

"You must, *m'sieu*, you must," I cried. "It is only a little thing, yet it means my happiness."

There came a faint twitching at the corners of the general's mouth. He had had his fun of the situation, and now in his grim way he paid tribute to it.

"By George, but you are a wonder, John!" he muttered half to himself.

Then I understood with a dull sense of hurt that was rather the outcome of injustice than of disappointment. To me it seemed the very refinement of cruelty.

"So you refuse?" I began.

"Of course," he broke in biting. "And the day will come when you will thank me for it."

Without further protest I arose. It was no use, and I was in no mood to argue.

Yet I did not mean to leave without a final word. If I had lost, I would not slink away in silent defeat. And then there was that cold, impassive mask of the general's. Perhaps I could not get in behind it, but I would leave him something to think about.

"*Bien, m'sieu*," said I deliberately. "You have won, and I wish you joy of your victory. At least I have stood against you man to man. I have not fought through another against women."

It was useless, insolent, yet it had its effect. Instantly the general was up and facing me in trembling, white-hot fury.

And as I looked at him, the years slipped away and it seemed that I was a child again, staring with round, frightened eyes, as I groped for a forgotten name. The sudden hush, the menacing form, the



strange yet familiar interior—save for one missing figure, it was my vision of M'sieu Abraham.

And then, as if to make it complete, the door creaked open, and Monsieur Dugas entered the room.

CHAPTER XVII

MONSIEUR DUGAS.

HE SLIPPED in so smoothly, so quietly, that his presence was betrayed only by the squeak of the rusty hinges. At first glance he seemed very pitiful and harmless, a mere filthy bundle of rags. Then, as he turned toward the table, his attitude declared itself.

Though he cringed and shuffled as of old, it was with some strange, new quality of abasement. Now his movements were informed with purpose—stark, deadly purpose that seemed fairly to cry itself aloud. Even before I caught sight of the weapon in his hand, I had divined his mission.

It was an ugly weapon—a squat, heavy revolver of the sort known as bulldog. Also it was at full-cock, the hammer poised and ready, like some waiting fang.

But worst of all was its unspeakable age and foulness. Though hidden, I knew that its bullets were green and rank with verdigris. I had seen such bulldogs, such bullets, cast aside and forgotten in the gunshops of St. Pierre.

All this I caught in Monsieur Dugas' brief advance from door to table. Arriving there, he raised his arm and brought down the bull-dog upon the tabletop. He did this very carefully and methodically, as if it were something that he had rehearsed a number of times. Then he spoke, holding the bulldog with a steady hand.

"I have come for my settlement, *m'sieu*," said he.

His words held no threat or challenge, merely the same dogged purpose that had marked his approach. And having spoken, he waited with the calmness of perfect assurance. Though bulldogs were notoriously inaccurate, he had placed himself beyond the possibility of failure. There could be no miss at that pointblank range.

Knowing this only too well, the general moved not so much as a muscle. He had seated himself at the opening of the door,

so that the bulldog now pointed directly at his chest. With so broad a mark presented it was useless to duck or dodge.

Also, since Monsieur Dugas' finger was on the trigger, there was no chance of a sudden spring. It was an impossible situation, and the general accepted it with a dignity, a composure beyond belief.

Yet all the time he was fighting gamely with the only weapons at his command. Once at a circus I had seen a trainer subdue a refractory leopard. He had done so without force or speech, solely by the power of his gaze. And this was what the general was doing, boring into Monsieur Dugas' slow determination with eyes that were like flecks of polished steel.

I will never forget those eyes. There was no fear in them, no uncertainty, only the calm, imperative force of a dominant personality. Though the general spoke, his words were superfluous. They seemed merely some trifling accompaniment to that steady, merciless gaze.

"Put down your pistol, Dugas," he directed. "Put it down at once."

And he added to me, without moving his eyes:

"Steady, John. You can do nothing here."

I marveled that Monsieur Dugas could stand it, that his scattered wits should allow his forthcoming reply. But then he had lived only for this moment. There had been plenty of time to prepare himself in those long, empty days upon the prairie.

"No, I will not put down my pistol, *m'sieu*," he answered. "It was too hard to get. I could not buy it. I could not take it. I had to break in after it like a thief. When I have had my settlement, yes. Until then, no. All along you have been after me. Now it is my turn."

He droned to a close, and the duel went on again, the dreadful, silent duel between madness and indomitable reason. It was heart-breaking. It was unendurable. I fought down an impulse to rush in screaming. Why did not Monsieur Dugas shoot and end it? Yet how could he with those eyes?

It seemed an age before the change came. And even then it was very slight and subtle, a faint relaxation upon the part of Monsieur Dugas, sensed rather than seen. His shoulders twitched, his hand trembled.



Perhaps it was merely the natural reflex from an intolerable strain.

But it was enough for the general. Slowly, majestically he arose, his eyes never losing their clutch upon the mad-man's will.

"Give me that pistol, Dugas," he commanded.

And then it happened, the backward start, the jerk of the finger, the sudden report sounding doubly thunderous in the smallness of the room. Yet I have never believed that Monsieur Dugas fired intentionally. Mad though he was, he could not have done so beneath that gaze.

That he was beaten I am sure. Only in defeat, and in the confusion of surrender did he accomplish his purpose.

With the crash of the bulldog I sprang, reaching out blindly to prevent a second shot. But Monsieur Dugas was too quick for me. In a flash he had twisted aside to fire again. Then, dodging back with incredible swiftness, he disappeared through the half-opened door.

At once I plunged after him, but the general recalled me.

"Let him go," he ordered. "They will catch him soon enough."

And so I turned back to him to find that he had collapsed into his chair. He looked terribly gray and crumpled, and one hand was pressed tightly below the level of his waist.

"You are badly hurt, *m'sieu?*" I questioned.

"I am done for—shot through the middle," he answered quietly. "And you?"

Only then did I look down and realize that I had been hit. In the excitement of the moment I had felt no shock.

"Through the shoulder," I muttered, half-fascinated by the slow welling of blood. "I do not think that it is much."

For a space the general fought his agony, his tormented eyes roaming restlessly about. Then, all at once, they came to a stop, and his free hand rose weakly to point to a corner of the room.

"Pay attention, John," said he. "This is important. In the safe there you will find the original of the will that Cestia showed you. It is all in order, just as I finished it upon the day I determined to have you here."

He waited, panting, and went on:

"It was not for this, although I had

been warned. I did not expect it. I merely wished to secure you in case of accident."

"But, *m'sieu,*" I began, utterly overwhelmed. "I can not—*Toinette*—"

"Live your life," he interrupted shortly. "The will is unconditional."

He waited again and added with a touch of his old intolerance:

"If I had lived, it would have been different. I would never have given in, and you would have come here. You may rest assured of that. As it is—"

His voice died out and he lay back, gasping, his eyes fixed dully upon the tattered flag above the mantel.

"Life is strange," he murmured. "I went through Shiloh for this."

He fell silent, and once more I tried to speak to him, uttering vague, stammered fragments of protest, of uncertainty, I scarce knew what. But he broke in at once, declaring that we understood each other, that it was all settled, that I was a Marsh and he would expect me to be one.

He spoke harshly, impatiently; yet I have always felt that at that moment and in his fierce old way he was very near to me. At least he had said that we understood each other, and this meant much from the general.

Afterward there was a strained, uncomfortable pause which was broken by the sound of footsteps outside. At the door they hesitated, and a young man peered uncertainly in.

"You're all right, general?" he questioned. "It's mighty late, and they said they was some shots—"

He choked silent as his eyes became accustomed to the smoke-laden twilight of the room.

"Oh my Gawd!" he began on a rising scream.

"Quiet, Paul," ordered the general. "I am hurt, and so is this gentleman, my grandson. It was Dugas. You get the name, Dugas. Send at once for the doctor and notify the sheriff. Then hurry back with help."

It spoke well for the general's training that Paul hesitated no longer. In an instant he was gone, shouting as he went.

Of what followed I remember little. For by now I had bled a great deal and my head was beginning to go round.

Thus, when the footsteps returned and the room became suddenly filled with ex-



cited servants, I could only try to lurch forward in the general direction of the table. Then my feet went out from under me and I fell through vast, swirling depths of blackness into merciful oblivion.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTERWARD

AFTERWARD I was very ill. Of the general's death, which occurred that night, of his huge, stately funeral, of the capture and confinement of Monsieur Dugas I knew nothing for many days.

True, I came to myself soon after being removed from the office and insisted upon being taken home to the woods. But the doctor refused, giving me a draft that sent me back into unconsciousness again.

Next day it was the same. I must not even move about in bed, they told me. There was the chance of fever, of infection. I must keep perfectly quiet until this danger was past.

So I was forced to lie there, feeling very strange and lonely in the great testered bed, which took me back to my father's room and the days of the rue Bourbon.

From my friends in the woods came messages of sympathy and assurance, but I did not see them. They were timid folk in that great house and it was not for them to disobey the doctor's command. Yet I felt that if I did not soon see a familiar face, I would go mad. It was bad enough to suffer as I was suffering now with my shoulder. It was too much to do so alone.

At last in my extremity I thought of Le Bossu. Toinette had said that he was at the bridge. Perhaps if I sent for him he would manage to come to me. At least he would try, and when the little man tried, he seldom failed.

In the end, after much careful planning and waiting, I sent out my summons by Paul, who, having been the general's body-servant, was only too anxious to serve a new master. And Le Bossu came, gaining entrance past my door in his own peculiar way.

"So, Jean," said he with his quiet smile. "Then Dugas has been mistreating you again? We must make the best of it as we did before."

Afterward he took charge, declaring that

he had not come to visit me but to nurse me. And the doctor, observing the efficiency of his methods, the effect of his presence, allowed him to remain.

Thereupon he became a fixture at my bedside, ruling me with a quiet insistence that was not to be denied.

I must not move so much as a finger. This was no mosquito-bite but a deep hole with a chunk of lead at the end. And a dirty chunk at that. If I squirmed about, the dirt might be worse than the lead.

His warning was justified when upon the third day blood-poisoning set in. After this for a long time I raved in ceaseless delirium. In many ways it was like my sickness at Bayou Portage. There was the same careful nursing by Le Bossu, the same frightful visions, even the same vague sense of a rescuing hand to draw me back in moments of dire peril.

And as before the hand was ever the same, very cool and soft and caressing—the hand of Toinette. It stayed me, it comforted me, it made possible my final recovery. But for it I could never have resisted the dark malevolent tide that drew me toward extinction.

And yet, when at last I was myself again and could look about me, there was no Toinette. It had been a dream after all. Cruelly disappointed, I questioned Le Bossu, who reassured me with promises for the future. Toinette was all right. She had sent me a thousand messages. I would see her as soon as I was well enough.

It was not much, yet I clung to it, nursing my strength so that Toinette might the sooner arrive. But when finally I was fit for visitors, it was Madame Alcide who came, very grave and tender and laden with certain delicacies of which she knew I was fond. To my anxious questioning she also replied evasively.

Toinette was not well. She had worked too hard. No, it was nothing to worry about, but just now she must not risk a long drive in the sun. Of course she would come as soon as she was able. In the meantime I must be patient.

It was poorly done, for Madame Alcide was ill used to concealment. When she had gone, I gave up. Toinette might come, but it would not be the coming for which I longed.

That she did not care for me as I wished was plain. That she was taking this means



of impressing me with the fact was plainer still. Otherwise she would never have deserted me in my hour of need.

Had I been well and wholly myself, I might have sought other reasons. As it was, I became obsessed with the idea that I had lost Toinette, that without her the future held nothing for me.

What if I owned Marsh Island? What if, as Judge Cestia assured me, I was now not only a planter, but *the* planter of the parish? All this meant nothing in my present mood.

As for the judge, I gave him full charge of my affairs until such time as I could look after them myself. He was very kind and considerate, and with my sickness my former hostility had vanished. After all, he had merely served the interests of one of his numerous clients.

In the days that followed I saw no more of Madame Alcide. Her visit had upset me, and it was thought best that she should not return. But Monsieur Bonnemaïson came, driving out upon the first available Sunday with Doctor Poussard.

It was good to see them, to hear Monsieur Bonnemaïson's glowing account of affairs. The crop was wonderful. Never had he seen such a stand. I would have my hands full in grinding it.

For the rest, he had missed me terribly. At first it had seemed impossible to go on. Even now he felt the need of a partner, and he was considering Poussard. What did I think of it? Himself for the cane, Poussard for the store?

And the little doctor, declaring that it was too much, surveyed me with shining eyes while I voiced my approval of this combination.

Later, when I could go outside, the other wood-folk arrived. They came fearfully in groups, tiptoeing upon the gallery to gaze at me in silent awe, as if I were some strange exalted being upon whom they were looking for the first time.

And as I watched them, I understood that Judge Cestia had been right and that I had indeed gone up on the hill, far, far away from these former friends of mine. I might see them, greet them, speak with them, but they could no longer play a part in my life. Even with Madame Alcide, Monsieur Bonnemaïson, the little doctor, it would be much the same.

Of them all there had been but one who

could have entered fully into this new life of mine, and I had lost her. The loneliness of it was unspeakable. They were all gone save Le Bossu, and soon I must lose him.

More than once I had protested against the little man's kindness only to receive the same reply. He had started this business; he meant to finish it. When I was well enough, it would be time to think of leaving.

So I had kept him on beyond his period of nursing, absolving my selfishness with the thought of my necessity. For in those final weeks of convalescence Le Bossu had become more necessary to me than ever. He was my confidant, my adviser and above all my comforter.

But now that I was up and able to move about, I felt that in fairness I could no longer keep him. He had had a long siege of it and he was plainly homesick.

Perhaps he was tired, he admitted. And although he had been very comfortable, it would be nice to sleep beneath the stars again. Suppose he began by looking over his boat and laying in supplies. Then, if everything was all right, he would leave.

Accordingly after three days of preparation Le Bossu came to me to say good-by. All was in readiness and he would sail with the afternoon tide. There was much that I had meant to tell him, yet at the last moment I could only gulp out, "Bossu."

But the little man understood, patting me upon the shoulder in his old way.

"That is all right, Jean," said he. "What use are the lips when the heart is speaking? Only send for me if you need me, and I will be satisfied. I will always be ready and waiting for your word."

"And one thing more. Be a man. You have come to a high place, and many are dependent upon you. Remember, it is not your happiness but theirs that must count."

So he left me alone with my duty.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HILLTOP

THAT afternoon, when I could stand my loneliness no longer, I had Paul move a chair to the outer edge of the hilltop. Here I seated myself beneath an oak, looking out across the marsh toward a well-remembered bayou. It was too early for my purpose—I must wait.



In course of time a certain boat would pass out along the bayou bound for the bay. From my lofty perch I could follow it far, as it twisted its way to open water. Perhaps, when it was just below me, I might even glimpse a figure in the cock-pit. Thus I would see my last of Le Bossu ere he returned to the old free life of the wild.

So I waited, my eyes fixed hungrily upon the marsh, my back turned squarely to those acres that were now my own.

Ah, to be free again, to roam these other trackless acres, secure in the knowledge that Toinette would be waiting for me at the door of the hut! That was living.

Perhaps it was all very childish and unreasonable, yet there was some excuse for me. I was young, I had been very ill, and my life seemed utterly empty. Thus, when at last my head went down into my hands, I felt little shame. It was weak, I knew, but this was my darkest hour.

And so I sat there, forsaken and hopeless, until from behind me there came a faint swishing as of a skirt. Then the swishing changed to a rushing that ended in a sudden thump beside my chair.

"I have come, Jean," said a voice, and I raised my head to look straight into the eyes of Toinette.

One searching glance I gave them before I held out my arms. Yes, they were the eyes that I was looking for, the eyes that I had treasured.

"Toinette," I asked at length, "why did you not come to me when I was so ill?"

"But I was there, Jean," she answered. "I never left you a moment. Only when you were yourself again did I go away."

So that rescuing hand had really been there. I reached out and took hold of it.

"And then?" I went on.

"And then I waited," said Toinette. "It was hard, Jean, for I loved you truly as I have always done. It almost broke my heart. Yet what could I do? How else would Tante Aurore allow me to act?"

"You remember that day when you wished me to marry you? All I asked was one word of love, yet it was not yours to give. True, when you left me that day in St. Pierre, I thought that you loved me, but how could I know? You had gone up, far up, where you might easily wish to forget me. And so, if I came to you and you did not want me——"

Her cheeks flamed, and now it was her head that went down against my arm.

"Ah, Jean, can you not see?" she pleaded. "How could I do otherwise?"

I did not wait to see. The past made no difference. The future counted.

"And now?" I questioned.

"Now we are sure, Tante Aurore and I," she replied. "Bossu came to us and told us this morning. He has been with you and he knows."

"And you will marry me?"

"I am here, Jean," said Toinette simply.

After this she fell silent, nor did I find any need for words. I was content to lie back in my chair and watch her, wrapped in the peace that is born of perfect joy. Thus we were when at last Le Bossu's sail appeared winging its way into the vast, shadowy heart of the marsh.

Then Toinette spoke, very softly, like one who utters a pleasant thought.

"Papa Ton will be glad," said she.

And I understood, for the little man had told me that he would put in that night at Bayou Portage.

Soon after this Toinette declared that she must leave. It was late, and Achille was very slow. Yes, she would be back next day, bringing Tante Aurore. The old lady could wait no longer to see me, and besides, there were certain proprieties to be observed. Now that I was a great man, all eyes would be fixed upon me.

So we rose and crossed the hilltop to the opposite side, where I stood for a moment, gazing eagerly out in the direction of the fields.

Then we went down to where Toinette had tied the sully.

Of our parting I will say nothing, save that it was observed only by Achille. And he was too old to care about such things.

Climbing up to the front seat, Toinette unsheathed her switch for the vital stroke that would send Achille upon his way.

"Tomorrow, Jean," she called, and all at once she lowered her arm.

"It is 'Jean' for the last time," she added soberly. "Now that you have come into your own, I must use your true name. We can not go on as before. It would not be fair to M'sieu the General."

I nodded in sudden conviction.

"You are right, Toinette," I agreed. "Tomorrow I will be John Marsh."

So here ends the story of Jean Trouvé.



The Image of Sespbra

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

THEY of Poictesme narrate that in the old days Count Manuel married, and so fell into disfavor with King Raymond. They tell how it was Raymond's daughter, the Princess Alianora, whom Manuel had loved and loved no longer, who prompted this disfavor, and thereby set Dom Manuel a problem which stays unsolved.

For Manuel fled oversea with his wife, Dame Niafer, and they came in their distress to Sargyll where Freydis, the high sorceress, received them hospitably. Queen Freydis also, they relate, had loved Dom Manuel, in a sped time wherein these two had practised queer necromancies. Now Manuel had long ago forsaken these arts, and he had forsaken Freydis too; but he remembered very pleasantly the fallen old ancient gods and the droll monsters and the instructive ghosts which he and Queen Freydis had been used to evoke; and most pleasurably of all, and with a glow of pride, he remembered the image which he had made and to which they had given life, because in doing that, Dom Manuel felt, he had really accomplished a masterpiece of artistic conjury.

He hoped to find Freydis, the gray witch, more philosophic than Alianora, the princess: and in this hope he did not err.

"For all passes in this world," said Freydis, "and the young Manuel whom I loved in a Summer that is gone is nowadays as perished as that Summer's gay leaves. What, grizzled fighting man, have you to do with that young Manuel who had comeliness and youth and courage, but no human pity and no constant love? And why should I be harboring his light-hearted mischiefs against you?"

"Ah, no, gray Manuel, you are quite certain no woman would do that; and people say that you are shrewd. So I bid you very welcome to Sargyll, where my will is the only law."

"You at least have not changed," Dom



Manuel replied with utter truth, "for you seem today as fair and young as you were that first night upon Morven when you loaned life to the image I had made. Yet that was a great while ago, and I make no more images."

"Your wife would be considering it a waste of time," Queen Freydis estimated.

"No, that is not quite the way it is. For Niafer is the dearest and most dutiful of women, and she never crosses my wishes in anything."

Freydis smiled a little, for she saw that Manuel believed he was speaking veraciously.

"Well," said Freydis, "it is a queer thing surely that in the month which is to come your wife should be bearing your second child under my roof and in my golden bed. Yet it is a queerer thing that your first child, whom no woman bore nor had any say in shaping, but whom you made of clay to the will of your proud youth and in your proud youth's likeness, should be limping about the world somewhere in the appearance of a strapping tall young fellow, and that you should know nothing about his doings."

"And what do you know about him, Freydis?"

"Eh, I suspicion many things, gray Manuel, by virtue of my dabblings in that gray art, which makes neither for good nor evil."

"Yes," said Manuel practically, "but what do you know?"

"I know that in Sargyll where my will is the only law you are welcome, false friend and very faithless lover," she said.

He could get no more out of her.

So Manuel and Niafer remained at Sargyll until Niafer should be delivered. Glittering messengers came from King Ferdinand and from King Hoel and from the Duke-Regent Sigurd, each proffering this or that alliance, now these princes knew Dom Manuel was at outs with Raymond Bérenger; but Manuel considered only Niafer and let statecraft bide. Two other ships that were laden with King Raymond's men came also in an attempt to capture Manuel; so Freydis dispatched a sending which caused these soldiers to run about the decks howling like wolves and to fling away their weapons and to fight one against the other with hands and teeth until all were slain.

There was never a more decorous hostess than Queen Freydis, and nobody would have suspected that sorcery underlay the running of her household. It was only through Manuel's happening to arise very early one morning that he chanced to see the night-porter turn into an orange-colored rat and creep into the wainscoting when the sun rose; and Manuel of course said nothing about this to Niafer.

So the month passed prosperously and uneventfully, while the servitors of Queen Freydis behaved in every respect as if they were human beings; and at the month's end Niafer was duly delivered of a girl child. It was Freydis who tended Niafer and Freydis who brought the news to Manuel and Freydis who bade him rejoice now that all peril was over, if Freydis was to be trusted.

"And we shall celebrate the happy event," said Freydis, "with a gay feast this night in honor of your child."

"That is well," said Manuel. "But I suppose you will be wanting me to make a speech, and I was never a great hand at such matters."

"No, for your place is with your wife. No, Manuel, you are not bidden to this feast, for all that it is to do honor to your child. No, no, gray Manuel, you must remain up-stairs this evening and throughout the night, because this feast is for them that serve me; and you do not serve me any longer, and the ways of them that serve me are not your ways."

"Ah, ah!" says Manuel. "So there is sorcery afoot! Yes, Freydis, I have quite given over that sort of thing. And while not for a moment would I seem to be criticizing anybody, I hope before long to see you settling down with some fine, solid fellow and forsaking these empty frivolities for the higher and real pleasures of life."

"And what are these delights, gray Manuel?"

"The joy that is in the sight of your children, playing happily about your hearth and developing into honorable men and gracious women and bringing their children in turn to cluster about your tired old knees, as the Winter evenings draw in, and in the cosy firelight you smile across the curly heads of these children's children at the dear wrinkled white-haired face of your beloved and time-tested helpmate



and are satisfied, all in all, with your life and know that, by and large, Heaven has been rather undeservedly kind to you," said Manuel, sighing.

"Yes, Freydis, you may believe me that such are the real joys of life and that such pleasures are more profitably pursued than are the idle gaities of sorcery and witchcraft, which indeed at our age, if you will permit me to speak thus frankly, dear friend, are hardly dignified."

FREYDIS shook her proud dark head. Her smiling was grim.

"Decidedly I shall not ever understand you. Doddering patriarch, do you not comprehend you are already discoursing about a score or two of grandchildren on the ground of having a half-hour-old daughter, whom you have not yet seen? Nor is that child's future, it may be, yours to settle. Well, go to your wife, for this is Niafer's man who is talking, and not mine. Go up, Methuselah, and behold the new life which you have created and can not control at all."

So Manuel went to where Niafer lay pale and glad in the golden bed of Freydis, and he duly looked at the contents of the small heaving bundle at Niafer's side; and whether or no he scaled the traditional peaks of emotion was no one's concern save Manuel's. He began, in any event, to talk in the vein which, he felt, this high occasion demanded.

But Niafer, who was never romantic nowadays, merely said that, anyhow, it was a blessing it was all over, and that she hoped now they would soon be leaving Sargyll.

"But Freydis is so kind, my dear," said Manuel, "and so fond of you."

"I never in my life," declared Niafer, "knew anybody to go off so terribly in her looks as that two-faced cat has done. As for being fond of me, I trust her exactly as far as I can see her."

"Yet, Niafer, I have heard you declare time and again——"

"Well, and if you did, Manuel, one has to be civil."

"You women!" he observed discreetly.

"As if it were not as plain as the nose on her face—and I do not suppose that even you, Manuel, will be contending she has a really good nose—that the woman is simply itching to make a fool of you

again. Manuel, I declare I have no patience with you when you keep arguing about such unarguable facts.

Manuel, exercising augmented discretion, said nothing whatever.

"And you may talk yourself black in the face, Manuel, but nevertheless I am going to call the child Melicent, after my own mother, as soon as a priest can be fetched from the mainland to christen her. No, Manuel, it is all very well for your dear friend to call herself a gray witch, but I do not notice any priests coming to this house unless they are especially sent for, and I draw my own conclusions."

"Well, well, let us not argue about it, my dear."

"Yes, but who started all this arguing and fault-finding, I would like to know?"

"Why, to be sure I did. But I spoke without thinking. I was wrong. I admit it. So do not excite yourself, my darling."

"And as if I could help the child's not being a boy."

"But I never said——"

"No, but you keep thinking it, and sulking is the one thing I can not stand. No, Manuel, no, I do not complain; but I do think that after all I have been through with——" Niafer whimpered sleepily.

"Yes, yes," said Manuel, stroking her soft crinkly hair.

"And with that silky hell-cat watching me all the time—and looking ten years younger than I do now—and planning I do not know what——"

"Yes, to be sure," said Manuel soothingly; "you are quite right, my dear."

So a silence fell, and presently Niafer slept. Manuel sat watching her with a perplexed, fond smile. For Niafer was the dearest and cleverest woman in the world, of course, but it did not seem to Manuel that she was rising to properly exalted zones of sentiment over the advent of the small heaving bundle at Niafer's side.

Nor did this Niafer appear to be quite the girl he had married a twelvemonth back. But even so, this Niafer was his wife, by his own choice; and whatever else she was, or was not, he could not now control at all.

SOME while after Niafer was asleep, and when the night was fairly advanced, Manuel heard a whizzing and



snorting in the air. He went to the window and lifted the scarlet curtain figured with ramping gold dragons, and he looked out to find a vast number of tiny bluish lights skipping about confusedly and agilely in the darkness like shining fleas. These approached the river-bank and gathered there.

Then the assembled lights began to come toward the house. Manuel could now see that these lights were carried by dwarfs who had the eyes of owls and the long beaks of cranes. These dwarfs were jumping and dancing about Freydis like an insane body-guard.

Freydis walked among them very remarkably attired. Upon her head shone the uraeus crown surmounted by two crested snakes, and she carried a long rod of cedar-wood topped with an apple carved in bluestone, and at her side came the appearance of a tall young man.

So they all approached the house, and the young man looked up fixedly at the unlighted window as if he were looking at Manuel. The young man smiled; his teeth gleamed in the blue glare. Then the whole company entered the house, and Manuel could see no more, but he could hear small prancing hoof-beats downstairs and the clattering of plates and much whinnying laughter. Manuel was wondering what he must do, for he had perfectly recognized the strapping tall young fellow.

Presently Manuel heard music; it was, he knew, the ravishing Nis air, which charms the mind into sweet confusion and oblivion, and Manuel did not attempt to withstand its wooing. He hastily undressed, said a staid prayer or two, and he slept dreamlessly.

In the morning Dom Manuel arose early and left Niafer still sleeping with the baby. Manuel came down through the lower hall, where the table was as the revelers had left it. In the middle of the disordered room stood a huge copper vessel half-full of liquor, and beside it was a drinking-horn of gold.

Manuel paused here and drank of the sweet heather wine to hearten him. Then he went out into the bright windy morning and to the river-bank, where that which he loved and dreaded awaited Manuel. Manuel knew that he went to meet the image which he had made of

clay, and to which through unholy arts he had given life.

The thing came up out of the glistening ripples of brown water, and the thing embraced Manuel and kissed him.

"I am pagan," the thing said in a sweet mournful voice, "and so I could not come to you until your love was given to the unchristened. For I was not ever christened, and so my true name is not known to anybody. But in the far lands where I am worshiped as a god I am called Sesptra of the Dreams."

"That name has the ring of an anagram," said Manuel.

"It is, if you insist, an anagram," the thing replied.

"I did not give you any such name," said Manuel; and then he said, "Sesptra, how beautiful you are!"

"Is that why you are trembling, Manuel?"

I tremble because the depths of my being have been shaken. I have lived for a great quiet while through days made up of small mishaps and little pleasures and only half-earnest desires which moved about upon the surface of my being like minnows in the shoals of a still lake.

"But now that I have seen and heard and touched you, Sesptra of the Dreams, a passion moves in me that possesses all of me, and I am frightened."

"It is the passion which informs those who make images. It is the master you denied, poor foolish Manuel, and the master who will take no denial."

"Sesptra, what is your will with me?"

"It is my will that you go hence with me on a long journey into the far lands where I am worshiped as a god. For I love you, my creator, who gave life to me, and you love me more than aught else, and it is not right that we be parted."

"I can not go on any journey, just now, for I have my lands and castles to regain, and my wife and my new-born child to protect."

Sesptra began to smile adorably.

"What are these things to me and you, or to any one that makes images?"

Then Sesptra began to speak adorably, as he walked on the river-bank, with one arm about Dom Manuel. Always Sesptra limped as he walked. A stiff and obdurate wind was ruffling the broad brown shining water, and as they walked, this wind buf-

feted them and tore at their clothing. Manuel clung to his hat with one hand and with the other held to lame Sespbra of the Dreams. Sespbra talked of matters not to be recorded.

"That is a handsome ring you have there," said Sespbra, by and by.

"It is the ring my wife gave me when we were married," Manuel replied.

"Then you must give it to me, dear Manuel."

"No, no. I can not part with it."

"But it is beautiful, and I want it," Sespbra said.

So Manuel gave him the ring.

Now Sespbra began again to talk of matters not to be recorded. And Manuel saw that Manuel's imperiled lands made such a part of earth as one grain of sand contributed to the long narrow beach they were treading.

He saw his wife Niafer as a plain-featured and dull woman, not in any way remarkable among the millions of such women as were at that moment preparing breakfast or fretting over other small tasks. He saw his new-born child as a mewling lump of flesh. And he saw Sespbra, whom he had made so strong and strange and beautiful, and it was as in a half-daze he heard that obdurate wind commingled with the sweet voice of Sespbra as Sespbra talked of matters not to be recorded.

"Now then let us go into the house," said Sespbra, presently, "and write droll letters to King Hoel and King Ferdinand and Duke Sigurd, in reply to the fine offers they have been making you."

WHEN they had come into the disordered banquet-hall, Manuel cleared away the silver plates from one corner of the table, and he took pen and ink and he wrote as Sespbra dictated.

"But these are very insulting replies," observed Dom Manuel, "and they will make their recipients furious. These princes, Sespbra, are my good friends, and they are powerful friends, upon whose favor I am dependent."

"Yes, but how beautifully these replies are worded! See now, dear Manuel, how divertingly you have described King Hoel's hideous nose in your letter to King Hoel; and in your letter to the pious Duke Sigurd that which you say about the ab-

surdity of religion here is a masterpiece of paradox and very exquisite prose. So I must see to it that these replies are sent, to make people admire you everywhere. But you and I will not bother about these stupid princes any more, nor will you need any friends save me, for we will go to this and that remote strange place, and our manner of living will be such and such, and we will do so and so. And we will not ever be parted until you die."

"What will you do then, dear Sespbra?"

"I shall survive you, as all gods outlive their creators. And I must depute the building of your monument to men of feeble minds which have been properly impaired by futile studies and senility. That is the way in which all gods are doomed to deal with their creators; but that need not trouble us as yet."

"No," Manuel said, "I can not go with you."

The hand of Sespbra closed on the hand of Manuel caressingly.

Manuel said:

"I will go with you. But what will become of the woman and the child whom I leave behind me unfriended?"

"That is true," Sespbra replied; "there will be nobody to look out for them, and they will perish miserably. That is not important, but perhaps upon the whole it would be better for you to kill them before we depart from Sargyll."

"Very well, then," said Manuel. "I will do that, but you must come up into the room with me, for I cannot bear to lose sight of you."

Sespbra said—

"I shall not ever leave you now."

They went up-stairs together into the room where Manuel's wife Niafer lay asleep. Manuel drew his dagger. Niafer turned in her sleep, so that she seemed to offer her round small throat to the raised knife. Manuel saw that on the other side of the golden bed sat Queen Freydis, making a rich glow of color there, and in her lap was the naked new-born child.

Freydis rose now, holding the child to her breast and smiling. A devil might smile thus upon contriving some new torment for lost souls, but Manuel had not known a fair woman's face could be so cruel.

Then this evil joy passed from the face

of Freydis. She dipped her fingers into the bowl of water with which she had been bathing the child, and with her fingertips she made upon the child's forehead the sign of a cross.

Said Freydis—

"Melicent, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Sesphra passed wildly toward the fireplace, crying—

"A penny, a penny, twopence, a penny and a half, and a half-penny!"

At his call the fire shot forth tall flames, and Sesphra entered these flames as a man goes between parted curtains, and instantly the fire collapsed and was as it had been.

Already the hands of Freydis were moving deftly in the sleep charm, so that Niafer did not move. Freydis today was resplendently robed in flame-colored silk, and about her dark hair was a circlet of burnished copper.

Manuel had dropped his dagger so that the point of it pierced the floor, and the weapon stood erect and quivering. But Manuel was shaken more horribly than shook the dagger, with horror and self-loathing. So he waited, looking at his dear wife Niafer, who slept untroubled, and at fiery-colored Freydis, who was smiling rather queerly.

"Come now," said Freydis. "I must tell you that Sesphra is pagan, and can not thrive except among those whose love is given to the unchristened. Thus he could not come to Sargyll until the arrival of this little heathen whom I have just made Christian. Now we have only Christian terrors here, and your fate again is in my hands."

Dom Manuel groaned.

"Freydis," he said, "you have rescued me from unspeakable wickedness. A moment more and I would have slain my wife and child because of Sesphra's resistless magic."

Said Freydis, still smiling a queer secret smile:

"Indeed, there is no telling into what folly and misery Sesphra would not have led you. For you fashioned his legs unevenly, and he has not ever pardoned you his lameness."

"The thing is a devil," Manuel groaned again. "Oh, I have loosed among man-

kind a blighting misery which I can not control at all!"

"The thing is you as you were once, gray Manuel. You had comeliness and wit and youth and courage, and these you gave the image, shaping it boldly to your proud youth's will and in your proud youth's likeness. But human pity and any constant love you did not then have to give, either to your fellows or to the image or to me. So you amused yourself by making Sesphra and me that which we are today."

Now again showed subtly evil thoughts in the bright-colored, shrewd face of Freydis, and Dom Manuel of a sudden was frightened. It occurred to him for the first time that he and his loved wife and child were in this sorcerous place at the mercy of the whims and the unwholesome servitors of this not very friendly looking witch-woman. Dom Manuel thought of that discomfortable night-porter and of the madness that had smitten King Raymond's men and of the clattering, vicious little hoofs of the shrill dwarfs, and this room seemed chilly.

SO MANUEL said, with jovial laughter: "You speak as if you had not grown more adorable each year, dear Freydis, and as if I would not be vastly flattered to think I had any hand in the improvement. You should not fish thus unblushingly for compliments. Yet much of what you assert is true, for I would that I had not ever meddled in this mischancy business of creating things I can not manage."

Queen Freydis moved in shimmering splendor toward the fireplace, and she paused there, considerably looking down at the small contention of flames.

"Did you not, though, again create much misery when for your pleasure you gave life to this girl child? Certainly you must know that there will be in her life—if life indeed be long spared to her," said Freydis reflectively—"far less of joy than of sorrow, for that is the way it is with the life of everybody. But all this likewise is out of your hands, for in Sesphra and in the child and in me you have lightly created that which you can not control. No, it is I who control the outcome."

"Why, to be sure," says Manuel heartily, but in a cold sweat, "and I am sure, too, that nobody is better qualified to



handle it. Come now, Freydis. Just as you say, this is a serious situation, and something really ought to be done about this situation. Come now, dear friend, in what way can we take back the life we gave this lovely fiend?"

"And would I be wanting to kill my husband?" Queen Freydis asked, and she smiled wonderfully. "Why, but yes, this fair lame child of yours is my husband today, and I love him, for Sespheira is all that you were when I loved you, Manuel. No, Manuel, Sespheira must live for a great while, long after you have been turned to graveyard-dust; and he will limp about wherever pagans are to be found, and he will always win much love from the high-hearted pagans because of his comeliness and his unfading jaunty youth. And whether he will do any good anywhere is doubtful, but it is certain he will do harm, and it is equally certain that already he weighs my happiness as carelessly as you once weighed it."

"Well, Freydis, but, to be sure, this puts a new complexion upon matters, and not for worlds would I be coming between husband and wife——"

Queen Freydis looked up from the flames toward Dom Manuel, very sadly. Freydis shrugged, flinging out her hands.

"And at the last I can not do that, either. So do you two dreary unimportant well-mated people remain unhurt, now that I go to seek my husband, and now I endeavor to win my pardon for not letting him torment you. Eh, I was tempted, gray Manuel, to let my masterful, fine husband have his pleasure of you, and of this lean, ugly woman and her brat, too, as formerly you had your pleasure of me.

"But women are so queerly fashioned that at the last I can not consent to harm this gray, staid, tedious fellow or any of his chattels. For all passes in this world save one thing only; and though the young Manuel whom I loved in a Summer that is gone be nowadays as perished as that Summer's gay leaves, it is certain a woman's folly does not ever perish."

"Indeed, I did not merit that you should care for me," said Manuel unhappily.

But internally he felt much more cheerful, for it appeared that Freydis was not going to do anything violent and irreparable and such as her better nature would afterward regret.

Queen Freydis went to the window and lifted the scarlet curtain figured with ramping gold dragons.

"Look you now, that ship which shows at the river-bend, with lions and castles painted on her brown sails, is King Ferdinand's ship, which he has sent to fetch you from Sargyll; and all your troubles are over, for Ferdinand will give you new wealth and forts and meadowlands. So I may now depart, to look for Sespheira, and for my pardon, if I can get it."

"But whither do you go, dear Freydis?"

"What does that matter," she answered, looking long and queerly at him, "now that Count Manuel has no further need of me?"

Then Freydis looked at Niafer, lying there in a charmed sleep.

"I neither love nor entirely hate you, ugly and lean and fretful Niafer, but assuredly I do not envy you. You are welcome to your fidgeting gray husband. My husband does not grow old and tender-hearted and subservient to me, and he never will."

Thereafter Freydis bent down, and she kissed the child she had christened.

"Some day you will be a woman, Melicent, and then you will be loving some man or another man. I could hope that you will then love the man who will make you happy, but that sort of man has not yet been found."

THEN Freydis went away, and her castle went with her as a smoke passes. Manuel was thus left sitting out-of-doors in a reaped field, alone with his wife and child, while Ferdinand's ship came about.

Niafer slept. But now the child awoke to regard the world into which she had been summoned willy-nilly, and the child began to whimper.

Dom Manuel patted this intimidating small creature gingerly with a strong comely hand, from which his wedding ring was missing. That would require explanation.

So Manuel devoted this brief waiting in a reaped field to wondering just how much about the past he might judiciously tell his wife when she awoke to question him. This problem, they relate, was set Dom Manuel in the old days, and they say, too, that it remains unsolved.



The Devil's House

BY J. STORER CLOUSTON



IT WAS on a dirty afternoon in late October that Dr. Anstruther turned out of the mud and crowds and traffic of New Bond Street into the well known show-rooms of Messrs. Marshley & Waldron. That was when Marshley & Waldron were in their old premises, a short way up from Piccadilly, and when motor-omnibuses and cars were yet in the womb of Time, and on a day like this your trousers were splashed by the wheels of hansoms and such-like prehistoric vehicles.

"I'll just have a look round by myself, thank you," he said to the young man who advanced, and strolled on slowly through the rooms.

The doctor was a tall, gaunt, large-boned Scotchman with a clipped gray mustache and ragged eyebrows and a dry, reserved manner; yet underneath the formidable brows and the caustic speech a very occasional twinkle in the eye and a surprising flavor of geniality in his rare smile hinted at the reason why his friends, though few, were devoted.

It was that quality, in fact, of friendship which had first led him into Marshley & Waldron's. A retired Anglo-Indian and a confirmed bachelor, he had settled in the east coast hamlet of Chipping-Urby a few months after his old friend Colonel Barlow retired from the army and came to live at Urby Hall.

The pair had always been intimate cronies and by this time had grown to be inseparable; the more readily as the doctor had no near relatives and the colonel only one, his nephew and reputed heir, Vincent Barlow, a young barrister living in London; while neighbors in that part of the world were almost non-existent.

Colonel Barlow was a man of ample means and a passionate collector, especially of rare china, but with a strong distaste for London and indeed for towns and town-life of any kind. Dr. Anstruther, on the other hand, liked to run up to town oc-

asionally, and on these occasions used to look round the show-rooms and curiosity-shops on his friend's behalf. He himself was a collector in a modest way and an excellent and sagacious judge.

Such a valuable client was not apt to be left long alone, and he had hardly been there five minutes before Mr. Waldron himself came forward and greeted him affably, the Mr. Waldron of those days being a square-shouldered gentleman with a waxed red mustache and a pale, business-like eye.

"We happen," said he, "to have an article of *vertu* at present that the colonel might quite fancy. I have noticed his taste is generally for the odd and unusual; in fact, sir, one might almost say for the *outré*. I think that is so, doctor?"

Dr. Anstruther was a man of few words. He merely nodded and agreed that Colonel Barlow's taste did run that way.

"It's a quite remarkably *outré* article," said Mr. Waldron. "Quite unusually *outré*. In fact it's a little too much so for most people."

Both by profession and instinct the doctor was an observant man, and it struck him even at that moment that there was something a little curious in Mr. Waldron's laugh. He followed him through two or three show-rooms, and then, as they approached a wide shelf on which a space seemed to have been cleared round a single object, he was again struck, this time by a curious note in Mr. Waldron's voice.

"Tut, tut!" he exclaimed impatiently. "What bit of nonsense is this now?"

This single object was covered with a cloth thrown loosely over it, and as Mr. Waldron spoke, he plucked it off and threw it aside with an air of considerable irritation, the doctor noticed.

Dr. Anstruther himself was one of the most imperturbable and least fanciful of men, yet hardly was the cloth off when he was conscious of a curious wish that it were on again. The vase that stood revealed was tall and of a foreign and ornate design, but beyond the fact that it had, generally speaking, a kind of spiky appearance, he was hardly conscious of its details, his eye was so filled by one figure embossed on it in low relief, and the impression produced by this figure was so singular. For some moments he gazed at it in silence, and it was with a conscious

effort that he turned away his eyes at last and spoke.

"I don't like it," he said. "What do they call the thing?"

"In our catalog we called it the Lutzigen Vase," said Mr. Waldron. "But that's only where it comes from—Lutzigen in Brandenburg. It has also a kind of popular name, so to speak, which means, I believe, 'The Devil's house.'"

"First part is suitable enough," muttered Dr. Anstruther, looking hard at the vase under his eyebrows, "but why 'house'?"

"Why it was called so I have no idea, but we are hoping to get some more information about its story, and if we do, I'll be happy to send it on to Colonel Barlow."

Dr. Anstruther nodded absently. His thoughts seemed singularly engrossed.

"The only figure on it," the other continued, "is this curious gentleman, who seems to be a kind of high dignitary or possibly a learned professor; his robes might do for either. The vase is certainly some centuries old, and it is hard to say exactly what he was meant for."

But it was not the robes of the squat, round-paunched figure that fascinated and repelled the doctor. It was the broad, gross, smiling face with the remarkably bulging eyes. And yet even that seemed scarcely ugly enough to give him the very odd sensation that kept running down his spine all the time he stood there and increased disagreeably every time he looked the creature straight in the eye.

"It is an evil thing," murmured Dr. Anstruther, more to himself apparently than aloud.

"Kind of odd feeling he gives one," agreed Mr. Waldron, who looked if possible even less likely to be subject to odd sensations than the doctor, being in fact the very incarnation of commercial shrewdness and assurance. "One or two of our assistants get quite scary, especially as it's growing toward evening and before we light up. That's the meaning of this foolishness."

As he spoke, he indicated the cloth with his foot.

"Nervous chickens, I call 'em," he said, "but I suppose some people are built that way."

He lowered his voice a little and added—
"The worst of this bit of silliness is that the thing might get stolen and something



else put in its place, and you'd never know while this cloth was over it."

"I should hardly think it was a thing a thief would select," observed Dr. Anstruther.

Mr. Waldron tugged the end of his stiff red mustache.

"One would scarcely think so," he agreed. "But it's a queer case. I hardly know what to think."

"*Humph,*" grunted Dr. Anstruther. "Well, to me it seems safe enough. And now I think I'll look at something else."

Frowning formidably, he looked the figure hard in the eye before he turned away, as if defying it to intimidate a veteran who had looked heathen idols and sudden death in the face for thirty years, and then the two passed into another show-room.

"It doesn't appeal to you then, sir?" inquired Mr. Waldron.

"It does not," said Dr. Anstruther emphatically. "Does it appeal to anybody?"

"It isn't my own taste certainly. In fact, speaking unprofessionally, it hardly seems to me what you'd call a healthy taste. Still, as a matter of fact, I've seen one or two who seemed hardly able to tear themselves away from it. There's a foreign chap in particular——"

Mr. Waldron broke off suddenly, and then, touching the doctor's arm, said in a lowered voice:

"There he comes now! The thing seems to be a regular magnet for the fellow—just look at him, sir."

From where they stood they could see into the other show-room, and there, slowly approaching the vase with his back half-turned toward them appeared a well-dressed young man in a black felt hat. Dr. Anstruther studied him with pursed lips and an intent professional look in his eye. More and more slowly the young man came toward the vase, stopping sometimes as if he hesitated and almost decided to flee, and then drawn on by a force too strong for him. The simile of the snake and the bird rose vividly to the doctor's mind.

"Quite interesting," he murmured. "I've seen natives attracted like that by the filthiest looking idols—women especially. Temptation takes damned queer forms. *Hullo——*"

He broke off and his eyes opened wide. The young man had come right in front of the vase by this time, and now, with a

jerky impulsive movement, as if forced despite his judgment, he raised his hand and deferentially bared his head. It was a curiously square head, Dr. Anstruther noticed, with very close-cropped fair hair, and it bent a little forward involuntarily toward the vase.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Mr. Waldron. "The chap is taking off his hat to it!"

His voice must have reached the young man, for he turned with a violent start and for a moment showed a pale face with wide-open blue eyes staring in their direction. It was an open, pleasant and simple face, the doctor thought in the few seconds it was turned toward them, and then the young man hastily put on his hat and hurried out of their sight.

"What a rum go!" commented Mr. Waldron.

"Very," murmured Dr. Anstruther.

ABOUT the middle of the day, a week later, Vincent Barlow rang the bell of his sitting-room in Ebury Street and asked to see his landlady. While waiting for her, he stood looking out of the window, as he had been looking before he rang, a slight frown on his usually good-humored face and his hands impatiently jingling the coins in the pockets of his tweed trousers. From his costume it seemed evident that he must be going out of town.

It was a slim, dark-haired, good-looking specimen of the briefless young barrister who turned from the window to greet his landlady when she entered.

"This is a great nuisance," he began. "I'm afraid I must ask you to give me a little lunch in my rooms before I go. My uncle has asked me to take down rather a valuable bit of china which he has been buying. Marshley & Waldron were to have sent it round here ready-packed first thing this morning, but it hasn't come and I can't start without the thing.

"I'm going round now to their place to see what has happened. If by any chance it comes while I am away, please see that the bearer understands that I haven't started for Urby Hall yet but am coming back to my rooms; and let him leave the thing here. Be very careful of it. The lord knows how much my uncle has paid for it."

He snatched up his hat and was off, and it was over an hour before he returned.



"That china vase is going to play the dickens with my week-end in the country," he told his landlady half-humorously when he got back. "It seems that some other collector is after it and has persuaded Marshley & Waldron not to send it off till he has telegraphed an offer to my uncle; so here I've got to wait till they get Colonel Barlow's answer."

About four o'clock a note came round by hand and Vincent said with resignation:

"Well, my uncle has refused the offer and the vase will be packed up and sent to meet me at Liverpool Street in time to catch the seven-forty-five. That's the only train left now—and a rotten bad one at that."

AS HE followed his porter toward the train, Vincent Barlow glanced over his shoulder at the illuminated clock and saw that it was twenty-five minutes to eight. Ahead of him, down the whole drafty length of the lamplit platform he noticed only one fellow passenger, a man in an overcoat and a black felt hat, and when this man had turned into a carriage, he and the porter were alone.

Vincent had a quick imagination and he was accustomed to, and, being young, enjoyed its tricks, yet he was sharply and a little disagreeably surprized by the acute sense of loneliness which suddenly possessed him now. That Liverpool Street platform seemed to him the most depressingly desolate spot he had ever visited, and though as a rule he was most particular in securing a carriage to himself, it gave him a fresh touch of depression to see that not only was the third-class compartment he selected empty but all the other compartments in that coach likewise.

"There seem to be very few people traveling by this train," he remarked, and then added: "Be careful with that box, porter; it contains china."

"China?" said the man. "I was wondering what was in it. It ain't one of them cremation-urns, is it, sir?"

For an instant Vincent looked at the box askance and then he laughed and said—

"Not as bad as that."

"I was wondering," said the porter with an odd look at the box.

He placed it on the seat and went away, and for a minute or two Vincent hung out of the window, watching his retreating

back, and then with a conscious effort drew the window up and settled himself in a corner of the carriage.

It was a blustering October evening and even under the station roof he could hear the rushing and the sighing of invading eddies from the wind without. Now and then they made the window rattle and promised a chilly journey over the east coast flats.

Behind his youthful ardor for the gaities of town Vincent had a deep affection for vacant country spaces and the seaboard regions, and as a rule a journey like this, out of London at dark into the dead of the country, gave him a pleasing sense of adventure.

But tonight his spirits fell with every minute he sat waiting for the train to start, and, what surprized and disconcerted him most, was that he found himself wishing that some fellow passenger would choose this compartment to keep him company.

They started at last and he wrapped his rug about his knees, lighted his pipe and tried to bury himself in a novel. Yet at each station, while they passed through the environs of the town, he caught himself instinctively glancing at the window and feeling each time a sense of disappointment that no one entered. And then when the black country succeeded the strings of lamps and the stopping-places grew few, he threw down his book and sprang to his feet.

This time it was more than a sense of loneliness that oppressed him. A nasty fancy had begun already to touch his nerves and make them quiver, and now it became intolerable. He was far from timid; his nerves were usually under admirable control, and his high spirit scorned this intruding fancy.

Yet more and more loudly a voice seemed to say to him—

"There is somebody else in this carriage."

He stood still for a moment, wrestling with the impulse, and then nothing could withhold him from dropping on to his knees and looking first under one seat and then under the other. To make sure, he even took his stick down from the rack and passed it along.

"You fool!" he said to himself; yet he caught himself breathing more easily.

He sat down again and picked up his

book, but again that unnerving fancy was too strong for him. He knew for certain now it was only fancy, for, save under the seat, where could a fellow passenger hide himself in a third-class railway-carriage?

And then he found his eyes instinctively turning to that square wooden box which the porter had so carefully placed on the opposite seat. And each glance he gave it was more uncomfortable.

"Can the thing actually be an antique cremation-urn?" he wondered for an instant and then almost laughed aloud at the idea of any urn containing a concealed fellow passenger.

But then again he wondered what had made the porter ask that question and eye the box so oddly. Had he felt something of the same discomfort as he wheeled it on his barrow? If so, could his own feeling be mere fancy?

They stopped at a station, and with a vast sense of relief he let down the window and leaned out. The clean night air seemed to blow the disturbing fancy out of his head, and when they started, he left the window down and let the wind whistle into the carriage all the way to Gilswood Junction. Uncomfortable he still remained, yet the fresh drafts of air seemed to have a tonic effect, as if the fancy were morbid and its cause unclean and the pure wind from the sea disinfected the carriage.

The special feature of this evening train to which Vincent had objected was the change which its passengers had to make at Gilswood and the tedious wait of an hour before the connection for Chipping-Urby could be caught. That night, with the platforms in half-lighted darkness and the wind tearing through them as through a funnel, and hardly a passenger to be seen but himself, the prospect was even less exhilarating than usual.

As he went toward the refreshment-room, he was conscious of one or two figures passing out of the station farther up the platform, but at the moment those were all he noticed, and the refreshment-room itself struck him vividly as emptiness incarnate. He had not ventured to let his uncle's precious vase out of his sight, and so he carried the box in with him, placed it on a chair and went to the counter.

The hour of the train's departure from London had meant a chop at his rooms instead of dinner at his club, and he now

bought a plate of sandwiches and a cup of cocoa and bore them to one of the tables by the wall.

"Thank Heaven, this will serve to kill some of the time!" he said to himself.

The place was a typical railway refreshment-room, large, gaunt and ill-lighted. On this particular evening it was full of drafts and flickering shadows within and besieged by the wind without. The waitress vanished after she had served him; the light was too bad for reading, and as he sat there with his sandwiches, there began to creep over Vincent the same uncomfortable, haunting fancy that had depressed him in the train.

On the chair beside him stood the wooden box, and before long he found himself with his elbow on the table and his head on his hands, staring at that square case and wondering—insistently wondering.

The creak of a chair which disturbed him seemed for an instant to be the twang of his own startled nerves. He turned his head sharply, to see a man sitting at that same table a few feet from his elbow. But for that one creak as the stranger settled himself in his chair, he might have dropped out of space.

"I am afraid I have a little startled you," said the stranger politely.

Startled though Vincent unquestionably was, his eyes wore merely the impassive steady English stare that simply says, "I don't know who you are"; that barrier which, along with the North Sea, has kept the outer world for centuries at arm's length.

But behind it he was observing. From his accent, the man was a foreigner, he noticed, and neither his clothes nor the close-cropped fair hair beneath the black felt hat had the British cut. He was young; his face was open, simple and serious; and his manner seemed to Vincent indefinitely suggestive of some secret excitement held tight on leash.

On his part, the stranger seemed to fidget a little under the young Englishman's gaze.

"I must apologize—" he began.

"Not at all," said Vincent briefly.

For a few moments the stranger said nothing more. He had ordered no refreshments and simply sat there with his elbows on the table, twisting his fingers a little. Then he remarked—



"There seems to be a curious feeling in the air tonight."

Again Vincent was startled, for there was that in the young man's tone which suggested they shared a confidence, and he was only too well aware how vivid this curious feeling was to himself. Yet his voice remained cool and his eyes guarded.

The young man was manifestly growing nervous and his fingers were twining and intertwining faster, but a look of stolid resolution had mounted to his eyes and stayed there. When he spoke again, his voice was deliberate with the deliberation of strong control.

"You have noticed it too," he said quietly, "and you have been wondering. Yes, it is strange and seems not easy to account for."

A subtle hint in his eye more than his voice that he was not so mystified himself broke a little into Vincent's reserve.

"Can you account for it?" he found himself asking.

"It is because you are taking away something that you should not take."

Vincent was sitting at the side of the oblong table and the stranger at the end. Between them, under Vincent's elbow, was the chair on which the box was resting. Both glanced at it, the stranger eagerly and yet with a little shudder, Vincent quickly and only for an instant. The next, his eyes were on the stranger's.

"You seem to know my name," he observed dryly.

"Yes," said the other, talking quietly now and with his restraint ebbing away as he spoke, "I know all about you, Mr. Barlow. It is the vase which you are taking to your uncle. It was I that telegraphed to buy it back from him today—for he ought not to have it. But he has refused—refused me any price.

"My own name is Helmolt. I am not myself rich but I am what you call of a good family—von Helmolt we are really called; and I have many friends and relations with influence and with money. But I could not get them to realize till it was too late and when they sent me at last the money to buy the vase, then it was too late—just too late!"

There was something so urgent and sincere in the young man's flow of words that Vincent's mouth relaxed.

"Bad luck," he murmured.

Von Helmolt's blue eyes began to light up.

"You sympathize?" he cried eagerly. "Ah, I shall tell you more! This vase is a national relic. It should never have gone out of its own country. And now it must return to its country."

"How?" asked Vincent dryly.

The other grew even more insistently earnest.

"You and I shall try to think of a way, Mr. Barlow," he said, lowering his voice. "Put yourself in the position of me. Imagine an English relic, something historic, something unique, something of not so great value in itself but of so much sentiment and value to you."

He glanced at the box as he spoke, and it was curious to note the mixture of gloating and yet of something like shrinking that seemed to affect him for an instant.

"Then imagine it going away from England, and how would you feel? That is how I feel."

Though Vincent had treated his profession lightly enough, he had yet acquired something of its scepticism and something of its mask.

"I see," was his only remark.

"If you see, surely you can also feel a little."

Again Vincent looked at him without discernible expression.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well, Mr. Barlow, I offer you three hundred pounds for that vase."

"Unfortunately it isn't mine to sell."

"Four hundred pounds!"

"I tell you, Mr. von Helmolt, it isn't mine to sell."

"Five hundred pounds! Come now, Mr. Barlow, I know all about you. You have debts; you need money. You can give your uncle whatever share of that five hundred pounds you choose. It covers nearly ten times what he paid, so there will be plenty for you both. Or, if you like, the box might simply get stolen—"

"I think I hear my train," said Vincent.

As he rose, the other laid his hand beseechingly on his arm.

"But surely, my friend—"

Vincent shook the hand off with a sharp movement of his arm, so sharp that it struck against the chair between them and the box upon it rattled and slid an inch or two toward the edge.

The most extraordinary change came over Helmolt.

"For God's sake!" he cried in an agonized voice.

But on the instant Vincent had seized the rope round the box, and the man's cry died into a gasp of relief.

"If you were to break that vase——"

Again he broke off and looked at Barlow half-imploringly and half-menacingly.

"If you break it, or any one breaks it—beware! That which is in it— Oh, my God, but it must not get broken! It must not!"

Vincent looked at him with a kindlier expression. The man was mad, he felt certain, and he said to him soothingly:

"That's all right, I shall be careful. Don't worry about it."

A distant rumble rose faintly above the voices of the wind. This time he knew it actually was the train, and with a nod and a "good evening" he crossed the room toward the platform.

Glancing over his shoulder as he went through the swinging door, he saw Helmolt with his feet planted apart and his head a little thrust forward, staring, it seemed, at the box he carried rather than at himself.

"Obviously mad," he said to himself with the confidence of youth.

SHORTLY after seven o'clock Dr. Anstruther left his house to dine at the hall. He had to pass through the straggling street of the little village on his way, where the greatest house was the small ancient tavern obscurely styled "The Yellow Mouse" (a quadruped surmised by the learned to be descended from the "*Maunch d'or*" in the arms of the early lords of Urby).

In the light of a young moon its sign-board hung black above the side-walk, and beyond, a dark figure approached. Every inhabitant of the village was well known to the doctor by this time, and this man was not one of them, he decided.

As they drew nearer, there seemed to be something vaguely familiar in the figure—a young man in an overcoat and a dark felt hat, he seemed to be; and then before they had approached near enough to see more distinctly, the stranger turned into The Yellow Mouse. A curious suspicion shot through the doctor's mind.

It was barely half-past seven when he passed through the lodge-gates, and as he still had plenty of time, he strolled slowly up the avenue. Two lines of tall beech-trees nearly met over his head, but their leaves were fast thinning and the crescent moon gave light enough to see glimpses of the park on either hand, and, more dimly, the gray old house ahead.

He noticed that the air was unusually still for the time of year in those regions. Under the trees the evening, indeed, felt even close.

"If it were July, one would expect thunder," he thought.

So constantly did Dr. Anstruther dine at the hall and so unvarying was the routine that it gave him a sharp shock of surprize to find himself shown into the drawing-room. Save on the very rare occasions when there were a party of other guests, it had always been the library; but tonight a fire was burning here, and, what surprized him afresh, a paper and a couple of magazines seemed to show that the colonel had been sitting there during the afternoon.

"Some repairs must be going on in the library," he deduced.

Colonel Barlow entered, a middle-sized, wiry-looking man with a weather-beaten face and a quiet, resolute eye. A mouth and chin firm to the point of obstinacy gave a hint of the qualities that had given him a fighting-reputation still remembered in India, and since then made him the most pertinacious and indefatigable of collectors.

Yet tranquil good humor was the chief impression given by his face in repose, and still more so when he spoke and smiled.

"You've moved into the drawing-room, I see," said his friend, and once again he was surprized, this time to find his remark barely answered.

Colonel Barlow murmured something vague about "a change," and then, as usual in that house, dinner was announced with military punctuality.

The colonel detested the trammels of conventionality and made it a rule that his servants should not stand about in the dining-room overhearing the conversation. When he wanted to talk, he liked to talk freely, and tonight he began abruptly—

"Vincent has been down here for the week-end."

"You told me he was coming."

"His manners are not improving."



"His manners!"

The doctor stared at his host.

"What's the matter with them?"

"He has been spending too much money," said the colonel shortly. "And when I told him what I thought of his extravagance, he was rude to me. I can't stand rudeness, Anstruther, even from Vincent."

Dr. Anstruther got a very sharp and a very unpleasant shock of surprise this time. The mere fact of a quarrel between this uncle and nephew, usually the best of friends and mutually attached, was astonishing. His host's petulant irritation was, knowing the man so well, perhaps even more unexpected.

"What actually happened?" he asked quietly.

Colonel Barlow hesitated. He was a reserved man and strongly averse from the discussion of matters that touched him nearly, but gradually in the course of the dinner he let fall the incidents of his nephew's visit and their unfortunate conversation.

And as they came out, Dr. Anstruther wondered the more. There seemed to have been no reasonable grounds at all for any serious difference; either on the part of uncle or nephew. There was no story, in fact, to tell, unless something were being held back.

Yet there seemed to be the less reason to suspect this, since his host's resentment seemed gradually to fade away, till by the time the mahogany table was cleared, after the custom of the house, and the port was passed, it had quite vanished, and he was his old quiet self again. It was as if the fumes of something disagreeable had dissipated at last.

Both men were abstemious drinkers and heavy smokers, and as a rule after a glass of port they adjourned at once to the library, but tonight Colonel Barlow passed the decanter thrice and then had the cigars brought into the dining-room. And all the while Dr. Anstruther was conscious that he had not yet talked of all he meant to. At last he said, a little abruptly—

"Well, Anstruther, I bought that vase after all."

"I thought you would—just to show your independence of my opinion."

The doctor smiled a little as he spoke, but there was no smile in response.

"It is—" began the colonel, and then hesitated. "It's a devilish queer article."

Dr. Anstruther nodded.

"I suspected that would attract you."

"It doesn't attract me now——"

Again Colonel Barlow broke off and then added:

"And yet in a way it does. Come and have a look at it."

He jumped up suddenly and walked quickly to the door, like a man bracing himself to do something he shrank from, the doctor noticed, and it struck him forcibly that in all his long friendship with Barlow he had never seen him act quite like this before.

Entering the library at Urby Hall after a pleasant dinner with his old friend and with an evening's talk ahead always appealed to Dr. Anstruther as one of the happy moments of life. The innumerable multitude of books in their ordered rows, the wide blazing fire making the gilt letters twinkle, the shaded lamps, the old leathern easy-chairs and the aroma of excellent cigars seemed to him to leave nothing else for fancy to desire. But tonight as he crossed the threshold he realized on the instant, without a word said by either, why the colonel had been sitting in the drawing-room, why he had lingered over dinner, even why he had quarreled with his nephew.

His eyes turned at once and instinctively to the left, again without a word to prompt him, and he saw the vase from his first step into the room. It stood on top of the long bookcase that ran down that side of the room, a little above the level of his head, and from that height the squat gross figure seemed to look down at him with a smile at once intimately familiar and contemptuous.

And behind the smile there exuded an atmosphere for which he could not find a name which should sum up what he could only call its beastliness.

Colonel Barlow closed the door, and both men went to the fire and then turned and stood side by side with their backs to it, gazing at the vase.

"Well, Barlow, frankly I don't call it pretty," said the doctor at last, and as he spoke, he had an odd feeling that his criticism was overheard; as if he were half-aware of some one behind the curtains or under the table.

"It's the most hideous thing I ever bought."

"Too *outré*, as Mr. Waldron calls it, even for you?"

"Yes," said the colonel curtly, and then in a moment added with a touch of impatience most unusual in his voice, "Well, if you've looked at it long enough, let's sit down."

They sat down with their backs to the vase, and each in turn tried to start the conversation, but it lapsed after a sentence or two. Nearly five minutes of dead silence followed, and then, though he had tried to turn his thoughts in every other direction, Dr. Anstruther found himself asking suddenly—

"Did you have your talk with Vincent in this room?"

The colonel nodded.

"With that thing standing there?"

"Yes," said the colonel, looking straight into the fire.

The doctor said nothing more, but he was amazed to catch himself accepting a bit of old china as a perfectly adequate explanation of why two of the most good-humored men of his acquaintance should lose their tempers.

All at once Colonel Barlow threw his cigar away and jumped up as if to get a pipe from the mantelpiece. He put out his hand to the pipe-rack and then withdrew it, turned round and abruptly exclaimed:

"I'm going to turn the damned thing round. I can't stand the look of that creature."

Dr. Anstruther saw him go to the bookshelf and put up his hand.

"I can reach it better," he suggested, jumping up too.

But it was one of the colonel's few little weaknesses that he disliked being thought short of stature. He did not even condescend to rise on tiptoe, but with an impatient movement tried to turn the vase well above his head.

"Steady!" exclaimed the doctor.

The vase was swaying already and before he could stride across the room the thing had happened. Colonel Barlow just managed to break its fall or it would have shivered into a hundred fragments. As it was, it broke with a crash and lay in three great pieces on the floor.

"My God!" said the colonel, and if the doctor did not say it, he thought it.

And it was not the mere accident that affected them. Recalling his feeling afterward, it seemed to Dr. Anstruther—and Colonel Barlow confessed to the same sensation—as if the nasty atmosphere of that room had become concentrated a hundred-fold. And then both men found themselves breathing easily and even smiling at each other over the pieces of china. It was as if a cloud had burst in thunder and a fresh, clean breeze sprung up.

"That's a lesson to a young man to be careful," said the colonel with his usual good-humored philosophy.

"Yes," said the doctor dryly, "you can't give that vase away as a wedding present."

"I can't afford to do this sort of thing often," added the colonel, though with singularly little appearance of annoyance for a man who had just broken an exceedingly valuable curio.

They picked up the pieces and laid them on top of the bookcase again, and it struck Dr. Anstruther as a curious circumstance that the squat figure seen in two halves, though ugly as ever, seemed to have quite lost his peculiar repulsiveness. And when he remarked on this, his friend agreed with him.

When they returned to the fire and lighted their pipes and fell into their accustomed leather chairs, their talk started straightway on its familiar lines.

"We'll shoot the North Side on Friday," began the colonel.

"Lining that high hedge for the first drive as usual, I suppose?" said the doctor.

WHEN Dr. Anstruther left a few minutes after midnight, the young moon was then low in the sky and it was appreciably darker in the avenue. The glimpses of the park were dimmer, the shadows through which he walked were blacker, and the air, it seemed to him, had grown still closer. The doctor, in fact, soon threw off his overcoat and strode down toward the lodge-gates with his white shirt-front making a little light spot in the gloom.

For some reason his thoughts went back suddenly and vividly to his old days in a certain frontier station, when the tribes were restless and sentries were being sniped by daylight and suffered a still gorier fate at night.



"A nice mark this shirt would make, if there were a Pathan behind one of those trees," he thought; and then, to his annoyance, he caught himself glancing suspiciously to the right and left in turn and even quickening his stride a trifle.

"I am growing senile," he said to himself, and the next instant stopped dead with a sudden contraction in the region of his heart.

A dark figure was actually standing within five paces of him, a figure that first seemed to loom up to a gigantic height, and then, as he kept his eyes hard and frowning upon it, appeared to shrink to a lesser stature than his own. Neither said a word, but he was conscious both of an intense scrutiny and of a swift return of that same repellent sensation he had felt in the library.

"You'll know me next time, my man," he rapped out in his harshest voice—and Dr. Anstruther's voice could be very formidable. "Who are you?"

Without a sound the figure slunk away, so swiftly that in another instant it had utterly vanished into the shadows, and yet so silently that he did not even hear a foot-fall. He strode to where he judged it to have stood and said to himself:

"The fellow must have been standing on the grass, though I could have sworn he was nearer. Who the devil can it have been?"

To give chase was so obviously futile that after peering into the shadows for a minute or two he resumed his walk down the avenue. More and more slowly he paced, till, when he reached the lodge-gates, he stopped short for the space of several minutes. The stranger had apparently been coming in the opposite direction and had certainly gone on toward the hall, and the more he reflected on this, the stronger grew the doctor's reluctance to leave his friend's house unwatched and unwarned.

To stand by the avenue and expose himself seemed unlike the conduct of a thief; still, it had been a suspicious incident.

And then the spirit of the old hunter decided the matter. He put on his overcoat again to hide his shirt-front, pulled his soft hat down over his face and retraced his steps, walking on the grass this time.

All the way up the avenue he saw not a glimpse of a living thing and heard not

a sound, though the night was so still that the breaking of the slightest twig would have been audible to his keen ears. The house, as he drew near, was a dark mass unbroken by a glimmer of light and to all appearances quiet as the grave.

Skirting the gravel, and all the while divided between the fear of making himself look foolish for his pains and an insistent haunting sense that all was not well with that house tonight, he passed round the corner and entered a flower-garden that lay beneath the library windows.

And there he stopped dead. Through a chink in the curtain he could see a ray of light escaping from one of those windows. Knowing his friend's habits to a nicety, he could count on the colonel's smoking one last small pipe after his own departure and then going off to bed. He had had time enough by now to finish his pipe and be off, and the light then meant he was a little later than usual.

Keeping on the grass, Dr. Anstruther stole along till he was almost opposite the window, and then he stopped again abruptly. He could see now that the window was a few inches down at the top, and in the dead silence of that still, heavy night a murmur of voices had reached him, faint but unmistakable.

Dr. Anstruther ought to have felt reassured. There were several possible solutions of the problem of who the second person could be—the colonel's old soldier butler, for instance, or the housekeeper with a report of a servant ill. And it was manifest that there were no high words or quarreling. Yet, instead of reassurance, a dreadful, nameless uneasiness seized upon the doctor and kept him there with his muscles instinctively braced like an animal ready to spring.

Faintly he heard the murmur of voices, so faintly at that distance and through the curtains that it was impossible even to tell which party was speaking; yet the doctor had the strangest fancy that he knew one from the other by a curious feeling which seemed to affect him when one spoke.

He was telling himself that this was the idlest freak of imagination, when he heard, low but quite plainly, a laugh, and at that—imagination or no imagination—his scalp tingled and for the instant he could not have moved even if he would.

Dead and utter silence followed for



minute after minute, and then out went the light; the window became of the same blackness as the creeper-covered wall, and Dr. Anstruther turned away at last. An instinct as strong as that which had brought him back seemed to tell him that the danger had passed from the house.

It struck him then that if a stranger—that figure in the avenue perchance—had entered the house and conversed with his friend, he might see him emerge from the front door. And so he hastened out of the garden and round the corner of the house, but though he stood under the shadows for several minutes, he saw nothing.

Then it occurred to him that if there had been a visitor, Colonel Barlow would most probably have shown him out before extinguishing the library lights, and so he set off again.

"I must never let Barlow know I've been spying on him," he said to himself, for he knew that one of the few things his old friend would find it hard to forgive was anything like an attempt to surprize a confidence he had not given spontaneously himself. And, indeed, no man could feel a stronger sympathy for this sensitive reticence than Dr. Anstruther, for his own sentiments were precisely the same.

As he went down the drive, he glanced at his watch and noticed that it was then quarter past eleven.

SOME shooting-details to be arranged made Dr. Anstruther's excuse for walking up to the hall next morning after breakfast. Even from himself he tried to conceal the truth that he was devoured with something between apprehension and curiosity to learn what had happened last night, for in his estimation curiosity was a vulgar vice and apprehension a foolish weakness.

But even if he did not see through himself as he hastened to Urby Hall at twice his usual pace, he realized it quickly enough when he found his old friend smoking a pipe in his library, apparently as imperturbable as ever. The intense relief came almost as a shock.

Yet he had only been in the library a couple of minutes when it became clear to his watchful eye that the colonel's composure was not unlike his own—a veteran's contempt for ruffled nerves. They talked of shooting briefly, and both fell silent, and

then abruptly Colonel Barlow said, with a forced laugh—

"I was half-thinking of coming to see you professionally today, Anstruther."

"What's the matter?"

"Something I ate or drank must have upset me, I suppose. I don't often have nightmares, but I had a bad one last night—soon after you left me, in fact."

"Soon after I left?" repeated the doctor in rather an odd voice.

"I must have fallen asleep in my chair. I mean," added the colonel, correcting himself quickly, "I did fall asleep in my chair."

"And you had a dream—a nightmare—before you went up-stairs, and—er—before you put the lights out and so on?"

Colonel Barlow nodded.

"Extraordinary thing," he said.

"Very," agreed Dr. Anstruther,

The colonel began pacing the room as he smoked—with unusually quick steps, his friend noticed.

"It was damnably vivid. That infernal vase seemed to have put it into my brain—and its infernal name."

"Its name?" repeated the doctor.

Colonel Barlow stopped his walk sharply and looked for an instant at his friend. He seemed to hesitate and then resumed his pacing and said, in a curiously confused and indirect way for him:

"Connection of ideas, I suppose. If the thing hadn't been absolutely impossible, I'd almost have— Do you know it wasn't till this morning that I thoroughly realized it was only a dream?"

He stopped at the turn of his walk and for a moment was silent. Then in a lowered voice he began—

"Do you know, Anstruther, I actually dreamed—"

At that moment the butler entered.

"Mrs. Summerton wishes to see you, sir," he announced.

The colonel had been so carried away by what was in his mind that for a moment he looked at his butler in silence.

"Mrs. Summerton of the Yellow Mouse, sir," added the man.

The colonel turned to his friend.

"Will you excuse me for a few minutes, Anstruther?"

"Beg pardon, sir," put in the butler, "but I think Mrs. Summerton would like to see Dr. Anstruther too, he being a magistrate likewise."



"Oh," said the colonel, "she wants to see us as magistrates, does she? Well, show her in."

The woman who entered was elderly, pale, and very respectably dressed; a woman of a naturally quiet and superior type, one would judge at once, and yet, as evidently, a woman who had come through some very disturbing and very recent experience. And hardly had the door closed behind her before she swayed, threw out an arm to find support, and dropped into a chair.

A LITTLE later she told them this story:

"He came by the morning train yesterday—a German gentleman he was, sir, or leastways a German. Helmolt was his name, he said, and he wanted a room at the Yellow Mouse. As you know, sir, we don't have many strangers in Chipping-Urby. I hadn't had not one of his class—that's to say judging of his class to look at him from his clothes and such like—not since my husband died a year ago come January, and there's only myself and my niece Lizzie in the house now. Of course there's the lad George, too, but he doesn't live on the premises, and no experience he's had of waiting on gentlemen either.

"So naturally, sir, I was a little doubtful at first if the gentleman would find satisfaction; and I says to him quite plainly what was in my mind.

"'Oh, I won't give you no trouble, Mrs. Summerton,' says he, and, to be sure, he was as good as his word. Indeed, sir, a nicer, more modest-like gentleman I never had to do with than this Mr. Helmolt—down to last night."

"What was he like?"

"Oh, quite a young man, sir, with his hair that close-cropped I'd have thought he'd been a convict, if he hadn't have been a foreigner. Very fair he was, with blue eyes and such a quiet, civil, well-brought-up young man, too. He found my poor husband's flute and played tunes on it and played with the kitten too all the time he was in the house. I says to Lizzie, 'Never did I see a young man with more peaceable tastes!'"

"Did he wear a black felt hat and tight trousers and shoes that looked as if they were made of brown paper?" asked the doctor.

"He did indeed, sir! That's the very things he did wear. Oh, I quite took pity on him when I saw how foreign he was. He asked such funny questions too; one would have called him inquisitive if he'd been English. A lot about you, sir, he asked—" she was turning now to Colonel Barlow—"and whether you was very rich, and about your curiosities. Whether did you keep them long or sell them again, and if I'd heard of your buying anything in particular lately. But I just answered so he was none the wiser by the end.

"And then in the afternoon off he goes for a walk and was away that long I'd have thought he'd have walked miles, but George tells me that old Thomas Walker tells him that all the distance he went was up to the hall here and rambled round the park and stood for nigh an hour on end behind the big yew hedge, staring at the house, like as if he'd fallen into a trance."

"By gad!" exclaimed the colonel. "I saw the fellow myself from this very window. I spotted him as he was walking away. I remember wondering who he was and thinking he was too respectable-looking to be up to mischief."

"Behind the yew hedge?" said the doctor, half to himself. "He'd be looking toward the library then."

"Yes, sir, and so he would," said Mrs. Summerton, "though he says nothing to me or Lizzie of where he'd been. When he came back, he had tea, and after that he seemed to get restless-like, and at last out he goes again. It was beginning to get dark by then, and quite dark it was when he came back, saving only for the moon. And from what George can hear, do you know where he'd been, sir? Up to the hall again and staring at the house."

"Again?" exclaimed Colonel Barlow. "What the deuce was the attraction?"

"When did he get back the second time?" asked Dr. Anstruther.

"Some time after seven o'clock, sir."

"Ah!" said the doctor. "I thought that was the man. I saw him turning into The Yellow Mouse. What happened then?"

"Well, sir, he just went in to the little parlor up-stairs. I'd given him the little parlor to himself, for there was no one else staying in the house and I thought he'd like to be private and comfortable-like, and there he was for the rest of the evening—up till the time he came out."



Mrs. Summerton's tone fell and she shivered a little.

"You are sure he was in the parlor all the time?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, quite sure, sir. Lizzie was in and out once or twice, bringing him his supper and seeing to the fire. Besides, we'd have heard him if he'd gone out.

"Well, sir, it got to be late at last and there was no customers in and George had gone away, and I had just been to lock the front door and was thinking about going to bed, when something made me look over my shoulder as I had almost got back to the kitchen. It was kind of shadowy behind me, for I'd put out the lamp in the front passage, but I'll swear to my dying-day, sir, I saw a black figure of a man crossing the front passage very quick, as if he'd come through the front door, and disappearing up the stairs. And I'd just locked the front door myself—and never a sound of his footsteps did I hear. How I got back into the kitchen without falling down in a faint I don't rightly know, sir."

"What o'clock was this?" asked the doctor with a curious intensity in his voice.

"I happened to notice, sir, it was just quarter-past eleven when I left the kitchen."

Dr. Anstruther nodded in silence, and as if to himself, and the colonel asked—

"Did you see his face?"

"No I did not, sir, and thankful I was too, for what I did see made me more of a tremble than ever I've been before in my life."

"But was it actually anybody? Did you see him again?"

"I never saw or heard but one man in the house, sir," she said in a low voice, "and whether there actually was two or which it was I saw, that I don't know. But I'll tell you the very truth, sir, just as it happened.

"When I got into the kitchen, Lizzie was for laughing at my notions and saying it was either the shadows or perhaps the strange gentleman up-stairs come down for a moment and then gone up again. So at last I let myself be persuaded I was foolish and yet I wanted to make sure, so I took a lamp in my hand and went into the passage and up the stairs to see if I could hear if there was voices or anything in the little parlor."

"Was there?" asked the colonel.

"No, sir. There was just dead silence; I can swear to that. But just as I was near the top of the stairs, his door opened a chink and I saw him plainly peering out. Oh, sir, the difference in his eyes!"

She paused for an instant and shivered afresh.

"It was not like the same young man at all. And then he spoke—just one word, but it was enough. I was holding the lamp before me and it was quite dark behind me and so his eyes would be dazzled and he wouldn't be able to see rightly who it was. That's how he came to make the mistake.

"'Lizzie!' he says, and if you heard a girl being addressed at night in a voice like that, sir, you'd know the man didn't mean much good.

"I gave a little scream—I couldn't help myself—and so he knew then who it was. He said just one word that time, too; it was in his own language but I knew it was a curse-word, and then he banged the door again, and I was just able to get down without dropping that lamp, and no more, sir!"

"And then?" asked the colonel quietly.

"Then, sir, I put off going up those stairs again to my bedroom just as long as I could, and all the while I was wondering if I could say anything to Lizzie. For she's a kind of innocent high-spirited girl and I feared she'd just laugh at my fancies.

"For he'd only just said her name, mind you, sir; and could I explain to her how he'd said it? Then says she, 'I'm that sleepy, auntie, I'm going off to my bed,' and so we both went up then. And I'd been in my room about ten minutes when suddenly I heard the girl scream!"

"Yes?" said the colonel, still quietly.

"I was at my door just in time to open it to her, and it was all the two of us could do to get it shut and locked in his face. You can guess yourself, sir, what he'd been after, but you'll hardly guess what he did when she struggled with him. He just hit her on the eye with his fist and it was all black and swelled up by the time she'd got to me."

"My God!" murmured the colonel, very quietly indeed this time.

The Gurkhas who had fought under him could have told you instantly what that quiet meant.

"Oh, how he swore, sir, and shook the door. And then suddenly it grew even



worse. He was quite still for minutes and minutes on end—it seemed hours to me, sir—and we could hear him breathing and feeling about the door with his fingers.

"And then we thought we heard him going down-stairs, but we weren't sure, and there was nothing we could do except put the chest of drawers against the door and just wait. My room's at the back of the house, sir, and there's no one who could have heard us if we'd cried for help.

"Then at last, when it had been quite quiet for a long time, we heard the cat cry out once down below, and then gentle sounds of his moving about and other queer sounds that we couldn't understand till morning. And that was the way the night passed with us, sir."

"And in the morning?"

"When we knew that neighbors would be about at last, we ventured out. He was gone then, but he'd done what was almost the worst thing of all. He had heated the poker and burned some writing on my nice mahogany table. It's the one thing in my house I'm proud of, sir. And I'd told him it was, too. And on the table was a bucket of water and Lizzie's kitten—the one he'd been playing with—was lying drowned at the bottom of it."

"Do you know where he's got to?" the colonel rapped out like a rifle-shot.

"He had slipped out of the house without our hearing him and caught the early train to London."

"Damn!" murmured the colonel with the profoundest disappointment.

"And not a penny has he paid me—and my table is ruined!"

"What did he write on it?" asked Dr. Anstruther.

Mrs. Summerton took a sheet of note-paper from her pocket.

"I wrote it down, sir, for I knew I couldn't carry it in my head."

On the paper they read:

My compliments and farewell to you and Barlow and dirty little England. They can keep their vase now. And you can keep your slut.

"And such a quiet peaceable young man he seemed!" cried the poor woman. "Do you think, sir, was he taken suddenly mad?"

The two men were looking at each other.

"The vase—that was what he was after!" exclaimed the colonel.

The doctor nodded.

"I knew that," he murmured.

"This happened after it was broken!"

Again the doctor nodded.

Colonel Barlow turned to Mrs. Summerton and led her to the door, talking gently.

"I'll make the damage good," he said as she went out, "and if I can catch the fellow——"

HE CAME back to his friend and both were silent for a space. Then the colonel said in a very serious voice.

"What I dreamed last night was that Satan himself walked into my library and tried to tempt me. It was a damned queer form of temptation too—not the usual thing one reads of. I was to be the swept and garnished house and he was to inhabit me. I dreamed I told him I'd get my dog-whip to him, and then I dreamed he laughed and went away."

Dr. Anstruther seemed for an instant about to say something and then held his peace.

"I didn't tell you last night, Anstruther," continued the colonel, "that I'd heard from Marshley & Waldron and they'd told me the legend about the vase. The gentleman in question is said to have been imprisoned in it—shut up in that beastly figure—some hundreds of years ago, and if the vase was broken, he'd get out. I didn't tell you because—er—well, the whole thing was beastly and had got a bit on my nerves. When I had the dream, I thought of course that that yarn had put it into my brain."

Again Dr. Anstruther made no answer, and in a moment the colonel said—

"If one believed in such things, one would say he had found his swept and garnished house."

This time Dr. Anstruther nodded emphatically.

COLONEL BARLOW saw the local police at once and they communicated with London, but by the time Mr. Helmolt's address had been discovered, he had departed for his native land.

"Where they will regret the breaking of that vase some day," observed Dr. Anstruther grimly. "Or were we all off our heads—or simply dreaming?"

"Time will show," said Colonel Barlow.

The Heart of Conchita

BY EDGAR YOUNG



LITTLE Conchita Morales was by far the homeliest girl in Guayaquil. She had a figure like a horse shoe, a pinched up little face devoid of even rudimentary prettiness. Later one noticed that she had large brown eyes, regular white teeth, and extremely small feet. She was tongue-tied of speech. But she could dance like a dream, could thrum real music from a guitar, and she could sing.

Charles Barnes and Eugene Rodin had been invited to the *baile* at the *alcalde's* house, by the *alcalde's* son, Francisco, whom they had met on the boat from Balboa. Francisco, "Pancho," or Frank Martinez had just finished an education at Columbia University and was proud to show off both his American friends and his knowledge of English and was pleased to show the Americans his own people at their best. The average American may travel all over Central and South America and never see the inside of a better class home.

After the general hand-shaking and meeting the guests was over and the two Americans had whirled through a few dances, Barnes noticed that the little Morales girl certainly did not lack for partners and between dances men flocked around her. He made mention of this to Rodin. They both engaged waltzes with her and when these were over agreed that she could certainly dance but otherwise there didn't seem to be anything to her. However, the commotion the men raised over her caused Rodin to call Frank Martinez aside and ask him concerning her. Martinez chuckled.

"Oh, Conchita. Not very pretty is she? Certainly not a brilliant conversationalist. She's a darling though. She's what we call *simpática*, fascinating, as you say in the States. I used to be crazy over her. I begged her to marry me, and when she refused I came near ending my life by suicide. She's said 'no, *senor*,' to all of us. I think I've lived it down up there in your

hustle-bustle States. But I'll know better when this ball is over."

When he had walked away both Americans grinned knowingly.

"Love goes where it's sent," said Eugene Rodin, "the poor mutt lost his head about her and thought everybody wanted her."

Barnes looked across at the girl standing in the center of a group of men who plainly showed their admiration for her.

"Yes, and she seems to be proving his words," he stated, "but they can all have her. That big dreamy eyed Lola seems about the one for me. Either she or that little spicy Luz."

And the men went ahead enjoying themselves. It makes any American put his best foot foremost to equal the manners and breeding of the better class Latin American. In Spanish, English, and French, the conversation often touched on topics not heard outside the most select drawing rooms in the United States. Wit, jest, banter, and sparkling bits of talk, the *frou-frou* of silken skirts, gleaming white and olive shoulders, twirled mustaches, languid eyes that now and then spoke boldly, sighs, jealousy, and all the rest of it, to the wailing of the fiddles and the shrill piping of the flutes.

And when the ball was over, the men, one and all, stampeded over to Conchita and asked her to sing. She only consented after much coaxing, in which the two Americans joined. Some one brought a mandolin and she stepped quickly to the center of the hall.

She began with a comic love song, something about a young fellow who always carried a loaf of bread and munched on it when he passed and repassed his sweetheart's door (played bear) so that her mother would not think he kept himself alive by seeing her (*solo por verte me mantengo-o-o*), sang a couple of *ranchitas*, then she sang her favorite. It was "Vida Mia." It is a song that stirs the soul. It is an old one written by some wandering troubadour back in Spain. It is a song of wandering and love unrequited. Soft, sibilant, lisping, now and then rising to the high notes like the lute of a lonely shepherd, her vibrant contralto spread the veil of *Queen Mab* over the sordid earth. Men and women were gods and goddesses, she a fairy queen.

Outside the trade-wind whispered among

the palms, the perfume of moon flowers was wafted through the room, just beneath the window the Guayas gurgled against the stone wall as it rose with the incoming tide. She had paused and trotted from the room behind her aunt Juana before the audience came back to earth. Frank Martinez strode rapidly in her wake. Then the bustle of leave-taking began.

On the way back to the hotel Barnes said to Rodin—

"I guess Pancho hasn't lived it down yet."

"He'd be a poor clod if he had. She's a bear! No wonder they rave about her. She was as far ahead of any other girl there as I am of a crazy monkey," murmured Rodin.

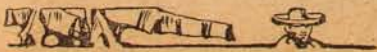
"Yes. On this earth we are blind people wandering through a haze and it is only by soul contact that we know each other. There is a wonderful spirit bound up in that clay. And it expresses itself in song."

Both men paused and each looked keenly at the other. Then they laughed and walked rapidly toward the hotel.

II

GUAYAQUIL is certainly not a health-resort. People die there of yellow fever, bubonic, and other less deadly diseases. There is not a stone or brick building in the city, and even the cathedral is built of split bamboo, due to the frequency and violence of the earthquakes. It is sixty miles up the Guayas River from the coast and the city is below the level of the river at high tide. The natives of Guayaquil are mostly immunes but now and then a plague breaks out that slays a quarter of the population in a few months. This is how it has earned its name of "The Graveyard of South America." Few Americans and white Europeans remain longer than to catch the next boat away. Those who have been there and got away alive boast of it ever afterward.

During the Summer of 1912 twenty thousand people died of "Yellow Jack" and bubonic and many more were slain in the swamps just outside the city as they fought hand to hand battles with *machetes*; for a revolution was in progress. A series of earthquakes came that caused the earth to roll in waves like a stormy sea. Wooden shacks were toppled over and people lay



flat on their faces in the muddy streets and prayed for mercy. The rains came and washed thousands of bodies down the little creeks and into the Guayas. Numerous corpses floated up and down with the tide in front of Guayaquil.

Eugene Rodin and Charles Barnes remained through it all. The last thing they wanted to do was to leave. No matter what the day brought, the cool of the evening saw them either in the *patio* of the Morales' home or at the home of some friend where she had gone. Some of Conchita's suitors had died, some had been slain in the revolution on one side or the other, and some had lost heart from the cruel competition waged by the two Americans and by Frank Martinez. One or the other, or all three of them, was with her constantly. She sat hunched up in a chair and held tongue-tied discourse with them and they bore with it. Later she sang. Then there was no more sickness on the earth, no earthquakes, no revolutions. Nothing but love and kindness and Conchita with a heart of gold.

One night Conchita noticed a look pass between Rodin and Barnes that was anything but friendly. She had been at great pains to treat them both equally well and had often neglected Pancho to do so. That night she cried when the three men had gone home. The friendship of the two had appealed to her as something fine and noble. It had been so unselfish. She had been having a grand time and now it appeared that trouble was brewing. Her woman's intuition had sensed it even before the men knew of its existence. She vowed to see less of them in the future. And she did.

But the less she saw of them, the more jealous they became of each other, and the more enamored of her. It had been a hard Summer and the nerves of the two men were raw. Also the tropical sun strikes a certain hysteria into a stranger's brain. The normal loves and hates and desires are magnified a hundred-fold. Cold-blooded scientists make mention of ultra-violet rays of the sun. Herb Spencer would have called attention to the nearness of the motive force that drives life on this planet. They all forget that plant life absorbs carbon dioxide from the air and gives off pure oxygen. People are living at white heat in

the tropics because they are drunk with a superabundance of oxygen.

An ill-timed jest caused one of the Americans to move from the hotel and take up residence at a native *peñon*. After this they passed each other on the street without speaking. And then, separated from each other, they began to hate as bitterly as close friends do when they fall out. By using Pancho as a mutual friend they timed their visits so that they did not meet at the Morales' home. Pancho had decidedly the better of it for he came and went when he chose, and he sympathized with all three in turn.

Each of the Americans tried to pick something bad from him that the other had let slip. But he only had good words that each had said about the other. This caused both Barnes and Rodin inwardly to rage for it appeared to each that the other was trying to appear more gallant. Each hoped that the other would forget and say spiteful things and by this appear to be less of a man in Conchita's eyes. Hate fed on hate and jealousy fed on jealousy until the men were at dagger's drawn with only a word needed to start real trouble.

III

A BALL had been going on at the *alcalde's* house. Conchita had refused to dance with either American, but had danced frequently with Pancho Martinez. At the finish she had been especially cruel and had refused to sing and trotted away with her aunt Juana with a curt nod for both Barnes and Rodin. Each of them knew in his heart that the other had been the cause of her peculiar actions and was raging. Pancho had gone in her wake, possibly to sing a serenade under her balcony.

In filing out of the door some one tramped on Barnes' foot. Rodin was fully half a yard behind him when it happened. Barnes' face went black. He stopped and glared at Rodin.

"I would thank you, sir, to look where you're walking. You hurt my foot."

"I knew you wore a number nine, but didn't think you had an Uncle Joe heel that stuck back like a pot leg."

"Keep to hell off of them!"

"Back out next time. They'll take up less room!"

The men said no more but stalked down the street with their heads in the air.

Guayaquil was an inferno, the Guayas was a slimy river filled with snakes and reptiles and covered with floating islands of putrid vegetation, the death-dealing mosquitoes flew in clouds, the wind flopped drearily through the palms and banana bushes; bloated-faced men, dying with the plague, crawled belly-wise through the streets toward the river to gulp the murky fluid and die where they lay, a breeze came across the swamp from the *matadero* heavy with the stench of rotten flesh. In the houses women were wailing their dead with high-pitched sobs.

Rodin noted that the Peruvian Line steamer *Santa Ysobel* lay in the middle of the stream loading cattle from some lighters at her side. Half-naked stevedores in the lighter fastened the cable around the horns of the steers and they went up over the side kicking and snorting. A thought came to him and he hailed Barnes. The other paused until Rodin came up. Rodin's eyes were bloodshot and he shook a clenched fist under Barnes' nose.

"This town is getting too damned small for both of us. I'm thinking it would be safer for you to take that Peruvian and beat it for Callao!"

Barnes took off his coat and folded it carefully.

"Gene Rodin, I've always suspected you of being yellow. I hate to have to thrash you. I feel sorry for you. But I'm going to do it."

"Yellow, am I? We'll see who's yellow. Any big boob can fight like a gringo and get all beat up whether he wins or not. I think you are afraid of cold steel. I've been in these countries so long that I believe in knife-fighting. You pack one with you that's just like this one I have. What are you going to do with it, use it to cut cigaret shucks with?"

Rodin pulled off his coat and rolled his sleeves up above the elbows. He took a sheath-knife from his belt and ran his thumb along the edge. It glittered cruelly in the lamplight. The two men squared off. The street ran along the river front and was deserted except by people too sick to notice what was happening. They sprang and each parried for an opening. No words were spoken as the men circled around like fighting cocks trying for a

thrust. Barnes slashed for Rodin's throat and the point missed by a hair. Rodin's knife grazed Barnes' stomach as Barnes sprang back.

There was a stifled scream and quick running steps on the board-walk. Conchita ran between them. She begged them hysterically to be friends. Her excited tongue-tied words appeared ludicrous under the circumstances. Pancho had arrived from somewhere and he put in a word now and then from a few paces away.

"You no fight, *para* me. You be good friends, *saben*. *Buenos amigos* for yourself. And both good friend myself. *No es mejor?* (Is it not better?) I like as good friend both, but as lover, no! No! No! *Así* me like Panchito. I make matrimony with him, pretty soon."

Both Americans eyed her harshly. They grasped her by either shoulder and spoke fierce words to her.

She smiled up into their angry faces and reiterated what she had said before. The twisted little smile and the quivering lips made each man's grip on her shoulders relax until their hands lay like a gentle caress. Then she put both their hands from her. The men stood facing each other like bashful school-boys. She looked quickly from one to the other as if undecided.

"Be good friends, yourself," she coached.

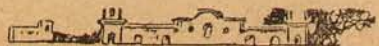
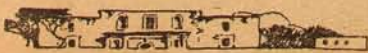
They shook hands and smiled at each other. Conchita drew away and came to the side of Pancho who took her arm and spoke gentle words into her ear. She appeared more stoop-shouldered than ever, her face more pinched, her eyes more brooding. The Americans hustled over and shook hands with Pancho Martinez with a heartiness they did not feel. Then telling the couple "*Hasta luego*" (*au revoir*) they strolled down the wharf. "*Adios*" (Good-by) would have been more appropriate. It was really the farewell.

Looking out upon the murky Guayas they noted that the last lighter was poled into place, and the men shouting to each other as they hurried the cattle aboard.

"I wonder—" began Rodin.

"Let's try."

They turned and ran across the wharf and up into the city, each man to his stopping place. In a few moments they came running back carrying suit-cases. A *botero* who dozed in his flimsy boat aroused to the



prod of a nervous foot and stared at the silver piece thrust before his eyes. Then he headed his boat for the ship and began plying his paddle.

Conchita still stood on the wharf arm in arm with Frank Martinez when the boat shot out into the river. She heard the two Americans laughing and joking good-naturedly. In the dim boat lamplight, at the head of the gangplank, she saw them go aboard the ship. She saw the plank hoisted, heard the anchor chain rattle in, and the thumping of the anchor on the deck, heard the engines throb deeply, and saw the ship move slowly down the Guayas on its way to the sea. She sighed deeply. Pancho pressed her arm and murmured gently.

"It was a surprize when you said you would make matrimony with me, but a glad surprize. My heart overflows with love for you, Conchita, *chiquilla*, I will speak with the priest tomorrow, no, eh?"

"*Tonto*, (foolish one), I made jest with them. It's not you that I love. You are my good, good friend. It was one of those. I had not the heart to pick."

She began to cry gently. Big hearted Pancho tried to console her but she turned from him and ran away toward home, leaving him staring after her dazedly.

Through the big bamboo doorway, arched with flowering vines, she hastened, and up the light stairway to her room. Throwing open the lattice window she gazed down the river at the disappearing lights of the *S.S. Ysabel*. As they were swallowed up in the darkness she took from her dress a few small trinkets the men had given her. Something seemed to be clutching her throat as she kissed these little remembrances.

"*Adios*, good friends. You will meet many others and many pretty ones but none will consider your happiness more than little Conchita."

Then, as if no other way in the world would express how she felt, she began singing "*Vida Mia*," her favorite, the song of wandering and love unrequited. And had she known it, perhaps she would have felt better, or perhaps worse, for two Americans stood at the stern rail of the *S.S. Ysabel* peering back into the darkness with heavy hearts.



Gouache Pictures of Italy

II. Palazzo Contarini

BESIDE the high window, but partly withdrawn
And concealed by the fold of a gold-lacquered screen,
This admirable day-bed discovers the sheen
Of its hooped salmon satin and yellowing lawn.

On spindle legs, thin as a spider's, it stands.
The gilding has scaled to a faint silver tone.
A lavender dust, as of hours outgrown,
Drifts past on a quaver of old sarabands.

Bewilderingly fragile, it baffles decay
With the porcelain pinks on the ormolu spray
Twined about the Saxe clock. Hark! the weary sweet chime

Of the hour it strikes. At precisely this minute
The Duke would declare he was wasting his time,
And the lady half-languidly rise from her spinet.

Poor flesh and blood lovers long dead, the fine bloom
Of your coquetry crumbles and smiles in this room.

Amy Lowell



*The Terrible Island

BY BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

A Four-Part Story

Part III

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

SAPPHIRA GREGG was one of the bravest women and best traders of New Guinea. That night, as I sat on the porch of her house on Croker Island with "Rocky" Jim, my West Australian friend, and Percival Flower, the new government surveyor, she said—

"I can tell you if any one could find Ku-Ku's island, his fortune would be made."

I am a crippled "bug-hunter" acquainted with the talk of the islands, but Flower, being a stranger, had then to hear about old Chief Ku-Ku of the Trobriand Islands, whose biggest treasure-house had never been located, though all New Guinea knew that it held the immense hoards of shell money that made him a Papuan millionaire.

But so associated was the very mention of Ku-Ku with the dangers and tortures to which he had subjected his men on trips to this mysterious treasure island, that no information could be wrung from the natives as to its location. Those who returned from it alive came back sightless. Chief Ku-Ku had finally been stabbed in the back by one of his blinded victims.

Sapphira's scream cut horribly into the silence that followed our talk of Ku-Ku.

"If I'm not mad," she said, "a ghost has just walked up out of the sea and is coming to the house!"

"That's not a ghost—it's a girl," said Flower.

Before we could grasp it, the ghost-woman in evening dress, dripping with sea-water, had fainted in Sapphira's arms.

Days later, though she still could tell us nothing of her past, her attention was caught by the word "shipwreck." Quite mechanically she said:

"They're gone. They went, in the boats. Ku-Ku Island, Finster Island, Caradoc Reefs, Disappointment Island, Ku-Ku Island."

Amazing to have the direction of this spot, as secret as it was coveted, given to us! And to have it come from Lady Mary, as we began to call the beautiful sea-woman, be it right or wrong, but increased the mystery of her identity.

One day the *Tagula*, the schooner of the good Swede, Captain Carl, landed weeks before she was due. This brought matters to a head.

"What can have brought her?" I asked.

"Whatever it is, I know what will take her away, and where to. There's our chance for the island," Jim called back on the way to meet the captain.

IN NO time at all Jim had poured out the story of the sea-woman and her message about Ku-Ku. With very little more talk we chartered the *Tagula* for the big search.

Captain Carl had landed to see if any of us could identify a dead man he had picked up at sea. The sight of him seemed to stimulate Lady Mary's deadened memory, but to Flower's eager questions she gave only fragmentary answers saying "Cedric," a name evidently connected with her former life. She could not have done more damage than she did by using this one word, "Cedric." I knew instantly from the way that Flower acted that he had let himself fall deeply in love with her. Since I knew that my own love must count for little, I was cruelly glad of his rebuff. Though she could not explain why seeing the dead man had made her struggle to remember, yet with a

quiet air of ownership she placed the ring that had been taken from him on her finger, as if it had once belonged there.

When the work of provisioning Carl's boat was completed and we were a few hours under way, we discovered that Lady Mary was a seaman. While she was earning Carl's praises at the wheel, the bo'sun sighted an English man-of-war.

A chance to trace Lady Mary's friends! Captain Carl promptly signaled. But the dapper lieutenant who came over reported no recent wreck in New Guinea waters. He was suddenly signaled back to his ship before any arrangements for helping Lady Mary could be completed.

"Trouble brewing in German New Guinea," was Carl's explanation of the wireless that had summoned the man-of-war away in such haste. Lady Mary resumed the wheel again at Carl's invitation.

DAYS later it was the sea lady who first sighted the *Lusancays*. Carl would not leave his ship but insisted on a quantity of supplies being put ashore with us. A quick storm blew up as we were forcing our way through the thick brush of the island and drove us into one of the many caves for shelter.

Jim had just dashed out into the rain to look for the ship, when a dark barefoot man, dressed in rough dungaree, walked uncertainly into our midst. At Sapphira's ill-timed gasp the stranger swung round, snatched a revolver out of his belt and fired. After five more shots, one of which landed in my arm, Flower downed him with a furious blow and rushed us safely out of the cave.

As I looked back, four men with pistols appeared at the mouth of the cave. The next shot went wild. I slipped along the track to warn

Jim, who greeted us with the news that the *Tagula* had disappeared. He figured that the squall had driven her onto the reef and sunk her.

"Why didn't the beggars welcome us?" said Flower later.

"They expect their cutter any day," the sea lady broke in and then told us the facts which the sight of these natives had brought back to her. She related how these men had taken her into their cutter off a big fast ship with guns. They had spoken Greek and a little pigeon-English. They had captured and maltreated a poor native in a canoe loaded with red shell and shell money, until he told where he had found his treasure. After that they had killed him and thrown him overboard. Then they had fought to win her. Terrified and desperate she had managed to jump into the sea undiscovered. All she remembered was that something had hit her on the head before she had made her way to shore.

"As far as I could make out" she finished, "some of these Greeks were to be left on Ku-Ku Island and the rest return for them, but I don't know how soon. Is there a treasure here of really great value?"

"This island," said Flower, "is mostly made of phosphate rock—stuff that makes more fortunes than gold ever made."

Almost before light the next morning, while I was keeping watch, one of the Greeks stole into sight. Flower attacked him, while Jim grabbed his pistol. Jim's first shot killed the intruder.

The dead man was for all the world like the brother of the corpse that had come ashore on Croker Island. We examined his eyes with care but could see nothing wrong with them.

"All the same, he was as blind as a bat in the daylight, and pretty near blind at night," declared Jim. "Nice sort of an island, I don't think."

CHAPTER VIII

DURING THE BATTLE'S LULL

THE sea lady had come out and was standing on the beach, her clothes aflutter in the sunrise wind, the sunrise light of youth upon her face. How young she was! I felt my one and thirty years, old beside the narrow tale of hers, and I felt glad, spitefully glad, that Flower was six years older.

"Thirty-seven," I said to myself. "Near forty—why he's middle-aged."

It did not occur to me to think of Jim, who might have had a year or so more, as verging on elderliness. But then. . . .

"Are you going to shoot the Greeks with that pistol?" Lady Mary asked of Flower.

I saw she was standing nearer to him than to Jim or me, although there was, one might say, an amplitude of room on

the beach. I do not think she knew she was doing it.

"If we can," he answered.

"You could not shoot them all with it," she said.

"No," answered Flower.

"There would be some left."

"It looks so."

"And you might all be killed."

"Let's hope nothing so unpleasant will happen."

"But if you were—Sapphira and I—"

"Sapphira and you—?"

"Don't make me say it," she said, turning, I thought, a little paler.

"I won't," said Flower, with that direct kind way of his. "I know what you mean. You are afraid of falling into their hands. You won't, Lady Mary, and you won't need to keep that pistol for yourself and Sapphira, either. Jim—" he beckoned to the miner—"it's time we



talked this matter out. See that Sapphira and Lady Mary aren't left alone at any time when they are outside the cave; not for a minute. You and I will divide the duty. Don't you feel bad, now, Ireland." (I don't know how he knew; his back had been toward me till he turned to speak.) "You're as good a man as any of us but for one thing, that you can't run very fast. You've got to be the bravest man of us all."

"How is that?" I asked him.

"For this reason," said Flower, strolling away a little out of the earshot of the women. "You can't defend yourself very well, since defense may mean simply clearing out one-time, at any moment, and—Jim and I can't defend you. It will take all we can do to look after the women."

"Each of them must have a strong arm and a quick pair of feet near her all the time, in case of those devils trying a snap-shot—you must remember we can't be sure how much they are or are not able to see. But you, Ireland—you with your lameness," (I liked the clean, simple way he spoke of it) "you must face the music alone."

"They've got you once—how is that arm this morning, by the way?" He began untying it as he talked. "Because you couldn't be quick enough. And they may get you again. Yours is the worst risk, but all the same, I depend upon you."

"Right," said I.

And it was understood without further words that if lives were to be sacrificed or risks taken to save another, mine might be the forfeit.

Flower looked at the wound with a professional eye.

"Not too bad," he said. "But would be better for some iodine. We'll burn a pile of seaweed; get it down to ashes, and then I'll tell you what to do. Carl slung in a thousand table-bottles of quinine with the stores, because apparently that is stores in New Guinea, but nothing else. I needn't tell you to keep up heart; you don't need to be told. We must keep the women cheerful."

"Do you think it a bad business all round?" I asked.

He did not answer for a moment or two.

"I don't know," he said presently. "The

worst thing is that eye-trouble, whatever it is."

"Can't you make a shot at it?" I asked, remembering the medical training of which he had told us.

"Not a guess—or rather, so many guesses that none of them is any good. Where there's an effect, there's a cause. Island only inhabitable from November till March—full of caves—has been a *guano* island countless ages ago—might be a line of inquiry and might not, behind any one of those facts. Let's come back; I think Sapphira has made breakfast. Afterward we'll tally off the stores, and have them served out properly. No knowing how long they may have to last."

It was an odd meal, the first breakfast of ours on the island. We ate it inside the cave, lest any of the Greeks should by chance be possessed of enough sight to come to the edge of the glacis and send a bullet into the midst of us.

Sapphira cooked in emptied tins. Jim had picked up a few broken coconuts on the beach, trimmed them into cups with his knife and cleaned them with sand. There was some wild *taro* growing among the stones of the glacis; its great flat leaves, two or three feet across, made ample plates for our food, and small shells were no bad substitute for spoons.

When we had done, and Sapphira, who scorned any aid, had rinsed the cups in the trickle of fresh water that ran down the wall of the outer cave, we laid out all the stores and counted them. There was enough for something under four weeks, carefully managed.

"Of course," said Flower, "we'll use them as little as possible and try for all the stuff we can find in the shape of wild vegetables or fruit or fish, or coconuts. As this is pretty important, I think we'll have a hunt over the island. Do you know anything about botany in general, Jim? I'm no great hand at it."

"Ask our scientific man," suggested Jim. "I don't know a pea from a prussic-acid bean."

"Is there prussic-acid beans?" asked Sapphira, suspiciously.

"Why not?" said Jim firmly, and no one seemed to be able to answer the inquiry, though I saw the word "Potassium" trembling on Flower's lip.



He turned away, stroking his mustache.

"Well, come along," he said to me. "Can you name any useful things?"

"I'm an entomologist," I said, "but you can hardly take that up as a profession without running more or less into botany."

"No, I see that. So you're going to be the chief character of our boys' romance—desert island——"

"Desert—no such luck," growled Jim.

"Desert island according to the usual specifications," persisted Flower. "And you know there always has to be a character who has seen all the plants before and knows what they are good for."

"I remember," said Jim. "I read about them in the Yankee papers. About the milk-tree that gives milk, and the boot-trees—I read about them in a Yank magazine—where you can pick a pair of Wellingtons or a satin slipper, number small two, and the shrub that grows rum for the bad characters, and the——"

"Really," I broke in, for I was feeling a little excited and rather important, "the most awful mistakes are made about those matters. Practically all the food-plants except coconuts, are cultivated, and——"

"Suppose we go and solve the problem by walking, according to the classics," suggested Flower.

"Oh, I must go, too," said the sea lady. "I always did love boys' books better than girls', and it's really most exciting to be in a desert-island adventure."

"Certainly," said the surveyor. "Jim, I know, will take good care of Sapphira. We don't want to leave the stores unguarded."

"I wouldn't presume to take care of Sapphira," said Jim. "I hope she'll take care of me. Won't you, Sapphira? I'd like to be told some more about all my bad habits. Tell me about how I smoke more than is good for my health—I just love to hear that—and how I had three more whiskies than I ought to have had last time I went down to Samarai for a bit of fun. And tell me again how you've got no patience with me and how you wish I was dead. I think it's good for me to hear that."

Sapphira eyed him much as one might imagine a handsome gold-eyed wasp would eye something or some one who

had painlessly drawn its sting and presumed to mock it. We left them to discuss the rules of conduct and started on our trip.

There was not a sign of any one of our enemies about. On the top of the island the wind blew free and the grasses were shaking. The place was not very large; and you could see the rim of sea all round it—sea wonderfully colored, like sheets of chrysoprase and opal, where the reefs ran under, and shading through pink and lemon-ivory color into the blue of deeper waters.

We walked with caution past the mouth of the cave, Flower taking the lead. It had been blocked up inside in a most ingenious way with piles of beer and whisky-bottles, arranged so that a touch would cause them to fall down with hideous clatter.

"No catching those weasels asleep," remarked Flower, after we had passed by. "I think there is not much danger from them in the day time. It looks to me as if the blindness that haunts this place didn't work so completely at night."

"There's a banana. I saw them in the West Indies," remarked Lady Mary.

"Oh," said Flower, "have you remembered about the big ship with the guns, and how it brought you here?"

"What ship?" said the sea lady.

And I saw, and he saw, that the door had closed again. But she had made advance all the same. She never hesitated for an ordinary word now, and I knew that her remembrance of greater things than those we wished to know had returned to her, for—dare I tell it—I had heard her through the dusk and silence of the cave murmuring her innocent little prayers, after we had all gone to rest.

"Well, you've made the first score," said Flower. We stopped beneath the banana. It was a very tall one, I suppose twenty feet in height, with a great bunch of fruit at the top.

"I beg your pardon," I corrected him. "That is a wild banana."

"What!"

"Yes. The bunch of fruit stands right up instead of drooping down. That would prove it alone, but knock down some of it with a stone if you want—there! Uneatable, you see, and full of seeds."



"No score, decidedly," said Flower. "And score one to me, for I see citrons. I know you can't eat wild citrons, but you can drink them all right."

We loaded ourselves with a few of the great round, rough, golden fruits and passed on.

"Score one," cried the sea lady, excitedly. She had found a bush with small green fruits.

"Now, Swiss Family Robinson," urged Flower. "Don't let her cheat. That is uneatable, I'll bet my hat."

"It is," I pronounced.

"Forfeit, Lady Mary," cried the surveyor.

"No," I said, "for she's got the best thing yet—candle-nuts. These have an oily kernel that you can string on a coconut-leaf rib; they burn down and down, and are as good as any candle."

The sea lady rejoiced, mocking at Flower in a way that I think he enjoyed, and that I know I did not. We hunted industriously, and Flower presently declared that he had found raspberries, but that it wasn't possible, so they must be a delusion. I told him they were real, but never much good below two-thousand-foot level.

"Cherries," said Lady Mary. "Score one."

I had a look at them. They were too long for my fancy, more like red peppers in shape. I tasted one. It was not bad, rather agreeable than otherwise, but as I could not identify the fruit, I preferred to let it alone, spitting out, for precaution, the one I had put in my mouth.

"We'll give you half a mark till we try it on a bird or something," I suggested.

Lady Mary laughed poutingly.

"You are none of you playing fair."

We continued our walk, but found nothing more until we got down to the beach, where I, rather unfairly scored two at once by telling Flower that the beach hibiscus, with the yellow flowers, furnished excellent fibres and that the red hibiscus we saw growing on the glacis was admirable for blacking shoes.

"You rub the petals on your shoes," I explained.

"That oughtn't to count," said Lady Mary, "because we shall never black our boots at all. People on desert islands never do, I'm sure."

"Very well," I said, "I'll give that up and put in another. I think that's the paper mulberry, growing in the gully. If there's more of it on the island, we may be very glad of it."

"We aren't likely to write many letters," objected the sea lady, anxious to win her game.

"No, but we may wear out some of our clothes."

"And how on earth is a little shrub with horrid little rough leaves going to dress us?"

"It dresses most of Papua, away from civilization. You can beat *tappa* cloth out of the inner bark."

"Tell me some more clothes you can get in the bush," asked the sea lady, regarding me with an interest that warmed my heart.

"Haven't you seen the canvas that grows on the coconut?"

"I'm afraid I'm awfully unobservant; I haven't."

"Oh, almost nobody does notice it; I can't think why. But if you are an entomologist, of course, you are always poking round the bark of trees. Take a piece yourself. It's wrapped round the shoots."

She picked out a young coconut standing close to high-water mark and reached up into its crown.

"Oh, oh, how wonderful!" she cried. "It is real canvas, brown canvas with a warp and a weft! Oh, how does the tree ever weave it? And what big pieces, like the gores of skirts. Oh, Mr. Ireland, I must have a coconut dress to-day. Where can I get needles and thread?"

"I can show you a dozen plants with excellent thread—that wild banana for one. But as to needles—" I paused; I was fairly graveled; there are no vegetable needles of decent quality.

Flower, I think, had had enough of my small triumph. If he possessed a weakness, it was the desire to lead.

"If curved needles will serve you, Lady Mary," he put in, "I can spare one for you and one for Sapphira. I've almost forgotten I ever studied medicine, but I do carry a pocket-case."

Now she turned to him, and I could see she was more grateful for that promise of a needle than for all I had found and told about. But all she said was:



"How very providential that you did study medicine. Think if any one should be ill."

"I never practised; I did not even go up for my degree," he reminded her.

"I think we could trust you," she said; and those golden eyes of hers looked up into his.

"It's beginning, it's beginning," I said to myself. "Damn it," I thought, as I limped away along the beach toward the cave; but what I was damning or what I thought was beginning, I could not easily have put into words.

This girl was almost certainly engaged to some one called Cedric; she was certainly of a disposition almost quixotically honorable; Flower was not the man to steal another man's sweetheart, especially under such circumstances. And as for me, I did not come in anywhere or anyhow. What was there to curse?

Jim, when I reached the cave, was sitting outside it on a heap of ejected bracken, looking quizzical and smoking a pipe.

"Where's Sapphira?" I asked.

"Making the beds," said Jim.

A volley of bracken—I can call it nothing else—was fired out of the cave at the same moment, and half-buried him in its descent. He shook it aside like a water-dog shaking off water.

"That's one she's making," he explained. "She's swept up all the caves nicely with a coconut-broom and she's scrubbed all the opened tins with sand and put them in rows according to size on the ridges of the walls. And she's cleaned off all the green that the water makes trickling down. It'll last nice and clean till tomorrow. And by and by she's going to tackle all that untidy stuff that the waves have thrown up close to the cave and have it burned in a heap. And——"

"Did you stand by and let her do all that work?" I asked.

"She drove me out with the broom," explained Jim equably. "I told her all the things she ought to do, and, of course, she couldn't let a mere ignorant man know more than her, so she invented a few more and then shooed me out."

"Won't she be frightfully tired?" I suggested, listening to the sounds of

scraping and throwing about that were going on inside.

"Her troubles!" was Jim's comment. "What did you find on top?"

But I was not chiefly interested at that moment in what we had found on top.

"Jim," I said, with what might have seemed irrelevance to an onlooker, "did you ever do any horse-breaking?"

"Whips of it," he replied, cocking a mischievous eye at me.

"Did any of them ever get the better of you?"

"Don't seem to remember it, if they did."

"How did you do it?"

"Kept them going till they were tired."

"And if they jibbed or bolted?"

"Kept them jibbing or bolting. What are you getting at, you little devil?"

"I'm trying the Socratic method on you, Jim."

"I know as much about Socrates as you do," averred Jim, and bar the pronunciation, which on his tongue rhymed to "dates," he may well have been right.

"Just answer another, Jim. What did you do with a horse when you'd broken it?"

"Your turn to answer," said Rocky Jim. "What did they do to Socrates?"

"They poisoned him," I was compelled to state.

"Moral plain," said Jim, getting to his feet. "I'm going for a walk."

And I was left to reflect, not for the first time, that few people were able to boast of having "got change" out of Jim.

Nor was I altogether gratified, for once, to hear the sea lady's golden laughter close at hand.

CHAPTER IX

THE MYSTERIOUS BOX

NOW BEGAN our life on the island. The first problem we had to solve was the matter of signals. It was true that few ships or none ever came within sight of this far outlier of Lusancays. The place was on the road to nowhere; it was dangerous even to steamers because of its uncharted reefs and fierce shifting tide-rips and currents; and to sailing-vessels, as we had seen, it was deadly.



Nevertheless some chance might send a ship in our way, and we could not afford to neglect it. Probably the cutter of the half-caste Greeks would be the first to turn up.

Well, that had to be risked; we thought we might be able to make them hear reason. But we hoped very hard that some surveying man-of-war or some schooner, driven out of her course, might run near enough to sight the island before the Greek boat came.

"She is a good bit overdue," pointed out Flower. "If they went to Samarai for stores, they ought to be here by now. Of course, if they went on to Port Moresby to make application for the island——"

"I don't think they did," said Jim. "Why not?"

"Couldn't say. I just don't think it. I'm willing to suppose she's met with some bad luck. You must remember Lady Mary told us they were half-drunk."

"Well, however that may be," persisted Flower, "a signal we must have; a permanent one flying from one of the trees, and a smoke as nearly all the time as we can manage it."

"Did you ever," said Jim, "try to keep up a permanent smoke-signal? It takes one man doing nothing else all the time but humping wood and tending it—because it blazes or goes out if you don't look after it."

"Besides," put in Sapphira—we were talking in the cave after supper on one of these first days, I can't be sure which—"the natives are always making smokes when they burn off for their gardens; no one would take any notice of a smoke on an island anywhere about New Guinea."

"Must be a flag on the top of a palm-tree trunk then," declared Flower. "We can do without that piece of sail now, since Sapphira has made our blankets——" she had spent the whole of that day, with Lady Mary's assistance, sewing together wads of coconut canvas for the beds—"and if we cut the top off a palm, it will make a fine flag-staff."

"I never saw the white man yet who could climb a coconut," remarked Jim.

"Time you did, then," was Flower's reply.

And he gave us all the exhibition next day. He did not attempt the dangerous and all but impossible feat—for a white

man—of "shinning" the tree. He cut sharp-ended pegs of hardwood, hammered them in with a heavy stone as far up as he could reach and then stood on them to hammer more. In spite of his great bulk, he was exceedingly agile and active; the task was no easy one, but he carried it through. Before long, a dingy banner of sail-cloth floated from the top of the decapitated palm, carrying its message across the sea.

We were all well pleased; it seemed that a step toward freedom had been taken.

But next morning the palm was lying prone on the ground, chopped off through the trunk.

Neither of the women was about when we found it. I thought it just as well; Jim would surely have burst, if he had been compelled to retain in his system the flood of descriptive language that came forth, when he caught sight of the chopped-down signal-tree.

I gathered without much difficulty that he held the Greeks responsible and that he disapproved of them, singly, collectively, presently and retrospectively, and also of all the work of their hands, past, present and to come.

Flower put his hands in his trouser pockets, looked at the tree and remarked, simply, "Damn."

I said that some one of the Greeks must be able to see a bit more than we thought.

"I shouldn't be surprized if the whole lot of them could see fairly well at night," mused Flower. "There was some dilation of the pupil in the case of that man that Jim shot."

"We can't signal, that's clear," I lamented.

Flower said nothing, but later on I saw him busy collecting pieces of drift-wood and aimlessly, as it seemed, carrying them to the top of the island and throwing them into the sea. After he had thrown them he would stand watching them for an hour or more. I wondered if he were going out of his senses.

"No, he isn't," said the sea lady, when I gave voice to my fears. "He has something in his mind he doesn't mean to tell."

I saw how she spoke for him and how she took it for granted that she under-



stood him better than any one else did.

"You don't, then," said I to myself. "Women always think they 'understand' the man they take an interest in, but as often as not they're only dressing him up in their own fancies." But aloud I only said, "Well, let's hope it is all right."

The sea lady stood watching him for a minute, and then she did a curious thing. She went down to the beach, where a few of the many bottles that the Greeks had strewn about the island lay gathered in chinks and openings of the rocks. She picked up a couple of them and carried them to Flower.

"Lady Mary, Lady Mary, you mustn't wait on me," he exclaimed, turning round from his earnest gazing at the sea and taking the bottles from her hands. "Thank you all the same." Then he seemed to awake. "How did you know I wanted these?"

The sea lady stooped to tie her shoe. I, like a fool, came forward eagerly to do it for her; and then I saw that she had bent down her head to hide her face.

She let me tighten the lace, the while she stood up bravely with a telltale glow on her usually pale cheeks.

"I—just knew," was all she said. Then, after a pause—for I think the sudden fire in the big man's eyes was a little too warm for her to bear—"Great minds think together, you know," she said, with an air of lightness, bending down again to that troublesome shoe, and I, wiser this time, let her adjust it herself.

I went away. What else could I do?

Later, I saw them together on the beach, busy filling bottles with wide leaves on which Flower had written some message with a thorn, and corking them up with corks that any one of us could find for the gathering in the neighborhood of the cave where the Greeks kept hidden all day. Flower had wax, too, from the candle-nuts I had discovered, and smeared the corks well with it when they were driven home. Then he and the sea lady lashed the bottles to little rafts of driftwood. I stood watching for quite a while; I did not offer to help, for I knew they would rather be left alone.

It was the sea lady's idea to put sails on the tiny crafts that carried our hopes of freedom. She had been knotting and fastening the fibers that secured the bottles

with true sailor skill—all the work of her hands was neat, finished and effective; there were no loose ends about Lady Mary—and by and by she took a sharp sliver of driftwood and began hammering it into the little raft.

"Let me do that," said Flower. "What do you want?"

"Would they not go farther and faster with sails?" she asked.

"I was depending on the currents; I estimate them at seven knots an hour in some places—however, the sail could do no harm."

"Let me," she pleaded. "They are such pretty toys."

Toys! when one came to think of it, it could not have been more than five years or so since she was playing with actual toys, herself. And yet, she had three men that I knew of, held in the hollow of those flower-like hands, and how many, of whom I did not know?

What was it we all loved in the sea lady? I asked myself the question often enough in those days. She was very, very pretty, but it was not that. She was young, unmarked, unfurrowed in body and mind as a lily or a bloomy peach. But it was not that.

She was as brave as Nelson, as gentle as her own grandmother, and as brilliant and self-helpful as probably her own granddaughters would be. But you do not love a girl because she balances gracefully between the generations, catching the sunset gold and the sunrise glow alike.

Why did her world find the sea lady irresistible? I might answer that question now by asking another. But I did not know the other in those days—not even when I looked at our sea lady and saw something in her face and vaguely sensed something in the pretty names we gave her that seemed to point toward a solution of puzzles unsolved.

Well! I gave it up for the moment and pleased myself by watching her. She had hammered the slip of wood home now, and Flower had hammered one or two others on one or two other rafts. And they got the indispensable coconut canvas, and made little sails out of it and set them cunningly on the tiny masts, so that the fairy ships would sail with anything approaching to a fair wind.

And then they carried the fleet down



to the sea-channel, where the tide was running out strongly toward the outer walls of the island, and put them in and craned their necks to watch the ships go out.

And afterward they and we went up to the top of the island to see the little vessels floating away and away. They went surprizingly fast, tiny as they were. We saw them make their way through the reefs, as if they had each a pilot aboard.

"Will any one ever find them, I wonder," said the sea lady, looking wistfully toward the little ships.

I knew what she was longing—that she, and perhaps another, were on the decks of the fairy fleet, sailing away and away from the Terrible Island. It seemed hard that the little boats could go and that we could not.

You know how it is when you write a letter to one far away and wish and wish that you could slip yourself inside the envelope, to go with it whither it was going. Well, I think she was feeling somewhat after that fashion. And I know, so did I feel.

The fleet had better luck than the tree-signal; but we did not rely on it over-much. All this time, I need hardly say, the Greeks were constantly in our minds. It seemed absurd that we, two strong men and another, and two women in the full possession of health and strength, should be terrorized by the miscreants in the cave. Yet a way out of the difficulty was hard to find.

They had plenty of firearms and ammunition; we had one revolver and two cartridges. They were absolutely unscrupulous as to ways and means; we knew there were many things at which we should draw the line—shooting them as they had attempted to shoot us, when we were supposed to be asleep, for example. This matter had been debated between us. Flower held that it could not be managed in any case, since the Greeks kept their cave thoroughly closed all day time, and that therefore we need not discuss the idea.

Jim, and for the matter of that myself, had a notion that some way might be found. But, as we were all agreed that the act was impossible to us, that made little difference.

On one thing we were agreed—that some

means of making the island safe might be and should be found. Flower decided that as a preliminary he would spend a night concealed near the Greeks' cave and keep watch on their actions.

"There's no knowing what we may pick up about them that would be of use to us," he said.

Jim, cheerfully preparing to share his vigil, was curtly told to show a little common sense.

"You must stay down at our own cave and look after Lady Mary and Sapphira," explained Flower. "We can't leave them to Ireland; but I shall be very glad to have Ireland with me."

So he salved the wound he could not help inflicting.

We found a place to hide ourselves in before the sun was down. There was not much difficulty about it: the piles of overgrown coral rock near the caves furnished more refuges than one, and we had only to choose.

"You find one, Ireland," said Flower, "while I take a walk round and see none of the brutes are out."

You have seen the *dolmens*, *menhirs*, *kit-cote* houses of France and England, no doubt; or if not those, photographs of them, which are common in many tourists' resorts. I fixed on a sort of natural *dolmen*, a little cavern made by a large rock lying on the top of two or three smaller ones.

Once inside this, with the trailing vines draped down in front of the opening, not a soul could have seen us even in broad daylight, much less in the second-quarter moon that we expected. Flower and I got ourselves safely into it before the light failed, and waited. We did not dare to smoke; mosquitoes were active, and our quarters cramped. The wait promised to be a long and an uncomfortable one.

It did not last half an hour. No sooner was the light fairly out of the sky and the thin moon climbing up from the east than the bottle barricade began to clink furiously inside the cave. They were coming out.

Forth they came, four of them, stumbling and feeling their way.

"Why," I whispered to Flower, "they're all as blind as bats."

"Wait a bit," said Flower.

The fourth man walked with more certainty than the rest. He did not pause at the entrance, as they did, and then feel for the nearest rock and sit down on it, yawning and stretching. He stood erect and walked forward.

I thought he was looking about him, though his sight was clearly not normal; he strained his head forward, lifted his chin and peered through half-closed eyelids.

Having satisfied himself that no one was about, he spoke to the three others. They lurched forward and took their seats on a flat rock, while the first man went into the cave again and came back with a load of tins. I felt rather dispirited, as I saw the liberal helpings of food that he distributed to the company squatted on the rock; it was clear they had plenty of everything.

They ate largely, picking the meat out of the tins with their knives and tossing it rudely down their throats. They passed round a bottle of gin and drank out of the neck. It was a weird scene, up on the top of the lonely, windy island, under the feeble moon.

The men were dressed in the rough khaki stuffs that are popular in New Guinea, away from the townships; they seemed almost to melt into their surroundings in that pale light; one could have imagined them to be so many gigantic fungi growing on the rock, but for their occasional movements.

Above them the flag-like leaves of wild bananas flapped against the sky; on the high summits of the coconuts, eighty feet in air, huge plumes, moon-silvered, writhed and beat among the glittering claws of Scorpio, and eclipsed and snowed and eclipsed again the white lamps of the Southern Cross. And the wind cried in the grasses and the lonely sea complained below.

Hunger satisfied, the Greeks rose and stretched their limbs with animal yawns and howls. They lighted pipes and smoked; they lurched about the open spaces, trying to obtain what exercise they might after their cramped day in the cave.

We heard them talking to one another, but it was all in Greek or in some bastard Graeco-Malay dialect that Gilbert Murray himself could not have made head or tail of. What Flower and I guessed of their

sayings was put together out of their gestures which were, like those of all half-civilized people, very free and expressive.

The three men who were completely blind seemed to be abusing the partially blind man, perhaps for having brought them to the island, perhaps for having failed to guard sufficiently against the evil that had struck the whole crew.

I saw them raise their hands to heaven and shake their fists in a kind of despairing way; and once or twice one of them struck at his blinded eyes as a dog bites at the wound that smarts and burns. The other man seemed to be trying to calm them down.

We noticed that he pointed more than once to the beach below and laid his hand upon the big navy revolver in his belt. When he did this, the other men, mechanically felt for their revolvers, and one of them, once, facing down toward the caves where he supposed us to be, spat fiercely.

By and by the man who could see appeared to tell them that he was going to the beach. It had been our habit of late to sit out on the sand at dusk, cooling down after the heat of the day. I guessed that the Greek intended to try a snapshot from some safe corner, and my heart seemed to turn over in my breast, as I realized that Jim and the women would not know he was coming and would probably expose themselves to his fire. But Flower had seen that as soon as I did. He gathered himself up, slipped out of the shelter-hole, and whispering to me to await his return, ran after the Greek.

I thought to myself, watching him go, that it was indeed a lucky chance that had sent us to the island provided with a pair of rubber-soled shoes apiece, for the rock-climbing we expected.

"Those shoes, they are good things to take," Carl had said. "In that breaking-neck place they may save your life."

They had done that already, more than once, in the hideous game of blind man's buff we were compelled to play.

Left alone with the three blind men, I kept quiet and on the watch. I knew that any unguarded movement of mine would send a hail of lead pouring in my direction, and I had no wish at all to stop a bullet—probably dum-dum'ed—from one of those .45's.



For some few minutes the men remained as they had been left, only shifting their position so far as to stand a little closer and back to back in a triangle. It was plain that they were taking no chances. This movement brought them nearer to me, and with the temporary dying down of the wind I was able to hear clearly a few of the words that passed between them.

I am no mighty Greek-scholar, but I have passed my B. A. degree, and modern Greek is very like its ancient prototype in a large number of verbs and nouns. I was almost sure that they were talking about a box. What box? They seemed to set a value on it.

"And that word is 'girl,' if I am not mistaken," I thought. "Box and girl—what have they to do with—"

One of the men repeated the words; and this time he motioned with his hand toward the cave.

Instantly a new thought struck me. They were talking of something that belonged to the sea lady.

If I had been attentive before, I was all one strain of attention now. I didn't hold my breath—one does not—but I remember I listened with my mouth as wide open as a frog's. That helps you to hear. I heard more; I understood another word or two, helped out by gesture. They were saying that she ought to be where her box was, and one of them kissed an imaginary maiden.

I have never since then blamed juries for acquitting a murderer under the "unwritten law." In the flash of blood-lust that went through me like a jag of lightning and left me dry-lipped and shaking, there in my hiding-hole, I understood, once for all, how men kill because of a woman, and how other men in defiance of law forgive them.

And now I was not afraid at all of those blunt-nosed bullets of theirs. I called myself a craven for thinking such blinded brutes worthy of fear. I was determined, coldly and unalterably determined, on knowing the secret of their cave, before Flower had time to chase the seeing villain back again, or to shoot him with one of our two precious cart-ridges.

Have you ever been to New Zealand? Do you know the Dragon's Mouth—the

cavern that is full of fiercely boiling water for eighteen minutes and a half out of every twenty, and empty for the remaining ninety seconds? Have you ever, in company with a guide, made callous by continual risks, gone down into that cavern while it is dripping and steaming with the breath of the newly withdrawn waters, and climbed through and out again, death dragging on the soles of your feet, before the furious flood comes back with a howl of escaping steam?

Lame as I am, I have done it. I felt, that night up on top of the Terrible Island, when I crawled with exceeding care out of my hiding-hole and made for the empty cavern, as if I were taking, once again, that nightmare trip through the Dragon's Cave. If one did not get out in time. . . .

The three Greeks were listening intently for any sound from the direction of our beach; I think that may have drawn their attention off, in some degree. At all events, they did not hear me, as I crept out of the hole, rose slowly to my feet and walked, on the balls of my toes, to the cave-opening.

I did not dare to light a match; the scratching would have betrayed me. I could only feel my way down the slope where we had sheltered on the day of the storm and into the opening from which we had seen the Greek come forth.

If they came back and caught me, I knew I shouldn't have a dog's chance of escaping their bullets, in that confined space. But, after what I had heard, I just had to go, and that was all there was to it.

The cave was not nearly so large as I had expected. Four or five short strides, even of my lame leg, brought me across it. Ten feet or so, I thought. I tried it the other way; it was two or three yards longer. No doubt there were other caves. I hoped I had got the right one.

I got down on my hands and knees and began clawing round the walls. If they had a box, it was ten to one they would use it as a seat; in that case, I should find it somewhere on the floor.

I came across a number of other things—blankets, coconut-shells, heaps of oil tins, loose bottles; and more than once only the greatest care saved me from making a noise by displacing some of these



miscellaneous goods. But no box. I stood up and felt round the walls. I was almost frantic.

It could not be long till the man who could see returned, or until some alarm connected with his absence caused the others to seek refuge in the cave—indeed, I wondered that nothing had happened yet.

Surely Flower must have caught up the Greek—surely the three outside would know by this time that everything was not right.

Was that one of them coming back? I halted, scarcely daring to breathe. No. I had only heard the sound of water dripping somewhere in unknown crevices. The men were still outside. I fumbled on about the walls. Surely I must have gone almost round.

My fingers struck on something smooth and hard. In the same instant I heard an unmistakable sound of scuffling outside. They were coming back!

I grabbed the thing I had touched; it was undoubtedly a box, small and covered with something that felt like leather. I got out of the cave as quickly as I could; there was some little light from the sky on the way back, although coming in I had been in utter darkness. Could I get up the slope in time—were they . . .

Against the spangled violet of the night rose three dense black shadows. I was trapped.

There was only one thing to do—flatten myself against the wall of the descending passage and hope for the best. If any one of the men happened to touch me in passing, I did not rate my chances of escaping very high.

Apart from my lameness and apart from the pistols they carried, every one of the men was exceedingly handy with a knife, like all his kind, and could whip a blade out of his belt and into something warm and human, while a more civilized type of man would be wondering if there was really anything there. I squeezed myself up against the dank limestone of the passage and hoped the Greeks might walk fairly straight.

They came grunting and shambling down the slopes; one of them was smoking.

It fell out of his mouth; he stooped, felt about for it and picked it up again, striking a match to relight it.

My heart gave a horrid jump as the flame shot up, but I realized almost at once that they could not see me and that I had now an opportunity to glance at the box. The match flickered, wavered, went out. But I had had a look. I was carrying a leather-covered dressing-case.

After that, I would have faced the devil himself to get my booty safely away, for I was certain that the case was our sea lady's. It might have papers inside. It might have jewelry. It might have all sorts of things that would serve to identify her—if only I could get safely away.

Two of the men passed me with a wide margin of safety. I flattened myself against the wall of the cavern and felt as one does when one is overtaken by a train in a tunnel or cutting, with no "refuge" at hand to get into.

The third man was walking unsteadily; he smelt strongly of gin, and I made no doubt he had more than his share of the bottle they had been handing round. He passed me with the smallest possible margin and then, staggering slightly, stretched out one hand to steady himself against the wall. The hand descended flat upon my face.

He raised a wild whoop and snatched at my nose with one hand, while with the other he fumbled about his belt. If he had not been half-drunk, there would have been the end of Owen Ireland. But providentially he was, and that gave me the moment I wanted to duck away.

Of course the other two had flung round instantly, and they were sober. Cursing me in Greek—I can't say how strange those fragments of academic culture sounded, in such a place, and from such lips as theirs—they made for me like dogs falling on a hare.

I had not time to think—one acts by instinct in such moments as these. There was just light enough from the starry sky and the pale moon outside the cave for me to see where I was going. I dodged, but not into the open passage and out at the entranceway. Instinct shouted to me to get back, where they would least expect me to go—into the cave.

In their eagerness to seize me they had collided against one another, but they drew apart at once, and all three swung round toward the cave-mouth, fired in the direction of the opening.



"They would have got me sure with that," I said to myself, and then stumbled and scrambled out. I went after them as quietly as I could, thanking Heaven and Carl again for those rubber shoes.

They never thought of guarding the cave-mouth, but spread themselves out beyond it, near the rocky table where they had supped, and stood listening, their revolvers in their hands.

The night had become very still; there was not a sound but the faint breathing of the Pacific, far below, and now and again the winnowing of some huge fruit-bat's wings. I saw the men stand silhouetted against the stars; you might have thought them images of black stone.

Now this was a pretty pickle, because I could not, like Flower or Rocky Jim, move easily without making a noise. My lameness handicapped me; I never could be sure the weak foot would not drag.

It was impossible for me to steal past those three listening forms on the track, and, if I got off it, the rustling of the grasses would have been as good—or as bad—as a bell about my neck. I saw nothing for me to do but keep quiet in the cave-mouth, ready to move as soon as I saw a chance.

"I wonder," I thought to myself, "if I'll be alive in five minutes' time—in half an hour?" and I looked up, with mingled curiosity and awe, to the glorious spangling of the stars overhead. Was their secret in a little while to be mine?

Then I remembered that whatever wonders and glories might be the heritage of my departed soul, voyaging loose in the universe there would not be, from the outermost of the far-fixed stars, to the near, familiar moon roaming now among the silvered vanes of the palm-trees, the face of one dear woman, the sound of her golden voice. And eternity seemed cold. And more than ever I was resolved that my life should not end here and now, at the will of these eyeless brutes.

"I know she's not for me," I thought. "But I want to be on the same earth with her, as long as she treads it. If she were in Tasmania and I in the Klondyke, it would still be something to know that the same old world held us both—that we went spinning round the sun together."

I clutched the leather dressing-case more tightly under my arm and swore that I

would surely get away clear with it—to her.

I don't really know how I intended to manage the business, but I am sure I should have worked out some plan or other. As it was, Fate decided for me; I had not been standing there in the cave-mouth for more than a minute or so, when I heard the noise of feet running hard along the track and of a voice shouting something in Greek. The man who could see was coming back.

What he said must have been a warning, for the other three men, dropping their hunt after me, made for the cave-opening as fast as they could, arms stretched out and hands feeling the way. They could not go very fast; I saw that I might have time, covered by the noise of their movement, to get out of the cave, pass the Greeks somehow or other on the track and get myself hidden before the fourth man arrived. But it would be touch and go. If I could have moved as quickly as Flower!

Well! I could not, and that was all there was to it. I crept at the best speed I could muster along the wall of the entrance slope, reached the opening and slung myself round the corner of it just as the first of the three men groped his way to the place where I had been standing a couple of seconds before.

I cast a look down the track. White moon and the trembling shadows of palms; a fruit-bat winging through the stars; the night-wind stirring the plumes of the Pampas-grass. As yet, no more, I scuttled out on to the track. *Pad-pad* came the feet, drawing nearer; he would be in sight immediately. Reckless of making sound now, I flung myself into the cave refuge where Flower and I had been keeping watch.

I barked elbows and knees; I wrenched one foot cruelly; I knocked the wind out of my lean body as I fell—but I fell inside. And, just as I fell, I heard the feet come *pat-pat*, up behind me and pass me like the wind.

No, he had not seen. He was in a hurry to get back to the cave; no doubt he had looked neither to the right nor to left, but kept straight on. It had been a very narrow escape. I hugged the box tighter. We were nearly out of the wood now. The Greek rushed down the cave

slope, and in another minute I heard a babel of voices beginning.

I got up and out, and, in spite of my lameness and my wrenched foot, went hobbling at a pretty good pace toward the slope and the way to the beach. It would not take them long to talk things over, and if they started hunting for me with the help of the man who could see. . . .

"Flower!" I gasped.

The big surveyor was coming back.

"Why, Ireland!" he said, halting. "Did the brute get away?"

"He's into the cave by now," I said. "I hope to God he——"

"Oh, no, he didn't get any one. He saw me, worse luck, or I'd have had him; it would have been worth risking one of our cartridges. This isn't a healthy place just now; we'd best get back."

I was with him there; the whole length of the pathway lay open to fire, and the moon was climbing higher and growing brighter every minute.

"Give us your arm," said Flower. We hurried along together. "No use chasing after him now," regretted the big man. "He's safe. What have you got under your arm?"

"Box. Dressing-case," I gasped.

We were slamming along at a five-mile gait; I really don't think he knew that he was hauling me like a bundle of wash.

"Dressing-how-much? Is it a joke?"

"It's Lady Mary's," I panted.

Flower, with the steady remembrance of the job in hand that always characterized him, got me and himself under the lee of the slope before he stopped and burst out:

"Where did you get it? What is it? How do you know——"

"I got into the cave for a minute while the men were out," I explained.

And in a few words I related my adventure.

I thought he would have stove in my spine. He clapped me on the back like a housemaid beating a pillow.

"You —— plucky little devil," he swore. "I wouldn't have done it myself."

"I'm quite sure you would and better," I coughed. "Let's get on. I can't be easy till we have the thing in safety."

They were all waiting for us outside the cave when we arrived. The sound of shots had been heard down on the beach. Lady Mary and Sapphira, in the light of our

driftwood fire, looked anxious and pale-faced, as if they had been listening and wondering. Jim was seated comfortably on a flat stone, eating coconut. I do not think he was very fond of it, but he said it passed the time.

"I reckoned you'd get back all right," he observed comfortably, shifting a hunk of nut from one cheek to the other.

But when he heard about the box, he was as much excited as any one. I handed it over to Lady Mary; we all went into the cave, and Jim lighted up, with prodigal display, almost the whole of our stock of candlenut torches.

We crowded round the sea lady. Of course we should have looked away and pretended not to take any undue interest in her private property, but we simply couldn't do it.

"It's locked," said Jim.

"It's been broken open," said Flower.

He was right; the lock closed but did not catch. The box, now I saw it in full light, was a beautiful thing; deepest violet Russia leather, with handles, lock and name-plate of engraved brass. On the plate all eyes were instantly fixed.

I can not hope to tell you how disappointed we were when we saw that it was engraved with a Christian name alone. "Alix" cut evidently in facsimile of a written signature.

"Is that your name?" asked Flower of the sea lady.

She held the box in her hands, looking curiously at the plate.

"I don't know," she said presently, raising her head. "You call me Lady Mary."

"Alix," said Flower. "Alix. Does that recall anything to you?"

She stood looking at him, her lips a little apart, the delicate line of her eyebrows seeming to waver. I do not think for an instant he knew, but he had spoken her name in the accent of a lover. It seemed to me that she was listening, not to what he said, but to that tone.

"Alix," he said again.

"Lady Mary," put in Jim, "if you don't open that box soon, some of us are just going to curl up and die of suppressed curiosity."

"You suppress it a lot, don't you?" commented Sapphira.

"I'm not sure that it is mine," said the sea lady. "I can't remember."



And the old distressed expression that we had not seen for long came clouding over her face again.

"Better open it and see," counseled Flower.

The sea lady, obeying him, as she always did, put the box in his hands, the while she manipulated the lid. It seemed to me, and I dare say to the rest, that her fingers moved as if they were familiar with their ground. In a few seconds she had loosed the lid, and the dressing-case was open.

It was a wreck.

There had been bottles, jars, toilet-appliances of all kinds fitted into it, one could see by the numberless morocco loops, differently sized and shaped.

There was still a writing-case, delicately tooled, but devoid of pencils and pens. There was a beautiful small jewel-case, removable but fastened in with catches. It had been roughly dragged open, and the velvet linings were torn loose, apparently in search for some secret recess. It was empty. The case had been most thoroughly looted.

"That's been silver fittings it had—likely solid," said Sapphira relishingly. "The brutes have ripped loose every bit of metal."

"Not every bit," said Jim, who had taken the case up and was turning it slowly over. "They missed this." He laid his finger on the name-plate, which we had supposed to be engraved brass. "That's gold," said the miner. "And the handles."

"Then," I suggested, "the fittings must certainly have been gold too. No wonder they looted it."

"Gold!" said Sapphira, almost smacking her lips. "That's doing it proper, that is. But I might have known it. When she was thrown ashore her 'little shimmy,' went on Sapphira narratively, "was like a spider's web trimmed with the frost off of a window-pane."

I felt grateful to Jim for foregoing the mischievous comment that I saw twinkling in his eye.

"Here," said Flower, somewhat hurriedly, "give it back till I have another look. May I hunt right through it, Lady Mary?"

"Oh, please do," she said.

She was not nearly so much interested as the rest of us were; the question of her

own identity did not seem to sit very heavily on her mind. But she watched with attention while the big man's big, dexterous fingers felt all over the case, inside and outside, to ascertain whether anything of interest, value or significance had been left behind by the robbers.

I did not expect that anything would come of the search, but Flower was determined to have the last secrets out of the box, and his efforts did not go unrewarded. A flat morocco letter-case came to light.

"Now we have it," said the surveyor in a satisfied tone. "This is certainly some of your property." And he handed the case, unopened, to the sea lady.

She drew out of it a simple letter, written on foreign paper. I saw her turn it over, but not a gleam of expression came into her face.

"I do not think it is mine," she said. "Will you read it?"

"Aloud?" said Flower.

"Why not?" she answered him.

He looked at her curiously, but took the letter. We were all standing round him; none of us had thought to sit down. The light from the candlenut torches, smoky and glaring, fell on the ring of interested faces, of which the calmest and least interested was certainly that of the sea lady.

Flower read:

"G— CLUB, PICCADILLY,
"MY DARLING ALIX:

"I have written to you already by this mail—though indeed I scarcely expect my letter will catch you up, on your flying journey. I am writing again, not because there is anything special I have to say, but because I must repeat just once more how I love you, and how sweet you looked that day down at Liverpool, when I saw you off by the ever-to-be cursed *Caronia*. Alix, Alix, Alix, get quite well soon, and come back quickly. You are rich in unspent years, but I am so poor that I grudge every day you spend away.

"I saw H. M. the other day. She was most gracious, and asked me to send you her kindest regards. She tells me that it is a poor return I make for favor, in taking away the best of all her maids, and I can only agree with her, but man is selfish. Dear, you should have heard how she spoke of that other maid; 'it seems more like twenty days than over twenty years,' she said, 'since Margaret went away.' 'I shall not easily forget her,' she said, 'but your little Alix is sweeter.' She looked at me as if she would have said much; H. M. forgets nothing, and you of all people don't need to be told what her lovely tactfulness can be.

"Enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself—I grudge you nothing, though I wish it could have been shared by me. Tell Lady Grace to guard my jewel. I almost fear to let it go so far from my safe-keeping. I came up to town yesterday; the Court looked so lovely I was loath to leave it behind. They are working hard at the Dutch garden, and I hope it may be worthy of its mistress. I got Adam's mantelpiece; it will replace that Jacobean one that was damaged. Queen Elizabeth's bedroom is being cannily treated, but some of that paneling has simply got to come down and be replaced. I agree with you about the engravings; they are banished to the housekeeper's room. For all I can do to the place, for all the many people it harbors, the Court looks empty and sad. It waits, like its owner.

"Good night, Alix, sweet Alix, so like your godmother. I pray the Seven Seas may treat you ever kindly and carry you back safe to old England. 'And your petitioner will ever pray.'

"Always yours only,

"C. DE C."

There was silence in the cave after the reading of the paper. Flower folded up the sheet, put it back into the violet morocco case and handed it to the sea lady without a word. I did not dare to look at his face.

The pause was broken by Sapphira.

"Well, if that's not a nice love-letter—and do you know anything about them people, dearie?"

"I do not know," answered the sea lady.

There was struggle, almost pain, visible on her face.

"It's written to some girl in service in a big house, who's gone traveling with her mistress, I reckon. They say things about a maid, and taking her away. I'd guess the chap who wrote it was the steward or bailiff or something of the place they call the Court; he seems to have a lot to do with the repairs. Well, it's an interesting letter, but it don't tell us much, does it, dearie? And how do you think you ever got it in that dressing-case of yours? Was it your maid that it was written to?"

The sea lady was silent; I doubt if she heard a word.

I wondered that Flower, who had been so keen on helping her to recover her memory, had nothing now to say. It seemed a matter of no moment to him—to judge by his demeanor—whether the sea lady ever recovered her memory again or not.

And yet this was far and away the best and biggest chance that had ever presented itself of lifting up the dark curtain that

heretofore had covered all her past. Could he not even ask her a question or two?

I fancied that memory must be very near to dawning in her mind. Of course, I did not take Sapphira's view of the letter. I guessed, more accurately than any one else in that place was likely to do, the full astonishing significance it bore. But what use was that, or anything else, as long as the sea lady could not remember?

And still Flower was silent.

It was Jim who spoke.

"What about turning in? I've got first watch, and I want to get it over."

"Give it to me," said Flower, speaking for the first time since he had handed the letter back to the sea lady. "I don't feel sleepy. I'll look out now, and you can have the middle watch."

Sapphira and the sea lady went into their cave. Flower, the handy man, had made them a partition of woven palm-leaves, with a sort of swinging flap for a door, so that they enjoyed complete privacy. Jim dropped down on his bed of bracken and coconut canvas, flung his arms above his head and sank instantly to sleep.

I lay down near the doorway; it was a warmish night, and I wanted to feel the breeze on my face and look at the stars as I lay. Old tropic wanderers will want to know what we were doing about mosquito-nets; there is no sleeping in hot countries without them. I can answer that we were very well off in that particular.

The ever useful coconut canvas, open in texture and capable of being split to different thicknesses, had been sewn into nets that did all that was required. But Ku-Ku's island was not much troubled with mosquitoes, and often enough we did not lower the nets till near morning.

I lay, then, with my face to the open sky, waiting for the sleep that I knew would be long in coming. On me, and me alone of the company, the weight of a great secret had descended. I knew about Lady Mary.

Her name, it is true, I did not yet know. But a single telegram sent to any center of civilization when—or if—we got away from the island, would bring all the information that we could desire. I knew where the telegram should be sent; I knew to whom it should be directed.

I knew that Lady Mary, whatever she



was, was not Lady Mary; Lady she might be, probably was, but her real name was Alexandra, and she had been named after the highest lady in the land, whose god-daughter and maid she was.

No wonder that I had thought I remembered that still, self-possessed way she had of standing with her hands before her—I had seen its like on the platform of a hundred public functions in England. No wonder that a likeness had haunted me, unknown to myself, when I looked at our sea maiden. It is well known to certain sets of society—of which sets I once was an outer, unconsidered member—that those in constant and immediate contact with the very great often acquire an amazing resemblance to them. And the features of Lady Mary—the very large eyes with a beautiful fullness underneath; the oval chin; the long neck and sweet, close-set mouth—were the best possible foundation for such an acquired likeness to grow upon.

What was the fascination of the sea lady? There are no words to tell. But the hearts of us poor, comparatively humble men leaped their own reply.

I could not rest, even with the quiet stars to calm me. I turned again and again, looked to the darkness of the cave, with the face of Rocky Jim showing as a dim white blur; to the beach, moon-silvered, with the wild bananas swinging their vanes like great, dark, snatching hands across Orion's jeweled belt and sword.

I heard the upward crash and downward suck of wave after wave on the island walls outside; I heard the sinister hum of the reefs away at sea, like the call of a myriad giant hornets. The moon climbed up and up among the white stems of the palm-trees; the bell-bird ceased its tinkling in the forest; the ghost-pigeon that wails in deep night, when all true pigeons are asleep, and that lures—so Papuans say—the wanderer into dark places of the bush, and he loses sight and dies, took up its melancholy crying. And still I could not sleep.

I thought that Flower's watch must be almost over. I got up and walked bare-foot, over the cold sand; there was no use lying awake like this when I could have a companion to relieve my loneliness. But I could not see the surveyor.

I supposed he had gone up to the top of the island to look about him and make sure that no more trouble need be expected from the Greeks. I found a quiet seat among the rocks—my strained foot was giving some slight trouble—and settled myself to wait.

In a minute or two I saw him coming up from the edge of the sea. His hands and hair were dripping; he had evidently been bathing his head to cool himself. I was about to speak to him when I caught sight of his face in the full moonlight and saw that upon it which closed my lips.

"God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." It was Sterne who said that, and he ought to have known, for, with all his genius, he was weak to stand against the winds of life.

I think God does so temper the cruelest of all winds for us who are shorn of the strengths and splendors of other men. I suffered bitterly in Ceylon, when the girl I loved with a young man's first passion was taken from me.

I had suffered, since that day when the sea lady first stepped dripping and sparkling out of the ocean into our lives, with the knowledge that she was not, could never be for me. But the hell that I saw in Flower's face when, thinking himself alone with the night and his agony, he looked up to the un pitying skies and stretched his great arms abroad and beat and wrung his hands, was as far from me as the heaven that he had hoped for was forever out of my reach.

I felt shamed to my soul to have spied upon his agony. I knew now why he had not spoken; why he had wanted the first watch of the night so that he might be alone to wrestle with the blow that had fallen on him. I knew that he had never taken the ring the sea lady wore and the few unconscious references to "Cedric" very seriously; that he had hoped and that he had loved, as few men in the world can love, with all the great heart and soul enshrined in his great body.

I had, in the days that passed, heard something of the history of his first marriage. It was a sad and a heroic tale. He had married a woman who drank; the trouble had developed during their engagement, and Flower had insisted on carrying out his promise, in the hope of saving her.

He had not saved her; after a struggle



that lasted for long and bitter years, she had died—of drink—leaving him defeated, free, and so weary with the fight that he had never since her death cared to give any woman a second glance, until Lady Mary came, and—as he did not tell me, and as I knew—took him captive with the first look of her innocent lovely eyes, for as long as life should last.

Yes, he had hoped. And this was the end. No one, reading that letter, could have mistaken the fact that it was written by a lover to the woman who had given him her promise, and upon whom he relied as he relied on God or Heaven. I could not understand all of it myself, but so much was clear. Clear, also, was that other dizzying truth that I thought Flower had not even perceived that placed our little sea lady, by right, within the range of the "fierce light that beats upon a throne."

If I had ever thought of pointing out to him this additional barrier, I lost all idea of it now. Best keep the secret, so long as it could be kept. There was no good end to be served by revealing it.

The question of the moment was how to get back to the cave without being seen. I turned cold when I thought of Flower, reserved as an Indian, sensitive as only a strong man is sensitive, knowing that I had watched him in his moment of abandonment. He had calmed down now and was sitting with his head propped upon his hand, in an attitude that spoke no more than quiet dejection.

Not even his sorrow could make him unmindful for a moment of his duty. He sat where he could overlook the whole of the slope leading down from the summit of the island, and from time to time he raised his head and scanned it closely.

Something or other that he saw, or fancied he saw, caused him by and by, to rise and walk a little forward. I seized the chance of slipping unseen into the cave again. But then, or thereafter, there was little sleep that night for me.

CHAPTER X

FLOWER PLANS A HUNT

FROM THE day on which we found the letter, I dated a change in Flower. Up to that, though, he had worked hard

at times to supply comforts for the women and to make our cave-home safe and pleasant—aided by Jim's effective help and my slighter assistance—he had taken things easy when there was nothing special to do and had loafed as big men do loaf.

They are not like us small fry, who must be always on the fidget after something or other, amusement, diversion, the overseeing of our neighbor's business, if we happen to have none of our own.

They work more in fits and starts, and, though accomplishing as much on the whole as the restless little folk, they seem to enjoy long periods of doing nothing at all.

Flower had taken his share of pleasant dozing in the heat of midday under the cool shelter of the cave; of bathing in the dawn or at sunset, in the clear green waters of the cove; of lounging and smoking near the light of our driftwood fire, when all the various tasks of day were done.

Now he rested no more, he amused himself no more. Like the famous statesman whose name I can not remember, he showed that he could "toil terribly." Long before Jim and I had disentangled ourselves from our bedclothes, he would be out on the beach, collecting the fine white wood-ash that was our only soap—and very good soap it is—running fresh water into the breaker and scrubbing down with a whisp of coconut fiber; dressing again, as much as any of us dressed, and getting away to collect a bit more firewood for Sapphira or to fish off the outer wall of the island or to look for wild peppers for the inevitable stew.

He would eat hurriedly and get away again before the rest of us had finished; a hundred tasks he had found or made seemed to be always waiting for him.

He had undertaken a geological survey of the whole island and used to spend hour after hour under the fiercest midday suns, with a smoothed-down slab of wood and a rough charcoal pencil, drawing and making notes, tapping strata with a make-shift hammer of rock and breaking specimens away; peering into chasms and over "faults" that showed on the high edges of the cliffs.

He would hunt unweariedly through and through the bush for anything animal, vegetable or mineral that might be of use to our little community of castaways. He



would try, undaunted by failure after failure, to catch some one of the Greeks outside their fortified cave, day time or night time, and make him prisoner.

"If we could only get hold of one of the brutes and make him listen to reason," he said, "one might arrive at some understanding about the ownership of the place."

But no such opportunity presented itself.

He would cut down mulberry-trees with his knife, working hard for hours to fell one or two of the slim trunks, and rip them open and collect the inner bark, driving Jim and myself, his helpers, as if we were all in danger of imprisonment or torture, if we did not produce a certain tale of work by a certain hour.

And he got flat logs and set them out of the sun in a cool part of the beach and made wooden beaters and set every one to beating *tappa* cloth out of the fibers. And when we were all tired or had gone off to other jobs, he would sit there still, a strange figure, loose, wild hair standing up all over his head, torn shirt hanging off his neck, hands, each with a beater tight held, working up and down like parts of some machine—*tap-tap, tap-tap*, till sunset, he never rested. He never stopped to yarn with any of us or to have a quiet smoke—he smoked as he worked and spoke only when it was necessary.

And he kept away from the sea lady.

I do not say that he avoided her when there was a chance of doing anything for her or for Sapphira. But he made no occasions to seek her company. He peeled candlenut torches, so that she should have the light she fancied of nights in her sleeping-cave, and in silence left them where she could find them.

He plaited her a new wide hat, almost as big as an umbrella, out of palm-leaves, and handed it to her without a word, leaving barely time for thanks before he turned away into the bush again.

Often in the night, when it was Jim's watch or mine, we might see Flower's great shaggy head lifted up from his bracken bed and peering from the doorway of the cave; or one of us, patrolling about the slope, might suddenly come upon him, loping down, with that deerhound stride of his, from the plateau, whither he had gone to make an unexpected visit. He seemed to trust no one but himself to keep guard over the sea lady.

Jim and I, talking things over, agreed that he was taking the Greeks almost too seriously. After all, we argued, things could not go on like this forever. We had been near three weeks on the island, and in all that time the men of the cave had never—to our knowledge—been out in daylight.

If they came out at night, it was with the utmost caution, using the man who could see as a sentry, so that they could get back in a hurry, should any one of us come along. They would certainly get tired of this sort of thing. They would run up some kind of flag of truce—appeal to us in some way—try to make terms. So Jim and I argued.

Flower used to listen to us, if he was present, in utter silence. He was not much of a talker at the best of times, but this want of responsiveness on his part had a chilling effect.

"Don't you agree with us?" I asked him once.

It was the time of the evening meal. We were sitting inside the cave, our log stools placed about a table that we men had managed to knock up out of the natural planks found buttressing the roots of certain great Papuan-trees.

We were careful with our ship-provisions nowadays; lemon-grass tea smoked in our tins; fish from the lagoon were served on platters of banana-leaf, white coconut cream, with red peppers cut up on it, stood in a coconut-shell at every one's elbow, to dip the morsels in, since we had no sauce.

We had a single precious biscuit apiece; and Sapphira had stewed a mess of miscellaneous fruits in a couple of ox-tongue tins, and served it for a sweet course. Despite the absence of the story-book bread-fruits and yams and oranges and bananas, which are never found on true "desolate islands," we thought that Ku-Ku's island was doing us none too badly.

Flower dipped a piece of parrot-fish in the coconut sauce and ate it before he made reply.

"No," was all he said.

"Why not?" Jim and I demanded together.

"Because," said Flower, setting down his emptied tin—I knew he missed the "real" tea worse than any one else in the party, but he would not touch the remain-



der of our little store, preferring to leave it for use in possible sickness—"you've forgotten their point of view."

"They haven't got any," said Jim. "They're half-castes—or quarter at the best. You can't reckon on them as you would on white men."

"You can reckon on human nature, be it black or white," declared Flower. "For some time past, those men have been saying to one another, just as we have, that this state of affairs can't continue. They probably expected their boat long ago. I dare say the blow that did for poor Carl may have accounted for her too."

"Well, they must be beginning to see that. They are asking themselves, 'How is it to end?' And you may be sure that they will find some answer before we shall. Because, if things are unpleasant for us, they are just about twice as unpleasant for them. We haven't committed two murders that would hang us, at Port Moresby."

"We aren't trying to 'skin' the island of its shell and shell money—which I suppose they have hidden away before some one else discovers it—our game is to apply decently to the Lands Office for a lease. We aren't shut up all day; we haven't so far—gone blind, any of us. Oh, the light end of the stick is ours, without doubt. That's why I say that they will make the first move."

"What do you think it will be?" asked Lady Mary.

The light in his eyes as he turned to her! The bitter longing beaten down by his will, as a man beats a fire back into the ashes from which it has burst forth.

"I can't tell you that," he said, with the gentleness that his voice always held when he spoke to her—which was hardly ever, now. I wondered if she saw the double meaning that I could not help reading into the words.

I do not think she did. Sitting there on her rough log stool, her much washed and mended cotton dress falling over her Diana-shape like the draperies of some fair statue, a blood-colored hibiscus burning in her hair—why had she placed it there?—the sea lady, I knew, was thinking hardly at all of anything Flower might say. She was thinking of him; looking at him; wondering, grieving over him.

Did she love him then? It was impos-

sible to tell. That supreme self-control of hers, like clear ice about a flower, showed yet protected the beauty of her heart and mind. One saw—one suspected the sweetness of that which lay within, but one could not touch the lovely thing. The sea lady's secrets were her own.

Yet I thought that the shadow which rested on the face of the big surveyor, in these latter days, threw some portion of its shade on her.

But he had not done speaking. He held out his tin to Sapphira for more of the lemon-grass tea, swallowed it, as if to clear his voice, which seemed less under control than usual—perhaps he had caught some cold wandering about the island—and went on, with a change of subject that seemed curiously abrupt—

"I want to do some hunting tomorrow."

"What are you going to hunt?" demanded Sapphira, alert at the mention of anything that might concern the kitchen.

"Pigs," said Flower.

We who walk somewhat apart from the rest of humanity have strange intuitions at times. I can not say why, but at that moment I felt an unreasoned conviction that Flower had not changed his subject so much after all. I was sure the pigs had something to do with it.

"I thought there wasn't any," objected Sapphira.

"There are a very few. I've found traces lately. I think we could manage to trap some in that stretch of big scrub."

"Why aren't there more?" demanded Jim. "This ought to be a mighty good place for them, judging by other islands."

"I should suppose," said Flower, choosing his words with some care and looking only at the piece of fish he was eating, "that the island, for some reason or other, does not suit them."

"Where do you reckon they came from?"

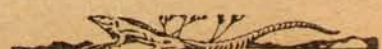
"Ku-Ku probably brought them."

"Isn't there food for them here?"

"Plenty."

The conversation seemed to languish. Supper finished without much more talk. Afterward, Jim went up to do sentry while the rest of us enjoyed a quiet lounge on the beach in the cool of the twilight.

Every man has his faults, and I am no exception. The worst of mine, or one of



the worst, I fear, is curiosity. I can't mind my own business, exclusively. I must know what the rest of my immediate world is thinking, feeling, fearing. Especially I must hunt down a secret when I suspect one. If this is a meanness, it has at all events never led me into mean conduct. I play fair. I don't trap—I ask.

That night I was hot on the trail of a mystery. What had Flower meant? What was the inner significance of his talk about pigs? I knew it was waste of time for me to question him; the big man was not the sort of person with whom one could take a liberty—unless . . .

Yes, that was the way. If the sea lady asked him, he might or not tell, but he would not at all events be angered.

"Lady Mary," I whispered.

She turned her head in the twilight. We were sitting on the outer rim of the little group.

"Can you slip aside to speak to me?" I said, softly. "Something about Flower."

She did not appear to hear; she made no answer—but she rose by and by and changed her seat. We could talk, now, without being overheard.

I told her, in a few words, that I thought there was something behind the hunting-plan and begged her to try and find out. She nodded, and by and by went back to her place.

"Mr. Flower," I heard her say.

He started just a little, as a horse starts when a spur touches it. He turned his head to look at her; he had been looking darkly through the gathering darkness, out to the prisoning sea.

"What are you going to hunt pigs for?"

"For you to eat," he answered.

"Is that all?"

"No, Lady Mary."

We knew now that her name was not Lady Mary—but it had become a habit to use it. And she herself laid no claim

to the other. "It may be mine," was all we could get her to say.

"Am I not to know?"

I would have given her all that she asked even to the half of my kingdom, had I been a king and she a slave who asked in such a tone. Flower felt it—even more than I, perhaps.

"You shall know, if you wish; but it might be better not to trouble you," he answered.

"I think I would rather be troubled," she said.

And through that hateful clairvoyance of mine that always told me everything which was likely to pain me, I knew she was asking and persisting, not because I had set her on, but because she wanted to be assured that no special danger to Flower lurked in this new enterprise, whatever it might be.

"Well," he answered her after a pause, "I can tell you what I want them for, if you wish. I want them, partly for food and partly for experiments."

"Experiments?" Her voice showed dismay, almost horror. "You were a doctor—do you mean—oh!"

"I was a medical student," he corrected. "And I don't mean vivisection. My experiments, if I make any, will not be in any way troublesome to the pigs."

There was a note of finality in his voice that seemed to tell her she had asked enough. Yet she ventured one more question.

"Why do you want pigs, in especial?"

"Because, in some ways, they resemble human beings."

She asked no more. I could have put a question or two on my own account, but Lady Mary, once satisfied that no danger to Flower was involved, left the subject alone. I do not know if further asking would have brought further replies. He had gone very far out of his usual road in answering even so much.



TO BE CONTINUED



Stella Maris of Pete's

BY MELLA RUSSELL McCALLUM



IT WAS a dull evening at "Pete's Restaurant and Sailors' Home." The mechanical piano was silent. The Scholar was lost in a book, hunched over the oilcloth-covered table; the remains of his "ham-and" pushed aside, his disreputable old legs twined about those of the chair.

It was queer how the Scholar never got sick of those fool Latin books. You'd think, old tar that he was, he'd be ready to rest, and smoke his brown cigarets in peace, like Old Jack and Twist-Eye over there in the corner with their cribbage-game. The few loungers-about were apathetic and sleepy. The Kid was making love to Stella. That was about all the Kid ever did ashore, and, if practise makes perfect, he must have been a star. In fact he was a star. For Stella was past-mistress at love.

But tonight she listened to the Kid with half an ear. He was a little too drunk to appeal to her. A surge of something akin to disgust rose up in her. Gently, lithely as a cat she unwound herself from the arm that enclosed her bare shoulder. And before the Kid knew he was being cut, she was standing some distance away, patting the red folds of her skirt over her hips, regarding him with displeasure through her tangly lashes.

She made a pose for *Carmen*; slim, gipsyish. Only no *Carmen* ever had hair like Stella's. Even now, under her gaudy silk head-gear, it strayed about her face in fine, fair tendrils, a heritage from her little English mother, who had been—according to Pete, her father, in an eleventh-hour burst of confession—bonny and good.

Queer words to associate with any one connected with "Pete's Restaurant and Sailors' Home"! But then, the little English mother had died when Stella was tiny, before Pete gave up the sea and bought this outrageous dump that was half-ship and half-house and wholly disgraceful.

"Aw, Stel, what's the little idea?" whined the Kid.

"Tired. Goin' to bed," she said briefly. "Uncle Frank, will you—Uncle Frank!"

She stamped, for the Scholar did not look up.

"Yes, Stella Maris; what is it?"

The Scholar kept one finger on the place he was reading.

"I want you to lock up early. See that Jack and Twist-Eye don't set themselves afire. Shoo the rest out. And if any one's got to eat, cook 'em something yourself. I'm goin' to tell Aunt Cynthy to go home for the night."

"With pleasure I shall obey, O Stella Maris," said the Scholar.

Stella sniffed. The Scholar's language was so ridiculous. And why did he persist in calling her Stella Maris? He knew her name was Jackson. Hadn't old Pete's name been Jackson?

"But, aw, I say, Stel!" The Kid drew himself up to a hulking, handsome six feet.

Stella shrugged and turned on her wobbly French heel.

But before she reached the door, there was a desperate pounding outside.

Black Cynthy bounded in, wringing her hands, eyes rolling.

"Foah Gawd, we'se gittin' raided!" she moaned.

The others shuffled to their feet, alert.

"Raided, your granny!" snapped Stella. "Shut up, Cynthy! Don't I run a respectable hotel?"

"Respectable! Huh! How about——"

The Kid was smarting.

"Open the door, Cynthy," cut in Stella. "That'll be enough from you, Kid. What about the time I nursed you through typhoid?" she hissed.

The Kid subsided. A tense voice rang from the hall:

"Man 'most dead! Some one help me bring him in!"

"Sure," Stella's voice rang above old Cynthy's mumbling.

She darted into the hall, followed by her guests. The stranger wore a chauffeur's livery.

"Cynthy! Fresh sheets in the best room, and hustle like hell. Uncle Frank! Kid! Go help 'em in. How many hurt?"

"Just Mr. Gregory. I must have drove on to a condemned bridge."

The Kid and the Scholar followed the man out into the night, returning presently with a still, limp figure. Stella had already

phoned for a doctor. With surprizing tenderness all the guests assisted in getting the poor chap up-stairs, while their proprietor gave sharp orders. For once Aunt Cynthy had really hustled. The best room presented a fairly neat appearance.

Stella opened the windows and let the night breeze play over the still figure. Then she knelt and put her ear to his heart.

"He's breathin'," she said.

The Kid scowled. But he went off down-stairs with the rest at her bidding.

When the doctor arrived, there was a fresh fever of activity. His diagnosis was not long forthcoming.

"Half his bones are broken. I'll get another surgeon and we'll find out how bad he is internally. Can he stay here?"

He looked hard at Stella.

"Are you the landlady? Because it would probably mean death to move him. While here—there's a chance."

"Of course he can stay," snapped Stella. "What do you think I am? A heartless vamp?"

"That's fine, thank you," he said. "Now the first thing is a nurse. It's twenty miles to a hospital——"

"Does she have to be a trained nurse?" Stella breathed fast. "I know a peach of a practical nurse."

"You do? Well, get her right away, then. She'll do till we can find better. Where's the telephone? I'll call Dr. Seager."

Stella pointed to the booth, then flew into the deserted dining-room, beckoning to the Kid and the Scholar. Her eyes were shining oddly.

"See here, you."

She shut the door and talked low.

"I'm goin' to be the nurse myself. And you sports ain't goin' to give me away."

They stared in amazement. Then the Scholar, quick to divine motives, nodded—

"Far be it from me to give you away, Stella Maris."

But the Kid remarked—

"Helluva lot that doc'll let you nurse a patient o' his'n!"

"He won't know it's me. Just wait till I come down-stairs—you won't know me yourself. But you got to promise you won't squeal, Kid!"

She drew tantalizingly near him. And when he caught her and held her close, she did not struggle.

"You beauty! You little devil!"



The Kid was himself again.

"Promise me," she whispered.

"Aw, why d'ya wanta pull off a fool stunt like that, girlo, when me and you's so happy——"

"Kid! I pulled you through typhoid. Please!" She kissed him.

"Aw, well, go to it, then. Only just give me a chance when it's over."

STELLA sped up to her room, casting off her gipsyish attire as she went. First she scrubbed her face. Scrubbed off the rouge and the too-black brows. Then she let down her pale, fine hair and combed it up again into a plain, loose twist. Rummaging through a trunk, she brought up a wrinkled but clean blue gingham house-dress, and from somewhere unearthed a white apron.

She hardly knew herself when she was done. The mirror reflected a pale, rather delicately pretty girl with a wealth of fair hair and brown eyes behind tangly lashes.

"Gawd! Wonder what Pete'd say," she muttered.

It was her own father who had taught her the manners and morals of a gipsy.

She ran down-stairs. The Kid and the Scholar gasped. The Scholar bowed.

"Stella Maris," he said admiringly. "Now you are like your mother!"

But the Kid scratched his head.

"You look so damned—so damned——"

"Respectable," she supplied, laughing. "Sure, I do. And I am, time bein'. Now, Uncle Frank, you and me'll sneak out back and around front."

She snatched Aunt Cynthy's dark shawl and wrapped it round her.

"You can interdooce me as Miss Stella Maris, from a neiborin' farm."

The doctor never guessed. He was relieved. With a curt nod he told her what to do. In half an hour the other doctor came. Things hummed in the sick-room.

And thus began a new, strange chapter in the life of old Pete Jackson's Stella.

Of course, if she hadn't had a natural knack for nursing, she never could have gotten away with it. But ever since she was a child, she had loved to take care of the sick. It was the one useful thing on earth she did love. Many an old seafarer she had nursed back to health—and young ones, too, who never forgot her.

As for her guests giving her away, she

had no fear. She had a reputation for fair play herself, and they would do the same by her in this, her latest whim. Aunt Cynthy could see to the cooking and the Scholar could look after things generally. The Scholar never paid any board anyway, so she could ask him. She kept him on because he had known her mother.

When a girl has had a good bringing-up, it is her own fault if she is not a credit to it. But when a girl has had no bringing-up—who can say?

Stella did not know what respectability was, except as something to be scoffed at. She had put rouge on her face since she could remember. Pete had showed her how to apply it. He had also taught her that her surest asset—surer than the uncertain receipts of the hotel—was her slim beauty. And she had been an apt pupil. She had earned an unsavory reputation at a tender age, and always managed to live up to it. Her house, while keeping the letter of the law, was avoided by all who valued their good name.

What charm, therefore, could there be for her in playing the dull rôle of nurse? Why, the charm of the unknown.

ALL her crowded young life she had wondered what it would be like not to be shunned as old Pete's girl. She had, at infrequent intervals, longed for quiet, untroubled waters, for humdrum respectability. Her friends were so unrestful, with their ready fists and passions. She had actually craved drudgery.

And now she was to have it, and in her own house, too. Already she was enjoying herself. She liked the homely, laborious tasks the doctors gave her. And she found herself interested in the fate of the poor smashed-up young man.

The next day the first doctor mentioned the landlady to her.

"Where is that young heathen that was ordering every one around here last night?"

"Oh, she goes and comes," evaded Stella.

"I guess she don't look after her business."

"Apparently not."

He lowered his tone.

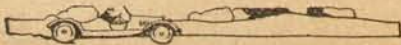
"This is a tough joint, I hear," he con-

fided.

She jumped. It sounded so funny.

"Is it?" she asked. "I ain't seen nothin' out o' the way."

"Oh, you wouldn't," he answered.



Was that a compliment? She thought it must be.

Of course it is doubtful if the charm of the humdrum would have lasted in other circumstances. If the patient had been wholly charmless himself, for instance.

But as soon as the doctors agreed that he would pull through, her interest in him became something other than that of nurse. For he was like a young chiseled god, she thought. He reminded her of the statues the Scholar had taken her to see in the classical museum once. Fair, regular features; fair, crisp curling hair; long gold lashes. She wondered about his eyes. He hadn't opened them yet.

And who was he? His clothes spelled money. The chauffeur had said he was taking Mr. Gregory back to school. She had meant to ask that chauffeur a lot of things, but he had hurried away to notify "the guardian," he said.

SHE expected the young man's relatives would show up soon. They must feel terrible about him.

But nobody came except the chauffeur again, with a roll of bills that would have given Pete apoplexy, and the message that Mr. Gregory's guardian, Mr. Estis, was greatly distressed over the accident and would be out to see him just as soon as he could spare the time.

Stella was highly indignant at that message and told the chauffeur so. But he merely shrugged like the well-trained servant he was.

Then on the third day the young man opened his eyes. Stella nearly dropped the bottle she was carrying. For his eyes were the clearest gray she ever saw.

"You look like an English girl," was his first remark.

She shook her head. She couldn't speak. At last she managed—

"My mother was English."

"I knew it. But tell me about myself. What happened? Dick started to cross a bridge, I remember, and we went through on some rocks."

She recounted the story.

"Where am I now?"

"At a road-house, four miles from Fairville. Twenty miles from the city. The proprietor took you in."

"Say, thank him for me, will you?"

"It's a lady. But she's gone away now."

"How interesting. You're from some hospital, I suppose."

"No, I just live near. They sent for me. I ain't a real nurse. But both the doctors say I'm doin' all right."

"I should say you were," he said contentedly, attempting to stretch out an arm. "Ouch!" He winced. "I am smashed up."

Before the day was done, she had gathered his history. He had no family. He was responsible to his guardian, Mr. Estis, of a well known legal firm. But in a few months he would be twenty-one, and then he would have control of his own affairs. He would probably go into his guardian's office. But then again, maybe he wouldn't. He might strike out for himself. From the nonchalant way he spoke of money she knew he had plenty. Why, the roll under his pillow would choke Aunt Cynthia's cow!

Young bones knit quickly, especially if the will helps. And Gregory Allison was a model patient. He obeyed the doctor and he obeyed the nurse. If they told him to grin and bear it, he grinned and bore it. If they told him to shut his eyes and try to sleep, he shut his eyes and tried to sleep.

"But it's hard not to be able to talk to you all I want to," he told Stella the next day. "I've never known a girl like you. I want to get better acquainted."

Stella flushed. There was no rouge to hide it, and the young man saw. A sympathetic tint stole faintly into his cheeks.

"I ain't a educated girl," said Stella.

"Rubbish! Any one can get an education. But any one can't get what you've got."

"What?"

"Why, character, you know."

Verily, it was more than a new chapter in life; it was a new life!

"Most of the girls I know are so useless," he went on. "They couldn't roll bandages like you're doing now. Nice little things, you know, but—well, I shan't ever be interested in them again."

"Why not?"

Stella turned away to hide her face.

"Oh, I shan't, that's all. Say Miss Maris, what's your first name?"

"Stella."

"How beautiful! Stella Maris. You were named that on purpose, I know."

"No, I guess not," she said uneasily. "It just happened."



He shook his head.

"No. Such things don't just happen."

"I think you'd better try to go to sleep."

"All right—Stella."

He smiled up at her. Her heart pounded.

THE rôle of respectability wasn't so monotonous after all.

To do them justice, Stella's guests were loyal to her. Even the Kid—although the Kid went away on a short cruise a few days after the accident, so his loyalty wasn't so remarkable. They went about their business as usual—if pipes and mugs and cribbage and seven-up are business.

Stella gave her household orders secretly at night. Aunt Cynthy ministered to their needs and the faithful Scholar kept his eye peeled off and on—when Ovid wasn't too engrossing. They regarded Stella's adventure in respectability as a great joke and called her "Miss Maris" to her face without winking. But privately they thought she was crazy to drudge that way.

A week passed. Two weeks.

"He can be taken to a hospital safely now," the doctors agreed, speaking to Stella.

"I don't care to go," announced Gregory.

They had thought he was asleep.

"But it may be inconvenient for the—er—management of this place to keep you," suggested the first doctor.

"I think I can find out about that," offered Stella.

So the next day she told him she had talked with the landlady and that everything was all right. The young man could stay as long as he liked at the regular rates.

Of course young Allison stayed.

And of course he fell in love with Stella.

She cried when he told her.

"What makes you do that?" he demanded in some awe.

"I can't help it, Mr. Allison."

"Gregory, you mean."

"Gregory, I mean."

"You aren't unhappy, are you, Stella?"

"I'm so happy—I'm—But I think you'd better go to sleep now."

"I will if you'll kiss me."

Stella hesitated. She was two years his senior, but she was centuries older than this boy, fresh from his tutors and guardians. Why, he had even admitted that this was the first time in all his life he had not been under some sort of guardianship.

But the blood surged hot within her breast. She had a right to happiness, she argued. Most men weren't worth kissing. But Gregory! She had a right to take the love he offered.

No matter what she had been, she loved him, and she was his now. She was good now. Loving him made her so. The past didn't count. Old Pete didn't count. Or any of her lovers—the Kid—

She leaned over and met his lips lightly.

"Now sleep, dear," she said.

He closed his eyes, still smiling.

As the days went on, she ceased to struggle with herself. She listened to him and they laughed together and just drifted. He suffered very little pain now. The danger of internal injury was past. She neglected to give Cynthy orders and went about in a haze of happiness. The first real happiness she had ever known; happiness that she had not believed possible.

But all drifting craft must pull up somewhere. A month, six weeks passed. Gregory Allison recovered. He sat up now and even walked about with a crutch.

One day the chauffeur came to take him home. He said that the guardian was highly gratified at his ward's recuperation.

Stella went about the task of packing his things with a leaden weight in her breast.

He watched her as she worked. He was sitting in an old rocker with a steamer-rug across his knees.

"Hang it all!" he burst out. "You know how I hate to go, don't you, Stella?"

She faced him miserably.

"Do you s'pose—I'll ever see you again?" she whispered.

The possibility had never occurred to her. In her experience men came and went, bees about a flower; and the flower had never cared—till now.

"Why, darling girl, what ever put such an idea in your head?"

He held out his arms. She flew to him, flinging herself beside him on her knees.

"You know I'll be of age in just a short time, and then there's no reason why we can't be married, is there?"

She pushed him back a little, staring at him. Marriage! She had never dreamed of it.

She could have laughed. How easy everything was. Her fears for nothing. Why, it was too simple. She could simply leave the old life forever like a soiled, dis-

carded garment. They would never find her. Or if they did, they would be loyal. She had been fair to them always. Even the Kid wouldn't spoil the game. He'd play fair.

Gregory pulled her back to him jealously. "It won't be long, dear. Just a few weeks. Oh, Stella, you're so—so—all I can think of is bonny. You're so bonny!"

She thought suddenly of Pete's dying confidences. Pete had said her mother was bonny—bonny and good.

Bonny and good! Somehow the words seemed to belong together. Now Gregory was bonny and good. But she, no matter how bonny she might be—

"Stella! Your hands are cold—you frighten me."

"No, nō, Gregory."

"You love me, don't you?"

The voice of conscience was a thing to be laughed at, along with all decency. Yet it tortured old Pete's Stella now. Perhaps it was the little English mother speaking within her. She thought of her childhood; dancing in a little red skirt for her father's guests; kissing their rough faces when they tossed her in the air.

Gregory Allison had told her about his childhood, spent first with a governess who had implanted ideals of manhood and womanhood in him that he had never forgotten—would never forget. Later with a favorite tutor, who had taught him all the healthful sports, with the underlying idea that the body must be slave to the soul,

BUT she loved him so! Why did these scenes persist, to torment her? Gregory would never know anything of her life. She would be his slave. The old days would be wiped away. She had a right to happiness. Old Pete had come near to cheating her out of it, but he shouldn't—he shouldn't! She had the right—and she would take it—and marry Gregory—and be happy, happy, happy!

The boy was terribly alarmed at her long silence.

"Stella, you must tell me what's the matter. Don't you—" he choked—"don't you love me enough to want to marry me? Don't lie to me—because I can't let you marry me out of pity, dear."

Pity! She could have screamed at that.

It was supper-time down-stairs. She knew it by the smell of Aunt Cynthia's fried

potatoes, wafted up to them. Pretty soon the Scholar and Twist-Eye and Jack and the rest would range themselves about the oilcloth-covered table.

The Kid might come in tonight, too. He was due. There would be remarks passed about Gregory's departure. They would express relief that Stella would be back soon.

But she would not be back. She was planning swiftly. She would go that very night to the city, to some quiet place, and wait till she and Gregory could marry. And then—

Why, after that they would be happy. She would adore him always and give him her best.

For Gregory deserved not her best, but the best on earth—the bonny and good. She couldn't cheat Gregory. She had never cheated any one.

"Oh, Holy Mother!" she prayed for the first time in her life. "Pete wins."

"Stella!" cried Gregory frantically.

"I—guess I—made a mistake," she said hurriedly. "I—thought I cared—enough—but—I guess I don't."

His arms relaxed, tightened, dropped, returned. He pleaded.

She got up and went on packing his things.

Half an hour later an auto glided off up the road away from "Pete's Restaurant and Sailors' Home."

Stella lay on her bed for several hours. Then toward midnight she got up calmly and put on her gipsyish clothes. The regulars below were dozing, but they perked up joyously at sight of her.

"Gosh, Stel, we was 'fraid the rich kid'd want you to run away with him or something," chuckled old Jack.

Stella slumped down in her chair and crossed her red silken ankles complacently, as she lighted a cigaret.

"He did," she said.

"Then why'n'ell didn't you?"

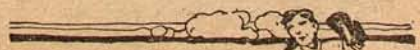
This from the Kid.

"You could of got a nice wad and then shipped him and beat it back to me—eh, girlo? What was the matter with your brains? On a vacation?"

"Oh, hell, you wouldn't understand," said Stella.

But the Scholar straightened his old back and smiled across the top of his book.

"Stella Maris!" he said softly.



Dynamite Has Its Advantages

BY DALE BROWN



IF YOU have not felt the charm of Daggett Bowl, that long, oval valley sequestered by pine-covered hills literally infested with twittering redbills, pounding woodpeckers and rasping blue-jays; if you have not seen the flood of violets sweeping up to meet the conifers, if you know nothing of the cinnamon smell of the hills—you won't understand why Nell Daggett was in such an ugly mood that old Simmy stuck to his kitchen till she was out of sight.

Simmy himself—bow-legged, water-eyed, leather-skinned—was somewhat uncertain of temper and afraid of no one. But when Nell, ordinarily a sweet-dispositioned, altogether lovable young woman, so far forgot her seminary English as to call him a quartz-headed, clatter-mouthed old rooster, Simmy knew that it was wise to stay in the kitchen.

That kitchen had been his sacred province since the day, some twenty years before, when Pop Daggett, Nell's father, ordered him to transfer his activities from the chuck-wagon, over which he presided, to the new culinary realm; and even Nell respected it.

The fact of the matter was that Nell, born on that very ranch, was afraid that she would be compelled to leave it and teach school, or some such thing, and she did not want to. She wanted to stay there and regain possession of the place, which she had been obliged to sell to an aged Easterner named Gorman. Two notes which Pop had neglected to mention before he died and drouth and a scourge had been responsible for that; and Gorman, summering at the ranch, had offered a price and agreed to retain Nell as manager. Having no alternative, she accepted the offer.

Gorman had tried nearly everything and felt that he might as well round out his financial gambling-career with sheep as with anything else.

"But you make it pay me," he had said, "or some one is going to buy a ranch real cheap. I'll give it one fling."

He did not know that Nell's heart was broken over the sale of the place; she kept that side well hidden. But he did know that he had agreed to sell back to her after a period of years at the price he paid. Gorman expected to be dead by then, so he couldn't lose anything—if Nell made it profitable in the meantime.

And that was the trouble; it was not profitable. A well-planned campaign of depredation—mysterious costly "accidents"—seemed to be underway to force the sale of the ranch, and not a clew to the author had developed. Gorman threatened to accept one of several offers; Nell did not want him to do so—and as a consequence Simmy found it wise to stay in seclusion.

Nell crossed Kitter Creek, rushing down from Old Saddleback, at the foot of which snuggled the ranch-buildings, and came into the south pasture, where Joe was repairing a fence.

"Broken?" she asked, sliding from Perk.

"Nope; cut," said Joe, a tall, angular somber-visaged man in the middle thirties.

He pointed to a huddle of fleecy bodies fifty feet below, and Nell half-wished that she were a man, so that she might at least swear satisfyingly.

"I met Frank Lester a while ago," she said. "He repeated his offer for the place, and I told him I had advised Gorman to hang on—that we were living in hopes of getting to the bottom of it. I hate to think Frank would——"

Joe straightened up, glanced at her and then at a huge flock—Frank Lester's—grazing around the rim of Daggett Bowl. Frank ran sheep on three sides of Daggett's and lived up a coulee between twin hills on the east. Said Joe:

"Frank wants it; he needs it. He could use this water, I reckon, and the ranch-house, and——"

"Oh, I know. But so do you want it—and so do I. We have just as much reason. That's foolish."

"Mebbe so."

Joe was inclined to sullenness at times, and he was stubborn—a rather morose individual.

"Mebbe so. But just the same somebody's doin' it, and . . . say, Nell, you ain't tryin' to say you or me——"

"Sure! That's just what I'm trying to say!"

Nell could be sarcastic upon occasion.

"Any one would imagine, to look at you that you had a little—a *very* little intelligence. Now forget about Frank. I heard from Gorman's lawyers today, and what do you think they said? The boss is coming out himself."

"N-o-o!"

"Y-e-e-s! And I'm to hold the fort till he gets here. I don't see how he can learn anything, if we can't. They didn't say when, but they said he was going to investigate personally. Sounds as if he thought *I* was doing it—deliberately. And whoever is, *won't*, while he's around, will they?"

Having thus worked herself into a fine rage, she caught up Perk and astonished that little horse immensely by digging her heels into his flanks. Joe stared after her, a rather ugly frown on his homely face.

TWO days later, Simmy, sunning himself on the corral-fence, stared incredulously at the occupants of an approaching buckboard and waddled into the house with his news.

"Fred Moore's comin'," he announced.

"All right."

Nell, busy at her desk, did not look up.

"Yeah—but that ain't all."

She sighed and swung about; she knew Simmy.

"He's got his buckboard an' that team o' sorrels he got off o' Frank Lester. He's comin' hell-bent. Must be dang near here by now, I reckon."

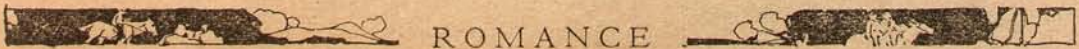
He waddled to the window and peered out.

"Yep; there he is. And say, Nell, y' ought t' see that there fellah with him—dangdest lookin' fellah ever *I* see, now *I'm* tellin' yuh!"

Nell frowned. Another vacationist, probably—and she didn't want vacationists pestering around; she wouldn't have them. They were a nuisance at any time, but just now. . . .

Nevertheless she went out to meet the stranger, a short, slender, good-looking young man, attired in startling checks, and smiling. She tried to be irritated by the smile and the checks and the young man's assured attitude—and failed miserably.

"You're Miss Daggett?" he inquired.



"I'm Jerry Malone. Freddie out there said he thought you'd take care of me. I'm a trouper—circus-performer, you know; and I've been dreaming of a vacation like this for years—honest!"

Nell could not restrain a smile; he was such a clean-looking boy and so eager. But she refused to commit herself at once; merely urged Fred and Malone to stay to dinner and talk it over.

In the afternoon, however, despite Nell's resolution to forswear vacationists, Fred drove back alone to Lemm, and Malone, from choice, took up his quarters with Joe in the old bunk-house—a bit of diplomacy having no little impression upon the Daggett forces.

Malone was a likable chap. On the third day, by the gift of a slightly out-of-date, alarmingly checked suit, he completely won Simmy. It was difficult to tell what Joe thought of him, but Nell seemed to lose some of her pessimism.

Jerry was a new sort of human being; you could not be blue and out of sorts when he was around. Perhaps his indifference to feminine charm had something to do with Nell's interest. He accepted her in much the same spirit as he accepted Simmy, as if she were a rather good sort—good enough to pal with for a few weeks, anyway; and this piqued her.

She knew that, as a mere woman, she was attractive, and she wondered if it were possible that Jerry did not know it. If so, she'd see that he learned it.

It was on the fourth day that Jerry wandered away alone, in his pocket a lunch wheedled from Simmy. He climbed Old Saddleback, swung around the eastern hills, and in the late afternoon came out at the lower end of the valley. Crossing the rim, he lay down within the Daggett borders, feasting his eyes on the glory of the western ridge; and there Nell found him and slid from her horse.

"Pretty, isn't it?" she asked.

"Pretty? I've never seen anything like it!"

He pointed to Lester's flocks.

"Whose sheep are those?"

"Frank Lester's. He has the rim on three sides of us."

"Oh—then you own just this strip through the center? Got the best of it at that, haven't you?"

"Yes; that is, Mr. Gorman has. He

owns this—I don't. I had to sell two years ago, and he was here from the East and bought it."

"Had to sell? Doesn't it pay?"

"It did pay—but I had a run of bad luck. It would pay now, if——"

"If what?"

Nell looked at him sharply, wishing she might read what was beneath his smiling exterior.

"I don't know why you shouldn't know—you or any one else," she said, and went on to tell of her trouble.

Jerry was silent for a time after she finished.

"Looks like Lester, doesn't it?" he finally asked. "You and he are about the only two people who could be interested; and I don't suppose you'd——"

"Oh, yes, I would," she interrupted bitingly. "I'd kill sheep and cut fences and poison stock and all such things. I'd love to do it. You see, I was born here, and I hate awfully to give it up."

Outwardly she was a very sweet, attractive young woman, and she smiled at him with very red lips and very dark eyes and told herself that she hated him and how dare he say such a thing or even think it! It wasn't any of his concern, anyhow, and she'd see to it that he left the ranch—left that very night.

No, she wouldn't, either. She'd see to it that he stayed there until she finished with him; she would make him fairly grovel, and then she would laugh at him—cruelly!

"As I was about to say——" Jerry, apparently unperturbed, broke in on her thoughts—"I don't suppose you'd dare accuse Frank, without some scrap of proof, would you? We might have him pinched on suspicion."

Nell's reply was a glance which should have seared his very soul but seemed to fail of its purpose. He continued to grin . . . and he had dared lead her into the trap—deliberately! She bit her lip, and felt sure that her temples were redder than they should be. And she mounted Perk and rode recklessly away.

JERRY watched her, quite aware of her appeal and a bit disturbed by it. He lay on his back, gazing across the bowl, and finally fell asleep, to be awakened by a drop of rain.

It was quite dark, and the drop was



forerunner of a perfect deluge. He crawled hurriedly beneath a clump of brush and had been there but a short time when his ears caught the low bleating of sheep and a light, dull rumble skidding along the ground. A moment and the rumble and bleat increased, as if a flock were being driven toward him at break-neck speed.

Peering forth, he saw a dark mass spring from the murk and rush toward the fence shutting off that fifty-foot declivity to the rim. It was over in a moment. The leaders halted a second at the edge; there was a creaking as the fence went down, the flash of shadowy bodies.

Jerry could not see, but he could hear the horror of the thing—and he shuddered and crept from his shelter, unmindful of the rain.

Far across the bowl glimmered the ranch-house lights, guiding him through thick, coarse grasses across a bare field, a meadow, a horse-pasture and into a lane leading to the bunk-house.

And there he met a huge figure in slicker and boots, which proved to be Joe. Almost breathlessly Jerry told the story as they hastened toward the house.

"It was awful, Joe," he added. "My Lord, how can a man do a thing like that?"

Joe made no reply; merely cursed beneath his breath—and a peculiar thought flashed into Jerry's mind. What was Joe doing in the lane at that hour? Of course, he might have business there; then again, he might not. Jerry wanted to inquire into that, but some instinct halted him. However, he thought about it long after he crawled into bed.

In the morning Nell, half-distracted by the outrage—the first since Jerry's advent—temporarily shelved her grievance against him; and when he suggested a visit to Frank Lester, "just to feel him out," she rather reluctantly consented.

They met Lester coming from his ranch-house and Nell introduced the men. Frank was perhaps forty, big and hearty—but, according to Jerry's mental cataloguing, "slippery."

"Come up out of the sun," he urged; and on the porch, comfortable in easy chairs, "What's on your mind, Nell?"

Face to face with opportunity, she hesitated and glanced helplessly at Malone, whose countenance remained as expression-

less as a blank wall. Nell entered another score against him in her black book.

Why in the world had he wanted to come if not to talk—to help her? She hadn't suggested it; hadn't seen the object in such a visit. Floundering helplessly, she grasped at the first straw which offered.

"Frank," she said, "I'm at my wits' end, and I need advice. You know how things have been going at my place; and last night . . . well, it was worse than ever. And no one at home seems to have intelligence enough even to guess at it."

She smiled sweetly at Frank, looked pityingly at Jerry—and immediately began to feel better. At least, *that* opportunity had not been neglected.

Lester sat staring down the coulée, puffing thoughtfully at a huge brier.

"Don't believe I can help you," he said at length. "I reckon I know what you're trying to get at, Nell. You and I are about the only folks who have a reason—and you ain't doing it. Well, my word wouldn't be worth much under the circumstances, would it? One thing I can do—I withdraw my offer. That makes it look better for me, anyhow."

Riding toward home, Nell was inclined to feel that Frank had exonerated himself, until Jerry grinned at her and said:

"Clever stroke, all right, but it doesn't mean anything. Easy enough to make it again when the time's ripe, and it puts a stopper on your suspicions right now. Yes, I'd done that myself."

Nell's spirits dropped to zero. She knew that Jerry was right.

"I'm going to write Gorman's lawyers again tonight," she said desperately. "I'm through. I haven't a chance to get the place back, and—and—oh, I don't want to stay another minute without that hope. I can teach—or something. If only Gorman would accept Joe's offer——"

"Joe's offer!"

"Yes. Joe has raked and scraped—but it isn't enough, by a good deal. Joe loves it as well as I do. He came in with dad when he was a mere kid, and I wouldn't so much mind his having it. Gorman's lawyers said that the boss was coming out soon. I wish he would. I'm—oh, you can't imagine how I hate to give this up!"

Jerry said nothing for a minute or so. He looked off toward the ranch-buildings, then at Nell, and finally said:

"And if Joe got it—you could marry him, couldn't you? That would be one way to solve the thing."

Nell nearly fell from Perk. Never in her life had she known any one with a better developed faculty for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Either that, or he was deliberately baiting her. At the thought her teeth clicked audibly. She'd give him something to think about, anyway.

"I don't know a better man," she said defiantly, "and I hate to give up the place. I suppose you're thinking of the thing called love—whatever it is. Well if Joe asks me——"

Her chin was outthrust, her eyes blazed, and when Jerry merely grinned in that intimate, teasing way, she wanted to choke him. Said Jerry indifferently:

"Go as far as you like. I don't blame you a bit. Nope; I wasn't thinking of love; I'm just as selfish as you are. If I loved a woman to death, I wouldn't marry her—unless she was a trouper. I wouldn't give *that* up for the best woman on earth."

IT WAS not what she expected or wanted him to say, and it irritated her so that for two days she avoided him and made life almost unbearable for Simmy. Simmy's disillusionment was heart-rending. For all his years, he did not suspect that even the sweetest of women is mortal—under sufficient provocation.

With the passing of another week, Nell and Jerry not only regained the old footing but attained an intimacy causing Simmy to squint his old eyes after them. And at the end of that week came a letter from Gorman's lawyers, regretting Nell's resignation and asking that she remain in charge till the owner might be communicated with.

They had no instructions other than the injunction to entertain no offer for the ranch till the owner could personally investigate; and when that would be, they were not at liberty to state. Under the circumstances Nell had no choice, feeling, however, a bit resentful at what she was pleased to term "the imposition of Gorman."

"It isn't fair," she complained to Jerry. "He can't expect me to take more interest than he does, can he? I've made up my mind; I want to get away."

"And hunt up a school?"

"Yes; if I have to," she flashed. "The

longer I stay here, the harder it will be to leave."

Jerry's grin was maddening.

"Cheer up," he advised calmly. "Maybe he'll sell to Joe yet, and then you can——"

"If you say it, I'll—Jerry, you're a miserable little brute!"

And then earnestly:

"You shouldn't joke about that. I don't even know that Joe would—would ask me."

"I'm not joking; I'll make him," persisted Malone. "Or else—well, we've got to take care of you some way, haven't we? If worst comes to worst, I might kidnap you; take you back on the show with me."

"Never! I'd rather be an old, wrinkly schoolma'am—than prance about the country that way."

"I know, but—why, I couldn't stand this. You'd learn to like it——"

"I don't think I'd fret about it, if I were you," she put in cuttingly. "It isn't likely we'll have to face that problem,"

"I'm not so sure."

The good-natured banter had gone from his voice, and he was staring at her peculiarly.

"Sometimes I think——"

What he thought she never knew, for Joe came up and put an end to the passage, and she went to the house in a decidedly puzzled frame of mind. She told herself that she did not like Jerry; that she would not marry him, if he was the last man on earth.

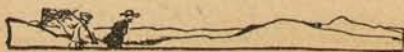
Being a poor liar, however, she could not make it sound convincing—not even to herself. And because she was sound at bed-rock, she did a good deal of thinking about it.

Perhaps Simmy's vision was clearer than any. He chuckled and confided to Joe:

"Danged if they ain't in a slippery position, walkin' a rail thataway. One leetle shove one way or t'other an' off they go—an' they'll allus be wonderin' where they'd 'a' lit if they'd been pushed the other way. Nope, I ain't bettin' a dang nickel on it."

CAME a night when Jerry, wakened by some one moving cautiously about the bunk-house, caught a gleam of light as the door was opened and closed softly. He sat up, every faculty alert, uncertain how to proceed, finally throwing back the covers and slipping to the floor.

A light step without caused him to spring back into the bunk. The door again



opened softly; some one entered, and a moment later a board creaked in Joe's corner. Jerry lay down, listening, and finally fell asleep.

In the morning he mentioned the incident.

"I got up to look about once," Joe said quietly. "Thought I heard some one prowlin' round."

Immediately after breakfast Nell suggested a climb up Old Saddleback, and Jerry agreed eagerly. Half-way up they halted beside Kitter Creek, Jerry reveling in the view down the valley.

"Lord, it's wonderful!" he said reverently. "And the birds—the silence of these woods—the song of old Kitter here. I don't wonder that you want it back."

"My dad found it," said Nell dreamily. "Sometimes I think I'll—I'll die when I have to leave it. Let's not talk about it. Let's cross the creek here; we can ford it on the rocks."

Jerry led the way, turning to grin back at her.

"Spike your foot into them," he cautioned. "They're slippery."

And then it happened. Somehow Nell's foot slipped; she struggled for balance—and fell forward into Jerry's arms.

Later, neither could recall just what happened; only a vivid remembrance of a moment in which they clung together, lips meeting, hearts pounding with the rush of youthful blood.

And then they were upon the bank; Nell weak, nerveless, trembling throughout the length of her; Jerry standing humbly, head bowed, face white—as if he had done a fearful thing, for which he was willing to pay.

She faced him a moment, then turned away to look down the valley, and her glance went to the tank near the sheepsheds, from which a colt was wobbling its crazy way.

"Look, Jerry," she gasped. "That colt—"

He looked in time to see the colt sway dizzily, stumble, and fall; and together they hurried down Old Saddleback, arriving in the corral as Joe stepped back from the colt.

"Poisoned!" explained Joe. "Thought I heard some one in the night. Wonder where the mare is? Lucky them hosses was out in pasture."

Without a word Nell turned toward the house, and Joe and Jerry, rounding the horse-barn, found the mare—dead!

"And now what?" inquired Jerry, as they went back to the tank.

Joe spread his hands and swore.

"All right," said Jerry significantly. "Think of something by tomorrow—or I'll horn in on this thing myself. There's been about enough of it. Looks almighty queer to a man up a tree."

He left Joe staring wonderingly after him, and he spent the rest of the day studiously avoiding Nell—an unnecessary precaution, for she kept religiously to the house. The mind of neither was on the poisoned tank but the incident on Saddleback, which somehow seemed of more vital import. As for Jerry, he gloried in the recollection, while Nell—well, one moment she did—and the next she did not.

Far into that night Jerry lay sleepless. And again Joe cautiously left his bunk and crept from the house. Jerry slipped to the door, opened it just wide enough to peer out, and discerned Joe's figure melting into the blackness of the shearing-pens. Hurriedly drawing on shirt and trousers, he followed, and as he rounded the horse-barn he saw a figure stooping above a little flame, which suddenly sputtered into life and began creeping along the ground toward the water-tank.

Despite the fact that he had been suspicious of Joe, Jerry gasped at the audacity of the thing he saw and started on a run for that little line of fire, as the figure above it straightened and came toward him. He was small, perhaps, but not for nothing had he battered his way through a rather rough old world, and he clenched his fists and prepared either to take or give a drubbing.

But just then another figure sprang from the shearing-pen blackness and tackled the one that had lighted the fuse.

Jerry gasped again and stopped to stare, forgetting the imminent explosion. He saw the two men come together, heard a curse—and then one of the men shot violently backward and fell to the ground.

He did not get up, so again Jerry broke into a run, and when sufficiently near attempted a flying tackle, which, coming unexpectedly, was rather effective. His bulky opponent was knocked from his feet, his curse smothered by a mouthful of dirt.

Jerry grinned to himself, scrambled up,



took a quick look at his victim for identification-purposes and was about to start for the fuse when the explosion came. There was a deafening roar, a blinding flash—and when he got to his feet, lights had sprung up in the ranch-house.

He staggered to the huge bulk he had successfully tripped. It was quiet, sprawled grotesquely where a plank from the demolished tank had downed it. Huge drops of water falling caused Jerry to look up; then he remembered.

HE DROPPED to his knees beside the still form, joined a moment later by Nell and old Simmy and Joe, who had recovered from his knockout and appeared rather groggy. The corral was a lake.

"Turn him on his back," commanded Nell, and gasped when she saw the face.

"Frank Lester!" she choked. "I—oh!"

She shoved Jerry away, dropped down and tore open Frank's shirt.

"It's beating! Get hold, boys; let's get him into the house—quick!"

That in itself was some task, but, accomplished, proved Frank not seriously hurt. A discoloration between the shoulder-blades marked where the plank had struck. Nell faced Jerry and Joe.

"I been sleepin' with one eye open," explained Joe. "Heard some one last night, but couldn't find nobody when I got out. Then tonight—well, there you are.

"Frank hit me first, that's all; and if it hadn't been for Jerry there, you might still be thinkin' it was me, I suppose. You been thinkin' it long enough—all of yuh. I ain't blind. Mebbe I can get a little joy outta life now."

Then he clumped away, and Nell looked at Jerry and Jerry looked at Nell; and both smiled and glared at old Simmy, who growled and went back to his bunk in the shed behind the kitchen. Jerry nodded toward the still form on the lounge.

"What about him? He's apt to come around any minute. Better have Joe stay with him till we see how he's going to take it, hadn't you? I'll ask Simmy to get to town after the sheriff."

Nell had not been thinking of such matters, but she nodded and went to the bunk-house, and Jerry followed Simmy into the shed.

Later they met again, this time on the

porch. Simmy was on his way to town, and Joe was in the room with the still unconscious Lester. Light was breaking over the hills to the east. Said Jerry:

"Well, your problem seems to be settled at last. The boss can't help giving you another whirl at it after this. In time I suppose you'll have it back."

Nell did not seem very enthusiastic.

"Perhaps," she agreed absently. "You're—what are you going to do?"

"Me? Oh, my time's about up. I've got to go back, I suppose. The white tops—well, they pull, Nell."

"I suppose they do, Jerry. When—when are you going?"

"Nell, let's drop it. I'm going—how soon can you get ready?"

"And if I won't?"

She was still a bit defiant.

Jerry slid one arm about her shoulders. He was still grinning, but his tone was earnestly dolorous when he said—

"Then—well, it'll smash me—that's all."

Nell tried to restrain the smile, to force him to "grovel"—but failed.

"I'll go," she said simply. "Somehow it's all very clear this morning. It isn't a question of where, is it? It's just a question of who. I'll be happy anywhere."

Jerry drew her to a seat on the porch step, the grin disappearing as if by magic.

"Let's do," he urged earnestly. "Queer; but I've changed, too. Somehow I'd rather play nursemaid to the sheep.

"That's what you get for falling in love, I suppose. It makes you want to do what you know well you *don't* want to do."

He was silent a moment, then went on: "I've been cheating you, anyway, and I think I want to stay—sort of an enjoyable punishment. You see, Nell, Gorman was my uncle; and when he died a few weeks ago, I was the only one left, so I got it all. I thought I'd learn more out here if you didn't know that, and I told the lawyers to stall you along. If Frank had known I owned this place—"

THEY were still on the porch when Simmy and the sheriff drove up, and Simmy's face took on a look of satisfaction.

"After all," he announced, as he led the way to the back door, "they wasn't shoved off o' that rail; they was liter'ly blowed off. Dynamite's got its advantages."



Obi

BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

WESTON WYNNE rode a hired horse through the wild lands lying behind Scarborough in Tobago.

He constantly fell into thought and forgot the surrounding scene; but when he did so, the lazy creature under him appeared mysteriously to know it. Napoleon at these moments slowed down and occasionally stopped dead with his nose in the green luxuriance of the wayside. Then Wynne came to himself once more, rated Napoleon and pushed forward again.

They came to a fair place presently, where a stream of pure, bright water wound through the woods and flashed like silver through the gorgeous colors of a tropical wilderness. Great trees decked with veils of lichens and adorned with white orchid-blossoms hung over the rivulet; anthuriums, vast-leaved philodendra, ferns and trailing parasites innumerable covered the banks with a tangle of lush life, and upon many a bough and branch, where their flying seeds had fastened, there clustered gray dog-pines in sprightly companies.

The hillsides were rich in wild plantain, wild indigo, guinea-grass, cotton, cashew-palms and cabbage-palms; one tree on the stream-brink glowed with purple flowers, and other lesser shrubs beneath it flashed feathery red-gold through the green. A king-bird, a little image of new bronze, sat on a stone by the water and ground-doves and sugar-birds, bluebirds and humming-birds, like flying emeralds, made the hot air glitter with their sparkling shapes.

The stream itself reminded the young traveler of little rivers in his native land. He had seen such in Devon, though here another sort of volcanic boulder took the place of the granite. The waters bustled merrily along with whirls and eddies, with flashing falls and still, placid reaches that mirrored the flaming flora of the banks; but instead of brake and bramble here were tree-ferns and stephanotis.



Weston Wynne was come to the West Indies on a sad errand. Roland Wynne, his father, overseer of the Fort King George Sugar Factory, had suddenly disappeared from his home. That accidental death had overtaken him appeared certain, for ample evidences of the fact were recorded. All particulars reached the son of the dead by letter, and since the vanished man had many interests in Tobago and the lawyers seemed unwilling to wind up his affairs, Weston Wynne, a partner in a London stockbroking firm, obtained permission to go abroad and settle matters on the spot.

A sum of ten thousand pounds was involved and he alone had interest in the estate, for his mother was long dead and he had no near kindred. The young man hardly knew his father, for he had been sent home soon after his third year, and with the exception of a visit to Tobago, when he left school at fifteen years old and before he went into an office, he had never seen him. That was twelve years ago and he remembered only a brown, taciturn man who spoke little but was kind and generous.

He recollected their excursions together. Roland Wynne had ridden everywhere with his boy, showed him the sugarwork and various enterprises in which he was interested, taken him to see his few friends, who left no impression on his mind, and to visit an ancient, native Obi man—an experience the lad never forgot. Toby Pierce, the strange creature was called, and Wynne remembered still his strange den—a grotesque place full of things that to the boy's intelligence had seemed weird and horrible indeed.

Weston recollected that Toby Pierce had been useful to his father, for the cult of Obeah was a living myth yet and the youth remembered what his father told him on that former visit. His memory even recalled the identical words spoken, though as a boy he had missed their irony.

"Jumbies and Obeah are deeply religious ideas and time has not rooted his primitive faiths out of the Ethiopian's nature. Quashie treasures his aboriginal gods and demons quite as much as any the missionaries have presented him. But our negroes mix their creeds and take what they like from each.

"When a man or woman dies, the *loup-garou* has to be reckoned with you know—

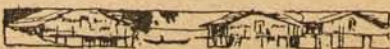
a vampire-creature that is drawn to a dead nigger like a cat to fish. I've often heard the mourners singing through a long night to scare away *loup-garou* with 'Hymns Ancient and Modern.' So ancient and modern join hands and superstition is justified of her children from generation to generation.

"*Loups-garou* take off their skins when at work and hide them at the roots of a silk-cotton tree. Naturally it is very desirable to find these skins, because without them the monsters die—catch a chill, I expect. I've never found one yet, but perhaps you will, Weston, if you hunt carefully. Myself, I have the greatest respect for Obi, and Pierce is an old friend of mine.

"We used to have epidemics of thievery in this island, and Christianity and the Eighth Commandment were powerless to stop them. The cane disappeared by the hundredweight, till Toby Pierce came to me and promised to settle the matter for a stiff consideration. And he kept his word. The old black devil put Fort King George plantations under Obeah—a high-sounding performance, though it merely consisted in tying empty bottles and bright-colored rags and rubbish on sticks all round the estate. But he was right—we never lost another cane."

WESTON WYNNE had spent two months with the harbor master of Tobago, an old friend of his father, and now, his affairs completed, was about to return home. The properties that accrued to him on Roland Wynne's death were not to his taste as investments, and he had already completed operations for the sale of shares in a large local argave-hemp estate, found a purchaser for a grove of coconut-palms beside the sea and sold considerable gardens of cocoa and nutmeg, which local men were willing to take off his hands. In the course of his business with certain merchants and magnates of the island, Wynne had detected a general attitude not wholly friendly to his vanished parent.

Himself, he was still under thirty—a frank and straightforward young man, the junior partner in a prosperous business, and Roland Wynne it was who had bought him the partnership and laid the foundation of a successful career. Half the dead man's capital had gone to that enterprise, and the son entertained nothing but regard for the



memory of a generous father; but he found his own natural affection not widely reflected at Tobago.

None indeed in his hearing spoke an evil word against the dead; but at best his former companions were indifferent; at worst they implied to Weston's sensitive ear a measure of dislike and disrespect. His host was evasive when he remarked on this experience.

"Think nothing of it," said Teddy Rice, the harbor master, an Irishman. "Your father kept himself to himself and neither sought nor cultivated friends. In business he was frankly a hard man. He let nothing he could shift, or circumvent, come between him and his purposes. He was too clever for us here, and there are men among us who have a long memory for a bad deal. Nobody has any quarrel with you, at any rate, and I can assure you that most of us were sorry enough when he came by his tragic end—sorry enough and surprized enough."

The taking off of Roland Wynne had indeed been strange, and his son found a local suspicion that the apparent manner of it differed widely from the truth.

For two days Roland Wynne had been reported missing from his home; then his clothes were found on a lonely beach at the north side of the island. They lay on a rock fifty yards above the limit of the sea, and from them footmarks extended to the water. These left no distinct impression in the soft sand, but suggested that Wynne, suddenly tempted to bathe, had followed his inclination and never returned from the water.

His horse stood tethered under the shadow of trees a quarter of a mile distant, and it was indeed through the neighing of the poor creature that searchers had first been drawn to the spot. Once in the sea, Wynne might have died of cramp or shock, or he might have been destroyed by a shark. But the improbability of the overseer's riding to this lonely spot and deliberately entering the water seemed so extreme that none felt satisfied the circumstantial evidence could be trusted.

The harbor master dilated on the subject for the benefit of Roland Wynne's son:

"If his watch, or his purse had been missing, then we might fairly have argued a crime; but they weren't. He had, as you know, ten pounds in gold in his pocket and

his gold watch and chain as well. Also that pocketbook you had.

"Some men thought, and still think, that your father did away with himself, but I'm not one of them. He wasn't that sort at all and I'm sure he found his life well worth living, though he lived it much to himself. But to me the grand mystery is why on earth he wanted to go bathing at all. That was a most unlikely amusement for a man of his age and habits."

"That's a question of fact, I suppose. He must have done it," said Weston. "He may have been suffering from the heat and taken a sudden fancy for a swim.

"He could swim, for I remember when I was a boy out here one Winter, he taught me to swim in the bathing-pool."

"He never suffered from the heat in his life," answered Rice, "and no more did another man who came to an end in exactly the same way. That's another story—fifteen years old—and yet we ancient Tobagians were reminded of it by your father's death, because it is an identical mystery and was never explained and never will be.

"Yes, it's fifteen years ago since Bertram Stockly vanished off Tobago. And he went bathing, too, and his clothes were found not half a mile from where they found your father's. Stockly was a coconut-grower—an amiable sort of chap without enemies. And then again—he was well over seventy when he disappeared—a man about as likely to go bathing as a land-crab. Everything was quite straightforward in his case also and the tragedies are parallel in almost all particulars, save that at Stockly's death no horse was involved. He lived on that side of the island and his home wasn't two miles from where he disappeared."

"Is there any possible way of connecting the two incidents?" inquired the young man; but Rice shook his head.

"I wonder the same thing, but nobody here sees any link, except that in both cases the circumstantial evidence points to a most unlikely accident. Black men go into the water with comparative impunity, though they have been snapped up sometimes; but that any experienced white should take the chances is wildly improbable."

So the matter stood; and while Wynne mourned his father's end and would have made every effort to solve the problem had



opportunity offered, it was impossible that he could feel any deep emotion or reach such sorrow as he must have endured under different circumstances. His father was no more than a well-loved name to him, not a personality.

HE RODE now on an excursion to amuse himself, and the little stream reminded him that here in his boyhood he had come with his parent to see the famous wizard who lived near by. To his youthful eyes Toby Pierce had seemed a creature of infinite age, and forgetting the point of view, he doubted not that the negro was long dead.

Some negresses were filling calabashes with water at the river, and Weston, drawing up his lazy horse, chatted with them. They loved to talk and were full of local information, for the most part untrustworthy. Sometimes they contradicted one another and argued shrilly together. Once or twice the rider confounded them himself and volunteered the truth respecting the names of plants and other things. When he did so, the girls fell in with his opinion at once and agreed that he was right and they were wrong.

"Dat so, Massa—Massa too clebber," they said.

He asked them whether they knew anybody called Toby Pierce.

"He used to live out this way; but I expect that was before your time," said the visitor; then the water-carriers all spoke at once and assured him they knew Toby and that he was very much alive.

"Him terrible ole, secret man, sar—most dangerous ole man—you no go near him—he Obi man an' do fearful tings."

"I'm not afraid of him, Jane," answered Weston. "He won't hurt me. I thought he must be dead ages ago."

"Obi man him nebber die, sar—de debble look after him," said another girl.

"Where does he live—that's what I want to know?"

They pointed the way, and giving them a shilling to buy cakes, Weston left the party, rode on and followed a rough track that presently abandoned the stream to climb up a little secluded knoll at the edge of the jungle. On the summit there stood a negro-dwelling—one somewhat larger than most. Its walls were dirt-colored and the roof was thatched with palm-leaves. The place

came back to the traveler's vision unchanged after absence of years, and he well remembered arriving there on a pony beside his father.

The spot was silent; the house of the Obi doctor, very lonely. No sign of life appeared before the open door, but fragments of things that had lived adorned it, for on either side of the entrance stood a bullock's skull bleached silver-bright by the suns of many years. A patch of sweet potatoes and a pomegranate-tree stood beside the hut, and the estate of Toby Pierce also comprised a few banana-clumps where hung some fine clusters of fruit.

His boundaries were marked by a wire fence, on which hung feathers and old beer-bottles at intervals of three yards. Within this weird zone no man might enter uninvited, and it is certain no black man would have done so; but Weston Wynne felt no fear. His only interest was psychological and centred in the consciousness that these things, long faint in memory, now flashed sharply out again. He tethered his horse at the fence, strode over it and walked toward the hut. Then he lifted his voice and shouted—

"Toby, Massa Pierce—Massa Pierce!"

He was answered, and a very singular human being appeared from behind the hut. The creature carried an old rifle and wore nothing but a pair of tattered pants and a necklace of white teeth. He was very ancient and his ribs made a gridiron of his lean breast. His limbs were leather and bone, and so thin was he that the bones threatened to break his skin. His scanty wool was reduced to white tufts over his ears, and a tangled network of furrows and deep lines scarred his shrunken face, over which shone the dome of his skull. But Toby was tough and full of life. His deep-seated black eyes shone brightly and his countenance was alert and intelligent despite its hideous ugliness.

"Who want Toby?" he asked. "Who you, sar? Dis my land yo' walk ober."

"You don't remember me? How should you? Yet I've been in your house before today, Toby."

"I no 'member massa," he answered staring intently at the visitor.

"But you remember my poor father. It was he who brought me to see you ten years and more ago, when I was a youngster."

"What him name, den?"



Toby showed a good deal of independence and seemed not much interested in the stranger. But now his manner changed and, on hearing that the son of Roland Wynne stood before him, he became much more alive.

"My father died strangely, you know, and I came out here to settle his affairs. And I remember that he thought a lot of you, Toby, so I decided that I'd look you up before I sailed."

"Me Gard! Yo' Marse Wynne's son?"

"I am. He brought me here to see you when I was a boy and told me how clever you were in frightening the niggers away from the sugar-cane."

"Well, well! Yo' Marse Wynne's boy—dat so? Poor ge'man, Berry sad him drown."

"I can't understand it at all, Toby. What did you make of it?"

Toby reflected and shook his withered head.

"Dam bad business, sar. I say nuffin', but I tink a lot."

"And another chap, they tell me, disappeared in the same way years ago."

"Dey 'member 'bout dat? Him go same way as po' Marse Wynne. De debbil always busy and ebry man hab enemies—even de good man, like Massa Wynne."

Toby appeared to be full of mystery, and the other scented light. He began to wonder whether he might be on the track of his father's murderers and even imagined the ancient man before him might know more than he chose to tell.

"If there was false play, Toby, I'd pay a pretty long price to get to the bottom of it. Those that knew my father best don't for a moment believe he ever went down to bathe in the sea."

Mr. Pierce nodded and mumbled to himself.

"Dar plenty hid; but who care what one ole man say?"

"You know something, Toby?"

"Wait here, Marse Wynne," answered the other. "You go see yo' horse him tie up safe—den you come in and I tell you what happen to yo' farder. I know—I know—I know whar him am dis minute!"

"Good God! Not alive?"

"No, sar—him gone plenty dead. I tell you 'bout him, an' I tell you who kill him. You wait dar an' I call you in one two minute."

THE ancient hopped off into his den, leaving the rifle at the door. He was lame, but moved with great agility. With his back turned, a look of unspeakable malignity came into Toby's face and he showed a yellow tooth or two between his purple lips.

But Weston's eyes were not upon him. He felt dazed before the coming revelation and marveled what it might be. Already he wondered if one among those whom he had met in Tobago would prove his father's enemy. Had he already shaken the hand responsible for Roland Wynne's mysterious death?

Toby had hardly disappeared before he was back again.

The hate in his face had gone and it seemed that greed sat there instead.

"One ting 'fore you come in my house," he said. "You pay me for what I tell you?"

"Yes, I will. If you can bring me face to face with my father's murderer and can prove it, I'll give you plenty of money."

"Hunder pound, sar?"

"Yes, Toby."

"I Obi man—I wise. Nobody done quarrel wid me—dey frighten."

"I'm not frightened—no more than was my father. He was your friend. Obi's all humbug and you know it is, Toby."

"Dat so, Marse—you too clebber for poor ole nigger. But you no tell de folk I humbug."

"They wouldn't believe me if I did."

They entered a monstrous chamber and it was some moments before the visitor's eyes grew accustomed to the gloom. Then weird and bizarre objects thrust upon his gaze from every side. Dead creatures haunted the place and were propped in corners or hung on walls with a hideous semblance of living. Festoons of eggs and empty bottles depended from the roof; skins of animals and birds littered the floor; strange malodorous smells greeted Wynne's nostrils.

There was a square of red glass let into the ceiling, and from it across the velvet gloom fell a flaming eye of light upon a three-legged table with a copper face. A lump of glass lay here and flashed as if red-hot. Filth, mystery and darkness shared the hole, and across one corner was hung a curtain which concealed Arcanum—the Holy of Holies.



Near it sat a little, black, almost naked woman with a dirty red garment drawn over her middle. Her eyes were shut, and the visitor perceived her face shrunken with an appearance of infinite age. She was quite motionless and appeared to be as dead as the other fragments of animal mortality—shriveled apes and bloated reptiles—perched around her.

So indeed it proved.

"Dat my po' wife, sar—she mummy—she die, an' I lub her too well to put her in de ground, so I stuff po' Mamie—an' dar she sit. She always berry quiet lady; but now she nebber say nuffing—po' gal!"

Weston stared at the corpse and edged farther away from it. Obi was doubtless all rubbish, as he had affirmed and Toby allowed; but he could well understand the psychological effect of such a den on any ignorant mind. He liked it little himself; there was something magnetic and mesmeric about Toby. Despite the negro's amiability Wynne began to dislike the old man.

Drawing a chair, Marse Pierce dusted it and begged his visitor to be seated. Then he cleared the little copper table.

"I fetch ge'man a drink, den I tell him who kill his farder," said Toby. "I tank God Him send Marse Wynne's son to hear 'bout it."

He disappeared behind his curtain and brought out two calabash bowls, a bottle of Holland's and a jar of water. Then pouring the spirit into the bowls, he added water and drank from his own.

"Good luck an' berry long life, sar. An' now I tell him dat it Marse Teddy Rice, de harbor massa—dat damn villain kill your farder. I prove 'bout it. Him pretend him friend an' he kill him."

"Rice! Good Lord, Toby! What a mad idea—the last person on earth to do such a thing—my father's best pal in Tobago."

"I hab de proof, sar—I fetch him for you. Drink de Hollands—yo' farder give me dat bottle an' plenty udder bottles. I no get no more now him gone."

Toby emptied his own calabash, then rose and went behind the curtain. Weston heard a door shut. He sat bewildered and felt that he was breathing some creepy essence. He gasped and heard his blood beating through his arteries. It seemed unspeakably mad to suggest that Rice

could have had any hand in his father's death, yet the knowledge that no accident had destroyed Roland Wynne did not astonish the young man.

His mind moved slowly, heavily. Something in the foul air of Toby's den made him drowsy. He felt thirsty, too, for his own flask had been emptied long ago. He lifted his calabash. Toby had not yet returned, but he thought he heard the sound of a man digging outside.

Then he prepared to drink and the bowl was actually at his lips, when his glance happened to fall on the mummy of the woman in the corner and he saw that her eyes were open. A moment before they had been glued together in the puckered and withered face; a moment afterward they were glued together again. Not a sign or tremor of life was revealed by the creature, but he could have sworn that she had looked at him.

Something as near to fear as he had ever felt took young Wynne at his waistband. He knew by a sudden deep admonition that he stood in great danger and panic-terror nearly lifted him from his seat and sent him flying to his horse. But he mastered it, called upon his reason and made that play servant to the intuition that now warned him of peril.

What the peril might be and how he had incurred it, he could not guess; for a moment his mind flung to the other extreme and he was inclined to laugh at himself and his hallucination. But reason saved the situation, for he was a reasonable man without much imagination or power of dreaming in his waking-hours. He believed himself in danger, yet knew not in the least its nature. But he could trust his eyes. The motionless creature in the corner by the curtain was alive, and she had certainly been watching him.

She must not know that he had seen her eyes; he must proceed as if quite unsuspecting. He turned his back on her, took out his flask, poured some of the contents of the calabash into it, whistled cheerfully and then shouted out to Toby—

"Come on old boy—I want another drink."

Then he lifted the calabash to his mouth and made a sound as if emptying the contents down his throat, while in reality he very carefully avoided so doing.

His manœuvre met with an immediate



and terrifying response. He heard a shrill scream behind him and turned to see Toby's wife leap from her chair and rush away. The little monster yelled at him.

"Yo' dead! Yo' dead man!"

Then she cried to Toby.

"Him drink—him drink de calabash! Dig him grave, Toby!"

He heard a laugh outside and Marse Pierce went on with his operations.

Wynne's first instinct was to fight, but he knew not what powers the Obi doctor might have in reserve. He made a bolt therefore, dashed after Mamie, who had joined her husband, and running to the fence, mounted his horse and flogged the astonished Napoleon into a gallop.

It seemed, however, that he was not to escape, for his hasty departure and his power to mount the horse told the enemy that no drop from the fatal calabash had passed his victim's lips. The negro snatched up his rifle, which stood at the door, and at a range of less than fifty yards fired at Wynne just as his steed broke into a gallop. The horse reared and the man fell off. Then the frightened creature galloped away. For once Napoleon ran very fast indeed.

MARSE PIERCE, putting another cartridge into his weapon, came limping down to finish the victim if necessary. But then Fortune ceased to smile on the Obi man, and Wynne, in a fury of passion, leaped from the ground at his approach, dashed upon him and tore the gun from his hand. It was the horse, not the rider, that had been hit; and with the muzzle of his own rifle at the small of his back, Toby was now driven the six long miles that separated his habitation from the port.

He passed the time for his captor strangely. Toby, indeed, poured undying hate and the reason for it into the young man's ear. It was not a long story, and that night when the priest of Obi lay safe in Scarborough jail and half a dozen black policemen set out to catch Mamie and find the stricken horse, Wynne gave the harbor master particulars of his own adventure and then proceeded to Toby's own narrative.

"I hope the old devil was lying," he said, "for he's told me something that will darken my life forever if it's true. It may

be, though nobody can prove the truth of it, now my father is dead.

"For some time when he found the game was up, the brute said nothing. Our progress was slow, because he is lame and could only crawl. He wanted night to come down and give him a chance to make a bolt; but we fell in with a couple of policemen before the sun set and, though they were evidently frightened out of their wits at Toby, they did as I bade them and kept me company till I got him to the station and saw him under lock and key. By that time the old fiend had spit out his story to me.

"It seems, according to him, that he and my father were very thick many years ago and that he was very useful to my father in all sorts of blackguard ways. I never will believe it, for if it's true, there must have been a side to my father I never heard about or guessed at—or anybody else, I should hope. But he says that he and my father were hand and glove, and that he did many a dirty trick and was useful to my father over and over again and put away more than one nigger for him.

"He asked me who bought Bertram Stockly's coconut-grove, when he was supposed to be drowned ten years ago, and of course, I knew that father did. Then he swore that he put away Stockly—poisoned him—and that the man never went near the sea, but lies buried in his own compound outside his den. And—it's horrible, Rice—he says my father fell out with him a month before he died and turned on him and stopped certain payments and so on, knowing that Toby's word could do him no harm. If that's true, it's terribly clear that my father did not guess how strong and agile the old wretch is still. At any rate he doomed himself by that quarrel.

"Toby waited his time and cringed and never let my father guess what he meant to do. Then, after stalking him for some weeks, he got him on a lonely ride and shot him through the head, as he tried to shoot me. He took his horse and his clothes where they were found and buried him with the other. That can be proved, or disproved of course."

"And why did he want to poison you?" asked the harbor master.

"Because I'm my father's son. As soon as he heard that, he hated me and was determined to settle me too. So he got me in



and hatched the yarn about you to distract my mind and make me forget him. What kept me from drinking was the accidental glint in that old hag's eyes. Another moment I should have been done for. He'd set her to watch that I drank, because no doubt a drop would have had me down and out in a twinkling, and when she shut her eyes again, not guessing I'd seen them open, I tumbled to it all in a flash and acted accordingly. And one thing's certain—the money I had from the coconut-trees must be given to any heirs of poor Stockly who are known to exist."

"Your father paid for the trees, my dear chap."

"It's an awful thing—hard to believe for a son."

"A man don't choose his own father anyhow. But don't be too inquiring, my dear Wynne. Naturally the people here wern't going to speak against the dead to you, and for my part I liked Roland very well, though I couldn't help knowing he was a bit of a buccaneer in his methods. He was always straight enough with me. But you can speak of him as you found him and think of him as you knew him."

"He was a good father anyway, Rice."

"Then let it go at that. We can prove whether Toby was lying, though I don't think he was myself. We shall get at the truth when he's tried at Trinidad."

BUT Marse Pierce was never tried. With the help of his ragged trousers he escaped the judgment of his fellow men, and a negro warder, peeping into his solitary cell after midnight, found that the old reprobate had strangled himself with his waistband.

Teddy Rice was wont to tell the end of the tale in his own fashion.

"In death they were not divided, for when Mamie saw her husband marched away by young Wynne, she knew the game was up and she had poisoned herself before the boys got to her.

"As for the rest, they found the Obi man's garden-patch a proper boneyard.

"There was poor Roland Wynne right enough, with a bullet-hole bored through his head, alongside a skeleton we took to be Stockly's. And half a dozen niggers slept their last sleep close at hand. Toby, sure of his prey, was already digging another grave for our young friend, when he gave him the slip.

"No—we haven't encouraged Obi since then. Any nigger starting that game in Tobago will get himself disliked. This is a very advanced island nowadays. As for me, I was only sorry for the visitor. It's a nasty jar to find your father was such a shady customer—especially if you're dead straight yourself."



The Mountains

WIND blows upon them salt-edged from the ocean,
Rain beats upon them, blackening the stone,
Frost heaves the ledges with obscure commotion,
And the hilltops bleach like bone.

Dwindling mountains are they on a dwindling planet,
These that look so solid, these that show so fair;
Wind and rain and frost and hail set tooth to the granite,
It wastes like smoke into air.

Though they now are passing like a slow word spoken,
In the inch of time wherein man stands alone
He sees their rock-knees holding, sees their flanks unbroken,
And his heart drinks strength from the stone.

Yet they are at best but a short-lived generation,
Such as stars must laugh at as they journey forth.
Think of old Orion, that great constellation,
And the Dipper all alone in the north!

Abbie Huston Evans

Broken Dreams

BY KONRAD BERCOVICI

A BRAHAM ZUSSMAN was the foreman, salesman, manager, bookkeeper and the only working-man of the Berman Silk Neckwear Mfg. Company of London, Paris, New York.

The factory was situated in the rear of a Grand Street building in a fourth-floor five-room apartment. Four rooms were occupied by Mr. Berman's family of six. The fifth room, the front one, was a factory in the day-time only; at night two folding beds were wheeled into the room, and the big white-pine cutting-table was also changed into a bed for the two Berman boys, Kalman and Henry, four.

Mr. Berman had developed quite a trade among the East Side storekeepers. But he had engaged the young freckle-faced, flat-nosed, stooping Abraham, because the boy spoke English "like water" and could do almost everything. When Abraham had nothing else to do, he went to see the storekeepers on the West Side, and from there he was sure to bring back a few orders to keep the machines busy. Long strips of silk-sausages, which the dexterous Mr. Berman and some, or all, of his children turned inside-out with thin sticks which they manipulated most wonderfully, became elegant neckties before the Berman family were through with them. Between supper and bedtime Mrs. Berman sewed the labels on and there was no one in the family who could press them as well as Regina Berman, the manufacturer's eldest daughter, who also gave the last touch to a tie before it was packed for shipment.

On Saturday evenings Abraham came to get his pay, and incidentally, also, to enter everything in the books and to make out and mail the bills to the customers. It was not only his work. It was his privilege.

Abraham was twenty and earned only fifteen a week, but in the five years since he had arrived in New York, he had managed to save a few thousand dollars. His



employer frequently made use of part of this sum; improved his credit by paying his bills promptly with the loan he made from his working man.

Abraham's willingness to lend money to his employer will be easily understood if it is mentioned right here that he had made up his mind to marry Regina Berman. Regina was the ideal wife for him. Not too "Yankeefied," keeping the Sabbath, speaking Yiddish well, a good housewife. As to her pressing neckties, it was a well known fact that she could do it better than any one, even better than Abraham himself, although he knew the trade from A to Z. It was like a gift from Heaven. All of Berman's children were gifted in that direction. A necktie coming out of the Berman factory was a masterpiece. But Regina outclassed them all.

Abraham Zussman never thought of her without thinking of her ability to transform a rag into a beautiful necktie. In the five years he had been in America he had thought of nothing else but neckties, and he was sure that everybody worth while talking to was interested in the same subject.

Regina Berman was still wearing her hair in long, loose braids over her shoulders. It was the high-school girl style; distinguishing her from the working girls. Her almond-shaped, large, dark eyes stood well apart on top of a lightly arched nose. Her mouth was somewhat wide and full, but her chin was delicate and harmonized with the broad forehead.

What made her still more attractive was her cheerful disposition, her sprightliness; she was always ready to smile and laugh and sing. She was the pride of the family. Her picture and her school-certificate, framed and enribboned, hung in the most conspicuous part of the room over the rolltop desk at which Abraham occasionally worked.

That Regina still went to school was due to her mother's ambition to make a school-teacher out of her. A school-teacher appeared to her as the priestess of a beautiful and useful god presiding over the destinies of children. It was no sacrilege to think so.

Was it not because of the school-teachers that there were no pogroms in America as in Russia? And had she not lost her mother in such a pogrom? And hadn't

they come here, leaving a prosperous grain-business in Russia, because of the pogroms? So Regina had to become a school-teacher as a compensation for what this country was doing for the children, no matter if Mr. Berman, who had more practical plans concerning his daughter, agreed or not.

Berman's plan was a very simple one. At eighteen Regina was to be graduated from high school.

Abraham Zussman's capital should by then be over three thousand dollars. If Abraham consented to become a partner in the business, he would take him for a son-in-law. The firm of Berman & Zussman could then begin to operate on a large scale and he, Berman, would become the president of his lodge—an ambition he had nurtured because of his dislike of Mr. Samuel Goldstein, the "& Co." of the firm of Cohen & Co., Cloak Manufacturers, on Grand Street.

Regina also had plans for the future. She wanted to become an actress. Because she knew that her parents would make life miserable for her if they knew her wishes, she had seldom mentioned her desires in their presence.

She had occasionally spoken of acting as a "great art," as a "sublime one," but it was only to prepare the ground. Of course, the Bermans were very pleased when their daughter appeared in the amateur theatrical performances of her school, but that was not like being a professional actress. Actors and actresses, the Bermans thought old-fashionedly, were all right on the stage, but as relatives, God forgive!

With the singleness of purpose characteristic of women and of her race Regina thought of nothing else but the stage, and thought more about it because she did not dilute her thought with talk about her dreams. She had seen a few plays in English and had been quite often with her parents to the Yiddish theater on Second Avenue, where a sixty-year-old, rather portly woman played the rôle of a sixteen-year-old girl and drew tears from the easily impressed audience.

When Regina was seventeen, Mr. Berman began to bestir himself in her and his own behalf; he had seldom contradicted his wife. He hated scenes. Like all Jewish husbands he was the real master of the house. So he let his wife go on dreaming about the teaching-profession for Regina,



knowing that his own plans would ultimately be realized.

"You know, Abraham, I want you to devote more time to sales. You can talk English like water. I will raise your salary and give you a commission on sales. A man can't turn a machine and run after customers at the same time. You have a good head on your shoulders and we two—well, what's the use of *slummoosing*—take the sample case and good-luck to you, Abraham. And if you think you can do better in Hoboken or Long Island, go there. You are your own boss," said Berman one morning to Zussman. "For the machine I have hired another man."

THUS Abraham Zussman became the general salesman of the firm. He brought more orders than that working man and the whole family working overtime every night of the week could fill, and, when Berman had hired a second working man, Abraham Zussman printed a business-card for himself:

MR. A. ZUSSMAN
General Sales Manager
of the
Berman Neckwear Mfg. Co.
London, New York, & Paris

His pay-envelope now contained thirty dollars and more every week, and the loans to his employer increased in size and frequency. Berman's own capital was little more than zero.

Berman began to be anxious to conclude his plans. He was afraid that some marriage-broker might get hold of the boy and set all his plans to naught. Whenever Abraham returned from his travels, Berman invited him to stay for dinner with the family and seated him near Regina.

Once when Zussman had returned late in the evening from Jersey City in a heavy rain, Berman dropped the newspaper he was reading and asked that tea be brought to the young man. His wife went to prepare the samover, but Berman called to his daughter, "Regina:

"You make tea for him. It will be sweeter, ha, Abraham, what do you say? Look how wet he is. Look out or you will catch cold. Take your coat off."

Soon the samover was on the table and Regina prepared tea for the two men.

"Won't you drink tea with us?" asked

the young man, encouraged by her father's previous remark. "It will taste better in your company."

"Hey, mama, have you heard what Abraham said? Look at him."

Regina called to her mother, who was busy in the kitchen.

As she spoke, she also poured tea for herself and sat down opposite the young man and looked at him with amused eyes. Old Berman could hardly contain his joy when Regina lighted a match for Abraham's cigar—he smoked cigars, now that he was a salesman on the road; business demanded it.

"Next thing you know, he will send a *schatchen*, papa," Regina cried out, as she filled Abraham's glass again.

"Keep your mouth shut, you shameless chatterbox," her mother cried. "That girl becomes impossible."

"*Sha-sha*, what are you so mad at? Do you think that Abraham Zussman is not a nice name? And does he not come from a good family? What?" intervened Mr. Berman. "A woman will get in the air for nothing."

"You too keep your mouth shut—you talk like an old woman. God forgive. Solomon, I tell you, you keep your mouth shut," Mrs. Berman admonished her husband as she entered the room.

Abraham felt very ill at ease for a while, but he found solace in the look Regina gave him.

The following evening, Saturday, Abraham invited the girl to a show. Regina accepted eagerly after one look at her father. She dared not look at her mother, where she knew there was disapproval.

When she went into the next room to dress, her mother followed her and had it out with the girl. Berman scented the brewing storm, and as he did not want the young man to hear what his wife told her daughter—the walls separating East-Side rooms are very thin—he took Abraham to the remotest corner of the shop to show him some new samples of silk he had just received.

When the two young people were gone, the children were given nickels and dimes to go out and buy candies, and husband and wife threw their cards on the tables:

"What do you mean by letting her go out with that man? The nerve of that 'nobody' to come and invite my daughter to



a show with him! And she's graduating next year from high school. Is she his kind? What do you mean, Solomon Berman? What? Do you think she is too heavy on your hands already, Solomon? I tell you it will not be!" cried the mother in her loudest voice.

"I think nothing of the sort. I think that Abraham will make a good son-in-law," answered Solomon Berman very calmly. "We have no dowry for that *grand* daughter, you know, and Abraham will be a good partner in the business. He will put his money in the business and we will have a regular factory. That's what I think, woman."

"Is that what you say?" Mrs. Berman shrieked at the top of her voice. "Is that so?" And the black wig shook on her short gray head. "Then better don't think at all, I say.

"My daughter is going to be a teacher in four years. I have dreamed of nothing else since she was that high. I have put up with everything to keep her in school, but not because I wanted Abraham to have a learned wife."

"Better send her to a nunnery then," interrupted her husband.

"Do you think," pounded the woman on the table, "that I have sent her to a high school that she should marry Abraham Zussman? What? Solomon, I tell you, it will not be. It will not be, I tell you!"

Solomon Berman put an end to her ravings by letting himself into his overcoat and announcing that he had an important meeting at his lodge. He left his wife to herself.

WHEN the children returned, sucking red lollypops, they found their mother in a crying-fit that touched their hearts. She had thrown herself full length across the bed and was tearing the pillow with her hands.

"What's the matter?" Kalman asked.

His mother's sorrow was so contagious that he felt like crying himself.

The mother did not answer. Soon all of them lent their voices to the song of broken dreams.

Hours later, when Regina, all flushed, had come home from the theater and a visit to the ice-cream parlor, she found her mother and the little ones sleeping, huddled together on the large bed. She understood.

Not all, but enough. She knew the motif of the despair. But she had her own dreams to realize, her own life to live.

Abraham had taken her to a Second Avenue theater. At the box-office he had asked for the best seats in the house. In the lobby he had met several acquaintances, to whom he introduced Miss Berman, only too proud to be seen with the daughter of his employer.

He had never before been inside a theater. The luxury of it all, the mosaic floor, the colored walls, the frescoes, the painted heads of the muses, the gorgeously blazoned ceiling, with the thousand and one lights protruding from little plaster ornaments gave him a thrill he had never experienced before.

To his left sat Regina. She insisted on telling him the story of the play which she had already seen the Winter before. In the animation of speech she put her thin, warm hand over his thick, freckled fingers. The feel of it was enough to make any one's blood tingle and dance.

"It's sure now. She will be my wife," he thought.

In the tense moments of the play she passed her arm in his and even leaned her head on his shoulders when the intriguing woman on the stage was stealing the husband of the good wife—the good and over-faithful wife of all the stages of the world.

Abraham looked at the stage but saw little and understood less of what was going on. Not because the play was too complicated for him. His mind dwelt on one thing:

"She will be my wife. No one can press a necktie better than she does."

Between the third and the fourth act he bought her a box of chocolates from one of the hawking boys sauntering between the rows.

On the way home, as he was elbowing space for two through the dense crowd of ample women and slow-moving men, she pressed even nearer to him. By the time they were sitting opposite each other in the ice-cream parlor, they had progressed so far that he had dropped the "miss" and called her "Regina." It was after the ice-cream that the girl sent her first shaft by claiming that she could play the rôle of the star much better than "that fat actress."

Bewildered by her pretension, he just said "Maybe," sparring for time. On the

way home she confided a little more of her secret to him. She intended to become an actress. He was the only one to whom she had ever confided her dream. He must not mention a word about it to anybody.

He promised. She even asked him to come to see her act at the performance her school was putting on. He promised to come. Before he had said good night, she patted him on the shoulder. As he lifted his hat to her, she put a finger on her lips.

"But not a word of this to any one. Good night and thanks," she called out, as she ran up the dark stairs of the ill-illuminated, moldy, ill-smelling hallway.

The following evening Abraham invited Regina for a walk on the avenue. The girl accepted the invitation against the feeble protests of her mother. Strange how her attitude toward Abraham Zussman had changed in a few days. He had never existed at all as far as she was concerned. He was a working man in her father's shop. To a romantic girl of Regina's type a youth such as Abraham had no attraction whatsoever.

And suddenly the change. Because she had confided her dream to him, he became a different man in her eyes. Because he had listened to her and had not contradicted, not scoffed, not discouraged, she was anxious to be alone with him again, walk by his side on crowded Second Avenue and pour into his ears all she had dreamed of since she was a child—a stage, an audience, and she the center of it all.

As soon as they were on the street, Abraham opened the conversation by telling her that he had thought the whole night about what she had told him the previous day.

"I think you could be a great actress."

She slipped her arm in his and answered—

"That's very nice of you to think so," and woman-like she made him assure her again and again that she was to be a great actress.

"And I will come to see you act on the stage and you will not even know that I am there, Regina," he moaned sadly as he sat down on a bench in Stuyvesant Square.

"Don't be a child, Abraham," she replied, nestling close to him. "You will help me become a great actress—that's what you will do; won't you?"

"I? How?"

But she would not tell him how. It was

high time to return home with her. Tomorrow, if he wished, he could take her to the theater, to the English theater, where they played "Hamlet." He promised. On the way home she told him the story of the play, dwelling chiefly on the great rôle of *Ophelia*. Abraham was greatly impressed. He was only too anxious to go and see the play with her the following evening. They stood in the hallway of her home and talked a little longer.

"But," said Zussman before leaving, "wouldn't your mother be against it—I mean that you should go with me to the theater?"

"Leave ma to pa," she laughingly answered, as she allowed him to hold her hand in his.

WHEN Abraham Zussman came to invite Regina to the theater the following evening, the girl's eyes were very red, but her braids were no longer hanging over her shoulders. She was dressed ready to go, and there was strong decision in her voice as she said to the boy—

"We must hurry, Abraham; it's getting late."

"Regina, you have cried," Abraham said to her as soon as they were on the street.

"Oh, it's nothing," she answered, pressing his arm, and kept very quiet on the way to the play.

She was very quiet all through the performance. Abraham tried hard to make conversation during the evening, but she was not so disposed.

On the way home she asked him—

"How do you like the play?"

"I did not think of the play. I thought tonight of your eyes—you have cried; and I know it's because of me. It's the same thing, I know, Regina."

She had to console him. Yes. Her mother was against her. Against the theater. Did not want her to become an actress.

"But I want you to become an actress and I am going to show them what I can do," Abraham cried out suddenly. "Theater is just as good a business as neckties, if not a better one—you'll see."

"Will you do that? Oh, Abraham!"

She pressed his arm even closer.

"Will I?" and he returned the pressure. It was as good as an engagement. Be-



fore saying good night to each other they kissed at the foot of the stairs.

Neither mother nor father felt like asking questions the next morning when Abraham walked from the shop into the living-room and announced boldly to Mr. and Mrs. Berman that he and Regina were engaged and that he had bought her a ring.

"*Mazeltoff, mazeltoff*, I wish you luck," Solomon Berman exclaimed, as Abraham put the ring on Regina's finger. "But you could have asked us—I am her father, am I not? There is her mother, too—but, well—America—children here don't ask their parents."

THE two parents soon woke up to the fact that their little Regina was a woman striking out for her own shores. She quit school without as much as "by-your-leave" and boldly announced that she was going to become an actress. Whereas Abraham Zussman had formerly been grateful for the slightest favor shown him by his employer's wife, he now expected little services and accepted them as if they were due him.

And Solomon Berman too woke up to something he had not expected. He had expected Abraham to consider the marriage to his daughter and the subsequent inevitable partnership in the firm as a stroke of fortune that comes once in a thousand years to one of two million men. But now, without many preliminaries, Abraham announced that he was not going to invest his money in the necktie business. Abraham's decision made Berman realize that it was he who ought to be thankful to Abraham Zussman for taking his daughter in lawful wedding without demanding any dowry. Abraham had money; three thousand dollars. What had Berman? Nothing at all.

There were two distinct groups now in the house. Berman and his wife, and Abraham Zussman and Regina. The younger ones had the deciding voice in everything. Abraham already bossed the factory; Regina bossed the house. When it finally came again to words between husband and wife, Mrs. Berman said:

"I say, Solomon, the quicker they marry, the better it will be. I am not responsible for what is going to happen if she keeps it up that way."

"You may be right. For all the good it will do me now, let them get married."

After reflecting for a few moments, Berman continued.

"Maybe you could have a little *shmoos* with your daughter about the partnership. What do you say, Leah?"

"I say nothing. But I think it was Regina, that put that idea in his head, not to come in partnership with us. What does she care about her father and mother? She wants to be an actress. She speaks of him, you should hear her, Solomon, as if he were, who knows what—as if we don't know who he is. I would never have slaved for her the way I did," the mother cried.

"What brought about all this change, what?" questioned Solomon Berman, talking more to himself than expecting any answer to his query.

But his wife was ready with the answer, as if the question was just the thing she had waited for.

"When I wanted to talk about it to you that night when he invited her to the theater, you had an important meeting at the lodge," she mimicked. "Ha? A meeting at the lodge was more important to you than the future of your daughter, the dream of your wife."

Solomon Berman knew the answer to his query now. It was youth against old age.

"I think it well that she should marry early in the Spring, eh, Leah?"

"Let them marry when they will. She has broken my heart. I don't care much what she does now," said the disappointed mother.

"You wanted a school-teacher, ha? If not a school-teacher you don't care. You come from a race of school-teachers, ha? Only school-teachers!"

And there was raillery, bitterness, sarcasm in his voice. It made the woman cry. He regretted his words. He had never spoken to her in such a tone before.

"You did not understand me, Leah? Why must it be Regina? It will be Malka, your youngest daughter. Is she not your child, too? Come on, don't cry. Malka has good reports. She is bright. She is smart. It will be Malka, what?"

"It's not the same, Solomon, it's not the same; it never will be the same; it never will be the same, I tell you," she cried, yet she was thankful to her husband for the suggestion.



He felt that his words had taken root.

"Why is it not the same? Is she not our child as well as Regina? Better make some tea for us. I feel I want some tea."

Leah started to put the glasses on the table, and going to and fro, she spoke partly to herself, partly to her husband.

"And really, why not? If it's not Regina, it will be Malka. A few years later. Well! What does it count? A few years sooner, a few years later. What does it count, ha?"

"Of course it doesn't. Sit down and have your tea."

ABRAHAM and Regina went frequently to the theaters. To the Yiddish ones at first and to Broadway afterward. He had seen Regina act in the amateur performance she had spoken about and was impressed by her ability then. He thought that she could do such things at least as well, or even better, than pressing neckties.

Yet later on, when he had seen other actors, he was not so sure about that. There were many things that she had yet to learn, he concluded. She was, of course, very gushy about her talents, as well as all stage-struck young people.

They went together to the theaters, but each had his or her own thoughts and reasons for doing so. She wanted to see rôles; he came to observe the business-end of the theater. Regina's theatrical inclination had set his mind traveling in a new direction. He informed himself about expenses and incomes of the theater. About actors and plays. About the chance of gain and loss.

The stage, the thousands of heads, the cries, the laughter, the problems proposed and resolved—the whole thing represented to him only a different business in which there were bigger chances than in the one he was in just then. It had never occurred to him before that there was another business than neckties for him until then. It was not love for his intended wife or inclination that urged him in that direction. It was simply a chance to make more money in a different business than neckties.

He realized at once that his capital was ridiculously small for such an enterprise. He had formerly thought of himself as a rich man. In his old business three thousand dollars was a capital to be reckoned with. In the theatrical business, he soon

learned, it was about enough for one day's expenses. Tens of thousands of dollars were spoken of as lightly as if the dollars represented cents. It was a big business. The ante was bigger. It made him look on his own capital as something to be risked easily on a chance of making more money quickly.

He began to visit, with Regina and alone, the cafés frequented by Yiddish actors. In the course of a few months he had gathered all the information necessary. Conversation with better informed men gave him a certain polish. His willingness to stand treat endeared him to many. His larger vision served him even in his work as a salesman. He brought in more orders now in a day than he used to bring in in his best week a few months before.

To carry out these orders he had to advance money to Berman to buy two more machines, a cutting-table and several other things. He became more than a partner in the business; he practically was its owner, but he looked on it as a side-line. His ears and eyes were open for other things, bigger things—the theater!

Only a few months before Regina had been infinitely his superior. Her ambitions and her learning as a high-school girl were sky-high. That she consented to go out with him he had considered a heavenly privilege in spite of the fact that he had planned to marry her years before. But now he towered over her. His ambitions were greater, and what he had picked up from here and there was more than she had ever known. He laughed to himself when he thought how much he had admired this and that inferior actor and the trashy plays that he had seen at first.

Regina's ambitions! Well! Love now did not color his judgment about her ability. There was much she had to learn. And if she succeeded, she would be a good asset in the business. Stars commanded big prices. Three and four hundred dollars a week. If he could save that at the beginning, it would make things easier. But with or without her he was determined to enter the theatrical field. He had very little to lose and the prospects were large. Thousands, tens of thousands. The Yiddish theater was a mint.

Regina too felt that Abraham had become her superior. Long before they were married, she took orders from him. It was



he who enrolled her as a pupil in an East-Side acting-school, treating her as one with superior knowledge treats a beginner. She began to love him. He was a man, a real man, and would make her a great actress. The Yiddish stage at first and then Broadway. Broadway, her name in electric lights! Broadway—a star on Broadway!

In the shop Solomon Berman was now little more than a salaried employee. He also took orders from the future son-in-law. It dispirited him so that he did not even attempt to run for the presidency of his lodge, to compete with Goldstein, who had been a tailor at home and was now a manufacturer of clothing in America.

When the wedding of Regina Berman and Abraham Zussman finally took place, the guests of Abraham outnumbered and outshone the guests that came by Berman's invitations. Abraham's guests were writers and actors. It clearly established the fact that the Bermans were *passe* and the Zussmans on the rise. It was not at all as Berman thought it would be—that he would have to apologize for accepting Abraham Zussman as his son-in-law. It looked as if Abraham Zussman had condescended to marry Regina Berman, the dowryless daughter of a necktie-manufacturer.

AT THE beginning of the following season Abraham was the owner of the Regina Theater, on Second Avenue. How had he bought it? By willing it. By borrowing money from the bank. By a few successful and daring real-estate operations. Instead of neckties the factory now turned out puttees for the army and twenty machines worked day and night in three shifts. Yet all these things, each one with its possibility of riches, were only side-affairs. The main track of Abraham Zussman's mind was occupied with theatrical projects.

He laid his plans rapidly. Actors and playwrights sought his company and listened to his opinions. He was invariably right. His point of view was that of the public. The public was his business. He studied his business. He left his wife to watch the show from a first-row seat. He went to the gallery and observed the people. Noted when they laughed or cried, when the interest sagged or rose. When his theater was ready to open for the season, his education was finished.

In the first play to be produced his wife

had a very important rôle. She was the star. During the preparation for the season Abraham was too busy with other things to see his wife rehearse. That end of the business was in the hands of a capable director, who assured Mr. Zussman that she was a genius.

Regina worked with him every day. Who can describe the jealousies of the other actresses? How they spoke of the luck of that "slip of a girl, lucky enough to marry a man rich enough to buy a theater for his wife to act in." How they flattered Regina when they spoke to her, and how unflatteringly they spoke of her behind her back. Every little mistake of routine of the novice was immediately reported and guffawed about to eager listeners in cafés and restaurants.

"That lucky slip. She is a star now. She has her own theater. Wait till the first night. What's the use! The critics have probably been paid to praise; I leave that to Abraham Zussman," were the continual remarks.

Regina did not know in what world she was living. She was scared by what she had desired since childhood. It had all happened so quickly that her enthusiasm had had no time to cool off. The director, sure that Zussman went into the business only for his wife's sake, thought it his duty to be very flattering to Regina and assure her that she had but to appear on the stage to have the world at her feet.

To Regina her husband was her god. He had never told her his reasons for going into the theatrical business. She took it for granted that it was because he wanted her to shine as a star. How grateful she was to him for his confidence in her! How she loved him for his willingness to risk his capital to satisfy her ambition! She must, she must succeed. More for his sake than for her own. How he must have loved her during the years he had been working for her father! It was as one reads in stories.

THE night of the first performance. Slowly at first, but in the last half-hour very rapidly, the theater had filled. The East Side is always eager to go to the theater, now more than ever before. So many new dresses to show. Bediamonded fingers, heavy golden chains crossing under and over overgrown abdomens.

Through the peeping-hole of the big



curtain Regina watched the theater as it filled to capacity. Soon the musicians appeared. At the first bar of the national hymn all heads shot up, some still munching fruit, others sucking candies and speaking to one another. Children cried aloud. Ushers were running to and fro. Boys hawked chocolates and sodas. It seemed more like a huge exhibition of prosperity than a theatrical audience.

Then the curtain rose for the first act and the noise instantly ceased. From the first moment of her appearance it was clear that Regina would not "take." Her own lack of experience stood in her way, and the others, especially the woman next to her in importance, Madame Sherman, did all that could be done to accentuate the star's bewilderment and ignorance of routine.

The prompter spoke so loud that he was heard better than the actress, and whenever the audience was supposed to cry, loud laughter was heard. The test of a play and an actor on the East Side is tears. The more the better.

When the curtain fell after the first act, Regina Berman, in the language of actors, was "dead."

She walked through the other acts as through a series of torture-chambers. Only once during all the performance had she seen Abraham.

"Brace up, girl. Brace up, don't worry, it will be O. K.," was all he said to her.

She hardly dared to face him when it was all over. He came into her dressing-

room and sat down near her. She cried and cried.

"Abraham, Abraham, after all you have done for me! I am unworthy, unworthy of you."

"Well, it's all right. It will not kill us," he answered.

"But we are ruined. I have ruined you," she moaned.

"Not at all. I have already told Madame Sherman to take your rôle tomorrow."

"What do you mean—Mme. Sherman?"

"Well, you don't expect me to let you continue now—do you?"

"What? Is it not all over? Won't you give up the theater now?" she flared up for a moment.

"Why should I? Because you have failed? A business like that does not depend on one single actress. The loss is not so terrible as you think. Of course, it would have been better, more economical—but that does not matter much. Madame Sherman takes your place. I will engage some one else in her stead, and—I will dismiss the cashier. You could take her place and save me some money until you can return again to the stage."

"So, you have not done it all for me? For me only, Abraham?" she asked, as if roused from a long-drawn dream, her eyes wide open, her mouth agape.

"What do you mean, 'For me only?' The theater is a business—a big business."

And because this shattering of two dreams in one evening was more than she could stand, she laughed and cried and laughed again.



Adventuring

OUT upon the hillside a pixie wind is playing.
 He beckons and he calls to me, bound by my window-sill,
 And gladly would I follow him to far adventures straying,
 The friendly, frolicking old wind whose voice is never still.

O Brother Wind, gray Brother Wind, wait for me while time passes,
 A month, a year, a hundred years, they matter not to you—
 One day and I shall join you, creeping up through stems and grasses,
 And we will go adventuring down an old world that is new.

Edna Valentine Trapnell

Some Pearls and a Swine

BY CARL CLAUSEN



MAINA LO, the shell-diver's daughter, took from the shelf above the hearth a heart-shaped pearl shell and a small leather sack. Placing the shell upon a low stool in the middle of the floor, she shook into it twelve small, gray seed-pearls from the sack and poured over them half a cup of coconut-oil from an earthen vessel. On her knees, her elbows resting on the edge of the stool, she pursed her lips and blew softly upon the surface of the oil.

Her father watched her intently from his mat, peering over her shoulder with his watery, brine-blinded eyes, a broken stump of a clay pipe between his toothless gums. Old and decrepit was Aoku, the shell-diver. The icy clutch of twenty fathoms had squeezed the warm blood from his veins and left him a paralytic, helpless wreck, dependent upon the charity of the inhabitants and upon the bounty of the occasional traders whose schooners tarried in the lagoon for a few hours between the tides.

"What see you in the shell, daughter?" he croaked, raising himself on palsied knees.

Without answering, Maina lo continued blowing, until the funnel-shaped opening made in the oil by her breath touched the bottom of the shell and caused eleven of the twelve small pearls to arrange themselves in a circle about the base. The twelfth and largest stayed in the center of the circle and no amount of blowing could dislodge it.

"A strange ship will enter the straits," she answered, gazing into the shell with her face between her hands. "We shall have food, much food, my father. I see a very white *sahib* with hair like the sun and eyes the color of mother of pearl."

"It is time," Aoku mumbled. "Perhaps it is Perrot, the trader. He is free with his purse and he favors you."

"Perrot, the Frenchman, is a swine," she

cried. "Sooner would I starve than eat from his hand. Have you forgotten his perfidy with other maidens? Aileta who leaped from the cliff and others?"

Aoku shook his head and gazed at the floor.

"I am an old man," he whined. "Soon I shall be gone. Have I not labored for you these many years? It is time you took a man. Among our own people not one finds favor with you. Then why spurn you this white trader who has much gold and fine houses?"

"The Frenchman is a swine," Maina lo repeated. "Think you he would take me to dwell as his wife? Not he! I am still a maid, and a maid I remain until—until—" she paused and patted her father's wrinkled cheek—"until my heart calls me."

"We shall starve," Aoku whimpered. "I am an old man——"

"Rest easy, my father, I am young and strong. I can dive. Tomorrow I begin. Who knows but some day I may bring up a great pearl?"

"But you are a woman," he remonstrated, "and good to look upon. The men will laugh you to scorn."

"Yes," she said, slowly, "I am a woman—and good to look upon."

She rose to her feet, poured the oil from the shell and replaced the twelve small pearls in the sack.

A quiet serious-minded girl was Maina lo, with rather heavy, sensuous lips and somber eyes that somehow suggested slumbering passions. She had the respect of traders and natives alike, for she was a good girl. Also, she was beautiful, a rare combination along the Straits of Malaita, where beauty and virtue rarely go hand in hand.

From her crown of glossy black hair to her finely-arched bare feet she was good to look upon. Proud of bearing she was, high-breasted as Venus, with the aristocratic blood of her race flowing undiluted in her veins.

She was proud of this blood. Upon the free and easy unions between maidens of her race and the white masters she looked with scorn. Her mind, primitive, and untutored though it was, grasped the significance of such unions and their effect upon the destiny of her race.

In a vague sort of a way she understood

that she and her people were inferior to the white man who seemed to possess everything in the world worth possessing. She wondered why. It seemed unjust. Did she not love, hate, eat and drink as they? Did not the sun smile on white and brown alike, and the soft-trade winds, did not they kiss the graves of both races, impartially?

The brown man toiled no longer at his ancestral pursuits. Rum had left in him no desire for the old, simple life. Upon his women a new and sinister value had been placed, and he had sunk low enough to take advantage of it.

Maina lo pondered much upon these signs and hot hatred grew in her heart against the white man and her debased brethren. Had she lived in New York instead of upon Danrhyn atoll, she would have been an ardent suffragette.

AOKU'S boat, the *Moonbeam*, was the fastest and best equipped of the fleet. Crippled and reduced though Aoku had become, he had ever refused to part with it at any price. Originally the lifeboat of a merchantman, the old diver had bought her for five pounds sterling from the captain of the ship, who was anxious to use the deck-room which it displaced for stowing cargo. Aoku had dragged the boat upon the beach, overhauled her from stem to stern, decked her over with a deck of inch and a half baltic-pine and rigged her with a long slender mast, mainsail, topsail and two jibs. Outside the South Pacific Trading Company's lugger at Duralong—an ex-yacht—no faster boat existed in the straits.

Before daybreak Maina lo hoisted mainsail and jib and stood across the bar with a five-knot breeze long before the rest of the fleet had begun to stir. She headed for Little Akaroa, a cove on the lee side of Duralong, where diving was good on the slack tide. Once clear of land, she set the tops'l, slacked out the main sheet and squared away before the wind.

The *Moonbeam* leaped in response to the increased pressure of sail and buried her nose in the turbulent greenness under her bow. Maina lo hung upon the tiller and through the flying spray watched the white-caps chase one another in the wake astern, and her heart leaped in exultation with the *Moonbeam*.

Here she was at home. A sister to the

north wind, she, racing down her ancestral domain. Her long black hair lay coiled in two heavy braids about her head. She had fastened the braids securely with shell-pins and raffia in preparation for the diving. A snug-fitting sleeveless tunic of woven raffia encased her slender body from the armpits to the knees, giving her absolute freedom of movement, a very necessary thing in twenty fathoms of water.

When the sun rose warm and dripping from the eastern sea, she cast aside her covering blanket. The warm wind raced through the loosely woven tunic and drove the blood dancing through her veins. Her cheeks were aflush with excitement for her new undertaking.

Although it was no uncommon thing for women of her race to engage in pearl-diving, Maina lo had never descended more than a few fathoms among the shallows of the coral reefs, while her father worked the great depths between the barrier reef and the mainland.

Aoku had playfully taught his young daughter the tricks of the trade, never dreaming that some day he should become dependent upon her for food and shelter. There had been in his mind visions of their triumphant return to their native Marquesas with much gold, for the pearl-beds of the great barrier reef were rich in the early days of the industry, but years had passed from plenty to scanty, from scanty to poverty, his body becoming more useless and withered from month to month.

Maina lo grew into young womanhood among the fleet, capable and earnest, always learning, always inquiring, the ablest and most skilful sailor on the lagoon. The pilot at Duralong never ceased to relate how he watched her from the lighthouse drive the *Moonbeam* across the bar in a black northeaster at low tide with a double-reefed mains'l.

With decks awash and the mainboom dragging in the trough of the seas, Maina lo rounded Point Miguel and nosed her way, close-hauled, along the barrier reef, looking for a safe passage. The wind threw the boat on her beam-ends under the heavy sail-pressure and she was forced to furl the tops'l and outer jib.

So busy was she, dodging submerged reefs and taking in her high canvas, that she did not notice a bank of dark clouds rising with incredible swiftness out of the

northern sea. The first intimation she had of the approaching hurricane was, when looking across the straits, she saw an incoming bark furl her canvas down to lower tops'ls and square away to sea.

Through her glasses she made out the bark to be the *Pappillon*, the French prison-ship that for the past two years engaged in transferring prisoners from the penal colony of New Caledonia to Cayenne.

ANXIOUSLY watching the oncoming cloud-bank, she ran the boat into the wind, double-reefed the mains'l and set the storm-jib. There was but one thing to do; follow the *Pappillon* out to sea. To look for shelter along the reef was worse than useless. Swift as she worked, she had hardly tied the last knot in the reef when the hurricane burst upon her.

So sudden and furious was the onslaught that the boat was thrown on her beam-ends with the storm-jib pounding in the teeth of the gale, threatening momentarily to dismast her. Maina lo leaped for the tiller and threw all her weight against it, but with her deck buried amidships in storm-whipped water, the *Moonbeam* lost all steerageway and pounded head on into the seas. One after another the reef-lashed waves raked the frail craft from stem to stern. With her knees braced against the lee bulwarks, in water to the waist, Maina lo hung on to the tiller in grim desperation, expecting momentarily to be dashed to pieces upon a reef.

Then gradually the *Moonbeam* paid off, righted herself and tore out to sea before the hurricane in the two-mile wake of the *Pappillon*.

To prevent getting carried overboard, she tied the main halyards around her waist and made the end fast to a ring-bolt in the deck. In less than half an hour she was out of sight of land, racing before the eighty-mile gale with the jib-sheet taut as a violin string and the hurricane howling in the rigging. Through the flying mist ahead she saw the *Pappillon's* lower tops'ls blow out in a shower of shreds, leaving the bark running before the wind with bare poles.

The last of the young sun hung lurid and ghostly behind the black clouds astern. Sky and water seemed to unite in a frenzy of storm-lashed fury. A lone albatross swept down the gale before her and was

swallowed up in the blackness ahead. She was utterly alone in the turbulent expanse of storm-whipped waters, hanging on the tiller with numb, nerveless hands.

Then, the deluge. The heavens seemed to open their flood-gates. Howling, snarling, raging came the icy, spume-laden downpour, whipping the surface of the waters into a veritable caldron of leaping fury. It beat upon her bare arms and legs with the sting of a lash and drove the breath out of her body.

The frail craft shuddered beneath the weight of it and wallowed for minutes at the time, submerged to the bulwarks, only to rise gallantly again, shake herself and leap forward on the crest of the next wave.

Never for a moment did Maina lo's heart fail her. With numb, frozen hands she grasped the tiller in a grip of steel; guiding the *Moonbeam* through the chaos of wind and water. Even momentarily she did not relax her vigilance. She looked upon the white, merciless death about her and smiled. The fear of death was not in her. With blinded eyes she strove to pierce the gloom ahead. So low hung the clouds that it seemed as if by reaching out her hand she might touch them.

Sun nor stars broke the inky pall, and the sea beneath was like a caldron of madly boiling milk, a great expanse of blinding whiteness. The hiss of the rain was drowned in the thundering noise of the waters pouring over the boat.

How long it lasted she could not have told. When the squall passed on, she saw the *Pappillon*, a scant quarter of a mile ahead. Her rigging and white, slender spars stood drawn against the blackness of the sky like a delicate, silver-threaded pattern upon a curtain of black velvet. She was laboring heavily without a stitch of canvas. A storm-torn signal of distress fluttered from the mizzen gaff.

With the cessation of the rain, the waves began to rise. The sea changed in aspect. Great mountains of water lifted the *Moonbeam* toward the sky and flung her forward with incredible speed. The little craft plunged on, her head down green, phosphorescent valleys of abysmal depth, climbed up the next wave bravely, only to be tossed as by some giant hand into the sky and go coasting madly again.

With a deafening roar a great sea bore down upon her. Maina lo set her teeth,

flung herself face down upon the deck and took a fresh turn about her waist with the halyards. For one breathless moment she waited with the thunder of the oncoming waters in her ears. The *Moonbeam* lay momentarily passive like a hunted stag awaiting the *coup de grace*.

Then with a last brave attempt to meet the onslaught, she staggered into the thundering death. The tiller snapped in Maina lo's hand like a piece of matchwood. With terrific force she was hurled against the mast, the waist-rope almost cutting her in twain by the force of the onrushing waters.

Bereft of the guiding hand, the *Moonbeam* swung broadside to the seas. The jib blew out with the noise of a blast. Topmast and jib-boom went crashing over the side.

Stunned and half-drowned, Maina lo groped her way on hands and knees along the engulfed deck to the companionway and tore the hatchet from the rack. With bleeding hands she chopped the tangled rigging adrift to prevent the dragging topmast from pounding a hole in the side of the boat.

On examination she found the rudder carried away. Only a broken splinter of wood remained, swinging uselessly above the water-line. Cutting one of the oars from its lashings, she chopped a deep notch in the stern, laid the oar in the notch and lashed it securely to the top hinge of the broken rudder. Then rising to her feet, she threw her weight against the oar and righted the boat.

She was almost abreast of the *Pappillon*. Fifty yards to starboard the great black hull of the prison-ship towered monstrously above her, her stern pointing toward the sky. She was foundering by her head. Foc'sle-head and forward deck lay engulfed to the fore-hatch. Crowsnests and rigging were crowded with human forms awaiting the end. The fragments of two splintered lifeboats dragged in the water from the tackle at her davits.

Against the railing of the poop-deck a crowd of prisoners was lined up. Two sailors with hammers and chisels were striking the shackles from the unfortunate men across the iron hawser-bits. As fast as he was freed, each man leaped for the rigging.

The bark was drifting helplessly before



the gale. With her forward hold half-full of water she staggered drunkenly to her grave. Curious, incredulous faces stared down at the frail craft with the lone half-nude figure of a girl standing upright in the stern, guiding the boat with only an oar. A sailor in the mizzen truck waved his sou'wester to her.

Above the tumult of the wind came faintly the sound of voices. They were cheering her. From the rigging and yard-arms flashed a message of tribute from a hundred doomed men. Then suddenly the great bark plunged head down in the waves up to the mainmast. Her stern rose in the air with the dripping rudder pointing to the sky. One by one the men in the rigging dropped into the sea. The two sailors abandoned their hammers and chisels and leaped from the railing of the poop.

In the stern stood the solitary figure of a man silhouetted against the sky, with manacled hands raised above his head, the last of the prisoners whom the sailors had abandoned in their efforts to save themselves. A giant of a man he was, with a great shock of yellow curls dancing in the gale. He was signaling to her, pointing astern with his manacled hands.

Maina lo measured the distance with her eyes, cast all her weight upon the oar and swung the *Moonbeam* under the stern quarter of the bark. Tying a bowline in the main halyards, she threw the rope overboard and signaled her readiness. With a terrific swing the man brought down his manacled wrists across the hawser-bit, breaking the shackle-chain. Then he leaped.

Straining at her oar, Maina lo saw his head rise in the wake of the sinking bark, a few feet astern. The *Moonbeam* staggered momentarily as the man caught the dragging rope and rose half-way out of the water with the sudden strain. The next moment two bloody, mangled arms with the broken shackle-chains dangling from the torn flesh were thrust over the railing. Grasping the man beneath the armpits, Maina lo dragged him to safety and sprang back to her oar, just as the last of the *Pappillon* disappeared beneath the waves.

NIGHT came with the hurricane spent and a chill moon rising out of the sea. Weary and worn, Maina lo left her

oar and knelt beside the prostrate form upon the deck. By neither sound nor movement did the man betray sign of life. One mangled wrist lay across a forehead white as death. The broken shackle-chain swung tangled in his hair with the movements of the boat. She looked at the man helplessly. To all appearances he was dead. She had risked her life and boat to no purpose.

When she accidentally touched his forehead with the tips of her fingers, she thought she saw a faint flutter of the eyelids. She placed her ear against his breast and listened breathlessly. Barely perceptible yet unmistakably came the soft beating of his heart. Life was not quite extinct.

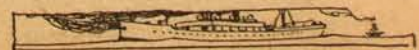
For several minutes she sat looking at him perplexedly. Across the moon-flooded waste long, swift lines of ponderously cat-footed rollers moved from horizon to horizon, breaking in menacing white-capped thunder about the boat. Phalanx after phalanx of storm-torn clouds charged the young ascending moon.

The storm still raged in the higher levels, though but the merest breath of wind fanned her cheek as the boat coasted down the rollers. A blue layer of chill, shroudly mist hung low over the sea with an interminable stretch of clear, sparkling space above. A sinister, brooding peace of fury-gorged elements enwrapped the universe.

Against the deck the face of the unconscious man glowed ghastly beneath his matted, brine-soaked locks that moved Medusa-like in the wash of the deck with the pitching of the boat. A strange freak of circumstances had placed in Maina lo's hands the fate of one of the hated race. Only in the fact that he was a convict and therefore in the estimation of his own people no better than she, did Maina lo find in her heart a sense of pity for him.

Like herself, he was very young. A downy golden beard covered his vigorous, aggressive jaw. His nose was straight, finely molded, with sensitive blue-veined nostrils. There was a bold, careless quality in the repose of his face. Where his shirt lay open, the skin of his throat glowed soft and velvety beneath its coat of sun-bitten tan. A pathetic boyish look, reminiscent of a brutally disillusioned childhood, hung about the corners of his mouth.

Taking his head in her lap, she began



to rub his face and chest briskly and rolled him back and forth to induce circulation in his frozen arteries. After several minutes of unceasing labor she was rewarded by feeling the play of his reviving muscles under her touch. When she placed the water-soaked blanket under his head, he opened his eyes for a fraction of a minute and gazed up at her unseeingly.

Letting her hand fall upon his shoulder, she leaned over him breathlessly, searching his eyes by the faint light of the moon. Deep blue, the color of mother of pearl, they gazed beyond her into nothingness. When he had closed them again, she sat lost in thought, studying the blank repose of his face.

Then, rising to her feet, with a look of determination upon her face, she found the hatchet and knocked the cover off the hatchway. Below decks everything was snug and tight. Groping about in the dark she found matches and lighted the lantern which swung from the beam above the bunk. She extended her stiff, frozen hands over the flame and looked about with a sigh of relief. Not a drop of water had the staunch little craft shipped.

Returning on deck, she dragged the unconscious man below, dropped him in the bunk and began to strip him of his wet garments. When she pulled his coarse prison-shirt over his head, she gave a gasp of horror. From the neck to the waist his back was a mass of horrible, bloody bruises.

She knew too well the mark of a cat-o'-nine-tails to be mistaken. Cords of beaten flesh lay in livid lines from armpit to armpit. He had been brutally whipped. With a sob of mingled rage and compassion she worked away feverishly and flung the last of his water-soaked garments on deck. Tender-handed and pitying, she anointed his body with healing oil from her locker and bound up his mangled hands with strips torn from the blankets.

She forgot race-hatred and prejudice in administering aid and comfort to the helpless, white-skinned stranger who had come to her out of the sea, bruised and bleeding. She rolled herself into the blankets against his icy body that the warmth of her youth might kindle into flame the flickering spark of life. With maiden shyness she drew his face to her breast and closed her eyes. An indescribable feeling of peace and contentment came to her. She slept.

WHEN she awoke, she was alone. The cabin was flooded with warm noon-tide sunshine. The boat swung lazily upon a calm, sunlit sea. She heard him move about on deck. Wondering, she sat up and looked about. Before leaving, he had tucked the blankets around her.

She crawled on deck and found him curled up, prison-garbed, on the mainsail with his back against the mast. She dared not lift her eyes for fear of encountering his. He held out his hand and took hers between his two bandaged ones and raised it to his lips, drinking in the beauty of her with his clear, boyish eyes.

Gently withdrawing the hand, she knelt beside him and pressed the spot his lips had touched shyly to her breast. No word passed from her lips. He also was silent, but in his eyes she saw enshrined something which she dared not believe true.

The youth of him, for he was but an overgrown, bearded boy, spoke to her own in youth's breathless language, tremulous with awe and exquisite delight at their mutual discovery. Fiercely her spirit assailed the barrier of blood and found his amid the wreckage.

It was no mere mortal love which shone from the splendor of her face. The fire in her eyes was love's refining flame, the beacon that has guided frail humanity through the ages in its wingless pursuit of happiness.

The sea moved inevitably from horizon to horizon. Near by a flock of albatrosses fought over a drifting morsel of food. She remembered then that she had not eaten since the morning before.

When she placed food and drink from her locker before him he followed her with his eyes, eating ravenously the while. Knowing the scanty supply, she ate and drank sparingly herself, heaping his lap with fruit and sun-cured fish. When he had eaten his fill, he drew the sail about him with a grateful smile and closed his eyes.

While he slept, she tiptoed about, repairing the damage done by the storm. Every little while she paused in her task to watch him in silent exultation. Bending low over him, she touched his cheeks shyly with her lips and ran her finger-tips lightly through the gold of his hair.

In the afternoon a strange sail appeared, bearing down upon them with a strong



breeze from the east. With a sudden fear in her heart, Maina lo recognized the *L'Aiglon*, the swift brigantine of Perrot, the trader.

Arousing the fugitive, she pointed to the ship.

"It is Perrot, the French trader," she whispered. "Go below and hide. Even now he may have seen you through his glasses."

The boy's face turned white beneath his tan.

"He shall not take me alive. Sooner death than the living hell of Cayenne."

The girl took his face between her hands.

"Fear not, *temasere*," she said softly. "He shall not take you at all, dead or living. But you must hide swiftly."

Hastily rigging a jury jib-boom with the second oar, she hoisted the remaining jib and the mainsail and bore away to the south. Storm-beaten and damaged though she was, the little *Moonbeam* staggered bravely on. With anxious eyes Maina lo watched the brigantine grow larger and larger. Through his glasses Perrot, the trader, had recognized her and was driving the *L'Aiglon* off her course in an effort to overhaul the *Moonbeam*. Maina lo set her teeth and prayed for night.

At dark the brigantine was a league astern, gaining rapidly. Through the glow of the tropic night her red and green beam-lights followed the wake of the *Moonbeam* like the two evil eyes of a demon. Crouching at her oar, the girl resorted to every known trick of seacraft in futile efforts to outmaneuver the Frenchman. A stone's throw to starboard, the great white hull of the brigantine rose out of the phosphorescent sea, a ghostly avenger, following every movement of the *Moonbeam*.

With a sob of rage and despair Maina lo saw her mainsail flap idly in the breeze that began to die with the approach of dawn. At daylight the *Moonbeam* and the *L'Aiglon* lay a cable-length apart upon the calm, rose-tinged lap of the sea. From the forward davits of the brigantine a boat was being launched.

"WELL?"

Maina lo drew from her bosom the leather sack containing the twelve seed-pearls and threw them upon the cabin table. She glanced through the open port-

hole at the *Moonbeam* towing in the sluggish wake of the *L'Aiglon* and bit her lip. Perrot, the trader, laughed loudly. It was a cold, sinister laugh that seemed to emanate from his flaring hair-studded nostrils.

"A piker's bet, *mademoiselle*," he snarled. "Twelve seed-pearls, value thirty francs, for your pasty-faced lover. *Sacre-bleu, enfant*, the Government of France will pay me one thousand francs for him, dead or alive."

The girl choked back a sob.

"It is all I have," she murmured faintly. "*M'sieu* will have mercy. I will sign a contract. Half my earnings for one—nay two years to come shall be yours. I have found a new bed where the shell is heavy and pink-edged, and there are pearls of fine luster."

Perrot leaned back in his chair and leered lewdly upon her. His bleary pig-eyes lingered with bestial contemplation upon her slender, lightly garbed form.

"The thirteenth pearl *mademoiselle*," he said, smacking his damp lips with an insinuating leer, "the finest in the world, and I trade. Take it or leave it. A house in Suva, fine silks and nothing to do till tomorrow, as the Yankees say."

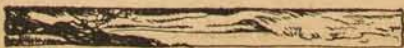
"*M'sieu* is jesting," she whispered. "I am still a maid, and poor. There are others more beautiful than I. Have mercy!"

He rose from his chair and took a step toward her. With a look of inexorable loathing, Maina lo drew away and turned her back upon him. A hundred feet astern swung the *Moonbeam* at the end of the *L'Aiglon's* hawser. Perrot's eyes followed hers through the porthole. Upon the deck two sailors sat Turk-fashion, guarding the hatchway, smoking their pipes. The girl was hardly aware of the trader's presence. She stood looking out to sea with her arms folded upon her breast.

A rose-tipped ridge of fleecy clouds framed the young dawn. Her face grew radiant. Carved indelibly upon her soul stood the runes of love's sacrificial message. Her sacrifice would atone for the mere carnal sin! Fragrant and virginal his white rose should ever rest upon her heart.

"*Eh bien, mademoiselle*, time is precious. I am waiting," Perrot growled.

"I accept," the girl answered in a barely audible voice.



"Ah!"

The trader drew a breath of surprize and gratification and placed his hand upon her arm. Her flesh cringed beneath the foul moisture of his palm.

"One moment, *m'sieu*—the terms of our contract. Food and water for thirty days. A suit of clothing to replace his prison-garb, a compass, a chart and medical supplies. You are to repair the damage done by the storm and send the ship's blacksmith to strike his fetters."

The trader waved his hand airily.

"It shall be done—everything. In one hour your convict shall be as free as the wind."

He raised his swarthy, grinning face to hers.

"One kiss, *mademoiselle*—just one leedle kiss to seal the bargain."

"*M'sieu*, have a care!" she panted, turning upon him with the fury of outraged chastity.

Perrot shrank back, a cunning look in his bloodshot eyes.

"*Très bien, ma chérie*, business before pleasure, eh, what?"

Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he mounted the stairs and locked the companionway door from the outside. She heard him descend the poop-ladder and order the crew to haul the *Moonbeam* under the stern quarters.

Through the porthole she watched the ship's carpenter fit a new jib-boom in place of the broken one. The two sailors fell to work upon the tangled rigging, while others lowered the supplies over the side. Perrot himself descended the rope-ladder and threw an old suit of clothes upon the deck.

"*Mademoiselle* sends her best regards," he said maliciously.

The boy steadied himself against the mast and looked at the bundle blankly.

"*Monsieur* had better go below and change," Perrot continued. "The authorities of Tahiti might ask embarrassing questions of one landing there in the garb of a thief."

"The authorities at Tahiti?" the boy repeated weakly. "You mean——"

"That you are free," the trader interposed.

"Free?" the boy ejaculated. "I don't understand."

The trader shrugged his shoulders.

"*Monsieur's* obtuseness is alarming," he

sneered. "I said free. A price has been paid. *Mademoiselle* begs me to wish you a *bon voyage*."

THE two men measured each other across the open hatchway. The blue eyes of the convict grew hard with the glint of steel. His hands moved convulsively at his side. He was about to leap at Perrot's throat, when a sound above his head caused him to look up.

Maina lo, with her finger upon her lips cautioned him from the open porthole unobserved by the trader or the sailors. Turning his back upon Perrot, the boy picked up the bundle of clothes and threw it down the hatchway.

While the blacksmith worked at his shackles, the boy kept his eye on the porthole. Presently a brown hand grasping a slender, fine-toothed saw was thrust cautiously through the opening. Fascinated, he watched the saw move back and forth across the rudder-stock, six inches above the top pintle. While the blacksmith perspired over the shackles, oblivious to everything save his task, the saw ate its way into the oaken rudder-stock, slowly, relentlessly. Minute flour-like particles of sawdust floated over the heads of the two men on the rising breeze and were lost in the swirling wake of the *L'Aiglon*.

Perrot and the sailors had clambered aboard the brigantine, their task finished. Only the blacksmith remained. The boy prayed for time. In a dozen ingenious ways he delayed the work of the man.

Slowly the gleaming saw-blade sank into the wood. Outwardly calm, he watched its progress with his heart pounding madly against his ribs. Only an inch of the wood now remained. His task completed, the blacksmith rose, tossed the sundered shackles into the sea, picked up his tools and clambered aboard the *L'Aiglon*.

"Son of a thief, let go the hawser," Perrot bawled from the waist of the ship. As the boy bent over the forward hawser-bit to cast off, a sudden lurch of the brigantine swung the *Moonbeam* close under the stern, less than four feet from the porthole. He could almost have touched the girl's face, so close was he. The saw was withdrawn. Only the fraction of an inch of the wood remained.

"Set the mainsail and stand by to windward," she whispered, as his head swept



past and the released *Moonbeam* drifted astern. He heard the faint snap of the parting rudder-stock as he leaped to the halyards and ran up the mainsail and jib, and hove to.

Crouched under the belly of the sail, every nerve alert, he saw a brown figure drop from the porthole of the *L'Aiglon* and come plowing hand over hand through the water toward him. The next moment Maina lo, dripping with brine, swung herself on deck. From the helpless brigantine

came cries of rage. The helmsman spun the useless wheel in his hands. Slowly the disabled craft swung into the wind, sails aback. On the bridge, beside himself with rage, stood Perrot, the trader. The girl waved her hand to him.

"*Bon voyage, m'sieu,*" she sang out. "Twelve seed-pearls you will find in the sack upon the cabin table. The thirteenth—" she turned her wet, radiant face to the boy's—"the thirteenth, *m'sieu,* is my wedding dower. *Au revoir!*"



The Freshet

THE river is a green snake
 Sleeping among snowy hills,
 Stirring on warm days, lifting his head,
 Falling asleep again between white hills—
 But let him hear the earth-music
 Of rain walking over plowed fields,
 Of falls talking in the beech forest,
 Of snow slipping down the white hills,
 The weeping hills—
 Let him taste ditch-water again,
 Drink it, wallow in it,
 And he will cast his skin,
 Lashing from bank to bank all night.

At daybreak
 His jaws will be full of brushwood,
 Full of great logs, grinding and crunching,
 Dripping with brown slaver.
 He will throw his mad length about helpless bridges,
 He will bend down the cottonwoods
 And strip them naked,
 Lashing from bank to bank
 While the hills weep, the white hills.

The rain is walking over plowed fields,
 Running to meet him.
 The hoarse falls shout to him,
 Wild to join him, fettered among the beeches,
 Great voices pealing from the white hills,
 From the weeping hills
 Earth-music.

Bernard Raymund



Mitch Miller*

BY EDGAR LEE MASTERS

A Serial

Conclusion

CHAPTER XXVI

THERE was days in here that I kind of forget. I remembered Mr. Miller gave Mitch a watch which he had always promised him, and it looked good, but didn't run very well. So he was goin' to old Abe Zemple which was a mechanic to fix it. But it seemed to run worse, if anything. One thing that happened there was this: Old Zemple had a clock all apart, the wheels and springs scattered all over the bench. Mitch saw this and for fun he put a extra wheel on the bench with the rest. So when Old Zemple was puttin' the clock together again he couldn't find no place for this wheel, and finally he just left it out, and of course the clock run, havin' all the wheels back in it that really belonged to it. He went around town braggin' about puttin' a clock together with one wheel left out, and it was just as good as if it had all the wheels, and that showed that the factory didn't know about clocks.

But it happened that in fixin' Mitch's watch, old Zemple had left out a little pin, just a little pin that you could hardly see, and Old Zemple found it out and put the

pin in, and then the watch run. Old Zemple told Mr. Miller about leavin' the wheel out of the clock, and Mr. Miller said, "How do you explain it, Abe? You leave a big wheel out of a clock and it runs; and you leave a little pin out of a watch and it won't run? Somethin' wrong. Look into it, Abe. For I've noticed about people that when they try to get somethin' extra into their lives, and fuss around like you did with this wheel tryin' to find a place for it, that they don't need it, and do all right without it; and on the other hand, other people lose somethin' so little it don't seem to count, and yet they can't get along without it. But also sometimes a man thinks he's improved on creation by leavin' somethin' out of his life, or gettin' rid of somethin' in society and it turns out that it didn't belong there, just like this wheel. We get fooled a good deal; for you know, my boy put that extra wheel on your bench." And then Old Zemple said, gettin' mad—"Some boys have lost pins or never had any. Their fathers don't raise 'em up right." And Mr. Miller said: "This town is just full of wheels that have nothin' to do with the

clock. They either belong somewhere else, or they are left overs of other times—like Henry Bannerman.” referring to the man that spent all day every day walkin’ up and down on the stone floor back of the pillars of the court house.

I want to come back to Mitch’s watch. But first I remember it was about now that a troupe came to town playin’ Rip Van Winkle, and Mr. Miller and my pa took Mitch and me to see it. And as we came back home, pa said to Mr. Miller: “Henry Bannerman is a kind of Rip Van Winkle—an extra wheel—he’s been asleep ten years, anyway.” So Mitch and me began to beg for the story about Henry Bannerman, which was that he drank until he had a fever and when he came out of the fever, he was blurred like and not keen like when he could recite Shakespeare and practice law fine. So pa said that onct when Henry first began to practice law again after comin’ out of the fever, he had a little office in the court house and Alcibiades Watkins came in to see him about a boundary fence, and sat down and told Henry about it, takin’ about an hour. When Alcibiades finished, Henry says: “Tell it to me over; it’s a long story and important and I want to get it right.” So Alcibiades told it over. And then Henry says, “You came to consult me, did you?” Alcibiades said yes. “Well,” says Henry, “I’ll have to charge you—I’ll have to charge you two dollars for the advice.” And so Alcibiades took out two dollars and handed it to Henry and waited for the advice. And Henry said: “Well, Alcibiades, I have listened to you for two hours about this boundary, and the boundary fence, and I don’t know a thing about it, and my advice to you is to go and see Mr. Kirby who can understand it and is a good lawyer.” So Alcibiades said, “Well, I know, but I came to you for advice.” “Yes,” said Henry, “I know you did, and I have giv it to you—go and see Mr. Kirby—he’s a good lawyer and will tell you what more to do and how to do it. You see I’m not a barrister—I’m just a solicitor.”

So Mr. Miller and my pa talked, which was as much fun almost as the show. They seemed to know everything and to kind of stand back of Mitch and me, next to God, or somethin’ strong that could keep any harm away.

But to come back to Mitch’s watch.

George Heigold had a piece of lead with printing letters on one side, in copper. They called it a stereotype, and it would print. And he wanted to trade Mitch for the watch, so he offered his stereotype; and as Mitch was crazy about printin’ and books, Mitch traded and was glad of the chance. But when Mr. Miller found it out, he said: “What did you do that for? That lead stereotype ain’t worth nothin’—and here you have traded off your watch which I gave you. You know, I think you are goin’ to be a author—for authors give their time and everything they have to print things—and this looks like the key to your life, and a sign of what your life is goin’ to be. So I think I’ll begin with you and put you in the office of the Observer to learn the printer’s trade like Franklin.”

Of course this stereotype would print; and Mitch printed with it a good deal, but as it always printed the same thing, the fun soon died down and Mitch really wished he had his watch back.

So that’s how Mitch began to set type and help run a newspaper. The editor was Cassius Wilkinson, and a good deal of the time he was in Springfield, and the rest he was talkin’ politics or gettin’ drunk. So that the paper just run itself. The foreman was Dutchie Bale, who used to go to the farm papers or the Chicago papers and just cut great pieces out of ’em and set ’em in type for the paper; and as the editor didn’t care and Dutchie didn’t care what went into the paper, Mitch had a chance to write for the paper himself; and also Mr. Miller slipped in some wonderful things and people began to say that the paper was lookin’ up. While Mr. Wilkinson, the editor, smiled and took the compliments give him just like he deserved ’em. And onct Mitch printed one of his poems about Salem, where one of the verses was:

Down by the mill where Lincoln lived,
Where the waters whirl and swish,
I love to sit when school is out,
Catchin’ a nice cat fish.

I don’t believe Mitch worked in the newspaper more’n a week or ten days, but lots happened; and I went down to see him a good deal to hear Dutchie Bale talk and swear. He swore awful especially on press day, for the press nearly always broke



CHAPTER XXVII

down just as they started to print. Then Dutchie would turn loose:

"Look at the old corn-sheller, look at the old cider mill, look at the junk, (all the time puttin' in the awfulest profanity). Here he's over at Springfield, and me runnin' the paper and tryin' to print a paper on a grindstone like this. I'm goin' to quit—I've had enough of this (more terrible profanity)."

Mitch would be standin' there half-scared and half laughin', and another printer named Sandy Bill would be sayin': "Why don't you tighten that bolt, Dutchie?" Then Dutchie would crawl under the press and start to do what Sandy said, but findin' that the bolt was all right, he'd crawl out again and maybe see Sandy kind of laughin'. So thinkin' Sandy was foolin' him, they'd begin to quarrel, and maybe, it would end with Dutchie throwin' a monkey wrench at Sandy and rushin' out of the room. He'd come back later, for you couldn't really drive him off the place; and maybe after a hour or two the paper would be printed.

Well, Mr. Miller had wrote a long poem about the Indians, and he began to print it, and then somethin' happened. A man named Pemberton, which they called the Jack of Clubs, and a man named Hockey, which they called "Whistlin' Dick" had an awful fight by the corner store, and Mitch wrote up the fight for the paper, the editor bein' in Springfield, and Dutchie not carin' what was printed. Mitch called 'em human wind-mills and when the paper came out, everybody in town began to laugh and the papers sold like hot cakes. Mr. Wilkinson was in Springfield and had nothin' to do with it, but Whistlin' Dick thought Mr. Wilkinson had written the piece and put it in. So he kept goin' to the depot waitin' for Mr. Wilkinson to get off the train from Springfield. When he did, which was in a day or two, he went right up to Mr. Wilkinson and hit him, and then proceeded to lick him until he had enough and got up and ran, though he was sayin' all the time that he didn't write the piece and didn't know nothin' about it. Then Mr. Wilkinson came to the office and read the piece and Dutchie told him that Mitch wrote it. And that ended Mitch as an editor. He was afraid to go back to the office anyway, in addition to bein' fired.

MITCH was now a changed boy and everyone could see it. He didn't come around as much as he used to. At first Mr. Miller set him to work to learn the printer's trade as I have told. That kept him away from me; but after he lost the job, still I didn't see him like I used to. I looked him up a good deal, but he was mostly quiet. He didn't want to fish, or to swim, or to go out to the farm—he just read, Shakespeare and other books; lying in the grass by his house. And he wouldn't come down to see me much, because he said it made him think of Little Billie. And Zueline had gone away with her mother, they said to Springfield; and if she'd been home, Mitch couldn't have seen her anyway. I was terribly lonesome without Mitch and the days dragged, and I kept hearin' of him bein' off with Charley King and George Heigold and it worried me.

Harold Carman had been put in jail, and then let out on bond, which held him to testify in the Rainey case. And one day Mitch came to me and says: "I'm really caught in this law. I've been to see your pa. I thought I'd told my story once and that would do; but he says there'll be a new jury that never has heard about the case or what I know; and I'll have to tell it all over again. And with Harold Carman to tell about their tryin' to get him to say he found a pistol, and my story, they can convict Temple Scott. So I'm caught, and if we had ever so much to do, and ever so much treasure to find, or trips to take, I'd have to put it aside for this here law and testifyin'. And if they knew how I hated it, they'd never ask me if I didn't like it and like makin' a sensation and actin' the part of Tom Sawyer."

Pinafore was played at last, and we all went, but when my pa sang the Merry, Merry Maiden and the Tar, Mitch got up and left the hall, because as he said to me afterward, it brought back that awful night when Joe Rainey was killed. It must have affected others that way too; that and the death of Mrs. Rainey, who had a part in the show. For they only played two nights, instead of three, which they intended. Not enough came to make it worth while.

Then one night I went up to see Mitch and the house seemed quieter. The girls

was playin' as before, but not so wild. Mr. Miller was reading to Mrs. Miller, English history or something; but Mrs. Miller looked kind of like she was tryin' to pay attention. She didn't act interested and happy like she used to. Mitch told me then that his pa had been let out of the church; that while we was gone to St. Louis the trustees met and decided that they wanted a minister who would put a lot of go into the church and get converts and make things hum; that the mortgage on the church had to be met and they couldn't meet it without gettin' more people interested in the church and church work. That may have been all true; but just the same everybody said that Mr. Miller was let go because he preached that sermon about God bein' in everything, which he didn't mean except just as a person talks to himself. He was dreamin' like Mitch when he said it.

So Mr. Miller was goin' to Springfield to see what he could do about gettin' to sell books or maps or atlases, and quit preachin' till a church turned up, or preach a little now and then, and marry folks when he could and preach at funerals. I heard Mr. Miller say to my pa that he was worried about Mitch, that Mitch talked in his sleep and ground his teeth, and talked about engines and horses and findin' pisols and treasure, and ridin' on steamboats, and about Zueline and Tom Sawyer. And he said he'd tried to get him to go out to the farm with me and ride horses and get a change, but he wouldn't. He just read Shakespeare until they hid the book and then they found him readin' Burns; and once Ingersoll's Lectures, which they also took away, because Mr. Miller thought Mitch was too young.

About this time I was about a third through readin' the Bible to earn that five dollars that grandma had promised me. And Mitch asked me what I thought, and I said I didn't understand it much; but in parts it was as wonderful as any book. And Mitch says, "Do you know what the Bible is?" "No," I says, "what is it?" "Why," he says, "The Bible is the Tom Sawyer of grown folks. I know that now; so I don't have to go through the trouble of findin' it out after I'm grown up and depended upon it for a long while. There's the sky and the earth, and there are folks, and we're more or less real to each other, and

there's something back of it. But I believe when you die, you're asleep—sound asleep—I almost know it. And why we should wake up a bit and then go to sleep forever is more than my pa knows or any person in the world knows."

Mitch scared me with his talk. He was so earnest and solemn and seemed so sure.

One night when I was up to Mr. Miller's, it came up somehow what we was goin' to do when we was grown up—Mitch and me—and Mrs. Miller thought we should be taught something to earn a livin' by; and that the schools instead of teaching so much, and teaching Latin and Greek, which nobody used, should teach practical things.

And Mr. Miller said, "Look out! That's comin' fast enough; it's on us already. For back of the schools are the factories and places that always want workers, and they're already usin' the schools to turn out workers, boys who don't know much, or boys who know one thing. And it makes no difference what happens to me—it's just as much or more to know how to enjoy life and to enjoy it, as it is to be able to earn a livin'. If you earn a livin' and don't know how to enjoy life, you're as bad off as if you know how to enjoy life, but can't make a livin' or not much of one. Look here, you boys: Anything that gives you pleasure, like Greek and Latin, stories, history, doin' things, whatever they are, for the sake of livin', are worth while. And you let yourselves go. And don't be moulded into a tool for somebody's use, and lose your own individuality."

And that's the way he talked. And then he said it was all right to dig for treasure if we wanted to and to want to see the Mississippi River and see Tom Sawyer, and he didn't blame us a bit for anything we had done. "Yes," he says, "I'll take you to Springfield to-morrow; ask your pa, Skeet, and come along."

I did; and the next morning we took the train for Springfield; and here was a big town not as big as St. Louis, but awful big. The capital was bigger'n any building in St. Louis, with a great dome and a flag. And Mr. Miller took us out to see Lincoln's monument. Just when we got there, two men in overalls came running from the back of the tomb and said a man—an old soldier—had just killed himself with a knife. So we ran around and found him lyin' in a lot of blood. The men came back



and took a bottle of whisky out of his pocket, and a writing which said that the prohibition party had been defeated, and if it hadn't been he couldn't have got whisky; and so he killed himself because the prohibition party had been defeated. And Mitch says, "What a fool idea! If he wanted the prohibition party defeated, why did he drink and buy whisky; and if he drank and carried whisky in his pocket, why did he want the prohibition party to win, and kill himself because it lost. He was crazy, wasn't he, pa?"

And Mr. Miller said, "Not necessarily—that's sense as things go in the world. Some people want whisky done away with so they can't get it their own selves, and when they can't get a law for that, it disappoints 'em, and they keep on drinkin' because they're disappointed, or kill themselves because their disappointment is too much. For you can depend upon it that any man that gets his mind too much fixed on any idea, is like a cross-eyed man killin' a steer with a sledge hammer; he must hit whar he's lookin'. Lincoln had a way of holdin' to an idea without the idea draggin' him down and away from everything else."

They had carried the dead man off so we went into the tomb to see the curiosities. And there was more things than you could see: All kinds of flags and framed things, pictures and writing and show cases with pistols, and all sorts of trinkets, bullets, and knives; and a pair of spectacles which Lincoln had wore, and a piece of a rail he had split, and books he'd read, and a piece of ribbon with his blood on it the night he died, and a theatre program and lots of other things.

Then we went out doors and looked up at the monument, and it made me dizzy to see the clouds sail over the top of it. And there was a figure of Lincoln in iron, and of soldiers in iron charging, and horses in iron; besides mottoes cut in the stone and in iron. Then we went around to the back again where the old soldier had killed himself. They had the blood wiped up now. So we looked through the iron bars where a stone coffin was, but Lincoln wasn't in there, Mr. Miller said. For once they had tried to steal him, and got the lead coffin out, and clear down the hill that we could see; but they caught 'em. And after that they dug way down and put Lincoln there,

and then poured mortar or concrete all over him, clear up to the top; then laid the floor again and put this marble coffin there, which was a dummy and had nothin' in it. So now nobody could get Lincoln forever and ever.

And then we came around in front again, and Mr. Miller looked up at the statue of Lincoln and began to study it, and he says: "I brought you boys to Springfield and out here to learn and to get things into your mind. You'll remember this trip as long as you live. It's the first time you've ever been here, and you'll be here lots of times again, maybe; but you'll always remember this time. Now, just look at Lincoln's face and his body and tell me how anybody could see him and not see that he was different from other men. Look how his face comes out in the bronze and becomes wonderful, and then think if you can how a handsome face would look in bronze—just the difference between a wonderful cliff or mountain side, and a great, smooth, perfect boulder. And yet, boys, that man went right around here for twenty years, yes and more, all around this town, all around Petersburg, up at Old Salem, all over the country, practicing law, walking along the streets with people, talkin' with 'em on the corners, sittin' with 'em by the cannon stove in the offices of the hotels, sleepin' in the same rooms with 'em as he did up at Petersburg at the Menard House, when the grand jury had the loft and they put Lincoln up there too, because there was no other place to put him."

"The Menard House," says Mitch, "do you mean that hotel there now?"

"The very same," said Mr. Miller, "didn't you know that?"

"No," says Mitch.

"Well, that shows you; you're like the people who lived when Lincoln did, they didn't know him, some of them; and now you don't know the places he went to and the country he lived in; and you'd never have gone to Old Salem, if you hadn't gone there for treasure—would you, Mitch?"

Mitch said he didn't know, maybe not.

"Well," said Mr. Miller, "if you find Lincoln while tryin' to dig up a few rotten dollars, it's all right anyway. Now, boys, look here, it seems an awful time to you since Washington lived, since the Government was founded—but it isn't. We're all



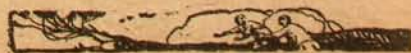
here together, and when you get to be old men, you'll see that you were born and lived in the beginning of the republic. How will it look hereafter? Do you want to know—take a history and look at it now. Let's see! Washington had just been dead ten years when Lincoln was born; Lincoln had been dead eleven years when you were born. When Lincoln was born, the Government had been founded just 23 years, was just a little more than of age. It wasn't but just 80 years old when Lincoln became president. Why these figures are nothing. Think about it. When did Juvenal live? About 42 A. D. When did Virgil and Horace live, and Caesar and Augustus and Domitian? What does 40 years here or there mean when you're lookin' back over hundreds of years or a thousand? And so I say, you boys were born in the beginning of the republic not a hundred years after it was started, and if either of you ever get your names into the history, there it will be beside Lincoln and not far from Washington—for you were born 10 years after Lincoln died and not a hundred after Washington. Well, there you are. You're young and the republic is young, and the chance is before you to do for the country and help out, for we're havin' bad times now, and they'll be worse. After every war, times is bad, and we're goin' to have other wars and worse'n ever."

Then Mr. Miller said: "There's two kinds of men—at least two. One that thinks and one that acts; or one that tells people what to do, and others that listen and do it, or else have thought it out first themselves and do it. Well, look at Lincoln up there. Here he was over at Old Salem running a store, surveyin'; then in politics a little, then a lawyer; but mostly for twenty years he was thinkin' about the state of the country, slavery and things; and he thought it all out. Then they elected him president, and he acted out what he thought.

"Well, don't you suppose he could have got rich practicing law or tradin' in land? He was a good lawyer—none better! Why didn't he get fees and save and buy land during the twenty years he practiced law? Because his mind was set on the country, on how to make the country better, on being a shepherd of the people. The man who thinks of money all the time, thinks

of himself; and the man who thinks of the country and wants to help it is thinking of what can be done for people and how the country can find treasure in having better people, and better laws, and better life and more of it. Yes, sir, boys, you'll find somewhere that Lincoln said his ambition was to be well thought of by his fellow citizens and to deserve to be. And it never occurred to him that he could do that by gettin' money.

"Don't you boys think I'm lecturin' you for huntin' for treasure, or that I want either of you to grow up and be as poor as I am. I don't. I want you to have sense and provide for yourselves; Lincoln did that; he really had plenty after he got fairly started. But on the other hand, gold as gold I hate, and I see it getting power in this country. Why, it has it now. Look at Lincoln's face, what do you think he'd think of what's happened since the war—the robbery, ruin and conquest of the south, the money grabbing and privilege grabbing at the north, the money deals in New York, the money scandals everywhere—the treasure hunting everywhere—and not a big man left in the country; none of the old, fine characters left who built their lives on foundations of wisdom and service and makin' the country better—none of these left to come forward and take the country out of the hands of these vultures, wolves, hyenas. And what are we going to have. Is money goin' to be the master in this country, or is man goin' to be? I hate it—I hate it as Lincoln hated it when he asked whether the dollar or the man should be put first. And I hate it because it is brainless, spiritless. It cares for nothing but itself. It is a snake that swallows and sleeps and wakes to eat again. It is a despot; it is without love, genius, morality. It is against people, against God, against the country. It is as wicked as Nero, as gluttonous as a cormorant; and it makes cowards, slaves, lick-spittles of some of the best of men. In this country, intended to be of free men, where men could grow and come to the best that is in them, already we find these laws and principles mocked—by what? By gold, by riches; and we find talented men and good men compelled to step aside for rich men; and rich men held higher than good and useful lawyers, preachers or anything else. Well, there's Lincoln: and if never again in the history



of this country a rail-splitter, a boy who worked up from nothing with his hands and his mind, comes to rulership, still there's Lincoln, on whom no rich man could frown and no big-bellied capitalist could patronize or ignore or make step aside. Why, it's great—it makes me happy, it gives me hope. And I can see for ages and ages the face of Lincoln on books, on coins, on monuments; until some day his face will be the symbol of the United States of America, when the United States of America has rotted into the manure piles of history with Tyre and Babylon, as it will if it doesn't turn back and be what Lincoln was: a man who worked and thought, and whose idea was to have a free field, just laws, and a democracy where to make a man and not make a dollar is the first consideration."

And then Mr. Miller said: "Yes, this is a great monument and Lincoln was a great man. You see when all the sap-heads and poets down in New England and all over was hollerin' for nigger equality and to give the nigger a vote and to marry him, and give him the same right as anybody, Lincoln just kept cool; and he didn't even emancipate the nigger until he had to in order to win the war. It was to win the war, understand. He wasn't swept off his feet by anybody, orators or poets or yawpers—nobody. But you'll see when you grow up what the difference is between not havin' the nigger for a slave and allowin' him to vote and marry you; and you'll see that what Lincoln said when he went over the country debatin' with Douglas, speakin' at Havana, and right here in Springfield and at Petersburg, too, he said to the last and acted on to the last. It was after the war and after Lincoln was dead that these here sniffers and scalawags got into power and pushed it over until they gave the nigger the vote and all that. And if this country goes to pieces because the good breeds have been killed off and die off, and the country is run by the riff-raff, then Lincoln, say 500 years from now, will stand greater than he is to-day, unless the world can then see that the nigger should have been kept a slave, so as to let the wise and the intelligent have time to think better and work better for the good of the country. For boys, you can put it down that a country ain't good that is run on the principle of countin' noses, and lettin' everybody have a say just because he walks on

two legs and can talk instead of barkin' or waggin' his tail." And so Mr. Miller went on.

Then Miller said damn or that something could be "dammed." And Mitch says, "Pa, did you know you swore?" And Mr. Miller says: "I shouldn't have, and don't you follow my example. But sometimes I get so mad about the country."

So we had seen the monument and walked away; and when we got a long way from it, we turned around and looked at it for the last.

Then Mr. Miller said he was glad he was out of the church, that he had tried to do certain things, but they wouldn't let him, and kept him in a groove. And now he was going to sell atlases and geographies, and be a free man, and maybe write a book. And he said: "The idea seems to be that goodness, spirituality, is church. It isn't, and it never was; it wasn't when the Savior came; He found goodness and spirituality in a lot of things, in a free life, in the freedom of out-doors, and not in the synagogues. Now boys, believe in the Bible, in the Savior—I mean that; but don't let that belief make you into a membership with those who live for denial, for observation of injunctions, for abstinence from life, more or less, for solemnity, for religion as business, and business as religion, and religion for business. This is not goodness—not spirituality. Lincoln was good and spiritual—he believed in the mind and he used it. Wisdom, beauty, play, adventure, friendship, love, fights for the right, and for your rights, travel, everything, anything that keeps the mind going; and kindness, generosity, hospitality, laughter, trips down the Mississippi, making cities beautiful and clean, having fun,—all these things are spirituality and goodness. They are religion—they are the religion of the Savior. They will make America; and they ought to be Americanism."

So Mr. Miller went on. I can't remember half he said, but it was plain he was worked up. Losin' his church or something had set his thoughts free; and everything considered, I think he wanted to give us some ideas about things. And so after lookin' at Lincoln's home, a frame house, not very big, not fine, but a good house; and lookin' at the furniture and things he had, we took the train back to Petersburg.



CHAPTER XXVIII

I COULD see plainer and plainer that I was losin' Mitch. There was something about having this business together of huntin' for treasure that kept us chums; and now that was over and if we didn't get something else, where would we end up? Mitch said that the trip to Springfield had cured him of being mad at his pa for takin' us to Hannibal to see Tom Sawyer the butcher. And he said: "Suppose you was at Old Salem fishin' and you had a can of worms for bait, or thought you had, and you was really out of worms, which would be better, to set there and think you had bait and go on believin' that until you began to catch fish and needed lots of bait and found you hadn't none, or to find out you hadn't none all of a sudden and then go get some in time for the fishin' that got good? And so, wasn't it better to find out that Tom Sawyer didn't live and find it out suddenly than to go along being fooled until something serious happened, and be a fool to the end, and maybe lose some good chance." What I wanted to tell Mitch was that our case was real, that we had found treasure and would get it on Christmas; but I had promised my pa I wouldn't tell, and I didn't. I only said to Mitch: "We're just as sure to get treasure as the sun shines." And Mitch said: "Maybe, but not real treasure, not money, not jewels, or things like that."

As I said, I was surely losin' Mitch, for he was goin' considerable now with Charley King and George Heigold. I don't know what he found with them to like; only they were older and as it turned out, he did things with them that he and I never did. I tried my best to hold on to him, but couldn't. Sometimes I'd think I wasn't losin' him, that it was just fancy. Just the same things wasn't the same. The Miller family wasn't the same; there wasn't as much fun up there; and now Mr. Miller was away a good deal selling atlases; and sometimes when I was there of evenings Mrs. Miller would be sittin' alone, no one reading to her, and the girls kind of walkin' the rooms, and Mitch a good deal away of evenings, not home like he always was before.

You see I had a pony all the time; but pa loaned him here and there, and sometimes took him out to pasture across the

river to a farmer's and that's how it was I didn't ride him sometimes out to the farm. But now he was in the barn, and as I didn't have Mitch, I rode about the country by myself. And once went out to the farm for a few hours, comin' back to town in a gallop all the way, to see how quick I could make it.

Finally I thought I'd go out to the farm on my pony and stay for a few days, and go camping with my uncle over to Blue Lake. I was goin' the next day and was out under the oak tree when Mitch came along. He seemed stronger, bigger, more like Charley King and George Heigold; there was something about him kind of hard. He seemed as if he'd fight easier; he was quick to talk back, he seemed to be learnin' about things I didn't know. There was a different look in his eyes. He was changed. That's all I know. Mitch sat down in the grass and began to make traps out of timothy to catch crickets. Somebody had taught him that. His face began to change. He began to look friendlier and like himself again, except he looked older and like he knew more. And then he began to talk:

"Skeet," he says, "I'm not Tom Sawyer, and I never was; never any more than you was Huckleberry Finn. I know who I am now. Do you?"

"No," says I. "Who are you?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Skeet—I'm Hamlet."

"Hamlet—who was he?"

"Well," says Mitch, "he was a prince."

"Well, you ain't," says I.

"No, I ain't. But Hamlet could be just like me and not be the preacher's son; and because he wasn't wouldn't make him different. Yes, sir, I'm Hamlet. I've read the play and thought about it a lot. And I know now who I am. And you, Skeet, are Horatio."

"Who was he?" says I.

"He was Hamlet's friend, just as you are my friend. And as far as that goes, there was never any persons more alike in this world than you and Horatio. You are good and steady, and don't change, and you are a good friend, you have got sense, and you have no troubles of your own, and so you can listen to mine, as Horatio listened to Hamlet's."

"What troubles have you?" says I.

"Lots," says Mitch, "that is general troubles—of course Zueline and this here



court worries. I've got to testify again. I'm tangled up just like Hamlet was, and I want to get away like he did, and I can't. And it teaches me that it ain't because I'm a boy that I can't get away, for Hamlet was a man and he couldn't. He was getting old, most 30, and he couldn't do any more with his life than I can with mine—not as much, maybe."

"And yet you say he was a prince."

"Yes, but what difference did that make? Did you ever see a chip get caught in a little shallow in the river in the reeds; and then see it get out of the shallow by the current changing or something, and then see it start down the river all gay and free, and run into some brush floating, or get thrown against the logs to one side of the dam and held there? Well, Hamlet was a prince, and he was just a chip caught by the dam and couldn't budge and kept tryin' to and couldn't. This is what my pa says the play means; but also I can see it for myself. I keep readin' it and it gets clearer. And pa says it will never make any difference how old I get, the play will be wonderfuler and wonderfuler, and is to him; and that finally I'll wonder how any man could ever write such a thing."

"But didn't Shakespeare—he wrote it, didn't he?—get it out of some history?"

"Of course," says Mitch, "and didn't Lincoln live, and right here in this town, as you might say? But suppose somebody could write up Lincoln and use the very things that Lincoln did and said, not as we hear 'em around here, wonderful as they are; but write 'em up so that you'd know what Lincoln really was and why and all about it. For that matter, take Doc Lyon. We know he was a lunatic, but why, and what for, and just what it means to be a lunatic, I don't know and no one will know until some Shakespeare writes him up. For that matter, some folks think that Hamlet was a lunatic."

"Well, you ain't, Mitch," says I.

"No more than Hamlet was. He just was troubled and his mind kept workin' and that's me. But what would you say if I was the son of Joe Rainey and Mrs. Rainey?"

"How do you mean?" says I.

"Well, suppose I was their son, and suppose I knew that Mrs. Rainey, my mother, wanted Joe Rainey, my father, dead, and put it into Temple Scott's mind to kill my

father, Joe Rainey; and then Temple Scott did kill him, and then Mrs. Rainey, my mother, put a pistol down so as to make it seem that my father, Joe Rainey, had carried a pistol? Suppose I was their son and was up in the tree and saw what I saw, what would I do?"

"Then you'd have to testify," said I.

"You don't know what you're sayin', Skeet. You don't see that I love my father, and he's been murdered; and I love my mother, and she has really murdered him. And if I testify against my mother, I get her hanged, and if I don't testify against her, then I wrong my father that I love; my mother goes free, and sometimes I hate her, because she is free, and my father has been robbed of his life, and I do nothing to punish her and Temple Scott for taking his life away. That's the worst of it; or maybe it's just as bad because I'm tangled in law and can't do what I want to do—can't be free to hunt treasure, we'll say, or do what I want to. Don't you see what a fix I'm in. Then suppose with findin' out what my mother is, the whole world changes for me—I get suspicious of my girl, and won't marry her and everything goes bad and finally I get killed myself, after killin' Temple Scott who's married my mother, we'll say, and in a way cause my mother to die too."

"Well, of course all this can't be," says I, "for you're not the Rainey's son;—they're both dead anyway, and Temple Scott will probably be hanged, and no one will kill you—you'll grow up and get married—not to Zueline—"

"No," says Mitch, "never to her. For I ain't suspicious of her—I'm just done with her, just like Hamlet was done with Ophelia. I know her as he knew Ophelia, though she's different from Ophelia. She's cold, Skeet, and never understood me. I see that now. If she had, she'd never let her mother keep her away from me. Nothin' can keep a girl away from you that loves you. And I'll tell you something right now. Not long ago, I was walkin' by her house on purpose and she came out goin' somewhere. I tried to talk to her, and tell her that we could meet sometimes, maybe down at Fillmore Springs, or take a little walk at dusk or early evening; and that I wouldn't bother her much, only we'd understand that by and by we'd get married and be together forever, and I'd go



away happy if I could have that hope. Well, she kind of turned on me and said no, and hurried on. And, Skeet, when I saw that, when I saw that it was her as well as her ma that wanted me away, and meant to keep away from me—something kind of froze through me—or burned maybe, and then froze—my heart got like a big stone, and I could see it just as if it had been scald and then turned white and shiny and kind of numb like my foot I cut in two. I began to laugh, and since then I have been changed and I'll never be the same again. My ma said it was foolish, that I was just a little boy and I'd grow up and it would all be forgotten. But I know better—I'm Hamlet—and I don't forget and I never will. Do you remember one time when you and I was out to your grandpa's farm and Willie Wallace was settin' out trees?"

I said yes.

"Well," says Mitch, "Willie Wallace that time cut a gash in a tree with the pruner while handlin' it and settin' it out. And he says to us, 'That tree will never get over that. By and by it will be a big scar, growin' big as the tree grows big, and grown over, maybe, but still a scar; or worse, it may stay open more or less and rain and frost will get in, and insects, and after while it will be a great rotten place, a hole for a snake or a rat, or maybe a bird.' Well, pa says that Linkern lost Anne Rutledge and that he thinks Linkern's beautiful talk and wonderful words came from losin' Anne Rutledge. I don't quite see how—but if it did, then if a bird gets into the hole in the tree, that's a sign that you say somethin' or write somethin' because you've been gashed, just as pa says that Shakespeare wrote his wonderfulest plays and sonnets because he'd lost a woman. And sometimes I think I'm goin' to write something. I keep hearin' music all the time, and I try to write words down, but they don't mean anything, they are silly; so I tear 'em up."

So Mitch went on and he worried me. And I says: "Mitch, I'm goin' to say something to you! Do you like me as much as you used to?"

"Every bit," says he. "Why?"

"Because," says I, "you don't always act the same. And besides, you keep goin' with Charley King and George Heigold—and—and—"

"And what?" says Mitch.

"And—I was afraid you liked 'em better'n me."

"Why," says Mitch, "them two boys is just grave diggers compared to you—or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—while you are Horatio all the time."

He explained to me what he meant by this, which was that in Hamlet, Hamlet talked to grave diggers and to two men named Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, without givin' a snap for 'em compared to Horatio.

Then I said, "I'm goin' out to the farm to-morrow. School will begin in about three weeks. I'm goin' out on my pony, and you can ride behind. And you'd better come. We'll have a lot of fun, and my uncle is goin' to take me campin' to Blue Lake." So Mitch said he'd go and after a bit he began to repeat something he'd committed to memory like this:

O what can ail thee, knight at arms,
Alone and palely loitering,
The sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight at arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone,
The squirrels' granary is full,
And the harvest done.

I met a lady in the mead
Full beautiful, a faery's child.
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I saw pale kings and warriors too,
Pale princes, death pale were they all.
They said La Belle Dame Sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall."

Mitch was goin' on with this when we heard some boys whistle. It was Charley King and George Heigold. They called Mitch to the fence and talked. Then Mitch called back and said, "I'm goin', Skeet—come for me—what time?"

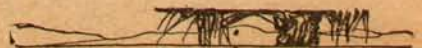
"I'll be up about 7," I said.

And Mitch climbed over the fence, and went with these boys.

I went up to the fence and follered them with my eyes till they turned the corner by Harris' barn and was gone.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE NEXT morning I was on my pony and up to Mitch's house at 7, and whistled and whistled. By and by one of



the girls came out and said Mitch had staid all night at Charley King's and wasn't home yet. So I went over there; but he and Charley was up and gone already. Mrs. King came to the door, came out and stood by the pony and petted him and said I had pretty eyes, same as before. Then she said Charley and Mitch had gone somewhere. She didn't know where. So I rode off and rode around a bit and then I started for the farm, thinkin' that Mitch had treated me mean—and why would he for Rosencrantz or Guilderstern? whichever Charley King was. I was sure Mitch would turn up and the next day grandpa was goin' to town early to be home by three o'clock, and he said he'd bring Mitch out if he could find him.

My uncle now was in a mood to go camping to Blue Lake. So we got the tent out and began to mend it where it needed it, and fix the ropes. We took the guns and cleaned 'em, and I helped my uncle load a lot of shells. We set aside some pie plates and cups and did a lot of tinkerin' around. Grandma didn't want us to go. She was afraid we'd get drowned or shoot ourselves, or that a storm would come up and we'd get struck by lightning.

In the afternoon old Washington Engle came and he and grandpa sat under the maple trees and talked old times, even about Indians, for they had been in the Black Hawk war together, and they had seen the country grow from buffalo grass to blue grass and clover. I sat there listenin' and pretty soon a buggy pulled up and somebody called in a loud voice and laughed. It was John Armstrong and Aunt Caroline. They had drove over to visit and John had brought his fiddle to play some of the old things for grandma—some of the things he had played year before when Aunt Mary was sick and grandma was takin' care of her. Grandpa liked gospel tunes, like "Swing Lo, Sweet Chariot," but grandma liked "Rocky Road to Jordan" and "The Speckled Hen" and John could play these and couldn't play religious tunes worth a cent. And John told stories as before; and he told about a man at Oakford who never had any money and always wanted drinks. So he took a jug and filled it half full of water and went to Porky Jim Thomas' saloon and asked for a half a gallon of alcohol, and Porky Jim poured it in. Then this man said to Porky

Jim, "Charge it, please," and Porky Jim says: "Why, you ain't got a cent, and you never pay anybody." So he took up the jug and poured out what he had poured in and told the man to take the jug and go. And he did and had of course a half gallon all mixed. John laughed terribly at his own story—the women didn't laugh, nor grandpa. My uncle did, and I, that's all.

Then Aunt Caroline helped grandma get supper and we had a lot of fun and they drove home.

The next day grandpa started early for Petersburg, so as to be back by three o'clock for something. And my uncle and me was getting ready, because we was goin' to drive to Blue Lake that night, pitch the camp, and fish while it was quiet. So we had to grease the wagon and do a lot of things. And grandpa was to bring Mitch.

Three o'clock looked like it never would come. But at last about three I saw the white horses on the far hill, and then I saw them pulling hard and slow up the near hill and I could see grandpa now but couldn't see Mitch; and I watched and looked. Then I thought he was hid under the seat; or had dropped off to walk and come in later and fool me.

Grandpa drove in the lot. His face was set. He looked serious. He didn't look at me. He held the lines and looked straight ahead. I climbed on the carriage and says, "Where's Mitch?" Just then my uncle came up to unhitch the horses. My grandpa threw him the lines and grandpa got out of the carriage. Then he said, speaking really to my uncle and not to me: "Mitchie Miller was killed this afternoon on the railroad."

"Grandpa," I cried, "Grandpa."

My grandfather's eyes were purple—they had grown deep and almost terrible to see. And he said: "Yes, son," and hurried toward the house.

I went to the barn. I saddled and bridled my pony. I leaped into the saddle and struck my heels into the pony's flanks, and away I went in a run all the way to Petersburg—six miles and not a pause or a let up.

When I got there in a little more than half an hour, I found that they had Mitch up at the house of Widow Morris. So I went there. He was still alive—and they let me in. It was terrible. Such a smell of ether—medicines. Such whispermings—such

fulness in the room. The doctor said we'd have to clear out, some of us. And some left. I staid long enough to see Mitch. His eyes were closed. His face was yellow—I could see blood. I turned siek and went out of the room. Just as I got to the door I heard Mitch say, "Has pa come?" They said, "He's comin' Mitchie, be patient, he's comin'." Then I stood by the door.

And pretty soon Mrs. Miller came and the girls and my mother and Myrtle and most everyone. It seemed Mr. Miller was away selling atlases, but would be home soon, maybe, or maybe not till late, and maybe not till to-morrow. All the girls cried like their hearts would break; and Mrs. Miller knelt down by the bed, and Mitch says to her "Where's pa?" And she says, "He's comin', Mitchie." And then she choked and had to walk away. They cleared the room now pretty much, and of course Mrs. Miller allowed me to be in the room if I wanted to, and could stand it. But I stood by the door, or just inside a little for Mitch was talkin'. Finally they let me go to the bed-side, and Mitch saw me and says, "Skeet," and then turned his head kind of over as if he wanted to say something he couldn't bear to say.

Then Mitch began to talk more. "Don't row so fast," he'd say—"The river's gettin' swifter. Take the horses from that engine. I'm goin' to see Tom Sawyer—I can fly to him—fly—fly—fly—Zueline—it's you, is it?"

Then he kind of woke up and says: "Is Zueline here?" And they said "No, but she was comin';" but she wasn't; she was out of town, and probably wouldn't have come anyway. And then he said—"Get my pa—he must forgive me before I die."

By this time I knew how Mitch was hurt. He'd been with Charley King and George Heigold, and they had been flippin' on the train. And Mitch was ridin' on the side of a car with his foot hangin' down that he had cut in two, draggin' against the wheel, which he didn't notice because his foot was numb from being cut in two when he was four or five years old. So the train gave a lurch and dragged him under, and the wheels cut him at the hip. It couldn't be amputated by the doctor, and they couldn't stop the bleedin'.

Then Mitch began to repeat all kinds of poetry from Hamlet and things I didn't

know and he repeated what he had recited to me that day:

I saw pale kings and warriors too,
Pale princes, death pale were they all.
They said La Belle Dame Sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall.

And he talked about flyin', about treasure, about St. Louis, about Doc. Lyon, and Joe Rainey and the pistol; and once he talked as if he thought he was testifyin' in court; and he said—"Now we're on the Mississippi—how fast the boat goes—don't run so fast." But always he'd come to and say where's my pa.

And after a bit there was a stir—Mr. Miller came—pushed his way through. He was pale as ashes, all trembling, out of breath, for he'd run up the hill. And he came to the bedside, but Mitch was dreamin' again, drifting and dreaming, and talking about boats, about money, about Hamlet, about treasure, about pale kings and warriors and death pale princes. But pretty soon he says, "Where's my pa? Is he never comin'?"

"I'm here," said Mr. Miller.

Mitch opened his eyes and looked at his father for about a minute and saw his pa had come. He was pretty weak now and it was hard for him to speak. But finally he said, "Take my hand—pa." And Mr. Miller took it. And then nothin' was said for a while. And then Mitch spoke again—"Forgive me, pa." And Mr. Miller, who was tryin' to keep from cryin' so as not to worry Mitch, says, "Oh yes, Mitchie." And then Mitch says: "Say a little prayer, pa." And Mr. Miller knelt by the bed to say a prayer, and Mitch says—"Not out loud—just to yourself."

So Mr. Miller did, and then Mitch wandered again and he says, "Don't row so fast." Then there was a terrible stillness. Mitch had died with them words.

And my friend—my chum, was gone for good.

CHAPTER XXX

AND then there was the funeral. It was held at Mr. Miller's house and everybody was there; my grandpa, my grandma, my uncle, John Armstrong and Aunt Caroline, Willie Wallace, Col. Lambkin, Nigger Dick, Dinah, my ma and Myrtle, all the Sunday School children, and

George Montgomery. Only Charley King and George Heigold wasn't there. They were afraid, bein' partly responsible for Mitch's death. And when everybody was seated and ready, Zueline and her ma came. They was all dressed up, and everybody looked at 'em. Mr. Miller, of course, couldn't preach the sermon for his own boy; so they sent for a wonderful preacher over at Jacksonville and he talked for about an hour about pearly gates and the golden streets of paradise; and there was Mitch lyin' there, pale, his eyes sealed, just asleep, but in such a deep breathless sleep. And they had the church choir there which sang:

"I will sing you a song of that beautiful land,
Of the far away home of the soul,
Where no storms ever beat on that glittering
strand,
While the years of eternity roll."

And the minister went on to say how good God was, how no sparrow falls except He knows it, how all our hairs was numbered and how God loves us, and would comfort the father and mother and brothers and sisters, and little friends; and how if it hadn't been for the best, Mitch wouldn't have died; and that God knew best and we didn't; and if we could look ahead and see the dreadful things that would happen, we'd know that God was good and wise to take Mitch away before they happened—while he was yet a boy, and had had no trouble and all the world was still beautiful to him. And he talked about sin and what suffering does for people, how it makes 'em humble before God, and respectful and at last saves 'em if they will heed the lessons and turn to God. Everybody cried when the last song was sung, especially the children who sobbed out loud and Mr. Miller and Mrs. Miller and the Miller children—and I looked over at Zueline and her ma. Her ma was just lookin' down. I thought I saw a tear in Zueline's eyes, but I'm not sure. So we went out to the cemetery and they buried Mitch not far from Little Billie. So it was all over. We began to separate and get into carriages or walk. And pretty soon I was home. There was nothing there. My ma went in and began to do something. Myrtle went out to the swing. I went in the house but couldn't stand it, and then came out and hung on the gate.

After a bit Charley King came along and asked me about everything. Pa said Mitch had been running with Charley King and George Heigold, and they got him into things too much for his age, flippin' cars and such things, and that's how Mitch lost his life. You see I'd been scared about this; I didn't want Mitch to go with 'em; I didn't know why; but now it was clear.

And with everything else, it was Sunday, for Mitch had died Friday, four or five hours after he was run over. And it was only a week now till School would take up.

The next day I went down to the office with pa. I wanted to be close to him; he was a man; he was strong, and I was lonesome and grievin', and at night always dreamin' of Mitch. And after a while Mr. Miller came in, and Mrs. Miller too. They looked terrible sad and pale. Here was Mr. Miller out of a church and not makin' much, and here they had lost their only boy.

So pa went over to his safe and got the \$1,000; he had it in two envelopes, one marked with my name and one with Mitch's; and he came back, holdin' 'em in his hand and he said: "You know that these boys found that money that belonged to old Nancy Allen. Well, a fellow named Joe Allen turned up here from Pike County—a third cousin of hers—and her only livin' relative, and I had this money for him. But when I told him that these boys had found it while lookin' for treasure, and what kind of boys they were, the old fellow remembered his own boy-hood, his poverty, and all that and he wanted to do something for these boys. So he made me take this thousand dollars to divide between 'em." Mrs. Miller began to sob. And Mr. Miller's voice was broken, but he said, "Hard, I never heard anything like this—never in my life." "Well, here's the money," says pa; "and I made Skeet promise not to tell anybody about it until we got ready to." He stopped; and I, not thinkin', said: "It was to be a secret till Christmas."

Then Mrs. Miller broke down completely, and for several minutes nothin' was said. My pa was cryin', so was I. So was Mr. Miller, and just then the train came in, the same that had killed Mitch, and it seemed like none of us could stand it.

After a bit pa says: "Of course, half of this money goes to you and Mrs. Miller under the law, and the other half belongs



to Skeet—but I'm not going to let him take it. He doesn't need it. I can always take care of him, and I'll inherit quite a lot, and he'll have that. And as far as that goes, it wasn't his idea to hunt for treasure—he was just a helper and followed up Mitchie's idea. So now here it is, and it goes with my blessing and with Skeet's."

And I said, "Indeed it does." And pa handed the envelopes to Mr. Miller, and he took 'em and fingered 'em in a nervous way and he says: "What shall we do, ma—we need the money, but somehow I don't like it, and I won't take Skeet's share, would you?"

And she says, "No—never—I'd never take Skeet's share; that is Mitchie's share and his too." "Here," he says, "here's the envelope marked with Mitchie's name, you take this, Skeet, because you and Mitchie worked together, and if you want to give me the envelope marked with your name, I guess I'll take it—I seem to have to."

So that's the way it was done. And he said to pa: "Hard, there never was a better man than you, or a better name or family than yours, or a better boy than Skeet." Then the tears came in his eyes, and he and Mrs. Miller left. And afterwards I said to pa, "I don't want this money. If I could have had it with Mitch, if we could have spent it together for velocipedes—and dogs, and sets of tools, for scroll saws, watches and whatever we wanted, and soda water, when we wanted it, and bananas, which we never had much because they cost ten cents a piece—for anything, that would have been different. But now it's just so much rags or paper, and I haven't got any use for it whatever. I am Huck Finn at last—the money means nothing to me. It meant nothing to Huck because when he got it, he had to put on shoes and dress up. And now I've got it, I've lost the only thing that made it worth while. I've lost Mitch who made it interestin' to get, and would have made it interestin' to spend."

Then I told pa I wanted to give it to the Miller girls, barrin' just a few dollars to buy a present for ma and grandma and Myrtle, maybe—and I wanted them to take enough to put up a stone at Mitch's grave with some words on it, suitable to him.

So pa said he thought that was all right. And I took out \$20 and we put the rest in

the bank in the names of the Miller girls—and that ended the treasure.

So next Monday school commenced, and I sat in my seat lookin' out of the window. Zueline had been taken to a girl's school in Springfield so as to get her out of the common schools and her mother had gone with her to stay all winter. And every day the train came through that Mitch was killed on. The days went by; the fall went by; the winter came. The snow began to fall on Mitch's grave and Little Billie's; and still we went on. Delia got the meals as before; the wash woman came and did the washing on Monday; pa was buying wood for the stoves; we had to be fitted out for winter. Grandma and grandpa came in to see us, cheerful and kind as they always were. Once he carried a half a pig up the hill and brought it to us; and they were always giving us things; and grandma was always knitting me mittens and socks. They had lost a lot of children, two little girls the same summer, a daughter who was grown, a grown son who was drowned. They seemed to take Mitchie's death and Little Billie's death as natural and to be stood. And they said it wouldn't be long before we'd all be together never to be separated and then we'd all be really happy.

And finally the December court came around and they tried Temple Scott. Harold Carman testified to what he had said to the woman on the boat. And Major Abbott was kerflumxed and lost the case. Temple Scott got 14 years in prison—and that ended that. He went there and staid.

And then Christmas came and in the evening I went up to the Millers'. The girls were playing about the same as before. Mr. Miller was reading Shakespeare to Mrs. Miller and he looked up finally and said, "Ma, I've just thought of an epitaph for Mitchie's stone—here it is in Hamlet: 'The rest is silence.'" And Mrs. Miller said yes and put her knitting down to count stitches. The girls rushed into the room laughing and chasing each other. And then I went home.

I had presents, but what were presents? My chum was gone. I thought of the last Christmas when we was all together—Mitch was here then and Little Billie. I couldn't enjoy anything. I crept up to bed and fell asleep and dreamed of Mitch.

Mr. Masters' epilogue to "Mitch Miller" is published on the opposite page in The Meeting-Place



The Meeting-Place

HERE is the Epilogue to Edgar Lee Masters' "Mitch Miller."

Perhaps it should have been printed on the opposite page as a part of the final instalment, but it seemed to be so personal in content and to explain so clearly Mr. Masters' reasons for writing the story that we felt it really belonged in *The Meeting-Place*, which is, after all, only the glance of an eye away.

YOU will be surprized to know how I came to write this story. But before I tell you that, I want to say that if Mitch had written it, it would have been much better. I sit here, dipping my nose in the Gascon wine, so to speak, as Thackeray wrote of himself; and I know now that Mitch was a poet. He would have made poems out of his life and mine, beautiful songs of this country, of Illinois, of the people we knew, of the honest, kindly men and women we knew; the sweet-faced old women who were born in Kentucky or Tennessee, or came here to Illinois early in their youth; the strong, courtly, old fashioned men, carrying with them the early traditions of the republic, in their way, Lincolns—honest, truth telling, industrious, courageous Americans—plain and unlettered, many of them, but full of the sterling virtues. Yes, he would have written poems out of these people; and he would have done something more—he would have given us symbols, songs of eternal truth, of unutterable magic and profound meaning like "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." I am sure he would have done something of this kind—though it is idle to say he would have written any-

thing as immortal as that. You must only indulge me in my partiality for Mitch and my belief in his genius, and hope with me that he might have done these great things.

And yet! And now why did I write this story? As I was sitting with my nose in the Gascon wine, which is a strange figure, since there is no Gascon wine here, and no wine of any sort since a strange sort of despot has got control of the country, for the time being only, I hope—as I said, as I was sitting with my nose in the Gascon wine, I was also reading, and I was alone. I have had chums, I have had companions, but none like Mitch, never in all my life. And being alone, I was reading—what do you suppose? I had been out for the evening, I had found a book lying on the table of my host, I had looked in the book and begun to read. My host saw I was intrigued and said, "Take it along." I did, and was reading before going to bed. The book was the letters of John Keats to Fanny Brawne— Well, don't you suppose these letters made me think of Mitch who had repeated "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" to me and was uttering some of its marvelous lines with his dying breath? But this was not all. Let me quote one of Keats' letters to Fanny Brawne:

"When you were in the habit of flirting with Brown, you would have left off, could your own heart have felt one half of one pang mine did. Brown is a good sort of man—he did not know he was doing me to death by inches. I feel the effect of every one of those hours in my side now; and for that cause, though he has done me many services, though I know his love and friendship for me, though at this moment I should be without pence were it not for his

assistance, I will never see or speak to him, until we are both old men, if we are to be. I will resent my heart having been made a football. You will call this madness. I have heard you say that it was not unpleasant to wait a few years—you have amusements—your mind is away,—you have not brooded over one idea as I have, and how should you? You are to me an object intensely desirable—the air I breathe in a room empty of you is unhealthy. I am not the same to you—no—you can wait—you have a thousand activities—you can be happy without me. Any party, any thing to fill up the day has been enough. How have you passed this month? Whom have you smiled with? All this may seem savage in me. You do not feel as I do—you do not know what it is to love—one day you may—your time is not come. Ask yourself how many unhappy hours Keats has caused you in loneliness. For myself I have been a martyr the whole time, and for this reason I speak; the confession is forced from me by the torture. I appeal to you by the blood of Christ you believe in. Do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have harried me to have seen. You may have altered—if you have not—if you still behave in dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you—I do not want to live—if you have done so, I wish this coming night may be my last. I cannot live without you and not only you but chaste you; virtuous you. The sun rises and sets, the day passes, and you follow the bent of your inclinations to a certain extent—you have no conception of the quantity of miserable feeling that passes through me in a day—Be serious. Love is not a plaything—and again do not write unless you can do it with a crystal conscience. I would sooner die for want of you than—

Yours forever,

J. KEATS.

Then I turned back a few pages in my disconnected way of reading this book, and I found these words: Fanny Brawne to whom this agonized letter of Keats' was written wrote to a Mr. Dilke ten years after Keat's death in regard to a memoir proposed to the dead, and in the following unconcerned and ignorant way:

"The kindest act would be to let him rest forever in the obscurity to which circumstances have condemned him."

No remembrance here for Keats' adoration; no thrill that a human heart, even if it had been the heart of an ordinary man, had poured out its last devotion to hers; no pity for his obscurity, if it was such, his untimely and tragic death; no recognition of his passion for beauty, including his misguided passion for the beauty which was not in her; no perception of the goodness in the man, the bravery of his heart;

the white fire of his spirit; no understanding of his greatness, even after Byron had written that "Hyperion" was as sublime as Aeschylus, and Shelley had poured out in "Adonais" the grief and the passion of a flaming indignation and scorn in one of the greatest of elegies; no memory contemplating the agony of a dying youth stricken with consumption, and torn with the tragic spectacle of defeated ambition. "Let him rest forever in the obscurity to which circumstances have condemned him."—These were her words in the face of all these things.

And so, reading these words of Fanny Brawne, my mind turned back to Mitch, and his life rose before me and took shape in my mind, and I wrote; just because he had had this boyhood love for Zueline and went through that summer of torture for losing her. And I could see that he might have suffered these pangs again; that over and over again, perhaps, he might have poured out his passion in the endless search for beauty and faith, and in the search for realization and glimpses of eternal things through them, and that he would have never found them, through woman; and so, thinking I could look back upon his death at twelve years of age with complacency, and almost with gladness.

But also if he had lived through as many years as I have lived, he would have passed through the chaos, the dust, the hate, the untruth that followed the civil war. He would have seen an army organization exercising a control in the affairs of the republic beyond its right, and ideas that were dead and were never rightfully alive, keeping the people of his country from pulling themselves out of poverties and injustices, and from planting themselves upon the new soil of each succeeding year and its needs. He would have seen wealth amass through legalized privilege into the hands of treasure hunters; and he would have seen these treasure hunters make and interpret the laws their own way, and in behalf of the treasure they had and were seeking. He would have seen his country go forth to free an island people, and then turn and subjugate another island people as a part of the same war, and then depart from the old ways into paths of world adventure and plunder. And he would have seen his country spend ten times what it spent in the civil war and lose in battles or disease

half as many young men as it lost in the civil war in the crusade of making the world safe for democracy; and he would have seen democracy throttled and almost destroyed at home, and democracy abroad helped no whit by this terrible war. He would have seen that all these things happen for treasure—for gold which cares nothing for laws, nothing for liberties, nothing for beauty, nothing for human life, but always seeks its own everywhere and always, which is its own increase and its own conservation. He would have seen men jailed for nothing and sacred rights swept away by the sneers of judges, and written safe guards of the peoples' liberties by those very judges sworn to support, overthrown by them, at the bidding of treasure hunters who stand back of hired orators, hired newspapers, hired clergymen, hired lawyers, and hired officials. He would have seen congresses uttering and acting upon lies, and his country bound together with a net-work of elaborate falsehood.

The America his father hoped for and the America he would have hoped for, sits, for the time-being anyway, in dullness and in dust. And so I am not sorry that for these nearly thirty years, Mitchie Miller has been dust, a part of the hill overlooking the Sangamon River, not far from the deserted village of Old Salem—his dust at one with the hill and sharing its own eternity.

EDGAR LEE MASTERS.

MAYBE some of you Canadians once knew the principal character in Ramsey Benson's story:

WISHART, Mo.

THE original of *Blackstock* in "Whom the Lord Loveth" was an English minister who quit the ministry for his health's sake and took up land in Manitoba. He, too, lost four crops of wheat by frost, while the fifth blessed him with an increase of fifty fold.

He utterly refused to take land farther south, because he wouldn't set foot off British soil merely to gain a worldly profit. But when he was subsequently called to preach in the United States, he went, his notion being that a call to preach was from the Lord and mightn't be disobeyed.

Obstinacy, some would call it, but anyway it is a testimony to the stout fiber of the British character, and it explains in some measure why England is still a sturdy nation, though her authentic history goes back more than a thousand years.

RAMSEY BENSON.

NOT being an erudite student of folk-lore, I find myself reading Mr. Cabell's explanation of the origin and meaning of his story in the same spirit as I read his romance, "The Image of Sespheira." Some day I'll look for Codman and go in search of a copy of Lewistam's "Key to the Popular Tales of Poictesme" and solve the riddle. Maybe some of you have your own opinions about the meaning of the tale.

DUMBARTON, VA.

ERUDITE students of folk-lore will, of course, not fail to recognize in "The Image of Sespheira" a rehandling of one of the legends clustering about that half-mythical Dom Manuel whom Codman calls "the Achilles of Poictesme, as Jurgen is its Ulysses." These tales, however, remain very little known to the average reader; and, indeed, I propose some day to publish an abridgement of the Manuel epos, in the belief that, with slight modernizations, his exploits may yet be esteemed not uncurious by persons desiring to kill off a vacant half-hour.

This particular episode is, in Lewistam's opinion, an allegory of the creative literary instinct, of the will to "write things." Now my personal feeling rather obstinately balks at that unriddling, irrespective of its plausibility. For it is certainly plausible, and the fact is past question noteworthy that, alike in the old French and in our English, "Sespheira" is an anagram on "phrases." Yet, as Lewistam concedes, there is obscurity in the parable, a troubling shifting of the symbolism, so that, although the image created by Manuel may well be interpreted as a book inspired by his love for Freydis, and surviving its begetters, yet (still to quote from the "Key to the Popular Tales of Poictesme"): "the returning Sespheira is surely no book, but rather the literary instinct itself, resistless and beauty-loving and defiant of all human ties."

These things are as they may be. For one, I prefer to view this story as unadulterate romance, with no more (though, to be sure, no less) of ulterior "teachings" concealed about its evolution than is detectable in the unfolding of the chronicle-history of "Cinderella" or of "Puss in Boots"; and Sargyll, I elect to believe, is an island that stands salubriously removed from the gray coasts of Pedagoga. I humbly confess, even so, my quite personal opinion in this matter to be of no more weight than is the opinion of any other reader of *Romance*.

JAMES BRANCH CABELL.

MEET a new writer: Miss Nell Hanson, author of "Jimsie of Kilmack."

MONTREAL, CANADA.

"JIMSIE OF KILMACK" is my fourth attempt at fiction, and my very first accepted manuscript; so, critics, please be gentle as you read. As I am so very new and totally unfamiliar, I'm afraid nothing I write about its origin can be of great interest. However as it is the custom of the magazine that contributors should write a few lines for *The Meeting-Place*,

I can only do as I am asked, whether I have anything interesting to say or not, seeing that the editor has been so nice and kind as to buy my story.

By the way, I notice among numberless writers a tendency to consider all editors who buy their particular creations "nice and kind and altogether delightful," and those who send them rejection-slips "impossible men." I have tried during my extremely short "literary career" not to harbor resentment, but I must confess to a distinct bias toward *Romance*.

I wrote the story early in the year, while ill in bed. I had been reading Marion Crawford's "In the Palace of the King," and the tragedy of the hunchback jester struck me and remained with me afterward far more than anything else in the book, and gradually, in a day or two, wove itself into the story of *Jimsie* and *Norah*—I don't quite know how. I suppose I made it happen in Ireland because I am Irish, though I've lived in Canada for a number of years, and because I love Ireland and love the West Clare coast that I have tried to use as a background. There my grandparents lived, and there my mother spent much of her girlhood, and I have vivid memories of happy Summers spent there when I was a child; of the gentle, lovable, wonderfully courteous country-people; of the sea and the sunsets and the curraghs in the bay; of the larks singing overhead. I remember especially one year, when we returned to London, that station after station, as we passed through, was filled with men and women, the women with their shawls over their heads, keening bitterly as the train bore away their loved ones, emigrants to the far America. I didn't know I was going to be an "emigrant" myself one day!

And because no one can know that one is Irish for two minutes without asking one's politics, I may say that I was a believer in John Redmond, but now I don't quite know what I am. Most emphatically my views are *not* those of the Sinn Féin.

NELL HANSON.

THE author of "The Heart of Conchita" doesn't tell us very much about himself or his story, but you'll find his ideas of romance and other things extremely interesting:

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

POSSIBLY one of the greatest writers of prose and verse that has been produced on the American continent in the past century was Rubén Darío, who died in 1916. This man was an Indian, of pure blood, born in Nicaragua. Like many another great man he was misunderstood by some of the petty government officials of his country who wished to mold the people to their puny outlook on life and was compelled to leave soon after attaining early manhood.

He became a wanderer through the lands of South America and first came into international prominence by the publication of a book of prose which he called "Azul," after Victor Hugo's motto, "*L'art, c'est l'azur!*" Juan Valera, the famous Spanish critic, was very severe in his

criticism, claiming that Darío should have given more time to the teaching of correct Spanish. He was especially hostile to the title, wanting to know why was art blue rather than yellow, red, green or plain white or black. It was in the book, but Don Juan, stern realist, was unable to see it. Darío proved that he had his hand on the pulse of Youth by revolutionizing Spanish literature, heading what is known as the *modernista* movement, which spread to all Spanish-speaking lands of the earth.

He resided, at some time or other, in all the Latin-American countries and later spent some time in Europe. He is as well known to readers of Spanish as Shakespeare is to readers of English. I remember seeing him in Buenos Aires several years ago, a great broad-shouldered man with a placid face and large brown eyes beneath an expanse of forehead, such a peculiar, striking appearance of face and figure as to cause me to remember it today. He was possibly a straight descendant from the royal races that inhabited Central America before the conquest, races that were enjoying the highest type of civilization when men of Europe were living in caves and fighting with stone axes.

In all of his works he teaches the compelling force of the desire for the Ideal. This Ideal he compares to the *Velo de la Reina Mab*, the Veil of *Queen Mab*, a veil of opalescent blue made of filmy gauze. He illustrates this by showing *Queen Mab* coming to four gaunt, unshaven men in a garret—a sculptor, a painter, a poet and a musician. They are lamenting the sordidness and brutality of life. She alights from her car, made of a single pearl, and twines them in the folds of her veil. Their sighs and groans are turned to laughter as they glimpse the world as it now appears to them.

In other words Life is as you look upon it. Adolescent Youth sees it full of promise, Old Age views it with a tinge of bitterness, it gives back the image that is thrown from the mind.

Romance? Does it exist? I'll say it does. It has made easy many a rough spot for me. Some one will come along and say there is no romance in the world. And then there will a regular mob rise up and tell him there is. To me it represents the Veil of *Queen Mab*. I am also a very stern realist like Don Juan Valera, but I now and then try to clutch a corner of the Veil and peer at things as they should be—the Ideal state to which we will evolve as human beings within the next several thousand years.

EDGAR YOUNG.

JAPAN—the old Japan—will never cease to be a source of romance. "The Tale of the Talking Skull" in the September issue is one of a number of similar folk-stories that will appear in *Romance*. Mr. Post Wheeler tells us something of how his material was gathered.

STOCKHOLM.

I SPENT seven years in Tokyo at our embassy—nearly two years of that time as chargé d'affaires—and during that time was able to make



a study of Japanese things and thoughts, which only a long period can make possible. As you will understand, there are many things in an Oriental country which one does not begin in any way to grasp until one has gained some acquaintance with the language and some familiarity with the literature, verbal and written. Folk-lore has always been a hobby of mine (perhaps you have seen my "Russian Wonder Tales" which I did when I was American chargé d'affaires in Petrograd—or rather St. Petersburg) and I gave to Japanese folk-lore the leisure time of those seven years in compiling a collection which I have aimed to make comprehensive.

I have put together a vast number (literally thousands) of tales, taken down in many cases in shorthand from the lips of professional storytellers (for Japan has these just as Turkey and Persia) and have compared variants and traced sources. It is my intention to bring these out in perhaps fifteen volumes in the near future, and the tales which *Romance* is to publish are offered with a view to familiarize the Western public with this mass of popular fiction which I consider so interesting and valuable for western scholarship to understand. This task has, of course, cost me very great labor and, incidentally of course, thousands of dollars, but it has also been a labor of love.

POST WHEELER.

I THOUGHT Konrad Bercovici knew more about Gipsies than he knew about the people of the city, before I read his recent book, "Dust of New York," and "Broken Dreams," the story that appears in this issue of *Romance*.

MORRISTOWN, N. J.

THE characters in "Broken Dreams" are old acquaintances of mine. To a good many people in New York the story will be merely a printed record of facts. I am afraid, however, that I shall not be on speaking-terms any more with a few men and women with whom I have chatted frequently, seated at the same table in some East Side cafés. But that is very often the fate of the writer who writes what he observes instead of what he invents.

The truth about my work in general is that I am so interested in following and observing the threads of the lives of people I know that I have little time to write down what I see. Some of my stories, though actually written in a few hours, have taken years of another kind of work. The actual process of writing is to me what the stuffing of the "kill" is to a passionate hunter. The hunting, the following of a maze of faint tracks in the beaten trails of the woods, the tracing of the animal to its lair after losing the scent again and again is what gives me great pleasure.

Frequently one follows the track of a bear only to cross the footprints of a deer or hear the powerful wing-strokes of an eagle overhead or suddenly face a wolf. And there are also beautiful birds and interesting insects—some that sting but give honey and others that merely sting. For the hunter the forests are stocked

with game—and the world is my hunting-ground. The sky, in a singing blue or a deadly ashen, the forest decked in green or black and naked, the mountains, the seas are all for me to see, to tread, to swim. Men, women, children—in white, brown, red, yellow, black, gay or sad, happy or otherwise—I am alive to them.

If I am able to describe but a little of what I hear and see every day, it makes me happy. For twenty years I have struggled against "authoring"; now it's all over. I have fallen. I pray God that my readers be merciful. *Vae victis!* Woe to the vanquished.

Of the East Side I know this much after many years of study: It does not matter much in what language people are happy or sad. A thousand superficialities, differences in culture, tradition and religious rituals make one believe that all nations are not alike. But after closer observation the rock-bottom essentials which are common to all mankind convince one that love is love and hate is hate in the hearts of men and women of all colors, of all races.

But those differences! How subtle and eluding!

KONRAD BERCOVICI.

HERE'S a proof that subway-riding isn't all crush and curses:

NEW YORK CITY.

THE idea of "Stella Maris of Pete's" came to me on the Sea Beach subway. Leaving Coney Island, before you go underground, you pass through a dispirited, slovenly section of patchy shacks and boat-houses. One particularly dingy brown house has a large sign, "Stella," on top. The name is so ironical, the place so unstar-like that immediately I began to imagine it to be the road-house of my story. Out beyond "the creek" lies the bay and the clean, free ocean. But here is only unloveliness.

Then it occurred to me to call the girl and not the house, Stella, and to make the one person on earth who fully understands her—the *Scholar*—nickname her "Stella Maris"; a harmless whimsicality, since no one else has the slightest inkling of what it means. The plot was simply to develop the tiny gleam of goodness that lay within her, thus justifying the appellation for the time being.

But don't place any halo on *Stella*. She won't have another god-like experience. She rose to the heights—once. That's all. That's the story. The rest of her life will probably fray out like the old house on the creek. No one will mourn its demolition, except the *Scholar*—if he survives her. But won't you always feel a little more charitable for knowing her romance?

MELLA RUSSELL McCALLUM.

FRANCE knows how to recognize romance when she finds it. I see that the French Academy's Grand Prix de Roman has now been awarded to Pierre Benoit for his novel "L'Atlantide," which recently appeared in English in *Adventure*, this being its first publication in this country.



HERE is a word about authors' haloes from a poet whose work has been published in *Romance*:

NEW YORK CITY.

THE editor tells me that there is a meeting-place in this magazine where that "distant, odd and haloed creature," the author, may take off his halo for a while and be a real human with the other real humans, his readers. It sounds good—provided, one has a halo.

When I got the news, I looked for my halo at once, but I couldn't find it. I have been writing for a long time and my latest book is just out, so I suppose I am an author. But where my halo is, I don't know. All I ever have to wear on my head is an occasional hat decorously trimmed by myself. And I usually feel as humble about my hats as I do about my books.

Of course, when I was very young, in the days before I had to think about buying hats, I used to dream about a halo. I thought I wanted one. I still think it might be becoming. But I don't think of hats or haloes nowadays, when I write. I just try to tell my readers what I honestly think and feel about life. And I believe in my readers. I believe they will care most for the best things I have to say to them. I believe that if there are any haloes, the readers wear them!

I have had some readers, I know, whose haloes must be big and beautiful, if kindness of heart can make them so. One of them, whom I have never met, sent me a dozen ears of sweet green corn from the country not long ago. It came in the morning mail along with a very cruel review of my book. Who minds a review when there are roasting-ears? Another reader sent me a little bunch of violets and early buttercups last Spring. Another once sent me a dozen fresh eggs. And sometimes they write letters that are as good as corn or eggs or Spring blossoms. Readers, truly, wear haloes. And the beauty of it is that, in spite of that fact, they are not always "odd and distant." Seems to me they should be invited to The Meeting-Place too and that they should bring their haloes with them.

MARGUERITE WILKINSON.

FROM Bernard Raymund whose poem "The Freshet" appears in this issue:

COLUMBUS, OHIO.

I WONDER that I feel at home in this department, since I do not remember having been in any out-of-the-way place in my twenty-six years. The most exciting thing I do is to teach medical students physiology in the Winter and swing a scythe or spray potatoes in the Summer. People often ask, "How do you ever find time to write?" Well, I just don't, not half-enough.

BERNARD RAYMUND.

THERE is one feature of *Romance*—the most important a cynical news-dealer might say—that we have tried to keep in tune with the rest of the magazine, and that is the cover. This letter from a

reader makes me feel we haven't altogether missed our object; or, to put the praise where it belongs, it's proof that Leon Bellisle, the artist, knows how to catch the spirit of romance in line and color.

BURLINGTON, VT.

THE July number of the *Romance* magazine has on the cover a picture of a native girl of one of the Pacific islands. She is standing on the sand, and behind her are some green palm-trees sharp against an intensely blue unclouded sky and—the bluer ocean. For us in the United States, in New England, that picture is indeed romance: the new and different beauty, the what-may-happen-next feeling, the far-off place which is not too far-off for the possibility of our some day going there. There must be the possibility of realization in romance, not only "something lost behind the ranges, something hidden," but also the "go and find it" mood.

The essence of romance is in the combination of the strange and the possible, the unknown and the familiar. But it is easy to let the familiar things become boringly usual; and when they do, we seek romance in literature to relieve the heaviness of the prosaic and to renew our powers of seeing, grasping the wonder all about us.

" . . . And all unseen

Romance brought up the nine-fifteen."

The picture on the July cover is suggestive of adventure, strange reality, new beauty (that is, to us, in this country); but to the girl, to any one living on that far, hot shore, I wonder what the outlook is. Many eventless days—changeless weather. From the empty, sunlit routine of that life I think one might look far off and see a different romance here (wherever this here may be; mine as I write is a New England town of many gardens, great elms and cool, still houses). The catching of romance depends more upon attitude of mind than circumstances. The stories we read of other people's adventure ought to show us how to see the romance near by in any life, and to stir up the desire for more and more of it.

I should like to know if your readers think they have any romance actually in their own lives or if they have only the desire for it in the thing just beyond. Would it not be possible, and interesting too, to open discussion in The Meeting-Place pages about the reality of romance and what it actually is? For people need it so often and don't know how to see it.

HELEN UNDERWOOD HOYT.

Yes, The Meeting-Place has always been open for a discussion of this kind, but (please forgive me, but I must say it!) most of you readers are so very shy about giving your ideas of "romance." Here's hoping this appeal from a fellow reader will send more of you hurrying to the ink-well.

S. M.



The Ugly Duckling

By Laura Kent

Mr. Peck, the manager of our office, stormed up the aisle between two rows of desks.

"Where's that Miller girl? She's never to be depended on."

I looked at the other girls, and they looked at me. Miss Miller was the most conscientious one of our number, and we knew it right well. But that fact did not ease her suffering in any way when Mr. Peck shouted at her later for a thousand and one imagined shortcomings.

I didn't like Miss Miller. But I felt sorry for her.

I admired her, too; she was so brave. She faced scolding after scolding from Mr. Peck, and many a slight from more than one of the girls without flinching—until one day.

I found her one afternoon just after lunch, in the room just outside of the office, crying as if her heart had broken. I forgot my dislike for her in a moment; tears make anybody your sister.

"You are sick?" I asked, though I knew perfectly well that she wasn't.

"Yes," she sobbed, "if it's being sick to be sick of life."

I laid my hand on Miss Miller's shoulder. She looked up at me with unbelieving eyes, for none of us had ever touched her before. "Won't you tell me your trouble, dear?" I asked.

She could only say incredulously, "You don't mean that. Nobody means to be good to an 'ugly duckling.'"

A blush burned my face, for I knew then that Miss Miller had overheard what Miss Terry had said to me about her a few minutes earlier.

"Oh, you shouldn't be too severe on Miss Terry,—she's such a fearfully thoughtless creature. Nine-tenths of the things she says are said without thinking."

Miss Miller dried her eyes and talked with sudden firmness. "This thing that she's said now is the one-ten-th that she's thought about. I am an 'ugly duckling.'"

Then, without further ado, she took her hat and went away. Mr. Peck told us later that she had found a better position. So she told him, but I knew better: her self-respect would not permit her to remain among us longer.

I suffered the most intense shock of my life about four months later. I met the "ugly duckling" at an engagement reception. I looked and looked. The realization of the fact that I was face to face with the Miss Miller I had once worked with was painfully difficult. When the last vestige of doubt disappeared, I could only stand spellbound and give utterance to a long astonished "O-o-o-o-oh!"

For the "ugly duckling" was no longer an "ugly duckling." Anybody, even Miss Terry, who used never to tire of ridiculing her at the office, would have called Miss Miller a beauty now.

"How did you do it?" I gasped.

She answered with a simple sincerity. "I am not going to pretend that I don't know what you're talking about," she said. "You want to know what became of the 'ugly duckling.'"

I laughed off my embarrassment.

"Fashion Academy," she said.

"Fashion Academy?" I asked. I saw no connection.

"Yes, Fashion Academy helped me out just after I had made up my mind to stop being an 'ugly duckling.' I had heard about Fashion Academy from a friend. I turned to it in my hour of humiliation because I had the vague feeling that somehow a good part of the ugliness of all 'ugly ducklings' is in the feathers. 'Fine feathers make fine birds,' they say. To make a long story short, I enrolled for Fashion Academy courses in Costume and Millinery Design.

"Not much more than a month later, I was designing dresses and hats for myself that made me—I must say it—beautiful. I learned that I had been dressing the wrong way all my life. I learned how much clothes may mean to a woman. In short, I learned how to dress.

"I learned that every woman's figure is an individual thing, that every woman's personality is something apart from all other personalities. I learned how to adapt the lines of a gown and a hat to my figure. I learned to suit

colors to my complexion and the coloring of my eyes and hair. I learned how to express my personality in dress. In other words, I learned how to dress my individual self, of all women in the world.

"And every style of dress or hat was original, for I designed it myself. I do not now have to be humiliated by seeing my style of dress or hat on every fourth woman that I meet. That is what often happens when you buy a dress or hat of popular style in the shops. What is more, I have made every dress myself from the drafting of the pattern to the very last stitch,—every hat from the making of the frame to the last bit of trimming. And the cost of these home-

made dresses and hats, as beautifully made as anything one could buy in the store, was from one-third to one-tenth the store price."

Miss Miller paused. I began to think that I, too, had been more of an "ugly duckling" than I need have been. "What," I thought, "would charming, original dresses and hats designed just for me do for my appearance?" And then I said to Miss Miller, "But I suppose the learning was terribly hard."

She smiled. "That's quite the most remarkable thing about it," she replied. "Learning a Fashion Academy home-study course is more like play than like work. The lessons are marvelously simple, and so fascinatingly interesting that every one in my family was as anxious to see them as I was. I spent never more than two hours a week on my designing, and yet the results I got were splendid, according to my teachers. It's so pleasant to be able to improve oneself right in the comfort of one's own home. Besides, of course, a home-study course costs only about one-fourth the price of the course taken right at the school."

So ended the "ugly duckling's" story of how she stopped being an "ugly duckling." Now I, too, have enrolled for a home-study course with Fashion Academy. I have only done three lessons so far, but already I have made great progress. The interest my teachers take in me is simply splendid. Each lesson is criticized in the greatest detail; and whenever any little part of the work is not done

to please them, I am asked to do it over again.

I am beginning to think of the possibility of becoming a professional costume designer. From letters that are published in the beautifully illustrated booklet sent by Fashion Academy, sent free upon request, I can see wonderful opportunities in this work. One former student of Fashion Academy earned \$125 a week and designed costumes for Lady Duff Gordon (Lucile) three months after her graduation. And hers is only one instance of the great number of amazing successes made by Fashion Academy graduates as professional designers.

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