

# *The Thrill Book*

Semi-Monthly

Oct. 1, 1917  
15 Cents



MR. SHEN of SHENSI  
by H. Bedford-Jones







# THE THRILL BOOK

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SEMIMONTHLY

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Vol. III

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# The Thrill Book

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## Mr. Shen of Shensi

H.  
Bedford-  
Jones

### CHAPTER I.

#### GENTLEMEN OF NOWHERE.

A RATHER small man, quite plump, wearing a silk hat and frock coat, his features showing a bare hint of the Oriental, entered the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. He greeted the desk clerk and requested his room key. Another man, who carried a light malacca stick, entered the hotel by the same doorway, cast his eyes about the lobby, and paused to light a cigarette—which, however, he flung aside almost immediately.

As the small, plump gentleman turned from the desk, a young man stood before him.

"Beg pardon, sir. Aren't you Prince

Kou Chang? My name's Smith, of the *Chronicle*; if you could spare me five minutes, I'm very anxious to obtain an interview with you——"

A bland smile broke across the faintly Oriental features. "Certainly, Mr. Smith!" he rejoined in clear, excellent English. "But, I beg you, forget the title! There are no princes in China now, you know. Will you come into one of the parlors and be comfortable? I am quite at your disposal."

After the two, leisurely strolled the man with the light malacca stick. He was a brown-faced man with a ministerial severity in his dress. He wore a wig of dark, false hair which contrasted with his shrewd gray eyes; the wig was ill-fitting and rather obvious.



Meantime, Prince Kou Chang was discoursing to the reporter with suave ease.

"Yes, I am proceeding to-night to Washington," he observed. "A special emissary from the republic of China? Yes. But, I beg of you, do not make any mention of my mission. I am very glad to give you an interview on any other subject you may desire. For instance——"

While the prince chatted with the reporter, the man with the wig and the malacca stick returned to the desk in the lobby, and scribbled upon a card the following words:

REVEREND JOHN UPDEJOHN, of the Saving Grace Mission, Grant Street, Chinatown.

Would like to see you regarding Mr. Shen of Shensi.

The writer passed the card to the clerk behind the counter.

"Please send this to Prince Kou Chang at once. You will find him in the parlors."

Five minutes afterward, the reporter was striding briskly away, and Prince Kou Chang was approaching the desk in evident haste, the card in his hand. The Reverend John Updejohn advanced to meet him, with a grave inclination of his head that passed for greeting.

"You are Prince Kou Chang?" he inquired.

The eyes of the Oriental—those eyes which had almost no slant to them at all—seemed to pass over the face and figure of his interlocutor with a searing, withering intensity, as a tongue of red flame licks out and over a stone wall. Like stone, indeed, were those gray eyes which met his gaze; hard and brilliant and crystal-clear as the agate of Yunnan.

"I am, sir," responded the Oriental. "Do you wish to speak with me in private?"

"Not at all," answered the man of the wig. "As you may see by my card, I am a missionary, in close touch with

Chinatown here; one of my friends, the late Mr. Fraser——"

"Perhaps," said Prince Kou Chang, smiling, "we had best be seated, sir!"

The missionary bowed grave assent. Five minutes later the two men were comfortably ensconced in deep chairs, and the prince proffered cigarettes which were refused. He himself lighted one.

"Proceed, Mr. Updejohn," he said, calmly.

"A friend of mine, a Mr. Fraser—he died in France last year—left some notes about a man who called himself Mr. Shen of Shensi; those notes were given me, and I found them of intense interest. Seeing in the morning papers that you had arrived here, I took the liberty of coming to ask if you know anything about this man, Mr. Shen."

"Ah! Why ask *me*?" inquired the prince.

"You are said to be on a diplomatic mission and you would probably know about this Mr. Shen if any one would."

The prince nodded. "I know of the man," he said thoughtfully. "But there are certain circumstances about your coming to me which are not clear. What, if I may ask, did Mr. Fraser's notes say? I have heard of him as a Sinologue of great learning and ability."

"Yes; his death was a loss to learning," said Updejohn. "It seems that Fraser had come into touch with a Chinese scientist, who called himself Mr. Shen of Shensi."

"This Mr. Shen, I gather, was at the time an agent of Japan. He was not only a scientist, but practiced extensively the arts of Chinese magic. Unfortunately for himself, he defied the Japanese power, or at least got into serious trouble with the Japanese, and was supposed to be killed. Fraser always had an idea that the man was not dead, but would turn up in this country as a terrorist agent."

"In a disjointed note, Fraser said that this Mr. Shen had been responsible for the bolshevist madness in Russia—this alone serves to show what manner of man Mr. Shen was, for Fraser must have known the fact absolutely."

Prince Kou Chang gazed across the lobby with unfathomable, careless eyes.

"Have you, by any chance," he inquired, "a copy of this note?"

"I believe I have." Updejohn clapped a hand to his pocket. He produced a paper scribbled in pencil and handed it to the prince. The latter read the writing with evident interest; it was unsigned and jerky, but its purport was quite clear:

Shen is not dead, but alive. His hand is against every man's now. Chinese, Japs, hate and fear him. Established self in Russia through bolshevism; started revolution there, diverted it to Red channels.

Will eventually return here unless killed. Adherence to bolshevism matter of expedience. Japs will go any length to kill him; China ditto. They can't do it.

The prince nodded and returned the paper. "I see," he said smilingly, "that you have a comprehensive knowledge of this Mr. Shen! It is substantially correct, so far as I can judge."

Quickening interest shone in the agate eyes of the missionary. "This infamous person is then alive? In such case, my information should be laid before——"

The prince held up one hand in good-humored protest. "My dear sir, to the best of my knowledge this man was killed in Russia. But, granted that he is alive, why on earth would he come to this country? He is, I understand, a sort of human Ishmaelite, a destroyer, with personal ambition perhaps behind his work. What could he hope to do in such a country as this? Why come here?"

"I don't know," answered the missionary bluntly. "If he's dead, as reported, so much the better; I don't believe he'd come here in any case. Nobody would flock to his standard."

The prince laughed. "Oh, as for that, you have plenty of parlor bolshevists, and the wild-eyed radicals who call themselves mystics; I speak as a foreigner; you understand. This sort of person, I imagine, would be as putty in the clever hands of Mr. Shen. However, you may safely assert that he is dead. The fact is proven, I think."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said the missionary earnestly. He rose. "You have greatly relieved my secret apprehensions, sir. Although I am only a private citizen, I take unashamed interest in the affairs of my country. Sir, good morning!"

"Good morning."

The prince bowed. For an instant he watched the figure of the missionary leaving the hotel, then he turned and walked swiftly to the elevators. Once in his own room, he took down the telephone receiver and called the Chinatown exchange; speaking fluent Mandarin now, he requested a certain number.

"Is this the Society of Benevolent Sons?" he inquired. "I would like to speak with Li Far Huan, the venerable merchant on the floor above. I will hold the line."

He waited until another voice answered him.

"Li Far Huan? I am glad you recognize my voice," he said, smiling a little as though he had detected a strange agitation at the other end of the wire. "I have work for you. There is a missionary, the Reverend John Updejohn of the Saving Grace Mission in Grant Street. Please interview him immediately on my behalf; he has just left me. He has a very extensive knowledge of Mr. Shen of Shensi—you understand? I shall be here until noon. You must call me before that time and inform me that all danger is removed. Good-bye!"

Taking the telephone directory, the prince ran his finger down the H column



until it halted at the name of Maurice Hoskins. Reverting to his excellent English, with a queerly cruel little smile playing about his eyes, he called the Hoskins residence on Nob Hill. When response came, he asked for Mr. Hoskins, refusing to give his name.

"Mr. Hoskins?" he said at length. "This is the gentleman from whom you have been receiving messages for some months—ah! I see that you understand. May I inquire if the commissions have been executed?"

He listened for a moment and nodded.

"Quite right; it was not a question of money at all," he assented. "So everything is ready for me? That is good, very good! I shall install my own servants there to-night and get up my own baggage. I wish that you would send your car for me at noon exactly—no, do not come yourself. The chauffeur will inquire for Prince Kou Chang, at the St. Francis——"

He broke off for an instant, then his voice bit out with sudden acerbity:

"Kindly remember, sir, that we are speaking over the telephone!" he said severely. "I will get the location of the house when I see you, and not before. If you fail to observe the caution I have commanded, I will not be answerable for consequences. That is all."

He turned to his suit case and began to pack. Presently he took from his pocket a railroad ticket to Washington, with a Pullman reservation for that night's overland train. From his suit case he produced a large automatic pistol and pointed it at the tickets, which he held in his left hand. He pressed the trigger, but no shot ensued; instead, the tickets vanished. For an instant one edge showed near his fingers. He moved the pistol slightly; the edge vanished, and so did half his hand.

The prince tossed the pistol into the suit case again. Smiling, he scratched

a match, held it to the tickets which had reappeared in his hand, and watched them dissolve in smoke.

"So passes the Manchu prince, Kou Chang!" he murmured, then started as the telephone summoned him with its insistent jangle. The connection was established from below.

"Yes," he said in Mandarin, "it is I. Ah, Li Far Huan! You have succeeded?"

His countenance changed suddenly. His eyes widened; a livid pallor crossed his face, to be succeeded by an angry rush of color.

"No such mission?" he repeated. "No such person in the city? Ah—well, I shall call you again. Very well."

He hung up. Seizing the telephone book, he turned to the S list. There was no Saving Grace Mission anywhere in the city. He turned to the U's. There was no Reverend John Updejohn in the city. There was no Updejohn at all!

"Ten thousand hells!" said the prince softly, staring at the wall. "Who was he?"

## CHAPTER II

### KENRICK TAKES HOLD.

TWO men sat in an office far above Market Street—an office whose wide windows overlooked the sparkling bay, with its ferries and ships, and whose view leaped across to the yellow hills of the farther shores.

One of the men, whose sparkling blue eyes looked odd in conjunction with a dark wig, was Kenrick the explorer—James Kenrick, much better known in the purlieus of the Royal Geographical Society and the khans of Samacrand than in his home town of San Francisco. The other man was Colonel Blank, who ostensibly conducted this brokerage office and whose connection with the United States government was altogether unobtrusive.

"You have no photos of Mr. Shen

of Shensi to verify your theory?" asked Colonel Blank.

"Don't need any," rejoined Kenrick, producing a pipe and filling it carefully. "We know that the Chinese embassy in Washington denounces this Prince Kou Chang as an impostor. We know that Kou Chang left the St. Francis and vanished; we know that his transportation to Washington was never used. In other words, he got into the country on forged papers.

"That he is Shen, there is no doubt whatever. I followed him into the hotel, knowing that I'd seen his face in Vladivostok a couple of months ago. Can't remember his name there. I happen to know the real Prince Kou very well; I merely used the Shen of Shensi matter with this fellow on impulse. As it chanced, I hit the nail on the head, and he took to flight."

"I think you're right." Colonel Blank tipped back his chair and gazed over the bay with grave eyes. "In any event, I'll go the limit on your judgment and knowledge of such things. Have you any idea as to whom he'll work in with?"

"Plenty." Kenrick touched a match to his pipe and relaxed in his chair. "Maurice Hoskins."

"Eh?" The other glanced around, startled. "Young Hoskins—the millionaire? The crank who calls himself a bolshevik and so forth? Well, you're away off there, my friend—away off! Haven't you seen the morning papers?"

Kenrick puffed. "Nope. What about Hoskins?"

"Committed suicide last night."

"Huh-huh; I was looking for something of that kind. Say, this fellow is Mr. Shen of Shensi, and don't make any mistake about it! I'll bet he got in with Hoskins, used him for weeks and months from a distance, and when he got here decided to shut Hoskins' mouth. The millionaire kid was a bit cracked, anyhow; ran around with these

cults and long-haired gents from down the coast. Shen killed him, probably got a slice of his wad, and is now comfortably settled somewhere and ready to work."

"The hell you say!" ejaculated the other man, then held silence a space. "Look here, Kenrick, how on earth can we tackle this fellow? From all you say, he's more or less impervious to the usual methods——"

Kenrick grinned. He put a hand to his head and removed his wig. Against his bald skull appeared three cicatrices of old burns, scarring the skin white.

"Colonel," he said, fingering the scars, "you can't tackle this man; you simply can't do it, that's all! He knows more than all of us put together. But I can tackle him, because I know exactly what to expect from him and I can meet him at his own game.

"See those scars? I got those when I was initiated as a Taoist monk, up in Mongolia. Those Taoists are magicians; no fake about 'em, either! I was a young fool and I took a notion to learn their magic. Well, I learned it and I tell you what, it cost me something! Shen is a crack Taoist, among other things; he's a scientist of the first water; and I'll bet that he's come here with something big up his sleeve!"

"What can he gain?"

"Don't ask me." Kenrick shrugged his shoulders and replaced his wig. "I'm going to look up everything that Hoskins did for the last six months; rather, I'll let you do that for me, with your organization. Get me the dope by to-night. Throw every man you've got on that job! Hoskins was not a real criminal; he was just a plain fool, and the chances are he left plenty of tracks. As for me, I'll drop out of sight after to-day."

"But you'll want help——"

"No, thanks!" Kenrick rose with a liteness that betrayed his physical condition. "I can reach you if I want help

—when I want it. Until then, leave things to me.”

“But this is madness!” protested the other. “Man, you can’t go at this alone——”

“Huh!” sniffed Kenrick scornfully. “Have you any one who knows the Chinese dialects? Not one. Have you any one who has a smattering of science and Taoist magic? Far from it. Have you any one who has seen and talked with Mr. Shen of Shensi? Echo answers no. Ergo, let me be the goat! That China boy of mine will provide all the assistance I need just now; the chief thing is for you to get your men out on the Hoskins job and have a report for me at the earliest possible moment.”

“Very well,” assented the other helplessly. “You’ll be at your rooms?”

“I will not, but that boy of mine will, unless Shen has spotted me already and kills him. He joins me to-night. I have rooms over toward the Jap quarter, on Sutter street.”

“You talk pretty glibly of killing people——”

“Think we’re dealing with puppy dogs?” exploded Kenrick. “Good Lord, man! Wake up! See you later, I hope. So long!”

Leaving the office, the explorer descended to the street. Here an automobile awaited him, at the wheel a slim, mild-eyed Szechuan boy by the name of Tsing. Kenrick climbed in beside the driver, and ordered the car out along Post Street. Not until they had crossed Van Ness did he break silence.

“I’ll get out at Gough, and you take the car home, Tsing. Leave instructions with the landlady to take care of my mail. Wait there until a messenger boys comes. Then bring my bag and the message over to the new rooms. Come in the car. We’ll want it.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Tsing and drew in to the curb.

This Szechuan boy was a trifle decep-

tive in appearance. He looked half his age, and his gentle eyes had fooled many a man into the other world, for Tsing was bred from Chinese and Mongol and Cossack, and his soul was a thing of steel that was utterly responsive to only one master-hand—that of Kenrick.

Ill pleased with himself, Kenrick strode on toward his new quarters.

“Should have nabbed that yellow devil there at the hotel,” he reflected. “The trouble was that I couldn’t be sure until I got word from Washington that he was a fraud! If I’d known that he was Shen, I’d have taken a chance and done it. I was a fool to let him slip through me there! Now he’s dropped out of sight.”

He spent the afternoon working out chess problems and trying to arrive at some conclusion regarding what Mr. Shen expected to accomplish in the United States.

He could get nowhere on the matter, however. That Mr. Shen of Shensi cared nothing for bolshevik principles and interests was a matter of course—except as they might be turned to his own advantage.

In what that advantage could consist was beyond Kenrick. Looking at it from every possible angle, he could not reach any logical end.

“We’re dealing with the impossible and the illogical,” he decided finally, as darkness was falling. “One thing is certain—Shen will have to work within the routine of tricks; and that means that he’ll have to work through a woman. Since he can’t transcend the intelligence of his medium, he’ll have to pick her carefully. Since she must know this city and this country very well to give him information, she’ll have to be a white girl. Good! If there’s anything in the papers within the next few days about a girl disappearing we may begin on the supposition that Shen is working the old tricks.”



As six o'clock passed with no sign of Tsing, Kenrick sallied forth and obtained dinner at one of the hotels in the vicinity. At seven he was again in his rooms. At seven thirty, Tsing knocked at the door and entered.

"This letter came by mail." The boy extended an envelope, followed by a parcel. "And this package by messenger, fifteen minutes ago."

Kenrick seized first upon the package. He opened it, to find a second package inside, with a sealed envelope. The latter contained a curt note from Colonel Blank:

This was found among the effects of Hoskins. It was sent him by parcels post from Tientsin six months ago; he paid duty on it. Whether it has any bearing on present matters, I can't say.

Aside from this, nothing whatever. Recent activities quite barren of suggestions.

Kenrick glanced up. "You brought the evening papers? Good. Let's see about this——"

He opened the package and brought to view a strip of very ordinary Chinese embroidery, five feet long and two in width. Aside from the embroidery, this was decorated with small round mirrors, each one half an inch in diameter, sewed to the cloth. Kenrick viewed it with unconcealed disgust and tossed it to Tsing, who already knew all there was to know about the present enterprise.

"Tsing, things like that are sold by the score to tourists. You can buy 'em right here in Chinatown! See if you can find anything suspicious about it. Looks all right to me, except I don't see why Hoskins would import such a thing from Tientsin. By the way, any news in Chinatown about our friend Mr. Shen?"

"Yes, master. It is known that he is here. The On Leong and the Suey Leong Tongs have made peace very hurriedly; when the tiger comes, the jackals slink away! Everyone is much

excited, and nobody knows anything very definite. Rumors are plentiful."

Kenrick nodded and tore open the letter which had come by mail. As he read it, a slow whistle broke from him.

DEAR MISSIONARY UPDEJOHN: We had a very pleasant conversation, and I thank you for the warning conveyed.

I hope to see you again before long, upon which occasion I promise you an interesting entertainment. I shall send for you when I am ready. Sincerely,

PRINCE KOU CHANG.

Kenrick laughed. "Tsing, we just got out of there in time! He traced me down without great difficulty; not a hard matter, perhaps. He'll not find us in this place, however. We're reasonably safe here. Nothing out of the ordinary with that bit of embroidery, eh? Well, hand me those papers."

Five minutes later, Kenrick looked up. "Tsing! Did you read about the accident last night? A car returning from the beach resorts ran square into another car, on the Twin Peaks boulevard—struck head on. Two men killed. Woman in first car swears the second car showed no lights and was invisible; second car party swears lights were on full. A witness has been found who corroborates woman of first car—says other car could not be seen. Yet there was not a trace of fog! I want you to take me out there to-night, now!"

Tsing held up one slender hand in protest.

"One minute, master! Look at this." He held up the embroidery and touched the looking-glass ornaments. They were very loose. "I cut one off—see! There is a trace of glue on its back. One could write books on rice paper, concealing the paper in small segments behind each of these things, and send full instructions from China to this place without the customs men observing."

Kenrick leaped to his feet. "Good boy! We've established the link, then.



Now to this place on the boulevard—quick! Did you ever hear of black light?”

“Never, except in magic,” returned Tsing dryly.

“Then we’ve something to learn. Hustle, now! We’ve run Mr. Shen to earth.”

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE BLACK RAY.

AS the car sped out toward Golden Gate Park, Kenrick felt a thrill of confidence in his own deductions.

“We have to cut off this deviltry without delay,” he said. “Once Mr. Shen gets settled, he’ll be invulnerable! As his menacing letter testified, however, he’s not yet ready for action. If we can strike now, hit him before he gets intrenched, we’ll win!”

Tsing did not respond. He had no fear of Mr. Shen, lacked all interest in the man; his devotion to Kenrick was entire and absolute. He asked no questions about the affair in hand, and seemed, indeed, an automaton. He was far from that, however. His quick brain had pierced the secret of the embroidered panel almost at once.

That discovery had tremendously encouraged Kenrick. The link between Mr. Shen and the dead Hoskins was definitely established; he had no doubt that Hoskins had acted as a tool for Mr. Shen.

“Probably,” he confided to his companion, “Hoskins fitted up some sort of laboratory for Mr. Shen—got him located. And then Shen killed him——”

“No proof of that, master,” cut in Tsing.

“The fact itself is the best proof.” Kenrick chuckled. “If we run foul of the gentleman there’ll be no talk about proof!”

“You have located him, then,” stated Tsing with simple confidence.

“We will locate him, I think, if we can find the scene of that accident. It

was not a great way from the tunnel entrance.”

The car purred smoothly on its way, cut across from the park to the Twin Peaks road, and headed back toward town. Turning from the coast road, Tsing slowly crawled toward the tunnel entrance. It was a region of new dwellings, a real-estate addition completed within the past year or two; many of the residences were large and formal, surrounded by gardens or enclaved amid thick trees.

The night was moonless, and Kenrick’s scrutiny of the roadside houses was of little avail. A constant trickle of cars was on the road. When the headlights suddenly brought into sight a pile of wreckage beside the road, Kenrick ordered Tsing to pass on, then to turn and pass the spot.

Kenrick had no clear and definite idea in seeking Mr. Shen hereabouts. Upon reading the account of the remarkable accident of the previous night, into his brain had flashed the notion that Mr. Shen was concerned with it. Would not a shaft of black light enclosing one automobile explain that very queer accident? Kenrick knew well enough that black light was no impossibility, at least where Mr. Shen of Shensi was concerned; the man was famous—or infamous—for his knowledge of light and for his clever handling of lights in view of their positive effects upon the human system. Why deem black light impossible?

Near the scene of wreck, Kenrick ordered the car pulled up beside the road. Now that his theory was facing the facts, he felt it a strangely vague and futile theory. For a space he sat in silence, watching the passing cars, searching the house illuminations, struggling to find some basis for his “hunch.” He could find none whatever. The scene was very prosaic and natural.

“Drive home, Tsing,” he said at last. “We’ve failed for this time.”

None the less, as the car sped home, Kenrick felt profoundly that his basic thought had been right, and that he was leaving behind him some tangible explanation of the mystery, had he only been able to grasp it. This conviction lingered with him in the night. Twice he wakened, striving to catch some elusive suggestion from his subconscious self, but failing in each effort.

When he read the morning papers, however, the situation changed suddenly.

Upon the previous night, a girl had been abducted—a graduate nurse from the Mount Zion Hospital, who roomed not far from that institution. She was a young woman of unquestionable character and high education. One of the hospital doctors had presumably sent his car for her; she had been last seen by her landlady while entering the car. The doctor in question did not own such a car and denied all knowledge of the matter. The Mary Hills case was spread broadcast over the first page of every morning paper.

What attracted the lively interest of Kenrick was not the fulfillment of the prophecy he had made about just such an event, but the description of the car itself. Twice had the car been noted, once by the landlady, and once by the occupants of another car at the very crest of the Twin Peaks; and each time for the same reason. The curtains of the limousine appeared to be up, yet in each report was the strange fact that the car seemed "filled with darkness." It contained no lights, and no lights, according to the reports, shone through it from the far side!

Naturally, this odd report met with unmerciful jesting from the newspapers, but Kenrick read it aloud to Tsing with frowning concentration.

"That was Mr. Shen," he concluded. "And he is in possession of black light, Tsing! Can you realize the power that it puts in his hands? Why, it's incred-

ible! Think of what it would do for crime—let alone war! The weapon is almost beyond comprehension. And that car was heading for some spot on the boulevard—a spot somewhere near the point of our trip last night. Tsing, I want to ask something of you."

The gentle, almost mournful eyes of the Szechuan boy met the gaze of Kenrick, and a smile filled their dark depths. "Anything, master."

"May I use you—with the crystal ball?" Kenrick was grave, his agate eyes tinged with a somber reflection. "You know that I would not ask this, did I not consider the emergency serious for both of us. I have no doubt that at this moment Mr. Shen is making use of this girl, and that he either is now, or has already been trying to find me. Fortunately he has nothing of mine in his possession; the affair will be hard for him, especially if I fight him through you."

Tsing rose, smiling. "Why it troubles you to use me, master, I cannot tell; but now or always I am ready. Shall I get the box?"

Kenrick inclined his head, and Tsing disappeared.

There was a telephone in the room, almost the only article of luxury, for Kenrick had taken these lodgings in an old-fashioned and sordid end of town. Stepping to the instrument, he called the number of Colonel Blank's office.

"Kenrick speaking," he said, upon hearing the colonel's voice. "I'm well on the track of things; expect to know definitely to-night. I want you to trace up something for me. See if Hoskins was engaged in any real-estate activity in the neighborhood of the Twin Peaks tunnel; if so, get a record of the transactions. If not, get me a list of any new houses erected near there in the past eight months—high-class houses, I mean."

"You think our man's in that quarter?" demanded the other.

"Yes, but it's a mighty slender think so far. For Heaven's sake don't fly off the handle and try any rough stuff until I call you in! I'm going to look things up to-night."

"Where shall I send the information if I get it?"

"I'll send my boy after it at noon. By the way, that package you sent me proved to be the missing link; the two men are connected definitely."

"Fine work! I'll be ready for your boy at noon."

Kenrick turned. Tsing was standing before him, holding a large teak box, like a tea box; upon the sliding panel in front were carven ideographs, gold-filled.

Taking the box, Kenrick set it on the table and slid open the panel. He brought forth a small ball of crystal, and dropped into a chair. From his pocket he took the letter he had received from Prince Kou Chang, and handed it to Tsing; the latter pulled up another chair and sat facing him. Kenrick was very pale. He had few scruples about whatever concerned himself alone, but in what he was about to do, he felt that he was touching upon forbidden ground; only the emergency justified him in his own eyes.

Tsing sat relaxed, his eyes fastened upon the crystal ball in Kenrick's hand.

"We must find the writer of that letter, Tsing." Kenrick spoke now in Mandarin, but flavored his speech with the Szechuan accent, the better to control his subject. His voice was monotonous. "Center your thought upon that and forget everything else. Your life and mine depend upon our success, and many more lives than ours only. The man whom we seek has set half of Europe in conflagration, and he is now here in this city, seeking to cast this country into the blaze also. Even if we win, we shall not win without some kind of struggle. This man is not

alone. He has his followers around him——"

Kenrick's voice died away. He could scarcely repress a secret exultation that he had not forgotten the tricks of the old Taoist trade—the concentration of the will, the mastering of the subject, the picture-painting of the mind!

The eyes of Tsing had lost expression. They had become fixed and constant, slightly dulled, rather lifeless.

"Are you freed of the body?" inquired Kenrick gravely.

"Yes, master," said the dead voice of the boy.

"Then seek the writer of this letter."

There was silence. In the morning sunlight that drifted into the room the scene was unreal, ghastly. The eyelids of Tsing flickered slightly.

"Speak!" commanded Kenrick. "You have found him?"

"Yes, master. A small man, well-fed, clad in black. He is in a room with a woman, who is seated. He is holding a crystal ball in front of her and——"

"Where is this place?"

"A room. I cannot describe it."

"Where is the house?"

"Master, I—I cannot tell——"

For an instant Kenrick leaned forward as though he were about to utter an imperative command. Then abruptly he relaxed, shaking his head a little.

"Never mind," he said, although the words were reluctant. "Come between this man and the woman; prevent her, if possible, from obeying him. Keep me informed of what takes place between them."

Silence ensued for a moment. Then Tsing spoke again.

"He is angry, master. He is fighting against me—trying to control her—ah! The woman has fainted in her chair——"

"Waken," commanded Kenrick quietly. In his gray eyes blazed anger



and pity; he could imagine what was passing in that house of mystery, and his heart bled for the girl who was in the power of Mr. Shen.

Ten minutes later Tsing, with no evidence of ill effects, was on his way for the car, which was kept in a nearby garage on Post Street. He was to proceed downtown on various errands, and to call at the office of Colonel Blank before returning.

"If he gets me that information," said Kenrick grimly, "the game lies in our hands!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### RUN TO EARTH.

**T**SING brought back definite word from Colonel Blank.

It appeared that Hoskins had built a house, later selling it; the title was now vested in a John Smith. The address was in Archer Drive, a side street of the new addition close to the Twin Peaks tunnel.

"On the strength of conjecture, this settles it," said Kenrick quietly. He then went on with the note from Colonel Blank.

Something is going on under the surface. We are advised that several noted radicals are heading this way from Eastern points; several of them already under indictment with appeals or trials pending. Draw your own conclusions. Speedy action is imperative.

Kenrick carefully tore up the letter. The situation, beyond any doubt, was threatening. Mr. Shen was obviously calling to a conference many of the extreme radical leaders of the country; what he would do with them when he got them together, was another matter.

"He's not aiming in the dark, however," concluded Kenrick. "He has some definite plan in that devil's brain of his! What he expects to gain out of it all, we may never know——"

"Ah, master!" Tsing, who had been perusing the morning papers, looked up

suddenly. "Did you see that the Canadian nationalist and radical, Bourra, is to visit San Francisco within two weeks? A small item on the last page. And the Japanese disturber Ito Hare, who has made so much trouble in Nippon, arrives here next week on a lecturing tour."

"Bull's-eye to you, Tsing!" exclaimed Kenrick, frowning. "The clouds are indeed gathering. If we fail to strike within a day or two, so much the worse for us. Let's go out and look over the situation. Get a line on that house Hoskins built; if it looks good, we can go there to-night. Once we can get definite assurance that Mr. Shen occupies the place, we can have it surrounded and raided within ten minutes."

"A raid will not catch that sort of man," said Tsing sagely.

"It can make a lot of trouble for him anyway. Come along!"

Twenty minutes later they had reached Archer Drive, a short addition street which held only four houses, all of them placed amid trees and gardens. A little farther on, Kenrick halted the car and got out.

"I'll walk up the hill," he said, "and spend an hour or so inspecting the place. Don't bother to come back, Tsing; I can take a street car when I get through."

Tsing assented, and the car rolled away.

Having already noted that a tree-clad hill opposite Archer Drive would give him a complete view of the situation, Kenrick turned from the boulevard and bent his way toward the hill in question.

It was a practically untouched bit of land, doubtless held for speculation, and with no houses upon it. Working his way toward the crest of the rise, Kenrick crossed the summit and descended the other side; then, confident that he had vanished from sight of any one who might have watched him, he retraced his steps to the crest again.



Gaining this he cautiously picked a spot and worked his way forward among the trees until he had a clear view of the four houses on Archer Drive below.

Taking from their case the high-powered binoculars he had brought along, he focused upon the dwellings. The number of the house built by Hoskins was ten, and at the first glance he saw that the second house on the left, at the end of the drive, was the one in question. He had no need to verify the guess by the house number, so different was this structure from its neighbors.

The grounds were surmounted by a high brick wall, pierced by an open-work gate of iron; this gate was closed. The house and garage were of brick and appeared to be empty, quite unoccupied. Doors and windows were closed and shuttered. No sign of human life appeared about the entire place. Trees and shrubs grew thickly around the buildings.

The house was wholly plain in structure, and to any one viewing it from the level would see nothing out of the ordinary. To Kenrick, however, looking down upon it from above, the slate roof appeared false on all sides. Set below this roof, in the center of the building, was a rounded dome that seemed to be a huge skylight of glass.

"That's Shen's mark," reflected the explorer. "Playing with light values is his great specialty! Still, we'll have to make sure to-night. The raid will have to be sudden and sharp and smashing; it won't do to take the law into our own hands and then find that a huge mistake has been made! Before I can call in Colonel Blank, I'll have to know absolutely what I'm doing, beyond any chance of error."

Motionless under the trees, Kenrick waited and watched.

He was not altogether surprised over locating Mr. Shen so easily. Being out of the country and unable to apply his

own peculiar talents, Shen had perforce used Hoskins as a tool, and Hoskins had none of the Oriental's genius. So far as proof was concerned, the trail had been well covered up, but Kenrick was not concerned with legal evidence.

During two long hours Kenrick waited patiently, watching for any slightest indication that the house was inhabited, but finding none. He noted with approval that no street light had yet been placed at the intersection of Archer Drive with the boulevard. He could approach unseen after dark.

At length he gave up his lonely vigil in disgust and traced his way down the hill again. He took occasion, when he came to the real-estate office at the intersection of the boulevard with the car line, to drop in and verify his guess about the house.

"Yes, that's number ten," said the agent. "Sorry I can't tell you much about the place; it's not listed for sale. Occupied? It's been vacant for some time, but I think a party has taken it over."

Kenrick was more than satisfied with this information. He was now morally certain that Mr. Shen was in that house, but he would have to make sure of it beyond all peradventure before calling on Colonel Blank. A few hours would tell the tale now. If he could reach a certainty before midnight, the raid could take place at once.

Upon reaching his rooms, Kenrick was a trifle surprised to find that Tsing had not yet returned with the car.

At five o'clock he began to be distinctly worried over the non-arrival of Tsing. He called up the garage, but they had seen neither car nor boy. At length, Kenrick called Colonel Blank, and got that officer on the wire.

"Has that boy of mine been around there on any chance?" he inquired.

"Not a sign of him, old man! He hasn't vanished?"

"Plumb gone." Kenrick's voice was anxious.

"Give me the car number. I'll take it up with the police, and if there's anything wrong, I'll have the dope for you inside of ten minutes. This begins to look serious, Kenrick! You don't suppose that our friend has struck a blow?"

"Don't know that any's been struck yet," said Kenrick dryly. "Tsing may be laid up somewhere with an accident, only I've heard nothing from him."

"Discovered anything about that house yet?"

"Something. I'll tell you when you get a report on Tsing. Hope nothing's wrong!"

Kenrick rolled a cigarette nervously, having given the colonel his telephone number and that of his car. Before the cigarette was smoked out, the bell jangled.

"Kenrick?" inquired Colonel Blank. "Your car was found at five this afternoon—picked up where the road comes down from the Twin Peaks to the street. It had a broken steering knuckle and had smashed into an iron light pole; badly wrecked. The police have been trying to notify you at your own apartment."

"And Tsing?"

"No sign of him. Not received at any hospital. No blood around the car."

"Hell!" ejaculated Kenrick savagely. "Then Shen's grabbed him. Colonel, I'm going out after supper to investigate that house. I'm fairly certain that Shen is there, but when we jump the place, we'll have to shoot to kill and can't make mistakes. I'll call you before midnight at your office; keep some one at the telephone all evening, will you? And when I do send the word, be ready to jump quick and hard!"

"Hold on! I can come out with a search warrant——"

"Nothing doing," snapped Kenrick.

"It wouldn't catch Shen, and he's the one we want. You've got to pull the gambling raid stuff, quick and sudden; only, we don't want any prisoners! Don't worry. If we catch Shen, he'll fight. And now that he's nabbed Tsing, I'm after him to the finish. So long!"

Kenrick rang up the garage, arranged for the wreck of his car to be taken care of, and then went out to dinner. He could do nothing until after dark.

The disappearance of Tsing left no doubt in his mind that the Szechuan boy had been the victim of some infernally clever plot laid by Mr. Shen. Kenrick accepted this fact in grim silence; he was not given to making threats.

"It was probably meant to nab both of us at once," he reflected. "I was a fool to use the car at all, since its number could so easily be traced to me! No doubt Shen's accomplices had been following it steadily, awaiting some opportunity to spring the coup. Well, Tsing has obviously been made prisoner—not killed. That's one gleam of hope! If I can get to work in time we'll save him."

Returning to his rooms, he summoned a taxicab. Then, taking out the teak box that held his simple apparatus of Taoist magic—which is essentially a magic of the will, of hypnotic and suggestive powers, rather than a sleight-of-hand—Kenrick pocketed the few things he desired. An automatic pistol bulked in his coat pocket.

He was waiting on the curb when the taxi showed up, and he paused only long enough to assure himself that it was a regular car and no trap laid to ensnare him; he was suddenly suspicious of all things and every one. Then, giving the driver direction to let him out near the tunnel entrance, he entered the cab.

The car went out by way of the park, doubtless to increase the fare. Upon reaching the boulevard, Kenrick was not sorry to note that a light fog cloaked

this section of the city, which, added to the moonless night, provided exactly the obscurity he desired.

When he left the car, which rolled on toward the peaks and town, Kenrick strode on rapidly toward Archer Drive. Two of the places in the drive were lighted up, but number ten was dark.

As he turned up the short street, a swinging beam of light apprised him that a car was also turning. He took instant advantage of a telephone pole to escape the lights, which pierced the thin fog, and saw a large enclosed car pass him almost silently, heading up the drive. A sudden thrill seized him, as he noted that the limousine body appeared entirely obscure and unlighted.

He watched the car's lights approach number ten, excitement riding him hard. Was Tsing in that car—being brought to Mr. Shen at this moment? Would the car enter the seemingly deserted grounds? Kendrick could follow the machine clearly by reason of its headlights, and he waited with burning impatience.

But, when the lights came to number ten, at the end of the short street, they vanished very abruptly. The car, so far as Kenrick could see it, disappeared. He fancied that he heard the click of iron, as though a gate had closed. Leaping forward, he ran at top speed toward the spot where the car had been.

But when he reached it, there was no car. The gates of number ten were closed, and its driveway was empty blackness. The limousine had vanished!

## CHAPTER V.

### DEVIL'S WORK

FOR a long moment Kenrick stood motionless, watching the driveway before him. There was no faintest glimmer of light from within the house or garage. The porte-cochère,

which he had noted during the afternoon, was a pool of obscurity.

He moved forward and made a surprising discovery. The mass of the garage was dimly visible to him; but when he moved a few steps, so that he was looking at the garage beneath the roof of the porte-cochère, the garage vanished! In other words, the porte-cochère was filled with a positive, concrete darkness—a solid body, as it were!

Kenrick drew a deep breath. He did not doubt that from some hidden angle had been turned on a black ray concealing the car which must now be beneath the porte-cochère. Despite impossibilities, despite the wild incredulity of the theory, he firmly clung to the belief that Mr. Shen of Shensi had discovered black light.

He laid a hand on the iron gate, half expecting to feel some electric shock. None came. Instead, to his renewed surprise, he found that only half the gate was locked; half of it swung loose, unlatched. Was this accident?

As he stood thus, debating with himself, he caught a faint and instantaneous glimmer of light from the doorway opening on the porte-cochère. It came and was gone again in a flash, but that flash decided him, showed him that the house was indeed occupied! It sent a thrill of excitement vibrating through him. It proved to him that beneath this exterior of desertion and darkness lurked some hidden occupancy. Without further hesitation, he pushed open the iron grille and stepped forward.

He was still suspicious of striking some unseen signal, some concealed alarm, but he encountered nothing. There was no further gleam of light; no sound reached him.

Coming to the porte-cochère, Kenrick halted abruptly, gripped by a sense of the uncanny, a wild clutch of horror at the unreality of what faced him. The opening was indeed filled with a solid obscurity. Holding out his hand and



moving slowly forward, Kenrick saw his hand suddenly vanish, as though he had plunged it into an inky mass. Yet he felt nothing. An instant later his fingers touched a solid substance, and he jumped backward in a plunge-of-panic. A bitter smile curved his lips.

"Brace up, fool!" he chided himself inwardly. "There's no mystery here, no ghostly terror! You know exactly what you're facing. That was probably the vanished car that you touched. Let's see!"

He stepped forward again, groping. He found himself clouded about by an invisible darkness, as it were; a darkness which closed everything to view. His hand touched a solid substance, and he found that it was the rear end of the limousine.

"Come!" he reflected. "This is not so bad. If I'm in the black light, it's a cinch that no one can see me."

He turned and directed himself toward the house doorway. Encountering steps, he ascended three of them; his outstretched hand came into contact with a door, and he groped for the knob. Without hesitation he tried the door, and it opened, swinging outward.

At this, which seemed a stroke of sheerest good luck, Kenrick paused. It was possible that the overconfident servants of Mr. Shen might have left gate and door unlocked; yet it seemed hardly natural. On the other hand, the possibility was tempting! Kenrick tried to penetrate the darkness, but found himself unable to do so. He could feel the door open at his side, and knowledge that it would create an appreciable draft within the house and draw attention, impelled him to close it swiftly.

He stepped forward—two steps. And at the second step he could scarcely repress a cry of astonishment.

He had stepped directly into a lighted hallway! Behind him, concealing the door and threshold, was a blank wall

of blackness; the black ray completely cut off all vision, though Kenrick could not see whence it originated.

The hall in front of him was wide and absolutely empty except for the electric light in the ceiling. It was merely a blank corridor, white-tiled. At the far end was a heavy curtain that presumably cloaked a doorway; the curtain was of black velvet.

Once more and for the last time, Kenrick hesitated. Should he leave as he had entered, content with the discovery of the black ray? But it was no discovery. Where it came from he knew not. There was no connection established with Mr. Shen. For all proof to the contrary, he might have stepped into the house of an alderman or a stock broker. Should he miss the chance that was now presented to him, of investigating the place?

"Not this trip!" decided Kenrick. "It's too good a thing to pass up. Beyond the Alps lies Italy, so let's draw the curtain and start something. If they've got Tsing here, I'll sure get action out of somebody!"

His pistol in his right hand, he walked toward the curtain at the end of the hall. No sound came from behind that drapery. Putting out his left hand, Kenrick swept it aside in one swift, decisive gesture.

There greeted him, as though in mute challenge, an impenetrable wall of darkness. The light from the hall did not pierce this darkness; it was another black ray, obviously, that had been flung across this doorway. Conscious of the risks he ran, but conscious also that the black ray would hide him, Kenrick strode forward into it.

A scornful exclamation escaped his lips. A single step had taken him through the veil! It had been there like a threat, a futile menace to the spirit. One bold step had conquered it.

"I wonder if it's merely some esoteric Taoist mummary instead of a scientific

discovery?" thought Kenrick. "It's along the same lines—but no; it's a real thing, beyond doubt! I'll give the devil his due."

He swept his quick, birdlike gaze around the room in which he stood, hoping that his quest was ended. But, as though to mock him, there were only cheap chairs about the walls, a cheap rug on the floor, a cheap table in one corner by a window. An electric light cluster was in the ceiling. There was nothing else in the room. The walls were bare and without ornament.

Kenrick was puzzled. He felt an impulse to doubt, to wonder if he were not the victim of some hallucination about that black light; but he fought it off quickly and stepped forward. A second glance showed him something upon the table—a photograph. He picked it up, gazed at it a moment, lifted his eyes to search the room again, then scrutinized the picture once more. It showed two figures against a dark background—two figures in ancient Chinese armor, the faces convulsed in fury. Slowly, incredulously, Kenrick brought himself to realize what that photograph meant.

He knew—none better, since he could do the trick himself—that the Taoist magicians can throw scraps of paper, the familiar "paper men," to the floor and cause armed warriors to arise before all beholders. That this feat demanded a superstitious and pliable audience, responsive to the least mental suggestion of the wizard, Kenrick knew. He had had Tsing photograph the trick when he performed it, but had registered nothing. Here, obviously, the phantoms of the imagination had been photographed. Or was the picture itself some trick? He smiled and laid the photograph down.

"A trick, of course," he muttered; "but a Taoist trick! Shen is here. This isn't evidence. I'll go farther and fare better if I keep on. If it hadn't been

for this picture, I might have slunk out of here, thinking I had failed!"

He turned away toward a door which he perceived at the opposite side of the room. Advancing rapidly to it, he grasped the knob and opened it. Another veil of darkness met him. Scornfully, he stepped into and through it. He was growing irritated by this childish repetition. All fear of the uncanny blackness had left him.

Now he came out into such a blaze of light that for a moment he was absolutely dazzled by its brilliance. When his eyes perceived what was before him, he stood motionless, caught in a sudden grip of unbelieving horror.

The room was very small and entirely bare except for a chair in the center of the floor. On the chair was set a wide basin of brass, filled with earth; and in the basin, the earth tamped about his neck, was the head of a man—and the head *lived*!

Below the basin was nothing, except the chair itself. There was nobody to that frightful head. It was the head of a white man, and the eyes were fastened upon Kenrick in a horrible living stare; color was in the cheeks, and the lips moved soundlessly. The absolute horror of the thing for an instant paralyzed Kenrick—only for an instant, however.

It came to him suddenly that this awful guardian of the place was itself no more than a trick of magic; he forced down the cold shiver that touched him and stepped forward. Angered that his nerve had for a moment been daunted by this whim of fancy, he lashed out with the pistol in his hand and struck the head violently.

The living head toppled over in the dish; to Kenrick's gaze it seemed that blood came from the severed neck. By a terrible effort he withdrew his eyes from the sight and glanced about, fighting to regain the self-control that threatened to leave him. His left hand stole



inside his coat and touched an object there. As though the touch had banished his mental trouble, he smiled and looked again at the chair.

And now, as he looked, he saw only a block of wood lying there in the brass dish.

"Ah!" He could scarcely choke back the cry of exultant triumph that rose to his lips. "Your magic is less than mine after all, you devil out of hell! Aye, and your will is less than mine also! Now, by heavens, I'm getting to the heart of things. If that doorway does not lead into the hub and center of all this devilry, I miss my guess!"

He turned, and with swinging strides passed to a curtained doorway across the room. He seized the curtain and jerked it aside, his pistol ready. But his arm slowly lowered as he gazed upon what lay before him.

This doorway was not veiled by the black ray. Instead, there stretched before Kenrick a lighted path three feet wide; a section of carpet showed at the bottom, the top was a foot above his head. Except for the floor, this path was enclosed on all sides by solid blackness. The black ray at work again, thought Kenrick!

He looked at the far end of this lighted path. There he saw a section of a table, all except a small portion of it cut away by the encircling blackness. On the table was a card. Nothing else was visible.

Kenrick quietly walked down the path of light, scorn in his eyes. When he came to the table, he had reached the end. There was nothing ahead of him, nothing around him, save the blackness. He saw writing on the card, and thrilled suddenly as he recognized it for the writing of Prince Kou Chang. He took up the card.

As he read it, the scorn died out of his eyes, and the exultation died out of his heart. Upon the card was written:

MY DEAR MR. KENRICK: Thank you for this obliging visit. I flatter myself that you responded excellently to my mental suggestions! It is a pleasure to deal with so open-minded a man as you.

I trust that you are enjoying the entertainment that I have provided for you.

MR. SHEN OF SHENSI.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CAUGHT

KENRICK slowly let the card fall to the table. His eyes swept about in desperation; he saw that now the path of light was cut off abruptly behind him by the black ray. He stood in a tiny illuminated island.

He saw now, too late, how he had been trapped, how one thing after another had been brought to his notice, how he had been beguiled into this place. They must have known all along that he was watching the house! He disdained the hint of mental suggestion. The game had been well played, that was all; a daring game, managed with infinite craft and cunning.

Through the blackness, a faint chuckle drifted to him. It was followed at once by the bland voice of Mr. Shen of Shensi.

"Put your automatic pistol on the table, Mr. Kenrick! To attempt any resistance would be utter folly."

Kenrick was tempted to fire blindly at the voice, but reason checked the impulse; also, a new element of surprise came to him, for it now appeared that objects within the scope of the black light were not invisible to Mr. Shen!

Accordingly, he obeyed the suave command and placed the pistol on the table. As he stepped back, the wall of blackness moved toward him, covered the table—and then retreated again. The pistol was gone. It had been snatched by some hand, invisible to Kenrick.

"All this is very interesting, but only to a certain extent," observed Kenrick



calmly. "Suppose you lift the veil and disclose yourself, Mr. Shen!"

There was no answer, except that the pool of light shifted slightly around him. Kenrick knew better than to make any futile attempt to escape from the house, or even from the room in which he now was; that wall of blackness held him a secure prisoner, totally unable to find the door by which he had entered.

He suddenly perceived, however, that the radius of his illuminated island was growing wider, the black veil retreating before him. With a tacitly eloquent scorn, he took his pipe from his pocket, filled and lighted it. Then, smoking coolly, he seated himself on the table's edge and watched.

He was facing a real and tangible danger now. All suspense was gone, and the icy nerve for which he was famed had returned to him in full strength. His coolness was not assumed. Despite the disconcerting knowledge that he was trapped, his agate eyes betrayed a steely vigilance, and uncompromising alertness. He knew that trouble lay ahead.

The blackness continued to retreat gradually. Into the light projected the arm of a chair, followed by the chair itself; and in the chair was sitting a woman. Kenrick recognized her immediately, both by her costume and her face, as the missing nurse who had been pictured in all the papers.

"So you have solved the Mary Hills case, Mr. Kenrick!" chuckled the voice of the invisible Mr. Shen. "That gave you a clew, eh? I thought that you might understand the possibilities of black light. You observe that the lady is unharmed? She is merely asleep and she will remain asleep for a time."

Kenrick's teeth tightened upon his pipe, but he said nothing. He perceived that the chair, the table, the rug under his feet, were extra fine objects; the room seemed to be magnificently furnished.

"I think you were looking for your boy, Tsing?" came the bland accents. "He is just behind you."

Kenrick turned and took an abrupt step, then halted.

In another chair, this one an old lacquered temple seat, sat Tsing. He, too, was in a state of trance; but his eyes, wide open, stared out at Kenrick with a glazed, lackluster expression as though the brain behind them were dead.

Only with a great effort did Kenrick thrust down the hot anger that surged into him. The sight of Tsing in this condition, laid beneath the infernal spell of Mr. Shen, maddened him; but it likewise warned him. He understood that Mr. Shen was conducting all this "entertainment" with an object—the object of mastering him, of deadening his mind to the peril that surrounded him, of guiding him into some subtle trap where he would find himself enmeshed in the uncanny net of Mr. Shen's will.

He removed his gaze from Tsing, knowing that for the present he was unable to help the boy. If the chance came, he reflected grimly, he would have a little surprise in store for Mr. Shen!

The light had now cleared completely from the room, with the exception of the four walls, which were hidden from sight behind a black veil. This, as Kenrick understood, was to prevent him from knowing the position of any possible exits.

As he had suspected, he was now in the central room of the house, a room some thirty feet square. At the same height above him was the glass dome, screened now by extended curtains. To one side of Kenrick sat the impassive Tsing; to the other side, the equally impassive figure of the nurse.

The only other object in the room was a large pottery *fu* dog that stood on a stand beside the table. This figure immediately caught Kenrick's eye, and he regarded it with interest. From

the glaze, he took it to be of the Tang or Sung period. Set in the forehead of the dog was a large crystal ball which glowed with a peculiar illumination, as though lighted by some inward fire. Kenrick found himself staring at this ball and swiftly removed his gaze.

"Have done with this childish play, Mr. Shen," he said carelessly. "You are only wasting time in trying to impress me, and you will not succeed in putting me into any state of trance, I assure you."

A chuckle from the dark veil made answer to him. Then abruptly Mr. Shen stepped out into the light. The Oriental's plump features were smiling. He wore the costume of his country, and his face seemed to have assumed a more pronouncedly Chinese cast than when he was clad in Occidental garb.

"Well, Mr. Kenrick! It is a pleasure to meet you thus alone and untended!" exclaimed Mr. Shen blandly. "Unfortunately, it was not possible to bring your boy Tsing here before dark, so that, beyond rendering him helpless, I have been unable to make use of him as I would like."

Kenrick made an impatient gesture. "Come, Mr. Shen! Enough of this mummery. What are you doing in this country? For whom are you working?"

"For myself, of course," said the other. "But we must have chairs and be comfortable."

Mr. Shen clapped his hands as he spoke. A block of shadow detached itself from the wall and moved forward between the two men. It retreated again and left behind it a small table and two chairs; on the table were cigarettes and a bottle of wine, with two handsomely carved cups of a reddish brown substance.

"The performance," sneered Kenrick, "denotes good training. Do you really expect me to drink with you?"

"I do," said Mr. Shen, "for two rea-

sons. It will be your last drink on earth; and it will be a good one. That bottle came from the czar's cellars, and it is port that was bottled about 1750. I advised you to join me. Those cups of rhinoceros horn are supposed to be poison proof, as you are aware."

Despite everything, Kenrick was intrigued by the man. One could not deny Mr. Shen a certain vague but impressive force of character. Kenrick moved forward to the nearest chair. Mr. Shen had already seated himself and was pouring wine into the cups.

"It was really a pity about the czar," he observed easily. "Poor fellow! I would have saved him with that black light of mine, if he had consented to my terms. But like all weak persons, he was obstinate. Lenine was wise enough to fall in with me; in the end, he and I shall probably rule most of the world."

Kenrick smiled derisively. He was perfectly well aware that Mr. Shen was probably relating the simple truth in all this and he fell in with the subject of discussion.

"What use to rule a world of madmen and fools?" he inquired, taking one of the cigarettes and stowing away his pipe.

"Every use, if the ruler be sane," Mr. Shen chuckled. "But, my friend, we shall bring a new social state out of chaos; my real object in bringing about the chaos in Russia was the destruction of the church. That has been accomplished, and we are supreme."

"And you expect to do the same thing in this country?"

"Certainly. I shall absolutely destroy Christianity. It has failed as a religion, as a social power, and as a political organization."

"Ah!" observed Kenrick. "Then why do you fear it?"

Mr. Shen gave him a sudden flaming glance—a glance of malignant hatred, of venomous gall—that passed as sud-

denly into bland suavity. He did not answer the question, however.

Kenrick sipped his wine, for he had no particular fear of poison. He had much more fear of Mr. Shen—fear, not for himself, but for the world. This was no madman, but a fearfully sane genius—a man absolutely without the least moral or ethical sense.

"Upon my word," said Kenrick, gazing at the other, "if such a thing were possible, I'd say that you were an ambassador from hell!"

Mr. Shen chuckled in frank delight. "That," he answered cheerfully, "is the best compliment I have had in years! I presume that you have formed some idea of my plans for the United States? First to use the radicals and create chaos; then destroy the radicals, retaining some few men of ability——"

"By means of black light?" broke in Kenrick scornfully.

"Only incidentally, my dear Mr. Kenrick! I regret that I have not yet been able to install much of my apparatus in this house; I am occupying it only temporarily, until another and more secluded establishment shall be prepared. This black ray is interesting and valuable in many ways, but I have not yet concluded my experiments. The entire subject of colored lights, with their effects, is absorbing. The compound of colors which will produce madness, for example; and on the other hand the negative rays which entirely abort the spectrum, destroying light, as in this black ray—an inaccurate but descriptive title. But now, what about yourself?"

"Eh?" Kenrick took a fresh cigarette, and gazed at his captor. "In what way?"

Mr. Shen smiled blandly. "I have no illusions about you; you are dangerous. At this very instant, I fancy that you are considering whether to reach out and strangle me, or to use some hidden weapon against me. That, I assure you,

would be folly. Two of my men have you covered, and at the first sign from me, will fire."

Kenrick flung back his head in a burst of hearty laughter. "Come, come, Mr. Shen!" he exclaimed. "To think of a magician such as you descending to the use of lethal weapons—why, it's encouraging! See here: do you know the force, the actual force, which is destined to overthrow all your fine schemes and bring your whole infernal system of devilry to nothing?"

"What is it?" demanded Mr. Shen, gravely meeting the gaze of Kenrick.

"I'll tell you," said Kenrick leaning back, "upon one condition. I'll give you a sample of how it works. I'll prove to you that, against this force, you are utterly helpless."

For a moment Mr. Shen searched his face with intent eyes. Then, reading the earnestness that underlay Kenrick's words, he nodded.

"This is interesting," he answered smoothly. "What is the condition—to save your life?"

"No," replied Kenrick steadily. "I'm thinking only of this boy, Tsing, and this woman."

He laid down his cigarette and leaned forward, his cold eyes on those of Mr. Shen.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SYMBOL.

THE woman is no use to you," said Kenrick. "You have failed entirely to make any use of her—is it not so?"

Mr. Shen sneered. "Ah! You seem to know a lot about these things!"

Kenrick nodded. "I do. Since this is the case, I want you to send that girl home. She can tell nothing about you. Give her orders to waken in an hour and send her home in your car."

"Very well," assented Mr. Shen. "But I shall have to get another girl somewhere; I had intended to break



down this one with drugs. Still, let her go. It is true that I've been able to do little with her." He turned to the girl. "Miss Hills; you will waken in an hour and you will forget all that you know about me and this place. Get up and walk to the door."

Changing to Mandarin, Mr. Shen directed his own servants to take care of the nurse as Kenrick had directed. Walking steadily across the room, she vanished into the blackness that still cloaked the walls. Kenrick noted the spot very carefully. A door was there! "You want Tsing set free, also?" asked Shen mockingly.

"I don't ask the impossible," responded Kenrick. "You'd not——"

"I'll destroy his brain and then free him, if you like," suggested the other.

"At least," said Kenrick quietly, "set his soul free. Remove him from this trance, even if you have to put him in irons. Get him out of here, so that I can deal with you unhampered."

Mr. Shen regarded his visitor in frank admiration. "The reports of your cold-steel nerve were not unfounded," he said and sipped again at his wine. "You actually expect to deal with me, do you?"

"Certainly. I shall show you very plainly how all your hell-foundations shall be ruined and destroyed—rather, what will destroy them! It is utterly impossible for you to succeed——"

"I have succeeded—in Russia," observed Mr. Shen softly.

"Russia is not the world," quoth Kenrick. "And you'll have a different class of people to meet with in this country; I'm one of them."

"Do you expect to get out of here alive?" queried Mr. Shen amusedly.

Kenrick shrugged his shoulders. "I never give up until the end, but I'm not thinking of myself primarily."

Mr. Shen leaned back and surveyed him with thoughtful gaze. "You interest me, Mr. Kenrick," he said slowly.

"I've learned that you know a good deal about China and our hidden mysteries. You've written articles that have interested even me. I should like immensely to probe that brain of yours!"

"You can't," rejoined Kenrick curtly.

"Conceded." Mr. Shen gave an affable wave of his hand. "I am curious to witness this experiment, or rather exhibition, of yours. When it is concluded, I shall offer you a choice—either to yield willingly to my power and be placed in a condition of suspended animation, or to die. The former alternative offers you the chance of waking again in a new world, the world that I shall create——"

"You're wasting time," said Kenrick impatiently. "I have no intention of yielding to your influence on any conditions. But, first, what about Tsing?"

Mr. Shen sighed and turned to the seated figure of the Szechuan boy.

"Tsing! Come here," he commanded abruptly in Mandarin.

Tsing rose from his seat and stood impassively before them, his eyes fixed on vacancy. Kenrick leaned back in his chair and took a fresh cigarette. He took a match from his pocket and lighted it. The empty eyes of Tsing fastened on the flame. Kenrick waited, his gaze fastened intently upon the boy's face.

"Do you understand my orders?" said Mr. Shen.

Kenrick moved the match to his cigarette end, then dropped it as the flame burned his fingers. The vacant eyes of Tsing followed the blaze. Kenrick produced a second match and lighted it. There seemed to be a struggle in the face of the boy; his eyelids flickered.

"I understand the orders, master," he said dully.

Mr. Shen frowned. "Go to the door and——"

"Wait!" struck in Kenrick, also speaking Mandarin. "Tsing, you are now obeying my orders, not those of

Mr. Shen! Go to the door and allow yourself to be placed under restraint without resisting. When you reach the door, waken! Do you understand?"

"I understand, master," said Tsing. He turned, walked toward the same point where the nurse had vanished, and disappeared in the black ray.

Kenrick touched the match to his cigarette. Mr. Shen was watching him in a mingling of admiration and bewilderment, and now spoke softly.

"By the lords of hell, but you were near to death in that moment! Clever—ah, yes! Where, if I may ask, did you learn these secrets? That little business of the match—focusing his brain on you when I recalled his spirit—ah, that was well done!"

Kenrick smiled. "I know more than you give me credit for knowing, Mr. Shen. Well, shall I proceed?"

"By all means."

For a moment Kenrick puffed at his cigarette. "I imagine," he said at length, "that you have two kinds of black light—one which is impenetrable, and one which cloaks objects to external view, but permits them to be seen by any one within the ray itself?"

"I congratulate your acumen!" Mr. Shen covered obvious surprise by a bland smile. "You are correct. I have not yet concluded all my work on the subject, but have produced the two rays somewhat as you describe them."

"Then," said Kenrick, "to remove any suspicion that I might be trying to assassinate you, suppose that you surround us with what I may call the visible ray?"

As he spoke, he reached beneath his coat and produced a cross of white-painted wood, set upon a heavy and disproportionately large base. Mr. Shen frowned.

"What do you mean to do?" he said sharply.

"To prove to you that against this symbol your black light is useless!"

Kenrick surveyed him with a careless smile. "Your magic arts consist of trickery, pure and simple; against the living and vital principle of Christianity, they are helpless. I shall prove this to you within five minutes."

"Bah!" snapped the Oriental. "Have I not told you that I shall destroy Christianity throughout the world as I have destroyed it in Russia? But you shall see for yourself."

He clapped his hands and uttered a few words in Mandarin. Instantly the black walls began to draw upon the two men. Kenrick leaned forward and placed the wooden cross upon the table.

"Bah—you and your cross!" Mr. Shen cackled suddenly. "The transparent rays shall cover us. Upon the table, blotting out your cross from sight, will fall the solid ray. Ah! Now watch!"

About the two men closed the walls of blackness. But Kenrick found that he himself and the man opposite him were distinctly outlined in a crimson light, as was the table. Then, unexpectedly, the table vanished.

A shrill cry broke from Mr. Shen. "The cross—what trickery is this?"

Although the table had vanished, the cross stood out in a burning white radiance, untouched by the black rays! Kenrick reached forward and turned it about, facing Mr. Shen. Unobserved, his thumb pressed a spring in the base.

"Watch it, Shen! I'll not try to spring anything on you. This magic of mine is no more esoteric than yours. I was trying to study out any possibility of a black light, and it occurred to me that, even if you had discovered such a thing, it would find itself ineffective against one substance."

His voice was monotonous, smooth, quiet. Mr. Shen stared at the blazing cross, his face suddenly looking more than ever Oriental and Chinese in the crimson glow that outlined him.

"So I made experiments," continued

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE IDEOGRAPH.

Kenrick. "This cross, to be frank, is painted with a strong solution of radium; the radio-active rays are too powerful for your black light, that is all. I promised you a symbol, and this is it—the symbol of the cross, which you boast that you will destroy, but which will in reality destroy you."

A hoarse growl broke from Mr. Shen. His features contorted violently; with a painful twist, he tore his eyes from the cross and fastened them upon Kenrick, a baleful triumph in their dark depths.

"You devil!" he cried out. "You have tried to turn my own tricks against me! Where did you learn such things? A moment longer, and you would have had me under the spell——"

Kenrick stood up. He had failed and realized it fully. His one hope had been that he might lure Mr. Shen to gaze upon that radiant cross long enough.

"Where did I learn these things?" Smiling, he put a hand to his head and removed his wig. "Look at those burns, Mr. Shen! You are a Taoist. I have learned those secrets of Asia likewise! And do you know what I resolved? That under the symbol of that cross you should be destroyed—aye, though I should perish with you! I was prepared for some such trap as this——"

An appalling, incoherent sound broke from Mr. Shen. Starting to his feet, he struck the floor with his heel.

"And I," he cried out, his face frightful to witness, "was prepared for you!"

Kenrick tried to throw himself aside, but failed. The floor seemed to slide from beneath his feet; he felt himself going down into darkness, falling bodily.

"But the cross—the cross shall destroy you!" he shouted as he fell, and his words were drowned in the racking outburst of an explosion that filled the darkness above him with a terrific glare.

NO one within a ten-foot radius of that cross could possibly have lived," said Kenrick, a trifle unsteadily. "I expected to die myself—only the plunge into the cellar saved me. More than a bomb, it was an incendiary bomb. It was intended to destroy Mr. Shen and the establishment at once and it did so. The deadliest thing ever seen!"

"The house, at least, is gone," said Colonel Blank; "and I hope the man as well."

Kenrick lay on the ground at the end of Archer Drive, his left leg broken by the fall which had plunged him through Mr. Shen's trapdoor. Beside him stood Colonel Blank. At the boulevard end of the street, autos and crowding pedestrians were kept back by a line of police.

In front of number ten, and through the grounds, were strewn Colonel Blank's men. A fire engine was pumping sparks at the corner. The house itself was going up in a red ruin of flame, already bursting through the roof.

"A good thing for you, Kenrick," said Colonel Blank, "that I took matters into my own hands after getting your phone message! I knew you would run your head into danger and so I gathered the crowd and came along. We had just got the men nicely posted when we heard your explosion, and at that we came in on the jump."

Kenrick smiled, then sobered as from within the burning house came a shot, and another. A group of figures approached the two men.

"Here's a chap who claims to be Kenrick's boy," said one of them softly. The other houses in the drive were crowded with sightseers who were well within hearing, despite the roar of the flames. "Found him tied up."

"Tsing!" exclaimed Kenrick joyfully.



"Yes, master." Tsing came forward, quite impassive as ever.

"Do you know where they took you this afternoon? What happened?"

"A truck ran into me, master, as I was coming down the Twin Peaks road. Two men seized me before I could get out of the car. They took me to the office of Li Far Huan, a merchant above the tong of Benevolent Sons in Chinatown. There I beat off one of the men, but the others overpowered me——"

"Send there, colonel!" snapped Kenrick quickly. "Get a squad there at once and nab Li Far Huan. Here, Tsing! Go with these gentlemen and guide them! I'll be at my own rooms when you get through—yes, the old lodgings."

Colonel Blank gave swift instructions to one of his aids, who summoned a squad of men and departed with Tsing.

"What about the nurse?" demanded Kenrick.

"Found her first crack—senseless from the smoke, I imagine. She's at the hospital by this time. Seems all right."

"Yes, she's not hurt. Thank Heaven for the way things turned out! Did you get any apparatus out of there?"

"Apparatus be damned!" snorted the other. "We were after *you*!"

Kenrick groaned despairingly. "You missed the biggest stunt of all, then! Mr. Shen had discovered black light; was using it right along. If you'd gotten hold of one of his machines so that we could——"

"Take it easy, old man," broke in Colonel Blank soothingly. "You're all right now; no need to get excited——"

"Confound you! Do you think I'm lying?"

"Just a bit touched in the head, maybe. Black light, huh? Very interesting. Hello! Here comes the report. Cool down, now!"

Kenrick forced himself to lie back silently. He realized slowly that his

story would not be credited in its bald details; it smacked too highly of wizardry—even were he to explain that the wizardry consisted of common Taoist tricks! And the black light—well, he would simply have to keep quiet, unless some proof could be extracted from the house.

He saw, however, that there was no hope of this. Despite the efforts of the firemen, the entire building was by this time a shell of flame—a steamy vomit of fire was pouring up into the sky from the building.

"What luck?" demanded Colonel Blank, as another group joined them.

"Got two men in a room together, just as the order came to clear out," said a smoke-blackened operative. "Both Chinamen, big husky brutes. They showed fight, so we left 'em there according to orders," he added grimly. "No one else was found, although we had no chance to make a real search. The whole interior was blazing."

"No sign of a little, fat man in Chinese costume?" asked Kenrick.

"No, sir. Not a sign of any one else—though he might have been there, as I say."

Kenrick relaxed, watching the blaze with weary eyes. Had that bomb of his, cunningly set in the base of the cross, failed to do its work? Had he risked himself for nothing? He could not believe it; yet, as he gazed at the pyre that flamed to heaven, he felt sudden fright and uneasiness.

"Come, Kenrick," Colonel Blank turned to him. "I have an ambulance waiting for you——"

"Nothing doing," said Kenrick firmly. "I stay right here until we know something definite about Mr. Shen. Great Scott, man! Everything swings on that! My leg's all right."

Silence fell on the group.

Five minutes afterward, a man approached up the drive, one of the policemen keeping the crowd out of the

way. He saluted Colonel Blank deferentially.

"Beg pardon, sir; is there a Mr. Kenrick with you?"

"Right here," answered Kenrick, starting up to his elbow. "What is it?"

The policeman extended a card. "A man sent this up to you, sir. He said he was Morrissy, Colonel Blank's assistant——"

"What!" ejaculated the colonel. "I have no man of that name——"

"He wasn't no chink, that I could see," replied the policeman defensively. "A kind o' small man, and spoke just's good English as I do myself! Besides, he said he was your assistant and had got hurt. He was hurt, all right, too——couldn't hardly walk. I helped him to the ambulance, and I guess it got away with him——"

"All right, colonel," Kenrick spoke up quietly. "That was Mr. Shen, and you've no chance on earth to catch him now. He'll have the ambulance drop him somewhere and he'll be gone before you could trail him."

"What? You think——"

"Let him go and don't waste your time trying." Kenrick laughed mirthlessly. "It's a miracle how he escaped that bomb with his life. He must have managed to get out of his Chinese garb——probably had his American clothes on underneath——and crawl away. We have just one consolation, that he was badly hurt and had some doubt of his own condition. You can get after him later, if you want to try your hand at it; but I advise you to leave things to me. By the time I'm out of bed myself, will be time enough to take up the search. Read this and you'll understand."

Colonel Blank took the card from Kenrick's hand and held it up to the light of the conflagration. Upon the card had been hastily scribbled a few lines in pencil:

If I die, you live. But if I do not die——then you shall taste of hell.

Beneath this penciled scrawl was a large Chinese ideograph embossed heavily in scarlet—the ideograph that stood for the English word

SHEN



## LOVE'S SILENCE

By Arnold Tyson

A DEARTH of things . . . the things we hunger for;  
 A few stray moments we have learned to trust;  
 The touch of hands that wither in the dust;  
 Some trinkets added to our slender store;  
 A lovely room somewhere on which the door  
 Of time shuts in a sudden windy gust  
 Of fury; little stabs of beauty; rust  
 That gathers on the latchspring; dreams that soar.

Now through the distant corners of the earth  
 Life sends us different ways, through many lands,  
 Yet where the voiceless dreamings shall have birth  
 The urge and passion of your slender hands,  
 The sharp, swift blaze of beauty . . . these are worth  
 Love's silence if the spirit understands.



# Recoiling Sparks

~~by~~ Roy W. Hinds

**I** KNOW not what awakened me. There was no impression of sound on my senses. As I sat bolt upright in bed I could neither see nor hear anything unusual in the night. There was but one sound—the gentle swish of the sea a quarter mile away. My bedchamber was ablaze with the silver glory of a great moon, hanging in the sky like a brilliant mirror throwing back the gleam of a mighty conflagration. Through my windows I could see the palm trees, rearing into the moonlight like gigantic toadstools.

There was no unusual sound, yet I knew that danger lurked near by. I sat quietly in bed, staring straight through the doorway which led to the stairs; sat tense, rigid, afraid that the slightest movement would precipitate the ominous peril which surely hovered in the air.

An open doorway was between my room and the room of my friend, Brakely. The stairway leading to our chambers came to a landing three feet below the thresholds of our rooms, and from one side of this landing a few steps led to his chamber, while, straight ahead, the ascent was taken up by a few steps leading to my threshold.

Thus, in going to his room, Brakely

mounted to the landing and turned to the right, while to reach my room I stepped straight across the landing and up. A fragment of the landing and a few steps were visible from where I sat in bed. The house was quite old and not large.

For some inexplicable reason I felt that I would have to fight off this impending danger single-handed. Something told me I would not have the reinforcement of Brakely's six feet and two hundred fifteen pounds of brawn and muscle. I did not even contemplate fleeing into his bedroom, and I can explain that no more than I can the reason for my awakening. The unseen finger of Providence must touch one upon the shoulder in times like this, and bid him be on guard.

No, I did not think of calling upon Brakely for help, and this was very strange indeed, for we were the best of friends and he was one of the bravest of men. But what is stranger by far is the feeling which came over me that I would have to *fight* Brakely.

Had I not been a man of some courage this would have thrown me into panic, for Brakely, as I said, was of massive strength, athletic, and long trained in college sports and in a career



where his life more often than not depended on his ability to crush antagonists. I am a medium-sized man, of ordinary strength, and no especial skill in battle beyond the natural skill of self-preservation born in every man.

I knew that Brakely was not in his bed. The sound of ordinary breathing in sleep, when all else was still, was audible between the two bedrooms, and Brakely's breathing, in sleep, was far from ordinary. He was given to deep, heavy breathing always and sometimes snoring.

In that house there was not the faintest sound, strain my ears as I might. There was no sound but the suscitated throbbing of my own heart, which, the longer I sat, began to smite my eardrums with a donging roar.

Of a sudden I became calm. The perspiration dried on my forehead. The heart ceased its floundering, steadying into normal pulsations. The twitching faded from my nerves. As a physician, I knew that the excitation of danger had passed subconsciously into the calmness which comes to all men feeling themselves face to face with the utmost test of self-preservation.

I had it in mind to arise quietly and dress, and had one foot almost on the floor when I heard a creaking on the stairway. I did not attempt to draw the foot back. I sat just as I was—and waited.

I had but a moment to wait.

First I saw a slippered foot setting down easily—oh, so easily!—on the landing. It had been raised from the first step down, and I could see a trousered leg as far up as the knee. I could see a massive white hand clutching the banister and part of an arm. I knew the leg and arm. They were part of the huge body of Mason Brakely—at once my friend and my adversary.

He moved as stealthily and as coldly as an iceberg bearing down upon the frail hulk of a schooner. His very

stealth confirmed my instinctive fears. There was no doubt now. He had pitted himself against me—and I must pit myself against him.

Still I dared not move. Had I leaped from bed, I felt sure the action would precipitate the struggle, and my hope lay not in struggle, but in keeping out of Brakely's clutches. I feared to lie down again; feared that he would spring upon me before I could get out from under.

I glanced at the huge earthen pitcher on the washstand, and at once told myself that, if he entered my room, I would grasp the pitcher and endeavor to beat him to the floor. I would endeavor to crash it full upon his head, hoping that it would merely stun him; but, if necessary to save my own life, that it would kill him.

The foot came full upon the landing, and was followed, just as quietly, by the other foot. Presently the whole figure of Brakely, clad in shirt flung open at the neck, trousers, and slippers, stood upon the landing in the full glare of the moonlight—stood for an instant like a marble figure of some terrible wrath, the moonlight scarce whiter than his face and garb.

The glance he turned into my room was fleeting and furtive, and, seeing that I was sitting upright, he tried to screen his real design by shifting his gaze toward his own room. Though there was no need of stealth now, he stepped just as quietly and just as slowly to the stairs leading into the other chamber—and I saw him disappear. I knew now with what I had to contend.

I had seen his eyes.

As a physician, I knew the nature of his madness. It was madness in which cunning was equaled only by tenacity of design. He had set his whole being upon one thing—my life. He could be diverted only by a strength and cunning greater than his own. A strength and cunning which even feebly

approached his own were not in that house that night. The nearest human habitation was a fisherman's hut two miles down the shore.

I had seen the terrible eyes—glittering like tongues of flame reaching for the wretches they had hemmed in. I had seen the grim jaws—set as hard as the stones of a dungeon. I had seen, rising out of the flaring shirt neck, the great throat, swollen by torrents of fevered blood. I had seen the tousled black hair, a strand or two lying raggedly against the white forehead.

## II.

The tragic story of Mason Brakely's young manhood is not unknown, particularly in his own State. It will be recalled that he was the central figure about which fate wove the threads of a murder mystery into a drama no less thrilling than any in fiction. It will be recalled that he was convicted and sentenced to death in the electric chair and that he spent more than a year in the death house. The confession of the man who was guilty of the murder, a confession which was made a half hour before Brakely was to have been executed, will ever form one of the dramatic pages in criminal annals.

Brakely, in fact, was being led to the electric chair when the news of the confession reached the prison, and he collapsed. He faced death without a tremor, but was unable to withstand the good news. The shock overturned his nervous system.

He had been condemned to die three different times, once after each of his three trials, the first two having been won on appeals. He had three times traversed the terrible road up to the very night of execution, only to be given a new lease on life.

The effect of these things on the man was profound. It is bad enough, of course, to endure once the horrors

of preexecution, but Brakely made three separate journeys to death—journeys which covered weeks of anticipation, and finally three horrible "last nights."

He and I had been college mates; more than that, we were the closest of friends, and I hardly did anything else in the nineteen months from his arrest to his vindication but work for that vindication. I hardly did anything else but labor with his lawyers and visit him in jail and prison. On three different occasions I shook the hand of Mason Brakely, thinking it to be for the last time, and departed from that death house, suffering far more than he, for my affection for the man was immeasurable.

We had scarcely been out of college two months when Brakely was arrested. Of course there was a woman involved, but there is no need to go into details. After his vindication Brakely, who also was a physician, became a wanderer over the face of the earth—a soldier of fortune, seeking to forget in adventure the horrors of that death house.

He often told me—and I saw him at intervals during his wanderings—that what clung to him closest were the memories of the men who had been executed while he was there. Six of them there were—four had been led away screeching and fighting. The cries of these men were never wholly quiet in his ears. Their faces never wholly faded from his vision.

Brakely, although a physician, had never practiced, but he had become wealthy in his wanderings. Now, years after his release from the death house, he had come back to the United States. He told me he had become interested in electrical development while in Europe and that he intended to settle down and devote his life to his latest hobby. In a short time he made several successful inventions, or rather improvements on electrical apparatus, and money came to him very fast.

He had inherited a small estate on the southern coast, and, needing a vacation, I had gone there with him for a couple of months in the late fall. He was a hermitlike man now, accessible only to myself, and preferred this lonely spot to a more pretentious estate which he could have had with ease.

I knew that Brakely was pursuing his electrical experiments in the little house. He had a room which I never was permitted to enter, but I thought nothing of that because I myself had done considerable research work in medicine and chemistry, and I knew how desirous I always had been of excluding everybody from my laboratory until I had achieved the result I sought. Engaged in research and experiment, I would not even permit my laboratory to be swept, and kept the door locked constantly.

So Brakely's desire for absolute solitude and secrecy in his laboratory was not strange to me. He had nailed boards over the windows, and always kept the door locked. He worked by lamplight. He spent much time in profound meditation, into which I did not intrude. I made the most of my vacation in hunting, fishing, motor boating, and roaming over the beach and forests. For days sometimes I would see Brakely only in the morning and at night. Sometimes he would drop his work and meditations, and we would have an old-time friendly evening, but this was not often.

Brakely gained the solitude of his bedchamber without noise. I sat still a few moments, trying to detect by some sound or other just what he was up to; but he was as quiet in the room as he had been on the stairway. That was the terrible part of it—the quiet. I think it would have relieved me had he gone charging about the house in maniacal fury. If I had heard a dresser drawer open I would have surmised that he was reaching for his revolver

—and I would have known what was coming. Even if it meant my certain death, it were far better to know it than not to be aware of the exact form and bent his insanity had taken. Brakely had a revolver in his room, and there were two shotguns and a rifle in a closet downstairs.

But Mason Brakely had not planned for me a doom so merciful as a quick bullet. He had laid out my end in a way much more weird and fantastic, as I was soon to learn.

However, I did not then know what he was up to. I shifted my gaze between the two doorways for a few moments, not knowing from which he would choose to strike. Then I realized that my own safety lay in getting my hands on one of the guns downstairs. I arose as quietly as I could. There was nothing to be gained by sitting helpless in bed.

I slid my feet into slippers, and, pajama-clad, tiptoed to the stair doorway, keeping a watchful eye also on the other doorway. Very cautiously I peered around the casing toward Brakely's room. What I saw froze my blood for an instant, and then sent it racing through my veins.

He stood on his threshold, crouched like a panther, as though he had expected me to do the very thing I had done. His eyes glittered with weasel cunning and his lips laid open in the ferocious smile which sets on a man's face when he clutches a throat in mortal combat. I noticed, however, that Brakely did not have his revolver in hand.

There was plainly but one thing for me to do—get to the closet containing the guns as quickly as I could and before he did. I was sure I would have to shoot old Brake. I would try to wound him, to incapacitate him, but I had to remove the menace from my own life, even if I had to kill him. I doubted whether I would have much



time to shoot as precisely as I wanted. I might have to blow his head off or blast his chest away. I would rather break one of his legs.

I could not beat Brakely in a run, even had I been able to get out of the house. I would have to go two miles before I could get help—and I could not run two miles. Brakely normally had tremendous endurance, and, insane, all his muscular and lung stamina would be increased beyond measurement.

I sprang. I was only an instant quicker than he, but that instant was sufficient to give me momentary advantage. I leaped down the stairway like a man pursued by an overwhelming vengeance. I say down the stairway, but, as a matter of fact, I went only halfway down the stairway. From there I vaulted over the banister.

Brakely vaulted over, too. I thought I heard him snarl as he pounced down, but I was out from under before his huge body reached the floor. The drop permitted me to gain on him a little. I raced into the next room and across it to the closet. It ran through my mind that the guns were always loaded. I reached the closet and flung open the door.

He was so close upon me that I realized, with heart turned sick, that I would not have time to pick up a gun and shoot. He would have his powerful hands upon me before I could turn around. I had only one hope left—and I grasped it. Even that was hardly accessible, so close was he to me now. I leaped into the closet and jerked the door shut, jamming the heavy bolt into its socket just as I felt Brakely's hand turn the knob on the other side.

I leaned against the door and breathed heavily. Then I fumbled about in the dark in search of the guns.

They had been taken out of the closet.

### III.

The hope that never dies was a mere flicker in my breast now. I could not long survive in the closet. It was not large, and I soon would draw from the air all its oxygen. Besides that, I felt sure Brakely could force the door. There were at hand, had he chosen to get them, an ax, a hammer, and a saw.

The door was stout, but not stout enough to resist an ax in the hands of a maniac. I was conscious of thankfulness that the old house, built when the country was wild and sparsely settled, was equipped with bolts inside its closet doors. Brakely told me once that this was for the protection of the women, who occasionally sought refuge in the closets while their menfolk fought off marauders.

There was absolutely no chance of flight. Although I could hear no sound, I felt sure Brakely was lying in wait outside the door, ready to pounce on me the moment I emerged. There was no weapon of any kind in the closet. There wasn't a strip of board. Being in my pajamas, of course I didn't even have a penknife.

Realizing that I had but a short time in which to act, I endeavored to herd some sort of plan from the seething thoughts that stampeded through my brain.

Of insanity there are various forms. One is the insanity from which every vestige of reason has fled. That is where the entire brain structure has toppled and the nervous system has become like a network of wires over which furious currents race after the directing hand has gone wild. It is just as though a telegraph operator sat at his key and frantically made dots and dashes without any effort at forming letters or words. The dots and dashes flash into the brain and surcharge the whole system with a tur-

bulent, incongruous, and usually ferocious momentum. He has nothing to which appeal can be made—he has no memory, no knowledge of the things about him or of himself. He doesn't even know that he is human.

I did not think that Brakely's insanity was of this description, because he did not rave and he showed a certain method in his actions. His was a collapse of the nervous system, the throwing out of joint of certain nerve centers—better described as a crossing of wires—in which the brain was not wholly lost. He was desperately insane, but he still had a coherence of thought and control of motive which left me a feeble hope.

There was some part of his brain which survived. It was dominated for the time by the cells which had collapsed. It was shuttered off from his mad being, as a peace-loving man might seek refuge from an angry mob. He still had reason. He knew he wanted to slay me and that I was seeking to evade him. He knew I was in the closet, and he knew he had to be watchful lest I escape. I doubt if he knew, at the moment, just who I was, but that is no matter, for the affections of a normal mind do not live when the mind falls.

It was my task to reach the part of his brain which was still healthy. I might do it by a word. I might not be able to do it at all. Had he been in a cell, where I could proceed with leisure and method, I would have had a better chance; but I was the one who was in a cage, a cage rapidly become stuffy and unendurable.

"Brake!" I cried, my mouth close to the keyhole.

There was no answer, but I thought I heard something brush against the door.

"Brake—old boy!"

Still he did not answer, though I could now plainly hear him moving

about the room. I cried again and again, and very faintly his answer came.

"Where are you?" he asked. His voice was husky—the huskiness of frayed nerves.

"This is Walt!" I cried frantically, overjoyed at this seeming response of his real self. My voice apparently had darted like a lance to the sober tissues of his brain. "This is Walt, and I'm locked in this closet!"

"What are you doing in there?"

"I—I stepped in here, and the bolt got jammed. I can't slide it back." He must not have the faintest idea, if he were emerging from the cloud, of the real facts.

"I'll get the ax and burst in the door," he shouted.

"No, no!" I cried. "Don't do that!" I did not like to think of Brakely just then with an ax in his hand. "Don't do that! I can work it open all right."

I fumbled at the bolt a minute, and then slid it back. I had to quit the closet, and I might as well do it before my strength was sapped by the weakening air.

I stepped outside, and saw Brakely standing beside a table. Even in the dim light I noticed that there was a softer glare in his eye. He was still insane, but the lust for blood, temporarily at least, had faded.

"What were you doing in that closet?" he asked me. His tone was quizzical, bewildered.

By what I was able to diagnose in hasty observation, it was evident that Brakely had suddenly gone insane, as a result of earlier blows at his nervous system linked with some very recent overexertion of faculties. He had, after an hour or two perhaps, been flung into a violent mood, due to some deep concentration of his already tottering brain. In a spasm of that sort he had attempted to achieve by violence what, mildly insane, he would have tried by cunning. He had not

lost his cunning, but it had been handi-capped by his violent mood. After that would come a calculated calmness, tricky as only the insane can be. That apparently was his plight at the moment.

His whole nervous system for the time had been ripped from its moorings, much as a fisherman's net is ripped away and lashed into shreds and tatters by a storm. He suddenly had become possessed of a desire to slay me, but now the lust for blood had lulled into a milder insanity. As long as he was that way I might control him; I might humor him, and even aid him in carrying out—provided it was harmless—whatever design might be in his shattered brain.

That was my diagnosis at the moment. I did not know then that he had been insane for a week, and that I had lived all that time in the shadow of death. Had I been watchful in the slightest degree, I would have observed the change, but—well, I had not been watchful.

I was soon to learn that his insanity was not the result of overwork of recent date. I was soon to learn that the hurricane raging in his brain had been years in the making, that his fancy, peopled by tragic recollections which became darker and ever darker in his broodings, had evolved the ghastly design now unfolding. Had I known the thoughts which were leaping about, like frightful insects, in that cunning brain—had I only known!

"I got chilly in bed, and was looking for another quilt, Brake," I answered his question. "Some way the bolt got jammed."

"I've been looking for you," he said quietly, never once taking his eyes off me. "I've something I want to show you—and also I've something I want you to do for me." His voice was still husky.

"And you know I'll do it, don't you,

Brake?" I said, a great wave of relief passing over me. "There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, Brake, and you know it."

"I'm not so sure of that," he said, and I didn't exactly like his tone. "However, get on some clothes and we'll talk it over."

I felt an impulse to dash from the house and attempt to hide myself in the forest, but I knew he was watching me closely—ever so closely—and I was too cautious. There was no need of enraging him, so long as he was mild.

"I'll go upstairs and dress," I said.

"I'll go with you."

"You'd better stay down here, Brake. I'll be down in a minute." I had vague ideas of leaping from an upstairs window or of getting hold of his revolver, if it were still in his room.

"I'll go with you," he said. He was not to be thrown off. He clung closely to me, never permitting me to get out of arm's reach for an instant, though he did not offer to lay hand on me.

After I had got into underclothes, shirt, and trousers, we walked, side by side and without a word, down the stairway. He led me straight to the door of his mysterious laboratory and unlocked it. When the door was pushed open I saw that a kerosene lamp was burning in the room. There was nothing visible from where I stood but a long workbench on the other side of the room, a large table in the center, and two small chairs. Bench and table were littered with wire, battery jars, and other electrical apparatus. The floor had its accumulation of junk, too.

"Step in," he said. "We'll have our little talk in here."

An unaccountable dread overcame me, but, being within grasp of his strong hand, I had no choice. I stepped into the room and over to the table in the center. My eye quickly swept half the



room before I gave my whole attention to Brakely. So far I had seen nothing unusual. With misgiving I watched him close the door, lock it, and thrust the key in a pocket in his trousers. I turned a quick glance to the windows, and saw that they were still boarded up. He walked slowly to the other side of the table and pulled up one of the chairs.

"Get a chair," said he, "and sit down."

I turned to obey, and my gaze fell for the first time into a corner of the room somewhat shaded from the glow of the lamp. It was then that I saw what speared my heart with the supreme horror of that horrible night.

In the corner, as grim as the most vivid fancy could picture it, stood a fully equipped electric chair!

#### IV.

I don't believe there exists a death chamber as weird and as ghastly as that room—the house as lonely as a lighthouse when the dawn breaks over the sea with a storm, and the room, windows boarded up and lighted by the yellowish pallor from the sputtering lamp, seeming to be even farther from the world. Thus we sat with the littered table between us; my hope not nearly so bright as the dilated pupils of Brakely's eyes. And at my back—unseen, yet as plain as though it were before me, so vivid its impression—stood the instrument of death, which I now knew that Brakely had fashioned for me.

Studying him as closely as I did now, I measured with despair the depth of his insanity. It was hopeless, at least for some days, and without treatment which I was powerless to give at the time. He had set his whole being upon one thing. I could not circumvent him by strength. There was no weapon

that I could see in the room. My only hope lay in outwitting him.

"Walt," said he evenly, though in the raspy, hoarse voice of the insane, "you're a man who has given his life to mankind, aren't you?"

"I've tried," I said, forcing an air of easy assurance, "to stamp out what disease I have encountered. That is the business of our profession."

"That's it," he agreed. "That's it." Your life is wrapped up in a profession which seeks to benefit humanity. First you nearly worked yourself to death in saving me, and then you started out to save others. It's wonderful to have a friend like you, Walt."

"It's wonderful to have a friend like you, Brake."

Here was the proof of his particular affliction—rational insanity. Reasonable, remembering everything, retaining his affections, knowing every move he was making, he was insane upon one thing, and upon that, as unswerving as the ram of a battleship.

"You and I both, Walt, are alone in the world," said he. "We're bachelors, and we haven't any relatives closer than cousins."

"Yes," I agreed, knowing only too well where this was leading.

"What could be better, then," he asked, elbows on the table and his glittering eyes pushed nearer to me, "than giving our lives to humanity?"

"That would depend, Brake, on whether the end was worth the sacrifice."

"It is worth it—and I'll prove it. I'm glad to find you in a reasonable mood. Look back of you—in that corner."

I faced the hideous thing again, standing there as silently and as yawningly as the pit of hell. Then I turned quickly back to him.

"That," said I, "is an electric chair."

"Yes, it's an electric chair, Walt, and I'm going to ask you to die in it."

We looked steadily into each other's eyes a moment, and then Brakely reached to the floor and lifted up a glass jar, which I now saw for the first time. This jar had a capacity of a gallon, and over its top was clamped a metal cover. The jar was nearly full of a greenish liquid.

"What good will it do humanity," I asked, watching him place the jar on the table, "for me to die in that electric chair?"

"What good will it do humanity?" he repeated. "It will do this good: So long as men die in electric chairs, the sacrifice we are to make here to-night will cause their end to be without horror. It will demonstrate that there is absolutely no pain attached to the most powerful of electric shocks. It will prove to all men that dying by electricity is as easy as dying by chloroform."

"And still," I argued, "it will not remove the horror that all men have of death—whether by chloroform or electricity."

"You have never before been confronted with death by electricity, Walt, else you wouldn't say that. You haven't any conception of the horror induced in a man's mind by weeks of waiting for that terrible, rending, burning shock. You've never seen the terror on their faces as they are led by your cell. You've never heard their cries. You know nothing about it." He was silent a moment. "Tell me," he asked quickly, "would you rather die in that chair or be chloroformed?"

I admitted to myself that I would rather be chloroformed, but I said to Brakely: "I don't know that it would make any difference, Brake. I really don't. I don't want to die, but if I had to die I don't know that I'd worry much over the method, so long as it wasn't one of torture."

"But you," he countered, "have just been sentenced to death." The earth

seemed to drop from beneath my feet at this. "You have just been sentenced to death, and you are to be spared the ordeal of waiting. That's the horror of it, Walt—the waiting, the weeks of anticipating that shock, with others about you being led to slaughter. You think of that shock and the odor of burning flesh and hair."

Here were the years of brooding upon the terrible experiences of his youth. Tragedy was heavy upon him, and his voice seemed to bleed with it.

"How are you going to prove by my death, Brake, that the end is painless?" I asked.

"I have here," he said, laying his huge hand on the jar, "a chemical solution which I compounded after years of research. Only within the last few days have I learned of its success by experiments on myself. There are elements of narcotics in it, but its chief ingredient is a chemical compound which acts as an antithesis to electric shock—not the current, mind you, but the shock. When this solution is rubbed on the hands, feet, and head, or wherever the electrodes touch a man's body, the electric current is admitted to the tissues without shock. It doesn't weaken the current; it simply induces, when the current meets the liquid, a sudden lethargy, with absolutely no sensation of pain. The victim dozes off, with positively none of the sensations of pain or death."

"And how do you know this?"

"I've tried it on myself," he said calmly, "at reduced voltage, of course. I felt none of the tingliness of electricity. There was no shock. I touched my hands to two electrodes and there was a squeezing sensation, as though I were shaking hands with some one, and then a delightful drowsiness. There wasn't the slightest unpleasantness about it, Walt; not in the least. Why, if I were confronted by death



like that, I'd sing every day I was in a cell, and march out gladly!"

Poor devil! He didn't understand that when he made his last test he was insane, and that electric shocks, unless strong enough nearly to kill, are virtually imperceptible in certain forms of insanity. And I couldn't tell him he was insane!

"But, Brake," I argued, more to gain time than anything else, for I knew he couldn't be moved from the main point, "don't you think that if State governments wanted to reduce the horrors of execution, they would adopt the chloroform method? Supposing I do die without pain, what good is that going to do the men who are to be executed?"

"When the results of this experiment are published," he cried, rising to his feet in the manner of an impassioned orator, "public opinion will demand that my discovery be used in every death chamber in the country! Then the men who are to be executed for years to come will be spared the horrors that were not spared me. They will meet death bravely, instead of like squealing pigs. I have prepared everything.

"I have written my own story, and in it I give such a description of the horrors of a death house that nothing can stand in the way of their amelioration. It will be many years yet before capital punishment is abolished, but it won't be six months before the horrors are taken away from it by my discovery."

"Just how is your discovery going to be made public?"

"At seven o'clock in the morning," he said, "and I have set the time of your death at six-thirty, Doctor Malbauer and Doctor Traxler will arrive here. They are our friends, and I have their assurances that they will be here. Of course they don't know what's going on; they think I'm down sick, and I've arranged it so they will get into

Blaffton at six o'clock. It will take them an hour to get out here.

"When they arrive I'll have your body laid out on this table. I'm going to clear this junk away and spread a sheet over it. I'll explain things to them and they will perform an autopsy. Of course they can tell by the brain cells and structure of the nerve centers and heart whether you died with pain or a very little pain or absolutely without pain. They will find that you died absolutely without pain, and the result will be given to the world. Then, Walt, my old friend, I'll kill myself. I can't ask you to sacrifice your life unless I'm willing to do the same. But that will be nothing, so long as my discovery is given to the world. I have written its formula, and will deliver it to Malbauer and Traxler, together with my written story. It will be a big thing for the newspapers, and the country will rise up and demand just what we seek."

I sat, amazed, with rapidly diminishing hope. I say *diminishing* for lack of another word, for I doubt if anything so small as my hope can diminish. I was astounded at the details which this insane man had gathered into the finished web of his dark design. I stared while he smiled.

"But tell me, Brake," I asked, "why don't you conduct your experiment on a pig or an animal of some kind? Why sacrifice our lives when another method is available?"

"A man has got to die," he said positively. "I might electrocute a hundred pigs and attract no attention. But if I electrocute a man—don't you see? Publicity is what we must have—publicity and a deep investigation. The world must have our story and my discovery. Walt, I've thought this thing out thoroughly—and a man has got to die!"

"Then," I said with some heat, "why don't you climb into that chair and let me electrocute you? Why do you



choose me, against my will, when you're the one——"

"I'd give my soul, Walt," he interrupted, "if that were possible. Indeed I would. You know, Walt, that if you ever got me strapped in that chair you'd run for help and wouldn't finish the job."

"But you needn't strap yourself in the chair. If I offer to run away you can jump out and stop me."

"No," he said; "you'd give me enough juice to stun me—and then run off. You wouldn't go through with it, Walt, and you know it. As I said, I've gone into every detail of this thing, and there's only one course to pursue—we've both got to die; you first, and then me."

I turned around and looked at a small clock I had heard ticking on a shelf. It was four-twenty.

"I have," I said, forcing a smile, "two hours and ten minutes to live."

"Two hours and ten minutes," he agreed. "Don't you think it's wonderful, Walt?"

"It will be if everything turns out all right," I said.

"And you agree to die, do you, Walter, old boy?"

"Well, Brake, I don't see what else I can do. I'm in a corner."

"Yes," he admitted sorrowfully. "And I'd hate terribly to have to compel you to die." My worst fears were confirmed. I was to die anyway, willing or unwilling. "I want you to go to it like the brave man you are, Walt. I don't want to strap you into that chair by force. I want to feel that you're as willing as I to make the sacrifice."

"Of course—of course."

"And you agree?"

"If you really think it will achieve the end you seek, I'll agree, Brake. I've a lot of confidence in you."

"Good old Walt!" he cried, thrusting his hand across the table. "Good old Walt! I knew you were true blue!"

## V.

As we began our death watch, talking much as we had at other and more pleasant times, I set to wondering if I could not contrive to turn that clock backward, having no doubt that he had spoken the truth about Traxler and Malbauer, college mates and old friends of both of us. If I could do that—set it back, say, forty minutes—I had a good chance to return safely to the peaceful practice of medicine. But of all things I must not do, I must not antagonize Brakely. He had determined on my death and he would see it accomplished. He might hasten it if I showed fight.

He watched me in every movement I made. I knew him thoroughly now—embodying all the love he really held for me, but not abating in the least his maniacal cunning. He had taken, and would take, all necessary precautions from the time he had hidden the firearms until I lay upon the sheet-covered table.

"Come, Walt," he said after a few minutes, "we'll go upstairs."

We went up the stairs side by side, talking in a very friendly vein. From a linen closet he procured a sheet and we went back to the death chamber. He cleared the junk from the table and spread the sheet over it, talking earnestly of his discovery all the time.

"Brake," said I, "isn't it customary to give a condemned man his breakfast? Why don't you fetch me something to eat?"

"Come into the kitchen," he suggested, "and we'll get breakfast."

"Brake," I protested, "I dislike your attitude of distrust. I've given you my word—and I want to be trusted. Let's not doubt each other at a time like this. And will you forbid me the right of being alone for a while? That is not denied the most wretched of murderers."

He gazed at me intently. "Walt," said he, "I'll trust you. You stay here, and I'll fetch your breakfast."

I waited a minute or two after he had quit the room, and then, when I heard him fumbling around in the kitchen, I grasped the clock from the shelf and set it back fifteen minutes. I did not dare set it back more, for fear he would notice it, trusting to other opportunities to stretch the time until Malbauer and Traxler should arrive. The clock now said four-forty-five, but of course the right time was five o'clock. Brakely had started a fire, and while it was burning up he stepped back to the door of the death chamber for a moment.

"Walt," said he very sorrowfully, glancing at the clock, "you've set that clock back fifteen minutes."

"Why, no——"

"Yes, you have, Walt." He stepped to the shelf and turned the clock to the correct time. "Now I'll have to watch you again. Come into the kitchen with me."

There was a determined light in his eye, and I obeyed. In the kitchen I found he had hidden various things—the poker and everything which might be turned into a weapon.

We both had breakfast of fruit, fried ham and eggs, toast and coffee, but there was a strained atmosphere between us now. Brakely's lips had set grimly, and I know the man had convinced himself that he was about to confer an enormous benefit on mankind and that he was sorry that I, his friend, should try to circumvent him. He was more intent than ever upon my death. He cut my ham into bits, and compelled me to eat breakfast with a spoon.

Then we returned to the death chamber. At the door, I stopped abruptly, determined to make a struggle for my life. I sprang upon him, striking him with my fist squarely upon the point of the jaw, clutching for his throat.

The blow merely drove his head back a little, and before my hand could reach his throat he had clutched both my wrists in a terrible grasp and flung me into the small chair in which I previously had been sitting at the table. He shut the door and locked it quickly.

"Walt," he said, "I'm awfully sorry that you acted this way." He did not seem to be angry. "I don't want to execute you now, but you may force me to. I want the body as fresh as possible when Malbauer and Traxler get here. So let's not fight any more."

"All right, Brake," I agreed. "I'll yield. It was hard, Brake, to give up life with so little warning, but I'll do as you say now."

I had finally formed a coherent plan, and the success of it depended to the fullest degree on amicable relations with my executioner.

Arising from the chair before the sheet-covered table, upon which more than once I had visioned my stark body, I asked him if I might examine the electric chair. Together we went to it.

It was an old morris chair from which the cushions had been stripped and into which a seat of leather had been tacked. Strips of sheet steel had been nailed about its structure, forming the circuit to the electrodes fastened one upon each arm for the hands; a huge one hanging down from the back for the head; another hanging limply from a steel strap over the left arm for the heart; and the long strip of steel, fashioned like the foot rest on a barber's chair, for the feet. A pair of copper wires were connected to the chair, below the right arm, in screw sockets attached to the sheet steel. These wires ran to a switch eight feet away and thence to a huge generating set against the wall. It was a powerful system, I could see that—powerful enough to wrench the life from me. The chair was equipped with a set of straps securely to hold the victim.



It was rather dark in that corner, from the position in which the kerosene lamp was set, and, laughing, I sat down in the chair and placed my hands on the electrodes. Brakely smiled down upon me.

"It won't be so bad, Walt," he said. "You'll simply fall asleep."

"I guess you're right," said I.

I sat a few minutes in the chair, keeping him busy at talk while I rubbed my hands over the strips of steel on the arms and felt of the ends of wire fitted into the screw sockets. Then I got up and we resumed our places by the table—the sheet-covered table. The clock on the shelf now said five-forty-one—forty-nine minutes before the time of execution.

"Brake," I suggested, "that ham made me thirsty. Let's get a pitcher of water."

"You'll go with me?" he asked.

"Certainly. I'm resigned now to the inevitable."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, but I could wish you were a little more enthusiastic about this great contribution to mankind."

I was principally concerned in saving my poor life instead of giving my carcass to his wild dream, but I said nothing. We went to the kitchen, procured a large pitcher of water and two glasses, and returned to the horrible yellow room. In the kitchen I had seen that daylight was coming on—coming on with a grayness which turned the sky the ashen hue of a corpse.

In the execution chamber Brake set the pitcher and glasses on the table, and I did not offer to drink at once, for I had drunk in the kitchen.

"Suppose," I suggested, "that we delay the actual execution until we hear the steps of Malbauer and Traxler on the porch."

"You're sparring for time," he commented.

"But," said I, "it will not interfere

with your plans and it may be of immense benefit in determining the exact state of my body. You can strap me in the chair and stand at the switch. The moment we hear their steps or the porch you can throw on the current. If I contemplated trickery, that would gain me nothing, for once that switch is in——"

"I believe you're right," he agreed quietly. "We'll do that. It may be better to have the body warm when we start the autopsy."

"Certainly! If I'm going to give up my life in this cause I want to do everything to make the sacrifice profitable. I don't want the experiment to fail simply because you killed me too quick."

I had taken to pacing the floor now, stopping to examine the switch, the generating set, and the chair. I did not lay my hands on a thing, because he watched me like a hawk, although he did not object to my walking about. Even in his insanity he didn't wish to deny me this slight balm to my nervousness.

I walked to the table and poured out a glass of water as though about to drink, but I did not drink. Glass in hand, I sauntered over to the switch and studied it intently. I shifted the glass from one hand to the other, and accidentally spilled half the water on the floor beneath the switch. I quickly drank the remainder of the water, and set the glass back on the table.

I paced about the room, kicking idly at the scraps of junk that lay on the floor. It was now eighteen minutes after six o'clock, and soon I upset another glass of water in such fashion that it slopped over Brakely's slippers.

"You're nervous," he said, and there was pity in his tone.

"I'm extremely nervous," I assured him. "Let's get the Bible and spend a few minutes in prayer."

We soon had the Bible in the room, and now, the better to hear Malbauer



and Traxler when they came, Brakely left open the door to the room. The sun was rising grandly, and the sky had been enlivened into a healthful glow.

We read together a few passages of the Scriptures, knelt and prayed for the repose of both our souls, and then, tears in his eyes, Brakely quickly prepared me for the execution.

He produced a pair of shears and cut a wide area of hair away from my scalp. Then he cut a round piece out of my shirt and undergarment, over the heart. Then he anointed my head, my breast, and hands thoroughly with the greenish solution. Seated in the chair, I watched him pull my slippers and socks off and lave the soles of my feet with the fluid. In a few minutes I sat helpless in the chair, my bare feet strapped to the foot rest, my arms to the arms, and other leather thongs holding my legs and trunk securely. I felt the cold electrodes clamp down upon my head and over my heart. I must have had a terrible look upon my face, for I was in mortal fear.

"Good old Walt," he whispered as he worked, and soon he stood by the switch. I breathed more easily.

"Don't look at me, Brake," I pleaded, "else I'll lose courage."

"I'll not look, Walt, old boy!" I could hear him sobbing gently, a weird sob in which insanity and emotion were mingled.

"I won't throw in the switch," he promised me, "until we hear them on the porch, and I'll give you a signal first."

"Good old Brake!" said I.

"Good old Walt!"

I stared straight ahead, and he did not once face me. We had but a tense minute or two to wait.

We first heard the chugging of an automobile, and soon a thumping of boots on the porch and a clattering at the door.

"There they are, Walt; there they are!" cried Brakely. "Good-by, dear old Walt; I'll be with you before the day's over! Good-by——"

The cry died in his throat with a sickening gurgle, for he had thrown in the switch. His body first became stiff, then trembled from head to toe, and, shuddering, went down with a mighty crash.

"Help! Help!" I cried with all the strength I could summon into my shaking voice.

There was a crash as a front window went out, for Malbauer and Traxler were men of action, and soon they were in the room. Sparks sputtered furiously from the wire ends lying against a strip of sheet steel on the floor near the chair, and there was a nauseating odor of burning cloth and flesh.

"Throw off that switch!" I cried. "Take the broom there, and don't step on those pieces of steel or in the water!"

Traxler soon had thrown off the switch, and Malbauer and he rushed to my side, seeing in my ghastly position greater need of help than in Brakely on the floor.

"Brake needs you first!" I cried. "Quick—quick! It's electrocution!"

They lifted him to the table, and Traxler raised an eyelid.

"He lives," he said calmly.

I collapsed. I sat, sobbing, like a stubborn corpse which, strapped in the horrible chair, refused to be quiet even after life had been burned out of it.

Brakely was brought back to consciousness. His powerful body, its endurance swelled by his malady, had resisted a shock which surely would have killed me. Luckily he had fallen in such a way as to break the current. His feet were horribly burned—but he lived.

It took me some time to convince Malbauer and Traxler that we were not both insane, for my nerves refused to lie still all through the day, so terrible

had been the experience. But they finally got my story out of me, and until these pages were written it has been kept secret.

I had outwitted Brakely during the moments I was walking around the room and while we were praying. In kicking idly at the scraps of sheet steel there was a method. While walking and while on my knees I lined up a complete system of scraps of steel and connected them with the puddle of water which formed beneath the switch and in which Brakely stood in his wet slippers, so that when he turned on the current he got it himself.

When I sat down in the chair I had unloosened the wires from the screw sockets and let them drop to the floor. It was dark in that spot, and I had chosen a moment when Brakely's eyes were turned. From these exposed wire ends I kicked my little steel circuit into line. Guided by Providence, I saved my life and his, too.

Poor old Brake! He never wholly recovered, but violence did not come to him again. I visited him often in a quiet sanitarium, where he died a year ago. We were friends to the end, but sometimes I feel that old Brake never quite forgave me.



## SUCH BEAUTY

By Roy le Moynes

**L**IFE'S bleeding hands are at my throat . . . I see  
 The heavy shadows gather in her eyes  
 And all her arts, her horde of ready lies  
 No longer thrill me with their subtlety.  
 Though she still holds me I have shaken free  
 The lust of bitterness and vain surprise;  
 For every vision that within me dies  
 I gain the strength of an eternal mystery.

I've known a heart that does not dream of fear,  
 A spirit flaming with eternal light,  
 Music that only the immortals hear  
 Amid the open silences of night . . .  
 Past the tumult that fills the weary ear  
 I know such beauty as my laugh at night.



# Between Two Worlds

by Ada  
Louvie  
Evans

**T**HE doctors say that Andrews' death was caused by heart failure, and up to the time I pen these words no one has ventured another opinion. Some things are hard to say. Very likely the doctors were right. No post-mortem was made. But the *causes* of heart failure?

You will say, of course, that there is no such thing as a dim half world, where the spirits of beasts and men, rightly tuned to the vibrations of that medium, can mingle together on common ground. You will say, too, that it is preposterously ridiculous to attribute to an animal the powers of good and evil impulse belonging only to man. You will scoff utterly and unreservedly at the ancient theory of the beast-human-devil. So did Bill Johnson, so did Tom Patterson, so did I—a year ago. But now, I say, I know of many things which formerly had never entered my most horror-haunted dreams.

And Andrews, poor fellow! He plumbed depths we never reached. I hope that by this time he has lost forever the memory of those crawling pits of blackness into which his quivering soul was dragged.

For ten years Bill Johnson, his man

Tom Patterson, and myself have spent two weeks of each November hunting in the Northern woods. Last year was no exception. Bill had asked permission to invite a new man to join the party this time, a young fellow by the name of Andrews, who worked in his office. Naturally Bill's indorsement was enough for any man.

At five-thirty o'clock on the afternoon of November 17th I was speeding up the maple-lined drive to Bill's bachelor quarters at Longgreen. Mine host commenced to shout airy greetings at me when I was still afar off, and lifted me to my toes by a slap on the back as I entered his ancestral hall.

As usual a huge fire was roaring behind the library grate, but in the half dusk of the big room I stumbled against the back of an armchair and caused the occupant to jump in a startled manner. At the same instant I was conscious of a smothered growl at my feet, and hastened to retract my last step.

"Shag," shouted Bill, "get out of here!"

"Beast of a temper," he muttered as a huge, grayish brute got up and ambled out of the room. "Don't know why I keep the worthless cur, anyhow." He laughed apologetically, and for the



few seconds of time that it took for the dog to pass through the French doors and out of sight down the corridor, Bill's eyes followed him. Then, at a stir from the man in the chair, he pulled himself up.

"Sam," he boomed, "I want you to meet Andrews here. Looks as if he needed a change, don't he? Won't a week in the little old woods pull the crinks out of him, though? Guess we could stand a little light here, eh?"

"Glad to meet you," I began. "Any friend of Bill's——"

Then I saw that he wasn't looking at me at all. He was slumped back in his chair, with one hand—his right—hanging limply over the arm. His face was turned toward the door. In the reflection from the fire his skin looked ashen and transparent. Following the direction of his intent gaze, I thought I caught a glimpse of the dog's face grinning against the glass of the door, an illusion which seemed to dissolve itself into the dark of the hall as Bill clicked on the switch.

Andrews drew a quicker breath, like a man who has been suddenly released from an electric current, and turned his face toward me—not a remarkable face except, perhaps, the eyes. I remember that at the time they reminded me startlingly of the helpless, frightened eyes of the first rabbit I ever trapped. He lifted his hand slowly, as if it had a weight at the end of it, and held it out to me. He made no attempt to rise. With a voice as commonplace as his face he said:

"Very glad to meet you, sir."

In surprise I noted that the back of his hand was clammy and covered with red spots. A mere boy he seemed perhaps twenty or thereabouts.

Tom's call to supper—three blasts on a cow's horn—checked off Bill's next pleasantries in its bright beginning.

After supper, with Bill and Andrews, I returned to the library full of a sense

of well-being and all I could eat of Tom's nonbeatable fried duck. The fire was licking its tongues after something up the chimney. Shag lay stretched on the fur robe in front of the hearth.

"Say, Sam," said Bill as he lowered his stomach carefully into the biggest chair, "do you remember that trail along the bluff, where Tom got the big bear last fall? By jing, I'm going to beat him to that place if it takes a leg! If there's any big game stirring it will be along that bluff. We can put Andrews here near one of the drinking spots on the lake. Ever take a shot at a bear, Andrews?"

We both looked toward the boy where he sat in the corner somewhat behind my chair. Shag was lying beside him—I had not seen the beast move from in front of the fire—licking the back of his hand and looking into his face. The boy raised his eyes—I felt somehow that it was with difficulty—to look at Bill.

"No, Mr. Johnson, I never even saw a bear," he replied slowly and very distinctly as if keeping his mind with an effort on the words he was speaking.

"The deuce you haven't! Well, you'll see a bear, and several other things you never saw before, on this trip, my boy!" prophesied Bill, leaning across the dog to slap Andrews' thin knee resoundingly. Then he straightened up with a curse and shouted: "You, Shag, get out of here! Get out—of—here!" his voice rising higher with every word.

The dog obeyed his command sullenly, only stopping at the door to turn and show us his bared fangs, and then slipping his gray bulk silently down the corridor.

Bill muttered a few minor curses against the beast, but I did not venture to inquire what he had done to deserve them. Then, settling back into the depths of his chair, he began, as I had been expecting him to at any moment,

on his oldest and most cherished moose story. I composed myself for a restful half hour with my own thoughts, as I knew from much experience that nothing short of sudden death could turn him from that story until the last word had been spoken and the period added.

At the place in the middle, where he always stopped for a breath, Andrews arose nervously and remarked in a low and apologetic voice:

"If it is all right, Mr. Johnson, I believe I'll go to bed. I don't know why, but I seem to be unusually tired since I got here."

Bill cast him an unseeing glance, waved his hand benignly in his direction, muttered, "Sure, sure, make yourself at home," and picked up the moose just where he had left him.

In an effort to distract my mind from the cracking of Bill's favorite joke, I watched Andrews from the tail of my eye. He walked with a quick, halting step to the glass doors, and was about to open them when, as I thought, there appeared in a fitful red gleam from the fire the face of the dog, Shag, grinning out at him from the blackness of the hall.

He hesitated and half turned back. Thinking, rather contemptuously, that he was probably afraid of the dark, I tried to help him out.

"Want a light?" I asked. "Here's the switch." And I pressed it.

Without so much as a "thank you" he turned to the hall and stared up and down its brilliantly lighted length. My eyes followed his. It was empty. The malevolent beast face against the glass had been a figment of the firelight then, after all.

"Good night," he said, and started toward the stairs.

Neither this little occurrence nor any of the others made any special impression upon me at the time. Andrews seemed to me merely a super-

sensitive, rather effeminate young man. It is since it has all happened that these little things come back to me with such tremendous significance, like the finger prints and cigar ashes in a detective story.

As I turned from the hall, Bill, with appropriate and dramatic gestures, had just emptied his repeater into the old bull and was loading up again to meet him head on. Our little byplay had not swerved him a hair's-breadth from his narrative.

We lingered on for two hours after Andrews had left, loath to lose even the first evening of our cherished holiday. Had it not been for the fact that we had to make a five o'clock start, daylight would have found us still unearthing moldy yarns. However, at eleven, Bill's stockinged feet padded up the stairs ahead of me.

"Night," he yawned, and rolled to his own room at the far end of the corridor.

I knew the way to mine well, and proceeded there. In passing Andrews' door I was surprised to see a dim light showing through the glass transom.

"Wasn't so tired, after all," I thought to myself.

When I was nearly ready for bed it happened to enter my mind that Andrews had been looking at my road map and had not returned it. I could not spend the night without that map safe in my right-hand pocket. I put my head out of the door. The light still shone through the transom, so in my stockinged feet I started quickly down the hall. About to put my hand on Andrews' doorknob I stopped. Something stopped me. I can account in no other way for not rushing into Andrew's room in my usual headlong manner.

From the other side of the door I heard voices, Andrews' low and tense, which seemed to be agreeing nervously with what the other voice was demand-



ing. The second voice I could not place. It was a low murmur, almost continuous, strangely unintelligible, a mere jumble of sounds. As I stood during those few seconds, listening to words I could not understand, there came over me a feeling of violent repulsion for the second speaker. I did not know him, but that made no difference; I did not want to. I hoped to Heaven that I should never have to see the owner of that voice.

Steps within the room brought the speaker close to the door, and Andrews' voice came to me very distinctly.

"Yes, I will," he said. "I promise you I will do it!"

The door opened, and I was gripped by a sudden nausea. I flattened myself against the wall, yet, in spite of my ardent desire to do so, I could not close my eyes. They were fixed on that lighted slit of doorway from which one figure emerged, alone, and turned to go down the hall.

"Good Heaven! Shag!" burst from my lips.

On the instant the dog silently whirled and faced me, his face drawn into the most satanic expression I ever saw on an animal. Andrews closed his door and left the hall in darkness. I fled precipitately for my room, expecting every second to feel the fangs of that beast at my throat.

In the morning, after spending rather a restless night, I must confess, I was inclined to look upon the previous evening's occurrence as a distorted nightmare. What reason had I to excite myself if Andrews had a spell of talking to himself in Hindustani or some other unearthly jargon? Perhaps he was a ventriloquist. Perhaps Tom was the other speaker. As to the dog—well, it was his business if he wanted that beast hanging around in his room. The cause of my queer sickness was too much fried duck, of course. By the

time I was dressed the thing had assumed normal proportions.

At four-thirty we had finished a substantial breakfast. When Tom and I brought up the cars at four forty-five we found Bill and Andrews engaged in a heated discussion on the front porch. Shag was squatted in the midst of the pack of hounds, a place where he certainly did not belong.

"He's no hunting dog, Andrews, and he'd simply be a nuisance! Why, I tried him out on wolves once and he ran! He ran, mind you, ran from a wolf! He hasn't any nose and no eyes to brag of. Why—why—why——" Bill ended in a splutter and a waving of hands.

Andrews, paler than he had seemed the night before, was regarding him steadily.

"But I promised, Mr. Johnson. I promised that he should go."

"Promised!" Bill shot at him. "Whom did you promise?"

Andrews threw a wild and helpless look around him and caught at the porch post. In spite of the waves of horrible nausea that were sweeping over me, I managed to control my voice enough to speak. I said the first thing I could think of to help Andrews out of his predicament and stop his suffering. Weak-livered fool that I was, I said with my tongue cleaving to my palate:

"He promised me, Bill. I forgot to tell you——"

My bosom friend hurled his anger upon me.

"Say, what kind of a frame up is this? What do you want of that worthless——"

Words were coming easier now. A strange sense of some one's approval enveloped me. I lied glibly.

"Oh, I just had a little theory I wanted to try out on him. I didn't suppose it would make any difference to you one way or another——"



Bill shrugged his shoulders resignedly. "Sure, take the beast if you want him. But I'm bound you'll be sorry enough. Load 'em in, Tom."

We rode to Lawton with the pack yapping and snuffling at the backs of our necks. Shag had refused to ride, and was loping along untiringly in the rear. Andrews was riding with Bill. Tom and I were in my car.

Our usual first-night stop was at Loggerville, but as there was an uncommonly bright moon we decided to push on the other fifty miles to the camp. We ate a cold supper without stopping. Twenty miles from camp we entered the woods. The going was rough from here, and we had to slow down to a scant ten miles. About nine o'clock the wolves began to tune up somewhere behind us.

"Nice place for a chase," muttered Tom, bumping around behind the wheel.

As the howling grew louder and closer, he glanced apprehensively over his shoulder, and, while thus engaged, ran the car squarely into a stump. Bill and Andrews spun merrily on ahead.

Tom climbed out to crank with more energy and fiercer curses than I had ever seen or heard him exhibit before. I cocked my rifle just "in case."

Suddenly the howling ceased, and was succeeded by a startling stillness. A few twigs cracked to the west of the road, where the shadows were densest, and to my suspicious imagination the bushes were alive with slinking forms. I risked a shot. A snarl answered me, and Shag sprang into the light, his jaws dripping bloody foam and his eyes green against the glare. I had a good mind to give him another—by mistake, of course, but, as if sensing my thought, he leaped back of Tom, knocking his hand off the crank.

"The devil!" shouted Tom, and in his excitement let fly a precious wrench. The dog stood his ground, grinning

evilily. If the next spin had not started the engine I believe Tom would have tried to throttle him with his bare hands.

Bill and Andrews had the bunks spread up and a fire going when we rolled in. Bill was in his usual mood of elephantine hilarity, and even Andrews was whistling as he puttered around with the firewood.

"Well, you old sawed-off," were the words by which Tom's employer greeted him. "Can't you make that old steam roller of Sam's keep up with a real car? Or did it see a ghost and shy for you?"

Tom's teeth were still on edge over the affair of the wrench.

"No," he growled, "I didn't see no ghost, but I did see——"

A queer sound made me whirl on my heel, the hair rising on the back of my neck. Bill and Tom caught my movement, and turned more leisurely.

On the other side of the fire I could see Andrews in vivid relief against the dark bushes, one hand thrown up in front of his eyes, the other groping aimlessly for a tree trunk beside him. I saw, too—oh, what's the use? I couldn't make any one believe it, but I know what I saw. I couldn't have been mistaken in that bright light from the fire, and I turned so sick and faint that I had to drop on the ground and lean my head against a stone. What Bill and Tom saw was the dog, Shag, calmly licking his paws in front of the fire.

"Hey, Andrews!" I heard Bill shout. "What's the matter? Get burned?"

"Spark flew—in my eye," I heard the boy reply faintly after a pause.

"All right now?" persisted Bill.

"Yes," came Andrews' answer wearily.

I felt, rather than saw, his eyes peering through the smoke in my direction, and, to save any more conspicuous incidents, I managed to sit up and pre-



tend to be tying my shoe string when Bill again turned toward me.

It was nearly midnight when our final preparations were complete. Bill was for turning in immediately, but I asked him to wait a few minutes. I felt that the time had come to use plain language—after what I had seen.

We settled ourselves at the other side of the fire, away from the cabin. Bill yawned prodigiously.

"Well, Sam, what's on your mind? Let's get this over."

With horror choking me, I remembered Andrews cringing against the tree trunk and the thing in front of him, and I came straight to the point.

"Bill, that dog, Shag, has got to be killed!"

With the perversity of a good-natured man who cannot hear any one but himself abuse his property, he thundered:

"What you got against old Shag, Sam? Besides, wasn't it you that made such a hell of a fuss over having him come along? Wanted to prove some kind of a theory on him, didn't you?"

"Well, I've proved it," I snapped, "and the answer is, he's got to be killed."

"You don't say so." Bill slid down on his spine and crossed his legs stubbornly.

"Look here, Bill," I pleaded, "you know he's an ugly brute. He's going to hurt somebody some day."

"Oh, afraid of him, are you?" Bill can be as disagreeable as any man I know when he sets out to be.

"Hardly! But Andrews——"

"Seems to me he has quite a fondness for Andrews. Always tagging him around."

I groaned. "He has. That's just it! Bill, you've got to believe this! I saw it! To-night, when Andrews cried out, I saw that dog——"

A psychic guillotine sliced the next word from my memory. I felt a hot,

fetid, sickening breath on my cheek, and turned to gaze into the green eyes of the beast I was condemning. Slavers were dripping from his red tongue, and the corners of his mouth were turned up in his habitual hellish grin.

"Hello, Shag, old scout!" said Bill. "Come here, sir!"

The dog belly-crawled to his feet and fawned upon him, his half-closed eyes leering at me while Bill fondled his ears.

With a groan of helpless disgust I lumbered across to the cabin, threw myself onto my blankets, and immediately fell into a heavy and dream-harried slumber. Seemingly for hours there had been ringing through my dreams the howling of a wolf, and at last my palpitating heart shook me awake to hear in reality the last notes of that howl echoing and rebounding from forest to heavens.

Bill was standing by the dying fire, his rifle on his arm.

"Gosh! Some fellow!" he said as I emerged. "Must have been right in front of the door"

The hounds were tearing at their chains and raising a deafening din. Bill looked at them, and the light of battle flamed into his eyes.

"Let's get him!" he cried. "You wake Tom and Andrews while I get my hat."

I met Tom in the doorway, but when I grabbed for Andrews' shoulder my hand sank into the blankets as if they had been air. I ripped them back. Andrews was not there. Tom was watching me, open-mouthed.

"Seen him leave?" I asked.

"No," he whispered.

Bill was stamping impatiently outside.

"Where's Andrews?" I yelled at him.

"I dunno. Hurry up. He must be round somewhere."

"Call him!" I urged.

He did, with his usual volume and

carrying power. A faint howl, far to the south, was his answer.

Something in my expression as I burst through the cabin door must have pierced even his complacency.

"Don't think anything's wrong, do you?"

"I damn well know it is!" I screamed. "If that brute hasn't killed him already it's going to! Loose those hounds!"

They took up the trail with a rush, and in a few moments we heard them baying a mile to the south toward the bluffs. Our quickest way to catch them was to cut through the woods and come out on the bluff above the north end of the lake. Tom ran low behind me like a bloodhound, and Bill slumped after, breathing hard and speechless for once. The night had grown cloudy, and only now and then did the moon break through long enough to show us a path through the thickets. Before I had gone three rods my knees were shaking, my throat was dry, and my body wet with a cold perspiration. A wild fear that I might be too late drove me on.

The hounds were silent now—the silence that means the slow and deadly closing in on the prey with every gasp saved for running. As we broke through the last of the trees on the edge of the bluff the moon came out again in a brilliant flood. Below us, stretching a quarter of a mile to the lake shore, lay the level bottoms, as flat as a table, every object clear cut in the moonlight, and in the center of the open place stood a man and beside him sat a dog, ears pricked forward in intense listening.

"Andrews!" gurgled Bill.

"That devil, Shag!" came through Tom's teeth as he raised his rifle and held it so without cocking, while a half-fearful, half-puzzled expression spread over his face.

On the instant pandemonium broke

4A Thrill

loose. A score of wolves dashed over the bank and turned to face our hounds, who were plunging after them. Yelping, snapping, barking, they writhed into a dark mass and rolled across the short grass toward the two motionless figures. Then the man was left alone, and into the center of the mass leaped a gray cyclone, tearing, slashing, right and left, throwing dark forms over his shoulder to lie still on the dark-stained grass.

"Good old Shag!" sobbed Bill, pacing the bluff and fondling his rifle, which he dared not use for fear of injuring the dogs. "Good old fellow! Watch him clean 'em up! Thought he wouldn't chase a wolf, did you? Look at that!" he exclaimed as an unusually vicious toss threw a victim to the ground directly below us.

Then we all three dropped to our stomachs with a gasp and peered down at the still-twitching animal. For horrified seconds we gazed, scarcely trusting our own eyesight. It was not a wolf whose lifeblood was slowly trickling through the stiff grass. It was one of our own hounds!

Tom was the first to raise his eyes, and his exclamation brought the rest of us to our senses. The wolves, still a full score, had drawn into a quivering circle around the two figures—the motionless man and the huge, blood-spattered dog. Six dark, silent bodies dotted the ground. We had had six hounds.

We could hear the quick, panting breath of the beasts below as they inched forward on trembling haunches, and the yellow light of the low, declining moon gleamed back from glassy eyes and dripping tongues.

Cursing low and steadily, Tom was sliding down the bluff; I followed him. But Bill stood above us like a statue, his gun resting limply on the ground.

Before we reached the level a hoarse cry from Andrews halted us. He had



thrown out his hands before his face, and his head had dropped back between his shoulders. There was a roar from the beast as it stretched to full height on its hind legs, and the intent pack arose as one.

Tom jammed his gun, and I hung in a gooseberry bush like a rabbit. Helpless as in a nightmare, we saw the monster spring straight at that defenseless throat, saw him spring and drop halfway to his goal.

Then the sound of the gun split our ears. A clean shot through the lungs. Nobody but a man with nerves like old Bill's could have done it at that distance.

The pack scattered like mice at the sound of the shot. The man slowly collapsed to his knees, then to his full length on the grass. Bill was cascading earth down on our necks, and we all dashed forward.

Andrews, white as paper and as limp, lay where he had fallen, eyes wide open, and in them such an expression of horror and loathing of things unspeakable and beyond the ken of men as I hope never to see again. He did

not try to speak. I am sure he did not see us. His body was limp. Bill knelt beside him, chafing his hands and speaking his name over and over.

Shag was writhing in contortions of agony, growling and coughing, but his eyes were vilely, triumphantly evil—the look of the gambler who has his one more trick. Fascinated, I followed his every move. Was his body growing longer as it writhed? Were his limbs straightening, his hair becoming shorter? The feeling of sickness, of awful nausea, was mounting within me again, but, fighting it off, I sprang upon him and plunged my knife up to the hilt again and again.

At the same instant Andrews struggled to a sitting posture, gasped "Yes, I—I—" and dropped back with his eyes closed forever on their fearful secret.

The brute we buried where he lay. We would have left him to the pleasure of the elements, except that there was that thing about him which no human eye should see. A white, furless hand had taken the place of his right forepaw.

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## A THOUSAND MILES

By Charles Kipro

LOVE may meet Love and go upon his way  
And never know and never understand  
How life, like some rare flower, might expand;  
How every minute goes and will not stay.  
But some time when the debts we never pay,  
Around us in the gathering darkness stand  
We shall remember how Love's slender hand  
But for a moment in our fingers lay.

A thousand miles stretched like a fog between  
Us in the room . . . a thousand nameless things  
Rose up like angry knives whose blades are keen,  
And all the heart's awakened questionings  
Caught in our throats, and eyes sank all unseen  
Into a single pool of wonderings.



# The Gift Wife

Rupert  
Hughes

## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Two old college-friends, David Jebb and Gaines, meet in the Nord Express, bound for Ostend, where they are to embark for America. Jebb is a famous surgeon, who is in charge of a little girl, Cynthia Thatcher, whom he is taking to her mother. He confesses to Gaines that he is subject to intermittent spells of drinking, when he knows nothing of what he does or says. Gaines gets off the train and is left behind. Jebb's hand is mangled in a door of one of the cars, and he faints. He is given brandy by one of the passengers. This starts him off. He leaves the train with Cynthia at Cologne and begins to drink. The next thing he knows he is lying in a strange room, attended by a black man. The child is gone and all his money. Suddenly a woman heavily veiled enters. She speaks English and from her he learns that he is in a Turkish harem, where he has been brought in a state of unconsciousness. The woman's name is Miruma, and she has been given as a wife by the sultan to a pasha named Fehmi. The black slave, Djaffer, breaks his arm, and Jebb sets it. No tidings can be learned of Cynthia.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE YANKEE IN THE HAREM.

OUTSIDE there was the crack of a whip, the clatter of hoofs smacking cobblestones, the rumble of heavy carriage wheels. Jebb hurried to the window overhanging the street. Iron bars were fixed in the casement, and there was a wooden lattice within, but he could see in a criss-crossed picture a crooked lane.

Inside the carriage there were packed five women, or rather five figures in black robes, like hooded mackintoshes, with black veils pinned across the face. They were like mourners, in costume, but not in behavior. Their hilarity was infantile; they were cage birds escaped.

They were all talking at once—all but one. Jebb noted that one of the women sat still, not laughing, not chattering, but gazing back his way. He felt sure who it was.

He could see little from this meager window—a skein of twisted street, a few old houses, a border of mountains, and a strip of sky. Uskub was not pretty from here. The only soul he knew was gone; he was alone in an empty harem.

He was alone with his problem. He had time to think. There was nothing else to do. But his thoughts brought only new remorse, new problems, new despairs. To hate his habit and to swear that he would never touch liquor again—that was so old and so futile.



He had no idea of the date, but, judging from his previous experiences, at least two weeks must have passed. The steamer should have reached America a week ago, bringing with it the mystery of his disappearance. Gaines had surely arrived a few days later on another boat. He would tell what he knew. The New York papers, the papers of his home town, would have him pilloried in headlines.

The police and the detective bureau of the press would be publishing him broadcast. At first he would be accused of the infamy of kidnaping. Then people who knew would be telling of his habits; his curse would be the property of the newspapers.

He writhed at the shame his other self had dragged himself into. He felt his future blighted beyond renewal. It were better that he should bury himself here in Uskub, or in some yet remoter place. He could not go back and confront the expiation of his unwitting crime.

And then he visioned the mother's suffering. He heard the widow call aloud in the night for her child, her heart already torn asunder by the imagined treachery of her husband, and by his tragic death in a far country.

He saw the child wandering among strangers, hungry perhaps, terrified as only a lost child is terrified, pleading with passers-by, who could not understand what she wanted. He heard the mother and the child crying for one another in the wilderness of the world.

He saw John Thatcher lying in his grave, beyond the reach of slander, yet all the more deserving protection from it. The dead man rose in his shroud before him, crying: "Where is my child? Where is my good name? Where is the fruit of my toil, my legacy of comfort to my beloved?" And Jebb could not answer. He was his brother's keeper, and yet—

Whatever else Jebb felt, he felt one

thing absolute; that at any cost soever of hunting, of suffering, of humiliation, of privation, he must devote himself utterly to the finding of that child, the clearing of the father's name, and the redemption of his fortune.

The task was plain; the means to accomplish it were out of the reach of fancy. Jebb's position was abject. He was the helpless pensioner on the mercy of a strange woman, whose good name, and whose very life he endangered every moment. Yet, if he left her roof, where should he turn for help, for funds, even for food?

He tugged and twisted long and long at the Gordian knot about him, and the sole outcome was weariness, hopelessness. And so he fell asleep.

It was again the sound of sheep trotting through the dust that woke him; again the shepherd's flute; again the dreamy cry of the muezzin was calling the sunset prayer. The western flank of the distant minaret was crimson.

Deliciously refreshed, Jebb turned on his couch. He raised his head. The pain was gone. He sat up without a twinge. He rose and walked to the street window. His legs were weak, but they upheld him. He watched the sunset building cloudy bonfires on the mountaintops. He heard the clatter of the carriage returning with horses at full gallop, racing with the gloaming which must find no Moslem woman abroad. Miruma's friends were laughing, but their laughter was softened by the twilight gentleness. And one figure was silent.

And then the door opened and Djaffer entered, his arm in the sling, but his face beaming gratitude, his tones cooing like an old nurse's. He shuffled here and there, disposing lights. When the room was illuminated he went to the door and beckoned, and the slave girl came in with a laden brass tray upon her head. The two slaves whispered and made much mystery. They



disappeared and returned with more trays and more food, and a new table to replace the splintered wreck which Djaffer carried away with childish pride.

When all was ready they went to the door and salaamed their mistress in. She was important with new ideas, but insisted that Djebb Effendi should eat first, though again she refused to bear him company. It was plain that she was hungry and that she was tempted, but her scruples prevailed.

Miruma had made a point of that dinner. It had taxed the resources of the kitchen—the cook had been told that a wife of a bey was to dine in the harem that night, and Djaffer was determined that his benefactor should have the best that Uskub could purvey.

As before, the first rite was the washing of the hands in orthodoxly running water poured from the graceful *ibrik* into the *leyen*. Then his hands were dried with an embroidered towel.

Jebb sat waiting for some one to give him a fork.

"Why does not Djebb Effendi beg—?" Miruma asked.

"Well—er—ah—I have nothing to eat with?"

"Mashallah! Has not Allah given you many fingers?"

Thus instructed, he managed to clean up a sufficient portion of each dish, though he was as awkward as a man attempting chopsticks for the first time.

There followed an embarrassment of lamb and mutton, preparations over-oily and overcooked, Jebb's palate said. There was a salad in a pie, followed with grape sirup, candies, cakes of sesame seeds and honey, and a *hochaf* of mingled fruits, raisins, cherries, plums, flavored with musk and rose water, and served ice cold. There was fortunately a tortoise-shell spoon for this.

Again the *ibrik* and the *leyen*, and the embroidered towel, and, finally and al-

ways, coffee, served now in silver cups. Again she rolled a cigarette for Jebb.

"Thees tobacco," she said, "we call 'the blond hair of Latakia.'"

But old Djaffer felt that the guest deserved more substantial fumes than these. He hastened to bring in a narghile. This smoke machine was familiar enough to Jebb, though he had never run one. When Djaffer had lighted it he gave one of the stems to Jebb and one to Miruma. They sat a moment, drinking the smoke through the gurgling water, and it had a purring comfort of its own.

"I like long-distance telesmoking," said Jebb, and he crossed his legs Turkish fashion, until both feet went to sleep. Jebb felt that he had waited as long as he could for information:

"Has the Hanum Effendi something to tell me? Is there any word of the child?"

The veil nodded in distressful negative.

"Nothing have I heard of the *kuchuk-gul*, the leetle rose. It will need searching in some other city. That needs much money. Allah bringed Djebb Effendi to this place for a great purpose, I am sure, but Allah has not leaved him the money. I have hoort the feeling of Djebb Effendi by to offer him of mine. Now, Allah has wheespered to me how Djebb Effendi shall earn mooch money queeck and mooch power and fame."

Jebb's eyes broadened. "Tell me in—Allah's name."

She took her crossed feet in her hands and rocked with excitement.

"Djebb Effendi is Ingiliz Effendi."

"No, no; I'm not English; I am American."

"Eet ees alla the same to us Osmanlis. Djebb Effendi is great pheeseectian, great soorgeon. In our country we theenk the Frank doctors work meerales. Of old time one believed that Allah sent seeckness and—and"—she

paused in dread of the great word which the Moslems avoid—"may he keep far from you—the—the cupbearer of the world.

"At the promenade to-day Jantine Hanum is expected. But she comed not. She says her younger son, her worshiped son, Gani Bey, is in pain most frightful. The hanum theenk somebody is give heem of poison, but he is too young to have enemies, and he does not die in his pain.

"Still they say his mother is tell Zobeide Hanum that he soffers so he is turn in his pain like snake that is stuck through weet a spear; then the pain goes again.

"I beegen to theenk, if Djebb Effendi can cure that son, the father pays mooch! The father is Akef Bey, a very reech bey. There are no good doctors here. Once was a good missionary doctor, but he is goed away. A young man is come in hees place. Djebb Effendi could leeve in Uskub and become most terreible for reechness!"

The thought of living in Uskub was not so appalling to Jebb as it would have seemed a few hours before. The thought of money was always agreeable. In his present state the hint of a way to lay hands on an appreciable sum was as a rope let down from heaven to his drowning soul.

"I will see this man at once," he said. "It is bad etiquette, but I am desperate. I will tell him that I will cure his son. I can, if anybody can."

Miruma's palms were up in protest. It would never do. He would be treated as a fraud; he would not be permitted to see the son. Things were not done in Turkey in straight lines. The Osmanli, like nature, loves a curve. Miruma had thought out a plan during the long silences she had kept while the other hanums had clattered at their gossip, or leaving the carriage on a high hill had romped and shrieked in the fields like schoolgirls at recess

Miruma had worked her plot up into a scenario: Djaffer was to approach the elder brother of the sick man, and get him to ask how Djaffer had been hurt and who was healing him. Djaffer was to pour out a wonder story of how he had fallen on the street and snapped his arm, just as, by Allah's grace, the magical visitor to Uskub, the world-famous surgeon, Djebb Effendi, was passing. He would say that the great Ingiliz doctor was visiting in Uskub for a few days to see the mountains. Then the elder brother would hurry home to tell his mother, and they would discuss it with Akef Bey, the father, at the bedside of the young bey. Akef Bey would call upon Djebb Effendi and implore him to save his child. Djebb Effendi must be very sorry for the boy, but in great haste to be gone. The father would beg more, offer more. Finally Djebb Effendi would consent, asking a fabulous sum. Of course, once he had access to the boy, the cure was easy—for him.

Jebb smiled at her unlimited faith in his powers, but he had further respect for her gifts of management. The plan sounded feasible. The element of hypocrisy was not overlarge. Doctors use a grain of it now and then.

"So I am to wait here till the father calls on me?" he said.

"Mashallah! Here?" gasped Miruma. "A man could never call upon me. His wife, perhaps, might come, but if Jantine Hanum knowed that I have a man here——"

There was no word to express that!

"Wh-what am I to do then?" said Jebb.

"There is in Uskub a large *khan*—a hotel—the Hotel Turiati. Djebb Effendi shall go there and command the best room, and wait."

"I can command the room, but do I get it? I have no money—not even baggage."

"Of that also I have thinked," said



the amazing woman. "You shall say your baggage is sended to Stamboul. You stop but for one—two days."

"That accounts for the baggage. But shall I say that my money was sent on to Stamboul, too?"

"The money—you moost take that from me."

Her protesting gesture checked his. "Djebb Effendi shall pay me when the Akef Bey pay him. Please, please!"

And forthwith she produced a purse and drew from it a bundle of the Imperial Ottoman Bank's notes, valued at five pounds Turkish each.

But Jebb put out his hand. "Thank you! And God bless you for your good heart, but I couldn't."

"You moost," she said laughingly.

And then an inspiration saved him.

"I don't need it. I have this ring. I will pawn it."

Between the shame of openly borrowing money from a woman and a hostess, and the shame of pawning a ring which he had come by in some unimaginable and perhaps criminal manner, he chose the more subtle crime.

Miruma sighed at the rejection of her offer. It would have given the poor shut-in prisoner a wonderful sense of beneficent pride to fund the enterprise she had invented. After a while of low spirits, whose drooping her very veil imitated, she yielded—with a restrictive clause.

"Djebb Effendi must not take the ring to a Jew yourself. He would cheat you horribly. It would be knowed in all Uskub that the effendi was in need. Djaffer shall take the ring and breeng you mooch more than you could touch. He shall say eet is my reeng. It looks a woman's reeng." Then a gasp. "It ees perhaps a ring some lady gived the effendi?"

There was such a tang of jealous fear in her voice that Jebb took the plunge and lied with magnificent promptitude.

"No, no. I bought it myself—in—Cologne." And he added with perfect truth: "It has no associations for me whatever."

With which he twisted it from his finger and held it out to her. This convinced her more than any words. The veil collapsed with a sigh of relief.

Suddenly a truth thrilled Jebb to the heart; he saw that this woman, for whom he had begun to feel a tenderness, had begun to feel jealous of him. The implied proprietorship did not irritate him. It nearly delighted him, and the delight was the keener for being edged with fear. He tried to mask his confusion under an air of business.

"Can Djaffer go at once so that I can leave to-night? I am afraid for you every minute I remain here."

"No, no, effendi. Eet is two o'clock; the sun is seated for two hours. All Uskub is going to sleep. To-morrow morning while yet the effendi is sleep—inshallah—Djaffer shall have goed and comed back with the money."

"But how can I slip out in the daylight without being seen?"

"Also that I have theenked. I tell you to-morrow day, for now eet is ver' late. The moon is in the branches of the cypress like a white swan. I weary the effendi. Allah send you the sweetest of sleep!"

She was gathering herself together to stand up. He leaped to his feet to help her. To rise from a cross-legged position is something of a feat. It's one of the few that harem laziness permits. Miruma rose straight in air like a lark leaping up from a meadow.

But, as she stepped forward, her foot caught on the hem of her robe. She lost her poise, swayed, would have fallen, but Jebb had risen from the divan. He put out his arm. Her weight was upon him so suddenly that he had no little difficulty with his own equilibrium. The recovery of both was a matter of brief and busy delay.



Miruma gave a little cry of alarm at her plight, another of dismay at finding herself in a man's arms. And then she fled, soft-footed, spiritual, like a dark cloud trailing along a mountain-side. But she left Jebb with a savor of rose leaves about him, with arms empty, yet strangely tingling as with the very ghost of suppleness, liteness, warmth.

On a mad impulse he ran to the door that swung behind her. The old Djaffer was there. He confronted Jebb with all the majesty of the angel at the gates of Eden, yet with all the appeal of a suppliant, putting up a wounded arm in place of a flaming sword.

Jebb put out the lights, and groped his way to the windows where the moonbeams beat in and showered the floor. He hung across the ledge overlooking the dim, the breathing slumber of the garden. Radiance came down from the sky like rain. And up from a dark fleece of flowers, shrubs, and plants came a blur of perfume, and an exquisite, inarticulate music from the glimmering basin where a jet of water, seeking in vain to go higher than its source, leaped and lapsed like a tongue of silver flame.

Down a distant street the night watchman was already moving, tap-tapping with his staff like a blind man groping through a paradise.

The beauty of the fragrant night, the glowing sky, the shadowy garden, weighed upon Jebb's heart like a world sorrow. He was alone in a vast wilderness, and he must go tap-tapping through it, searching, but searching without eyes or memory. And a strange new spell of love was upon him, appealing to him to stay. But he had no right to stay here or to love what was here.

At another window, a lattice window overlooking that same garden, the rays of the same moon were playing upon the unveiled beauty of Miruma,

like a blind man's fingers exploring the brows and cheeks and lips of one beloved. And Miruma's heart was like the benighted world, one great mood of longing for the forbidden, the unattainable.

Outside her door, on his humble mattress, lay Djaffer. And through a little grilled window in the corridor he, too, lonelier than all, most cursed of all, stared at the same far-gliding, cool-gleaming moon, itself an empty, frustrated planet.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE VEILED MAN.

JEBB'S first conscious view of the streets of Uskub was strained through the mesh of a woman's veil. He was supposed to be an honest Turkish wife of the old school, for the veil covered even his eyes.

Usually the eunuch sits like a footman alongside the coachman and shouts "*Varda!*"—Make way!—to the people in front of the horses and glares at such impertinents as stare into the carriage. But this morning Djaffer held the lines himself.

The Serbs, Bulgarians, Albanians, and gypsies that make up the population of Uskub certainly paid no heed to the long, slim hanum who rode in the second-best carriage, which Fehmi Pasha allotted to his second-best wife.

Jebb was too solemn to relish the ludicrousness of his own appearance. Under the balloonlike space of a black *charchaf* he wore his own clothes, cleaned and pressed, and he carried his derby hat, in which the scar of a dent was not entirely healed. The ring was gone from his finger; its diamonds and its dark center stone had been translated into gold liras or Turkish sovereigns, silver piastres, and bronze paras with some bank notes—a total of one hundred and fifty dollars in American money.



It had looked like a deal of riches as Djaffer poured it into his hand, but it was a contemptible sum compared with his needs and his distance from home.

Jebb was thinking less of what he might encounter than of the fascinations he must leave. In Constantinople the *ferije* and the *yashmak* are out of style, but in the country towns old fashions cling, and Miruma had put on a costume quite appropriate for a carriage in Uskub—a black and shapeless swaddling cloak about her body and a creamy *yashmak* about her face and hair.

Costume customs are no more consistent in Turkey than America, and Miruma felt justified in revealing to Jebb in the street glimpses of her that she denied him in her home. And now he saw her eyes looking through a muslin mask of such uncompromising opacity that he caught only a small melon slice of her beauty—her eyes and a bit of forehead, of cheeks, and of hair at her temples.

Her eyes were so beautiful that they excelled even the vision he had imagined when he had only the veil to look at. They looked at him now with a sad, sweet gaze of farewell and of devotion. It was inconceivable to Jebb that this perfect creature should have been tossed from one hand to another, as one might flip a diamond, not knowing its value.

Hers were the eyes where a great love smoldered. Jebb could hardly endure the communion with them now. The Venus of Milo was luckier than many people imagine, since the loss of her arms and our ignorance of what her hands were doing, concentrates all the world's attention on her face, and the serene mood that imbues it. So Miruma, in hiding all of her but her eyes, gave them complete sway. Jebb, staring at her, found her eyes so wonderfully fair that he felt as if he had

never seen eyes at all till now. They were like twin moons in a sky where the stars are blotted out by a haze.

He could not even guess at her other graces—at the line of her nose, the curve or color of her lips, her chin, her throat, shoulders, or bosom. He only knew that she had eyes; she was eyes.

And Miruma, who was such a child for laughter at incongruous things, had not even a smile for Jebb arrayed in his outlandish disguise. She had seen him hustling into the carriage and showing an immodest amount of trousers, and a huge pair of American shoes. These things did not amuse her. She had thought of Jebb as an Allah-sent messenger. She had come to recognize in him only a lost and troubled wanderer. Yet she regretted his flight all the more. He was the one man that had understood her, felt sorry for her, treated her as a woman, not as a puppet.

As the carriage slewed and pitched along the choppy sea of the Uskub pavements, Jebb paid no heed soever to the streets, the people, or the houses they passed; he stared solely at the little rift of her through the *yashmak*, as at a glimpse of a lost Eden. He felt it a duty to leave Miruma at once, while their good fortune held out. Yet he felt it an equal duty not to leave her to the dreary vacuity of her life.

He was impelled to a compliment—though such things came hard from him.

"Your eyes are glorious——"

"Mashallah!" she cried. "A compliment is mos' bad luck!" She ran on in a nervous effort to outrace her desire to weep:

"You weel save the yong son of Akef Bey, I know. And then you go far, far from Uskub, hunting for the little child. You weel find her, I know. Then you will go yet more farther to



America. Sometimes maybe you weel think of me—yes?"

"I'll never forget you! I can't forgive myself for leaving you—taking all your charity and doing nothing in return."

She shook her head sadly. The eyes veiled with hopelessness. It was well for her that she had been trained to the creed: "I am resigned."

"Allah has been good to me to let me help Djebb Effendi so little moch as I have helped him. But Djebb Effendi cannot help me. I am beyond that. Think no more of me—the cage bird is perhaps happier not to get out into the cold wood. But one theeng I weesh; that you might also yet save one more seeck person before you leave Uskub—the first wife of my pasha—the only true wife of Fehmi Pasha."

"Is she ill?"

"Terreeble ill. She is ver' moch weak. She has moch pain, and she seems to be fading a-way like one flower on a too hot day. The doctors of Uskub shake their heads and do not know. It is ver' moch bad when a doctor says: 'I do not know!' Yes?"

In the bitterness of his heart Jebb demanded:

"But if she died, the pasha might turn to you for comfort."

"It ees that I am afraidin."

"But you said you had hoped to be his wife, and the mother of a child for him."

"That was yesterday—Djebb Effendi."

Her eyelids fell over the timid great eyes, and a blush pervaded her temples. Jebb understood, and their hands, almost without their volition, met, embraced, enlaced, clung fiercely together in a secret adieu.

All the while Djaffer's whip was nagging the old horse through the streets, past the horse market, across the ancient bridge, up the heights, beyond the citadel, and out on the plains made

dreary by innumerable graves; for the cemeteries surround Uskub like a dead sea.

The Turks make themselves comfortable in graveyards and love to sit and meditate upon the comfortable narghile and the comfortable nirvana that is reached via the underground route; but they take little thought in keeping the tombstones of their gone upright. The shafts lean to right, to left; they fall flat, and weeds cover the carved turbans and fezzes and the curly-lettered inscriptions. But even so, they make a comfortable bench for the philosopher to sit upon.

It was Miruma's idea that Jebb could be best disposed of in one of these labyrinths whence he could stroll back to Uskub at his leisure. The main thing was that he should not be seen descending from her carriage. Djaffer was alert for his opportunity, and the carriage was winding dreary enough turns, but always some saunterer, some established smoker, or some group of veiled women appeared and forbade the risk.

Miruma was saying: "I weesh terribly moch you could save the first wife of Fehmi Pasha."

Jebb was saying: "I wish I could save his second wife," when the carriage came to an abrupt halt. Djaffer called back something softly to Miruman, and she, all in a flutter, commanded:

"Queeck, Djebb Effendi slip off the theengs and step out the carriage. Queeck or somebody comes."

He tore off veil and robe in frantic clutches and stood in the road once more an American citizen.

"When shall I see you again, Miruma! When?"

But Djaffer had cut the horse with the whip, the old nag had responded with a leap and a gallop. The carriage was out of call—all his farewell speeches unsaid. There were a thou-



sand things he wanted to tell her. But she was out of earshot and her figure dwindled with the carriage.

Her gaze was clinging to him, though, and he felt, rather than saw, the tears that were pearly and spilling from those moon eyes.

The carriage swerved round a spur of land. She was gone. He was alone, alone in a graveyard, alone in a graveyard of an unknown people. And a cold breeze from the white peaks round Uskub was whispering: "Miruma! Miruma! The sun and the moon!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE STREETS OF USKUB.

**J**EBB, deserted in the tumbled city of the dead, made haste to retrace the path he had come by. But it seemed that he would never have done with tombstones. They lined his pathway all the long distance into Uskub and up to his very hotel.

Nearing the town, the road filled with creatures out of unusual picture books. Albanian men in baggy white trousers corded with black braid, and wearing white skullcaps on their cropped pates; veiled women in trousers, so long and full they had to lift them from the mud; Christian peasant wives, whose naked faces were almost shocking in this environment; bearded old farmers perched on short-legged asses; Bulgarians of piratical mustache; smart Turkish officers on glistening chargers; Greek priests with inverted opera hats on their heads; Serbian teamsters, whacking yoked buffaloes or oxen; Jews, in dirty gaberdines; and dirtier gypsies, with children they had themselves crippled to wheedle alms.

It was like a shabby masquerade, and there seemed to be some vast excitement simmering among the people. But in all the languages Jebb could not find a word that gave him a clew.

Suddenly his weary feet were picked up and shod as with wings, or rather with roller skates. A military band was coming his way, and its music teased him with its vague familiarity. At last he recognized it. It was one of Sousa's marches. The brass band's dialect was as Turkish as a fez, but he knew that they were playing at "The Stars and Stripes Forever!"

Homesickness and patriotic pride wrung his soul like a lemon peel between them. To be at home with his own people became abruptly a fierce longing. Then his heart sank, for he wondered if he would ever dare to show his face again where he was known.

Jebb did not pause until at last he reached the Hotel Turati, where he was accepted at his own recognizance. Here he elicited the good news that there were British, Austrian, and Russian consulates in the town.

He made haste to the British building, but the Albanian *kavass* on guard informed him in a few broken English phrases that the consul was ill and was not likely to be well for some days. Jebb stood irresolute, then went to the Austrian consulate. He knew it by the huge flag swung from the balcony, its double-headed black eagle almost sweeping the ground.

Here he was informed that the consul was in conference with his Russian confrère and the two governors of Uskub, the Turk and the Christian, and that the affairs of Turkey were in such confusion, added to the increasing disorder of the district itself, that there was little hope of seeing the consul.

Jebb looked so downcast at this that his informant asked the nature of his errand, and introduced himself as Herr Xavier Franz Heller von Hellwald, of Vienna. Jebb introduced himself as a former student at the University of Vienna, and the young attaché mellowed immediately.

His brother, he said, was a physician,



and a graduate of the university, and he invited Jebb to join him in coffee and tobacco. They adjourned to a coffee house or *kafené*, a humble wooden structure, with an awning over the walk, and cane-bottomed stools. An attendant made them coffee in two small brass pots, sweetened it, and brought them a glass of water. Jebb, following Hellwald's action, sipped the water, and gave back the glass. The attendant fetched a twin-stemmed narghile, but Hellwald produced cigars of his own, which Jebb accepted with relief. He was weary of cigarettes and water pipes.

Before many words had passed, he and Hellwald had discovered a number of acquaintances in common, and Hellwald, sick of glum Uskub, was delighted, and soon felt able to ask:

"But what brings you, Herr Doctor Chebb, to this dismal cemetery of an Uskub?"

Jebb shook his head, and then poured forth in halting German, and with halting courage, as much of his story as he felt it discreet to divulge. He evaded the miserable cause of the whole adventure, and said nothing of his début into Turkish life through the door of the harem.

Hellwald listened with as much gravity as his fat cheeks permitted, and at the end of the recital mumbled a bewildered sympathy.

"Don't waste sympathy on me," Jebb cried, "but think of the child. What has become of her? How shall I find her?"

"That is a problem, indeed, Herr Doctor Chebb. Now, if you knew where you lost her——"

"If I only knew!"

"If you knew where you had lost her, it would be easier. And yet not easy at that. If she had disappeared in Vienna, or Berlin, or Paris, we could telegraph, and the great engine of the police of Europe could be set in motion. It would be expensive, but it

could be done—at least, it might be done. But we are in Turkey, and Turkey is in revolution. Nobody knows what will happen to-morrow. Nobody knows what happened yesterday. We only know that Constantinople is captured by the revolutionists, and that the sultan is prisoner."

"The sultan a prisoner!" Jebb gasped. "The sultan a—why, I thought he was the religious head of the nation. Isn't it sacrilege?"

"The sultan is a Mohammedan like the rest. When he goes to Selamlık every Friday to pray there is a man at the door of the mosque to say to him: 'Oh, padishah, be not proud. Remember there is a God who is greater than thou.' The sultan before Abdul Hamid was deposed by the Turkish pope, the Sheikh-ul-Islam, and this sultan may be put aside the same way. We shall know any moment what has been done. But it is strange that you have not known this. Where have you been these last three weeks?"

"I do not know," Jebb stammered. "I have been—ill."

The Austrian looked at him in complete befuddlement. He could not make him out at all. Suspicion seized on the first theories at hand, that Jebb was insane or criminal. Neither theory was tenable in the presence of Jebb's intelligence and his manifestly honest distress.

He saw the American knotting his brow with the anguish of his thoughts, and squeezing his head in his hands, as if to keep it from splitting, as he groaned:

"Turkey in revolution! And the little child lost among these savages."

"But the Turks are not savages, Herr Doctor Chebb," Hellwald protested. "People are people everywhere. In this vilayet there is a Turkish governor and also a Christian. And if you could know them both and their intrigues you would think the Turk was no worse

than the Christian—he could not be. And if you could know the inside of the diplomacy of all the European nations meddling with Turkey, as I know it—you would say that we have no right to be Pharisees. Under cover of helping Turkey and protecting Christians, our European nations behave like robbers and pirates. The Turks are bad enough, but we Christians are, if possible, worse yet.”

“But somewhere in Turkey that little girl is crying for her mother. Nobody understands her, and I cannot find her. I don’t know where to begin. But there must be somebody to appeal to. Whom should I turn to first?”

Hellwald’s brow was heavy with the riddle.

“The Turks are terribly busy these days, Herr Chebb,” he said. “They are changing the worst despotism of Europe to a constitutional monarchy. To hunt for a little girl in this turmoil would be to hunt for a lost button upon a raging battlefield. Better give up the child, Herr Chebb. Perhaps, no doubt, she has fallen into the hands of kind people. People are good to lost children. She will not starve.”

“But her mother—her widowed mother—I should never dare to go back to America without the child. I should not care to live without finding her. It is my one duty on earth, Herr von Hellwald, I must try, and try, and try. You see that, don’t you?”

Any one seeing Jebb and his terror might have been pardoned a moisture about the lashes. Two or three large tears spilled from Hellwald’s trembling eyelids and rolled down, to be lost in the wheat field of his beard.

“What did you say the child’s name was?”

“Cynthia Thatcher.”

“Tsetia Tat—Tsent—tseend——”

He tried again and again, growing angry at the ridiculous “th,” which his tongue and teeth could not manage.

“*Hilf Himmel*, Herr Doctor, if somebody asks the child her name, and she tells it, nobody will be able to repeat it or to remember it.”

Difficulties were barricading Jebb’s way so fast that one more made little difference. He simply threw himself on Hellwald’s generosity.

“You must help me.”

“I will do my all, and gladly. It will take much money. In Turkey nobody moves—not even the sultan—without baksheesh. It is not just what we call *Tringeld* or *pourboire*, but something like what one puts on the axles of wheels. You have much money, yes?”

Jebb tossed his hands. “I have a hundred and fifty dollars—about six hundred marks.”

“That would not go far in such an affair. But perhaps you can cable to the mother for money.”

“The mother is poor—poor—a widow.”

Hellwald grew more solemn. A blush stained his cheek.

“I would lend you money gladly for such a purpose, Doctor Chebb, but I am only a young diplomat with many debts. The consulate needs all its funds, because of the distress of our citizens in this revolution. Perhaps you yourself have something to sell or to pawn?”

“I have nothing.”

“You have a difficult problem, Herr Doctor. We must see what we can do. Your passports are in good shape, I hope.”

“Passports? I never had any.”

“You must have had them to get into Turkey. And you must have had a *teskere* or you could not have traveled.”

“If I had them, I lost them, and I don’t know where.”

“Where were you last, did you say?”

“In Salonica, I think. All I know is that the train from Salonica brought me here.”



"Salonica! *Himmel*, it is the very home of the revolution. Everything started there.

"It was there that the Young Turks formed an army and marched on Constantinople. The sultan's soldiers resisted, the glorious city was bombarded, captured, the sultan locked up in his palace. We think that the parliament will dethrone him to-day, it may be—or to-morrow."

He sat back, puffing and staring at Jebb, and went on:

"All these things began in Salonica. And you have been in Salonica without knowing. And how did you get there? You could not have dropped into Salonica from the clouds. You probably reached there by the railroad from—Constantinople. Have you been in Constantinople?"

"I don't know."

"Did you have the child with you in Salonica?"

"I don't know. I may have had. I cannot tell.

Hellwald shook his head in dismay. He would have believed Jebb to be a spy, but a spy would have some story to tell. At length, Hellwald said:

"I might telegraph to our consul in Salonica to find if the child has been heard of there. He is a good gentleman, our consul, a father, and he will put the gendarmerie to work. Meanwhile, you must get money in some way—and then you must go yourself."

"Get money—yes, I must get money, but how? How?"

The two men sat wrestling with a problem as old as money itself.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE FIRST RAY.

PAST the café where Jebb and Hellwald sat pondering flowed the eddying traffic of the street. Now and then a Turk, a Russian, an Austrian, or a Macedonian saluted Hellwald,

after the manner of his race or station, and the Austrian answered in kind.

Among those who passed was a venerable white-bearded Turk in fez and frock coat. Hellwald said to Jebb:

"That is Akef Bey, one of the leaders of the Young Turks. His younger son is very ill, and the doctors here can do nothing for him. It is a dangerous thing to fall ill here in Uskub."

Akef Bey saw Hellwald, and greeted him with a sad courtesy, in a sweeping salute from the brow.

Hellwald rose. "Excuse me, I must ask him how the boy is to-day."

He went to the old man and questioned him in Turkish. Akef Bey answered with much excitement and vivid gestures of pain and despair. Hellwald listened with evident sorrow. Then he seemed to brighten with an idea. He beckoned Jebb, and managed, by alternating between Turkish and German to introduce Akef Bey to "*Herr Doctor Chebb von der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*."

The letter "j" is as common in Turkey as with us, and the bey did not at first connect Jebb with "Chebb." He shook hands with dignified reserve, then suddenly realized the truth.

"*Allah kerim!*" he cried, and wrung Jebb's hand with an enthusiasm that threatened him with another fracture to treat. He explained to Hellwald that he had heard of Doctor Jebb from a man named Djaffer. Hellwald glowed with joy, and broke out into expansive Turkish, patting Jebb on the shoulder, and waving his hand grandiosely. Afterward he explained:

"I have just told Akef Bey that you are one of the most eminent physicians in America, and that I knew you well in Vienna when you studied there. It is near enough to the truth for a diplomat."

As he was saying this to Jebb, the bey was pouring fluent Turkish into



his other ear. Hellwald translated in short asides:

"He is asking me if you cannot come to see his son at once—don't accept—look solemn—you are busy—you are leaving town—the other physicians have failed to help him, he says—they are ignorant dogs—his son cries aloud in agony."

"Ask him where the agony is," said Jebb.

The distracted father responded to Hellwald's question by seizing his loins in his hand and bending in frightful contortions, and then brushing imaginary sweat from his brow. Jebb understood before Hellwald translated.

Jebb said: "If it is appendicitis, as I judge it is, the young fellow must be in considerable distress."

That was a huge superlative of pain for Jebb, and he permitted himself to be urged forward. On the way they passed a miscellaneous bazaar, where a meager supply of drugs was kept for the foreign population. There Jebb managed to find a large hypodermic needle and a supply of tablets, which he purchased along with a few of such simples as the *ejza-hané* possessed.

Then the three resumed their walk.

A little farther on an embarrassment troubled the old man.

"Akef Bey wants me to explain," said Hellwald, "that you may find in his home—two other physicians."

Jebb stopped short. "Then I can't go."

"And why not?" Hellwald thundered.

"It's against our ethical code to call on another doctor's patient."

"Ethical nothing! This is no time to stand on ceremony."

But old conventions held Jebb fast. Hellwald explained the situation to Akef Bey. The father laid aside all courtesy. He seized Jebb's hand and urged him forward, pouring out words which Hellwald translated, as he took

Jebb's other arm, and pressed him on the way.

"The bey says that he did not know of your distinguished presence in Uskub till after these men came. They are not really physicians. When the boy fell ill the mother, who is very religious, sent for one of these wild-haired dervishes to drive out the wicked spirits. When they did not go Akef Bey, who is not so religious, ran to the nearest Christian missionary—a young *Schottischer*."

*Schottischer* suggested to Jebb only a dance till he realized that Hellwald was speaking of a Scotchman. His heart warmed at the thought of meeting some one who spoke his own language—or nearly. But Hellwald was explaining how the Turk came to call in a missionary to cure his son.

"Do not be afraid to push him out of Akef Bey's home," he concluded. "He is no doctor and he knows it. He is a nice young man, and he will welcome you. What the dervish will do, God knows. He may summon the evil spirits to torment you, but if he is no better at calling them in than he is at calling them out, you shall have no trouble. You will come, yes? Do not forget that it means the money for the lost child."

Jebb assented without further parley, and Hellwald told the news to the overjoyed father. The next turn of the street brought them to their destination.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE DERVISH AND THE SURGEON.

THE home of Akef Bey was important in Uskub, large enough to be called a *konak*. A walled garden surrounded all of it, except the dark-red street façade, with the lattice-windowed upper story jutting above the lower.

The bey led them up a broad stairway to a large hall with a cushioned divan along three sides, with low,



carved tables, mirrors, and Turkish hangings. They were asked to sit down, and the bey, with hurried salaams, lifted a portière and vanished into another room. He reappeared a little later and asked them to come in.

On a low platform covered with bedding a boy of fifteen lay writhing. Over him bent a long-robed, bearded man, who seemed to be blowing on the boy and touching him lightly with his hands. Jebb saw nothing, looked at nothing but his patient. He took out the hypodermic syringe, and said:

"Could I have some hot water?"

Hellwald interpreted; the bey ordered; some one ran from the room. Jebb knelt at the bedside and examined the glowing body. He noted the right leg drawn up close. The bey told, and Hellwald translated, the history of the case, the earlier attacks of violent nausea and fever, credited to severe indigestion. When Jebb tried to touch the boy he winced away.

Jebb glanced toward Hellwald with one word: "Appendicitis."

By this time some one was kneeling at his side with a ewer of steaming water and a basin. He filled the chamber of the hypodermic needle and paused for the tablet to dissolve. Then he looked about for the first time.

Squatting on the floor at his elbow and almost touching him was a be-whiskered Turk in a long, tawny cloak and a very tall, brimless camel's hair hat. Jebb supposed him to be the dervish sheikh Hellwald had spoken of.

A little aloof stood an elderly woman, evidently the mother—the Jantine Hanum that Miruma had spoken of—for her streaming eyes were sunken with age and many griefs, and her veil was soaked with her tears. Clinging to her was one who was apparently a daughter, too young to have donned the *yashmak*. She was plainly to be beautiful soon, but sympathy for her brother had made her haggard.

In the background hovered a young man in shabby European costume.

When the opiate was dissolved Jebb made read for the injection. The terrified boy fought him away, and the dervish muttered angrily, but Jebb, half expecting to be knifed in the back, overcame the boy's feeble resistance, and thrust the needle in the shivering flesh. Gani Bey screamed as if he had a death wound, and the women echoed him piercingly. Even the father closed his eyes and toppled against the wall. The dervish leaped to his feet with a fanatic howl, and raised his hands threateningly, but Hellwald caught his arm and flung him aside. The family's thoughts were so focused on the boy that they did not see the sacrilege.

Jebb alone was calm. He was almost smiling at his success in inserting the opiate so near the center of pain. It meant a saving of many minutes in the relief that was to follow. Having done all he could at the moment, he took under his thumb the boy's wrist and mechanically felt for his watch. It was not there. He turned to Hellwald, but before he could speak he heard some one say:

"Four-r-teen minutes to eleven, doctor-r."

And a watch was placed in his palm by a hand that lingered to clasp his as the donor continued:

"I am glad to see a real doctor-r here, doctor-r. You are an Amayrican, I presume. My name is Murison, Donald Murison. I am a Presbyterian missionary, not a physician. I have done my best, but it is not much. This horrible dervish here gets in the way so with his witchcraft and his incantations."

Jebb smiled. "May I ask what you prescribed?"

"There didn't seem much to do except to give calomel and a hot-water bag. But it is hard to keep anything on his stomach, outside or in."



"Had you thought an operation was—indicated?"

"Ye-es, I supposed so, but I couldn't trust myself to make one. And there is no decent surgeon nearer than Salonica. I have a set of instruments, but——"

"You have a set of instruments?" Jebb demanded eagerly.

To Jebb in ultimate Uskub, this news was as welcome as the sight of a raft to a lost swimmer, or a loaded weapon to a soldier at bay, or a horse to a dismounted knight.

Murison explained further. "Yes, I have a fairly good set of scalpels and scissors, and—I don't know the names of the things—and a quantity of ether and sterilized gauze. They equipped me pretty well when they sent me here, but I have never even opened the case. If you can use any of the tools you are ver-r-y welcome to them."

"Thanks, I may need them," said Jebb.

The boy on the divan showed no lessening of his pain and the family was losing its new hope.

Jebb took up the needle again, the patient's wild eyes saw it with such a shuddering revulsion that Jebb could not come near him. He had to content himself with an injection into the arm he held.

Suddenly the daughter paused stock-still and gazed at the boy. Then she whirled her mother round.

An influence, miraculous to them, was at work upon their beloved. As stealthily as the sunset flush withdraws from the west, the pain oozed out of the patient's flesh. The release from crucifying anguish was by pure contrast an almost ineffable delight. The shrieks of little Gani Bey were softened to murmurs ambiguous between fatigue and delight. The knotted muscles relaxed, and he uncoiled and lay supine. He seemed almost ready for the incredible luxury of sleep.

The women breathed fervent phrases

in which the word "Allah" was recurrent. Jebb was a little jealous, perhaps, for he said:

"Tell them it isn't Allah, but the angel anæsthesia."

Murison gave the credit to Jebb and his opiate, and the women turned to him.

The dervish slipped out of the room unnoticed.

Under the spell of the drug the boy permitted Jebb to make a careful examination and confirm the theory suggested by the other symptoms. He turned to Murison.

"Tell them the relief is only temporary. The boy is very sick, and the pain will come back on him with renewed violence. The cyst will burst and flood his body with poison and he will die, unless—unless the danger is removed at once, and for all time."

"By an—an operation?"

"That is the one hope. It would be murder to neglect it. I should be a criminal unless I urged it."

"But it is very dangerous, isn't it?"

"It is so common at home that it has become a minor operation. I have done it hundreds of times."

"Is there nothing else to do?" Murison temporized, but Jebb answered firmly:

"I operate, or I refuse the case."

With much circumlocution Murison broached the subject to the parents and they were affrighted at the thought. But Akef Bey was converted at last and gave his consent. He ordered the women to their quarters, and put all the servants of his household at Jebb's command, while Murison hastened to fetch the instruments.

While the servants were preparing another room as Jebb directed, washing it thoroughly, floor, walls, and painted windows, with boiling water, bringing a long high table from the kitchen, sterilizing the linen, tearing up sheets for bandages, and attending to the hundred



schemes that Jebb improvised to approach hospital ideals, Hellwald was exercising all his diplomacy in manipulating a bargain with the father, to whom Jebb's multitude of details bore the look of elaborate incantation, and impressed him all the more for their mystery.

Akef Bey, who was the soul of generosity, and who had but one passion, the health and well-being of his adored family, exclaimed:

"If Jebb Effendi saves my boy I shall be his slave; all my possessions are his."

Hellwald brought him gently from the peaks of sincere hyperbole, and explained that as Jebb was a craftsman, not a magician, he scorned to take advantage of a father's grief to rob him; all he wished was an appropriate fee for his learning and his skill. The outcome was in Allah's hands. Jebb did not want a reward for a miracle, but recompense for his years of study, his vast experience, his science.

There was time enough before Murison's return, and during the boiling of the instruments and the preparation of the ether for Hellwald to modulate through all the stages of a Turkish bargain. The upshot of it was that Hellwald settled upon one hundred pounds Turkish or about five hundred and twenty-five dollars, as the fee for the operation, whether successful or not. He accepted Akef Bey's word of honor as equivalent to a deposit in gold.

The women begged for the privilege of a last visit with the boy, still slumberous with the opiate. They knelt before his couch, shedding silent tears, and whispering prayers against the dark angels that trouble the dying soul. Gani Bey was awake enough and brave enough to face the farewell rites.

Hellwald explained: "They are asking and granting mutual forgiveness for injuries or unkindnesses of the past. They call it the *helal*."

The mother and sister, after the final embraces and kisses, suffered themselves to be exiled to the *haremlik*, gazing their farewells as to one at whose lips the Cupbearer of the Sphere already held his chalice.

By this time Jebb was ready with the ether, and, smiling courage into the brave eyes of the little stoic, he hid them under the hood and watched the deep breathing of the obedient youth till the drugged soul had ceased to murmur.

Then he lifted the body, limp with mimic death, and carried it across the hall to the room prepared for the operation. Hellwald sat outside on the divan, trying to divert Akef Bey with such conversation as he could force his anxious mind to manufacture. As Murison went in with Jebb he looked back with doleful eyes at the shivering father. Then he let the curtain at the door fall.

It seemed many hours, but it was hardly the half of one when Murison lifted the curtain again for Jebb, who reappeared, carrying in his arms the burden, still peacefully unaware of its new wounds and bandages.

The surgeon's face wore a look of quiet triumph, and Murison, as he lifted the curtain at the door of the boy's room, turned back to murmur:

"*Ajayib!*" which is to say: "Wonderful!"

The father, the mother, and the sister crowded at once to the room to find their idol still alive, breathing raucously and beginning to mutter sleepy nonsense as he came back to the world. They cried aloud with joy.

All the afternoon Jebb ministered to the boy, and eased his pain as much as he dared. That night he had a couch spread for himself on the floor alongside, but sleep did not visit him, or any one else under that roof. For nature, the seamstress, was stitching the wounds with needles of pain. But by the hour when the few swallows of the



early spring woke in the eaves, and the muezzins, as regular as the sunrise, were crying the name of Allah to the four corners of the world, peace fell on the racked body, and the frightened spirit of the boy. And all the household slept.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE RETURN OF THE SUN AND THE MOON.

**J**EBB performed no miracle at Uskub. His patient did not rise and run through the streets. In fact, he kept his bed and suffered for many days. But ordinary people are skeptic of miracles, and there was something reasonable and mechanical and slow and convincing about the handicraft of Jebb that made a profound effect in the old town.

Legends began to cluster about him. He was called "the American," and when he walked the streets he was stared at; whispers followed him, and pointings of the hand and noddings of the head, "*Baksana! Ameriquali!*"

When Jebb had carried the young bey sufficiently past the shoals to intrust him to the care of his mother he went back to Hotel Turati to wait until it was safe for him to leave town. He was immediately besieged with patients of every sort, from the poor Serb, who begged him to prescribe for the cough of his sick buffalo, to the British consul, who sent for him on his own account. The very dervish sheikh, who abhorred him officially, visited him after dark and implored him to come and cure his ailing daughter—for the dervish sheikhs marry in Turkey.

Meanwhile Hellwald had received a telegram from the Austrian consulate at Salonica saying that the police had heard nothing of the lost child. A letter followed the next day confirming the telegram, and adding that the negative of the police meant nothing. At best they were lazy, and the revolution

had turned Salonica into a seething caldron. The consul strongly advised Hellwald's friend to come in person to make his search and to bring plenty of baksheesh to scatter.

And now Jebb began to wonder if he might not have lost the child in some other city. Salonica was a long journey from his last definite memory of Cologne, and there were various ways of arriving there. He must have come through Austria, in any case, and he persuaded Hellwald to write to the head of the Austrian secret service to make inquiries.

But the world is so large a haystack, and the child was so small a needle, that Jebb took the step only to make sure that he was overlooking nothing.

He waited with increasing impatience for the young bey to improve enough to be left. The boy's strength and youth were mending him as rapidly as might be, but the days passed with leaden tread.

What time Jebb was not giving the patients who began to regard the Hotel Turati as a dispensary, he spent in studying a German-Turkish grammar lent to him by Hellwald. It served a triple purpose; it killed time; it polished up and renewed his neglected German; and it equipped him with useful Turkish phrases, though he found the Arabic characters tough to master.

Before he had learned more than a few of the elaborately ceremonial greetings—it was the third day of Gani Bey's convalescence—a servant brought to his room a request that he grant an audience to Fehmi Pasha.

The name set Jebb's nerves a tingle, and he stammered, as he told the servant to bring the pasha up.

While he waited he wondered what could have led Miruma's husband to seek him out. His first thought was that Djaffer or some other servant might have betrayed their secret, and he saw Miruma choked to death with a



bowstring, and the pasha coming with eager scimitar to slay him and put him in a sack with her, to cast them both into the Bosphorus, according to the best romantic traditions.

When the pasha entered, and, salaaming low, touched his breast, and his lips and his brow, and smiled appeasingly, Jebb thought of the wiles of the bloodthirsty Turk of literature. But he pointed to a chair. The pasha bowed again, and launched forth into a stream of Turkish. The flood carried away all of Jebb's little phrases, and he could not even remember how to say that he did not speak Turkish.

The pasha showed his disappointment at the check, thought a while, then ventured in bad French:

*"Dje parle français oon peu. Est-ce que moosoo le parle?"*

And Jebb answered in worse:

*"Ung poo."*

Proceeding then with much caution, yet with far more mangling of French grammar than Jebb realized, the pasha explained that he had heard of Jebb's great success. The pasha's wife—if Jebb Effendi would pardon a gentleman for mentioning his wife to another gentleman—the pasha's wife was very ill. She was wasting away, and no one seemed to know just what, or where, or whence her ailment was. Perhaps—undoubtedly—Jebb Effendi would know at a glance.

Jebb was so relieved at the nature of the pasha's visit that he consented to go at once. Fehmi Pasha begged him to honor his poor carriage, which waited below, and they went together.

Fehmi Pasha did not impress Jebb so favorably as Akef Bey. There are Turks and Turks and Turks. Discounting—as he tried to—his natural prejudice against Fehmi Pasha, the jailer and persecutor of Miruma, Jebb felt him to be a man of craven and clammy nature, effusive, but insincere; showy, yet ungenerous. Jebb learned

from such French as was jolted out of the pasha that his wife, Nahir Hanum, was a strong-minded woman, a sort of Oriental suffragette, and more Young Turk than the Young Turks themselves.

Jebb gathered that the pasha was a somewhat hanum-pecked husband, and quite as much in fear of his wife as in love with her.

When he entered the door of the pretentious mansion he saw what the pasha meant by his wife's advanced ideas. She had outgrown the more or less graceful usages time has mellowed in Turkey, and the furniture, the walls, everything breathed the spirit of progress ill digested, of ostentation displacing comfort.

The main hall was covered with imported wall paper of a tawdry pattern that would have offended an American farmer of the old school. The pasha evidently admired it as the latest triumph of new art.

The pasha's wife's couch was not the usual mattress upon the floor, but a bed from France, a canopied and almost coquettish piece of furniture, quaintly chaperoned by a banner of velvet, embroidered with a stanza chosen from the Koran as Nahir's particular motto.

The pasha delicately withdrew after the presentation. Jebb could not understand how completely Turkish custom releases the physician, especially the foreign physician, from the restrictions of harem etiquette, and he was unable to shake off a chill between the shoulder blades. He expected every moment to hear the tread of some huge black guardian and feel his sword.

Nahir Hanum was plainly suffering a mortal illness; Jebb's eyes told him that. She commanded more French than the pasha, but she was so wasted away, and so completely prostrated that her voice was but a thin wire. Jebb had lost his little all of French through uneasiness, and he could neither ask the



delicate and technical questions, nor understand much of what Nahir Hanum had to say.

He gave up and went back to the hall, where the pasha waited anxiously.

His French was almost too lame to express its own lameness, but he managed to make clear his need of an interpreter. He was about to suggest that Hellwald or Murison be called in when the pasha exclaimed:

"If only my other wife were here. She understands English."

"Your other wife!" Jebb echoed with a great obscure pain about his own heart.

"Yes," said the pasha apologetically, "it is my misfortune to have two wives, effendi. I will send for the other at once. Perhaps she can repay me now, in part, for the enormous expense she has put me to."

He was not yet modern style enough to have electric bells in his *konak*, so he clapped his hands. A servant appeared, whom he dispatched for his coachman. When this man arrived he was dispatched posthaste to request Miruma Hanum to come at once. The coachman's salaam did not conceal his amazement at the command.

Jebb could hardly believe the reality of what was taking place. By a sudden shift of scenery and event he was to meet Miruma again, and under the very roof, in the very presence of the tyrant who kept her in fruitless bondage. He could not trust himself to utter a word of approval, protest, or comment. But the pasha, not realizing that he was telling a twice-told tale, was excitedly dashing headlong through the French language, with such carnage to grammar and accent that Jebb would have been at a loss to understand a word, had he not possessed a scenario in his own head.

He felt a contradiction of emotions as he realized the pasha's resentment against the helpless Miruma. Jebb

would have hated the pasha for loving Miruma, yet he could hardly love him for his evident dislike.

The motives of the pasha were not of the noblest. He was a decayed politician, trained in licking the old sultan's sandals, and in hunting baksheesh, which is Turkish for graft. Thrown out of that employment and left to mope in idleness, he had turned miserly.

"The possession of two wives, moosoo," he said, "was not my wish, but my misfortune. My father had but one wife, and his father before him. Few Turks except the rich and dissolute have endeavored to keep more than one wife. The law permits us four, but the law does not furnish us with funds. And it were easier to keep four tigresses in a cage, Moosoo Jebb, than four wives in a house. For Turkish women are tyrannical, moosoo, and very exacting. They fear only the priests. It is the priests that keep them under the veil, the priests and the fear of other women's gossip.

"I was content with one wife. Nahir Hanum is a good woman, she has borne me many children—why should I have desired another wife? I did not. But his imperial majesty, the padishah—whom Allah preserve!—in those beautiful days when I enjoyed his favor, felt graciously inclined to present me with another. My own wife, she is a noble woman, moosoo, but jealous—mashallah! She threatened to destroy herself if I—if I made the other woman, this Miruma, my real wife. I went through the ceremony, but only the ceremony. Miruma Hanum is beautiful, I am told, though I have never seen her without her veil.

"The padishah—whom Allah preserve!—withdrew his favor from me soon after he honored me with his expensive gift. But Allah manages all things best, and perhaps now my second wife will help us to save the life of my beloved, my one true wife. I



have been told that Miruma Hanum has studied the English. Indeed, I have had to pay for many English books for her diversion. Perhaps now she can repay me for them by helping you to heal the mother of my sons."

Jebb listened in silence, his temples throbbing with conflict. At length he made so bold as to say:

"If you do not love and do not see your second wife, pasha, why don't you divorce her?"

He knew well enough why, but he asked the question. The pasha squirmed a little as he answered:

"It would be both ungracious and—dangerous, effendi, for me to dismiss the gift of the padishah."

But Jebb persisted. "The padishah is no longer dangerous. I hear that he is a prisoner, and in disfavor. Some people say that he will be deposed—perhaps put to death, and that his brother, whom he has kept in prison for many years, will be the new sultan."

"That is true," said the pasha, and he fingered his prayer beads with nervous hands, as if he were counting money. But he kept silence.

At length Jebb said, with an effort at guilelessness:

"If you should grant your second wife a release, she would no longer be an—an expense to you."

"The release is itself a great expense," said the pasha, thinking hard. "I could not dismiss her without providing for her future or repaying the—the money I received from the padishah as her dowry."

"Why not repay it?" said Jebb, wondering at his own presumption.

The pasha gave him a curious look, smiled craftily, and said:

"You surgeons speak easily of amputations."

Then he changed the subject to coffee.

At length the sound of horses' hoofs outside reminded the pasha that he had not yet told the first wife of the visit of the second. He excused himself hastily, and entered his wife's room with manifest uneasiness.

Too restless to sit still, Jebb began pacing the floor. His random steps brought him to a window commanding the garden. He saw a servant run out and open a gate in the wall. A tall negro in fez and frock stepped in. His wrist was in splints. He bowed low before a veiled figure that followed with evident reluctance.

She stood there in the flower-bordered path—Miruma.

She looked about the strange place timidly, then came forward with resolution to the foot of the outside stairway leading to the balcony. She mounted slowly, pausing often to renew her courage. Between two terrors, she was compelled to be brave. She dared not disobey her lord, the pasha; she hardly dared to face her superior, the *Bash-Kadin*. To have met her in health for a battle royal would have been, perhaps, inspiring; but her rival's helplessness and illness lent her a ghostly advantage.

At length Miruma reached the balcony, stood before the door leading to the very room where Jebb waited, gathering all his resources of self-control. And at last she entered, saw him.

He knew by the quiver that went through her that she had not been prepared for this meeting. But she made no further sign.

For a long moment they were alone together. Then they heard the pasha's voice.

# An Eccentric

~~Roy~~  
Leslie



**D**ID I ever tell you the story of Jonah Ladew and the well?" the detective asked, leaning back in his chair and contemplating me through a cloud of tobacco smoke. "No? Well, perhaps it will while away a few minutes of this tiresome trip."

And here's the story as the detective told it.

When I was a very young man, if suspicion makes the detective, I was far further advanced in my profession than I am at present. My eyes and ears were perpetually seeking for criminal faces and whispered conversations; my mind was a revolving roulette wheel of numbered crimes; and my hands were continually itching for some rogue's collar.

I first met Jonah Ladew while I was spending a hard-earned vacation in a little country place many miles from the city. It was a beautiful spring day. As I walked through the orchard, the blossoms above my head seemed like a snow-storm arrested in midair. The perfume of flowers bathed in dew, the singing of a multitude of birds, the stream of golden sunlight pouring down from a cloudless sky, turned this little grove of trees into a veritable Eden and for the nonce cleansed my mind of the

black, sooty specks of suspicion which clung to it like cinders. The world seemed a brighter and cleaner place than I had imagined.

Following a little, winding path, I soon found myself on the outskirts of the orchard. There, fifty yards in front of me, stood a small, white house, evidently newly painted and suggesting in the sunlight a country girl decked out in her finery. An old-fashioned stone well was immediately in front of the house, and bending over it, his back toward me, was the stoutest man I have ever seen. He was so fat, indeed, that from the rear he looked like an animal dressed in men's clothes. His small, round head was bent forward; his great, red neck was covered with perspiration and flies. Although his hands, his shoulders, his legs, suggested violent movement, he remained perfectly motionless till I approached and touched him on the arm. At that, he wheeled about and faced me.

"Have you dropped something into the well?" I asked.

His bulbous cheeks, which had been suffused with blood, now turned sickly white; his round, bulging eyes avoided mine.

"What?" he said, in a shrill, piping



voice, and his right hand, like a monstrous, purple beetle, fluttered up to his breast.

"I asked you if you had dropped anything in the well," I said sternly, fixing him with my eyes.

"Dropped anything in the well?" he repeated. "That's a funny question! Why should I drop anything into the well?"

"You were looking down into it as though you ~~had~~—just this way."

Pushing past him, I bent down and glanced into the well. Far below, I saw a circle of dim light, like a disk of glass, which reflected a shadowy head. It was water and nothing more. Suddenly I heard a shrill laugh and, looking up, saw the fat man convulsed with merriment. He was tittering like a great washerwoman.

"Well," I asked, "what is it?"

"You looked so funny peering down," he said, gasping and wiping his face with his shirt-sleeve. "You looked as though you expected to see something. You couldn't though, could you?"

"No—only water. But I think I'll have a drink of it. I'm rather thirsty."

"No, don't," he muttered. "That water isn't very good; I never drink it."

"I think I'll try it just the same. I'm partial to the well water about here." Grasping the windlass, I began to turn it.

The bucket came up easily enough. But, as I continued to turn the windlass, I saw a strange expression steal over my companion's bloated face. Bending over the well, he stared down with dilated eyes and open mouth. As the bucket rose slowly into view, his whole huge body began to tremble like a figure made of jelly. Suddenly, with a hoarse cry, he put his hand into the black aperture and, seizing the rim of the bucket, turned it upside down. I heard its contents splash back into the well.

"Nobody ever drinks *that* water!" he cried, turning on me with a strange light in his eyes. "Nobody ever drank it but brother Joe."

"And where's brother Joe?"

"Ah," said he with a titter, "nobody knows that—nobody! He left home years ago and he never came back. Since then that water's been left alone."

"Well, if I can't have a drink, I'll be of, Mr.——"

"Ladew's my name—Jonah Ladew."

"Well, good afternoon, Mr. Ladew."

"Good afternoon," he said, with another of his girlish titters. Turning about, he lumbered off toward the little white house.

For a moment I stood looking irresolutely at the well, then I hurried back to the orchard. When I reached the grove of trees, I hid myself behind some underbrush and waited. Nearly an hour passed. Then I saw the front door of the white house open and the heavy figure of Jonah Ladew come out. Looking about him on all sides, he again approached the well. Bending over it, he began to turn the windlass. From my hiding-place, I could hear him talking to himself in a shrill voice. Occasionally his girlish titter rang out on the still air.

"Ah, there you are, Joseph!" he cried. "How do you like it down there? Now you're coming up, you *see*—up into the beautiful, clear air where the flowers are blooming. Higher, higher—now you're nearly up. I can see your face so plainly. Remember how you used to kick me, Joseph? Do you, Joseph? That's high enough, Joseph. Now we'll go down, down, down."

And then Jonah Ladew dropped the handle of the windlass; the rope ran out; the bucket fell into the water. He raised and lowered that bucket fully fifty times, while the birds sang above my head, the blossoms fluttered down like tiny stars, and the breeze murmured its soft refrain through the

branches. It is only by violent contrast that the heights of horror can be reached. In this beautiful spot that tittering mammoth madman crooning over his well was peculiarly revolting.

Finally, bathed in perspiration, I leaped to my feet and hurried off to the village. Fifteen minutes later I entered the mayor's office.

"Well, what can I do for you?" the mayor asked.

"There's a murderer in town!" I cried.

"Where?" said he, looking lazily at the windows, the doors, the tables.

"His name is Jonah Ladew. He lives in a small, white house on the other side of Smith's cherry orchard."

"Oh, he's not a murderer," said the mayor wearily. "He's just an eccentric."

"I know he's insane, but he's a murderer as well. His brother has been missing for years. I know where he's been all this time. He's been at the bottom of Jonah's well."

"You have been watching old Jonah—I can see that," said the mayor with a smile. "He is a bit eccentric at times, but he's right smart at some things. Jonah's smart at selling apples."

"And his brother?"

"Why, Joe's been lying in the graveyard twenty years now. He was shot in a drunken scrap down the river. Joe was a mean scoundrel. He used to like to get a man down and then jump on him. Looked a lot like Jonah, only taller. Some people say that Jonah wouldn't be the way he is if it hadn't been for the beatings Joe used to give him. Jonah may be carrying a grudge; it wouldn't surprise me if he was."

"And you're sure of all this?" I asked suspiciously.

"Why, man," said the mayor, pulling his beard and half closing his eyes. "I was one of Joe's pallbearers! What a sweating time we did have of it! He was a powerful big man, was Joe."

That ended the detective's narrative. For a moment there was silence, broken only by the train rumbling over the tracks and the rattling of the window-panes in their sockets.

"So Jonah Ladew wasn't a murderer after all?" I said at length.

"Well, that all depends," said the detective, staring up thoughtfully at the ceiling. "Yes and no. It was a crime that had been committed in the brain."

## DIM UNKNOWN

By Carl Buxton

BELOVED, how my heart cries out to you

Like some poor penitent upon his knees

Who seeks new visions of old mysteries,

And thinks to raise his failing hopes anew.

Alas, the treasures of the earth are few;

Life is a wilderness wherefrom one sees

The sunlight far above the close-grown trees,

Wherein we feebly dream our swift days through.

Behind our smiles we hide our tears, behind

Our tears, our dreams . . . this much we own

If one possess the splendid gift to bind

Unto the spirit by his strength alone

That which he does not earn but lives to find

By taking chances with a dim unknown.



# A Step and a Half

~~Harry~~ Golden



ON a dismal morning in the early fall I set out along the county road for a walk, little knowing and caring not at all where my desultory steps might lead. Fog had crept into the narrow valley, and the low, blunt-nosed hills showed dimly through the mist. I am impressionable, susceptible—a victim of moods. I fought against the gray cheerlessness of the countryside, but it searched me out; and I bowed my head beneath the mantle of gloom that settled about me, and clung to me, like the folds of a wet blanket.

Not alone were the weather conditions responsible for my dark mood. I had received several disappointments during the past few days. They were in the form of printed slips—short but to the point—and came to me, inclosed with many familiar typewritten pages, in fat self-addressed envelopes. Furthermore, all my worth-while possessions I carried in my pockets—and I was not overburdened with them. I was lonely and among strangers. I had no trade, no reliable profession. It seemed to me that I had nothing.

And then suddenly the fog began to rise; the gray old hills shrugged themselves free of it, and turned golden brown in the warm sunshine. My spirits rose with the fog. My musing leaped from dour introspection to rosy self-appraisal. What if I did have only a few dollars? I had youth and strength and health; and I had a system with which I could make money—much of it—honestly. I had the world to live in! The whole wide world, with all its strange places and its strange people, was mine to study and to enjoy. And I had imagination—ah, what a gift of the gods that even money cannot buy!

A little bird twittered in the hedge near by. I cut a fancy caper in the road, whistled a gay little tune and passed blithely on my way.

I came to a great arched gateway at one side of the road which bore the inscription "State Hospital." I passed beneath the arch and on to the superintendent's office. I entered the office and spoke to a man whom I found there, seated at a desk.

"You are the superintendent——"

"Yes," he interrupted me, "and I suppose you are Mr. Brown. You are late; I have been waiting for you two hours. You may go to Doctor Bask's office and report. He will explain your duties. Call in here again this evening and fill out a formal application——"

"Please excuse me," I cut in. "I'm not Mr. Brown, nor am I an applicant for a job. My name is Bistol, Horace Bistol, and I have come to look around a little, and to talk, perhaps, to a few of the inmates—those who are harmless."

"Pardon me, Mr. Horse Pistol, I don't——"

"Just a moment," I interjected curtly. "Before we go any further let's get that name right—H-o-r-a-c-e B-i-s-t-o-l."

"All right," he returned with an irritating smile, "spell it as you please; it's your name not mine. But, as I was about to explain, I thought when you entered that you were the new man we are expecting this morning. Go ahead and look around as much as you wish. The patients you find amusing themselves out there in the yard are trustees."

I thanked the superintendent and went out into what he had called the yard. This I found to be a great garden with well-kept flowers and trees, and with walks that encircled the many buildings and smaller inclosures.

The day was promising well for me. Already I had met and studied, if but momentarily, one interesting character. I classified the superintendent thus: Willing to grant a favor, courteous enough in his own peculiar way, straight to the point in business matters; but too much self-satisfied, cursed with a sense of low-grade humor, too liable to jump at conclusions, and altogether lacking in the ability to read character. I laughed to myself as I thought of how the fellow had mistaken

me for a job hunter. Couldn't he see that I presented a different type? Couldn't he know that I was not a day worker—a nonentity to be encompassed, measured, limited by the monotonous, regular revolutions of clock hands?

Many men were sauntering about the grounds. I noted one in particular. He walked a short distance ahead of me, leisurely, with a peculiar, free swing of movement for a man of so heavy a build. His hands were clasped behind his back; his head he carried a little forward, and he seemed to be wrapped in profound study. I do not know whether it was the unusual size and build of him or whether it was his preoccupied manner that distinguished him so markedly from the others. Slowly I overtook him, a little in doubt as to whether or not to accost him, so greatly engrossed was he in his musings. At last I decided to run the risk of a rebuff.

"Good morning," I said.

I was almost at his shoulder. He paused and turned slightly to look down at me.

He studied me for a moment out of keen but not unkindly gray eyes. There were flecks of gray in his wavy brown hair, but I judged him to be not over thirty-five or forty years of age. His face lighted neither with pleasure nor surprise at my intrusion.

Then finally he answered "Good morning," seemed to forget my presence, and began to move on again in his slow abstracted manner. I dropped into step at his side, a little at a loss as to just what course to follow. Evidently the fellow did not want my company forced upon him; still, I wished to have a word or two with him. There was something about him that had impressed me, aroused my interest. At first I had thought this man to be an inmate of the place, but now, after one look into those sharp eyes



and keen-cut features, of course, I thrust that thought aside.

"This is a fine day," I began inanely.

The big fellow stopped short and faced me.

"Yes," he said, "this is a fine day. You wish to converse with me, I see. Upon what subject, please? Come, out with it! You are a stranger here—a newcomer? Most likely you wish to discuss with me the hypothetical principles of perpetual motion?"

I was nonplused at this. Was this strapping, hardy, intelligent-looking man, after all, insane—an inmate, and not a visitor or an attendant? Had he perhaps become unbalanced from brooding on the intricate impossibilities of perpetual motion? I had heard of that very thing toppling a man's reason. I decided to humor him.

"I don't know much about perpetual motion," I answered. "I am deeply interested in it though; and perhaps you can give me some information on the subject. You have made a study of it?"

He snorted contemptuously.

"Certainly not!" he replied. "Do I appear as crazy as that? If you have any views on that absurd, mechanically impossible proposition, I wish you would kindly keep them to yourself. There are a lot of deep-thinking and long-winded expounders of that subject here now. Their discourses amused me at first; but long since they have begun to cloy."

"I am not particularly interested in perpetual motion," I hastened to assure him.

"Please excuse me," he begged in mollified tones; "I was too hasty in judging you. But when you've been here as long as I have, and have had to listen to as much senseless chatter about such things as I have had to listen to, you will become suspicious of strangers yourself. They all specialize—just what is your specialty?"

"Why," I stammered, "I—I'm not crazy at all. I—I'm just a——"

"Ah, so that's it," he said, rudely interrupting me. "You will find several of your sort here, too, and they are as bad as, if not worse than, the other kinds. They're not crazy! Oh, no! They're here just because some heartless wretch wants them out of the way—heirs to fortunes and all that sort of thing. Not crazy—just framed—railroaded. Well, I'm not of your kind, and I'm damned glad of it. If you wish to have anything more to say to me, just forget that you're not crazy. I'm tired of listening to the yammerings of lunatics who incessantly protest that they are not crazy."

"I want you to understand," I blurted out hotly, "that I am *not* crazy. I am no more crazy than you are! I'm merely a visitor here."

"Oh," he said, in conciliatory tones, "why didn't you say so before. But you have evidently mistaken me for an attendant or a visitor, also. Please allow me to insist, truthfully, candidly, that I am insane. But," he added, "I am getting better; I hoped to be cured soon."

I began to feel a little dizzy from the way in which our conversation had run. I could not bring myself to believe that this man was of unsound mind. Still he had insisted sanely, or insanely, enough that he was insane. I checked further conning of the perplexing question and took him at his word. At least here was a character well worth studying.

Then as I walked along at his side I noticed that my companion limped. I was sure that he had not limped while I had been walking behind him a few minutes previously.

"You are lame in the left foot?" I asked.

He started, flew into a fit of rage, stamped the mooted foot upon the solidly packed gravel walk.



"No! Damme! No! I am *not* lame!"

Then his anger passed as suddenly as it had come. He looked at me a little sheepishly.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You do not understand. I shall explain and then, I am sure, you will forgive me for having lost my temper. That—that which you noticed is not a limp; it is a habit—a dastardly, doltish, apish habit, that I have been trying to break myself of every day for the last four years. It—it has largely to do with my being here—a pitiable remnant of my former self, a State's charge, an incompetent, broken in reason. Come and sit with me on this bench and I shall tell you the story."

I went, delighted at the opportunity to hear a story such as this one promised to be; but I was greatly depressed at finding a man of apparently so sound a mind and of so good an address, avowedly in so sorry a plight. And here in his own words is the story he told:

Out in the world of affairs, during the several years immediately preceding my advent here, I followed the business of man hunting. Four years ago last summer I was in the employ of a private detective agency located in San Francisco. This firm made a specialty of running down and bringing to justice those of the higher order of crooks. It was a sort of banker's protective association. I followed many dim and crooked trails in those days; and I was considered a successful operative—I always got my man!

I had just returned from a long, hard trip into Mexico, bringing back with me an absconding bank cashier. I was looking forward to the enjoyment of a quiet week or so about town; when on the same day of my arrival the chief called me back into his office.

"Sorry, Bill," he began, "but I've got

to send you out of town again to-day. A dude by name of Gentleman Jamison has been working a brand-new system on some of our air-tight banks here. We've got to get him, and get him right. This is a particular case. This fellow Jamison has had help, and we are afraid of the system and of the accomplices he has left behind. It's up to you to fetch him back in shape to do some talking. He's a prize slicker, right enough—not a bad man though, just a nimble-witted dude. You bring him back—that's your end of it; and I'll make him come clean as a white-fish—that's my end of it. I know his kind, though, and it won't take much to make him chatty. A little rough stuff—third-degree work—and he'll come through! Mind now, bring him back on the cushions with you, and not in a box in the blind. Dead men tell no tales, you know, and it's the tale we want this time as much as the man.

"Here's the dope on him. I've got it all in shape for you. He's a little fellow, you'll notice—a little guy with one flat tire—gimpy in the left foot. And here's a map of the lava beds of the northern part of the State, showing an old emigrant trail and the few scattered water holes along the way. It's a duplicate of a map Jamison has with him. He bought his ticket for Redding; but got off the train at Anderson, and took the stage from there into the hills to the east this morning. You've got time to catch this evening's train and reach Anderson just a day behind him. Outfit there and go after him. Don't get any help from the sheriff up there, unless you're sure that you'll need it. We want to keep this thing quiet till you get back here, so as to surprise Jamison's accomplices.

"I hate to have to send you out so soon after the hard trip you've just finished, but you're the only man handy now that I feel like trusting with the job."



I grumbled a little, of course, at this change in my plans, but that evening I boarded the northbound train with the map, a full description of Jamison, and a warrant for his arrest, together with more of the chief's verbal instructions and warnings. At Anderson I outfitted with a pack horse, a saddle horse, a camp outfit, and provisions enough to last for more than a month. You see, I had some sort of idea of what might be awaiting me up there in that desolate, barren country into which I was going.

About noon on the first day out, I met the stage driver on his return trip. He told me where Jamison had left his stage on the day before to take the old emigrant road at the edge of the lava beds, afoot with a pack on his back. A little farther along I found the old road where it crossed the newer one which I had been following. I found this old road to be more of a trail than a road, and more of a puzzle than either a trail or a road. It was dim and hard to follow—a crooked bare-rock trail running through the lava, mile after mile, without dust enough in it for the impression of a footprint. Only old wheel scars left by the ox carts of the pioneers and a blaze, here and there, on an occasional, forlorn bull pine or a juniper, marked the way. Long ago this trail, which had once been a section of an important transcontinental thoroughfare, had been abandoned, except for the passing of some cowman.

I examined the trail closely at intervals, and always I found fresh scratches on the rocks, which I concluded must have been made by hobnails or calks in Jamison's boots. This led me to believe that he was not so shrewd as the chief had pictured him to me—else he would not have worn calks in the soles of his boots to betray the way he had gone.

I camped that first night at Jamison's

camp of the night before. I did not come to this camp till it was almost dark, and I was surprised at this; for I had gotten an early start that morning and had ridden steadily all day. I realized that Jamison had been making better time than I had—he could not have followed that trail in the dark. Certainly he had spent fewer hours in traveling thus far than had I. A lame man—and a soft, little city dude, at that, with a pack on his back. It was incredible. But, there was the cogent evidence—the indisputable proof.

The next morning I packed and saddled by firelight, and then I had to wait an hour for the dawn to flush that I might see to follow the trail again. I was determined to overtake Jamison that day if he kept to the trail.

On the second night I camped beside the cold ashes of Jamison's fire of the night before. He had made another dry camp, and that square in the middle of the trail. I told myself that speed stood the fellow well in hand, for he seemed to have no caution. Why had he not hidden this evidence of his camping place. It seemed, almost, that purposely he was leaving landmarks for me to follow. And I marveled more than ever at the fast gait he must have held on to all that day. I was certain now that the chief had it wrong about the fellow's being lame. Why, I was almost too greatly tired by that day's ride to spread my blankets, and my horses had begun to stumble long before I called a halt that night.

On the third morning, already on my way along that old trail that wound and twisted among the rocks, worming its way upward and eastward into the very heart of the lava beds, I met the dawn face to face.

About noon I saw a pyramid of rocks at one side of the trail. This pile of rocks, as I correctly supposed, marked the location of a hot spring which was platted on my map. Beside the pile



of rocks I saw a fire; and beside the fire I saw a man; and soon I came close enough to note that the man limped as he moved about, busy preparing a meal. Not once did the man at the fire glance back along the trail as I rode up. He did not even start when I came close behind him and ordered him to throw up his hands. He turned slowly and smiled at me; then he nodded toward my leveled automatic.

"Please put it up," he said. "Looking down the muzzle—or nozzle, or whatever you call it—of one of those things rocks my equanimity. Anyway, I'm not armed! I'm not going to run, and I'm not going to fight. Tie up your nags and have dinner; it's all ready—I've been expecting you."

I was confounded, of course, at the attitude the fellow had taken. Had he put up a fight, or shown fright, or tried a get-away, or had he become sullen, I should have known how to deal with him. But this flippant indifference of his was new to me, and I put him down for a queer one from the start. Because I was flustered, I blurted out:

"See here, I'm Bill Gladding, and I've got you!"

Again he smiled his tantalizing smile.

"And I am Gentleman Jamison," he said with an extravagant bow; "and you've got me!"

I dismounted, unsaddled, unpacked, and tied the horses to a juniper tree close at hand. I pretended the while not to watch Jamison too closely; but always I kept him in the corner of my eye. He made no untoward move, however, and I soon became more at ease with him.

"We camp here to-night," I told him as we sat down to dinner, "and to-morrow we hit the back trail."

He merely smiled in acquiescence.

I was in a quandary for a while that evening. How was I going to keep a safe watch over my man without hav-

ing to sit up all night. Finally I struck upon this plan: We spread our blankets down to form one bed; we removed all the loose rocks from near the head of the bed, and I left my pistol close to the spring—beyond arm's length from the bed. You see, I **did** not fancy the idea of Jamison's cracking my head with a hunk of lava, or shooting me with my own gun while I slept. We then turned in, and as we lay there side by side on our backs, I handcuffed Jamison's right wrist to my left wrist.

It was not long until Jamison began to snore, and soon afterward I dropped off the sleep also. In a sort of semiconsciousness, I held myself in readiness to awaken at Jamison's first move.

That first move came some time just before dawn. I felt him twist a little tentatively, to ascertain, I suppose, whether or not I was awake. I lay pretending to be asleep, but I was awake—wide awake, alert. I wished to learn what sort of trick Jamison intended to play. Cautiously I opened one eye, there in the starlight, to gauge carefully the exact distance and location of his slim throat. I had taken the precaution to keep my right hand outside the blankets, and it lay there now, free, ready for an instantaneous, sure swing.

Slowly and carefully Jamison began drawing up his legs. When his knees had come almost to his chin he shot his feet upward and outward, suddenly, hurling the top blanket and canvas covering into the air in parachute fashion directly toward the horses, where I had them tied to the juniper tree near the foot of the bed. Both horses fell over backward at the same time, in one frantic lunge against the tie ropes, which parted like cotton twine. They whirled in a flash. Snorting, and with shoes ringing hollowly on the lava, they were off down the trail in the direction we had come.

Like a fool I had lain there quietly



waiting for Jamison to make his move, and when he made it, so surprised was I at the manner of it, that I did nothing to prevent it. I did not even strike out with my right hand as I had intended to do.

"You damned fool! why did you do that?" I asked after a moment's pause.

"Perhaps I had the nightmare, and did it in my sleep," he answered, cool enough.

"You lie!" I told him. "You did it on purpose."

He was unusually slow in answering this time, but his voice did not rise or quicken above a drawl.

"I never lie! I did it for a purpose. What are you going to do about it?"

"First, I am going to try to overtake those horses. When I come back I'll tell you what next I am going to do!"

I removed the handcuff from my wrist and jerked Jamison roughly to his feet. I led him to the juniper and handcuffed him securely to it; and there I left him, clad only in his light underclothes, shivering in the cold.

I stumbled along the trail in the half light of dawn, stubbing my toes against benches and juts of lava. Only once and momentarily did I glimpse the faint outlines of the frightened horses streaking along the ridge. I soon came to realize that I might as well try to head off a brace of wild geese; so I returned to the camp. I unchained Jamison from the tree, but immediately I replaced the cuffs about his wrists.

"You're going to wear that jewelry from now on till I turn you over to the chief for your third degree," I said. "And I'll stand for no more funny business from you!"

"And what next are you going to do about it?" he asked.

"I am going to beat you up," I answered. "I am going to maul you and batter you till you are half dead!"

"When?"

"Now!"

"All right. Take these off and start in." He evinced neither fear nor surprise as he held his manacled hands out toward me.

"No," I said. "Didn't I just tell you that we are going to leave those cuffs on?"

Then with the realization that I was in earnest, surprise crept over his face. His wide blue eyes narrowed to slits. They seemed to harden, and he centered them upon my own eyes. His voice was a little shaky with his first words:

"You are not going to beat me up with these on?"

I nodded.

He repeated: "You are *not* going to beat me up with these on!"

His voice had become lower, and it did not tremble now. Neither was there any interrogation in his tones. They were assertive—positively, unmistakably assertive.

"But I am," I returned.

"But you're *not*!" he challenged.

"You're in a fine position to tell me what I shall do," I taunted.

"Listen! Lay a finger on me while I have these cuffs on, and I'll kill you! I'll get out of this awkward position eventually, and when I do, I'll murder you in cold blood! I'll outwit you yet. I'm shrewder than you are."

"Prove it," I dared him, more to spar for time to think than for any other reason.

I had the upper hand—all the advantage—everything; still, something in his tenser manner—the look in his eyes—the chill—the positiveness in his words—unnerved me for the moment.

"All right—to prove it," he came back. "You are not shrewd or you would not have given me the chance to run the horses off."

"I hardly could have forestalled that," I lied. "I was asleep. You took an advantage."

"No," he cut in, "it was all your

blundering and ignorance of things that a man on the trail should know, that not only made the thing possible, but gave me the idea. Last night I watched you tie the horses to this tree. You tied them low, almost to the ground, where the trunk of the tree is stiff and without spring. Had you tied them a little higher up they could not have broken the ropes; the spring in the tree there would have neutralized the shock—would have made the strain gradual and ineffective. And then, those camp fires of mine that you noticed in the trail and chided me about—I built them not at my camping places, but farther apart, just to confuse you and speed you up a bit. There, is that proof enough?"

All this was a revelation to me, and he saw that fact registered on my face. There was no room for denial.

"Well," I rejoined a little shamefacedly, "if I accept your proof, I believe that justifies me all the more in leaving the cuffs on. If you are the strategist you proclaim yourself to be, I consider myself entitled to all the advantage I can get," I retorted with a sneer.

"Free my hands, and I'll take the beating. You'll have advantage enough at that. You're a big hulk of a man—horse-sized, and undoubtedly used to rough-and-tumble bouts. I'll bet you've razooed many a poor plug caught out in a fix like my own. Better take 'em off," he said. "Remember, I'll get you sooner or later if you don't!"

I smiled at him and shook my head in refusal.

"Are you afraid to give me any show at all?" he asked. "Are you altogether a piker—a cheap sure-thing man?"

He won his point, in that he roused my ire.

"No, damn you! No, you little runt!" I blustered. "I'm not afraid! Why, I can break you in two with one hand!"

Angrily I unlocked the cuffs and

threw them among the rocks. Then Jamison squared off—or rather he made as if to square off; but my fist caught him full and fair in his doll's face, and sent him reeling. It seemed the job was going to be easy enough; and I was afraid, almost, that it would be over all too soon. But he came back with a spring that threw me off my guard; and then we had it hot and heavy. Not that he was any match for me, understand. But he was quick enough to get away from most of my blows, and he certainly could stand up against an incredible amount of punishment. I struck out for a finish. He sprang back. I followed up; and then the totally unexpected happened. I stubbed my toe against a rock, pitched forward, and fetched up on my head against a solid spur of lava.

Hours later, lying on the blankets where Jamison had dragged me, I came to my senses. My first thought was, of course, that Jamison had made his get-away. I raised myself on a shaky elbow, turned to look around; and then I saw him there at the fire frying a pan of bacon. Both his eyes were swollen almost shut. His lips were puffed into a sort of ridiculous grin, and his nose, which formerly had been so straight and slender, was now merely a bulbous protuberance.

Jamison had lost the most in facial beauty, but I don't know who had lost the most, taken all in all; for I had an ugly scalp wound, which Jamison had washed and dressed for me. And, furthermore, the shock of my fall seemed to have unjointed my head from my neck and my neck from my shoulders, and my every tooth seemed loose from the jar.

When I reached out for the cup of strong hot coffee Jamison handed me a few moments later I noticed for the first time that the manacles were dangling from my wrist by one securely locked cuff!



"I put them there," he answered my mute question. "And I threw the key in the hot spring. What are you going to do about that?" he asked with the hint of a grin in his half-closed eyes.

I made no answer. I drank my coffee in silence. What was there to say?

After a moment's pause, Jamison vouchsafed further explanation: "I left one cuff open, you will notice, so that you may lock it about my wrist again to-night—if you so desire. But you may not so desire! Do you remember that story, 'McTeague,' by Frank Norris? Particularly the finish where the bad man finds himself handcuffed to a corpse, alone, in the middle of the desert? Rather a disconcerting predicament to be in. Don't you think so? I shouldn't relish the idea of being handcuffed to a man I couldn't get loose from at will."

I had read the story, and I recalled it. The passage Jamison had cited returned to me instantly, vividly in all its gruesome detail. With the key lost, I decided in a flash, not to handcuff myself to this irrational freak again. Furthermore, I furtively snapped the open cuff shut, for I purposed to forestall the possibility of any capricious prank of his doing the thing for me.

During the following few days nothing of interest happened for us. We lay around the camp recuperating against our trip out. I kept a pretty close watch over Jamison all the while, and this grew to be a strenuous task toward evening of the third day. For two nights and almost three days now I had slept no more than a wink at a time. On the third night I was afraid to go to bed lest I fall asleep and give Jamison a chance to escape. However, shortly after midnight I did lie down, and although I tried my best to prevent it, I did fall asleep. About two hours later Jamison awakened me by shaking my shoulder roughly. He was up and dressed. He had a fire going

and coffee boiling, also he had two light packs made up and both of our canteens filled with water.

"What's the meaning of this?" I asked.

"We're going to travel," he answered.

"We're going to wait for daylight," I countered.

"I'm on my way as soon as I have a bit of breakfast," he replied. "You may wait as long as you please."

The bubbling coffee had an inviting smell. I got up, put on my boots, and tried to argue with Jamison as I joined him in a light breakfast.

"You'll get lost," I told him, "if you go ramming around there in the dark."

"I'm not afraid of that," he came back. "I know where I'm going, right enough."

The fellow was not to be turned from his crazy purpose. He got up, slipped into his pack straps, swung his canteen to his shoulder, and started off into the starlight.

"Come back," I warned him, "or I'll shoot!" I clicked my automatic for effect. It had no effect.

"I am not responsible for what you do," he called back. "Shoot or come along. Suit yourself."

Without further parley, I took up my pack and followed. What else could I do?

Jamison took the back trail, sane enough at the start, but we lost it before long—that, of course, was inevitable. Daylight found me still following his crazy course, and cursing him. Before long I got an idea that we were lost; and I thought for a while, because of the way in which Jamison continually swerved from one tack to another, that he was trying to find the trail again. But I was soon disillusioned as to this; for he was too bold in the choosing of directions, or rather, in the changing of the directions. He was not looking for the trail, at least not in a haphazard way. He would fol-



low only for a short distance one general direction; then he would swerve abruptly to another, and then to another, and so on and on. He seemed never to entertain any hesitancy as to when or where to turn. I came to the belief that his only object was to lose us more completely; and I was sure that he could have no possible idea as to where we were wandering.

That country through which we went winding and twisting, is merely a mass of rock ridges—ridges and the spurs of ridges, and the branches of the spurs, with ravines in between, and then more ridges—a myriad of lunatically designed ridges leading everywhere and still nowhere—ridges that dodge around one another, that collide with one another, that merge into one another. There is no system, no reason, no key to that mad design—that chaos of malformation. It is all a monotonous repetition of geological confusion—a total frustration of order—an utter bafflement of conformity.

Hour after hour Jamison sped on—yes, *sped* is the word—and I clung to his heels. For a while I contemplated that conglomeration of rock pile upon rock pile for some point of identification, for some landmark for future reference; but I gained nothing for my pains except a headache; and I soon gave up all hope of establishing for myself any sense of location or direction. I found my surroundings to be all of a piece; and still, strangely, they lacked sameness. I lowered my eyes, and kept them lowered, to pick a way for them among the rocks.

Then I fell into serious error. I left off picking my own way among the rocks, and began following precisely in the footsteps of the man ahead. As I have mentioned before, Gentleman Jamison limped. I now began to take particular note of this limp. It was a peculiar limp—different from any that I have ever seen a man have, before

or since. He would take, with his good foot, a long stride; and then, with his lame foot, a short stride. And always when the lame foot would leave the ground it would leave with a spring, that seemed to enhance the man's gait rather than impair it. Because I stepped always in his footsteps I had to adjust my strides to his—a long step, and then a short one. I began to study the secret of the spring in that lame foot, and in the days that were to follow I learned it, too.

We made a dry camp that night, and I was too nearly done for to wait for my share of the supper that Jamison set about to cook; I immediately spread down our one blanket and turned in. Nor did I even so much as try to stay awake that night to watch my man. I had had enough of that self-imposed sleeplessness by now, and anyway it would have been impossible for me to stay awake a minute longer that night.

On the following morning we were up and at it again before sunrise—Jamison in the lead, villainously lengthening that already too long and confusing multiangular way we had come. Jamison in the lead with his untiring step-and-a-half business, and I in the rear, sometimes only half a step, never more than a step behind, always with my eyes on his bobbing heels, following every swing and movement of his body and imitating to an absurd nicety that damnable trick walk of his. All day it continued thus, ascending and descending those interminable rock ridges, and crossing the ravines, and on and on—a step and a half, a step and a half, a step and a half.

Previously I had entertained fears of Jamison's being unable to hang on to the trail with me on the way out. By now all these fears had become dissipated. I knew that if the play should come to a show-down, I should be the first to go under. Always before I had measured a man's strength, and ability



to do things that require nerve and muscle, by the breadth of his shoulders and the depth of his chest. But here was this little fellow not more than half man size teaching me the meaning of the verb to walk. There was not much to him, but what there was must have been of spring steel. Along in the middle of that forenoon my water gave out. The sun was hammering straight down upon us with the terrible white glare of a blast furnace. Early in the afternoon my thirst became painful. I slumped down on a spur of lava, for the first rest I had taken since morning. Jamison missed my presence at his heels, turned, came back, and sat down beside me.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I can't go much farther without water," I croaked. "But anyway," I complained, "what's the use of going on? We're lost."

"I'm not lost," he said.

Then he handed me his canteen. It was about a quarter full and I drained it before handing it back to him.

"That's all the water you'll get till after sundown," he remarked. And then he went on to add, "You'll learn to do with less water before I'm through with you!"

Shortly after sunset we fetched up at a hot spring. Here near the spring were a packsaddle and a riding saddle; a camp outfit lay scattered about the remains of a dead camp fire, and a roll of blankets lay spread out upon the ground close at hand. It was fully half an hour before I recognized the camp as our own—the one we had left on the morning before. That gives some inkling of how totally lost I had been during those two days.

I questioned Jamison, and he held forth that he had not been lost—that intentionally he had returned to our old camp! I wouldn't believe him; I couldn't have believed him had I tried. The thing was too preposterous. That

zigzag trail we had made couldn't have been back-tracked. Our return to the hot spring was through sheer bull luck. I was sure of that!

For two days we rested at the camp. In the starlight of the third morning, with our light packs and filled canteens, we again shunted off aimlessly into that maze of ridges and ravines bent upon another hideous pilgrimage. The first two days of this journey were without event worth noting; they were mere monotonous repetitions of the two days of the previous trip.

For several days a light ash had been sifting down upon us from lazy eruptions of Mount Lassen. Intermingled with this ash cloud there had been a steel-gray veil of smoke, which came, also, from the crater of the mountain. On the forenoon of the third day the indolent breeze shifted, and carried the ash cloud and the smoke veil away from us to the farther side of the mountain. We could now quite plainly see the mountain itself, with this smoke and ash mist rising in funnel fashion high into the sky and streaking off in an opposite direction to settle low over the lava beds again. But I could not judge, even approximately, our distance from the mountain. The high, light atmosphere up there has a peculiar trick of magnification that I could never get used to.

At first I was overjoyed at this lucid reappearance of the mountain. Every moment or so I would glance up at it, striving to hold it in my consciousness as a landmark. It was the one little speck in the whole crazy, befuddling make-up of that scurvy country that claimed any mark of distinction, any individuality. I did not know whether we were north or south, east or west of the mountain. The sun was too near the meridian to permit of my telling by it whether the time was in the forenoon or in the afternoon, and my watch had long since stopped running. Not-

withstanding this unsettled question of direction, however, the mountain for the moment was a solace to me. Then, because of my steadily growing fatigue, the lava beds all about me as far as my eyes could carry, began to swing and swirl and sway. Old Mount Lassen was the one fixed, sane point in all my confusing outlook. It seemed the only representative visuality remaining to me of another world—the outside world. An almost irresistible impulse to head straight toward it overwhelmed me. Still I knew all the while that Mount Lassen was but the nucleus of those lava beds, the central, the parental point, from which they had at some remote time flowed out in a molten mass of white-hot billows to curdle into that devastated labyrinth of infamous ridges and ravines.

I looked up at the mountain again, and another phase of my weakened condition became manifest. Once, some years ago I made a long sea voyage. During the entire trip I did not suffer from seasickness; but the moment that I put my foot on solid ground again the deferred sickness came over me in its most violent form. I experienced a recurrence of the same sensations as I looked up at the mountain now. I found that by looking up at that one fixed point I, too, seemed to become a steady, fixed point, and I could feel the lava beds begin to swing and swirl from beneath my feet. I suddenly returned my gaze to Jamison's heels and began to swing and sway myself with the lava fields once more. Much better this than to be seasick. Jamison continued to move always with his funny trick walk. My business was to follow in that funny trick-walk fashion—a step and a half, a step and a half, a step and a half—and I tell you I found it business enough to keep me occupied for the moment, too.

I had emptied my own canteen long since, and as on the previous trip, I

had finished the emptying of Jamison's also. My mouth was powder dry; my lips had begun to crack and shrivel; and my tongue—I could tell by the feel of it—was beginning to swell. My head felt light and seemed to float along yards above my shoulders like a toy balloon fastened to a string. Jamison kept going without a pause or a backward glance. I caught myself marveling at his ability to hold the pace he had set; but I did not wonder at my own ability to follow. Strangely, it seemed as if I stood apart, inert, watching him pick his way. My own effort to progress must have become subconscious, sort of mechanical, just the humdrum operation of lifting my feet and letting them fall again in Jamison's tracks as quickly as he would vacate them. My simulation of his limp must have grown perfect, for I affected it now without the slightest effort or inconvenience.

We came to the edge of a flat table; it was a quarter of a mile across, and had not the inequality of surface so large as a hen's egg. Here Jamison had no need to so painstakingly pick his steps; so he turned to look back at me for the first time, I believe, since I had begun the mimicking of his gait. He watched with surprise, for some little time, my crow-hopping along behind him; and then it seemed he grasped understanding of this peculiarity, which had caught his notice quickly enough, but which he had been so slow to define.

He began to giggle. He pointed to my feet. He tried to speak; his voice grated against the sides of his throat, and stuck fast. He gulped a couple of times and tried again.

"I got your meat, old top! I got your meat! I made a step-and-a-half man out of you—a step-and-a-half man!"

He watched me a while longer; and then he threw himself flat upon that lava table, and rolled, and laughed, and gibbered about his getting my meat and my being a step-and-a-half man.



I flopped on the rock beside him, and pointed at his feet, and laughed, and yammered about meat and step-and-a-half men.

I've heard it said that women who are not easily moved to tears, find great relief in time of stress if they can but bring themselves to weep. That orgy of mirthless laughter and senseless chatter brought some such relief to Jamison and me. I believe we were both verging on the borders of delirium from exhaustion and nerve strain, when we gave way to those absurd antics; for we had gone for hours and days without speaking to each other except in undertones and monosyllables and in but few of these. Soon we steadied down, and lay there silently resting; and when we finally got to our feet to push on, it was with strange reanimation. I could feel it in myself, and I could see it in Jamison.

I don't know how long after this it was that I began to lose step, and then to stumble, and at last to fall. Perhaps it was only an hour or two, but it seemed much longer. Then Jamison struck upon an ingenious idea: He began marking time for me in the croaking of a bullfrog, and in rhythm attuned to the lame. He would say: "A step," slowly, and then with a sort of jerk—"and a half! A step—and a half! A step—and a half! A step—and a half!"

This availed its purpose for miles; but finally it lost its potency. At last I fell. Jamison turned, and came back to urge me on. I refused to rise; and he sat down beside me to invent some new scheme for getting me started again. I became mildly interested as to what the outcome of his speculations would be; but it seemed that he was unable to contrive any other novel stratagem; so he resorted to argument.

"Come on," he urged. "Buck up; don't lay down on me like this. Another hour of hiking and we'll come to

water. I'm not lost! I know where we are headed for; and it's not far—and that's on the dead level!"

I thought of many words with which to confute what he had said, but lengthy speech I knew would be difficult; so I replied merely, "You're a liar!" and let it go at that.

He ignored the taunt. Then after a moment's silence he replied:

"Perhaps I should try to get you up and going again by kicking you in the face. I have heard of men quitting like dogs, and then being started again in that manner. But I don't think I'll try the system out on you. I don't think there's any spirit or fight left in you. I think you're just a great big fizzle—a farce with jelly bones and rag muscles!"

I looked at him and smiled as best I could.

"No good," I returned. "You can't get me riled."

"Well, then," he said, "I'll go on for water; I'll fetch you back some. You rest up a bit. But mind, don't get up while I'm away and go rambling about; you'll get lost and I won't be able to find you."

"Lost!" I mocked and laughed ironically.

"Yes, *lost*," he came back sharply. "Stay where you are, and I'll come back in a couple of hours with water."

"You'll play hell!" I rejoined.

I watched him set off alone in his ludicrous gait, chanting time to himself as he went: A step—and a half, a step—and a half, a step—and a half. I don't know whether he kept up this insane iteration from force of habit, or because he found that it helped him on his way as it had helped me. He hobbled along the ridge for a hundred yards or so, then turned abruptly, with that damned certainty of his, to follow a spur of the ridge; then he disappeared. Half an hour later I caught a glimpse of him hobbling along another

ridge not a quarter of a mile away. At first I thought he was coming back toward me, but he turned sharply in the opposite direction, and passed from sight again. He was traveling in a big arc made up of short tangents and angles. He had all but completed a semi-circle with me as the central point.

"No, he's not lost!" I said to myself sarcastically. "Oh, no! He knows where he's going right enough—and so do I. He's going straight to hell!"

Darkness fell and loneliness crowded in with it from every angle of those far-reaching lava fields. I wished now that I had made another try at going on with Jamison. I was afraid to stay there alone—but I was still more afraid to set out alone. I had not the remotest idea of what direction to go in to find water, or Jamison, or anything else.

The moon came up and flooded the lava beds with white, mysterious, shifting light. Hours later I heard irregular footsteps—the grating of calks on rock. As nearly as I could tell the sounds came from near the point where I had last seen Jamison disappear. I watched that point, and soon I saw Jamison top the ridge and go on in an opposite direction to that which he had traveled along it before. There was no gainsaying the fact now. The fellow was actually back-tracking himself among those rocks where there had been no possible means of leaving even a single track! I tried to call out to him, but my voice would not carry. I watched for him to reappear along my ridge, and sure enough, within the half hour, there he came, carrying a canteen and half an arm load of juniper limbs and a coffeepot. He came up, built a fire, and made some coffee. It was then that I took particular note of the coffeepot, and recognized it as the one we had left at the hot spring. He had gone back to our old camp, and had returned to me in that crooked, crazy way he had chosen to travel.

I knew now that all this was not through sheer luck. He had a system—an uncanny, unfathomable system all his own. He was not lost! Before morning I followed him back to our old camp at the spring again.

Once more we rested at the camp—for three days this time—and then on the morning of the fourth day we set out again. This not without remonstrance on my part, but Jamison remained obdurate. "There's no sense in this thing! What's the idea anyway," I had argued.

"Third-degree work! Rough stuff!" he had answered. "I'm going to wear you down to a shadow, and then I'm going to wear the shadow down till it flickers and fades out. I'll teach you what it means to run down a *real* bad man—and catch him! Take the black trail without me, or else come on; yours is the choice."

I followed him; what else was there for me to do—me a prize man hunter? I had lost a great deal of flesh on those last two trips; I was stiff and sore, but otherwise I seemed to be in fair condition. My muscles had hardened, and I was foolish enough to think that I could stick it out to the finish.

"I'll follow you," I told him, "till all the fires in hell go out! And I won't lay down in your tracks again. You'll never get my meat. You haven't got the stuff in you to do it!"

"You're mistaken in that," he answered. "I have an advantage that you haven't taken into consideration. All the time you are following me you are lost. When we start out, you don't know when or where we are going to finish—you never know whether you are going or coming. When first you took to following in my footsteps you gave up all your initiative—all your individuality. First you made a little dog of yourself, and then by mimicking my gait you became a monkey. As long as you are lost, your mind will remain out of



kilter; and because of that you won't be able to stand the gaff. A man who is lost is a man without reason, and a man without reason can't win from me in the game we are playing. You'll stay lost until you figure out my sure system for going and coming; and that you will never do!"

Here, indeed, was a proposition that set me to pondering. All along I had rather subconsciously known of his holding an advantage over me, and I had known, too, that that advantage was one not wholly physical. I had been unable to analyze it beyond that point. Now, of course, I knew it for what it is was in all its insidiousness. Yes, always I had followed under the handicap of being lost—as irretrievably lost as a bit of driftwood in the middle of an ocean. As we started on again—Jamison in the lead, I bringing up the rear—I determined to figure out his boasted system. This was of no avail. I tell you there is no head nor tail, neither starting place nor stopping place, to that damnable abortion of creation—it's all middle ground, a gnarl of ridges and ravines. I could find no logical point all along our tortuous way from which to begin a reckoning or a reasoning, either forward or back. I gave my eyes and my thoughts—again unreservedly to the flickering heels of Jamison.

We made a dry camp late that night, and broke it early the next morning, to go clacking over the rocks again, with Jamison doggedly leading and me apishly following—a pretty brace of askew-brained miserables we must have seemed.

In the middle of the afternoon of that second day out we came upon an ice cave. Jamison and I had each heard that these strange freaks of nature abound in the lava beds; but this was the only one we ever found there. The sun was scorching hot; we were both footsore and tired, and we threw off

our packs with the intention of camping there for the night. The mouth of the cave was not much larger around than the head of a barrel, and ice came to within a few feet of the surface. We dropped to our hands and knees and crawled into the cave. The rock rim of the opening was hot enough, almost, from the shine of the sun, to blister the palms of our hands; but the air that came up to us from farther within the cave was cold. A yard from the surface we found that the immediate bounds of the cave became more clearly defined, that is the floor became comparatively flat; the walls carried perpendicularly to the low roof, and the whole had the appearance of having been hewed to symmetrical lines in approved tunnel fashion—slightly wider at the bottom than at the top. We went on a little farther and came to where the floor, walls, and ceiling were all of solid ice; and here the declination of the floor became more marked. Water dripped continuously from the ceiling to wet our shoulders and trickle down the floor. We came to an abrupt rise in the floor; this had more the appearance of an obstruction in the cave than a change in the form of the cave itself. It was a sort of bench of solid ice, perhaps four feet in thickness; and there was not more than two feet clearance between its flat top and the ceiling. We noted that the water trickling down the decline found passageway beneath this bench—between it and the main floor. Here is where we should have turned back. We didn't! We squirmed across the bench and dropped to the floor again on the other side. Here the cave widened slightly, and the dip of the floor became steeper. We judged that it grew even steeper farther along, for we could hear water dropping as if from a miniature waterfall. The center of the passage we found to be too slippery for good footing; and we crowded close to the walls, Jamison

to one and I to the other. Here where the water had not run the ice was rougher and offered fairly good footholds. A few feet farther on the light dimmed rapidly, almost to darkness. The dip of the floor became much more noticeable and tricky under foot; and somehow we seemed to sense a jump-off and danger a little way ahead. We paused and turned to retrace our steps. Then we heard it!—a grating sound coming from the chute above us. And then we saw it there in the weird, half light of that clammy place—a vague form moving, slowly at first, then faster—bearing down upon us! It was the bench which we had crossed and which proved now to be merely a huge cake of ice. The water had melted it partly loose from the main floor; and in scrambling over it we had broken it free.

"Quick!" cried Jamison. "Close to the wall on your side. Get a foothold and brace yourself for it!"

Before his last words were out of mouth, the thing was upon us. It came with a jar, and our feet skidded from under us. We clawed frantically with the nails in our boot soles for new holds. Jamison found rough ice enough for a temporary foothold, and he stopped that cake of ice all by himself. This gave me time to pick a bit of rough ice also, and to brace myself, and to relieve him of a part of the strain.

There we stood with every muscle knotted, straight, stiff, rigid, human props against that weight of ice. There was not six inches of space on either side of that cake of ice—between it and those ice walls. We stood there almost shoulder to shoulder, and each with a shoulder to that ice block.

"A man trap," said Jamison, after a moment or so. "A man trap set by the devil and sprung by a couple of damn fools!"

My nerves had been twanged like banjo strings at the start, but now I found myself growing strangely calm.

"We're in a pretty bad boat," I answered, "but I guess we can manage to keep cool."

I remember now that we both laughed at that.

"A bad boat," rejoined Jamison. "A bad boat without a sail."

"And with the bottom kicked out," I came back, and we both laughed again.

It's strange how a man's sense, or nonsense, of humor under such perilous conditions will become whetted.

We stood straining in silence a few moments longer. I felt the chill from that huge cavern of ice creeping within me, until it had searched out the very marrow of my bones. I felt the bite of the frost more poignantly in my left hand and arm than elsewhere; this I attributed to the handcuffs, which still dangled from my left wrist.

To my braced shoulder came a slight tremor. I knew it for what it was, a forewarning of further movement on the part of the ice block. To quell that tremor I strained till my eyes started from their sockets.

"My foot slipped," grunted Jamison. "You held the whole weight of the thing for the moment. I didn't think you could do it. My foothold is just about gone. How's yours?"

"Seems all right so far," I answered.

"Do you think you can hold her by yourself for a minute or so again, while I reach in your pocket for your knife, and chip out a good foothold in the floor?"

It seemed to me an hour before Jamison had that nick ready, and had again braced himself to take back his share of the load—I know that it was all within the passing of a minute, though.

"That's better," he said. "Now give the baby to me to take care of till you chip out a couple floor notches for yourself."

I was a little reluctant in taking his advice. I knew just how much man power it took to hold that block of ice



in place, and I didn't think that Jamison could do it alone. Then it seemed that my feet were about to slip, too. I took the knife from him, and made for my own toes two notches in the floor. Meanwhile Jamison held that ice cake as steady as a church.

"Easy enough," he said. "I believe I could hold her all day, alone."

But his words came with a sort of gasp that belied them. The strain of that short minute had winded him, just as the running of a long race will wind a man.

We stood there motionless again. All was silence, except for the sound of falling water behind us, which held us in fearful speculation of some unknown, impending danger just beyond. A numbness began creeping over us from the cold. Jamison mentioned this.

"And," he added, "we can't stand here and hold this hunk of ice much longer; we'll freeze and snap in two in the middle. Anyway if we could hold it here for a year, that wouldn't get us anything. You get out!"

"How?" I asked.

"Climb over while I hold."

"What about you?"

"I'll take a chance on following you, when you get in the clear."

"And who'll hold this while you climb over?" I asked.

"I'll get over while she's in motion—I'm quick enough to do that—and drop to the floor on the other side before she reaches the jump-off."

"I don't believe you can do it," I argued. "I'll hold while you climb out first, and then I'll run the risk, myself, of following."

"No good," he returned. "You're too clumsy. You haven't the action. You wouldn't stand as fair a chance of making it as I would."

"If you won't go first, we'll both stay," I countered.

He paused a moment before answering this time.

"Say," he said. "I've had you sized up all wrong from the start. I didn't think you were man enough to make that sort of proposal. I'm sorry now because of some of the trouble I've put you to. I thought all along that you were a quitter—that you'd squeal if things should center to a jam. Here now, listen to reason; we haven't all day to argue. You climb over while I hold; then I'll follow. My chances of being able to follow are ten to one better than yours—and you know it! I don't know what in life waits for you outside there; but I do know what I'll find waiting for me if I get out—prison! But I'm not going to think of that now. I'm going to do my damnedest to follow you out—and I'll come close to making it, too!"

Our teeth were chattering by this time, and we were speaking in low tones, almost in whispers. To speak a word aloud in that place was like shouting into a barrel.

At last I allowed him to persuade me to go. With a commingled feeling of regret and relief, I scrambled over that block of ice, as best I could in my half-frozen condition, and scurried to the opening of the cave. I listened. Almost immediately I heard the ice block begin to move; I heard Jamison drop to the floor; I saw him in dim shadowy outline for the fraction of a second, and for the fraction of a second only. I heard a terrific crash, which seemed to come from far down within the earth. The crash reverberated in a thousand smaller crashes and finally died to silence—a cold deathlike silence, in which I could hear my racing heartbeats, keen and clear as hammer blows on steel.

Then from a hundred miles down that dark, ice-walled passageway there came a voice—Jamison's voice—unfamiliar, distorted, uncanny. Sonorously it boomed, and rolled, and roared, echoed and reechoed. That cave was

a monstrous megaphone, wherein the slightest whimper of sound became magnified ten thousandfold. I stood dumfounded; and it was minutes before the meaning of his words broke through the awful spell.

"How did you make it?" they asked.

"All right." And then, "Where are you? What has happened to you?" I quavered.

"I got over that block of ice, right enough," the voice boomed back, "but not quite in time. Where I hit the floor it was too steep and slippery to permit of my sticking——" The echoes confused his words, and he paused to let the echoes die away. "I slid over the jump-off, and landed on a shelf." Another pause. "The ice cake beat me here, glanced off and fell a mile or so farther on."

"What are your chances for climbing out," I questioned with quaking voice.

"No chance!" he roared back.

With an unpleasant feeling of weakness at the pit of my stomach, I repeated, "No chance?"

"None," he answered. And then he went on to explain, brokenly, because of the pauses that the echoing bellows necessitated.

"I am here on a narrow shelf.—The jump-off is about twenty-five feet, I should say, almost directly overhead.—The wall above me is as smooth and as flat as a plate-glass mirror.—I don't know what there is below me, except darkness, and space, and cold.—I can sense the space—worlds of it.—The air is several degrees colder here than in the passageway above.

"Wait a minute," he called again. "I'm going to try an experiment to find out what's below." Several minutes later he called back: "The experiment worked. I twisted together a couple of five-hundred dollar bills—you couldn't find them when you searched me; could you?—twisted them together tightly, lighted them and let them flutter down

into the pit.—I saw by that light—no I can't tell you what I saw.—Imagine, if you can, the Grand Cañon of the Colorado multiplied by the Alps a hundred times, and the result done in cut-glass and set with diamonds.—But its bleakness, and coldness, and the vastness of its solitude is beyond imagination.—It is a thousand miles deep.—I know. I have seen part way, and having seen so much, I can guess the rest.—I tell you it's a thousand miles deep.—I paid a thousand dollars for a single glimpse of it, and I got my money's worth.—And still, I'd give another thousand to blot that scene out.—I'm terrified with the sheer infinitude of it all."

"How can I help you?" I called back in despair.

"By going back to camp, and getting the pack rope, and letting one end of it down to me."

I turned instinctively, as if to start, and then an important fact struck me square between the eyes.

I was lost! I would be unable to ever find our camp again! I had not figured out Jamison's system. I called excitedly to him, to remind him of the plight I was in. And he began calling back instructions that would make it possible for me to follow the back track. He disclosed to me the working of that system of his for keeping located, which had so puzzled me all along.

"Start back along this ridge," he belled—"west toward the sunset.—Follow till you come to the second spur that turns from the ridge on the left.—Then follow main spurs and the branches of the main spurs till the last one finally runs out in the bottom of the first ravine.—Turn to the right along the bottom of the ravine.—Go till you come to the second spur leading out of the ravine again to the left.—Follow along this spur and its branches to the summit of the next main ridge.—Turn to the right along this ridge; follow



to the second spur turning to the left, and so on.—Always turn to the right on coming to the tops of the ridges and to the bottoms of the ravines.—Always turn to the left to follow the second left-hand spurs.—This is just the reverse to the system I used in coming here. Follow it carefully and you will exactly back-track yourself.—It will take you a day and a half to make it back.—Fill your canteen before you leave; and don't try to travel in the dark.—Good luck to you.—Say, would you mind slipping your automatic down the chute to me.—It will give me courage to wait here in the dark alone till you get back.—I'll listen for it and try to stop it when it lands here on this shelf——”

Without pausing for an instant to think, I tossed the gun, holster, and belt upon the ice floor of the cave, and watched it disappear.

“I got it,” Jamison called in a moment. “Thanks, and good-by.—Remember, always the second spur and to the left.—Always to the right when you first top the ridges; always to the left when you leave them at the second spur.—Always to the right when you come to the bottom of the ravines; always to the left when you leave them at the second spur.”

As the voice died away for the last time, fear clutched my heart in a chill grasp. Suddenly it came to me—the reason Jamison had asked for the gun. He knew that he could not wait there three days for me to return from the spring with the pack rope; and he knew, too, that the pack rope was not long enough to be of any use in helping him out of that hole.

I turned and without paying the slightest heed to the direction I took, I began to run. My nerves had been keyed too high during the past few hours; they gave way. I couldn't force myself to stand still there and wait for that shot, which I knew was sure to

come. I heard it when it came, quivering and muffled—but the ice cave was rods behind me. I must have run on till darkness came, which wasn't long afterward. And then I cowered down among the rocks to wait a year for the coming of dawn.

All night long I lay there in a fitful nightmarish daze. Daybreak found me struggling with my reason—struggling to conquer the tumult of fear and the mental quaking that had overcome me. I began to experience full realization of the seriousness of my predicament. I knew that if I should succeed in escaping from that place, I must do it wittingly and not in a blundering way. I recalled the instructions Jamison had shouted to me from the cave. I repeated them aloud a time or two. I had them straight; I was sure of that—and it seemed as if Jamison's voice was saying them over with me. I was in possession of the system—the system by the aid of which Jamison had traveled over those lava beds with such precision and confidence that it had all seemed sheer wizardry to me. I had the system, but I lacked the starting point. Without a definite starting point the system was useless. In my flight from the cave I had taken no heed of the spurs that climbed to the main ridge on each side. I had left that main ridge and had wandered willy-nilly, I did not know in what direction nor how far. But I knew that I had circled, and that I could not have come far—perhaps a mile or two. I decided to circle again in an attempt to find the cave. All forenoon I wandered, twisting and winding; and then all unexpectedly I came out within a foot or so of the cave opening. Here my fear and trembling of the night before came over me again. I heard what I had feared to hear before. A piteous, broken, moaning sound came up to me, chilled and magnified ten thousand times by that deep ice-walled cavern. At first I thought

that sound came from Jamison—that his shot had missed its vital mark, that he was not yet dead. I know now that Jamison was dead, and that the sound existed in my imagination only, or else was caused by the wind whistling down that hole. There had been but one cartridge in that automatic when I tossed it down to Jamison; and I knew that he had not wasted that one shot—he was too sure and careful a man for that.

I was thirsty, but I did not stop to drink, nor did I fill the two canteens. I snatched them up from where they lay among the rocks, and they were but half full. We had filled them when we first came to the cave, and had quenched our thirst from them.

I hurried along the backbone of the ridge. I came to the second branch of the ridge leading to the left, and I followed this spur till its last branch ran out in the bottom of the first ravine. I turned here to the right along the bottom of the ravine, and passed on till I came to the second spur leading from the ravine to the left. I followed branch and spur to the top of this next ridge, turned at the summit to the right, then turned from the top of the ridge again to the left at the second spur—and so on, all the rest of that day until dark. My canteens were both empty by this time, and I lay awake nearly all night thinking of water.

After that night, I don't remember much of what happened during the rest of the trip out. I got back to our old camp at the hot spring all right; but I don't know how long it took me to do it. I had lost continuity of thought. It must have taken days, though, for incidents of that trip stand out clear and sharp now in my mind's eye, without any minor incidents in between to link them together.

I remember sunsets—I don't know how many, though. Wonderful, they seemed to me then in my half-demented

state. Wonderful, gorgeous they seem to me now in disjointed memory. Sunsets that filled the sky with a riot of color; that flooded the lava beds with an extravagance of crimson, and orange, and gold, that mellowed into mauve; that gave way at last to deceitful, argent moon spray, and the modest sheen of a million stars.

Dazedly, as if it had all happened in a dream, I remember a thunder shower; and I remember having crawled on my hands and knees, like a sick bear, in the bottoms of the ravines to drink from the freshets.

At times when I was near to forgetting all about that system, Jamison's disembodied voice would come rumbling across those lava beds from that ice cave miles away, crying: "Turn to the left!" or, "Turn to the right!" as the case might demand. Yes, I say that he helped me out of that hole, even after he was dead! And I don't care how the telling of it sounds. I say that he shouted to me: "Turn to the left; that's the second spur!" or, "Turn to the right; this is the top of the main ridge!"

I stayed at our old camp a day or two, perhaps; and then I took the back trail for civilization; and in a little more than due time I came to the stage road.

At the first settlement I came to on this road my actions and my physical condition aroused suspicion. Of clothes nothing much remained to me. My hat and overshirt were gone completely; my shoes barely hung together; my trousers were in tatters; my face was covered with a heavy beard; and my hair hung low over my ears in a tangled mass. The handcuffs still dangled from my left wrist to further damnify my appearance. I asked for water at a roadside grass ranch. I drank all the water I could hold; and I gathered up all the old cans I could find, and filled them with water, and tied them on strings and hung them to me. And then



I went upon my way. All the people whom I met along that way took a curious interest in me; all thought that I acted strangely, and seemed surprised at this, just as if a man who had been through such experiences as I had should have no justification for acting strangely. I was merely and unwittingly proving the principle that disaster engenders precaution. I had suffered grave disaster because of lack of water. And now I was taking no further risks.

At last I came again to the lowlands, where the country is more thickly populated. I met more people as I passed along my unobtrusive way; and I became a gapingstock for the gawkies! Everywhere I was greeted with curiosity, and then with more concern; and at last I was taken to a court and tried before a superior judge there, as to my sanity. I was found wanting. That judge wrapped in his complacency, like a big, juicy red apple wrapped in tissue paper, couldn't see wherein I was justified in carrying about with me through a land of plenty, a great supply of water against the possibilities of another dry spell; as I put it to him. I tried to explain; I saw the futility of explanation, and became silent, almost stoical. What is the use of trying to explain to a fat, sleek judge, who has always been well watered and well fed, the horrors of famine and drought. Had he followed my step-and-a-half trail across that rock-ribbed hell up there under the smoke cloud of old Mount Lassen, with his tongue hanging out and his throat on fire, perhaps he would not have thought my ideas concerning water supply and demand quite so crazy after all.

Well, anyway, the judge is still on his bench, I suppose; and Gentleman Jamison is still up there in cold storage; and I am crow-hopping around the grounds of an asylum with that damned step-and-a-half trick walk of his.

And that's the end of the whole miserable affair!

The speaker paused. After a moment he looked up at me, and there were tears in his keen gray eyes.

"Say," he remarked, "you are the first man who has ever listened to that story. You did not interrupt me once. Maybe you believe it! Does it ring true?" There was humble appeal in his voice.

"It doesn't ring quite true," I answered. "Not quite true to life. It sounds almost like a magazine tale—but I believe it! I believe it, every word of it!" I hastened to add.

"And was it well told—told like a magazine story?" he asked anxiously.

"It was," I assured him; "it undoubtedly was!"

He turned to me again, with mute thanks. He seemed to glean some strange satisfaction from my assurance. Then he fished from his pocket a stub of pencil and a tattered notebook. He began to write feverishly, and seemed to have forgot my presence entirely.

I slipped from my end of the bench and quietly stole away. My muse was dragging me away from there. She wanted me to herself, with just a piece of paper and a pencil between us. The blessed mood was wrapping its wonder folds about me again!

I stopped at the superintendent's office. I wanted to have a word with that prosaic, matter-of-fact person before leaving the place.

He smiled up at me as I entered.

"What luck?" he asked.

I felt too exhilarant to answer his platitude.

"I would like to ask you a few questions," I began briskly. "A few questions about one of the patients out there. The big fellow who walks sometimes with a limp, and sometimes without."

"I know of no such patient," he answered.

"Oh, yes you do," I contradicted.

"He's a big fellow—unusually big, and well built, with keen gray eyes and a pleasing voice. He has just finished telling me a story which has to do with his being here, and I want a few corroborative points."

The superintendent looked at me and smiled in a sort of patronizing way that I did not like. It was an amused, almost a pitying smile.

"Have you been letting that fellow give you a fill?" he asked. "What sort of a yarn has he been spinning now? Tell you about being adrift in an open boat, or of being lost in the desert without water? Or was it a love tale?"

"No one of the three," I answered curtly. "He told me a story—a wonderful story—the true story of how he lost his reason. A story of the lava beds!"

"He told you wrong," said the superintendent. "He isn't here because of the lava beds."

"Because of what, then?" I asked almost angrily.

"He went crazy trying to make a living writing stories for the magazines. Seems that he couldn't quite come through with the dope. Now he spends his time making up yarns to tell to people who have nothing of more importance to do than to listen to them."

"Oh," I said—just, "oh!"

I began to feel my muse sneaking away to leave me in the lurch.

"Say," I began again, after a moment's pause, "did that fellow, Brown, whom you were expecting, show up?"

"No," he answered; "we're short-handed, too. Need a man——"

"I'll take that job," I said impulsively.

"All right," he came back. "You can fill out a formal application blank later. Go to Doctor Bask's office and report. He'll explain your duties to you. Call in here again this evening."



## ONE LIKE YOURSELF

By Alphonse de la Ferté

YOU say that I am selfish and intent  
 Upon this shadow called myself, this thing  
 Of flesh and bones that strains itself to sing  
 Like one whose courage and desire are spent.  
 Don't place your faith in this frail instrument  
 When it is still, but when the wires ring  
 With music bought of rich remembering . . .  
 That is its highest purpose and intent.

How helpless is the flesh beneath the hands  
 That strip it of its freedom for a song;  
 One like yourself who ever understands  
 Can pluck the right from out a world of wrong;  
 Come, help me tighten up my armor bands  
 So I may go to battle and be strong.





# "Ghosts of Chaacmol"

*Anthony J.  
Lorenz*

**C**HAACMOL walks; my father saw him," the Indian lad whispered.

Words could not persuade Juan to take a step farther into the jungle of undergrowth that served as a path to Chichen-Itza.

I took another *real* from my pocket to show him my utter disregard for Mayan ghost kings. But it had no effect on the credulous Yucatecos. He turned on his heel and ran back to the hacienda.

The natives of Yucatan had woven a legend about the ruins of Chichen, once the seat of the mighty Chaacmol. Chaacmol, the Tiger King of Itza. His teocallis reeked with the blood of untold victims. Every chamber in the great palace on the Gnomon mound had witnessed scenes of bloodshed that were deigned to please the frightful Kuk-ulcan, the feathered serpent sun god of Mayapan.

To the spirit lair of this fiend of a thousand years ago I was again journeying. The narrow, snakelike trail, overgrown with tangled underbrush, had once served the warriors of Chaacmol in their stealthy advance upon the

unsuspecting city of the peaceful Comom. That night the last of the Itzacs was slain with his three thousand warriors and Chichen became the capital of Chaacmol.

The plain before me was dotted with a hundred katunes, the stone books of Mayan history, their hieroglyphic carvings as yet an unsolved mystery of a forgotten race. Beyond them rose the pyramids crowned by temple and palace, dungeon, and nunnery, an almost formless mass of crumbling stone.

As I had trudged the mile of footpath I noticed the air growing more sultry every moment. I glanced behind me. The east was wrapped in an ominous cloud bank that rolled up from the distant gulf. It seemed to be racing with me in an endeavor to pile itself against the mounds like a barrier, impenetrable.

"If I can but reach the ruins before the storm breaks," I thought hopefully, "I'll be sheltered in the ruined passageways. Those clouds mean rain, and the kind that pours like a deluge out of the skies."

I reached the foot of the Gnomon mound just as the first heavy drops of

rain fell pattering on the stones. The steps leading to the palace structure were broken, but formed a safe ascent. Before I knew it I ran bluntly against a low wall, encompassing the ceremonial court of the temple.

A sheer precipice with nothing but the thin air below marked the three remaining sides of the pyramid on which rose the palace itself. Creeping under the low arch of a ruined portal, I found myself in a dark and gloomy chamber. Its stone walls were covered with spectral carvings.

Out of the darkness of the farther corner arose a ghastly form, clothed from head to foot in a flowing white robe. I shuddered. The words of Juan's warning came back to me. It approached the lighted doorway in a quick step, and I saw that it was anything but a ghost.

"*Sehr angenehm*," the man, swathed in an artist's smock, addressed me in German. "Professor Weber, Hamm, Westphalia," he declaimed, bowing gracefully and shoving a card under my nose. "I am an artist," he added needlessly, before I could even acknowledge the introduction.

"A rather singular meeting," I said. "Pardon me, but I have no card with me. I am Wallace Phelps, hatter, Paterson, New Jersey." I copied his procedure as dexterously as possible.

"I was painting the sunset over those ruins," he said, when I recovered sufficiently from my surprise to give him audience, "and was driven here for shelter from the storm."

I recognized in Professor Weber the little, round-faced German tourist who was so effusively welcomed by the Mexican port officials when he landed at Progreso a fortnight before. In the Casa Blanca I had overheard his remarks regarding the credulous natives, and he repeated the same discourse to me.

In this priggish analysis of the Yu-  
7A Thrill

catecan character he indulged during the long hours of the evening. The rain poured in torrents. We were thrown together for the night, for there was no leaving the ruins before day-break.

The storm had completely enveloped the plain below. It was dark, "black as hate in the heart," as Tutul, the bard of the legend of Canek, sang in the ancient Mayan epic.

Lurid lightning flashes set the ruins of the surrounding structures in rugged vignette against the storm-filled sky. In the ceremonial court the darkness seemed palpable. My small flash lamp seemed only to accentuate the gloom. Nature alone kept up an intermittent illumination.

We were forced to wax congenial. I took out a cigar, and, handing another to the professor, lighted them, holding the flaming match for a moment to a massive stone that lay at my feet. It was a part of the large column that formed an arch in the palace. Sculptured upon it the head of a tiger, with wide-open jaws and bulbous eyes, was plainly discernible.

We were in the sanctuary of the Tiger King.

I turned my flash light on the column. The gaping jaws of the beast, with its hollow eyes, shone weird.

"This is the private chapel of Chaacmol," I said in an almost guttural tone. My voice sounded peculiarly deep, and almost frightened me.

"Here the Tiger King held his private devotions," I said mockingly, and swept the chamber with my light, "and there"—I focused the beams upon a huge sculptured block—"is the sacrificial stone."

I thought I heard the professor shudder as I slowly articulated each word. I stepped over to the block. On it was carved the symbolic figure of Kuk-ulcan, the feathered serpent, the image of the Mayan sun god.



"We tread historic ground, Herr Professor," I continued as though I had made an important discovery, "for this is the very chamber in which Chaacmol sacrificed Cheles."

"Who was Cheles?" Professor Weber asked.

Cheles was Chaacmol's only child. History relates that he ordered the sacrifice of his own daughter because she professed her love for Holcanes, the son of Cocom, whose throne the Tiger King had usurped.

"Cheles," I repeated, "Cheles—little bluebird."

A flash and a furious detonation cut short my words.

"Chaacmol," I continued as the thunder died away, "is America's counterpart of the Roman emperor, Tiberius. The fiends of the Old and of the New World are they—Tiberius and Chaacmol."

"I have been in the villa of Tiberius, at Capri," the professor said weakly, as if reminiscent of the horrors that the dungeons above the Blue Grotto had sealed within themselves.

"I wonder if Cheles was happy in her fateful love for Holcanes," I asked as if speaking to myself, "but who knows what countless tears she wept in her curtained chamber, Cheles, the bluebird of Mayapan. Here the lovers embraced for the last time, here in the sanctuary of Kuk-ul-can they met for the mutual sacrifice.

Before her eyes Holcanes was stretched upon the block and the pulsing heart torn from his breast, each throb a new protestation of his undying love. And then the same fate befell her, magnified a thousand times because she had violated the vow of the Mayan vestal.

"I thought you were a hat manufacturer," the professor cut in sharply.

I was taken in surprise.

"I am," I began explaining, "but as

I study the ever-changing history of headdress, both ancient and modern, I naturally become familiar with the *milieu* in which the various designs were worn. The Mayan kings and nobles, for instance, wore the *quetzal*, the plumed headgear that was later adopted by the Aztecs." The explanation seemed to satisfy Professor Weber, Hamm, Westphalia.

"We are in a chamber of horrors, the like of which no dungeon in the castles of Europe can equal," I continued, seeing that the German was growing steadily more nervous. "The natives say that on still nights the plaintive farewell song of the maiden can be heard, ending in a cry, her spirit asking judgment upon her inhuman father."

The storm grew apace wildly with my story of the unhappy princess. For a brief space it died down, and only the sighing of the norther through the corridors of Chaacmol's palace kept one mindful of the tempest. Dawn, it seemed, was an eternity away.

I stepped boldly on the sacrificial block and peered through the high slit in the wall above, adown the steep side of the castle into the pool at its western base.

"Come here, professor," I said. "Through this very window the bleeding bodies of the lovers were thrown. There, in the sacred well, they were united—in death."

The professor did not stir.

A flash of lightning illumined the dank water in the pool a hundred feet below.

"Could this old limestone pit be given a tongue and made to tell what it has seen, what world romance could equal it," I said. "Did you hear me, Herr Professor?"

A faint "Ja" replied.

"Directly above us is the great open-air altar, where on a single morning two thousand Itzaen captives were sac-

rificed to Kuk-ul-can, or rather to the blood lust of Chaacmol," I continued.

I could see the glowing tip of the professor's cigar burning faintly against the blackness of the storm-clad night. I bent another piercing gaze over the ponderous jutting wall into the clammy darkness of the pit.

The coloring of my mood suddenly changed. The thunder reverberated through the crumbling walls. A crash in the adjoining chamber startled me. I calmed myself, thinking that a block of the ancient masonry had dropped from one of the arches.

"What a wild scramble must have taken place that morning," I said with a shudder, "for the hearts of the victims!"

Professor Weber's affirmations grew even fainter than before.

"Out in the ceremonial court the Tiger King's warriors gathered for their feast," I added, "drunken, mumbling men singing their great war song, 'Conex! Conex! Paleche!'"

The words seemed to be caught up like an echo from a distant corridor.

No answer came from the professor.

For a moment the ruins swam in a sea of dazzling blue. Beside me I saw a ghastly face.

"Countless are the nights during which Chaacmol hurried through these very halls, restless ever, from chamber to chamber, finding no peace from the torturing agonies. The legend says that he locks himself in his sanctuary as though to shut out the past, and calls the name of Cheles as if its very sound might soothe his conscience. Do you hear me, Herr Professor?"

I heard his cigar sizzle on the damp ground.

"I am not feeling quite—well—it is so—sultry," he muttered, his voice sounding hollow.

"Yes, and they say Chaacmol still goes about here. On nights when the tropical storms silence the farewell

song of Cheles he comes here, hoping to find rest. The story of the Tiger King's crimes is so terrible that it is small wonder that the credulous Yucatecos say the fiend walks, the proud head of the warrior bowed until his white quetzal sweeps the ground. Do you——"

A faint shriek from the professor snatched me out of my wanton reveries.

"Look—look—Chaacmol!"

I glanced about me. For a moment my breath left me. I, too, was bewildered at the sight. Through the ruined ceremonial court, not twenty paces off, passed a shrouded figure. I almost lost my poise.

"I see nothing," I said quietly. "It is your overheated fancy. Calm yourself. My conversation has made you very nervous." My imagination, I thought, had run rampant with me.

"You see nothing?" the professor groaned. "There, between—the rocks—the ghost—Chaacmol!"

"I see nothing, Herr Professor, I assure you," I whispered, my throat parched.

Slowly the shrouded form returned. Directly in front of the arched passageway that led from our chamber to the ceremonial court it stood, perfectly rigid. The rain poured in torrents. The figure shook spasmodically, trembled and groaned in inexpressible agony. A shriek pierced the darkened dawn above the howling norther and the swish of storm:

"Cheles! Cheles!"

A blinding flash and crash that shook the ground, sending tottering stones to the depths below, accompanied the ghost cry. A tree on the jutting ledge of the court was in flames. The apparition laughed, hideously, wildly.

Then it seemed to wait in hushed anxiety. I observed it in the weird illumination—a ghastly, wan face, shaggy brows overhanging a pair of



glassy eyes, vacant and insane, prematurely blanched hair, bony hands outstretched in grim supplication to the elements—a true picture of the maniac Chaacmol.

I wondered whether Boecklin could have done it justice. Professor Weber could certainly not, for, I am sure, he never saw it.

"Conex! Conex! Paleche! Come on, come on, ye warriors!" the apparition sang the refrain of the ancient Mayan war song.

The professor sank against the wall.

The specter suddenly seemed to have sensed our presence. Hesitatingly it came nearer.

"Are you here again, Cocom, Holcanes? Lift up your voices and rattle the death song Canek wrote for you," the apparition moaned, peering through the arched door of our chamber.

Before I was even aware that the words were uttered in Spanish the fiend was up, and, humming a merry tune, danced blithely away to the end of the clifflike wall.

"God, if it should fall!" Fear overtook me, not the fear *of* but *for* the ghost. To grapple with this spirit fiend on the edge of the chasm meant certain death for both of us. I thought of my automatic. I drew it from my pocket and aimed.

But whoever or whatever the apparition might be, it was doing me no harm.

Lower and lower the specter leaned over the ledge. Long it stared into the depths. The time passed like a silent meditation, a gruesome pondering over some unexpiated crime through an eternity of forlorn hope.

"Cheles! Cheles!" The reverberance of the plaintive whisper trembled fearfully on the calm. Only the distant, rumbling thunder, like a far-off antiphonal of penitents, brought me to the realization of the tragedy for which a forgotten race had set the stage and

furnished the characters, such as no modern Belasco could.

Slowly the specter raised itself and glided along the edge of the abyss. Again it stood still and bent over the brink, peering into the inky waters of the pool as though the victims which they had engulfed were not quite dead and their piteous cries, sirenlike, lured the phantom down.

The apparition swayed, and for the briefest second it floated on the thin air, then suddenly plunged headlong down into the sacred pool.

I rushed out of the chamber, and, leaping over the ruined wall that separated us from the ceremonial court, reached the spot where the ghost had disappeared. The waters of the pool were now invisible from above; dark and shadowy, they lay concealed amid the heavy undergrowth that surrounded them.

The storm had subsided. Occasionally a belated heavy raindrop pattered on the flags of the court. The glowing embers of the storm-rift tree made the dark dawn more hideous.

I returned to the professor, who lay as if dead, his head resting on the sacrificial stone. I felt his heart, as though I feared he, too, might have fallen a victim to Chaacmol. His pulse ran heavy. He had fainted, and had not witnessed the closing scenes of the tragedy. I alone had seen the climax.

I put my brandy flask to his lips. His eyes rolled, like those of a madman, as hysterical as those of the frenzied Yucatecos he had described in José's tavern.

Heavily he leaned on my arm as I walked with him out of the dank chamber into the open air of the courtyard.

The witchery of the storm-passed night spread about us. For a long time the professor said nothing. He seemed gasping for his senses. I asked him to accompany me to the roof of the

palace to view the sunrise over Chichen-Itza.

"It will efface all memories of the storm." I sought to lure him on.

"The storm—that was nothing—the other," he said vaguely.

Alone I went to the palace roof, just as the first rays of the sun reddened the distant horizon. The stillness of the morning was profound. Suddenly the great round sun came flamingly through a rift in the cloud banks splendidly, and instantly the whole world hummed and sang.

I understood why these ancient peoples were worshipers of the sun. Nature herself taught primal man to revere the light as a god. After the hideousness of the night of storm and terror I, too, was thankful for the light.

As the mist cleared from the vale and the smaller structures of Chichen became visible, each raised on its squat pyramid, overgrown by the verdure of the tropics, I saw, not the snakelike columns of Chaacmol's warriors slinking through the night, but the glorious procession of priests coming up the Sacred Way to the temple atop which I stood like a high priest awaiting the victims of the morning's sacrifice.

The weird music of the flute and droning boom of the trunkul I seemed to hear, instead of the clear bird notes that enveloped all. The memories which stole over me were intoxicating like Balche, the drugged ambrosia of Chaacmol's fiendish concoction.

I had visited these ruins before, but never had a sunrise over the phantom city of the Tiger King impressed me so.

I returned to the ceremonial court, where the professor sat, his head buried in his hands.

He had no heart for painting that day, and wanted to return to Merida immediately. I sought to dissuade him from making the return trip in the heat

of the day, but all was of no avail. I warned him that his condition would not permit it. Nevertheless we made the attempt.

The journey was made in silence. Not once did he mention the happenings of the night.

As we neared Merida he seemed to revive.

"Did you really see nothing?" he asked incoherently.

"Absolutely nothing," I answered, for I knew that an acknowledgment on my part would necessitate explanations which I would rather not make.

"I firmly believe that you saw Chaacmol, Herr Professor," I said finally. "You will pardon me if I say that I at first mistook it all to be an illusion, created by your overwrought artist's fancy. But I remember now, you said you are a Westphalian. That accounts for it all. You suffer with the psychic affliction known to science as second sight, a dire misfortune for a man of your calling. It may ruin your whole career."

He seemed flattered when I spoke of his career.

"Do you think so?" he asked.

"Without a doubt," I answered solemnly. "My friend, Doctor Philhower, director of the sanitarium at Merida, has made a study of this rare and occult phenomenon of the mind. I believe—I know he can help you. I would take you to him in person, only I leave Merida early to-morrow."

He seemed disappointed.

"Where are you going, Mr. Phelps?" he asked.

"I shall go to Panama to purchase a stock of hats," I said.

We reached his hotel, the Casa Grande.

Juan drove me to the American Club, and I gave him a *real* for his faithfulness.

There I met Doctor Philhower, a



classmate of mine at Harvard. Over our dinner I related my experience at Chichen-Itza. I told him that I had advised the professor to consult him.

"Have you seen to-day's paper?" he asked, pointing to a story under big headlines, telling of the mysterious disappearance of Don Salo, a wealthy hennequen planter, who had been confined in Philhower's hospital.

The alienist related the story of Don Salo. It was a sordid tale, the past of a misled life, drained of love, a congeries of waggish follies.

I listened with interest.

"And then?" I hung upon my friend's every word.

"Then came the murder. Don Salo was a raving maniac."

"Where was the crime enacted?" I asked.

"At the hacienda near Chichen-Itza, almost within a stone's throw of Chaacmol's palace. The tragedy in his own family became closely associated—yes,

completely identified—with the legend of the Tiger King. After the tragic death of Celeste, his only daughter, a beautiful girl, who fell a victim to her lover's jealousy, Don Salo became Chaacmol."

In the open window a spray of honeysuckle swung to and fro like a spicy censer, filling the room with an exotic fragrance.

"Don Salo," he continued in a climactic monotone, like one closing a sad book, "was Chaacmol, and all that took place during those bloody carousals a thousand years ago, during those nights of terror and days of endless sacrifice, unparalleled in history, were the acts of his vengeance. Again and again Don Salo escaped us and revisited the scene of the crime. Wandering amid the ruins of Chichen-Itza, moaning and gesticulating, he set the credulous countryside in a frenzy. The peasants have seen his ghastly figure just as you saw it—for the last time."



## THE DISTANT STARS

By Francois de Vallient

THE dusk is at the hour's end . . . one hour  
My love, to dream, to pause a while before  
This short, sweet evening close forevermore  
As petals close around a lovely flower.

Let us retire unto a lonely tower.

Mount winding stairs and close and lock the door

Forgetting for a moment that a war

Slays like a monster with despotic power.

With faces pressed against the windowpane

We'll watch the myriad flaming, golden bars.

Of this immortal daylight ebb and wane,

Then as the darkness cloaks the bitter scars

That give the shattered earth so deep a pain,

We'll lose our souls among the distant stars.

# The Heads of Cerberus

Francis Stevens



## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Through the magic powers of the Dust of Purgatory which they have inhaled from a silver vial ornamented with the heads of Cerberus, the three-headed dog of mythology, Terence Tremore, his sister Viola, and their friend, Drayton, pass through Ulithia, the phantom borderland of life and are transported over the barriers of time to the Philadelphia of A. D. 2118. The old city hall with the historic statue of William Penn still stands, but the system of government is entirely different. The chief ruler of the city is a very old man known as Justice Supreme, under him are privileged classes known as the Servants and the Superlatives. The whole governmental system is called the Penn Service. The masses of the people are kept in abject subjection and ignorance, and are known as the Numbers, each individual wearing a button with his number on it.

The visitors from the Twentieth Century are joined by a burglar, who calls himself Arnold Bertram and who has the Cerberus vial in his possession. The more important personages under the Penn Service are given names indicating abstract qualities, as Courage, Kindness, Power, Contentment, Love, et cetera. The Superlatives are those who possess these qualities in the highest degree. Their fitness is determined by election. The visitors are invited by the lady known as Loveliest and the man, Cleverest, nephew of Justice Supreme, to witness the election and they go to the Temple for that purpose. Candidates who aspire to supplant the Superlatives and fail are cast into a pit of punishment.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE JUSTICE OF PENN SERVICE.

THE Supreme Servant had already seated himself on his throne of gold. His virtuous subordinates occupied lesser seats to his right and left, while the chairs on the pavement, at either side of the dais, were by now pretty well filled, mostly by the women-folk of the Superlatives. The Numbers still waited in their silent, terrible patience. When Mr. Justice Supreme took his seat they had knelt and again risen, a feat only possible because it was done as one surging motion. Here and there a cry or groan, quickly stifled, gave testimony that, even so, the weaker folk must have suffered.

Between the candidates and the front

ranks of the crowd ran the inclosing plush rope. Against it, on the outside, the police guard had now faced about toward the dais. None of the Numbers, save those immediately behind the police, could hope to see what went on before the dais. They could hear, however, and for that privilege they had stood five hours, silent.

Tremore glanced at his watch. It pointed to eleven fifty-nine.

And now Courage, whom the Loveliest had designated as Mr. Justice Supreme's right-hand man, arose and walked to the front of the platform. In his hands he held a document from which depended the red ribbons of an official seal. Without a preliminary word the Servant began reading:

"To all whom it may concern: Be



it known by these presents that I, Justice Supreme and Spiritual Director of the City of Philadelphia under our dread lord, Penn, do hereby decree that upon the twenty-third day of September, in the year twenty-one hundred and eighteen, there shall be held in the sacred temple of Penn, beneath the Golden Dome of Justice, a series of examinations by which——"

The document proceeded to enumerate the various offices for which candidates might contest, related in detail the ghastly penalty of failure, and concluded abruptly with the signature and seal of Mr. Justice Supreme.

Mr. Courage—and Trenmore thought it must have required considerable courage to read a document of that nature, with its numerous references to "this democratic and blessed institution, the bulwark of your liberties!"—finished and resumed his seat. There was a moment's pause. Then Pity took the place of Courage on the platform.

"The first examination will be held in the superlative quality of Kindness."

A short, stocky, heavily built man emerged from behind the dais and took his place, standing fairly upon the eagle and dove symbol that covered the pit. Either his features or his title, in Trenmore's opinion, must be misleading. Those thin, cruel lips, narrow-set eyes, and low, slightly protruding forehead indicated several possible qualities; but benevolence was hardly of the number. As agreeably as his facial limitations would permit, the gentleman smiled up toward Mr. Pity.

"Is there any other candidate for this office?" droned the latter in his high, singsong voice. "It entails the management and control, under Penn Service, of the Bureau of Penn Charities for Philadelphia and environing suburbs. Any candidate? There is no other candidate for Kindest! Present incumbent of the office may retire."

Having reached this foregone conclu-

sion, Pity returned Kindness' smile, and the latter did retire, as far as the chairs at one side, where he sat down beside a very fleshy, bediamonded and prosperous-looking lady whom Viola remembered to be his wife.

Three other offices followed: the Wisest, appropriately superintendent of the Board of Education; the Bravest, chief of the Electrical Bureau; and Most Ingenious, this latter holding the curious office of providing entertainment for the Servants of Penn themselves. The holders of these positions came out one by one, stood upon the fatal symbol, and retired, their right to superlativism unquestioned.

"The fifth quality upon my list is Sweetness of Voice. This office carries with it the honor, duties, and emoluments of Director of Civic Music."

Out to the eagle with assured tread waddled a mountain of flesh, crowned by a head of flowing black hair which Svengali might have envied, with a beard of astounding proportions, and somewhere between hair and beard a pair of small, piglike eyes.

"Is there any candidate for this office?" droned the bored voice of Mr. Pity. "Is there any other candidate for this——"

"Go on out there, boy," muttered Trenmore, giving the Numbers' candidate a friendly push. As they waited, he, like Viola, had conceived a strong sympathy for this solitary, youthful champion of the despised Numbers. "Go on out, boy! Go out and give 'em hell!" was the Irishman's ambiguous encouragement.

The candidate, however, cast him a grateful glance, sensing the spirit behind the words. As Mr. Pity uttered the third and last call for candidates, the young man advanced boldly into the arena.

He was greeted by a low, thunderous mutter of applause, starting at the front ranks of the crowd and spreading back-

ward in a resonant wave. Mr. Justice Supreme grasped the arms of his thronelike chair and half arose.

"Silence!" he snarled. "Silence, my children! You are committing sacrilege! Do you know the penalty?"

His answer was the silence he had commanded, and the faces in the front rows went very white. Their vantage point was uncomfortably close to the pit.

"Mr. Pity," muttered the old man, sinking back, "will you kindly proceed?"

Bowing, the master of ceremonies turned once more to the contestants.

"Candidate, what is your number, place of residence, employment, and age? Answer in order, please, and speak clearly." He held a fountain pen poised over the list in his hand.

"My number is 57403. My—my—I live at 709 Race Street." The boy's clear tenor, faltering at first, grew firmer. "I am a carpenter's apprentice. I was nineteen years old in June."

"Nineteen years and four months, odd." Mr. Pity wrote it down forthwith. He capped his pen, replaced it in his vest pocket, and smiled down upon the young carpenter with such a friendly look that Viola's heart gave a leap. Perhaps, after all, the boy was to have a fair chance.

"Very well, young man." In Mr. Pity's tone was a distinct note of encouragement and approval. "If you have the best voice in Philadelphia, now is the time to prove it. Sing your best. Don't be afraid of hurting any one's feelings."

He smiled wickedly upon the fat man, who suddenly lost his composure and glanced downward rather anxiously at the deadly trap under his feet. "As you know," continued Pity, "you must sing without notes or accompaniment, but so must your opponent. His Supremity is waiting. Penn, the august,

will decide through him this free and democratic contest! Sing!"

There was a second's pause. Then the boy, standing above Death and before the Throne of Justice, raised his clear young voice and sang. His was a ballad of the people, unwritten, passed from mouth to mouth. It redounded in rhymes of "love" and "dove," "thee," and "me." It was sentiment—crass, vulgar, common sentiment—but the air had a certain redeeming birdlike lilt.

"He sings well. Oh, he *does* sing well!" thought Viola.

The tenor rose to its final high note, held it, and died away. No. 57403 bowed, stepped back one pace, and folded his arms. His face was flushed, alight, and his clear eyes looked fearlessly upward to his judge. No cheering followed, but a great sigh rose from the Numbers—a long, simultaneous exhalation, as if each man and woman had been holding breath throughout that last high, sweet note.

"Very good!" exclaimed Mr. Pity, again smiling. "There might be some criticism of your selection, but to give it is not in my province. And now, having heard this high-voiced young candidate, let us listen to his rival, our present esteemed musical director." He bowed to the hairy mountain. "His Supremity is waiting. Penn, the benevolent All-Father, will through him decide this contest. Sing!"

Straightway an aperture appeared in the black beard. White teeth flashed. A burst of sound ascended to the golden dome and rebounded therefrom, assaulting the ears of the multitude beneath. It was a cannonade in bass; the roar of awakened hungry lions; the mingled tumult of a hundred phonographs all playing Pol Plancon records with rasping needles—Plancon intensified past endurance by a gigantic sounding board, and also—alas!—Plancon hopelessly off key. With an inaudible cry Viola clapped her small



hands over her music-loving ears. She saw Sergeant 53 grinning at her, saw his lips move, but he might as well have talked in a Kansas cyclone.

The roar crescendoed to a terrible, disharmonic laugh. At last Viola recognized the music he was murdering. Of all selections he had chosen the "Serenade of Mephistopheles," from Gounoud's "Faust," a number demanding the most refined, sardonic, and genuinely superlative of voices for an endurable rendering.

Before he ended, Viola was sure she must fall upon the porcelain floor and writhe in anguish. Fortunately her powers of endurance were greater than she gave herself credit for. The final burst of demoniac mirth died an awful death, and Viola's endurance received its reward. Henceforth she could appreciate the bliss of silence.

Looking around, the girl half expected to see the audience flat, like a field of wheat after a wind storm; but, though even the policemen wore a somewhat chastened appearance, they still stood. She glanced toward the dais. Mr. Pity, with a pained, faraway expression, was scribbling at his list. Mr. Justice Supreme opened his eyes with a start, like a man unexpectedly relieved from torment. He snarled incoherently and flapped a yellow hand at Mr. Pity. The bull of Bashan stood his ground, his eyes blinking, his beard once more a dark, unbroken jungle. As the two Tremmores learned later, his complacency was not without foundation. His wife was a third cousin of Mr. Justice Supreme, and he himself was distantly connected with the family of Mr. Purity, of the dragging leg.

The master of ceremonies lifted up his own thin, piercing voice, like the piping of a reed after the bellow of thunders.

"Sir, His Supremity thanks you for your wonderful rendering of—er—sound." He turned to the throne. "Mr.

Justice Supreme, the contestants in all humility submit their respective merits to the high decision of our lord and father, Penn!"

The old dandy dragged himself to his feet. The audience was more than hushed; it wasn't even breathing now. No. 57403 cast a pitying glance at the bearded mountain and fearlessly eyed his judge.

"Children of Penn," began that snarling, senile voice, "in due legal and sacred form two contestants have striven before the father and protector of us all. One is young. He should have further perfected his attainments before presuming to air them in this sacred Hall. Yet his very youth excuses him, and Penn the All-Father is merciful. He can forgive even presumption. For the magnificent bass voice which we have just been privileged to—hm!—enjoy, in a rendering of the work of a great composer, so exalted above the paltry, sentimental balderdash of the other contestant—I—I—words fail me!"

Mr. Justice Supreme glared down at the contestant he was praising with eyes so malevolent that the mountain actually cringed—if a mountain can be said to cringe.

"The decision of Penn," snarled Mr. Justice Supreme, "is that No. 57403 be dropped into the Pit of the Past. Mercy may extend to his immortal soul, but not to his presumptuous body! And the present musical director will continue in office."

Dropping back on his throne with a gasp of exhaustion, he recovered sufficiently to rasp out: "Go! And Penn bless you!" to the victorious contestant.

Then, with the air of one who has got through a tedious but necessary duty, he let his ancient, villainous body relax and his bleared eyes close.

The mountain removed itself with suspicious alacrity. If the look in its

porcine eyes went for anything, that musical director valued the "blessing of Penn" less than the permission to vacate an unexpectedly dangerous neighborhood.

But for poor No. 57403 no such retreat was possible. For an instant he looked unable to believe his ears. He reddened and glanced uneasily about, as if to question others of this injustice, this incredible decision. Then the color faded, he drew himself to his slender height and bowed to the condemning judge with a dignity worthy of some classic young Greek.

Viola clutched at Terry's arm in frantic appeal, but one mightier even than Terence Trenmore was present there—a giant crushed, betrayed, bound down in fetters of ignorance; but a giant none the less. A low growl was the first intimation that he had awakened. It was the voice of the Numbers; a warning protest against this blackest wrong. They surged forward. It was a little motion—half a step—but before it the police were crushed irresistibly back against the plush rope. Alarmed, they faced about with threatening clubs. The eyes of the enthroned figure on the dais snapped open.

"Silence!" he snarled. "Guard, open the pit!"

A crouching, striped form stole forth, leaned over the Dove, and the symbol dropped. But the young man did not drop with it as ordained. He had, quite instinctively and naturally, stepped backward from the danger.

"In with him!"

"No—no—no!" This time it was a roaring negative from hundreds of throats. Heedless now of sacrilege, the Numbers again surged. The plush rope stretched and broke. In an instant clubs were rising and falling desperately. The police might as well have attempted to dam Niagara with a toothpick. A few Numbers in the front ranks went down, it is true, but over their bodies

came their fellows, pushed irresistibly by the mass behind.

The former inclosure disappeared. A series of piercing shrieks cut the uproar like knife stabs. They came from below, and Viola, shuddering in her brother's arm, knew that some unfortunate had been pushed into the Pit of the Past.

Mr. Pity, finding himself confronted by a myriad of upturned, glaring eyes, retreated precipitately. But the dais was not stormed—not yet. To many years of ground-in teaching, too thorough a dread of the awful power of Penn Service held them back.

"Go to it—go to it, boys!" yelled Trenmore, holding Viola in one arm and shaking his other fist excitedly. "Down with the murdering hounds! Scrape the platform like a dirty dish!"

His great voice merged indistinguishably with the swelling roar beneath the echoing dome. The police were down, or helplessly packed in. One more surge and the wave would have broken over the platform, performing the very feat suggested by Trenmore. But in that fatal instant of superstitious hesitance the blare of a bugle rang high above the din. It was followed by a rattling, crashing sound, mingled with shrieks, screams, and horrible, echoing sounds of pain and fear unutterable.

Turning its eyes from the dais, the mob knew that its moment of power was past. Each one of those colored panels in the walls, enameled with the figures of strange gods or demons, had slid to one side. Each had hidden the muzzle of a machine gun. Three of them were already in action, spitting curses that killed. There were women and even babies there, but what cared Penn Service for that? They were merely Numbers. And Numbers in revolt must be crushed—massacred if need be.

The growl of the giant was transmuted into frantic prayer. Those close



to the dais flung themselves on their knees and stretched supplicating hands toward the throne they had all but overturned.

A moment Mr. Justice Supreme waited, while the guns still spat and swore. Then both his hands went up, palms outward. The crashing rattle ceased. Only the prayers and shrieks continued, increased, and echoed from the Dome of Justice to the wail of a great city, sacked and full of bloody wrongs.

Again the old man raised his yellow, skinny hands, this time with a silencing, pacifying gesture, and silence followed, spreading from before the dais as the first growl had spread. Even the wounded, so great is the power of lifelong submission, ceased presently to shriek. Only the occasional wail of some infant, too young to recognize the supremacy of ruthless force, broke the ghastly quiet.

"My children," began the High Priest of Evil, "you have sinned grievously." The excitement had invigorated and ennobled his voice, so that it was no longer a snarl, but a dreadful threat. "You have been punished a little," he cried. "Beware lest the great and tender patience of Penn be strained to breaking and you be punished past any power to remedy!"

He pointed solemnly upward at the Red Bell. A shivering groan swept the hall.

"You have broken the sacred silence. Beware that it be not broken by a voice more awful! Beware that it be not broken by a tongue at whose speaking you and your sons and your daughters, your women and your men, shall fall into the ignoble dust from which you sprang! Ungrateful Children of Penn, gather up your wounded and your dead. Depart from this temple which you have desecrated. Go home, and on your knees thank the old and faithful servant who intercedes for you—even you,

the graceless children of a kind and merciful father! But first yield up the body of that young man whose vanity and presumption have caused your sorrow and his. Yield him, I say! Where is he?"

Mr. Justice Supreme actually tottered forward to the platform edge. Like a bloodthirsty old ferret, questing some particularly tender rabbit, he scanned the faces nearest him. The crowd gave back. Here and there the head and blue shoulders of a policeman bobbed into view. But No. 57403 was not produced.

"Give him up!" yelled the old man. Dignity forgotten, he brandished his ebony cane like a sword. "Yield him up, you—whoever is concealing him! Or the guns shall talk to you!"

He was answered by a low mutter, then silence. The Numbers stood with set, dogged faces, staring back at their oppressor.

Trenmore gave Viola a sudden squeeze. "Powers o' darkness!" he whispered exultantly. "The pups have the makings of men in them, after all! They'll not give him up, their sweet-voiced lad. They'll die by the guns, men, women, and babes, but——"

"Surrender him!" The high priest's voice crackled ominously. "I'll give you while I count three. One—two—thr-ree! Oh, very well then!"

His right hand started slowly up, palm out. A second more and the guns would resume their devilish chatter. There came a swirl in the crowd, a struggle, and out into the little open by the pit sprang the singer, disheveled, but triumphant.

"Don't shoot!" he cried. "Don't shoot! Friends, I thank you for everything—what you wished for me, what you have given, and what you would give if I would let you! But *you*," he turned upon Justice Supreme with the look and face of a deathless young god, unfearing and scornful, "*you* I do not

even hate! You poor wreck of what was one time a man, you are already dead and damned in the rottenness of your vile body and viler spirit! If you are the servant of Penn, then I am his enemy. I go to tell him so!"

And before any could stir a hand the boy had dived, head foremost, into the pit.

A moaning sigh rose, echoed, and fell. Those nearest the pit turned aside and covered their ears with their hands; but the shriek they dreaded never came. Presently one of the pit guard, lurking out of sight behind the dais, sneaked cautiously around, crept to the pit, and looked down. Then he raised his eyes to the purple, raging face of Mr. Justice Supreme. The high priest made a gesture with his cane. A moment later and the eagle and dove symbol swung into place again.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### DISASTER.

IN barely thirty minutes the hall was emptied, cleansed of blood and débris, and the ceremony of the "examinations" resumed. Mr. Justice Supreme had waited, dozing, on his throne. The lesser servants perforce waited also, albeit impatiently and with much glancing at watches and *sotto-voce* complaint about the delay.

Sad, silent, and defeated, the Numbers had retired, bearing with them their injured and their dead. When the hall was at last cleared the lovely, milk-white pavement resembled more nearly the pit of a slaughter house than the floor of a temple. It was smeared and slimy with trampled blood, fragments of clothing, and other fragments less pleasant to contemplate. The temple force of "white wings," however, made short work of it. They dragged out a few lengths of hose, turned on a powerful water pressure, and in less than five minutes the blood and débris

were washed down three drains to which the pavement imperceptibly sloped. The wet floor gleamed whiter than ever, and the Red Bell and wonderful walls were reflected with redoubled glory. A corps of scrubwomen went to work on hands and knees to dry and polish the cleansed floor, while Mr. Pity, with a final glance at his watch, again rose and advanced to the platform edge.

"The next superlative quality on my list," droned the master of ceremonies, disregarding the fact that he addressed only the bent backs of five inattentive scrubwomen, "is that of Quickest. This office entails management and control, under Penn Service, of the Department of Police, involving responsibility for the keeping of peace in Philadelphia and outlying suburbs."

A slim, alert-looking man of about forty-five advanced to the pit.

"Is there any other candidate for this office? Any other candidate?"

Came the click of hurrying heels, and round the dais appeared a small, rotund figure, surmounted by a cherubic but troubled countenance. Trenmore growled disappointedly. He had hoped for Drayton, not Bertram. What misadventure was keeping his friend away?

Bertram came up just as the master of ceremonies commenced his stereotyped conclusion: "No other candidate for this office. Present holder may——"

"Wait a minute there!" cried Trenmore, and thrust Bertram forward. "Go on—go on in, you fat rascal!" he added in a forceful whisper. "Here's the contest for Quickest now. You've not quite missed it. Go on!"

Though Bertram struggled vainly to face about, the Irishman still pushed him forward. He was not wasting such an opportunity to delay the proceedings in his absent friend's interest.

"I—I've changed my mind!" the burglar protested.



"Are we to understand," cut in Mr. Pity, "that this person does or does not wish to compete? Just a minute, chief. I don't know whether or not you have a rival."

"Certainly not!" spluttered Bertram.

"Certainly he does!" Trenmore's affirmative drowned out the burglar's plaintive negative. "If you don't," he added in his victim's ear, "I'll wring the round head off you!"

Mr. Arnold Bertram succumbed. Between two dangers, he chose the pit.

"Very well, y'r honor," he stammered. "I—I guess I'll have a go at it."

"Come forward then," snapped the master of ceremonies impatiently. "What is your number, place of residence, occupation, and age? Answer in order and speak clearly, please."

"My—— Say, I ain't got no number."

"What?" Pity glanced frowningly at Bertram's lapel, and saw the green button with which Loveliest had supplied him. "With whose family are you connected?"

Just then Cleverest, who had been sitting quietly among the servants, rose and strolled to the front. He looked Bertram over; then turned to the throne.

"Your Supremity, this is one of those four strangers of whom you are already informed. Is it permitted that the usual questions be omitted?"

Both Mr. Pity and the Superlative seemed to interpret the inarticulate snarl which replied as assent. The latter gentleman, after giving Viola an encouraging smirk, sauntered back to his seat.

"Very well," said Pity. "But I must call you something, you know. Haven't you any title?"

"Me name's Bertram," conceded the burglar.

"Well—er—Bertram, you now have an opportunity to prove yourself the

quickest man in the city. Bring around that machine there."

At the word a thing like a penny-in-the-slot scales was trundled over the porcelain by two pit guards. They brought it to a halt just before Mr. Pity. Following it came Mr. Virtue, who drew the chief of police aside, whispered earnestly to him, and stepped back. Suspiciously Bertram eyed the contrivance, with its platform and large dial.

"Now, Bertram, place yourself on that platform and grasp the lever at the right. That's it. Now. Raise your left hand and snap finger and thumb nine times!"

With a dazed look the burglar obeyed. The needle on the dial jerked, swept around once, quivered, and stopped. By the servant's instructions, Bertram performed a number of similar feats, all equally trivial. Each time the needle made its mysterious record. At last Mr. Pity seemed satisfied.

"Very good. Mr. Virtue, would you mind making a note of that percentage? You may step off, Bertram."

Still dazed, Bertram again obeyed.

"You next, chief. Thank you."

The mysterious rites of the grasped lever and foolish-looking calisthenics were repeated.

"What is the comparison, Mr. Virtue?"

The servant figured for a moment on the back of an envelope.

"Ninety-eight for friend Bertram; ninety-five for the chief. Congratulations to you, my man! Sorry, chief. I fear you're getting old!"

The alert man who had been so unceremoniously superseded stepped off the little platform. He did not look particularly concerned, thought Trenmore—not at all like a man condemned to lose both means of living and life.

"It's all in the game, Mr. Virtue," he observed cheerfully. "Tell the boys

to send lilies of the valley. When's the funeral?"

"Some other time, chief," retorted Virtue with equal jocosity. "The pit is not working right to-day."

"The cheerful liar!" muttered Trenmore. "Now tell me, Viola, what's the meaning of yonder small comedy?"

The girl, white-lipped and sick at heart, laughed mirthlessly. "What does it matter? At least, neither Bertram nor the other is to be murdered. Terry, if Mr. Drayton does not return soon, what shall we do when our time comes?"

"He will return—he must—but now what's wrong with the little round man?"

It was evident that Bertram was in a difficulty of some sort. The displaced chief of police had him firmly by the collar. Mr. Virtue was glaring at him with an expression of incredulous wrath, while Cleverest strode toward them, anxiety in every line of his sharp features.

Terence and Viola were at that time unable to understand the disgrace of Bertram and his immediately subsequent condemnation. It appeared only that during their three minutes' conversation with one another the burglar had committed some act so unpardonable that even the intercession of Cleverest did not avail him. Apparently the act had been witnessed by every one present save the two remaining candidates. The accusation was not even formulated in words.

"In three hours' time let him be cast into the pit," came the inexorable judgment from the throne. "Let him have that three hours to consider and repent of his sacrilege. Penn is just and all-merciful. Take the prisoner away! Let the former chief resume his official duties."

The chief celebrated his rehabilitation by dragging his presumptive successor off the scene, the latter still sput-

tering and expostulating, his captor wearing an expression of serene amusement.

"What next?" questioned Viola hopelessly.

The next arrived with great promptness. Mr. Pity had no more than glanced at his list, after the prisoner's removal, when there came the tramp of feet and the sound of an excited voice.

"Bring him along, men," it commanded. "Drag the sacrilegious beast before the throne! Let his Supremity judge the dog!"

Then appeared the triumphant Mr. Mercy, waving on a cohort of four policemen. In their midst was another and much disheveled prisoner.

"'Tis Bobby!" groaned the Irishman.

Loveliest appeared, crossed behind the guarded prisoner, and defiantly took her stand beside Trenmore. Evidently the downfall of two of her four protégés had alarmed the woman. As much occasion for formality had vanished with the Numbers' exit, she had chanced the anger of the throne and come to her "big man's" assistance. Once more Mr. Justice Supreme was roused from somnolence.

"Well, well," he demanded crossly of Mercy. "What's all this about? Are we never to have a moment's peace to finish these examinations? Who is that fellow you have there?"

Mr. Mercy bowed gracefully, silk hat for once removed and pressed to his triumphant bosom. He cast one glance of joyous malice at Loveliest, and addressed the throne:

"Your Supremity, I have a well-nigh unbelievable charge to lay against this prisoner. Because of the magnitude, the incredible audacity of his crime, and because one—I might say two—of our own number have actually stood his sponsor—because of these things, I say, I have presumed to interrupt the proceedings of this Board of Examiners in the full faith that——"



"Get to the point—get to the point, man," cut in the high priest petulantly. "What has he done?"

Again Mercy bowed. "Your Supremity, to waste no words, this mad and audacious stranger, this insolent abuser of Your Supremity's hospitality, who now faces the very throne with such brazen effrontery——"

"Well—well? Mr. Mercy, if you can't tell it, step aside, please, and allow me to question the prisoner himself!"

"He has invaded the holy Library of Penn," retorted Mercy, "and perused the sacred books!"

There was a general movement of interest among the bored servants. Several of the women auditors rose from their chairs and walked forward to obtain a better view of the prisoner. Even His Supremity was aroused. His face purpled with a rage greater than that awakened by the presumptuous Numbers, his mouth worked horribly, and it was some moments before he could sufficiently control his voice to speak. "How do you know this?" he at last enunciated hoarsely.

"Because I caught him at it," replied Mercy unguardedly.

"You? You found him? What were you doing in the library?"

Mr. Mercy started and gasped at the trap in which he had caught himself. "Why—I—I was passing by and the door was open. I looked in and—and——"

"Your Supremity, have I permission to speak?"

The interrupter was one of the police officers holding Drayton. Mercy turned upon him with furious face, but Justice Supreme waved him to silence. "You may speak, Forty-five. Mr. Mercy, I am conducting this inquiry. Kindly refrain from intimidating the witness."

"Your Supremity, two hours ago or thereabouts, Mr. Mercy come to me

and says, 'Forty-five, is the door of the library locked to-day?' I says, no, I thought not, as Your Supremity had been in there reading. On days when you cared to read, you very seldom kept it locked. No one would ever dare go in there, anyway. Then he says——"

"Wait a minute!" came a voice of repressed fury from the throne. "Mr. Pity, will you take this down, please?"

Pity drew forth his fountain pen and a small blank book. He began to scribble furiously.

"Your Supremity," he says then, 'is the door actually open?' I didn't believe so, but I walked over into Corridor 27 just to have a look. Of course the door was shut. Mr. Mercy, he followed right along behind. 'If I were you,' he says, 'I'd open that door and turn on the fan at the end of the corridor. His Supremity was complaining to me it was that stifling in the library it pretty near made him sick. Well, I thought it was a queer thing Your Supremity hadn't spoke to me if you wished the room ventilated. But Mr. Mercy, being one of the Inner Order, and of such high authority——"

"I understand," snapped the high priest. "Get on. You opened it?"

"I did, Your Supremity, with Mr. Mercy looking on. Then I went to turn on the fan, and Mr. Mercy strolled off. Without meaning to spy on him, I followed. My rubber soles don't make much noise, of course, and I guess he didn't hear me. He went around a corner. Just before I reached it myself I heard him speaking. Thinking he would blame me if he thought I was spying on him, I stopped where I was. He was talking to this prisoner here, as I found out later. First he says, 'Were you looking for some one, Mr. Drayton?' The prisoner, he says no; he was merely strolling around and got lost and can't find his way back to the Green Room. 'I'll take you there

myself,' says Mr. Mercy. 'But have you seen the library?'"

At this a sort of gasp came from Mercy. He staggered slightly where he stood. He dared not interrupt, however, and the policeman continued.

"This Mr. Drayton says, no, he ain't saw it, but he'd be real glad to—in fact, there wasn't anything much he'd rather see. So Mr. Mercy says, 'You go on around that corner straight along the corridor and you'll come to it. The door is open and you can go right in.' This Mr. Drayton says he's understood strangers was not allowed in there. Mr. Mercy says, 'Oh, you're as good as a Superlative already. This library is open to officials.'

"The gentleman thanked him and come on around the corner and past me, but Mr. Mercy he goes the other way."

Mr. Justice Supreme interrupted: "Why did you not stop this man? Do you mean you allowed him to enter without any protest?"

"I did, Your Supremity. Mr. Mercy is my superior, sir, and while I intended reporting to Your Supremity—as I am doing now—it wasn't for me to interfere with his commands or permissions. The stranger, he went in the library. I stuck around, thinking I'd keep my eye on him, at least, to see that he didn't remove none of the books. That would be going it a little too strong. But he stayed and stayed. Once or twice I strolled by, and there he was, reading for all he was worth.

"Then, a while ago, Mr. Mercy comes hurrying along again. He stops short, like he was surprised. 'Haven't you got that door shut yet?' he snaps at me. Before I could answer he runs to the door, looks in, and shouts: 'What's that fellow doing in there? Forty-five, go in there and get that man! Did you know he was there?' Before I had a chance to say anything he blows

his whistle. Twenty-seven and Seventy-nine comes on the run. Sixty-three got there later. We go in and grab this Mr. Drayton. He seems surprised like, and starts to say something about Mr. Mercy telling him to go right in and read. Mr. Mercy tells him to shut up, if he don't want rough handling, and he shuts up. Then Mr. Mercy orders us to bring the man here. That's all I have to say, Your Supremity. If I have taken a liberty in reporting just at this time——"

"Don't be a fool," snarled His Supremity. "You are about the only honest man on the force and the one man I have never caught in a lie. Mr. Mercy, have you any defense?"

"Simply that this is a fabrication on the part of No. 45," drawled Mercy. Having passed through the various stages of rage, surprise, and fear, he had emerged in a mood of dangerous calm. "I had occasion to discipline the fellow recently. This, I presume, is his revenge."

Mr. Justice Supreme glared at him. His next words showed that while the servants as a body might be "Masters of the City," Mr. Justice Supreme was in turn their very arbitrary tyrant. Whether he held this power because of his own malignant personality, or because of hereditary authority, it was power absolute. No. 45 had made no mistake when he braved the certain wrath of Mr. Mercy and thereby gained the favor of His Supremity.

"Mr. Mercy," said the latter with snarling bluntness, "you are a liar and No. 45 is not! Again and again you have recently overstepped the mark, thinking, perhaps, that I have no eyes and no ears but my own, and that they are growing defective with old age. We will go into your case fully at a more appropriate time and try to correct that impression. You will find that the exposing of state secrets to help along some petty intrigue of your



own is not the light offense you appear to believe it.

"Let this prisoner be held as a witness—no, I do not care to have him held. One who has desecrated the realm of sacred knowledge cannot die too quickly. Cast him into the pit!"

A trifle pale, but entirely self-possessed, Drayton had stood silent. Even now, hearing that by-this-time monotonous decree, he made no attempt to defend himself. Indeed, he found composure for a certain whimsical reflection. Twice before he had been condemned to the pit—once, two days ago, by Judge Virtue, in this very temple; once, in a distant place and age, before a tribunal whose proceedings, though less promptly fatal, were strangely similar in spirit. And of the two, Penn Service was the kindlier. Its condemned neither endured imprisonment nor had time to suffer the bitterness of unjust disgrace.

Breaking from her brother's sustaining arm, Viola Trenmore pushed her way between the police and caught Drayton's cold hand in hers.

"Mr. Justice Supreme," she called, "may I make an appeal?"

Drayton turned with a gesture of protest. "Viola," he said earnestly, "go back to your brother. You can do nothing for me."

"And do you think we would let you die alone?" she whispered fiercely.

Mr. Justice Supreme gazed down upon her, and as he looked his loose old mouth spread in a ghastly smile. A gleam brightened his lecherous old eyes.

"Are you the young lady who is destined to assume the title of Loveliest? My nephew has spoken to me of you. He spoke very highly—very highly indeed. My own eyes confirm his claims for your fitness. Your examination is next on the list, I believe, and I assure you that you need fear nothing from your rival. You will make many

friends, my child, and you must count me as one of the first."

At the words, Lady Green-eyes, standing by Trenmore, gasped and turned very white beneath her rouge. Even before the high priest had finished, however, her green eyes were flashing. A surge of real color backed the artificial on her thin cheeks. With catlike quickness she had comprehended the situation. As though he had grown suddenly loathsome, she drew away from Trenmore.

"So!" she spat out. "You were planning to betray me, were you? After all I have done for you, you meant to put that sly puss of a sister of yours in my place! You were planning to have me thrown in that very pit I saved you from such a little while ago! And I thought you were honest. Because you were so big and strong I took you for a real man! Bah! You are no better than the rest of these swine—you are no better than Mercy or Clever or any of the others!"

Her voice had steadily risen until every eye in the hall was focused upon them.

Trenmore could say nothing. His face was suffused by a deep, burning flood of painful color. At this moment what had looked right and just enough when Cleverest proposed it appeared in a different light. No matter if the woman had planned a disagreeable future for Viola, she had also unquestionably saved the girl from a choice between death and dishonor; saved himself and Drayton from immediate destruction.

What miasma of treachery existed in this ancient city that he, who prided himself on his loyalty, had become so horribly infected?

Up went his head in that old gesture of defiant decision. He strode to his sister's side, sweeping two policemen out of his way, and flung an arm about Viola and his friend together.

"Your honor," he thundered, "that lady yonder is right! We have been in danger of making ourselves no better than the Servants of Penn, Heaven judge them for their sins and their murderings! No better than your honor's self, and I take shame to admit it! But that is over. We three want no favors. We want nothing at all from any of you, save to go our way clean and straight. If you choose to murder us, then we will go by way of that pit you're so infatuated with. Terence Trenmore has been mad these two days past, but he's sane again now, thank Heaven, and can speak for himself and his own!"

Viola drew a long breath, and stood up proudly between the two men. She had meant making a desperate plea for Drayton's life, and if that failed she had meant to die with him. But this was far better—that they three go together, not forced, but proudly and avoiding shame. From her eyes also the scales had been swept away. She knew now that this ending had been inevitable—that she could never have stood by and seen another woman, however hateful, murdered that she might go safe.

The semiamiable expression on the High Priest's face twisted back to its habitual snarl. Cleverest stood glowering like a thundercloud.

"Nephew," said Mr. Justice Supreme, "your clemency and kindness have been thrown away. Do you still wish to raise this girl to your side?"

"Yes!" came the prompt reply. The trap mouth clicked shut on the bare affirmative.

"You do?"

"I do, Your Supremity. As a personal favor, I ask that Miss Trenmore be urged to speak for herself and that her brother be not yet condemned. That woman whom we have tolerated too long as one of us has insulted him so grossly that I cannot wonder at his taking umbrage. I ask that she"—he lev-

eled a thin forefinger at the indignant Loveliest—"be removed beyond further power to poison with her venom, and that this girl and her brother be given time to consider before they hurl themselves to destruction. I even ask that you grant this other stranger—this Drayton—reprieve that he may bid his friends farewell. It cannot be that he would wish so young and lovely a girl to share his fate. If he is a man he will urge his friends to accept the life, wealth, and high honors which Penn Service can bestow. Your Supremity, may I hope that my prayer is granted?"

The high priest bowed his head. It was clear that Cleverest had a tremendous influence with his uncle and a hold on Penn Service far stronger than indicated by his official position.

"You ask a great deal, my boy, but you always did that. After all, there can be no harm in granting your wish. The girl is too pretty to be the bride of the old war god. If, however"—and his voice rose to the shrill impatience of the aged—"if after due respite they still refuse your kindness, then I decline to be troubled any further. If they refuse they shall all die, and that green-eyed she-cat with them. I'm tired of seeing the painted fool about.

"Take these three people away. Lock them all up together and let them make up their minds once for all. At ten to-morrow morning they may either die or accept. No great matter which. Hold that other man—Bertram—for the same hour. Take them away! And now, Mr. Pity, there are no further candidates. You may omit the rest of the proceedings. I want my luncheon. I'm an old man, Clever, and all this excitement is bad for my heart. If you ever had any consideration for any one but yourself——"

His snarling whine was shut from their ears as the three prisoners passed into the Green Room, and the red door closed behind the last of their guards.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## THEIR LAST CHANCE

WHEN Justice Supreme commanded that the former candidates for Superlativism be "all locked up together," the police evidently construed the command as including Bertram. It was into the bare, steel-walled room where that rotund gentleman awaited his fate that Trenmore, his sister, and Robert Drayton were presently escorted. They were little surprised at this. What did amaze them was to find their fellow victim not alone. Seated on the floor with his back to the wall, he was engaged in earnest conversation with a small female person, enthroned upon the only chair in the room. Moreover, the latter was wagging an admonitory finger at Bertram as if delivering a "curtain lecture" of the most approved domestic type.

The chair comprised the entire furnishing of the cell. There was not even the moldy straw, without which no medieval dungeon was complete. It might be merely a detention cell; or perhaps prisoners of the temple passed to their doom too swiftly to require sleeping accommodations.

In costume Bertram's companion emulated the rainbow for color. Her large hat was bright green, lined with pink. She wore an old-rose silk sweater over a soiled lace blouse, and crumpled blue linen skirt; her hosiery was golden yellow, and her down-at-heel pumps had once been very elegant green buckskins. As the door clanged shut behind the newcomers, she turned upon them large, inquiring eyes, whose size was accentuated by the thinness of her face. Her complexion, however, was as fine as Viola's own and unmarred by any touch of the rouge stick. The yellow button displayed upon her old-rose lapel bore the number 23000.

Bertram's first expression of surprise changed to one of genuine concern.

"Say, boss," he questioned Trenmore. "What's up? Did they frame you, too? Or have you come to kiss your old college chump good-by?"

"We'll be saying good-by this day the way we'll be troubled with no more farewells at all," retorted Trenmore grimly.

"Are you really in bad, all of you?"

"We are that. And who's the lady, Bertram?"

"A pal of mine," replied the burglar. Taking the small person's hand, he forthwith presented her. "Skidoo, these here are the three friends of mine I was telling you about. Miss Trenmore and Mr. Trenmore and Mr. Drayton. Gents and lady, let me make you acquainted with the brightest, best-hearted, prettiest kid in this bughouse burg. Her Number is 23000, but that ain't no handle for a lady. I call her Miss Skidoo."

His round face shone with such whole-hearted pride in the human rainbow; he was so clearly assured of her cordial reception by any one possessing brains and eyes that Viola, who had at first hung back a trifle, extended her hand.

"We are very glad to meet you, Miss Skidoo," she said gravely, "but sorry it has to be in such a place."

Terry's eyes were twinkling. He followed his sister's lead, however, as did Drayton. "Any friend of Mr. Bertram's," Terry contributed, "is bound to be most interesting. 'Tis charmed we all are, Miss Skidoo!"

"Same here," responded No. 23000, eying them with a sort of childlike solemnity. "Bert's been gassing about you folks ever since I met him. But, gee! The lookout's fierce for this bunch, ain't it?"

"I fear it is about as fierce as possible," sighed Viola. "At least for four of us here."

"Count me in," announced the girl. "They drug me in, just for comin' to

the temple with Bert. I ain't done nothin'."

"I couldn't help it," Bertram defended himself. "I wasn't going to fall for the game, but Mr. Trenmore here, he says I must. Say, bo, won't you tell the kid that I didn't want to go in the game? She won't believe nothing I say."

The Irishman, somewhat conscience-stricken, hastened to assure No. 23000 that the blame for Bertram's downfall lay entirely on his shoulders. "He appeared to have no desire at all for it, but I did not and do not yet understand the way of what happened."

"Aw, I didn't do nothin' to get sent up for," said the burglar disgustedly. "I did cop a medal thing one of them guys was wearing on his watch chain, but I was going to give it right back to him. That weighing machine of theirs was a crazy way to test speed. I wanted to show 'em what quick really meant. So I copped this here medal thing off the one they call Mr. Virtue. Then I flashed it, and was going to explain. They didn't give me no chance. They just jumped on me and said I'd been and done sacri—sacri—something or other, and that was all."

"They was just waitin' fer a chanst to land you," commented Miss Skidoo wisely. "They didn't never mean you should have that job really. Sooner or later they'd have framed you. Say, folks, let's set on the floor and fight this thing out right."

Acquiescing willing enough, Terence and Viola between them related the various events occurring between Drayton's departure from the Green Room and his return in the custody of Mercy. The story of cold-blooded cruelty, the hints of internecine warfare among the Servants and Superlatives—united only against their common enemy, the Numbers—was interesting and startling enough to call forth many exclamations from Drayton and Bertram. Miss Ski-

doo, however, listened with the bored look of one who hears an oft-told and wearisome tale.

"Say," she commented at the end, "a ordinary person like you or us"—indicating herself and Bertram—"ain't got no business mixing in with that gang of highbinders. They're always layin' for each other an' scrapping among themselves; but say, a snowball' got a better chanst in a bucket of hot water than a straight guy or a plain Number around this joint. As I've been telling Bert here——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Drayton curiously, "but where did you happen to meet Mr. Bertram?"

She flushed so red that Drayton wished he had not asked the question. Catching the look in the lawyer's eye, Bertram bristled instantly.

"Say," he blurted, "I want you to know that Miss Skidoo here is a straight, nice kid. I was to a movie last night, and she was there with her dad. I got talking to the old man. He says, come along and get some home cooking; them hotels ain't no good. I stayed so late—talkin' and playin' seven-up—that they let me bunk out in the spare room. That's all. Straight, decent folks, just like there used to be, even if they are tagged with numbers instead of proper monikers. Get me?"

They got him. Drayton apologized silently with his eyes for the equally unvoiced suspicion.

It seemed that Bertram had bragged to these chance acquaintances of his pull with the Superlative, Cleverest. Miss Skidoo had warned him earnestly against any attempt to supersede the chief of police, no matter what his pull might be. The present Quickest, it seemed, like the musical director and most of the other superlatives, was a distant connection of "Penn Service." She revealed to him many facts regarding that "democratic institution," Superlativism—how every man of the Su-



perlatives, save Cleverest, held his job by pure favor, aided by the pull he could exercise through family connections.

"Cleverest, he's a Servant by birth," the girl explained. "He only took on that Superlative job because the next Justice Supreme can't be chose from the Servants in office. He's the old man's nephew. When the old man dies Cleverest will chuck the law and run this city. He was aimin' to marry Loveliest because he wants to be high man anywhere he is, and the Loveliest's husband, when she has one, is supposed to run this town, outside of the Service. But I guess he meant to chuck her as soon as the old man passes over.

"Them Servants, they keep the Service itself right in their own families, father to son like. Only Mr. J. S. as is, he ain't got no son. Say, me sister's a scrublady an' she's got a swell job scrubbin' floors right here in the temple. Course, she don't get paid nothing, but she's fed good, and as for clothes, the ladies round here gives her a lot. That's how I get these glad rags I'm wearin'—from sis. But I tell you a job like hern is great for gettin' wise! Folks don't take much more notice of a scrublady than if she was a chair or sump'n. She's told me a lot o' things.

"Servants of Penn! Say, I reckon if that big image o' Penn could get a peep at what goes on under his feet he'd jump right down on top of the dome and smash the bell and everything else!"

The flow of her eloquence was interrupted by Drayton, who had been listening with even greater interest than the others. "Tell me, Miss Skidoo, have you or any of your friends an idea of who William Penn really is, or rather was?"

"I dunno nothin' about that there Will-thing. Penn is the All-Father. He runs heaven and hell just like the Servants runs us. I don't believe in him no more. I think there ain't noth-

ing but Philadelphia, and when you die you stay dead!"

"Well, religion aside," said Drayton, "I myself have learned a great deal since this morning. The Penn Service library was really most informing. If its doors could be thrown open to the Numbers, I believe they are men enough yet to overthrow this government of false priests and their sycophants and come into their own. It would be worth living, just to see it done." He sighed. "However, that is not to be. We can help the sorrow of this age no more than we could cure the grief of our own."

"Get on with it, Bobby," said Tremore. "Sure, I've a load of curiosity I'd hate to die burdened with!"

"I'll tell it as briefly as I can. There are big gaps in the story as I collated it, but the general run is clear enough. I became so absorbed that I forgot the time and the competitions and everything else. It seems that after the close of the Great War there followed a few years of respite. Then Bolshevism, that even in our day had rent Russia to fighting shreds, had its way of Europe. Class war, which spells social chaos, ensued.

"The U. S. A. very sensibly and hastily declined to be further involved, but unfortunately did not stop there. The country had been largely militarized during Wilson's second administration; but this new European outbreak swung the pacifists back into the saddle. You know the delirious possibilities which may spring from the brain of a full-fledged pacifist. Wilson's administration was over. His successor was a weakling; a dreamer, and completely under the influence of a man named Andrew Power. I'll tell you more of that later. Congress—I don't know what they were thinking of, but they backed this sawdust president, or rather the man behind his chair. According to the records, it appeared to all these

wise rulers that the only safety lay in complete severance of relations with mad-dog Europe. So they severed them. They deliberately stopped all traffic and communication between the United States and Europe. Later, in logical sequence, they dropped communication with our nearest neighbors, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America."

"Why, Mr. Drayton!" exclaimed Viola incredulously. "How could they?"

"They did. I am telling you what I read in books and old newspapers of those times. Now this man I spoke of, this Andrew Power, who stood behind the presidential chair, seems to have been a sort of sublimified madman. His personality was of the Napoleonic order raised to the *n*th power. He was a madman, but he was a reasoning madman. Taking the theories and work of the pacifists, he carried them to a logical conclusion.

"The trouble with the world, he said, was that its communities, its nations, had grown too bulky and unwieldy. He pointed to the case of Switzerland, a small, therefore manageable, republic, with its efficient, well-equipped army, its contented people and high rate of wealth per capita. The United States was a republic, but it could never be like that. It was too big. All the really big countries, he said, were ill-balanced, ill-governed, and with a high percentage of poor and unemployed. The ideal nation would consist of not over three or four million souls, with a democratic government. It should be completely isolated from the world in a space compelling it to keep the population within that limit of three or four million. Each State in the Union, he argued, was a potential ideal republic, given the isolation which was apparently—but only apparently—impossible."

"But," cried Viola, her eyes wide

and incredulous, "that was a hundred times worse than the secession of the South from the North!"

"I have told you," replied Drayton wearily, "that this man was mad. The whole world, I think, was mad. In this country, too, bolshevism had been lifting its disorganizing clamor. The madman carried the mad people with him. State by State, it seemed, they might handle what was daily becoming more ungovernable. If some States were rotten, let them rot alone; not infect the others. It was necessary to redistribute the population, but that does not appear to have troubled their maniacal energy. There were riots and battles. What sane people remained objected strenuously to the whole scheme. But Power—this Andrew Power, who stood behind the president—had the majority with him. I think that many clever, wealthy men foresaw opportunities for absolute despotism under open colors. At any rate, the scheme was carried out, each State accepting a population within its powers to feed."

"But that meant the end of civilization, the end of exchange!"

"Oh, they arranged for exchange of products in a limited degree, but all other intercommunication, all exchange of ideas or moving about of people from one State to another, was cut off under heavy penalty."

"Their coast line, man—their coast line?" broke in Trenmore. "What was Europe doing then?"

"I don't know. The history of the world ends in that library with the isolation of Pennsylvania. For all I know, the nations of Europe may have emulated the Kilkenny cats and devoured one another, or perhaps they are still fighting. Anyway, what these people call 'Philadelphia and its envioning suburbs' really includes the whole of Pennsylvania.

"They began here under a sort of commission government, but the 'con-



tractor gang'—Philadelphia was always, you know, peculiarly——"

He never told them, however, what it was that Philadelphia was peculiar in. There came a sound at the door. The heavy bolts slid back, and a man entered, partly closing the door behind him. The man was Cleverest. For an instant he stood, arms folded, glaring majestically upon them.

The captives rose and faced him with more or less composure. Had the high priest's nephew come to announce an advance of execution or to offer them further terms?

"You've stared long enough," said Trenmore brusquely. "What is it you want with us?"

"A little fair and decent treatment perhaps," snapped Cleverest. "Do you realize what a very unpleasant position you have placed me in? Every man in the temple is laughing at me behind his hand for standing by a gang of beggars and getting insulted for my pains!"

Viola interposed quietly. "You are mistaken, sir. None of us has ever said a word to or about you that could be construed as an insult."

"Your brother meant to include me in his tirade addressed to my uncle," the man retorted gloomily.

Terry eyed him in obstinate dislike. "You led me to forget my honor, sir, and conspire against a woman. I'm not blaming you so much as myself; but 'twas a dirty deal, and well you know it!"

"You were ready enough at the time," sneered Cleverest with more truth than was pleasant. "However, matters are not yet too late to mend. Your death won't help Loveliest now. My uncle has settled that once for all. You've blundered and blundered until the best I can do is to save you and your sister. Miss Trenmore"—he eyed the girl with a coldly calculating eye—"I love you. I am offering you more than any

other man in this city could offer. I desire a beautiful and accomplished wife, and you are better qualified than any one I have met. If you marry me you will be not merely Loveliest, which is in one sense an empty title, but the future Mrs. Justice Supreme!"

"Unless," replied Viola very coolly and not at all impressed, "you should see fit to depose me before your uncle's death. You could do that, couldn't you?"

His face expressed surprise, mingled with a kind of vulpine admiration. "You knew all the time," he exclaimed with a laugh, "and hid it from me! No danger, my dear. You play fair with me and I'll stick to you. I've never seen a woman yet that could touch you for looks, brains, or manner. As an added inducement, remember that I offer your brother's life!"

Viola looked from Drayton to Terry and back again at Drayton.

"Terry!" she whispered at last. "I—I can't. Oh, forgive me, Terry! Yes, I'll do it for you. But he must save Mr. Drayton, too!"

"You'll do no such thing!" stormed the Irishman. "I'd rather see you dead, Viola, then wedded to that fox!"

"Don't consider me, Miss Viola," put in Drayton. "Save yourself if you wish and can. But not—for Heaven's sake, not in that way—not for *my* sake!"

The girl and the lawyer were looking into each other's eyes. The faint rose of Viola's cheeks brightened to a livelier hue. Cleverest saw, and jumped at the conclusion most natural to a born Servant of Penn.

"Oh, is that it?" he demanded angrily. "Is this man your reason for declining my offers? Perhaps I have been a bit hasty, after all. The wife of Justice Supreme can have had no former lovers, dead or living!"

Viola uttered a little, horrified cry. The pink flush became a burning flood

of color. Drayton sprang, but Terry was before him. One second later the Superlative's body crashed against the steel wall of the cell and dropped in a limp heap to the floor.

At the sound of his fall, the door was again flung open. The occupants of the cell found themselves covered by four leveled rifle barrels. Cleverest had not come here alone, and it looked as if the guard were in a mood to fire upon them and clear the cell of life forthwith. But finding, upon examination, that their superior was merely stunned and had suffered no broken bones, they decided to leave punishment to their masters. With many threats they retired, bearing the insensible Cleverest with them.

"That settles it!" said Drayton. "Nobody can ever mistake your feelings toward them, Terry!"

"I only wish that I'd killed him," growled the Irishman.

It was seven p. m., and they were beginning to wonder if Penn Service wasted not even bread and water on condemned prisoners, when the door bolts again clicked smoothly.

"Our supper at last!" commented Terry with satisfaction.

He was mistaken. No food-bearing jailer appeared, but the chief of police himself, alert and smiling. Behind him the light glinted on a dozen rifle barrels. They were taking no further chances, it appeared, with the Trenmore temper.

"I have come to make a rather unpleasant announcement," began Quickest. He spoke with quiet courtesy, but firmly and as one prepared for an outbreak. "You were to have been passed to the All-Father in the morning, I believe. His Supremity has instructed that the time be advanced. Will you accompany me without resistance? If so, you may go unfettered."

**To be concluded in the next number of THE THRILL BOOK,  
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### RAMBLE-THOUGHTS

**A**N optimist is a man who expects his little back-yard garden to become like the illustrations in the seed catalogue without doing any work. Is it any wonder that vacuous optimism is a subject of American humor?

So with the pessimist, we might define him, but he is a minority proposition—the minority that never comes into power. Politically speaking, the minority party is non-existent as far as power goes. The human mind demands light. It cannot live in a dark, damp cellar.

Did you ever stop to think how unlike a mushroom we really are? Get a hunch on yourself. With some of you fellows it is necessary to point out what you are not in order to show you what you are. Come to think of it, I'll bet you never explored yourself in any definite way; you look at things perhaps, but did you ever count the steps as you went downstairs? Did you ever figure out the exact width of a street? Did you ever compute the height and weight of your friends? And yet I've seen men standing on the corner who guessed at the weight of people, never missing. It can be done.

It isn't that these things are important; after all, everything is relative as concerns its position in our own minds. It is simply to show you how alert you might be.





# The Mouse and the Cheese

Will H. Greenfield

**W**HEN Joel Crumpleton was born there was the perfect shape of a mouse on the calf of his left leg. From earliest infancy he was strangely influenced to do mouselike things, such as stealing bits of food and sneaking around when no one was stirring in the house. Before he was ten years old he was known to every one as The Mouse, and only his mother remembered to use his given name.

While The Mouse tried to divide his time with strict impartiality between eating and sleeping, people who wanted to be polite said he worked for his father. The latter kept a tiny provision shop in London. He sold butter and eggs and cheese and pickled pork and parafin and groceries of all sorts. Mr. Crumpleton was a child of misfortune, or, as he phrased it, "adversity's favorite target." Bad luck found him with unerring frequency. Like the leopard, wherever he hid he was spotted. The basement of his personality was perennially under the bruising sandal of Nemesis. But in a patience competition with Mr. Crumpleton, Job himself would have been obliged to be content with honorable mention.

The Mouse was just twenty-three years old when the crash came. Most

unexpectedly Mr. Crumpleton was attacked by apoplexy, and with shocking suddenness he took his place in the long line of his honorable ancestors. Mrs. Crumpleton, after filling the metropolitan ear with hysterical panegyrics as to her husband's vasty virtues, made an heroic attempt to continue the business. But the business smashed, through the chain stores cutting into the little trade. Well, hardly smashed; that's too imposing. The business just faded, and one morning the Crumpletons, mother and son, didn't bother to take down the shutters.

When The Mouse took over the support of the household he demonstrated his complete incompetency. He developed an uncompromising antipathy to work. Inside of a year he became a nocturnal prowler, familiar with the deeds of the dive, the dark alley, the lonely road, and the midnight hour. He took too much tobacco and too little exercise, eating like a pig and drinking like a duck. In ways that were dark and tricks that were the irreducible minimum of petty outlawry he was an acknowledged adept. His fear of prison, however, kept him out of it, for he never hesitated to sacrifice a pal to dodge the dungeon.

The day of exposure came at length, and his cronies knew him for what he was—a spineless stool pigeon. They had a way of their own of dealing with his species, and there was nothing between The Mouse and the grave except a ride in the hearse, when the letter from his uncle in New York arrived, and The Mouse departed for America.

Mrs. Crumpleton was not sorry to see her son leave London.

“Here is the opportunity of your life, my dear,” she told The Mouse. “Uncle Anthony Crumpleton is a rich grocer in New York, and he has quarreled with his son, Jim. He says in this letter that if you take an interest in his business he will make you his heir. Folks call him a miser, I’ve heard, but he says he’ll be generous with you to spite his son. He’s pleased to think you know something about the business, too. It’s a new start for you, my dear. I think Uncle Anthony wants you for protection also, for he has old-fashioned ideas and don’t believe in banks. And he is worth over a thousand pounds if he’s worth a penny!”

The Mouse smacked his lips at that, and three days after he landed in New York he was working like a galley slave in Uncle Anthony’s Third Avenue grocery and delicatessen. He had an unconquerable feeling that he was doing a shameful and grossly culpable thing in toiling thus, but he nursed visions—visions that made the ultimate robbery of his avuncular relative not merely a matter of conjecture, but a mathematical certainty. In fact, a curious dementia seemed to seized him. He couldn’t get enough of work.

Uncle Anthony was an old skinflint, whose venerable and threadbare clothes looked well in the charitable light of his dingily lighted store. He was meanness, ingratitude, and heartless cupidity ten times compounded. He did a large credit trade, and did not scruple

to plunder patrons who bought “by the book.” He was their special convenience in seasons of financial distress—at exorbitant interest. A growing fear of robbery rode him like an old man of the sea, yet he refused to make room for The Mouse in the dwelling part of his store.

“I can take care of my own,” he was wont to assert. “I’ve foiled the crooks of New York for twenty-five years, and I’m sure I haven’t lost any of my old cunning. All I ask you to look out for is fire. I’m deathly afraid of fire. I can’t tuck heavy gold away as conveniently as I can hide the greenbacks.”

“Don’t you mean yellowbacks?” The Mouse queried one time when they were talking on the subject.

“What’s it to you whether I have green or yellow?” rasped his uncle, and for several weeks he was as cool as an arctic breeze. He did not thaw out until one afternoon he stood in the rear of the store and saw his son, Jim, come in and engage The Mouse in conversation.

Jim Crumpleton looked to be drinking himself into a premature grave. His features were thin and sharp, his complexion sallow, his whole appearance unhealthy. Fine dark eyes increased the peculiarity without enhancing the beauty of his puny face. He had a racking cough and seemed floundering hopelessly in mental fog.

“Say, Tommy Atkins,” he babbled childishly, “can’t you and I get together and trim the old man for a piece of change? I haven’t had nothing but whisky for a week, and I feel a sleigh ride coming on.”

The Mouse favored him with a stony stare. Out of the tail of his eye he caught the shadow of his eavesdropping employer as it flung itself athwart the basement door.

“Are we friends or enemies?” pressed the son of the house.



Then, with the most positive finality, The Mouse rendered his decree:

"Enemies, sir! Them as want to cheat or rob my Uncle Anthony can't be no friends of mine. If you know when you're bloody well off you'll get out of this here place of business."

Jim Crumpleton coughed, stammered, choked miserably, and went meekly out.

That evening, as The Mouse was getting ready to leave for his ground-floor apartment in the next block, his Uncle Anthony drew him into his office in the rear of the store.

"My dear boy," he crooned, "I want to tell you that from this date on I will pay you a dollar more a week. Keep up the good work, Joel, and you'll never regret it. I know how to appreciate honest service. You have worked hard—as hard as me almost—to increase the business. Keep a sharp eye out for fire, Joel. My little yellowback babies dread the flames, you know. I don't trust the banks, Joel, but I believe I can trust you. Have patience, dear boy, and some day this business and all I have will be yours. Good night. Be prompt in the morning. And here is a dollar for theater."

But it was only a week or so after that The Mouse fell from favor in a manner that set him thinking. And from these thoughts came action.

During his employer's absence he descended to the cellar and quartered a whole cheese. Uncle Anthony discovered this upon his return and flung himself at The Mouse with a bellow of rage.

"What do you mean, you dolt!" he exploded. "What did you cut that cheese for? Didn't I tell you never to cut a whole cheese—didn't I? How dared you?"

The Mouse backed away without speech. He appeared to be considering his employer's sanity.

"How dared you cut that cheese?" sputtered Uncle Anthony wrathfully.

"Because there was none cut, sir, and there were customers waiting for it, sir. Besides, sir, I think I can cut a cheese every bit as well as the next one, sir." The Mouse's puzzled air and steady gaze dampened the other's ire.

"Excuse me, Joel; excuse me! I'm a bit upset. A cheater of a woman skipped out on me owing a pretty stiff bill. And her name was Bill, too—ha, ha!" His breath dodged back and forth through his teeth in wheezy laughter. "Did I say Mrs. Bill? I'm wrong; her name was Mrs. Williams. All the same, though. I hope you won't mind my little outburst. I'll not hold anything against you," he concluded with expansive generosity.

"Thank you, sir. I try to please you all the time, sir."

"You do, Joel, you do. Go home now, my dear boy. I'm going to close up myself to-night. I'm giving you a few hours off."

The Mouse left the store, but he did not set his course for home. Instead he visited a neighborhood saloon, bought a drink, smiled at the disconsolate figure of Jim Crumpleton, and walked out. As he anticipated, Jim followed him to the sidewalk.

"Got the price on you, cousin mine?" he blurted thickly.

"Do you know where I am living?" asked The Mouse, handing him a half dollar.

"Sure! I've watched you cooking your supper through the street window many a night."

"To-morrow morning I want you to call there, Jimmy, old dear. I might have something for you. Good night!"

Next morning, as soon as Uncle Anthony had hitched up his horse and wagon and started for the wharf, The Mouse padded down the cellar and examined five whole cheeses that stood on a shelf under the stairs.

"Never touched 'em, just as I figured," he chuckled to himself. Then he started in to quarter them with the big cheese knife he carried. When he halved the fourth cheese he emitted a low yelp of delight, dropped the knife, and tore at the gaping center with his fingers. When he finally ceased pawing he straightened up with a huge bundle of orange-backed bills in his trembling hands. For a minute he stared at it with cold rigidity of feature, like a man in a trance; then he laughed and snapped his fingers at the world outside.

Ten minutes later The Mouse stood in his little room down the block and laughed another laugh of infinite amusement.

"Twelve thousand dollars!" he muttered rapturously. "In a minute James will be here and I'll let him have a few notes for them to find, the silly blighter! He chased me out of the store at the point of a gun, and I came home to arm myself and go back after him—didn't want to notify the police and disgrace the family, gorblime me! I'll stop and parcel post this bundle home to mom, like a good child, and she'll know what to do with it—we'll be able to——"

There came a knock on the door.

"There's Jimmy boy!" he whispered exultingly. He had started for the door, when he chanced to glance through the little street window. Two policemen stood on the steps! His heart was ice for a second; then it burned like a hot coal and beat at a furious pace.

"He set a trap for me, the old miser!" he gulped. "I'm caught with the goods! I can't hide the stuff here!"

He looked wildly about him. There was a red-hot fire in the little cook-stove, and he clapped his hands at sight of it. Rushing to the bed, he reached beneath the mattress, wrenched the package of money from its hiding place, and, stuffing it into the stove, jammed down the lid. He laughed as he heard a roar in the stove pipe.

"No jug for mine!" he breathed. "It's gone—gone! And what can they prove?"

Rap, rap, rap!

He opened the door.

"What's wanted, constable?" In his voice there was scorn and contempt unutterable.

"Sorry to trouble you," said the foremost officer. "Will you buy a ticket for the Police Pension Fund's benefit concert next Saturday night? It won't cost you much!"





# The Perfect Melody

Newton A. Fuessle



**D**OCTOR HERMAN BOLZA, the watery-eyed, spectacled ethnologist, bent over his scales and weighed out for La Veuve, his musher, a thousand dollars in gold dust. For Yelk, the Chinaman, he measured out a canvas sack of dust thrice the size of the Frenchman's.

It was at Nome. Before them lay a five weeks' journey south and east across the bleak, snow-caked tundra. La Veuve, the musher, set up the tepee at night while little Bolza was massaging the paralysis out of his thin legs and muttering things in strange languages. By day the Frenchman sent his long, rawhide lash stinging among the dogs or else lumbered on ahead, making trail for the struggling animals. The flabby-faced, iron-muscled Yelk followed his two companions and the dogs with docile patience written on his yellow face.

Toward the slim, farthest, frozen fingers of the Kusokwin River crept these toilers of the snows. It was there that the Chinaman had once traveled alone with a little Welshman, a daring *voyageur*, until one day, under garish snow-clouded skies, the yellow man's companion had died. Yelk had kicked

a hole in the snow, buried his master, and set out alone for Nome, staggering into the city at length, a gaunt shadow of a man.

It was not alone the fatigue of the frightful journey that had made such a specter of him. Back there in the wilderness he had seen something, something terrible, and had fled from it. But now in Nome, when Bolza, the learned man of science, heard from Yelk's own lips what he had seen, he was neither afraid nor astonished; he was delighted. Doubtless it would be one of those idols which he was seeking, one of those prehistoric pre-Confucian things, the lure of which had dragged him into this land of frozen austerity, in search of odd things for a famous ethnological society.

As an ethnologist of eminent attainment, Bolza had gone on hundreds of odd adventures for several different societies of savants. And when he learned that Yelk had asserted that the thing which had terrified him had been placed there by the spirits of his ancestors in resentment because Yelk had hearkened to the exhortations of a Christian missionary, little Bolza's eyes had sparkled with delight.

Evenings, while the smoke of their fire rose a hundred miles straight to the zenith, the little savant would harangue La Veuve and Yelk on a hundred matters.

"By gar!" the Frenchman would exclaim at intervals, to prove that it was a case of value received for Bolza's expenditure of gold dust. But the Chinaman, peering taciturnly into the fire, gave never a word or nod, so that, to his companions, his stolid face looked like an idol carved from a block of yellow wood.

When the quicksilver crawled lower, the resinous pine sticks no longer sufficed, and then rose the roar of an arctic blast lamp, whose bizarre light made the three trailers look like ghosts peering out of their parkah hoods.

"To-morrow we go dat way," Yelk would sometimes mumble in oily tones, drawing his hand out of its great glove, and pointing a thin, yellow finger off into the night.

Bolza and La Veuve would exchange looks. Then the ethnologist would fall into a droning discussion again of the probability of coal lying a thousand feet underfoot. Or perhaps the dismal howling of a wolf in the distance would deflect him into a dissertation on the ancestry of dogs.

"*C'est ça*," La Veuve would mutter, playing with his brass earrings, as he gave attentive heed to the strange discourse.

"W'at you t'inkin' 'bout, Yelk?" he would ask after a while, turning to the Chinaman. "Baim-by your tongue s'peek fast," he would sneer in contempt of the Chinaman's taciturnity.

Without seeming to hear, the Chinaman's inky eyes would remain intent upon the faggots.

"Don' answer den," La Veuve would mutter, with a shrug of his great shoulders. "Be damn to you den, crazee chink," he would add, with a grin at Bolza.

"Leaf him alone," Bolza would command. "Yelk iss not a fool. Yelk iss not an ordinary Chinaman. Not py a damn sight. In his het are the brains of great Buddhists—*wie?* De Chinese are a great people. Dey possess mind and learning. Vile ve are prattling, La Veuve, Yelk is bissy mit great problems. Leaf him alone."

One day the three overtook Skagway Pete and Zilla, his wife. Zilla was as ugly a hag as had ever sneered at a tenderfoot or curled her lip in derision at a dog that loafed in his harness. She cooked them caribou meat, and the men ate ravenously.

Seated before the fire after supper, the bearded savant Bolza waxed garrulous, according to his custom. He recounted strange stories of journeys on remote oceans, of a trip on a privateer, on the Caribbean Sea, of a jaunt on camels across Siberia, of a memorable game of poker between three millionaires at Nampa, Idaho. A chance remark now and again from Skagway Pete, a grunt from La Veuve, a contemptuous, inarticulate wail from Zilla, seemed to keep the scientist's memory in an animated clog dance.

Between the stories, Skagway Pete would interpolate laconic queries, generally wholly irrelevant. How much did the other estimate his dogs to be worth? How far had he traveled that day? Whom had he encountered on the way?

And once, even Zilla managed to untwist her tangled wits, let her vacuous eyes emit a few sparks of intelligence, and herself propounded a question. What had brought the prying white man into Skagway Pete's domain? Whither lay their quest? Had they come to bring evil, perchance, unto Pete and Zilla, his ever-faithful squaw? For answer, Bolza uncorked an enthusiastic narrative of the South Sea Islands, beginning with: "Ven I vas adrift off de Madeiras——"



"Nay," wailed the woman, interrupting him at the very start, "why came the white man hither with this devil-faced yellow ghost and this ugly French musher?"

She spoke in Siwash, but her mate repeated the question for her in English, in obedience to a kick from his mistress.

And straightaway the ethnologist began another story of remote adventure, the squaw's husband mumbling a clumsy translation for the hag.

"Nay," she interrupted harshly, "ask this white man why he came hither in the dead of winter. Does he bring evil?" she ended in a screech.

Bolza glanced at her peevishly with his watery eyes diminishing into mere slits, and responded: "My goot man, tell your vife dat all dis shall be told her in goot time. She brebared us eggcellent foot. Her tea iss matchless. Derefore shall she know vat she desires."

When the interpreter's droning gutturals had conveyed the savant's speech to Zilla, the squaw regarded Bolza out of her beady eyes, and said contemptuously: "Then wherefore does he not speak, this chechahco?"

Faithfully the squawman repeated the question.

Bolza conveyed a burning ember to his pipe bowl, cleared his throat, and began, Skagway Pete repeating the story after him in Siwash for Zilla.

"There be those," said the squawman, his mumbling tones flowing in alternating current with the doctor's, "far to the south, where it is always warm, who have never seen this land of ice and storm. Ignorant chechahcos they be, and anxious to pay gold and silver to hear by word of mouth how the children of the snows live out the savage years—what manner of food they eat, what beverage they drink, their habits, their ways, their children, their beasts of burden, their strange houses, their toil. People have wondered much, back

in the southland, since first discoveries of gold told them there was a north-land."

"Yea," wailed Zilla, swaying slowly where she sat, as her interest was aroused, "and what manner of country was his, this man's, who wears the great eye things; he of the pale, thin, bewhiskered face?"

"A land," quoth Pete, interpreting, "where one needs no fire, save to cook; where one gathers a mysterious force from the air, which sends rubber-wheeled wagons flying like the wind; where there is much dancing and singing and wonderful music."

"Music," broke in Zilla, with contempt, "there be no music save Pete's. Show this paleface, Pete. Show this braggart that there be no music but thine."

Skagway Pete, obedient to the squaw's command, took a mouth organ from his pocket, let it creep back and forth under his puckered lips, and wailed forth shrilly tune after tune—tunes heard in Klondike dance halls, snatches of airs he had heard Swedes whistle down in far Sitka, and lugubrious recollections of gospel hymns which he had heard revivalists chant in front of dives in Dawson.

Holding himself aloof from all notice of the performance at first, Yelk, the Chinaman, latterly set his oily eyes in a sudden gaze at the squawman, and his face grew hard.

"R-r-l-lotten," he muttered in contempt at last. "He play like damn fool. Damn—damn—damn fool! Not music ut all."

Pete regarded the Celestial in undisguised disgust, deigning not even a reply.

But La Veuve, the trailer, was rejoiced at this music in the wilderness. "*Eh bien*," he exclaimed eagerly, "*continuez, w'y do'n' you?*"

But Skagway Pete was not listening

to the Frenchman. To the squaw he was repeating the Mongolian's words.

"Ugh," grunted the hag, "for that the devil's bones will rot! The unbeliever! The yellow slob! The scum of the earth! For those words he will yet be smitten dead by Heaven. There be no music only Pete's. Is it not so, life of my heart?"

"Wie?" interrupted Bolza, when Pete had repeated his wife's words in English. "Vell, I vill dell you someding. The Chinaman iss not wholly wrong, aldo you blay de inshtument eggceedingly vell, my friendt. It iss true dat your music and mine, and all white men's, iss ridiculously bad, ven you combare it mit Chinese music. Diss iss qvite an arbitrayry statement. But I vill eggsblain."

Bolza's voice flowed softly on, as though he had repeated the dissertation on Chinese music often; as though, even now, he were facing a class of a university. As Skagway Pete mumbled a translation after him for Zilla, the hag surveyed little Bolza with withering contempt. Even La Veuve, as he puffed thoughtfully at his pipe, wrinkled his forehead in skepticism. But Yelk, the Chinaman, leaned thoughtfully forward, missing never a word, and soon the sphinx mask faded off his face, and a glimmer of rapt attention smoldered in his eye.

Now and again Bolza, apparently forgetting that Pete was muttering a translation for Zilla, let his vocabulary soar far above the squawman's intellect. At such times Pete's words would cease, and the hag, visibly aggravated, swayed peevishly backward and forward.

"It iss a scientific fact," spoke Bolza, "dat de Chinese haf reached de highest perfection in deir music. Dat iss incontrovertible. Ve whites half only aggomblished de most elementary steps. Let me dell you someding. De Chinese music iss a t'ousand years in advance off ours."

9A Thrill

Pete had stopped translating, for the other's vocabulary had passed quite out of his ken, and the squaw, as she gazed into the fire, seemed to have lapsed into dreaming. La Veuve listened cynically, the ghost of a sneer on his face now and again, but vanishing swiftly when he recalled the thought of the gold the savant had paid him.

But Yelk, educated years ago by the missionary in Hunan province, understood nearly everything. And as he listened, his brain swam. The faggots, also, had kindled a glow in his eyes. Those words! Never, since he had sailed away from Changsha in the little junk, had the memory of the music of his people been conjured back thus. Never, since his home had sunk slowly away in a line of mist and sea, had the memory of the strange, mournful music of his people, unheard in this alien land, begun to throb as now within his breaking heart. And as the savant's voice flowed on, the soft, mystic memories of his people's songs leaped into a rushing torrent, while his eyes burned with blinding tears.

The ethnologist, all unconscious of the effect of his words, talked on. He described the discordant *mélange* of terrific noises, the crash of iron on cymbals, the rasping wail of reeds, the blare of rusty brass. And then, he said in almost a whisper, there would rise, by some splendid magic, the frail, wan note, sweet with an almost impossible sweetness, the spirit of perfect melody!

Yelk, who had been swaying slowly at first, now shook like a sapling rent by tempest. His black eyes burned; his heart was afire.

But the savant, talking on, himself mastered by his fantastic text, remained all unconscious of Yelk, his Chinaman. Always, he said, there would be the piercing blasts, the ferocious discords, the pound of deafening contrivances; then the instant hush, and then the faintest strain of perfect melody, short-

lived, flimsy, fragile, and sweet with uncanny sweetness.

"Vell," he continued, "dere ve haf de highest form off human music. De contrast iss apsolute; its power iss com-belling. Our loff for music begins mit de simple; it ends mit de complex. It begins mit de plain mudder's lullaby; it ends, de Caucasians t'ink, mit de rhapsodies of Liszt. Ve haf it in Liszt, in Wagner, in Tschaikowsky—dis contrast, dis almost disgordant noiss, followed by silence, and den by the frail, sweet bit of melody. But it has progressed farder yet—over in China. And yet men vill not agree mit me. Dey haf prechudice for t'ings Chinese. My friendt," he demanded suddenly, turning upon the Chinaman, "iss it not so?"

"Ach," resumed the savant, as the other remained silent, "dat iss de perfect melody. You haf de roar of terrible discords, and den, creeping out off de silence, dose subdued, fine notes in shivering soprano. Dat iss de perfect melody, dat which iss cajoled fort' by deligate yellow lips, by t'in yellow fingers. Ve whites do not understand it; t'erefore ve deride it. Our young vimen blay racktime. But you haf de perfect melody, Yelk, de perfect melody!"

Bolza stopped, and again his watery eyes sought the Chinaman's. "*Mein Gott!*" he cried, startled.

Yelk's face had undergone the change of changes. Livid, afire, drawn into a grimace, it was no longer the thing of wood it had been on all the journey.

"*Mein Gott!*" cried the ethnologist again.

The Mongolian did not answer. The fire in his brain raged on. In his mental vision loomed the thing his learned master was seeking. The religion of his fathers, the dormant fear of Confucius, the first uncanny fright at beholding the thing—these, wrested into life in some strange way by Bolza's recital, now stalked before him, mon-

strous forms. Yelk shrank back in utter fear, as he thought of the desecrating mission he was on.

And now another thought darted at him out of the black night. For five years he had been an animal. A drunken miner had called him Yelk, and he had suffered the name to replace that of his fathers. He had washed dishes in this alien land, had cooked the white devils' food, had gambled, had been the yellow dog of the brutal whites. He had whined impotently when the white brute had kicked him.

Slowly had he acquired the brute ways of the brutal whites. Drink, vice, the life of a dog; and the souls of his ancestors forgotten! Forgotten his home, his education, his Heaven-born people, the temple! Forgotten! Gone! Derided by the dogs of white men, flogged, spat upon, until at last his face had become a sphinx face, his heart a lump of granite, and the yesterdays at home a void!

But now, at last, a thin shred of fire, ignited, somehow, by the savant's mumbling words, had shot a blinding, burning radiance into the void. Suddenly there ripped back into his mind the memory of things forgotten, things which had been rasped and eroded out of existence—familiar forms and faces, ghosts of gone events, the passion for women of his kind. These had startled his heart by this strange little man's dissertation. They were calling, calling!

"Yelk!" cried Bolza, regarding the other with whitened face.

The Chinaman, hearing at last, turned fiercely upon him. Lust shone madly in his eyes, and burned like a lambent flame from every line in his yellow face—the sudden lust for things forgotten but recalled, the lust for home, for his discarded learning, the desire for women of his kind, women with faces thin and yellow as the sunshine.

Yelk sprang like an animal to his



feet. His lips were wrenched into an animal snarl. From his bosom he ripped the white man's sack of gold, and cast it with an inarticulate cry at Bolza's feet.

His master, the ethnologist, sat like a man of stone, speechless at the Chinaman's terrific outburst in that weird pantomime. And La Veuve, the French musher, true to his name, which means "the widow," given him in contempt

years before by a bully in Nome, shrank back into the shadows in utter terror. Shrank similarly Skagway Pete, the squawman, while the hag, her eyes glued in fear and fascination to the Chinaman's, shuddered violently.

Yelk bent, and jerked tight the thongs of his snowshoes. Then out of the circle of firelight he plunged, into the black night, into the shadowy waste of snows.

### VIOLETS?

By Harold de Polo

**T**HE very house itself looked like the abode of tragedy, standing white and bleak as it did on the wind-swept hill under the whirling snow.

Inside, in a prim, forbidding room, a woman lay dying. Mere death was not the tragical part of it. What made it hard was that the woman did not want to die—just yet.

"If only God had been good enough to wait until the spring," she told the doctor by her side, "then—then I might have seen my violets!"

All her life, alone, she had lived in her little white house on the hill—with her flowers. They were her only love, her only goal. She was known the countryside over—and farther. Automobile parties, on Sundays, would leave the State road miles away for a look at her famed gardens.

Again she breathed a fervent prayer and spoke to the physician:

"Oh, doctor, if only I might see my violets! Or if only I might see *any* of my flowers! But my violets! I have always loved my violets more!"

The doctor was bending over her now, for her head had sunk farther back into the pillow and her eyes had closed. Suddenly, however, they opened, and with all the strength in her emaciated frame she pushed him away and lurched forward to a sitting posture. There was color in her cheeks now, and her gaunt, plain face was even very, very beautiful. She put out her hands and clutched at the air, and her voice was stronger as she cried out:

"Oh, oh, I *knew* it! I *knew* that God would be good and kind—I *knew* that He would not take me away without letting me see them! Look—look! My violets—my violets, my violets, my violets!"

But the voice stopped abruptly, and she fell back. Her face, though, was neither pain-ridden nor longing; it was utterly serene and happy.

"Queer," murmured the doctor as he covered her with a sheet, "queer how the dying always seem to have those hallucinations!"

The nurse, who had been off on an errand, entered the room as he finished his task.

"Why—why, doctor," she asked blankly, standing by the bed, "where did they come from? Where are they?"

"What come from?" he asked, with a frown.

"The violets—the violets, doctor! There was a very strong smell of *them* when I came in the room!"



# Words that Came Alive

*Mary  
Caroline  
Davies*

**T**HE war annoyed Le Grange, as neighbors cooking onions would have annoyed him. And, as he would have shut his material doors against the odor of onions, so he shut his spiritual door upon the war, and in the seclusion of his own personality tried to forget that there were people in the world so ill bred as to push bayonets in and twist them out at each other.

Le Grange lived in a studio. He not only spent part of his days and all of his nights in one, as do many of us, but he *lived* in his.

In no dreamy, reminiscent, reverie-filled hour, did he ever live partly in the cabin of his brother, who was a forest ranger in northern Idaho, or partly in the bungalow of his sister in California, or in the house in Cleveland where his mother and aunt exchanged thoughts on things to eat and things to embroider and things to take. His spirit was never in any of these places. His thoughts and his interests did not roam abroad. He lived in his studio.

Le Grange was thirty-two. He was

not interested in people either in the mass or as separated units. He lived among the skyscrapers of New York, not among the people. No baby across the aisle in the subway had ever changed a muscle in his face. He had never given a penny to a child on the street.

Le Grange had never been in love. His affection for his mother had not greatly influenced his life. His family were really not interesting people, and he was discerning enough to have observed it. His actions were little influenced by emotion. He had a chaste regard for beauty of words and color and sound, but his joy in them was not really so much pleasure as it was the necessary accompaniment to the intelligence of a cultivated man.

He was well satisfied. He wanted no change in his life. He had pulled his daily existence, as it were, on to the track of his choosing, and he wished it to run on this track as long as it ran at all. It seemed possible, probable, almost inevitable that it would do so.

He knew that words sometimes come alive and rend their creator. But he

had such perfect control of his subjects that he felt almost scorn for them.

A good number of Le Grange's lyrics had been set to music, but he never sang them, bought them, listened to them or thought at all about them. He believed that to say that a poem would "set" well, damned it as mediocre. He thought all songs beneath any one's notice but that of the "man in the street," for whom he had always had a contempt and horror.

He considered war songs particularly absurd. Patriotic songs were like one's children, one liked them for their *raison d'être*, and not for any good qualities they might possess.

He wrote a war song. But that was only for money and to oblige the composer, who was sincere, and wrote the music for it with the fervor which he would have liked to put behind a bayonet directed at the kaiser's stomach.

The song took well. The composer became wealthy. Le Grange, also, became wealthy. The composer spent his money with the complacency of a man who, while being willing to do a good deed for itself, still is not displeased to find that virtue is not its only reward.

Le Grange did not feel any particular glow from duty accomplished. He did realize that his lines were rather neatly turned. The words were well put together, they had an effective sound. Especially three or four words in the middle of the chorus.

Newspapers pointed out the fact that it was songs like Le Grange's that stiffened the morale of an army and of a nation. It was undoubtedly true that the song did have a very definite effect. Tired soldiers sang it and felt their old fighting fury come back and sustain them.

Mothers and sweethearts sang it, and singing, sent their men to the front. It was used at recruiting meetings and spurred many men to enlist.

All this stirred no answering thrill in the breast of Le Grange. What happened to the song and its singers was no concern of his. He really could not be expected to care about the victims of a piece of hack work.

If his song—and the composer's music—sang some men to dissolution, and others to the spiritual force where they created their souls, that was their affair.

If his song swung a nation into step, saved it from annihilation, carried it on to victory—what was that to him? They *were* rather clever words, especially those in the middle of the chorus, three or four, wasn't it? He almost forgot what they were, but had a vague recollection that they were clever.

One night he woke up sharply to hear those words saying themselves over and over in his mind, the four words halfway through the chorus. It was hours before he could get to sleep. Often when one is half asleep, one feels near insanity, is haunted by the possibility that, if he overworks a bit more, if he neglects proper sleep and rest, he may some day go insane. Before the words would let him sleep, this thought had grinned at Le Grange. The next morning he shrugged at the whole affair. He was rather pleased, indeed, that the thing had happened, since it proved that the words were catchy; no wonder they got hold of the people, if they got hold of even him, their blasé creator, who knew of what they had been born.

Several days later, as he was strolling up the Avenue, he suddenly found that he was keeping step to the words, rhythmically walking to them, and saying them over and over very distinctly in his mind. It annoyed him. He changed his step, he trailed, he walked faster. He knew that he must be looking ridiculous, but he was determined once for all to put a stop to this. The words were good, but he did not wish



their excellence for their purpose proved to him in this way.

It was not until he met a friend, and in the few sentences they exchanged, forgot what plagued him, that he was able to throw off the influence of the pursuing words.

After that, there were not three consecutive days of his life, that were not broken into by misery for a space, while his words tormented him to their heart's desire. He grew afraid to sleep. He grew afraid to walk. He grew afraid to be alone.

But even now he did not see what the words wanted, what they were trying to do.

Suddenly one day, as he was standing on a corner of Forty-second Street and Sixth Avenue, he knew. He gradually became aware that he was facing a recruiting poster. And as the sight of it pierced through the wall of his preoccupation, in one agonizing flash he knew what the words wanted, and in that same instant knew that they must win. Their attack upon him at the moment was so sudden, and their torture so clever and acute that, as a man with a burned hand pulls it from the stove, or a man hurt with thirst seizes a glass of water and drinks it for relief, automatically he entered the place and signed himself away into service as a private.

Le Grange went to a training camp, and eventually to Europe and to the front. Throughout the months which passed, he was rebellious, but the words gave him no opportunity to be outwardly anything but complacent.

When his section was told off for duty in the trenches, he was afraid, horribly afraid. He was almost a maniac with fear. But the words were spurring him, goading him, commanding him, and his control was too weak now to oppose them.

On the morning when the men waited for the last minutes to pass before they went over the top, his fear was a monstrous thing that stretched him upon the rack of his sensitiveness. It was now that the words came into their own. Their insistence, their dominance, their tormenting of him, reached their hideous climax in those few moments. It was as if the words were telling him that this was what it had all been for, this was what they had brought him here for; the seeing that he was in this particular place at this particular moment, was the task that, whatever ruler there may be of words in some invisible realm, had sent them to accomplish.

At the breaking moment in the tension of the men, at last the command came; and they charged with the eagerness of those last moments added to the eagerness engendered in them by what they had seen and felt and suffered in the months of their waiting.

Somewhere out in No Man's Land, Le Grange fell. He was badly wounded, and in some strange way by which soldiers often know the fact, some way quite removed from scientific or medical knowledge, Le Grange knew that his wound was a mortal one. He knew besides that he did not have long to live, a few hours perhaps. He was in great pain. But strangely, he was happy for the only time since the night when he had first awakened and thought of that especially clever part of the song, about the middle of the chorus. For the words had stopped torturing him.

He died quite quietly at last, and in the eight hours in which he lay there alone before his death, the words did not once intrude. They had done what they had been given to do. Their work was ended.

# Crimson Flowers

~~by~~ **Tod  
Robbins**



**J**OHN CAREWE was working in his garden. Far away, over the distant hilltops, the dying sun hung like a huge paper lantern on an invisible wire. Against this lurid background the small, bent figure of the old man resembled a spider weaving its web before the open grate.

Leaning on the hedge, I spoke to him. "So you are at work again, Mr. Carewe. How are your flowers progressing?"

Dropping his shovel nervously, he turned his yellow, shrunken face toward me. From the midst of the roses it looked like a misplaced sunflower.

"So you have been watching me," he cried in a shrill, quavering voice. "That is good for people—to watch me at work. It may teach them other things than gardening."

"What, for instance?"

"Why, life itself. The mind is a garden, my friend. What lies hidden there must spring to life. These flowers are crimson thoughts. See how quickly they grow—grow into deeds if I do not cut them each day. So must all men do if they would live in the sunlight; they must cut the crimson thoughts out of their gardens, even as I."

Once more he bent over his flowers. Picking up the shears with grim satisfaction, he began cutting off their languid, drooping heads.

"But this must be a very wicked garden," I said. "What is buried here?"

"Ah," said he, "you would like to know that, eh? What a man my son was! You can have no idea—such a sly one, such a cruel one, such a blood-thirsty one! Crimson thoughts were in his head continually, but now they grow nicely in my garden. He ruined me; he tortured me; he made my head revolve on my shoulders—yes, actually revolve like a wheel.

"But now I have him here, and he supports me in my old age. Each day I sell his thoughts—his evil, crimson thoughts. What a revenge that is! He lies there, grinding his teeth because of it, and he can do nothing—nothing.

"When the hangman was through with him they gave me what was left for my garden. But have a thought, lady; have a crimson thought for a remembrance."

So saying, he rose and hobbled toward me with a single flower in his hand—a flower that glowed like a hand-ful of the bloody sunset in the west.



# At the Hands of the Master

Everett  
McNeil

THE moment I seated myself on one of the benches in Washington Square I saw the man with the slight limp in his right leg. My attention was first drawn to him by the sharp staccato sound produced by the iron point of his heavy, curiously twisted cane hitting at regular intervals the hard cement of the walk. It was held by the odd way he kept turning his head from side to side as he advanced between the two rows of occupied benches that lined each side of the walk. As he drew near I saw, with each turn of his head, a rapierlike glance from a pair of deep-set, glinting eyes flash swiftly out from under the black brim of his soft felt hat and transfix, for an instant, some occupant of a near-by bench. Then as swiftly it would dart back and out again to the face of some one seated on the opposite side of the walk.

I watched him curiously as he advanced toward me, wondering greatly what his odd actions meant. Evidently he was seeking some one, and yet I felt sure that it was not some one he already knew. There was no eager ex-

pectancy, as if he were searching for a friend or an acquaintance, in the look he flashed into the faces, only a quick, keen, intense scrutiny that seemed capable of reaching to the very soul at the first glance.

A long black overcoat, with a long black cape, reaching below the hands—it was a chilly day in early April—hung loosely about his tall, gaunt, raw-boned frame. His hair was long, jet-black, and fell in a mop to his shoulders. These, the black cape, the black mop of hair, and the broad black brim of his hat, accentuated like a fitting frame a face striking in its dark-yellow pallor, in the peculiar greenish glint of its intense black eyes and in the angular prominence of its bones. There did not appear to be a soft line or curve anywhere on the face. He was a foreigner. His features and dress told me this; but told me little more, except that I felt quite certain he was not a European. He was probably an Asiatic; but of an unfamiliar type, at least to my eyes.

Be that as it may, his appearance, his actions at once aroused my interest,



my curiosity, and the nearer he came the louder the regular tap-tap of the iron point of his cane sounded, the greater became that interest, that curiosity.

I do not think I took my eyes off him once as he approached. I watched his every glance with anxious interest, hoping that it would reveal the object of his search. I felt sure that the discovery meant very much to him. There was an intensity in his swift glances, in his actions, in the way he held his body, that showed how great was the tension of his nerve forces. He looked and acted like a man searching for something desperately needed, something that he might find at any moment or might not find at all.

When he was almost in front of me I involuntarily lifted my eyes to his face and met his eyes. I literally felt the thrust of that swift, intense glance—and it chilled like cold steel. When directly in front of me the man stopped and stood motionless for a moment.

"I cannot be mistaken," he said, still thrusting with his eyes and speaking slowly, with an odd foreign accent and tone. "You are the one man I want."

"How can that be?" I answered, startled. "I never saw you before. How, then, can you want me?"

He paid not the slightest attention to my words, to my question; but, slipping the crook of his cane over his right wrist, he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a card.

"Ring bell at this address at exactly six o'clock this evening." He handed me the card. "Bylif will admit you."

I took the card mechanically, hardly knowing what I did. I really saw nothing, felt nothing, but those two intense eyes boring into mine.

"This"—again the hand was thrust into the pocket—"is for yourself," and he dropped a gold piece into the palm of my hand. "There will be more when your work is completed. At exactly

six o'clock this evening, remember. Now I go to make ready for your coming."

With a last piercing glance he turned sharply from me and limped off in the direction whence he came without a glance in my direction, as if there could be no doubt of my obeying his strange commands.

The sharp click of his departing cane broke the spell—I had been like one in a hypnotic trance—and I jumped to my feet. Why? I do not know to this moment. Possibly it was with the intention of following the man and questioning him; possibly to hand back the coin he had given me and to decline his strange mission.

All had happened so abruptly, so unexpectedly, and so queerly that my mind was in too great confusion to record anything clearly. Whatever may have been my intentions, when I stood on my feet I did nothing, only stared after the man until he had passed out of sight behind a clump of foliage. For a minute longer my tensely listening ears heard the sharp, staccato sound of the metal point of his cane hitting the hard cement of the walk. Then it died away in the distance.

The feel of the heavy coin in my hand now arrested my attention. I glanced down, and, with a start of surprise, saw that a gold double eagle lay shining on the palm of my hand.

Twenty dollars!

And a moment before I had been absolutely penniless! And I was told there would be more to follow, if—

I looked hastily and with curiosity greatly awakened down at the card the man had given me and which I still held in my hand. It was a plain white card, bearing the following imprint in black type:

**RANJI TSHAH KHILJI**  
Mahatma .

Delhi, India

13A Perry Street

New York City

From the mystery of the card I turned quickly to a man seated near me with the heavy links of a gold chain stretched prominently across his stomach.

"Will you be so kind as to tell me the time?" I asked.

The man ponderously drew out his watch and glanced at it. "Quarter after five," he answered.

"Thanks," and I hurried off in the direction of Sixth Avenue.

The hands of the clock in the Jefferson Market tower had just reached six o'clock when I hurried up the steps of the high front stoop that gave entrance to the sedate-looking brownstone front of the house at 13A Perry Street. There was nothing suspicious about the outward appearance of the place. It looked like hundreds of other brownstone houses in New York City. However, I thought it a little queer that the windows opening on the street were all hung with heavy black velvet behind the graceful folds of their rich lace curtains, so that it was impossible to get a glimpse of the interior.

Not a sound, not a sign of life came from within as I paused a moment on the top step to listen before pushing the electric-bell button.

A full minute passed without a sound coming from within that silent house, and I was about to place my finger on the button again when I heard the soft pit-pat of footfalls, like the sound of a heavy beast walking on a soft carpet of grass, approaching the door. Then the door swung softly open, and there stood in front of me a huge black man. To my startled eyes he looked fully seven feet tall and broad in proportion, even for that height.

A snow-white turban crowned his head, great gold earrings hung from his ears, a sleeveless tunic of the softest and whitest silk, fell from his shoulders almost to his knees and was gathered about his waist by a belt made from the

skin of a cobra, the head and fangs forming the buckle and the red jeweled eyes shining venomously. His great arms and the legs to a little above the knees were bare. On his feet he wore a pair of soft leather sandals.

A magnificent figure of a man he looked as he stood there in the doorway, the soft red light of the hall lamp that hung a few feet behind him causing his form to stand out with startling distinctness.

"You were a minute early. That is why I kept you waiting. The Master's commands must be obeyed exactly. I am Bylif. Follow me. The Master awaits you."

He spoke plainly, yet with the same curious foreign accent and tone I had noticed in his employer's voice. The moment he ceased speaking he stepped aside for me to enter, and softly closed the door behind me. I heard the click of the lock as the key snapped it into place. Then he turned from the door and led the way toward the far end of the hall, where heavy folds of black velvet concealed a wide doorway. His feet sank into the thick rug that covered the hall floor at every step, and again, in fancy, I heard the sound of the pit-pat of a heavy beast walking softly over grass, even as I had heard the footfalls of a man-eating tiger in the jungles of Asia.

"This is beginning well," I, thought as I followed Bylif. The door locked behind me, the giant black man, the darkened house, the silence, disturbed only by our footfalls on the soft rug. Yes, a good beginning that promises much; but what can it all mean? This is not Bagdad, or Delhi, but New York!

At that moment Bylif placed his hands on the heavy folds of black velvet that hung in front of the doorway at the far end of the hall, and, holding them apart, bowed and turned to me.

"The Master is within. Enter," he

said, making an arched way for me under his great right arm.

For an instant I hesitated, and as I did so I thought I saw the great black form stiffen and a savage glint come into the eyes. But the lure of the adventure was now hot in my blood and drove out all thoughts of possible perils. Eager as a boy to be at the mystery of these strange doings, I stepped under the great arm and between the parted folds of velvet into the room beyond.

As first I could see nothing, for there was no light in the room; but I could feel the presence of Bylif standing a pace behind me, and I knew that he had closed the parted folds of the heavy portières, through which we had entered, for no light came from the hall. I took two steps into the room and stopped, a fearful dread creeping into my heart.

"The Master is coming." Bylif's voice was low and reverent, like the voice of one speaking in the holy of holies. "Listen!"

Low, weird strains of enchantingly beautiful music now came to my ears, while at the same moment a soft radiance began flooding the room with a peculiar golden-tinted light. I saw that the walls and the windows of the large room in which I stood were hung with black velvet, excluding all light from without, that even the ceiling was canopied with the same material, and that the floor was covered with a heavy black velvet rug.

Directly in the center of the room and some two paces in front of me stood a couch covered with a great robe of black velvet. Close by the side of the couch were two chairs, one a great, comfortable armchair that seemed to invite repose, and the other a rigid, armless, straight-backed chair, apparently made from the blackest of ebony and highly polished.

Some two paces in front of the big, comfortable chair was a small, gleam-

ing ebony table with a top of the whitest of polished marble. On this table stood a great polished crystal ball at least a foot in diameter and so made that it could be revolved swiftly on its supporting sockets.

I shuddered involuntarily as my eyes glanced around this ominously furnished room, and I was about to turn to Bylif, determined to ask him what all this mysterious mummery meant, when the hangings at the end of the room parted, the golden light grew brighter, the mysterious music sounded louder and nearer.

Finally, from between the parted folds, stepped a tall figure, clothed completely in white, from the silk turban that crowned the top of the head and the loose folds of the silk tunic that covered the body and the limbs to the soft sandals on the feet.

It needed but a glance from those piercing black eyes for me to recognize in this startling apparition the man who had given me those strange commands in the park.

Bylif fell on his knees, and, with hands outstretched, bowed his head thrice to the floor before the tall figure.

I remained standing, smiling a little to think that the man should imagine that he could awe or impress an American by any such weird stage settings; yet I had a slowly increasing dread of what these strange and elaborate settings might portend.

The mahatma bowed, and, seating himself in the straight-backed chair, motioned me to take the big comfortable chair, which was so placed that he could look me directly in the face.

I sat down, wondering greatly what was coming and beginning to feel that I had been a fool to rush so rashly into this strange adventure, yet not willing even now to take a backward step.

Bylif rose from the floor and took his station behind the Master's chair.

"I am here and ready to learn what



is wanted of me," I said as I turned my eyes to the face of the Master. "Speak, for I am becoming impatient of all this mummerly."

He made no answer, but sat stiffly erect in the hard, straight-backed chair, his eyes looking steadfastly into my eyes as if they were fathoming the very depths of my soul.

The golden light now illuminated the dark face, so that I could see its features distinctly. Never have I seen a human face that looked less human, in the sense of being subjected to human feelings, passions, and emotions. It was as if he had slipped a marble mask over his features. Only his eyes appeared to live.

For a moment we sat thus in silence, his eyes looking steadfastly into my eyes, then the marble lips moved.

"Yes," he said, "I was right. You are the man I want—the one man I want."

He placed a hand in the bosom of his tunic and drew out a small richly embroidered leather bag.

"In this bag are one hundred gold pieces—American gold pieces—and the eye of Urr. Keep the jewel, for Urr watches over its possessor; but spend the gold as freely as you like. I hand the bag to Bylif. He will give it to you when you go from the house after you have served."

As he spoke he held the bag up over his right shoulder for Bylif to take, but not for an instant did the glance from his eyes leave my eyes. Bylif took the bag and slipped it into the folds of his tunic under the cobra belt.

"The service you are to do is a great service." Again the marble lips moved. "It is just that its reward should be great. But fear not. No harm can come to you from it now or hereafter. All is ready. We will begin Bylif!"

The servant stepped forward, and, going to the small black ebony table that stood directly in front of me, with

the crystal ball on its white marble top, touched a black button in the side of the table. Instantly the crystal ball began revolving, at first slowly, but with an ever-increasing speed that soon transformed it into a swiftly whirling globe of glimmering lights.

Again and again, during these brief scenes, I had tried to speak, had tried to move, but I could not utter a sound, could not move a muscle. I had not been able to do so since the Master had seated himself in the straight-backed chair and had looked into my eyes. Yet, strange as it may seem, I had no anxiety, no fear because of this strange condition of mind and body, only a great curiosity and a greater desire to know what all this was the prelude to. The Master had said that no harm would come to me, and no one who had looked into the Master's eyes could doubt his word.

Now I felt my gaze irresistibly drawn to the whirling globe. At the same moment Bylif, the giant black man, stepped directly behind the crystal, and, stretching out his great arms, began to whirl swiftly around on his two feet.

Behind Bylif the heavy folds of black velvet that concealed a small alcove parted and I saw three musicians—the source of the weirdly beautiful music—step between the parted curtains and out into the room and arrange themselves, one behind the other, directly back of the huge turning figure. As each took his place he began to whirl swiftly around on his feet, even as Bylif and the crystal were doing, all the while keeping up the music on his odd instrument. They were dark-skinned thin men, dressed in white turbans and tunics, and looked as if they had just stepped off the streets of one of the native villages of India.

The Master now arose slowly from his chair and came and stood by my side, resting one hand softly on the top of my head and bending a little down-

ward so that he could look closely into my face.

His hand was cool, wondrously cool and pleasant and quieting to my excited nerves. I attempted to lift my eyes to his face, but could not take them off the whirling globe and the spinning figures beyond.

"Peace be with you." The Master spoke softly. "Peace go with you. Rest, peace, and sleep. Soul rest, body rest. Sleep—sleep—and—dream!"

His words came more slowly, more drowsily, with pauses between each word, and an irresistible languor began stealing slowly over my senses. The crystal globe, the whirling Bylif, and the three swiftly revolving musicians became white, fantastic, ever-changing blurs to my tired eyes.

I longed, above all things, to close my eyes, to shut out the sight of those tiresome gyrating blurs, but I could not. Heavy fingers seemed to hold my eyelids apart, and a force outside of myself compelled me to keep my eyes fixed on the spinning blurs.

The music now became like that which one hears in a dream, low, ethereal, dreamy, soul-entrancing. The golden haze deepened, the whirling figures disappeared in a yellow fog, the music sounded afar off. Like one speaking from a great distance the Master's voice came to my ears.

"Sleep—and—rest. Soul rest—body rest. Sleep!"

The Master's hand reached downward—I could see it dimly—and passed slowly once—twice—three times before my eyes.

Then again the voice of the Master sounded in my ears, sounded all through my body, as if it were commanding every muscle, every nerve, every tissue, every bone and blood drop I possessed—commanding even the soul itself.

"Come forth, come forth, spirit of man. Come forth, come forth, soul of

man. Soul, spirit, do my bidding. Come forth, come forth, I, Ranjit Shah Khilji, the mahatma, command you."

A great dizziness, a sensation of falling from a great height, a whirling, blinding, wrenching at all the moorings of life, vivid flashes of lightning, crashings of thunders. Then a sudden surcease of all sensations—blackness—nothingness.

My knees hurt, as if I had been a long time kneeling on stone. My back ached, as if it had been bent awkwardly for hours. My elbows and forearms felt chilled and sore. I slowly lifted my head and opened my eyes.

I knelt prostrate, with head bowed on the hard stone floor, before the incense-smoking altar of a great temple. Priests and attendants moved mysteriously to and fro in front of the altar. Weird voices were chanting a hymn in a language I knew I had never heard before, and yet I now understood it perfectly. Back of the altar, on a huge pillowlike throne, sat a great gold image of Buddha. Calmly, imperturbably, benignly, the serene face and placid eyes looked out over the moving forms of the priests and the white-robed figures of the prostrate worshippers.

Slowly, dazedly, like one moving in a dream, I arose to my feet. As I did so a white-robed form that had been kneeling by my side also arose. Our eyes met.

It was the Master.

I was neither startled nor terrified at finding myself in the midst of these strange surroundings—not even when I looked into the face of the Master. Like one in a dream, I accepted all appearances, all actions, all happenings, all scenes—however incredible and unnatural they might appear—as if they were the most ordinary occurrences. I felt queerly. I knew I was myself; but I did not seem to be the same person I had been. My body somehow

felt strange to me. Yet I accepted this condition as a perfectly natural one, one that needed no explanation.

"Zaman Shah"—the compelling eyes of the Master were fixed on my eyes as he spoke—"Zaman Shah, son of Shah Malik Kafur, friend of Ayub Khan, the hour has come. Go and perform your mission. Afterward return hither swiftly. Peace go with you."

I made a low obeisance to the Master, and, without a word, turned and walked slowly, with head bowed reverently, between the long rows of worshippers, out through the great and wondrously carved door of the temple and on until I found myself in a little antechamber adjoining the temple. The moment I entered this little room a black servant, bowing low before me, slipped a pair of richly embroidered shoes on my feet, for I had been in stocking feet while in the sacred precincts of the temple, and conducted me through a narrow passageway and out through a small door to where a richly furnished palanquin rested on the shoulders of six men.

The men instantly lowered the conveyance, the bowing servants held apart the heavy silk curtains, and I entered, the servants closing the draperies after me.

Then I was borne rapidly away, the bearers running so easily that I hardly felt a jar. Small, curtained windows on each side and in front of the palanquin enabled me to look out whenever I wished. A richly framed mirror showed me my face, the face of a high caste native of India; but even this extraordinary sight did not startle me.

For half an hour or more we journeyed through the narrow and dirty streets of what must have been one of the large and populous cities of India. Everywhere the people made way for us in fear and haste. Evidently I was now an unusually important personage.

At the end of that time we passed

through a great carved marble gateway, guarded by two native soldiers armed with modern rifles. The guards presented arms, and we passed inside without a question and on through a large and beautiful park to the portals of a white marble palace.

"Wait for me here," I heard my voice saying to my bearers as I stepped out of the palanquin. I did not even think it odd that I should speak their language or that my voice should sound like the voice of a stranger. "I will return shortly."

Through many long and beautifully decorated halls, carpeted with soft thick rugs, past many armed guards, who always presented arms at my approach and stood stiffly erect, past many servants who made most humble obeisances, my conductors led me.

At last they paused before the jewel-embroidered, silken hangings of a great doorway guarded by two armed attendants, and, bowing low before me, held the silken curtains apart and announced:

"Zaman Shah, the beloved, the thrice blessed!"

"Enter, beloved of the Most High. Enter and make glad the eyes of your friend," a deep voice commanded from within.

I stepped between the parted curtains, and found myself in a great room, furnished and adorned with Oriental magnificence. Near the center of the room a fountain, guarded by marble nymphs, played into a large marble basin. Graceful swans floated on the surface of the pool, and gold and silver fish flashed through its waters. Great rugs, soft as feathers to the feet, covered the floor. Rich tapestries hung from the walls. Luxuriant divans, buried under soft silken pillows, invited repose. Golden censers, from which floated yellow clouds of sweet-smelling incense, swung from the ceiling.



On a divan near the pool reclined a richly dressed, dark-featured man with a cruel, sensual, passionate face. About him were grouped a number of beautiful female slaves. Some were playing on native musical instruments, some were dancing, and others were frolicking in the pool, darting and swimming about like mermaids—a wondrous scene of Eastern luxury and magnificence.

There was no need of telling me that I stood in the innermost sanctuary of the great prince, Ayub Khan, one of the wealthiest and most powerful of the native princes of India, that I stood there only because I was supposed to be his most intimate and best-loved friend. Somehow, the moment I stepped inside of this magnificent chamber, I knew this. At the same time, I knew that the great purpose that had brought me here was nearing its accomplishment.

I accepted these strange and mysterious doings without question, almost without wonderment, as one accepts the weird happenings of a dream, and yet, back of it all, I felt an implacable purpose controlling my every movement.

I bowed low and stepped forward to go to the prince, and had almost reached the divan where he sat, a smile of welcome on his face, when the silken curtains that concealed a doorway near the divan were thrown violently apart and a beautiful girl, her eyes wild with terror, her hair disheveled, her silken clothing torn, rushed in and threw herself at the feet of the prince.

Hard behind her came the chief of eunuchs, a big brutal negro, from whose clutches she had evidently just escaped. The negro stopped short between the silken hangings, and his black face took on a sickening yellowish pallor at sight of the prince.

"Mercy! Mercy, great prince!" screamed the girl as she clung to his feet. "Mercy! Mercy! I will do your

bidding. I will be the most humble of your slaves, but save me from the death bag and the black waters. Save me from the clutches of that monster!" And she glanced in shuddering dread at the negro.

Prince Ayub Khan jumped to his feet, the smile gone, his face black with rage, his lips drawn back in a wolfish snarl. He glanced from the cringing, terrified girl at his feet to the big negro, standing as if petrified, between the parted curtains.

"Master, master, the sight of the black bag frenzied her. She struggled—the wild cat. She escaped from my hands. I could not catch her. She ran like a fawn. I tried to stop her before she got here, but could not. Now——"

The great brute took a step into the room, his eyes on the girl, his hands outstretched, his fingers spread and curved like the talons of a bird of prey.

"Halt!"

The prince clapped his hands furiously. The negro stopped. The girl cowered at the feet of the prince. A dozen armed attendants rushed into the room. The prince pointed to the negro.

"Seize and bind that man. Throw him into the deepest dungeon of the palace. I'll teach him to bungle my orders."

"Master! Master!" stammered the trembling negro.

"Silence!" stormed the prince.

"Master, I—I—I tried——"

The heavy butt of one of the guns of the attendants struck the negro on the head. He sank, senseless, to the floor and was borne swiftly from the room.

The furious prince now turned to the terrified girl clinging to his feet.

"Here, take this little beast," he commanded. "Tie her in the black bag and throw her to the crocodiles. I'll show you what it means to disobey me, to

come unbidden into my presence," and he glared at the horror-stricken, trembling girls, who had watched this dreadful scene with fear-distorted eyes.

Two of the attendants seized the unfortunate girl and bore her, shrieking, from the room.

The prince sank down on the soft pillows of the divan and turned to me with the smile of welcome on his face.

"Come, my friend, take this soft cushion by my side. I will have Zillia dance for us. Her feet are like moonbeams on murmuring waters, and her form is more graceful than a lily swaying in the wind. It was for her that I sent Arilla—the jealous little beast—to the black bag and the crocodiles. Peace go with her!" He smiled lightly. "Come, sit beside me and watch my Zillia dance." And he started to make place for me on the divan by his side.

"Nay, my beloved prince, whose kind heart thinks only of giving his friend pleasure," I again heard my strange voice saying, "I have something more delightful than the dancing of Zillia, more pleasing than the smile of a peri in paradise, that I would show my prince; but there must be no other eyes to see, no other ears to hear." Bending low, I whispered in his ear: "The queen of all jewels, the eye of Urr, from the innermost holy of holies of the most sacred temple of Urr, the seven-times guarded sacred temple of Urr, the jewel my prince has so long and so ardently sought, my love has secured for him. It is a secret that must be most zealously guarded, for death hovers ever over the eye of Urr. Dismiss all, that our eyes alone may look upon its glories." And I thrust my right hand under the folds of my silken robe.

At my whispered words the eyes of Prince Ayub Khan caught fire, his face flushed and paled, his body trembled with eagerness, and, half rising from the divan, he hastily commanded all

leave the room. Then, summoning the two guards at the door, he bade them stand without and permit no one to enter unless at his order.

The girls, still sick with the horror of what they had seen, hurried from the room, the guards vanished, and the prince and I stood alone in that magnificent chamber.

"Now the jewel, the eye of Urr!"

The hand the prince extended toward me trembled.

"This, the eye of Urr sends thee, thou sacrilegious beast!" And, like lightning, my right hand flashed from under the folds of my robe and drove the razor-sharp blade of steel it held into the throat of the prince and left it sticking there.

From the look of dread and horror that came into his eyes as he sank, voiceless and dying, down on the soft cushions of the divan, I knew that the words I had spoken had had in them a more awful meaning to him than it was given me to know.

He clutched wildly at the dagger, but his hands fell nerveless before he could touch its haft. With his glazing eyes staring at me in horror, his body slumped down among the soft cushions—and he was dead.

For a moment I stood and looked down on the terror-frozen face, and it came to me that I had been made the instrument of a just, if terrible, vengeance, whose mysterious workings I was not to fully understand.

Now I turned away from the dead prince and went slowly from the room, still feeling myself under the control of a power I must obey. At the door I paused, and in the name of the prince commanded the two guards standing just outside the rich hangings to allow no one to enter. Then, clapping my hands, I summoned servants to conduct me to my palanquin.

The servants came running, and led me obsequiously through the long halls

of that palace of tragedy to where my men stood waiting.

"To the temple, and go swiftly!" I ordered the bearers as I stepped within the palanquin and pulled down the curtains.

I felt no compunctions, no pangs of conscience, no sorrow for the deed I had done. I was as indifferent to the act as the steel blade I had left sticking in the victim's throat. I had no sense of responsibility in the matter whatever. The hand that struck had not been mine, but the brown-skinned hand of Zaman Shah. How I came to act through the body of Zaman Shah I knew not and cared not. Like an automaton, I had moved as the strings were pulled.

The great temple was deserted when I again entered it, save for one prostrate, white-robed form before the incense-smoking altar and the great gold image of the serene and imperturbable Buddha. I went direct to the prostrate form and knelt close by its side.

"It is done," I heard my voice saying as I knelt.

"And well done," replied the low voice of the Master. "Now we will return."

I turned my face toward the prostrate form by my side and looked into the eyes of the Master. Even as I looked his form faded slowly away, all but the two eyes. The eyes grew larger, approached closer. My head began to whirl. Again came the odd sensation of falling from a great height, the wrenchings at all the moorings of life, the sudden release—then blackness—nothingness.

A cool, powerful hand seemed to pass before my eyes, sweeping away the heavy fog in which all of my senses were struggling. I opened my eyes; but at first I could see nothing distinctly. I was engulfed in a radiant golden haze. Then gradually the mistiness cleared

and things around me began to assume forms and colors. At the same moment my mind, my will, my soul seemed to be released from the grip of a powerful hand, and I knew that I was the captain of my soul again.

I lay in the black velvet room on the couch. By my side stood the Master, looking serenely down into my eyes.

"Your work is done and well done," he said. "You have performed a great, a very great, service to me and to mine and to the cause of right and justice. Peace go with you!"

Crossing his two hands on his bosom, he bowed low, and, turning, disappeared behind the heavy curtains.

Bylif, the giant negro, now entered, wheeling a small table before him, on which was a huge silver tray loaded with a feast fit for a king.

The sight of the food made me at once realize that I was exceedingly hungry, that I felt as if I had not tasted food for days. The moment the table was in front of me I began eating like a half-famished man.

Now the curtains in front of the little alcove where the musicians had been were pulled aside, and three beautiful girls ran joyously out into the room and began to dance and sing. The moment I had finished eating, Bylif waved his hand. The music stopped and the girls disappeared behind the heavy folds of the black velvet that now again concealed the alcove.

"Come," ordered Bylif, and led me out of the black velvet room and through the long hall.

At the door he paused, and, thrusting a hand into the folds of his tunic under the cobra belt, drew out the small, embroidered leather bag that the Master had given him. He unlocked the door, opened it, and, as I stepped out, he handed me the bag.

Then the door closed behind me and I heard the lock snap into place and the soft pit-pat of his footfalls going



away from the door. I paused for a moment on the broad top step and listened. The footfalls died away in the distance. Not a sound of life or motion came from within.

Two minutes later, while hurrying down Greenwich Avenue, I glanced up at the Jefferson Market clock, and was astounded to see that it was only ten minutes after six o'clock.

And I had entered that mysterious building at precisely six o'clock on the even of April 5th.

Could it be possible that I had been in the house less than ten minutes?

Across the street I saw a news stand. A moment later I was staring unbelievably at the date line on one of the papers.

"Monday, June 5th," the line read, and all the different papers on the stand bore the same date.

I fear the news dealer must have thought me insane, for I suddenly caught up one of the papers, thrust it under his nose, and demanded savagely: "Is that date correct?"

"Sure, boss," answered the man, giving me a startled look.

I dropped the paper and hurried away, anxious to get into a room by myself, where I could examine the bag Bylif had given me.

Two months! It seemed incredible, impossible! No wonder I had been hungry!

I hired a room in the first hotel I came to, and the moment I had closed and locked the door behind me I pulled the bag out of my pocket and turned out its contents on the bed.

A hundred twenty-dollar gold pieces lay shining on the white bedspread, and in their midst lay a beautiful, pearl-inlaid, jewel-incrusted ebony box, about the size and shape of a large egg.

At first I could discover no way of opening the egg. Then I noticed a little pearl-headed protuberance about midway between the two ends. When

I pressed this with my thumb the cover sprang open and I saw, in a little nest of silk plush, the largest and most beautiful ruby my eyes have ever beheld, and I have seen some of the world's finest, for, by profession, when I am not running wild on some mad adventure, I am a gem expert. Reverently I lifted the precious jewel out of its nest and examined it carefully. It was perfect and of that exquisite pigeon-blood tint that adds so greatly to the value of an otherwise perfect ruby.

For a long time I sat contemplating this precious jewel, turning it over and over and viewing it in every possible angle of light. Then I fell to wondering over the strange manner in which it had come into my possession. I could not make the thing seem real or even possible. The longer I pondered the matter the greater became my confusion of thought. And yet there were the one hundred gold pieces, the marvelous jewel, the eye of Urr, and the two months that had passed as but two hours!

A month later came a yet stronger and stranger confirmation.

I was in the reading room of a large library when my eyes chanced to fall on a recent copy of the *London Times*. As I glanced over it idly my attention was seized by the headline that glued my eyes to the page.

#### PRINCE AYUB KHAN MYSTERIOUSLY MURDERED.

CALCUTTA, June 25.—News has just reached the officials here of the murder, on June 5th, of Prince Ayub Khan, one of the wealthiest and most powerful, as well as one of the most cruel and licentious nabobs in all India.

The crime was committed by Zaman Shah, the prince's powerful favorite. Ayub Khan was slain by the thrust of a thin, narrow-bladed dagger into his throat, in such a manner as to render his death almost instantaneous and to still all possible outcry. Zaman Shah had been alone with the prince when the crime was committed and, when he left, he had ordered the two guards sta-

tioned outside the prince's private chamber to allow no one to enter.

When the crime was discovered, suspicion at once pointed to Zaman Shah, who was found in a temple, prostrate before an image of Buddha. He denied all knowledge of the deed. Indeed, when arrested, he appeared like one in a trance and acted as if surprised beyond measure to find himself a worshiper in a temple. He stoutly affirmed that he had not been near Ayub Khan on the day of the murder; but the testimony of the servants who had seen him enter the palace and had conducted him to the prince, and that of his palanquin bearers, who had carried him to and from the palace, was decisive. He was promptly tried, found guilty, and executed by the son of Prince Ayub, who had inherited his father's throne.

The motive of the crime is unknown, but it is rumored that an adept from the mysterious, seven-times guarded, sacred temple of Urr, said to be the only living mahatma, a human being believed to have preternatural powers, was seen in the temple where Zaman Shah was found.

Furthermore, it is known that both Zaman Shah and Prince Ayub Khan had aroused the wrath of the priests of Urr by causing the death of one of their number in an attempt to steal their sacred jewel, known as the eye of Urr.

Those wise in the mystic lore of India, shake their heads and, while affirming nothing, hint at many strange things and talk in low whispers, of the marvelous powers of those mysterious beings known as mahatmas.

For a long time I sat staring at the paper, reading the names and the particulars over and over, mystified, horrified, terrified, hardly believing the evidence of my own eyes. There could no longer be any doubt in my mind but that I had been made the innocent instrument, in the powerful hands of the Master, of the killing of Prince Ayub Khan and of the death of Zaman Shah, in some province of far-off India.

But how had the marvel been accomplished?

I have no idea. I only know that the thing happened to me exactly as I have herein written it down.

And yet how could I have killed a man in India and have returned to New York City on the same day—that fateful fifth of June?



## BEYOND A SINGLE DAY

By Philip Kennedy

I DARED not call this growing love of ours  
 A singing imagery of human need  
 Until I knew that it was neither greed,  
 Nor idle hunger that the heart devours.  
 Days come when all of beauty's red, red flowers  
 Shall wither on the stem and turn to seed. . . .  
 We have been mad with love, yet dare we heed  
 The thin, sharp voice that tells of dying powers?

I know, I know that everything men say  
 Conceals the lash, the sting, the fleshly halter;  
 Yet love, those of us who must surely pay  
 Are those that do not dream and always falter,  
 Come let us see beyond a single day,  
 And worship sin upon a scarlet altar.

# The Escape

## ~~Mordant~~ Hall



HE was a little slip of a man with keen dark eyes. One hand was dug deep in his trousers pocket, while the fingers of the other twitched nervously as he made his way through the crowded Café Bourbon, toward our table.

I was seated with French Cosgrave, a man of whom I had heard little good, but who was decidedly interesting as a story-teller. It was only a few minutes before I noticed the little stranger entering the place that I had asked permission to sit at Cosgrave's table, the only one at which there was a vacant chair. Two other seats at our table were also unoccupied. The stranger stood by them for a few seconds, gazing around the café, and finally, with a profound bow to Cosgrave and myself, we heard him say:

"Would you mind very, very much if I were to take a seat at your table? See, every one of ze uzzers are occupied. It is not done as a rule, I am aware——"

"Certainly, certainly," chorused Cosgrave and myself. The stranger rolled his r's melodiously, and there was no disguising the fact that he was a

Frenchman. He sat down and slipped his arms out of his overcoat, and fumbled with something in the right-hand pocket.

"Gif me a *marza gran*," he told the waiter.

From his pocket he pulled, with his left hand, a gold cigarette case, and, snapping it open—always with the left hand—he plucked one of the gilt-tipped cigarettes from the case, and, putting it between his lips, lighted it.

The orchestra struck up Gounod's "Ave Maria," and the first few bars of the accompaniment were sufficient to cause the laughter and hum of conversation to soften gradually, until the audience was only whispering. It was a gathering of the upper-bohemian caliber, where the spendthrift youth and the young-old man delighted to sip French drinks, chat, and listen to the music.

From this place there had come many an exciting piece of news that had filled the leading columns of the newspapers. Three of the handsome orchestra leaders had eloped with wealthy women. Two of the "Four Hundred" once recreated themselves by having a fist



fight, without gloves; another fantastic person, who pretended to write poetry, once sent the patrons into a panic when he produced a live snake at one of the little, round tables, and began caressing it.

At any rate, it would take a nice-sized book to tell everything that had happened to make known the name of the Café Bourbon, and the manager did not indulge in a press agent.

The stranger swept the place with his glistening eyes, and, now and again, devoted himself to the big glass of black coffee that stood on the table before him.

He was about forty-five years old, with heavy, dark eyebrows, and one of those chins alleged to denote a certain amount of will power. He was immaculately clad. In his shirt front were two large black pearls—larger, even, than those worn by the Count of Beau Rivage, and I knew those, as I had seen the old man in Monte Carlo.

That the little man was fastidious was evident from his waxed mustache, the delicate perfume on his fine cambric handkerchief, his small, well-fitting shoes, and the delicate way he flipped the ashes from the end of his cigarette.

I must confess it; I entered the place that night with a premonition that something strange would happen; but I was not prepared for the stranger's sudden words.

"You see," he said, indicating a table twenty feet away, almost directly in front of me, and behind him, "that man wiz ze woman wiz ze white feather in her hat?" He chose a time when there was a lull in the music.

We both looked. The woman had her back turned to our table, the man almost faced me. He was handsome, about the same age as the Frenchman, but decidedly bigger.

"I am going to keel heem when I finish telling you my story." Both of

us started perceptibly, and I observed that Cosgrave paled. "Don't you dare say one word. Cry out, or give a warning, and I will keel who does," he said, with strange calm, rapping the coat-muffled barrel of a revolver on the brass rim of the round marble table.

The point of the pistol was directed between Cosgrave and myself, and a look in the Frenchman's eyes told me that he meant what he said.

"You cannot help heem. He is as good as dead," the little man went on. "But I want so much that some one should hear my story before I do any shooting. I want some one to know that it was not altogezer wrong. Understand?"

We nodded. "And, messieurs, I want you to keep your eyes all ze time on me. Ze first one who regards that couple with a sign gets ze bullet from zis little pistol I hold in my hand. I mean what I say."

His left hand no longer shook, and he gulped down the rest of his coffee, keeping his brilliant eyes fixed on us both.

"You can perfectly well understand that some one must know the story, even if I must die, too. So please be good, and listen—eh?" He raised those eyebrows in a questioning glance, and again tapped the table with the revolver.

"Ten years ago I was in Meudon, which is not far from the beautiful city of Paris. I was then an officer of the finest regiment of cavalry in the French army. The coat was light blue, with black trimmings, and the trousers were scarlet. I could ride a horse, perhaps, better than any man in my regiment, and, though I was not looked upon as a big man, even in my own country, I was not so very small, either.

"At a dance one night, given by the Marquis de Pelliére, I was introduced to the most charming woman I ever met in my life. She was one of those

beautiful French women, with a voice like silver, and, from the first time I kissed her hand, when I left that night, I knew I was in love. Yes, the great French rider, Lieutenant de Ramon, was in love. I did not feel easy the next day. I was happy, and yet I was unhappy. I was glad, and sometimes I was not glad. It was a singular feeling, which I had never before encountered—a wonderful feeling.

"As I rode with my regiment next morning, in parade, before the general, I could see, in the mist before my eyes, the exquisite figure of this wonderful girl. I was gloomy, and yet I thought I had seen in her eyes a sparkle of admiration for me. This is not conceit, as I tell only my story, just as I think it then, and it was, perhaps, her regard that brought me to her feet, a devoted slave. Slave—I would have done anything for her—any, any mortal thing! And I had just met her once, gentlemen."

The stranger paused to strike a match, and, by slightly narrowing my eyes, I could see every movement of the doomed man sitting with his companion.

Occasionally I could even catch words of the conversation between the two. At that time he looked the happiest man in the crowded place. I could feel the beads of perspiration drop from my forehead as I thought that in a few minutes he would be lying stone dead, with a bullet probably marring his handsome face. My hands were clammy, and the palms were wet, and, as I watched that laughing man only a few tables away, I tried to think of some way to tell him he was doomed.

I longed to yell: "Get out! Get out! You, with the woman, over there—run, run for your life!" But even as these thoughts passed in my feverish head, another rap of the pistol sent a shiver through me.

"*Nom de Dieu*, will you keep your

eyes here? Right here on me, or I blow out your brains in an instant. He might better die than you, eh, monsieur? He is a man who deserves death, and you will be a martyr for him, eef I keel you. Come, now, be good, and look always here at me. Once not—puff, bang—and then it is over, quite over, for you. I mean it, every little word."

"Paris is an ungodly hole, filled with a gang of beings who wish to suck every cent from Americans——" I caught this one sentence in the dead silence from the man with the woman with the white feather in her hat. And that plumage shook and nodded, bent and bowed, in the draft from the opening doors.

The little Frenchman smiled sneeringly. "You hear what he say? *Sacré cochon!* I make heem say somezing else before I shoot heem. But, where was I in my love tale? Ah, I know. I say I would do any mortal zing for her. Yes, I would even have sat on my fine big black charger in the Grand Place of Meudon, and yelled to the crowd as they passed: 'I love Mademoiselle Pacard!' And they could think what they willed.

"I was in the Rue de l'Ombre when I saw her the second time, and, in one sweet, beautiful, mellow voice, she told me I could come wiz her on her walk in the town. Did I accept? I should think so, and most quick, too. I laugh with great happiness as I walked wiz her. I tole her she was most sweet, exquisite; and her pretty face become all red with blushes to the roots of her blue-black hair. She say she like my uniform, and zen, without waiting, I immediately tell her: 'I 'ope, dear mademoisellé, that you like not only my uniform?' To which she answer that she likes also ze Lieutenant de Ramon. And, messieurs, I blush also with great happiness. Nevaire before had I been tole such a zing in so sweet a manner."

Again the Frenchman paused, living in the thrill of his own story.

Through my narrowed eyes I saw the doomed man puffing rings of smoke toward the low ceiling of the room.

"The music's good here. We'll come again to-morrow night," I heard him say.

The Frenchman did not wince, and I hardly think he could have heard the utterance.

"Come again to-morrow night," I thought. "To-morrow night they'll be thinking where they'll bury you. And 'twill be the grandest piece of excitement that even old Café Bourbon has put forth."

I wanted excitement; I wanted to be thrilled; but I did not wish to see any man murdered in cold blood while I looked on, knowing his fate. No man was bad enough, in my opinion, to be stripped of life in a second, without fair warning—nothing more than a glimpse of the round hole at the end of a pistol barrel—and then a pop. It was a death for a murderer. And, there before me, as a drop of perspiration fell to the marble from my temple, was the same pistol; harmless until an insignificant human had touched the trigger with just one finger; and at that instant a life was to go out.

"She learn," the story-teller went on in the same easy, glib tones, now getting to French-English, and then to even Anglo-Saxon pronunciation, "how much I love her when one day I stop her horse when it was running away. I was on horseback, and she was driving. I save her life that day, she afterward tole me. 'Will you give me back that life?' I ask, all the fervor of a man in love, many days afterward.

"'Yes, I will,' she answer.

"'You will marry me?' I ask again.

"'Yes, François, I will be your wife.'"

With irritating coolness, the Frenchman reached forward with his left hand

for the matches, and held up a light for my cigar. While I pulled to get a light, I thought a loud yell would startle every one in the place, and the little Latin would be foiled in his effort to get his man's life. But, as I looked down, the sight of the half-cocked pistol silenced me, and I knew that it might silence me for good and all, were I to utter a word.

There was something in the stranger's calm that denoted business—a killing business. I might even lose my own life, and still the other man would die, too. I could not turn to see Cosgrave, and was as helpless as a lamb.

The man with his fair companion with the big feather in her hat was talking earnestly. "No, Thursday," I caught, "I'm going to dine with Crawford, in Delmonico's. We're going to have a roaring time. It's his bachelor dinner. He's to be married on Saturday."

And still the stranger seemed unperturbed at the words; or was he too interested in his own story to even hear the conversation of the man and the woman?

By some fiendish design the orchestra began the slow, weary music of Chopin's "Funeral March." To me that was a certain sign that some one would die. Never before had I thought I was a physical coward, and yet here was a man about to be killed, and I did not have courage enough to warn him because of the pistol in a small man's hand.

Moisture welled from my face and poured down my cheeks. I was hot and cold in turns, like one suffering from a chill. Every instant I expected to hear the bang of the little pistol. It startled me every time the right hand of the desperate man moved and made a clinking sound with the barrel on the brass rim of the table. His scheme, to me, was diabolical, and he seemed to gloat over the fact that Cosgrave



and I showed ourselves such utter cowards. I listened again.

"For months and months we were as happy as two children. I think she love me almost as much as I did her. My family had plenty of money, and they send me every time just so much as I wanted. We had one fine home, with horses and carriages, automobiles, and life was what you Americans call a dream. She love to see me in my uniform, and I had many bright new ones made. One day I meet one fine Englishman, and he tell me that he is in a hard fix, and, as I had been introduced to him by a great frien' of mine, I lend heem money. Pretty soon his big check comes, and he pay me back everything, and give a big dinner to myself and my wife.

"Your wife is one of the most beautiful women ever I have seen,' he say one day to me. And my answer is that I think she is the prettiest woman I also have ever set eyes on.

"Only a soldier can get such a woman to fall in love with him,' he return to me with a wink.

"Afterward he come often to see me. In his English riding clothes he look a very handsome man, and he could ride like one of your cowboys. Just to show my wife one day how well he could sit in the saddle he do a trick. He pick up a handkerchief from the groun'.

"She look, laugh, and clap him for his cleverness, and then I, jealous of the applause my wife give to the Englishman, try the same thing, too. I fail, and my wife laugh in a different way. I was not pleased."

As if mocking the Frenchman while he told his story, the man before me, looking at the woman, laughed loudly and heartily. "He was a cunning little beggar," I heard; and the woman's silvery laughter echoed as the humdrum music of the funeral march still continued.

But the voice of the story-teller drew

my attention like a magnet. "After that I find the Englishman visiting my wife much while I am absent, and, though she tell me she cares nozzing for him, and don' want to see him, there is not the truth sound in her tone. So jealous was I that I was mad. I tell her then I keel ze Englishman if he bother her, and she laugh and say there is no use for that.

"One day I smile when I see him thrown from his horse, and I wish only my wife see him also. He was white and pale, and could not talk when he was picked up, and when they take off his coat and his shirt I was there. I hoped he would die. I see then on his chest a big, red mark, which comes from the birth. It was like a triangle shape, and, to my mind, was very singular. When you see that man dead, I tell you I shall shoot, you will also find on his chest the red triangle. If not, you will know I have keeled a man by mistake. But I know my man by his face.

"Well, like all devils, he get well; and my wife, she nurse him in the hospital. Sometime' I wish I was ill, so I could also be nursed by my beautiful wife. Before I come, I see they talk much; and, when I am there they talk little. It was suspicious, and I was mad jealous.

"When does he go away?" I say to myself; but he get perfectly well, and stay in Meudon. He tell me one day he think he will marry a Frenchwoman, and stay alway in Meudon.

"Then come one time when the regiment is ordered out on the road to maneuver, and I am forced to go and leave the Englishman in Meudon. I say to my wife to come along from town to town with me, and she agree. Two days afterward I wait my wife in one small town. She does not come, and I am ill with wonder.

"I sent her a telegram, and there comes no answer. I sent still another,

and there is also no response. I am so impatient I run back to Meudon, and find my wife is not in the house. I asked the servants, and discover she has been gone three whole days. I seek the Englishman, and find he also has gone. Then, when I ask others, I am told they left the depot togezzor on a train for Paris. My love had gone out of my life. Then I keel him for that; but now, after I think it over, I would forgive him if I hear not afterward of what he did to the poor woman."

"Dum-dum-te-dum," the bass viol sounded, and then came the higher notes of the violin. It was very near the man's end, I thought.

The shrimpish man paused as if he wished to lend more dramatic emphasis to his plot to end his enemy's life.

That enemy, who was alleged to have a triangular birthmark on his chest, was calling the waiter, and attentively I strained my ears to catch whether he was giving a fresh order or asking for the check.

Then, not daring even to put my hands to my burning head, I saw him put his hand in his pocket and pull out a roll of bills. Suddenly it flashed across my mind that the man might get away with his life if the stranger was so engrossed in his story that he did not observe the pair were leaving the café.

I think my eyes widened their vision then, for I could distinctly gaze at the Frenchman, and, at the same time, see the man who was doomed to be killed if he were seen leaving. I realized that the slightest movement of an eyelash would, perhaps, give an inkling to the Frenchman as to what was happening behind him. My face seemed to me as if it had been bathed in moisture, and I could see the drops on the marble in front of me. Never before had I known what real fear was.

The hat with the white feather moved forward and then downward, and my

beating pulse throbbed as I thought that the Frenchman might hear the sound of the moving chairs behind him, despite all the other noise.

Thank Heaven, the music played on! I wish to see no man killed, not even one I did not know, if he *had* stolen a man's wife.

I could hear the singing sound of money as it fell on the marble table, and I knew the waiter was getting his tip. The stranger, oblivious, apparently, to what was happening to the man, continued his story in the same deliberate manner.

"I took a train for Paris, and searched every hotel, big and small. I could find no trace of the Englishman and my wife. I gave orders to sell my home in Meudon, and then told my father and mother I was going to take a journey for my health. They believed I was ill, and I dared not tell them what had happened. I went to London, and lived there for years, went back and forth from Paris, occasionally going to see my father.

"My mother died, and she asked, in her dying breath, why my wife had not come to see her when she was ill. I became a member of several clubs in London, and every time I encountered an unfamiliar member I stared at him in the face to see if it was the man I wanted. One day I heard a Frenchwoman was dying in a London hospital. Nervously I went up to see who it was, and, to my horror, found my beautiful wife, thin and much aged. She told me the Englishman had brought her to London, and then, when he lost his money, forced her to go to artists and act as a model for them. I forgave her before she died, but vowed I would keel the man. I told her that—yes, I told her that.

"Year after year passed——"

Here, once more, I lost the thread of the story, so keen was my attention to every movement of the man who was

now about to leave with the woman of the white feather. He pushed back his chair, and the grating sound, although I am by no means a nervous man, caused me to shudder. There was a mirror back of me, and I thought the Frenchman might see the couple reflected in it.

They were terribly slow about leaving, and I longed to shout: "Hurry, hurry!" The woman was now standing, and the waving feather bobbed up and down. They both started to leave.

The Frenchman's eyes were blazing. He was in no mood to be interrupted. They walked just back of his table, and I felt Cosgrave shudder. His chair slipped a little, and there was an ugly grin on the story-teller's face. The pistol turned a little in my direction, and, although my eyes gazed directly into those of the Frenchman, I followed the white feather. The door was opening.

I gave them time and thought both had escaped, and was about to give vent to a sigh of relief when I saw the man coming back, evidently for something he had forgotten. Would he ever go? Or was he really doomed to be meat for the Frenchman's weapon?

He had forgotten his gloves, and I saw him stand—it seemed for minutes—but it must have been for one brief second, as he tipped the waiter who handed them to him.

Slowly he seemed to crawl toward the door, and then, to add to my horror, the door went to with a slam. Every movement of the pair was accentuated, and my agony of mind made my vision almost double and my hearing wonderfully acute.

The funeral march stopped. To me it was the longest piece ever played in the Café Bourbon. The door had been closed one second—two seconds—three seconds.

I counted by my beating pulse the time, hoping they would be able to get

far away before the Frenchman finished his story.

"So I just came in here," I heard him beating his way along, "and thought that before bed I would take one large glass of coffee. Some people take it for their nerves to keep them awake; but me, it makes me sleep. Nevaire did I think for an instant that in this very place, where I had not been before, would I find the man for whom I had looked with such care for so many years. And to-morrow I was to leave for London! Yet here it was that I found him." He paused an instant, and then: "I must be grateful to a wonderful Providence—very, very grateful."

He turned to look at the table, and his forehead wrinkled when he saw it was empty. He had talked too long, and I wondered what he was going to do.

Suddenly he jumped to his feet, and, with a catlike movement, swiftly turned. Before I could find my tongue he was out of the door.

My first shout to Cosgrave was a feeble one; I darted after the stranger, overturning the very table at which the couple had been seated, and ran out of the café into the street, staring in a half-dazed condition at a departing automobile, in which the little Frenchman was speeding up Fifth Avenue.

I was satisfied they had escaped, and called to Cosgrave, who, I thought, was following me. I looked around, and he was not there, and once again, with a feeling of freedom such as I have never before experienced, I pushed open the door of the Café Bourbon.

"That's one of 'em," I heard the head waiter say.

In an instant I was tackled by two big waiters, and they half dragged me to where I had been sitting.

Under the table, with his legs sprawled, was Cosgrave. "Unconscious with fright," I thought.



A man who appeared to be a physician helped the attendants of the café to carry Cosgrave into an anteroom.

"Dead, stone dead," whispered the doctor.

"How did it happen?" chorused the crowd that had managed to force an entrance to the small room. "Who killed him?"

The doctor pulled down his shirt, and felt his heart.

"Heart failure," was the laconic verdict of the physician.

I looked over at the relaxed countenance of the dead man. Then I gazed at his exposed chest.

On the right-hand side was a triangular red birthmark.

I did not tell any one the real cause of Cosgrave's death. He just died there—that was all. But now the smell of a *marza gran* makes me ill; when a public funeral passes, playing Chopin's dirge, I turn into a side street and hurry blocks out of my way to escape that ghostly minor lilt.

And I can tell you this: I have never ached for excitement again, nor for a seat in the Café Bourbon, and when I sit anywhere else I sit with men I know.

### THE SONG FROM THE DEAD

By Pearl Bragg

I HAVE not played," shuddered Molbring, "since she died."

"But is it just," I asked, "to neglect your mission to the world?"

The muscles of Molbring's face twitched. "You don't understand," he muttered; "I dare not play." He thrust out his hands despairingly and turned from the piano. "You were there the night of her American debut. We had been married only a few days." He swallowed as if something choked him. "There is *something*." Again he shuddered. "She was nervous—her initial appearance in America. And some one in the gallery—*laughed*."

After a tense silence he continued: "Oh, the sight of her—stricken, dazed! Then the laughter of the audience quenched suddenly, hideously by her own! Those awful days of her delirium! Always singing the opening measures of her aria, only to break into that mad laughter. She died—*laughing*!"

Suddenly his eyes blazed; he crashed back the piano lid.

An indescribable thrill passed through me as those long-denied fingers united with the beloved keys. Swiftly, tenderly he slipped into a Brahms melody.

Suddenly I straightened, staring. I knew my Brahms as well as he. *Whence came those alien chords?* The next instant angry fingers punished the keys; Molbring ceased, his face ghastly.

"Did you hear?" he gasped. "That accursed aria—haunts me!"

Then I realized the original of those intruding chords. *They were the introductory measures to the aria his wife sang at her last public appearance.*

Molbring's fingers fumbled over a jangle of tones. He pulled himself from the seat and plucked at my sleeve.

"I hired them to hiss," he moaned. "I wanted to discourage her. I could not share the homage; I—I—was to be *all*!" He sobbed hysterically. "I never hired them to laugh! No, not to *laugh*!"

I moved away, horror-stricken, but could not tear my eyes from him.

"Let her sing!" he shouted, attacking the aria with a mad thunder of volume.

I could not listen, and rushed from the room. Too late! I heard the voice—the break—the terrible laugh!

*Then I heard Molbring laughing—laughing madly with her!*

# THRILLING EXPERIENCES

We announced in the September 1st number that the best letter setting forth a thrilling experience, would be awarded a prize of \$10. Since that publication, we have decided upon a fairer way of rewarding the writers of interesting letters. It is as follows:

We will pay the writer of every letter published, at manuscript rates. If we do not publish letters submitted to this department, it means that we do not consider them interesting enough for publication. No letters will be returned. You are advised to keep copies of what you send us.

Four or five hundred words should be the maximum length. The "experience" may be some actual, physical adventure or some wandering exploration in the pallid borderland that separates this life from the realm of the unseen. It must, of course, be bona fide, and must also have some particularly striking quality or psychological significance in order to receive consideration in these columns. Letters will be printed over the writer's name, unless contrary instructions are given.

## *The Editor, THE THRILL BOOK.*

DEAR SIR: The train pulled out of the old Pennsylvania Station in Washington. According to timeworn tradition, it wandered along down through peaceful quiet Virginia, wending its way toward Richmond, stopping at every crossroad to say "How do you do" to its friend, the little open-face station, or to take a drink or fill up on ammunition to have another smoke or two before turning in for the night at Richmond.

The four corners at which we left the train is about twenty miles this side of Richmond. We were to spend the summer on an old plantation about three miles from the station. Mrs. Bayley was living there by herself, and, as we wanted a nice quiet place to rest up in, she agreed to take us for a few weeks. She met us at the station, and we had a nice drive through scrub pines and over sandy roads. Rather dreary country and inclined to have too many snakes for my comfort.

The house was a typical Virginia mansion, nestled among tall trees, on top of a slight hill. The outhouses were numerous, and everything around the whole place was in a run-down condition. The building had been free of paint for many years, the roof was leaky, and—well—you all know the story of the Civil War survivors. This was the story visualized in its most pitiful aspect.

Mrs. Bayley confided to us on the way

over from the station that she had been nervous lately, and felt uneasy at being alone in the old house, especially at night. It was a lonely place, the only people within a mile being a family of poor whites who lived in the overseer's old quarters, and Mrs. Bayley might just as well have been entirely alone as far as any protection from them was concerned.

We were delighted with the place, and after washing up a bit and settling our bags in a convenient place, we meandered around to get the lay of the land. The ground sloped away from the house in every direction, and part way down one side of the hill and in a clump of bushes, was the ruin of an old spring house. We wandered down and looked at it—I must own up to a feeling of awe—and just then we noticed a low bush beside us shake and rustle as though a heavy wind were blowing through the leaves. The air was calm. We looked at each other a minute, and then simultaneously turned and ran up the hill, arriving at the house rather breathless and feeling decidedly foolish. We looked at each other again and laughed, no doubt it had been our imagination.

We had dinner in an old room adjoining what had once been the dining room, but was now used as the kitchen. It had a tremendous fireplace, where a modern range had been fitted in, filling up the chimney space. Mrs. Bayley amused us by telling of



a thrilling incident that happened there during the Civil War. It seemed that some raiders had suddenly surprised the family at dinner, and in the scrimmage that followed, her uncle was killed. As the attacking force was running away, old Ben took a shot at and killed one of them, the Yankee dropping not far from the house. They were afraid to stir out for a number of days, so they took up some of the bricks from the fireplace and dug a grave there for the uncle. This was very romantic and interesting—but on top of the shivery bush episode we were just a trifle nervous—I must confess that I made no bones about not being the last one out of the room after dinner.

Mrs. Bayley told us some more of her family history that verged on the tragic. One of her ancestors had been in the habit of walking in his sleep, and one night he walked off the edge of the porch and was killed.

In our room there was a fireplace with wood placed ready to light. In one corner was an old wardrobe which she had cleaned out for us to use. There was also an antique dresser, and the whole place delighted us in every detail. The bed was one of these old four-posters, and we had visions of dreamless sleep on the downy pillows. We couldn't get the wardrobe door open that night to put our things away, and we wondered at that a little. But it was nothing to cause any uneasiness, for it could easily be fixed in the morning. We finally got settled down for sleep, and, closing our eyes, rejoiced at finding such an ideal place.

Bang! Our door flew open and shut with a crash, resounding through the whole house, or as it seemed to me. Now, that door had been locked by me when we came in, and no one had been near it since. The key was now lying in the middle of the floor. Harry got up and tried the door; it was still locked. We got settled down again, this time leaving a little light burning. To our amazement, we heard a little creaking noise, just as my eyes were closing, and, opening them, we saw the wardrobe door moving slowly open. Almost at the same time our door again flew open. This time Harry leaped out of bed and grabbed it, but a force stronger than he was manipulating it. It swung to and the latch clicked. We were feeling mighty queer by that time. Suddenly a shot rang out on the night air. And we heard the rush of footsteps, a door open and some one come running up the stairs, and right toward our door. But no one entered. I must confess that I grabbed Harry and hung on to him terror-stricken, and we sat thus until morning appeared.

At breakfast Mrs. Bayley asked us how we had slept, and was very much distressed when we confessed what had happened. She owned up then that she had had the same experience, and had been so frightened that she couldn't stir or make any alarm. She said she had been hearing queer noises in the house, sounds coming from the attic as though men were rattling poker chips, soft footsteps passing overhead and along the hallway. This was not very comforting, and we decided that we could not risk passing any more nights like the one we had just survived, and so she drove us to the station and we gladly took the train back home, and breathed sighs of relief when we got in our own little modern apartment, whose four walls would never harbor such things as ghosts.

A WOMAN READER OF THE THRILL BOOK.

To the Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.

DEAR SIR: I had been ill and had just about recovered—in fact, I intended to return to my office duties the next day—when my most thrilling experience occurred.

As to the cause of it, I can't pretend to offer any explanation. Such a thing had never happened to me before. Nothing of the kind has happened since. Perhaps it was due to an overwrought condition of the brain and nerves at the prospect of returning to my duties after a prolonged absence. Perhaps there was something in the tonic I was taking that affected me strangely on this particular night. I can only relate the facts as they occurred.

My residence is a ten-story apartment house. I am on the eighth floor. I went to bed on the night in question at ten-thirty, and almost immediately fell into a sound sleep. Certainly I was dead to the world by eleven.

I dreamed. It was a comical dream—one that comes to almost every one, I believe, at one time or another. At least practically everybody I have ever asked admits having had a dream of this sort.

I thought I was walking along the street—a rather fashionable thoroughfare, thronged with well-dressed men and women—and that I was in a nightshirt, the extremities of which kept growing shorter and shorter. In spite of my unusual garb, I felt no embarrassment. No one seemed to notice me. Apparently I was doing nothing extraordinary. I rather reveled in the luxury of the thing—the free, untrammelled sensation of being without any clothes to speak of. I walked quite slowly and seemed deliberately to keep close to the walls of the buildings abutting on the sidewalk.



Presently I appeared to reach a crossing. A runaway horse was coming straight at me. I felt that I could not move. I pressed close to the wall and screamed with fear.

My own voice awoke me. The dream had been wonderfully realistic. I still felt the sense of freedom. At first I did not know where I was. After several moments of half-awakened unconsciousness, I realized my situation in all its horror. I was on the narrow stone coping that jutted out from the wall of the building some six feet below my window and eight stories above the ground. For the first time in my life, to my knowledge, I had indulged in sleepwalking.

As the truth came to me, a tingling feeling seemed to start in the soles of my feet and to pass like charged wires right through my legs and the trunk of my body up to my brain, and out to my finger tips.

Asleep, I could have climbed back to my room. Somnambulists are not affected by dizziness. Awake, all I could do was to press against the wall of the building, every nerve aquiver, and scream again and again, and yet again, with the horror that had gripped me.

I was afraid to look down into the street or even into the open space. I just faced the wall and yelled at the top of my lungs until they finally called in the aid of the fire department to rescue me.

Perhaps this won't seem much of an experience, but then you see, I am a man who has always led a quiet, uneventful, unadventurous life. Very truly yours,

Chicago, Ill. HENRY J. MERSHON.

*To the Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.*

DEAR SIR: Have you ever attended your own "wake?" I have. It happened thus.

I am big and—I flatter myself—of rather imposing appearance. I wear—or, rather, I once wore—a large mustache in which I took some little pride.

Well, one night some years ago, I met an old friend on leaving the office. You know the kind. The come-on-old-man-and-let's-have-'nother-drink type that is now practically extinct. It developed into a party. We picked up other familiar spirits, had dinner, and then adjourned to some one's apartment for a poker session.

At midnight Barclay, one of the crowd, insisted that he had to go home. The mention of home reminded me that I had not phoned my wife. I was in no condition to talk to her then, but hit on the happy idea of having Barclay dispatch a messenger boy from the office on the corner as soon as he got outside. Of course it was a fool idea, but then I was in a fool state.

Next morning, feeling rather shaky, I journeyed straight to the office, and muddled through my day's work somehow. Then I went home.

Something strange about the place struck me the moment I passed into the vestibule—an atmosphere of gloom and mourning, an unspeakable, uncanny stillness, a penumbra of grief.

I mounted the stairs to my apartment with feelings of trepidation. The door was open. I entered, passed along the passageway, and went into the parlor.

I started. A coffin occupied the center of the room. The usual undertakers' trappings were around the place. Two women with bowed heads sat in one corner. Another knelt at the bier. Two men conversed in hushed whispers on the other side of the room.

No one looked up as I came in. I approached the coffin, then gave a horrified gasp.

There, laid out in the array of death, the face showing signs of severe abrasions in spite of the undertaker's efforts to fix it up—was myself.

My gasp of dismay aroused one of the women. She looked up and saw my blanched countenance. Then she screamed—screamed frightfully in sheer panicky terror.

"Herbert! Herbert! It's his ghost!" were the words she uttered as soon as she became coherent.

My wife came running in. At first she, too, was terrified, but when I satisfied her that I was real, she calmed down and forgot to scold me for staying out the night before.

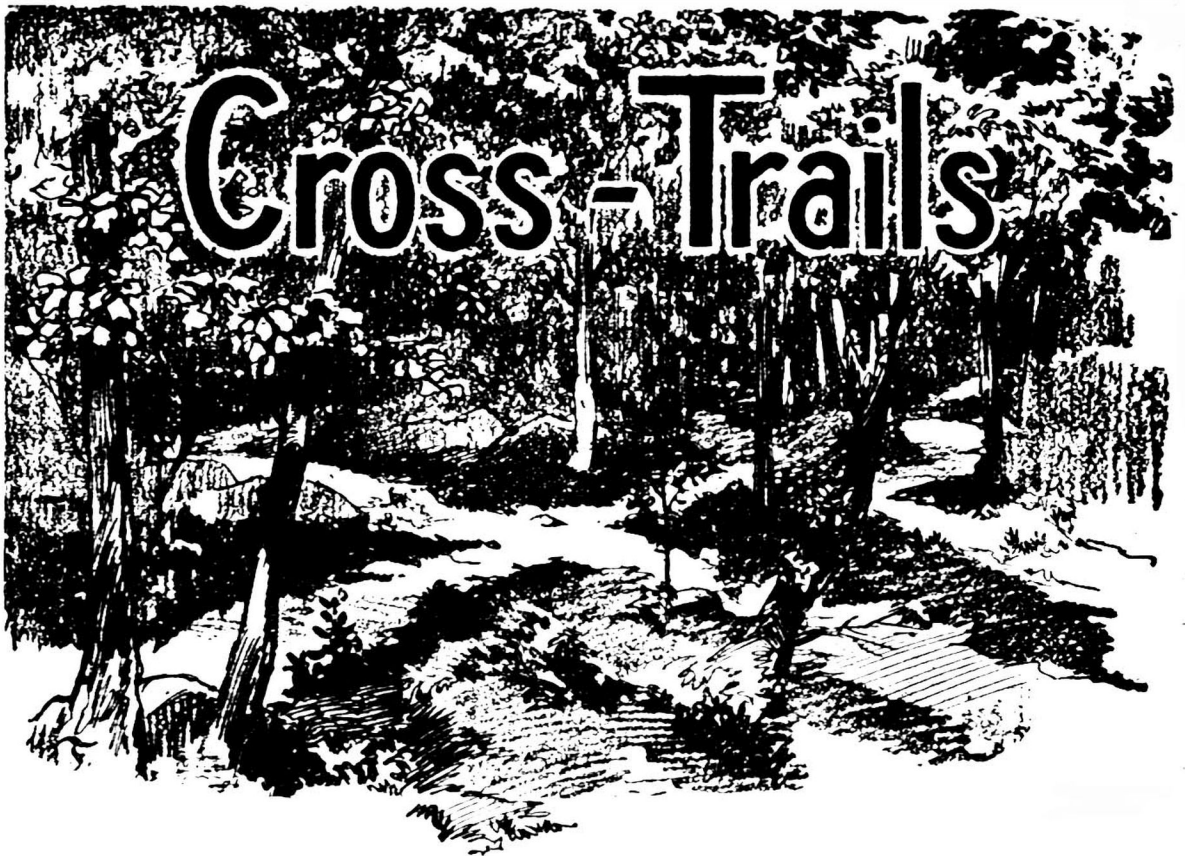
Of course, Barclay had neglected to dispatch a messenger. When one o'clock in the morning came, and I did not put in an appearance, my wife, being of nervous temperament, reported my absence at the local police station.

It so happened that a man of my general description—with a very ferocious mustache—had been knocked down and killed by a trolley at about six o'clock in the evening.

By this time my wife was in a semi-hysterical state, and as the face of the dead man was rather badly bashed up, she readily identified him as me and prepared for the obsequies.

Of course, we managed to smooth things over and made peace. Since that time I have never stayed out late with the "boys"—and I have shaved off my mustache, but I keep the ashes of it in a little vial in my dressing table as a memento of the occasion when I attended my own funeral. Very truly yours,

HERBERT S. R.



## American Literature.

**W**HY is it that the teachers of literature are afraid to consider American literature as a serious matter, worthy of study? The other branches of thought in the college curriculum are given hours of the student's time, but the average time devoted to our literature consists of about two hours a week. There is no reason in the world why the instructor should not comprehend America's debt to the works of English writers, but this doesn't mean that he should ignore the reality of a purely national literature that comes within the borders of the United States.

Owen Johnson in his amazingly subtle story: "Stover at Yale," shows how callously ignorant the average undergraduate is of his own country's art and literature. Ninety-five out of a hundred know hardly anything about "Leaves of Grass"; the writings of the

Transcendentalists; the "Bigelow Papers"; the songs of Foster; the novels of Mark Twain. It would be a safe wager, for example, that half of them have never heard of the development of philosophy from Cotton Mather through Jonathan Edwards and ending in the entirely new contribution of Pragmatism by William James.

It may be true that in the early days the settler was forced to look back across the water whenever he thought of culture. This lasted through a good two hundred years. The necessity for such a background ceased, however, with the rapid rise of the New England school. The modern college is carrying on a dead idea. Their catalogues display excellent courses in English literature, the study of ancient English poetry, tendencies in modern English literature, et cetera. We look in vain for serious consideration of the works of Whitman, Hawthorne, and Emerson. We do not find even an attempt

to take up a consecutive examination of Thoreau, Sidney Lanier, Thomas Nelson Page, or Frank Norris. Here and there one runs across futile little spurts at the study of Emerson and Poe, mostly abortive in scope and superficial to a high degree.

The fact that we are fortunate enough to share in the English language with England does not mean that we are under the necessity of losing our own development of literature. The facts show the state of affairs is exactly the contrary. Joseph Conrad admitted, when he decided to write in English rather than French, that the English language was the most perfect for the expression of thought.

The literature of America is to-day hardly a local affair. The Colonial period is over; the New England era a matter of two generations ago. Since that time we have had the schools of writers who have sprung up almost simultaneously in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and in Boston—schools that are pointing the way to developments that even transcend what has already been produced.

There is too much of the snob and too little of the sincere attitude shown in the study of things American. It is not necessary that we go to any extreme. We may find solace in the poetry of Tennyson, but this does not mean that we should neglect a Whitman, whose book has had an enormous influence throughout the civilized world.

A fair amount of level-headedness, combined with a fair sense of proportion, may lead us finally out of a purely fictitious snobbery as concerns American literature. The best way to study America is through her literature. Let

the fact rest as to the relative qualities. First we must know ourselves, then we can consciously approach criticism without making eternal idiots of ourselves.

### The Next Number.

**M**MURRAY LEINSTER always spins a good yarn, whether it is one of stirring adventure or a scientific fantasy. The October 15th issue of **THE THRILL BOOK** starts off with a complete novel by this author—"Juju."

Here is a swiftly moving, colorful story of African magic, witch doctors, a gorilla, a trio of white men and two white women. The scenes are laid in Portuguese West Africa and the uncanny atmosphere of that land of strange happenings infolds the plot like an enchanted garment.

Then there is "The Ultimate Ingredient," by Greye la Spina; "Amaratite," by Ralph Roeder; "Like Princes," by Eugene A. Clancy; "The Mystery of the Timber Tract," by Francis Metcalfe; "A Recruit for the Lambs," by L. R. Ridge, and other decidedly unusual short stories, each with a distinctly novel and powerful idea—a typical "thrill." In addition, there will be installments of the serials, "The Gift-Wife," by Rupert Hughes and "The Heads of Cerberus," by Francis Stevens.

Neither Rome nor any other large city was built in a day. Our ideal of what **THE THRILL BOOK** should be, cannot be attained in a few issues. But we are trying to make the magazine a little better and still a little better with each issue. How do you think we are succeeding?

THE EDITOR.

