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ALL-STORY WEEKLY



*An Amazing
Sequel to an
Unparalleled
Adventure*

**The Conquest of the
Moon Pool**
by A. Merritt

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCIV

NUMBER

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. XCIV

NUMBER 1

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1919

The Conquest of the Moon Pool

by A. Merritt

A Sequel to "The Moon Pool"

A "DIFFERENT" SERIAL

EVERY reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY who had the good fortune to secure a copy of the June 22, 1918, issue will surely remember Mr. A. Merritt's amazing "different" novelette, "The Moon Pool." Beginning the very day after publication, the flood of flattering interested letters began—a flood that has scarcely subsided to date. In fact the demands for a sequel became so insistent that we took up the matter with Mr. Merritt, and he, in turn, approached the International Association of Science with a view to getting their permission to publish the astonishing results of Dr. Walter T. Goodwin's further attempts to solve the mystery of the Moon Pool, and effect a rescue, if they still lived, of his friend and colleague, Dr. Throckmartin, the latter's wife, and his associate, Dr. Stanton. After some delay, which is explained in the letter from the president of the Association published below, permission was obtained, the manuscript put into magazine form by Mr. Merritt, and—*here it is*—the first of the six installments of a story so weird, so soul-stirring, and of such tense and terrible interest to every human being that even the title "different" but weakly describes its uncanny fascination.

TO THE EDITOR OF ALL-STORY WEEKLY:

December 5, 1918.

THE International Association of Science takes the greatest pleasure in notifying you that, after long discussion and hesitation by the executive council, the decision has been made to pass to you for presentation in your publication the further narrative of Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, Ph.D., F.R.G.S., *et cetera*, relating his experiences in quest of the solution and possible destruction of the extraordinary phenomena emanating from that group of prehistoric ruins in the Caroline Islands known as the Nan-Matal.

The delay of the International Association in making definite reply to the many and compelling appeals of yourself and your readers for additional information upon Dr. Goodwin's surprising adventure was due, frankly, sir, to a very real doubt not

as to the expediency of revealing at this time certain features of these later observations, but as to the actual danger to humanity such revelation might involve.

Still, in view of your courtesy and courage in printing, on June 22, 1918, under the title of "The Moon Pool," so extraordinary and (as the association was well aware) so apparently incredible a recital; in view, too, of the fact that no other agency of publicity could have presented to so great and widely spread an audience the evidence clearing the names of Dr. David Throckmartin, his devoted wife, and his equally devoted young associate, Dr. Charles Stanton, of the cloud of scandal that had gathered over them, the International Association realizes that it owes you a very real debt of gratitude indeed.

Furthermore, the response of your readers touched us profoundly. Enough money to equip a score of expeditions and enough offers of personal service to have manned many score were tendered; and besides them many valuable suggestions for coping with the powerful, inexplicable and clearly unhuman manifestations of unknown, mysterious energy described by Dr. Goodwin in his first narrative. But before these could be received the association's own expedition of relief was on its way.

The tragic fate of that heroic party, lost with all others on board the steamer *Adelaide*, when destroyed by the German raider Von Moltke in the Papuan Gulf, has been recorded by the public prints; and while the association was considering the formation of a second expedition we were confronted by a development that changed radically the whole situation.

This development was the return of Dr. Goodwin himself, bearing news that made a second expedition, for the present at least, not only inadvisable, but apparently useless. And it is the astonishing, the disquieting import of his news, the menacing potentialities within it, that is the cause of our long delay in answering you.

Nevertheless, a way seems to have been found both to accede to your appeal and to neutralize the danger in doing so. Dr. Goodwin is now preparing his narrative, but it will, of necessity, be a month or more before you can receive it; this not only because the history cannot adequately be presented within less than one hundred thousand words, but also because when finished it must be submitted to the executive council for possible censorship and approval. And here I wish to warn you, sir, that because of subtle dangers involved in its presentation there are bound to be elisions, or at least glossings over, of certain facts, circumstances and conclusions. When we tell you that we believe our duty to the world's welfare demands this, you will, I know, sir, be the first to acquiesce to these deletions.

But notwithstanding these precautions it will be through you that the world will learn of calamity narrowly escaped; catastrophe beside which the war, terrible as it was, is but a pleasant dream; cataclysm, indeed, which threatened to destroy all civilization as we know it, to deliver to a monstrous slavery all of our race dwelling on the face of our planet and, at last, to annihilate it.

Let me say further that the narrative of Dr. Goodwin, amazing in the best sense of that word as it may be, is fully supported by proofs brought forward by him and accepted by this association. His evidence will be dealt with in purely scientific expositions of all phases of his investigations after (may we say the more popular) aspects of his experiences have been revealed by you.

That the whole view-point of science upon the history of humanity, of its evolution and of the character and potentialities of certain forms of universal energy, and particularly that form of etheric and magnetic vibration we call light, must be revised from their foundations is certain. Disconcerting as this may be to science, out of the new humility created and the new research and experimentation demanded by Dr. Goodwin's discoveries, there is bound to come a broader and a better and an invincible knowledge.

The association will, as before, avail itself of the courteous services of Mr. A.

THE CONQUEST OF THE MOON POOL,

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Merritt to convey to you Dr. Goodwin's manuscript when it is ready, and, orally, a full and personal explanation of the causes of our hesitation, now only to be hinted in this communication.

Respectfully yours,

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCIENCE.

Per J. B. K., President.

P. S.—Let me recall to your memory the fact that in 1899 the Caroline Islands were bought by Germany from Spain for twenty-five million pesetas, that since that time German domination of them has been complete, and, further, that they have been the field of a number of German scientific expeditions.

Allow me also to inform you that the German chapter of the association, although outlawed from the parent body early in the war, preserves its entity as an independent unit and numbers among its members some of the most acute, daring and far-seeing scientists that atavistic and war-crazed nation has ever produced.

J. B. K.

CHAPTER I.

THE DWELLER IN THE MOON POOL.

IN beginning this narrative I find it necessary to refer, briefly, to my original recital printed in the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* of June 22, 1918, under the title of "The Moon Pool," of the causes that led me into the adventure of which it is to be the history. For in so much as that recital was confession, so the adventure was expiation of a promise broken and an intellectual cowardice that held me silent when by speaking I could have checked a great wrong before it had taken root.

At last I did speak, knowing full well that in doing so I was putting in jeopardy my scientific reputation—as dear to me as honor to any woman; and after speaking, acted—knowing equally well that by my action I threw down my life as stake in an unknown game with death. More than life and reputation no man can offer in repayment of error.

But was it error? In the light of what followed it may be the very inhibition which my long training as a scientist had imposed upon me—that rigid reluctance to testify to the existence of a thing seemingly outside of science, that almost unconquerable sensitiveness to the possible disbelief and ridicule of my colleagues—was but the hand of a higher power placed over my mouth, stilling me until the appointed time: holding me back until that exact moment

when my going would forge the last links in the chain to bind the Dweller.

For certainly had I spoken that dread night on the Southern Queen, when the monstrous, shining Thing of living light and mingled rapture and horror embraced Throckmartin and drew him from his cabin down the moon path to its lair beneath the Moon Pool, I would have been written lunatic or worse. And so, perhaps, would I have been written by my brothers in science if three years of biting remorse had not etched my words with the acid of conviction invincible.

Had I set forth for that group of Southern Pacific islets called the Nan-Matal, where the Moon Pool lay hidden, a day before or after, I would not have found Olaf Huldricksson, hands lashed to the wheel of his ravished Brunhilda, steering it even in his sleep down the track of the Dweller, and of the wife and babe the Dweller had snatched from him. Nor would I have picked up Larry O'Keefe from the wreck of his flying boat fast sinking under the long swells of the Pacific. And without O'Keefe and Huldricksson that weird and almost unthinkable fantastic drama enacted beyond the Moon Pool's gates must have had a very different curtain.

The remorse of a botanist, the burning, bitter hatred of a Norse seaman, the breaking of a wire in a flying-boat's wing—all these meeting at one fleeting moment formed the slender tripod upon which rest-

ed the fate of humanity! Could that universal irony which seems to mold our fortunes go further?

And yet always I think, it is upon such fragile chances that the wheel we call life rolls, and always are they the determinants of its course. What is chance but the working out of a lofty mathematics in which every thought, every action, every happening since the world began to spin around the sun is a factor? And what is life, moment by moment, but the constant totaling of these vast equations?

A hundred thousand years ago a stinging gnat escaped the sweep of a trapped mammoth's trunk—and in the glory of Egypt the horse of a Pharaoh on which one of its progeny lighted threw, under its sting, the Pharaoh, destroying a dynasty. Had the mammoth crushed its tormentor the gnat which killed the Pharaoh would not have been—nor can we say any other would at that precise moment have been at that precise place to work Pharaoh's bane. Time, place, and effect were all determined one hundred thousand years before.

Fifty thousand years ago a bullock fled from a tiger, and two thousand years ago the augurs of Nero, reading in a beast of that same bullock's blood evil omens, held back Nero's armies and a nation won respite from slavery.

And those chances of a hundred thousand years ago were determined by chances a hundred thousand years before them; and so back to the first quickening of life in the primeval slime.

A woman kisses and an empire falls; a horse stumbles and a race bows its neck to the yoke; a child asks a question and gods die.

To Fate the Spinner come countless myriads of threads, each stretching back to the dim beginnings. Fate weaves them—but she does not make them. And the pattern of her web, I think, is not determined by her but by the threads as they come. So it was that there crept toward her that strange, supernally beautiful, supernally

dreadful thread I have called the Dweller; an alien thread that once woven in her web would have changed forever the pattern that is humanity. But even as she reached for it, there came to her hand other threads that in her swift fingers bound and covered and thrust back at last the radiant menace. Had they not been there—

But there they were—O'Keefe and Huldricksson and I; Larry O'Keefe and Olaf Huldricksson and I, and Lakla of the flower face and wide, golden eyes, Lakla the Handmaiden of the Silent Ones, and the Three who had fashioned the Dweller from earth's secret heart—each thread in its place.

And so humanity lives!

And now let me recall to those who read my first narrative, and to make plain to those who did not, what it was that took me on my quest; that enigmatic prelude in which the Dweller first tried its growing power.

Early in 1915, Dr. David Throckmartin, one of America's leaders in archeological and ethnological research, set out for the Caroline Islands, accompanied by his young wife, Edith, his equally youthful associate, Dr. Charles Stanton, and Mrs. Throckmartin's nurse from babyhood, Thora Helverson. Their destination was that extraordinary cluster of artificially squared, basalt-walled islets off the eastern coast of Ponape, the largest Caroline Island, known as the Nan-Matal. It was Throckmartin's belief that in those prehistoric ruins lay the clue to the lost and highly civilized race which had peopled that ancient continent, which, sinking beneath the waters of the Pacific, had left in the myriads of islands we call Polynesia only its highest flung peaks.*

The Funafuti borings of 1897, definitely proving the existence of this continent, had also shown that its subsidence had taken place at a comparatively recent date—not more than from fifty thousand to one hundred thousand years ago.

Dr. Throckmartin planned to spend a year on the Nan-Matal, hoping that within its shattered temples and terraces, its vaults

* For more detailed observations on these points refer to G. Volkens, "Über die Karolinen Insel Yap," in *Verhandlungen Gesellschaft Erdkunde Berlin*, xxvii (1901); J. S. Kubary, "Ethnographische Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Karolinen Archipel" (Leiden, 1889-1891); De Abrade "Historia del Conflicto de las Carolinas, etc." (Madrid, 1886).

and cyclopean walls, or in the maze of secret tunnels that running under the sea threaded together the islets, he would recover not only a lost page of the history of our race, but also, perhaps, a knowledge that had vanished with it. For that this dead people had commanded powers, had wielded energies unknown to us, is not only proved by the astonishing character of their crumbling remains, but, as it has been written by one world-famous student of them, by "echoes of sublime theogenies and philosophies still heard in the oral traditions and folk lore of many Polynesian groups."

The subsequent fate of this expedition formed what became known, until my confession in April before the International Association of Science, as the Throckmartin mystery. Three months after the little party had landed at Ponape, and had been accompanied to the ruins by a score of reluctant native workmen—reluctant because all the islanders shun the Nan-Matal as a haunted place—Dr. Throckmartin appeared alone at Port Moresby, Papua.

There he said that he was going to Melbourne to employ some white workmen to help him in his excavations, the superstitions of the natives making their usefulness negligible. He took passage on the Southern Queen, sailing the same day that he appeared, and three nights later he vanished utterly from that vessel.

It was officially reported that he had either fallen from the ship or had thrown himself overboard. A relief party sent to the Nan-Matal for the others in his party found no trace of his wife, of Stanton, or of Thora Helverson. The native workmen, questioned, said that on the nights of the full moon the *ani* or spirits of the ruins had great power; that on these nights no Ponapean would go within sight or sound of them, and that by agreement with Throckmartin they had been allowed to return to their homes on these nights, leaving the expedition "to face the spirits alone, as being white, they were no doubt stronger than the *ani*."

After the full of the moon on the third month of the expedition's stay, the natives had returned to the Throckmartin camp only to find it deserted. And then, "know-

ing that the *ani had been stronger*," they had fled.

Enlightened civilization, rejecting such a story as a preposterous figment of the primitive mind, crystallized the mystery into a scandal having two versions: one, that Throckmartin, discovering that his wife and Dr. Stanton had betrayed him, had in his rage killed them, together with the old nurse, afterward in remorse committing suicide; the other that Stanton and Mrs. Throckmartin, taking Thora with them, had abandoned Throckmartin and had hidden themselves and their guilty passion in China.

These were the lies that my silence allowed to take root and flourish—for I had been a passenger with Throckmartin on the Southern Queen; I had been with him when that wondrous horror which had followed him down the moon path after it had set its unholy seal upon him snatched him from the vessel; and he had told me his story, and I had promised, God forgive me, that if the Dweller took him as it had taken his wife and Stanton and Thora, I would follow.

He had told me his story, and I knew that story was true—for twice I had seen the inexplicable power which Throckmartin, discovering, had loosed upon himself and those who loved him; that unearthly Thing that left on the faces of its prey soul-deep lines of mingled agony and rapture, of joy celestial and misery infernal, side by side, as though the hand of God and the hand of Satan working in harmony had etched them!

Nor can I better describe the Dweller than I did to the members of the association—as I first beheld it on that first night out from Papua when it came racing over the horizon to claim Throckmartin.

We two were on the upper deck. He had not yet summoned the courage to tell me of what had befallen him—he'd back, as I was during the years, by the fear of disbelief. Storm threatened but suddenly far to the north, the clouds parted, and upon the waters far away the moon shone.

Swiftly the break in the high-flung canopies advanced toward us and the silver rapids of the moon stream between them

came racing down toward the Southern Queen like a gigantic, shining serpent writhing over the rim of the world. And down its shimmering length a pillared radiance sped! It reached the barrier of blackness that still held between the ship and the head of the moon stream and beat against it with a swirling of shimmering misty plumes, throbbing lacy opalescences and vaporous spiralings of living light.

Pulsing through it were glittering atoms and coruscations, drawn, it seemed, from the moon rays pouring on it. And all about it was a storm of sweet, insistent tinklings as of pizzacato on violins of glass or little sparkling-white crystals tuned to sound: strangely compelling and as strangely disquieting. At once they played upon the heart like little fiery fingers of desire and tiny cold fingers of death.

Then, as the protecting shadow grew less, I saw that within the pillar was a core, a nucleus of intense light—veined, opalescent, vital. Above, tangled in the swirls and plumes and spiralings, yet ever, firm, and steady in all the incessant movement, were seven lights like seven little moons. One was of a pearly rose, one of delicate nacreous blue, one of lambent saffron, one of emerald, a deathly white, a ghostly amethyst, and one of gleaming silver.

Through the gusts of tinklings came a murmuring cry as of a calling from another sphere—making soul and body shrink from it irresistibly and reach toward it with an infinite longing.

“*Av-o-lo-ha! Av-o-lo-ha!*” it sighed.

Straight toward the radiant vision walked Throckmartin, his face transformed from all human semblance by unholy blending of agony and rapture that had fallen over it like a mask! And then—the clouds closed, the moon path was blotted out, and where the shining Thing had been was—nothing!

What had been there was—the Dweller!

It was after I had beheld that apparition that Throckmartin told me what would have been, save for what my own eyes had seen, his incredible story. How, upon a first night of the full moon, camping on another shore, they had seen lights moving on the outer bulwarks of that islet of

the Nan-Matal, called Nan-Tauach, the “place of frowning walls,” and faintly to them over the waters had crept the crystalline music, while far beneath, as though from vast distant caverns, a mighty muffled chanting had risen; how, on going to Nan-Tauach next day, they had found set within the inner of its three titanic terraces, and opposite that mysterious vault which Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge and Christian named “the treasure house of Chau-ta-leur, the sun king,” a slab of stone, gray and cold and strangely repellent to the touch; above it and on each side a rounded breast of basalt in each of which were seven little circles that gave to the hand that same alien shock, “as of frozen electricity,” that contact with the gray slab gave.

And that night, when sleep had seemed to drop down upon them from the moon, but before the sleep had conquered him, he had seen the court of the gray rock curdle with light, while into it walked Thora, bathed and filled with a pulsing effulgence beside which all earthly light was shadow!

He told me of their search for Thora at dawn, when the slumber had fallen from their eyes, and of their discovery of her kerchief caught beneath the lintel of the gray slab, betraying that it had opened, and opening, closed upon her; of their efforts to force it, and of the vigil that night when Stanton was taken and walked—“like a corpse in which flamed a god and a devil” in the embrace of the Dweller upon the shattered walls of Tauach, vanishing at last through the moon door, even as had Thora. And the muffled, distant, mighty chanting as of a multitude that hailed his passage.

After that, of the third night, when his wife and he watched despairingly beside the moon door, waiting for it to open, hoping to surprise the shining Thing that came through it, and surprising, conquer it; of their wait until the moon swam up and its full light shone upon the terrace; of the sudden gleaming out of the little circles under its rays and of the sighing murmur of the moon door, swinging open as its hidden mechanism responded to the force of the light falling on the circles; and of his

mad rush down the glimmering passage beyond the moon-door portal to the threshold of the wondrous chamber of the Moon Pool.

Absorbed, silent, marveling, I listened as he described that place of mystery—a vaulted arch that seemed to open into space: a space filled with lambent, coruscating, many-colored mist whose brightness grew even as he watched; before him an awesome pool, circular, perhaps twenty feet wide. Around it a low, softly curving lip of glimmering, silvery stone. The pool's water was palest blue. Within its silvery rim it was like a great, blue eye staring upward.

Upon it streamed seven shafts of radiance. They poured down upon it like torrents; they were like shining pillars of light rising from a sapphire floor. One was the tender pink of the pearl; one of the aurora's green; a third a deathly white; the fourth the blue in mother-of-pearl; a shimmering column of pale amber; a beam of amethyst; a shaft of molten silver. The pool drank them!

And even as Throckmartin gazed, he saw run through the blue water tiny gleams of phosphorescence, sparkles and coruscations of pale incandescence, and far, far down in its depths he sensed a movement, a shifting gleam as of some radiant body slowly rising.

Mists then began to float up from the surface, tiny swirls that held and hung in the splendor of the seven shafts, absorbing their glory and at last coalescing into the shape I had seen and that he called—the Dweller.

He had raised his pistol and sent bullet after bullet into it. And as he did so, out from it swept a gleaming tentacle. It caught him above the heart; wrapped itself round him. Over him rushed a mingled ecstasy and horror. It was, he said, as though the cold soul of evil and the burning soul of good had stepped together within him.

He saw that the shining nucleus of that which he had watched shape itself from vapors and light had form—but a form that eyes and brain could not define; as though a being of another world should assume what it might of human semblance, but

could not hide that what human eyes saw was still only a part of it. It was neither man nor woman; it was unearthly and androgynous and even as he found its human semblance, that semblance changed, while all the while every atom of him thrilled with interwoven rapture and terror.

Behind him he had heard the swift feet of his wife, racing to his aid. Love gave him power, and he wrested himself from the Dweller. Even as he did so he fell—and saw her rush straight into the radiant glory! Saw, too, the Dweller swiftly wrap its shining mists around her and drew her over the lip of the pool: dragged himself to the verge and watched her sink in its embrace, down, down through the depths—“a shining, many-colored, nebulous cloud, and in it Edith's face, disappearing, her eyes staring up at me filled with ecstasy supernal and infernal horror—and—vanished!”

Then, far below, again the triumphant chanting!

There had come to Throckmartin madness. He had memory of running wildly through glimmering passages: then blackness and oblivion until he found himself far out at sea in the little boat they had used to cruise around the lagoons of the Nan-Matal. He had bribed the half-caste captain of a ship that picked him up to take him to Port Moresby, from whence he intended to go to Melbourne, hoping to find some who would return with him, force the haunted chamber, and battle with him against the Dweller.

And on that third night I cowered in the corner of his cabin and saw the Dweller take him!

Here then you have the prelude.

For three years I was silent, and then, obeying a sudden, irresistible impulse, I gave my narrative to my brothers of the International Association of Science and started, alone, for the Nan-Matal to make reparation. For Throckmartin had not entirely believed that his wife was dead—nor Stanton nor Thora; rather he thought that they might be held in some unearthly bondage.

And he had, too, a vague belief that the deep, underground chantings that had accompanied the disappearance of the Dwell-

er with its victims, pointing clearly as they did to the existence of other beings or powers in its mysterious den, held a vast threat against humanity. How true was his scientific clairvoyance, and yet how far from the amazing, unthinkable truth you are to learn. It was my own conviction that in both he had been right, that I might break that bondage, and if not release the world from the menace, at least discover its nature and forewarn the world; and it was this conviction which now forced me onward at all speed toward the Carolines.

I delayed my departure from America only long enough to get certain instruments and apparatus that long brooding over the phenomena had suggested might be useful in coping with them.

Nine weeks later, with my paraphernalia, I was northward bound from Port Moresby on the Suwarna, a swift little copra sloop with a fifty-horse-power motor auxiliary, and heading for Ponape—for the Nan-Matal and the Chamber of the Moon Pool and all that it held for me of soul-shaking awe, of peril beside which bodily death is nothing, and of new and blinding knowledge.

CHAPTER II.

"THE SPARKLING DEVIL TOOK THEM!"

WE sighted the Brunhilda some five hundred miles south of Ponape. Soon after we had left Port Moresby the wind had fallen, but the Suwarna, although far from being as fragrant as the Javan flower for which she was named, could do her twelve knots an hour. Da Costa, the captain, was a garrulous Portuguese; his mate was a Canton man who had all the marks of long and able service on some pirate junk; his engineer was a half-breed Chino-Malay who had picked up his knowledge of power plants Heaven alone knows where, and who, I had reason to believe, had transferred all his religious impetus to the mechanism which he so faithfully served. At any rate he seldom came out of the little pit which did as the Suwarna's engine-room, and seemed to sleep, as it were, always with one ear awake to hear the smallest complaint from his Amer-

ican-built deity. The crew were six huge, chattering Tonga boys.

The Suwarna had cut through Finschafen Huon Gulf to the protection of the Bismarcks. She had threaded the maze of the archipelago tranquilly, and we were then rolling over the thousand-mile stretch of open ocean with New Hanover far behind us and our boat's bow pointed straight toward Nukuor of the Monte Verdes. After we had rounded Nukuor we should, barring accident, reach Ponape in not more than sixty hours.

It was late afternoon, and on the demure little breeze that marched behind us came far-flung sighs of spice-trees and nutmeg flowers. Beneath us the slow, prodigious swells of the Pacific lifted us in gentle, giant hands and sent us as gently down the long, blue wave slopes to the next broad, upward slope. There was a spell of peace over the ocean that was semihypnotic, stilling even the Portuguese captain who stood dreamily at the wheel, slowly swaying to the rhythmic lift and fall of the sloop.

There came a whining hail from the Tonga boy lookout draped lazily over the bow.

"Sail he b'long port side!"

Da Costa straightened and gazed while I raised my glass. The vessel was a scant mile away, and must have been visible long before the sleepy watcher had seen her. She was a sloop about the size of the Suwarna, without power. All sails set, even to a spinnaker she carried, she was making the best of the little breeze. I tried to read her name, but the vessel jibed sharply as though the hands of the man at the wheel had suddenly dropped the helm—and then with equal abruptness swung back to her course. The stern came in sight, and on it I read Brunhilda.

I shifted my glasses to the figure at the wheel. It came to me that there was something odd about him. He was crouching down over the spokes in a helpless, huddled sort of way, and even as I looked the vessel veered again, abruptly as before. I saw the helmsman straighten up and bring the wheel about with a vicious jerk.

He stood so for a moment, looking straight ahead, entirely oblivious of us, and then seemed again to sink down within him-

self. It came to me that his was the action of a man striving against a weariness unutterable. I swept the deck with my glasses. There was no other sign of life. I turned to find the Portuguese staring intently and with puzzled air at the sloop, now separated from us by a scant half mile.

"Something veree wrong I think there, sair," he said in his curious English. "The man on deck I know. He is captain and owner of the Br-rwun'ild. His name Olaf Huldricksson, what you say—Norwegian. He is eithair veree sick or veree tired—but I do not undweerstand where is the crew and the starb'd boat is gone—"

As he spoke I clearly saw the arms at the wheel of the Brunhilda relax, the wheel spin and the vessel lurch about to swell and wind and saw again the helmsman stiffen like a man awakened violently from deep sleep; saw his arms tighten spasmodically and bring the ship once more to her course.

A gleam lighted the eyes of the Portuguese; a cunning speculative light.

"Veree sick or somet-ing veree wrong," he repeated. "I t'ink I better go close and see if he need help, sair?"

I read what was passing through his mind. Here, perhaps, was profit, salvage. Still it was the right thing to do. I nodded acquiescence. He shouted an order to the engineer and as he did so the faint breeze died utterly and the sails of the Brunhilda flapped down inert. I saw the helmsman glare about him and thought I heard him curse. But we were now nearly abreast and a scant five hundred yards away. The engine of the Suwarna died and the Tonga boys leaped to one of the boats.

"You Olaf Huldricksson!" shouted Da Costa. "What's a matter wit' you?"

The man at the wheel turned toward us. As his body lifted I saw that he was a giant of a man; his shoulders enormous, thick chested, strength in every line of him, he towered like a viking of old at the rudder bar of his shark ship.

I raised the glass again; his face sprang into the lens as though he himself had leaped from his deck and was staring at me; and never have I seen a face that was lined and marked as though by ages of unsleeping misery as was that of Olaf Huldricksson!

The bloodshot eyes peered into mine with a look in their depths that might have been in the eyes of the mummy of that ancient Sultan who cursed Buddha Gautama and whose eyes were doomed to live, the Javans say, as long as that Sultan's withered body could defy time!

The glasses dropped from my shaking hand. The two Tonga boys had the boat alongside and were waiting at the oars. The little captain was dropping into it.

"Wait!" I cried. I ran into my cabin, grasped my emergency medical kit and climbed down the rope ladder. The two Tonga boys bent to the oars. We reached the side and Da Costa and I each seized a lanyard dangling from the stays and swung ourselves swiftly on board. Da Costa approached Huldricksson softly.

"What's the matt-r, Olaf?" he began and then was silent, looking down at the wheel. My gaze followed his and we shrank together involuntarily. For the hands of Huldricksson were lashed fast to the spokes of the wheel by thongs of thin, strong cord. They had been bound so tightly that they were swollen and black, the thongs had bitten so into the sinewy wrists that they were hidden in the outraged flesh, cutting so deeply that blood fell, slow drop by drop, at his feet. We sprang toward him, reaching out hands to his fetters to loose them. Even as we touched them, Huldricksson grew rigid with anger that had in it something diabolic. He aimed a vicious kick at me and then another at Da Costa which sent the Portuguese tumbling into the scuppers.

"Let be!" croaked Huldricksson; his voice was as thick and lifeless as though forced from a dead throat, and I saw that his lips were cracked and dry and his parched tongue was black. "Let be! Go! Let be!" The words beat upon the ears heavily, painfully—like the sinister sobbing of the devil drums of the Solomons that are beaten with adders' heads and of the skins of women flayed alive. It was the dead alive and speaking!

The Portuguese had picked himself up, whimpering with rage and knife in hand, but as Huldricksson's voice reached him he stopped. Amazement crept into his eyes

and as he thrust the blade back into his belt they softened with pity.

"Something veree wrong wit' Olaf," he murmured to me. "I think he crazee!" And then Olaf Huldricksson began to curse us. He did not speak—he howled from that hideously dry mouth his imprecations and I think I never heard such hate and bitterness issue from any man's lips. He cursed us by everything in heaven and earth and hell—yes, and he cursed earth, hell and heaven as well. And all the time his bloodshot eyes roamed the seas and his hands, clenched and rigid on the wheel, dropped blood.

"I go below," said Da Costa nervously. "His wife, his little Freda, they are always wit' him. You wait." He darted down the companionway and was gone. Huldricksson suddenly was silent, slumping down over the wheel, forgetting us.

Da Costa's head appeared at the top of the companion steps.

"There is nobody, nobody," he paused—then—"nobody—nowhere!" His hands flew out in a gesture of utter hopeless incomprehension. "I do not understand."

Then Olaf Huldricksson opened his dry lips again and as he spoke a thrill ran through me, stopping my heart.

"The sparkling devil took them!" croaked Olaf Huldricksson, "the sparkling devil took them! Took my Helma and my little Freda! The sparkling devil came down from the moon and took them!"

He swayed and two great tears ran down his cheeks. Da Costa moved toward him again and again Huldricksson watched him, once more alertly, wickedly, from his reddened eyes.

I took a hypodermic syringe from my case and filled it with morphin. I drew Da Costa to me.

"Get to the side of him," I whispered, "talk to him." He saw the little syringe in my hand and nodded. He moved over toward the wheel.

"Where is your Helma and Freda, Olaf?" he said.

Huldricksson turned his head toward him. "The shining devil took them," he repeated. "The moon devil that spark—"

A yell broke from him. I had thrust the

needle into his arm just above one swollen wrist and had quickly shot the drug through. He struggled to release himself and then began to rock drunkenly side by side. The morphin, taking him in his weakness, worked quickly. Soon over his face we saw a peace descend. The pupils of the staring eyes contracted. Once, twice, he swayed and then his bleeding, prisoned hands held high and still gripping the wheel, he dropped to the deck.

It was with utmost difficulty that we loosed the thongs, but at last it was done. We rigged a little swing and the Tonga boys slung the great inert body over the side into the dory. Soon we had Huldricksson in my bunk. Da Costa sent half his crew over to the sloop in charge of the Cantonese. They took in all sail, stripping Huldricksson's boat to the masts and then with the Brunhilda nosing quietly along after us at the end of a long hawser, one of the Tonga boys at her wheel, we resumed the way so enigmatically interrupted.

I had cleansed and bandaged the drugged Norseman's lacerated wrists and was sponging the blackened, parched mouth with warm water and a mild antiseptic when the Portuguese softly entered the cabin. I did not hear him until he spoke, so engrossed was I in my thoughts of this mystery of the Brunhilda. At first, when Huldricksson had spoken of a "sparkling devil from the moon" I had felt a shock of apprehension. Could it be that on the very threshold of my quest the Dweller had come out to meet me?

But in the light of Huldricksson's fettering this thought had vanished. There had probably occurred on the Brunhilda one of those swift, devilish tragedies of the South Seas that ever and anon flare up like lightning out of hell. A mutiny of the only-half-tamed crew, a treacherous blow from behind that had felled the Norseman to the deck, a mordant humor or obscure superstition that had left him to awaken fettered to the wheel of his ravished vessel, a carrying away of mother and child to death or worse than death in some reeking island jungle.

Such a story is a commonplace in those vast reaches of sea and sea-hidden lairs of

cruel and savage tribes. And yet there was no mark or blow upon the captain's head. Suddenly I was aware of Da Costa's presence and turned. His unease was manifest and held, it seemed to me, a queer, furtive anxiety.

"What you think of Olaf, sair?" he asked. I shrugged my shoulders. "You think he killed his woman and his babee?" He went on. "You think he crazee and killed all?"

"Nonsense, Da Costa," I answered. "You saw the boat was gone. His crew mutinied and tied him up the way you saw."

Da Costa shook his head slowly. "No," he said. "No. The crew did not. Nobody there on board when Olaf was tied."

"What?" I cried, startled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said slowly, "that Olaf tie himself!"

"Wait!" he went on at my incredulous gesture of dissent. "Wait, I show you." He had been standing with hands behind his back and now I saw that he held in them the same thongs that had bound Huldricksson. They were bloodstained and each ended in a broad leather tip skilfully spliced into the cord. "Look!" he said, pointing to these leather ends. I looked and saw in them deep indentations as of teeth. I snatched one of the thongs and opened the mouth of the unconscious man on the bunk. Carefully I placed the leather within it and gently forced the jaws shut on it. It was true. Those marks were where Olaf Huldricksson's teeth had gripped! Dazed I turned to Da Costa.

"Wait!" he said again. "I show you." He took the cords and rested his hands on the supports of a chair back. Rapidly he twisted one of the thongs around his left hand, drew a loose knot, shifted the cord up toward his elbow. This left wrist and hand still free and with them he twisted the other cord around the right wrist; drew a similar knot. His hands were now in the exact position that Huldricksson's had been on the Brunhilda but with cords and knots hanging loose. Then Da Costa reached down his head, took a leather end in his teeth and with a jerk drew the end

of the thong that noosed his left hand tight; similarly he drew tight the second.

And then he stood and strained at his fetters. There before my eyes he had pinioned himself so that without aid he could not release himself. And he was exactly as Huldricksson had been!

"You will have to cut me loose, sair," he said. "I cannot move them. It is an old trick on these seas. Sometimes it is necessary that a man stand at the wheel many hours, without help, and he does this so that if he sleep the wheel wake him, yes, sair."

I looked from him to the man on the bed.

"But why, sair," said Da Costa slowly, "did Olaf have to tie his hands?"

I had no answer.

"We'll have to wait till he awakens, captain," I said. He nodded acquiescence and was silent for a time. "What did you think, sair, of what he said of sparkling devils?" he asked at last. And as he spoke I knew that this was what had been on his mind all along. Clearly he knew something, had heard something, that gave the words I had dismissed an unquieting significance. I looked at him closely.

"I don't know," I said. "Do you?"

He fidgeted, avoided my eyes, and then rapidly, almost surreptitiously crossed himself.

"No," he replied. "I know nothing. Some things I have heard—but they tell many tales on these seas."

He turned, almost abruptly, and started for the door. Before he reached it he turned again. "But this I do know," he half whispered, "I do know I am damned glad there is no full moon to-night." He passed out, leaving me staring after him in amazement. What did the Portuguese know?

I bent over the sleeper. On his face was no trace of that unholy mingling of opposites, of mingled joy and fear, that the Dweller stamped upon its victims. But with Da Costa's revelations the security I had felt in my theory of the prisoned wrists crumbled. Huldricksson's words came back to me—"The sparkling devil took them!" Nay, they had been even more explicit—"The sparkling devil that came down from the moon!"

They sank upon my heart like weights, carrying subconscious conviction that resisted all my efforts to dismiss. I lifted the sheet from Huldricksson and went over his body minutely, turning it from side to side. The Norseman was, as I have said, a giant, and his mighty, muscled form was clean and white as a girl's. Nowhere was there a trace of that cold, white stain which was the mark of the touch of the Dweller and that had been, on Throckmartin, a shining cincture girdling the body just below the heart.

Throckmartin had believed, and I had believed with him, that the thing I had gone forth to find had no power outside the islet of the moon door and that it was only by virtue of that mark it had been enabled to follow him. But was this true? Huldricksson had been steering straight for Ponape, not away from it—and there was no trace of the Nan-Matal's dread mystery upon him.

Had the Dweller swept down unheralded and unknown upon the Brunhilda, drawing down the moon path Olaf Huldricksson's wife and babe even as it had drawn Throckmartin? But if this were so then I must revise much of what I thought I knew of its action, for the ravishing of the Brunhilda could mean only one of two things: we had been wrong in our theory that the Dweller's power was limited by place, or else in the years that had passed its power had overcome that limitation.

As I sat thinking the cabin grew suddenly dark and from above came a shouting and patter of feet. Down upon us swept one of the abrupt, violent squalls that are met with in those latitudes. I lashed Huldricksson fast in the berth and ran up on deck.

The long, peaceful swells had changed into angry, choppy waves from the tops of which the spindrift streamed in long, stinging lashes. Behind us the Brunhilda pulled and strained on her hawser and Da Costa stood, hatchet in hand, ready to cut if necessary. I could see the rolling white of the Tonga helmsman's eyes watching on the other deck, like a rabbit a serpent, the Portuguese and his weapon, for well he knew there would be little chance for him if the Suwarna cast him adrift.

A half-hour passed, and still Da Costa withheld his hand. And then the squall died as quickly as it had arisen. The sea quieted. Over in the west, from beneath the tattered, flying edge of the storm, dropped the red globe of the setting sun; dropped slowly until it was just above the horizon, and then, just before it touched the sea rim, seemed to be drawn down and up into that curious oval, that ever-startling phenomenon of refraction which the ancient Egyptians christened the "gate of the west."

I watched it—and rubbed my eyes and stared again. For over its flaming portal something huge and black moved, like a gigantic beckoning finger!

Da Costa had seen it, too, and he turned the Suwarna straight toward the descending orb and its strange shadow. As we approached we saw it was a little mass of wreckage and that the beckoning finger was a wing of canvas, sticking up and swaying with the motion of the waves. On the highest point of the wreckage sat a tall figure calmly smoking a cigarette.

We brought the Suwarna too, dropped a boat, and with myself as coxswain pulled toward what I knew now was a wrecked hydroairplane. Its occupant took a long puff at his cigarette, waved a cheerful hand, and shouted a reassuring greeting. And just as he did so a great wave raised itself up behind him, took the wreckage, tossed it high in a swelter of foam, and passed on. When we had steadied our boat, where wreck and man had been was—nothing.

I scanned the water with anxious eyes. Who had been this debonair castaway, and from whence in these far seas had dropped his plane? There came a tug at the side of our boat, two muscular brown hands gripped it close to my left, and a sleek, black, wet head showed its top between them. Two bright, blue eyes that held deep within them a laughing deviltry looked into mine, and a long, lithe body drew itself gently over the thwart and seated its dripping self at my feet.

"Much obliged," said this man from the sea. "I knew somebody was sure to come along when the O'Keefe banshee didn't show up."

"The what?" I asked in amazement.

"The O'Keefe banshee— Oh, yes, pardon me, I'm Larry O'Keefe. It's a far way from Ireland, but not too far for the O'Keefe banshee to travel if the O'Keefe was going to click in."

I looked again at my astonishing rescue. He seemed perfectly serious, and later I was to know how exasperatingly, naively, and entirely serious he was on that subject.

"Have you a cigarette?" said Larry O'Keefe. "Mine went out," he added with a grin, as he reached a moist hand out for the little cylinder, took it, lighted it on the match I struck for him, and then gazed at me frankly and with manifest curiosity. I returned the gaze as frankly.

I saw a lean, intelligent face whose fighting jaw was softened by the wistfulness of the clean-cut lips and the roguishness that lay side by side with the deviltry in the laughing blue eyes; nose of a thoroughbred with the suspicion of a tilt; long, well-knit, slender figure that I knew must have all the strength of fine steel; the uniform of a lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps of Britain's navy.

He laughed, stretched out a firm hand, and gripped mine.

"Thank you really ever so much, old man," he said.

I liked Larry O'Keefe from the beginning—but I did not dream as the Tonga boys pulled us back to the Suwarna how that liking was to be forged into man's strong love for man by fires which souls such as his and mine—and yours who read this—could never dream.

Larry! Larry O'Keefe, where are you now with your leprechauns and banshee, your heart of a child, your laughing blue eyes, and your fearless soul? Shall I ever see you again, Larry O'Keefe, dear to me as some best-beloved younger brother? Larry!

CHAPTER III.

LARRY O'KEEFE.

PRESSING back the questions I longed to ask, I introduced myself. Oddly enough, I found that he knew me, or rather my work. He had bought, it ap-

peared, my volume upon the peculiar vegetation whose habitat is disintegrating lava rock and volcanic ash, that I had entitled, somewhat loosely, I could now perceive, "Flora of the Craters." For he explained naively that he had picked it up, thinking it an entirely different sort of book, a novel, in fact—something like Meredith's "Diana of the Crossways," which he liked greatly.

Seeing, I suppose, my involuntary start of surprise, for the possible ambiguity of the title had never before occurred to me, he hastened to say that he had admired the book hugely, and once starting it, had read it straight through; a statement which I felt sprang more from his courtesy than fact, as the work, although not lacking perhaps in interesting description, is extremely technical and was written for the initiate rather than the layman.

He had hardly finished this explanation before we touched the side of the Suwarna, and I was forced to curb my curiosity until we reached the deck. Da Costa greeted us eagerly, and was plainly gratified by the military salute which O'Keefe bestowed upon him.

"You haven't seen a German raider called the Wolf about, have you?" he asked with a grin, after he had elaborately thanked the bowing little Portuguese skipper for his rescue. "That thing you saw me sitting on was all that was left of one of his majesty's best little hydroairplanes after that cyclone threw it off as excess baggage. And by the way, about where are we?"

Da Costa gave him our approximate position from the noon reckoning.

O'Keefe whistled. "A good three hundred miles from where I left the H. M. S. Dolphin about four hours ago," he said. "That squall I rode in on was some whizzer!"

"The Dolphin," he went on, calmly divesting himself of his soaked uniform, "was hunting a Hun boy that got out of somewhere about a month ago and has been sneaking around seeking whom he might devour. The Wolf has been doing some devouring, too. We heard at Tangaloa that it had been working along these lanes. I went out on a scouting flight. Before I could get back to the Dolphin that blow

shot up out of nowhere, picked me up, and insisted that I go with it whether or no.

"About an hour ago I thought I saw a chance to dig up and out of it. I turned, and *blick* went my upper right wing, and down I dropped. Engine began to work loose, and just as I knew something had to come along quick or the banshee of the O'Keefes was due for a long, swift trip from Ireland, I sighted you.

"And here I am, and again I say I'm much obliged to you," finished Larry O'Keefe. "And I'll take another cigarette, if you don't mind."

"I don't know how we can notify your ship, Lieutenant O'Keefe," I said. "We have no wireless."

"Doctair Goodwin," said Da Costa. "we could change our course, sair—perhaps—"

"Thanks—but not a bit of it," broke in O'Keefe. "Lord alone knows where the *Dolphin* is now. Fancy she'll be nosing around looking for me—unless she sights that raider.* Anyway, the *Dolphin* is just as apt to run into you as you into her. Maybe we'll strike something with a wireless, and I'll trouble you to put me aboard." He hesitated. "Where are you bound, by the way?" he asked.

"For Ponape," I answered.

"No wireless there," mused O'Keefe. "Beastly hole. Stopped a week ago for fruit. Natives seemed scared to death at us—or something. What are you going there for?"

I saw Da Costa dart a furtive glance at me. It troubled me. I had, of course, told him nothing of the real reasons for my journey, stating simply, when I had employed him, that I wished to go to Ponape where the scientific work I had planned might keep me many weeks. What did the man know, I wondered, and what was the explanation of his remarks in the cabin and

of his manifest unease? O'Keefe's sharp eyes had noted the glance and, misinterpreting it and my consequent hesitation, flushed in embarrassment.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he said. "Maybe I oughtn't to have asked that?"

"It's no secret, lieutenant," I replied, somewhat testily. "I'm about to undertake some exploration work there—a little digging among the ruins on the Nan-Matal."

I looked at the Portuguese sharply as I named the place. I distinctly saw a pallor creep under his skin and again he made swiftly the sign of the cross, glancing as he did so uneasily to the north. I made up my mind then to question him when opportunity came. He turned from his quick scrutiny of the sea and addressed O'Keefe.

"There's nothing on board to fit you, lieutenant," he said, looking over the tall figure before him. "But perhaps we can find something while your clothes dry. Will you come to my cabin?"

"Oh, just give me a sheet to throw around me, captain," said O'Keefe, following him. Darkness had fallen, and as the two disappeared I softly opened the door of my own cabin and listened. I could hear Huldricksson breathing deeply and regularly.

I drew my electric-flash, and shielding its rays from my face, looked at him. His sleep was changing from the heavy stupor of the drug into one that was at least on the border-land of the normal. Gently drawing down his jaw, I noted that the tongue had lost its arid blackness and that the mouth secretions had resumed action. Satisfied as to his condition I returned to deck.

O'Keefe was there, looking like a specter in the cotton sheet he had wrapped about him. A deck table had been cleated down and one of the Tonga boys was setting it for our dinner. Soon the very creditable

* The *Wolf* had truly a remarkable record. This raider was not only equipped with wireless, but had, like the *Dolphin*, a hydroairplane. The *Wolf* would pick up wireless messages and, according to the story of a Scotch-American prisoner, who escaped, its sailors would predict days before whether they would have, at a certain time, new supplies of beer, or coal, or beef—and their predictions always turned out truly. The *Wolf*'s airplane usually trayeled fifty to sixty miles on its scouting expeditions, and its pilots asserted that they could "spot" a ship ninety miles away from a height of ten thousand feet. On her return to Germany, with a small fleet of captured ships, one of these, the *Ignatz Mendi*, passed within a mile of two heavily armed American transports. The commander of the *Ignatz Mendi*, when off *Juland*, mistook in the fog a Danish lighthouse for a German torpedo-boat he was expecting. The *Ignatz Mendi* piled up on the beach, and the prisoners within escaped to tell the story of the raider. The *Wolf* made a safe return. J. B. K.

lder of the Suwana dressed the board, and O'Keefe, Da Costa and I attacked it. The night had grown close and oppressive. Behind us the forward light of the Brundibar glided and the binnacle lamp threw up a faint glow in which her black helmsman's face stood out mistily. O'Keefe had looked curiously a number of times at our tow, but had asked no questions.

"You're not the only passenger we picked up to-day," I told him. "We found the captain of that sloop, lashed to his wheel, nearly dead with exhaustion, and his boat deserted by every one except himself."

"What was the matter?" asked O'Keefe in astonishment.

"We don't know," I answered. "He fought us, and I had to drug him before we could get him loose from his lashings. He's sleeping down in my berth now. His wife and little girl ought to have been on board, the captain here says, but—they weren't."

"Any signs of a fight?" asked O'Keefe. I shook my head, and again I saw Da Costa swiftly cross himself. "We'll have to wait until he wakes up to get the story," I concluded.

"Wife and child gone!" said O'Keefe. "And you saw nothing?"

"From the condition of his mouth he must have been alone at the wheel and without water at least two days and nights before we found him," I replied. "And as for looking for any one on these waters after such a time—it's hopeless."

"That's true," said O'Keefe. "But his wife and baby! Poor, poor devil!"

He was silent for a moment and then began to tell us stories of the great war and of what he had seen in Flanders of broken hearts and homes, and tragedies of motherhood and childhood. He had served there, it appeared, during the first year. He had been wounded at Ypres and, recovering, had been assigned to the naval service. For the last year he had been cruising along the Australian and New Zealand transport lines.

"And I'm homesick for the lark's land with the boche planes playing tunes on their machine guns and the Hun Archies tickling the soles of my feet," said Larry O'Keefe with a sigh. "If you're in love,

love to the limit; and if you hate, why, hate like the devil, and if it's a fight you're in, get where the fighting is hottest and fight like hell," sighed Larry. "If you don't, life's not worth the living!"

I watched him as he talked, feeling my liking for him steadily increasing. If I could but have a man like this beside me on the path of unknown peril upon which I had set my feet—I thought wistfully. We sat and smoked a bit, sipping the strong coffee the Portuguese made so well.

Da Costa at last relieved the Cantonese at the wheel. O'Keefe and I drew chairs up to the rail. The brighter stars shone out dimly through a hazy sky; gleams of phosphorescence tipped the crests of the waves and sparkled with an almost angry brilliance as the bow of the Suwana tossed them aside; far to the east a faint silver glow heralded the rising moon. O'Keefe pulled contentedly at a cigarette. The glowing spark lighted the keen, boyish face and the blue eyes, now black and brooding under the spell of the tropic night.

"Are you American or Irish, O'Keefe?" I asked suddenly.

"Why?" he laughed.

"Because," I answered, "from your name and your service I would suppose you Irish—but your command of pure Americanese makes me doubtful." He grinned amiably.

"I'll tell you how that is," he said. "My mother is an American—a Grace, of Virginia. My father was O'Keefe, of Cole-raine. And these two loved each other so well that the heart they gave me is half Irish and half American. My father died when I was sixteen. I used to go to the States with my mother every other year for a month or two. But after my father died we used to go to Ireland every other year. And there you are—I'm as American as I am Irish."

"When I'm in love, or excited, or dreaming, or mad I have the brogue. But for the every-day purposes of life I like the United States talk, and I know Broadway as well as I do Binevenagh Lane, and the Sound as well as St. Patrick's Channel: educated a bit at Eton, a bit at Oxford, a bit at Harvard; always too much O'Keefe *cum* Grace

money to have to make any; in love lots of times, and never a heartache after that wasn't a pleasant one, and never a real purpose in life until I took the king's shilling and earned my wings; just thirty—and that's me--Larry O'Keefe."

"But it was the Irish O'Keefe who sat out there waiting for the banshee," I laughed.

"It was that," he said somberly, and I heard the brogue creep over his voice like velvet and his eyes grew brooding again. "There's never an O'Keefe for these thousand years that has passed without his warning. An' twice have I heard the banshee calling—once it was when my younger brother died an' once when my father lay waiting to be carried out on the ebb tide."

He mused a moment, then went on: "An' once I saw an *Annir Choille*, a girl of the green people, flit like a shadow of green fire through the Carntogher woods, an' once at Dunchraig I slept where the ashes of the Dun of Cormac MacConcobar are mixed with those of Cormac an' Eilidh the Fair, all burned in the nine flames that sprang from the harping of Cravetheen, an' I heard the echo of his dead harpings—"

He paused again and then, softly, with that curiously sweet, high voice that only the Irish seem to have, he sang:

"Woman of the white breasts, Eilidh;
Woman of the gold-brown hair, and lips of the
red, red rowan,
Where is the swan that is whiter, with breast
more soft,
Or the wave on the sea that moves as thou
movest, Eilidh."

CHAPTER IV.

OLAF'S STORY.

THREE was a little silence. I looked upon him with wonder. Clearly he was in deepest earnest. I know the psychology of the Gael is a curious one and that deep in all their hearts their ancient traditions and beliefs have strong and living roots. And I was both amused and touched.

Here was this soldier, facing war and all its ugly realities open-eyed and fearless, picking, indeed, the most dangerous branch

of service for his own, a modern if ever there was one, appreciative of most unromantic Broadway and yet soberly and earnestly attesting to his belief in banshee, in shadowy people of the woods and fantom harpers! I wondered what he would think if he could see the Dweller and then, with a pang, that perhaps his superstitions might make him an easy prey.

For how then was I to have known that Larry O'Keefe's childlike faith in the existence of these fantasies of the Gaelic imagination was to prove not his weakness but his strong buckler against creatures that not even the imagination of his race could conceive?

He shook his head half impatiently and ran a hand over his eyes: turned to me and grinned.

"Don't think I'm cracked, professor," he said. "I'm not. But it takes me that way now and then. It's the Irish in me. And, believe it or not, I'm telling you the truth."

I looked eastward where the moon, now nearly a week past the full, was mounting.

"You can't make me see what you've seen, lieutenant," I laughed. "But you can make me hear. I've always wondered what kind of a noise a disembodied spirit could possibly make without any vocal cords or breath or any other earthly sound-producing mechanism. How does the banshee sound?"

O'Keefe did not laugh. Instead, he looked at me seriously.

"All right," he said. "I'll show you." From deep down in his throat came first a low, weird sobbing that mounted steadily into a keening whose mournfulness made my skin creep. And then O'Keefe's hand shot out and gripped my shoulder, and I stiffened like stone in my chair—for from behind us, like an echo, and then taking up the cry, swelled a wail that seemed to hold within it a sublimation of the sorrows of centuries! It gathered itself into one heart-broken, sobbing note and died away! O'Keefe's grip loosened, and he rose swiftly to his feet.

"It's all right, Goodwin," he said. "It's for me. It found me—all this way from Ireland."

There was no trace of fear in face or voice. "Buck up, professor," laughed

O'Keefe. "There's nothing for *you* to be afraid of. And never yet was there an O'Keefe who feared the kind spirit that carries the warnin'."

Again the silence was rent by the cry. But now I had located it. It came from my room, and it could mean only one thing --Huldricksson had wakened.

"Forget your banshee!" I gasped, and made a jump for the cabin.

Out of the corner of my eye I noted a look of half-sheepish relief flit over O'Keefe's face, and then he was beside me. Da Costa shouted an order from the wheel, the Cantonese ran up and took it from his hands and the little Portuguese pattered down toward us. My hand on the door, ready to throw it open, I stopped. What if the Dweller were within--what if the new power I feared it had attained had made it not only independent of place but independent of that full flood of moon ray which Throckmartin had thought essential to draw it from the blue pool!

The Portuguese had paused, too, and looking at him I saw my own cravenness reflected. Now, from within, the sobbing wail began once more to rise. O'Keefe pushed me aside and with one quick motion threw open the door and crouched low within it. I saw an automatic flash dully in his hand; saw it cover the cabin from side to side, following the swift sweep of his eyes around it. Then he straightened and his face, turned toward the berth, was filled with wondering pity.

Da Costa and I had stepped in behind him. Through the window streamed a shaft of the moonlight. It fell upon Huldricksson's staring eyes; in them great tears slowly gathered and rolled down his cheeks; from his opened mouth came the wo-laden wailing. I ran to the port and drew the curtains. Da Costa snapped the lights.

The Norseman's dolorous crying stopped as abruptly as though cut. His gaze rolled toward us. And then his whole body reddened with a shock of rage, and at one bound he broke through the strong leashes I had buckled round him and faced us, a giant, naked figure tense with wrath, his eyes glaring, his yellow hair almost erect with the force of the passion visibly surging

through him. Da Costa shrunk behind me. O'Keefe, coolly watchful, took a quick step that brought him in front of me.

"Where do you take me?" said Huldricksson, and his voice was thick as the growl of a beast. "Where is my boat?"

I touched O'Keefe gently and stood in front of the giant. He glared at me, and I saw the muscles of the gigantic arms flex and the hands below the bandaged wrists clench. He was berserk--mad!

"Listen, Olaf Huldricksson," I said. "We take you to where the sparkling devil took your Helma and your Freda. We follow the sparkling devil that came down from the moon. Do you hear me?" I spoke slowly, distinctly, striving to pierce the mists that I knew swirled around the strained brain. And the words did pierce. He stared at me for a moment. I heard O'Keefe murmur: "Good stuff! That's the idea. Humor him." Huldricksson stared at me and thrust out a shaking hand. As I gripped it I saw his madness fade, while his great chest heaved and fell. "You say you follow?" he asked falteringly. "You know where to follow? Where it took my Helma and my little Freda?"

"Just that, Olaf Huldricksson," I answered. "Just that! I pledge you my life that I know."

Da Costa stepped forward. "He speaks true, Olaf," he said. "Dr. Goodwin here he follow as he say. You go faster on the Suwarna than on the Br-rv-un'ilda, Olaf, yes."

The giant Norseman, still gripping my hand, looked at him. "I know you Da Costa," he said. "You are all right. *Ja!* You are a fair man. Where is the Brunhilda?"

"She follow be'ind on a big rope, Olaf," soothed the Portuguese. "Soon you see her. But now lie down an' tell us, if you can, why you tie yourself to your wheel an' what it is that happen, Olaf?"

"If you'll tell us how the sparkling devil came it will help us all when we get to where it is, Huldricksson," I said.

On O'Keefe's face there was an expression of well-nigh ludicrous doubt and amazement. He glanced from one to the other. The giant shifted his own tense look

from me to the Irishman. I saw a gleam of approval in his eyes. He loosed me, and gripped O'Keefe's arm. "Staerk!" he said. "Ja—strong, and with a strong heart. A man—ja! He comes, too—we shall need him—ja?" He turned toward me. I looked toward O'Keefe and saw his doubt deepen.

"He comes," I said, "if he can."

Once more Huldricksson searched me with his glance; once more turned and absorbed O'Keefe in the icy blue of his eyes.

"A man, ja," he repeated. He pointed to me. "And you—a man, ja! But not the same as him—and me."

"I tell," he said, and seated himself on the side of the bunk. "It was four nights ago. My Freda"—his voice shook—"Mine *Yndling*! She loved the moonlight. I was at the wheel and my Freda and my Helma they were behind me. The moon was behind us and the Brunhilda was like a swan-boat sailing down with the moonlight sending her, ja.

"I heard my Freda say: 'I see a *nisse* coming down the track of the moon.' And I hear her mother laugh, low, like a mother does when her *Yndling* dreams. I was happy—that night—with my Helma and my Freda, and the Brunhilda sailing like a swan-boat, ja. I heard the child say, 'The *nisse* comes fast!' And then I heard a scream from my Helma, a great scream—like a mare when her foal is torn from her. I spun round fast, ja! I dropped the wheel and spun fast! I saw—" He covered his eyes with his hands.

The Portuguese had crept close to me, and I heard him panting like a frightened dog. O'Keefe, immobile, watched the Norseman narrowly. His hand fell and hate crept into his eyes; a bitter hate; that winged and white-hot hate that makes even the gods tremble.

"I saw a white fire spring over the rail," whispered Olaf Huldricksson. "It whirled round and round, and it shone like—like stars in a whirlwind mist. There was a noise in my ears. It sounded like bells—little bells, ja! Like the music you make when you run your finger round goblets. It made me sick and dizzy—the bells' noise.

"My Helma was—*indeholde*—what you say—in the middle of the white fire. She

turned her face to me and she turned it on the child, and my Helma's face burned into my heart. Because it was full of fear, and it was full of happiness—of *glyaede*. I tell you that the fear in my Helma's face made me ice here"—he beat his breast with clenched hand—"but the happiness in it burned on me like fire. And I could not move—I could not move.

"I said in here"—he touched his head—"I said, 'It is Loki come out of Helvede. But he cannot take my Helma, for Christ lives and Loki has no power to hurt my Helma or my Freda! Christ lives! Christ lives!' I said. But the sparkling devil did not let my Helma go. It drew her to the rail; half over it. I saw her eyes upon the child and a little she broke away and reached to it. And my Freda jumped into her arms. And the fire wrapped them both and they were gone! A little I saw them whirling on the moon track behind the Brunhilda—and they were gone!

"The sparkling devil took them! Loki was loosed, and he had power. I turned the Brunhilda, and I followed where my Helma and mine *Yndling* had gone. My boys crept up and asked me to turn again. But I would not. They dropped a boat and left me. I steered straight on the path. I lashed my hands to the wheel that sleep might not loose them. I steered on and on and on—

"Where was the God I prayed when my wife and child were taken?" cried Olaf Huldricksson—and it was as though I heard Throckmartin three years before asking that same bitter question. "I have left Him as He left me, ja! I pray now to Thor and to Odin, who can fetter Loki!" He sank back, covering again his eyes.

"Olaf," I said, "what you have called the sparkling devil has taken ones dear to me. I, too, was following it when we found you. You shall go with me to its home, and there we will try to take from it your wife and your child and my friends as well. But now that you may be strong for what is before us, you must sleep again."

Olaf Huldricksson looked upon me and in his eyes was that something which souls must see in the eyes of Him the old Egyptians called the Searcher of Hearts in the Judgment Hall of Osiris.

"You speak the truth!" he said at last slowly. "I will do what you say!"

He stretched out an arm at my bidding. I gave him a second injection. He lay back and soon he was sleeping. I turned toward Da Costa. His face was livid and sweating, and he was trembling pitifully. O'Keefe stirred.

"You did that mighty well, Dr. Goodwin," he said. "So well that I almost believed you myself."

"What did you think of his story, Mr. O'Keefe?" I asked.

His answer was almost painfully brief and colloquial.

"Nuts!" he said. I was a little shocked, I admit. "I think he's crazy, Dr. Goodwin," he corrected himself, quickly. "What else could I think?"

I turned to the little Portuguese without answering.

"There's no need for any anxiety to-night, captain," I said. "Take my word for it. You need some rest yourself. Shall I give you a sleeping draft?"

"I do wish you would, Dr. Goodwin, sair," he answered gratefully. "To-morrow, when I feel bettair—I would have a talk with you."

I nodded. He had known something then! I mixed him an opiate of considerable strength. He bowed and went to his own cabin.

I locked the door behind him and then, sitting beside the sleeping Norseman, I told O'Keefe my story from end to end. He asked few questions as I spoke; only watched me with a somewhat disconcerting intensity. In the main his inquiries dealt with the sound phenomena accompanying the apparition of the Dweller. He made a few somewhat startling interruptions dealing with Throckmartin's psychology. And after I had finished he cross-examined me rather minutely upon my recollections of the radiant phases upon each appearance, checking these with Throckmartin's observations of the same activities in the Chamber of the Moon Pool.

"And now what do you think of it all?" I asked.

He sat silent for a while, looking at Huldricksson.

"Not what you seem to think, Dr. Goodwin," he answered at last, gravely. "Let me sleep over it and, like the captain, I'll tell you to-morrow. One thing of course is certain—you and your friend Throckmartin and this man here saw—something. But—" he was silent again and then continued with a kindness that I found vaguely irritating—"but I've noticed that when a scientist gets superstitious it—er—takes very hard!"

"Here's a few things I can tell you now though," went on O'Keefe, while I struggled to speak—"I pray in my heart that the old Dolphin is so busy she'll forget me for a while and that we won't meet anything with wireless on board her going up. Because, Dr. Goodwin, I'd dearly love to take a crack at your Dweller.

"And another thing," said Larry O'Keefe. "After this—cut out the trimmings, Doc, and call me plain Larry, for whether I think you're crazy or whether I don't you're there with the nerve, professor, and I'm *for* you.

"Good night!" said Larry O'Keefe and took himself out to the deck hammock he had insisted upon having slung for him, refusing the captain's importunities to use his own cabin.

And it was with extremely mixed emotions as to his compliment that I watched him go. Superstitious! I, whose pride was my scientific devotion to fact and fact alone! Superstitious—and this from a man who believed in banshees and ghostly harpers and Irish wood nymphs and no doubt in leprechauns and all their tribe!

Half laughing, half irritated and wholly happy in even the part promise of Larry O'Keefe's comradeship on my venture, I arranged a couple of pillows, stretched myself out on two chairs and took up my vigil beside Olaf Huldricksson.

CHAPTER V.

A LOST PAGE OF EARTH.

WHEN I awakened the sun was streaming through the cabin port-hole. Outside a fresh voice lilted. I lay on my two chairs and listened. The

song was one with the wholesome sunshine and the breeze blowing stiffly and whipping the curtains. It was Larry O'Keefe at his matins:

"The little red lark is shaking his wings.
Straight from the breast of his love he springs."

Larry's voice soared—

"Listen the lilt of the song he sings,
All in the morning early, O!"

I sat up and looked at Huldricksson. He was sound asleep and in his sleep he smiled. The voice came nearer my door—

"His wings and his feathers are sunrise red.
He hails the sun and his golden head;
'Good morning, doc, you are long abed!'"

This last was a most irreverent interpolation, I well knew. I opened my door. O'Keefe stood outside laughing. Behind him the Tonga boys clustered, wide toothed and adoring. Even the Cantonese mate had something on his face that served for a grin and Da Costa was beaming. I closed the door behind me.

The Suwarna, her engines silent, was making fine headway under all sail, the Brunhilda skipping in her wake cheerfully with half her canvas up.

The sea was crisping and dimpling under the wind. Blue and white was the world as far as the eye could reach. Schools of little silvery green flying fish broke through the water rushing on each side of us: flashed for an instant and were gone. Behind us gulls hovered and dipped. The shadow of mystery had retreated far over the rim of this wide awake and beautiful world and if, subconsciously, I knew that somewhere it was brooding and waiting, for a little while at least I was consciously free of its oppression.

"How's the patient?" asked O'Keefe.

He was answered by Huldricksson himself, who must have risen just as I left the cabin. The great Norseman had slipped on a pair of pajamas and, giant torso naked under the sun, he strode out upon us. We all of us looked at him a trifle anxiously. But Olaf's madness had left him. His face was still drawn and in his eyes was much

sorrow, but the berserk rage had vanished. He stretched out a hand to us in turn.

"This is Dr. Goodwin, Olaf," said Da Costa. "An' this is Lieutenant O'Keefe of the English Navy."

Huldricksson bowed, with a touch of grace that revealed him not all rough seaman—and indeed, as I was later to find, the Norwegian had been given gentle upbringing and a fair education before the wanderlust of his race had swept him into these far seas.

He addressed himself straight to me: "You said last night we follow?"

I nodded.

"It is where?" he asked again.

"We go first to Ponape and from there to Metalanim Harbor—to the Nan-Matal. You know the place?"

Huldricksson bowed—a white gleam as of ice showing in his blue eyes.

"It is there?" he asked.

"It is there that we must first search," I answered.

"Good!" said Olaf Huldricksson. "It is good!"

He looked at Da Costa inquiringly and the little Portuguese, following his thought answered his unspoken question.

"We should be at Ponape to-morrow morning early, Olaf."

"Good!" repeated the Norseman. He looked away, his eyes tear filled.

A restraint fell upon us; the embarrassment all men experience when they feel a great sympathy and a great pity, neither of which they quite know how to give expression. By silent consent we discussed at breakfast only the most casual topics.

When the meal was over Huldricksson expressed a desire to go aboard the Brunhilda.

The Suwarna hove to and Da Costa and he dropped into the small boat. When they reached the Brunhilda's deck I saw Olaf take the wheel and the two fall into earnest talk. I beckoned to O'Keefe and we stretched ourselves out on the bow hatch under cover of the foresail. He lighted a cigarette, took a couple of leisurely puffs, and looked at me expectantly.

"Well," I asked, "and what do you think of it now?"

"Well," said O'Keefe, "suppose you tell

me what *you* think—and then I'll proceed to point out your scientific errors." His eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Larry," I replied, somewhat severely, "you may not know that I have a reputation as an observer which, putting aside all modesty, I may say is an enviable one; also that while I have my share of imagination it is purely scientific and deals only with the interpretation of facts. You used a word last night to which I must interpose serious objection. You more than hinted that I had—superstitions. Let me inform you, Larry O'Keefe, that I am solely a seeker, observer, analyst, and synthesist of scientific fact. Facts pass through my mind in exactly the way threads pass through a loom; and I have no more superstition about them than the loom has. I am not"—and I tried to make my tone as pointed as my words—"I am not a believer in fantoms or spooks, leprechawns, banshees, or ghostly harpers."

O'Keefe leaned back and shouted with laughter.

"You're telling me what you think *you* are, Doc," he said at last, "but not what *you* think *it* is."

"Larry," I began indignantly. He saw that I was really hurt and instantly his levity gave way to almost boyish contrition.

"Forgive me, Goodwin," he said. "That was rotten bad taste I know. But if you could have seen yourself solemnly disclaiming the banshee"—another twinkle showed in his eyes—"and then with all this sunshine and this wide-open world"—he shrugged his shoulders—"it's hard to visualize anything such as you and Huldricks-on have described."

"I know how hard it is, Larry," I answered. "And don't think I have any idea that the phenomenon is supernatural in the sense spiritualists and table turners have given that word. I do think it is supernormal; energized by a force unknown to modern science—but that doesn't mean I think it outside the radius of science."

"Tell me your theory, Goodwin," he said. I hesitated—for not yet had I been able to put into form to satisfy myself any explanation of the Dweller.

"I think," I said at last, "it is possible that some members of that race peopling the ancient continent which we know existed here in the Pacific and which was destroyed by a comparatively gradual subsidence, have survived. We know that many of these islands are honeycombed with caverns and vast subterranean spaces too great to be so called: literally underground lands, running in many cases far out beneath the ocean floor. It is possible that for some reason the survivors of this race of which I speak sought refuge in these abysmal spaces, one of whose entrances is on the island where Throckmartin's party met its end.

"As for their persistence in these caverns—we know the lost people possessed a high science. This is indisputable. It may be that they had gone far in their mastery of certain universal forms of energy. They may have discovered the secret of that form of magnetic etheric vibration we call light. If so, they would have had no difficulty in maintaining life down there, and, indeed, shielded by earth's crust from the natural forces which always have surface man more or less at their mercy, they may have developed a civilization and extended a science immensely more advanced than ours. And unless they have also developed a complete indifference to conquest and an inflexible determination never to come forth from *their* world, they must always continue to be a potential menace to *our* world."

I paused. His keen face was now all eager attention.

"Have you ever heard of the Chamats?" I asked him. He shook his head.

"In Papua," I explained, "there is a widespread and immeasurably old tradition that 'imprisoned under the hills' is a race of giants who once ruled this region 'when it stretched from sun to sun' and 'before the moon god drew the waters over it'—I quote from the legend. Not only in Papua but in Borneo and Java and in fact throughout Malaysia you find this story. And, so the tradition runs, these people—the Chamats—will one day break through the hills and rule the world; 'make over the world' is the literal translation of

the constant phrase in the tale.* Does this convey anything to you, Larry?"

"Something," he nodded. "Go on."

"It conveys something to me," I said. "especially in the light of what Throck-martin heard and saw and what Huldricks-son and I witnessed. It was Herbert Spencer who said that there was a foundation of truth in every myth and legend of man; that man could create nothing of himself—and that it was the true mission of science to strip the husks from the fact, the perhaps tremendous fact that was at the root of myth, and not to pass it by scoffing."

"I know Spencer's kind," interrupted Larry. "He wouldn't have stuck up his nose at the O'Keefe banshee. Not a bit of it. He'd have had all the O'Keefes dying off quick so he'd have more chances to put salt on its tail and bottle it up as a laboratory specimen. I'm damned if I know which is worse—the scientific curiosity or the scientific sup—" He stopped guiltily. I looked at him suspiciously, but his face was grave, and after all there was much in what he said. I resumed:

"Now it is possible that these survivors I have mentioned form Spencer's fact basis of the Malaysian legend. It is possible that they are experimenting with their science, and that what I call 'the Dweller' is one of their results. Or it may be that the phenomenon is something that they created long ago and control of which they may have lost; or again it may be some unknown energy that they found when they entered their subterranean realm and which they have learned to control or which controls them.

"This much is sure—the moon door, which is clearly operated by the action of moonlight upon some unknown element or combination in much the same way that the metal selenium functions under sun rays or the electric light, and the crystals through which the moon rays pour down upon the pool their prismatic columns, are humanly made mechanisms. Set within the

ruins they would seem to argue for the ancientness of the work. But who can tell when moon door and moon lights were set in their places? Nevertheless, so long as they are humanly made, and so long as it is this flood of moonlight from which the Dweller draws its power of materialization, the Dweller itself, if not the product of the human mind is at least dependent upon the product of the human mind for its appearance."

My pride in this analysis was short lived.

"Wait a minute, Goodwin," said O'Keefe. "Do you mean to say you think that this thing is made of—well—of moon-shine?"

"Moonlight," I replied, "is, of course, reflected sunlight. But the rays which pass back to earth after their impact on the moon's surface are profoundly changed. The spectroscope shows that they lose practically all the slower vibrations we call red and infra-red, while the extremely rapid vibrations we call the violet and ultra-violet are accelerated and altered. Many scientists hold that there is an unknown element in the moon—perhaps that which makes the gigantic luminous trails that radiate in all directions from the lunar crater Tycho—whose energies are absorbed by and carried on the moon rays.

"At any rate, whether by the loss of the vibrations of the red or by the addition of this mysterious force, the light of the moon becomes something entirely different from mere modified sunlight—just as the addition or subtraction of one other chemical in a compound of several makes the product a substance with entirely different energies and potentialities. Carbon, for instance, is a food, a fuel, and useful in a host of ways. Add to one atom of carbon an atom of oxygen—CO—and you have carbon mon-oxid, one of the deadliest gases both to animals and plants known; add another atom of oxygen—CO₂—and you have not only not nearly so deadly a gas to animals but an actual plant food. Why? Ah, that we cannot tell.

* William Beebe, the famous American naturalist and ornithologist, recently fighting in France with America's air forces, called attention to this remarkable belief in an article not long ago printed in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Still more significant was it that he noted a persistent rumor that this breaking out of the buried race was close at hand.—W. J. B.

"Now these rays, Larry, are given perhaps still another mysterious activity by the transparent globes through which Throckmartin told me they passed in the Chamber of the Moon Pool and whose colors they take. The result is the necessary factor in the formation of the Dweller. There would be nothing scientifically improbable in such a process. Larry. Kubalski, the great Russian physicist, produced crystalline forms exhibiting every faculty that we call vital by subjecting certain combinations of chemicals to the action of highly concentrated, brilliant rays of various colors. Something in light and in nothing else produced their pseudo-vitality.

"We know the extraordinary effect of the Finsen rays, which are only the concentration of the chemical energies in the green and blue of the spectrum, upon malignant cell growths in the human body: and we know that the X-ray can dissolve the normal barrier of matter for us, making the solid transparent. We do not begin to know how to harness the potentialities of light. This hidden race may have learned; and learning, may have created forms with powers and possibilities undreamed by us."

"Listen, Doc," said Larry earnestly, "I'll take everything you say about this lost continent, the people who used to live on it, and their caverns, for granted. But by the sword of Brian Boru, you'll never get me to fall for the idea that a bunch of moonshine can handle a big woman such as you say Throckmartin's Thora was, nor a two-fisted man such as you say Throckmartin was, nor Huldricksson's wife—and I'll bet she was one of those strapping big northern women too—you'll never get me to believe that any bunch of concentrated moonshine could handle them and take them waltzing off along a moonbeam back to wherever it goes. No Doc, not on your life, *jamais de la vie*, as we say at the front—nix!"

"I've told you that what you call moonshine is an aggregate of vibrations with immense potential power, Larry," I answered, considerably irritated. "What we call matter is nothing but a collection of infinitely small particles of electricity—electrons; and the way the electrons are grouped makes

of matter man or wood or metal or stone. Light is a magnetic vibration of the ether and is probably composed of similar particles of electricity but functioning in another way from the particles that make matter. Learn the secret of making light and you come close to learning the secret of matter. Why Larry, if you could take *all* the energy out of the sunshine that in one minute covers one square foot of earth, you could blast *all* of earth to bits. And your wonderful wireless is nothing but vibrations—yet it carries words around the world with almost the speed of light itself."

"Yes," said Larry, and you know the kind of apparatus we have to make to catch those vibrations. Why the knock of a gnat on it is like the kick of an elephant! Why, Doc, you could put me up against *all* the wireless vibrations in the world at eleven o'clock at night when they're heaviest, and all I'd say would be—"That mosquito humming around me is sure dying of old age and general decrepitude."

"But—" I began.

"No," he interrupted. "It's wrong. And about the sun—Say! I've seen a New York copper standing at Forty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue for six hours at a stretch with a 110 degree heat beating around him. And all he said when he was relieved was—"Well, about three good cold pails of suds will just about do me." Three good cold beers Doc, was all he needed to neutralize six hours of the same old rays that in one minute on one square foot have enough energy to blow up the world! And he was right.

"No, no Doc. It's good in theory, but it don't work out. Like my old professor in chemistry at Eton who was always trying the balmiest experiments that never worked out either. But at the end of every fliv he'd turn to us cheerfully and say: 'The experiment has failed, gentlemen, but the principle remains the same.' Same way, theoretically, old Archimedes was right when he said that if a man could get a lever long enough he could move the world. But will man ever get hold of that long a lever—*Jamais—de—la—vie!*"

"All right O'Keefe," I answered, now

very much irritated indeed. "What's your theory?" And I could not resist adding: "Fairies?"

"Professor," he grinned, "if that Thing's a fairy, it's Irish. There aren't any fairies anywhere but in Ireland. It takes a country with a history to grow the Little People—and Ireland's got more history than all the else of the world put together. If it's a fairy it's Irish and when it sees me it 'll be so glad there'll be nothing to it. 'I was lost, strayed or stolen, Larry *avick*,' it 'll say, 'an' I was so homesick for the old sod I was desp'rit,' it 'll say, an' take me back quick before I do any more har-*rm*! It 'll tell me—an' that's the truth."

I forgot my chagrin in our laughter.

"But I'll tell you what I think," he said soberly. "Down at the first battle of the Marne there were any number of Englishmen who thought they saw the old archers of Crécy and Agincourt, dead these half dozen centuries, twanging their fantom bows and shooting down the Huns by the hundred. And you can find thousands of Frenchmen who see Joan of Arc and Napoleon regularly. It's what the doctors call collective hallucination. Somebody sees something a little queer; his imagination gets to work hard because his nerves are pretty well strained anyway, he says to the next fellow: 'Don't you see it?' and the next fellow says, 'Sure I see it, too!' And there you are—bowmen of Mons, St. George on his white horse, Joan in armor, and all the rest of it."

"If you think that explains Throckmartin and myself, how do you explain Huldricksson, who never saw Throckmartin and didn't see me before the Thing came to the Brunhilda?" I asked with, I admit, some heat.

"Now don't get me wrong," replied Larry. "I believe you all saw something all right. But what I think you saw was some kind of gas. All this region is volcanic and islands and things are constantly poking up from the sea. It's probably gas; a volcanic emanation; something new to us and that drives you crazy—lots of kinds of gas do that. It hit the Throckmartin party on that island and they probably were all more or less delirious all the time; thought

they saw things: talked it over and—collective hallucination. When they got it bad they most likely jumped overboard one by one. Huldricksson sails into a place where it is and it hits his wife. She grabs the child and jumps overboard. Maybe the moon rays make it luminous—I've seen gas on the front under the moon that looked like a thousand whirling dervish devils. Yes, and you could see the devil's faces in it. And if you got into your lungs nothing could ever make you think you hadn't seen *real* devils."

"But that doesn't explain the moon door and the phenomena of the lights in the Chamber of the Pool," I said at last.

"*You* haven't seen them, have *you*?" asked Larry. "And Throckmartin admitted he was pretty nearly crazy when he thought *he* did. Well!"

For a time I was silent.

"Larry," I said at last, "whether you are right or I am right, I must go to the Nan-Matal. Will you go with me, Larry?"

"Goodwin," he replied, "I surely will. I'm as interested as you are. If we don't run across the Dolphin I'll go. I'll leave word at Ponape, to tell them where I am if they come along, and I'll make arrangements with Da Costa to stop at various points where the old dear may run in and leave messages. If they report me dead for a while there's nobody to care. So that's all right. Only old man, be reasonable. You've thought over this so long, you're going bug, honestly you are."

And again, the gladness that I might have Larry O'Keefe with me, was so great that I forgot to be angry.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MOON DOOR OPENS—AND SHUTS.

DA COSTA, who had come aboard unnoticed by either of us, now tapped me on the arm.

"Doctair Goodwin," he said, "can I see you in my cabin, sair?"

At last, then, he was going to speak. I followed him.

"Doctair," he said, when we had entered, "this is a veree strange thing that has

happened to Olaf. Veree strange. An' the natives of Ponape, they have been very much excite' lately. An' none go near the Nan-Matal now, for they say the spirits have got great power and are angree because of that othair partee which they take.

"Of what they fear I know nothing, nothing!" Again that quick, furtive crossing of himself. "But this I have to tell you. There came to me from Ranaloa last month a man, a German, a doctair, like you. His name it was Von Hetzdorp. I take him to Ponape an' the natives there, they will not take him to the Nan-Matal, where he wish to go—no! So I take him. We leave in a boat, with much instrument carefully tied up. I leave him there wit' the boat an' the food. He tell me to tell no one an' pay me not to. But you are a friend an' Olaf he depend much upon you an' so I tell you, sair."

"You know nothing more than this, Da Costa?" I asked. "You're sure?"

"Nothing! Nothing more!" he answered. But I was not so sure. Later I told O'Keefe.

"A German, eh?" He whistled. "Well, that means trouble. Now I'll pray to all the fairies in Ireland that we don't meet up with the Dolphin."

His prayers must have been powerful, for the next morning we raised Ponape, without further incident, and before noon the Suwarna and the Brunhilda had dropped anchor in the harbor. Upon the excitement and manifest dread of the natives, when we sought among them for carriers and workmen to accompany us, I will not dwell. It is enough to say that no payment we offered would induce a single one of them to go to the Nan-Matal. Nor would they say why.

They were sullen and panicky, and I think the most disconcerting thing of all in their attitude, was the open relief they showed when they learned that the British warship might steam in, seeking O'Keefe. It indicated that their fear was deep-rooted and real, indeed.

Finally it was agreed that the Brunhilda should be left at Ponape in charge of a half-breed Chinaman, whom both Da Costa and

Huldricksson knew and trusted. We piled her long-boat up with my instruments and food and camping equipment. The Suwarna took us around to Metalanim Harbor, and there, with the tops of ancient sea walls deep in the blue water beneath us, and the ruins looming up out of the mangroves, a scant mile from us, left us.

Da Costa's anxiety and uneasiness were almost pitiful and I knew that even if we could persuade him to stay with the party, his superstitions would make him worse than useless. His men, too, who had got inklings of the happenings on the Brunhilda, were already half mutinous. But there were tears in the eyes of the little Portuguese when he bade us farewell, invoking all the saints to stand by and protect us; and the sorrow in his face and the fervor of his parting grip were eloquent of his conviction that never again would he behold us.

Then, when he had passed with the Suwarna out of view, with Huldricksson manipulating our small sail, and Larry at the rudder, we rounded the titanic wall that swept down into the depths, passed monoliths, standing like gigantic sentinels upon its shattered verge, and turned at last into the canal that Throckmartin, on his map, had marked as the passage which, running between frowning Nan-Tauach and its satellite islet, Tau, led straight to the gate of that place of ancient mysteries, where the moon door is portal of that dread chamber wherein the Dweller made itself manifest.

And as we entered that channel we were enveloped by a silence; a silence so intense, so—weighted, that it seemed to have substance; an alien silence that clung and stifled and still stood aloof from us—the living. It was a stillness, such as might follow the long tramping of millions into the grave; it was—paradoxical as it may be—filled with the withdrawal of life.

Standing down in the chambered depths of the Great Pyramid I had known something of such silence—but never such intensity as this. Larry felt it and I saw him look at me askance. If Olaf, sitting in the bow, felt it, too, he gave no sign; his blue eyes, with again the glint of ice within them, watched the channel before us.

As we passed, there arose upon our left sheer walls of black basalt blocks, cyclopean, towering fifty feet or more, broken here and there by the sinking of their deep foundations—and only where they had so broken, had the hand of time been able to crumble them. From these dark ramparts the silence seemed to ooze, and my skin crept as though from hidden places in them scores of eyes, ages dead, peered out upon us.

In front of us the mangroves widened out and filled the canal. On our right the lesser walls of Tau, somber blocks smoothed and squared and set with a cold, mathematical nicety, that filled me with vague awe, slipped by. Through breaks I caught glimpses of dark ruins and of great fallen stones that seemed to crouch and menace us, as we passed. Somewhere there, hidden, were the seven globes that poured the moon fire down upon the Moon Pool.

Now we were among the mangroves and, sail down, the three of us pushed and pulled the boat through their tangled roots and branches. The noise of our passing split the silence, like a profanation, and from the ancient bastions came 'murmurs'—forbidding, strangely sinister. And now we were through, floating on a little open space of shadow-filled water. Before us lifted the gateway of Nan-Tauach, gigantic, broken, incredibly old; shattered portals through which had passed men and women of earth's dawn; old with a weight of years that pressed leadenly upon the eyes that looked upon it, and yet in some curious, indefinable way—menacingly defiant.

Beyond the gate, back from the portals, stretched a flight of enormous basalt slabs, a giant's stairway indeed; and from each side of it marched the high walls that were the Dweller's pathway. None of us spoke as we grounded the boat and dragged it up upon a half-submerged pier. And when we did speak it was in whispers.

"What next?" asked Larry.

"I think we ought to take a look around," I replied in the same low tones. "We'll climb the wall here and take a flash about. The whole place ought to be plain as day from that height."

Huldricksson, his blue eyes alert, nodded.

With the greatest difficulty we clambered up the broken blocks, the giant Norseman at times lifting me like a child, and stood at last upon the broad top. From this vantage-point, not only the whole of Nan-Tauach, but all of the Nan-Matal lay at our feet.

To the east and south of us, set like children's blocks in the midst of the sapphire sea, were dozens of islets, none of them covering more than two square miles of surface; each of them a perfect square or oblong within its protecting walls. Behind these walls were grouped ruins—houses, temples, palaces, all the varying abodes of men. On none was there sign of life, save for a few great birds that hovered here and there and gulls dipping in the blue waves beyond.

We turned our gaze down upon the island on which we stood. It was, I estimated, about three-quarters of a mile square. The sea wall enclosed it like the sides of a gigantic box. It was really an enormous basalt-sided open cube, and within it two other open cubes. The enclosure between the first and second wall was stone paved, with here and there a broken pillar and long stone benches.

The hibiscus, the aloe-tree and a number of small shrubs had found place, but seemed only to intensify its stark loneliness. It came to me that this had been the assembling place of those who, thousands upon thousands of years ago, had gathered within this citadel of mystery. Beyond the wall that was its farther boundary was a second enclosure, littered with broken pillars, fragments of stone and numerous small structures; and the second enclosure's limit was the third wall, a terrace not more than twenty feet high. Within it was what had been without doubt the heart of Nan-Tauach—an open space three hundred feet square; at each of its corners a temple.

Directly before us, black and staring like an eyeless socket, was the entrance to the "treasure-house of Chau-ta-Leur" the sun king. The blocks that had formed its doors lay shattered beside it. And opposite it should be, if Throckmartin's story had not been a dream, the gray slab he had named the moon door.

"Wonder where the boche can be?" asked Larry.

I shook my head. There was no sign of life here. Had Von Hetzdorp gone—or had the Dweller taken him, too? Whatever had happened, there was no trace of him below us or on any of the islets within our range of vision. We scrambled down the side of the gateway. Olaf looked at me wistfully.

"We start the search now, Olaf," I said. "And first, O'Keefe, let us see whether the gray stone is really here. After that we will set up camp, and while I unpack you and Olaf search the island. It won't take long."

Larry gave a look at his service automatic and grinned. "Lead on *Macduff*," he said. We made our way up the steps, through the outer enclosures and into the central square. I confess to a fire of scientific curiosity and eagerness tinged with a dread that O'Keefe's analysis might be true. Would we find the moving slab and, if so, would it be as Throckmartin had described? If so, then even Larry would have to admit that here was something that theories of gases and luminous emanations would not explain; and the first test of the whole amazing story would be passed. But if not—

And there before us, the faintest tinge of gray setting it apart from its neighboring blocks of basalt, was the moon door!

There was no mistaking it. This was, in very deed, the portal through which, as I have told in my narrative so courteously printed by THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY last June, Dr. Throckmartin had seen pass that gloriously dreadful apparition he called the Dweller; through it the Dweller had borne in an embrace of living light first Thora, Mrs. Throckmartin's maid, and then Dr. Stanton, his youthful colleague; and through it at last had gone Throckmartin, down the shining tunnel beyond, whose luminous lure led to that enchanted chamber into which streamed the seven moon torrents that drew the Dweller from the wondrous pool that was its lair.

Across its threshold had raced Edith Throckmartin, my lost friend's young bride, fearlessly flying down that haunted passage to aid her husband in his fruitless fight against the Thing—and out of it he himself had rushed, a merciful darkness shrouding

consciousness and sight, after he had watched her sink, slowly sink, down through the blue waters of the moon pool, wrapped in the Dweller's coruscating folds, to—what?

And then there seemed to drift out through the stone to face me that inexplicable being of swirling, spiraling plumes and jets of sparkling opalescence, of crystal sweet chimings, of murmuring sighings that Throckmartin had told me stamped upon the faces of its prey wedded anguish and rapture, terror and ecstasy commingled, joy of heaven and agony of hell, the seal of God and devil monstrously mated—and that my own eyes had seen clasp Throckmartin in our cabin of the Southern Queen and draw him swiftly down the moon path—here?

What was that portal—more enigmatic than was ever sphinx? And what lay beyond it? What did that smooth stone, whose wan deadness whispered of ages old corridors of time opening out into alien, unimaginable vistas, hide? It had cost the world of science Throckmartin's great brain—as it had cost Throckmartin those he loved. It had drawn me to it in search of Throckmartin—and its shadow had fallen upon the soul of Olaf the Norseman; and upon what thousands upon thousands more I wondered, since the brains that had conceived it had vanished with their secret knowledge?

Did the Dweller lurk behind it in wait for us? When we found its *open-sesame* would we find within truths of our world's youth to which the riches of *Ali Baba's* cave were but dross? Was there that within which would force science to recast its hard won theories of humanity, of its evolution, of its painful progress from brute to what we call man—or would we loose upon the world some nameless, blasting evil, some survival of our planet's nightmare hours, some supernormal, inhuman thing spawned by unthinkable travail in a hidden cavern of mother earth?

A barrier of unknown stone—fifteen feet high and ten feet wide; and yet it might bar the way to a lost paradise or hold back a hell undreamed by even cruellest brains!

What lay beyond it?

Swiftly the thoughts raced through my

mind as I stood staring at the gray slab—and then through me passed a wave of weakness. And not until then did I realize the intense, subconscious anxiety that had possessed me; the mordant fear that I had been prey of inexplicable obsession and had by it misled my colleagues of the International Association and through them the entire scientific world.

I stretched out a shaking hand and touched the surface of the slab. A faint thrill passed through my hand and arm, oddly unfamiliar and as oddly unpleasant; as of electric contact holding the very essence of cold. O'Keefe, watching, imitated my action. As his fingers rested on the stone his face filled with astonishment. In Huldricksson's eyes was mingled hope and despair. I beckoned him: he laid a hand on the slab and swiftly withdrew it. But I saw the despair die from his face, leaving only eagerness.

"It is the door!" he said. I nodded. There was a low whistle of astonishment from O'Keefe and he pointed up toward the top of the gray stone. I followed the gesture and saw, above the moon door and on each side of it, two gently curving bosses of rock, perhaps a foot in diameter.

"The moon door's keys," I said.

"It begins to look so," answered Larry. "If we can find them," he added.

"There's nothing we can do till moonrise," I replied. "And we've none too much time to prepare as it is. Come!"

But stark lonely as was that place, I felt, as we passed out, as though eyes were upon me, watching with an intensity of malevolence, a bitter hatred. Oiaf must have felt it, too, for I saw him glance sharply around and his face hardened. I said nothing, however, nor did he; and a little later we were beside our boat. We lightered it, set up the tent, and as it was now but a short hour to sundown I bade them leave me and make their search. They went off together, and I busied myself with opening some of the paraphernalia I had brought with me.

First of all I took out two Becquerel ray-condensers that I had bought in New York. Their lenses would collect and intensify to the fullest extent any light directed upon them. I had found them most useful in

making spectroscopic analysis of luminous vapors, and I knew that at Yerkes Observatory splendid results had been obtained from them in collecting the diffused radiance of the nebulae for the same purpose.

It was my theory that the mechanism operating the moon door responded only to the force of the full light of the moon shining through the seven little circles which Throckmartin had discovered set within each of the bosses above it; just as the Dweller could materialize only under the same full-moon force shining through the varicolored lights. Obviously the time, then, of the door's opening and the phenomenon's materialization must coincide.

With the moon only a few days past its full, it was practically certain that by setting the Becquerel condensers above the bosses I could concentrate enough light upon the circles to set the opening mechanism in motion. And as the ray stream from the waning moon was insufficient to energize the pool, we could enter the chamber free from any fear of encountering its tenant, make our preliminary observations and go forth before the satellite had dropped so far that the concentration in the condensers would fall below that necessary to keep the slab from closing.

I took out also a small spectroscope, easily carried and a few other small instruments for the analysis of certain light manifestations and the testing of metal and liquid. Finally, I put aside my emergency medical kit.

I had hardly finished examining and adjusting these before O'Keefe and Huldricksson returned. They reported signs of a camp at least ten days old beside the northern wall of the outer court, but beyond that no evidence of others beyond ourselves on Nan-Tauach. Moonrise would not occur until nine thirty, and until then there was no use of attacking the moon door.

We prepared supper, ate and talked a little, but for the most part were silent. Even Larry's high spirits were not in evidence: half a dozen times I saw him take out his automatic and look it over. He was more thoughtful than I had ever seen him. Once he went into the tent, rummaged about a bit and brought out another

revolver which, he said, he had got from Da Costa, and a half-dozen clips of cartridges. He passed the gun over to Olaf, who took it with a word of thanks.

At last a glow in the southeast heralded the rising moon. I picked up my instruments and the medical kit; Larry and Olaf shouldered each a short ladder that was part of my equipment, and, with our electric-flashes pointing the way, walked up the great stairs, through the enclosures, and straight to the gray stone.

By this time the moon had risen and its clipped light shone full upon the slab. I saw faint gleams pass over it as of fleeting phosphorescence—but so faint were they that I could not be sure of the truth of my observation. The base of the gray stone bisected a curious cuplike depression whose perfectly rounded sides were as smooth as though they had been polished by a jeweler. This half cup was, at its deepest, two and a half feet, and its lip joined the basalt pavement four feet from the barrier of the great slab.

We set the ladders in place. Olaf I assigned to stand before the door and watch for the first signs of its opening—if open it should—and the big sailor accepted the post eagerly, thinking, I suppose, that it would bring him nearer the loved ones he now was sure were within. The Becquerals were set within three-inch tripods, whose feet I had equipped with vacuum rings to enable them to hold fast to the rock.

I scaled one ladder and fastened a condenser over the boss; descended; sent Larry up to watch it, and, ascending the second ladder, rapidly fixed the other in its place. Then, with O'Keefe watchful on his perch, I on mine and Olaf's eyes fixed upon the moon door, we began our vigil. Suddenly there was an exclamation from Larry.

"Seven little lights are beginning to glow on this stone. Goodwin!" he cried. But I had already seen those beneath my lens begin to gleam out with a silvery luster. Swiftly the rays within the condenser began to thicken and increase, and as they did so the seven small circles waxed like stars growing out of the dusk, and with a queer—curdled is the best word I can find to define it—luster entirely strange to me.

I placed a finger upon one of them and received a shock such as I had felt on touching the moon door, only greatly intensified. Clearly a current of some kind was set up within the substance when the moonlight fell upon it. And now the lights were glowing steadily. Beneath me I heard a faint, sighing murmur and then the voice of Huldricksson:

"It opens—the stone turns—"

I began to climb down the ladder. Again came Olaf's voice:

"The stone—it is open—" And then a shriek that came from the very core of his heart; a wail of blended anguish and pity, of rage and despair—and the sound of swift footsteps racing through the wall beneath me!

I dropped to the ground. The moon door was wide open, and through it I caught a glimpse of a corridor filled with a faint, pearly vaporous light like earliest misty dawn. But of Olaf I could see—nothing! And even as I stood, gaping, from behind me came the sharp crack of a rifle; I saw the glass of the condenser at Larry's side flash and fly into fragments; saw him drop swiftly to the ground and the automatic in his hand flash once, twice, into the darkness.

Saw, too, the moon door begin to pivot slowly, slowly back into its place!

I rushed toward the turning stone with the wild idea of holding it open. As I thrust my hands against it there came at my back a snarl and an oath and Larry staggered under the impact of a body that had flung itself straight at his throat. He reeled at the lip of the shallow cup at the base of the slab, slipped upon its polished curve, fell and rolled with that which had attacked him, kicking and writhing, straight through the narrowing portal into the mistily luminous passage!

Forgetting all else, I sprang with a cry to his aid. And as I leaped I felt the closing edge of the moon door graze my side. And then, as Larry raised a fist, brought it down upon the temple of the man who had grappled with him and rose from the twitching body unsteadily to his feet, I heard shuddering past me a mournful whisper; spun about as though some giant's

hand had whirled me—and stood so, rigid, appalled!

For the end of the corridor no longer opened out into the moonlit square of ruined Nan-Tauach. It was barred by a solid mass of glimmering stone. The moon door had closed!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Skywaymen



by

Henry
Leverage

THREE was excitement at Zenith Tower!

It could not have been caused by the final terms of Germany's capitulation to the Allies. It could not have been due to the arrival of the day-mail from England *via* airplane. That achievement had become commonplace.

The excitement, however, had communicated itself to a vast throng who had motored northward, and who were gathered about the rearing pillar of concrete and structural-steel which pricked a sky-high hole up through Manhattan's atmosphere, fully three thousand feet.

Zenith Tower was ablaze with nitrogen lights. A diadem of white fire rimmed the great landing and departing stage, from which the mail-planes departed for the zone-centers of the United States. These centers were at Boston, Washington, Atlanta, New Orleans, Chicago, and St. Louis.

The day-mail from England, *via* the tip of Greenland, had arrived on time to the

And where was Olaf Huldricksson? And who was the man at our feet who had brought this calamity down upon us? And what were we to do, prisoned, and my bewildered brain told me, hopelessly prisoned, without food, in the very lair of the Dweller itself?

minute. The swooping bulk of the British plane, with its five droning motors, had settled upon Zenith Tower like a black specter on an Alpine crag.

Beside this plane stood another, which seemed to strain at its holding ropes, so eager was it to leap from the pinnacle and soar in the velvet of the night.

The eyes of the crowd were on this plane. An event of importance was about to happen.

No mere departure would have drawn that throng. No experiment in aerodynamics would have caused them to forego their dinners and crane their necks.

A disturbance in the rear of the crowd passed unnoticed. A shabbily dressed man, with long hair and soiled collar, who carried a package, pressed eagerly forward, glanced upward and elbowed his way to the receiving elevators of Zenith Tower.

A burly pilot barred his progress. A rough hand gripped the man's thin shoulder and spun him around.

"Out with you!" the operator exclaimed. "What d'ye want here?"

The man rubbed his left hand across his eyes, darted a venomous glance at the pilot, and said boldly:

"I've a package for the night-post. It must go! I'm willing to pay any rate."

The pilot released his hand and stared at the man. His eyes dropped to the package. It was not large. It weighed about five pounds. It was bound stoutly with hemp-twine and addressed in a scrawling chiography.

"You're willing to pay the rate?" repeated the pilot. "Do you know what the rate is?"

"This is express, not mail." The man held out the package. "It weighs four pounds fifteen ounces," he added eagerly. "I weighed it."

"I want it to go on the new mail. It must be in Orangelands by morning. I'm willing to pay anything to get it there."

"The rate is a dollar an ounce for express!"

This statement was delivered as a final one by the pilot, who saw in the man only a meddler and a notoriety seeker.

The man did not wince. He held out the package and attempted to place it in the tower-pilot's protesting hands.

"Send it!" he cried. "I'll pay!"

"You—" The pilot pursed his mouth and thrust the man aside. "Make way!" he shouted. "Step aside for the mail-sacks. Here comes the first-class matter!"

A heavily armored motor car had stopped on the outside of the throng. Through a lane of craned necks three guards hurried toward the tower's base. They were followed by two messengers who staggered under the load of mail-pouches.

"One billion seven hundred million in new bills," said the first guard to the pilot. "They're for the Pacific Station. Can we all get in the lift together?"

The pilot nodded, allowed the guards to enter, and saw that the iron-grilled door was closed behind the two messengers with the sacks. A purr sounded. The elevator shot upward. Its progress was marked by flashing lights at each supplementary stage of the giant tower.

A rocking cheer announced its arrival at the top platform. The thin splinter of a search-light shot a white beam up to the heavens. A second light sprang from a city tower and spot-lighted the men on top of the vast structure.

This light brought out the details of the mail-plane. The crowd waved their arms. It seemed as if the great bird was about to leap from the crag. A droning announced that one of its internal combustion motors was hitting on all twenty-four cylinders. There were two more motors to start in action.

The man with the package groaned. He grasped the iron-grilled gate to the elevator and shook it with his left hand. In the cove of his right arm he still gripped the bundle which he wished expressed to the Pacific Station.

"Curse them!" he said. "Curse that pilot! I must start this surprise on its way. I must!"

An outpouring of cold air, followed by a gust, announced that the elevator was descending. It came to a sudden stop before the waiting man.

The two messengers, followed by the three guards, stepped out and hurried through the crowd to the waiting armored car.

The pilot peered around and narrowed his eyes at the man.

"You here yet?" he snarled.

"I must send this package. Won't you take it?"

"I'll take you up to the receiving clerk. If he takes it—all right. If he don't, he'll kick you off the tower!"

The man glided into the elevator and smiled covertly. The controller handle was jerked over as the pilot slammed the door. The lift soared at the rate of a thousand feet a minute. It came to a stop at the highest level of the tower.

The pilot opened a door, thrust out the man, and followed him across a tiled roof to a desk, over which was a demi-shed.

"This guy here wants to send a package to the Pacific Station," said the pilot to a serious-faced young man behind the desk. "What'll I do with him, Jimmy?"

The clerk glanced at the man, and then

at the bundle that was thrust forward. He turned and stared in the direction of the huge, three-engined biplane which was on the point of departure.

"Call Danton," he said. "I'll ask him if he can take any more. Does this fellow know our express rate?"

"Sure, I told him," said the pilot as an aviator glided forward and leaned over the edge of the desk.

"Can you take any more express?" asked the clerk to the aviator.

"How much does it weigh?"

The clerk snatched up the man's package and dropped it on the scales. He failed to see the strained, fear-riven expression of the man as he roughly tested the strings about the bundle and glanced at the address.

"To Mayor Bingham, eh?" he said. "Well, my good fellow, it'll cost you exactly eighty-seven dollars and twenty-five cents to send this package by night-post. Got it?"

The man eagerly thrust a grimy hand into his right trouser-pocket and brought forth a roll of soiled bills. He counted these upon the desk. He fished in the other pocket and laid down a dime, two nickels, and five one-cent pieces. He had the exact change.

"The mayor!" he stammered. "He will get this personally?"

"He will! It isn't often that express is carried from tide-water to tide-water between two days—from sundown to sunup. That's what's going to happen to this. Here's your receipt."

The man clutched an oblong of white paper, folded it and stared at the leaning aviator who had turned a wrist and glanced at an illuminated watch-dial.

"I'm off!" exclaimed the air-pilot. "Get the express bag aboard! I've got six minutes to start the outboard motors!"

The man who had left the package edged toward the elevator. He was dropped the full distance in the time of three minutes. He lurched out through the iron-grilled gate and worked his way past the waiting throng.

He turned at the near-by entrance to a cheap apartment that lifted above the plain upon which was the Zenith Tower. He saw the splinter of heaven-darting light.

He heard the crowd roar. A muffled drone vibrated the night air.

Entering the apartment and climbing the stairs, he opened the door to his room and stepped inside. Upon a shelf was a row of books, whose titles concerned capital and labor.

The floor of this room was littered with string and paper cut from a huge sheet of manila-wrapper. The man gathered up this evidence and thrust it into the sooty mouth of a chimney-place. He sat down on a bed and dropped his unshaven face in his hands. He heard the far-off shouts from the crowd about the Zenith Tower.

His face lifted, and his eyes glowed with fanatic fire. He snarled an answer to the crowd's shouting.

"Curse you, Bingham!" he said. "You were elected to-day! To-morrow morning I shall have my revenge. Twelve hours—just twelve hours—and Bingham, you—"

Danton, first pilot of the mail-post and an ace from the splendid expedition which went to France, gave the signal that all was ready as the two outboard motors purred and warmed to the task ahead of them.

A gale of propeller-driven wind swept across the departing stage of the Zenith Tower. It fluttered the selvage of the giant plane's wings which had leaped from England to New York in twelve hours.

The second pilot of the mail-post, which was to reach the Pacific by daybreak, climbed into the after-cockpit, strapped on his belt, and watched the assistants who struggled with the holding ropes of the great plane.

The last leash was unshackled, the last shout from the crowd, gathered about the base of the tower, rose upward in a welling flood. The biplane swished off the departing platform, pointed its sharp prow starward, and zooned over the housetops and the towering spires of New York.

Its speed, even before the engines had completely warmed or the carburation had become perfect, was two hundred and twelve miles per hour.

This velocity was obtained with the same general engine construction that had served so well in the days of the war. The three

twenty-four cylinder engines were arranged with the center engine as a pusher and the two outboard units as tractors. It was possible to remain aloft with two units out of commission.

The care of the three engines—their spark-control, their force-feed oiling, their gasoline pressure—was left to the pilot in the after cockpit, who answered to the name of Robertson.

Danton and Robertson were unlike as the poles. The first pilot was the beau-ideal of the air-post. He wore a soft leather birdman's costume, with padded hood and great wind-resisting goggles. Robertson, on the other hand, was clad in oily sheepskins and a helmet which was spotted with grease.

He sat in an aluminum seat just forward the boss of the crank-shaft which drove the pusher-propeller. At his left and right, or to port and starboard, as he called it, the ninety-degree cylinders of the tractor engines showed, with their rocker-arms flashing in the night.

Before his braced feet lay the mail pouches, with an express bag on top. They had been lashed down with bands of thin leather. This precaution was taken in case of a loop or tail slide.

Storms were likely to be met with on the great circle route which they were taking. A meteorological report, handed to Danton three minutes before their departure, denoted an atmospheric depression in the region of the Great Lakes.

Robertson had placed this report in his glove. He lifted his head above the edge of the cockpit as the plane passed over New York Harbor and touched Danton on the shoulder. The first pilot nodded and lifted the dictaphone.

"Revolutions 1,695, 1,674, 1,689!" shouted Robertson. "All's well with the power-eggs. Big storm ahead!"

Danton dropped the dictaphone, pointed upward, and glanced at his altimeter as the great plane soared and took the twenty-thousand foot level.

"To hell with the storm!" he said, with his voice lost in the swish of a hurricane of their own making.

Robertson checked off his instruments,

and found that he was getting the maximum from the engines. He feared to advance the sparks or enrichen the carburetor's mixture. He decided to let well-enough alone.

Their speed, by drift-compass, revolution-counter, and wind-vane beneath the upper wing, he estimated to be two hundred and fifteen miles per hour. This was over what the designers of the plane had promised.

He lifted a celluloid trap-door and studied the land below him for drift-marks and position. This was required in the mail-post regulations on the part of both pilots.

A triangle of actinic lights flashed up to him. These lights were mile-spaced apart. He closed the door and sat back in comfort. The plane had passed Perth Amboy and was on the short leg to Philadelphia.

A belt of white-points arched the wine-dark velvet overhead. These stars rocked slightly at times. This was when Danton moved the controls.

The first pilot had the birdman's sense of wind-pockets and currents. He was holding the Great Circle route like a wild goose going home in the fall.

Conversation between the two pilots was difficult, but not impossible. Dictaphones of marvelous power were furnished both cockpits. With these a whisper could have been heard in a calm. In a gale a shout became a whisper.

Robertson began to talk to Danton after the plane had crossed the thin line of lights at North Broad Street, Philadelphia. His voice was thrown forward with all the force of his lungs.

Danton held the dictaphone to the side of his helmet. He nodded now and then. Oftentimes he raised his gauntleted hand and answered with the silent language of his fingers.

"You watching that storm?" shouted Robertson.

Danton pointed upward toward the thick edge of the top wing.

"She's a hell-roarer from barometer readings!"

The first pilot shook his head to indicate he feared no storm. This, in a measure, was true. The speed of the plane was two hundred and fifteen miles an hour.

No storm that ever blew would have that

velocity. Robertson's fear, translated in the birdmen's language, was that it would "pull their speed."

"You're going over it?" asked the second pilot.

Danton nodded.

"She's some way yet!"

Again the first pilot bowed his head. He glanced at the watch on his wrist and then leaned over the edge of the cockpit. His eyes searched the dark land which unrolled beneath them.

River and road and checkered meadow flew tailward. A blur of lights, without formation, indicated a city. A second blur, to the north, was a large suburb. Dense wooded slopes showed in defined lines. Charcoal fires crimsoned the water-courses.

"Pittsburgh!" called back Danton.

Robertson caught the word as it was formed by the mouth. He had not used his voice-amplifier.

"Sure!" he shouted. "We're on time!"

He reached forward and opened the oil-feed three-way-cock, a quarter turn. High-speed engines needed oil and more oil. A faint rise in the temperature of the radiator, which was indicated by a spiral thermostat, called for this action.

Cupping his gloved hands he shouted to Danton:

"Some swag we're carrying?"

Danton turned his head and glanced at the mail-sacks. He rubbed the frost from his goggles and lifted his glance to Robertson.

"It's safe!" he exclaimed. "Can that talking!"

Robertson grinned through the grime and oil on his lips. Danton had little appreciation of the thing they were doing.

It was one matter to pilot a standard plane between the mail stations. It was a different matter, in Robertson's estimation, to carry a billion and more dollars between New York and Orangelands in the span of a single night.

The calamity howlers had written to the papers that the project was dangerous in the extreme. The Air Mail Department and the Air Board Control showed the records of their offices. Not one cent had ever been lost in air transit.

The birdmen were too far removed from things mundane to stop to rifle mail-bags. They had looked upon the stars and learned to belittle the works of man.

Robertson bided his time and watched the engines. He closed his eyes wearily. He rubbed his goggles with a tired hand-motion. He felt drowsy. He had an oxygenator tube in the cockpit. It was hardly time to use this.

He yawned more openly and waited for Danton to give some signal. The whirling propellers, the clicking rocker-arms on top of the engines' cylinders, the harp-string note which came from the piano-wire stays, all served to force his sleep.

He dropped into unconsciousness and fell over sidewise. He awoke when a quick dart upward and a side-circling indicated that Danton had sensed the edge of the storm and was going over it.

Robertson sat rigid and reached swiftly for the oxygenator's pipe. This was not unlike the mouthpiece to a gas-mask. He fitted it under his gums and breathed in the life-giving mixture.

He set the tube down as he felt the warm blood race through to his brain.

The great bird of silk-and-steel soared on a ten-degree incline. It climbed at the rate of one thousand feet a minute, without perceptibly checking its forward speed.

The engines required carbureter adjustments as rarified air decreased the oxygen in the mixture. Robertson worked swiftly, keeping his adjustments in tune with the straining engines.

The altimeter before him on the cockpit, which was illuminated with a tiny electric globe, or pilot light, showed twenty-six thousand feet elevation above sea-level. Danton was riding over the storm. The mail-plane had leaped its enemy as a hunter leaps a hedge.

Robertson flattened his face against the celluloid trap-door. He bunched his body, cupped his hands, and peered downward. He saw a billowy mass of angry clouds, through which darted forked-lightning. They were ten thousand feet above a tornado!

The thin air caused the second pilot to breathe at double-rate. He thrust up his

hand and coiled his fingers about the oxygen tube. He gulped the phlegm in his mouth and inhaled the oxygen.

He repeated the gulping. Life and warmth came to him. He felt intoxicated and secure. He twisted in his belt and sat down on the seat.

Peering forward through the frosty goggles he saw Danton bending over the control-stick and dragging at the oxygen.

A short hour passed, with the plane gradually sinking to its twenty thousand foot level. The lights of a sleeping city came up through scattering clouds. A diamond formation of green flares denoted that they were passing over East St. Louis. The plane had drifted thirty miles south of the Great Circle route between New York and the Pacific Station at Orangelands.

Danton nodded as Robertson shouted this information. The plane swung three degrees to the north. It lunged on like a black javelin. They were alone in a void of bright stars. The land below them seemed far away and forgotten.

The progress they made over the earth, which rolled with them, was one-fifth the speed of the planet's periphery. Time would come, with higher developed engines and smaller wings, when it would be possible to keep pace with the sun.

Robertson dwelt on these things and attended to his regulations, which were almost automatic. From sidereal thought his mind swung to the sensation they would cause on arriving at Orangeland as the first spears of the sun chased them before its rising disk.

He pictured the waiting crowds and the tall, sky-flung landing-stage at the edge of the Pacific. He saw the startling headlines in the papers. The California sheets would shout something like this:

“Coast to Coast in a Night! One Billion Seven Hundred Million in Gold Certificates Carried by the Condor of the Skies! Resolute, Daring, Fearless, Tireless, and Sleepless Pilots Accomplish the Remarkable Feat of Spanning the Continent in Twelve Hours.”

Robertson sat bolt upright and strained at the belt which held him to the aluminum seat of the cockpit. He felt the knifelike

cut of the wind as it swept past Danton and came over the marcelle.

He heard the unmuffled droning of the three engines, whose seventy-two cylinders were all joined in a continuous roar to their swift progress. Above these sounds, familiar to him, he heard another. It was like the rip of silk in the dark!

He grew cold. He felt the ice of fear creeping up his spine. He glanced over the edge of the cockpit. The land below was unlighted and level. They were over the Missouri River and on the long leg to the Rockies.

Danton had shown no sign of hearing the ripping sound. The first pilot was bent to his work of keeping the giant plane on an even keel, despite the spirals of air which rose from the heated prairies.

A thin reed-note pierced to Robertson's brain. He rubbed his goggles and stared out and under the starboard wing of the plane.

A cracking sound shot athwart the dark sky. A swish was followed by the high-beat of wings in the night.

There flashed over the surface of Robertson's goggles a streak of gray, which stood out clearly as the outlines of a monoplane that had risen to their level and was holding its own with the Mail-Post.

The second pilot stared, with the balls of his eyes touching the glass of the goggles. He gripped the edge of the cockpit and tried to scream to Danton. He heard his own voice rattle in his throat.

The gray monoplane hung just over the starboard aileron of the upper wing. It was not more than fifty feet away from Robertson. He shouted again. Danton turned his helmeted head and saw the object of his partner's cry.

A perceptible increase in speed indicated that Danton had “stepped on the emergency throttle,” in an endeavor to get away from the apparition. The monoplane dropped back to the tail of the biplane, then forged ahead. It took up its same position at the tip of the upper starboard wing.

Robertson clutched madly for his oxygen tube and gulped as much of the gas as his lungs would hold. He reeled as he dropped

the tube and glared at the monoplane. He saw red! His brain swirled with thought.

How came a plane in the air of speed sufficient to hold its own with the Air Mail? What was the purpose of the pursuer?

"Step on it!" shouted the second pilot, jabbing Danton in the back. "Open her up!" he cried. "Give her gas!"

Danton lowered his shoulders and crouched like a racing driver. The three twenty-four cylinder engines of the Air Mail roared and snapped defiance. The fire streaked from the open mufflers and made crimson the night.

It was useless, although their speed mounted to two hundred and thirty miles per hour. The black monoplane held the same position near the outboard wing. It seemed fastened there like a vampire bat.

Danton, with his chin half over his right shoulder, tried a left swerve. The mail-plane turned its tail to the monoplane. It roared southward at the twenty-thousand-foot level.

The maneuver was useless. Mile upon mile, and yard upon yard, the black pursuer gained and took up the same position near the stretching wing.

Robertson squinted his eyes and studied the monoplane. He gradually made out a few blurred details. Its spread, from tip to tip, was not more than thirty feet. Its cockpit contained two men, whose black helmets were barely perceptible above the edge of the marcelle.

The engine of the monoplane was hidden in a barrel-like nose. Before this engine, which must have been all of a thousand horse-power, a ten-foot propeller whirled like a spinning plate.

The foremost pilot of the monoplane turned a frosty glance up the mail-plane, reached down to a control, and brought the edge of his left wing under the tip of the biplane's aileron. He came closer with rare skill.

He pressed some signal. The rear pilot rose in the cockpit, dragged out two huge blued-steel revolvers, and shoved them at Robertson like any two-gunner.

He called across the night. He jabbed the revolvers toward Danton. Robertson, shaking in every nerve, reached and clapped

the sound-amplifier to his helmet. He heard:

"Bail up, you! Come clean with the poultry swag! Throw out the mail-pouches, or I'll drill you full o' bullets!"

Robertson lowered the dictaphone and raised his gauntlets. He tried to reach the stars in that anxious moment.

They had been stuck up by highwaymen of the sky!

The seconds passed in anxious thought. Robertson gradually lowered his right hand and snatched at the dictaphone. He clapped it to his ear and listened. It was only in this manner that he could hear what the man with the businesslike guns wanted.

"Come clean!" he heard. "Kick the booty into our mitts, or I'll plug you right!"

Robertson tore his eyes away from the bandit and stared at Danton. The first pilot of the Air Mail was an "ace." He had won the proud insignia of the War Cross by bringing down five Hun airmen.

The situation, however, was different from any he had ever faced. Two Missouri holdups, in a black racing plane, were not to be taken lightly. He acted in the only manner possible.

The biplane dipped, nose-dived, dropped, and then looped-the-loop and came back on her course. The two mail pilots stared behind and through the triple-rudders of the plane. They saw the spinning disk of the bandit's machine. They heard the roar of its sharp exhaust.

It flashed by at a speed which was over three hundred miles per hour. It dropped back by swirling and side-slipping. It took up the same position near the starboard aileron.

"Thought you'd shake us!" shouted the bandit in the rear cockpit. "Go it, kid! Try again!"

Robertson gasped and held the voice-amplifier close to his helmet.

"Thought you was real smart men!" said the bandit, whipping up his two revolvers. "Thought you was, eh? I'm going to give you till I count ten!"

"If you don't come across with the kale, down you go! It's a long way down, 'boes!"

Robertson dropped his eyes to the cel-

luloid trap-door. The land was a long way down!

"Come across!" shouted the bandit. "Out with the cush—and be damn quick! Get 'em up, you, there, aft! Keep her steady, you, forward!"

"We ain't got much time to waste! Me an' Bill, here, got a date to count that kale. Toss it out, 'cause these gats are gettin' hot!"

Robertson grew cold as he heard the bandit count "one!" He felt the dictaphone clatter against his head as his hand shook uncontrollably. Listening, he heard:

"Two!"

The suspense was a gripping thing. The two planes raced like a wild goose and a hawk. Their wing-tips almost touched. Their engines were wide open and flamed a double-comet tail across the velvet of the night.

"Three!"

Danton dropped his sound-amplifier and bent toward his air-speed-indicator. He turned and formed the words: "Two hundred and thirty," with his teeth showing through the opening in the helmet.

Robertson shook his head and indicated that the attempt to escape was useless. The bandit in the rear cockpit of the monoplane held the two weapons like a train-robber. His greedy eyes were slit-lidded through the glasses of his goggles. They bored like two sharp drills.

"Four!"

Robertson reached forward and seized a strap which held down the mail-bags. He drew off a gauntlet and started working feverishly with his numbed fingers. He straightened and clapped on the dictaphone. Above the roar of their swift passage he heard the bandit exclaim:

"Seven—eight!"

Danton raised his right hand as a signal. He feared to turn from the controls of the mail-plane. Robertson caught this signal and shouted toward the monoplane:

"All right! All right! We surrender! What do you want us to do?"

"Come across with the cush!" snarled the bandit as he lowered his guns. "Get 'em loose, and we'll tell you what to do! Got any gold or express?"

"One bag of express matter."

"All right, cul! Get ready now! Kick the stuff out when we go below."

"See that you drop it in my cockpit. If you miss, I'll drill you full of lead!"

Robertson was no coward. He had been trained and picked for the position of second pilot. He knew when a man had the drop on him, however.

The steadiness of the bandit's hands that held the revolvers spoke of long practise. There was no getting away from the fact that they were at the tender mercies of a killer!

The black monoplane disappeared, as if by magic. A humming beneath the biplane denoted that it had looped-the-loop and come up on a lower level.

Robertson opened the celluloid trap-door and peered down through the opening. He rubbed his goggles. He saw the sharklike outline of the monoplane. It rose under them and swam along like a pilot-fish beneath a whale.

The bandit in the rear cockpit gaged the distance to a foot. He glanced upward and straight into Robertson's goggles.

"Kick out the booty!" he shouted. "Express first! Drop it in my lap! If you miss, I'll plug you with my smoke-wagon!"

Robertson drew away from the opening and reached for the express-bag. Bunching this about a package in the center, which felt like a loaf of heavy bread, he crammed it through the opening and waited until the monoplane came directly beneath.

The bandit glared upward. He flourished the gun. He shouted something which Robertson did not hear. The monoplane dropped six or seven feet as Robertson let the express-bag go from his nerveless hands.

It sailed through the air and plumped in the after-cockpit of the monoplane. It rebounded with the force of the fall. Then, and with a roar that seemed to blot out earth and sky and stars, the monoplane disappeared in a mushroom of smoke and lurid fire.

Danton drove onward over a rocking sea of agitated air-waves. The great mail-plane heeled and fluttered like a ship in a gale. It righted finally and lunged forward.

It zoomed and racked the night with its set speed of two hundred and fifteen M. P. H., which was the velocity specified by the Air Board Control.

Robertson, the second pilot, glanced behind him and through the triple-vertical-compensated-rudders of the giant plane. He saw, with wonder staring out of his birdman eyes, a flaming thing drop through the night like a red star that had fallen from heaven.

Back by the Zenith Tower, in the upper room of a cheap tenement, the frowzled man who had sent the bundle by the Night Post woke from a fitful sleep and gazed through his unwashed windows toward the first gray streak of dawn.

He groaned, blinked his eyes, and rolled from his bed. He dressed without washing. He crossed the floor of his room and, opening his door, tiptoed down-stairs and went out into the street.

A raucous voice echoed from a cañon of tenements. A boy ran, crying an extra. The man fished into his pockets and gathered together three cents in coppers. He hailed the boy and bought the paper which was splashed with staring head-lines.

Climbing to his room, the man spread out the paper and read the details which had brought out the extra. They were brief enough:

NIGHT MAIL FALLS TO ITS DOOM!

One Billion Seven Hundred Million
Burned Up!

The man glared at the report which followed the head-lines. He read with swimming eyes:

ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI.—An airplane containing the bodies of two aviators and express matter fell near here this morning. The charred remains indicate beyond doubt that Danton and Robertson, pilots of the Night Mail, have met their deaths. No trace has yet been found of the huge amount of Treasury certificates known to have been in the mail-plane.

Rising with a bitter oath the man crumpled the paper and stared at the wall. He swung and dashed through the open

door. Down the stairs he clattered and out into the open street. There he raised his hands to the first streaks of dawn and cursed wildly.

A shout echoed through the deserted street. A second newsboy rounded the corner and came toward the man, crying "Rextra! Rextra! All about the great ocean-to-ocean flight!"

The man snatched a paper from the boy's hand and glared at the fresh head-lines. He reeled, dropped the paper, and slunk toward his doorway as the boy picked up the sheet and went on crying the glad news.

The head-lines the man read had burned into his brain. They seared his soul. They had been contrary to the first report.

AIR MAIL REACHES ORANGELAND ON TIME—TREASURE SAFE!

Early Report of Finding of Burned Plane and
Bodies in Missouri Had No Bearing on Great
Flight. Robertson, Second Pilot of Mail
Post, States He Threw Out Express
Bag to Lighten the Great
Plane's Load!

The man repeated these head-lines over and over as he climbed the stairs to his room and laid himself across the bed. He turned his face toward the wall and groaned. He rolled over and stood swaying, with his knees knocking together.

His fanatical eyes wandered over the floor. There was a loose plank under the corner of the cheap rug. He stooped to this plank, lifted it with his finger-nails, and dragged forth a small bundle done up in manila wrapping-paper.

In this bundle was a double-handful of T. N. T. chips scraped from the edge of shells.

The man made a little pile of these on the edge of a newspaper, struck a match on his heel, touched the flame to the paper, and threw himself across the bed as the first puff indicated the explosion which was to follow.

"Damn you, Bingham!" he said brokenly. "I thought I'd *done* for you—but—but you are lucky! You were—"

The Grouches

by E. J. Rath

Author of "Too Many Crooks," "When the Devil Was Sick," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

IT was the night before the opening day of the fishing season, and out on the pond the bass were leaping, but John William Higgins, expert angler, was worried by the fear that some other fisherman would discover the little lake on Pop Brundage's farm—a lake that for six summers he had considered his own. And when Mame Brundage—she was eighteen, a reader of the "society news" in the Sunday supplements, and preferred being called Marigold—visited him in his shack that evening, she told him that a woman boarder was going to occupy the cottage near the farmhouse.

When Miss Louise Dean arrived she was pounced on by the ambitious Mame. She said that she had come in search of rest. Marigold couldn't understand why any one would live on a farm if they could help it. "It's terrible depressing," she remarked, as she tried on one of Miss Dean's hats. "It narrows one; that is, if one doesn't manage to get away once in a while."

Next day Miss Dean had a chat with Higgins, leaving him a little breathless. Then she met a man, on his way to the Brundage home, who told her that he was Augustus J. Tilley, a naturalist. When she told him her name he replied: "Certainly; of course"—which surprised Miss Dean. And when she picked an imaginary bug from his collar, the naturalist was startled.

Mame had decided to marry a wealthy man. So when another guest, Mr. March, handsome and well groomed, but decidedly peevish, arrived and was assigned to the cabin on the hill, she thought her Prince Charming had come at last. But March snarled that he had come "to be let alone," and passed his fellow guests with black looks.

Tilley and Higgins had an argument about the relative merits of fishing and bug hunting—and about which amusement was most likely to interest Miss Dean. The fisherman thought that he had won, for the next day Miss Dean spent the morning in his boat, learning the art of bass fishing. They saw March watching them from the shore, but when they landed he went away angrily. He met Tilley, who addressed him as neighbor. "Takes two to be neighbors," snapped March, as he walked on.

CHAPTER VIII.

EARNING A NICKNAME.

WHEN Mr. March entered his cabin, short of breath and temper after a rapid climb up the hill, he found Mame Brundage sitting in the rocker, examining the addresses of several letters.

"Don't say I never bring you anything but your meals," said Mame, as she inspected him with applauding eyes. "Here's some mail Pop brought up."

He snatched the letters, glanced at them in swift succession and tossed them on the table.

"Your name's David, ain't it?" she observed. "David March. Don't you think it sounds strong and determined?"

He tossed his hat and cane into a corner.

"I do," continued Mame. "There's your dinner on the table. I just carried it up."

"It's gettin' cold. I been wonderin' where you were."

He walked over to the table, lifted the napkin and frowned heavily at the dinner.

"Loin of pork," explained Mame.

"You've been walkin', haven't you? I thought you said you didn't walk any."

"It must be doing you good up here. It's very healthful. You're lookin' better than when you came. Where you been walkin' to?"

Mr. March drew up a chair and sat at the table. Mame arose hastily and began pouring out the tea.

"Quit it!" he commanded. "I'll wait on

myself. What's the name of the tall fool who sleeps at the house?"

"Oh, you mean Mr. Tilley. I told you his name yesterday. He is a kind of a fool, ain't he? My, but you're quick to notice.

"He's the gentleman that collects bugs, only I haven't seen him collect any since he's been here. He ain't much on dressin', is he? You got to have clothes to dress."

Mame's glance wandered to the wall, where Mr. March's wardrobe hung unashamed.

"What's the name of the fat idiot who catches fish?" demanded Mr. March.

"That's Mr. Higgins. I told you about him, too. He is kind of fat, when you come to think of it. Don't you think it rather spoils one to be fleshy? I do.

"They say he's wealthy, but I ain't so sure about it. He owns an automobile, but I don't know what kind it is. He never said. I don't think that sounds very good, when they don't say."

"Where does he come from?"

"Mr. Higgins comes from New York. I don't know where Mr. Tilley comes from. He hasn't had any mail yet.

"Why don't you try the potatoes, Mr. March? They're fried in the very best lard."

Mr. March snapped at another biscuit and did not pay any attention to the potatoes.

"You didn't happen to see Miss Dean while you were out walkin', did you?" asked Mame.

"Didn't see her," answered Mr. March, shortly.

"You wouldn't be much taken with her, if you did. She ain't the kind you'd like. She's what I call a very strange woman.

"I ain't sayin' there's anything wrong about her, Mr. March. I wouldn't say that of anybody. But she's queer.

"Now, you take what she did this mornin'. Here she's been around for several days and never paid any attention at all to Mr. Higgins or Mr. Tilley or anybody. And then all of a sudden this mornin' she gets up and says she has to hurry, because Mr. Higgins has promised to take her out fishin'.

"That was the first thing she ever said to me about it. She had the invitation all the

time and she never said a word. I call that kind of deceitful. Don't you?"

Mr. March was engaged with a mouthful of pork and made no answer.

"I thought you would," nodded Mame. "If everything was open and aboveboard there wasn't any reason she couldn't have told me yesterday, at the very least.

"That's why I think she acts very strange. But she ain't any queerer than Mr. Tilley. He follers her."

Mame paused to permit this disclosure to make its impression.

"He ain't very far from where Miss Dean is," she continued. "I don't mean he's with her, you understand, because she don't seem to take any interest in him at all. There don't seem to be anything reciprocated. But he sort of hangs around and watches her. He's neglectin' his bugs something terrible, although mom 'd sooner he'd be that way, because she can't tell what he's liable to bring into the house.

"Instead of bringin' 'em in, mom always aims to keep 'em out. She's very sanitary. You needn't ever be worried about your meals. But—oh, yes. Well, as I take it, he must have fallen in love with her. When one loves one follers around, don't you think?"

"It's very strange what some people see in folks. I'll bet you wouldn't ever foller her around, Mr. March."

There was a gentle challenge in Mame's voice. He seemed oblivious of it.

"Yes; she's very strange, Mr. March. We've had a great many talks, as is natural between women. I wouldn't want her to feel I was tryin' to shut her out of my life. Almost anybody can come to me with their troubles.

"I'm kind of soft-hearted, my friends say. But even at that, you couldn't say that I ever force myself on people."

Mr. March fixed a brief but penetrating glare upon her and tasted his tea.

"What's your line of business?" she asked, suddenly.

"Trying to take a rest."

"I mean in the city."

"Trying to ruin my health."

Mame laughed knowingly.

"Ain't you the one for a joke!" she ex-

claimed. "Some people are awful quick that way. I had a gentleman friend down to Hurleyville—"

He rose from his seat and pointed at the tray.

"I'm through," he said.

"You're a light feeder, Mr. March. You ought to see Knock eat. He'd surprise you. As I started to say—"

"Take it away!" he commanded.

"I brushed all your clothes this mornin'," she said, as she picked up the tray. "You'll find everything kept tidy while you're here. I can keep house as good as mom, and in some things I'm neater."

"I'm going to take a nap," he declared, as she lingered.

"Pop does that Sundays. Every Sunday afternoon—"

"I'm going to take off my clothes and get into bed!"

Name gasped and walked out with the tray.

Mr. March, however, did not take a nap. For awhile he tried to read, but his mind was usually too restless for that placid amusement, and it proved so on this occasion. He discovered, too, that very early in the book a pronounced love interest was developing between hero and heroine, which caused him to fling it aside with an exclamation.

"Rot!" he declaimed. "Rot! Rot! Why in the name of Heaven do people in books slobber over each other? Why don't they leave out all the hogwash? Who the blazes ever held a woman's hand for a whole minute and just looked into her eyes?"

"Nobody! There's no sense in it; it's not practicable. It doesn't mean anything and it doesn't get you anywhere."

Having hurled this contemptuous challenge into the face of love, David March began in a perfunctory manner to open his mail. The letters did not interest him. He wrote an answer to only one of them and that was addressed to his business partner:

Told you not to bother me about the office. Do as you please, and let it go at that. I'll come back when I'm ready. Feeling rotten. Regards.

Then he changed his clothes, selected a new hat and stick and went forth for an-

other walk. Nature in a primitive state did not interest him, so he took a turn about the Brundage farm to observe Nature in cultivation. What he saw did not please him in the least.

"Lazy slackers!" he growled, as he glanced in the direction of the farmhouse.

After that he allowed his legs to take charge of him, and he found them once more carrying him in the direction of the lake.

As he neared it he moved cautiously. Presently the fisherman's shack was in sight, and he stopped, irresolute, while he lighted a cigar. Then he moved forward into the open.

Higgins was sitting on the gunwale of the skiff.

"Oh, hallo!" he said.

The intruder did not answer immediately. His glance was roaming restlessly, including a momentary study of the interior of the shack, near the open door of which he stood.

Finally it became fixed upon Higgins, the survey being both minute and comprehensive:

"Live here?" demanded March.

"For the present," answered Higgins, non-committally.

"What do you do up here?"

"Fish."

"Just fish, eh?"

March's voice conveyed an irritating hint of scorn.

"Just fish," acknowledged Higgins. "Aren't you the fellow who was up here this morning?"

"I believe I did walk up this way."

"What did you beat it in such a hurry for? We were coming ashore to see what you wanted."

"I didn't want anything, and I didn't leave in a hurry," snapped March.

"You were staring at us hard enough," observed Higgins, persistently. "Miss Dean noticed you, and so did I."

"This is Brundage's land, isn't it?"

"So he says."

"Then I'll walk on it wherever I please."

"Suit yourself."

The two men continued to regard each other, each according to his own mood.

"What do you do? Hire the boat out?" asked March.

"No. But sometimes I invite friends."

He said this in a manner that was cool and significant, and observed that it produced signs of additional irritation.

"Friend of yours, is she?"

"Looked like it, didn't it? Haven't you met her yet?"

"No. Don't want to, either."

"Well, in that case probably won't. I'll tip her off."

March glared sourly and smoked fast.

"Met Mr. Tilley yet?" inquired the fisherman.

"I met a solemn-faced ass walking around the place."

"That's Tilley," nodded Higgins.

"She's out with Tilley now," the fisherman added, with a faint sigh. "He came and got her right after we had lunch."

"Miss Dean did the cooking up here today. Crackerjack cook. She and Tilley are out hunting for some bug that spells its name in Latin."

"That all he does? Hunt bugs?"

"And Miss Dean," amended Higgins. "But once she gets interested in fishing there'll be nothing to that."

The visitor walked abruptly over to the shack, stuck his head inside, and studied the interior, after which he sneered and shrugged.

"Don't like my little house, I take it," observed Higgins.

"There isn't a decent building on the whole place. Everything's a mess."

"Then what are you staying here for?"

"That's my business."

"You bet it is," assented Higgins, with marvelous composure. "I don't know that anybody else is likely to make it theirs. Say, why don't you take something for it?"

"For what?"

"That grouch of yours."

For an instant there was a prospect that Mr. March would spring upon him, although it did not serve to alarm Higgins, who was a fairly capable person in emergencies. But after a period of glowering, the visitor abandoned any belligerent plans he may have entertained and turned to make his departure.

Where the path rounded the corner of the shack he stopped and glanced back. He had decided it was, perhaps, best to make an explanation.

"I'm here for my nerves," he said. "They're gone. I'm here for a rest. Get me? All I want is to be let alone."

"You're putting your money on a winner," said Higgins, as his visitor was passing out of ear-shot.

The fisherman returned to his task of conquering the snarl in his best silk line.

"He's just a high-grade grouch; that's all," he remarked aloud. "And this is no place for a grouch, particularly if he's a dressy one. It'll set him crazy."

"If it doesn't, why just leave it to Mame—I mean Marigold."

CHAPTER IX.

TEA FOR THREE.

KNOCK was standing at the edge of the lake near Mr. Higgins's shack, amusing himself with a fishing rod while he waited for the owner of it to appear.

He knew that the rod was expressly forbidden him, but Higgins was not in sight, and nature was weak. He counted upon sharp eyes and an alert pair of ears to give sufficient warning of a hostile approach.

But he did not count upon hooking a bass within fifteen feet of the shore, and when that happened Knock, like a true fisherman, forgot that the world existed. He was still in blissful oblivion when the profane hand of Higgins snatched the rod from his grasp and completed a capture that was already half accomplished.

"Aw, why didn't y' let me?" demanded Knock reproachfully.

Higgins transfixed him with a stern glare.

"Didn't I tell you never to touch one of my rods?"

"I know. But I ain't hurt it any. An' you got a fish, haven't you?"

"If I catch you at it again I'll whale you, or I'll tell your father to whale you."

"You ain't got to tell him. He whaled me yesterday, without anybody tellin' him to," complained Knock.

"Well, you keep away from here when I'm not around," warned Higgins.

"Want any bugs?" asked Knock.

"Not yet."

"Want any frogs?"

Higgins considered. For the past two days the flies had been doing poorly, and the same was true of every spoon that he tried.

"I might use a few frogs," he said.

"I got nine."

"How much?"

"A quarter," said Knock.

"A quarter! Say, last year you sold me frogs for ten cents a dozen."

"They ain't so easy to get any more," explained the frog merchant.

"Cut it out," advised Higgins. "I hear that-stuff in the city."

"Well, they ain't easy. I'm tellin' you right. An' besides, I got other things to do. I'm workin' for other people."

"Who are you working for? Your father?"

"Gee, I'm always workin' for him. But he don't pay nothin'. I'm talkin' about people that pays."

"All right; go and work for them, then. But keep away from my rods."

It was not the purpose of Knock to have the conversation end at that point.

"I'm workin' for Mr. Tilley," he volunteered.

Higgins became suddenly attentive.

"What do you do for him?"

"Ketch bugs."

"What kind of bugs?"

"Lots of kinds. Crawlin' ones, mostly. They're easiest."

"What does he pay you?"

"I'm gettin' ten cents a day."

"Why doesn't he catch his own bugs?"

"I dunno. I guess I'm doin' all his ketchin' now. He mostly hangs around where Miss Dean is."

Higgins pondered upon this intelligence. It not only surprised him, but produced a certain sense of displeasure.

"I'm workin' for Mr. Marsh, too," added Knock with an emphasis that hinted at news of importance.

"What do you do for him?"

"Oh, anythin'. Run errands. Wunst he

sent me down to th' village with a telegram. He's payin' me for *all* my time."

"How much?"

"I get a quarter a day."

"Well, if he buys all your time, how do you find time to hunt bugs for Mr. Tilley?"

"I don't, gen'rally," said Knock. "But Mr. Tilley, he don't know that. He thinks I'm workin' for him all day."

"It don't take long to ketch a few bugs. Sometimes he don't care if I don't get none."

"Does Mr. March know you're working for Mr. Tilley?"

"Sure. He says for me not to get all tired out ketchin' bugs, 'cause he may want me to do somethin' for him *any* time."

Higgins considered for a moment this additional piece of testimony, which conveyed the suggestion that Mr. March had a certain amount of complicity in blocking the wheels of science.

He wondered whether it was wilful, and if so, why.

"Oh, I got a letter for you," said Knock suddenly. "That's what I come up here for. I didn't come up on purpose to fish."

He fetched a crumpled envelope out of a crowded pocket and proffered it. Higgins flattened it out. It was addressed to him in a strange handwriting, and it contained neither stamp nor address.

He opened it hastily and with a certain measure of excitement.

DEAR MR. HIGGINS:

At four o'clock this afternoon I am having tea at the cottage. Would you care to drop in, if your fish will excuse you for an hour or so? I shall be glad to see you. A farm can become really lonesome, you know, when people are scattered about at the four corners of it.

*Sincerely,

Louise DEAN.

P. S.—Mr. Tilley has promised to come, but I have teacups enough for three.

Higgins coughed, flushed and put the letter in his pocket.

"What's Miss Dean writin' to you?" asked Knock.

"Er—what? Nothing!"

"She wrote one to Mr. Tilley, too. He got it this mornin'. Mame was crazy for me to let her see it, but I didn't. Mame don't never give me anythin'."

The fisherman rubbed his chin and glanced down at his clothes. He knew very little about the business of taking tea with ladies. But—well, Tilley was going.

"Miss Dean said I was to get an answer," remarked Knock.

"How's that? Oh, did she? All right. Just tell her 'yes.'"

Having recklessly cast the die, Higgins decided that he would heat some water for shaving.

"Miss Dean gimme ten cents for bringin' that letter. I got time to take an answer."

Higgins caught the significance of the statement and began tentatively fumbling in a pocket.

"I'll give you a nickel to tell Miss Dean 'yes,'" he said.

"I got a dime for bringin' the letter."

"You're getting altogether too much money, you young pirate. A nickel."

Knock thought for several seconds and then looked up through narrowed eyelids.

"Gimme a dime an' I'll sell you them frogs for twenty cents."

"A nickel."

"Aw, all right."

The Brundage scion started off slowly, pausing once to hurl back:

"Then frogs is still a quarter."

Afternoon tea at Miss Dean's cottage established a precedent at the Brundage farm. There was a table on the porch, covered with a white cloth; there was a little copper kettle swinging from a bracket over an alcohol lamp; there was a fragile china teapot for the brewing; and there were cups and saucers and paper napkins and a tin box of crackers.

Then there was Miss Dean herself, in a flowered pink dress that gave her a butterfly appearance.

She, of course, was at ease; she could not have been otherwise. But Tilley was not. He sat with his long legs crossed, one dangling loosely over the other; his fingers were interlaced and his hands pressed close against his midriff.

When he was not looking expectantly at Miss Dean he was eying the copper kettle, rather fearfully. He did not like tea.

This was the scene when Higgins walked

across the meadow in the direction of the cottage, sustained by fortitude, but at the same time feeling quite silly. As he reached the bridge he hesitated.

"Welcome!" called Miss Dean, waving her hand. "Right across the bridge, if you please, and straight ahead."

Higgins reached the porch without mishap and made a bold attempt to look comfortable.

"I was beginning to be in doubt of you," said Miss Dean, shaking hands.

"Huh! How's that? I sent word I'd come."

"Did you? Then Knock must have forgotten to tell me. But it doesn't make the least difference. It was nice of you to come."

During this interchange, Tilley remained seated, regarding Higgins with an expression which indicated his opinion that he thought the fisherman had managed the whole affair very badly.

"I believe you've met each other," said the hostess, turning from Higgins to Tilley. "Or must I introduce you?"

"We've met," said Higgins.

"Yes," said Tilley, without rising.

Each of these gentlemen had a thought in his mind, and the thoughts were identical: Why had she done this thing?

Miss Dean possessed one of the great merits of a true hostess; she was absolutely impartial. If she smiled at Higgins, she did not forget to beam upon Tilley very soon afterward.

If Tilley received his tea first it was Higgins who was granted priority with the crackers. If she pressed Higgins to try a second lump of sugar, it was to Tilley that she expressed her sorrow over the absence of lemons.

Yet with all this kindly watchfulness she also knew exactly what not to notice. She took no heed when Tilley made noises in his teacup, nor did she pay the least attention to the unique manner in which Higgins pushed whole crackers into his mouth, prodding them home with a relentless finger and then macerating them with a powerful movement of his jaw.

"I have changed my opinion about the farm," Miss Dean was saying. "When you

begin to know it there are lots and lots of things that are absolutely fascinating."

"The fishing," said Higgins, tactlessly.

"The insect life," amended Tilley.

Miss Dean smiled at both of them.

"Yes; both the fishing and the insects," she said smoothly. "I'd never even dreamed I should care for fishing and I hadn't the wildest notion I should ever do anything with a bug except shoo it away.

"Yet here I am, actually taking an interest in them. See what you have done—both of you!"

"Nothing in the world to compare with fishing," sighed Higgins, pleasantly. "You get sport and utility rolled into one."

"Indeed, yes," assented Miss Dean.

"Except for the monotony," remarked Tilley.

"Monotony! Where do you get that?" Higgins manned his guns.

"Where? Let me ask you a question: What kind of fish have you got in that lake?" inquired Tilley.

"Bass. Just bass, thank the Lord!"

"I thought so. Very well. All you can possibly do is to catch bass, just one bass after another.

"No variety; no hope of any other species. Nothing but bass, bass, bass."

Higgins sat on the edge of his chair, glaring, with cup and saucer trembling in his hand.

"While I," added Tilley, "in my pursuit of insect life, find a thousand and one varieties from which to pick and choose. I do not hunt one insect, day in and day out.

"There is always something new; always a change. Each day is different from another."

"Did you ever have an insect fight you for twenty minutes at the other end of a little thread of silk?" demanded Higgins.

"I am not interested in fighting."

"Did you ever eat a bug after you caught him?"

Tilley ignored the question.

"No; I guess not. And what's more, I understand you don't even catch 'em."

"You mean that you doubt—"

"You've got Knock Brundage catching 'em at ten cents a day," said Higgins, triumphantly. "That's the kind of naturalist

you are. You don't suppose I let anybody go out and catch my fish for me, do you?"

Tilley, having thus been taken somewhat by surprise, swallowed several times in his embarrassment and coughed on a cracker.

It was Miss Dean who spoke next, and with smiling but firm authority.

"We're not going to talk about fish or bugs any more," she said. "We're going to talk about people, who are sometimes almost as interesting."

Higgins and Tilley accepted the gentle rebuke and asked for more tea. As Miss Dean handed them their cups she glanced out across the meadow and observed therein a man, walking quite rapidly in a direction parallel to the porch.

He was staring at the cottage. The fisherman caught her glance and discovered the object of it.

"Well, there's somebody you can talk about all you want as far as I'm concerned," he said. "You can go as far as you like."

"It's Mr. March, isn't it?"

"That's who it is. It's the Grouch, all right."

"The who?" exclaimed Miss Dean, in a wondering tone.

"The Grouch. That what I call him. That's what he is."

Miss Dean took another long look at the Grouch.

"The Grouch?" she repeated, as if experimenting with the word. "The Grouch?"

And then Tilley did something that was really astonishing. He nodded his head vigorously at Higgins.

"He's a grouch, sure enough," he said, solemnly.

Miss Dean sat suddenly in the rocker and began to laugh. It was a perfect crescendo of merriment, lasting for nearly a minute. When it was over she dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief and smiled at them.

"Hope he's not a friend of yours," said Higgins, anxiously.

"A friend? Why, no, indeed. I've only seen him at distances."

She laughed again and then checked herself abruptly.

"I must have said something funny," mused Higgins, rather pleased at himself.

"It—it wasn't that," she gasped. "At

least, I don't think it was. I'm—I'm afraid I've been rude.

"In fact, I think what really made me laugh was to hear you and Mr. Tilley bringing in a unanimous verdict."

"Well, I do agree with him," admitted Tilley, reluctantly. "You've got to agree, if you ever met him."

And he pointed at the retreating figure of Mr. March.

"Absolutely," said Higgins.

Miss Dean smoothed her skirt, picked up her tea-cup and settled back in the rocker.

"I feel that at last we've hit on the very thing to talk about," she said. "Now, Mr. Tilley, we'll hear you first. Tell me everything you know about the Grouch."

Tilley did not have much to relate, but he told it faithfully and without prejudice. He took much pains to be accurate.

"There!" said Higgins, as the naturalist finished. "Doesn't that make him a grouch?"

"Now we'll hear you," said Miss Dean. "Don't leave out a single thing."

The narrative of Higgins was considerably longer. He was, perhaps, not quite so accurate as Tilley, but he was more vivid.

"What did I tell you?" declared Tilley as the fisherman concluded. "He's a grouch."

Miss Dean made an attempt to assume a judicial attitude, but abandoned it for a fresh burst of mirth.

"Well, isn't he a grouch?" demanded Higgins.

"Yes, isn't he?" echoed Tilley.

"There can't be a doubt of it," assented Miss Dean. "He's not only a grouch; he's the Grouch. But what in the world do you suppose made him grouch?"

"My idea," said Higgins, "is that he was born that way."

Tilley shook his head.

"No; that's impossible," he declared. "Nobody is born with a grouch. A person may acquire a grouch, but it is not hereditary."

"Now, that's where you're dead wrong," said Higgins. "I'm giving it to you right when I say you can inherit a grouch. This man isn't a grouch because he wants to be; he's a grouch because he has to be."

"It's environment," said Tilley. "It's not heredity. It's absolutely foolish to talk about inheriting gourches."

"Environment nothing! Now you're thinking about bugs again." Higgins stood up to emphasize his words. "You take it from me, I know more about this man's grouch than you do."

Tilley also stood up and glared balefully.

"I'll take nothing from you, sir," he said. And then Miss Dean interfered again.

CHAPTER X.

EASY MONEY FOR KNOCK.

TWO days after the unpleasant climax of Miss Dean's tea party there was an extraordinary encounter between Higgins and Tilley, which came just short of blows and which, unhappily, also took place in the presence of the lady of the cottage.

Higgins accused Tilley of stealing a can full of live bait. Tilley denied it. He said the hellgrammites had been caught for his own scientific study.

Knock Brundage, who was hopeful that there would be blows and blood, said that the hellgrammites belonged to Higgins. Tilley thereupon tried to strengthen his claim to the bugs by declaring that he had been told by no less an authority than the Grouch that they were his personal property.

This dragging of the Grouch into the controversy surprised Miss Dean no less than it did the fisherman, and her quick eyes also observed that it caused a certain uneasiness on the part of Knock Brundage, who seemed, with some difficulty, to be retaining a secret.

When the contestants, each in an unyielding mood, had been persuaded to abandon the arbitrament of force, Miss Dean reflected deeply on the whole affair and then sent for Knock, on the plea that she had some work for him to do. He found her at the cottage, with a box of candy open.

"Mom says I got to do some work for you," he announced.

"We'll talk about that presently," said Miss Dean. "I want to ask you a question. It's about Mr. Higgins's bait. It was really his, wasn't it?"

"Sure it was."

"Did Mr. March know that it belonged to Mr. Higgins?"

Knock hesitated. He was under certain financial obligations.

"Of course this is just a little talk between ourselves," said Miss Dean. "Neither of us is going to say anything about it afterward."

Her hand chanced to knock from the edge of the table a leather bag that contained her purse and it made a jingling noise as it struck the floor.

"Sure he knew them hellers belonged to Mr. Higgins," Knock said hopefully, glancing down at the bag.

"Did Mr. March tell Mr. Tilley that they were intended for him?" she asked.

"Don't know," said Knock promptly.

"Did he know that Mr. Tilley took them?"

"Uhuh."

"How did he know it?"

"He saw him with 'em."

"Ah, yes." And Miss Dean nodded again. "Now I want to ask you something else, Knock: How did Mr. Higgins find out that Mr. Tilley took his bait?"

"I told 'im."

"Really, now? What made you think of telling Mr. Higgins about it?"

Knock paused and reached for the box of candy. Miss Dean moved it nearer to him.

"Mr. March, he told me I'd better tell Mr. Higgins."

Miss Dean leaned back in the rocker. There was a smile on her lips.

"Why, of course," she said. "How stupid of me not to understand. That's why Mr. Higgins came down here yesterday to see Mr. Tilley."

"He was goin' to hit 'im in the jaw," volunteered Knock. "Gee! Don't you wisht he had?"

"Certainly not. I'm very glad he didn't."

"I bet he'd 'a' knocked him right down on his back if he had," declared Knock. "I bet he'd 'a' made his nose bloody."

"Don't be unpleasant," chided Miss Dean. "Now, another thing, Knock: What does Mr. March do with himself all day?"

Knock masticated and mused.

"Why, he don't do nothin' partic'lar," he answered at last. "He's just swears around some; but he don't swear as good as pop."

"My pop can swear better'n anybody. Ain't you never heard him swear?"

"I never had the privilege," said Miss Dean.

"He swears somethin' fierce," affirmed Knock. "He'll make you scared, when he gets swearin' good. I can just tell you everythin' he says."

"Never mind, Knock."

"When he gets real mad he says—" Knock went on.

Miss Dean held up her hand.

"I was talking about Mr. March," she reminded him. "But if he doesn't do anything except swear, I won't ask you to go into details."

"Oh, he ain't always swearin'," conceded Knock. "Sometimes he just asks questions."

"About what?"

"Oh, ev'rybody."

"About me?"

Knock nodded.

"What did he ask about me?"

"I—I don't remember anythin' partic'lar."

Miss Dean jingled the bag that now lay in her lap, and Knock's ears listened to the music.

"No. Nothin' partic'lar," he repeated, regretfully. "He just wants to know what ev'rybody's doin'; that's all. That's what I'm gettin' paid for."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Dean. "Mr. March pays you a salary?"

"No, ma'am. I get a quarter a day to run errands and tell 'im things."

"I'm sure you're well paid. Did you ever tell him anything about me?"

"Sure."

Miss Dean elevated her eyebrows.

"What?" she asked.

"Oh, nothin' much. Just about when Mr. Tilley comes, an' when Mr. Higgins comes, an' what you do, an' things like that," said the spy calmly.

"I'd no idea you paid so much attention to things," observed Miss Dean.

"Who? Me? He gives me a quarter a day."

The lady of the cottage laughed softly and began to whistle. Knock helped himself to the candy.

"Tell me a lot of things," she commanded. "Tell me about everybody."

Knock complied to the extent of his recollection, and even beyond. He told her about Mr. Higgins, and Mr. Tilley, and Marigold, and the Grouch, talking with little or no reservation and drawing freely upon his imagination where his memory failed.

"What work you want me to do?" he asked suddenly.

Miss Dean had forgotten about the work. She glanced at her watch.

"I'm afraid it's too late, Knock. We'll let the work go until some other time. Take the candy with you."

Knock took the box without protest and hugged it under his arm. Miss Dean opened the leather bag and found a silver coin.

It was a half-dollar. Knock sucked his breath sharply as it touched his palm.

"You want me to work for you regular?" he asked.

"Just when I need you," said Miss Dean.

"You gimme half a dollar a day an' I won't work for nobody else."

"But that wouldn't be fair to the others. And I don't really want much of your time, Knock. I just want your—advice."

"All right; any time," he said. "Will you want any to-morrer?"

"If I do I'll let you know."

Miss Dean sat in the rocker for a long time after Knock left the cottage, completely absorbed with her thoughts. Often they amused her, for once she laughed outright, while she smiled several times.

"It's not very clear yet," she murmured. "Particularly about Mr. Tilley. As for the Grouch—"

She took writing materials from the mantel, carried them over to the table and sat down. The letter proved to be a long one and at various stages she paused for thought, wrinkling her forehead and chewing the hilt of the pen between her teeth.

"At any rate," said Miss Dean irrele-

vantly, "something is going to come of it, even if I don't know what."

Simultaneously, but at a different part of the farm, another person was writing. Mame Brundage had carried her diary off to the quieter seclusion of the woods; the orchard was becoming a thoroughfare and, beside, Knock had been snooping and showed unmistakable symptoms of being close to a find.

She is changing and it is suspicioius. She is takeing an interest in men. So far it is onley Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley. But who knows what will come next. Ah what if she takes an interest in Mr. March. But I will have faith in him. He has strenth and he will not yeld. To-day he smiled at me and how my hart beet. There is times when he looks like a night errand of old.

Mame altered her position, so that her shoulder-blades no longer cut painfully against the tree under which she sat.

I tried on her stockings yesterday, while she was walking with Mr. Tilly. They looked beautiful. Ah how ones nature craves all that is best in life. If he coud onley have seen me when I had them on but I didnt dare leave the cottage. But this is all vanity and the world is vanity as I read in a novel down to Hurleyville. She still writes letters and now she is getting a great many from the city. One day she got three. Can this be respectable. But still I will not judg her. Judg and be jugged it says and I will not.

And now her thin cheeks flushed and the pencil trembled in her hand.

They are calling him the growth which means he is hateful and cruel to fellow man. It is not true. Ah it cannot be. None of them can look down into his hart like I can. They do not understand. He is rich and hansom and when he looks at me their is such a meaning in it. Something has distroyed his happyness but I will do my best. He is eating better now. When one knows him one quivers with rage to hear him called a growth for I know his hart is kind even if his lips are cruel. But I will be brave. He may bend my spirrit but he cannot brake it.

She stared out among the trees, but her eyes saw only a vision of gray flannels and a malacca cane.

God help me if she ever looks at him or takes up with him like she does with Mr. Tilly and Mr. Higgins for Heaven knows no furey like a

jelous woman. But I need not fear. If he seeks beauty he will know where to find it. Cloathes is but vanity but she has many expencive ones. Yesterday she gave me some money one dollar becaus I have been working at the cottige. Something inside me told me to spern it but I didnt. If I did she would have understood and she must never understand until it is all settled between us. I refer to me and Mr. March. This is the first time I have spelled his name. What a thril it gives one. I wonder when he will speak.

Mame sat idly for several minutes, and then began to reread the sacred pages. Some of them forced sighs from her lips and brought troubled looks into her eyes. At last she glanced at the waning sun and slowly closed the volumes.

"This is my heart," she said aloud, as she began wrapping the book in its protective oilcloth. "And now I will put it away for the day and try to be strong."

She carried her heart with its oilcloth cover back to the orchard and was about to deposit in the stone wall when something gave her pause. Somebody had been tampering with the movable stone.

"It's Knock Brundage!" she exclaimed hotly. "He's been foolin' 'round here. He's been watchin' to see where I put it. If I ever ketch him—"

She walked swiftly up the hill to the cabin and peered within. As she expected, it was empty.

Entering, Mame walked over to the corner at the foot of the bed, fell on her knees and fumbled for an instant with one of the boards in the floor.

It came loose in her hands. With a sharp sigh she thrust her burden down into a dark hole and replaced the board.

"There!" she murmured, as she rose to her feet. "My heart is safe. And at night, when he's asleep, it'll be near to him."

CHAPTER XI.

MOSTLY ABOUT A SLIPPER.

IN dim moonlight a solitary figure prowled in the orchard of the Brundage farm, passing restlessly among the trees and stooping with an impatient movement when a low-hanging branch impeded progress.

The Grouch had acquired this habit of

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walking at night several days before. The early curfew of the country found him unready for sleep, and if he went to bed and tried to force himself into slumber the stillness of the cabin fairly shrieked at him. On those occasions he would arise, curse the simple quiet and dress himself again.

His soul—for he had one—cried for the city. Twice he determined to go to it; once he packed his clothes into the trunk and locked it. And then, both times, he swore that he would not go.

"Damned if I'm a quitter! I'll see it through," he would mutter to himself.

To-night he had been walking for more than an hour, through the orchard, along the hillside, across the rocky field that stretched toward the woods and then back to the sloping meadow. The farmhouse was long since dark, but the cottage shone like a beacon. Once, when he walked half-way across the meadow, he could hear laughter, and he knew they were sitting on the porch; how many he could not tell.

A little later, as he again halted in the meadow, he heard footsteps on the wooden bridge. A voice called "Good night." He scowled and retraced his steps to the orchard, where he stood in the deep shadow of a crooked apple-tree and waited.

Presently he saw the thick figure of the fisherman, crossing the yard in front of the house and striking out across the field in the direction of the lake. Higgins was whistling something foolish and irritating. The Grouch made off for the hillside again.

"I'm going to bed!" he snapped. "And to-morrow I'll go home. I'm an ass."

Five minutes later he violated his vow and was once more walking in the meadow. The cottage lights were fairly maddening. He moved nearer to the cottage this time, so near that he could hear the water racing in the creek. It sounded chilly and spooky.

Now the outline of the little bridge became visible to him, and then he discerned an object that was on the bridge, yet evidently not a part of it. It was a white object of no particular shape. He halted as the object stirred.

Miss Dean was sitting on the bridge, alone. She did not appear to be watching the water, or the stars, or anything that the

night could display among its wares. She simply sat there, somewhat huddled, with her arms clasped about her knees.

A stone rolled under his foot and Miss Dean raised her head.

"Is that you, Mr. Tilley? Oh, Mr. Tilley!"

So she was expecting Tilley, was she? The Grouch sneered as he came to a halt.

"Come here, please," she called.

He hesitated and made no answer.

"I tell you to come here. I can see you perfectly."

Still he did not obey. It was bad enough to be trapped; worse to be mistaken for an idiot who chloroformed bugs.

"What in the world is the matter with you!" demanded the lady. "Don't you think it's rather rude of you not even to answer me?"

"I'm not Tilley," said the Grouch.

There was a moment of silence.

"Oh!" said Miss Dean.

The brief exclamation was followed, he thought, by a suppressed laugh, but he could not be certain.

"Nevertheless, come here, anyhow," she commanded.

"My name is March," he said shortly.

"I imagine so. At first I thought you were Mr. Tilley. I was expecting him, you see."

Her voice had a coolness that brought a heavy frown to his face.

"He was to bring down a book," she went on, "but it's so late now that I hardly believe he will come. However, you will do just as well."

The Grouch, still annoyed at having been caught, was also mystified. Besides, there was something imperative in Miss Dean's voice. He walked as far as the end of the bridge.

She looked up at him from where she sat and studied him as closely as the light would permit.

"Mr. Higgins just left here a little while ago," she remarked, with apparent irrelevance.

The Grouch said nothing.

"We're going fishing to-morrow," she added. "Mr. Higgins fishes very beautifully and he is patient with beginners."

He shifted his weight uneasily and cleared his throat.

"I'm afraid I have interrupted your walk, Mr. March. If so, I'm sorry. But even if you're not Mr. Tilley, it's quite fortunate that you came along. It's better than having nobody come along, anyhow."

He glared savagely, but she seemed to miss it entirely.

"You see," she explained, after a pause, "I want to go to the cottage. It's my bed-time."

"Then I suggest that you go ahead," he rasped, turning on his heel.

"Here! Don't go away—yet," called Miss Dean. "Come back here. Oh, ple-a-ease!"

He paused and clipped the grass with his cane.

"The trouble is," she said, "I can't go to the cottage. That's why I'm sitting here. I can't get up."

"Why?"

"Because my foot is caught between the boards of this bridge."

The Grouch moved out on the bridge and stared down at her.

"You see," she said easily, "I came this far to say good night to Mr. Higgins. When I turned around to go back my foot slipped down between two boards. Somehow or other, I can't get it out."

He looked closer, still suspicious. Miss Dean drew back her skirt and exhibited an ankle that disappeared through the flooring of the bridge.

"You can see that I'm not lying about it—Mr. March. It really happened exactly that way and here I am to prove it."

"Why didn't you call Higgins?" he asked, sourly.

"Oh, I did. But he was too far across the meadow by that time."

What disconcerted the Grouch more than anything else was the fact that she seemed to be in no hurry about anything.

"Did you call anybody else?"

"No; I didn't. You see, I thought I'd give Mr. Tilley a chance to bring the book. I suppose I could have made somebody hear me, if I shrieked; but I don't like to shriek. It sounds rather commonplace."

"Hurt?" he demanded.

"Oh, no, indeed. Not a bit. It isn't sprained or twisted or anything. It's just caught."

"Oh, no; you needn't worry, Mr. March. You won't have to pick me up and carry me into the cottage. I could crawl it, anyhow; it's not far."

The Grouch's face was set sternly as he bent over again to examine the situation more closely.

"If you will just manage to get that board loose at one end it will be all right, I think," she advised.

He took hold of the board, but it seemed to be firmly fastened. Miss Dean watched in interested silence. With an impatient exclamation, he seized his walking stick, inserted it between the board and its neighbor, and pried. The stick snapped instantly.

The Grouch glared at the half that remained in his hand and then flung it violently into the creek.

"I thought you'd break it," she said.

"Why in blazes didn't you say so, then?"

"You'd have thought I was interfering. Beside, I couldn't be sure. Men know a great deal more about mechanics than women."

He tried tugging at the board again and finally stood up, panting.

"I tell you what," said Miss Dean. "If you don't mind walking over to the lake and telling Mr. Higgins, I'm sure he'll come down and get me loose. He's exceedingly strong."

The Grouch snorted.

"Or you might get Mr. Tilley. He's strong, too. He lifted me over a fence one day."

"Tilley be damned!" barked the Grouch.

He left her and scrambled down the steep bank to the edge of the creek. Miss Dean covered her mouth with her hand and appeared to be choking.

She heard him fuming around below her. Once he struck a match, but a whiff of wind extinguished it immediately. Then a foot slipped and went into the water above his shoe top. He swore.

The lady on the bridge clasped her hands and rocked to and fro. Then, after a

splash, he tossed a stone out on the bank and climbed up after it.

"I'm sorry I'm making so much trouble," she said.

"So am I," agreed the Grouch.

He came out on the bridge again, kneeled down and began hammering at the end of the board with the stone. Presently a finger interposed itself and he uttered a shocking exclamation.

"Sorry," said Miss Dean.

"Will you let me do this?"

"Very well."

He hammered for a while longer and then examined the board again.

"Try it now," he commanded.

Miss Dean maneuvered her ankle and shook her head.

"It's looser," she conceded. "But it's not quite loose enough."

"You'll never get it out while you're in that position. Stand up."

She tried to obey.

"You'll have to help me, if you want me to stand up," she said.

The Grouch gave her a hand and yanked her briskly to her feet, where she stood balancing on one of them. Then he bent down to make an examination. Miss Dean steadied herself by placing a hand on his shoulder.

"Push it along toward me a little," he ordered.

"You'll have to hammer the board some more, I'm afraid."

For answer, he seized the ankle in both hands and tugged. Miss Dean gripped his shoulder and cried out.

"Don't! Please wait. Be careful!"

"Hurt?"

"No, but—"

He tugged again and the ankle moved slightly in the slot.

"Stop!" she commanded. "Don't you see that—"

He checked her words with another wrench at the ankle and Miss Dean's foot came out from between the boards.

"There!" said the Grouch.

"Yes — there!" echoed Miss Dean, sharply. "Now you've done it!"

"You said it didn't hurt."

"It didn't," she declared, wriggling her

ankle angrily. "But you've pulled my slipper off and it fell into the water."

"Well, how could I tell anything about that?" he demanded.

"By using what Nature put inside of your head. Do you suppose I walk around in the evening without shoes?"

"Don't stand there! See if you can find it."

"What's the sense of trying to find it?" he retorted, hotly, as he glanced down at the black water. "I haven't got rubber boots, and I haven't got a lantern, and it's gone downstream, anyhow."

"Mr. Higgins would manage to find it. He wouldn't have pulled it off. in the first place."

"Higgins is a fat fool," snarled the Grouch.

"Are you going to look for it?"

"I'll take a look to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Oh, yes; it will be miles away by then. No; you needn't take the trouble to look for my slipper, Mr. March."

"Don't be alarmed. I won't. But I'll get you another one."

Miss Dean stooped down, removed the slipper that remained to her and flung it as far down the creek as she could possibly throw it.

"I'll get you a pair," said the Grouch.

"When I want you to get me anything," said Miss Dean, "I'll ask."

The Grouch stood irresolute for several seconds, thinking of what he ought to say. Then:

"Well, are you going to stand here all night in your stockings?"

"If I decide to catch cold it's my own affair," said Miss Dean.

He turned and walked off.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. March—thank you."

"Don't bother."

"I insist. Even if you are the Grouch."

"The what?" he cried, whirling.

"Didn't you know that everybody here calls you the Grouch?" she asked, sweetly. "Oh, yes. That is, everybody except dear Marigold."

The Grouch trembled with a retort. But it was too late. Miss Dean had stepped

gingerly across the bridge in her stocking feet and was making her way to the cottage.

CHAPTER XII.

TILLEY'S TELEGRAM.

AUGUSTUS J. TILLEY did not enjoy his breakfast. He not only had the uneasy conscience of an eavesdropper, but also the usually unpleasant reward. For he had eavesdropped; not deliberately, it is true, but none the less effectively.

And he was worried.

When he learned that Mame was going to the village he asked her to wait long enough for him to write a telegram, which he did in the privacy of his room up-stairs. Enclosing it in an envelope, he carried it out to the buckboard, in which Mame was already seated. There was a five-dollar bill in his hand.

"I don't know how much it will be," he said. "But that's more than enough, anyhow. And will you ask the operator to send it at once?"

"Oh, yes; I'll do that, Mr. Tilley. But you can't ever rely on Joe Gildersleeve. He's very slack. If he has to go out and flag a train before he gets it sent he's liable to forget all about it for half a day."

"He's not at all enterprisin'. They do say the comp'ny wouldn't keep him, only there ain't anybody else here that know how to send telegrams. Only one day last month—"

"Quit your talkin', Mame," interrupted Mrs. Brundage. "I guess Joe Gildersleeve's got as much gumption as most folks. You go on an' take Mr. Tilley's telegram."

Thus Tilley's telegram went to the village, over the shabby old road that Pop Brundage lengthened from time to time by sheer insistence of statement. Several times during the drive Mame examined the envelope, always noting with dissatisfaction that it was securely sealed. That Tilley should have taken pains to conceal the message from her view impressed her most unfavorably.

"He may have the right," she assured herself, "but it ain't very good manners."

Mame found Joe in the ticket-office at

the station and tossed the envelope and the five-dollar bill through the wicket, with a rather grand air.

"You send that at once, Joe Gildersleeve," she commanded. "It's very important."

"How's all the boarders?" asked Joe, as he took the envelope and ran his finger under the flap.

"Our guests are excellent," said Mame, coldly, as she watched him.

He unfolded the paper that Tilley had placed within the envelope and read it slowly.

After a maddening study of the document, he carried it over to a desk behind him and began counting words, following which he thumbed a rate book.

"That'll be a dollar sixty-two," he said.

"Seems like a lot of money, Joe Gildersleeve. You sure you've got it counted right? You let me count."

"I counted it all right," he assured her, as he continued to make change. "I ain't cheatin' anybody."

"Well, Pop says you can't trust a corporation," said Mame, "and I ain't goin' to have any of our guests taken advantage of."

Joe laughed and brought the change over to the window, where Mame examined it carefully.

"Oh, I'll count it again, if you ain't satisfied," he volunteered, with a grin.

He went back to the desk, picked up the message and repeated the word count slowly. In the middle of the telegram he wrinkled his forehead and shook his head.

"Are you any good at makin' out handwritin'?" he asked.

"If you're speakin' about Mr. Tilley's handwritin', I'm very familiar with it," answered Mame.

"I ain't sure about a word," he said, coming over to the window.

"Let's see," said Mame, eagerly.

But he did not pass the telegram through the window. Instead, he held it up, with the top part folded over, in such a manner that she could not read the address.

"You see," explained Joe, pointing, "he's talkin' about somebody bein' out late and meetin' somebody else. And then he

says: 'Send further instructions. Worried about—' And right there I can't make out that other word."

Mame's eyes were hawklike.

"It begins with an 'S,'" she said. "S—I—T—"

She paused to glance at the signature, which consisted of the simple word "Tilley."

"Oh, I know what it is," she said, suddenly. "He means 'situation.' He's worried about 'situation.'"

"I guess you've got it," he assented. "It makes sense, anyhow. 'Worried about situation.' That's the way I'll send it."

He moved away with the telegram in his hand. Mame's anxiety rose to an alarming intensity.

"Maybe that ain't right," she said. "Let me see the whole telegram, Joe. Then I can tell you better."

"No; you got it right, I guess," he said. "It sounds right."

"You can't ever be too sure," she warned.

"I'll take a chance on it. If they don't understand it they'll repeat it back."

Mame threw discretion away.

"Lemme see who it's to, Joe," she pleaded.

He eyed her wisely and shook his head with a tantalizing smile.

"Go on, Joe; lemme see. You see, he's stoppin' with us and—"

"'Gainst the comp'ny's orders," said Joe. "You ain't got any more right to see that than you got a right to see peoples' letters. I only showed you part of it because I couldn't make out a word."

"I ain't ever goin' say I saw it," declared Mame, indignantly.

"'Gainst orders," repeated Joe, complacently.

There was an answering click from the sounder and he drew a chair up to the desk. Mame stood glaring for several seconds.

"All right, Joe Gildersleeve," she said, ominously. "It's easy to see where you learned your manners."

"And if you haven't got it counted right, there's goin' to be trouble. You mind that. The gentleman that's sendin' that telegram is very influential."

She stalked out of the station and climbed into the buckboard.

"Get up, you!" she said to the sorrel mare. "You're gettin' too lazy to switch flies."

Mame, however, had seen a little more than Joe thought she had, for when he spoke about "somebody" being out late, as he paraphrased the telegram, her eyes were quick enough to discern that Tilley had written "she," not "somebody."

So preoccupied was Mame in trying to glean a meaning out of a tumult of thought that the road, by some freak entirely foreign to its settled ways, shortened itself, thus setting at defiance the theories of Pop Brundage and threatening to destroy all of his deliberately formed conclusions. After delivering an armful of packages in the kitchen, she sauntered away to the cabin.

"I been down to the village," said Mame, as she entered and sat down.

The Grouch was writing at the table. He simply grunted, without looking up.

"I was sendin' a telegram for Mr. Tilley. It cost a dollar and sixty-two cents. I think that's a lot of money for a telegram, don't you?"

He continued to write.

"It must have gone quite a distance, for that amount of money," she observed. "Maybe it went to New York. I don't know; I couldn't see the address."

"There's times when Joe Gildersleeve is poison mean. One meets that kind of a person now and then. He ain't a very good operator. He'll probably send it wrong."

"He had trouble makin' out the handwritin', so they'll probably have trouble readin' it at the other end, too."

"I'm writing," said the Grouch, shortly. Mame leaned over calmly.

"You write a much better hand than Mr. Tilley," she declared. "Don't you think one's character shows in one's handwriting? I do."

"There's something bold about the way you write. It shows strength. Don't you write fast, though?"

He shook his head angrily and dipped the pen again.

"Now, Mr. Tilley, he don't write distinct. He don't write like he was very

well educated. Maybe he hasn't had advantages; only it don't do any good to have advantages unless your head is right to start off with. Does it?"

"Joe Gildersleeve couldn't read one of the words Mr. Tilley wrote and he had to get me to help him. I made it out. It was 'situation.' Seems to me that ain't a very hard word to write, if one has any natural talent at all."

The Grouch favored her with a baleful look.

"I'm real quick at readin' other people's writin'," she added. "But I don't claim anything extraordinary for that. Still, if I hadn't made out that word for him Joe wouldn't have been able to send it at all."

"I'm thinkin' of takin' up telegraphy; it's more intellectual than workin' for the pictures. I don't mean by that that Joe is intellectual, but—"

"I am not interested in Tilley's telegram," said the Grouch, with slow emphasis.

"No. I wouldn't think you would be. Still, it was a kind of funny telegram, too. It was about Miss Dean."

The Grouch's pen came to a halt, although he did not lift his glance from the letter.

"In the part I saw he didn't mention Miss Dean by name," continued Mame. "But he said 'she.' Joe Gildersleeve tried to tell me he said 'somebody,' but I could see where Mr. Tilley wrote 'she'."

"It seems she was out late; I suppose that means last night. And she met somebody. The second time it did say 'somebody.' I could see that clear enough."

The pen in the Grouch's hand was still idle. He was listening.

"After tellin' about her meetin' somebody, it went on to say that he wanted further instructions. And then that's where I came in, for it said 'Worried about situation,' and it was the 'situation' part that Joe couldn't make out."

"It seems she must have been in some kind of a situation last night. I think it's very strange, don't you?"

The Grouch turned and stared at Mame, but made no comment.

"She's very peculiar," affirmed Mame,

nodding. "That's why one doesn't cotton to her, maybe. But who could she be meetin' 'round here, Mr. March? I expect it was Mr. Higgins; he's kind of soft on her.

"What I don't understand is why Mr. Tilley should worry about it, except that he's sort of soft on her, too. I dare say, bein' soft on her, he was telegraphin' to some matrimonial agency. They give directions, you know; they tell just what to do.

"Even at that, I don't see the attraction; unless it's the money. Of course, she's got a great deal of that. It seems I was wrong about her stockin's. When she first come I thought she brought only her Sunday ones. But she told me she wore that kind all the time, even in the city.

"So you can see there's money there somewhere. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything about it, though; I hope you won't take it improper of me."

The Grouch shook his head.

"All women wear stockings," he growled.

"Well, I should hope so!" exclaimed Mame, as she drew her feet under her chair. "Except, of course, the ones they call classy dancers. I mean the kind that dance on

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

the grass and wave their arms and run around, all flutterin'.

"They don't wear stockin's; they don't wear—I've seen them in the movies. Pop saw them once, too. He said they didn't last very long at it; they got lumbago.

"I should think they would. But he didn't get his that way. Pop got his—"

The Grouch held up his hand for silence, and Mame paused.

"If you're entirely through, I'll continue writing," he said.

"Oh, certainly; excuse me. Only I thought you'd like to hear about the telegram. I'll prob'ly find out more about it, even if Joe Gildersleeve won't show it to me. If I hear anything I'll let you know."

"You needn't bother."

"Oh, it ain't a bother. Besides, if I thought you was interested—"

"What the devil do I care about Tilley's telegrams?" he snapped.

When she had gone the Grouch sprang to his feet and slammed the door. Then he tore up the letter he had been writing and tossed the pieces into the fireplace.

His temper this morning was somewhat worse than usual.

The title of the story is "The Cut Shell" by George Gilbert. The title is written in a large, flowing cursive script. Below the title, there is a detailed illustration of a large, textured shell resting on a small mound of sand. The shell is dark and has a rough, pitted surface. The sand is depicted with small, wavy lines.

George
Gilbert

"JUST hand me out the twelve-gage and the canvas vest with the cartridges in it; I'm going to go with Jean back into the hills to look for some grouse for to-morrow's dinner."

At the tent door, inside which his companion on their trip into the Rainbow River country, Glenister Drayne, was lazing away an afternoon that had promised well, then turned rainy, then had cleared, Prentice In-

gram stooped. A half yawn greeted him; then the gun was poked out through the flap and the vest followed. Ingram slipped the vest over his dun sweater, broke the gun, put two shells in, snapped it shut, murmured his thanks to the idler inside, turned to face smiling Jean Duplay, his brown beard crinkling with pleasure over the enjoyment his employers were having. The trip had been an easy one for Jean. Ingram hunted mostly with his camera, naturalized, botanized, fished a little; Drayne had days and days of languor, followed by intense fits of the hunting fever. Already Jean had guided him to the acquirement of several fine trophies—a lordly moose-head, the skin of a giant brown bear, several fine deer. These, duly packed, woods-cured, had been sent in by boat down the Rainbow and they were to follow in a few days, by way of the river, through Lake Nepischaling, to their outfitting place, Rande. Ingram's specimen-cases were well filled; his photographic-plates about all used, with many really desirable pictures secured.

Three weeks before they had gone up Big Pike River from Nepischaling, followed that stream far into the back country, then portaged into a tiny stream that brought them into the Rainbow, which in turn was bringing them back to the lake again. It was in 1906 and they were in unorganized territory far, far beyond the usual tourists' and campers' regions of Ontario or Quebec. The late September weather was glorious, sparkingly crisp o' nights, pleasant during the brief days. This was young Drayne's first big hunt; Ingram was a veteran with both gun and camera.

"Drayne," Ingram called, a shade of annoyance coming over his face as he stooped, took up a leaf and rubbed at a soiled place on the butt of the gun, "why don't you fix that pipe of yours? It leaks nicotin at the joint in the stem and you get it on your fingers and then onto everything you touch."

"Never mind, Pren," Drayne laughed; "a little tobacco tar won't hurt an old smoker like you."

Still wiping disgustedly at the gun's stock, Ingram turned away from the tent and

the snug little nook under the river's bluffs where they had been camped for the past two days. A moment later and he and Jean were trudging up the slope, back from the river, toward the moderate hills. Jean had another shotgun, his own, that had been used many times for securing grouse, ducks, and other small game for the pot on the trip. They considered they were out of the big game regions and therefore were not careful about hunting near the camp. A few more camera studies of small game, a bit of fishing over the big springs for the grandfather trout of the lake, and they would turn their backs upon the out-of-doors for the year and their faces toward the big city.

Although Ingram and his veteran guide appeared to go carelessly, yet the habitual caution of the woodsman was on them and they breasted the slope toward the crest of the rise that culminated a mile inland in a sharp hill with the eager, silent tensity of the man of the outer spaces. It was here that Ingram, out botanizing the day before, had put up birds among the beeches, where they had been feeding on the well-flavored nuts that give to the grouse its ultimate tang of perfection when broiled before a wood fire.

A glorious cock bird hurtled out from the brush at their feet and rocketed it in the effort to top the crest and whisk over it. Jean, amused, stood at "ready" while Ingram snapped his gun to his shoulder, swung in on the bird, pulled.

At the crack of the gun the bird collapsed in mid air, as if an invisible hand had reached out and plucked it down. Jean's mouth was open to applaud the deft shot, when a tremendous crash from the group of little hemlocks at the hill's knife-edge crest was followed by a lumbering, perilous charge from a towering, antler-fronted monster, whose snorting challenge as he came told of his rage.

Coming so silently up-wind, expectant of the grouse, stalking them or rather their feeding ground, as carefully, almost as if trailing big game, they had blundered onto a surly old bachelor moose, driven from the herd, morose, ugly. And Ingram, shooting at the first grouse they had seen, had shot

into the clump of hemlocks where the old solitary had been either hiding or awaiting their coming in that belligerent silence that the ostracised male moose, deposed from leadership by a young bull, at times affects.

Without blenching, Ingram fired again, right into the face of the oncoming terror. The futile bird-shot but angered the old fellow the more. His forefeet upreared, he came down on the place where the hunter had been, but Ingram, keeping his head, had leaped aside. The moose, turning broadside, made as if to follow, when Jean cuddled his gun to his shoulder, fired, almost pointblank, into the side of the great animal. Like a stricken bullock the moose collapsed, his legs doubling beneath him, his body crashing to the earth. In the single moment of complete quiescence and before the animal could kick or recover, Jean coolly stepped closer still and fired the other barrel, at a distance of a few feet, into the moose's neck, crushing the vertebræ with the impact of the shot clustered and centered upon one spot.

Ingram, his finely molded, clean-shaven face, white, but his arm still steady, had his gun reloaded now and came to Jean's side, his gray eyes snapping with excitement and the remnant of a fear that will grip the best nerved men when danger is overpast.

"What did you shoot, what kind of a load, out of a shotgun to knock an old, crazy moose off his feet like that?" Ingram demanded, his wonder growing as he noted the gaping hole in the carcass that still quivered and the bloody torrent that spouted from the wound.

"Regard, *monsieur*," and Jean took from his pocket a good shell and his knife. With the knife he nicked the shell all around, behind the wads over the powder. Ingram, still puzzled, watched. Placing the shell in the gun, Jean said:

"Eet is the cut shell, la, la," with a smile of placid triumph; "now, eef I that triggair pull, the whole end the shell, she go out, *pouf, bam!* like to a bullet. Eh, what could stand eet before?"

"But it would burst a gun-barrel," Ingram protested.

Jean's shoulders went up in a shrug of unconcern.

"Only use heem in moments of dangair, *monsieur*; not lightly. And only in the bore cylinder of *monsieur's* shotgun. In the bore choke she jams, she blows up the barrel, eh? But in the bad pinch, when no other way is out, when one has the shotgun, where one should the rifle have, theese shells, she may be used. Always when we are in the countree for the big game, if I go with the shotgun for small games, I keep one cut shell, in the right barrel, cylinder bore, for such dangair."

He broke the gun, handed Ingram the cut shell, calmly cut another for himself, inserted it in his gun.

They inspected the moose. Ingram had seen too many head of big game down and in front of his camera to waste any time over a dead moose of itself. The patchy coat of the old rogue, the splintered antlers, told their story. The animal was of little worth as a specimen. The hide, tanned, would be good for Jean Duplay for domestic uses. Ingram so indicated and Jean agreed to come for the hide later that day. After some further talk they left the carcass and went on to finish their bird hunt. Some parts of the meat might cook up well —after much stewing.

"And regard, *monsieur*," Jean insisted as they passed that way, bound toward the camp, with a fine bag of juicy birds, "the cut shell, she is not to be shot unless in a moment of great dangair. At close range she stops a'mos' afreyt'ing, like a cannon."

At the camp they found Drayne sitting before the tent, on his heels, skipping bits of shale over the pool. His slender, finely corded corduroy suit, dun soft hat with bright flies snugged into its band, high-topped, waterproof shoes, became him well.

"Ho, hum," he yawned as they approached, putting one well-formed hand up to cover his mouth that was overarched with a small, well-turned mustache of dark brown. His brown eyes rolled back into his head as he gaped; the yawn exposed a set of fine, even teeth.

"I'd get out of here to-day, but for one thing," Drayne said petulantly as Ingram came to show him the birds, while Jean went to build up the fire from the coals among its ashes, "and that is that I've

seen a pretty girl. While you were away a canoe came down and went toward the lake. In it were an old trapper, with some furs, and a girl. I'll bet his daughter. What a pretty one! Black hair, red cheeks, and dressed in Indian toggery, although she was a white."

"One of the habitants from the back country going in for supplies before the season closes in, I suppose," said Ingram.

"They stopped a while and I gave the old man some tobacco and managed to get the girl apart for a bit of a flirtation. She was not averse, Ingram, I tell you that. She told me that her father was going in to Randeal and she was going to stay at some place along the lake, where there are some Indians or breeds, and visit with them until her father comes back and picks her up. I mean to look her up when we get into the lake. Don't care how long we remain. The girl's name is Varlane."

Ingram stepped over to Jean, laid the birds down for the guide to dress, and then walked thoughtfully back to Drayne's side and sat down beside him.

"You better not chase after that girl, Drayne," he said gravely.

"Why not?" And the younger man skipped another stone.

"What can it lead to? You are a married man—"

"Well, what of it?"

"I've been coming up here for years now. I know these people. They are good. I know who that girl is; Paul Varlane's Marie. Her mother's dead. She's all her father's got. I took it for granted when you asked to come with me that you would behave like a gentleman. So far, I've had nothing to complain of; you've been a good camp fellow, taken your share of the hard knocks. I hope you'll see this matter of Marie as I do."

Drayne skipped another stone, yawned, got up without saying anything and went into the tent. A stolid indifference seemed to have dropped, like a curtain, between the two men.

Later Jean went up the hill after the skin of the moose. Drayne, off for trout, was not back when Duplay returned.

"I do not tell the young *monsieur* of the

cut shell," Jean told Ingram, who was busy carding some butterflies, "the young *monsieur* is not of judgment the best with firearms, *monsieur*. Pardon that I thus seem to make *critique* of one who employs me, to anothair, but so it is."

"I know what you mean, Jean," said Ingram, nodding his head; "he is careless with other things besides firearms, too. Tell him about the cut shell and he'll blow his arm off trying for fun. He's a nervy fellow, but heedless."

Next morning, as they raced through the white water that was the chute above the last big pool before the river entered the lake, Drayne, turning his head, between paddle dips made in guiding their canoe, flashed at Ingram:

"You're right about that French Canuck beauty; I'll not bother her."

Ingram breathed more freely after that. Drayne's reputation as a woman's man had come to him dimly in the city; but like the average man, he had paid little attention to such talk. He knew Drayne was happily married, had seen his pretty wife at the Woodcraft Club's reception. So he was glad that the male flirt's passing fancy was exorcised, as it seemed.

The next day they spent over the big springs at the lake's head. The huge trout lying there, ambushed at the river's mouth, were well fed and full of fight. They rolled up, struck, came in fighting with tigerish vigor. It was easy to catch what they wanted and what Jean wanted for salting down for his use after they came to Randeal. At this point of his yearly trips Ingram always gave Jean the remainder of the salt he carried for curing hides, let the old guide use some empty kegs that he would have sunk in the lake and buoyed against the autumn need for salt trout for winter use. It gave opportunity for much good fishing and he had no compunctions about taking the fat, lazy trout in large numbers then, as they were far, far out, and every ounce of them was used for food.

Their camp for the fishing was at the river's mouth, on the lake shore, there sandy, clean. Ahead of them the lake heaved its waves and sparkled in the drowsy warmth of a bit of summerlike mildness

thrust into the oncoming chill with grateful insistence. About a mile distant from their camp a low, narrow spit jutted from the lake's left shore. Beyond that, still, a column of smoke marked where the camp of the Indians was, at which Marie Varlane was staying.

They had an early supper. That over, the fish cleaned and brined, Drayne stepped into one of the canoes, began to paddle off toward the right shore of the lake.

"I believe I'll go for a little trip to kill the hours until time to turn in," he said.

Ingram nodded. He was on his back, smoking, just his shoulders and head propped against a tree bole.

"Regard, *monsieur*," said Jean as Drayne's canoe began to seem small in the tranquil distance, "as we feeshed, about noon, I saw near the spit," waving his hand toward it, "some mallards. Often you have said: 'Jean, I weesh I had picture of mallards sleeping.' Now is the time."

Together they discussed ways and means. Jean added his knowledge of wild life to that of Ingram and the naturalist brought to bear his technical skill as a photographer of wild things.

"We can fix it like this," Ingram said: "I can go over there to-morrow morning early, find out where they go in for the night. Then, during the day, I can put up the camera, going onto the spit from the other side, so as not to alarm them by going directly from the water toward the place they sleep. The camera set, the flash-light in place, I can paddle quietly around after dark to-morrow night, set off the flash and I may get the picture. I can trail a cord out through the bushes for the flash, to let it off and one to open the shutter."

A light wind sprang up a couple of hours after dark, drifting Drayne back from the lake's expanse into the shifting illumination their fire made as it flickered toward embers.

The younger man made no comment as he came to land. Soon he had settled himself for the night; then Ingram turned in and the guide last of all.

Drayne pleaded lack of interest in the fishing next day, right after breakfast.

"Caught so many yesterday I'm sick of

the sight of them," he offered in explanation; "I'm going down-lake to explore a little creek. Found it there in the evening. I'll be back, maybe, before noon."

Soon he was gone, taking one canoe. After he had been gone a while, Ingram paddled for the spit. Drayne was well out of sight by then.

Rounding the spit, Ingram hugged the shore. He found it to be quite two hundred yards long, narrow all the way from shore to lip, but indented about half-way of its length, until there it was almost cut off so that its outer end was all but an island. It was into this tiny inlet that the ducks had paddled each night to sleep on the quiet water of the miniature lagoon.

The mallards, alarmed at Ingram's wary approach, sailed out of the little strait to the lake on the side of the spit toward the camp. Ingram, intent on them and how to circumvent their timid vigilance, brought the camera, set it up, focused it on the bit of clear, open water in the sheltered nook, where the camera's eye could overlook the desired spot. He set the flash-light, inserted the plate, arranged the shutter, ran the cords back into the low shrubbery to the desired distance to a small tree, the only one of the spit. When he had made sure that all was as he wanted it, he started for the canoe again. Then and then only, did he begin to give that attention to other things than the securing of a good picture of the mallards and noticed that the sand on the spit, in between the smaller growth, was padded and marked with the prints of the feet of some large animal. At the edge of the water he saw the tracks plainly—those of a very large bear. Smaller tracks, as of cubs, he saw, too.

Ingram felt no fear for the safety of his camera, as it would retain the man-scent and so repel a blundering bear, even if the appearance of the strange thing did not. There was the chance that the bear might set off the flash-light and shutter by stepping on the strings, but that chance he had to take.

All arranged to his satisfaction, Ingram circled the spit again and paddled back to fish with Jean again. On his way in he looked for Drayne, but he was not in sight.

Upon approaching camp, Ingram saw that Jean had company. A strange canoe was drawn up; Duplay was sitting on a log, smoking, and with him was a Montagnais breed, a slight, wiry fellow, with the extreme cheek-bones of his tribe.

"Regard, *monsieur*," said Jean, "this is Jim Pike, of the camp down the lake where Marie Varlane is, while her father is in to Randeles to trade. He tells me that if you were to set your camera at such and such a place on the ridge back from the lake, you could get pictures of a great bear, who, with her cubs, comes every night along the left side the lac to feesh, hein."

Jim Pike began his story. Ingram listened with the grave courtesy that made the men of the woods like him so well.

"The big brown bear is on our totem; we could not kill her," Jim Pike said, referring to his tribal creed. Some of the tribes will not kill certain animals, unless in self-defense.

Ingram nodded his comprehension.

"And this M. Drayne?" inquired Jim Pike, as if casually, "is he a man of familee?"

"Oh, yes, he is married," said Ingram, seeing that the Indian had a reason for asking.

"Oh, so," puffing out a great cloud of smoke from a new pipeful.

He asked in particular as to the setting of the camera for the mallards, told of his own experience in guiding a camera-hunter in other years, then warned Ingram that the huge brown bear had been seen at times on the spit where the camera was set and went away, leaving a trail of tobacco-smoke after him as if he had been a steamer, instead of a man in a canoe.

It was near sundown that Drayne, a thunder-cloud on his brow, came paddling back, to find Ingram and Jean fishing, a great lot of trout heaped in the middle of the canoe between them.

"I'd like a word with you apart," he said to Ingram when, the canoes in at the camp, Jean had gone to get salt for the trout.

Ingram walked apart with the other. Off to one side of the camp, fifty paces, Drayne wheeled on Ingram with:

"What did you want to tell that breed, Jim Pike, that I was married for?"

"I told the truth, didn't I?" came the steady reply.

"Yes," angrily, "as far as that goes. But it's made me a lot of damned trouble. I met that girl, Marie, again—quite by accident, you will understand. She made up to me and I—well, I flirted with her all yesterday afternoon and this morning."

"Yes?" with a rising note of anger.

"Oh," and the handsome face was overcast with passion's disfiguring signals, "to think of a common breed throwing me, Glenister Drayne, out of a frowzy Indian camp—"

"Well, Drayne, he's the girl's uncle and responsible to her father for her—"

"And you—you—had to meddle! I'll be glad when I get in to Randeles and am on my way home. I'll be away from a sneak, a coward, a hound, like you."

"Careful or I'll repeat what Jim Pike did to you—"

Drayne flung away into the woods, muttering.

Ingram went slowly back to the camp. It had been a very painful experience for him. It was the first time he had taken with him into the woods a man who had failed to measure up to man-size and the incident had pained him very much. He, too, would be glad to get to Randeles, to see the last of Drayne, now that the other had shown his true colors.

Arrived at the camp, Ingram sat down on a log, smoked, thought. Presently Jean announced that the supper was ready. Ingram was thinking whether to call Drayne or not when, to his surprise, the other walked calmly out of the bushes and came in, whistling a low tune. Drayne went at once to Ingram and, extending his hand, said in a low voice:

"Forgive me, old man; I know I'm in the wrong. I'm going to forget the pretty half-breed girl. Let's go to supper."

Overjoyed at this sudden shift, not disposed to inquire too deeply into it, Ingram returned the hand-clasp warmly. At the best it meant complete restoration of their friendship; at the worst that they could keep up an appearance of concord until

they got out of the wilds, perhaps home again.

After supper Ingram explained to Drayne his plans for the night. He told him of the mallards, of the bear tracks, of the offer of Jim Pike to put him in the way of getting a chance for a picture of the old bear and her cubs. Drayne seemed to be at his ease. He joked, asked questions as to where Ingram was going to land, made a tentative offer to go along and help.

"No; I want no one with me," Ingram said, "mallards are light sleepers and that whole flock would sail out into the open lake at the least sound. The old bear, ramping around there, probably has stirred them up often enough as it is."

"Hein, that old ba-ir," said Jean; "better the *monsieur* take the rifle. It would be awkward on her to stumble in the night, *monsieur*."

"All right, Jean, put the rifle in the canoe for me," said Ingram, continuing his smoke.

The fire had died down. The stars had come out. The wind, a bit cool now, was wiping the last of the day's warmth out of the spaces between the sky and the water. Off, down-lake, a loon laughed sleepily; an owl hooted. Drayne, too, was smoking his pipe.

"I guess I'll go now," said Ingram.

"Be careful for the rifle," cautioned Jean.

"I'll go down and shove you off," said Drayne, heartily.

"Thanks," said Ingram, pleased at this hint of helpfulness from the man he had thought so short a time before to be mortally offended at him. He got up and went toward the canoe.

Ingram noted that a gun was ready in the end of the canoe nearest shore. As cautioned, he stepped over it carefully. As he did so, he saw that Drayne was not with him. He was about to get out, thinking Drayne had been shunted from his self-imposed rôle of helpfulness by a return of pique, when he saw the other striding through the gloom.

"Don't get out; I'll shove you off," he called. "I stopped to knock out my pipe and lace my shoe that had come undone."

Ingram went into the forward end of the canoe, grasped the paddle. He felt

himself shoved off, swung on the paddle, spun the canoe, called a word of good-by and went silently into the night.

Setting his course by a big, low-lying star, Ingram soon came to the point of the spit. Quietly he rounded it, skirted its out-thrust length until he came to the place where he had landed to set the camera. Then he got quietly out, pulled up the canoe, got ready to crawl through the low stuff growing there to the place where the pull-off strings were. He thought he heard a slight noise out ahead of him and that made him think of the bear and that, in turn, of the rifle. He searched with his hand in the canoe for the gun, found its muzzle, started at the unfamiliar shape of it, sensed what it was, drew it toward him carefully. It was the shotgun!

Could Jean have made such a mistake as to send him out where he was liable to run onto a bear with cubs, and with only a shotgun to defend himself with?

For proof he had the shotgun in his hand.

He listened. All was silent. The wind had gone down. The lake was quiet.

Then he laughed at his fears. Then he sat down on the end of the canoe, broke the gun, felt that there were shells in it. And he kept getting the reek of some odor that was familiar, yet whose meaning eluded him.

At one moment he was impelled to lay the gun down and go spring the flash-light without further delay. Then the caution of years and years of woods ranging made itself felt. Instead, he lifted the shell out of the right barrel, drew out his knife, nicked the shell as well as he could in the dark and thrust it back into place again, snapped the gun shut, threw on the safety and began to crawl toward the pull-off cords.

The familiar work, the calls upon muscle and brain in doing it, wiped out the shreds of uneasiness from his mind and heart. Soon he was where he could hear the soft quacking that a group of mallards will indulge in, even long after dark in the fall, when the urge to go South is on them and they, perhaps, are talking over the coming trip. At last he came to the little tree, the only one on the spit, where the cords

ended. He felt about, found the strings. His eyes, sharpened by the gloom, made out the things he needed to take account of, fairly well.

Ingram breathed an inward wish that the mallards were in the center of the open space of the tiny bay, where he had the camera focused. Then, half straightening up, to observe what appeared in the flash's flare, he laid the shotgun down, took a string in each hand, and—pulled!

"Boom! Swusssssh!"

For a single tense second Ingram saw the group of mallards stand out before the camera and to one side, about fifty feet before it, *was the great mother bear*. The flash died; the mallards, blinded, panic-struck, squattered about, then were silent. A tremendous growl from the bear, then a high-pitched squall that Ingram knew was from a frightened cub, came to his ears, almost together. He stepped hastily to one side, to be away from the spot where the old bear had seen him, and in doing so, stepped on to something soft, that yielded under his heel, that cried like a child. Ingram stooped, by good luck, grasped the shotgun again.

"Woof!"

The old bear, snarling, came toward him, hurtling through the dark with all the fury and fighting spirit of five hundred pounds of outraged motherhood. Ingram threw off the safety as he straightened partly up and sidestepped, just in time to avoid the deadly rush.

"Woof!" And again the cubs squalled in panic-fear.

She had turned, agile as a cat and was coming back. Ingram saw her bulk up-reared between him and the low-hanging stars that enrimmed the horizon out beyond, realized that on that little sand spit, in the darkness, she had him at vantage; that he could not get to the boat. He took the chance and, without raising the shotgun, fired from the hip as he often had done snap-shooting woodcock in the tag-alders.

"Bang!"

The roar of the gun split the night. Ingram reeled aside, leaped, was in the canoe, leaving the old bear to thrash to death in the bushes and the cubs to squall. One

shove placed him out in the lake, free of peril. Then he sat down and thought.

The shotgun! How came it where the rifle should have been? But for knowing the trick of the cut shell he would have died!

He felt it over, and again to him came the repulsive reek. He laid the gun down and paddled furiously for the camp.

It was Jean who greeted him at the strand.

"Monsieur," he cried, "are you safe? For why you take the shotgun when I once have the rifle put out for you? I heard the boom, it is not the snap of the rifle, but the boom of the shotgun. I look; the rifle, she is in the tent."

"Jean," said Ingram quietly, "bring me the rifle, if you are sure you did not place the shotgun in my canoe."

The rifle procured, the lantern's rays focused on it, Ingram went over it, smelling. Then he handed the shotgun to Jean and asked him to smell. Then the rifle, pointing out the grip as the place to be smelled.

"Nik-o-teen!" said Duplay.

"Yes, Jean. Call the young *monsieur*."

Drayne, protesting, came blinking out into the circle of light, to find Ingram, seated on the log-end, menacing him with a rifle, whose muzzle wavered not.

"Drayne," he said with quiet finality, "when you offered to shove me off as I was leaving for the spit, a dirty plan came into your mind to get even with me for balking you in your pursuit of that little Varlane girl. Don't interrupt me now or this gun may go off!"

"You lagged behind to get the shotgun. When I was engaged in getting the paddle ready and in seating myself and thought you were bending over to grip the bow of the canoe to shove me off, you really were taking out of the canoe the rifle Jean put there and substituting therefore the shotgun, in which you made sure were two shells loaded with bird-shot. You figured that I *might* run into that old she-bear, with her cubs, get cornered and shoot her with the bird-shot enough to enrage her to a point where she'd make mincemeat of me. And that then you would be even with me

and no one ever would be the wiser. But you left a smear of nicotin on the grip of that shotgun and also on the rifle and I managed to kill the bear and escape.

"Now you get into the spare canoe; we can get in without it. Jean will give you rations enough to last you on the way in to Randeles. Take your paddle and go. If you do that, in order that no scandal may come to Marie up here, in the society that will judge her, I'll keep quiet at home about this, so your wife will never know of it. You deserve no consideration whatsoever. Now, go!"

If you ever go into the studio where Ingram makes his matchless wild-life pictures

for the magazines, you will see an enlargement, framed, of a group of mallard ducks, sleeping. And if you are more than a superficial observer, you will be able to make out, in the masses of heavy shadows near the side of the picture, the looming bulk of a bear, upreared, her teeth bared in a snarl. And glued to one corner of the frame is a twelve-gage shotgun shell, of which the front half is missing. And if you ask Ingram what it is, he will tell you that it is his most successful night flashlight picture of wild-life and the shell is a cut shell. But more he will not tell you. I had to get this story from Jean Duplay and he stipulated that I change some of the names.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the matter of a "cut shell," we wish to call the reader's attention to the following facts, submitted by Mr. Gilbert. This data will definitely dispose of any doubts cherished by the amateur sportsman or the lay reader on the possibility of turning a shotgun into a deadly weapon for big game by means of the cut shell.

Mr. Gilbert read an article in one of the sporting papers, about 1894 or 1895, telling how the cut shell could be worked. "I made the experiment," he writes us, "expecting to get my head blown off the first time, but nothing untoward happened. Within the next few years I shot at least two hundred cut shells out of that gun, and when I sold her, in 1899, she did not rattle in the breech or show any signs of wear. But she was a specimen gun."

The cut shell is, of course, an emergency resort, and should not be employed except to stop a charging bear or moose, in the event a man, hunting small game with a shotgun, should be caught. In no case should this emergency shell be shot from an inferior gun or from a barrel in the least choke-bored.

The author writes that he has put a hole with a cut shell through both sides of an oak barrel on the other side of a river. On another occasion he and a friend shot one of the shells through the 1/16-inch iron sheathing of a powder-house door. But this sort of shell is not accurate like a rifle-ball, though they may go straight for a long distance. Now and then this shell may burst when fifty feet from the muzzle of the gun, and cover the landscape and the gunner with its "innards."

Like all emergency methods, the cut shell is not for everyday use, but there can be no question either of its possibility or its effectiveness.

In the October issue of *In Field and Stream*, R. P. Holland contributes an experience that bears out the testimony of our author. Holland and an experienced hunter had encountered, some years ago on a riven goose-pit in Canada, a man armed with "a cylinder bore, 26-inch barreled 'brush' gun of a standard make." Holland and his companion were both amused to find a man thus fitted out "to shoot Canada geese in the month of December." But let Holland tell his own story:

"A bunch of eleven geese showed, coming from the west, high up. They tumbled, then circled us wide, all of them clucking to the call of our live decoys, which we had tethered around the profiles. Out over the river they went, and headed back only to alight in the water. They floated down a ways, rose, and came up the bar not six feet off the sand. It looked like a slaughter, but they dropped down before they got within the killing circle, and after walking around a little they proceeded to sit down and go to sleep. We talked it over. Nothing to do but wait. We waited, but nothing happened. Finally the old-timer reached over and got the little cylinder bore and began taking the shells out of the magazine and barrel. 'What are you going to do?' I asked him. 'Either whop one of them geese or scare them out before another drove comes along and falls into them instead of decoying to us.' With that he took out a shell loaded with chilled 2s, and proceeded to cut it in two where the wads separate the shot and the powder. He then spread the crimp so that it would fit tight in the breech of the gun and inserted the first half of the shell. He shoved this on with the powder end, closed the gun, and sat there grinning. 'That will sure make them step.' And then he added: 'If you fellows will just watch now, I will show you one thing a cylinder-bored gun is good for.'

"We watched as he rose to shoot. For an instant he hesitated, then up came the necks of the geese as they located him, and the deed was done. We distinctly saw that half a shell hit the frozen sand-bar about ten feet this side of the geese, as though it had been a single bullet. From there the shot spread like a fan. Three geese flapped on the bar unable to rise, and a fourth fell back out, after the flock had risen into the air. Now, I can step a yard, and from those dead geese to the pit was ninety good steps. Our cylinder-bore friend confided in me about a month ago that he had been trying this stunt ever since, and as yet he had never killed anything."

A Shortage in Perfumes

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "The Green Sachem," "Trail of the Otter Pelt," "Dancing Laura," etc.

A "JANIE FRETE" STORY

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JANIE FRETE thought that chance alone was responsible for her meeting with Captain Taulk, expert *parfumeur* who had traveled extensively in search of rare essences, at her home on Two Canoe Island, in the St. Lawrence, near where he also had a cabin. But he showed her a photograph of herself, saying that he had killed the man from whom he had taken it for speaking disrespectfully of her. Janie remembered that she had given prints of the photograph to both Prolney Coswill and Derry Navror, adventurers after her own heart. When she looked through her correspondence file, she found an undated letter from Coswill, saying that he was going in search of treasure.

Convinced that Taulk had some covert object in view, she searched his cabin. She found evidence that confirmed her suspicions, and a letter signed "M. B.," which told Taulk that Coswill had hidden the treasure before he died, and that he had sent maps and papers to "J. F.," which Janie hadn't received. From other papers she learned that Coswill's death had resulted from wounds received in a fight with a native, and that Taulk had found her photograph among his effects, and had originated his story to obtain her confidence. The next day she received a letter from Navror, telling the true story of Coswill's death. Both Taulk and Janie left for the South.

Meantime, in the Antilles, Derry Navror, by the aid of a map, had unearthed an iron cask smeared with asphaltum, then had recovered it, unopened, with sand and brush. He, too, treasured a photograph of Janie. In a camp of turtlers he met and loved Sorilla, a beautiful Caribbean girl with the blood of a half-dozen races in her veins, and after killing a jealous rival, Lagniano, went to the girl's island home and was married to her.

Janie bought a motor-boat and visited Derry. Sorilla liked her, but was jealous. Taulk heard that Derry knew the whereabouts of the treasure, and landed, unseen, on Sorilla's island. When Sorilla returned from a secret interview with him, Janie recognized the odor of one of his special perfumes. Taulk was attracted by Savanilla, a beautiful native girl, with whom Janie had made friends. She drugged him, and had him placed on a small island inhabited only by natives. Derry started on a secret trip to get the treasure-cask, and while he was gone Sorilla took Janie on a turtling expedition, and Janie saved her life in a battle with a devilfish.

CHAPTER X.

THE USUAL THIRST OF JEALOUSY.

DERRY NAVROR departed from his island home, intending immediately to salvage the buried treasure cask which Prolney, on his death-bed, had intrusted to him to hand on to Janie. The

will, if the letter Proll had written, could be called by so dignified a name, read:

DERRY OLD BOY:

I'm all in, and I must die; so in haste I write you to ask that you see to it that Janie Frete receives the fortune which I picked up and buried in a cask on the Pampa Island, according to section of chart which I attach hereto for your

guidance. For your own trouble, and to pay expenses, I have for you my money-belt and certain trinkets, which are of good price, the Inca, for example, which you remember, an emerald of price.

Good luck, old boy!

PROLNAY COSWILL.

Chance and despatches had caught him, and he arrived in time to comfort the old pal, who had dreaded dying alone in a far and savage place. Now Proll could die with a semblance of peace of mind.

Derry had performed his final obligations to the remains of the man who had been. He found that Proll had really a fortune in United States currency, three or four pearls, and several emeralds, one a gem of great price and beauty.

Having nothing else more interesting to do, and feeling a responsibility he had not lately felt to any one or anything, Derry Navror had gone by the chart and found the big cask covered with raw asphalt. But he was without means of removing it, and he had searched eastward along the island shore for succor.

Finding turtlers, he had been well pleased, but cautious, in a measure. Sorilla had woven her net of charms about him, and Lagniano had forced the issue, by endeavoring to come within machete range, to do murder for sake of the woman.

The arrival of Janie Frete on their island had been the most embarrassing thing the adventurer had experienced in a long time. His old pride had survived through the vicissitudes of his life.

The fact that he had accumulated a fortune that gave him an income of several thousand dollars a year could not offset the fact that he had married an island girl, whose very splendor but added to his feeling of shame. Janie despised his failure to hold true to high ideals—she had told him that, long ago:

With all due regards—JANIE.

The sting and the lash of her scorn had followed him from land to land and from sea to sea; now she had come to him to exact her due; he felt that he could not too quickly be rid of her presence; she was a torment to his pride and to his conscience.

“Sorilla’s as fine a woman as ever lived

—beautiful — worthy!” he told himself truthfully, but the knowledge that he had not done the best there was in him to do was repeated over and over by his conscience, and he began to feel that he was as little worthy of Sorilla as he was of Janie.

Accordingly he had set forth upon his errand to get the treasure cask, to deliver it to Janie, and be rid of her as soon as possible. He left his harbor alone in the motor-boat, telling Sorilla that he had important business to attend to, and that in eight days, at the outside, he would return.

“I wonder what the darned stuff is?” he thought to himself, guessing a hundred different things.

It might be some rare old wine, or rum, or other priceless liquor—as they say. Perhaps the cask was but the wrappings of a hoard of gold and silver images, or gems and pearls. Again it might contain the whole stock of essence or oil or flavor about which one hears so much in the meeting-places of the fortune-seekers—those rare, unmatchable substances which sometimes fall into the hands of a beach-comber and give him a day or a lifetime of bought pleasures and joyous sensations.

Navror’s mind quivered upon the subject doubtfully. His thoughts reverted to those old days, when Janie’s scorn had driven him to despair, instead of to the performance of tasks of courage and efforts of valor.

She seemed to have asked too much of him, and he banished from his ideas the one which declared he deserved her contempt because he had been weak and not strong, cowardly and not heroic, far more lucky than he deserved, and not rewarded for his just deserts.

Though he was shamed in the presence of Janie because he had married Sorilla, nevertheless, in his heart of hearts, he knew that he did not deserve the wonderfully efficient island girl, whose fancy had fallen in love with his fair countenance, the iris-deep innocence of his eyes, and the physical daring of a reckless man who hunted the man Lagniano with the same liking that he had hunted black jaguars, wild steers, and buried treasures among poison islands and infested ruins.

So he arrived at the treasure palm on the level island. Just to the westward there was a cut in the shore, through which he could run to the safety of still waters. There he made fast to the bank, and with a big scoop-shovel went to the brush which he had cast down to cover the place where he had built the fire.

In the short time he had been away grass had grown up and the sticks and branches were covered with a running vine. He built a fire in the brush-heap, and burned it away. Then he dug through the thin ashes and warm sand.

The curious cask with its rough covering was where he had left it. He dug it out, only after much effort, and he was obliged to use his utmost strength to roll it up out of the pit.

Its weight was up among the hundreds of pounds, but when he had gotten it out upon the sand beach, he rolled it along easily enough, in spite of the coating of asphalt, which took up grains of sand in its grisly surface.

Beside the creek, where he had moored his cruiser, he brought out a wrecking bar, whose claws he set into the jacket on the barrel, and peeled it off, like pie-crust dough. The cask stood revealed, with its two hoops of iron, to serve as runners. When he had opened the asphalt ends, revealing the heads of the cask, he found that one of them had been chiseled out, to make a square opening.

The plate of metal, however, had been set back in, and soldered or welded into place with a brazing stick of some kind, and, apparently, a hot brazing torch. When he tipped the thing over and rolled it, he found that something inside heaved and lumped back and forth. It was not fluid.

It did not have the fall of metal, nor the sound of anything more remarkable or interesting than putty, or stiff tar in a ball, or a bag full of gum.

In his wanderings, Derry Navror had heard the stories of the men who have found treasures. He had found treasures himself—not immense ones, but several gem opals and pearls and golden images Indians had molded and buried in graves.

From such things his little fortune had

been established. He rolled the cask up two skids and lowered it with two lines into the cockpit of his motorboat.

He sat down to smoke on a thought which had come to him. First of all, he regretted having written to Janie about the treasure. He was a fool to have done it.

Perhaps, after all, it wasn't a treasure. Perhaps it was just some crazy notion of Proll's that this stuff was priceless and beyond value. Perhaps he thought it was as good as that petrified gum which they find in New Zealand and sell for small fortunes.

Probably it was just one of Proll's notions. On the other hand, Proll knew pearls, emeralds, U. S. certificates, and round yellow-boys! He had left this thing to Janie Frete, and in honor bound, Derry Navror was obliged to turn it over to Janie.

But suppose it was a fool's fortune? Then Janie would be sure, anyhow, that Derry had substituted something for the real thing.

"That's an idea," Derry felt, his eyes hardening, "if it is a fortune!"

There are two kinds of adventurers. One kind is hardened, case-hardened, and rendered impenetrable, invincible in his honesty. He starts forth with the soul of his honor for his life's protection, and he gives his blood, he suffers all privations, and finally he dies, keeping that honor unstained and perfect in its glorious radiance. Come what may, no flinch, no opportunity, no agony could bring down the citadel of the castle of his conscience.

The other type of adventurer—perhaps that term should not be applied to the whipped ones of fate—does not go forth of his own volition, but is hunted from place to place by his own restlessness and weakness and desires. He flees the consequences of dishonesty in all its forms, of crimes and misdemeanors, of falsehoods and prides, of disappointments and indolence. He but wears the semblance of strength and manhood and courage, and lowers his standard under what he calls the necessities that know no law.

Sitting there, smoking his cigarettes, with the waves rolling up and breaking just outside, and with the blue of the sky laughing at the blue of the sea, believing that he

was without the pale of society, and beyond the reach of the law, and beholden to no one but to himself, he dallied with the questionings and the arguings and the temptations which forever vie with one another in the heart of idleness and amid the secrets of the places that are beyond—those romantic dwellings of the imagination.

Temptation is the master fisherman of the closed seasons of the world. No bait is too mean, no lure too lovely for Temptation to use. Pearls, gold, fair women—envy, admiration, greed or desire—anything serves!

Derry Navror swam around among the hooks, wondering if he could not venture to nibble a little bait, and yet escape the consequences.

He amused himself, wondering what it was that Prolney Coswill had willed to Janie Frete? He had been well paid for his own efforts in her behalf. Proll had left him not less than ten thousand dollars' worth of property, and he could well afford to perform his last obligations. He wondered if it wouldn't pay better not to perform his duty?

"If that stuff's one of those fancy gums or spices, it'd be worth something," Derry reckoned. "Besides, it mayn't be any good at all, but just one of Proll's notions. He had pretty good sense, but he'd fall down sometimes, same as anybody."

He ransacked his mind for a hint, clue, or suggestion that would enable him to identify the contents of that cask. Far and wide there had been rumors of "finds" in the tropic islands.

Like fire in withered leaves such reports spread from island to island. Some one had found a pearl, some one had found a hoard of gold, some one had found the wreck of a silver transport, and through all the channels of rumors ran tales of fortunes made on the turn of a card, on the salvage of a ship ashore, on the purchase of a commodity or the sale of a rarity.

Derry himself had bought a bale of leaves for a dollar (silver), and sold them for five hundred dollars (gold)—a speculation in cuca. He could well believe anything from black magic to the favor of Neptune.

He wondered if it wasn't a dead man's hoax? That was not unlikely. Coswill

was a humorist of a kind, and he might have trifled with Janie Frete's feelings.

At least, Janie had taken the matter seriously enough to come down to the West Indies on a voyage. He tried to remember enough of her words, her gestures, to make up his mind whether she knew the fact; he could only recall that she had received a letter from Proll shortly before he departed on his last venture. Perhaps that letter gave her the clue? Perhaps she was keeping her eyes on him?

He started off on another train of thought. Janie Frete was not a common widow or orphan to be swindled out of her patrimony without looking into the subject rather closely. He knew that in all that part of the world there was no law, no custom, which would compel him to live according to the letter of his trust.

But Janie Frete was a law unto herself. She would not fail to make life decidedly uninteresting to any one who ventured to cross her. Despite his many ventures, perhaps because of his wide experience, Derry Navror felt a nervous thrill at the thought of arousing Janie Frete's resentment. Janie had always been very nice, very attractive, very desirable, but—and another, but—and still more doubt and questioning until his mind took on a new slant.

"I could have some fun with Janie, I bet!"

Under the guise of playing a joke, the idea of investigating the contents of the cask, and perhaps selling the treasure for his own benefit, took its final form.

At last Derry Navror had hit upon an excuse which would serve to hang his conscience on till it was silent. With aplomb he inspected the tool-locker of his motor-boat, drew out a cold chisel and a machine-hammer.

He began to chip and drill a hole in the top of the cask, where he could easily plug it again with a lead rivet or a cup of solder. He soon had a tiny slit in the iron, and through the slit whistled all the horrible scents, all the foul odors of all the world.

It fogged the face of Derry Navror, and choked him where he stood. It fairly drove him overboard, and he plunged into the

waves on the beach, to blow the smell from his mouth and nostrils with salt water. Never in his life had he caught such a calamity on the rot.

It was half an hour before he could get over that sensation of horror. The thing was the most incredible he had ever met.

Prolney Coswill had left that thing to Janie Frete! He threw up his hands in disgust.

Then he laughed. Circling around he got up wind from his cargo, and with a blow-torch he melted some lead. He plugged the tiny crack he had made in the head of the iron barrel and then poured upon it a seal of lead.

His curiosity was satisfied forever more. He had seen many things in his life which were inexplicable—this was one of them: apparently the dead man had concentrated all the sins of his life and emptied their concentrated essence of depravity into the iron barrel. It was beyond comparison with anything that Derry Coswill had ever met, and he had one time spent twenty-four hours in a Venezuela prison dungeon.

“I’ll pass it on to Janie Frete!” he said to himself. “I’ll invite her to take it to the north temperate zone and open it there under auspicious patronage—oh, gee!”

Here at last was a man who, dying, had bequeathed to Janie Frete the punishment for her invincible and unmovable heart. Derry was sorry that the inspiration had not been his. As it was, he would not fail to be the instrument through which a superior humorist worked.

He ran down the creek, dipped to the rollers and entered upon the wide sea. He steered out to another group of islands, which he wanted to visit for purposes of his own. He had never been there, but rumor had said one of the islanders had a buried treasure, worth four or five figures, at least.

That was a rumor irresistible to Derry, whose appetite had been whetted by contemplating the absurd errand for which he had been so well paid, according to the terms of Prolney Coswill’s final testament and will.

Not knowing the entrance to the little harbor of Gris Island, he cut a split in one of the planks of his motorboat, and, having

beached it, he was obliged to build ways and haul out to put in a patch. It was a week before he could go on his way.

He strolled along, by easy runs, from island to island, and stopped one day at Cabwa, which is just a very small island, with a luxury of fruit, nut, and other trees, among whom dwell a score or more of people, and as his boat slowed down, the most extraordinary of men rushed down the beach and yelled in frantic English:

“For God’s sake, white man, take me away!”

“Who in creation are you?” Navror demanded, his hand dropping to a convenient and reliable 38-40 revolver.

“I’m a white man!” the fellow cried. “Listen, now! Don’t get excited! Y’see—I’ve been robbed and—”

“Oh, everybody gets robbed down here!” Navror declared. “What’s your game?”

“Why, say, now, let me tell you. It was like this: There was an awful pretty yellow girl over on some island—one of the Caicos bank group—and she doped me, and she stole all I had. You know—”

“A pretty yellow girl on the Caicos bank?” Navror repeated with such intensity that only one marooned would have failed to notice it.

“Yes, sir. Flirted a little, you know, and we had a drink—”

“I see,” Navror replied with cold conviction.

“And when she had me where she wanted me she robbed me, and brought me here, or some of her tribe—”

“Who was it?” Navror asked.

“Why, I—I forgot: I just don’t remember.”

“Sorilla?” Navror asked, the name choking on his lips.

“Sorilla! That’s the name! She put the job up on me! She—”

Navror, his fury stirred by the primitive passion of mankind, sprang at the beach-comber, and with a free-armed sweep of the revolver butt knocked the ragged and blistered beach-comber senseless across the sand.

Then, with anger that grew sullen, deep, and lasting, he backed out of the little land-

ing place and continued on his way homeward. It was all right for him to go adventuring from place to place among the islands, but when his wife engaged in little ventures of her own, flirting with some man, even though to rob him—Navror was in such a grasp of jealous anger that he could not contain himself.

"And I married her!" he shrieked when he was in mid-seas. "And I married her—I gave her my name, and she plays that game!"

It was far across the seas to the next island, and he was obliged to wait over to get rest. A day later, in the dark night, he found his way to his home island. He stole softly into the anchorage, at low speed and with muffler on.

He grasped the butt of his heavy revolver, and with slow steps he bent his rigid way up the gravel path to the pretty cabin. He climbed the steps to the balcony and paused to listen to the things within the cabin.

He heard only silence. His weight made a dry-plank squeak, and he threw open the door, struck a match, and lighted a big oil lamp on the table.

He went across to the door of Sorilla's room and threw it open. Sprawled out upon the bed was the vast bulk of the cook and maid of all work.

"*Grango!*" he roared in the dialect, and the red-lipped black woman bounded to her feet with bulging eyes. "Where is Sorilla?"

"Gone! Gone!" the woman cried. "She went away in the dark of the moon, telling none whither she would go, and it is half the full moon now, and none that went with her, neither the Whale-Bull man, nor any of the crew, nor the white girl, nor the canoe have returned, and no word has come from them! Are you hungry?"

"What do you hear?" he demanded.

"Aga!" she exclaimed cunningly and rolling her eyes around, "the white girl was very beautiful, and Sorilla is the color of gold. They say never did such a pair hunt together before! And there was a—"

"A what?"

"A fine man, up the island, white and civilized and handsome! He, too, is gone—"

"You mean—"

"One who eats the orange, despises not the pork," the old woman replied enigmatically. "I do not know. Is our captain thirsty?"

"Aye!" he roared—"thirsty for blood!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BUCCANEERS HAVE COME.

THE black tangling, squirming mass sank from beside the canoe. The reaching arms and the monstrous worms disappeared in coils beneath the surface.

Where the octopus had been the water was stained black and the canoe yawed, drew up, yawed again, and drew away from the horror spot.

Janie and Sorilla clung to each other, staring—speechless, gasping, struck by such terror as neither had ever endured before. Janie could only hold her automatic, ready for another attack.

Few seconds had elapsed from the thing's first appearance to its washing under in its own murk. They stared at the water, and did not see what had really overtaken them.

Sorilla, turning her face from the running waves, gazed the length of her craft, and its silence, its barrenness, were eloquent. Not one man was left of the crew. Blinded by the bullets, nevertheless, the sea-monster had claimed its prey.

Up near the bow of the long canoelike vessel were ends of tentacles still squirming and writhing. The men had fought with their machetes, and had gone through, fighting.

Janie, catching the import of Sorilla's exclamation, discovered that the men were gone—and buried her face in her hands, unable to bear the thought and the sight that remained fixed in her memory. The two, shuddering, stunned and numbed by the tragedy, could not move.

For minutes they huddled there, and were only roused at last from their torpor when the boat rose suddenly, fell, and leaped again. The roar of breakers sounded in their ears, and they started up then, but too late to avert another catastrophe. They were in the breakers, and even as they

sprang to look about, their neglected seamanship brought them quartering to the beach.

The stern struck, bumped and fell again with a crash. The bow swung around, and as the water spurted up where the craft had been hogged amidships the foremast whipped over, and the bow rolled like a log. Janie and Sorilla seized one her suitcase, the other her duffle-bag, and leaped shoreward.

Happily it was a mere rolling sea, and they waded ashore to the beach. Their craft, twisted and heaved about, became but a mass of wreckage, from which they salvaged the sails and lines—about all there was too, except the planking which, once twisted, lost all its form and shape.

Three or four miles to the westward they could see the jungle-clump where they commonly camped, and where the lost turtlers had their seashore camps, with retreats from a storm in the jungle. In the other direction the beach ran into mirage and around a point.

"Sorilla!" Janie exclaimed. "What shall we do?"

The island girl shrugged her shoulders. For a minute she continued to gaze at the wreck. Then she turned and said:

"It is the fate! So be it! We shall cut from this sail hammocks and a shelter. We shall carry some of the rope with us for hammock lines.

"There at the camp are some supplies, I think. We need not starve. What have you in the leather bag?"

Janie looked sidewise at Sorilla, and then threw it open. There was a light rifle, boxes of ammunition, a silken tent, a kit of cooking wares, and a square box labeled "Emergency Rations."

"Caramba!" Sorilla exclaimed. "What did you expect?"

"I could not tell." Janie shook her head. "We need lack for nothing for several days—if you know which shellfish are fit to eat?"

"Ayah! I do—my dear! I believe, if I must say it, that you have traveled before!"

Janie laughed, and Sorilla sprang and kissed her enthusiastically; an army of men

might well have debated which of the two was most enviable on that sealing of devotion, and that final wiping away of the suspicion and questioning which each had had in her heart.

They went westward to the usual camp of Sorilla's boats. They found the old frames of bunks up in the jungle edge, and with their sheets and strips of canvas, housed in a respectable camp for the night. Janie took up her rifle, and, with Sorilla for guide, entered the jungle. Quarter of a mile back they came upon a wild pig, young and cock-eared.

"If you shoot, kill him dead!" Sorilla warned, but Janie needed no warning. Her 25-20 bullet went between the brute's starting eyes, and it fell in its tracks.

Sorilla ran to it, and Janie followed along the game path. As they stood by the red carcass, Janie's eyes looking beyond to the forks of the trail, saw something. A second look disclosed what it was.

Right there in the V of the two trails was a human skull picked white.

Sorilla and Janie went to look at it.

"What a tragic land!" Janie exclaimed in awe.

"One minute the bright sunshine!" Sorilla admitted; "next come night! I bet that man a bad man—hide out and die there!"

"Poor devil!" Janie shook her head.

"A big man in his feet, likely," Sorilla continued. "But his head not as big. Well, we got some good meat, all right!"

They carried the porker, which weighed hardly more than sixty pounds, down to the beach, where Sorilla rapidly and skilfully butchered it. She cut the meat into strips, and what she did not immediately propose to cook, she stacked upon a frame of sticks to cool in the wind.

Thin slabs were soon ready to fry over a fire which Janie built, and with salt from a canister among the turtler's supplies they made their supper before dark.

They had given the fact of their predicament little thought in the presence of the instant necessity to make ready for the night. They were outdoor girls. They had in their own lives met the phenomena of nature without embarrassment, knowing

how to meet emergencies far beyond the very dreaming of people of the cloistered hearth.

But when they had their camp made, and when they sat in the gloom between the jungle that overhung them, and the sea, whose occasional whiff of fragrant spray was flung to them, their minds turned to the major considerations.

Janie, who had looked into a late autumn snowstorm coming with a gale down Lake Superior, turned to Sorilla, who had seen the hurricane waxing in the low sky, and felt its grasp, and had heard its roar through the tropic islands.

"What have we to expect?" Janie asked.

"No one knows down here." Sorilla shook her head, for the mystery of the dark-blue seas was vivid in her mind. "Few come to this place, and some of those few we would rather not have come now. You Northerners!"

"How did you come to have that great gun? How did you come to have all those cooking things? Why did you bring this little bug-proof tent?

"What prompted you to carry that splendid little take-apart rifle? Why, I did not have an extra pair of stockings—and you—you have everything!"

Janie was surprised. Sorilla had given her an insight into the difference between them, in character, habit, and manner.

"Why, Sorilla, child," Janie replied, "in the North we cannot expect to find anything and everything just when and where we need it. Look you! Beside that skeleton you picked up a machete—just so!

"You are eating something—a fruit from a vine; and so it goes. Here you expect to find everything, or a substitute—and it makes you careless! Do you go with men like your crew without any weapon?"

"Oh—they would be bad—that kind—if I should let them!" Sorilla shrugged her shoulders, whimsically. "Every once in a while some girl is stolen—they did not try it with me, only two or three times. You see—"

"Well?" Janie asked as Sorilla shrugged her shoulders again.

"Weapons were provided for my hands; I was carried a hundred miles in a one-log

canoe by a most desperate man; I returned in it—alone!"

"You—"

"Aie-e! With my smile, first, and then—*caramba*—with his own machete!"

Janie shivered.

"I paddled home," Sorilla continued, "with eleven pearls which he thought were enough to supply him with money to make me contented. It was my first treasure-trove. Since then I have been wholly independent.

"I think I sold ten of them for thirty thousand dollars (gold). The other, the best of all, I wear to this day, for luck!"

She drew from her bosom a wonderfully beautiful pearl, pear-shaped and of great size. Janie knew it must be worth, at least, six or seven thousand dollars. It was caught by a ring-staple wedged in the small end, and a gold chain circled the woman's beautiful neck.

"I have been the great fool!" Sorilla shook her head. "I know now that you did not come to the Antilles seeking to steal away my husband. But I was in a quandary, I was alarmed—I admit—and I confess that I had in mind to do something on opportunity, but—ah, fair maiden of the North, I owe you my life now!

"By no possible chance could I have escaped that monster except by your shot in the eye. I saw it pucker up and draw, even as the black fountains boiled. I saw that other eye, too—you hit it!—but the horror carried down my men! To think I mistrusted you!"

"It was an inheritance, as I told you," Janie said, "that brought me down here. I admit as to my dear friend that I had my suspicions when we sailed forth. You see—that perfume!"

"That perfume—speak! What of it?"

"But one man in the whole world has blended *La Bella Dolsora*, and I mistrusted him!"

"A man did come to me!" Sorilla exclaimed—"Captain Taulk, who said that you meant no good; that you planned with my husband to take a great fortune away—I planned with him to look into the matter.

"I tell you the truth: I intended to leave you upon a certain island till I had looked

into that question of the fortune. My husband has gone for it. He went in his motorboat."

"I wish I had mine here!" Janie shook her head.

"We have much to think about besides what we have not got," Sorilla suggested philosophically. "That fortune — what is it?"

"I do not know; I am struck with curiosity."

"And I do not know, either." Sorilla shook her head. "It was rumored that when the man Coswill was killed an Indian cut him. A tragedy rests upon it. It was for the treasure, but Coswill would not tell of what it consisted, whether gold from the ground—"

"It was in a cask?" Janie suggested.

"I, too, heard that. Coswill carried away an iron barrel, rumor declares, but none knows; none could tell; even my husband, talking in his sleep, did not betray its nature. He did not know, I am sure, for I stuck his little finger in a glass of water while he slept, and he told me everything—but not what the treasure was."

"He had it buried on this island, by a palm-tree, west of here. He told that much. He described the place, and I saw it upon his chart, which he kept hidden."

"I intended, after taking you to a little island, just east of here, to return and investigate that palm-tree. My husband may have taken it. But we shall look and see."

By and by they slept in their double-bunk, which was completely sheltered by the green tent, with ground-cloth sewed in; in the morning, after breakfast, they followed the beach westward, crossing the creek on a foot log; they carried their camping outfit with them in packs on their shoulders.

They arrived at the palm on the point, and found the empty pit in the sand: they found the place where a heavy weight had been rolled on the sand; they discovered on the beach the lumps of asphalt which had been pried from the barrel, and they sat upon the discovery with feminine interest and discussion.

"It is some spice or flavor." Sorilla declared.

"No"—Janie shook her head decidedly—"it is a perfume; it is a most valuable perfume, too, else Captain Taulk would not have bothered me about it—"

"He had troubled you?" Sorilla demanded.

"Oh, I didn't tell you!" Janie laughed. "Now I shall tell it all to you!"

Having made their camp, eaten their supper, and made ready for the sudden night, they disposed themselves comfortably, and Janie told of Captain Taulk's scheming, his craft, and his failure—which was but partial. Then she told, in detail, of her visit to his cabin, after his departure, and of her examination of the man's premises, seeking a clue, which had at last been supplied by Derry Navror's definite letter regarding the treasure.

"But I cannot guess what it is!" Janie shook her head.

"I do not know, either, but when Derry comes for us, or we escape to him, then we shall learn all about it."

"He will come here?" Janie asked.

"Ah—alas, no!" Sorilla shook her head. "I told none where we were going; you see—forgive me, orange blossom—I had no desire to permit him to know or learn where you were to be!"

Janie laughed, to Sorilla's surprise. The difference in the kind and quality of things that make people laugh is the mark by which the urban, suburban and back-country people are distinguishable from one another.

But it was not the thought of being marooned on a little tropic isle that made Janie laugh; it was the lightning change in their relations with each other, their quick understanding, now, and the transition from deadly jealousy to trust and liking for one another—something to rejoice over.

"That mystery treasure will be the death of me yet!" Janie shook her head, talking in the pretty French with which they must interchange ideas.

"It is a most questionable fortune!" Sorilla declared, seriously. "You can see with what a fleet of difficulties it sails! It is hardly worth the danger, the difficulty—perhaps we should abandon—"

"My dear!" Janie cried, "it is the danger, the difficulty, the mishaps and the haps that make life worth living, and if I were to get no value in money from this inheritance, yet would I count it my most precious possession, because, perforce, it has led me to the most wonderful person of pure gold that I have ever seen—ah, Sorilla!"

"How I would love to see men—my kind of men—stare at you, with your eyes of deep purple, and your complexion of new gold, and that mass of blue-black hair! You have no idea what a sensation you are!"

Sorilla laughed.

"I have seen many expressions on the faces of many men," she said, "but I cannot but wonder, thinking of you, what you know about what men have said about you?"

"Oh—I'm like all the rest!" Janie denied.

"Is that so?" Sorilla laughed. "You make me believe that, with a gun at my head, perhaps! Ah—one time, I remember; it was in Cuba, as I strolled along, and some sugar men were there. One said, in the English: 'There's a beauty!' Another, he reply: 'You ought to see Janie Frete!'"

"You said you could not speak English!" Janie exclaimed.

"Oh, I understand the most common phrases!" Sorilla evaded, in French.

Janie shrieked:

"The most common phrases—'There's a beauty!'"

"And 'You ought to see Janie Frete!'" Sorilla added, and by that quiet, impressive wit, Janie saw that Sorilla was deeper than she had suspected.

So they talked along, as they waited for slumber, about many things, with even more interest in the affairs of house-keeping, of the market for turtles, of the luck in finding tortoise shells, of romance of the running waves, than in what men thought or did—but those things they said may be passed over, even though the two beautiful girls seemed to be lacking in balance, because what they said of men stands alone.

In fact, to their minds, a thousand af-

fairs stood on the exact level with men, as regards interest and importance. Again and again they reverted to the attraction of the fortune, whose value they could not guess because they could not name it—but they could not question its value because of Taulk's search for it, and the unfortunate Coswill's interest, to the death, in it, and the activity of Derry in seeking it.

"But Derry does not know what it is—or did not!" Sorilla shook her head. "Else he had told me when I put his little finger in a glass of water and asked him—"

"Will that always make a sleeper talk?" Janie exclaimed.

"Always!" Sorilla laughed. "It is the master secret of the voodoo—"

"The voodoo?" Janie asked. "There is really the voodoo?"

"Do not speak disparagingly of it!" Sorilla warned, softly. "Its secrets are many, and some are terrible. I have not told you, but when I was a little girl, from ten to twelve years, there came to our island a doctor, and she was a most terrifying old woman, more than six feet height, of whale-hide and shark jaw and monkey arms—oh-a! Had you seen her?"

"She took a great fancy to me, and my mother feared that she had in mind to use me in some of her midnight rites, but it was not so. I had then the complexion, the eyes and the hair, but I was much too thin, and much too scrawny, and I was like the snail with my eyes out like horns—oh-a!"

"Dr. Lanwata said I should grow up a very beautiful woman, and have many rare adventures, and that I should be much that I have become. I served by the volcano-stone altar that she built, and I put upon it the meat that she burned to the night-fliers, and she taught me the killing of snakes—many things! I just say, my dear, the voodoo is real!"

"I would not say one word to hurt its feelings," Janie replied gravely to the rebuke. "For myself, I know so much that is good in so many religious beliefs that I, on the one hand, dare not excite the wrath of one, nor on the other, fail to enjoy the pleasure of another, if it is in my power to obtain the benefaction."

"Ah, Janie!" Sorilla caught her companion's hand in the dark of the tent, to squeeze it.

So they drifted into sleep, at last. They had accepted the adventure as a matter of course. In the morning, when Janie started up, and looked about her at the vast sea, at the vast prairie, at the lone palm near by and the blue mirage of a jungle in the distance, she demanded of Sorilla what next they would do?

"Who knows?" Sorilla shrugged her shoulders indifferently, throwing her luxuriant hair into coils and loops and fastening them with native shell pins and combs that looked to be worth a fortune--as they were, of a kind. Janie started a fire, and Sorilla made breakfast of pork meat, which they had smoked over a fire, and both drank coconut milk, while they ate.

Sorilla, not satisfied, rambled along the edge of the waves, seizing upon shellfish, which she brought, and the two roasted them in the fire, to eat.

"Now what shall we do--where shall we go?" Janie repeated.

Sorilla looked up and down the beach; she looked at the sky; she climbed the shore to look across the wide pampas, or prairie.

"Who knows?" she repeated.

"But we cannot remain here forever!"

"Oh, nah!" Sorilla laughed. "Probably not so long as that—*mañana!*"

Sorilla enjoyed it; she saw no reason for doing anything; they could do something, or think of something the following day, but for the present there was so much to eat, and resting was such a boon, that it seemed unnecessary for them to worry about what was, at the nearest, as far away as the to-morrow.

There was nothing else for Janie to do but possess her soul with patience, and after the first hour of uneasy longing to be up and doing something, she sought the shade of the palm and sat down beside Sorilla, and, watching the waves roll in, dozed; Sorilla, too, watched the waves, and she watched the two long beaches.

She awakened Janie to point to a herd of wild cattle that had come down to the sand and were ambling along uneasily.

It was wild, simple, and indolent. Sorilla, apparently, was thinking of nothing. It seemed to Janie as if Sorilla expected, was even content, to remain there without attempting to escape in any direction.

She plied the native girl with questions about this island, about the chances of escape, about the things they might do--with but one answer to them all—"Quién sabe?" or "Who knows?"

Sorilla did not look to the horizon as if she expected any one to come from that direction; she admitted that probably no one lived on the other side of the island; she was thankful that it was not "savage" weather; she wished that she had a glass of wine, or rum; she missed home comforts; she wondered what a man, any kind of a man, would think or do if he found two lone females there between the sea and the "sabana"; she asked Janie which would be worse, to be captured by bad, bad men, or to live and die there alone when time should end for them?

Janie contained her feelings with difficulty; she wanted to be up and doing something, although admitting with reluctance that it was a very interesting country, and that she not hungry, and that if it wasn't for a shark whose little black sail skimmed along just beyond the breakers, and for the horrid, many armed monsters who might be lurking in the pound of the swells, she would like to go in swimming; she did bathe in the edge of the clean waves, but with a feeling of considerable embarrassment because there was so much of the outdoors, from horizon to horizon, to see her there; Sorilla, bolder and challenging, dived into a wave or two, and then they resumed their sitting in the sand—waiting.

Waiting was the last thing Janie would have done; but Sorilla had in mind nothing else to do; fate had treated them most scandalously, and if they escaped, it would be something never to be forgotten; on the other hand, if they should happen to be discovered by half-wild men, by outlaws, for example, or by the worst of all, white renegades, beach-combers who asked nothing better than an opportunity for crimes.

"The more-than-bad men would regard us as a favor and dispensation of Satan!"

Sorilla remarked, half-seriously, in her pretty French.

"I have my gun!" Janie exclaimed. "My rifle and my automatic!"

"*Qui!*" Sorilla laughed. "I have the idea, *chérie*, that it is the very well thing to be ready, for—*Voilà!* A yacht!"

Janie, springing to her feet, saw that it was indeed so—a dull colored, squat craft, swaggering and rolling along, steering by the lone palm. As it approached, Janie stared at it with her binoculars.

"Sorilla!" she whispered, "the Buccaneers have come!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAPTAIN'S RARE PRIZE.

CAPTAIN TAULK staggered up from the sand where he had sprawled unconscious. Navror's blow had been savage, and it had landed hard. Taulk, hardly more than a wild pig to the uncomprehending islanders, was seen, but simply neglected.

He emerged from his dark not knowing exactly what had befallen him. He recollect ed the coming of the motor-boat, which had filled him with hope; he saw now that it was gone.

He was brought down to the level of primitive life and primitive resources. He glanced over his shoulder fearfully; then he slunk away like a wounded animal into the thin jungle to hide and recover from his blow.

He crawled out of the hutch which he had found open for him, only to get something to eat, or to drink from a coconut. He shambled among the islanders, studying them from under his eyebrows. His face rapidly filled over with a black beard; his gait took on something of the simian pace, and the simian swing of his shoulders.

He could not depend on others; he must depend on himself; daily he strode around the island, looking for opportunity, for a sail, for a boat to take him away, and one day before long, he found a motor-boat at anchor in the little harbor.

In the boat was an ill-favored, hump-backed little man, with long, shaggy gray

hair, deep sunken blue eyes and wearing two garments, a shirt and a pair of tawny overalls.

Taulk walked down till his feet were in the wash of the little bay ripples, and studied the stranger, who looked at him meditatively, smoking a corncob pipe, and having the direct and discomfiting gaze of the temperate zone. Neither spoke till Taulk had conceived an idea.

"Howdy!" Taulk greeted at last.

"Howdy," the man replied, gravely.

"You seem to be a white man!"

"I expect I be," the motor-boater admitted.

"From the Mississippi River?"

"None of yore damned business where I'm from," the boatman suggested, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"It's important to me, where you're going to from here," Taulk said. "And likely it'll mean something to you—"

"I ain't too proud to turn a dollar—a middlin' honest dollar!" the man blew a puff of smoke.

"I'd rather not talk it out, too loud," Taulk hinted.

"I'll swing in, a leetle closter," the other said.

When they came within a few feet of each other, Taulk squatted on his heels and told his story:

"I own a cabin on the St. Lawrence River; I left there about a month or six weeks ago, to come down here to find a barrel of very essential material used in my business; I'm a perfumer by trade; that barrel, if I have been rightly informed, contains not less than—um—m—ten thousand dollars' worth of supplies.

"I struck one of the Caicos group, and one of those island people put one over on me, left me doped and without a dollar right where I am now. I don't mind that; but if I could get that barrel, I'd be in a position to give you the best ferry money you've had in many a day."

"Well, let me see 'f my story hitches with yourn; your name's Captain Taulk; Merton Bray's an agent of yourn—"

"What—what! You know Bray?"

"Yep!" the boatman chuckled, knocking out the ashes to fill his pipe again. "Bray

sent me down thisaway to see 'f I could pick up anything er other about this here barrel of juice de perfume, er whatever.

"I've been sailing around—some. Jump aboard! My name's—um-m—Hickory, Shag Hickory."

Taulk sprang aboard. The feel of the boat under his feet was the pleasantest sensation he had experienced in a long time. The glass of rum and an orange-juice chaser was a welcome stimulant.

Hickory, when Taulk was absorbed in quenching his thirst, eyed his guest sharply out of the corner of his eyes. It was a keen, calculating look, which might or might not mean a good deal.

"I been nosin' around down thisaway," Hickory continued. "I kinda reckoned mebby the'd be a chance to stow in a cargo, of some kind—what say?"

"If we could find out where that barrel's hidden!"

"I'd kinda like to get hep to what's in that bar'l," Hickory mused. "I've heard right smart—as them shanty-boaters says—about it.

"I ain't put so overly much confidence into what they said—but Bray, of course. I've done a little business with him, feathers, an' some tortoise shell, an' he put me in touch with a feller that took some pearls I picked up—"

"I tell you, it's worth ten thousand," Taulk replied, shrewdly, as he supposed. "There'd be a good hire for you—"

"Hold on, boss!" Hickory stopped him. "Stop right there; I've done business, without no bargain, an' then agin, afterward, I generally said I'd git a bargain—"

"Why—I'd pay a thousand—"

"Hold on, agin! As I understand this business, seein's I've heard it around, whose bar'l is that?"

"You see, if that bar'l belongs to a girl the name of Janie Frete, it'll sure be some trick gettin' it, in the fust place; keepin' it in the second place, and cashing in on it, in the third place. Mebby you don't know Janie Frete?"

"Why—why—not intimately—"

"No, I should say not—not intimately! It's some resky, this here deal of yours. Don't you know that?"

"Why—down here—"

"That's it, down here! Let me tell you sunthin': you come tracin' Janie down here; you gets onto an island, an' you think she don't know yer there; you meet a nice yeller gal, an' she makes a kind of Jazebo Pass over yer face, an' the next you know, you're along of some real dark people, who don't know any language you speak, not by the sentence, anyhow.

"Did it occur to you that Janie might of known that yeller gal?"

"Wha-what—no!" Taulk choked, half amazed, all angry.

"That's it, Brother Taulk; what you don't know about that Janie gal's sure the most int'restin' part of her biography.

"The yellow gal was tellin' a real choice c'lection of friends of hern about it, an' they've took up the laugh, in Jamaicy an' New Providence by this time—"

Taulk stared, and the color of his cheeks deepened, even under the black tan that was succeeding the blistering of his face. He was speechless, and under his speechlessness there was a malignance that increased.

"Janie rigged me that way?" Taulk choked.

"She shore di-id!" the motor-boat man drawled.

"If I could get my hands on her—"

"That's it," the other lowered his voice, glancing around through the jungle. "If we could git that bar'l an' that gal, I'd call it square—"

"To take her?" Taulk asked, breathlessly.

"Yes, sir—that's me! I ain't so particular, about these here burried treasures an' perfumeries, an' such things. No! But it'd be sure some proposition, to git that Janie."

"What for?" Taulk asked, expectantly.

"That's neither here nor there," the man said, but his face was the face of a goat as he said it. "You kin have yer bar'l; I ain't so overly int'rested into that. Janie's got an island all to herself, quite a ways from here, but I know where 'tis.

"There's a razor an' shears, and such, in the cabin. Get busy! Y'll find some white pants an' a barber's coat, an' a silk shirt, too. Don't know 'f them shoes'll fit

you. I don't care about meetin' Janie—not first along.

"Y' can kind of get so's she'll know you ain't the lost soul of a pirate, the way you look now, but somebody she might of knowed. You can do to Janie what was done to you—easy 'nough, for she'll sure be wishing for a human drink, after a week or two of coconut milk, where she is now—"

"She's marooned?" Taulk asked.

"That's right! I got word about it; y' see, Sorilla's took her down the line, an' left her on an island there, same's you got left 'cordin' to Janie's schemin'. Kind of a mixed-up business, I should say; Janie's down there, but if she should get to see me, 'count of knowing me, why she'd think something—but you!"

"Law me! She'd love a white man after a week in one of these lonesome, ha'nted, fly-by-night islands! Y' see these gray hairs? Well, I'm shy of forty yet, mister; I've suffered a lot from that girl.

"I'm just tellin' you; you ain't the only one that's squarin' up accounts with Janie Frete. I never hoped she'd get to come down here, but she's come, thank the devil, she may, for that!"

The man glared at the floor of the engine pit. His eyes stared, glassily. He had come down out of the north, and he had wandered up and down among the islands, perhaps for years. He had preserved his personality, and he had brooded long over something.

"All I ask," he added, "is to git that Janie Frete tied to them hammock rings in that cabin. That's all! She's shore proud, that gal! I ain't got no pussunal use for her, but—"

"She needs a lesson, independent as she is!" Taulk growled, for company sake.

"That's it; I see you understand; she gets the lesson, all right; all you got to do is get her, the way I've figured it out; you're a stranger down here in these parts; I got a place to put that gal, where she'll think of all the men she never treated right, you bet!"

"She's free, an' she's independent—but her time's comin'—"

"You know where the barrel is?"

"Yes, sir! I'd took it myself, but I

knowed I couldn't get Janie; she'd die before she'd let me get her; but you—you get her; I'll give you the barrel, an' then you just do's I say.

"Then I set you ashore—an' you forgets all you ever knowed about me, er this boat—er anything—"

"But she'll know—"

"She'll want to forget, too!" the sea rover muttered, half aloud.

So they prepared for their venture. Captain Hickory seemed to know exactly what was to be done. From what he called his slop chest, he fitted Captain Taulk out as well as could be: he even trimmed his guest's hair neatly, with a pair of good shears, but slightly stained by the tropical rusts.

They took on fruits, slabs of bacon, fresh meat for a meal, and a bushel of nuts, which Hickory obtained easily enough, since he talked to the natives like a native. Then they drove away in the little cruiser, and crossed the wide sea, bent upon revenge, in the region where vengeance is sometimes a profitable pastime for the satisfaction of the crude soul.

Their boat was not a swift one; it was, in fact, a slow, sure plugga, with a six horse-power heavy duty motor in a "yacht" which had been painted over to conceal it against a gray bank, or the distance of the sea, or to look like the ill-equipped, ill-cared-for craft of a bum-boater, a hobo of the seas.

Hickory, however, was a quick-acting, chart-reading, compass-course seaman—weatherwise with both a chronometer and a barometer in his cabin and a patent log to catch his mileage. His hands were always clean, and neatly manicured.

Shaggy as he looked, he combed his hair carefully, and the clothes that he had in his slop chest were neat and clean. Curiously enough, he had clothes there that exactly fitted Taulk, down to his socks and shoes.

But there could be no questioning the eagerness of his desire to capture Janie Frete, for some injury of the years ago. When they slept in the cabin in some island shelter, that night, Taulk heard the old-looking wastrel talking in his sleep about

Janie—mingled hate and longing, sodden with mysterious references to what he had in mind to do, as though he had kept his real intentions hidden even from the subconsciousness of his mind.

So they drew near to the *havana* island where Janie and the golden Sorilla sat in the shade of a tall palm, following the sun around, waiting. The two men were astonished to see two people where they had figured to find but a barren island, with a buried treasure just over the edge of the shore line a few yards. The glasses showed the navigator that one was Janie Frete, and that Sorilla was the other of the marooned girls.

"It's them girls!" Hickory said to his companion. "Where's Sorilla's black crew of turtlers?"

Taulk could not tell, but the two women further nonplussed the two motor-boaters by their apparent indifference. Janie, for example, stood up and pushed down her waist line to get it more shapely, or more comfortable—it was not clear what she had in mind. Sorilla lying at length upon the sand and one elbow, watched the motor-boat casually.

There was no landing along that part of the beach, the waves rolling in over a long, shoal water making it impossible either to approach near or to wade out to stillish waters.

Taulk waved his hands, eastward, to beckon them over to a little hook of land behind which the westerly wind that was blowing would make a lee shore.

The two girls talked to each other a minute or two, and then nodded their assent, and started along the beach, as if it was the race course for automobiles at Palm Beach and they two visitors there. They did not touch the little tent, the lines and camping outfit which surrounded the base of the palm.

It was as if they had camped down there, for amusement. They stopped to dip up a drink of water from a spring boiling at the head of a little gulch in the beach. They hardly so much as glanced at the gray motor-boat and its two eagerly consulting men.

Under the lee, nearly a mile along shore,

the motor-boat rounded in and came nosing up to the low peak of black volcanic rock which had just skimmed to the surface of the seas there. Taulk, standing on the bow with a line, ready to jump ashore, was no less nervous than the man who fussed and fumed over the motor in the pit aft.

Taulk ran the line out to an old drift log, and made fast, while Hickory hauled taut a stern line which led to an anchor he had dropped over to hold the nose of his boat from pounding on the stones.

"Ah—Miss Frete!" Taulk bowed, and turning to look at Sorilla. "Mrs. Navror—at your service!"

"Thank you, captain," Janie replied. "This is, indeed, a rare pleasure!"

"The pleasure is mine!" Taulk replied glancing from one to the other of the women, nervously.

Their looks alone were enough to startle those with feminine respect or fear in their hearts; but Taulk knew that there was much more to these two women than their looks.

"Where did you come from?" Janie asked, and Taulk grimaced. "You've had an awful rap beside the head—how came it?"

"I was—a man hit me!" Taulk admitted, glancing at Sorilla.

"You've been too much in ze sun!" Sorilla remarked. "Ze man peel like an orange!"

Hickory, coming forward over the cabin, with a pitcher and glasses in his hands, diverted Taulk's attention for a minute, and the two women looked at the shaggy tramp of the seas. He sprang down to the patch of sand among the jutting stones, and bowing, offered the three glasses, and put one for himself on a stone. He filled the three glasses, and his own.

"Health!" he said, and Taulk added. "Vale! Very delicious fruit juice!"

Janie sniffed her glass and looked at Sorilla. Then Janie drew a round matchbox from her bosom, struck a match and touched it to the surface of the fragrant glasses.

Immediately a pale bluish-green flame spread over the surface, and Sorilla, tipping her own glass, caught the blaze and

the two girls stood gazing at the two fires with critical, calculating, waitful gaze.

Hickory's mouth rounded out, showing beautiful white teeth; Taulk stared, with his lips drawn thin.

"We prefer ours scorched," Janie remarked, casually, waiting for the fires to burn down. "It's beautiful motoring down this way, isn't it?"

She addressed Taulk, but as she spoke, her glance turned to Captain Hickory, and Taulk, gathering all his will power, said:

"Captain Hickory, Miss Frete!"

"So pleased!" Janie curtsied softly, and as her eyes rolled, she suddenly started, stepped back and glared into the countenance of the gray old man, repeating, sharply: "Cap'n Hickory!"

"Yes'm!" the man asserted, harshly.

"What are you doing here?"

"Why, we heard—thought you might likely want to get to go—"

"With you?" Janie asked, scornfully. "With you—after—"

Her cheeks flamed and her eyes blazed. The man stepped back, hurriedly. Taulk and Sorilla gazed surprised at the tableau, as the anger of Janie increased till she stood enraged.

"You heard I was here—you knew I was here—and you came to me—what 'd I tell you?"

She had drawn her big automatic, and its deadly black muzzle was turned upon the man, who trembled and shivered as he failed to meet her eyes with his own start-ing glances.

A crunch in the whispering sands, a sudden shrill, warning cry from Sorilla, and, too late, Janie threw up the pistol to fire. As she did so, strong arms pinioned her arms to her side, and the gray captain dashed up.

Sorilla, unarmed, turned and fled like a wild heifer up the beach. When she glanced back, she saw that she was not pursued.

Instead, the two men were hoisting Janie on board the motor-boat, bound hand and foot, and like so much meat in a bag, they carried her aft to the engine pit and into the cabin.

Then Hickory and Taulk emerged, and

having whispered, Hickory jumped ashore and started up the beach toward the palm-tree and Sorilla, on a jog trot.

Sorilla, turning, fled at top speed. She dashed into the tall reeds upon the level, where she could hide, and one not see her, though but five feet distant.

However, Hickory did not follow her; instead, he went on to the palm-tree, and looked around it. He found the treasure pit; followed the barrel rut down to the beach and up the beach to the creek a few hundred feet distant, which neither he nor Taulk had noticed, when wondering how they could make a landing.

There he found the broken asphalt break-ing down like exceedingly stiff tar in the hot sunshine. It still retained the shape of the barrel, and the creases of the barrel hoop-runners.

"Somebody's got that 'ere treasure!" he read by the signs. "But, anyhow, I reck-on I got that 'ere Janie Frete—um-m. She's purty proud, Janie is!"

"Now 'f I kin jes' get shut of that there Taulk, who's no good, and no 'count. I bet me'n Janie comes to terms—of some kind! Yeh! You bet! I never expected luck 'd break my way, thisaway. Me got Janie Frete—down here! Why, she's mine, now—mine!"

He but glanced at the camp the two girls had made under the palm. He read the signs of the camp—the old sails and rope, the gathered drift-wood sticks and tall reed hoops to support the little tent.

The fireplace of stone and the piece of sail which the two had swung from the trunk of the palm tree, as a signal of distress, were clean indications of disaster.

Returning to the motor-boat, he called Taulk outside, and said, in a low voice:

"We got to have some fresh water; there's a good spring up by them girls' camp, and just beyond is a creek mouth; them girls has some big cans, an' you go fill them, an' I'll run the boat up to the creek."

"All right!" Taulk consented, starting along the beach. Hickory took up his bow line, coiled the rope and sprang abroad. He pulled the boat stern first by the anchor line, and then started the motor. He

steered out into the sea, but instead of following westward up the beach, after Taulk, he headed away eastward.

As the motor-boat rolled, he glanced into the cabin at Janie, who had succeeded in sitting erect, bound though she was, and who looked at him unafraid, but her face white, her lips pressed and blue: her eyes staring.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHO STEERS BY INSTINCT.

THE fury of jealousy now seized upon and possessed Derry Navror. He must pay the penalty of his years' long slackness of life. He found himself confronted by the law of compensation, of whose existence he had never dreamed, except as the topic of an essay, the compulsory reading of which, without understanding and without enlightenment, had left his mind cold in the presence of a keen and subtle universal truth.

He had meant to violate certain laws; he had had in mind to commit certain degradations; he had contemplated escape from the common and inevitable penalties—and the spirit of the universe was not concerned about how he suffered, so long as he did in anguish pay the freight on his triflings with the conscience of his own soul's determination and purpose.

Sorilla had taken her departure with Janie Frete—and a strange man had come to their island, unknown to the lord and master, and he was gone with the others!

Only, as it happened, Derry had stumbled upon that man, whose punishment was obvious, but insufficient according to the idea of vengeance in the thoughts of Navror.

Janie Frete's arrival always did turn the level pathways of peace and high living into a tumult of multitudinous excitement! He cursed the day when he had met Janie Frete! He swore an embarrassed oath, when he recalled her quiet rebuff on the day he would have laid his life and all its prospects at her feet, for her dalliance or service.

In years he had been successful in burying Janie's image under the presence of the gay and beautiful, the luminous and golden

Sorilla—and now Sorilla—and now that West Indian girl had—

Derry Navror had traveled far, but he had trained his soul but little. In bitterness he turned his mind topsyturvy—not that it had ever been particularly orderly—trying to discover a short cut to making that rare exotic lass who was master.

He told himself that he was a white man among a race of mongrels, and that Sorilla should have known, without being told, of the rare condescension he had exhibited when he offered to marry her, and had actually given her his own name—not that any one ever called her anything but Sorilla, but as matter of law and so forth, she was Mrs. Navror—a fact that had caused him a little perturbation when Janie appeared, with her temperate zone complexion and her North American continent standards.

Now Sorilla and Janie had gone sky-larking away together, and the story of their adventures would doubtless soon be talked about every camp-fire, before every fireplace, around all the kettles of soup, and over all the cabin-tables from Florida to the mouth of the Amazon, and the rumors would eventually be elaborated around the banquet-boards in New York, and along the bars in Chicago, and in asides at the green tables half the world around—hadn't Navror heard such yarns himself from Shanghai to Tierra del Fuego?

If Sorilla had been merely a local character, with a reputation in the Antilles, what wouldn't she gain in fame under the tutelage of Janie Frete?

Being a vagabond of many nations, he was a most resourceful man. He had still the energy of his birthright under sparkling frosts of the green-timber belt. He stormed out to rouse members of the island crews, to ask them what they knew, and rumors they had heard?

Thus he learned that Janie's copper-bottom motor-boat was still anchored in the island bay, and that the two had taken their departure with turtle-trapping apparatus, but whether the islanders had not heard.

That left him with all the points of the compass to guess from, and he had no

fancy for such a game of three hundred and sixty to one roulette. He needed definite information, and he sought it far and wide.

He found Savanilla up the island, and questioned her. Savanilla, observing the agitation of the husband of Sorilla, smiled whimsically, and invited Navror to quench his thirst immediately, and she would see what she could think in this sudden invasion of the peace and calm of her daily life, which so surprised her that it was impossible for a mere island handmaiden to think as rapidly and remember as certainly as the occasion required.

So she brought Navror a pitcher of fruit-juice from a cooling evaporator, knowing better than to try to play any questionable game of soft-blended liquors on him. She stood in apparent embarrassment until he told her to sit down, which she did, upon a little three-legged stool, and wrinkled up her forehead in the effort to remember something which would help him.

Yes, she had seen a man of the name, she was quite sure, of Captain Taulk, and he had remained there some time, waiting upon the directions of Sorilla, but Savanilla was very sure that he was but a trader, though in what she had not the faintest idea, except it was a treasure of some kind, which he desired to obtain, before a pink-cheeked, white-skinned girl of some name or other—

“Janie Frete?” Navror asked.

“Even so be it, husband of the Sorilla!” she replied humbly, and her attitude regarding him as merely Sorilla’s husband stirred a resentment in his heart.

Evidently this yellow girl didn’t know him! She was a very pretty yellow girl at that—Indian, Spanish, French all mixed up in one hundred and thirty pounds of feminine wilfulness, ignorance and subtlety. He could not, at that moment, think of any way of impressing her with the fact that he was the head of the household, and that Sorilla was his wife, instead of his being merely a husband-consort of Sorilla, which was the island attitude, rather accentuated by this girl, toward him.

“Do you know where she has gone?” Navror demanded.

“Sorilla does not need to tell any one

whither she goes or whence she returns!” Savanilla shook her head. “With a turtle crew, she and the white girl sailed—”

“Where did Taulk go?”

“Oh, he was very violent, exceedingly impudent, and far, far from courteous and respectful, so he went—”

“You sent him away?” Navror asked, relief salving his tortured pride.

“Oh, I would not go so far as that!”

“But what the dev—” Navror’s impatience overcame him, but as the young woman rolled her eyes up and looked at him, with that opaque cloud of resentment lurking in their shadowy depths, his quickness of temper died in its expression.

He could not gain anything by seeking to compel this close-mouthed, evasive, incalculable island girl to disclose what she might, perhaps, tell him if her humor fancied and the reward were adequate.

“He seeks something that does not exist,” Navror said, on a new tack, after a minute’s thought. “He seeks a treasure that is but a hoax, a joke that a dying man perpetuated upon a woman who had not loved him in return for his putting his own future, unreservedly, at her feet—”

“What?” the young woman exclaimed. “Not a treasure?”

“No, not a treasure, but a—a horrid thing.”

“You know?”

“Yes—I know,” he nodded. “Coswill was my partner, shipmate and pal. He left to me the sordid task of rebuking Janie Frete for being so cold of heart toward him, waiting for him to die to kiss a wreath to put upon his grave.”

“And was he a nice young man?”

“Fine—a true sport—brave—”

“I could not resist the importunities of such a man!” Savanilla sighed.

“No one could,” he shook his head, oblivious to her thought, “except some one like Janie, who has no heart, and but a February frost for a soul!”

“She must be very cold,” the young woman shook her head. “Captain Taulk in his madness—it took so little sweet rum to make him rave—disclosed the fact that he had followed Janie down here, to find her, and to take the fortune, too.”

"It is no fortune!" he exclaimed. "He's a fool!"

"That is true, wholly and unqualifiedly true—and you found the treasure barrel?"

"Yes, I brought it home for Janie, and I've put it into her motor-boat, where she'll find it when—if she returns."

"If she returns!" Savanilla repeated thoughtfully. "They have been gone overtime, the turtlers and the two most beautiful women. What do you have in mind might have occurred?"

"What would you do, if you were beautiful, had a beautiful companion, and a soul without conscience, and such an opportunity as—as these tropical islands present!"

"Ah! if I was beautiful!" she murmured. "If I were a wealthy—ah—"

"I should like a woman's answer!" he demanded. "How the devil's a man going to know?"

"Surely, you do not suspect that Sorilla would—" she questioned, and a smile of mockery flickered across her lips, and her eyes laughed to the depths of the fires that lurked in them.

"Then you think—" he turned on her, choking the question in two.

She laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"I never think," she shook, and replied: "If I did, the sky would fall upon me every time a man sits at my table and quenches his thirst. I think not, and I trust that all my own people are as complaisant."

He started to his feet and went out on the veranda in quick realization. If people saw him there, what rumor might not reach the ears of Sorilla? He could but flee, and that he did, little satisfied with what he had learned.

Savanilla watched him depart, laughing. It greatly amused her, these white men who had such strange ideas, a daylight code and a dark night code—who often feared the appearance of evil, while they planned the most wanton departures from the most ordinary paths of acceptable conduct in the eyes of the world.

Navror returned to his motor-boat and ran back down to his own landing. The rocking deep of the multitudinous blue of the unresting sea did not sooth nor calm his mind.

He was stung to the quick by the bitterness of his thoughts; it seemed that Sorilla and Janie Frete had gone skylarking together, which, down through the Antilles, he knew meant a boundless disregard of—everything.

Having sneaked into the harbor, Sorilla's harbor, he took his rifle from its canvas-case and wiped off the heavy grease with which he had coated all the parts, to protect them from rust. He worked shells through the action.

He stuck a bit of white paper into the breech and gazed down the shining barrel, with its delicate tracery of spiral twist, and smiled his instant satisfaction. Then he greased the rifle lightly, but filled the cotton in the case-lining with grease, and drew a heavily daubed, loosely braided rope through the barrel, and put the weapon away—where it would be handy and ready for service.

He performed the same ceremony on the automatic pistols, and on his old single action, 38-40, blued barrel, frontier model. As he worked, he began to remember the big yellow man, Lagniano, and he shivered as he contemplated the memory of the killing in the black jungle night by the still-hunting methods of a black jaguar against a mad bull.

He could not be sure upon whom he had in mind to vent his anger. He could not think of killing Sorilla—yet! It occurred to him that there are lots more women who need killing than men, but the habit is to shoot men and let the women escape.

Sorilla had treated him wretchedly; she had trifled with him; she was careless of his honor, and she had gone a romping with Janie Frete.

"Damn Janie!" he growled under his breath. "Janie never got what was really coming to her—um-m."

His mind sort of lost its bearing. Nailed down to the fact, he really couldn't think of Janie Frete needing killing—not exactly. What she needed was a lesson.

She had always been spreading doctrines around among the women which were exceedingly dangerous to the self-complacency and masterly masculinity of men. It always was humiliating for a man to be a clinging

oak to Janie Frete's part of the sturdy vine, but that was where men usually found Janie, when they began to pull the masterful business and search for symptoms of the clinging vine.

Janie had kissed Navror once when he sat sulking, taking his punishment like an absurd little puppy. It was a thrilling kiss, the kind that one never forgets; at the same time, Janie had said:

"Why, you silly little boy! Now run along—I must go to New York to-night—good-by!"

That was the last time he had seen Janie till she showed up in search of her inheritance. He grinned when he thought what her satisfaction would be when she received the dead man's joke.

"I'd better get down the line," he decided. "Janie's never been down here before, and Sorilla and she'll head for some of those show-places! Probably down by St. Vincent or Martinique. Guess I'll drop down that way!"

He rattled the loaded rifle-shells in his pocket and pulled his boat in to the dock. It was after midnight, and he turned on a light to fill his tank with the gasoline, take on a barrel of extra supply, and carry on board enough oil and grease to last a month.

He could not rest; he had to be going; he could feel something calling him down the line! Adventurers know the feeling; it often comes; once in a score of times it means something, and a man tells about it afterward as of something he'd heard tell—somewhere.

It was a voice in the vast dome of the flickering tropic sky; it was a tone, like the hum of a tornado; it was just nothing at all, except an excuse for Derry Navror to drive away at nine miles an hour—his best and most economical cruising speed.

He felt better for going, too, and he touched the motor up a bit to get a little more speed out of the old wreck. He turned his stern almost in line with the north star, but he could not hold her there. Something was working at his fingers, pulling the wheel over, and he found himself on a new course for him.

By the chart he was bound for Ambergris Cays. He had not been down there, though

it was well enough known to Sorilla and the rest of the natives.

He held his course and the next day he raised the bare sand, the glistening mirage and the little cluster of low palms and desolate poverty of vegetation. The wind was variable, out of the south and east, so he ran up into the lee of Cross Bar, got as close as he could to the shore without grounding, threw over his anchor, and, rifle in hand, waded ashore.

"I'm a damned crazy fool!" he growled to himself. "But something's got me! What t'ell! Nobody'll ever know it!"

Silently he walked up the long sand, white and beautiful, with shells that were lusterful as pearls, and when he arrived among the clumps of hard, dry palm fans, he peered up and down and around, till he saw a thatched hut, as if some castaway had built it for the purpose of having a shelter in which to die of hunger and thirst.

He crept up, still jeering himself, still accusing himself of a thousand follies, till as he peered for an opening among the palmettoes, he found one and looked, and glared with speechless amazement.

He had traveled far; he had fallen among ten thousand strange people; he had met his share of mishaps, had his share of "good times"; stored up an uncounted number of memories to contemplate when he should find leisure; he had answered summons and calls for help by night and day—but now he saw that he had met the most inexplicable adventure of all.

"How the devil did I know?" he asked himself, as he pulled the trigger back to cock his faithful 30-30 carbine noiselessly. "Now, how the devil did I know—who steered me to this damnable, God-forsaken hole, to get here at just this moment?"

Then he aimed, as at a wild beast.

CHAPTER XIV.

SORILLA, IN MISERY, FINDS COMPANY.

SORILLA, from a hiding-place in the reedlike grass of the island, saw Janie carried away in the motor-boat. She saw Captain Taulk, too, left marooned on the island.

She scurried up to where she had camped with Janie, having seen Taulk, with an angry waving of his fists, start along the beach following the motor-boat with futile execrations.

There she found Janie's rifle, and caught it up with an exclamation of intense satisfaction. At the same time, having loaded the weapon and worked the lever down and up, to make sure of its action, she looked after the man who had thus strangely come to keep her company on the great, uninhabited—often uninhabitable—island.

She had recognized Taulk and remembered her dickering with him on the subject of the treasure which her husband had concealed from her, though he had notified Janie of its existence.

She had a feeling of considerable indignation, thinking that her husband had been so careful of Janie's interests—in secret. The secrecy was suspicious. If he could have that kind of affairs, she could.

Accordingly, she regarded her predicament as interesting, and Captain Taulk's as even more interesting. She laughed when she saw him holding up his hands after the gray wretch of a captain who was stealing away with Janie as his captive.

Sorilla, as she thought of Janie's plight, shrugged her shoulders. To her mind it was fate. If it was meant that he should have her, why then that was it. At the same time, she was glad she had escaped.

It was much better to be marooned with a perfumery prospector, chemist and blender from New York, Paris and elsewhere, than to be the captive of--she wondered, on the instant, where she had seen that other man.

She remembered him. Some line, some detail, some appearance made her know that she had seen him before. Often one meets people that way, with the certainty that they are not strangers, yet one cannot recall the precise occasion, because it is not possible on account of appearances varying.

Sorilla, wishing now that she had been ready to shoot, as Janie had been when Taulk captured her from behind, watched Taulk as he gave up the chase and turned to come to her uncertainly—having discovered her at her camp.

Little by little Sorilla's mind ransacked the past in her memories, and at last she caught a glimmer which grew into a detail and finally the captor of Janie was placed definitely. She knew him at last.

"Jackwan!" she exclaimed. "Him!"

Jackwan had come down out of the north, like most beach-combers. He had appeared in a beautiful yacht, eight or ten years previous. He had been an owner, with a captain and a crew.

He had wandered about from island to island, spending considerable time over on Haiti and along certain questionable parts of the Cuban coast.

He had appeared at her own island when she was just a little girl, fourteen or fifteen years of age, just beginning to show the wonderful looks which had, for six or eight years carried Sorilla's name far and wide among the islands.

Jackwan had been attracted to her and had given her candy, of which his yacht had had an inexhaustible store. Then he had tried to persuade her mother to let him have her as maid to wait on his woman guests.

He had promised a dollar a day and everything—clothes and all. The bargain had been made, but Sorilla had disappeared after Jackwan had looked at her with a sidelong inspection that made her hate him.

"It's Jackwan!" she exclaimed. "I've heard of him, but not seen him. He stayed here over a summer, and he has got down to that little tub of a motor-boat—of which there are stories around!"

Stories around? Sorilla shivered. Jackwan was bad, mean and heartless. He was a cold horror of a man, grim and lurking. In all directions and far and near, he was feared and hated, not because of what he did, but because of the silence that followed the departure of people with him.

He carried away women and girls, and none ever returned. Sorilla had heard a dozen or a score of such instances.

The man himself would appear, and to all questions he would make no reply. He would not even say that the passengers on his craft had left him. In blank mystery he covered his tracks.

It was not so much that he took women away. That happened often enough.

Islanders below a certain type and class have few scruples, and their wayward lives are merely amusing, after the type of the un moral. It was the fact that none returned, none was ever heard of, and that all who accompanied Jackwan were swallowed up that made him a terror, a tradition and a menace.

"And he's carried Janie away!" Sorilla exclaimed, with sudden realization.

The approach of Captain Taulk interrupted her train of thought. This neat and accomplished personage was more to be considered, at that moment, than the affair of Jackwan, *alias* Captain Hickory, and the pale Northern girl.

Taulk watched Sorilla's rifle uneasily. He looked at Sorilla with even greater uneasiness.

Sorilla watched his every expression and gesture like a cat. She waited, too, for him to speak, her thumb on the rifle-hammer and her finger on the trigger.

"That brute has stolen Janie Frete!" Taulk exclaimed in French unexpectedly. "Isn't there something that can be done?"

"You should have thought of that when you captured her," Sorilla reminded him.

"Why—she was going to shoot him!"

"She should have done so, certainly!"

"But—why—I don't—didn't—"

"Just this: she knew and feared him, I think; at least, that man is the python, they call him, a great snake engaged in— in eating women. He steals them, for what purpose none knows!"

"A woman stealer!"

"Yes; perhaps he sells them; but perhaps he is a voodoo, and there is no deeper horror than a beach-comber who had turned voodoo; I believe that is his habit."

The thought blanched her cheeks.

"He took me on back yonder somewhere, where I was on an island with people who could talk no French, Spanish, English—"

"A little jungle island?" she asked quickly.

"Yes!"

"Then it is true—" she mused. "But you, how came you there, and tell me all about it?"

He sat down on a drift log, cast up by the waves, and began at the beginning, how

he was waiting for Sorilla to send him word; how Savanilla came and enticed him to a *siesta*, and the next he knew he was flying and life was a grand dream.

Immediately thereafter it was a distress of vast proportions. He was hungry, thirsty and associated with very much shaded savages.

"Savanilla's sense of humor!" Sorilla laughed. "I would have treated you much better. I shall now, anyhow."

"I thank you!" he exclaimed.

"If I had not known Hickory Jackwan's evil secrecy, I should have killed you, but he always works alone or through dupes. You were but his dupe, and he said to you he would join you, seeking that treasure you sought, and that he would take Janie, and you could have the treasure!"

"Exactly!" Taulk exclaimed. "You knew him?"

"His raids have extended to many islands; he is known everywhere; but he has stolen only people nearly or quite friendless, or strangers, who were visiting or wandering from afar."

"But—what will he do? Janie Frete—"

"*Quien sabe!* Who knows?" Sorilla shrugged her shoulders.

Taulk sat staring into the swells, breaking one after another upon the countless, prismatic shells and stones. A wave would recede, with patterns of bubbles and foam racing down, crumpling over the shells. A mass of water would rise up like an animal on its hind legs, and burst up and writhing in lip and throat and body, emerald greens, sapphires and tossing whites, deep indigo—flames in billowing mass as the new wave crashed upon the beach.

Taulk was shamed now. Whatever he might be, whatever his business code had been, whatever scheming and planning had lured him on, at least he had not realized what it meant when he bandied a bargain with that livid featured man, who had masked his proposals in such simple and commonplace terms, veiling the utter wretchedness under the mere promise of satisfying a greed.

Captain Hickory, scoundrel of the lowest kind, with no conscience, no moral remnant of self-respect, had no sooner seen himself

satisfied than he abandoned the tool with whom he had worked. Now the tool, as fools must ever do, shuddered as he realized the enormity of his own grisly part in the tragedy.

Sorilla, glancing at the height of the sun, said at last:

"The captain sees now, I think, the error and its consequences. I have decided that we shall be friends. It must be so."

"You have some work to do; gather drift for fire-wood and look out that you do not pick up any snakes that look like sticks and which, once they bite you, leave you dead when the poison blood reaches your heart. I shall make you some supper to eat."

So the solution of their problem entered upon its first process. They went about their tasks, and before sunset Sorilla had prepared an excellent little meal, with shell-fish, some roast roots—a kind of herb—and coconut milk with a hot spice-wood tea.

They dined, Taulk humbly enough, and deference became him very well. He was trained and experienced, and he carried himself toward the island girl as her position deserved, and as her intelligence, looks and demand warranted.

When they had dined, and when they had drank the spice-wood tea, a long evening was before them. No lonelier place could have been picked anywhere, than that level, monotonous island, with just the tall reeds to look at—they concealed many delicacies and marvels for those who knew what to seek.

The sea beating in, and the mackerel sky overhead, with the dark little jungle east of them, comprised a picture of the simplest complexity—if such a thing could be!

Sorilla arose from her log end and shook down her skirt. She threw her coiffure into a prettier heap upon her head. She looked meditatively at her brown boots.

She turned her head to listen to the distant grumble of a distant wild bull, hardly distinguishable in the pound of the sea upon the shore. Taking up her rifle she suggested:

"Let us walk along this beach for a little way!"

"I could ask no greater pleasure!" he exclaimed, and she smiled.

So they went walking, and as they walked, she glanced up at his face and noticed a curiously marked temple.

"How did you get that bruise?" she asked.

He hesitated. He had forgotten it. Now he remembered it with anger, which he concealed.

Navror had struck him thus, a cowardly, needless, unwarranted blow. He walked along for several minutes before replying, and then he said, deliberately:

"I had been taken to that island and marooned—I suppose by Savanilla, as you said. After many weary days I saw a motor-boat come in, and I ran down to plead for succor.

"The man aboard her stared at me, and then began to ask me questions. I told him the truth: how I had been on that island, and how I had dickered about the barrel of treasure.

"Then I told him of a pretty yellow girl who had entertained me at supper and with a fruit juice that knocked me into the middle of the skies, after which I found myself there in that most unhappy and disagreeable condition.

"Was it Sorilla you saw?" he asked me, and like a fool I admitted it, not thinking. Then he knocked me with his revolver-butt. Afterward Captain Hickory Jackwan, you call him, arrived, and of course I would by that time have sold my soul for a ride over the seas to civilization."

"And instead of civilization you find this island and another yellow girl and—"

"A girl of pure gold!" he cried.

"To look at!" She scorned her complexion.

"To look at?" He turned and looked at her. "If I were struck blind, yet would I know that I was in the presence of an incomparable woman."

"What can we do?" she asked quickly. "I have lived long on and among these islands, and we must not expect visitors here."

"My heart goes out to Janie, who is so much worse off! Ah! I should have had a rifle and killed you both."

"I deserved it," he admitted. "Shoot me now, if you ought to!"

"I ought to," she laughed, turning, and they walked toward camp. "But I feel much safer with a man at hand. Look—the sunset!"

While the light lasted, which was for but a few minutes, they walked in silence, and then as the night-black poured along the earth and engulfed them, she rested her hand in his elbow, nervous in the dark.

"There is a hammock which you will have to sleep in," she said directly. "And by spreading some of an old sail over it and rolling up in another piece, I think you will sleep very well. I know I shall sleep better for having you close by."

By the light of the fire she helped him swing the grass-rope hammock from a root snag of a log to a stake-drive in the grass on the overhanging bank. She showed him how to swing the old sail over the hammock, and how to lay the other piece of sail in the hammock, ready to crawl into it.

The hour had only just passed when his hammock was ready, a far better sleeping-place than he had hoped for. They sat on the log and looked at the fire which blazed at their feet, its warmth welcome in the cool of the evening.

"You say," she asked suddenly, "that when you told the man in the motor-boat that you had bargained with Sorilla, he struck you with his revolver-butt?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who he was?"

"No; a blue-eyed, light-haired, well-tanned chap."

"Ah!" she nodded.

Her face gave no expression of her feelings. Her eyes, however, closed ever so little, and looking into them one would have seen that they were apparently very close together, and that they were full of flickering purple lights and flares.

Sorilla was wondering; she was considering; and she lowered across the line of the leaping sparks and flames from the driftwood toward the island which rested far below the horizon beyond that dark sea. She looked from under her long, black lashes at the man who sat just along the log from her. She smiled.

"Good night!" she said. "I think it's time to get some sleep. Ah! I am glad I cannot look through the crystals and see Janie!"

Then she crept into her little tent, which had been Janie's, and lying there with the insect-proof flaps laced up she tried to forget, tried to hope that somehow Janie would escape.

She feared that Janie would be sacrificed, for that was the latest and most probable rumor.

"Anything but that!" Sorilla shook her head. "If that—that man does not kill her, but lets her escape, some time!"

In the morning, which came suddenly, Sorilla not remembering when she went to sleep, she awakened to find that Taulk had built a fire and that he was preparing breakfast. He, being a botanist, knew some things about herbs and grasses and roots which even Sorilla did not know, and his contribution was most delightful to Sorilla, when he had assured her that she need not fear any of his selections, since he had been experimenting for years with thousands of plants from all over the globe, seeking, especially, perfumes, but not disdaining flavors, farinaceous compounds and oils of many sorts, valuable in cooking and for salads, and any number of other dishes.

In fact, the tropics commonly supplied far more edibles than they did the more delicate flavors, the finest perfumes nearly always coming from the temperate zones.

"What can we do?" he asked impatiently, as they sat under the shade of the palm in the heat of the day, glad of the breeze from the sea. "We can't stay here always!"

"You are so tired of me as all that?" she demanded, looking at him.

He blinked. A Northerner finds it difficult to adjust himself to the manner of talking in the warmer climates. His thought had been that it was embarrassing for them to be there alone.

He had considerable of the *camaraderie* of the world in his mind, but this adventure was of too intimate a kind exactly to appeal to his precise code—a code that was rather too liberal in its business aspects, but quite strict enough to satisfy any one in its sections relating to women, as women.

"Why not that!" he exclaimed. "No—but don't you see—I was thinking, of course, about you—us—"

"Were you?" she asked.

"Afraid somebody was going to come and find us here, all alone and together, I suppose," she settled herself indifferently.

"Yes—but—of course—"

"It can't be helped!"

"No, I suppose not."

"What can't be helped—" she shrugged her shoulders.

"If I thought you—" he began doubtfully, looking at her wonderingly.

He had lived not so many years, but he had applied his hours, each to its own purpose. He had used his opportunities, and through use he had made more opportunities.

His name was known clear around the world, because he had examined into every detail of all the known literature in five or six languages, picking out the facts of his business, of the chemistry of perfumes, of the history, lore, tradition, use and mystery of odors whose service to the world few knew so well as he did.

He knew the medical, psychological, anthropological, and all the other theories of his trade and art.

He had seen the mûsk deer on the southern shores of the Kou-Kou-Nor, the Indian muskrat, the musk-bearing crocodiles and alligators, musk-ox, having collected the pods of the Himalayas, and bought the musk loot of bandits who operated along the Sungpan and Chengto road, and he had seen the arrival of the secret musk-caravans at Tengyueh, where the merchants came to avoid the highwaymen, who seek the precious stock—to mention a few of the activities necessary to follow one common substance of the perfume trade to its source, and only mention "musc baur," one of the countless efforts of chemists to make a synthetic musk, the lucky mixture of benzine with tertiary butyl alcohol, which yields a near-musk.

Janie Frete had attracted his attention, not as a girl, but as a person who possessed a secret hoard of most essential material in the perfume manufacture.

She had, for a little while, held his fancy,

but Janie was too tart a woman for some people ever to acquire a taste for her type. She had given Taulk the feeling which a clinging oak would have.

Now he found himself contemplating another type of woman, one whose exotic qualities did not sting nor bite the masculine fancy, but which worked through his mind and pervaded it with a thousand sensations and pictures and imaginations.

Recalling the man who had in rage knocked him senseless, Taulk considered the question which he had asked himself. The man had named Sorilla, and then in a fury attacked him. It had been a foul attack and a needless one.

"This is Sorilla!" he mused to himself. "A fragrant tropical blend!"

He had spoken truly. Sorilla was the product of several nations, of Spain surely and of France: also there was a breadth and depth to her forehead, a firmness of the texture of her fiber, which could mean only a Norseman, say, or a Circassian—English, Yankee, or perhaps a Scot or Irish strain.

That golden hue, a wonderfully beautiful complexion, must have harked back to some proud Inca, or possibly to a Moor, and not unlikely to both.

Despite himself, regardless of his firmest resolve, caught irresistibly by circumstances and held by his chivalry to the place to protect her, he could not escape the falling upon him of an entanglement of netting, which bound him up, enslaved his heart, mocked the protestations of his conscience and drove him helplessly along a course which, he felt, must inevitably lead to his destruction.

Sorilla, rolling her eyes up to look at him and to make the most casual and inconsequential remarks, seemed utterly unconscious of the transformation that was taking place in the very being of this quiet, courteous, and so very nice a man, who did not even talk about some most common and interesting affairs.

He would not even flirt with her to amuse her, and thus help while away the time. Much less did he by the least thing make her question her own safety in that far place.

But Sorilla saw through his efforts to

conceal from her the thought that was growing in his heart, and laughing at his attempts to stifle or retard its bursting forth, to bloom like the lilies of the field.

She smiled to herself as she saw that contest within the Northern man's soul. She even slyly fed the warring elements.

It was dangerous, and she knew well how very dangerous it might become. She was even not quite reckless at that: she thought angrily of how Derry Navror had accused

this man, had struck this man, because Derry did not have perfect faith in her.

Before she knew it, from hating her husband, Derry Navror, for his suspicion, she began to despise his littleness, compared to this trained, efficient, far-sighted and cultured man who, as she saw, for all his effort, in spite of his most conscientious struggling, was falling more and more into the entanglement which a beautiful woman has but to spread to trip the feet of a host of men.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.



NARCISSA—MY VALENTINE

BY JOEL BENTON

AS fair Narcissa trips along
With witching ways that never vary,
I feel the fields are full of song—
For it is middle February.
The fated day for birds to woo;
And so I muse, " May we not, too?"
Narcissa, blue-eyed, trim and neat,
Has many a youth with eyes upon her;
They think her charms divinely sweet,
And know she is the soul of honor;
Till I am stirred as she goes by,
With piercing love's idolatry.

The wavy luster of her hair,
Which falls voluminous in tresses,
Her cheeks, so roselike, white and fair,
And lips upturned for coy caresses—
For what fine purpose can they be
If they are not to beckon me?
A crystal stream goes singing on
From the thick forest's dim recesses,
And yet 'tis she I think upon
With lavished hopes, dreams and guesses;
So love-suggesting is her laughter,
Something divine must follow after.

The road to May, I note to-day,
Is swift, and falls in sunny places:
A southern breeze is on its way,
And hill and vale are full of graces—
May these with joy requite my labor,
And love, with her, my pretty neighbor!

That Receding Brow

by Max Brand

Author of "The Untamed," "Above the Law," "Devil Ritter," etc.

There are three barriers ye must pass
Of water, snow, and fire,
And one more grim than all the three
Before ye rest eternally
In the Land of Deep Desire.

The strong may pass the watery bar,
The brave defy the fire,
The patient pass the cold at length,
But what avails a threefold strength
In the Land of Deep Desire?

—The "Voodoo's Chant."

CHAPTER I.

THE ORANG-UTAN.

THEY sat upon perches like birds in the dingy room with its faintly offensive odor. For the most part they were silent as owls, but occasionally one of the monkeys broke into a shrill chattering, and when this happened the others turned their heads sharply and regarded the noise-maker with manifest disgust. The purposeless solemnity of the animals contrasted uncannily with the curious who passed through the monkey-house.

That slight and offensive odor as well as the sawdust on the floor made the room seem something like a circus menagerie, yet there was a difference. Other animals, whether a lion or a wolf, return the gaze of man with a look partly of awe and partly of fear, but the monkey stares back with a certain intimate curiosity which at the same time thrills and horrifies a human being.

There were a few who passed among the monkeys with a careful scrutiny, sometimes stopping for quite a time before one perch and walking round and round the chained

exhibit; they were the purchasing agents for circuses and zoos.

The majority of the people in the room went about without purpose, laughing and talking with one another. Aside from the monkeys the only motionless figure there was an old white-bearded man, a patrician figure, who stood in a corner with one arm folded across his breast and his chin resting in the palm of his other hand. He seemed to observe nothing but to dream in philosophic meditation.

He started now into an attentive attitude, and as he did so moved from the shadow which had hitherto veiled his head, and the light fell upon a singularly ugly face which the venerable beard could not disguise. Under the beard the line of the jaw showed square and powerful; the nose squat and misshapen with stiffly distended nostrils, the eyes supernally bright under the frowning arch of great, bony brows, the forehead slanting steeply back to an unmanageable gray forelock; the lip pushed up to a sneer by a fanglike tooth rising from the lower jaw. And at that briefly receding brow, that strangely bright eye and the ominous sneer, an observer stared in terror.

Afterward he could not fail to observe that the eye was bright not with malice but with understanding and he felt sympathy and respect for a figure so grotesque and yet so manly. If at first that face suggested an ape, in a moment it set one searching his memory for significantly ugly men, calling up the figures of Socrates and Æsop.

That which had roused the strange old man from his meditation was the sight of a dapper youth who was standing close to an immense orang-utan, which was shackled securely in an opposite corner. The big monkey squatted on his haunches braced with his long arms and was apparently asleep. His observer leaned over with one hand upon his knee and extended his walking-stick to rouse the creature, which made a vague and sleepy motion with one hand and immediately resumed its somnolent attitude.

At this dreamlike and grotesque movement the young man laughed and, moving a little closer, passed the point of his cane across the top of the monkey's head, but this time failed to elicit any response whatever. Confident that the big ape was now asleep, and eager for amusement, he tapped it sharply across the shoulder. What happened was as astonishing as if a grotesque statue of Buddha had come to life to startle an unbeliever.

The orang-utan seized the point of the walking-stick and jerked it violently toward him, the force of the act throwing the man off his balance. Finding himself reeling toward the ape he shouted and strove to regain his poise, but the long arm of his victim darted out again and his hand closed upon the wrist of his inquisitor. The shout of the endangered man was heard and a score of people rushed toward the place, but it was obvious that no help could come in time. The struggles of the man infuriated the monkey, who drew him close and then shifted his grip. With one hand he clutched the throat of the fallen man and with the other seized him by the hair and jerked back his head, at the same time baring a set of yellow teeth as dangerous as a tiger's fangs. The strength of a dozen men could not have torn the man from the orang-utan's grip.

Suddenly the old man who had stepped from the shadow a moment before cried out in a loud voice. It was a singular sound, not a mere cry of fear or alarm, yet certainly not an exclamation in the tongue of any nation of civilized man. Nevertheless, the effect upon the orang-utan was remarkable. First he raised his head and surveyed with a wandering glance the crowd that circled him, held back by their fear; then he stood erect, dragging up the struggling man with him, but apparently no longer thinking of vengeance.

"Don't struggle!" shouted the voice of the director of the monkey-house.

A tall old man with Herculean shoulders, as he spoke he came running toward the scene carrying a pikestaff. He stopped in utter bewilderment for the white-bearded man had continued his approach fearlessly toward the ape. As he came he uttered another sound, unquestionably addressing the orang-utan. It lacked the shrillness of his first call. It was a harsh and guttural muttering prolonged for several seconds. The monkey dropped its victim heedlessly to the floor.

"Save the old man!" cried one of the nearest men, turning in appeal to the director, for the great ape was now almost in reach of the white-bearded interloper.

A general movement started toward the scene, and for a moment half a dozen men were crying out at once. It seemed as if they had gathered courage from their numbers and were about to rush the orang-utan and bear him down with their united force. As they came nearer, however, the ape crouched lower to the floor, as if prepared to meet their attack. His eyes shone red with anger and he uttered a doglike snarl that stopped the would-be rescuers mid rush.

Again the old man spoke to the orang-utan. The ape stood up like a man, intent to listen and forgetful of all else in the place. The fire died from his eye while he uttered a gibbering murmur strangely like the sound which had come from the lips of the man. So singular, indeed, was the resemblance that a whisper of indrawn breath rose from the circle and all eyes shifted to the newcomer. He was turning

hastily away from this scrutiny half in shame when a new disturbance drew him back. For the young man who had lately been in the hands of the ape had no sooner scrambled to safety on all fours than he arose and, rushing to the director, shook a clenched fist in his face.

"That orang-utan should be caged!" he demanded. "I tell you he's dangerous. If you won't do it the law will do it for you!"

"Keep your hand out of my face, young fellow," responded the director with a frown. "Of course the monkey's dangerous. Didn't you see that sign over his corner?"

He pointed to a sign on the wall, "Dangerous. Keep away."

"There is a law to keep man-killers behind bars," raged the youth.

"There should be a similar law for fools," was the response, "besides, you must have bothered him or he wouldn't have touched you."

"Never came near him," raged the other. "I'll have you jailed for negligence."

"Get the law when you want to," said the director scornfully, "but now I'll teach this damned monkey his lesson."

With that he turned his back on the crowd and approached the orang-utan with his club balanced in his hands. The monkey perceived his purpose at once and cowered back against the wall, gibbering furiously.

"You are both the more unwise," said the old man whose voice had quieted the monkey before. "My young friend, your lies cannot rub out the fact that you annoyed the orang-utan. If a man jabbed you with sticks after other men had shackled you in a corner would you submit to the indignity? Not if you were worthy of the name of man. And you, sir, would you whip this monkey as if he were a tame dog which had done wrong? I tell you this orang-utan is a lord of the lawless forest. In his own land he is a king."

At this unexpected speech, delivered with such an emotionless and impersonal gravity, the youth fell silent, and somewhat agape, but the animal man felt that his dignity and professional importance had been questioned.

"Man and boy," said he, "I have hunted

animals in every quarter of the globe these forty years and I've never yet asked advice on how to control them. Strength and fearlessness is all any man needs with them. That I learned from Professor Alexander Middleton."

The older man started.

"Did you know Alexander Middleton?" he asked, peering at the trainer.

"I read a pamphlet of his thirty years or more past. There was a lot of it I couldn't fathom, and there was a lot which didn't require book-learning to understand. Add it all up and what you got was something like what I've just said. Strength and fearlessness will make a man master of any wild animal. I tell you I've tried it out half a lifetime and it has never led me wrong. Therefore, my old friend, though you may have some queer power over this ape, a power which I cannot understand, I say you shall not keep me from punishing him as he deserves. He must be kept familiar with the strength of his master's hand."

With this he turned his back resolutely on the other and faced the orang-utan, striking it sharply across the shoulders. The big monkey flung out with grasping hands the limit of his shackles, where he was brought up to a jangling halt and stood gibbering furiously, a spectacle of such fiendish rage that the spectators shrank back. The trainer stood his ground and the other old man stood with him, barely out of reach of the ape's stiff, extended fingers.

"Go back," said the keeper. "He might break his shackles."

"I have no fear of him. He will not harm me," said the gray stranger. "I know what Alexander Middleton and you have never known, that strength and fearlessness are equally unavailing without kindness."

The director stopped in amazement, lowering his club to the ground as he stared. Then a grin crossed his face.

"I see you're a Christian Scientist!" said he.

"I hardly know," said the other seriously, "but I do know that your strength and your fearlessness have only succeeded in maddening your captive. Look at him now! If you came within reach of his hands nothing could tear you from him. Is this the

victory of your fearlessness? Is this the achievement of your strength? I say that both you and your master are fools, *fools, fools!* Cruelty is your shield and pain is your weapon, for otherwise what would your strength and courage avail against this dumb beast—dumb to you at least. But see, there is no real harm in him!"

As he spoke he stepped directly toward the huge ape.

"Get back!" shouted the director. "Will you die to prove a theory?"

"No, I will live to prove it still better," said the other, and advancing still farther he laid his hand on the shoulder of the ape—on the very spot, in fact, where the club of the monkey-dealer had fallen a moment before.

The ape winced like a stricken thing under the touch of the hand. With a lightning movement he prisoned the man's arm with his great hand, a grip so violent that the whole body of the old man quivered perceptibly. At the same time the formidable yellow fangs were set about the stranger's wrist. As men cry out when they witness an atrocity they are helpless to prevent, the others at the spot groaned. Only the director was capable of action.

"Madman!" he cried, and leaped forward, with his staff raised to strike.

The teeth of the ape did not close on the helpless arm. The club of the director never fell. For once again the stranger spoke and at the effect of his voice the director stopped short and cursed softly. Those who stood nearest thought they could distinguish words in the utterance of the old man, so calm and conversational was his tone. The orang-utan released the arm and raised his head. The eyes which a moment before were red-lighted by the blood-thirst now peered in wonder up to the man. He extended a black and hideous hand and passed it slowly over the face of the interloper. It was like the gesture of a blind man who recognizes by touch the face of a friend. He raised the hand which still lay upon his shoulder and smelled it, then peered again with a monkey's puckering frown of curiosity. He passed his hand along the man's body. He felt his clothes. Every touch was as soft as a caress.

His motions ceased. He stood regarding his companion with infinite friendliness.

"Look at them!" muttered Olaf Thorwalt, the animal-director. "The same buried eyes, the same savage teeth, the same receding brow! Except that one of them is dressed in a man's clothes you would think them brothers, almost!"

"Aye," said another man as the stranger turned away from the ape, "but for my part I think I had rather have trouble with the monkey than the man."

"A queer fellow," said Thorwalt, "but I fear nothing on earth and certainly not this old man. He shall speak to me."

With this he went boldly up to the object of their comment.

"I have fought and captured monkeys from Cape Town to the Sahara," he said, "but I have never seen them handled as you have handled this one, and before you go I want to hear the secret of the trick."

"Trick?" said the other coldly, and then smiled. "At least it is a trick which you could never have learned from the pages of John Middleton. If you will come to this address I will tell you something about it to-night."

He passed Thorwalt a card and walked hurriedly away from the curiosity of the observers.

CHAPTER II.

ALEXANDER MIDDLETON.

THAT evening Olaf Thorwalt, the animal man, stood at the door of one of the most gloomily exclusive dwellings in Boston's most drably select residence section. But neither the servant who opened the door to him, nor the richly shimmering hardwood floor of the hall in which he stepped, nor the ponderous magnificence of two Barye bronzes which stood pedestaled in that hall served to overawe him.

He had been before the rich and the great many times. He had roamed the world searching for hard ventures and he had found his share, and he had carried with him the doctrine of fearlessness and strength as other men carry a Bible, or as his own Viking ancestors had borne shield and sword

a few brief centuries before. He had trapped in Canada, fished the Bering Sea, fought head hunters in Borneo and the Solomon Islands, hunted tigers in India, and shot big game of a thousand sorts through the mysterious length and breadth of Africa.

Now he shook back his heavy shoulders and stepped through the second door through which the servant bowed him. He found himself in a long and high ceiled room of Gothic stateliness and gloom. The tall and narrow window only deepened the gravity of the apartment. The light from the logs which flamed in a great open hearth was ineffectual to fight off the dimness, but set the room adrift with slipping shadows. From the farther end of this room his host advanced to meet him.

"I am Olaf Thorwalt," said the trainer in his deep voice.

"And I am William Cory," said the older man in his soft tone, as he took the hand of his visitor and led him to a chair near the hearth.

"Do you object to the dim light?" asked Cory.

Thorwalt noted that an open book lay face down on the arm of Cory's chair and there was an unlighted reading-lamp on a round table near by. His host had been reading before he came, but it was not difficult to imagine why he preferred to talk with another in semidarkness, for a brighter flare of the fire fell at that moment on his face and threw into brief relief the ugliness of his features, almost ludicrously homely, like a grotesque Japanese mask.

"We can hear as well in the dark," said Olaf Thorwalt.

"Very good," said Cory, "and now tell me what you wish to know about the late Alexander Middleton."

Thorwalt locked his big hands together and leaned earnestly forward toward his host.

"How did you know I wished to speak of him?" he asked at last. "But let that question go. It isn't Middleton alone who brings me to you, Mr. Cory. I have hunted through Africa, sir, and like all true African hunters, I believe that a great monkey mystery exists. I saw you quiet that orang-

utan to-day. What you did mystifies me. I thought you might care to tell me what you would not tell those who have not known the jungles. It is a secret?"

For some time Cory sat silent with his face half veiled by one hand, its conformation showing between his fingers.

"You are a frank man, Mr. Thorwalt," he said, "and I will be equally frank with you—franker than I have ever been with mortal man, and for many reasons. First, because you knew of the man, Alexander Middleton, and have followed his teaching of strength and fearlessness—"

"Aye, followed it like a Bible all my life!" said Thorwalt.

It seemed as though a shudder passed through the body of Cory.

"And therefore it is my duty to show you the falsehood of that doctrine," said he. "You have dealt with animals all your life and must know their powers intimately. And, above all, Olaf Thorwalt, you have been in the jungle; you have known the heart-breaking silences wherein all things are possible and wherein the laws which govern the rest of the world are void."

The last phrase was half a question. Thorwalt stirred in his chair and nodded.

"Aye," he said in a more subdued voice, "I was lost three days in the forest five hundred miles up the Kongo. I was near mad before I found my way back to the river. After that I knew that Africa had a heaven and a hell of its own."

Cory sighed deeply.

"Then I will tell you the tale which has been heavy in me these years!"

He drew himself suddenly rigid in the chair and clenched a hand above his head as if in imprecation.

"These unending years!" he said softly, and then: "Pardon me for this, Thorwalt. But now you shall hear. I have waited knowing that one day I must tell this thing or else in time go mad. I have waited for a strong and a brave and an open-minded man. And now you shall hear a story which will enter the secret places of your soul."

"It shall never be repeated by my tongue," said Olaf, deeply moved by Cory's wild emotion.

The other man acknowledged the words

with a gesture. He seemed already lost in the prodigious vision of his narrative.

"Look up there," he said suddenly, and pointed to a head sculptured in pure white marble.

It stood on a tall pedestal at one side of the hearth and as it looked down on them in the changing lights of the fire it seemed smiling and alive. It was such a head as Phidias might have modeled for an Apollo, a majestic and open forehead, a strong nose, lips pressed somewhat together as if in resolve, and a forceful chin which lent power to the whole face.

"There is Alexander Middleton," said Cory, "who passed from this world forever—thirty-two years ago!"

There was something in his manner of speaking, something of solemnity, grief, and horror mingled, that caused Thorwalt to rise as if to change his chair for one closer to the fire. In reality he desired to look more closely at the speaker.

"Aside from the one book which I read—and only understood a part of that, for I am not a learned man," said he. "I know nothing of Middleton. And has the story to do with him?"

There was a trace of disappointment in his tone, as of one who expected a tale of adventure and not a narrative in which figured a professor of anthropology.

"He was a god among men," said Cory, oblivious of his listener. "Yes, looking back on him now I see that he was a man with purposes higher than those of most men and with strength and will to accomplish them.

"I think it was his own tremendous physical strength—he was heavily built and as—as tall as I—or you—it was this great bodily strength and also the logical powers of his mind which made him a materialist in his philosophy. And his materialism made him justify force for its own sake. He used to say that all men can be weighed by their mental and physical energy and estimated as to value as one would estimate the horse-power of a machine.

"And when he went on in his studies of the physical powers of man and his mental development, the most fascinating of all subjects, anthropology, engrossed him. But

he stayed at one point a long period of debate. He believed in his heart that man was truly descended from a species of ape, but his material and logical mind needed a solid proof of the fact. Mere theory would not satisfy him.

"At twenty-five he had published three small essays upon his favorite subject. The first of these was evidently the one which found its way into your hands. Those tracts are forgotten now. But when they were published they were sensations. You would find them on the tables of all scientific men. The writings of Middleton were discussed at afternoon teas on the one hand and in college halls on the other.

"So at twenty-five, at an age when most men are making their feeble beginnings at life, Middleton possessed not only scholastic repute but popular fame as well; a large fortune, a young and lovely wife, and a mind which, in my opinion, and I have known many brilliant men, was inferior to that of no scientist, young or old, in all Europe. Aye, if ever there was a darling of the gods it was young Alexander Middleton.

"But a little thing will divert the course of life, and it was a legend told to Middleton by an old negro that changed the course of his, a tale of marvels and witchcraft and strange gods in the southwestern mountains of Abyssinia; gods, in fact, who lived upon the earth and were visible to the eyes of the priests who served them. They were larger than men, they were stronger than men, they were vastly wiser—and they dwelt in caves and in the trees!

"It was upon that last slender clue that Middleton pondered long and hard. It would seem incredible that so slight a fact—if, indeed, there were any facts at all in the narrative of the negro, three-fourths of which was manifest nonsense—could take a man from England, take a man from the midst of a life such as I have outlined to you, and lure him across a thousand leagues and more into a wilderness.

"But that is what it did to Middleton. He left his home and all the safer hopes of happiness to climb this moonbeam ladder which he dreamed might lead to fame. For in the strange Abyssinian gods he saw that

which is popularly termed the missing link—a species of creature half ape and half man and with the possibility of development in itself until it works out a higher destiny like that of man.

"Middleton went directly to Cairo. There he assembled a company of twenty-five picked men pledged to follow his orders without question, desperate fellows who loved excitement more than life, and all men who had been hardened to the climate of Africa. If there is a last reckoning, what account could Middleton make for the lives of twenty-five strong and brave men thrown away for a glimpse of a wild and horrible dream?

"Disaster dogged that expedition. Four men died of a virulent fever before they reached the upper portion of the Nile. Another was crippled by a fall shortly after leaving the river on the march for the mountains, and had to be abandoned in a friendly native village. Two more fell when a band of desert plunderers made a determined night-attack upon Middleton's little caravan. But it was out of this enemy that he captured the guide who was afterward to lead him to the land of his desire.

"It was a little, withered old man, perched on the top of a horse like a monkey and holding onto the mane with one hand while he screamed directions to his followers. Middleton shot his mount cleanly through the withers, and the nag dropped, carrying his rider with him in the fall. This put the followers of the old imp to flight, and Middleton's men carried him back to their tents for the night.

"A servant was found who could understand the speech of the old man. It turned out that he was a famous voodoo doctor, whose powers were respected far and wide throughout those regions. But great as were the powers of his magic arts, the power of a well-aimed bullet was far greater, and the Voodoo knew this perfectly. Moreover, he was well treated by the white men, and finally consented to accompany the expedition as a guide.

"It was on the third evening after the Voodoo joined the company that he stole a bottle of strong cordial and drained it. The result was a long delirium, in the first stages

of which he proved extremely talkative, and it was at this time that Middleton, who had picked up a good many of the curious old negro's phrases, heard him speak of the race of gods, stronger and wiser than men, who live in caves or—in the trees! Middleton had already noted that physically, and in his dialect the old negro was essentially different from the other negroes of the party. He made up his mind now that the Voodoo had probably come from a great distance. Why not from the very land of the strange gods Middleton sought?

"The moment this thought entered his head it became a certainty. As soon as the Voodoo had sufficiently recovered from his sickness Middleton questioned him closely, but when the questions turned upon this subject the Voodoo refused to speak farther, and showed the most abject terror. Neither threats nor promises of reward could induce him to talk.

"Middleton became greatly excited, and held the Voodoo without bread or water for two days before the negro would talk freely. By that time his spirit was broken, and he consented to do his white master's bidding, at the same time prophesying the most horrible disaster if they should attempt to penetrate to the dwelling places of these gods. He could not, or would not, tell the nature of this threatened disaster, but he spoke sometimes of a 'curse' and then fell silent; and there was none among them, not even Middleton himself, who could make him speak farther.

"Fear was on him and checked his speech, yet he submitted dumbly when Middleton informed him that was to accompany the expedition to the places where the strange gods lived. Beyond a doubt he felt that he was traveling to the scene of his death. But that death was, at least, a distant probability, and the death at the hands of the white men if he refused to obey their orders was a grim and sudden fact.

"So he stuck solemnly to his task of guiding Middleton's party toward the Imenani.

"Note that this is pronounced with the three consonants almost mute. They represent hardly more than slurs between the

vowels, such as might be the translation of the slow speech of a man of a cultured race. The Voodoo called the strange gods the 'Imenani.' Eliminating the three consonants, one finds a word made up entirely of vowels, 'Jeai.' But you are not familiar with Greek, and therefore you will not see at once the possible significance of this spelling.

"The natural barriers which protected the Imenani from the outside world were stupendous. It was difficult to see how a naked savage, such as the Voodoo, could have made his way from that far country, even in the whole course of a lifetime. For it seemed as if all the terrors of nature had been drawn upon to fortify the stronghold of the Imenani. First came a broad belt of desert, to the north and south of which the up-vaulting mountains cut off the coolness of the rain-bearing winds. From this veritable valley of death emerged the party of Middleton without loss. There were thirteen men, aside from the Voodoo and the leader himself, who came to the belt of the marshes.

"This lay at the southern side of the valley of the desert (the 'Valley of White Fire,' as the Voodoo called it). Over it rolled perpetual clouds at a great height. The winds which crossed the Valley of the White Fire rolled their cargo of vapors against the higher and cooler slopes of the southern and western mountains, and consequently, as this moisture condensed suddenly, there was a great and steady precipitation along this entire face of the mountains, and dependent only upon the steadiness and violence of the wind above.

"The result was that the white desert changed suddenly into a series of pale-green marshes, a region of poisonous vapors with no dry land. This belt was comparatively narrow, and soon gave onto the healthy upper slopes of the mountains, but the long trip across the desert had weakened the entire party. There were eight negroes employed as servants, and all of these contracted fevers, so that they had to be carried out by their white masters. Despite the use of preventives and their care in drinking only boiled water, the whites also began

to be affected before they had spent the second night in the marshes.

"Four negroes died in the miasmic swamps, and when the weakened others, after abandoning half of their baggage, came out on the mountain slopes and pitched a camp to recuperate, the healthier of the white men, led on by Middleton, who seemed immune from all troubles of whatever nature, were forced to nurse their afflicted companions through a long and painful period. During this time the four remaining negroes died, and an equal number of the whites were victims of the fevers.

"When these evils were finally conquered, the party held a consultation. Out of the original twenty whites there were now only nine alive, aside from Middleton. The only other addition to the group was the Voodoo; and it was doubtful whether he was more of an aid than a menace to the welfare of the rest. The total number of deaths, counting both negroes and whites, was now nineteen. Out of twenty-nine there now remained but ten.

"The majority held that they should turn back on their tracks and recross the marshes. It was pointed out that they were probably now immune to the marsh fevers, and that they had an excellent chance of breaking back across the marshes and the desert and coming again to the inhabited parts of Abyssinia, or by a more westerly route to the head-waters of the Nile. But if they kept on in their present direction they knew not what lay before them, and the objectors pointed grimly up to the white peaks which rose sheer above them.

"But all of these were overborne by Middleton. It was as if he were determined to take the responsibility for all these lives upon his own shoulders. He went among the men in the evening. He talked with them separately and broke down their resolve to return; and finally he rallied them when they were about to turn back, and had packed their equipment for that purpose. He declared that if they abandoned him, he would attempt the rest of the journey alone.

"They were, as I have said, picked men, and when they witnessed his resolution they

determined to bear him out, though by this time he was the only one of the party who did not dread the result of this ill-omened expedition.

"In two days they had climbed to the laborious top of the range of mountains, and here they were caught in a belt of arctic cold before they could cross the peaks and descend to the warmer slopes on the southwestern side of the mountains. Two men perished from this exposure. The cold drove the others on. They could not stop to dig graves or to perform a decent ceremony, but left their two fellows lying stark among the mountain snows and pressed on for life.

"It was not far to go now from the danger of the cold. The mountain slopes gave down easily from the summit and led the party to a more gentle air, and then into a belt of pleasant evergreens. They made no pause to enjoy the change, but went on at a quick march down the hills, then up the less-aspiring rise of a second range; and on the evening of the fourth day, after passing the first range, they came out on the top of a peak of the second and lower range."

Here Cory fell silent, looking fixedly at the fire while a vague smile stirred on his face. Thorwalt, after waiting a moment, leaned forward to speak, but as he did so a flare of the fire showed Cory's face more clearly, and something in it made the other man sit back quietly in his chair and wait.

There was a pause of several minutes, and while it continued Thorwalt turned his eyes upon the head of young Middleton. The firelight made it almost alive with meaning: beautiful, strong, young, resolved, a man who might conquer the world. And he looked from the bust back to Cory with his animal ugliness, his white age. There was a reserve which disguised his strength and made it now seem even greater than that of the young Hercules of the marble bust, and instead of resolve there was the seal of meditation, but not the meditation of impotent age.

If the strength of Middleton suggested a power which might conquer the world, the silent thought of Cory suggested a power

which had done with the world and its conquests and had turned to something beyond.

CHAPTER III.

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS.

"**T**HERE is power in quiet," went on Cory—"power and a wonder in the majesty of still life, and because of the horrors they had passed through, perhaps, or because of their utter weariness and fatigue, this power of silence came over Middleton and his men with a species of awe. For they looked down upon a magnificent valley, from whose beauty the mountains stepped solemnly back upon all sides.

"The last crimson of the evening glowed still upon the ridges and the upper peaks, but in the hollow heart of the valley the unutterable peace of night had already come, and through the center a river drove a rapidly winding line of white.

"And they had come upon all this suddenly, as one upon a lonely road turns at a quick bend into the view of habitation; for all the clays before they had walked either in the flat desert or among the upthronging peaks, and here, as they rounded a mountain side, they came at a step upon the voiceless promise of content. Where they stood the side of the mountain shelved out into a shoulder, whose inner arm dropped precipitously.

"It was on the very point of this shoulder that the wizened Voodoo stepped. The others paid little attention to him, saving Middleton, who always kept eye on the negro. He walked out until he seemed to totter on the very verge of the precipice. It came to Middleton that the Voodoo was about to cast himself into the valley rather than enter the land of his gods living. He started forward to intercept him when he saw that the negro had some other purpose.

"He raised his arms slowly above his head and lifted his face, a thin and pitiable figure against the obscure and monstrous outline of the peak across the valley, and as he stood he commenced to sing, swaying slightly from side to side in rhythm with his chant.

" It was hardly a song. There was variable tune. The changes were those of accent rather than musical notes, but as the chant ran on in a sharp drone, Middleton picked up the sense of the words, and they sent a chill through his blood. He looked to his companions. They could understand the speech of the Voodoo, at least to some degree, and there was such utter despair in the chant that Middleton could see his followers look to one another frowningly.

" Over and over again the Voodoo repeated his chant. Translated freely into English rime, though the original defied both critical translation and rime, the chant might be rendered somewhat as follows:

" There are three barriers ye must pass
Of water, snow, and fire.
And one more grim than all the three
Before ye rest eternally
In the Land of Deep Desire.

" The strong may cross the watery bar,
The brave defy the fire.
The patient pass the cold at length,
But what avails a threefold strength
In the Land of Deep Desire?

" A strange anger came over Middleton as he listened, a great feeling of impotence. He suppressed with a flush of shame the first sullen desire to seize the Voodoo and hurl him into the valley, but he had other work than the venting of his malice. The second phase of open dissension had come over the men.

" Now I want you to mark the sort of men who were following Middleton.

" They were seven in all, after the deaths of the two, in the last snows of the mountains. They were seven men chosen from among twenty by the impartial hand of sickness and exposure. Every one of the original twenty had been a man inured to danger and labor in a hundred parts of the world. The seven who now remained, gaunt and sunken-eyed men, were by proof-positive the hardiest and the strongest-spirited of the whole number.

" First, there was Tom Mulford, a cockney Englishman, who had been a farmer, a sailor, and chiefly a purposeless adventurer since he left the East End.

" Herman Fiedler, a German, was big, blond, and gentle. He had picked up the American habit of chewing tobacco, and his favorite diversion was to sit by the fire at night with his chin resting on both his hands and spit with astonishing accuracy at various embers, the while he reminisced of Munich beer-gardens in a dull voice.

" Jim White filled the picture of the typical Yankee, with large hands and feet and a lean neck. He had never lost the twang of his New England fathers. A disagreeable fellow, forever sneering and arguing and finding the darkest side of every predicament.

" George Duval was probably a Frenchman, though no one could ever get him to talk about his native land. But he had a stock of legends as old as *Marie de France* and as surely Breton. He was little and wiry, and he carried a needle and thread in his pack with which he was always doing mending, either for himself or for one of his mates.

" Musab, the Arab, had little to do with the rest of the party. Possibly he felt that he had fallen below his station in life, for, from his manner and his reserve, he must have descended from the family of some desert chief. He was the oldest member of the party and the most self-sufficient. When it was possible he would retire apart and prepare his own mess in his own way rather than contaminate his stomach with Christian food. Only the high pay had tempted him to go on this expedition.

" Tony Baccigalupi was a rosy-cheeked Italian boy of not more than twenty-two or three years. He was forever laughing; and yet, despite his youth and his laughter, he had a criminal record behind him as long as the villain in a detective story.

" It is rare, indeed, to find a man as ugly as the Swede—John Erickson. He had lost one eye in a knife fight. A black patch of leather covered the place, but the white scar ran down the forehead and the cheek above and below the eye. A deep seam on either side of his mouth made him seem to smile perpetually, yet he was a mirthless man. And when he spoke his face was contorted and his mouth drew far to one side, for his cheek was drawn taut on the

side of the scar, and made his speech a study in the grotesque.

" Make a note, Thorwalt, that every man was of a different nationality. If superstition had some influence upon them in the affairs which followed, it must have been some international legend. Or perhaps you will say that the terrific hardships which these men had passed had made them susceptible to imaginary evils. I will not say no to this. But I know that when Middleton looked around at his fellows, he knew that some force was working upon the Voodoo, and that the same force was operating upon those seven hard-headed, experienced adventurers.

" More than that, when he examined his own emotions he found a deep and inexplicable awe. He felt inwardly that he was now about to front a danger, compared with which the desert, the marsh, and the mountains had been nothing. He remembered the song of the Voodoo with forebodings. He was not surprised when Musab stepped a little forward from his fellows. He was always composed. He spoke now with even more than his usual dignity.

" 'There is truth in the words of the stranger,' he said, indicating the Voodoo with a gesture, 'and there is truth in his song. Fear does not lie, and that man fears. So do we all. Fear has come and sat down among us as we look down into the valley; it is hotter than the sun in the desert and it is colder than the snows of the mountains.'

" 'Now I say that there is truth in the song of the stranger. For look back upon our journey. Were we not a score in strength at the beginning? Where have they gone? They are dead in the river, in the desert, and marshes, on the peak of the mountain. And we must pass again to our own land by the way that we traveled to this. Therefore, I say, let us not enter this valley, for the strange man has said that there dwells here that which is more terrible than fire, and flood, and cold! Let us be wise and consider. My voice is that we turn back from the unknown!'

" As he ceased he thrust his hands again into the loose sleeves, folded his arms, and stepped back within the group. But his

words worked for him. Mulford argued heatedly that he would go no farther until a vote had been taken on the project. One after another they took the side of the Arab, all except Erickson, who stood in the background, seeming to mock the entire discussion with his habitual leer.

" Middleton stared about at his companions with a hysterical desire to laugh. These men, who had faced a thousand trials with the leanness of tremendous labor upon them, were turning back now because of the song of a grotesque negro and his search for the 'missing link,' which would prove that the only divinity in man was his own force would be a failure when it had come so far to the very edge of what he felt to be success.

" And the worst of his emotion was that he felt within his own heart the same fear which was making his fellows look askance into the darkening hollow of the valley.

" But he laughed aside his fears, and the sound of his laughter gave him new assurance. He talked to his companions simply and gravely. He explained in detail and in words of one syllable all his purposes in coming to this land. He told them how he hoped that this race of monkey-gods would prove to be those men-monkeys, or monkey-men, which would supply the last gap between the ape and the human being. He went a step farther, explaining to them in a measure what this would mean to both science and religion. Carried away by his emotion as he talked, he reiterated his determination to proceed in his quest, with or without assistance. In the end they swung around to his opinion, all except the Arab.

" But when it came to entering the valley, which by this time was dim with night, they found that the Voodoo could not be persuaded to accompany them. He was in a panic, and when they started to drag him along the little man resisted furiously.

" 'You are a fool!' said Middleton. 'Are there not both rifles and strong men to protect you in the valley of your gods?'

" 'What is the strength of bullets or of men against them?' moaned the miserable negro. 'The strength with which you crossed the fire, the water, and the cold, do you think it will help you now?'

"No argument would budge him. At last Middleton pressed the muzzle of a rifle against the small of his back, and this persuasion induced him to rise and pass down the slope into the heart of the valley, but every step of the way Middleton heard him muttering charms and invocations.

"They camped that night by the bank of the river, and with the murmur of the broad stream beside them, the quiet of the stars overhead, and the cheer of the open fire, the spirits of the men rose again, and they jested in turn at the Voodoo. But even after the rest of the party had rolled up in their blankets and were fast asleep, no peace came to Middleton. For he was either on the verge of discovery which would rock the realm of man's knowledge to the feet, or at the point of mocking failure. The moon rose late and floated coldly white over the mountain tops.

"Then Middleton threw aside his blankets and strode up the bank of the river, listening to the rush of the water and watching the moonpath on the stream, for his hopes and his doubts tortured him. Perhaps it was because he had no thought of discovery that he came upon the prodigy then.

"He had turned from the bank of the stream into an open space with great trees standing like spectators on the edges of the clearing, and the moon as clear as day in the center. When Middleton came to the middle of the place he stood a while with upward eyes because of the dark-columned majesty of this natural temple, with the purple mountains jutting against the far-away sky. It was at this moment that he saw between the roots of two forest giants a sitting figure. The moon, as I have said, was shining very clearly.

"He saw an ape of great size—“ went on Cory.

"Sitting?" broke in Thorwalt incredulously.

"Sitting like a man with his legs crossed," replied Cory placidly; "and his arms were folded like an image of a grotesque Buddha."

Thorwalt shook his head.

"I believe you are an honest man, Mr. Cory," he said, "but I have watched

monkeys for a good many years and I have never seen an ape take the position you describe, or any position nearly as human."

"Nevertheless," answered Cory, somewhat impatiently, "the thing which Middleton saw sat in the posture I have described. He saw an ape which, at that distance, was more like a gorilla than any species he had ever heard of or seen, though even at that distance, and in the moonlight, he could perceive notable differences. The stomach, for instance, seemed less obtrusive. The arms were comparatively short."

"Short?" asked Thorwalt.

"I said 'short'!" said Cory in a louder voice—"shorter than my own arms!"

He stretched them wide. They seemed longer than human and infinitely more powerful through the swift gesture.

"Middleton stood breathless as a child when it comes before an unexpected turn of the road and sees the garden of its dreams. The ape turned its head, perceived him, and rose to its feet, still with its arms folded."

There was a little crackling sound in the room. It was the stem of Thorwalt's pipe which had snapped between his teeth.

"He rose to his feet," continued Cory, "and then unfolding his arms, wonderful and incredible to behold! without fear this creature walked half a dozen paces toward him—with the stride of a poised man!"

Thorwalt sprang to his feet.

"Sir," he said rapidly, "I swear I believe you are a truthful man, but no monkey since the beginning of time has ever stood erect and walked in the manner you have described!"

"Do I not know it?" exclaimed Cory excitedly. "Did not Middleton know it when he looked on the prodigy? Did he not know that no ape in human knowledge had ever risen and walked erect with a certainty and poise so human? Thorwalt, the creature he looked upon, was that thing which a thousand explorers of the tropics have dreamed of and searched for, but have never found. It was the *pithecanthropus erectus*! It was the erect ape!"

"The erect ape!" repeated Thorwalt softly.

Cory stopped a moment, breathing hard. Thorwalt resumed his chair, but sat leaning far forward and with his eyes fixed upon Cory's as a bird stares at a snake.

"Middleton marked all this with the accuracy of a trained investigator," went on the narrator. "There might have been doubt had an ordinary observer marked these things; but Middleton, as I have said, was a cold-minded lover of truth for the sake of truth. There before his eyes he saw the possibility of verifying all his theories. Would he allow any detail to miss his examination, hurried as it had to be?

"The great ape was apparently five feet eight or nine inches in height. His legs were fleshier than those of the gorilla, and their curvature was hardly greater than that of a man. His lips were thicker and the teeth less protrusive; the forehead far higher."

He paused again with closed eyes as if he were recalling the vision of the scene.

"Sir," said Thorwalt. "I am trying desperately to doubt what you are saying, but on my honor I cannot help believing!"

"There was an almost human definiteness of the outline of the nose," went on Cory. "The hair on the face was thin. There was a patch of gray hair in the center of the head, perhaps the result of a scalp wound. No ape since the beginning of time had ever resembled this creature. The surety made him half sick. What was the thing?"

"He reached for his revolver. Five minutes of surgical work would resolve his doubts forever. But what of the doubts of the world? Would scientists give credence to this written report of a monstrosity discovered in the center of darkest Africa? He relinquished his grip on the handle of the weapon.

"The better way would be to capture it, bring it back to civilization alive, and with this living specimen bridge the gap between man and the dumb brutes to prove his own theory that the only god in man is the god of cold intellect. Nothing more was needed. The mind of a child could understand this proof. He would establish at one stroke a place in the annals of the world's significant men!"

"Greater than them all!" cried Thorwalt. "What is even the discoverer of a new world of land compared with the discovered truth of man's origin?"

"At the thought," went on Cory, "Middleton threw up his hand and cried aloud in exultation. The creature whirled and started back toward the trees which it had just quitted. The first few steps were a shambling but springy run, unmistakably like that of a man. Then it stumbled and rolled on the ground. Middleton whipped out his revolver and poised it, but as he drew the bead the strange thought came to him that this might not be hunting, but actual murder.

"As he dropped the weapon to his side again the creature recovered from its fall and started once more toward the sheltering trees, but this time scrambling along on all fours for all the world like any other frightened and hurrying monkey. When it reached the trees it went up a trunk with an agility of which no human being could be capable. A moment later it disappeared in the upper branches."

"And was lost?" exclaimed Thorwalt in a rueful voice.

"An army of searchers could not have followed it," said Cory. "This thought occurred to Middleton. Perhaps he would never see the creature again. As he listened to the dying crackle of the twigs a great sense of failure came over him.

"After a moment the crackling ceased, and Middleton heard a voice in a far-away tree-top. Once again he thrilled and started, and for a very good reason. You have handled animals of a hundred species, Thorwalt, but you must know that beyond a few imitative creatures there is nothing in the world which is capable of syllabification, saving man.

"Do not misunderstand me. The voice which Middleton heard in the tree was not similar to that of any known species of man. Nevertheless, there was a remote relation. It was this faint similarity which held his careful attention.

"There were no pauses in the utterance of the animal. There were, indeed, no actual and distinct words which could be remembered and repeated, for the sounds

blended; but they were more than a mere noisy expression of emotion. They were grouped and they had continuity.

" The human voice in narration is generally a monotone. This voice which came chattering down to Middleton was a monotone also, a continued and purposeful sound. Its significance was at once emphasized, for when the voice ceased there rose an answering burst of shrill animal cries, in comparison, utterly harsh and discordant.

" Then there was a stirring among the upper branches. He could see nothing, but he felt acutely that a thousand eyes were looking out upon him from the covert.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTIVE.

" **T**HE first voice began again. He knew it must be the voice of the ape which he had seen. Perhaps he could never prove this to the world, but he knew in his heart that the singular utterance he had heard from the tree-top came from none other than the *pithecanthropus erectus* which he had seen only a few moments before.

" But there was no purpose to be accomplished by remaining longer in the place. He turned and went slowly back toward the camp. That night he lay awake in his blankets and watched the camp-fire flicker up into the dark. He read his future clearly then.

" He bridged the arduous return through the snows and the desert and the marshes back to the headwaters of the Nile. He even planned how he would clothe the great ape so as to protect it from the weather. Once on the Nile, the remainder of the trip toward England was simple.

" Once in England--ah, once in England! They were all there, the fellows of his studies, the professors who had first guided him. There were audiences to listen to his lectures, to wonder and to believe.

" Still more--with this physical proof established, he should resume his writings. He would enunciate once more his former doctrines. He would elaborate them. They

were susceptible of being expanded into an entire system of philosophy. His name would have in the eyes of the world a significance as great as those of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Kant. He laughed softly to himself.

" He was up before the rest in the morning, and he spent that entire day wandering in the forest in the vicinity of the place where he had seen the ape the night before. It occurred to Middleton that perhaps the tree-dweller had been alarmed by the sight of the man and had wandered with his tribe into a distant portion of the forest.

" The second day also gave him no clues, and he was on the point of giving up the search and moving to a more distant portion of the forest. But he determined to spend one more day this vicinity. It was about an hour after the start he came upon a small stream, on the opposite bank of which he found the print of a foot.

" At first he thought it must have been a trace of one of his party who had bathed in the pool, perhaps. But when he examined it more closely it seemed to him that the spread of the great toe away from the print of the other toes was larger than human, and the indentation of the end of the toes was pronounced, while the heel mark was barely perceptible.

" These details convinced him that he was upon the trail of one of the tree-dwellers, though whether that trail led into the trees or continued along the ground he could not tell.

" After a close examination of the neighboring trees he went on cautiously through the forest, and, discovering a continuous opening through the trees which wound back and forth like a path, he held to this trail and in time came upon the same footprints which he had found at the bank of the stream. By this time he was convinced that he had come on the desired trail, and he went forward now with the caution of an Indian trapper.

" His caution did not serve him. At least it was misdirected, for as he stole along, watching the tree-tops before him with a painful scrutiny and stealing from trunk to trunk, his foot slipped on a root

and he was flung to the ground. Had he struck the soft sod, he would have been uninjured, but his head fell on the butt of his own rifle and the contact rendered him unconscious.

"He recovered his senses with the coolness of water upon his face. He opened his eyes and looked up into the blue of the sky. A second later he was immersed again. He started to struggle, for he felt two strong arms about his body. As soon as he stirred he was drawn up to the air again with his wits entirely returned. He saw the gray-headed tree-dweller who bore him in his arms and had carried him thus from the spot where he fell back to the stream."

"Cory," said Thorwalt, "that is possible; and yet—"

"If you begin to doubt here, you will laugh at the remainder of this story, Thorwalt," said Cory with the utmost gravity; "for the relation of wonders is just beginning. I do not think the rescue at the hands of the tree-dweller so impossible. He had felt the reviving effects of water. He had, doubtless, amused himself for some time watching the stealthy progress through the forest.

"He knew Middleton was hunting, for the actions of a traiier, whether man or beast, are unmistakable. He may even have guessed that he himself was the object of the hunt. But when he saw the hunter fall and heard his short cry of pain and surprise, he swung down from the tree and came to the rescue, though what was passing through his animal mind no man can say.

"Yet there was an irony about it. While Middleton was hunting him, gun in hand, the tree-dweller was apart, watching the hunter. The thing which Middleton could not capture by force came to him of its own free will.

"For when Middleton had recovered his senses he was sitting on the bank of the stream, and near him sat in a similar posture the great tree-dweller—for ape he cannot longer be called. Middleton sat within reaching distance of the link which bridged the space between man and beast.

"That he was a unique specimen Middleton was confident. In his searches

through the forest he had seen scores of apes of large size, but all of them were unmistakably the beast. The gray-headed tree-dweller was alone. He was a 'sport.'

"It is an old and established fact in science that the changes of species do not come gradually, but by sudden leaps which are called sports. For instance, for millions of years a species of tree may retain its peculiar characteristics, and then there will appear one which is a freak and which is different in some significant way from the rest of the species. Perhaps the navel orange developed in this manner from the seeded variety. But let that be as it may, it is certain that sports exist, and what is more probable than that the tree-dweller was a sport of the large species of apes which Middleton had found in its company?

"To him, at least, the matter was proved and closed. He allowed the monkey to examine him without stirring. At first he felt some fear. He knew that those great hands could crush out his life with a single movement. He feared that the strength which had been employed to carry him to the stream might by some brutish freak be diverted into anger. He noted the great yellow fangs, and saw how one of the lower canines pushed up the upper lip so that the creature seemed perpetually to sneer.

"But he was obviously bent on kindness only. Fear of man or hate had not yet entered into that forest. He fumbled at Middleton's head with his great paw. He caressed his cheek and pinched it with such violence that Middleton almost cried out. But apparently the ape was not malicious, simply wondering at the softness of the skin.

"Middleton spoke to it. The effect of his words was remarkable. The big tree-dweller started and quivered. His eyes filled with wonder and interest. It was the first time it had heard the modulated sound of the human voice. He bent his head to one side and leaned a little closer, for all the world like a man listening to an interesting tale. Middleton reached out his hand and ventured to pat the wild fellow on his shoulder.

"In five minutes more they were fast

friends. Ten minutes later they started back to the camp. Sometimes Middleton had difficulty in making the creature keep with him through the forest. He was continually breaking off to tear up some plant and examine the roots, apparently in search of edible varieties. Or he would swing up into a tree at a single leap and make a futile and half playful lunge toward a bird which went screaming off through the leaves.

"Finally Middleton caught him by the hand after one of these careless exploits. They came back into the camp in this manner, hand in hand like two children who had been playing until they were weary. A mighty moment, Thorwalt, when civilized man took the hand of the tree-dweller! Middleton felt as though he were walking with the spirit of some ancestor a thousand times removed, and back into the dimness of the lost centuries.

"There is no need of giving the next few days in detail or telling how the tree-dweller became acclimated to the camp. He had adventures with the fire the very first night. Afterward he came whimpering to Middleton and showed him his singed fingers as if he had been a child. Middleton bandaged the hand. He would not at first eat hot food, though the savory odor evidently tempted him greatly; but he soon learned.

"Toward the men he showed neither fear nor malice, only a great curiosity. And on their part, they at first gave him a sufficient distance. But familiarity bred the inevitable contempt.

"Jim White, the tall and lean American, played a practical joke on 'Gray-Head,' as they called him. The tree-dweller responded by catching the man about the waist and hurling him ten feet away as if he had been a child.

"After this scene of violence he was at open war with the men of the camp, with the exception of Middleton. Gray-Head refused to have anything to do with the other men, but with Middleton he was perfectly passive and would receive his food from his hands only.

"Then commenced a period of experiment so vital that could a detailed record of it be submitted to the scientific world

to-day a hundred theories would be shattered.

"Before Middleton had been watching the tree-dweller for two days he decided beyond doubt that the strange creature had the power of speech, and he set himself to learn Gray-Head's vocabulary. At first he could make no progress, but after he achieved a starting-point Middleton learned rapidly. There were no verbs in that language. It was merely a series of names. But as nearly as he could discover, the language of the tree-dweller included quite a large number of sounds, each of which had a peculiar meaning.

"Moreover, these sounds could be uttered with intonations which changed or qualified the meaning of the original. It was, of course, a highly consonantal and guttural utterance, but that this was the beginning of human speech there was no room for doubt.

"If there had been such a doubt it must have been destroyed by the second experiment of Middleton. This was teaching the tree-dweller to speak English. I do not mean that he was able to teach the strange animal to speak with the fluency or the accuracy of even a child of two years. The fact that the tree-dweller could speak at all was sufficient.

"What could have been done in time it is difficult to say. All of the experiments were limited to the space of one month, and during only the last three weeks of this time did Middleton attempt to teach Gray-Head to speak.

"The articulation of the tree-dweller was extremely indistinct, and he had peculiar difficulty with long vowels. For instance, he would say the word 'go' with a distinct 'g,' but with an 'o' so shortened and guttural as to be almost unrecognizable. This word and twenty or thirty other words Gray-Head learned. Words of more than one syllable he absolutely failed to comprehend or imitate, but at least half a dozen words he could enunciate so that every one in the camp understood them, and the most significant thing was that he understood them himself and would repeat them without urging as a means of *self-expression*!"

"I do not need to point out the impor-

tance of this. Some creatures have been able to mimic human utterance. A few others have learned to understand certain human expressions, particularly those of command and warning. But never in the history of the world has there been a creature other than man which was capable of both syllabification and the use of modulated sounds to express particular and exact shades of thought. Gray-Head was a *man*. And this was the opinion not only of Middleton, but of every other man in the camp. They were dubious at first. Before the month of Gray-Head's captivity ended they were satisfied.

"His ability to speak was the most convincing evidence. There were other evidences of a physical nature. These could not be properly determined until one of Gray-Head's species had passed under the dissecting knife. But his species consisted of himself alone. To subject Gray-Head to the knife would be murder, of which the world would acquit Middleton, but his own conscience would mercilessly judge. He determined, therefore, to be satisfied with this specimen which was now in his hands.

"He knew that the trip back to civilization would be arduous; particularly since they would be burdened with the care of Gray-Head. But they were now familiar with the dangers of the journey, inured to the peculiar hardships, and stood an excellent chance of returning to Europe with the link which shattered the religious dogmas of the western world and connected man with the great brotherhood of the dumb beasts.

"This determination Middleton finally imparted to his companions. They were well enough pleased to leave the wilderness for the long trip back to the head waters of the Nile, and while Musab and Piedler objected to burdening the party with the care of Gray-Head, they were voted down by the rest, who were now taken with a scientific fervor.

"It was two nights before the date they had set for their departure. Gray-Head had by this time grown quite accustomed to his new life--ate the food that was given him, and acted in all ways as well as could be expected. But on this night there rose

a strange wailing from the forest near the camp.

"It began while they were seated about the fire eating supper--a shrill, complaining sound like the lament of a catamount, a broken cry more human than the call of the mountain lion. It startled the men about the fire to silence.

"The wail was repeated, grew, and died out. It was followed by a great clamor within one of the tents out of which Gray-Head immediately appeared and stood looking about the forest and apparently waiting for the repetition of the call.

"Middleton felt at once that one of Gray-Head's companions was calling to him. He determined to make sure of his prize that night, and secured a set of strong shackles on the tree-dweller. Gray-Head submitted to the shackling restlessly, for he was still listening, it seemed, for a repetition of that wail within the forest. Then Middleton set out to explore the mystery.

"At the edge of the circling trees he found another of the tree-dwellers, smaller than Gray-Head, and slighter in proportions. As Middleton approached, the animal swung itself hastily into the tree, but from the branches it raised again the shrill and melancholy wail. From the camp came the deeper roar of Gray-Head in answer.

"It was plain to Middleton then that this was the mate of the tree-dweller, come to call for the captive. He stood a while, hesitating, for his heart smote him. The generous and the human part was to set Gray-Head at liberty, but to give him freedom was to cast away a certain chance of enduring fame.

"Middleton turned back to his camp with his mind determined. To lose Gray-Head meant the throwing away of all the labors of this arduous journey, which had already cost the lives of so many men. If a king should ask him he would not give up the old tree-dweller now.

"When he returned to the fire he told the men what he had discovered, and then went back to examine the fastenings which held Gray-Head. It was a shackle connected with a steel chain to a strong peg driven deep into the ground. It seemed impossible that the big fellow could break

loose. He was sitting on the ground now, wearied from his long efforts to break away, but he roused himself at the near approach of Middleton and snarled like an animal without opening his eyes.

"The wailing from the forest broke out again as Middleton came back to the fire. It was black night now, and the sorrow of the cry beset the camp with loneliness so that the men attempted to fight away the feeling by waxing talkative and repeating tales and jests—all except the withered Voodoo, who crouched in the shadow and glanced fearfully at the fire, and all the while soundless words formed at his lips.

"Middleton ordered a watch to be kept on Gray-Head that night, but he told the guard that in case anything unusual happened, such as the approach of another of the tree-dwellers toward the camp, or a furious outbreak of Gray-Head, under no circumstances should a rifle be fired without his direct authorization.

"His forebodings of trouble proved prophetic. A sudden clamor and a series of shouts in the middle of the night roused him. He sat up from his blankets, and in the bright moonlight he heard the jangle of a chain and saw Gray-Head struggling furiously with his shackle.

"The sound of a complaining wail was dying off in the forest. The others of the party had awakened at the same time at the call of the sentry, George Duval, but before any one could come near the captive he had wrested the stake from the ground and was hurrying off toward the forest on all fours.

"Duval threw himself upon the runaway, but the tree-dweller reared quickly on his hind legs and flung the Frenchman a dozen feet away, where he lay stunned by the fall. The others set after the fugitive, but he was already half-way toward the forest.

"Middleton had picked up a rifle as he ran in pursuit. But there was no hope of overtaking Gray-Head. The safety of the trees was not a hundred yards away from him, and the pursuit of Middleton and his comrades was an equal distance behind, and at the edge of the forest stood the other tree-dweller whose lamentations had called Gray-Head back to his own.

"Middleton dropped to one knee and covered Gray-Head with his weapon. Dead or alive, it seemed that he *must* reclaim the fugitive. Fame and reputation fled away from him in the clumsy form of the tree-dweller. But as his sights fell in line with the form of Gray-Head he knew that he could never shoot. In the eye of the world it would have been hunting; in his own eyes it was murder.

"Another thought came to him. He would remove the cause of Gray-Head's flight. At that he turned his aim on the second tree-dweller. There was no time for the second thought which might have kept Middleton's finger from the trigger. The two grotesque forms were turning side by side and fleeing toward the gray shelter of the forest shadows.

"Middleton fired."

CHAPTER V.

THE CURSE.

CORY stopped for a moment and struck the back of his hand across his forehead. The heavy breathing of Thorwalt was grimly audible through the room.

"She screamed terribly, like a woman," went on the narrator. "She turned and reached out her arms toward Gray-Head for help, and pitched forward at his feet. At the horror of it Middleton's companions stopped in the midst of their pursuit. Gray-Head had stooped and now raised the dead figure in his arms.

"Suddenly he turned and faced the whole group, still holding the limp form against his breast with one arm. The other arm he brandished above his head in wrath and roared out some gibbering words.

"Then Gray-Head turned and without hurry strode into the black night with his dead.

"Every man stood where he had stopped in the pursuit, and in Middleton's heart was a feeling of utter horror and loss. But now a rapid and gibbering sound rose behind them. Middleton turned and saw the Voodoo kneeling on the ground, his withered arms tossed in the air and showing

black and shiny in the moonlight, and as he kneeled he chanted:

“There are three barriers ye must pass
Of water, snow, and fire,
And one more grim than all the three
Before ye rest eternally
In the Land of Deep Desire.

“The strong may cross the watery bar,
The brave defy the fire,
The patient pass the cold at length,
But what avails a threefold strength
In the Land of Deep Desire?”

“Not a man there but read a new and bitter meaning in the chant. They had heard it before on the edge of the great valley. Fiedler cursed, and dragged the little negro to his feet with a single strong jerk and ordered him to stop his yelling.

“The Voodoo stood with his arms folded. There was a certain melancholy dignity in his voice as he spoke: ‘It makes no difference what we say to one another. We are all lost. He spoke from the forest yonder’ (he pointed to the place where Gray-Head had disappeared into the woods). ‘He threw the curse upon us. There is not one of us with magic strong to resist him. Our hearts shall be drier than the desert, our blood shall be weaker than water, the stars shall see our bones whiter than the snows of the mountain, for the curse is upon us—the curse is upon us.’

“He spoke, of course, in his native dialect, and the rendering I give is not an exact translation, but as in all savage languages there was a certain grave poetry which fascinated his listeners. Fiedler cursed again, but he stepped back and gave the old negro an opportunity to continue his speech.

“You have come a long way to learn the thing that is hidden. What is it you would learn? It will not give you meat to eat nor water to drink nor clothes to keep you from the sun. It is a shadow you seek, and to find it you have taken blood on your hands and the curse of the gods on your heads, and on the heads of all of us.”

“What curse, fool?” said Middleton, but he was strangely moved.

“All of us shall die, but one of us shall live in death,” said the negro.

“This is mummery!” exclaimed Middleton. “If there is anything you know, old sleight-of-hand, cut with it for a sovereign—real gold, my friend!”

“He held up the shining bit of money between thumb and forefinger. It glittered in the moonlight, and the same glitter came in the eyes of the Voodoo, but then he shook his head.

“I have said too much,” he answered. “You cannot whip words from me now. Chieftain, men who are in the valley of death speak truth. This is that valley—the valley of the gods!”

“As he spoke he gestured sweepingly around him to the swart mountain slopes. They could get nothing further from him. So they went back to camp, and with them they carried George Duval, for his shoulder had been broken in his fall.

“The next day they started again to beat the forest in search of the lost, but even Middleton was down-hearted, and the words of the Voodoo stayed in his ears. They found no trace of the tree-dwellers that day, and they returned to find that George Duval had developed a high fever from his shattered shoulder. The next morning he was delirious. The Voodoo grinned hideously and gestured to the waiting mountains.

“As if it were the grave for all of us,” commented Jim White, “and poor old George were going to be the first one to get ready for the long sleep, eh?”

“And when they returned from another day of fruitless searching Duval was plainly in a serious condition. His trouble had started from a badly fractured shoulder which they could not properly treat. It was Middleton’s opinion that the bone had torn the flesh and that gangrene had set in, but he did not say so. If it were the case there was no help for the suffering man.

“Yet he began to fear for the ultimate effects. If Duval died it would mean to Middleton that they had simply had no means of aiding properly a seriously injured man. In the eyes of his companions it would mean that the curse was beginning to work. And even in Middleton’s practical and serious mind there rose a doubt like

a shadow when, after another session of purposeless search through the forest, he came back to find Duval with a black and swollen arm, very near to death; while close to him lay Jim White, the tall and slangy American. He had shot himself with his own rifle, and with every breath a stain of bloody froth came to his lips.

"He died an hour after sunset. Duval passed out in his delirium before morning. He had not spoken for two days.

"They buried both bodies the next day. It was done silently. The men worked grimly at the soft sod. John Erickson mumbled a brief and half-improvised ceremony over the graves, and then they came back to their camp. On the way Tony Baccigalupi stumbled against the Voodoo and then turned and knocked him down with a muttered word about 'bringing the curse with his own black skin!' That day the men pleaded illnesses and excuses of one sort and another. Middleton was left to search the forest by himself.

"He came back that evening with a heavy heart and a sense of coming failure. It was the greater part of a week since the loss of Gray-Head, and as yet he had not sighted or seen one of the tree-dwellers. He was confronted in the camp with open revolt—and one more calamity. Tony Baccigalupi had been taken with a sudden fever and was even then babbling of green Italy. The rest of the men told Middleton with one voice that they were through with the entire work. They would wait until Tony recovered, but after that they would beat back for civilization with or without him—and they would take no 'damned monkeys' along with them.

"He tried arguments, but they met his appeals with shrugged shoulders. They had lost all enthusiasm for the great cause of science. The one thought which occupied their minds was the fear of the 'curse.'

"Easy to explain," said Thorwalt. "It was a mere matter of coincidence. Those fellows had been pretty hardly tried by their recent adventures. Then came the spectacular incident of the death of the female tree-dweller, and following on this the death of two of their comrades. It was

this matter of coincidence which broke their spirits."

"Perhaps," said Cory, "I do not say that it was not mere coincidence. But I know that those hard fellows, gathered from half a dozen widely separated districts of the world and strong from a hundred encounters with death, were now frightened by the passing of a shadow, and they looked upon the old Voodoo with superstitious eyes of dread.

"But let me be still more open. It was not his followers alone who were weakening. Middleton himself began to feel the first of many fears which he would hardly confess to himself—a deep and vague unrest which ate into his mind, so that even when he pleaded with them to stay with him in his search, only half his heart was in his pleading, the other half harbored the new and indeterminate fear. 'We shall all die,' the old negro had said, 'but one of us shall live in death!'

"They had not long to wait for Tony Baccigalupi. His gay Italian spirit held him up for a day or so. Then he sank rapidly. One afternoon while the rest of the party sat about smoking their pipes in silence, for all the world like hooded vultures waiting for a death in the desert, Tony broke out into a Neapolitan boat-song. Erickson went over to ask how he felt. He broke off his singing to curse the big Swede, and died with the curse on his lips.

"They waited only till his body was cold. There was no argument. They did not even delay to bury the body, and Middleton himself spoke no word on the subject. Each man was busy bundling up the necessities of the camp, chiefly food and ammunition. They started at evening.

"Strangely enough the Voodoo seemed unanxious to leave. He said that it made no difference now whether they fled or remained there. The curse had come upon them. But they needed his guidance still to a certain extent, and to leave him in the forest would be to abandon him to certain death from exposure and ultimately starvation. So they dragged the negro to his feet and started him on the journey.

"There were six in all, now, Erickson, the one-eyed Swede; Musab, the Arab; Herman Fiedler, the blond German; Tom Mulford, the talkative Englishman; the Voodoo; and Middleton."

"And one by one they died?" asked Thorwalt in an awed voice.

"For two days it was well enough," said Cory, as if he had not heard the comment. "But when they reached the snows the Voodoo disappeared in a storm. They defayed for a short time to search after him, and then a strange panic came on them. The snow was driven in swift circles by the howling wind, and some one cried out that the crying of the storm was like the wail of the tree-dweller. And some one else added that the curse was still on them. And the whole party, Middleton among the rest, fled like blind cattle through the storm. They even threw away some of their packs to lighten themselves.

"When the tempest died down after a few hours, their courage returned and they held shamefacedly on their way, but they were only five now and Middleton could see his companions one by one numbering the group of comrades and silently guessing which would die first. For they traveled now without hope, but with the grimness of men drowning in an open sea who struggle till the last against a certain death.

"On the edge of the marshes they paused a while to gather their strength, and a day of rest raised their spirits. Moreover they were far from the valley of the tree-dwellers, and far from the source of the curse. On the second night they fell into a card game and Musab, infuriated by ill luck or by some actual cheating on the part of Fiedler, drew a knife and stabbed the German below the shoulder, a mortal wound. As he lay on the ground Fiedler gathered strength to pull his revolver and shot the Arab through the heart while Middleton and Erickson held the latter to keep him from further mischief.

"So they broke up that last camp hastily and entered the marshes, and once more they made no effort to bury the dead men. The trip through the marshes was more horrible than before, and though Erickson and Middleton came through safely they

were worn to a shadow and poisoned with foul water and fever; behind them they left Mulford dying; before them stretched the white, hot desert.

"Neither Erickson nor Middleton expected to cross the desert. Erickson fell out the second day. He stepped on a small stone and sprained his ankle hopelessly. He sat on the ground, squatting like a monkey, and passed his water bag to Middleton without a word, and Middleton accepted it in silence.

"This will seem strange to you. It seems incredible to me sitting here, but these men had seen so many deaths that even their own fate did not matter. The Swede could not hold out long. He could not travel a step, and the water would not keep him alive for three days. It might tide Middleton through. So Middleton gripped his friend's hand silently and went on through the sands.

"I suppose nine men out of ten would have died on that trip, but Middleton was one man out of a hundred, and through his brain went the phrase of the Voodoo like a chant: 'All of us shall die, but one of us shall live in death.' A terrible promise, and yet it was a promise of life.

"Middleton lived. He was without water, delirious at times, and haunted by the coldly white tops of the mountain ranges on either side of the desert when a caravan picked him up. They were Arabs from the head waters of the Nile, and they carried him with them to their destination, hoping for a reward later. The trip took eight days, but Middleton was unconscious most of the time.

"When they reached the village he was desperately sick with a fever for ten days. When he recovered a little he induced an Arab to go down the river to the nearest large town and send a message to England. He scribbled it painfully himself. It was to his wife, and told her where he was, that he would not be able to travel for a month and to send on money. Then he relapsed into the delirium.

"He recovered from the worst of the fever, and found himself in a new world of dim quiet. As he glanced down the bed he was surprised to see a tawny and lean

hand covered with a strong and sparse growth of hair. He raised his hand to his forehead. The hand which responded to his will was the hand which lay upon the bed.

"Middleton laughed sickly and lay a long while with his eyes closed, thinking hard. The old words of the Voodoo came to him again with new meaning: 'One shall live in death!'

"He alone was left for that. He opened his eyes again and began passing a hand cross his face with a fearful and slow interest. What he found made him sick at heart, but not sure. He was only conscious of a great change.

"He called to the natives and bade them bring him a mirror, but when they took down the little bright circle from the wall his heart suddenly weakened. He crossed a forearm over his face and bade them take the mirror away. Afterward he lay shivering, afraid of he knew not what.

"He lay there for some weeks before the sickness ended in fact, and he was able to walk about. Even then he was in no hurry to leave the room. He feared something in his heart. He knew that it was light, but he dared not name it even to himself. And he feared the eyes of other men. He turned to the wall when another came into the room. He gave himself until the time when the money should come from England before he should rise and face the world and himself.

"But instead of the money, the wife herself came. Middleton as he lay in his bed heard her voice speaking to the natives and asking for him. He shouted out to them to let no one come in.

"She recognized his voice. She called to him, and the clear music of the sound tortured him. He shrieked to the natives to keep her out.

"'He is ill,' she said outside the door. 'He is delirious and knows not what he says. But I am his wife. I shall care for him.'

"'Dearest!' cried John Middleton. 'for God's sake do not come near me now. I am changed. I cannot let you see me now. Not now: to-morrow! Give me one hour to prepare myself. I forbid you to come!'

"'John,' she answered. 'it is the fever in you that speaks and not yourself. My friends, open that door!'

"Middleton threw himself against the door and strove to hold it closed. He was weak from his sickness. The door flew open and she stood before him, but the light of the day which entered with her half blinded him and he threw up his hand across his eyes to shield them from the glare. She had cried out with a voice of horror and he heard her step retreat.

"'I wished to see my husband, John Middleton,' she said. 'and why have you brought me to this grinning—beast?'

"John Middleton started and threw his hands out toward her. She was marvelously lovely with the keen white sun upon her.

"'Dearest,' he said. 'it is I!'

"She stood a moment watching him with an utter loathing in her face which grew into terror, and then with a little moan she turned and ran down the path and out of his life forever. Middleton turned and stepped back into his room, half dazed, and it chanced that he stopped before a little round cracked mirror on the wall.

"He thought at first that he was seeing some horribly realistic picture painted there, but when he raised a hand to his face a hand appeared by the face in the mirror.

"Middleton sat down and the chair creaked sharply under his weight. He strove for a long while to order his thoughts. Then he rose and went to the mirror again and still he could not believe what he saw. Look!"

Cory pointed to the bust of young Middleton by the fire.

"The head of John Middleton before he went into the desert to prove that the only God is the real God of force, was that of a young pagan god. But the face which scowled at him from the mirror was that of a beast: a blunt and wide nostriled nose; a shock of disordered gray hair streaming across his forehead; heavy sagging jowls, bright and sunken eyes under a thick brow, and his lip was lifted into a continual venomous sneer by a great tooth of the lower jaw. It was a horror to dream upon, not to see.

" Middleton moaned in anguish and terror. The face in the mirror snarled back at him like an angered ape. Once more he remembered the Voodoo's words: 'All of us shall die, but one of us shall live in death.' He tore the mirror from the wall and shattered it to a thousand fragments on the floor.

" But afterward a morbid and terrible curiosity came over him. It was impossible of belief, this horrid phenomena which his eyes had seen. He called for another glass. It was brought to him, and after that he stayed for hours before the mirror studying the strange visage which leered and frowned back to him.

" He strove to explain it. The apparent slant of the forehead was caused by the deep pucker of the brows from continual and anguished frowning. The cheeks had fallen and pouched from the devastating illness. The nostrils, perhaps, were distended by the labored breathing. The eyes were sunken from the fever, and for the same reason abnormally bright. It was no uncommon occurrence for hair to turn suddenly gray."

" But still he could not wholly reason the grim mask away. He knew his head as it had been. He had studied it not only with some vanity but with the precision of a scientist. He knew now that beyond a doubt a change had occurred in the bony structure itself! No anguish of soul or body could have affected that change!"

" In his utter bewilderment John Middle-

ton, the great apostle of strength, that cruel and self-sufficient doctrine, knelt on the floor and remembered a prayer out of his boyhood with stammering lips, but into his mind came the picture of the huge tree-dweller with his dead on his arms and a hand of imprecation in the air. The Voodoo had been right. All of them had died, but one of them would live in death.

" He had gone out stronger than the strongest. He had gone out to drag down the god of the simple-minded and put up one of his own desire. He came back, afraid even of death, and knowing that the veriest child in the street could teach him out of a greater strength than his own. Teach him that Reason and Ambition can never find a god that shall endure; teach him that the one faith which unites man with man and with the dumb beasts is the faith of kindness and love. There is no strength like that of kindness, Thorwalt. It was no power of mine which enabled me to save that man in your house this day. I had no fear of him because I had no scorn of him, my friend."

" But Middleton!" cried Thorwalt, rising. " Is he still alive? Can I meet him?"

The firelight flickered on the face of Cory, on the buried eyes, the receding forehead, the perpetual sneer of the lifted lip. Thorwalt stepped a pace back and caught his breath.

" Middleton is dead," said Cory quietly, " and I am the only man in the world with the strength to believe his story."

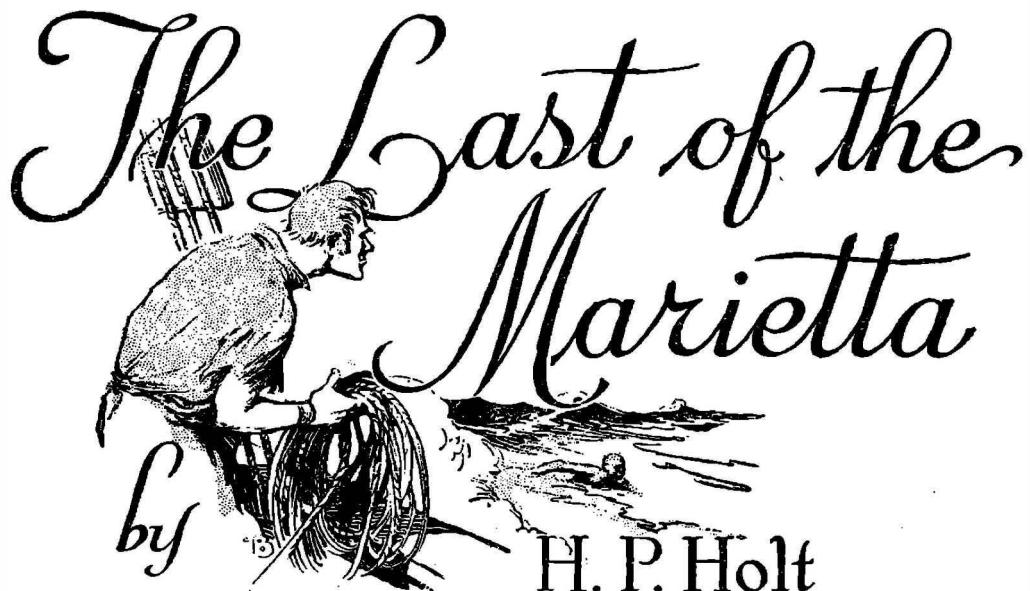
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FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

BY MAZIE V. CARUTHERS

WOULD you in matrimonial bonds
A maiden fetter?
Don't court by way of telephone,
Or write a letter—
Offer yourself as Valentine;
('Tis so much better!)
Just say in person, "*I love you!*"
That's what will get her!



The Last of the Marietta

by H. P. Holt

AKANAKA sailor kept a small boat just awash on the beach as the tide receded from the island of Galoa. A little distance off, the trading schooner Marietta tugged lazily at her anchor. Old Jim Bower's thoughts were a thousand miles away as he walked down to the water's edge, bound for his schooner.

There are some things on the island beaches in the South Seas which it is neither profitable nor politic to notice. Bower glanced at the figure of a man, snorted, and passed on. Ten yards further he snorted again, paused, and deliberately went back.

"What 'n hell are you doing here?" he asked biting.

The man looked up with an air of indifference and then resumed his task of allowing sand to trickle through his hand into an empty gin-bottle.

"Why?" he queried stupidly.

The skipper and owner of the Marietta glared. He was acutely conscious of the fact that it was not his affair anyway. He would have swung round on his heel, but for an expression he noted in the derelict's face.

"Things like you are a damned disgrace to humanity," Jim snapped.

The remark was gratuitous and entirely unappreciated. The derelict merely took up another handful of sand. He had reached the stage when words of that order conveyed next to nothing. He was about five

foot ten high, and his bare arm was but a sample of the thew and muscle in him that was degenerating.

"Want a drink?" asked Bower, chewing the butt of a cigar reflectively. An odd notion was passing through his brain.

For the first time the derelict displayed real interest in the conversation.

"Sure's you're a foot high," he replied avidly, moistening his lips with his tongue.

Jim Bower emitted a curious little laugh that had a grim note in it.

"Got a kit bag or anything?"

The man shook his head dully, without shame.

"Come on," the skipper ordered in a blunt fashion; and the derelict shambled down to the water's edge.

When Weeks climbed over the side of the Marietta he was drunk, and Jim Bower grimaced at his own quixotic motive. Bible thumping and temperance lectures were not in his line. He was a trader, pure and simple, accustomed for scores of years to the sight of men who had gone under in the perilous South Seas, where thirsts and mosquitoes grow abnormally.

There was rum in the skipper's locker, but it was not his intention to display lavish hospitality in that direction. He was not even in need of an extra hand.

Some one ashore, however, had spoken of Weeks as "seagoing." Evidently, Weeks's

diet had been limited lately, for his attack on a dish of stew was wolfish, and he was unmoved by the groan of the winch as the anchor came to the cat-head. The Marietta was running before the breeze by the time Weeks's appetite was satiated.

"What about that drink, cappie?" he jerked out, popping up his head through the companion.

"You wait a while, son," replied the skipper calmly, with a casual glance aloft. "Jim Bower is as good as his word, but you'll not die inside of an hour without it, will you?"

There was a clash of eyes. Hot, volcanic words sprang to Weeks's lips as he shot a glance at the receding shore. An hour afterward, to the minute, he tossed down an allowance of grog. Nor was that the only time during the day Jim gave the derelict a drink, for Weeks was in no state to plunge into total abstinence.

Twenty-four hours later his nerves were raw: another day, and only a vague line lay between him and insanity. After a bitter battle of words he was in the act of leaping over the rail and ending it all when Bower snatched at a belaying pin, and Weeks was carried below, unconscious, by a couple of the Kanaka crew. As soon as he recovered, the skipper gave him a draft strong enough either to kill him or keep him quiet for a dozen hours.

On the sixth day after the Marietta had sailed from the beach at Galoa, Weeks came on deck with a clear head, a new slant on life, and a peculiar interest in the gray-whiskered skipper.

"Karea next stop?" he inquired.

"How d'you know?" exclaimed Jim.

Weeks jerked a thumb at the compass.

"I know something about these waters," he said. "Had a boat of my own—once."

For a while they both watched a school of dolphins play. Your deep-sea sailor never rushes through conversation when God, the ways of the ocean, or disaster, are under discussion. Piecemeal, Weeks told his story, touching only on the high lights. And they were high.

"I'd like to stop along with you a while—if you'll have me," he declared in conclusion.

"Sixty dollars a month as mate, if you stick on the wagon," said Jim with satisfaction. In a way, he liked Weeks, and he viewed this new Weeks as something of his own creation. That also gave him peculiar satisfaction.

"But I guess you'd better lock me up in my cabin while we're lying at Karea," said Weeks. "Let my pay start from the time we sail from there. Karea's a—a place I remember, see?" And Weeks was accordingly placed under lock and key as soon as the vessel anchored.

Twice in the next six months Jim Bower had to manhandle the mate when he sideslipped, but Weeks's power of resistance against liquid foolishness was growing. The skipper nearly killed him once, and Weeks was not ungrateful—afterward. Indeed, gratitude was the better part of Weeks's nature that survived his degradation.

Sometimes Jim spoke to the mate of his own one great ambition—to "go into steam." He had a real and abiding affection for the old Marietta, the schooner that had carried him countless thousands of miles, everywhere from Peru to Canton, the Marietta that had been his floating home for twenty years; the Marietta, whose every whim and idiosyncrasy he understood.

But none knew better than Jim Bower that sailing ships were back numbers these days, except for certain purposes; and for his purpose, under modern conditions, he wanted a steamboat—such a steamboat, for instance, as the Pacific Maid, which jogged in and out of San Pete.

But boats like the Pacific Maid cost money. She was a tramp, with a tramp's gait and capacity, unlovely and full of unholy rattles, but she was just what Jim Bower needed and she was just what Jim Bower had set his heart on. She had been offered to him for sale, but even if he disposed of the Marietta for twelve thousand dollars—which was the last figure he had heard mention concerning her value—he would still be about four thousand dollars short of the rock-bottom price that was demanded for the Pacific Maid.

Weeks, entirely sympathetic, made an excellent audience of one while old man Bower discoursed on this, his pet theme; but

Weeks was as capable of adding up two and two as the next man, and out of good nature he refrained from expressing the opinion that the skipper's ambition seemed to be just about four thousand hopeless dollars short of realization, to say nothing of expenses incidental to starting out for sea on a steamer. Still, it amused the skipper to explain in detail to the mate what his plans would be, and Weeks often listened by the hour while Bower labored with a stump of pencil and odd scraps of paper, making hypothetical calculations concerning freights, coaling, wages, and repairs.

"Don't forget insurance," said the mate once, noticing that Bower never referred to that item.

"Insurance, eh?" Jim repeated vaguely. "Think I'd have to? Suppose, maybe, I would, with a steamer!"

"Why, of course," replied Weeks, amiably. "You've got this schooner insured, haven't you?"

Jim shook his head.

"Never did anything worse in twenty years than scrape a bit of paint off'n her in the East River, coming out of N' York, collidin' with a coal-barge," he said. "If she goes I go, so why waste money?"

"You're taking a big chance, cappie," Weeks commented gravely.

"Sometimes I've wondered, lately, 'bout that," observed the skipper, stroking his silvered beard. "Shouldn't be surprised if I did insure the schooner one o' these days when I run home. If anything happened to her it'd be kinda awkward, wouldn't it?"

"Kind of," agreed Weeks. "Never mind the cost. Plank down the money and let the other fellow take a chance on it."

The Marietta was bobbing her way toward San Pete, which exotic island port was once christened "The Devil's Parlor," probably by some discerning individual who had been financially mauled by the human sharks dwelling there. Anyway, being nicely appropriate, the name stuck.

Besides colored folk, scarcely two hundred men exist at San Pete—traders, gin-mill keepers, shipping agents, grafters, and the like, money-grubbers all, and ninety per cent openly and avowedly without a conscience among them, though the percentage

was raised a shade when Captain James Bower stepped ashore on the crazy wharf.

A ketch which had been doing regular duty as long as any man could remember, had recently returned to San Pete, given up the struggle and subsided quietly to the bottom while at her moorings; and when the Marietta arrived, some of the San Pete sharks sensed an opportunity to make money by buying her. Three times that day Jim Bower was asked whether his schooner was in the market, three times he said bluntly "Sixteen thousand dollars," and three times he was laughed at.

But Captain Bower was no fool, and he knew the value of a ship was exactly what people were willing to pay for her.

"Tell you what," he said to a swarthy Hebraic gentleman in the "hotel," just as he was on the point of sailing, "the Marietta's loaded with cargo now, and I'll be away over three weeks. Let's see, now, on the fifteenth o' next month I'll sell the schooner to the highest bidder."

And then, after definitely making arrangements about the auction, he sailed, filled with curiosity mingled emotions; for every plank in the Marietta was to him like his own flesh and blood. Still he was already able to anticipate something of the glow of satisfaction in possessing a steamer of his own.

And yet, because there was a doubt about it—a very distinct doubt—he refrained from mentioning to Weeks what he had done. He could, in fancy, feel the pulse of the boat beating beneath him as she churned her way through the silvery, moonlit sea. He knew the time must come when he would experience a pang as he passed the brave little schooner in other hands: but if one eat one's cake, one cannot also have it.

Head winds, light winds and dead calms toyed with the Marietta. For days at a stretch, Jim Bower, exercising every ounce of his skill with the old schooner, was not able to get more than three knots an hour out of her. He was nearly seven days behind time on his run back to San Pete. Toward midnight as they approached the short cut between the Kiyiki Reefs, Jim took the wheel from the Kanaka bosun.

He knew every inch of the way, having made the passage a hundred times.

This time the short cut was to save him eight or ten hours.

There was a gentle breeze, before which the schooner glided gracefully with every stitch of canvas stretched—mains'l and fores'l taut, maintops'l and foretops'l trimmed, jumbo and jib bellying, and balloon catching a capful. Weeks and the two Kanakas who comprised the rest of the crew, were in their quarters, asleep.

The colored bosun squatted on the poop, dreaming of things other than ships, so that presently his head nodded. The wind freshened a shade, but there was no need to shorten sail. The passage through which they were making the short cut was wide. Presently, however, Jim sent the Kanaka into the nose of the vessel, with orders to keep his eyes skinned for shoal water, as a light mist began to drift over the surface. The Kanaka, little suspecting that he was committing suicide, allowed his eyelids to droop for a few moments at a time. Soon they were closed altogether. There was a faint sound of water on the starboard bow, not loud enough to awaken him. Nor did it reach Jim Bower's ears, though, twenty years before, or even ten, no Kanaka's hearing had been more acute than his. It was the sound of water lapping and swirling over rocks. The skipper's attention at the moment was given wholly to the thickening mist.

Jim was on the point of bawling orders for all hands to tumble out when there came a sudden shock which threw the captain off his feet, his head striking the rail. There was a crashing, tearing noise as the main-mast, snapped off like a carrot close to the deck, fell over the side, carrying a flapping chaos of canvas and halyards with it.

The schooner, being nearly empty, tilted over.

Away in the peak a brown figure sprang erect as the deck reached an angle of forty-five degrees. The Kanaka bosun clutched blindly at nothing, toppled over the rail and was swept into the confusion of smashed gear by the same wave that lifted the stunned form of the skipper and washed him from the sloping deck. The Kanaka,

swimming like an eel, became hopelessly entangled in halyards under the sodden sail, and paid the penalty for drowsing.

Bower, revived almost instantly by his sudden immersion, struck out, but the tide was setting against him like a millrace, and there were jagged rocks on which he was bruised. He bellowed at the top of his brass-throated voice, convinced as he did so that the three men below deck on the stranded Marietta must at that moment be gasping in a death-trap. A friendly grating, washed off the vessel, bumped his elbow, and he clung to it for support. Then he gave up the hopeless struggle, and drifted away in the darkness and gathering mist.

For the first hour or so the situation seemed strangely unreal. Somewhere near there were man-eaters darting about, but up to now they had not attacked him. Moreover, the water was comparatively warm. Had any other hand than his been at the wheel when the disaster occurred, anger would doubtless have been the skipper's chief sensation. As it was, introspection was half paralyzed. It was galling for him to reflect that the Marietta must have had half her bottom torn out and that she now lay like a pierced beetle, immovable as the rocks which pinned her there. The thing that worried him most, though, was the fate of the men below.

Jim felt oddly like a murderer. This was the first ship he had lost in his long career. If Weeks and the two Kanakas had leaped from their bunks instantly and made a dash for the deck before being overwhelmed by the flood, they might preserve their lives for a while by clinging to the spars. They might.

"God help 'em!" the old skipper groaned; and then his thoughts turned to his own impending fate. But fate played one of her pranks on him. At dawn he was still clinging to the grating, expecting momentarily to find a limb snapped off by the brutes near. The wind had freshened considerably and a heavy sea was making. Bower's lips were set in a firm line. From time to time he muttered something.

It was now only a question of hours how long he could hang on to the grating, for his gnarled hands were white and numb.

He began to imagine fantastic shapes in the waves as they bore down on him. Once, when the sun was dying in a blood-red blaze, he could have sworn there was a catamaran, such as native fishermen use, a little distance away. Five minutes afterward, to his intense surprise, he found it was no figment of the brain, and the natives lifted him aboard. He screwed up his eyes and squinted into the driving spume, wondering whether he could navigate the catamaran back to the place where he had lost his ship, in the bare hope of picking up survivors; but the natives were rutining before the growing gale and could not have beaten back if their own lives had depended on it.

Twenty-four hours later, when the gale moderated, Captain Bower, without compass or sextant, set a blind course for San Pete and, with the first streaks of dawn next morning, ran up against the rickety wharf.

It was only as he approached the establishment known by courtesy as a hostelry that he remembered and realized that was the day on which the Marietta was to have been sold by auction. Brent, the hotel-keeper, and incidentally the man who was to conduct the sale, glanced at Jim and then in the direction of the wharf where no craft lay.

"What, did you swim ashore, cap?" he asked, with elevated eyebrows.

Jim laughed gruffly. A quaint idea had occurred to him that he might see the ghost of his old schooner sold, as a tribute to her honor and glory. Nobody on the island but he knew of the vessel's fate.

"Fell overboard and darn near got drowned for it," he said. "The Marietta's gone on to Sparrow Island, but she'll make San Pete afore morning."

It never occurred to any one to doubt the skipper's statement, and at three o'clock in the afternoon every dabbler in finance in the place assembled in the big room, where Brent, perched on a rostrum, painted the Marietta with a flood of eloquence which wrung Jim Bower's heart, for as he listened he began to believe it had all been true.

"Gosh!" he muttered as he wiped a queer

mistiness from his eyes; and then the bidding began.

"Eight thousand," offered the portly Hebraic gentleman, who for some unknown reason, wore a diamond scarf-pin, but kept his hand on it as a measure of discretion in that assembly.

"Nine," came from three places, and then "ten" and "eleven" followed at leisure. Brent thumped the table before him, harangued the crowd, and wiped away perspiration that trickled in a stream to the end of his nose. In a little while the offer stood at twelve. That was the Jew's bid. He and the other most likely buyers had put their heads together before the auction, to save them from cutting each other's throats unnecessarily, but unexpected opposition had come from a Portuguese named Mantez, the only man out of the "ring" who was dangerous.

"Thirteen," declared Mantez, with a triumphant snap, and Jim Bower somehow managed to extract satisfaction from the fact.

"Fourteen thousand," said the Hebrew testily, and turned to speak to one or two men near him, gesticulating forlornly with a dead cigar.

"Fifteen," put in Mantez with the face of a great poker-player, to hide the fact that it was his last gasp.

"Sixteen," said the Jew. Mantez turned out of the room, but Captain Bower hugged himself, albeit sadly.

And then a new voice was heard at the back of the crowd.

"Seventeen thousand," it said: and a shiver ran down Jim Bower's spine, for it was as though he had heard a voice from the grave. He was a tall man, and he raised himself on to his toes to see the bidder, knowing before he looked that none but Weeks could have uttered those two words in that tone, and that Weeks would only have used that tone when the vine leaves were slightly entangled in his hair.

"Eighteen," said the Jew, breathing stertorously.

Jim Bower made a movement as though impelled to bear Weeks out, away from this scene of a tragic farce; and then he shrugged his shoulders and listened. The

thing was beginning to get a curious hold on him.

"Nineteen," said Weeks.

"Twenty."

"Twenty-one," Weeks persisted light-heartedly.

Jim Bower scratched his grizzled chin, a prey to tempestuous feelings. Then he put his shoulder into the crowd, and steered as though there were no obstacles between him and the mate. He heard the Jew utter the words "Twenty-two" in a high-pitched voice. His fist closed like a vice over the arm of Weeks, whose face wore a happy smile until he saw Jim Bower. Then Weeks crumpled up, and went white, as one who has experienced a great shock.

Jim shook him like a terrier destroying a rat as soon as they reached the fringe of the crowd.

"Man, pull yourself together," he said jerkily. "Tell me, how did ye get off the wreck?"

Color was coming back into the mate's cheeks.

"You only ran her on the sand, cappie," he said, hanging on to the skipper's arm

and working it like a pump-handle. "I got her off with a kedge anchor on the top of the next tide. But you're drowned, Jim, drowned deader than a door-knob! You must be!"

Jim Bower looked down at the wharf, where the *Marietta* lay, with only her main-mast missing.

"Dead or alive, Mr. Weeks," he said with dignity which was distinctly frayed at the edges. "I'm going to take you straight back to the ship, and if you set one toe ashore again afore we sail in the steamship *Pacific* I'll break every bone in your body. Understand me?"

"Say, cappie," said Weeks. "you just interrupted a bit of fun I was having at an auction there. Selling something, they were. Don't know exactly what it was, but I went in and saw old Brent waving the hammer. Knew me last in my palmy days. Brent did, they was palmy once, and he grinned when he saw me, so I started bidding just to get a laugh on 'em."

"You got the laugh on 'em all right," observed Captain Bower in a curious voice. "There's the gangway. Watch your step."



MY LOVE COMES BACK TO ME TO-DAY

BY CORA A. MATSON DOLSON

I TREAD the dandelions' gold:
My heart is full as it can hold;
A robin sings overhead, and I
Sing back my own song in reply.

Upon their nest, in flowering bush,
His mate stays in the brooding bush
The purple plumes of lilac play,
And with their blossoms strew my way.

—
Far off, beyond the hemlock lane,
A brown road winds across the plain.
I watch that road, as waits the bird
To feel the thrill of new life stirred.

I hear, from one who haps along:
"That lassie sings a foolish song!"
But what care I for what they say?
My love comes back to me to-day!

If You Believe It, It's So

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "White Tigers," "The Whispering Chorus," "God's Messenger," etc.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ARMAGEDDON.

BUT how was he going to do this? He was all alone—all alone except for Alvah—and Alvah was unwarned.

"Just sigh fer all you can," old Sky-Blue was intoning gently; "an 'en, when I go out to announce my resolution to the world, I can say: 'Behold! Behold! Of such be the faithful of St. Clair! They didn't do this because of the ten per cent profit--nor the twenty per cent, or thirty per cent. Nay! Nay!' Though verily the profits will wax exceeding great--as I can tell you now, my beloved, they will--fer, lo! it has been granted unto me like a vision, and I saw the marble halls and the gilded domes even as of a new Jerusalem, and lo! the name thereof was the Seminary of the Beating Heart, and lo! I looked again and they that entered in and they that issued forth did wear fine raiment and rode in goodly autos."

"He's leading up to the touch," said Davies in his heart.

It was so.

The bishop was calling up his ushers. One of the first was that preternaturally glad but pale young man who had ushered Davies to the platform. And the bishop was giving them sheafs of those blank checks which he himself had set up and run off over at the *Messenger* office; also

bunches of folders containing his recommendations from the King of Sweden and others--these for any strangers who happened to be present.

And Davies saw, not without a flash of consternation, that in accordance with some prearranged plan the outer doors had been closed so that no one could escape, even should the rain stop.

Then Sky-Blue nodded at the St. Clair Male Quartet, and the quartet banged straight into one of those old revival jingles that anybody can follow, no one can resist:

"It's the old-time religion,
It's the old-time 'eligion,
It's the old-time 'eligion,
And it's good enough fer me!"

It wasn't a dozen seconds before every one was singing it, and a lot of people were stamping their feet as well.

Ushers scattering. Hysteria mounting. Old Sky-Blue waving his arms and shouting a note or two himself.

But in the midst of all this excitement Sky-Blue remained the master of both himself and the situation. He saw a little old woman down in front of the platform. Davies saw her, too. She was not only little and old, but she was manifestly poor--dressed in black, a little old black bonnet on her head, a threadbare dress of black alpaca, manifestly her Sunday clothes.

Sky-Blue read the signal in her devoted eyes. He reached down. Others aiding, he had her on the platform. She was nervous, a little frightened, but borne up by her faith.

She said something that was inaudible to others in the din, but Sky-Blue bent his ear to listen.

He straightened up. He shouted:

"God bless you, sister!"

There was a slight lull in the music and shouting. Sky-Blue bent his ear again, again straightened up and howled:

"Fer all she's got! That's the way to talk! She's signin' fer all she's got!"

He listened again, again proclaimed the tidings:

"Eighty-three dollars!"

Davies felt a glow of white heat in his breast that was almost killing him.

"You dirty old scum!" his mind roared.

But what could he do? Should he rise in his place and shout from his throat what his mind was dictating? This and all the rest? That here was a hypocrite—here was a fraud—here was a robber of the poor?

But old Sky-Blue, with his arm about the humble little sister in black, was singing again. He was laughing. He turned and gave Davies a look as if to say: "I'll show you!"

The Polyanna young man forced his way up to the platform and delivered a verbal message.

And old Sky-Blue, who was dancing a little by this time, did a couple of more jumps and shouted at the top of his lungs and waved his arms for silence.

"No money!" he howled. "No money! Brother Hitchcock here's just been tellin' me how some of you dear ones been offerin' him dimes and quarters. That's all right fer you dear ones that ain't got a bank account, and it's all right fer the blessed little children, and I'm goin' to ask Brother Hitchcock to register these sums so's no tithe ner jitney be unrecorded in the Golden Book. But let those of us who can, put down our names and our pledges."

Here one of the ushers cried out from the back of the hall:

"Judge Berry's down fer two hundred!"

There was an outburst of handclapping; but Sky-Blue called for a cheer, and the auditorium rocked.

And the quartet, which had begun on "Old Black Joe," switched to "Dixie," and this also kept the cheering going along for a while—long enough: for now others were trying to get their names into the cheering-line.

"Mrs. Melva Mellish down fer a hundred!"

"Seventy-five for Brother Cole!"

"Ed Brock, eighty!"

With considerable difficulty old Sky-Blue succeeded in getting himself heard again, although he had to shout at first to do it.

"Don't misunderstand," he yelled. "Don't misunderstand! If you can't sign the pledges give what you got! Go to it, boys!"

This last to the quartet.

And the riot broke loose again, ushers working like sin, sporadic cheers drowning the music, this brother and that brother or Sister So-and-So, who hadn't spoken to each other for years, perhaps, now shaking hands and singing in unison and smiling at each other through their tears.

Davies's agony increased.

Was he going to let Sky-Blue get away with this—rob the whole town?

"Look out! Look out!" he wanted to yell. "Those are checks that you're signing. Checks, you rubes! He's going to cash 'em! He's told me so! He's a fake!"

What if he should yell this? Would they believe him? Would Alvah think he was crazy?

Sky-Blue waltzed over and stroked his shoulder.

It was at that moment that Davies felt his blood stand still in his veins; felt the slow, cringing contraction of his muscles as he started to rise. The time had come. The hell of fate had begun to ring. He couldn't stand this. If he did he would be as bad as the bishop. And worse! For perhaps the bishop didn't know any better.

It seemed to Davies that he could already feel the people looking at him; feel the multitudinous focus of the thousand eyes, although as yet he hadn't moved an inch.

Then he was suddenly aware that it wasn't at himself the people looked, but at Colonel Evan Williams.

The colonel himself had risen, was waiting to make himself heard.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"THIS IS MY FRIEND."

OLD Sky-Blue righted himself and bawled:

"Brother Williams! Let us listen to Brother Williams!"

And there was just the barest suggestion—for Davies there was, at least—just the barest suggestion that the bishop was nervous; up against something that he wasn't perfectly sure about.

And there was that in the colonel's appearance to give any one pause, especially if that person happened to have a troubled conscience or any reason for such. The colonel was calm. He was self-possessed. And yet, also, he was somewhat out of himself and above himself—filling his Mobile coat perfectly, looking as he might have looked twenty or thirty years ago, except for his white hair and mustache, eye sagacious, florid, handsome.

Alvah was gazing at him. So was Davies. So gradually was every one else as the hall went silent.

"My friends," said Colonel Williams, "I feel that I cannot let this occasion pass without giving my testimony."

His voice was soft, yet vibrant, sonorous. It carried.

Old Sky-Blue had subsided into the chair the colonel had vacated, he having seated the little old woman in black in his own armchair—which was too big for her; and Sky-Blue sat there with a happy smile on his face, wondering what was coming off, and now and then patting Alvah's hand to show every one how happy he was and how his heart was overflowing with love.

"Testimony in the old religious sense," the colonel said. "Testimony as we used it in the revivals of our Old South! This, although the evidence is in, although the judgment be already recorded by the Judge on High! We've all been witnesses. We've

witnessed once more the ancient miracle of Grace."

Sky-Blue was still a trifle up in the air, as the saying is: but he was game. He clapped his hands and said: "Amen!" And this started a flutter of applause.

The colonel turned and took a leisurely look at Sky-Blue.

"What's comin' off?" Davies demanded of his soul.

The colonel said:

"Thanks to you, sir!"

He turned once more to face the audience, his voice thrilled:

"Thanks to him! Thanks to the rare spirit and bold of him to whom we have listened with such reverence in this hall, our friend, our benefactor, our saintly leader, the Rev. Dr. Culbertson!"

The applause started up again. It did this almost where it had left off, with much handclapping and some cries of "Amen" and "True! True!" But it gave a sudden jump and was twice as loud, twice as vociferous—cries of "Good for the colonel!" "Halleluiah!" "Ray for Dr. Culbertson!" Then it gave yet another jump and became a baby ovation.

"He's makin' it worse," said Davies to himself, and it was just as if a fist was pounding at his chest.

Sky-Blue was satisfied now. He waved an arm as a signal for the crowd to let the colonel continue. The colonel was watching the crowd, however, with all the ready strategy of the trained orator. He waited until the silence was practically complete, then intense, absolute. He adapted his voice to the silence, spoke softly:

"Gratitude is greatest when it is personal. Out of the full heart I speak. You are my neighbors. You have been patient. You have seen me fall. You have seen the forces of destruction cloud my sky like hungry eagles. But where are the eagles now? Gone! Gone! Thank God the sky is clear again."

"God bless you, brother," droned the bishop.

And there were a few other cries, slightly hysterical: "Halleluiah!" "Praise the Lord!"

"Cut it out," Davies implored in his

heart. "You don't know what you're doing."

But the colonel had all the appearance of one who does know what he is about.

He roared the next few words:

"Am I alone?"

Cries of "No! No!" and some laughter.

"Am I alone?" the colonel demanded again. "In the regeneration of my unworthy self we have seen but the passing shadow of the greater fact, the regeneration of our city, St. Clair! As he himself so eloquently has put it, thou art already a well-spring in the desert, St. Clair! Beautiful thou wert! Yea, more beautiful than any other city in the State of equal population!"

More applause.

"Think then what it will be when this dream of our doctor is realized, home of an institution unique in the annals of the world, the visible promise of that city of the new Jerusalem---prepared as a bride adorned for her husband--her light like unto a stone most precious---and filled with the glory and the honor of the nations."

All the time that the colonel was speaking the ushers were on the job of getting fresh subscriptions. Even in those moments of tense silence their eyes were alert. At each outburst of applause they were seizing the occasion to convert the enthusiasm into something tangible.

Davies's distress grew.

By degrees the congregation was fusing into an even greater degree of fervor than it had shown when old Sky-Blue himself was holding forth. It was coming along toward ecstasy as the colonel swung into his peroration, a personal tribute to Culbertson, but couched in the language of the Wise One:

"His mouth is most sweet: Yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!"

And then, in the midst of the cheering and handclapping and incipient song, old Sky-Blue jumped forward with streaming eyes and clasped the colonel in his arms and called for a song. But while he was doing all this he still had sufficient presence of mind to shout:

"Sign your pledges, friends! Er give what you can! Let us make this day a day of glory!"

The quartet had taken its cue from the colonel's speech, was shooting out the chorus of that other revival song:

"Oh, I'll meet you in the city of the new Jer-ooz-olum!"

It became a roar as the congregation joined in. The ushers were now working like mad, taking money and checks. An old farmer had clambered to the platform. He and Sky-Blue had to howl at each other to make themselves heard.

"I want to go down for fifty dollars!"

"Did you say eighty?"

"But I ain't got a pen."

"Use mine."

And Davies saw the bishop thrust his fountain pen smoothly into the old man's hand. Davies was in a riot of emotion. He didn't know what to do. The colonel's speech had made matters worse, a hundred times worse. What sort of a chance did he have to denounce the bishop now? Would it all wind up by his being forced to murder the bishop? Would such a murder be justified?

Alvah looked at him. She was radiant.

It couldn't have been Alvah's thought, therefore, that came to him---came to him like a flash of inspiration, of that rarer thing called illumination: but it was something which came to him from the girl's purity and innocence none the less; that perception, once vague, now clear, that old Sky-Blue was evil, was Satan.

Should he falter in the presence of this Prince of Darkness---lie down before him---when he alone of all the others there was armed to destroy him utterly?

Once more he trembled to the rise.

But now, as that other time, Colonel Evan Williams intervened. The colonel had called for order, commanded silence.

"I wish to put a motion," the colonel shouted.

Culbertson was supporting him---doing this right heartily now that he was certain of the colonel's motives.

Davies didn't get all that followed. All that he could see, all that he could think

about was that the town was stripping itself, signing pledges, each pledge a personal check to Culbertson, otherwise Sky-Blue, to say nothing of all the actual cash that was rolling in.

He barely heard what the colonel was saying about Dr. Culbertson being advanced in years; that he should therefore be relieved of wearisome detail.

Then he got it: his own name.

The colonel had spoken about that other and younger friend of his whom the whole town was glad to honor.

"Mr. Richard Davies!"

And there was plenty of applause at that as well.

And then the colonel was calling upon them to elect him by acclamation—elect him by a rising vote—which the congregation did, surging up to its feet before the question was fairly put: elect Mr. Richard Davies, secretary and treasurer, and custodian of all the funds, of the Beating Heart Seminary.

Davies heard all this a good deal as if he were in a trance. He was in a trance. He was until old Sky-Blue himself was falling upon him, calling him by name:

"Oh, my beloved Richard!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

FACE TO FACE.

LET the old man rave!" he communed with himself. "I've got him! I've got him!"

Sky-Blue whispered:

"Pretty slick! You put it over great!"

But it was as if another whisper came to Davies:

"You prayed in your heart. Your prayer is answered. You called for help. You've got it."

All this, while Sky-Blue was still cavorting about him—patting him on the shoulder, shouting out his joy and his felicitations. Verily, verily, was virtue its own reward.

"Begin it now," said Richard.

"What?" Sky-Blue asked.

"Pass it over—the check the old farmer gave you."

"Yea! Yea!" shouted the bishop. "All pledges and moneys to Brother Davies!" And he passed over the paper Davies had mentioned.

The ushers crowded in.

Davies bade a swift good night to Alvah. She glowed at him with love and admiration—a look that he was never to forget. He squeezed Colonel Williams's hand. Their eyes met. Did the colonel suspect what had come to pass, foreseen it, engineered it?

But the crowd was flowing strong by this time—others crowding up to congratulate him, pass him over their checks and money. He disposed of the water-jug and the glass. The wealth piled up and covered the table-top—St. Clair's donation to the Beating Heart.

It was a long, long time before the hall was emptied. It wouldn't have been emptied at all, perhaps—not before morning—if old Sky-Blue hadn't taken to shooing his well-wishers out into the night. He had to shepherd them out, establishing himself down near the door, where he could bless them and get rid of them at the same time.

Sky-Blue was moist and tremulous. Any one could have told that this was indeed—just as he said it was—the most beautiful day of his life.

He called a good many of the sisters by their first names. He kissed a good many of the girl children—did this fondly and with tears in his eyes—especially when the ages of these shaded up around eighteen.

"Is this little Effie?"

And little Effie blushing, forsooth, with all the warmth of her hundred and fifty pounds of corn-fed, buxom health.

"God bless you, sister. Did you get a receipt?"

Davies was grateful for the delay. He had his work cut out for him, and he didn't want to be interfered with for a while.

In spite of the bishop's expressed preference for checks instead of cash—thus insuring a vastly greater donation doubtless than could have been yielded by any ordinary collection—still there was cash galore—pounds and pounds of it, chiefly in pennies and nickels and dimes; yet with a fair

weight, also, of fifty-cent pieces and silver dollars. All this had to be counted.

An awful job!

Not only counted, but made to balance with the penciled memoranda turned in by the various ushers.

But he was something of the natural cashier. He went about the task with something of the neatness that characterized his dress, the speed that was such an asset in a fight. And this was a fight. He separated the coins and stacked them. This was a poker-game, and he was stacking his chips. He arranged the paper and the checks, folding each one of them lengthwise and getting them perfectly even, as he had seen the big bookmakers in times past prepare their rolls at the track.

The amount ran into the thousands—those pledges as good as cash, each pledge a personal check to Sky-Blue—Balaam N. Culbertson—payable by the local bank.

He had plenty of time.

He knew that he was going to have plenty of time. He worked with the knowledge that he had something or some one now on his side. He had no nerves; he was cool, perfectly confident.

He stowed the stuff away with method and care—bills in this pocket, checks in this. He had a large, clean, linen handkerchief. He put the coin into this and knotted it up, then hid it where he could have it safe and not be embarrassed by its weight. For, while he was confident, there was no telling what might happen.

So the town had elected him secretary and treasurer and custodian of funds! Had elected him by acclamation! This when he had believed the whole world to be against him!

He looked up finally to see the bishop in the act of shooing the last of his beloved out of the door. At last no one remained but the janitor. The janitor also Sky-Blue embraced. He had the man turn out all the lights except that of the reading-lamp on the platform. Then Sky-Blue dismissed this brother with a blessing, told him that he and Richard would tarry for a while, and would see that everything was closed up properly when they left.

So Sky-Blue eventually saw the janitor

through the door also, and locked the door behind him.

Then Sky-Blue came striding up the aisle, delighted but very important, rubbing his hands and inclined to lord it over Davies in a friendly sort of way.

"We've done it!" he exclaimed. "We've done it! Damn my white hairs if we ain't done it this time! Done it right! Did you get the applause? Oh, Chick! Let this learn you! Old Sky-Blue ain't such a has-been as you thought he was! Is he? What are the figgers?"

Davies told him.

Sky-Blue rolled his eyes heavenward, brought his fingers into contact over his stomach and twirled his thumbs. But he didn't hold the tableau long. Suddenly he was all nervousness and greed.

"Fork it over," he said. "Fork it over, so's I can fondle it."

He noticed the expression in Davies's face—saw something there that he didn't comprehend, didn't quite like.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Richard dryly. "Nothing—yet!"

"Oh, now, look here," the bishop ejaculated. "Don't go and spoil an occasion like this by a case of suiks. Don't, Chicky, I beg of you. Why, I'm as proud of you as I can be. You did your part noble—if you do know it yourself," he teased. "Seriously, my boy, your work to-night's confirmed everything I've ever thought of you, planned for you. It was a surprise to old Sky-Blue himself. It was. I confess that, there for a moment, I was gettin' a little leary. It was too good. It was comin' too easy. I've seen it happen before. It's just at such times as this that somebody begins to suspect—spills the beans—some rube lawyer, some jay banker er country cop."

"That's right," said Dick dryly, with his eyes on the old man.

The bishop was convulsed with reminiscent laughter.

"And you had me guessin'. You did. When the old colonel got up and began his spiel I could 'a' beamed him. 'Drat his old soul!' I says; 'may he drop down dead,' I says. And here he was leadin' right up to the gran'-stan' play 'at pulled the wool

over all of their eyes." He put these pleasantries behind him. "Well," he said, "now fer the big split. Le's begin with the cash. Where is it? Where'd you put it?"

He had begun to rub his hands again. He was in a tremor of eagerness and greed.

"I got it," said Dick.

"I know you got it. Hurry up. Come across."

Davies eyed the bishop. Davies had gone a little white, but he was very cool, steady. He measured his words.

"I'm not going to come across," he announced. "You're not in on this. You don't get a bean."

CHAPTER L.

SKIN FOR SKIN.

"I DON'T quite get you," said the bishop.

"I appear to be a little deaf. Say that again."

"You heard me."

"Methinks you was crackin' a joke."

His words were jocular: not so the tone of his voice.

"I was cracking no joke," said Richard. "I meant what I said, and I'll tell you again: you don't get a cent of this money. It isn't yours. It belongs to the people who shelled it out. They've entrusted it to my care. And I'm going to care for it. Is that clear?"

"So that's your game!"

"There is no game about it."

"Can it!" barked the bishop.

"I was as much surprised as any one when the colonel sprang that nomination."

"Fork out that chink."

"And maybe the colonel isn't such a fool as you seem to take him to be. He was a fine lawyer in his day."

The bishop was occupied in drawing up a chair. He was doing this with nervous haste.

"Damn the colonel," he muttered over his shoulder.

But when he had fully turned and was seated, and his eyes met Davies's eyes, all those preliminary misgivings and hatreds aroused by what he had originally seen in

Davies's face must have returned to him quadrupled. It steadied him—like the old war-horse that he was on the eve of battle. He took a chew of tobacco.

"Maybe the colonel had the situation sized up better than you think," said Davies, speaking steadily. "You've talked all along about me having so much to learn. Maybe I'm not the only one. Maybe you've got something to learn yourself."

The bishop forked his beard and looked around for a receptacle. Not discovering any, he arose and stalked very solemnly over to a back window which was open—all this merely to give him time to think. But Davies watched him narrowly. He saw the old man let his hand rest for a moment on an iron weight that was there to hold one of the inside shutters in place. He saw the bishop's furtive glance. The bishop came back unarmed.

"I'm talking straight," Davies announced somberly.

The bishop thought he saw a lead.

"But Chicky," he said: "I wasn't tryin' to hornswoggle you. So help me God: Hain't I said all along we were splittin' fifty-fifty?"

"Yes!"

"Well, then, what you stallin' for? Come across! Give me a feel."

"You don't get a feel," said Davies; "nor a smell!"

The bishop's face underwent a terrible change. It was just as if he had been gripped by the first spasm of some frightful pain—something that killed the good in him and showed him up black and horrible.

He emitted a blasphemous epithet, smooth but barbed.

Then he got his reason back.

"Still foolin'," he gurgled.

"Yes," said Davies: "I am not!"

"Sort of tryin' me out!"

"I've tried you out," said Davies. "This is where you get off. You're canned. You're leaving town."

The old man's distress was such, there for a while, that Davies expected to see him collapse utterly. He did collapse to some extent—exactly like a prize-fighter who has received a jolt on the solar-plexus. His face went ashen. He looked a little cross-

eyed. His condition was such that Davies felt sorry for him.

"You oughtn't to take it so hard," he said. "You're getting old, bishop. Why don't you straighten up before you die? You don't want to go to hell. No man does. Just see what a good impression you've made on the people of this town! Isn't that worth something? Don't you value their esteem?"

The bishop tried to speak, but he was still paralyzed.

"Why," Davies continued, "there's nothing in the world equal to a good reputation—to having a lot of friends—to having folks look up to you, honor you, love you. When I said that you had a lot to learn I didn't mean anything bad. You've got brains. You're one of the brainiest men I ever stacked up against. Honest! And you have a heart, too. You're not one of these ordinary crooks like they pinch or send to the chair. I bet you never killed any one in your life, unless you had to. I thought a lot of you the very first night I ever saw you."

The bishop partly recovered. He put a feeble hand into the breast-pocket of his frock-coat and brought out two badly worn documents of legal aspect.

"I done this for you," he murmured.

It was always a sign that his emotion was genuine when he slipped up on his English.

Davies took the documents and examined them, but he wasn't sufficiently used to such things to make out the nature of them right away. Sky-Blue, perceiving this, enlightened him:

"Mortgages!"

"What on?"

"The colonel's property."

"Where did you get them?"

"Tine."

"Frank Tine!"

"Blackmailed him," said the bishop weakly.

"You scared him so he's jumped the town," said Davies.

"Made him surrender the mortgages to me—was going to hand 'em over to the colonel as canceled."

Davies had a moment of indecision, and Sky-Blue profited by this to recover the

documents. He was beginning to be himself again. The blood was returning to his face and, doubtless, to his brain.

"But I won't," he said, "if you don't play square. I'll make the colonel and that niece of his wish to God Frank Tine still had these mortgages. That's what I'll do. I ain't going to let him and you double-cross me like an old sucker. You can bet your sweet, young life I ain't."

"The colonel hasn't got anything to do with this," said Davies.

"Bah!"

"He thinks as much of you as he does of me."

"He'll think a damn sight less of you when I get through with you. Are you still nursin' the idea you can hog this money for yourself?"

"I wasn't aiming to hog it for myself."

"What then?"

"I'm going to give it back."

"What?"

"Just what I said. I'm going to turn back both the cash and the checks—as far as possible—to the people who gave them."

"Oh, you are!"

"Yes."

"Well, you just keep your mouth shut and your ears open for a minute while I tell you somethin'. You try it! You just try it! I've been mighty patient with you. I've stood an awful lot of your sass and your brass. You thought you was cute, didn't you? Didn't know you was makin' a monkey of yourself? Shut up! I'm talkin'."

CHAPTER LI.

TOOTH AND CLAW.

DAVIES made a move to rise, but Sky-Blue delivered himself of such a murderous supplication that Davies kept his place. There was momentary silence, deep, broken only by the slow drip of water from the trees and the *chirr* of crickets.

"I'll give you another chance," said the bishop. His voice was terrible—throaty, not very loud, yet taking a lot of breath, like the purring hiss of a puff-adder or an alligator. "I'll give you another chance.

But this will be an end of the foolin', you rat. What are you grinnin' about? I'll make you grin. You'll grin out of the other side of your face when I throw you in. Once more, come across!"

Davies never moved. He merely looked with all his eyes. But he was alert, watchful, just about ready to go.

"You won't?"

"No."

"You won't, won't you? You'll look slick in your college clothes—doin' the lock-step. It 'll be the wolves fer you. I'll frame you—hidin' here in the country. The New York bulls won't do a thing to you when they get their hooks on you. I'll hang enough crimes on you to send you away for life. Damn you, I'll send you to the chair fer killin' a cop."

Davies must have known that these were not idle threats. In the world he came from many a man—many a boy—was believed to have disappeared beyond the doors of Elmira, Auburn, Sing Sing, on a trumped-up charge, "railroaded," convicted of another man's crime, the victim of perjured testimony and a private vengeance. And if any one could work such a vengeance, Sky-Blue could, with his cunning, his place of power in the underworld.

But, curiously, Davies felt no fear—felt only a keen excitement, a species of elation. It was as if he were conscious of that power that had already come to his aid—conscious that the power was still there ready to back him up again.

He did smile. It was a smile that was chiefly located though in his glowing eyes.

"You throw me to the wolves?" he said. "Maybe you will! But if you do you'll go with me, and it 'll be with a fang in every string of your meat. Now you shut up. You've had your say. Why, you dirty old man! Taking money from poor old women dressed in black! Spewing your guff about love and religion! I could take these two hands and jerk your whiskers out! Tear you to pieces like a rotten rag! And you got the nerve to sit there and talk about railroading me? I'm only sparing you because you're old, and because you're licked, and because you're up against something that even now you can't understand."

Sky-Blue had a movement—not very much of a movement, but desperate—to regain the ascendancy.

It was hopeless.

Davies arose from his chair like one moved by a force not his own. He stood over Sky-Blue and looked down at him. And the bishop looked up at Davies. The bishop's mouth was open. He appeared not to breathe.

"You're canned," said Davies. "You're going out of town. I told you once. I tell you again. I'm letting you go. You ought to go on a rail, in your skin, and your skin dolled up with tar and feathers. That's what would happen to you if I put the town wise. Culbertson! Balaam N. Culbertson! Founder of the Beating Heart! How old are you?"

"Seventy!"

"God pity you!"

"Chick!" It was a whisper.

"No more 'Chick!'" said Davies without passion. "Chick's dead. Remember that when you get back to New York. You won't hurt me. You can't. No man can. I've got a hold of something I can cling to. Influence! I've got a friend."

There was a quality about him while he stood there and while he was saying this that seemed to be taking all the strength and hostility right out of Sky-Blue—bleeding him, leaving him increasingly weak and helpless. He was still rigid—the bishop was—but he was impotent. Still, he attempted another threat:

"You'll—be sorry!"

But it sounded childish. It was futile.

"There are three trains going out of St. Clair to-morrow," said Davies, transferring his thought to the subject with a mental effort. "The first is that milk-train that leaves at four ten. You don't want to take that. You're tired. You want a little sleep—a little time to think things over. There's that other slow one—the local—to-morrow afternoon. I don't think you'd better wait for that. I'm going to get busy on this new job of mine to-morrow. Things might happen. I guess you'd better take the mail-train in the morning, eight forty-five. Is it understood?"

"I'll—take it."

"And you think I'll still be sorry?"

Sky-Blue merely wagged his head.

"Sorry!" Davies breathed. "Let me tell you something. I'm going home to-night for the first good sleep I've had since you showed up--going home without a load on my heart--going to hit the hay in peace. You needn't stick around to say good-by. I'll be getting up a little late. You'll be gone when I wake up. Go on and beat it! You need the rest."

He kept his eye on Sky-Blue as Sky-Blue got to his feet. For a moment or so the bishop stood there as if he expected to say something. He finally turned, however, and made his way, Davies still watching him, down the aisle, through the door, out into the night.

Davies, taking his time about it, recovered his improvised bag of coin from where he had hidden it. He turned off the light of the reading-lamp. He also started to leave.

But midway through the darkened auditorium he stopped—stopped short, lifted his face, looked as a man looks who suddenly finds himself in the presence of something great and unfamiliar.

So it was with him.

This flimsy hall had become a temple. The outer doors were open, and through the broad casement of them the night came in, soft, and mysterious, and holy. The place had become like a temple of Egypt, and what had just happened there became a rite—one of those rites of magic and wonder which have marked the recurrent dawns of the world after periods of darkness.

After that, Davies walked more slowly.

He came down to the sill of his temple, and he stood there as a priest might have done. There was an elation and a gratitude about him that made him shine, and which was neither of his body nor his mind, but of his spirit, flooding outward from the center of his being and transmuting him into a perfect harmony with the night and all the elements thereof—the damp, the perfume, the purple depths, the tender brilliance of the newly shining stars.

That was right.

There was nothing that could hurt him now.

He betook himself along the paths to the Flowery Harbor—looking up, as Alvah had told him to do. But the way seemed neither long nor dark nor lonely.

Only he did recognize that something had been lacking—some complete fulfillment—when he came within sight of his destination and saw that some one had put a light in the window. Alvah! And he knew that she had been waiting up for him.

He quickened his steps.

He saw her pale form hovering at the gate.

CHAPTER LII.

THE RETURN OF THE SHADE.

SHE said something about having been worried about him. But she was still under the influence of the excitement and the enthusiasm she had brought back with her from the meeting. But all her emotion was for him. She thought it was wonderful. She thought that everything was wonderful—and Davies was inclined to agree with her.

"Where's Dr. Culbertson?" she asked.

"I thought he had come home," said Davies.

"No."

"Then he's just walking around," said Davies. "Thinking! All men have moments when they feel like thinking."

This answer seemed to satisfy Alvah. Anyway, it was apparent that her thought could not easily remain away for any length of time from Davies and all that concerned him.

"Are you sleepy?" he asked.

"I feel as if I could never sleep again."

"I'm not sleepy either," he said. "Come on around to the pump. I want to wash the feel of all this money from my hands. I'll let you pump for me."

"What a lot of it!" she exclaimed, as she took his handkerchief-bundle from him. "Weren't you afraid of being robbed?"

"A little afraid, at first," he confessed.

"Now pump!"

She brought him a towel from the back porch.

"And why not afterward?" she inquired.

"That's a complicated story," he replied. He brought his clean hands to either side of her finely modeled head. He drew her gently toward him.

"Tell it to me," she whispered, unafraid. There is probably a basis in fact for all those old stories of fairycraft. There is, if all old gardens, weedy and decrepit in the daytime, can undergo such a transformation at night as the garden of the Flowery Harbor underwent this night. It became a place of beauty and majesty—a place of broad acres, filled with byways and avenues of mystery, lawns and parterres, pergolas and marble seats. The fountain played. There were nightingales.

"How much do you love me?" Dick whispered.

"More—more—more yet than anything I can think of to say," Alvah replied; and he was aware that this was so, although she had brought that fine brain of hers to the task of answering him truthfully.

They swayed lightly together in the glamouring dusk—did this like two young vine-tendrils in a breeze. He touched her closed eyes with his lips, brought his lips lightly to hers—and it was then that he knew there were nightingales in the land in spite of science. Also, he could hear the fountain play—although by daylight the fountain was dusty dry.

After walking many miles—or so at least it seemed to them—and each of these miles set to music, carpeted with violets—they found the bench that Davies himself had installed in the garden, manifestly for this particular occasion, although he hadn't thought of it at the time.

"And now I'm going to tell you," said Davies.

"What are you going to tell me?"

"That complicated story."

He was filled with a noble valiancy. No other word will serve.

They were still there an hour or so later when they saw a dark shadow which they knew to be the earthly presence of the illustrious Culbertson—"Culbertson, of London, England." The shadow came through the gate, passed slowly up the path. It was the shadow of an old man full of years and trouble.

"Shall we speak to him?" Alvah said.

"I think not," Dick replied.

They heard the front door open and close. There was an added touch of darkness, swift and deft, and that was the great one putting out the light, no doubt.

"How thoughtful you are," said Alvah, after a long interval.

"Why?"

"I should have disturbed him."

"Who?"

"The dear old professor."

"That's right."

"He was meditating—meditating on the wonderful things that happened to-night."

"Right again."

"And praying—praying for the whole world to be good and kind."

Davies swung her lightly backward in his arms. He looked down into her face—looked a long, long time. But he had no word to say; no word, that is, which could be considered germane to the immediate conversation.

As a matter of fact, old Sky-Blue had been letting himself go in meditation. He was still meditating when the sun came up.

He required little sleep, anyway; but even if this hadn't been the nature of him, still his brain most likely would have kept on scampering around—testing the wires, scratching at the planks, gnawing, prying, with the insatiable unrest and curiosity of a ferret in a cage.

His brain also was taken in something that it could not solve.

What was this old Chicky up to, anyway? What was the colonel up to? What was this game of theirs? Why hadn't Chick come across for a fifty-fifty split when it was dead certain that they couldn't do better than that if they didn't have him, Culbertson, there to help them? Anyway, what could Chick mean by throwing him over—with his long record of success—for a pal like Colonel Williams when, as every one knew, the colonel had allowed himself to be robbed since time out of mind.

Aha! Maybe that was it! Maybe Chick wanted a pal who would be easy! And yet, this hypothesis didn't solve the riddle either.

Why should Chick be so sure of himself in this matter of chasing him, Culbertson, out of town?

It was characteristic that Sky-Blue's attitude toward this part of the enigma was one neither of anger nor of injured pride. It was merely one more angle to the riddle—that was all—an intellectual problem.

Now, now, now!

What could Chicky and the colonel be up to?

They were smart. They were clever. He gave them credit for that. They had let him go on and on and play their game for him right on up to the moment of the big getaway. Then they had stepped in and given him the double-cross.

"And that," said Sky-Blue to himself, "was something I never expected to get handed to me. Nope! In all the years I've been handlin' it to others this is the first time any one ever done me a job like that."

He paddled over to his grip and got out a fresh package of fine-cut. With this he solaced himself, took a fresh grip on the problem. He eased his clothes, took off his socks.

Well, he was ready to admit that they were a pair of deep ones—either that, or a pair of monumental fools. No; not fools. The bishop knew men. Chick was no fool. And neither was the colonel. If the colonel was a fool the colonel would have gummed things when it came to swinging in Chicky as custodian of the funds. That was genius.

The bishop sat there by the open window of his room and nourished his indefatigable brain with repeated administrations of fine-cut tobacco—while the darkness melted, and the world turned heliotrope and pink, and the waking birds chirped and trilled, and a morning zephyr threw back the covers of dew and perfume from the flowers, and a few little rosy clouds went dancing out of sight, naked but prettily modest; he sat there in the presence of this pageant and schemed and studied and softly swore and tried again to fathom the mystery of Chick and the colonel, but especially of Chick.

What had spoiled the boy?

Once the best, and the cleanest, and the

soberest, and the least-likely-to-be-nabbed pickpocket in New York, and now out here in this jerk-water village.

Was it the girl?

Sky-Blue believed not. True, he had seen more than one bright, young man ruin himself for the sake of a skirt. But Chick had never been that kind. He had studied the lad from a distance, kept track of him as he would have kept track of a son.

And, just then, while he was thinking of Alvah, he heard various soft sounds from the back of the house that told him the girl was astir.

Maybe she was in this game. But he believed not. He recalled how she had been a little cold to him at first, had thawed to him only gradually. She wasn't the emotional sort. But she was the kind who when once put stays put. Anyway, it wouldn't hurt him to find out.

Alvah, with the kitchen fire just fairly started, looked up to see Professor Culbertson standing in the door.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE LAST BELIEVER.

"O H, good morning!" she cried. "I hope that I didn't wake you up. I think the others are still sleeping."

"She ain't wise to nothing," said the bishop in his heart.

He spoke up with the air of a sufferer.

"Alvah!"

"Yes?"

"Alvah! Give me a mouthful of coffee."

"Is there anything I have in the world I wouldn't give you?" Alvah cried with unmistakable generosity.

"She's like Molly, my second wife," the bishop communed with himself. "Couldn't learn her to lie in a thousand years. Good though! Good in her way!"

He accepted Alvah's pleasant invitation that he take his coffee here in the kitchen with her instead of waiting for it in the lonely dining-room. And presently she had served him on the kitchen table, she sitting opposite him and devouring him with affectionate eyes.

"I've so been wanting to speak to you alone," she said, after a while.

"Now it's comin'," said Sky-Blue to himself.

But it wasn't—nothing that he expected.

"I've felt so grateful to you," she said. "You've been such a wonderful influence in my life, and the lives of all of us—uncle's, and— and Richard's—not to speak of all St. Clair."

Her voice was so warm, her cheek so sympathetic, her eyes so moist, that Sky-Blue played up to her.

"Dear child!"

She refilled the cup he held out to her with a trembling hand. He noticed, as a younger man might have noticed such things, the pretty, pink dress she had on, the velvet tan of her bare forearms, the creamy warmth and smoothness of her throat. But with an older perception he also noticed how good the coffee was, how fresh the butter, how good her home-made bread.

It made him sigh aloud.

"You're not suffering!" she cried.

"A little rheumatism."

"You shouldn't have stayed out so late." She blushed. "We saw you come in."

"We?"

"Richard and I. We were in the garden. I wanted to speak to you, but—Richard wouldn't let me. He's so thoughtful!"

"My child," said the bishop in his heart. "you are spoiling me." Aloud he said: "Oh, yes! No one will ever accuse Richard of not being thoughtful."

Alvah stepped over lightly to the stove where the kettle was sputtering. She moved it back. She made such a picture of domestic beauty standing there—slender, efficient, a little flushed with the heat, that Sky-Blue again thought of his vanished Molly. Where was she now? Kalamazoo, the last time he had heard of her; and still living single. Was the time coming when he'd be willing to go back into double harness again? Molly would take him back. She was that kind. Maybe he'd look her up—if his luck didn't change.

"What was you saying?" he inquired.

"I'm almost ashamed to tell you how late we did stay out there."

"I'm an old, old man," he assured her.

"I think you're wonderful. I don't mind telling you—oh, I must tell you. I want to tell you everything."

"For God's sake do," Sky-Blue recited in his brain. He spoke aloud. "Yes, yes! If it's something about Richard, you can speak to me openly. I love the boy."

His voice shook. He saw that he was on the right track. So he let his voice shake yet more, and he even managed a little moisture in his own eyes. He repeated:

"I love the boy."

"You guessed—"

"Say on!"

"That I love him too."

"Piffle," the bishop said to himself. "Dear child," he droned.

"It was something that he told me."

"O-ho!" in silence. "Alvah, pass me the butter. You know you can talk right out to me. My sweet little granddaughters always do."

"You have granddaughters?"

"Seven," the bishop lied. "Go on! What did Dicky say?"

"Something terrible."

"A-about me?"

"Of course not. About himself!"

"Oh!"

"He told me--no, I can't!"

If this kept up she could never keep back her tears.

"Bring your chair around here," he coaxed, "and set here beside me. Dear child! Sweet child!"

And she had no sooner done so than he had his arm about her shoulders and was stroking her head, the while he looked skyward with a satisfied air.

"He told me," Alvah whispered, "that he had lead a terrible life in New York—had been brought up to steal things ever since he was a little boy—and that an old man had spoken to him—opened his eyes—made him yearn to lead a good life, and a clean life, be born again, as the Bible says."

There was more of it.

"Did—did Dicky say—who the old man was?" Sky-Blue inquired with his shaky voice as he smiled at the ceiling.

"You, Professor Culbertson?"

"Yes, yes! It was me."

"Then it was true!"

The bishop began to play the game as he saw it now. He had noticed the clock. He had only forty-five minutes to spare if he was to catch the mail-train, and that he had decided to do.

"Oh," he said. "You mean it was true about him hookin' things. Tut! Tut! He may have stolen a few marbles from some little playmate, or a banana from a pushcart—though I doubt it. I doubt it. He always was a sensitive child—overreligious—calling it murder if he killed a fly."

"But he said—"

"I know! I know! Told me the same thing! Romantic! Great imagination! Why, child, I carried him in these arms when he was baptized. I watched him grow up—the dreamy, poetical child—dressed in black velvet—lace collars and cuffs—"

"He told me they had been so poor!" exclaimed Alvah.

"Well, yes! Compared to the Carnegies and Rockefellers I suppose you would call 'em that. But one of the finest old families in New York—brass knocker on the door, old furniture, old servants. Lost it, though, in the grea-a-at panic ten or 'leven years ago, and there for a while Richard supported his parents—kept on till they died."

Alvah was moved to tears—happy tears, wistful tears; but she said that she wouldn't have minded it anyway, even if the story were true, only, only, and so on.

"Why, I remember when he was in our Sunday-school," old Sky-Blue resumed. But he broke off: "By crickety. I almost forgot—"

"What?"

"I have to leave on the eight forty-five."

"Going away?"

"Only fer a day 'r two." They were both on their feet. "He began patting his pockets. "Now, where did I put it?" He looked at her blankly. "Have you seen my purse? Bank ain't open. Don't need much. But—will the railroad trust me, do you suppose?"

"You old dear," Alvah laughed. "Let me lend you what I have."

She was off. She was back again.

"It's only seventeen dollars," she said.

"Seventeen dollars and thirty-five cents. I've been saving—" She blushed.

"Well, well!" he said, as he took the money. "Let Santa Claus try to make it grow fer you."

CHAPTER LIV.

THE DAWN OF GLORY.

THE day when old Sky-Blue, otherwise the bishop, otherwise "Professor Culbertson, the illustrious, of London, England," disappeared from St. Clair was to remain always one of the most notable in Richard Davies's career—one of the happiest, most beautiful, most promising days of all days.

It began that way.

It was late when he awoke, and he opened his eyes with a feeling of well-nigh inexpressible peace and thanksgiving. So it sometimes happens when one has slept profoundly and well, and the sleeper's soul has emerged—as it may be imagined to do after a tranquil death; and the sleeper finally awakens with some dim knowledge of this higher and better life, although he may recollect no single detail of it.

The weather was bright but dulcet, reviving instantly some feeling within him originally stirred to life by old Ezra Wood. And now Davies did think of that old man with a tremor of gratitude—seeing him again not as a superannuated farmer, but as a master, or an angel, or a spirit, straight from the center of all things.

This general impression of a world made over was strengthened when he came downstairs and happened upon Alvah in the hall. He saw a light and a tenderness in her eyes that was quite other than any light or tenderness he had seen there before.

It was something that caused him to take her in his arms as naturally, and yet as supernaturally, as if she had belonged there always. They whispered something about love and beauty.

But words were unnecessary. The whole universe was a word, and the word embraced all these ultimate things which, as they comprehended, were all the same thing anyway—truth, law, beauty, love, faith,

knowledge. All facts were as clear and fragrant as the air.

Later on, when Colonel Williams appeared, he was merely another element in this cosmic harmony.

The colonel was quiet, dignified, but gracious.

Somehow he appeared at once older yet less feeble; just a shade less human, it may be, and yet very much the grand old man. He struck an odd chord in Davies's brain. For the first time since they had known each other, the colonel was reminding Davies—vaguely, in no definable way—of Ezra Wood in his mystical aspect. It was something that pleased him, deepened his love for the colonel, deep as this affection had already begun to be.

"Culbertson's gone," said Davies.

He had waited until Alvah was out of hearing.

"And the Lord liveth!" the colonel exclaimed enigmatically.

For that matter, there was nothing very revealing in the way that they smiled at each other, except as an indication of mutual understanding.

"And now," said Dick, "I'll have to dope out a plan to return the proceeds of last night's collection. The checks will be easy. It's going to be the deuce, though, to return those nickels and pennies."

"Let the matter rest in abeyance," the colonel suggested, "until I see what can be done about it. Perhaps our friends may be willing to devote the fund to a new high-school, or a hospital." He added, irrelevantly perhaps: "There generally is a lack of community spirit in a place like this until the devil shows himself in person."

Mr. Marsh, the general agent of the insurance company, was already in the office recently occupied by Frank Tine when Davies got there. Mr. Marsh was business-like, but he was cordial.

He went into all sorts of details concerning the business, both local and abroad, and wound up by declaring that it was his purpose to put Davies in charge of the St. Clair agency forthwith if Davies felt the call.

Did he feel the call? Did he?

With a chance, not only comparatively,

but literally, to roll in wealth—run his own automobile—out through the country year after year—not only in search of new business, but in the accumulation of a larger and larger share of life!

There was a brightness in his eyes as he and Mr. Marsh shook hands on the proposition. It may have been this that caused the older man to say:

"You'll make good. For an insurance man, you know, has to be called just as much as a preacher does."

It was a prophecy. It was a hallowing, touch, moreover.

And no man, as Davies subsequently reflected, can ever be very good at his job, whatever that job may be, unless he feels that in doing it he is doing something in the nature of a preacher's work.

He announced the good news when he went home at noon, and the little dinner, with just the three of them there, was in the nature of a stately banquet—a repast with music and love, both music and love furnished magically out of the atmosphere.

When it was over, and the colonel had retired for his nap, Dick and Alvah went together out into the garden where their talking wouldn't disturb him. But as a matter of fact their voices wouldn't have disturbed a wren, although Davies had so much to say.

He said most of this under the grape-arbor in the back yard, where they were as remote and embowered as they would have been on a desert island.

"Oh, Alvah, when are we to be married?"

"Whenever you say."

And Dick, explaining how he was going to make all the money in the world, and fix up this old place and make a paradise of it for the colonel for so long as the colonel should live. They left themselves out of this part of it altogether, as was natural; any place and every place was paradise for them, just then, whatever the state of disrepair.

But this home-making element of the new dispensation underwent an unexpected development in the course of the afternoon.

This was when Davies received a visit from Harold Peebles—that handsome law-

yer who had bought the old homestead in a hurry as a nesting-place for himself and Tessie Fisher, *née* Wingate. Harold's mood was one of resignation underlaid with a sort of cynical melancholy. He had heard the news--about Tessie and Simp. He was willing to get rid of the Old Homestead at a sacrifice.

Dick's vision spread, enhanced by those earlier visions of his, only now made clear and logical.

He would want a country home. He would have a car. He would always crave a farm—if it were only to raise rocks and views, dreams and yet other visions.

He closed the bargain, and found that he had done better than he would have done if Frank Tine had not played him false. This became, incidentally, another germ of reason in his new philosophy—that no one can really injure any one else; that no one can injure any one but himself; and that, therefore, *if a man be all right*, everything does eventually turn out to be for the good.

It was a philosophy with a general application—which is the test of any philosophy; with an application for the whole town. For, after all, didn't St. Clair profit by old Sky-Blue's visit? It did. It lost the Beating Heart Seminary, it is true, but it gained the new hospital.—

For the matter of that, the town was richer in common sense, as well; was always a little steadier after that, not so ready to fall at the feet of the first platitudinous quack to come along, swallow the first spiritual cure-all to be shoved under its nose.

Which was something to be grateful for. Because, after all, just as every American is American—as Alvah put it—wasn't it so in an even greater degree, that St. Clair likewise was America?

But all this is of the more or less nebulous future.

The more immediate facts are that, almost overnight, Davies became St. Clair's man-of-the-hour—the story having spread as to how he had defied the so-called Culbertson and driven the old reprobate from the town; and that Davies and Alvah did marry and live happily forever afterward—however hard it is to make a statement like that without getting accused of plagiarism.

Drive through St. Clair to-day and you'll see the name of Richard Davies spread in gilt letters across the front of a business block. And then, if you keep on out through town and along the Dartown Pike you'll see the Old Homestead—reconstructed, with a hint of luxurious well-being about it, but none the less unmistakably, still the Old Homestead.

CHAPTER LV.

EPilogue.

CAME a gusty, sleety night to lower Manhattan—the Elevated rumbling, and the surface cars clanging and shrieking—clanging and shrieking no louder, however, than the garish lights and howling blacknesses of Chatham Square.

A corner of the pit!

That was what this part of the big town was on such a night.

And like shadows of the pit, all of them damned, a good many of the people thereabouts came and went—frail children, as unreactive to misery as kittens; older boys and girls, blunted to present pains by their first heady sniffs at an opiate future; and boys and girls older yet, body weary, soul weary, but forbidden to die, thus keeping up the legend of a punishment eternal.

Outside that smoky and smelly saloon which was known as the Commodore, a Salvation Army man, bareheaded, rapt of face and utterance, scattered riches more precious than pearls; but those who were headed for the Commodore passed him by as if he had been selling peanuts.

The Commodore had gone down-hill.

There had been a murder in the back room of it, and a couple of girls had drunk carbolic acid there, and the place had been raided a number of times by the police.

Still, there were always—or yet—a number of old-timers who kept returning ever and anon, like bloated, frowzy flies.

Unclean! Unclean! But dear to the blow-fly heart!

Phil came sneaking in, like a lean cat—no longer so spick and span—shooting the drops of water from his soiled raiment as a cat would twitch water from its fur.

He spied his old friend Solly at a table and slunk over to join him.

Solly hadn't seen Phil for a long time. Solly was just back from a two months' trip out into the wilds. But if Solly had gone for his health his time must have been wasted. He was still fat, but he wasn't cherubic any more. He was very white, flabby. He had a distressing habit of twitching his hands, rubbing his knuckles against his nose.

About the only sign of a greeting that passed between them was when Solly made a sign to Eddie, the bar-boy; and presently Eddie came back with two pones of whisky on his tray.

And Eddie stood right there, too, until he had received his money. Not a word.

They shot the stuff into them.

"Hear you been in stir," said Solly.

"Nuttin' but thirty days," said Phil with contempt. "What'd you pull in the West?"

"Nothin' but a pair of cold feet," Solly confessed without shame. "The bulls was houndin' me all the while I was there. I was sick. I'm sick yet."

This made Phil grin.

"You've lost your noive," he affirmed.

Solly pawed at his nose with the movement of a rabbit washing its face.

"I never had a fair deal," he complained.

"I thought you was goin' to come back with Belle," Phil sneered.

"Who- Blanche?"

"Yes: Myrtle—the kid that Chick sent out West—before he blew the town."

"Fergit it!" Solly ejaculated. "She's runnin' a restaurant in Colorado Springs, and makin' good."

"Why didn't you cop her out?"

"Who-- me- her marry me? Say, when she feels like goin' double she'll take her pick. She's lookin' great, coinin' money, straight as a gut."

"Didn't you talk to her?"

"Once; but all she'd talk about was Chick. Said she owed him a debt. Wanted to knew where he was, what name he was usin', said anyway she was sure he was makin' good. Remember when we was all here together last time--right here at this very table—Chick, Sky-Blue—"

There was a shaky voice from just behind them:

"Eddie! Eddie! Ask these gentlemen what they will have."

And there was old Sky-Blue himself.

"Grandpa!" cried Solly with a shadow of his old form.

But Phil grinned at the old man without reverence. He did kick out a chair for the newcomer, though, and in this the bishop seated himself with a creak and a groan. Sky-Blue was aging fast. When old men like him do let go, it's apt to be like that—no spiritual reserves to draw upon. He had lost weight. His beard showed neglect.

He announced weakly that he had come to say good-by. He was leaving shortly for Kalamazoo.

But he was the same old Sky-Blue in some respects. He bull-dozed Eddie in the process of ordering refreshments; he cursed Eddie away when Eddie sought to hang around until he got his pay.

"What was that you was sayin' about Chick?" he inquired.

"We wasn't sayin'," Solly replied. "I said that Myrtle was askin' about him out in Colorado Springs. I don't know anything more about him than I do about the man in the moon."

"Well, you never was an intellectual giant, Solly," said the bishop, with leisurely judgment. "Your friends would tell you the same thing—if you had any left."

Phil laughed. Sky-Blue eyed him.

"What was you doin' on the island?" the bishop queried. "Makin' brushes?"

"Naw!"

"Well, maybe you will the next time," said old Sky-Blue. "Be patient. It won't be long."

Solly sought to recover the spirit of sociability. He was fairly successful. He said that Myrtle had set him to thinking of Chick—thinking of Chick.

"And well you might be," the bishop affirmed. "I've been doin' it myself."

He meditated. There was a stamp of melancholy on his face even after he had got the ultimate drop of his liquor into him. But he gradually recovered himself as the medicine began to work, became more of the old Sky-Blue than ever.

He made Eddie call the proprietor, and he intimated to the proprietor that it would be good for the proprietor's soul and also his business to furnish a bottle. But as he did this he slipped a folded bill—very old and greasy and honest-feeling—into the proprietor's hand, so that the proprietor did just as Sky-Blue requested him to do.

"It was the last one I had left," said the bishop when he was alone with his friends. "The last work of poor John Schmidt, and now Schmidt's doin' time for the rest of his natural. Well, that's the way it goes!"

He started to refill Solly's glass with a trembling hand. He thought better of it. He filled his own glass and drank it off.

"Where'd you shove all them other Smitty queer bills you had?" Phil inquired with blunt cynicism.

"Well, I'll tell you," said the bishop, enjoying the liquor that still adhered to his mustache. "Most of it I got rid of up there in this here town of St. Clair I was tellin' you about. They run me out of town. Oh, they done it proper. They run me out of town. But I tell you. I kept my eye on the clock until it was just forty-five minutes ahead of train-time, and then I stuck it to 'em. I changed one of them bills in every store in town--candy stores, cigar stores, sody-water fountains, newspaper stands; I even slipped in quite a few on private parties—mostly widders and old maids—while I was tellin' 'em good-by.

"God bless you, sister. Can you change a ten?"

"And then runnin' to me with their good money and the tears in their eyes!"

Sky-Blue laughed at the recollection.

It may have been that Solly was still a little peeved at the way the bishop had just passed him up in the matter of another drink. Again, Solly may have been afflicted with that exalted moral sense common to invalids.

"Why, you old crook," he said. "you ought to go to the chair for deceiving women like that."

"They didn't lose anything," the bishop rejoined with a flash of righteous indignation. "They didn't lose anything!"

"How didn't they lose anything?"

"Why, they'll be still shovin' them counterfeits around among themselves till the cows come home," said the bishop. "One in the collection-plate! Another to the butcher's little square-head! Why, them bills will be legal tender in that town fer a hundred years—nobody willin' to beef fer fear of not bein' able to pass the phony bill on to the next one."

"And Chick's still there?" sneered Phil.

"He's there," said the bishop, with sudden gravity and enlightenment. "He's there. Solid, too! Solid as the Rock of Gibraltar! Tried to frighten him a little! Tried to blackmail him! Had no more chance 'n if he was the President of this gree-a-a-t country of ours!"

As Sky-Blue tossed off yet another drink he was swinging rapidly into his old familiar stride.

"Oh-h-h, it all goes to show!" he proclaimed. "Here was our Chicky up there, a pullin' the s-a-a-me line o' dope as I been a puolin' fer these past fifty year. 'Be good and you'll be happy.' 'Oh-h-h, the m-a-a-r-vulous power of pious twaddle!' And now, just see him! Behold, he is rich! He sets with the mighty! Solid as the Rock of Gibraltar!"

Solly and Phil were listening to Sky-Blue in a species of trance. It was a quality possessed by the bishop. He could command an attention like that even in the back room of the Commodore.

Finally Solly spoke.

"Well, how do you explain," he demanded seriously, "that he got away with it and you didn't?"

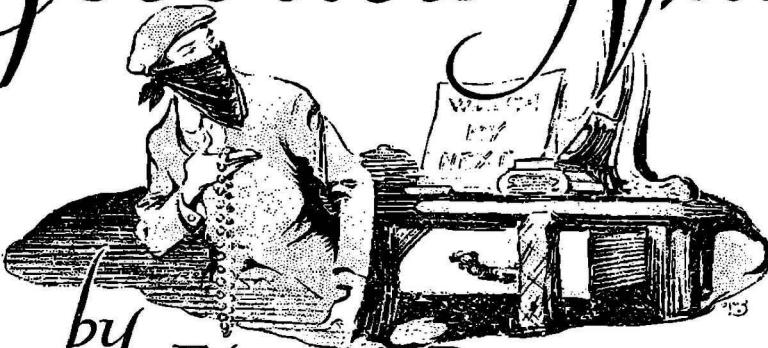
Sky-Blue reflected.

"A fair question," he adjudged. "A fair question calling for a fair answer."

He fortified himself with yet another drink. He smacked his lips. He formulated his thought.

"Well, I'll tell you," said he. "The difference was this: Chick, he believed it, and I didn't." An unexpected tear dropped into his beard. A far-away look came into his eyes. "Oh-h-h, my dear young friends," he intoned. "remember this! Remember this as you go through life: If you believe it, it's so!"

Assorted Nuts



by Elwood Brown

BIG Jim Burling, deep student of the law, and sole owner of the popular O. K. Garage, was suffering from the effects of gluttony. The gluttony was not gastronomical; rather it was mental, for the garage-man had overpartaken of his favorite dish, the Penal Code, with consequent indigestion. If he had stopped on page 128, with "Abandonment of Children," or even on 216, with "Violating Sepulture and the Remains of the Dead," all would have been well; but "Malicious Injuries to Railroad Bridges," on page 337, rather capsized him.

"I guess I'm gettin' to be a legal nut," he philosophized, shutting his book and stretching his huge frame. "But there's sure a punch in that book that I've never seen beat in gen'ral lit'rature."

He picked up the morning paper to regain his mental balance, and noted with mild interest the latest exploit of a notorious crook, one Silver Kelly, who delighted in original forms of burglary and styled himself the Artist of All Criminals.

Most recently he had stolen the jewels of a banker's wife by the indirect means of some passable poetry and Burling essayed one of the verses wonderingly. "To think he can get a couple of strings of pearls for that!" he muttered, and went on to read of the crook's finishing touch, which was always left after each theft; namely, a placard bearing the follow-up invitation: "Watch My Next!"

From this refreshing bit of refinement Burling turned to read another item which interested him equally. It had to do with a Crank's Convention, and a passage went somewhat as follows:

What promises to be a most original meeting of assorted geniuses will be held in Nature's Auditorium at Sycamore Park this afternoon, when the cream of cranks, faddists, theorists, dreamers, and cultists will foregather and settle all the problems of the universe. Ferdinand Cottle, the famous supersynthesist, who facetiously styles himself the most logical of eccentrics, has invited any and all to come prepared to unfold his or her conception of God, life, law, and love. With the bars down and the open blue the limit, he promises an unshackling of souls, *et cetera, et cetera*.

"I'd rather be my kind of a nut," mused Burling, and then suddenly looked up from his paper and faced a motley little group that fairly took his breath away.

"By the great supreme court!" gasped the garage-man. "Am I dreamin', or what? You must 've walked right off the newspaper I was readin'."

"We want a car to take us to Sycamore Park," announced the spokesman.

Burling looked them over, searching for something that might be according to statute, and found it not. There never was a law broad enough to encompass them.

If possible he disliked most of all a tall, angular female, who, without invitation, assailed him with an eloquent exhortation on the possibilities of a garage-man affinitizing himself to the cosmic forces.

She walked on the dewy grass each morning to attune herself. She recommended it.

Burling gulped twice and then turned to receive a salvo from a stout dowager party who seemed to be suffering from excessive reincarnation. The garage-man felt her tight grip on his arm as she exclaimed:

"You--you are from Cromwell's time! Tell me of that man of iron. I would to know!"

Plainly she was unbalanced, and Burling felt it best to humor her:

"I know somethin' of Cromwell's laws, but I never even remotly seen the gent. Madam, I must be excused. But you, who was *you* last time out?"

"Most recently I inhabited the body of Queen Victoria!"

"What!" exclaimed the student of law. "Impossible! I must file a d'murrer. It couldn't be done. Madam, you have the right figger, but Queen Vic died only twenty years ago."

The garage-man was rather weak on gallantry.

He turned from her and faced a self-announced lady cubist, dressed in weird geometric patterns, who looked dreamily into his eyes and gave him a violent headache.

Talking to the men, Burling was only a minute in running foul of a chap who claimed kin to the red shirt of anarchy, and who in a brief instant assailed the established law. His life was saved only by the interruption of a single-taxer. From this latter economic reformer Burling turned giddily to an individual who bore all the earmarks of a next-to-nature nut-eater.

The garage-man appraised him and decided he was perilously close to committing several misdemeanors, for all that he wore was long hair, a long robe, and thin sandals. Burling, in his recent attack on the Codes, had absorbed the law relating to the proper clothing of the person, and the unfavorable specimen before him, though he claimed the mystic name of Baba Balem, was at least worth an indictment.

The garage owner gave judgment. "I have no cars to rent!" He paused a minute, and the lines of his mouth descended. "Not at any price! I believe in protection of property."

He turned to go to his office, but met the detaining arm of the lady cubist.

"Won't *you* come with us?" she invited sweetly. "Not as chauffeur, but as guest. And perhaps you have some favorite theme that closely grips your heart--something of which you would speak to us out there on the bosom of nature."

Burling had no special longing for the bosom of nature, and he was not possessed of any great desire to expound publicly, but he did feel that some one might be needed to uphold the law. He looked at the near-anarchist and gaged him as loaded to the rail. The law would be attacked; he, Burling, in an emergency, could defend.

But business held the garage-man in check.

"If you will pay me fifty dollars for the day, the car and I are at your service."

The grass-walker drew her lips in anger, but the new edition of Queen Victoria, who bore visible evidence of money, turned with a regal wave of her jeweled hand:

"Though he was formerly some feudal baron and knows only robbery, we accept. I shall pay in advance."

After receipting the bill, Burling, hastily gathering several law books in case he might need quotable authorities, brought forth his handsomest car and took the wheel. He placed the nature-nut next him to keep him intact, while the cubist was assigned to the rear as foil to the anarchist.

Dominant ideas were on tap all the way to the park. The single-taxer, noting a large, vacant tract of land evidently held by some speculative individual, singled out Burling as a fitting listener.

"The real criminal to-day is the sleek land-hog, the man who waxes fat on un-earned increment while the toilers build up the community. I propose--"

"Save that for the park!" advised Burling. "An' incidently I got six vacant lots."

The garage-man was big: his rolled-up sleeves displayed well-knit brawn, while his voice was both deep and strong. The single-taxer became mute, and evidently decided to conserve himself for public offering.

For a few seconds there was quiet, then

Burling caught an opening shot from the lady grass-walker, and her tone was displeasing.

"There can be infinite life even in a garage," she announced. "From the lower orders of sordid business to the heights of..."

"Madam," interrupted the garage-man in soured notes, "if you wish to gain them heights in a hurry, slander my business. I'd rather live a lawful life in a garage than any infinite one where they don't know elementary law. You better read some of my books."

There was a peaceful lull for an interval and then Burling could feel the nature-nut at his side gathering himself for an offensive: a major offensive.

"You're all shackled and bound!" he challenged. "You're chained to convention, supinely held down by custom. *I live, I breathe, I alone am free!*"

He gestured dramatically, opening a slender rift in his meager garb.

Burling decided the man could not long remain legal. Grinning, he turned and remarked:

"You won't be free long! In the case of the People vs. Sanderson, a bath-robe was held to be insufficient—"

The garage owner was surprised to note a startled look, almost a fear, on the nature-man's face as he had remarked, "You won't be free long," which, however, quickly disappeared as he, Burling, expounded the law involved in the bathrobe case.

In time, and because the anarchist maintained a discreet silence, the party arrived at the appointed place, a natural amphitheater of great beauty. Burling, the practical and legal, sniffing the air and viewing with something of pleasure the surrounding hills, and the tall, graceful sycamores lining a rushing stream of clear water, for a moment wondered if the nature chap might be so completely unbalanced after all. The day need not be wasted in spite of the company.

The meeting started off briskly and without bloodshed, for Ferdinand Cottle did not talk too long. There followed one of the obsessed after another, and Burling's mouth opened wider and wider as he pondered how

human beings could hold such weird beliefs and live.

At length the anarchist reached the rostrum and unburdened. Burling watched him closely, half angry, half amused, for he believed the calumniator the product of a diseased environment.

"I stand for the individual, untrammeled of the law! Of what value are governments: why have courts of justice? Why should free man be restricted and bound by rigid laws made by those in power? Why should there be ruling power?"

He lingered only a moment on general concepts, and then singled out the courts, toward which he seemed most bitter.

"Could anything be more laughable, more ridiculous than the present system of court procedure? Think of it: we are following the steps of Englishmen, dead these hundred years, worshiping their quaint and redundant language, their clogging red-tape, their cumbersome, hide-bound, out-of-date system.

"Have you, my hearers, ever waded the pages of rot and wastage bound together in calfskin, the present day law book?"

He was going too far. Burling's amusement was changing to indignation, and when the demagogue selected the codes of the State for distinguished abuse he felt his fighting blood aroused in defense. It was all right, perhaps, to give vent to speech freely, but an attack on the bulwark of law and order could not be delivered with impunity. No, not even when launched by a hair-brained theorist.

By an effort of the will the garage-man brought himself to a realization of his immediate surroundings. He noted that the crowd seemed vastly bored; strangely fidgety; and he reasoned that the audience was chafing that one expounder should be given so much valuable time.

Soon the nature-nut, still at his side, began to squirm around in evident impatience, then abruptly rose to his feet and edged his way to the platform. He seemed possessed of a consuming urge, and it was but a little time until he was on the rostrum and hazarding a dangerous interruption.

"Brother!" he exhorted, "you claim to be free. I alone am free! I have a mes-

sage. It must be delivered! Hear me, it must be delivered!"

"Your message can wait!" cannoned the anarchist, and soon he let fly a heavy shell that brought Burling to his feet. "Down with the law, stuff of decay and rot! I would bury it deep in the bowels of earth! I--"

The vilifier was exceeding the bounds of propriety, and Burling, unpolished speaker that he might be, decided it was time to take a hand. He shouldered his way to the fore.

"Stop! You've ranted enough. I am for sanity an' law. Get off the platform!"

He started to make good his command, then quickly stopped, paralyzed, amazed! The nature-nut had suddenly gone rampant. Pushing aside his competitor, he raised a hand to heaven and opened wide his mouth.

"I am born of ether, descended into air of earth, and placed before mankind to lead him to the boundless life of nature. Air we breathe, raw food we should eat. Of the nuts, the nuts of the trees, of the winds of heaven, of bursting green life, I preach! I, Baba Balem, unshackler of the shackled, liberator of the bound, I urge, I command a life back to the wild!"

Burling watched both hands ascend toward the empyrean, and he prayed that the girdle at the waist might hold. Already in the dazzling sunlight a glint of white flesh was visible.

And then came action. The anarchist was not yet done; he advanced threateningly upon the nature man. A battle for freedom was imminent. He swung the upstart around until his robe fairly whirled, dervishlike, revealing something of slender limb.

The new phase of conflict quickly changed Burling's view-point, and he was suddenly in the grip of a large idea. His speech could wait. There seemed looming before him a golden chance to actively represent the law.

Let the battle rage: no policemen were present; at the proper moment he could step forward and exercise a right given him by the State, the right of every citizen to arrest! He felt he was man enough to

handle both of them. This done he could deliver his rough speech on "Sanity and the Law."

The men soon came to grips, with a biting and clawing besetting their alleged philosophies. The nature man shed a sandal; his girdle loosened: the robe was being sundered. In the audience women were fainting.

Burling abided the climax. As the nature man, his back to the crowd, became, without warning, abruptly stripped to the waist, with the girdle dangerously strained, the man of law strode to the front and took a commanding position before all.

One huge paw descended upon the anarchist, the other gripped the naked arm of the nature man.

"In the name of the law, I command you to step! You are disturbin' the peace and dignity of the State; you are under 'rest!'

It was a moment to glory in, and Burling gloriéd. Then glancing at his victims he was surprised at the utter fear in the nature man's eyes and the complete wilting of the anarchist. They, the freedmen, became as docile as little lambs.

"I thought everything was wide open here," pleaded the advocate of nuts, tying himself together. "I mean no harm. Let me go and I promise to be more careful."

The anarchist's fire also seemed quenched.

"I have been too enthusiastic. My talk is louder than my acts. I have never even kicked a stray dog, I am that lawful."

Burling's anger and indignation softened, so complete seemed the apology.

"I'll let you go on one condition, you viliators of the law. Each of you must give a public retract'n an' take an oath to support the constitution of the State an' the dignity of the commonwealth. Then you're goin' to divide my speech between you. You're better talkers than me."

And he apportioned "Sanity and the Law" in equal parts. Strangely, the speech commanded more real interest than the earlier orations. The anarchist's delivery appealed to Burling as polished, while the nut-eater needed no pebbles in his mouth. The audience, responding to law and order,

gradually approached normality, and relaxation.

As the dinner-hour drew near the meeting dispersed, and Burling went down to be interviewed by several reporters and congratulated for both his legal knowledge and executive ability. He was very modest.

"It's nothin'," he remarked, flushing. "Any respectin' citizen with the muscle would 've done as much if he knew his legal prerog'tives. These poor lun'tics that is tryin' to grip the unknowable don't know their simplest rights. They're even weaker 'n the average layman. I wonder if we can get a good feed—somethin' stronger 'n talk an' carrots."

"We'll split with you," invited one of the reporters. "We brought along some beef sandwiches."

Burling watched the assorted nuts divide, pair and single off according to their eating creeds. The single-taxer possessed a perfectly normal appetite, and joined forces with those who ate regardless: the lady grass-walker who seemed to have overcome her dislike to the garage-man, lingered near by and finally secured her passport with some steaming hot coffee.

Soon the reincarnated, who had fainted during the near catastrophe, and was still weak from its effects, joined the Burling group and apologized:

"I— I said you must have formerly occupied the body of a feudal baron. I wronged you! You were none less than Richard the Lion Heart."

"Lady, if you want to make me feel real good, swing it to Sir William Blackstone. If I was ever so much as his little finger an' wrote a single line of his 'mmortal work, I'd feel I belonged on those glorious hills up yonder somewhere, associatin' with that cosmic 'nfinite."

The meal was progressing pleasurable to all when the reincarnated suddenly stopped with a sandwich half raised to her mouth. She dropped the morsel, clutched wildly at her breast, and shrieked:

"They've gone! I've lost 'em: I've lost 'em!"

"Lost what?" asked Burling.

"My pearls, my pearls! They cost five thousand dollars. What shall I do!"

She threatened to faint again.

"We'll make a search," volunteered one of the reporters, and he began an immediate survey. No result.

"Let's go back to where you was sittin'," advised Burling. "Perhaps they dropped off when you surrendered."

A thorough search revealed no trace.

And then followed another lamentation; this time from a different locality. Burling rushed over.

"It's gone! My ring, my diamond solitaire! It must have happened when I was sick with those two wild men raging so. Oh, dear: oh, dear! What shall I do, what shall I do!"

Jim Burling, wise in the law which he sought to uphold, puzzled the seeming coincidence, and was not long in receiving a ray of light. As the said ray penetrated more deeply it gave him less and less of satisfaction, though much of illumination.

He should have been on the lookout! Of course a freak is expected to be honest if nothing more, but he, Burling, student of the Penal Code, should have gone deeper into the acts of the uncertain.

And he had had them in his very hands!

He glanced quickly over the entire park. The anarchist was nowhere within its lovely confines! He of the long robe and girdle likewise was absent! Further inventory failed to disclose the lady cubist with the eyes that produced headaches!

Burling became suddenly alive to his finger-tips. There might yet be a chance. He dashed for his auto, hoping against hope.

It was still there. They hadn't quite dared to be seen in so conspicuous a car of beauty. Burling's machine was known to half the city.

Inside the car was the nature robe, a wig of long hair, two thin sandals, and a placard, "Watch My Next!" Pinned to the robe was a neatly written missive:

Art is not great enough to absorb disgusting law. There was present one too many nuts, and he, the legal fiend, spoiled a pretty climax. My valued confederate, the lady cubist, was shorn of her star part. After relieving the distressed of their valuables, she was to have rushed upon the platform, cubically attired, and released some of her wonderful futuristic passes; passes developed in the ether of the fourth dimension, so weird, so

hypnotic that the anarchist and I must fade back and let Art have unlimited sway. And then the quick getaway.

Yours, in thorough irritation,

SILVER KELLY, *alias* NATURE NUT.

Burling muttered his chagrin:

" Both birds in my hands, an' I let 'em fly away."

He squared his jaw and added: " I don't know nothin' about the fourth dimension, but I know the time he spent writin' that is goin' to lose him his case. Here's where disgustin' law lands on art."

There were but three roads out; three autos were requisitioned, and Burling, using creditable shrewdness, with one of the reporters accompanying him, took the least

likely road of egress. He drove like mad for three miles, and then spied in the distance two men and a woman, neatly transformed to workaday business people.

He dashed up to them.

" Here, you nut-eater, the ride home is comin' to you! An' you, red-shirt, get aboard!"

They were hustled in and the car headed straight for Burling's friend at the police station.

The garage-man avoided the cubist's eyes.

" Look at the reporter if you must see," he said in a growl. " An' if you've got any of them ether passes, save 'em for the judge."



THE LAW AND THE PROFITS

BY W. E. NESOM

If you have aught to litigate,
Take my advice—forgo!
For, likely, taking legal steps
Won't get you anywhere.

You'll lose, no matter what your cause,
Nor how you go about it;
So keep yourself within the law—
But get along without it!

The tailor's man will press your suit,
And charge you fifty cents.
But when a lawyer takes the job
There's rather more expense.

For you will find, when you retain
A foxy legal guide.
That you are not permitted to
Retain much else beside.

By him who takes "contingent" fees
You're even worse bereft,
For when he wins he takes "what's right,"
And hands you what is left.

Nor should we be surprised to find
His ways as dark as smoke
Whose boast is that he treads the path
Of Blackstone and of Coke.

Cursed

by George Allan England.

Author of "The Shyster-at-Law," "The Brass Check," "Hypnotized," etc.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CAPTAIN FINDS THE WAY.

WITH the full significance of the curse burned deep into his brain, old Captain Briggs sat there on the bed a moment longer, his eyes fixed on the slip of paper. Then, with a new and very strange expression, as of a man who suddenly has understood and, understanding, has chosen and is determined, he carefully folded the paper and thrust it into the pocket of his bathrobe. He stood up, peered a minute at Ezra, advanced and laid a hand upon the old man's shoulder.

"Ezra," said he in a deep voice, gentle as it was strong, "there's times when men have got to *be* men, and this is one of them. You and I have gone some pretty rough voyages and seen some mighty heavy storms in years past. Sea-storms, Ezra. Now we're having a land-storm. I don't recall that either of us was ever afraid or refused duty in any wind or weather. We aren't going to now. We aren't going to be afraid; and whatever's duty, that's what we're going to do. It'll maybe lead us to a terribly dark port, but if that's where I've got to go, as a good seaman, so be it."

"And now," he added in another tone, "now that's all settled, and no more to be said about it." Affectionately he patted the shoulder of the broken-hearted Ezra. "Come, brace up now; brace up!"

"Cap'n Briggs, sir," choked Ezra, distraught with grief, "you ain't goin' to believe what Master Hal said, be you? He accused himself o' stealin' that there money

to perfect me. It was really *me* that done it, sir, not *him*!"

"We won't discuss that any more, Ezra," the captain answered, with a smile of deep affection. "Not now, at any rate. It doesn't much signify. Even if your lie was the truth, it wouldn't matter. There's so much more to all this than just one particular case of theft. There's everything to it. You don't understand, Ezra, and you can't. Come now, sir; pull yourself together! No more of this!"

"But ain't you goin' to do anythin' to bring him back, cap'n?" asked the old man. He got up from his chair and faced the captain with a look of terrible anxiety, of grief and pain. His hand caught that of Briggs in a shaking clasp. "That there boy of oun, oh, he can't be let go to the devil this way! Ain't there nothin' you'll let me do to git him back? Ain't there nothin' you can do to save him?"

"Yes, Ezra, there is."

"Praise God fer that, cap'n! You hadn't ought to be too hard on Hal. Young men ain't old uns. You an' me, we're old, but we'd oughta try an' understand a young un. Young folks is always drawin' plans that looks crazy to old uns, but they think they're O. K. Young folks is always stickin' up the circus-bills along the road o' life, an' old uns is always comin' along an' tearin' 'em down; an' that ain't right, cap'n. You an' me has got to understand!"

"I understand perfectly," smiled the captain, his eyes steady and calm. "I know exactly what I've got to do."

"An' you'll do it?" The eagerness in his

trembling voice was pitiful. "You're goin' to do it, cap'n?"

Alpheus Briggs nodded affirmation. His voice blended with a sudden furious gust of the storm-wind as he answered:

"I'm going to do it, Ezra. Never fear about that. I'm surely going to."

"An' what is it?" insisted Ezra. "What you goin' to do? Run after him an' bring him back?"

"Bring him back. That's just it."

"Praise the Lord!" The old man's eyes were wet. "When? When you goin' to do it?"

"Very soon, now."

"You got to hurry, cap'n, or you'll lose him! We mustn't let anythin' happen to our Hal. He's run kinda wild, mebbe, an' perhaps he ain't always steered jest exactly a straight course, but after all he's everythin' we got to love. If you can git him back agin, we'll be so dog-gone good to him he'll *hafta* do better, won't he? But you mustn't lose no time. If he gits aboard that there Kittiwink an' tries to make sail out through the Narrers, he's like as not to git throwed ashore on Geyser, an' git stove up, way the wind is, to-night. Hurry, cap'n—hurry!"

The captain smiled cryptically as he made answer:

"I sha'n't lose any unnecessary time, Ezra. But I can't do it all in a moment. And you must let me do this in my own way. Even though I seem to delay things, you must have confidence in me, and not worry, and not interfere. Do you promise that?"

The old man peered up at him through tears.

"I promise. You know best how to chart this course now."

"Yes, I believe I do. To save that boy, I've got to make a journey, and I'll need a little time all to myself to get ready. But just the minute I *am* ready, I'll go. You can depend on that!"

"A journey?" queried Ezra. "I'll go, too!"

"No, Ezra, this is a journey I must make all alone."

"Well, you know best, cap'n," the old fellow assented. He seemed sadly weak-

ened, broken, by the swift crowding of painful events. "But ef you need any help from me, call on."

"I will, Ezra," the captain assured him. "Now you'll do me a real favor by going to your room and resting. You're badly used up. There's nothing you can do to help, just now."

"But ef you're goin' a journey, won't you be wantin' me to pack y'r duffel? An' rig up Bucephalus?"

"When I want you, I'll let you know," smiled Briggs. With one hand still on the old man's shoulder, his other hand took Ezra's in a strong clasp.

"Ezra," said he, "you've always stood by, through thick and thin, and I know you will now. No, no, you needn't tell me so: I know it! You've been the most loyal soul in this whole world. No needle ever pointed north half as constant as you've pointed toward your duty by Hal and me. The compass will sometimes vary a point or two, but you've never varied the millionth of an inch. You're better than pure gold all through, Ezra; you're pure steel, hard and fine and true. You're a man, Ezra, *a man*—and I'm not ashamed to say I love you for it!"

His grip tightened on the old man's hand. For a moment he looked square into Ezra's wondering, half-frightened eyes. Then he loosened his grasp, turned and walked from the room.

Along the hall he went, and down the stairs. His face, calm, glad, beatified, seemed shining with an inner light that dignified and ennobled its patriarchal features.

"Thank God," he whispered, "for light to see my duty, and for strength to do it."

As he reached the bottom of the stairs, the front door opened, and Dr. Filhiol half-stumbled, half-staggered in, admitting a furious gust of wind and rain. With very great difficulty he was managing himself, holding his broken cane with one hand, while in the other arm he grasped the injured dog. Ruddy was whining and yelping; one leg hung limp and useless.

For a tense moment the doctor confronted Briggs. He pushed the door shut, and with eyes of rage and bitterness peered at the captain.

"And you, sir," he suddenly exclaimed, "you go against my orders; you leave your bed and expose yourself to serious consequences, for the sake of a man—no, not a man, a beast—who will do a thing like this!"

Furiously he nodded downward at the dog.

The captain grew a trifle pale. He advanced and, with a hand that trembled, caressed the rough muzzle.

"Hal?" asked he, under his breath. "This, too?"

"Yes, this! Nearly killed the poor creature, sir! Kicked him in the most brutal manner. And that wasn't enough. When the dog still tried to follow him, grabbed him up and dashed him down on the steps. This leg's broken. Ribs, too, I think, from the examination I've been able to make, so far. A miracle the dog wasn't killed. Your grandson's intention was to have killed him, all right enough, but I guess he didn't want to take time for it!" Filhiol's lips were trembling with passion, so that he could hardly articulate. "This is a terrible thing to do, captain. It's horrible, incredible! Injury to a man is bad enough, but a man can defend himself, and will. But injury to a defenseless, trusting, loving animal—my God, sir, if I'd been a young man, or anything but a cripple, and if I'd had a weapon handy, I'd have had your grandson's blood, so help me!"

The captain made no answer, but set his teeth into his bearded lip. He patted the dog's head. Ruddy licked his hand.

"Well, sir?" demanded Filhiol. "What have you to say now?"

"Nothing. What should I have? Hal's gone, and words have no value. Can you repair this damage?"

"Yes, if the internal injuries aren't too bad. I suppose I can mend the broken leg with splints and bandages; and as for the ribs, those will probably knit. But that's not the point. Hal, there, goes scot free, and—"

Alpheus Briggs raised his hand for silence.

"Please, no more!" begged he. "I can't stand it, doctor. You've got to spare me now!"

Filhiol looked at him with understanding.

"Forgive me," said he. "But help me with poor old Ruddy, here!"

"Ezra can help you. He can get you laths and shingles, cloths, everything you need. On a pinch, call in Dr. Marsh, if you like."

"Oh, I think my professional skill is still adequate to set a dog's leg," Filhiol sneered, his anger bubbling. "With Ezra's help, I can manage very well!"

"And you don't know how grateful I am to you for doing it," said the captain. "I'm grateful, too, for your not insisting on any more talk about Hal. There's some things a man can't discuss while they're still fresh. You're good at heart, doctor; good as gold! I wish you knew how much I thank you!"

The doctor growled something inarticulate and fondled the whimpering animal. Alpheus Briggs forced himself to speak again.

"Please excuse me now. I've got something to do. Something very important." His hand slid into the pocket of his bathrobe, closed on the paper there, and crumpled it. "Will you give me a little time to myself? There's a few affairs I've got to straighten out, now that Hal's gone. H-m—a new will to draft. I want an hour or two undisturbed."

The temptation was strong on the captain to take the hand of Filhiol as he had taken Ezra's, and say some words that might perhaps serve as a good-by, but he restrained himself. Where poor old Ezra would understand nothing, Filhiol would very swiftly comprehend. So Alpheus Briggs, even in this supreme moment of leave-taking, held his peace.

The doctor, however, appeared suddenly suspicious. Still holding the dog, he reached for another cane from the hall rack and, supporting himself on it, he fixed keen eyes on the face of Briggs, straining in the vague light through the leaded glass beside the door and through the fanlight over it, to see the old man's expression. He said:

"Captain, before I promise you the privacy you ask, I've got one question for you, and you've got to answer it."

"Well?"

"Have you overheard any of Hal's reading lately, or have you seen any of his translations from the Malay, or anything of that kind?"

By no slightest quiver of a muscle did the old man betray himself.

"No," he answered. "What do you mean, doctor? Why do you ask?"

"That's something I can't tell you, for the present. But are you quite sure you're telling me the truth now?" His look was sharp as a diamond-drill.

"The truth? At a time like this, there's no room for anything else. No, I've heard nothing. I've seen nothing."

"You've given your word, and I accept it," said Filhiol, thankful that no hint had reached Briggs concerning the curse. Swiftly he thought. Yes, it would well suit his purpose now to get the captain out of the way for an hour or so. That would give Filhiol time to run through the litter of papers in Hal's room, to find and to destroy the translation that might have such fatal consequences if it should come into the captain's hands. By all means he must get Briggs out of the way.

"Very well, sir," said he. "Take whatever time you need to settle matters relative to Hal's leaving. But be sure you put plenty of wood on the fire, and don't let any drafts strike you. By rights I ought to order you back to bed; but I know you wouldn't obey me now, anyhow, so what's the use? Only, be reasonably sensible, captain. Even though Hal *has* made a fearful mess of everything, and run away and left it, your life is worth a very great deal to lots and lots of people!"

The captain nodded. Filhiol's admonitions suddenly seemed very futile, very trivial, just as the world and life itself had all at once come to appear. Already these were retreating from his soul, leaving it alone, envisaging the one imperative of duty. At the last page of the book of life, with his hand ready to write *finis*, Alpheus Briggs realized with swift insight how slight the value really was of that poor volume, and how easily, how gladly—when love and duty bade him—he could forever close it.

Appraisingly he looked at Filhiol. The doctor, he understood, was expecting him

to make some move. By no means must he excite any suspicion. Toward the "cabin" door he turned.

"We'll talk this all over in the morning, doctor," said he. "But till then, no more of it. I haven't found myself yet. I've got to get my bearings and answer my helm better before I'll know exactly what to do. You understand?"

"Yes, captain, I think I do," answered the doctor with compassion dominating anger. He said no more, but hobbled toward the kitchen, there to summon Ezra and do what could be done for Ruddy.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"ONE MUST DIE."

B RIGGS entered his cabin, and quietly locked the door. He crossed to the other door, and locked that also, then closed and fastened the window giving on the porch. Then he went to the fireplace, overhung with all that savage arsenal of spears and clubs, bows, arrows, and put a couple of birch-logs on the glowing coals that threw their red glow on the white-painted walls, the shiplike ceiling, the polished mast, the brass telescopes and instruments in their racks.

He sat down in his big chair by the fire, pondered a moment with the fireglow on his deep-wrinkled, bearded face, then from the pocket of his bath-robe drew the crumpled bit of paper. This he smoothed out on his knee. Again he studied it, reading it over two or three times. In a low voice he slowly pronounced the words, as if to grave them on his consciousness:

"The curse must be fulfilled, to the last breath, for by Shiva and the Trimurthi, what is written is written. But if he through whom the curse descendeth on another is stricken to horror and to death, then the Almighty Vishnu, merciful, closes that page. And he who through another's sin was cursed, is cleansed. Thus may the curse be fulfilled. But always one of two must die. *Tuan Allah poonia krajah!* It is the work of the Almighty One! One of two must die!"

For some minutes he pondered all this. Before him rose strange visions—the miasmatic Malay town, the battle in the Straits,

the yellow and ghostlike presence of old Dengan Jouga, the witch-woman, shrilling her curse at him; the death of Scurlock and the boy, of Mahmud Baba, of Kuala Parang, of the *amok* Malay who had been shot through the spine and who, half paralyzed, still had writhed forward with his arms horribly to kill.

"No wonder the curse has followed me," murmured the old man. "I haven't paid it yet. I haven't suffered yet as any one would have to suffer to pay for all that. For all that, and so much more—God, how much more! It's justice, that's all; and who can complain about justice? Poor Hal, poor boy of mine! No justice about *his* having to bear it, is there? What fault is it of *his*? Why should *he* suffer and bear that burden for what *I* did fifty years ago? Thank God! Oh, thank God!" he exclaimed with passionate fervor, "that I can pay now—pay it all, and make him free!"

He relapsed into brooding silence a little while, his face not at all marked with grief or pain, but seeming haloed with a kind of high and steadfast calm. The drumming of the rain on the porch roof, the shuddering impact of the wind as the storm set its shoulders against Snug Haven, saddened him with thoughts of the fugitive, bearing the curse that was not his, out aboard there somewhere in the tumult and the dark, trying to flee the whips of atavism. But through that sadness rose other, happier thoughts.

"It's only for a little while now," said the captain to himself. "The curse is nearly ended. It will lift. When I've suffered enough, when I've paid the score, it will lift, and he'll come back again. Poor Hal—how little he knew, when he was writing this paper, that he was giving me the chart to steer my right course! How little he understood! If the hand of some divine Providence isn't in this, then there's no Providence to rule this world!"

Another thought struck him. Hal knew nothing of the fact that his grandfather had found the curse. He must never know it. In the life of better things that soon was to open out for him, no embittering self-accusation must intrude. All proof must be destroyed.

Captain Briggs leaned a little forward and tossed the curse of Dengan Jouga into the flames just beginning to flicker upward from the white and curling bark of the birch-logs. The paper lay inert, a moment, then curled, browned and puffed into flame. It shriveled to a crisp black shell, on which, for a moment or two, the writing glowed out in angry lines of crimson. Captain Briggs caught one last glimpse of a word or two, grotesquely distorted—"The curse—horror and to death—one—must die—"

Despite himself he shuddered. The hate and malice of the old witch-woman seemed visibly glaring out at him from the flames, after half a century. From the other side of the world, even from "beyond the Silken Sea," the words of vengeance blinked at him, then suddenly vanished; and with a gust of the storm-wind, up the chimney whirled and vanished the feathery-light bit of ash. The captain drew his bath-robe a little closer round him, and glanced behind him into the dark corners of the cabin.

"This—is very strange!" he whispered.

Still he sat pondering, remembering, while out in the kitchen Ezra and the doctor, with infinite compassion were doing their best to mend the hurts of Ruddy. They had no chloroform to ease the pain, but Ruddy seemed to understand; and between yelps of anguish he licked the hands that hurt him. Ezra with a variety of homely philosophizings to cover up his grief, the doctor in glum silence of anger, they worked; and still the captain sat before his fire, thinking, remembering, planning.

To his mind now persistently reverted the spectacle of the Malay who had been shot through the back. The recollection of that lithe, strong man, suddenly paralyzed into a thing half dead yet still alive, would not be gone from the captain's memories. It seemed so terrible to be stricken down to helplessness, to death that still was life; The captain forced himself to put aside the picture, to bring his mind back to the exigencies of the present. A spark snapped out upon the floor. He set his foot upon it.

"That's the only way to deal with evil," said he. "Stamp it out! And if we're the evil ourselves, if we're the spark of devil-fire

in the world, out we must go! What misery could have been saved for Hal, if I'd understood before—and what a cheap price it is to pay! An old, used-up life for a new, strong, fresh one. Why, the bargain's *too* good. It's like buying gold dollars for pennies!"

His mind, seeking what way of death would be most fitting, reverted to the poisoned kris that had so long been as it were the symbol of the evil he had done and of the old, terrible days. He peered up at the arsenal above the mantelpiece; but, look as he would, failed to discover the kris. He rose to his feet, looked more closely, explored the brickwork with his hands in the half light reflected from the fire. Nothing there. The hooks, empty, showed where the venomous Malay blade had been taken down, but of the blade itself no trace remained.

The old captain shivered as he stood there, amazed and wondering. In this event there seemed more than the hand of mere coincidence. Hal was gone; the kris had vanished. Despite all the captain's effort at being rational, he could not keep what seemed cold tentacles of fear from reaching for his heart. To him it seemed as if he could almost see the eyeless face looming above him, could almost hear the implacable mockery of its far, mirthless laughter.

"God!" he whispered. "This won't do! I—I'll lose my nerve if I keep on this way, and nerve is what I've got to have now!"

Why had Hal taken that knife? What plan, what wild notion had inspired the boy? Alpheus Briggs could not imagine. But something inchoate, predestined, terrible, seemed closing in. The captain felt the urge of swift, decisive measures. If Hal were to be rescued, he must act at once.

Turning from the fireplace of such evil associations, he went to his desk, struck a match and lighted the ship's lamp that hung in gimbals above it. He sat down quietly at the desk, opened a drawer and took out two photographs. These he studied a few minutes, with the lamp-light drenching down upon his white hair, his venerable beard, the strong and heavy features of his massive face. Closely he inspected the

photographs, holding them with hands that now had grown again quite steady.

One was a group, showing himself with the family that once had been, but now had almost ceased to be—the wife, the son, now sleeping up there on Croft Hill, and little Hal, a child in arms. The other, which longer absorbed his attention, was a portrait of Hal. Carefully the old man observed this picture, taken but a year ago, noting the fine, broad forehead, the powerful shoulders, the virile strength of the face that looked out so frankly at him. For the first time he perceived a new quality in this face, something he had never seen before—the undertone of arrogant power, the hint of brutality born of unbeaten physical strength.

The captain shook his head with infinite sadness.

"That's the real curse that lay on me, just that," he murmured. "That's what I've got to pay for now. Well, so be it. There's no other way."

He kissed both pictures tenderly, and put them back into the drawer. From it he took a box, and from the box a revolver—an old revolver, the very same that he had carried in the Silver Fleece fifty long years ago.

"You've done great evil," said Alpheus Briggs slowly. "Very, very great evil. Now you're going to pay for it by doing at least one good act. That's justice. That's the way things sometimes balance up in this world. Sooner or later the scale swings over, and there's justice done. Thank God there can be this time! God is being very good to me, showing me the way."

He broke open the revolver, inspected it, spun the cylinder and snapped the hammer two or three times.

"It's all right," judged he. "As good as ever, almost. This is an important job. It mustn't be made a mess of."

He looked for and found a small box containing a few cartridges, kept there in case burglars should visit Snug Haven, and carefully loaded the weapon, then snapped it shut, and laid it on the desk. The sound of Dr. Filhiol's cane along the hall caused him to slide the gun into the drawer and close it. Filhiol knocked at the door, and

Briggs arose to open it. He showed no signs of perturbation as he confronted the doctor. A calm and happy serenity glowed in his eyes.

"Isn't it time you got your writing finished and went to bed?" the doctor demanded tartly. "Can't have you taking cold, you know!"

"Almost time," the captain answered, nodding. "I'm just finishing up now. It isn't the easiest thing in the world to draft a new will, you understand."

"Oh, that's really it, eh?" asked Filhiol, well pleased. "Going to cut the boy off, are you? Good for you, sir!"

"You'll excuse me for not discussing it, doctor," said Briggs. "I sha'n't be long now. Tell me, how's Ruddy?"

"We've made a fair job of it, and Ezra's gone to his room, though I don't think he'll sleep much. He's taking everything terribly to heart. I'm going to turn in now. Anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you. Good night."

The captain's hand enfolded Filhiol's. But, still, neither by any undue pressure nor by word or sign did he give the doctor any hint of the fact that this good-by was final. The old doctor turned and very wearily stumped away up-stairs, his cane echoing hollowly through the corridor until his door closed. Briggs turned back into his cabin.

"A good, true friend," said he. "Another one I'm sorry to leave, just as I'm sorry to leave the girl and Ezra. But—well—"

Back at his task, he fetched from the safe his black metal cash-box, and set himself to looking over a few deeds, mortgages and other papers, making sure that all was in order for the use and welfare of Hal. He reread his will, assuring himself that nothing could prevent Hal from coming into the use and benefit of all his property, and also that the bequest to Ezra was in correct form. With a pencil he wrote a brief request to Hal, that Dr. Filhiol should receive three hundred dollars in memory of old times. This done, he replaced the papers in the box and put that back into its proper compartment in the safe.

On his desk a little clock in a square wooden frame was ticking, each motion of

its balance-wheel bringing nearer, nearer still the tragedy impending. The captain glanced at it.

"Getting late," said he. "Only one more thing to do now, and then I'm ready."

Taking a fair, white sheet of paper, he set himself to write a letter that should make all things clear to Hal. But first he brought out the revolver once more, and laid it on the desk before him as a kind of *memento mori*, lest by the writing of this thing his soul should weaken.

The lamp, shining down upon the old man's cramped, gnarled fingers as they painfully traced the words of explanation and farewell, also struck high-lights from the ugly blue metal of the revolver.

The captain's eyes, now and then leaving the written pages as he paused to think, rested upon the gun. At sight of it he smiled; and once he reached out, touched it, caressed it.

"So many good, true friends," he whispered. "You're one, too—perhaps the very best of all!"

CHAPTER XL.

ON THE KITTIWINK.

WHEN Hal, with shaking fist and blasphemies of hate on his rage-distorted lips, left Snug Haven, he bent his shoulders to the storm and with the burden of his suit-cases—light for his steel muscles—plowed through the gathering dusk down along the shore road toward Hadlock's Cove.

Cold, slashing rain and boistering gusts from the whipped Atlantic hardly cooled his wrath. His curses, snatched from his lips by the tempest, snarled out against the leaping of the surfs along the granite coast. Ugly, brutalized, venomous, he kept his way past the smithy—closed now, but still rimmed here and there with dull light where the forge fires blurred through cracks—past Laura's house, and so with glowering eyes bucking his way into the night that caught and ravened at him.

The sight of Laura's house filled him with an access of rage. That calm security of shaded windows dully shining forth from

behind the rain-scorched hedge seemed to typify the girl's protection against him. He twisted his mouth into an ugly grin, toothed like a beast's.

"Think you're safe, do you?" he growled, pausing a moment to glower at the house. "Think I can't ever get you, eh? H-m! I haven't even begun yet!"

In the turmoil of his mind, no clear plan had as yet taken form. He knew not yet exactly what he intended; only he knew that he now had a boat and full supplies, that from him the ocean held no secrets, that his muscles and his will had never yet known defeat, and that the girl was his if he could take her.

"She'll turn me down cold and get away with it, will she?" he snarled. "She will—like hell!"

Forward he pushed again, meeting no one, and so passed Geyser Rock, now booming under the charges of the surf. He skirted a patch of woods, flailed by the wind, and beyond this turned through a little opening in a stone wall, to follow a path that led down to the cove. On either side of the path stretched a rolling field, rich with tall grasses, with daisies, buttercups, milfoil and devil's paint-brush, all alike drenched and beaten down in the dusk by the sweep of the storm.

Louder and more loud rose, fell, the thunders of the sea, as Hal approached the rocky dune at the far side of the field—a dune that on its other edge sank to a shingle beach, horseshoe in form, that bordered the cove.

To eastward, this beach consolidated itself into the rocky headland of Barberry Point, round which the breakers were curving to hurl themselves on the shingle. The wind, however, was at this point almost parallel with the shore. Hal reckoned, as he tramped across the field, that with good judgment and stiff work he could get the Kittiwink to sea at once.

And after that, what? He did not know. No definite idea existed in that half-crazed, passion-scorched brain. The thing within him, the devil he half sensed, the driving power of his strength accursed, took no heed of anything but flight. Away, away, only to be away!

"God!" panted he, stumbling up the dune to its top, where salt spray and stinging rain skirled down upon him in skittering drives. He dropped his burdens, and flung out both huge arms toward the dark, tumbling void of waters, streaked and lashed with crawling lines of white. "God! that—that's what I want! That's what they're trying to keep me away from! I'm going to have it now—by God, I am!"

He stood there a moment, his oilskin hat slapping about his face, his reefer lashing in the wind. At his right, three hundred yards away or so, he could just glimpse the dark outlines of Jim Gordon's little store that supplied rough needs of lobstermen and fishers. Dim oblongs of light marked a couple of its windows. Hal's lip curled with scorn of the men he knew were gathered in that dingy, smoky place, swapping venerable yarns and smoking ever more venerable pipes. They preferred that to the freedom of the night, the storm, the sea! At them, too, he shook his fist.

"There's not one of you that's half the man I am!" he shouted his senseless defiance, which the storm gulped at one mouthing. "You sit in there and run me down. I know. You're maybe doing it now—maybe telling how gramp had to pay because I licked a bully, and how I've got to apologize! But you don't dare come out into a night like this. I can outsail you and outfight you all—and to hell with you!"

His rage, somehow, a little eased by this wild outburst, he turned attention from Gordon's store to the task immediately confronting him. The beach sloped sharply to the surf. A litter of driftwood, kelp and mulched rubbish was swirling back and forth among the churning pebbles that with each refulgent wave went clattering down in a mad chorus. Here, there, drawn up out of harm's way, lay lobster-pots and dories. Just visible as a white blur tossing on the obscure waters, the Kittiwink rode at her buoy.

"Great little boat!" cried Hal, with sudden enthusiasm. He realized how very ardently he had desired such a boat; how very keen his joy was in the reality of possession. A vast longing swept over him to be aboard, and away. Not so much was

it the desire for escape from any consequences of his robbery—for fear to Hal was yet a quantity unknown—as just the inborn urge and lure of the primal mystery, the sea calling to youth, to strength and daring.

Laura? And would he go without the girl? Yes. Sometime, soon, perhaps, he would come back, would seize her, carry her away; but for now that plan had grown as vaguely formless as his destination. Fumes of liquor in his brain, of passion in his heart, blended with the roaring confusion of the tempest. All was confusion, all a kind of wild and orgiastic dream, culmination of heredity, of power unbridled, of a spirit that had run *amok*.

Night, storm and wind called to the savage in this man. And, standing erect there in the dark, arms up to fleeing cloud and ravening gale, he shouted back with wild, mad laughter:

"Coming now! By God, I'm coming now!"

There was foam on his lips as he strode down the beach, flung the suit-cases into a dory—that it was not his, not the one belonging to the Kittiwink, mattered nothing—and with a run and a huge shouldered shove across the shingle fairly flung the boat into the surf.

Waist-deep in chilling smothers of brine, he floundered, dragged himself into the dory that slewed violently and shipped heavy seas, and flung the oars on to the thole-pins. He righted her, steadied her nose into the surf, and with a few strong pulls got her through the tumble. A matter of two or three minutes, with such strength as lay in his arms of steel, brought him to the lee of the Kittiwink's stern. Watching his chance, he hove the suit-cases to the deck of the dancing craft, then scrambled aboard and made the dory's painter fast.

Again he laughed, exultingly. Now for the first time in his life his will could be made law. Now he stood on his own deck, with plenty of supplies below, and—above, about him—the unlimited power of the gale to drive him any whither he should choose.

He strode to the companionway, his feet sure on the swaying deck, his body lithely meeting every plunge, and slid back the hatch-cover. Down into the cabin he

pitched the cases and followed them, half-clambering, half-sliding down the ladder. He fumbled for matches in the tin-can he knew held them, on the little shelf over the cupboard; found them, and struck one. It died. He cursed bitterly, tried again, and lighted the cabin-lamp. His eyes, with the affection of ownership, roved round the little place, taking in the berths, the folding-table, the stools. He threw the suit-cases into one of the berths, opened one and took out a square-face, which he uncorked and tipped high.

"Ah!" he sighed. "Some class!" He set the bottle in the rack and breathed deeply. "Nice little berths, eh? Laura—she'd look fine here. She'd fit great as crew. And if she gave me any of her lip, then—"

His fist, doubled, swayed under the lamp-shine as he surveyed it proudly.

"Great little boat," judged Hal. "She'll outsail 'em all, and I'm the boy to make her walk!" He opened the forward door, peering with pride at the little passageway that led to the galley, where some of his supplies were stored, the others being in lockers under the berths. "I tell you I got a bargain this time!"

Huge of bulk, heavy-shouldered, evil-faced, he stood there, swaying as the Kittiwink rode the swells. He cast open his reefer, took out pipe and tobacco, and lighted up over the chimney of the lamp. As he sucked at the stem, his hard lips, corded throat and great jaws gave an impression of indomitable power. The excess of that virile strength formed a brutal whole, in no wise differing from that of old Alpheus Briggs, half a hundred years ago.

"Make me go to school and wear a blue ribbon," he gibed, his voice a contrabass to the shrilling of the wind aloft in the rig, the groaning and creaking of the timbers. "Make me keep off the grass and go round apologizing to drunken bums. Like—hell!"

A gleam of metal from the opened suitcase attracted his eye. He advanced his hand, took up the kris, and with vast approval studied it. The feel of the lotus-bud handle seemed very grateful to his palm. Its balance joyed him. The keen, wavy blade, maculated with the rust of blood and

brine, and with the groove where lay another stain whose meaning he knew not, appeared to hold for him a singular fascination. Back, forth he slashed with the weapon, whistling it through the air, flashing it under the lamp-light.

"Great! Fine!" he approved, with thickened speech. "Some good little toad-stabber! Glad I got it—might come handy in a pinch, what?"

He stopped swinging the kris, and once more observed it, more closely still. Tentatively he ran his thumb along the edge, testing it, then scratched with some inchoate curiosity at the poison crystallized in the groove.

"Wonder what that stuff is, anyhow?" said he. "Doesn't look like the rest. Maybe it's the blood of some P. I., like McLaughlin. *That* ought to make a dirty-looking stain, same as this. Maybe it will, some of these days, if he crosses my bows. Maybe it will at that!"

CHAPTER XLI.

FATE STRIKES A BLOW.

HAL tossed the kris into the berth, and —was just about to reach for the bottle again when a *thump-thump-thumping* along the hull startled his attention.

"What the devil's that now?" he growled, stiffening. The sound of voices, then a scrambling of feet on the deck, flung him toward the companion-ladder. "Who's there?"

"He's here, boys, all right!" exulted a voice above. "We got him this time, the—"

Have you seen a bulldog bristle to the attack with bared teeth and throaty growl? So, now, Hal Briggs.

"Got me, have you?" he flung up at the invaders. "More o' that rotten gurry-bucket's crew, eh? More o' Bucko McLaughlin's plug-uglies!"

"Easy there," sounded a caution, as if holding some one back from advancing on Hal. "He's mebbe got a gun."

"T' hell wid it!" shouted another. "He ain't gonna lambaste half our crew an'

the ole man, an' git away wid it! Come on, if there's one o' ye wid the guts of a man! We'll rush the son of a pup!"

Boots appeared on the ladder, heavy sea-boots. Hal leaped, grabbed, flung his muscles into a backward haul—and before the first attacker realized what had happened, he had landed on his back. One pile-driver fist to the jaw, and he quivered into oblivion, blood welling from a lip split to the teeth.

"There's one o' you!" shouted Hal. "One more o' the Sylvia Fletcher's crew!" He laughed uproariously, half drunk with alcohol, wholly drunk with the strong waters of battle. "Looks like I'd have to make a job of it, and clean the bunch! Who's next?"

Only silence answered a moment. This swift attack and sudden loss seemed to have disconcerted Mac's men. Hal kicked the fallen enemy into a corner, and faced the companionway. His strategic position, he realized, was almost impregnable. Only a madman would have ventured out up to that narrow and slippery deck in the night, with an undetermined number of men armed, perhaps, with murderous weapons, awaiting him. Hal was no madman. A steady fighter, he, and of good generalship; a fighter with brains. In his heart he meant, as he stood there, to kill or cripple every one of those now arrayed against him. He dared take no chances. Tense, keen as a taut spring, he crouched and waited.

Then as he heard whisperings, grumbled oaths, furious gusts of mumbled words at the very top of the companion, an idea took him. He turned, snatched up the unconscious man, thrust him up the ladder and struggled up behind him with titanic force. His legs, massive pillars, braced themselves against the sides of the companion. Like a battle-ax he swung the vanquished enemy, beating about him with this human flail. With fortune, might he not sweep one or two assailants off into the running seas? He felt the impact of blows, as his weapon struck. Came a rush. Overborne, he fell backward to the floor. Up he leaped, as feet clattered down the ladder, and snatched the kris from where it lay.

But he could not drive it home in the bulky, dark form leaping down at him. For, lightning-swift, sinewed arms of another man behind him whipped round his neck, jerked his head back, bore him downward.

He realized that he was lost. The sound of wind and waves, joined to the keen attention he had paid the frontal attackers, had betrayed him. He had forgotten the forward hatch, opening down into the galley; he had forgotten the little passage-way behind him. Now one of McLaughlin's men, familiar with the build of the Kittiwink, had got a strangling grip on him. A wild yell of triumph racketed through the cabin, as the companion dumped three more men into that little space.

Hal knew he could not stand against this mass. He must use strategy. Backward he fell; and as he fell, he twisted. His right hand still held the kris; his left got a grip on the other's throat.

That other man immediately grew dumb, and ceased to breathe, as the terrible gorilla-fingers closed. Volleys of blows and kicks rained from Hal ineffectively. Still the fingers tightened; and the man's face grew horribly dusky, slaty-blue under the lamp-light, while his tongue protruded and his staring eyes injected themselves with blood.

The arm round Hal's neck loosened, fell limp. Hal flung the man from him, groveled up under the weaving, cross-cutting slash of blows, and bored in.

The crash of a stool on his right wrist numbed his arm to the elbow: the stool, shattered, fell apart, and one leg made smithereens of the lamp-globe. The smoky flare redly lighted a horrible, fantastic war. Hal fought to snatch up the knife again: the others to keep him from it, to down him, trample him, bash him in and smear his brains and blood upon the floor. Scientific fighting went to pot. This was just jungle war, the war of gouge and bite, confused, unreal.

All the boy knew was that he swayed, bent and recovered in the midst of terrible blows, and that one arm would not serve him. The other fist landed here, there; and now it had grown red, though whether from its own blood or from the wounds of

foemen, who could tell? Strange fires spangled outward before Hal's eyes; he tasted blood, and, clacking his jaws, set his teeth into a hand and through it.

Something wrenched, cracked dully. A blasphemy howled through the smoky air, voicing the anguish of a broken arm. A rolling, swaying, tumbling mass, the men trampled the fallen one, pulpings his face. One of the suit-cases fell, and wreckage strewed the floor, under hammering boot-heels. Broken glass gritted, as the shards of lamp-chimney were ground fine.

Back, forth, strained the fighters, with each heave and wallow of the boat. The floor grew slippery. The folding-table, torn from its hinges, collapsed into kindling; and one of these sticks, aimed at Hal's head, missed him, but struck the square-face.

Liquor gurgled down; the smell of whisky added its fetor to the stench of oil, bilge, sweat and blood. The floor grew slippery, and here, there, crimson splashes blotched the cabin walls.

"Kill—kill the son—of—" strainingly grunted some one.

Hal choked out a gasping, husky laugh. Only one eye was doing duty now; but that one still knew the kris was lying in the corner by the starboard berth, where it had been kicked by some sprawling foot.

He tugged, bucked, burst through, fell on the kris, grappled its knob and writhed up, crouching.

He flung the blade aloft to strike. Everything was whirling in a haze of dust and dancing confusion, lurid under the flare. Grinning, bleeding faces, rage-distorted, gyrated before him. He swirled the kris at the nearest; but it did not strike.

A hand vising his wrist, snapped the blade downward, drove it back. Hal felt a swift sting, a burning, lancinating pain in his right pectoral muscle. It seemed to pierce the chest, the lung itself.

He dropped his arm, staring foolishly. The kris, smeared brightly red, thumped to the floor.

"Got 'im, b' God!" coughed somebody.

"Got him—yes, an' now it won't be healthy fer us, if we're caught here, neither!" panted another.

The men stood away from him, peering

curiously. Hal confronted them, one arm limp. The other hand rested against the cabin bulkhead. He swayed, with the swaying of the boat; his head, sagging forward, seemed all at once very heavy. He felt a hot trickle down his breast.

"You — you've got me, you — " he coughed, and, leaning his back against the bulkhead, got his free hand feebly to the wound. It came away red, horrible. By the smoky, feeble flare, he blinked at it. The three hulking men still on foot—vague, brutal figures, with black shadows on bearded faces, with eyes of fear and dying anger—found no answer. One sopped at a cut cheek with his sleeve; another rubbed his elbow and growled a curse. On the cabin floor two lay inert, amid the trampled ruck of débris.

"Now you've done it, Coombs," suddenly spat forth the smallest of McLaughlin's men. He shook a violent forefinger at the blood-smeared kris that had fallen near the ladder. "Now we got murder on our hands, you damn fool! An' they can send us all to the chair fer that—or give us Charlestown fer life! We didn't come here to kill the son of a dog. We only come to give him a damn' good beatin'-up, an' now see what you've went an' done! We got to clear out, all of us! An' stick, too, we got to fix this story right!"

"What—what d'you mean?" stammered Coombs, he of the bleeding cheek. He had gone ashy pale. The whiteness of his skin made startling contrast with the oozing blood. "What story? What we gotta do?"

"Get ashore an' all chew it over an' agree on how we wasn't within a mile o' here tonight. Fix it, an' get ready to swear to it! Hold up our hands an' go through! If we don't, we'll all go up! Come along out o' here! Quick!"

"Ah, hell! If he dies, serves him right!" spoke up the third man. "They can't touch us fer killin' a skunk!"

"You'll damn' soon find out if they can or not!" retorted the small man, livid with fear. "Out o' here now!"

"An' not fix him up none? Not bandage him ner nothin'?" put in Coombs. "Gosh, that's fierce!"

"Bandage nothin'!" cried the small man.

"Tully's right. We got to be clearin'. But I say, set fire to this here boat an' burn her where she lays, an' him there in her, an'—"

"Yes, an' have the whole damn' town here, an' everythin'! You got a head on you like a capstan. Come on, beat it!"

"We can't go an' leave our fellers here, can we?" demanded Coombs, while Hal, sinking down along the bulkhead, collapsed upon the blood-stained floor. He felt his life oozing out hotly, but now had no power to raise a hand to the wound or even to wipe the blood away. Coombs peered down, his eyes unnaturally big. "We can't leave them! That'd be a dead give-away in case they didn't come to enough to get out afore some one come aboard. An' we hadn't oughta leave a man bleed to death that way, neither."

"T' hell with him!" shrilled the little man, more and more panic-stricken. "If he dies, good riddance. We should worry! Get hold o' Nears an' Dunning here, an' on deck with 'em. We can get 'em ashore, an' the others, too, in the dory. We can all get down to Hammill's fish-shed an' no one the wiser. Give us a hand here you!"

"I'm goin' to stay an' fix this here man up," decided Coombs. "I reckon I stuck him, or he stuck himself because I gaffled onto his hand. Anyhow, I done it. You clear out, if you wanna. I ain't goin' to let that feller—"

"You're comin' with us, an' no double-crossin'!" shouted Tully, his bruised face terrible, one eye blackened and swollen. He bored a big-knuckled fist against Coombs's nose. "If you're caught here, we're all done, all of us. You're comin' now, or by the jumpin' jew's-harps I'll knock you cold myself, an' lug you ashore!"

"An' I'll help ye do it!" volunteered the little man, with a string of oaths. "Come on now, get busy!"

Overborne, Coombs had to yield. The three men prepared to make good their escape and to cover all tracks. Not even lifting Hal into a berth, but leaving him sprawled face-downward on the floor, with blood more and more soaking his heavy reefer, they dragged the unconscious men to the companion, hauled them up and

across the pitching, slippery deck, and dropped them like potato-sacks into the dory that had brought them. Then they did likewise with the unconscious man Hal had used as a flail against them. In the deep darkness and the storm, all this took some few minutes and caused great exertion. But at last it was done; and now Tully once more descended to the cabin.

He looked around with great care, blinking his one still serviceable eye, his torn face horrible by the guttering oil-flame that gusted and danced as puffs of wind entered the hatch.

"What you doin' down there, Tully?" demanded a voice from above, half-heard in the storm clamor. "Friskin' him fer his watch?"

"I'll frisk you when I get you ashore!" Tully flung up at him. Coombs slid down into the cabin.

"That's all right," said he, "but I ain't trustin' you much; an' if we're goin' to make a clean getaway, an' not help this poor devil none, I ain't goin' to have you gum it all up by takin' no joolry as souvenirs!"

"Aw, go to hell!" Tully spat. "That shows how much you know!" He stooped and began pawing over the ruck on the floor. Here he picked up a cap, there a piece of torn sleeve. He even found a button, and pocketed that along with the other things. His search was thorough. When it ended, nothing incriminating was left.

"I reckon they won't get much on us now," he grinned, and contemplatively worked back and forth a loosened tooth that hardly hung to the gum. "An' if they try to lay it on us, they can't prove nothin'. All of us swearin' together can get by. There ain't no witness except *him*," with a jerk of the thumb at the gasping, unconscious form in the berth. "Nobody, unless he gets well, which he ain't noways likely to."

He rolled Hal over, looked down with malice and hate at the pale, battered face, listened a moment to the laboring, slow *rile* of the breath, and nodded with satisfaction. Even the bloody froth on Hal's blue lips gave him joy.

"You got what's comin' to you, all right, old bucko!" he sneered. "Got it proper. This here's *your* finish. Thought you'd get funny with Mac an' his gang, huh? Always butted through everythin', did you? Well, this here was one proposition you couldn't butt through. We was one too many fer you, all righto—an' to hell with you!"

He turned, and saw Coombs with the kris in hand. Fear leaped into his face, but Coombs only gibed:

"You're a great one, ain't you? Coverin' up the story o' what happened here an' leavin' that in a corner! Some near-coffee you got for brains—ninety-five per cent removed from the bean!"

Fear gave way to sudden covetousness.

"Gimme that there knife!" demanded Tully. "There is a souvenir! That there's a krish. I can hide it ●. K. Gimme it!"

Coombs's answer was to stoop, lay the kris down and set his huge sea-boot on it. A quick, upward wrench at the lotus-bud handle and the snaky, poisoned blade, maybe a thousand years old and of high value, snapped with a jangle of dissevered steel.

"Here, you!" shouted Tully. But already Coombs had swung to the companion. One toss and lotus-bud and shattered blade gyrated into the dark. The waves, white-foaming, received them; they vanished forever from the world of men.

"On deck with you now!" commanded Coombs. "If we're goin' to do this at all, we're goin' to make a good job of it. You go first!"

Tully had to obey. Coombs puffed out the light and—leaving Hal Briggs in utter dark; bleeding, poisoned, dying—followed on up the ladder. A minute or two, the dory pushed away, laden with three unconscious men and three others by no means unscathed of battle. Toward the shore it struggled, borne on the hungry surges.

Thus fled the men of McLaughlin's crew—avenged. Thus, brought low by the cursed thing that come half-way round the world and waited half a hundred years to strike, Hal sank toward the great blackness.

Lotus-bud, symbol of sleep, and poisoned blade—cobra-fang from the dim, mysterious Orient—now with their work well done,

lay under waves of storm in a wild, northern sea.

Above, in the black, storm-whipped sky, was the blind face of destiny peering with laughter down upon the fulfilment of its prophecy?

CHAPTER XLII.

IN EXTREMIS.

IT would be difficult to tell how long the wounded boy lay there, but after a certain time, some vague glimmering of consciousness returned. No light came back to him. Neither was motion possible to him. The content of his understanding now was merely pain, confusion and a great roaring noise of winds and waves. An utter lassitude and weakness gripped his body; but more than this seemed to enchain him. By no effort of his reviving will could he move hand or foot; and even the slow breath he took, each respiration a stab of agony, seemed a mighty effort.

Though Hal knew it not, already the curare was at work, the curare whose terrible effect is this: that it paralyzes every muscle, first the voluntaries, then those of the respiratory centers and of the heart itself. Yet he could think and feel. Curare does not numb sensation or attack the brain. It strikes its victims down by rendering them more helpless than an infant; and then, fingering its way to the breath and to the blood, closes on those a grip that has one outcome only.

Hal Briggs, who had so gloried in the strength and swift control of all his muscles, who had so wrought evil and violent things, trusting to his unbeatable power, now lay there, chained, immobile, paralyzed.

He thought, after a few vain efforts to move:

"I must be badly cut to be as weak as this. I must be bled almost to death. I'm going to die. That's certain!"

Still, he was not afraid. The soul of him confronted death, unterrified. Even while his laboring heart struggled against the slow instillation of the curare, and even while his lungs caught sluggishly at the air, his mind was undaunted.

He wanted light, but there was none. A velvet dark enveloped everything—a dark in which the creaking fabric of the Kittiwink heaved, plunging till it rolled his inert body back against the shell of the craft, then forward again.

"I got some of them, anyhow," he reflected, with strange calmness. "They didn't get away without a lot of punishment. If they hadn't knifed me, I'd have cleaned up the whole bunch!"

A certain satisfaction filled his thoughts. If one must die, it is good to know the enemy has taken grievous harm.

Still, what, after all, did it matter? He felt so very languid, so tired, so transfixed with that insistent pain in the right lung. Even though he had killed them all, would that have recompensed him for the failure of all his cherished plans, for the loss of the life that now, just opening out to his desires, was to have meant so wildly much to him?

He felt a warm oozing on his breast, and knew that the blood was still seeping away. His lips tasted salty, but he could not even spit away the blood he understood was on them. Curare is of a hundred different types. This, which he had received, had numbed his muscles beyond any possibility of waking them to action. A few vain efforts convinced him that he could not move. So there he lay, despite his pain, wondering how any loss of blood—so long as life remained—could chain him to such immobility.

And thence his thoughts drifted to Snug Haven, to his grandfather, to Ezra; and thence to Laura, but now in more confusion. The realization came to him that he was fainting. He could do nothing to prevent it. A humming sound, different from the storm-wind, welled up in his ears. He felt that he was sinking down, away. Then all at once he ceased alike to think, to feel.

When next he came to some vague consciousness, he sensed—seemingly a million miles away—a touch on his shoulder, the sound of a voice in his ears. He knew that voice: and yet, somehow, he could not tell whose voice it was. He understood that his head was being raised. Very dimly, through

closed eyelids that he could not open, he perceived the faint glimmer of a light, a white light.

"Hal!" he heard his name. And then again: "Hal!"

The futile effort to move, to answer, spent his last forces. Once more the blackness of oblivion received him mercifully.

"Hal! Oh, God! Hal, speak to me! Answer me!" Laura's voice trembled, broke as she pleaded. "Oh—they've killed you! They've killed you!"

With eyes of terror she peered down at him. In her shaking hand the little electric search-lamp sent its trembling beam to illuminate the terrible sight there in the berth. The girl could get only broken impressions—a pale, wan face; closed eyes that would not open; a fearful welter of blood on throat and chest, on clothing, on cushions in the berth.

"Oh, look at me! Speak to me! You aren't dead—look at me! It's Laura! Hal—Hal!"

Her words were broken, disjointed. For a moment or two, all presence of mind left her. For a moment, she was just a frightened, agonized girl, suddenly confronted by this horrible thing, by the broken, dying body of the man she had so loved. And while that moment lasted she cried out; she gathered Hal to her breast; she called to him and called again, and got no answer.

But soon her first anguish passed. She whipped back her reason into the fighting-line and forced herself to think. The pre-science she had had of evil had indeed come true. The furtive, dark figures, that from her window she had seen slinking down along toward Hadlock's Cove, had indeed sought Hal just as she had felt that they were seeking him. And the numb grief that, after Hal's passing down the road, had still chained her at that upper window peering out into the darkening storm, had all at once given place to action.

What ruses, what strategies she had had to employ to escape from the house! What a battle with the tempest she had fought, with wind and rain tearing at her long coat, the pocket of which had held the flash-light! Ay, and that battle had been only a skirmish compared to the launching of a

dory, the mad struggle through the surf. All thought of danger flung to the winds of heaven, all fear of Hal abandoned, all risks assumed of violence at his hands, of losing her good name in case of being seen by any one, so she had battled her way to him—to warn him, in case he might not yet know; to save him, in case McLaughlin's men at last had worked their will of him.

Laura, suddenly grown calm with that supreme, heroic resolution which inspires every true woman in the moment of need, let the boy's head fall back into the berth and mustered her thoughts. She realized the one essential thing to do now was go for help, and go at once. Strong as she was, and nerved with desperation, she knew the task of dragging Hal up the companion-way, of getting him into her dory, of carrying him ashore in the gale-beaten surf very far surpassed her powers.

So she must leave him, even though he should die alone there while she should be away.

But, first, she could at least give some first aid in the matter of stanching his blood. She peered about her, flicking the electric beam here, there, over the trampled confusion of the floor. By the reflected light from the cabin walls, her face showed pale and frightened, a white blur in the gloom. What could she use for bandages? A smashed suit-case yawned wide, its contents slewed about. She caught up a shirt, ripped it into broad strips and, laying the flash-light in the berth, bent to her work.

"Oh, God!" she whispered, as she laid bare the wound; but though she felt giddy and faint she kept on. Not so should weakness down her. The sagging dead weight of his body almost overbore her strength. She held it up, however, and without skill, but very tightly bound him, up around the massive neck, over the back, across the high-arched, muscular chest. She knotted her bandages, and let Hal sink into the blood-soaked berth.

Then she smoothed back his drabbled hair a moment. She bent and kissed him. Waiting no second longer, she snatched the light, turned and fled up the companion, clambered down into the dory banging alongside, and cast loose.

All the strength of her young arms, the courage of her woman's heart had to strain their uttermost. Passionately she labored. The wounded man whose blood was seeping forth back there no longer was the brute who had so cruelly sought to wrong her. He was no longer the untamed savage, the bully, the cheat, the thief. No, in his helplessness he had gone swiftly back to the boy she had known and loved—just Hal, her boy. The storm-devils, snatching at her, seemed incarnate things that fought her for his life. The wind that drove her away from the shingle-beach and toward the rocks below Jim Gordon's store, the lathering crests that spewed their cold surges into the dory and over it as it heaved high and swung far down, seemed shouting: "Death to Hal!"

Laura, her hair down now, and flying wild, pulled till the very wrists and arms of her seemed breaking. For a few minutes she thought herself lost; but presently, when breath and strength were at the ragged edge, she began to hear the loud, rattling clamor of the pebbles washing on the shingle. A breaker caught the dory, slewed it half round, upset it. Into the water, strangling, struggling, Laura plunged. The backwash caught her, tugged at her. She found footing, lost it, fell and choked a cry in cold brine.

The next breaker heaved her up. She crawled through wrack and weed, over jagged stones, and fell exhausted on a sodden windrow of drift.

For a minute she could move no further, but had to lie there under the rain-pelting, with the dark hands of ocean reaching up to drag her back. But presently a little strength revived. She crawled forward once more, staggered to her feet, and, stumbling, slipping, falling, getting up again, won to the top of the dune.

Off to her left, dim through the shouting night, the vague light-blurs of old man Gordon's windows were fronting the tempest. The girl oriented herself. She plunged forward, sobbing for breath. Not all the fury of the North Atlantic, flung against that shore, had beaten her, had turned her from her task.

Astonished beyond words, the lobstermen

and fishers eyed her with blank faces as she burst in the door and staggered into Gordon's. A moment before, gathered round the "old oak" stove in which Gordon had lighted a little fire of thin box-stuff, this gathering had been perfecting absolutely certain methods of trapping lobsters. Now, under the light of tin-reflectors, quids remained unchewed, pipes unsmoked. Bearded jaws fell. Eyes blinked from wrinkled faces. Had the President himself walked in and asked the time o' night, no more profound silence could have greeted him. The girl's wet, draggled hair, protected now by no hat; her outstretched arms; her bloodless face and burning eyes stunned them all to muted wonder.

"Quick, quick!" she panted. "Hal Briggs—"

"What's he done now, girl?" cried old Sy Whittaker, starting up. "He ain't hurt you, has he? He ain't hurt you, has he? If he *has*—"

"He's been stabbed aboard—the Kittiwink! He's bleeding to death there—save him—*save him!*"

Chairs scraped. Excitement blazed.

"What's that, Laura?" cried Gordon. "Stabbed? Who done it?"

"Oh, no matter—go, quick—go, *go!*"

"Damn funny!" growled a voice from behind the stove. "Gal goin' aboard night like this, an' him stabbed. Looks mighty bad!"

"You'll look a damn' sight funnier if you say that agin, or anythin' like it!" shouted the old storekeeper with doubled fist. "Hal Briggs ain't worryin' me none, but this here is Laura, old man Maynard's gal, an' by the Jeeruzlem nobody ain't goin' to say nothin' about her! Tell me, gal," he added, "is he hurt bad?"

She caught him by the arm. He had to hold her up.

"Dying, Jim! Bleeding to death! Oh, for the love of God—hurry, hurry!"

Around them the rough, bearded men jostled in pea-coats, slickers, sou'westers. The tin-reflectors struck harsh lights and shadows from rugged faces of astonishment.

"Who could o' done it?" began Shor-rocks, the blacksmith. "They'd oughta be ketched, an'—"

"Never you mind about that!" cried Gordon. He caught from a nail a formless old felt hat and jammed it on his head; he snatched up a lighted lantern standing on the counter, and with a hobnailed clatter ran for the door.

"Everybody out!" he bellowed. "Everybody out now to help Laura!"

Into the storm he flung himself. All hands cascaded toward the door. In this excitement the cracker-barrel—even unprotected as it now was—remained unmolested.

"You stay here, gal!" advised Asahel Calkins, lobsterman. "Ain't no night for you!"

"I can't stay! Let me go, too!" she pleaded. They made way for her. With the men she ran. Two or three others had lanterns, but these made no more than tiny, dancing blurs of light in the drenching dark. Along a path, then into the field and up to the storm-scoured dune they stumbled, pantingly, bucking the gale. The lanterns set great giant legs of shadow striding up against the curtain of the drive, as the men pressed onward. Snapping, Laura's skirts flailed.

Over the dune they charged, and scuttled down to the dories. Disjointed words, cries, commands whipped away. Strong hands hustled a dory down. Laura was clambering in already, but Jim Gordon pulled her back.

"No, gal, no!" he ordered sternly. His voice flared on the wind. He shoved her into the arms of Shorrocks. "You, Henry, look out for her. Don't you let her do nothin' foolish!"

He set his lantern in the dory, impressed Calkins and another into his service, and scrambled aboard. A dozen hands ran the dory out through the first breakers. Oars caught; and as the men came up the beach, dripping in the vague lantern-light, the dory pulled away.

To Laura, waiting with distracted fear among the fishermen, it seemed an hour, yet at the most hardly fifteen minutes had passed before the little boat came leaping shoreward in white smothers. Out jumped Gordon. Laura ran to him, knee-deep in a breaker.

"Is he dead—dead?" she asked.

"Nope. Ain't much time to lose, though, an' that's a fact. He's cut *some*, looks like! Goddy mighty, but there must o' been some fight out there!"

He turned to the dory. With others, he lifted out a heavy body, wrapped in sail-cloth, horribly suggestive of a burial at sea. Laura had to grip her hands together for self-mastery.

"Oh, hurry, hurry!" she entreated.

"We'll do all we kin, gal," some one answered, "but we ain't no real amb'lance-corpse. It's goin' to be a slow job, gittin' him home."

"Here, Laura, you carry a lantern an' go ahead to show us the way, 'cross the field," commanded Gordon, with deep wisdom. Only to give her something to do, something to occupy her mind, was kindness of the deepest. Into her hand old Calkins thrust a lantern.

"All ready!" cried he. "H'ist anchor, an' away!"

Seven or eight men got hold, round the edges of the sail-cloth, and so, swinging the inert Hal as in a cradle, they stumbled up over the dune into the field to the road, with Laura going on ahead.

To the right they turned, toward Geyser Rock, Croft Hill, Snug Haven. Now Laura walked beside them. Once in a while she looked at the white face half seen in its white cradle, now beginning to be mottled with crimson stains.

But she said no other word. Strong with the calm that had reasserted itself, she walked that night road of storm and agony.

Thus was Hal Briggs borne back to his grandfather's home.

In the cabin at Snug Haven old Captain Briggs—having finished his letter to Hal and put that, too, in the safe—had now come to the last task of all, the sacrifice that, so he faithfully believed, was to remove the curse of Dengan Jouga from his boy and make of him the man that he would have him be.

A strange lassitude weighed down upon the old man, the weariness that comes when a long journey is almost done and the lights of home begin to shine out through "the evening dews and damps." The captain

felt that he had come at last to journey's end. He sat there at his desk, eying the revolver, a sturdy, resolute figure, huge-shouldered in his bath-robe; an heroic figure, unflinchingly determined; a figure ennobled by impending sacrifice, thoughtful, quiet, strong. His face, that had been lined with grief, had grown quite calm. The light upon it seemed less from his old-time cabin-lamp than from some inner flame. With a new kind of happiness, more blessed than any he had ever known, he smiled.

"Thank God!" he murmured, with devout earnestness. "It won't be long now before I'm with the others that have waited for me all this time up there on Croft Hill. I'm glad to go. A few years more or less don't matter. It isn't everybody that can save the person they love best of anything in the world by dying. I thought God was very hard with me, but after all I find He's very good. He'll understand. He'd ought to know Himself what dying means to save something that must be saved!"

Once more he looked at Hal's picture. Without affectation, but earnestly and simply, he kissed it. Then he laid it on the desk again.

"Good-by," said he. "Maybe you won't ever understand. Maybe you'll blame me. Lots will, I know. I'll be called a coward, and worse. You'll have to bear some burden on account of me, but this is the only way. There isn't any other."

His expression was such as it had never been, reflecting the calm happiness which comes with realization that to die for one beloved is a better and more blessed thing than life. Never had old Captain Briggs felt such joy. Now the grim debt of half a century before was lifting from his soul. Not only was he opening the ways of life to Hal, but he was cleansing his own soul. And all at once he felt the horror of this brooding curse was lifting — this curse which, during fifty years of life, had been reaching out from the dark and violent past. Its power over him, he knew, was gone.

He breathed deeply and picked up the revolver.

"God, Thou art very good to me," he said quietly. "I couldn't understand the

way till it was shown me. But now I understand."

Toward his berth he turned to lie down there for the last time. As he advanced toward it he became vaguely conscious of some confusion outside. A sound of voices, gusty and faint through the wind, reached him. These came rapidly nearer, grew louder.

Listening, he paused, with a frown. Of a sudden, feet clumped on the front steps. Heavily they thudded across the porch. And with sharp insistence his electric door-bell thrilled its musical *brrr!*

"What's that now?" said the captain, his face growing hard. Premonitions of evil pierced his heart. As he hesitated, not knowing what to do, the front door boomed and echoed with the thudding of stout fists. A heavy boot kicked the panels. A voice bawled hoarsely:

"Briggs! Ahoy, there, cap'n! Let us in! Fer God's sake, let us in!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

CURARE.

"**W**HOS there?" cried Alpheus Briggs, astonished and afraid. He faced toward the front hall. "Who are you? What's wanted?"

A tapping at his window-pane, with eager knuckles, drew his attention. He heard another voice, a woman's voice—the voice of Laura Maynard:

"Here's Hal! Let us in; quick, quick!"

"Hal?" cried the old man, turning very white. That evil had indeed come to him was certain now. He strode to his desk, dropped the revolver into the top drawer and closed it, then crossed over to the window and raised the shade. The face of Laura, wet, pale, with disheveled hair and fear-widened eyes, was peering in at him. Briggs flung the window up.

"Where is he, Laura? What's happened? Who's here with him?"

"Oh, I can't tell you, captain!" she whispered. He saw her trembling; he noted those big, terror-stricken eyes, and thrilled with panic. From the front door sounded a confused bass murmur; and again the

bell sounded. "Men from the store—Jim Gordon and others. They're—"

"They're what, Laura? Bringing Hal back home?"

She nodded silently. He thought he had never seen a woman so pale.

"Captain, let them in!" she cried. "I've got to tell you. Hal—is injured. Open the door, quick! Get Dr. Filhiol!"

Everything else forgotten now, he turned, precipitated himself into the hall and snatched open the front door. Gusts of rain and wind tugged at him, flapping his bath-robe. For a moment, not understanding anything, he stood there in the lighted oblong of the door, peering out at what was all a blur of perfectly incomprehensible confusion. His fear-stricken eyes and brain failed to register any clear perception. A second or two, he neither heard nor saw. Then he became aware that some one—Jim Gordon, yes—was saying:

"We done the best we could, cap'n. Got him here as fast as we could. Dunno how bad he's hurt. We'll bring him right in."

The captain saw something white out there on the dark, wet porch. In the midst of this whiteness a form was visible—and now the old man perceived a face, Hal's face—and what, for God's sake, was all this crimson stain?

He plunged forward, thrusting the men aside. A lantern swung, and he saw clearly.

"God above! They've—they've murdered him!"

"No, cap'n, he ain't dead yit," said some one, "but you'd do well to git him 'tended to right snug off."

Old Briggs was on his knees now gathering the lax figure to his arms.

"Hal! Hal!"

"Sh!" exclaimed Gordon. "No use makin' a touse, cap'n. He's cut some, that's a fact, but—"

"Who killed my boy?" cried the old man, terrible to look upon. "Who did this thing?"

"Captain Briggs," said Laura tremulously, as she pulled at his sleeve, "you mustn't waste a minute! Not a second! He's got to be put right to bed. You've got to get a doctor now!"

"Here, cap'n, we'll carry him right in fer ye," spoke up Shorrocks. "Git up, cap'n, an' we'll lug him right in the front room."

"Nobody shall carry my boy into this house but just his grandfather!" cried the captain in a loud, strange voice.

The old-time strength of Alpheus Briggs surged back, recalled by this great need. His arms, that felt no weakness now, gathered up Hal as in the old days they had caught him when a child. Into the house he bore him, with the others following; into the cabin, and so to the berth. The boy's head, hanging limp, rested against the old man's arm, now tensed with supreme effort. The crimson stain from the grandson's breast tinged the grandsire's. Down in the berth the captain laid him, and, raising his head, entreated:

"Hal, boy! Speak to me—speak!"

Gordon laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It ain't no use, cap'n," said he. "He's too fur gone." With a muffled clumping of feet the others, dripping, awed, silent, trickled into the room. Laura had already run up-stairs, swift-footed, in quest of Dr. Filhiol. "It ain't no use. Though mebbe if we was to git a little whisky into him—"

"Hal! Master Hal!" wailed a voice of agony. Old Ezra, ghastly and disheveled, appeared in the doorway. He would have run to the berth, but Shorrocks held him back.

"You can't do no good, Ez!" he growled. "He's gotta have air—don't you go crowdin' in there now!"

The thumping of a cane, the shuffling of lame feet, announced Dr. Filhiol. Laura, still in her drenched long coat, helped him move swiftly. Calkins shoved up a chair for him beside the berth, and the old doctor dropped into it. His cane clattered to the floor.

"A light here!" commanded he, with sudden return of professional instinct and authority. Laura threw off her coat, seized the lamp from its swinging-ring over the desk, and held it close. Its shine revealed the pallor of her face, the great beauty of her eyes, the soul of her that seemed made visible in their compassionate depths, where dwelt an infinite forgiveness.

"You'll have to stand back, captain," ordered the doctor succinctly. "You're only smothering him that way, holding him in your arms; and you must not kiss him! Lay him down—so! Now, then, stand back. Ezra, stop that noise! If there's any man here who can't be quiet, out with him! Give me scissors or a knife, quick!"

Speaking, the doctor was already at work. With the sharp blade that Calkins passed him he cut away the blood-soaked bandage and threw it to the floor. His old hands did not tremble now; the call of duty had steeled his muscles with instinctive reactions to deep-rooted stimuli. His eyes, narrowed behind their spectacles, made careful appraisal.

"Deep stab-wound," said he. "How did he get this? Any one know anything about it?"

"He got it in the cabin of the *Kittiwink*," answered Laura, her voice low but quite steady. "Everything was smashed up there. Must have been a terrible fight. It looked to me as if Hal had fought three or four men."

"McLaughlin's!" cried the captain. His fists clenched passionately. "Oh, God! They've murdered my boy! Is he going to die, Filhiol? Is he?"

"That's impossible to say. We'll need plenty of hot water here, and soap and peroxid of hydrogen. Towels, lots of them! Ezra, you hear me? Get your local doctor at once. Somebody go for your village doctor. And have him bring his surgical kit as well as his medical. We'll need gauze, ligatures, needles, bichlorid. Tell him it's a deep stab, with great loss of blood. He'll know what to bring. Get a move on, somebody!"

Ezra left the room on his tasks bent; Gordon and Calkins hastily departed. The front door slammed and feet ran across the porch, then down the steps and away.

"Everybody else go, too," directed Filhiol. "We can't have outsiders messing round here. Get out, all the rest of you—and mind now you don't go making any loose talk about who did it!"

Silently the fishermen obeyed. A minute, and no one was left there in the cabin save old Briggs, Filhiol and Laura, gathered

beside the wounded and immobile figure in the berth.

"How long will it take to get your local doctor?" demanded Filhiol, inspecting the wound that still oozed bright, frothy blood, showing the lung to be involved in the injury.

"Ten minutes, perhaps," said Laura.

"H-m! Well, if that's the best we can do—But there's no time to lose here."

"Is he going to die?" asked the old captain, his voice now firm. He had grown calm again; only his lips were very tight, and under the lamp-glow his forehead gleamed with myriad tiny drops. "You might as well tell me, doctor. Is this boy of mine going to die?"

"How can I tell? Why ask?"

"If he does, I won't survive him! That's the simple truth."

"H-m!" grunted Filhiol, once more. He cast an oblique glance at the captain, and knew he spoke truth. And in that second he realized the thought which had been germinating in his brain could lead him nowhere; the thought that now his wish had really come to pass—that Hal was really now his patient, as he had wished the boy might be. He knew, now, that even though he could so far forget his ethics as to fail in his whole duty toward Hal Briggs, the captain held an unconscious whip-hand over him. Just those few simple words, spoken from the soul—"I won't survive him"—had closed the doors of possibility for a great crime.

Ezra came in with a steaming basin, with soap and many towels.

"Put those on this chair here," commanded Filhiol. "And then either keep perfectly quiet and ask no questions, or get out and stay out!"

Cowed, the old man tremblingly obliterated himself in the shadow behind the desk. Not now was he rebellious against the doctor, this intruder at Snug Haven. Not now did repartee spring to his lips. The stranger was a physician, sent by the goodness of God: old Ezra offered up a halting prayer of thanks, and held his peace.

The doctor began a little superficial cleaning up of his patient. Hal had still shown no signs of consciousness, nor had

he opened his eyes. The fact was, he remained entirely conscious. Everything that was said he heard and understood. But the paralysis, gripping him ever more and more profoundly, had made of him a thing wherein no slightest power lay to indicate his thought, his understanding. Alive, yet dead, he lay there, much as the *minok* Malay of fifty years before had lain upon the deck of the Silver Fleece. And all his vital forces now had narrowed to just one effort—the keeping of his heart in laboring action, his breath in slow hiccups.

Little by little the invading poison was attacking even this last citadel of his life. Little by little, heart and lungs were failing, as the curare fingered its way into the last, inner nerve-centers. But still life fought. And as the doctor bent above Hal, washing away the blood from lips and throat and chest, a half-instinctive analysis of the situation was more and more forcing itself upon him. This wound, these symptoms—well, what other diagnosis would apply? What other theory would fit the facts?

"There's something more at work here," thought he, "than just loss of blood. This man could stand a deal of that and still not be in any such collapse. There's poison of some kind at work. And if this wound isn't the cut of a kris, I never saw one!"

He raised one eyelid, and peered at the pupil. Then he closed the eye again.

"By the Almighty!" he whispered.

"What is it, doctor?" demanded the captain. "Don't keep anything from me. What is it?"

"I hate to tell you!"

The old man caught his breath, but never flinched.

"Tell me!" he commanded. Laura peered down in silence, very white. "I can stand it. Tell me the worst there is to tell!"

"Well, captain, from what I find here—there can be no doubt—"

"No doubt of what?"

"The blade that stabbed Hal was—"

"That poisoned kris?"

Filhiol nodded silently.

"God above! The curse—retribution!"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, captain, drop all that nonsense!" flared out the doctor

from taut nerves. "This is no time for your infernal superstitions! We've got all we can handle without cluttering things up with a mess of rubbish. We've got a long, hard fight on our hands."

"I know. But you can save him, doctor! You must! You must!"

"You don't need to dictate my duty to me, sir! I'll do all in human power. This wound here I'm not in a position to deal with. I haven't the necessary apparatus. Your local doctor can attend to that. It isn't the vital feature of this case. The poison is!"

"You've got a remedy for that, haven't you? You said you had!"

"Do you realize it's been an hour, perhaps, since this wound was made? If the curare had been fresh and new—" He finished with an expressive gesture. "It's old and dried, and some of it must have been worn off the blade. Perhaps not a great deal got into the cut. There's a chance, a fighting chance—perhaps."

"Then the remedy! Quick, doctor! Get it, make it!"

"I've got to wait till the physician comes, I've got no drugs with me."

"Will he have the right ones?"

"They're common enough. It all depends on the formula, the exact mixture, the proportions."

"You remember them?"

"Maybe I can, if you don't disturb my mind too much."

"I'll be quiet, doctor. You just order me, and I'll do anything you say," the old man promised abjectly. His eyes were cavernous with suffering. "Lord God! why doesn't Dr. Marsh come?"

"Hal here is suffering from a general paralysis," said Filhiol. "You might as well understand the situation. It won't seem half so terrible to you if you know something about it. The unknown is what terrifies. This curare is peculiar stuff." He laid his ear to Hal's chest, listened a moment, then raised his head. "There's some heart-action yet," said he. "Our problem is to keep it going and the respiration till the effects pass. It's quite possible Hal isn't unconscious. He may know what's going on. With this poison the victim feels

and knows and understands, and yet can't move hand or foot. In fact, he's reduced to complete helplessness."

"And yet you call me superstitious when I talk about retribution!" the captain whispered tensely. "I lived by force in the old days. He, poor boy, put all his faith and trust in it; he made it his god, and worshiped it. And now—now he's struck down, helpless—"

"It is strange," Filhiol had to admit. "I don't believe in curses, or anything like that. But certainly this is very, very strange. Yes, your grandson is more helpless now than any child. Even if he lives, he'll be helpless for a long time, and very weak for months and months. This kind of curare used by the upper Malay people is the most diabolical stuff ever concocted. Its effects are swift and far-reaching; they last a long, long time, in case they don't kill at once. Hal can never be the same man he used to be, captain. You've got to make up your mind to that, anyhow."

"Thank God for it!" the old man fervently ejaculated. "Thank the good God above!"

"If he lives, he may some time get back a fair, average amount of strength. He may be as well as an average man, but the days of his unbridled power and his terrific force are all over. His fighting heart and arrogant soul are gone. They're gone, captain, never to return."

"God is being very good to me!" cried Briggs, tears starting down his cheeks.

"Amen to that!" said Laura. "I don't care what he'll be, doctor. Only give him back to me!"

"He'll be an invalid a very long time, girl."

"And all that time he'll have a nurse to take care of him and love him back to health!"

Footsteps suddenly clattered on the porch. The front door flung open.

"Laura! Are you all right? Are you safe?" cried a new voice.

"There's my father!" exclaimed the girl. "And there's Dr. Marsh, with him!"

Into the cabin penetrated two men. *Nathaniel Maynard—thin, gray, wiry—* stood staring. The physician, brisk and

competent, set his bag on a chair and peeled off his coat, dripping with rain.

"Laura! Tell me—"

"Not now, father! Sh! I'm all right, every way. But Hal here—"

"We won't have any unnecessary conversation, Mr. Maynard," directed Dr. Marsh. He approached the berth. "What is this now? Stab-wound? Ah, yes. Well, I'll wash right up and get to work."

"Do, please," answered Filhiol. "You can handle it alone, all right. I've got a job of my own. There's poisoning present, too. Curare."

"Curare!" exclaimed Marsh, amazed. "That's most unusual! Are you sure?"

"I didn't serve on ships in the Orient for nothing," answered Filhiol with asperity. "My diagnosis is absolute. There was dried curare on the blade that stabbed this man. It's a very complex poison—either $C_{18}H_{35}N$, or $C_{10}H_{35}N$. Only one man, Sir Robert Schomburg, ever found out how the natives make it, and only one man—myself—ever learned the secret of the anti-dote."

"So, so?" commented Marsh, rolling up his shirt-sleeve. He set out antiseptics, dressings, pads, drainage, and proceeded to "scrub up." "We can't do this work here in the berth. Clear the desk, Ezra," he directed. "It's long enough for an operating-table, and we can get plenty of light above it. Make up a bed there—a few blankets and a clean sheet. Then we can lift him over. We'll strip his chest as he lies—cut the clothes off. Lively, every one; Curare, eh? I must admit I never came in contact with it, Dr. Filhiol. I'm not above asking its physiological effects."

"It's unique," answered Filhiol. He got up from beside the wounded man and approached the chair on which stood the doctor's bag. "It produces a type of pure motor-paralysis, acting on the end plates of the muscles and the peripheral end-organs of the motor-nerves. First it acts on the voluntary muscles, and then attacks those of respiration. It doesn't cause unconsciousness, however. The patient here may know all that's going on, but he can't make a sign. Don't trust to this apparent unconsciousness in exploring the wound. Plenty

of anesthetic, just as if he seemed fully conscious."

"Glad you told me that," said Marsh, nodding. "How about stimulants, or even a little nitroglycerine for the heart?"

"Useless. There's just one remedy."

"And you've got it?"

"I can compound it, I think. It's a secret, given me fifty years ago by a Parsee in Bombay. He'd have lost his life for it if it had been known. Let me have some of your drugs, will you?"

"Help yourself," answered Marsh, drying his hands.

While Laura and the captain watched in silence, Filhiol opened the bag, and after some deliberation carefully chose three vials.

"All right," said he. "Now you to your work, and I to mine!"

"Get everything you need?"

"I'll want a hypodermic when I come back—if I succeed in compounding the formula."

"How long will you be?"

"If I'm *very* long—" His look finished the phrase. Laura came close to Filhiol.

"Doctor," she whispered, her face tense with terrible earnestness, "you *must* remember the formula. You can't fail this time! There's more than Hal's life at stake now. The captain—you've got to save him, too!"

"And you, too! Your happiness—that is to say, your life!" the old man answered, laying a hand on hers. "I understand it all, dear. All, perfectly. I needn't tell you more than that!"

He took his cane from where it had been leaning against the fireplace, and turned toward the door.

"Captain Briggs, sir," said he, "I was with you in the old days, and I'm with you now—all the way through. Courage, and don't give up the ship!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

NEW DAWN.

TWENTY minutes later, anxious fingers tapped at Filhiol's door.

"Come!" bade the doctor. Laura entered.

"Forgive me," she begged. "I—I couldn't stay away. Dr. Marsh has got the wound closed. He says that in itself isn't fatal. But—"

She could not finish. From the hallway, through the open door, penetrated a faint, eloquent smell of ether.

"The captain's been just splendid!" said she. "And Ezra's got his nerve back. I've helped as much as I could. Hal's in the berth again."

"What's his condition?"

"Dr. Marsh says the heart action is very weak and slow."

"Respiration?" And Filhiol peered over his glasses at her as he sat there before his washstand, on which he had spread a newspaper, now covered with various little piles of powder.

"Hardly ten to the minute. For God's sake, doctor, do something! Haven't you got the formula yet?"

"Not yet, Laura. It's a very delicate compound, and I have no means here for making proper analyses, or even for weighing out minute quantities. I don't suppose a man ever tried to work under such fearful handicaps."

"I know," she answered. "But—oh, there must be some way you can get it!"

Their eyes met and silence came. On the porch roof, below the doctor's window, the rain was ruffling all its drums. The window, rattled in its sash, seemed in the grip of some jinnee that sought to force entrance. Filhiol glanced down at his little powders and said:

"Here's what I'm up against, Laura. I'm positively sure one of these two nearest me is correct. But I can't tell which."

"Why not test them?"

"One or the other is fearfully poisonous. My old brain doesn't work as well as it used to, and after fifty years—But, yes, one of these two here," and he pointed at the little conical heaps nearest him with the point of the knife wherewith he had been mixing them, "one of these two must be the correct formula. The other—well, it's deadly. I don't know which is which."

"If you knew definitely which one was poisonous," asked she, "would that make you certain of the other?"

"Yes," he answered, not at all understanding. "But without the means of making qualitative analyses, or the time for them, how can I find out?"

She had come close, and now stood at his left side. Before he could advance a hand to stop her, she had caught up, between thumb and finger, a little of the powder nearest her and had put it into her mouth.

"Holy Lord, girl!" shouted the old man, springing up. His chair clashed to the floor. "How do you know which—"

"I'll know in a few moments, won't I?" she asked. "And then you'll be able to give the right one to Hal?"

The old doctor could only stare at her. Then he groaned something wordless and began to cry. The tears that had not flowed in years were flowing now. For the first time in all that long and lonesome life, without the love of woman to soften and endear it, he had realized what manner of thing a woman's love can be. For the first time he had, as with the lifting of a veil, come to understand what had been missing from his life, and what could never be for him.

She remained there, smiling a little, untroubled, calm. The doctor blinked away his tears, ashamed.

"Laura," said he, "I didn't think there was anything like that in the world. I didn't think there was any woman anywhere like you. It's just too wonderful for any words. So I won't try to talk about it. But tell me, now, what sensations do you get from that powder?" His face grew anxious with a very great fear. He came close to her, took her hand, closely watched her. "Do you feel anything yet?"

"There's a kind of stinging sensation on my tongue," she answered, with complete quietude, as though the scales of life and death for her had not an even balance to turn either way. "And—well, my mouth feels a little numb and cold. Is that the poison?"

"Do you experience any dizziness?" His voice was hardly audible. By the lamp-light his pale face and widened eyes looked very strange. "Does your heart begin to accelerate? Here, let me see!"

He took her wrist, carefully observing the pulse.

"No, doctor," she answered, "I don't feel anything except just what I've already told you."

"Thank the good God for that!" he exclaimed, letting her hand fall. "You're all right. You got the harmless powder. Harmless for you, but the deadly foe of curare. Laura, you're—you're too wonderful for me even to try to express it. You're—"

"We're wasting time here!" she exclaimed. "Every second's precious. You know which powder to use now. Come, come along!"

"Yes, you're right. I'll come at once." He turned, took up the knife, and with its blade scraped on to a bit of paper the powder that the girl had tested. This he wrapped up carefully and tucked into his waistcoat-pocket. He reached for his cane.

"Come on down-stairs, Laura!" said he. "If we can pull him through it's you that have saved him—it's you!"

The thud of the old doctor's feet, the tapping of his cane, seemed to echo in the captain's heart like thunders of doom. He got up from beside the berth and faced the door, like a man who waits the summons to walk forth at dawn and face the firing-squad. Dr. Marsh, still seated by the berth, frowned and shook his head. Quite evidently he had no faith in this old man, relic of a school past and gone, who claimed to know strange secrets of the Orient.

"This boy is dying," thought Marsh. "I don't believe in all this talk about curare. He's dying of hemorrhage and shock. His pulse and respiration are practically *nil*—his skin is dusky with suffocation already. Even if the old chap has a remedy, he's too late. Hal's gone—and it will kill the old man, too. What a curse seems to have hung to this family! Wiped out, all wiped out!"

In the doorway appeared Laura and old Filhiol. The girl's face was burning with excitement. The doctor's eyes shone strangely.

"Still alive, is he?" demanded Filhiol.

"Yes," answered Marsh. "But you've

got no time to try more than one experiment. Think you've got something, do you?"

"Got it, Filhiol?" choked the captain. His hands twitched with appeal. "Tell me you've—got it!"

"Water! The hypodermic needle!" directed Filhiol, his voice a whiplash. "Ezra, a glass of water. Marsh, the needle? Thanks!"

He mixed the powder in a quarter-glass of water, and drew the solution up into the glass barrel of the syringe. Ezra, unable to bear any further strain, sank down in a chair by the fire, buried his face in both hands and remained there, motionless. Dr. Marsh, frankly skeptical, watched in silence. The girl, her arm about Briggs, was whispering something to him, though what it was could not be told; for through the room sounded a hollow roaring, blent of surf and tempest and wind-buffetings of the great chimney.

Filhiol handed the hypodermic to Marsh.

"Administer this," he commanded. "Your hands have been sterilized, and mine haven't. We mustn't even waste the time for me to scrub up, and I'm taking no chances with any non-surgical conditions."

Marsh nodded. The old man was undoubtedly a little cracked, but it could do no harm to humor him. Marsh quickly prepared an area of Hal's arm, rubbing it with alcohol. He tossed away the pledget of cotton, pinched up the bloodless skin, and jabbed the needle home.

"All of it?" asked he, as he pushed down the ring.

"All!" answered Filhiol. "It's a thundering dosage, but this is no time for half measures!"

The ring came wholly down. Marsh withdrew the needle, took more cotton and again rubbed the puncture. He laid the hypo on the desk, now cleared of the blood-stained bedding that had covered it. Then he felt Hal's pulse, and very grimly shook his head.

"Laura," said he, "I think you'd better go. Your father, when he left, told me to tell you he wanted you to go home."

"I'm not afraid to see Hal die, if he's got to die, any more than I'm afraid to have

him live. He's mine, either way." Her eyes were wonderful. "I'm going to stay!"

"Well, as you wish," murmured Dr. Marsh. He turned back to his observation of the patient.

Filhiol stood beside him. Wan, haggard, with deep lines of exhaustion in his face, he leaned heavily on his cane. The old captain, seated now at the head of the berth, was leaning close, listening to each slow gasp, laden with the sickly smell of ether. Now and again he passed a hand over his forehead, but always the sweat dampened it again.

"Any change?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Not yet," Marsh answered.

"It couldn't take effect so soon, anyhow," cut in Filhiol. "It'll be ten minutes before it's noticeable."

Marsh curled a lip of scorn. What did this superannuated relic know? What, save folly, could be expected of him?

The seconds dragged to minutes, and still Marsh kept his hold on the boy's wrist. A gust of wind puffed ashes out upon the hearth. Somewhere at the back of the house a loose blind slammed. The rising, falling tumult of the surf shuddered the air.

"Oh, God! Can't you tell yet?" whispered the captain. "Can't you tell?"

"Sh!" cautioned Filhiol. "Remember, you're captain of this clipper. You've got to hold your nerve!"

The clock on the mantel gave a little preliminary click, then began striking. One by one it tolled out twelve musical notes, startlingly loud in that tense silence of the room.

Marsh shifted his feet, pursed his lips and leaned a little forward. He drew out his watch.

"Humph!" he grunted.

"Better?" gulped Alpheus Briggs. "Better—or worse?"

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Marsh.

"What is it?"

"Dr. Filhiol, you've done it!"

"Is he—dead?" breathed Laura.

"Two more beats per minute already!" Marsh answered. "And a markedly greater amplitude. Captain Briggs, if nothing happens now, your boy will live!"

The old man tried to speak, but the words

died upon his white lips. His eyes closed, his head dropped forward as he sat there, and his arms fell limp. In his excess of joy Captain Alpheus Briggs had fainted.

By early dawn the tempest, blowing itself clean away with all its wrack of cloud and rain, left a pure-washed sky of rose and blue overarching the wild-tossing sea. The sun burned its way in gold and crimson up into a morning sprayed with spindrift from the furious surf-charges against the granite coast. All along the north shore that wave army charged; and the bell-buoy, wildly clanging, seemed to revel in furious exultation over the departed storm.

The early rays flashed out billions of jewels from drops of water trembling on grass-blades of the captain's lawn. Through the eastward-looking portholes of the cabin, long spears of sunlight penetrated, paling the flames on the hearth. Those flames had been fed with wood surpassing strange—with all the captain's barbarous collection of bows and arrows, blowpipes, spears and clubs, even to the brutal "Penang lawyer" that had come from Batu Kawan itself. No more should these reminders of a past forever dead intrude themselves at Snug Haven, waken evil memories in Captain Briggs or stir the curiosity of Hal.

Before the fire, in a big chair, Ezra slept of absolute exhaustion. Dr. Marsh was gone. By the berth, however, Filhiol was still on guard with Laura and the captain. All three were spent and haggard with the terrible vigil, but happiness brooded over them, and none thought of rest or sleep.

In the berth, now with open eyes, lay Hal, his face white as the pillow. With the conquering of the paralysis, some slight power of motion had returned to him; but the extreme exhaustion of that heavy loss of blood held him almost immobile. His eyes, though, moved from face to face of the three watchers, and his pale lips were smiling.

A different look lay in those eyes than any that had ever been there, even in the boy's moments of greatest good humor. No longer was there visible that latent expression of arrogance, of power, cruelty and pride that at any moment had been

won't to leap up like a trapped beast tearing its cage asunder. Hal's look was now not merely weakness; it took hold on gentleness and on humanity; it was the look of one who, having always gloried in the right of might, had found it swiftly turn to the bursting bubble of illusion—one who had learned a supremely terrible lesson and had seen a different and a better way.

This Hal now lying bandaged and inert in the old captain's berth was no longer the Hal of yesterday. That personality had died: another had replaced it; a wholly other and more human one. Something had departed from the boy's face, never to return again. One would almost have said the eyes were those of madness that had become suddenly sane—eyes from which a curse had all at once been lifted, leaving them rational and calm and happy.

Hal's eyes drifted from the old doctor's face to the captain's, rested a moment on Laura, and then wandered to the fireplace. Surprise mirrored itself in them at sight of the bare bricks. The captain understood.

"They're gone, Hal," said he, very gently. "Gone, burned up—they were all part and parcel of the old life; and now that *that's* gone they can't have any place here. I know you'll understand what I mean."

Hal made an effort. His lips formed the words soundlessly: "I understand."

"He'll do now," said Filhiol. "I'm pretty far gone. I've got to get a little rest or you'll have two sick men on your hands. If you need anything, call me, though. And don't let him talk! That punctured lung of his has got to rest!"

He got up heavily, patted Hal's hand that lay outside the spread, then took the cane he had borrowed from the hat-rack in the hall in place of the one Hal had broken, and started toward the door. He was notably weaker and more lame than the day before. How great a share of his small remaining energy had he not given in the past few hours!

The captain followed him, laid a hand on his shoulder, detained him.

"Doctor," said he in a low tone, "if you knew what you've done for me—if you could only understand—"

"None of that, sir!" interrupted the old man sternly. "A professional duty, sir, nothing more!"

"A million times more than that! You've opened up a new heaven and a new earth. You've given Hal back to me. I know it! I can see the change. It's real! The old book's closed. The new one's opened. You've done so much more for me than if you'd saved my life! You've saved a thing infinitely more than life to me. You've saved my boy!"

Filhiol nodded.

"And you, too," he murmured. "Yes, facts are facts. Still, it was all in the line of duty. We're neither of us too old to stand up to duty, captain. I hope we'll never be. Hal's cured. There can't be any manner of doubt about *that*. The curse of unbridled strength is lifted from him. He's another man now. The powers of darkness have defeated themselves. And the new dawn is breaking."

He paused a moment, looking intently into the old captain's face, then turned again toward the door.

"I'm very tired now," said he. "There's nothing more I can do. Let me go, captain."

Alpheus Briggs clasped his hand in silence. For a long minute the hands of the two old men gripped each other with a force more eloquent than any words. Then Filhiol hobbled through the door and disappeared.

The captain turned back to Laura. There were tears in his eyes as he murmured:

"If there were more like him, what a different world this would be!"

"It is a different world to-day, anyhow, from what it was yesterday," smiled Laura. She bent over Hal and smoothed back the heavy black hair from his white forehead. "A different world for all of us, Hal. Thank God you're here with us in it!"

His hand moved slightly, but could not go to hers. She took it, clasped it against her breast, raised it to her mouth and kissed it.

The sunlight, strengthening, moved slowly across the wall whence now all traces and reminders of the curse had been torn down. A ray touched the old captain's white hair, englorifying it. He laid his hand on Laura's hand and Hal's; and in his eyes once more were tears, but now glad tears that washed away all bitter memories.

From without, through a half-opened window that let the perfumed June drift in, echoed sounds of life. Voices of village children sounded along the hedge. Cart-wheels rattled. The anvil, early at work, sent up its musical *clank-clank-clank* to Snug Haven.

And from a Gothic-arching elm near the broad porch the sudden, flowing melody of a liquid-throated robin greeting the new day after the night of storm, echoed in hearts now infinitely glad.

(The end.)



RONDEAU

BY KATHERINE HOFFMAN

AH, little loves and light are best, swift-blown
 By sun and laughter to their brief birthright
 Of roseate fulness, and as swiftly flown—
 The little loves and light!
 Who tends great love grows him a tree of might,
 But in its branches the lone winds make moan,
 And homeless rains go sobbing through the night;
 And in its fall at last is overthrown
 His house of life. Ah, better far the white
 And pink heaped drift from rose seeds idly sown—
 The little loves and light!

An Unfair Catch

by
Augustus Wittfeld



FUZZY-WUZZY stood near the corner, leaning against the wall of the building as though it were his sole support. The noon whistle had just blown and the workers were hurrying out to connect with a noon-time meal. As they passed the corner, a number of them gave Fuzzy-wuzzy the once-over and indulged in caustic comments at his expense. Fuzzy-wuzzy was impervious to badinage and continued to bask in the sunshine with his back to the wall.

A large piece of orange skin, thrown with uncaring aim from one of the upper windows of the building, caught him fair on the top of the head and woke him to life. He turned languidly and gazed upward to locate the offender.

"Hey! You Moll!" he called. "Keep your floral offerings to yourself. This ain't no vodoville act."

"G'wan, you bum," came the retort, accompanied by another piece of orange skin.

Fuzzy-wuzzy side-stepped the offering and nearly collided with a flashily dressed young fellow who had just turned the corner. The newcomer stepped close to the wall, a few feet from Fuzzy-wuzzy, and proceeded to light a cigarette. A third piece of orange skin whizzed through the air and nearly knocked the burning match from his fingers. He whirled and faced upward.

"Some shot for a Jane," he called to the

girl at the window. "Why don't you throw a whole orange, while you are about it? I ain't no prodigal son to feed on skins."

"Catch this and you can have it," called the girl, holding a large orange to view.

The flashy one set himself to make the catch and the orange sailed through the air. It came straight toward his cupped hands, but a fraction of a second before it reached them, Fuzzy-wuzzy made a spring. He deftly caught the golden fruit with one hand and had it tucked in his coat-pocket before the flashy one could even register surprise.

"Hey, you," he snarled. "Come across with that fruit. It wasn't intended for you."

"What you getting sore about?" demanded Fuzzy-wuzzy. "The fruit doesn't belong to you."

"It don't, hey?" exclaimed the flashy one. "Didn't the Moll throw it to me?"

"She said you could have it if you caught it," replied Fuzzy-wuzzy. "You didn't catch it—did you?"

"It doesn't make a darned bit of difference whether I did or not," raged the flashy one. "I'm going to have it."

He made a rush. Fuzzy-wuzzy squared himself to meet it, and as the flashy one hurtled forward, he suddenly side-stepped and gave his opponent the heel.

The flashy one tripped over it and struck the concrete pavement, much to the detri-

ment of his suit and his skin. He arose snarling and advanced cautiously. He aimed a wicked blow at Fuzzy-wuzzy, which was neatly parried. The next instant they clinched, just as Carney, the cop, turned the corner in quest of peace and quiet. To have his dreams of a quiet time shattered by a common street fight, aroused Carney's ire and he sailed in, and what he did to those two belligerents would never have been tolerated at a Sunday-school picnic. Then he marched them to the patrol box and summoned the wagon.

II.

AT the station-house, Carney made his plaint to the sergeant.

"These two guys don't seem to know that there is a war on over in Europe, sergeant. They were fighting on the public highway."

"Names?" quizzed Sergeant Boyd, poised a pen over the blotter.

"Jack Dakin," volunteered the flashily dressed one.

"I think he is a liar, sarge," interrupted Carney. "While these two guys were fighting, a dame up at one of the windows hollers out, 'Give it to him, Tony,' and I don't think she was encouraging the bum."

"Come again, young fellow," commanded Boyd. "Tony what?"

"Tony Ferris," sullenly replied that individual, flashing a menacing look at Carney.

"What's yours?" demanded Boyd, turning to Fuzzy-wuzzy.

"No trouble to show goods," he announced, handing a pasteboard to Boyd.

Sergeant Boyd glanced at the card and an amused smile crept over his face.

"Some class to you for a hobo," he commented. "Pleased to meet you, Chick. But you should have known better than to start something on the public highway. Carney would never have pinched you without cause."

"Oh, that's all right, sergeant," said Chick airily. "I don't mind getting pinched, but when a Moll makes me a donation. I'm not going to stand for any Tony-boy trying to take it away from me."

"What was all the row about, anyhow?" demanded Sergeant Boyd.

"It's like this, sergeant," volunteered Tony. "I was standing on the corner, lighting a cigarette, when a Moll up at one of the windows biffs me with a piece of orange skin. When I asks her why she don't chuck me a whole orange, she's game enough to do it, and this crook snitches it right out of my hands. I wouldn't beef about it if she hadn't meant it for me."

"She told you that you could have it if you caught it," interposed Chick. "You didn't catch it. Did you?"

"It don't make any difference whether I caught it or not," retorted Tony. "It was meant for me. My lady friend ain't throwing no oranges to bums."

"Your lady friend?" questioned Boyd. "Then you know the young woman who threw the orange?"

"Sure, I know her," boasted Tony. "Here she comes now," he exclaimed, as a flashily-dressed girl entered the room.

"Excuse me, sergeant," she exclaimed. "But I saw the officer arrest those two fellows and I just had ta come down and tell you what I know about the case. That bum started the row."

"Are you the young woman who threw the orange?" asked Boyd.

"Sure I am," she replied.

"Whom did you throw it to?" questioned Boyd.

"I threw it to Tony, of course," she replied.

"Tony who?" snapped Boyd.

The girl hesitated for the fraction of a second and then replied.

"Tony Ferris. He's my gentleman friend."

"And what is your name, young woman?" questioned Boyd.

"Irene Cheston," was the reply.

"There does not seem to be any question as to whom the orange rightfully belongs," continued Boyd, addressing his remarks to Fuzzy-wuzzy. "Better hand it over to Tony before I commit the pair of you for a hearing."

"All right, sergeant," he complained. "I think it is pretty raw that I have to give this up after all the trouble it's got me

into, but you're boss, and I guess what you say goes. But if the girl intended it for him, she can give it to him herself."

The girl took the orange and handed it to Tony.

"Guess I'll be going," she said addressing Sergeant Boyd. "If you want me for a witness at the hearing, you can get me by calling up the M. D. Supply Company on the phone. Main 9824."

As she started for the door, Fuzzy-wuzzy swiftly strode to the sergeant's desk and whispered something to him. The sergeant galvanized into quick action.

"One minute, Miss Cheston," he commanded. "Officer Carney, guard the door. Now, Chick, what was it you were saying?"

"If it is permissible for one prisoner to make a charge against another one," replied Fuzzy-wuzzy, "I want to prefer charges against this pair. Tony Ferris has been violating the Harrison Act by selling morphin and cocain, and his partner, Miss Cheston, has been supplying him with the stuff. I think that if you search him, sergeant, you will find the goods on him."

Sergeant Boyd studied the prisoners a full minute and then he pressed a call-button on his desk. A pair of plain-clothes men entered.

"Frisk that fellow over there," commanded Boyd, indicating the scowling Tony.

The pair went to the task and turned all of Tony's belongings out on Sergeant Boyd's desk. The search brought to light a wallet, a package of cigarettes, a box of matches, a bunch of keys, some loose change — but nothing else. Sergeant Boyd surveyed the collection disapprovingly and turned to Fuzzy-wuzzy.

"Looks to me as if you was barking up the wrong tree, Chick," he said. "There's nothing in that junk that looks like dope. What put that idea into your head?"

"I know that Ferris peddles the stuff," asserted Fuzzy-wuzzy. "But I didn't know where he got it, until I learned that his side partner, there, was employed at a physicians' supply house and that she handles the stuff as her regular work."

"Sergeant Boyd, this is an outrage," exclaimed Miss Cheston. "That bum doesn't

know what he is talking about. If you call up Mr. Billings, my boss, he will tell you that it is absolutely impossible for any of the employees to carry the stuff out of the place. All employees must be searched before leaving the laboratory."

"Sure they must," assented Fuzzy-wuzzy. "But that doesn't stop it from getting out. There are more ways than one of croaking a cat."

Fuzzy-wuzzy advanced to the sergeant's desk and picked up the orange.

"Sergeant," he said. "If you examine this closely, you will note that there are a number of small circles on the surface where pieces of the skin have been punched out and then replaced. These circles are plainly visible despite the coating of paraffin which holds the disks in place."

"By the simple process of skinning the orange, I believe that we will get the goods on Tony and his partner."

Fuzzy-wuzzy suited the action to the word and carefully deposited the skin on Sergeant Boyd's desk. Then, as the sergeant leaned tensely forward, he drew from the pulp of the fruit a small vial.

"Hypodermic tables of Cocain Hydrochlorid!" Boyd exclaimed, glancing at the label. "We've got the pair of you dead to rights."

"You certainly have, sergeant," said Fuzzy-wuzzy. "And there are six or seven more vials of the stuff in the orange."

"Officer," commanded Boyd, after examining it, "lock the pair of them up in separate cells for a hearing later on."

As the pair were led toward the cell-room, Tony turned on Fuzzy-wuzzy. "You're damned smart, ain't you?" he shrilled. "Who the devil are you, anyway?"

"Who? Me?" queried Fuzzy-wuzzy, smiling. "I'm not anybody much of importance, but as your curiosity is aroused, it may do you good to know that I am a humble member of the narcotic squad, working in my natural state, without any disguise or make-up. The boss says that if I take a bath occasionally and buy some decent clothes, I may develop into a real detective, some day. What do you think?"

"Aw, go to the devil," growled Tony. "You make me tired."

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



DRAMA is the wine of life. From the tired business man to the budding youth, we are all in search of thrills. Not thrills, of course, for the thrills' sake, but the answer of life to life. Only the derelict refuses to respond to the melodrama, which life is continually staging.

Unless you have a vigorous appetite for the dramatic contrasts of life, we would advise you to forego the six-part serial which opens in this magazine next week:

FROM NOW ON

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

Author of "The Sin That Was His," "The Beloved Traitor," "The Miracle Man," etc.

Mr. Packard confronted a seemingly impossible task when he set out to surpass his distinguished achievements in the realms of fiction. No reader who has followed the Packard trail will ever forget the joy of the journey and the excitement of the chase in the company of this daring explorer of life's mysterious jungle. But in this new story he has surpassed his own brilliant record. For sustained interest, for dramatic intensity, and thrilling complications this unquestioned Packard masterpiece equals anything that has so far appeared in the **ALL-STORY WEEKLY**.

Dave Henderson, who plays the lead in this gripping story of romance and retribution, towers as high above the usual heavy hero of the underworld as *Raffles* outdistances the many base usurpers of his name and fame. Dave is not a saint in the clothes of a sinner, but if to understand all is to forgive all, we think you will agree with us there was bound to be a tide in the affairs of this man, which, taken at the flood, led on to fortune. A man like Dave Henderson has not only to clear the barriers raised by society and his own kind, but the far more dangerous bars of a headstrong and impetuous nature.

It is quite beside our purpose to usurp the author's prerogatives and tell Dave's story here, as it would be grossly unfair to minimize your pleasure by furnishing you leads. But we dare not close this prefatory note without giving you warning that it will be wholly your irreparable loss if you fail to make Dave's acquaintance in the first instalment of this six-part serial, which sets the pace for our 1919 endeavor.

No matter how often you have tracked your quarry through the fields of fiction, or how big your trophies of the chase, you cannot fail to respond to the breathless excitement of this alluring story, which is as luridly dramatic as anything in the life of Benvenuto Cellini or Casanova himself.

Once introduced to Dave and his deed and you will be besieging this office for the instalments which will not arrive fast enough to satisfy your impatient enthusiasm.

The curtain rises on the first scene of "FROM NOW ON" in next week's magazine; the wise will be in their seats when the doors open.

THOUGH our church windows and our office walls all bear hand-illuminated texts with the assurance it is more blessed to give than to re-

ceive, there are few natural Christians when it comes to cutting melons. In fact we are all looking for something for nothing in the face of com-

mon sense and life's experience which testify to the reciprocal nature of gifts and getting. If only he saves his life, who—paradoxically as it sounds—loses it, no less certain is it that the real prizes of life go to those who despise them. But I fear most of us, in the very act of despising, have a secret expectation that somehow some consolation prize will reward our conscious efforts at virtue.

Down in Tickfall human nature under the skin is the same human nature which is found in every other part of the country—true American red-white-and-blue human nature. But wherever Skeeter and Figger and their numerous following are gathered together, there in their midst you will find an eager but honest desire to gather plums and prizes without being too meticulously attentive to the market price. When Wash Jones turned the tabernacle and the meeting ground into a Southern home-town Coney Island, every colored person in Tickfall and its environs joined the stampede for Joyville. Many were the entries for the grand ball prize, but no one had figured on the consolation prize.

A close-up of competitors and a most diverting account of this unexpected outbreak of *metropolis* in Tickfall, and the complications that it involved, are all graphically narrated in the first of next week's two novelettes—

THE CONSOLATION PRIZE

BY E. K. MEANS

Author of "The Squeeze-Wheel," etc.

EVEN the most punctilious of us lapse at times, and "leave it to George." The less scrupulous among us sometimes "leave it to Jane." But only a dolt or a dunce would entrust the affair of his heart to a fellow sufferer. And therein lies our sin of overcaution, *sometimes*. No man woos by proxy after Dante's classical warning of the case of Francesca da Rimini, though circumstances might force a man to marry by proxy. But exceptions prove the rule in love as well as in law. Anyhow—

LEAVE IT TO LYDIA

BY FRANK LAPHAM

the second of next week's distinguished novelettes, discloses a situation in which father and son were completely powerless to help themselves, while Lois apparently was to be the innocent victim of a man's obtuseness, until a woman with truth in her soul and singleness of purpose in her eye, assessed the situation and pointed the way. A tragedy impended; three human lives were trembling in the balance; unselfishness was pitted against obtuseness, when Lydia changed the gears and herself took the wheel. How the car held the middle of the road, glided over boulders, took the hill, and finally landed in the valley of "Heart's Desire" you can follow for yourself in next week's magazine.

Frank Lapham writes with easy mastery of his materials, and in this charming story has provided you with a novel situation which will compel your interest and command your commendation. Don't let a lapse of memory deprive you of the joy of this triumphant triangle.

THANKS to Herman Howard Matteson, thousands of people to whom the name Siwash meant nothing and Puget Sound only a geographical direction have come to know this wonderful region and these delightful Indians. One need have no anthropological leanings, just a natural human sympathy and curiosity, to be drawn to these winsome, primitive people, who retain the world-outlook as well as the customs of their fathers. Siwash customs are many and their prejudices not few, but through the mists of superstition and the nature-wonder of these people shines a soul of pure gold, whose many convulsions Matteson has shown us with a sympathetic understanding. Witness "THE STORY BASKET," which appears in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and which is bound to enlist the approbation of all old friends of the Siwash and to win a legion of new ones.

PERHAPS somewhere in the West there is a ranch where no one ever laughs; where the foreman is a grouch; where the owner is so stingy that he hates to feed "the hands"; where the cow-punchers are down-hearted and don't get any fun out of life—but we've never heard of it. And we don't want to! The West to us is a land of wide reaches of prairie; of happy ranch-houses, in which live golden-haired heroines who wear short khaki skirts, high-heeled boots, long spurs, Stetson hats, and six-guns; of solemn-faced but laughing-hearted cowboys, and of bad men, whose badness is redeemed by their picturesqueness. If we are wrong—well, we want to stay wrong! All of which brings us to Frank Condon's rollicking story of the West, "F. O. B. ARIZONA," in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It's as full of laughs as a Brazil nut is of meat. We won't spoil your fun by telling you anything about the story—except that when the boys decided to show their affection for Mrs. "Boss" Keller by buying her a limousine—a chariot of such unsubdued tone that it was at once christened "the Royal Flush"—for a birthday gift, things began to happen. You'll start to laugh before you turn the first page, and keep right at it until you finish the story.

THE business woman often makes the expression, "the weaker sex," sound foolish. Clear-headed, self-reliant, quick-witted, sometimes a little hard in her business dealings, many a woman of the world of trade has been admitted into full companionship with the lordly male; not as a woman, but as a business associate. Her interests are the interests of the men with whom she is

thrown into contact; her ideas and ideals are theirs. Yet most of these efficient women who have invaded a field of endeavor that men once considered exclusively their own have not lost their womanliness—they kept it secret perhaps, but it is there. In their spare hours, in the intimacy of their homes, they are as feminine as any pink-cheeked youngster reading novels and eating chocolates in the hammock on the veranda. Such a woman is Nancy Daniels, cracker saleswoman "making" the small towns of the West, who William H. Hamby will tell you about next week in "BILLY BUCK HENSLY AND ART." It's a story of New Mexico—of the righting of a great wrong by a woman who had every reason to be bitter against a world which had given her nothing but what she had earned by hard toil, yet who kept her heart tender and warm and ever ready to help a sister in distress—which in this case was a girl artist struggling on against poverty and hunger. Nancy helped her in an unexpected way—and a way which makes a mighty interesting and colorful tale.

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ONLY professionals perhaps, are able thoroughly to appreciate the fine distinctions of the art of self-defense. Of course, even a rank outsider knows the difference between a gentlemanly boxing contest and an honest-to-goodness fight. But when a boasting boxer maliciously tries to stretch a technical victory into a slashing rout, and the boxer is a better boaster than a fighter, somebody is sure to be caught up with. Some wise hints for the ring and some wiser leads for life are furnished by E. S. Pladwell in his story, "THE FIFTH ROUND," in next week's magazine. Few of us miss the chance of a fifth round some time in our career. Let Danny Dale show you how to do it.

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WANTS SEQUEL TO "THE UNTAMED"

To THE EDITOR:

This is the first time I have ever written you to tell you how much good your magazines have done both myself and husband. We have both read them for five years before we were married, and have never missed a copy the three years we have been married. A week seems awfully long to wait for the next instalment of the serial, and when Thursday comes I simply sit down and devour both magazines from beginning to end.

I won't try to tell you what stories I like best, for it would take a ream of paper. But I like them all except most of the "different" stories; and I haven't a thing to say about them, for they don't happen very often, and the rest of the magazine is so good that it more than makes up for them.

I am especially fond of Edgar Franklin's stories, for they simply are *immense*. Also Achmed Abdullah, for his stories are a book by themselves.

Max Brand, E. R. Burroughs, and George A.

England are in a class all by themselves, and I can't speak *too* highly of them.

My husband is very fond of E. K. Means's stories, and read those first after the serials.

"After His Own Heart" is the best story I've read in a good while. But I think "Broadway Bab" takes the prize among them all for being a story full of life and yet with a sadder side to it. I was certainly sorry to have it end, for *Bab* was the most original girl I have ever met in a story.

I have only one fault to find in Max Brand's story, "The Untamed," and that is the ending. It certainly was a "thriller" from start to finish, but it didn't end at all like I expected it would.

Can it be that he expected to write a sequel, and ended it like that purposely? I am sure every one would be more than glad for a sequel, for if the rest of your readers feel as I did, they were greatly disappointed in the ending.

I have forgotten who wrote "Ladyfingers," and have been intending for some time to write and ask if you have the back copies and how much they are, or if it is published in book form and the price of it. That story ought to be read by every member of every family all over, for it certainly is the most interesting of all the stories you have published. I almost forgot to ask about "A Man's Hearth" that you published quite a while ago. I have forgotten the author, but would like to get it so I could read it again.

Hoping to hear from you soon through the Heart to Heart Talks, I will close, wishing you great success in the work that is truly helping people to read the best and cleanest stories for the least money.

Very sincerely yours,
Erie, Pennsylvania. MRS. L. B. C.

NOTE: "Ladyfingers," by Jackson Gregory, was published in the **ALL-STORY WEEKLY** April 21 to May 28, 1917. It has not been published in book form, but we can supply the six numbers containing it for twenty cents each. "A Man's Hearth," by Eleanor Ingram (**ALL-STORY WEEKLY**, September 11, 1915), has been published in book form by J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, for \$1.25 net.

A COLORED READER'S TRIBUTE TO E. K. MEANS

To THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find two dollars. Please send me the **ALL-STORY WEEKLY** for six months. I usually buy the magazine from our drug-store, but have been unable to get it lately. I think it is the best magazine on sale; especially do I admire E. K. Means's negro stories. They are true to life; gives the negro race as it is—some intelligent and some filled with superstition, as are all races. Quite a number of colored people read your magazine, and it is a pleasure to read a story of our race that does not make us always black monsters, incapable of human feelings. We are a race that

is by nature jolly and forgiving, and not the "beasts of prey" so often pictured. Many are ignorant, but not all. How many colored readers have you? We certainly appreciate E. K. Means. The only fault is he doesn't come often enough.

MRS. CARRIE MCADAMS.

Silu City, North Carolina.

LIKES THE WESTERN STORIES BEST

TO THE EDITOR:

Allow me to add a few words of praise to your magazine and the writers—especially those of the splendid Western stories. I am a constant reader of your magazine, and I find more entertainment in it than all the other magazines put together. I love the serials, and especially the *Western* serials. "The Texan" was *grand*, only a bit disappointing in the end. "Six Feet Four" just as good, only too short for such a splendid beginning. "A Substitute Millionaire" and "An Extra Husband" were "corkers," and now I'm reading "The Untamed" and "Broadway Bab," and I am simply carried away with both stories.

Your short stories are to be considered, too. Even the verses peppered here and there are like the mint to the "julep." But it's those big-hearted Western stories that appeal to me, such as the above mentioned and many others. I didn't care for "The Pirate Woman," but I am not a knocker, and it takes different stories to appeal to so many different tastes. Tell the writer of "The Texan" to get busy, and either give us a sequel to that story or another story just as good. But I think poor Tex was treated rather badly for such a splendid fellow. Hoping your magazine a long, successful career, and also the writers of those wonderful stories, I assure you I am an ALL-STORY WEEKLY booster indefinitely.

MRS. PEARL ARNOLD.

Birmingham, Alabama.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Please find enclosed ten cents in stamps, for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for October 10, as I was unable to get it at the news-stand. I have read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a long time, and think it fine. Have read "Above the Law," "The Brute-Breaker," "Sarah Worth's Feud," and others, all of which are fine. Hoping to receive my magazine right away, I am, always an ALL-STORY WEEKLY reader.

MRS. MARY E. SHALLENBERG.

Sand Springs, Oklahoma.

Enclosed please find fifteen cents for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, November 16. We failed to get ours, as it came in late Saturday, and sold out before Monday afternoon. We are living thirteen miles north of Dayton, Ohio, which was our home until last March. Being out in the country

keeps us on the alert, or we lose our copy, and as we have been reading it for years, in fact, since its birth, being readers of the old *Scrap-Book*, we couldn't do without it now. Our nine-year-old boy simply devours it from cover to cover, and if there is a Means story, he and his father have a happy time chuckling over *Skeeter Butts* and the rest of the Tickfalls. We have no preference, as all are good, clean stories, and the book perfection. Yours, for continual success,

MR. AND MRS. HARRY E. WHARTON

Vandalia, Ohio. and son "DICK."

Here's to the luck of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I have been taking this book for about three years, and, believe me, it's great. Please send me the book of November 9 of this year. First I have missed. Ten cents inside. Say, but Max Brand is a crackerjack. I'd like to shake hands with him. Let us hear from Dr. Goodwin's "The Moon Pool." I hate to go against your word, but I don't believe that story is true. Why, man, when I first read *that story* I was scared green. I'm like M. A. Paro, one of your readers; profanity isn't bad in a story at all. When he talks about "Kaiser Bill"—well, the one that don't say something about him in a—well, not a mild way, should be made to stand up against the wall by his side, and that's no treat. Hoping you a great success, I remain, a steady reader.

(MISS) ALDA JARVIS.

Norfolk, Virginia.

I enjoy reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY very much. Just as soon as I finish reading the magazine it is gone, for the old boys around me go after the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. If possible get Johnston McCulley to write some more stories for you. The best story that I have read in a long time is "His Grace," by R. A. Bennet. Some of your best authors are J. McCulley, E. R. Burroughs, Max Brand, R. A. Bennet, E. Franklin, H. Footner, B. A. Williams, and Isabel Ostrander.

Fort Worth, Texas.

C. A. PAXTON.

Enclosed you will find ten cents in silver for the January 4 number of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, which please send me as soon as possible. Let me drop a few lines of praise for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I can truthfully say it is the best magazine I have ever read, and I have read a good many. I have been a silent reader now for nearly a year. I buy them at the news-stands. "Everyman's Land," to my idea, was one of the best that ever came out. I won't try to tell you the story I like best, for it would take too much space; but if I find a story I don't like, I pass it up, for I know you people couldn't please everybody if you turned the earth upside down trying. For I know people will grouch, and here's hoping long life and success to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and hope I receive my copy soon.

Yours respectfully,

N. McAlester, Oklahoma.

M. C.