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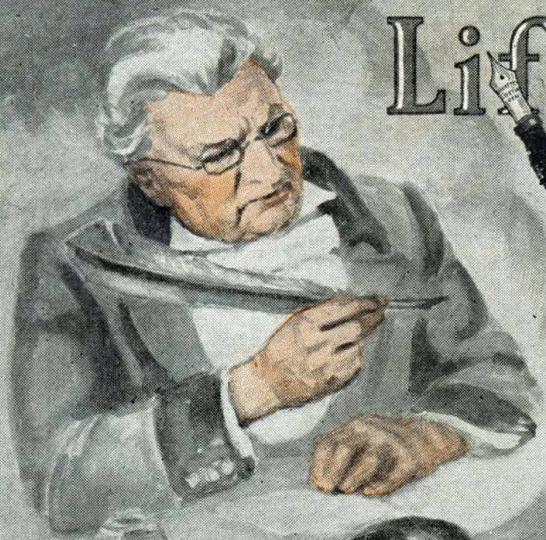
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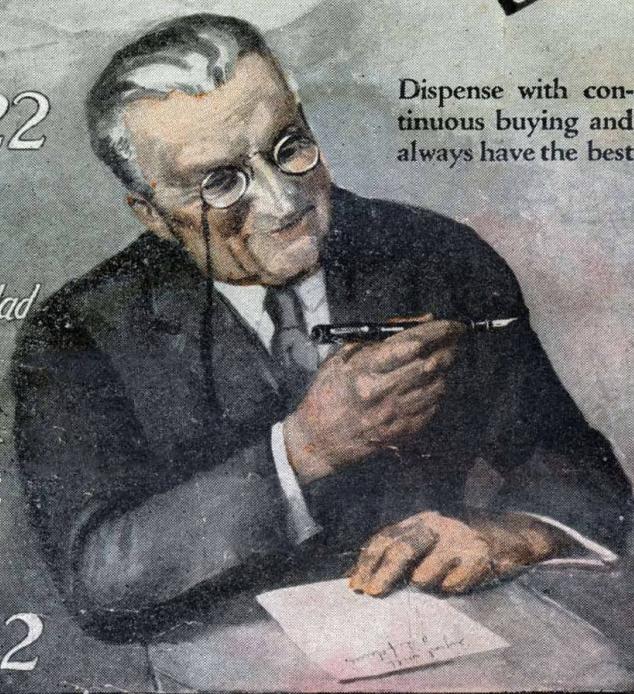


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EVER BUY**

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It comes as our *millionth* machine, with a history of 27 years of development. It comes from one of the largest con-

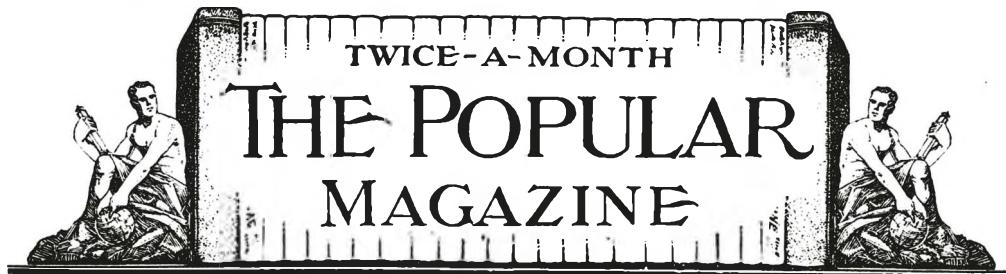
cerns in the country—and you deal direct, not roundabout. You therefore save the \$35 that it would otherwise cost to sell you an Oliver. If any typewriter is worth \$100, it is this new model. The latest usually brings a higher price—whatever it is. But we neither ask you to pay a premium nor to buy before satisfying yourself that this is the finest typewriter, regardless of price.

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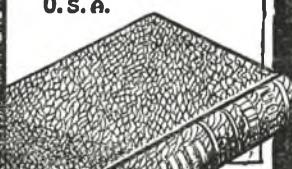


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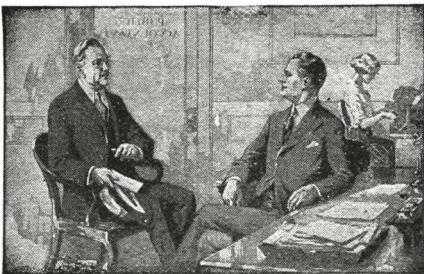
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To the average man the \$10,000 a year job is only a dream. Yet today there are a surprising number of men earning five figure salaries who were merely dreaming of them a short while ago. The secret of their success should prove a startling revelation to every ambitious man who has ever aspired to get into the \$10,000-a-year class.

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Earned \$1,800 in Six Weeks
My earnings for March were over \$1,000 and over \$1,800 for the last six weeks, while last week my earnings were \$365. I travel alone most of the time of the year, working 6 days each week.

The N. S. T. A. dug me out of a rut where I was earning less than \$1,000 a year and showed me how to make success. —J. P. Overstreet, Denison, Texas.

Mr. Overstreet, Mr. Campbell, and the others whose letters you see on this page are all successful salesmen. They have stepped into the \$10,000-a-year class—and they never sold goods before! It is hard to believe that such big success could come so quickly and easily. Yet it was all amazingly simple! Ask them the secret of their sudden success. They will tell you they owe it to the National Salesmen's Training Association. This is an organization of top-notch salesmen and sales managers formed expressly for the purpose of training men to sell and helping them to good selling positions. It has taken hundreds of men from all walks of life and made them Master Salesmen—it has lifted them out of the rut and shown them the way

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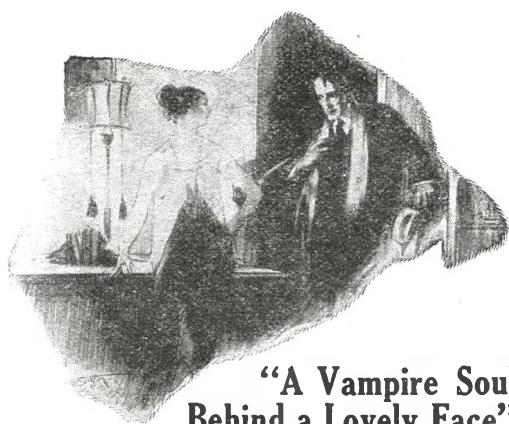
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City.....State.....

Age.....Occupation.....



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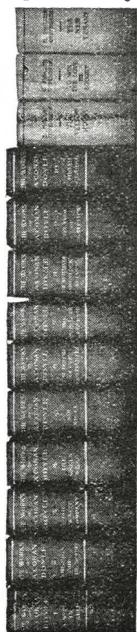
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**Jumps \$125
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A Month to
\$750 and
Over
READ
the Story of
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**W. E. Pence
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Act Right Now

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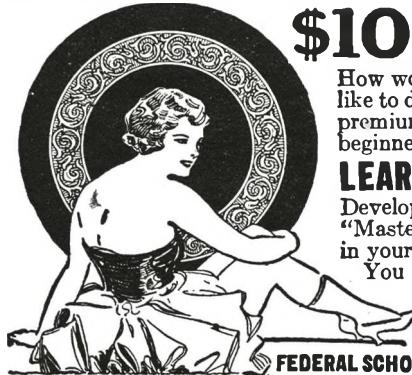
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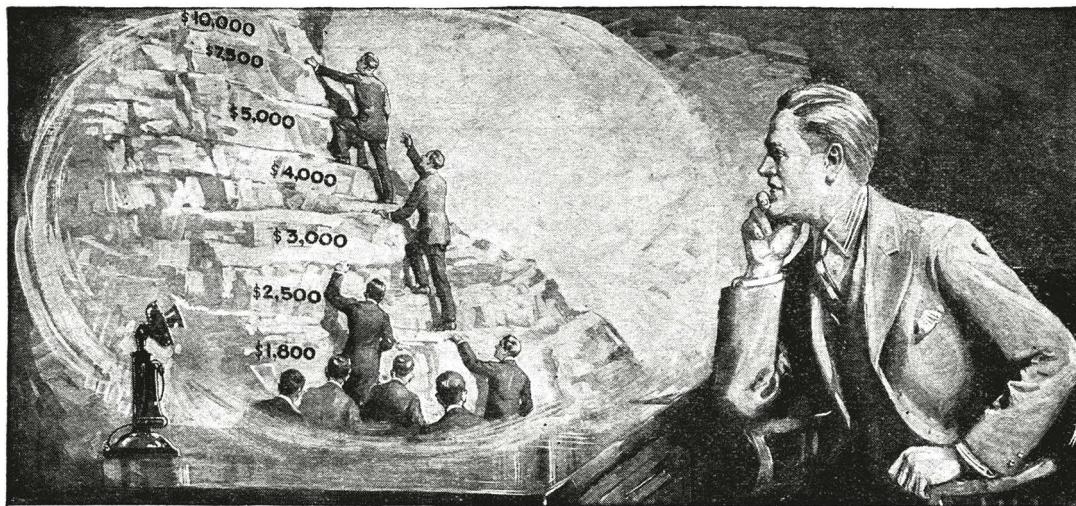
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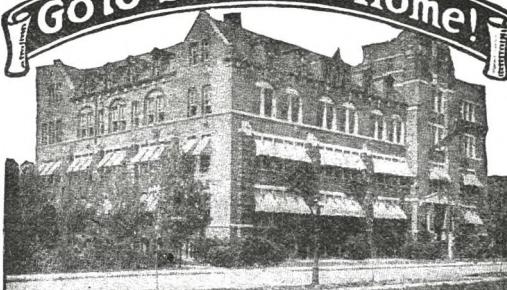


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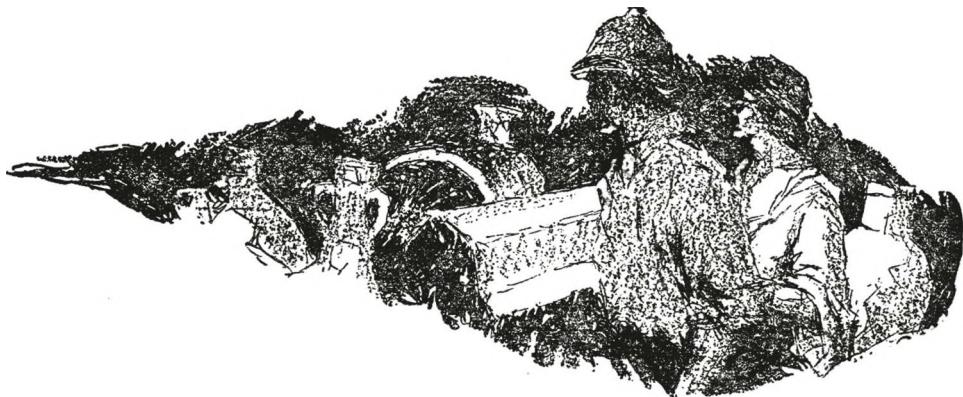
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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXV.

SEPTEMBER 7, 1922.

No. 4.



The Splendor of Asia

By L. Adams Beck

Author of "The Ninth Vibration," "The Hatred of a Queen," Etc.

FOLEDDED in the worn purse of a fever-stricken Calcutta beggar Soames and Ross found the mysterious clew to the ancient Splendor of Asia. Across the eternal Himalayan snows they set out in quest of the Unknown Glory along the mystic trail that led them to the fabulous Place of the One Woman and the hideous Things that Run and brought them back again to love, fame—bitterness and death.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

FOR a minute we were silent. Soames and I were sitting on the low wall over the steep drop to Lebong where the four roads meet in Darjiling; shining in snow before us were the mightiest of the Indian Himalayas—excepting only Everest—Kinchenjunga and her giant sister Janoo. The stalwart departing figure in a rough belted coat was Ras-Pa the wily Mongol with whom we had made our *bando-bast*—arrangement—for a trip up the mountains beyond Sikkim—very much beyond, as a matter of fact, though we did not think it necessary to harp too much on that. All having been fixed up, next day would see the first stage of our trek.

"It's going to be the time of our lives. I

told you so in Calcutta and I tell you so again," Soames said, knocking the ash off his cigar.

"And I say yes to that—if we pull it off. But you know, old man, when you've counted up the risks I'm not so sure. It's a wild, wild country up on the roof of the world."

"That's so. And yet—well, there's something in a thing of this kind, Ross, aside from the dollars. I'm all for the open road and the camp fires and the good sleeps and the whole blessed business."

"Same here! I used to dream of it down in Calcutta when one got sick of Chowringhi and the blessed old plaster casts on the Maidan. And—Lord! The steamy heat and the plotting little baboos up the back

streets! No, no! This is going to be the right thing whether we come back flush or beggars."

Soames and I had known each other a couple of years. We were both Indian civil-service men with the gift of tongues that oils the wheels in a land that has over two hundred languages, not to mention dialects, in its own vastness. We worked in the same office and growled at the very same heads of departments. But the difference between us was that Soames was six years older than I and I had an uncle and he had only his wits. Let me introduce myself as Christopher, known as "Kit" Ross, and explain my uncle. He was a man who had gone up the Indian ladder about as quickly as it could be done and was now Lord Lidderdale governing the principality of Bombay; and as he was a confirmed old bachelor his heir got more of a look-in than other fellows—and that was me.

It therefore followed that when I felt I could serve my country by an expedition up into those wild mountains that lie beyond the Debatable Land of India, strings were pulled mysteriously and the Indian government began to consider that information about the upper Passes, in view of possible bolshevist troubles with Tibet, was just the very thing they wanted. And when the Sirkar had reached that stage more strings were pulled, stretching far beyond the bounds of so-called civilization, and weird officials in the blue distance held themselves politely ready to speed the emissaries of the Sirkar on their way.

It was then I made it plain to the heads of departments that I could not undertake the task alone. Suppose I crocked up or went west, who was to run the show and bring back the information? No—Soames was the man. He knew Tibetan and Lepcha inside out and had a very fair knowledge of spoken Chinese which may be uncommonly useful in those parts. Soames was the heaven-born head of an expedition like this and I was ready to serve under him. So I respectfully represented, *et cetera, et cetera*. And Soames was appointed.

And now for the inside of this humility on my part. That is the true beginning of the story.

There had been an evening in Calcutta when there was some sort of freshness in the air and the stars were lamping out low and splendid in the black velvet sky; and on this

evening my noble self, tired with the heat and a bit sick of life, was strolling by the water beyond the Eden Gardens. Things were a bit out of joint. Joan Boston and I had quarreled pretty badly; and though that is quite another story it had its bearing on what followed. I don't know that I should have been quite so keen about the mountains if all had been smooth sailing there. And there had been a worrying business about a baboo razzle-dazzle with bombs. Altogether I was beginning to envy old Soames his absorption in race problems, in the natives, in a hundred things that seemed to take the place to him of everything that other men bothered about.

And as I lounged along and watched the stars making each a trail of light on the water like a little moon, there came to me a man. Afterward I was inclined to think that man was the messenger of fate. At the time I felt him a distinct addition to the annoyances of life, for he begged and begged and he declined to leave me in spite of the awe of the sahib. He stuck to me, he held out a lean brown hand and he asked alms in a voice alien to the Calcutta jabber. And his presence breathed of the mountains. In addition he looked most appallingly and consumedly ill.

His face was Mongolian, flat and good-humored, but wasted until the high cheek bones stood out like crags and the small eyes looked like little lost pools of ink behind them. In one ear he wore a massive silver earring set with large flat turquoises. A greasy, fur-edged cap, a tattered blouse, belted in with leather, and heavy, lead clasps, and shoes of strips of leather sewn together—that was his kit. An arresting kit, in a way; for though there are plenty of these men to be seen up Darjiling way they trouble Calcutta very little. There was something appealing about the fellow too—the innocence of the mountain man trapped in a big city. One saw him rent by the human sharks about him; one knew the black, evil-smelling dens in Calcutta where the kindly, flat face would win no mercy, where the very earring he wore might mean a slit throat and a splash in the Hugli and so an end. And he was deadly ill—he was shaking from head to foot, his lips cracked with fever, his eyes burning pin points.

I marched on. After all it was no affair of mine; and Heaven only knows what these natives are up to! But the man followed

me, pleading in his strange tongue, and I shook him off again and pushed on, understanding nothing of what he said, except that it must be the usual holdup for money.

Yet, at the corner, I looked back. The man had given up. His strength had failed and he was leaning up against the wall, shaking horribly. I saw the lean hand go up to his head and saw also a fat, cunning Bengali of the lowest type who had edged up to him, while an unveiled woman was closing in like a vulture on the other side.

After all—I thought and hesitated—and was lost. I walked back to where the man hugged the wall, shuddering.

"Clear out, you two!" A sahib speaking in that tone is obeyed. "I say, what's the matter?" I said to the sick man. "What were you trying to tell me just now?"

The answer came faintly from between rattling teeth—a poor attempt at English.

"Heaven born, your servant—sick. No money. Pity! Taking this"—he touched his earring—"buying food."

I reflected. Soames. Soames was the man. He knew half the languages of the hills. He had strange stores of herbal medicines gathered in the Terai where the black-water fever kills all but those of the native born who know the secrets of leaf and juice. Who but Soames had spent his vacations among the wild Lepchas in the deep Himalayan hill valleys, among the wild Bhotiyas beyond Sikkim—and knowing them all felt them to be human and had all sorts of queer sympathies and understandings with these queer creatures? Yes—Soames.

So I stepped aside and hailed a passing Sikh policeman, ordering him to telephone Soames Sahib at once at his rooms and ask him to come right away to Ross Sahib on the river side of the gardens. All in the lingo we politely call Hindustani. I knew it would get him. Soames was never out—he would be sitting smoking furiously and studying the customs of—say the Baltis. But he would come.

He did. In twenty minutes we were gravely surveying the shivering human wreck who leaned against the wall, half slipping down it from weakness. And with the first word he uttered Soames struck oil. He understood.

"I say, you know, Ross," he said, turning to where I listened respectfully, "this is a queer let-out. The man's a Lepcha—a Buddhist from above Darjiling. Of course

I had two leaves up there before you joined up; and I know the patter."

"By George, I believe you helped to build the tower of Babel!" I said with awe. "What does the poor chap say?"

"Not much. He's too sick. But look here —what are we going to do? As sure as we leave him he'll go under. He won't have a blessed look-in. And they're decent fellows, the Lepchas, and—well, I've always wanted to hunt one down to find out some of their little ways."

"H'm! that settles it. The hospital?"

"No. I don't take much stock in the hospital and there isn't a soul there that speaks his lingo. I see he's got Terai fever and I know exactly what to do. I'll put the poor beast in the attic room in my flat."

I own I viewed the patient with some dis-taste.

"He isn't too clean, but after all—as you had two sick monkeys and then the cat bear—and that fakir from Benares—I suppose the people will stand anything. I'll stick the damage."

"Rot! It'll cost me nothing. Hail a gharry."

I hailed a native vehicle and we bundled him in under the bewildered stare of the driver who could scarcely credit this new madness of the sahibs. Human life doesn't count for much in Calcutta among the people. A little sooner, a little later, what does it matter, when death waits for all?

Well, that was the beginning. Soames cleaned him. He explained that he might have been very much dirtier, if you come to that. He put him in a camp bed which, though hard enough for Western tastes, was wild and pampering luxury to the man of the hills. He gave him cunning medicines compounded of a root that grows in the hills beyond Tendong and all this worked a miracle and the man lived, unexpectedly and against all reason. And it is a fact that we rejoiced in that victory as if he had been flesh and blood of our own. After all, if you pit yourself against any old thing, you like to do the trick, and we both got as keen as mustard about it.

The man was so little trouble—at first almost unconscious all the time and needing nothing; then so jolly patient, obedient and grateful that it was only needful to leave some food by him and go off on our business and find him steadily better when the evening came. Even the janitor of the flats

made no objection. The two monkeys had been much more trouble and the cat bear was remembered with terror. So peace prevailed.

Then came the stage when he got up in our absence and did his clumsy best to tidy the room where he lay; and in trying to dust the sitting room he broke the treasure of Soames' soul, an earthenware image, compounded of the ashes of a departed lama and a little clay. So pathetic was his grief that Soames hid his anguish and bid the old chap cheer up; there were plenty more in Tibet if one happened to be taking a week-end there.

It was not long after that that the invalid, an invalid no longer, laid his silver earring at the feet of Soames and passionately besought him to accept it for the charges we had been at. It was all he had and, though it was little, he offered it as a token that his life was ours—and more Soames'. Might all the Buddhas, all the Incarnations, reward us for the mercy shown to a friendless man! There was no mistaking his gratitude and it touched Soames. The whole affair was one after his own heart and he liked the fellow. It was like having a big, kindly dog about the place. In the evenings he managed to extract a lot of useful knowledge of the high lands and the little ways of the hill folk. And so one night came the revelation.

It was extended to me when I came in, swept and garnished for a dance at Government House, and I own it knocked me endwise. I just seized the telephone and dispatched my regrets to her excellency that a touch of fever would deprive Mr. Ross of the pleasure, et cetera—and that though I knew well Joan Boston would be there! And I sat down, white tie and all, beside Soames, and the Lepcha squatted on the ground before us.

We had something to look at, for it was Soames' opinion that no one had ever seen a clean Lepcha before or ever would again. The tattered blouse, the greasy cap, had disappeared, and new garments in the highest Lepcha fashion had been contrived by a Hindu tailor who could copy anything earthly from a bishop's apron to the fluffy skirt of a ballet dancer.

He was a strong-built, Chinese-looking man of thirty with a cheerful grin and a straight way of looking into your eyes that took us both. His name, of many syllables

and appalling difficulty, Soames had boiled down to Yar, and this he accepted gratefully.

"I think, Ross, I'd better condense what I've gleaned from him. It may make no difference to you, but it has made a big one to me, anyhow. Light up, and let's have a palaver."

Yar, who had already developed a passion for the Feringistan pipe, was given his share and we all settled down to it.

"I don't know if you remember, Ross, that the last government expedition went up into Chinese Turkestan in 1912. They went up to do surveying and excavate for ancient manuscripts and treasure, along the old Chinese route that linked up China with Central Asia; and very interesting things they found. Murray was at the head of it."

"What did they find?"

"Lost cities, temples, pictures, manuscripts, all the refuse of a wonderful dead civilization that the sand is swallowing up as hard as it can. They came back through a corner of Tibet, avoiding Lassa and crossed into Sikkim. Well, I have Murray's book and I was looking up something the other night and Yar was hopping round, devastating the place as usual—and the book was open at the pictures of Tsanpo. Down came his finger on it and I all but jumped out of my skin, when he said, grinning placidly: 'Me there, sahib. Me knowing Murray Sahib. Me seeing all!'"

"Extraordinary!"

"Yes—you may say that. Of course I ordered him back into Lepcha at once, for I couldn't delay for his English. And this is his yarn. Murray lost a lot of his coolies when he entered Tibet and he picked up Yar among ten others—right there. Now, mark you! Murray had got pretty nearly all he wanted in the way of finds—but one thing he missed."

"What was that?" I was sitting upright now. I could see Soames was bursting with something big and Yar's eyes were following every word, like a dog trying to understand his masters.

"Well, after Murray had entered Tibet, reports reached him of a very ancient city or fortress lost in the mountains to the southwest. He first heard of it a long way off, at Ming-oe and was inclined to set it all down to native romancing. There was a king. There were arms, treasures—I don't know what all! Still, being a cautious fel-

low, he asked as he went along; and the scent got hotter. He spoke of it at Tsanpo and you may judge his surprise when Chang-Ta-Jen, the old Amban there, declared that he believed the story. There was a man who had seen it, but none had got in."

"Mirage," I said, "or crags like buildings. I knew a man who was up at Lopnor and he declared you saw Windsor Castle or Portsmouth Dockyard if you looked long enough."

"Yes, I thought of that too, but it doesn't quite fill the bill. To condense, Chang-Ta-Jen brought in a man who had seen the place from a distance; and Murray pushed a reconnaissance a little way off his route to investigate. He found nothing and, being short of time and men and beasts, he chucked it. You can see the whole thing in his book and it always fascinated me. That's all about Murray."

"And where does Yar come in?"

"As thus. Yar told me the story exactly as it is in the book, but with this addition. Murray had found a temple at Tsanpo with a secret chamber full of the most delightful old junk in the way of ancient documents; and by bribing the priest he was allowed to take away what he wanted. The men had of course to carry it. Well, when the expedition broke up, Yar and another of the men chummed up and engaged in a little deal of their own; and at Tsondo this friend got a kick from a pony and died. The law of wills is a bit loose up there and Yar annexed the deceased's sheepskin coat and other effects; and later on, sewn into the breast of the coat, he found this. He says the man believed it was a charm."

From a little leather purse, such as the mountain men carry for tinder and steel, Soames extracted a document written on yellowish paper, evidently having been rolled round a smooth stick, but folded flat now. The characters on it were Chinese but of the oldest type. Soames handled it with the deepest respect.

"When Yar gave me this he said it was a charm that would bring the lost city within reach. It would send the demons to sleep and make a broad way to the gate. Some lama had told him so. Of course I know little Chinese. I made out two or three words, such as 'wisdom,' 'splendor,' 'king,' but I soon stuck. Too difficult. So I walked off to the museum and said I had a bit of old Central Asian romance, like Murray's stuff,

and could they decipher it? Crosby went at it at once and here it is."

"Go on—do buck up!" I was getting wild at the invariable search in his pockets and all their rich fruitage.

"Here it is. No, it isn't. Yes, here." And out it came. He read slowly aloud:

"The King Mu of Chung-nan, riding many days' journey into the mountains, toward the Touch-the-Sky Mountain beheld afar the abode of Wisdom, where is the Splendor of Asia. Se beholding, the king approached, sending an embassy before with gifts suitable to the greatness of the Phra who dwelt there. He was bidden to enter."

Here is a hiatus in the script:

"The temple was rich with gold and silver and jade. Willingly would the king have lingered. But the imperial princess wearied of his society and he was driven forth with beating of drums. And when they looked up at the crags naught was seen. Yet let it not be forgotten that the Splendor of Asia is there. It is the place of the One Woman and the hideous Monsters that Run. And the king returning gazed on his own palace and it seemed to him no better than a hut and his wives too ugly to endure."

We were silent. I was digesting the thing, and Yar turned his eyes from one to another like a bird, so quick and bright were they.

"I tell you what, Soames—I believe what you bluffed Crosby with is the explanation. This is a bit of some Old World 'Arabian Nights.' Don't take it seriously. There's nothing to it."

"Well, I don't look at it that way. Murray took it seriously. Now if an expedition went up for that only—"

"An expedition! My good fellow, have you any little notion of what an expedition costs? Why, if we put all we have in the world to it, we couldn't begin to look at it. What's the good of flying kites?"

CHAPTER II.

You have seen from the beginning of my yarn that Soames got me roped in eventually. I did the same by my uncle, old Lidderdale, and he took charge of the Indian government. Not, of course, that King Mu would have gone down with the Sirkar, which is by no means romantic; as a matter of fact that priceless document did not get farther than Lidderdale. But Murray's opinion was in our favor and there was no doubt that one or two Bolshies had been skinned alive or

something of the kind in trying their luck in Tibet, which showed they were laying the trail there; and so, on the whole, the powers decided it would be worth while to spend about a tenth of what had been spent on Murray and trust to luck for what we might bring back. That was all we wanted; and here we were at Darjiling.

To say we were in high spirits is to put it mildly. I know I was in rollicking good humor and felt as I had not felt for months. Joan Boston and all my worries were left down in the steamy heats of Bengal and the clean mountain air was like wine in my veins. Soames was quieter but thoroughly satisfied. He had shouldered the bigger half of the arrangements—the men, the ponies and, later, the route. He had mugged up every available bit of information about Tibet and the mountains above Sikkim; and I really felt myself to be not much more than a hanger-on, so complete and efficient was every detail. I know we went to sleep that night full of nothing but thoughts of triumph and success.

The morning dawned gay and glad, the perfection of that Alpine land of beauty. The Himalayas were like a sweep of frozen billows in the stainless sky, the mighty crests glittering high aloft in the sunlight. Darjiling is the place in the world to see them. I have tried pretty well along the length of the range right on to Kashmir, but give me Darjiling all the time if you want to see what Nature can do when she tries.

The men were stringing out for the start and we were just off when an old Hindu woman came up and salaamed to me. Old and withered, a mummy ready for the grave, the only young thing about her was a pair of flashing eyes seen under the *sari* pulled over her head. She was singing to herself, as she came up, one of the queer songs of the hill people. Personally I thought she was a little mad. She sang:

I am a maiden like a folded bud,
Like a pretty, whirring shuttle.
I am a maiden like a whirling spinning thread,
Like a bright golden tassel.

She broke off.

“Gold, gold!” she whined. “The presence is going up into the hills for gold. Shall I tell him what the spirits say—the spirits that sit on the Touch-the-Sky Mountain?”

Two or three of the men gave ear with deepest awe and I shuffled my feet uneasily. Yar had been warned that not a word of

gold was to leak out to man or woman. We were simply officials of the Sirkar traveling on government business. So this was a beastly nuisance at the least; and possibly worse. Very likely it was only a chance shot, but how to silence the old hag? I hurriedly consulted Soames who was superintending the loading of the coolies.

“Tell her it’s real Sirkar business; no gold. Let her tell your fortune. That’s probably what she’s after and we’ll see what she knows or guesses. Very likely there’s nothing to it.”

I returned, smiling graciously. I spoke Hindustani all right and a bit of Tibetan, though I had not the gifts of Soames who was arguing in three different languages at the moment, exclusive of English. But the old lady addressed me in a Nepal dialect, now, that was beyond me and I summoned Yar to the rescue.

“Oh, Daughter of Hill Devils,” he began politely, “what is this? To shamelessly accost the great lords who depart on business for the king emperor—what brazen talk is this? What words are these of gold that is as dross to the presences?” Of course he had to interpret what he said for my benefit.

“Gold, gold!” she chanted, squatting before me and hugging her old knees. “Gold, not in money and paper and coins, but in loads, pony loads, yak loads! Let old Jehanira see the fortunate hand of the sahib.” Again Yar interpreted each word.

She rose on her knees, bent and wizen, and I reluctantly tendered my hand to the unclean grip.

“Not that hand—not the hand of greeting—but the heart hand that man does not give to friend or enemy,” she chuckled, and with greater reluctance I offered the left. She grasped it greedily. “Lay a silver piece on the palm, heaven born. The precious metals for the noble spirits!”

I laid a rupee, feeling it to be extremely ill spent, and she pouched it in the rags of her garments and began a very unattractive, whining, monotonous singing which finally shaped into these words:

“The past. A home across the sea—the black water where are the fish that fly. Across the sea that is red like blood. Across the middle sea. Across the sea of the rain and storms. And a boy sahib running with other boy sahibs and in his arms they put a cup of silver such as kings drink from. True sight, sahib?”

I started. I had clean forgotten—but yes, the May races at Cambridge, the winning, the triumph, the cup! Scarcely such as kings drink from, but a treasure for all that. I listened with more interest.

“A river—a narrow river like a ditch, and the sahib in a boat, alone. It is washed down the white water that falls with a roar and he strikes his head and a man—yes, with one eye—swims—swims like a fish and saves the sahib. True sight, sahib?”

True again, and queerer still. The scar was on my head now. The man was young. He had saved me when I went over the weir at Mapledurham. He was killed at Ypres. I remembered the blinded eye. The voice went on, now with a soothing monotony:

“The spirits watch from the cradle to the end. But that is not yet. And now the sahib forgets the beautiful Miss Sahib with the gold hair and eyes of turquoise”—that was Joan—“and he is journeying for the mountain of gold. Old Jehanira knows, for the spirits speak with her when the moon is high. Great peril. Snow and ice and the abominable Snow Men and a cold heart and hot anger and blood—blood! But the One Woman, and the strange place where the Things that Run are seen!”

My brain was spinning. But these were the very words of the old Chinese script—the writing of the King Mu. Yar interpreted stolidly but with an air of entire disapproval.

“For Heaven’s sake!” I said in Hindustani, “what does she mean?”

“She knows not herself,” Yar replied. “This old woman does not speak. Great Devil sitting up on the Touch-the-Sky Mountain—he speaks. This woman is but as the trumpet of bone that the lamas blow. She makes the noise, but she speaks not.”

And indeed as I looked I saw her eyes were glazed and stupid. Her head dropped painfully on her breast.

“Is there any warning to give?” I asked hastily, using the first question that came into my head.

“Beware of the man with the scarred jaw. Beware of the Things that Run. And most of all beware of Soames.”

The voice was hers no longer. It was a man’s deep voice. It had dropped the Oriental tokens of respect—sahib, huzoor. It had spoken as an equal, or a superior, and it warned me to beware of Soames. Was it

ventriloquism—delusion—what? I stared at the woman. To be candid, she was an unattractive object, for whatever possessed her had the look of drugs or drink; her breath came in heavy snores, now, and the lids dropped.

“No more saying,” said Yar in English and dragged her unceremoniously to the side of the trail. “She waking soon, not remember, nothing.”

I drew from my pocket a little book and made notes. I was so bewildered I had not digested the thing and I wanted to talk it over with Soames.

The rest had set forth—twenty men in all, laden with the light shelter tents and every necessity that our own or government knowledge had provided. And Soames was whistling as he went. The great adventure had begun.

I joined him as he strode on, alpenstock in hand, and put the matter before him. The change in the woman’s voice, her knowledge of the past, her knowledge of the document that was our secret. All these things disturbed him, for he was inclined to think that some one was behind it who had his own reasons for trying to frighten us off. The warning against himself we both laughed at—an obvious attempt to sow distrust between the heads of the expedition. But on the whole he took it more seriously than I expected.

“Queer fish, these people. You see, Ross, we haven’t by any means got to the bottom of human possibilities yet. I’ve seen and heard things among them that I don’t begin to account for. She might read a thing or two in your mind when she touched your hand. I knew a woman that could follow your thought as quick as you changed it. A native woman at Mundore. I thought out the first proposition in Euclid and as I thought it slowly she repeated it in Hindustani. Our friend may have been doing that; or it may, as I said, be a put-up job.”

“Well, if she was poking about in my brain she certainly didn’t find a warning about you there, old man. How do you get over that?”

“I don’t,” said Soames curtly. “I may as likely go dotty as another; and if so I give you free leave to heave me over the handiest cliff. And what’s more, I’ll do the same by you. All the same,” he added after a minute’s thought, “I’d as soon it hadn’t happened, for we want to keep this show as

quiet as we can. But I don't think Yar's leaky. He's too fond of us and has a strong feeling that it's his own show as well."

We left it at that and continued on our way.

CHAPTER III.

The marches were to be done at about fourteen miles a day. You cannot get more out of laden coolies, for the climbs are stiff and at the great heights it is hard enough for an unladen man to get along. So there are many days when one does much less. Each man carried about sixty pounds weight, and Soames looked like a general as he turned an eagle eye on his troops. Stations had already been established along the line of march, where stores were waiting for us, for it is no light matter to feed so many men in such country as we should strike later; and though something might be expected from the guns, it would not be much to count on. We should have ponies for several marches when we got up on the hills. A certain amount of yak transport, too, with luck.

The procession was quite picturesque. The coolies each had a wooden framework strapped on his back to which his load was fastened; and each carried a hollow bamboo to rest the load and to serve as a bottle on the sultry bits of the march. Yar's deep-chested voice was heard at intervals marshaling the coolies and rounding up the stragglers; and so away we went on the first stage to the Teesta Valley.

I knew the first stage or two, for I had been up at Darjiling in the summer, when all the rank and fashion of Calcutta come up for life and health and turn the place into a playground; but soon after Lebong my knowledge gave out.

It all interested me enormously; and I even broke the march a minute to dash into the little lamaist monastery at Ging, to pay my respects to the devils and deities that adorn the walls. Yar, from a different motive, dashed in also. No pains must be spared to propitiate the Mountain Devils on the sahibs' behalf; and here was a tremendous one with flaring tusks and flapping tongue and a blood-drenched altar to which Yar contributed a fowl squawking and struggling, in order that the sacrifice might hold us to the Splendor of Asia. Soames shook his head, but knew better than to interfere with customs that kept the men going and

gave a general atmosphere of "cheerio" to the proceedings.

We were as hungry as hunters when we reached the little rest house at Badamtan, after a three-thousand-foot climb through the almost tropic forest in its splendid luxuriance of tree ferns and vines, and sat down to a good meal washed down with the Murwa beer of the country, brewed from millet and served in a big hollow joint of bamboo. We sucked it up through the straws they brought and found the mild acidity was just a faint remembrance of English beer.

No more was done that day. The men were all resting in various attitudes of comfort and enjoying the Murwa beer to the full. It was a scene of lazy comfort in the shade. The humming birds were whirring about the bushes, there came the tap of the woodpeckers in the recesses of the glorious forest and I was getting drowsier and drowsier while Soames toiled over his notes, when—crash!—the whole camp was alert in a minute.

What was it? I jumped up and reached out for my gun. Nothing alarming at all. Four men, one leading a pony upon which a veiled woman sat. Probably Indian, for the hill women go free and unveiled and this one was covered also with the *burka* that conceals every line of grace and makes young and old alike shapeless.

The man leading the pony was a Tibetan of the comfortable class. The turquoise in his earrings, his amulets and the handle of his knife were large and good; and his belt clasp, set with turquoise and hill rubies in an intricate design, had a kind of barbaric beauty. The saddle was handsomely worked and the broad stirrups were certainly of rough silver.

The two men following were heavily armed and clearly a guard. As far as we were concerned we would have let them pass without notice except for the rough greetings of the coolies—especially as these were sternly ignored. I confess I was not interested. I had seen too many of that sort of women to feel any excitement and it was jolly to watch the Lepchas luring the humming birds into sight by imitating the hooting of an owl and see the little fellows crowding out to see the enemy.

But the cavalcade stopped short beyond the rest house and the leader singling out Soames beckoned him—not rudely, but with

an air that might be resented by a sahib in his own territory.

"Better not get their backs up, though!" he said, getting up. "We may want friends in the Debatable Land yonder." And he strolled lazily up with an air of his own, while I followed.

A ceremonious "Good day" in Tibetan was the first step and we replied politely. The veiled figure sat like a statue, but somehow I was conscious of eyes that pierced the wrappings.

"Do the sahibs go up to the Passes?" was the first question.

"We do not ask your route—why do you ask ours?"

"Because every man's life is precious to him and it has not been told you that the soldiers of the Dalai Lama are guarding the Chang-La. They have orders to bring all passers to His Ocean Greatness at Lassa. It is my counsel that you would turn back at the end of British territory; or—"

A pause.

"Or what?"

"It will be wise," the man said evasively.

I drew up a little nearer to Soames, fearing treachery, and laid my hand on the gun in my pocket. I was on the off side of the pony, with Soames and the woman's guide on the other, and in a flash the woman laid her hand on my wrist, restraining me—a small, strong, brown hand with slender finger tips—a young hand, for a hand is the greatest tale-teller of age that exists; and on the forefinger was the most extraordinary ring I had ever seen in my life. I was familiar with the jewels of most of the maharajas, for a series of Durbars at Delhi is a glittering display; but this ring fairly dazzled me. For it was a new gem. Imagine a diamond with all its flash and sparkle magnified and enhanced—a network of blinding rays in the sun. But imagine it a pale, bright blue, like the shallows of a summer sea, with lights playing from it like the sunny dance of sparkles on the ocean. It all happened in a minute. The quick slim hand was instantly withdrawn and I relaxed my hold of the gun.

Her guide went on in a measured Tibetan drawl:

"Her Divinity the Diamond Lady, the Abbess of Kamtok, has had a vision. She beheld white men climbing the Touch-the-Sky Mountain and sent word east and west and the soldiers are out in the Passes. The

Dalai Lama is merciful; he would not willingly slay, but if His Ocean Greatness strikes he strikes hard."

Silence followed. Soames considered seriously. It was odd that the guide should allude to the Touch-the-Sky Mountain which might be a myth for all we knew as yet. Half the world seemed to be thinking of the legendary peak. Very strange!

"Where and what is the Touch-the-Sky Mountain?" asked Soames carelessly.

"It is not to be found. It is the Mountain of the Gods. The search for it is inadvisable. Farewell. The counsel of a friend is to be heeded."

Was it fancy? I could have sworn that like a whispered echo I heard a silver "Farewell" from beneath the veil.

The man jerked the pony forward and they all disappeared round the great clump of tree ferns beyond the rest house. Soames turned away, his brow knotted, thinking hard.

"I say, Yar, who were those people?" I ventured.

"Big lord. Not knowing." Yar, too, looked disturbed.

I suggested that big lords did not lead ponies nor travel with so small a tail of attendants; but Yar, in his deplorable English, stuck to his point.

"Big lord. Not talk like small man."

I bearded Soames next. "Who is Her Divinity the Diamond Lady, when she's at home?"

"The greatest lady in Tibet. A kind of lady pope. Years and years ago when her convent was being besieged a miracle was wrought and the then abbess and all her flock were turned into pigs big and little, so that the besiegers went empty away. I wish her ladyship had kept her finger out of our pie. It's getting a bit hot."

It was an hour later when a Lepcha child, pretty and snub-nosed, came running down the path with a basket of split bamboo in one hand and six eggs in it; making straight for me she set the thing at my feet with a droll little salaam.

"For the lord whose hair is like gold," she said.

"Jolly little kiddie and jolly nice eggs!" I was feeling in my pocket for a small baksheesh when I caught an elaborate grin on Yar's broad mouth as he looked down at the little messenger.

"Who from?" he asked. The child giggled

and, muttering something, darted away and was lost in the jungle.

"What does it mean? Who sent them?" I asked impatiently. Yar collected himself for explanation:

"Lady seeing sahib sending. Love gift."

"Rot!" Soames was looking over my shoulder, laughing.

"Didn't you know the meaning of eggs up here? It's one of their little ways of offering marriage. And it may be a little awkward if one doesn't tumble to it. But, I say—who's the victim to your charms, Ross?"

"Heaven knows. Here! Take these things away, Yar. Call back the kid."

But we might as easily have whistled a humming bird from the jungle; and Soames refused to part with the eggs and the incident closed.

About and around the unromantic eggs, though, I heard the silver sighing of a voice that whispered "Farewell." They were particularly good when boiled next morning.

We made our start in perfect weather and all promised well; but Soames was preoccupied and inclined to be uneasy at the warning of the Tibetans. The jealousy of the Tibetan people about their frontier has not been lessened by contact with the British; but it was about the reappearance of the Touch-the-Sky Mountain that his anxiety centered. Here we were possessed of an ancient document known only to himself, Yar and me—for we might leave Crosby out of the count—and yet interest in what it dealt with seemed to be awake and watchful. Soames pondered deeply as we marched down the windings of the forest to the fever-stricken gorge on the banks of the Rangit River, where quinine was served out to all hands.

Beyond the river British territory ended and native Sikkim began. The crossing, slow and toilsome in the miserable dugouts, poled across by rough ferrymen, seemed to break the last tie with home and gave one the feeling that the unknown was closing in upon us. But it was a blessed change from life in the big offices in Calcutta, with the dull routine going on all day to the drone of the punkhas stirring the hot and sticky air. Here it blew free and cool down the river directly the stagnant gorge was left behind. Adventure, keen, living, gold bright and steel bright, beckoned ahead. Did it beckon with

the slim brown hand bearing a strange and radiant jewel?

Now came the climb out of the river valley, a good two thousand feet. Travel in Sikkim is apt to be a switchback business at best but it took us out of the malarial depths where no man who values his life would sleep unless he must.

We talked as we went, the coolies cheering themselves with a wild hill song punctuated with grunts and groans. Soames went over the route ahead of me, so far as he had worked it out from Murray's remarks and failures, from Yar and from the document. It was all plain sailing though uncommon hard traveling for some time yet. It would be on tackling the Pedong Pass that real trouble would start. But Soames was in hope of meeting wandering camps of herds-men corresponding to the Kashmirian Gujars from whom we might get information; and it was possible that at the Dorje-Tak monastery higher up some scraps of news might leak out if the fish were skillfully played.

Tents were pitched on a safe height above the malaria belt and the village people came in with their offerings of Murwa beer and magnificent oranges. They were a kind-hearted, jolly sort of folk, generous and friendly as far as their little means went; and they chummed up with our men, who settled down to a good time, sipping their beer through reed pipes while one of them warbled in a groaning minor that made it highly comic, this ditty:

"My love is the image
In a clear running stream.
O Little Tree of Gold!
O Little Blue Flower!
I am a Blue Butterfly
And I will follow, follow."

"After all, you know, it's better sort of stuff than our 'Stand from under, Sally,' and 'Come along, Dinah,' business," I said to Soames who was sitting there as solemn and reflective as a buffalo in repose. Soames was splendid, of course, but he had not been particularly chummy lately.

"Don't see it!" he said acidly. "Blue Butterfly indeed! However, it keeps them going and that's all that counts. Wait till we get up into the heights. You won't hear much about Blue Butterflies then. For the matter of that, wait for the leeches in the Teesta Valley."

I couldn't help grinning. "Don't be so disgruntled, old man! Take it all as a spree.

If we pull it off, well and good. If we don't, well and bad. In either case we shall have had a rattling good time."

"I mean to win out," he said slowly. "The treasure mayn't count for much with you, Ross. You've got an uncle and a future. I've got nothing and I must have hard cash and plenty of it to do what I want. Why, up here there's knowledge worth millions just waiting for the man that can take hold. And I mean to be the man."

"And you'll do it, if any one can," I replied and believed every word I said.

He impressed every one that way; there was a sort of dull power and knowledge about him that would shoulder difficulties aside like an elephant in bamboos. He was pleased and became a bit more expansive in the talk that followed, waving his pipe to stress the points, and we sat till evening was coming up through the trees.

Suddenly a little, light-foot messenger darted out of the jungle and salaaming with every inch of his brown body laid a bit of foiled paper, not too clean, at my feet and was off and away again into the green depths. I picked it up, bewildered.

"I say, they blow in as regularly as the postman! What's this?" And I handed it to Soames. I leaned over his shoulder and we studied it together. There was a rough drawing, or rather scrawl, indicating a winding river with the name written above it in Tibetan, "The Raging Secret One." Beside it was a narrow track labeled "The Way of the Running Things." At what was meant for a narrow defile The Way of the Running Things left the river and climbed an upward way inscribed "The Touch-the-Sky Mountain." The whole was clearly a rude map drawn by a most inexperienced hand.

We stared at each other in wild surprise. What did it mean? Was the intention good or bad, false or true? Every one of the names but the last was new to us. We pored over it in intensest interest. A blind, or a friend's guidance! It was just a toss-up. But what friend, and why? The plot was thickening.

Soames shouted for Yar, who came bearing his beer in a bamboo joint with two reeds sticking out of it. It had a false air of civilization that dimly recalled London and iced drinks in charming company—visions that faded before the grime of Yar's honest, flat face. He was no longer a clean Lepcha, but had reverted to type directly the march

began. Soames made him squat before us and began his catechism.

No, Yar had never heard of The Raging Secret One nor yet of The Way of the Running Things. Stay—there was Gyalpo, one of the coolies. Gyalpo had a grandfather, wonderful old gentleman who had seen and spoken with more than one devil in the heights. He had indeed, once come upon a party of them cooking in a big pot; and they had vanished on seeing him. Therefore Gyalpo might have heard his grandfather speak of these places. He went off and presently produced him, very much alarmed but loquacious, a wiry fellow all string and muscle, with a dangerous one-edged knife stuck in his girdle and a squint that belied an honest face.

The Raging Secret One? Yes, that was a true name, but he did not know that any one had seen it. It was far beyond where his grandfather had seen the cooking devils. Men did not go to look for that river. Very hard to find. Very dangerous. None but his grandfather could say the road there. The Way of the Running Things? He once had heard that name. But there were said to be devils with beaks like birds that could tear the flesh from a man's face. And worse and most terrible, there were the Abominable Snowmen, the ghastly dwellers in the heights, with the feet of a bear and huge, hanging hands.

"Where is his grandfather now?" Soames asked.

"Grazing sheep at the beginning of the Pedong Pass."

We dismissed him with a small baksheesh and Soames turned to me.

"It's a question of 'Who's your lady friend,' Ross. A sequel to the eggs. This scrawl was never done by a man. And—smell the paper?"

I did. Even now, folded, unfolded, opened, it had a faint but decisive smell of musk; that scent which breathes of Eastern womanhood to all who know the East. I looked uncomfortably at it.

"It's beyond me altogether," I said. "I did think of the woman on the pony; but it seems madness, and there isn't a woman in the world who either cares a rag about me or would do me a nasty one if she could."

Soames laughed grimly:

"That's a pretty bold statement. However, here's a fact; there's some woman takes enough interest either to lead or mislead you.

We shall hear more. I won't say it's the woman on the pony, for it seems too obvious. All the same, it doesn't always do to dismiss the obvious as impossible."

That night when I was tucked up in my tent I distinctly heard footsteps outside, soft as thistledown, and a faint rustle of drapery. I moved with tensest quiet to the opening and looked out into the moon-washed world.

CHAPTER IV.

We had a stiff climb next day through the Mang-Pu Valley in hot damp air that made it a bit of a grind; and the day after also. But it landed us in the cooler heights where the chestnuts grow and there were bits that reminded me of Europe. The headman received us politely when we camped, bringing the usual gifts of beer and fruit and yet another—a little piece of faded blue silk turned over to form a tiny bag. It was brought in, he said, by a Bhoutiya child from up yonder. He pointed vaguely to the towering hills above. It was for the young lord with hair like gold; and he placed it in my embarrassed hand. The thing was getting beyond a joke and I was half inclined to chuck it away unopened; but Soames took possession and sailed in with his questions:

"Have you seen or have any of your people seen five travelers pass, going up into the mountains? A woman with a veil and four men? The Sirkar offers a reward of much money for news of these people."

It was offered in vain. The headman denied all knowledge of such people. Some single people had passed, but no party. He called to other men and asked. No good. It ended at that.

The message in the little bag was a drawing as rough as the last. A figure evidently meant for a woman sat on a mountain about the size of an ant heap in proportion, stretching her hands out to some one unseen as if for help—or possibly in welcome. If in much higher works of art there is room for doubt there was much more here.

"She's no artist, anyway," said Soames; "but she means business, whatever it may be. There's method in her madness. Oh, me! They're the same all the world over. Here, Ross! Stop a mo'! Give me the magnifying glass."

I had it in my pocket and we held it over the remarkable work of art. Yes, undoubtedly there was something on a finger

of the outstretched hands. It might be a mark of the very wabbly pencil—or it might be—what? A ring? And a blue gleam darted through my mind like a kingfisher—though Soames would not be positive. Again it was "too obvious"—his favorite word. All the hill women wore rings. We smelled the paper gravely and steadily. Yes, undoubtedly musk again. And I ventured the opinion that village women were not likely to carry musk about with them. Soames put the paper in his pocket, with a saturnine grin:

"I don't know yet whether we've got to bless or curse your beauty, Ross, but it has certainly bowled over some lady up yonder." He jerked a thumb at the peaks in the distance and added: "Of course, as likely as not, she's a decoy. We must keep our eyes peeled and no mistake. Wish she'd send a reply paid. We might spot her then."

I smoked in silence, but I knew as well whom it came from as if I had seen her send it. What I did not know was the motive; and that ought to be all that mattered.

Two days later we crossed the Uplifted Horn Mountain, over the shoulder that looks down upon the river, and it was here that a very queer thing happened. Two forbidding-looking lamas crossed with us, having politely enough asked leave to join the party. We could not well refuse, for our men viewed them with the utmost reverence and it was our aim to keep every one in as good humor as possible. Yar described them as "magician lamas;" there was nothing they could not do. Let the sahibs give them food and ask for a taste of their magic. Every one knew they could move the mountains, call up devils, foretell the future and so forth. These men are of course a distinct and well-known class in Tibet and the surrounding countries and we were both interested; though Soames had seen a couple at work at Darjiling in the Ging Monastery and had not been much impressed. I suggested it would hearten up the men amazingly if they promised success.

"Yes, but suppose they don't!"

In the end we chanced it; and an invitation to eat was given and a little ceremonial scarf of silk presented with it—an observance so universal in Tibet that we carried many of the flimsy things in our load. Both were graciously accepted and at the appointed time the lamas approached, each extending a healthy-looking tongue to its

longest length and pressing forward the left ear—the odd Tibetan greeting.

Luckily Soames and I were instructed as to its meaning and did not repel it with the fury that it has called forth from Europeans who know no better.

The camp fire had been lit, for it was beginning to be very chilly at sundown, and a meal as gorgeous as our resources would run to was ready for the holy men. There was soup boiling hot from the big pot under the trees, savory with two parrots—alas! too beautiful for soup—that had fallen to my gun. It was soup better than good when flavored with the cunning herbs and peppers of the wilderness so well known to Wi-dong, our cook. A canned stew of beef followed, much enriched by the same herbs and with onions from the Lepcha cultivated plots. Nor did our guests turn up their flat, broad noses at the stewed wild raspberries as served with canned evaporated cream. There was honey, too, for Gyalpo had discovered a wild black bees' nest in a rotting tree. Later he would show us how to make a kind of mead from it. "Very good things in the jungle for understanding folk," he said.

But the crown of the feast was when Soames produced his flask and poured a little into the bottom of each greedily extended bamboo joint. A little, a very little water was added from the clear runnel that chattered down the rock beside us and it was quickly seen that the lamas were not hostile to the fire drink of Feringistan. Again the bamboo joint came out and once more I poured, but with a sparing hand.

They would not smoke—they shook their heads with disgust. There was some reason against it. But they would talk and did with apparent frankness while Soames and I lit up and the leaping flames of the fire made the dusk beautiful. They told stories of Tibet, wild stories of the horrible cruelties that awaited travelers who penetrated to the inhospitable Chang. Something with boiling oil in it appeared to be the invariable Tibetan welcome. We expected this. These stories are part of the propaganda of defense of the Hidden Land; and yet in spite of it travelers have gone and returned to tell its marvels.

We took it all seriously, however, professing amazement that any one should have ventured in the face of such dangers and did our level best to gain a useful reputation for timidity. That done, we

turned the talk to magic. The men talked big at first. Lassa was the place for marvels. What was there that the Great Necromantic Lama could not do? He had charms that would turn every bullet that was not cast with silver.

"Curious to meet that Middle Ages superstition up here," said Soames aside.

"Yes, or garnets," the elder went on; "but, of course, even the humblest of the lamas who have studied magic have certain sorts of control. Trifles such as the discovery of gold, of turning the inferior metals into gold or silver—these things are nothing."

I drew a wrench from my pocket, an old friend that never left me, and held it out. "This is steel. Could this be made into gold?"

The elder lama looked at it closely, turning it over and over, seemingly trying to decipher the trade-mark.

"A charm?" he asked laconically. I shook my head.

"If a charm, impossible," said the lama. "Otherwise, yes. Certainly gold or silver. Is it wished to see the power?"

"Certainly."

"And what reward?"

We looked at each other. It seemed flat blasphemy to offer money to the master of the mighty spell. A silver wrench and two or three rupees scarcely seemed to go together.

"I've got it!" I said and darted to my tent, whence I emerged waving a small but handy electric torch warranted to go for three months if used sparingly. I flashed it, and in the rapidly coming dusk the two men crowded to look, their eyes shining with avarice. The offer was good enough. The incantations began.

First the lamas drew from a bag a girdle of elaborately carved human bones, and then another, and put them on. Two rosaries of snake spines followed, and a trumpet made of a human thigh bone, such as is commonly used in Tibet for monastic ceremonies.

And next the younger uttered a salutation and a prayer:

"*Kye! Kye!* In the boundary of the horizon is a yellow dragon-headed dragon. Oh, dragon-headed dragon, accept this ransom and call back all the injuring demons!"

He faced to the four quarters of the compass, bowing to each as he turned. This

concluded, the elder blew a hollow blast on the thigh-bone trumpet, whereupon every man within hearing, excepting our two selves, stood up with every sign of terror. It was a weird scene in the firelight, with the sighing trees about us, and I own to feeling a sympathetic creeping in the roots of my own hair as the dolorous blast rang out about us. Then, making proclamation in a high, shrill cry, the lama commanded all present to turn their backs while the seventh magical power, control of all natural laws, was put into operation, and on no account to gaze with mortal eyes upon what, if seen, would cause those eyes to distill in liquid from the sockets.

As if on parade, every back was turned and the weaker vessels threw themselves flat on the ground. Three more trumpet blasts and both lamas, passing the snake-spine rosaries rapidly through their fingers, moved round the fire muttering, in the strangest singsong, *mantrams*, or spells. The shrill rising and falling cadences, the circling movements, threw me almost at once into a half-hypnotized state—it fascinated and repelled me. My eyes fixed on a bit of crystal in the lama's queer hat, and the light flickered, grew larger, seemed to dazzle me, till I felt like a bird with the snake waving before me. Soames caught me by the arm and shook it with a stern word, but I only smiled foolishly, the light swaying before my eyes. I could think of nothing else.

The younger lama took a brand from the camp fire and laid it on the ground beside us, heaping fresh wood upon it that instantly flared up high in the velvet dark of the night. He sprinkled it with a yellow powder from a box in his breast and the flames burned green and blue. Now they both paced sunwise round the fire, nine times, and sitting again recited the charms, performing the mystic gestures with the fingers until even Soames felt his attention waver and his eyes daze. Then, with a swift motion, the elder flung the wrench into the fire and resumed the charms, while the younger caught my hand and a hand of Soames and in a loud wailing voice bade us see.

Immediately a screen of smoke rose from the fire, forming as it were a background for a picture that shaped itself upon it.

There appeared a mountain, peaked and pinnacled, with a great fortress held like a

prey in its fangs; also a wild way climbing from a river through crags to the gateway. Beside it a white torrent flashed down the rocks. There was a banner with a gold dragon upon it. And even as we looked, the smoke blew aside and the picture was gone.

It wafted together again for another picture—a woman's face, with a very singular headdress like a priest's miter, with jewels set in it—a face of the haughtiest beauty, cold and angry and proud like a queen—not the face of a European, but dark of hair and eyes. But as we looked the smoke blew apart and it was gone.

A third picture—two men struggling together on a narrow plateau—a fearful drop of precipice beside them. I cried out on seeing it. And instantly the smoke blew apart and it was gone.

The voices stopped dead. I stirred and rubbed my eyes, half thinking I was dreaming. Soames was staring owlishly at the fire which had dropped as if at a signal when the voices stopped. In a second more it was out—was black ash—and by the light of the camp fire we could see the younger man raking in it with a small rod. He pushed something out and, filling his bamboo at the stream, poured water hissing on the object twice, three times. Then, lifting it in a grimy rag, he laid it between us. To all appearance it was of pure soft silver with a queer embossed pattern running along it.

Three more blasts on the unpleasant trumpet permitted the camp to return to its normal condition and the coolies turned frightened eyes upon where we sat with the magicians.

"You have shown us three pictures," said Soames composedly. "Did you see them also?"

"Certainly we have seen. It is by the force of our *mantrams* that the spirits show them. How should we not see?"

"What are they?"

"Shadows of things to come. Your thoughts cast the shadows."

"We have not seen the place or the woman. How then can our thoughts do this?"

"Past, present and future are one with the spirits. You will see. It would be better if you turned; but this you will not do."

"What is the fortress?"

"Very ancient. This can be seen."

"Have you not heard of it?"

"Never. We know nothing. Your

thoughts say these words: 'The Glory of the East.' But we know nothing."

"The woman?"

"Your thoughts say: 'The Imperial Princess.' We know no more. Take the gold you seek, but give our reward and let us go. The air here is full of devils. We cannot stay."

Their haste and uneasiness were evident. Whatever the cause might be they were genuinely frightened. It was an unheard-of thing that they should set out in the dangerous dark, but nothing would keep them, and we yielded perforce. They gathered up all their possessions, took the electric torch and were off—whereupon the younger turned for an instant.

"When you see the Touch-the-Sky Mountain, unless you seek worse than death turn and flee."

The next minute the darkness had swallowed them.

"Well, what do you think of Tibetan māhatmas now, Ross?"

I couldn't talk—I felt as if I had been on the bust for a week. I dragged myself off to my tent and Soames put the wrench in his pocket. No more of their sorceries for me! It was an unwholesome proceeding for all concerned. Far off I heard the sound of the trumpet receding into the distance.

CHAPTER V.

When I came out in the morning I found the whole camp fluttering with rags tied on bamboos, the time-honored offerings to the devils, and heard the shrill cry of "Graciously accept our offering. The spirits have conquered. The devils are brought low."

The air was getting uncanny and our men were decidedly jumpy. Soames agreed we had better let the supernatural take a holiday.

We tested that wrench by every rough-and-ready test in our power and the result was always the same—silver to the best of our belief. There was no more to say, but it opened up a lot of possibilities, if there were even a grain of truth in it, and we walked in silence many an hour that day.

The next few hours were consecrated to leeches. Leeches! The ten plagues of Egypt are pale beside the single plague of the Upper Teesta Valley. Thin as wire they hid in the grass and seized their victims as we went by. Boots and puttees were no protec-

tion, for they slipped through every crevice and then sucked their fill before they fell off into the grass again.

That night we camped in the precincts of the monastery of Dorje-tak and the whole lot of us, warmed and rested, fell asleep under the protection of the kindly lamas, about as dead beat as men could be.

The abbot, known as "The Omniscient White Lotus," gave us audience next day before we started off, receiving us in state in a hall of the monastery with all his lamas, rosaries in hand. His own rosary was of turquoise in veneration of the Goddess of Mercy, Tara, whose complexion is blue. He wore a miter-shaped cap of cloth with broad fillets falling over the ears; and his cup-bearer stood beside him.

The abbot asked of our journey and our intentions—the usual small talk served up to travelers. He assumed as a matter of course that we had no idea of entering Tibet and we said nothing. We were quite sufficiently on the qui vive to see the intention of some of the latter questions and it was up to us to be uncommonly careful.

"You met the two traveling lamas last night on their way to the Chang?" came at last from The Omniscient White Lotus.

"Certainly. Are they here?"

"No, they passed by another track. But we understand this from your men. Did they show you the metal-changing marvel?"

Extraordinary how all was known in this amazing country. None of the coolies had seen, yet it was known.

"They showed us a trifle of the kind." Soames' voice was very cautious.

"Those who have seen that marvel are favored by the Incarnations," the abbot replied politely. "You also saw the smoke marvel?"

"Yes, curious smoke effects. We could not see anything in them."

The abbot turned and whispered to the man beside him. He stepped forward and laid in my hand three little flat brightly colored pictures. Strange and more than strange—they were the very pictures we had seen in the wavering smoke—the wild fortress set in the rocks, the beautiful dark princess and the two men struggling in the heights. I passed them to Soames and it was only by a strong effort I kept my self-possession.

"These are strange pictures, your holiness. May I ask why they are shown to us?"

"Because in the archives of the monastery are preserved many thousand such pictures. They foretell the future and the date of each is known. For more than fifty years those three pictures have lain here and it was known that on this day those whom they concerned would come to the monastery. What they mean we cannot say, but the event will show."

"Do you give them to us?"

"We retain them. When the events represented take place, the pictures fade and are destroyed."

No use to say more. The whole thing was puzzling in the extreme. It could have been understood if the traveling lamas had come from the direction of the Dorje-tak monastery, but they had overtaken us on the way from India.

Some small gifts we offered—a can of preserves, a box of frosted fruits and so forth, all very graciously received, and we departed with a benediction from The Omniscient White Lotus and serious doubts of its sincerity. We were waiting outside on a little flat bit of ground, while Yar started the coolies, and Soames was laying down the law about the abbot and the pictures, and I was listening more to my own thoughts than to him. For it seemed to me that a strange destiny was watching proceedings with an eye to its own designs. Events were building themselves up in a regular sequence—the documents, the woman, the drawings, the smoke pictures, the abbot's revelation—all followed, as it were, a plan. But whose? That was hidden as yet, but always I saw a veiled figure leading us on, beckoning with a hand on which blazed a strange jewel.

While Soames was talking, a voice broke through his discourse, a chatter of singing from the upper part of the many-windowed monastery—a man's voice, hoarse and guttural, chanting:

"If you called the moon from the sky,
She would sit on a mountain peak.
She would be a fair woman
With eyes like stars.
Would not her hair blow
Like clouds in the peaks?
She would be the Imperial Princess.
Oh, for the wishing tree
Of the Touch-the-Sky Mountain!
If you called the Sun from the Sky
He would sit on the mountain peak.
He would be the Splendor of Asia."

It was staggering. Did all the world know our aim? Was the Touch-the-Sky Moun-

tain the first thought in every man's mind? We stared at each other.

"My sainted aunt! It's a facer, and no mistake!" I said.

Soames looked at me in the eyes squarely.

"I think, Ross, that as I have had more experience with these people than you it's only fair to own up now that I believe our plans have got out. As for the bluff we put up, they're not taking any. It's meeting us at every turn and I can't doubt it any longer. And that being so, it's up to us to decide what's best. It's dangerous, mighty dangerous. Now, Ross, shall we turn—shall we make this show into a common or garden trip, with a little playful excavation thrown in all along the Gyatsho route where a party of women would be safe on a picnic? Or—"

He spoke bitterly, frowning, not at me but at fate in general. Fate that gives a man his chance and then flicks it adroitly away; that builds him a visible kingdom in the desert, and then—pouf!—disperses it with a whiff into the mirage it is. The irony of the immortals!

I knew this was the chance of Soames' life—the one golden hope, whatever might be the upshot.

"Well, I've heard you, old man. But all the same I'm not for chucking. No, not by any manner of means. Of course it's rotten bad luck and all that; and if Yar had been leaking I'd scrag him as soon as look at him. But I think he's sound. We couldn't chuck now, Soames. It'd be selling the Sirkar as well as ourselves. No! Tails up! And let us take the road."

"Sure you quite understand what we're up against? The Tibetans haven't got at all pretty little ways when they have a down on you."

"Oh, stop jawing. Come along. Let's clear out. I've a feeling they're watching us from every eyehole."

I looked back before we turned the corner and at one opening I saw a sight that caught my breath. A woman stood there—a woman with her veil flung back, brilliant, proud, lovely, with ropes of silken black hair coiled upon her head. A vision and gone like a vision. The veil fell swiftly as the curtain of a theater, but not before I had seen a flash of the hand that pulled it.

"Soames," I said with conviction, "if you argued till you were black in the face—if you had every reason and right on your

side—if you turned back yourself—I'm for the Touch-the-Sky Mountain!"

"I also," said Soames, striding forward.

CHAPTER VI.

Ten days later we were through the lovely Alpine valley of the Chank-La and scaling the Himalayas; and the temperature was dropping steadily. Up the rocky trail the coolies climbed and climbed, going easier now in spite of increasing difficulties, because this part of the trek could be helped by yaks and ponies and a man travels with a lighter heart as well as legs when the load is mostly on the shoulders of a strong, hairy brute like the yak. Soames had been up in the mountains more than once and though he did not know this especial part he knew the ropes and went forward with a steady confidence. He and I mounted on sturdy Tibetan ponies, Yar always tramping ahead steadily, sometimes looming large in the mountain mists, sometimes lost entirely, but always reappearing, steady, reliable, good-humored, the man of men for a harebrained expedition of the kind.

We were among the nomad Tibetans now in the Mendong-La—and more than once we had seen their tents of black yak's hair. They follow the melting snows of the mountains, pasturing their herds on the sweet grass, until they reach the top of the Mendong-La Mountain; and from that they go down into Tibet proper. They mix a little trade with their herding, carrying small goods to Tashilunpo; and picking up rough jewelry, tea, and such things there, they work their way down again before the snows close everything.

Now, two days after entering the valley of the Pass, a group of these people were sighted—the black tents showing out among the crags. The leaders came forward with protruded tongues and there was evidently a wish to be civil, for they carried pitchers of the rich yak's milk, which is such a dainty in the heights.

Soames was doubtful of camping near them, this night, knowing there is often bad blood between them and the Lepchas and Sikkimese and fearing quarrels. He was therefore deciding to strike on when the men came up, grimy and weather-beaten. For all that, the belt of the leader and his massive earring were set with turquoise of a very fine blue and his tinder box was inlaid with

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what looked very like gold unless I was much mistaken.

"Gold, gold, everywhere," said Soames to me. "A man who had been up here told me the gold fields of the world are here and the Yukon is a fool to it. But as the Tibetans believe the big nuggets breed the little pellets and the gold dust, they never touch them and there are difficulties in the way at present."

I shrugged my shoulders. Gold was not the first thing in my thoughts just then, though I liked it as well as another.

The headman saluted.

"Do the great government lords go over the Mendong-La?"

"Why is this asked? When the Sirkar moves in India, no questions are asked. All make way in silence."

"Doubtless this is so, great lord. But the Dalai Lama rules in Tibet and all his people are commanded to tell those who travel up the Passes that the air of Tibet is bad for white people. They do not live long if they breathe it."

The old story. We put our ponies forward impatiently, but the man caught the rein.

"There is more, great lord. Do not be angry. Two days ago a party went up the Pass, going through our midst, and they gave us word for the government lords when they should follow."

"Speak quickly," Soames said curtly. "Who were these people?"

"How should a poor herdsman know? One was a lord of the Bon-Pa—the ancient people that live up yonder"—he pointed vaguely north—"and he wore a charm box set with shining stones."

"Don't know him."

"A lady was there veiled; and whether young or old we cannot say. Three men followed with little guns such as the government lords carry."

But this was a miracle. I had seen her face at the Dorje-Tak monastery and now we were told they were two days ahead. Impossible. Absolutely absurd. In these vast solitudes, not a creature, not an animal, could have passed us unseen. Why—it was magic! And yet these men could not have invented the party; and if they could, what object could there be? My brain seemed to whirl.

"The message?" Soames was using the curt style one finds impressive with all Ori-

entals. Fear or astonishment are never to be shown and the less they are felt, the better.

"The message was this, to be given to the elder lord: 'Over the Mendong-La is the way to attainment of desire. Great are the dangers. But when the beloved Sister Mountain is seen, know that the place is near.' Such are the words, lord. He caused me to repeat it until I could say it in my sleep."

Soames hesitated. The man was in earnest. Yar, standing by, put a strange question.

"Brother herdsman, have the lamas of Lassa instructed you in this?"

"No one instructed me but this lord of the Bon-Pa."

"Who are the Bon-Pa?" I asked at his shoulder.

Soames replied: "The ancient devil-worshiping people before Buddhism came to Tibet. Yar, go ahead! We don't camp here to-night."

He waited until the grumbling coolies and grunting yaks were started, Yar herding them on, and, calling the head man, he put a couple of rupees in his hand and went on. As I delayed to look at my girths the man drew up to me and spoke.

"Lord, it is best for a poor man to keep silence. Yet one thing will I say. It is better than best to turn back, turning aside neither to right nor left. For on one side is the great anger of the Dalai Lama, and on the other——"

A pause. I said nothing, looking steadily at him.

"On the other," he went on, "the terrible ancient people and the Things that Run. Turn in haste and live."

"What are these things? Many have spoken of them."

He shuddered violently.

"Few have seen. But it is said they are great and awful, with six legs, and where they run the grass is burned. Poison comes from them. The ancient people live among them and they use them to hunt their foes. Once in the trail that goes from Mendong we found a man with the flesh torn from his face, as with an iron beak, and before he died he said this: 'It is the Thing that Runs. I met it and I die.' Go rather to His Ocean Greatness the Dalai Lama than to these."

He turned abruptly away, and I rode

slowly on. When I overtook Soames he was in grim meditation and I did not disturb him. I had plenty to think of myself. At last he shook meditation off.

"Look here, Ross, I intend to follow the tip and go over the Mendong-La. It's the easiest way in any case, but that's not all. These people for some reason seem to want us to follow, in spite of our having been told it is a dangerous business, and it is certain that all I could learn in India pointed to the Mendong-La as being the way. Murray thought so too. I've been weighing all the way up whether to try the trail straight to the north, that the people talk about here; but I think that the Mendong-La is best. Murray saw the beginning of that trail, or what looked like it, as he came down; but no white foot has ever trodden it; and the stories about it—about the places up there—are so appalling that it might readily mean a mutiny and desertion among our men if they guessed what it meant. If we take the other way, we shall meet people going and very possibly overtake our friends and question them. What do you say?"

I gave it up. It all seemed the merest lottery.

But I could not sleep that night. It might be partly the high air which affects so many in the mountains, but it was also the strangeness of the facts. I gave up the struggle after a bit and lay looking at the undulating canvas and thinking hard as to whether we should follow the message left with the headman or no. As I thought, I heard a light, indescribable noise like the scratching of a rat. I flashed a light and behold! a tiny bit of paper pushed under the flap of the tent. Quick as thought I looked out. There was not a soul in sight and the moon was shining coldly on the rocks. The lady chose her messengers well—they were nearly as elusive as herself! My hand shook as I untied the thread of scarlet silk that bound the paper and perceived the smell of musk that an Eastern woman shakes from her garments.

"Is it well with you?" the screed began abruptly. "I think and fear. Oh, light of my eyes, distrust all messages that this hand writes not. There is danger. I say—avoid the Mendong-La. It is a snare and there is an ambush. Take the old trail that none travel and so, turning before the Mendong Pass, strike north. Pass by the Lake Where the Gods Sit. Continue to the south side

of the mountain, and fear no devils nor the Things that Run, for great are the rewards."

It ended as abruptly as it began. It had the effect of the eager voice of a woman that from sheer strength of feeling cannot continue, but stops trembling, with her earnest eyes on the hearer. I held it to the light—it was written in Hindustani which I read like English—and when at last I drowsed I put it under my pillow. I was clear only about one thing—that the writer was not deceiving me as far as she knew. I would have sworn to that. It was the most amazing thing that when remembrance came with the daylight I could find the paper nowhere. There was not one inch of the tent I did not search. In my life I had never searched so minutely for anything, for apart from my own private feeling it was by no means a thing to leave about. Be that as it might, it was gone, and giving up hope, I went out to find Soames.

"I say, Soames, a word with you. A very curious business—we must talk it over."

He came and sat down on a rock beside me, preoccupied with the work, and I told my tale eagerly. If I left out four words, that certainly did not concern any one but myself. All the rest I repeated word for word. I stressed the dangers of the Mendong-La and the absolute necessity of following the trail, if it could be found. And still Soames brooded. If one had not known him well, his silences would have been irritating. They were charged with doubt and suspicion. I felt that especially at the moment.

"The paper?" he said and stretched out his hand all weather-roughed and strong.

"Not got it," I said uncomfortably, for I felt the loss would put a different complexion on the thing to him. I told the story of my useless search.

"But, my dear fellow," said Soames impatiently, "you say you went to sleep with it under your pillow. Who could have got in? Who would have troubled to take it?"

"Who troubled to bring it?"

"I dare say—but—well, you know it looks to me uncommonly as if you had dreamed the whole thing. Fact. I think your mind was running on the woman and you dreamed the whole story."

"Rot! Blether!" I said indignantly. "Don't I tell you I got out of my bunk to get it. Don't be ratty. I swear it happened exactly as I say. You'd better not dis-

count what may be very important because you've got this wild idea about it."

I was bitterly aggrieved. He was civil but determined.

"Sorry I can't risk the whole expedition on your visions, Ross. Show me the paper and that'll be talking, though even then I shouldn't be disposed to take it very seriously. The woman's a woman—if it is she. She must have some private reason for trailing us up some way that isn't on any map. I know these Eastern women and their volcanic fancies that generally end in a knife between your ribs."

With a great effort I controlled myself. I was furiously angry with Soames and could scarcely say why. I see now that things were never really cordial after that, though Heaven knows I did my best. It may seem a small thing to split on, but it was his manner that made it all so impossible. Poor fellow. I understood it better later! In common loyalty I had to accept his decision—he was the virtual head, in right of his experience and age. Still I had a last try.

"Of course you've got the casting vote and I can prove nothing; and I know it's a strong point that you had decided on the Mendong-La. But will you do this—call Yar and get him to find out if anything is known of this trail by the Lake Where the Gods Sit?"

"It won't alter my decision."

"It ought to, if it alters the facts. Anyhow, hail Yar."

Yar, wrapped up like a mummy and drinking bowls of greasy Tibetan tea, was hailed, and the question put. By a silent understanding nothing was said of the paper. No, he knew nothing—had never heard of such a trail. Soames looked triumphant. I spoke up coolly.

"What about Gyalpo and his grandfather? Let's have him up. Better get to the bottom of the business."

Yar made a peculiar hooting call. In that country where to open your mouth or to withdraw your hand from its wrappings are things to be carefully avoided because of the bitter cold, men learn strange habits. Gyalpo came trotting up, his lips greasy with the unctuous tea.

"Aho!" he said on hearing the question. "Yes, I have heard the name of the God-sitting Lake. But this is strange talk for the lords. Is not the good trail over the Mendong-La and not up in the solitudes where the devils are? Now my grandfather——"

"Yes, your grandfather?" I could not restrain myself.

"He is grazing his sheep an hour, or it may be more, from here. And if there is a trail he will know. Very wise is my grandfather. When the birds get his flesh not one will be left who knows the mountains as he."

The pride in Gyalpo's face as he blinked and wagged his head rapidly was too much for Yar, who gave him a furious nudge in the ribs.

"Be humble before my lords. What is a foolish old Tibetan man to those who travel for the Sirkar?"

"Fetch this man here," was Soames' ultimatum; and they went off.

CHAPTER VII.

It was evening when Gyalpo returned, driving before him rather than leading a meek and timid old Tibetan, very far removed from the doughty mountaineer—an old man terribly frightened in the presence of government lords and protruding his tongue to such an extent that there seemed no prospect whatever of its returning to its right use.

"Foolish old one!" said Gyalpo, shoving him forward. "Behave with discretion in the presence of these mighty persons. They condescend to seek knowledge. Speak with truth that my name may shine before my masters. Is there a God-sitting Lake, or is there not?"

It was clearly difficult for the old fellow to get under way. He had never spoken with white men before and Soames was at all times alarming to the native mind. But as soon as his tongue had returned to its native sphere he was timidly communicative.

"Certainly there is this trail. Have I not known it for fifty years? Have I not followed it, though not to the end? For there are running devils beyond the God-sitting Lake. And higher up the Abominable Snow-men."

"Then there is a lake?"

"Very certainly. A lake like no other, with mists in which the gods walk. Voices may be heard crying to the traveler to leave the track, but he who does this is lost."

"And the devils?"

The man looked furtively around, and lowered his voice. "Of them it is not well

to speak. They come out of the rocks. Where they go is burning."

Gyalpo was listening open-mouthed to this revelation. It might be serious if it got about among the men and Soames spoke sternly.

"Folly! The burning is the fluid white people carry for many uses. Had that trail ever a name?"

"None, lord, for none would use it. It was in following a yak in the days of my youth that I saw it. A man showed me the way and he said it led to the castle of the ancient people."

I saw a kind of quiver pass over Soames' face. It was like a ripple and gone in a moment, but I knew he was alert enough now.

"The people? What people?"

"He said the ancient people that came over the mountains before even the Bon-Pa. A terrible people and place."

"What place?" My voice was almost as shaky as the old man's.

"It is in the Touch-the-Sky Mountain. A great castle. The man had seen it once, but knowing it was devil's work he never spoke of it but to me. And but a week later he was found dead near the beginning of the Lost Trail, with the flesh torn from his body, as if by mighty beaks."

His voice had dwindled down to a thread. Gyalpo looked fearfully at his grandparent. The cheekiness of his manner had quite disappeared and he was a badly frightened man. I saw his eyes wander from Soames, the arbiter of his fate, to his quaking grandfather.

"How is the Lost Trail known, if it is so hidden?"

"Lord, it is known to me, but if to any others, I cannot tell. Four days' march from here, at a very great height, is a rock shaped like a sitting woman. It is called 'The Pure Goddess.' Pass beyond the Pure Goddess, winding round her feet, and another rock will be seen like a dead man fallen on his back. Beyond that, strike to the north and in half a day is a very small winding trail; and two weeks' journey on that is the God-sitting Lake. Beyond that your slave knows nothing."

There was much more talk, but that sums up all we really got. And afterward the old boy was warmed up with buttered tea and comforted with *tsam-pa*—wheaten cake—Gyalpo undertaking to return him in safety

to his herd. I may add that in doing this pious office Gyalpo returned to us no more. He evidently preferred his grandfather's society to the Lost Trail and its terrors.

It disquieted Soames, for it was the first desertion. It was not to be the last.

At tiffin he told me curtly that he was disposed to give the Lost Trail a trial—that local tradition could never be safely put aside and therefore watch should be kept for the distinctive rocks and the Mendong-La plan given up or postponed. Of course this suited me all right, but I should have been glad, all the same, if the thing had been more cordially done.

I began to feel more strongly that Soames was not an easy man to live with, not altogether the fellow I would have chosen as a comrade in a tight place. You want more than courage for that—and of courage he had enough and to spare. But a spirit of partnership goes far, as does the cheerful word and the gay laugh. He made it pretty clear now that he resented the reversal of his plan even while accepting the thing. At all events, he said very little and the camp supper that night was even more silent than usual.

Four days we climbed steadily up the great mountain. The snow was at its summer lowest but it lay all around us and was so dazzling that the coolies had got out their curious snow goggles, primitive but effective—a kind of network of black yak's hair plaited into gauze and tied round the head. We followed their example with circles of blue glass stuck into cloth, a precaution born of experience, for in great cold metal acts as if it were red-hot and actually sears the skin. We looked more like magnified insects of a motorman's nightmare than human beings; and the thought struck me with dreary humor that if the Unknown had seen me thus I should not have been favored with any of the interest she had shown so far. But could it be possible that she—that any woman was before us in those awful uplifted wilds?

In the mornings the thermometer now registered twenty degrees below zero and it was bitter cold work getting along. The cliff now looked sheer above us—a mere precipice; but closer looking out revealed a slender zigzag up its face; and Yar, pointing upward, said sententiously:

"The *la-dook*"—pass sickness—"meets us up there."

True to tryst it did. And we could have done without it, for the mountain sickness is a terrible addition to the dangers and miseries of the great heights. As in Kashmir, the men set it down to a specific poison in the air, probably due to the devils who guard the Passes. Hence the name "*la-dook*"—the poison of the Passes. It was bad enough—a matter of panting breath, palpitating heart, intense giddiness, with a headache in the temples. The men sought eagerly for the wild onion or garlic which they say relieves the symptoms.

Boiling water became so difficult as to be almost impossible, owing to the reduced atmospheric pressure; and so we roasted and baked what we could and trusted to canned foods. Boiling the thermometer now gave us an altitude of eighteen thousand feet; and the sun was so hot on the snow at midday that we moved in constant danger of avalanches. More than one came thundering down the precipices before and behind us and plunged with an awful roar into the abysses below.

It was I who first caught sight of the Pure Goddess. And if the name was impressive, so was not she. But a heated imagination made something like a woman out of it, her hands laid in her lap; and evidently the coolies thought the same, for instantly the fluttering rags that represent homage to the divine were produced and fastened in every possible holding place. We respectfully circled her feet and found the Dead Man rock and were then certain of our trail.

There was evident surprise among the men when a halt was called here. They crowded up even beyond the limits of respect to hear what was to be. Soames spoke briefly. This was the trail which the government of the king-emperor commanded us to take. We must go by this way and not by the Mendong-La. There was no more to be said.

Sullen doubt and fear appeared on many faces and there was at once that grouping in twos and threes which all leaders dread. The discipline had been excellent up to this, largely owing to Yar's good management; but so also had been the traveling. It did not look healthy that on the first hint of the unexpected there might be trouble.

Soames said sternly, "It would be impossible to take the beasts the way we are going." Consequently the headman and a certain number were to descend a few thousand feet to the summer pastures and wait

the return of the expedition. We should take ten men on, including Yar. Yar would choose them. There were open murmurs now and clearly an anxiety to stay with the beasts. I believe it was not the material dangers, it was the unknown, coupled with the belief in the devildom that haunts the high mountains.

A man came forward and with an eloquent gesture pointed out to us what we had not noticed. Winding onward were large footprints, wide-toed and spread, leaving deep marks on the snow.

"Devils!" he said; and there was an answer in every face about us. Yar came behind him and shoved him contemptuously aside.

"Lord, these are not devils. High up are the hairy wild men, bigger than the Abominable Snowmen. Not often will they come down as low as this. They live up on high with the white snow lions and they tear out their hearts and eat them. When they are very hungry they come down to tear the yaks or men. And they tear them with iron claws

that grow on their hands—long, like bear claws."

Clearly Yar was a bit off color too. I must say I always admired Soames' readiness in times of trouble. You could not get him at a loss. Laughing scornfully he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his leather case and in it a photograph which he showed to Yar and told him to pass round. It was a mighty bear standing up like a man, fists held up for a fight and fierce little eyes gleaming. The great flat feet were almost human, but for the rending claws.

"Here are your hairy men. Here are your claws! I did not think the hillmen were women. Leave this child's talk. Yar, choose your men, and fix the loads after we have eaten."

It was done. We ate; and then an adjustment of the loads took place and the party divided; the beasts under the headman began the slow descent to the next pasture and Soames led on with me into the unknown, the ten coolies, with Yar, tramping after us.



CHAPTER VIII.

We journeyed for fourteen days from that parting of the ways before we came to the God-sitting Lake.

The coolies quickly recovered their stolid good humor as we descended to the comfortable height of ten thousand feet; and the guns of the two sahibs kept the cooking pots full. I shot a great mountain sheep for one item—a splendid beast that rejoiced their inner man and did not come amiss to ourselves. We had our first misfortune soon after, for the bivouac was raided two nights before we reached the lake. We were waked by a wild storm of shouts and shrieks. I was out first in a staring moonlight to see what I took for a huge man in a fur cloak

making off through the rocks and the men shouting to wake the dead. One lay motionless on the snow staining it with a dark trickle from a hidden face.

I fired and Soames followed suit; and the retreating figure fell heavily, fighting furiously with legs and arms and uttering a dreadful yelling cry, weird as death in the echoing snow silence. I went after it though Yar advised waiting until another barrel had been let drive into the flat bestial head. But when I came up I shouted aloud myself, for the most amazing sight met my eyes. No bear, as I could have sworn and would forever have sworn even if he had escaped. It was a man, yellow and lean and tall, with masses of furry fleece growing about his

body and matted like the pelt of a wolf—a horrible travesty of humanity. The face was beardless but for a few straggling hairs; the feet with cushioned splayed toes made a print in the snow easily to be misread for that of a gigantic bear and the great corded muscles would not have disgraced a grizzly's arm. But being man, the brute had a cunning no bear can boast, for on the mighty right hand were strapped two fierce iron claws, really frightful weapons for tearing and rending at close range. And it was these that accounted for the man who lay so silent on the snow. At once it recalled to me the trick of Sivaji the Maratha who, as Afzal Khan stooped to raise and embrace him, rent Afzal's abdomen with the "tiger's claw" of iron hidden in his hand. But how had the Abominable Snowman learned the ruse of a semicivilized India?

It was well I had plunked him. It did real good, for even our fellows found it difficult to believe the quarry invincible and supernatural as he lay on the snow before them. I unstrapped the claws from his hand and they examined them curiously. So this was how the Snowmen went about their hateful work! How they would swagger when they got back to their villages! They were already swanking like men who knew no fear when I recalled to them the poor fellow who was done for. We buried him in the snow with big stones piled above and so parted with a pang from the good-natured harmless companion who would never see his Lepcha village again and then continued our way, converts to another wild belief of the mountains.

Two days later we came on the God-sitting Lake, about four o'clock. Business first. Soames took out his aneroid and fixed the height at something like ten thousand feet; as for myself and the coolies we stared in stupefaction at the sight that lay before us.

The water was a metallic blue, marked with patches of some glittering stuff that strangely resembled the eyes of a peacock's tail—an effect so unusual and theatrical that one might almost expect the ballet to appear dancing from behind the rocks. I have never before or since seen anything in the least like it. There it lay—an immense peacock's tail fanned out in the cold sunshine and gently rippling in a light breeze. As for the rocks—it was easy enough to see how the lake had got its name. For they bore the most startling resemblance to

roughly sculptured figures sitting about it in solemn meditation, while towering above all was a mighty crag in the colossal shape of a woman, draped and hooded, looking down into the lake. The sculptors were wind and weather, though Soames declared he believed human hands had touched up the natural work. I cannot hope to convey the indescribable awfulness of these figures in the silence and desolation of the place; and if it were so in the sunshine, what would it be at night with a staring moon and a wild wind shrieking about it, or a veil of snow hiding and revealing the ghostly watchers?

Soames decided the camp was to be pitched there for the night and I knew we should have trouble, for the men were visibly terrified; and there was everything in the place to fill them with the supernatural fears that add so much to the difficulty of travel in these parts. I may as well own up that I could sympathize with them up to a certain point and I did not by any means approve his decision. It is never well to force men to unnecessary obedience and it would have been well worth while to trek for another hour and get out of sight of the haunted lake.

Perched on some crags was what I took to be a lamasery—monastery. I thought I could see the slits of windows, story above story—and even a rocky way that led up to it. I turned to Yar.

"Lamasery up there? Lamas taking us in for night?"

His teeth actually chattered.

"Not lamasery. No one. Devils there. Suppose we stay here, we hearing their voice. Heaven born, ask of our lord that we go on."

I did, more than once, but being very roughly repelled could say no more. A kind of dourness was hardening upon Soames. He would not have acted thus at the beginning of our adventure and it made me anxious to see it now. He was growing more and more difficult to live with. I tried to take it as all in the day's work, but I won't pretend I liked it.

So the tents were pitched and one of the sudden storms came on that you get in the heights. No snow, but an icy gale sweeping down the lake. The temperature went well down below zero and the whole place was as savage as it could be.

I knew before dawn why the men thought

it demon haunted, for no sooner did the dark settle down than the storm blasts brought a wild shouting and crying to us across the water. There was a braying of trumpets, a loose thunder of drums, then shouts of defiance and, later, a wild wailing like a city sacked and given over to death. A more horrid noise I never heard. I tell myself now it was some effect of the wind among the crags and windings of those lost and desolate mountains, but at least I did not believe it entirely then, for it kept me awake half the night in a state of suspense. And the men did not believe it either, as we had proof positive in the morning; for Soames and I slept late and Yar roused us with the pleasant news that all the men except three had deserted in the night. They must have felt precious bad to risk it, but of course in the endless hiding places of the caves and rocks they might be quite near us now, although hidden.

I never saw a man in a blacker fury than Soames. He swore he would follow them if it took a week. He would make them pay dear, *et cetera, et cetera*. One knows the kind of thing! But he knew as well as I that he could not and would not do it. It might mean the failure of the whole expedition, for every day is valuable in the brief summer of the mountains. We wasted an hour in this way and then very sullenly he gave the order to get on, abandoning all we did not need for our lessened party. The deserters had taken a good bit with them, having left by no means empty-handed.

I will not describe the next ten days. We went steadily on our way, the trail being faintly marked but traceable. Yar and the three men did splendidly and I got what enjoyment I could out of a bit of shooting here and there.

But I shorten my yarn up to the point where we came in sight of the end of the trek; and as yet we had seen no devils nor any sign of the Running Things. Soames and I often speculated about the latter. I think we banked upon snow wolves as being the most likely solution.

We had been traveling nearly all day through a stony ravine that skirted a mountain of singularly peaked shape. It was horned like the Matterhorn, but if possible more of a snow needle—very beautiful and unattainable. Following the direction in my last message we kept to the south side of this. Suddenly we rounded a corner of high

rocks and I looked up and an astonishing sight met my eyes.

Held in the fangs of the mountain, but not at a very great height, we saw a massive fortress—half castle, half lamasery—at least eight stories high and resembling strongly the pictures I had seen of the Dalai Lama's castle monastery at Lassa. It was too far away for us to see whether it was living or dead in the sense of being inhabited, but the sight was most wonderful as it rose among the crags and dominated them. It must have been a strong people that made such a fortress in such a place; and, with the wild sunset burning above it, it was a thing to remember.

But that in itself was not what struck me dumb. It was that here was the fortress of the smoke pictures—of the pictures at the Dorje-tak lamasery! There was no mistaking the likeness. No artist could have drawn it more faithfully in its magnificent desolation than the lamas whose canvas had been smoke and magic. We stood side by side looking at it, now that the goal was in sight, and not a word did we say. Yar and the remaining coolies were stolid and dumb. It had broken upon us so suddenly as we toiled through the pass—and now such a stillness met us. We were prepared for danger and alarms, but no people were coming or going. The place might have been forgotten since the world's beginning; the very wind seemed to have dropped dead about it and we could not hear the rushing of the torrent which we could see suspended like white drapery from the heights by the gateway. It was truly an awful place.

Very often in moments of strong feeling words are inadequate.

"Well, we're here," said Soames, breaking the silence uncomfortably.

"Yes, and what next?"

"Food, I should say—and then reconnoitering. We mustn't run any risks. We're too few as it is—and to lose one man might be fatal."

"Risks? It's all risk. But food's a good move."

We set to work with a will and finding a sheltered place among the rocks we made a fire with the scrubby juniper bushes and boiled as much sheep as we could eat, drinking the water. It made a lot of difference. Rested and refreshed, the savage wilderness and the mystery of the fortress seemed less oppressive to us. But the light was dying

and it was clear that nothing could be done till morning. It would be interesting to note too if any lights appeared in the fortress, any sign to mark it as alive.

So the darkness deepened and in the piercing cold we huddled into the little shelter tents, Soames and I in one, the men in the other. When the night was about us we went out and stared up toward where we knew the fortress to be.

No gleam—no sound.

But, yes—hush—a sound! As we stood, a strange running noise was heard in the distance, as of something running swiftly; not feet, not paws, not claws—a strange running that caught our breath as we heard.

We were withdrawn among the rocks in our little camp. The way we had come went beside and beyond it—a rocky track leading to the foot of the Touch-the-Sky Mountain, as we knew it to be. Along this track the sound of the running came. As it drew nearer a dim glow was apparent. Whatever it was, there came with it some sort of a faint light.

"Hardly a place for wheels!" I whispered, but my voice sounded small and thin to myself. Soames was dead silent.

The Thing was upon us—it rushed—it was passing. What was it? A swiftly shambling body on bent legs, grotesque, horrible. We could see it dimly in the faint light that went before it—a gigantic insect large as a mastiff; and as it passed it swayed a huge head and stared at us with dead, unseeing eyes that were the source of the dim phosphorescence that lit its way. If I compare it to a huge spider I repeat the thought that I had after its horrible passage. Yet there were differences.

I felt my knees shake under me as the devil face swayed away again. Now it was gone. The running died down and the night was silent.

"Thank Heaven the men were asleep!" My voice was manageable now. "They couldn't have stood it."

"The question is—can we?"

No more was said until we got back into the tent; and there I lit a light and we looked at one another dry-lipped. I smiled foolishly.

"But I'm going on all the same," I said. And I repeated it to hearten myself.

I felt as if I had had a bad dream. How could such things be? No, no, in this upper world of the mountains men saw visions and

dreamed dreams! Such things don't happen to sane men, for example, in Calcutta. Ah, but this was not Calcutta—it was the merciless desert.

It is certain I was not myself for a bit; my brain raced like a clock without the regulator; and it was a curious thing that Soames, the elder and the harder, was the more shaken of the two. He went outside the tent into the air and came back with his hair in wet strands on his forehead and white to the lips. But he returned more himself again.

"We've got to talk this over, Ross. We shan't get the men to face it if there's that kind of beast up yonder." He jerked a thumb at the mountain.

"Likely not, but we can go on. Yar will stick to us."

"I wonder."

"I don't. He'll come all right."

"Sure you want to go on all the same?"

"Sure."

"Then let's get to bye-bye. Better be fit and sound for to-morrow. I heard once from a hunter in Sikkim that all the natives say there are giant forms of life in these mountains that come down from time immemorial and have died out in the rest of the world. I laughed at him then. But now—"

We said no more, but I did not sleep and once in the night I could have sworn I heard a running.

CHAPTER IX.

When the day came it was possible to tell one's self that it had all been worked up by the dark and the pinnacle put on by the horror by our excitement. It was also possible not to believe this. But in any case omelets cannot be made without breaking eggs and if you leave Chowringhi for the heights you take your luck.

There was little talk as the tents were struck, except that Soames ordered the men to hide the tents in a little cave. No one could see them there and if a hurried retreat were necessary they might be useful. Yet it seemed strange to part with these little shelters and strike out into the blue. The sun was shining in strength upon rock and snow. Till a man has tried he cannot believe in the heat of the sun on the snow slopes. As a matter of fact the feet are often ice cold while the head is burning. But we went on steadily, the four men following, and

in an hour we had reached the lower ramps and looked up at the goal.

All things considered it came as a surprise to see a trail leading up; faint, but a trail. I had felt it would be a guarded place, draw-bridge up, portcullis down, and all that kind of thing. But no, there was no hindrance. We began the ascent doggedly for it was a steep climb. And as we did so, Yar edged up.

"Lords, a Thing passed in the night. Have you seen?"

"We have seen."

"I also."

This was unexpected. I looked him in the eyes.

"And did you not fear?"

"A little; but I made my heart hard. Death comes to all; and late or soon what matters? But see, lords, here is the powder that the men of Dong-Cha use for the great poison spiders that make webs like ropes. I cannot tell if it will help, but it is here."

He took a small packet out of some hidden repository and thrust it into Soames' hand, having spoken in Hindustani that the men might not understand. I must say the powder seemed an inadequate weapon; but it was all to the good that Yar should feel and speak as he did and Soames gave him one of the rare smiles for which Yar would toil like a slave. Again we went forward, on and up to where the fortress held in the fangs of the mountain looked exactly like a drop scene of a theater painted on the hard, clean air.

It was three in the afternoon when we reached the waterfall below the gates; and, looking back, the question arose: what in the name of Heaven could have induced any people to set a human habitation in wilds so vast, so cruelly lonely that the eyes ached in seeing the tossing billows of range after range of mountains until the sight could follow no more? Was it crime that had built it—or religion—or wisdom? Should we ever know?

Great gates of black wood bound, nailed and strengthened with brass and a darker metal, gates with huge barrel locks and hasps, sagged helplessly out and downward, ruined, broken, no longer a shield to what lay within. Walls of immense strength with countless, straight, narrow window spaces rose above us, something like the great gates of Peking, ponderous, sinister. I whispered to Soames, for somehow the place compelled

quiet, that they reminded me of the massive pylons of Egypt; and he agreed. But no head looked out, no voice hailed us.

There was no city. There never could have been room for one, whatever there may have been at the foot of the mountain; but even that did not seem likely. Lonely and grim, it looked down upon us with eyeless windows.

It was clear that we must go on and in. Night in the bitter cold would be death without shelter and the place must be deserted. Any resistance would have begun by now. We looked silently at one another and again we led the way.

There was a bare empty courtyard like the inside of an Eastern caravansary—a huge quadrangle where a regiment might have exercised, with rocks showing here and there as if the bones of the mountain were coming through. On one side were the gates we had passed; and elsewhere about us loomed the strange pylons of stone, full of windows peopled by silence. Thousands of eyes could have looked down upon it. None did.

We stood in the middle and stared about us. Yes, there was a pole with what had been a golden banner fluttering feebly from it in a dying wind, with a dragon sprawled on it in black. So much we could make out through the tatters. The last touch of the smoke pictures was complete!

"That can't be more than a few years old," Soames said and his voice sounded harsh in the lonely place. "Men have been here within that time. Well—let us go in!"

We went through a square opening and found ourselves in a labyrinth, a rabbit warren of narrow passages and small rooms. Here and there rough stone stairways led to rooms above and yet above. One we climbed and found the floor an exact replica of that below. Silence, emptiness, decay everywhere. To say it was ghastly to see this huge abandoned place that must once have been humming with life is to say little. It struck cold into one's blood. It gave the feeling of being at the world's end and looking down into space. We returned to the ground floor.

"Of course," said Soames, "the place must be thoroughly searched for the treasure and manuscripts of the document; and that will take time and plenty of it. We will fix our camp here and to-morrow the men can go down for all our possesions except the

tents. We can be quite comfortable here; and the guns will find us in meat for as long as we want. Also it's quite on the cards that we may find food in the place, if it's a resort of any kind of people. And we certainly shan't lack for water. There's plenty of wood in the gates and fittings. Now, Yar, get to work."

The men were glad to get busy—the eeriness of the place was more endurable when one did not stop to think of it. And Soames and I went cautiously from room to room, exploring.

I cannot tell how many we went into or looked into in passing. There were more cells than in a beehive. But suddenly the passage narrowed so that only one could pass at a time. The ghostly rags of an old curtain fluttered at the end of it in some dusty draft and to this we went, wary and expectant, ready for action.

A crash! Soames had fallen down two steps into a lower room. And I only saved myself on the edge. He sat up rubbing his knee and we looked about us.

It was an astonishing, an amazing place in the dim light from one slit arrow-hole window. It was a temple, long, narrow and of great height that faded into the darkness of an unseen roof; and the stony eyes of an immense face looked over our heads away into infinity. Those were the first impressions. Gradually the head developed into a colossal figure of gray granite seated with mighty hands laid upon its knees. Great cobwebs hung from it. In fact we believed at first that the head was draped in heavy, gray stuff, but again that weird draft from nowhere waved them aside and the face was seen in its impassive calm.

"What is it?" Soames whispered. One had to whisper there, whether one liked it or no. "Is it a Buddha?"

"No—no Buddha. But it can't be—yes—it is. Soames, it's Egyptian."

He thought I had gone clean mad and for the moment I could have believed it myself. Egyptian! And in the mountains of Tibet! Impossible! But I knew Egypt well and if I had ever seen a statue of a Pharaoh I saw it here—the statue of a dead Pharaoh. In his hand the ankh—the symbol of immortality, dependent from the knee; his brows were crowned with the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt; he had full, almost Nubian lips, locked in a stern immobility. The Great King, as he sits at Abou Simbel, star-

ing down upon the ancient river, the Nile—he sat here, his secret locked within his granite breast! Pygmies, we stood before his feet and marveled.

A long silence. Then Soames said, whispering:

"Ross, this is stupendous. We have made the find of all time. It turns ancient history topsy-turvy, for if the Egyptians were here—if there was communication at the time through Turkestan—why—all the theories and beliefs of the ancient world go dead. Can you swear it's Egyptian?"

I walked up to it, the awe of the thing a little wearing off now, and pointed to the base. It was covered with the hieroglyphics known to all the world and with the images seen only on the Nile. Cartouches of the kings, the sacred beetle, kings offering strange gifts to vulture and jackal-headed gods, queens, slender as reeds, with long-stemmed lotus flowers grasped in uplifted hands—all were depicted there.

"Unmistakable," I said with conviction. "The sooner we get back the better. We have done a thing that has never yet been done."

Soames stared incredulous and yet could not deny it.

"But it's simply staggering. The figure is gray granite and there's no granite here. You don't mean to tell me they dragged that graven image through these mountains? Why that means mechanical transport we know nothing of ourselves. Am I going clean mad?"

"What's that?" I stooped, for I saw something glittering on the ground—a yellow glitter. I looked curiously at it and passed it on to Soames in silence. It was a strangely ornamented gold charm, something like a European locket, with words on it. I could not decipher them, but it gave him no trouble.

"Dorje-p'ag-mo. The Precious Lady. It's safe to conclude a woman wore this. It's Tibetan, of course. Curious find—in company with this image."

"Not if that party is on before us." I said promptly. Soames shrugged his shoulders—that was a subject he always cold-watered. As for me, I put the charm in my pocketbook and subsided into wonderment before the Pharaoh once more.

We passed behind him now and, accustomed to the gloom, made out another image behind his majesty. One? Many! The

first, again in granite, I recognized as Ra, the Sun; but, most strange to tell—for in Egypt I have never seen the like—the miter and fillets on his head were all jeweled. Later we found that this was a detachable headdress of extremest splendor, the jewels being of immense value, some of them great emeralds. This certainly proved it to be of a more modern date than the Pharaoh, though the type was the same.

Facing this was Hat-Hor, the Moon Goddess, with the great horns as a crown, supporting the disk of the full moon all gloriously jeweled with pearls and crystals.

"What's that in the front of the crown?" Soames said, pointing eagerly. "That blue thing?"

It was larger, but the same mysterious stone I had seen on the hand that beckoned even in my dreams. No mistaking that. The scent was growing hot indeed. "I see!" went on Soames' urgent whisper. "The man is the sun—the woman the moon. And look—look behind them!"

He pulled me forward and in the dim light we saw a solemn circle of smaller figures; but these were of a yellow metal that we thought surely was gold, each with a star on the brow, with jeweled eyes fixed upon the two figures in front of them.

"The sun and moon and planets! Count! You'll see. Each has different jewels. Ross, this is a marvel, a wonder!"

"This is the find of finds!"

I stood and could not take it in. Murray's finds were nothing to this. No one had come near it. Fortune, fame, everything man can wish for was within our reach. The whole thing was enough to drive one crazy. To-morrow we must make drawings of every inscription we could find.

To-morrow! We little knew what that would bring forth.

CHAPTER X.

It was darkening rapidly now and we prepared to go back, loath to leave our treasures. As I turned, I suddenly heard a running at the far end of the temple and saw a dim and horrible shape shambling forward at the height of a great dog from the ground; and at the same time an evil odor assailed us.

I recognized the feeling of almost supernatural terror of the night before, but it was worse a thousand times in this ghostly place.

I caught Soames by the arm and we ran for our lives up the steps and down the narrow passage and never drew breath till we stopped, as it seemed, miles away in the room where the men were at their homely work.

Useless to tell of our discussion of how that danger might be faced and met, for nothing came of it at the time. We kept it a dead secret from the men—even from Yar. But such was our wild excitement at the marvels of the temple that I think even that awful incident made less impression on us than it might have done otherwise. It seemed that nothing could hold us back from achievement now.

Yar had put what provisions we had in the bigger of the two rooms, on the trampled clay, for want of a table; and, drawing water from the stream outside the gates, he made some tea and we sat and ate what we could—not much, for the poisonous odor was about us still—talking of how to take specimens of our find down with us and of the danger of leaving these precious objects at the mercy of wandering Tibetan looters. We little knew how well they were guarded.

Soames lay down in his sleeping bag after the meal and I strolled out into the courtyard and stood looking up at the stars glittering frostily in the black square made by the great walls. Surely the strangest of all strange destinies had brought us here. The life in Calcutta seemed wholly unreal now. Joan Boston, the dances, the bridge, the daily grind at the office—had it all ever been, or was it the dream of a dream?

The veiled woman—that too was dream-like. Where had her party branched off? Had they gone on over the Mendong-La to Lassa? Who—what was she?

And even as I remembered, I saw a dim light in a high-up opening at the other end of the vast quadrangle.

My heart stopped dead for a second. I could feel it halt and plunge forward. In that deserted place, in the bitter cold, the silence, the evidence of other life was a shock I felt in every nerve. Here with the wild mountains about us, in the very heart of desolation, it could only be the mysterious people who had shadowed all our way. And as I looked, half telling myself it was fancy, the light disappeared for a moment, as if some one passed before it, and then was seen again.

My mind was made up now. I turned back to the room I had left. Yar was sitting with his arms about his knees gazing with Eastern apathy at the stars through the window. Soames and the two others were sleeping soundly. This was lucky, for I knew well what Soames would have said to the plan I had in view. I silently beckoned to Yar, who followed me out into the square. There I pointed to the light, telling him to stand there and watch. He was to wake the others if I shouted or if he heard a shot, keeping his weapons ready. His little eyes twinkled with interest as he promised and I crept off, leaving him on duty.

Reaching the other end of the quadrangle I entered through a rough sort of arcading and a curiously carved doorway, the wood of it rotting visibly. Inside was the same rabbit warren of passages, narrow and criss-cross, also small rooms, all so bewildering that it seemed an army might have encamped in the unknown. I lit my way with my electric torch through the thick, musty air and darkness, going silently as a ghost. Finally I stopped, utterly mystified, for the aimless crossing of the passages made it impossible to find the way to the upper regions where I had seen the light. I had, in fact, lost all sense of direction and there was a very good prospect of staying there all night, as far as I could see.

And it was just then I heard a footstep above and instinctively clicked the light out and stepped back into the nearest cell. Unless the newcomer carried a light and swept it round I was safe; and with a hand upon my service revolver I waited events.

The steps moved slowly above, but with distinct purpose. Now they were descending one of the countless stone stairways that led up into the gloom. The steps grew quicker and I could hear a bursting sigh, as if from an overcharged heart—a dreadful, groaning sigh; and now a very faint light, hardly disturbing the gloom, crept down the steps. With every nerve and muscle like a taut wire I watched as I had never watched before.

The unknown presence came nearer. It was breathing heavily now—and again that bursting sigh. A man's voice! My wild hope vanished and instead came a clean-cut rejoicing that no light of our own could show from the other end of the quadrangle. Hush! he was in sight now—a black-hooded figure, unnaturally tall. He carried a kind of Tibetan lamp in his hand, with the wick floating

in the bronze cup; and the little light went straight before him. Within full sight he stopped and looked out into the frosty dark, sighing again as if his heart would break. No sound came from outside, Yar was silent and steady on his watch and nothing was there to startle the man.

He put up a brown claw and dragged the hood back from his head and even in that dim light I knew I was looking at a priest. No mistaking the thin ascetic face, the indescribable air of finesse that marks the priest out from other men. If his style and title had been proclaimed I could not have known it better. And what was this? For, as the hood dropped off, it disclosed the secret of the great height. He wore a tall divided miter, the exact shape of that worn by the image in the temple; but this had coiled about it a golden serpent, darting its head forward as if in defiance. And it was then that I noticed a scar, white and long, deeply indented in the man's jaw. And old Jehanira's words at the outset of our journey came flashing back upon me, "Beware of the man with the scarred jaw."

Standing, he muttered what I took to be a prayer in some unknown tongue and then went forward wearily—an old man and in deep trouble of mind. To follow—that was the one course clear before me. After all, the risk was not alarming as far as things had gone, even admitting Soames' axiom that each man of a party owed his life to the others. I waited till the priest had entered the next passage and then I crept after him like a ghost—or, what I suppose is quieter, a burglar.

He led straight down. The labyrinth was no labyrinth to him and after many turns he came to a door as heavily clamped with metal as the fortress doors themselves—not locked, but with a hasp that required knowledge. He twisted it either way and opened it wide enough to pass through, leaving it ajar as though certain none was there to follow. I was on his heels as soon as I dared.

A horrible sight lay before me. Six steps led down to a deep, wide pit crossed by a tottering wooden bridge with a broken hand-rail at one side only. Was it water it crossed—or cloud—or—Madness! It could not be true that the place was all creeping alive with life, with gray and awful shapes, heaving, crawling over one another, with hard sounds here and there as if horn rattled

on horn and claw on claw! Wriggling, monstrous forms—and, over all, an evil odor like a foul miasma. It was surely but a vile nightmare, for if it were true 'no man would cross that bridge where a slip on the wet plank, a break, would send him down an abyss of horror.

A nightmare! Yes, but I could see broad eyes glaring from the seething mass below, forming and reforming, shifting and changing—eyes with a dim phosphorescent glare like death in its lowest shapes. I stopped transfixed with horror. What deviltries were in this place of a dead people?

I must away and out of it!

The priest stopped in the middle of the bridge and looked down upon the mass of hateful life heaving itself upward. I saw a fearful shape sway over the others, gray, hairy claws struggled out of the chaos and gripped the bridge—a huge body followed, a hand, a face, not human, not animal, but rather the distorted malignity of a devil's dream, a creature like a spider but beaked like a parrot, huge as a mastiff! And it climbed toward the man, whether for deviltry or in some weird fealty, who could say? Standing his ground the priest drew a box from his clothing and scattered some powder in the air above the crawling pit. The claws relaxed, the body fell back, the movement ceased and the rattling of claws and beaks was silent. The man went on and I followed.

Another long passage going steadily downward, steps, another door, and we reached another temple—or so I judged it to be. And here the priest stopped and, stooping with his light, lit two of the Tibetan butter lamps which stood on what revealed itself as an altar. I whipped behind a tattered curtain just in time, as the place sprang into comparative light—the black shadows flickering all about me.

A wonderful place was revealed. Of all the mysteries that had met us this seemed to me the most solemn and strange. On the low altar was nothing but the lamps, but above it towered an image, greater than a man, in black marble, brooding and terrible. The attitude resembled that of the image of the dead Pharaoh we had seen already. But—stay! There was one difference. A massive hand lay on the left knee, but the other held, as a king holds his orb, a globe of flashing light, prismatic, wonderful—the purest light congealed into a frozen radiance. A

crystal? A diamond? But whoever saw a diamond the size of a small apple? What crystal ever sent forth those keen rays of blue and violet glory, shot with fierce reds and ardent greens? I knew the image of him who sleeps at Abydos—the dead, the ever-living Osiris of the most mysterious Egyptian worship. Awful, calm as in the mighty temples of the Nile, the same god held his state in the mountains of this secret land. A wonder incredible! Symbol of the ancient wisdom of Egypt!

The priest knelt and touching the ground three times with his brow intoned some prayers in a tongue unknown. It lasted until my arms and legs tingled from my constrained position as I half stooped behind the curtain; and desperate doubts and questions raced through my mind. Should I stun the man, seize the jewel, steal away and warn Soames, cross that awful bridge? Question after question, doubt after doubt. Chance, the blind goddess, settled it for me.

The priest raised himself and spoke aloud. But not to me.

"Royal Daughter!"

A faint voice—a woman's voice, replied in Hindustani—the common ordinary Hindu of everyday life in Calcutta. The sound in that wild place almost shocked me into movement, but the voice itself was not ordinary, was most musical—and vibrating with either fear or anger.

"For all the sakes of all the gods, release me, heaven born, for I die of fear."

There came no answer. The priest turned and took food from a receptacle near the altar and put it within reach of a small hand that I could see stretch itself from the shadow. Again the voice:

"Heaven born, I am guiltless. I swear it. How could I help it if the Sirkar in India knew of the Splendor and sent their servants? What have I done? Oh, take me from this awful dark and the noise of the devils struggling in the pit. Give me not living to them. Slay me here and now, if it must be, for the night is dread to think of!"

The priest spoke again with inhuman calm.

"Royal Daughter, what are you, or many like you, to the Splendor of Asia? Is it not the custom of the Royal House of Egypt that in the day of danger a virgin princess should be made a sacrifice to the Black Osiris, to him that sleeps at Abydos? And

was not this done in every generation, that the light of the jewel should not be extinguished and its glory depart from the house of your father? As your fathers fled across the great deserts, when the Roman people took the ancient throne from them, did not the Princess Thamutis die in the wastes that the gods might be favorable and guide them to safety? And so it was that a refuge was found in the mountains.

"Now again the Splendor is menaced; and you die that your house may live and that these heathen and outcast may go down over the Mendong-La and die in the hands of the wild people. For this were you brought up from India. Go, therefore, rejoicing to Amenti and implore the great god that the day of restoration come now and the Pharaoh sit again upon his throne by the ancient river, the River Nile."

The woman's voice answered with infinite sadness:

"Do I not know this? Then slay me now. Cast me not alive to the devils. Give to me, who am of your blood and the imperial princess, a clean death by clean steel. Is it much to ask? When in India you sent tidings to me, oh, Ptah-Sekt, that my father had need of me in the mountains. I trusted and came, for you said the day of restoration was at hand, that my father might again rule Egypt. Break not my trust."

"I said it and true it is. The English retreat from the august land; and as for the dogs that are left, it is easy to deal with them. But for this end also a sacrifice is needed and therefore have I brought you to the Holy Place and to the Osiris who is Death."

"Then here and now!" The girl's voice was inexpressibly mournful and entreating.

"Not now. For your father comes with the dawn and only while you live can we read the pictures that tell of the white men's journey. The watchers were out and they saw nothing. It may be the men have perished in the heights or have gone over the Mendong-La. This we shall know to-morrow. Eat, Royal Daughter. Sleep and have peace of mind. What are death and life that we should sorrow for either? The gods alone are eternal. Is it a great matter to die for your father's house? In lives yet to be your deed will gladden you. And as for the devils, for to-night I have charmed them to sleep. Repeat now the prayer to the Hat-

Hor that carries the moon on her brows—and wait the day in peace."

He extinguished all the lamps but one; and even in that dim light the jewel flashed like a wild aurora with its lancing splendors. Then, sighing heavily again, he passed out through the door and, still leaving it ajar, climbed the steps beyond and I could hear the creaking of the frail bridge as his steps fell upon it.

Terrified, I waited. Yes, that was the upper door. He was gone.

And then—a clear, strong voice spoke from out the shadows.

"Beloved—light of my eyes—speak with me. I saw you follow. That you might hear and know, I said what I have said. Come now and do not fear."

I was past all amazement, so it seemed to me, as I pushed that curtain aside and saw her sitting upright, leaning against the altar—no weak suppliant for life, but a woman, proud and haughty—the imperial princess indeed!

CHAPTER XI.

How shall I describe her? She was certainly more beautiful than any dream I had made of her—pearl-pale with suffering, with heavy clouds of midnight hair about her brows, the only color in her face the great dark eyes and the crimson of lovely lips. A wonderful and royal lady. And yet, when I saw her face to face, my dreams vanished. There was between us a gulf—of race, of time, of station, of thought—of everything in the world that sets man and woman apart. If she had been a beautiful ghost she could not have seemed more remote from me—she could hardly have filled me with more dread and alienation. I cannot describe this strange feeling. But so it was. A bracelet of steel was about her right wrist, fastened to a slight, strong chain that permitted her to move a few feet, but no more; and on the pitiful chained hand was the blue fire of the stone I had seen in the mountains. I knelt before her and she laid her hand on my shoulder.

"Lord, our two fates are one. I have known this by the magic of my people. When our eyes met in the mountains, did your heart meet mine?"

What reply to make? Those eyes searched my soul with a kind of proud submission that was infinitely touching—a royal woman, if ever there was one! I gathered my wits

together and spoke urgently, using Hindustani as she had done.

"Great lady, one thought and one only is now in my mind—how to save your life, and next to that my own. What room for aught else? Tell me—Instruct me as you have done in our journey—and I will obey."

She looked sweetly in my face.

"My life and my love are one. It is true the time is urgent. Beloved, you are in danger. To-morrow my father comes with certain men; and over my body they will make the smoke pictures and they will see with my eyes and brain. Nor can I hinder this. So they will know all you have done and do. Fly therefore now in the night, taking me with you, for through me they will see. Without me they cannot."

"Did you think I would go without you—that I would leave you to death?"

She smiled proudly.

"Our fate is one. Where you go I go. Thus it is decreed."

"Then tell me all I must know. Are we safe here?"

"He will not return. To-night I keep the vigil of the dead. I will speak. Light of my eyes, I am Nephthys, a daughter of the kings of Egypt.* For when the Romans had taken our throne my people fled through the deserts and by long and terrible ways until they came to these mountains. There is a place yet farther in the heights where dwell my Father the Pharaoh and my brother waiting their time. But this is the place of our treasures and of our gods. And so it has been since the days of the flight of our forefathers many centuries ago."

"But it is a custom with my people that the king's daughters are sent into India that they may learn the wisdom of the times; and I was sent to the house of the Maharaja of Kashi, he thinking me a lady from Bhotiya—as they have ever thought. And now has my father sent for me, knowing the English are gone out of Egypt and the day of his return is near. So I was brought to the priest my uncle; and to-morrow I die before the Black Osiris, as is the custom of my house, that he may be gracious to the king. Also the priest has heard of your coming; and they will make the smoke pictures that they may see with my eyes and destroy you. For this great jewel is the Splendor of Asia; it is the honor of our house and they know well that the white men, having seen, will covet. For in all the world there is nothing

like it. But this jewel is a free gift from me to you, O lord of my life."

I listened, but scarcely grasped all she said. The one thing clear was that if our lives were to be saved we must make off and quickly. Even then it might not be possible. Yet one question I must ask.

"Princess, how and why have you loved one as unworthy as I?"

"Our fates are one," she repeated. "In Darjiling I saw you and then I knew what the gods would have. And again and yet again I saw you when you knew not that the veiled woman was the daughter of kings and your wife to be. Of the journey up the mountains you know even as I. But now, beloved, listen. I have forsaken my people for love's sake; and my father has daughters that he may slaughter or wed as he wills. But for me, I am free and I give all the treasure to my lord. Set me free and you shall know."

She stretched out her slender wrist and I examined the chain. It was slight—entirely beyond a woman's strength, but within a man's. Aided by the strong knife I carried I set to work instantly, wasting no words. The one thing that mattered now was to get back to Soames and to get away with her. The rest must take its chance and I with it.

"I have been here since the dawn," she said simply. "Ptah-Sekt took me because he had seen two of the vile creatures running up the mountain as if the nests below were disturbed and he brought me here and chained me until my father should come."

I worked steadily on at the chain as I asked, "What are these creatures?"

"I know not, but they tear men cruelly with their beaks and they are full of poison. Dread them very greatly, beloved, for many and many are the men they have killed and had I not known you were at hand I would have strangled myself with my own hand rather than be flung into the pit."

As she spoke, the chain dropped at her feet, though the steel bracelet still clasped her slim wrist. She rose lightly to her feet. It seemed to me part of the strangeness of all about me that the chain was probably from Birmingham—a cheap sort of thing that you might walk into any store and buy. Yet it clasped the wrist of a princess of Egypt and but for my arrival might have doomed her to death. She laid her hand on mine.

"Come now and see the treasure house. No need of locks and bars here in the mountains and with the crawling devils for a guard."

She led the way to a door at the far end of the temple and holding the lamp from the altar lit up the strange sight in the cave—for a cave it was, partly natural and partly cut by the labor of many men.

I beheld many images—images of gold and silver, images of black marble, of dull granite; and each held in a mighty hand a great jewel, pulsing light. One was a ball of carbuncle, deep-glowing like the red heart of a smoldering fire; one, a glorious sphere of amber where the gold light swam like wine; another, clear green fire—could it be emerald? I doubted, marveling at its beauty, because of the size—a tennis ball of pure green radiance. And another was flashing crystal. And thus the images of dead kings and gods sat in solemn conclave as the princess lifted her light upon each awful face. One figure, granite and stern, stood in the midst, offering before a cat-headed goddess a dish with fruits upon it. And as the princess raised the lamp the fruits glittered and sparkled. They were such as Aladdin found in the Cave of Dreams Come True.

"That is Seti, the king. See how he wears the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt," she said softly. "From him we are descended. Should my father and brother die and I be childless, our line is ended, for my sisters are but the half-blood. They are naught."

"And your line goes far into the past?" Something of the vast antiquity I saw about me compelled me to ask the question.

"For many thousands of years, lord of my life. It is no upstart of yesterday that gives you her heart. Yet what is that? Here my father dwells like a Bedouin chief in the desert. But we shall come again—this we know."

She was silent for a little space.

"I believe no more in the gods of my fathers," she went on then. "It was truth in the beginning, but time changes truth into error. Only the wisdom of my people remains—the magic and the mysteries. The lamas who showed you the smoke pictures were the men with my father's messenger and me. And these pictures were shown that they might know your thoughts, for the inmost thought declares itself in these visions when the right spells are said. I would have warned you, but I could not."

3A P

"Then they were not lamas?"

"No. Tibetan servants of my father. They knew not the spells they said. They showed you also the trick of the silver changing. An idle thing. A deceit of the eyes."

"And the pictures at the Dorje-tak monastery?"

"We were there and the pictures were given to the abbot that you might fear and turn. But well I knew my lord would not turn—that my spell was upon him!" Her eyes brimmed over with love and laughter.

"And the priest who bound you?"

"He is Ptah-Sekt, brother of my father. But look here!"

She held the light aloft again and I saw vessels of gold tumbled in wildest profusion. They stretched away into the gloom till I could see no more. Great chests of dark wood stood about us on clawed feet of gold. What did they hold?

"Papyri, pictures, much learning in those chests," said the princess. "For thousands of years they go back. They were brought on camels across the waste when my fathers fled from Egypt and men bore them up here with the jewels and gold; and when they had done their work they were slaughtered and buried beneath this cave that their ghosts might guard the treasure. Some believe they have taken shape in the evil creatures of the pit and the rocks; but this I know not. Great riches are here and great wisdom and magic."

I shuddered a little. Gold and blood—always the same—inseparable in the world's history. I looked about me at the splendors of the Egyptian kings where the granite Seti, with kingly hauteur, made his equal offering to the goddess. Then I roused myself from the dream of the dead ages.

"We must go back to my people. If I delay they will search for me and the priest will hear. But how to cross the bridge? Alone I could do it, but you—surely, princess, you will die with terror."

"What do I fear if I am with you?" she said, looking up sweetly into my face. "But, here, beloved, and here—a gift from me to you."

She stood on tiptoe, looking most lovely as she did it, and took the emerald ball from the hand of the god and laid it in mine. So also with the glowing red jewel from another, and still clinging to my hand she drew

me back into the temple and, pointing to the flashing glory in the grasp of the Black Osiris, said proudly:

"A gift of love. This is the Splendor of Asia. Reach it down to me, beloved, and I will hide it in my dress, for it is the fortune of my house, and when we rule in Egypt, you and I, this will be our promise of greatness and joy. Yours it is and mine. It is the jewel that lighted the Temple of Sais. Its fellow is not known to man."

Much against my judgment and very much with the feeling of a man who endures the graciousness of a royal lioness I climbed up the pedestal and lifted the jewel from the hollow of the marble hand. Instantly a wild wailing cry ran round the place and so startled me that the sphere of light fell on the floor. Had it been less hard than adamant it would have broken in bits. She picked it up composedly, and quenched the splendor in the folds of her dress. "Bend forward the thumb of the hand and the crying will cease," she commanded. "The vulgar believe it is the ghosts of the dead men, but it was a magic to rouse the priests."

I obeyed and the weird cries ceased instantly, but the silence was even more terrifying. It was full of dust and death—and what was that stirring and rattling outside? The devils of the pit awakening?

"Let us go—let us go!" I said sternly. "What are jewels now? Come—or stay!"

"Beloved, I follow."

She took up her position behind me with the ritual obedience of an Eastern woman. We left the solitary lamp burning on the altar and ascended the steps to the bridge—I carrying my torch high.

There was a horrible, dim heaving and creeping beneath the bridge—here and there a hairy claw protruded, gripping the air, here a head with staring eyes, there a rending steellike beak. They were waking from the drug. One horror sprawled upon the bridge before us; and I had no weapon. I halted and she passed swiftly before me and, raising her hands—her black shadow swaying grotesquely over the unnamable life below—she cried aloud in a high and terrible voice:

"By Seti and Nekt-heb, by the Dogs of Death and the Children of the Dark, make way, O devils of the pit! Food do I promise you within a day! Fear not! It lives—it hastens toward you. Make way!"

I clutched the frail handrail. My brain was swimming, reeling. In a minute more

I would slip and fall among them if the strain lasted—if that voice went on.

The monster slipped off the bridge and fell wet and heavy among its kin below. Heads and eyes like unto those of the madness of a dream stared up at us, but none attempted the bridge.

"I have noted," she said, drawing close to me, "how the priests call when they fling men to them. They hoped for food and were still."

I answered nothing and she led the way steadfastly along the narrow passages and out into the keen moonlight air of the quadrangle, having made me extinguish my torch.

Oh, how it revived us—how heavenly clean and fresh that air was after those haunts of dust and death! I took the lead again now and guided her round in the black shadow of the walls to the spot where Yar stood patiently on guard, though two hours that seemed to me like a year had gone by.

Can anything surprise an Asiatic? If so, I have not yet found it. He looked at my companion in stolid silence and followed us in without a word. She had muffled herself in her veil as I went in to rouse Soames, for it was instantly necessary that he should be told what had happened. He was awake and alert in a second, his eyes bright and keen.

I compressed the story as best I could and he was on his feet before it was half done, revolving it in that swift, hard mind of his.

"Is the woman here?"

"Yes. The worst of it is—it sounds beastly to say it—but I think she has a liking for me. And for my part—I can't feel that way. She's like a long-ago goddess, beautiful and very dangerous. A man can't—"

"Why, no—of course not. All the same you're not going to let the lady know that until we're in a very different position from the present. It is she and she only can get us out of this and give us hope of the treasure and the papyri. To think I was asleep! I'd have given ten years of my life to see what you've seen. Well—we must clear out with her before the king comes. He may bring a force. Rouse the men quietly and tell Yar we're off. I'll speak to her."

He went into the outer room where the princess stood in statuesque patience, shrouded in her veil, and he bowed, certainly with no grace but with the strong masculinity that would always save him from being

ill at ease in any presence. She saluted him Eastern fashion with hands and head. He remained as businesslike as if an Egyptian princess with the jewel of the world in her keeping were an everyday occurrence. He spoke Hindustani as perfectly as she.

"Pray sit on that blanket. Do you know whether the king will come alone or with a guard?"

"He will come with my brother, with six priests for the sacrifice, and with a guard. If you would save your lives, let us go now."

"Have they guns and weapons like ours?"

"They have all this and more. They have the magic of my people."

He brushed that aside contemptuously. Stories to frighten children! But I knew better.

"Then it is your wish to come with us?"

"I follow my lord. And if I stay, they will read all you do through my thoughts before they slay me."

Soames turned to me.

"We must plan as we go. My idea is to get back to the tents and hide till they go. Something of that sort. But it wants thinking out. How to get down these rocks in the dark?"

The men, headed by Yar, were waiting in stolid submission, though roused from a much-needed sleep. The princess spoke once more.

"I know the secret way from the fortress and the swift and secret way through the mountains. Beloved, fear nothing. Take my hand."

I hung back imperceptibly, but Soames made an impatient gesture and she took my hand in a strong clasp and led the way.

It was not out into the courtyard again. She led through the intricacy of the passages until she came to a square opening in the wall. Passing through it she brought us to steps—the steps of an interminable descent through walls of rock dripping with moisture. The air was dense and still. It almost had to be swallowed like something tangible. But down she resolutely went and we followed. How long that descent lasted we never knew, but our knees were cracking with the strain when a cold air met us, fine and keen, and we came out into the night in a huddle of snow-covered rocks, exactly where we had begun the climb the day before.

"It is now for you to guide," she said and fell behind again, dropping my hand.

CHAPTER XII.

I had taken the bearings and we all went forward to the place where the tents were hidden, thankful to be free from the sorceries and dangers of the fortress. And as we reached the rocks the darkness was thinning and the dawn not very far away.

"It is a good place," she said decidedly. "My father comes from the other side—from the Chapka Mountains. Now let us sleep that we may be strong."

It was as if she had taken command of the expedition. I foresaw discord if she attempted that; but the pressing question was sleep. And yet, after all these excitements, I felt as if I should never sleep again. Her unseen eyes saw and understood.

"Drink this cordial, one and all, before we part for sleep. It is the nepenthe of the Greeks, which Queen Helen learned in Egypt from my people when she sojourned there. Have no fear. There is no harm—only rest and forgetfulness of all griefs."

She drew a flat, metal vial from her dress and asked for a cup. Into it she dropped a few drops of clear, honey-colored fluid and gave it to me. I drank, Soames also. Even to the men she gave a share.

"They are beasts," she said haughtily, "but we need our beasts of burden and this heals all weariness. Sleep, beloved. I will wake you."

How we slept! It was exquisite untroubled sleep, into the depths of which we sank as into an ocean of rest. It had seemed a long night of peace when her light hand touched us, and we sprang up fresh and alert.

"Come out and look, beloved. Let your friend look also."

A sight of wonder awaited us. The brilliant sun was shining in a blue, unclouded sky and all around the mountains glittered in spotless white, while the silence was so intense that a breath might be heard. The vapor from our lips went floating like clouds straight upward.

At the beginning of the ascent was a thin, black line of men preparing to climb to the fortress. We could see what looked like a pennon on a lance, though at that distance it was impossible to be sure.

"There are my father, my brother, the priests and twenty-five men. They do not go up by the steps, for that is a king's secret. What now is your counsel?"

Soames looked at his watch.

"It is now eight o'clock. They will take about two hours to do the climb. What then?"

"Ptah-Sekt will then meet them and take them to the temple and they will find my place empty. They will then make prayer, and drink of the holy wine. And they will afterward follow—if they can!"

Her face was so meaning that I shuddered slightly. I knew something terrible lay behind her smile.

"Beloved, the golden cup below the altar of Osiris was filled with wine for the sacrifice. It is the custom that all should share the wine of the god when it is set on the altar. I have put a drug in the cup. They will not follow. Some will die at the god's feet. Some will reel over the bridge into the pit. Did I not promise food to the devils? I have seen this thing done to our enemies."

Decidedly the princess was terrible. Her voice was somber and calm, though she had doomed her race to extinction. Had she no remorse—no sorrow? Apparently none. They had doomed her to a frightful death. It was her turn, now, and there was no more to be said.

"A very excellent thing if it comes off!" Soames said to me in English. "Well, we must wait on events. Yar, let us have some food."

It brought things down to the level of every day and in so far was reassuring. We dare not make a fire, so the meal consisted of cold meat and biscuit; and the princess took her share with appetite, throwing her veil back and disclosing her beautiful face with the full curved lips that resembled the goddess images of her Egyptian house. While we ate we watched the thin, straggling party of men toiling up the ascent, reaching the gates and silently disappearing within them to their doom.

"The problem is," said Soames later, smoking in deep meditation, "whether to return to the fortress and bring down some smaller valuables as a proof of what we have found, or to leave the whole thing untouched until we can get back with carriers and all that's necessary."

"I think, if you had seen that pit, you'd prefer to wait till the scientific chaps have fixed up something that would put those devils to sleep for good," said I and repeated

his remark and my answer in Hindustani to the princess.

"As to this, beloved, it is best to wait, if your wise men can help; for very terrible are the devils. But the danger is great here and now, for they come running very swiftly. Those above are kept for the slaying of our enemies and the guarding of the Osiris. And they are fed. They do not devour unless they are hungry, though they tear for the love of tearing."

"I like not the security!" I said, quoting "Hamlet"—and in vain, for my companions were looking fixedly at the fortress. Slowly the sun went up the sky and the heat and the glare of the snow strengthened and all was quiet as a picnic instead of a scene of fear and danger. I felt as if I were moving in a dream; and most of all I felt this in the companionship of the princess. Beautiful, young, she sat beside us, strange as the inhabitant of some distant planet; and though her heart reached across the gulf to me it could find no answer. She sat as if immured in a crystal sphere, visible, but ages apart from us.

The sun was past his zenith and the shadows on the snow were lengthening when suddenly a wild and piercing yell broke forth from the fortress. We leaped to our feet. Two figures, black against the snow, were dashing from the gates of the fortress and down the trail where the king and his guard had gone up. Silence followed again and there was not a sound as they sprang down the steeps, vaulting the stream where it flashed below the waterfall.

"Ready! They're coming this way," said Soames composedly and fixed his field glasses again. The two were evidently in wildest haste and fear—they ran as if the devil were after them. And he was! He was! For what was that appearing from behind a huge boulder to the left? What was that with great body and swaying head and six monstrous legs that shambled over the rocks more swiftly and surely than any man can run? Not seeming to move quickly, the brute covered the ground with dreadful surety. It gained—it won! The gray blot of its hideous body seemed to obscure one of the runners, to dwell over him, to pause—

"It has been a pastime of my people to set criminals to run against them," said the princess serenely. "But always they won. They can tire out a horse, though they do not go fast. Certainly they are devils. It

cannot be doubted. Though what will become of the spirits of the men slain I cannot say. That devil will run no farther—he will devour. See the other fugitive is pursued also. You will not need the guns."

True. The other wretch, seeing the appalling end of his comrade, uttered a heart-piercing yell once more and redoubled his straining speed, for a second hound of death had crawled from its lair. With efforts beyond what human flesh and blood can endure the fleeing man raced the wild descent—with the heavy, noiseless shambling of the huge body following ever nearer—gaining little but gaining always—and in a moment more the fugitive was heading straight for our hiding place.

"Poor devil—poor devil!" I said, moved to sickened pity. "I say, Soames, I'm going to shoot that beast—or try. I can't stand this."

I aimed—and Soames struck up my arm.

"Do you want to show where we are when Heaven knows what and who may be on us soon? You may need that very shot tonight! Don't be a weak fool. You should know better."

I turned away, sick in heart and body, yet could not withdraw my eyes from the tragedy. The poor wretch was within fifty yards of us now, coming as straight as if for help. But he would never gain it. The evil odor was about us—it must have choked the runner with its poison breath. Suddenly with a wild shriek he fell on his face, and the thing settled down upon him, gathering in its legs with a monstrous parody of a bird settling down upon its nest.

"I told you. They *always* win," said the princess musically.

Even Soames paled. Yar and the other two men were shaking like leaves in a gale. Yar came up to us with his hands spread out.

"Take us away, lords! Take us away from this hill of devils! Men cannot endure it and there is no lama here to defend us with charms. Come—now!"

"Don't be an idiot, Yar," was all Soames vouchsafed. "One would think you had never seen a man die before."

"All the same, it's not exactly a picnic!" I retorted. "And I think we shall have big trouble with the men if we don't clear out. Besides what's the point of staying? We have all the bearings and we can come again."

"Yes—and have the king and his men carry off the treasures—and worse, the papyril Who's to know they're dead? No, thank you!"

We had spoken English, but the princess interposed, calm as a goddess.

"I will now make the smoke picture that we may know what is in the fortress. Make me a small fire."

We made one of some of the miserable scrub that grew here and there and it took time to fan it from a pungent smoke into a flame. Meanwhile the princess had thrown off her veil and if I had thought her beautiful in the flicker of the butter lamps she seemed almost supernatural now, with the great, clear eyes and braided blackness of her hair in the pure light of the sun and snow. Lovely, yes, but no ornament for any man's house. Every movement was grace, every glance of the eyes romance. She moved and spoke a queen. But one thought and only one was with me—that she was a snare, a danger and a fear; and what the future would bring I dreaded to think. Her devotion struck me dumb. But her pursuit, for all I knew, might be as deadly as the one that had just ended beside us. And yet the very thought was a treachery to so much beauty—beauty bringing also such royal gifts in its hands.

She paced round the fire nine times, reciting a spell and holding in her hand the fylfot cross that is sacred throughout the world, offering it toward the sun as she went. She spoke in Tibetan.

"I offer you, O Holy Ones, the four continents and the Mountain of Paradise and I pray you to make us see!

"I offer up this magic cross through the virtue of which let no injury beset the path of purity, and I pray you to make us see.

"What virtue has been accumulated by all the virtuous I offer up, and I pray you to make us see.

"I humbly prostrate myself nine times to all of the evil spirits that are worthy of worship. Let night come."

Followed *mantrams* in a tongue unknown to both of us; and then she ceased and while the men sat staring at the fire with eyes as fixed and dull as owls she flung a powder on it from an amulet box which she wore like a Tibetan woman on her breast. And instantly the smoke wafted into a white background and we saw.

There appeared the Black Osiris seated,

in his temple, with the raised and empty hand that had grasped the Splendor of Asia. Appeared also a man, with a helmet wreathed with a snake, lying prone and dead at his feet; and beside him, dead too, Ptah-Sekt the priest; and men in attitudes that might betoken sleep but very certainly meant death, lay about the two. The princess spoke:

"I count my father, my brother, the six priests, and Ptah-Sekt. I count also ten of the guard. Pass, picture, and let sight come again."

The picture wavered and was gone. Instantly it reformed. This time it was the pit of horror and the bridge. The bridge ran across it broken, as though the weight of men fleeing in terror had weighted it down. A man's body clinging to the rail was being drawn down into the seething vortex of life by remorseless claws. A hand and arm here and there shot up from the gray moving mass to be swallowed up again. The princess spoke:

"I count the guard, all but two, dead in the horrible pit. Pass, picture, and let sight come."

It wavered and reformed. Now it showed two men fleeing from the gates—the tragedy we had ourselves seen, even to the monster living and within our sight, tearing and rending. As it had happened before our eyes so we saw it in the smoke. For the last time the princess spoke:

"Die; it is done!" And the flame fell instantly. "We have seen. I make my offering." She cut a long black lock from her hair and cast it in the red ashes. "Against injury from all evil spirits preserve us. Resume the sight. We have seen."

She turned to us and resumed her own talk as if nothing had happened.

"It is certain all are dead. And fear not that any will enter the fortress. All will be well. My counsel is that we depart."

She took the extinction of her house as calmly as if it had been the kicking down of an ant heap. What wild contriving lay behind it all? What was the goal of her hopes? I felt that every working of her mind was utterly beyond my comprehension. It was a most complex proposition.

Soames collected himself.

"If we can trust the pictures, the coast is certainly clear. But what about the treasure? Of course the government will claim it."

"The treasure is mine. I give it to whom I will," said the princess. "I give it to my lord. I do not give it to the government of India."

We stared at her. This was a development that had never occurred to either of us. It illustrates the difference of a point of view.

"I am the Queen of Egypt. I am inheritor of the Black Osiris—and the Splendor of Asia is mine alone. To my lord and to no one else I give it."

"That is impossible," said Soames curtly. "The day for such things is gone by. We are servants of the government and the treasure is the government's. Of this there is no question. The only question is whether my friend or I should stay on guard with two of the men until the government can declare its will."

But the great lady would not be silenced.

"My lord will speak later when he has heard *my* will. The treasure is mine. And if you have thought, O devil born, that I am a woman and helpless, beware and yet again, beware! What I counsel is this—that my lord and I reward you. Fidelity and valor are worthy of reward; and these you have shown. Then, having received great riches, go your way down into India in content. As for my lord and me—we will stay and he shall learn the further secrets that you shall not know."

Imagine Soames' feelings, addressed thus as a servant! He was black with fury. I interposed hurriedly in this strange debate speaking English that she might not know what I said.

"Of course, I'm entirely with you, Soames. And, to be perfectly frank, I've no notion of staying with her here or anywhere. But, for Heaven's sake, let us temporize. We are not by any means at the end of our difficulties yet; and, if I'm not mistaken, she is the biggest of them all. Don't make an enemy of her. Remember she has her rights, or thinks so. Also, incidentally, I believe she may have powers we don't understand yet."

"Rubbish! As for those smoke pictures—any of the charlatan lamas can do them. It's only a kind of hypnotism. We can't leave her here, but if she gives any trouble I shall turn her over to the Chongdon lamas and they can do what they please with her. I'm not going to have the whole thing spoiled for the whims of a woman."

"What is resolved?" The princess' resolute voice intruded itself again.

"Nothing as yet. I will tell you, great lady, when it is." Then I said to Soames, "That treasure is absolutely safe. The bridge is broken and there isn't a man living who could or would face that ordeal. Let's all go down together and then we'll find a safe place for her and settle up with the government for her. I see no other way."

Soames reflected in silence. Naturally suspicious, valuing the treasure at a much higher rate than I did, he was not inclined to trust me either to stay or go alone. I saw it plainly. So also as to the princess. She was the storm center, she represented the treasure. He was not going to trust her out of his sight, especially with me. She was a beautiful creature and he was certain that her face, combined with the treasure, might be altogether too much for my loyalty to his purpose. I could see it all passing in his mind as he took his resolution and spoke cautiously in Hindustani.

"As head of the expedition I think we should all go down to India together. The princess can come with us and can put her case before the Sirkar, which is always scrupulously just to natives." He turned from her to me.

"Natives!" The one word escaped her lips, and she clenched her teeth on it.

"Anyway there need be no anxiety about that," continued Soames. "As to your private arrangements with her, Ross, that is no concern of mine. Now we must start. It is too late to go far, but I do not wish to keep the men in this place. They all are as jumpy as they can be with this murderous business going on beside us. Yar, strike camp!"

I turned away, feeling thoroughly uneasy. I dreaded the rage, the disappointment of the imperious woman. Murderess she was, it is true, but she had served us well and her standards were none of ours—to say nothing of the consideration that her people had meant to kill her. I thought Soames brutal. A little soft speech, a little kindness might grease the wheels, and they were creaking badly now. I did not like the dark glance she cast at him, nor his amazing sullenness. She and I were virtually alone now, for the men were busy with Soames. She drew a little roll from her dress.

"Beloved"—and the deep eyes looked into mine—"your heart is true, is it not so?

When we go down into India your priests shall wed us—this is your thought? Then I give you this papyrus of the line of my fathers, for a man should know the pride of the house that is become his. And as for this thief and his insolence, bitterly shall he repent it. Already I have sent a dark devil into his heart to destroy him. Well did I see he would thrust himself between us, but this shall be poison in him, till death be welcome. It is a part of our wisdom that we can do this thing. As like as not he will fling himself over some precipice when it has worked in him. But for us—there is joy waiting in India?"

I stammered woefully in my answer.

"Princess, it is not our custom to wed without knowledge, the one of the other. Time to speak of this in India. And for the treasure—you shall speak before the Sirkar."

"The Sirkar is nothing concerned in my treasure," she replied proudly. "It is mine and therefore yours. But I will pay this low-born man with gold for his pains"—a pause—"and with more than gold for his insolence!" she ended softly.

I did not like her threats. Not, of course, that I believed in the "dark devil," though it was certain that Soames was in many ways a changed man since we had come up into the mountains; but that had seemed a natural development of his suspicious nature. Even now I cannot tell if it were so or no. Let those judge who hear.

I turned away, sighing, and the princess caught my hand, kissed it wildly and walked on alone, ahead of our little procession.

We started along the little trail and soon overtook her—Soames leading. The princess, light and active as a steel spring, walked beside me. She wore her veil only as a hood and her beautiful strong face was bright with health and courage. For Soames she kept a Sphinxlike silence. With me she was more communicative.

"In the way I take you there is food laid by for the coming of our messengers—coming to and from India. A tent also of yak's hair. Fear not, beloved—there is plenty and to spare. And know this—that in all things that are mine I will share with you as with myself. And as an earnest take this—for the Splendor of Asia is the jewel of the kings of our house; and where I am queen you are king. Freely I give it."

Carefully wrapped now in a little bit of silk, so that its brilliance was hidden, she

put into my hand the greatest jewel of history. I would have refused it, for I was utterly perplexed with doubts; but I saw it would pain and possibly infuriate her and I took it, saying:

"This I will keep for you, great lady, and if you require it at my hands it is yours."

She smiled and said nothing more, having given it as lightly as a flower. So we went on our way.

An hour later she stopped and looked keenly about her—finally leaving the trail between two rocks, the one shaped like a wallowing seal, the other like a cone. There was nothing special to distinguish them as far as we could see, in that land of strange rocks, but she insisted this was the way. And when Soames objected, on the strength of her assertion, to leave the trail, she pointed disdainfully to a slight mark on the base of the cone and, not even waiting while he examined it, she led forward, saying to me: "Come, beloved. The noble trust the noble. But for this man, let him take his own way and perish. This path leads swift and sure to the Dorje-tak monastery."

If it were so, this certainly explained how she and her party had been able to beat us on the way up; and for my part I trusted her entirely in matters like this. I followed, and Soames later. Hidden cunningly among the rocks the way became, in about a mile, a well-contrived trail about two feet wide, going steadily downward. It took advantage of every aid of nature to make the way easy; and, where nature failed, work had done its share. We could make twice the speed we should have made on the other way, not to mention that it cut off a good slice of the trek in distance. Where the rocks were too steep rough footholds were made; and at several dangerous places iron chains were put for handholds in climbing down the heights.

CHAPTER XIII.

Thus for six days we trekked, the princess holding her own with steadfast courage, elastic and strong as a mountain deer. The way, as we now clearly saw, cut off that terrible angle of the mountains after leaving the Mendong-La. Nothing could have been better. But what frightened me was the ill feeling steadily growing between her and Soames. I could not wonder. His treatment of her appeared to me as sheer madness. He

outraged her pride, her sense of possession at every turn.

In vain I interposed, reminding him that the very food we ate we owed her, for hidden all along the trail, at the points where we should need it, was food of the best, so that Yar and the Lepchas were cheerful with abundance, so contented as to make likely nothing but "fair weather" till we should reach Darjiling. Our debt to her was mounting daily, but I could not make Soames see it, and his behavior to me, personally, was atrocious. Nothing but the anxiety of our position and the princess' presence could have made me endure it. I would have struck off alone and stood my chance, rather than endure the brooding gloom and sullenness of his manner. She made no remark now, but I saw her looking often at him, fixedly, as we went or sat, her lips moving but not a word passing them. And once I saw him look up and whiten to ashen gray as her eyes met his.

On the sixth evening we came to a cave in the rocks, so hidden as to be unseen without her knowledge. And there we found a store of food and even of wine. Fuel was piled in a corner and by a blazing fire we sat and ate our meal while Yar and the coolies, well fed also, crouched at the back of the cave. A more picturesque scene was never in this world. The mouth of the cave opened on a flat plateau from which the trail went on and down skirting an appalling precipice. Twenty steps from where we sat would bring one to the giddy edge. Behind us was the little tent for the princess; and above that was a mighty wall of sheer rock, overhanging and dangerous. And a sea of billowing mountains tossed away like frozen waves as far as we could see.

We sat in comfort looking out upon it all, warmed and fed. It might have been the unaccustomed drink or the sense that we were nearing the end of our toils, for the Dorje-tak monastery was but twenty-four hours away, but Soames was insufferably overbearing and insolent to the princess. At first treating her like a spoiled, petulant child, he spoke loudly, threateningly, telling her the treasure was hers no more, that the government would acknowledge no claim, but might provide for her out of it, and this would be the utmost she could expect. As to her dreams of the Egyptian throne—he laughed them to scorn.

At first she retorted on Soames, with spirit

and sharply; and this goaded him on into greater insolence, though I did my best to hush him down. With glittering eyes she laid her hand upon my arm.

"Let him speak, beloved. Let him fill the cup until it runs over. I learn from his speech. The devil is at work in him. Let it work."

Soames laughed disagreeably.

"What the subject races have to learn is obedience. You do not seem to realize your position."

His very tone was an insult.

"Pray stop this argument, Soames," said I in English. "This is not the way to speak to any woman; and to this one we owe our lives. Her tent is ready; let's all go to sleep and wake up fresh for to-morrow. I strongly object to the attitude you've chosen to take up."

I turned to her and said much the same thing. I don't think she heard; her eyes were fixed with a peculiar, steely glitter on Soames, her lips a little apart. She was so still she scarcely seemed to breathe.

"Oh, all right. I'm pretty well fed up with all this," he answered roughly; and pulling himself together he slouched out of the cave and stood looking at the night.

It was worth looking at—a perfect frosty stillness—a round, bright moon shining in a sky like black velvet with diamond points of stars. It was so dead still that the cry of some belated marmot was heard from the other side of the precipice, as if it were beside us.

"Most beautiful is the night," said the princess gently. "It is a wish-catching night—when it is but to ask and have."

"Wish catching?" I asked, wanting to start some new subject.

"Yes. Form a wish to see anything you will and you can see it now. Behold!"

For a bright mist was rising from the depths of the precipice at our feet and filling it with vaporous billows of cloud.

"It's like that place in China where you look down two thousand feet into the mist and see what they call the Glory of Buddha reflected on it below," said Soames. "It's a trick of the monks."

"Choose!" said the princess again with her gentlest smile; and it could be very gentle when she pleased.

"I think of a woman!" I said to test her.

"Of a woman? Look then at the mist."

She stretched out her hand and clasped

mine. Believe me or not, as you will—on that white background of mist I saw Joan Boston, golden-haired, laughing, touching a man's shoulder with a light hand, as they swept round, dancing. And if I tried forever I could not tell you how real and yet unreal it was to see those figures swaying lifelike on the fleecy background of moonlit cloud. Sometimes a radiant billow would hide them, then they would sweep out into perfect clearness again. I could see them laughing, talking; only I could not hear.

"Soames, do you see? Do you see, man?" I cried.

"Nothing but the mist," he answered morosely. "What's that at your feet?" It was something shining white in the moonlight. I looked while the princess still held my hand and it was a fan, with mother-of-pearl sticks—the fan I had given to Joan—my first gift. I glanced at the princess. Her face was pale and sternly beautiful in the moonlight. Suddenly it struck me with a pang. She had thought, had hoped, perhaps that my thoughts would be of her. But she said nothing of that. Indeed she smiled again.

"Lord, would you like to see it in her hand—where it should be? Look then!"

She whirled the fan lightly and flung it. And, as I live, the dancing figure caught it in her hand and, opening it and waving it to me, fluttered behind a billow of mist. Mirage of the mind, but a terrible revealer of a man's inmost thought! The princess dropped my hand and I saw no more.

Soames was standing behind me.

"Did you see that? Amazing!"

"Nothing but the mist. It boils up the precipice like a caldron."

"If the friend of my lord will give me his hand, he too can read the future—or the present, if he will," said the princess smoothly.

"Is it sense cheating?"

"It is at least an art as old as Egypt," she replied, looking at the ground.

"Well, here goes!"

He stretched his hand out roughly, and she took it in hers. I could see the wonder grow in his eyes as he stared at the mist, but now I could see nothing.

"Impossible!" he cried angrily. "If that were to be the reward of all my labor I would—— No, no! Show me the next!"

She still clasped his hand lightly yet firmly. Now, for the first time, I saw Yar,

standing in the mouth of the cave, looking fixedly at his adored master. Not daring to interfere, scarcely even to see, for the ordinary Mongol dreads witchcraft as he dreads nothing else, he still stood keeping an anxious watch. Soames' voice was high and angry.

"What? Guillmard in my place at the office? Sitting in my chair! Ross with the viceroy and not I? Where do I come in?"

"Drop his hand," I whispered to her. "I know not what he sees, but it is black magic. Drop his hand. It maddens him."

She smiled maliciously. It was easy to see his fury was balm to her soul. The mist was boiling and seething in the gulf like wild billows, hiding the frightful depth below. Suddenly he turned on me.

"If you think you're going to throw me over and reap the seed I've sown, you're bitterly mistaken. You can't——"

"You're mad!" I said and I thought no less. "Go quietly into the cave and sleep off the wine, and——"

She dropped his hand and with a growl he flew at me like a mastiff. We were but a few feet from the abyss and the unexpected rush flung me down with my head and shoulders over it before I could recover my footing. It was a ghastly moment. Deadly silent the princess sprang at him as he reeled back and in a moment, as I dragged myself back with my feet and hands, his body struck me as he fell—fell over the dreadful edge and was gone. I saw him plunge into the mist—and saw no more. Yes—one frightful thing more! For Yar, seeing what she had done, rushed from the cave, and taking the princess by the shoulders shook her like a rat, in his rage and despair. And as I struggled half dazed to my knees he thrust her furiously from him on the edge. She flung up her arms and—Yar and I stood alone in the moonlight, he grinning like a dog and utterly unable to regain the mastery of his face or voice.

I pulled myself together somehow. I held him under my revolver, and ordered him away and the spirit went out of him and he fell on the ground, sobbing and wailing as I never thought to hear a man; and there I left him. For myself I went back into the cave and dropped my head in my hands and tried to realize the incredible thing and could not. The vessel Soames had drunk from still stood on the plank that served for a table. The fragments of our meal were

there. The princess' veil was on the ground, heaped as she had flung it. It seemed they had only gone out for a minute and would walk back and all would be normal again.

After the staggering unbelief, pity seized me. I thought of him first. Poor fellow! the goal so near, the reward so great! And now—the prey of eagle and fox! And the woman—so proud and brave and beautiful!

So I kept my vigil and all night long their ghosts mourned about me, praying for pity. In the dawn a blue glimmer caught my eye as the first frosty sunbeam stole into the cave, for a light wind fluttered the veil aside. I stooped and saw that the glimmer came from the strange stone which had beckoned me to the Touch-the-Sky Mountain. It lay upon a bit of paper, folded and written upon in Hindustani. This was the writing:

Lord of my life, have I not known that I am nothing. Is there another? I will draw the heart of your body that I may know. And if it be true—what then? For me, the leap attaining peace. For you, freedom—till in the endless linking of life we meet again. Till then I wait. All I have I give you. And take this for truth: I have loved. I love.

Then she had meant to die! Was the attack on Soames a deliberate intention or the wild impulse to save me? The latter, I was sure. She was no murderer then—she was defending her own.

In the dawn Yar came crawling to my feet for forgiveness, with the humility of a dog. Though the wild mountain man loved Soames better, he loved me too, and his heart was sore with my anger. He swore he had not meant to kill her, only to punish her with terror for her murderous act. I don't know. I never shall know the truth of that. Yet I could not be too hard on him. He implored me to strip him of all food and clothing and turn him adrift into the snows to die. He meant it, too.

I was pretty well worn out with the whole miserable business, but this had to be met.

"You must come down with me to India and the truth must be told to the Sirkar. And if they punish, they punish. But I will bear witness that you loved your master and tried to defend him."

"To avenge!" corrected Yar. "If a servant do not avenge his master, who should?" And that was as far as he could get on the moral side of it.

He seemed then to cast the load from his

mind, and went back to his work and to preparing the coolies as composedly as if nothing had happened. These people are like that. I envied him. I carried the burden for many a long day. I went and looked over the precipice, now the sun was up. A sheer drop of frightful depth; and at the bottom the river—the Secret Raging One, roaring unheard on its way. Hopeless to find them! I gave the word and we left the fatal place, trudging doggedly down.

It was then I first remembered I carried a fortune and a glory with me—the Splendor of Asia and the other temple gems; and at the moment it did not stir a pulse in me to remember. I was dead beat.

No need to tell of the trek down nor of how we picked up the other coolies and beasts. Yar was the perfection of guide and servant. He had begged for a worthless pencil Soames had been in the habit of using and that was the only reference he made to the tragedy. The man had a faithful heart, no doubt of that.

We dismissed the coolies at Darjiling and I went straight down with Yar to Calcutta. In the end the authorities found it in their hearts to pardon Yar.

Of course I was prepared for disbelief from the bosses as to all the wonders we had seen; and if it had not been for the jewels and the papyrus, I might have whistled for recognition in spite of Soames' careful notes and my own. But even official disbelief quailed before those proofs. My account of Soames' death, substantiated by Yar, was received with regret, for all knew what a sound student of the hill peoples and what a gallant adventurer was lost in him.

It may or may not have a connection with his strange behavior during the quest that it came out that his father had died in an asylum, a homicidal lunatic. Poor fellow! Never an honor came my way that I did not think of him and regret he was not there to take his share. And yet, if a doom like his father's overshadowed him, perhaps the gods had shown him a stern mercy in his end.

For the princess there were regrets all over Europe and Asia. A royal Egyptian lady—wild and beautiful, holding the arts of Thebes and Sais, what a reception would there not have been for her? But I had mixed feelings. There was no room in the modern world for her sad royalty. I knew

it well. No room for her either in my heart. It might be that the gods of her fathers, Osiris and the veiled Isis, had had pity on their royal daughter and smoothed her way to the paradise of her people.

Next summer I was made head of an expedition and, with Yar beside me, I guided them up the way she had shown us. It was with a horrid shudder that I passed the plateau where the two had gone down. We were obliged to camp there much against my liking; and again in a silent moonlight I saw the waves of mist billowing up from the abyss and hiding it with treacherous beauty. And, believe it who will, I woke in the moonlight calm and before the opening of my tent I saw the princess floating upon the billows with eyes fixed on mine and arms stretched out across the gulf no power could bridge. Shall I see her again when my time comes to follow?

When in due time we reached the fortress the way was easy before us. She had spoken truly. If any wanderers had passed by, none had dared to enter. The snow lay white and untroubled. A dreadful stillness possessed the place.

But a strange matter-of-factness came into it with us. I saw the awful pit once more, but the tide of hideous life in it was lower. They had found a way out over the canted bridge that hung forlornly down within their reach and evidently went in and out seeking for food in the deserted place. But we did not fear them now, for a poison gas carried in our equipment was directed into the pit and we waited in the courtyard of the thousand windows while it did its very efficient work.

Yet even when we went in the sight was evil. It was best to wait till the whole was covered with corrosive powder and the black fumes told us nothing was left but a hateful memory.

How it all came back upon me when we entered the Temple of the Black Osiris where the princess had lain a prisoner—the memory of her voice, her proud eyes. What is life but the dream of a dream?

But the find, now that we had leisure to examine it—and I had two experts with me—was beyond the wildest visions of the wildest adventurer. Gold, jewels, vessels, ornaments of the earlier and later Pharaohs, pearls, sick and faded now, bags of fiery opals, amethysts, grass-green emeralds—it was indeed a marvelous discovery. And be-

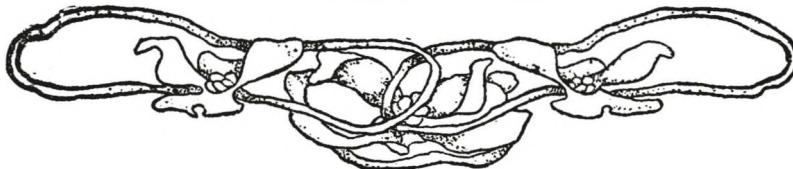
yond and above all these things were the magnificent papyri going back to the time of those priests of Sais who, as Plato testified, lived many thousand years before his day. In these was made clear the manner and reason for the marvelous journey through desert and mountain which had brought these wonders where we found them—a story so full of magic and mystery that I will write it one day for those who care to hear of true marvels that outshine the wildest fiction.

They are excavating still. For the floor of the cave was found to be a receptacle for treasure we had not guessed. I need say no more of that for the present. Of course I got my share and rewards and distinctions besides. And no one questioned my right to

the Splendor of Asia. It glitters in cold glory now in the greatest museum in the world—the greatest jewel of the dim and mysterious past that has come down to us—or probably ever will. Its story occurred in the papyri and is well worth telling in itself.

And Joan and I have completed our romance and Yar has never left me and never will. With a devotion worthy of a better cause, he has laid aside his habits and preferences and molded himself into those of civilized life so that he may be possible in our Indian home. Great were his rewards and all our servants pay him honor. And when he holds the Missy Baba in his arms I think even Soames is for that brief space forgotten.

The complete novel in the next issue will be "That Nice Dragon," by William West Winter.



THE LANGUAGE OF THE AIR

If you want to be considered to be in the "know" in flying circles, you will have to use the flying terms listed recently by the National Advisory Committee for Aéronautics, and ordered adopted by officers of the army and navy air services. The committee says that several inaccurate expressions have crept into general conversation on topics aéronautical. The English slang word "blimp," originally designating a special type of nonrigid airship, has been used carelessly in connection with all varieties of lighter-than-air craft, and now is declared to be obsolete. "Hydroplane," often used instead of "seaplane," really means a craft that travels on the surface of the water and does not rise in the air—the type of speedster known as a "sea sled" to followers of the sport of motor-boat racing. "Aéroplane," "hydro-aéroplane," and "dirigible" also are on the black list.

In this new language of the air, aircraft are divided into two great classes—"aérostats" and "airplanes." Aérostats are lighter-than-air craft, and are subdivided into two main classes, "airships" and balloons. All aérostats are kept afloat by envelopes filled with gas that is lighter than air. There are three types of airships—rigid, nonrigid, and semi-rigid. All are propelled by gas engines and controlled by means of rudders and fins. Balloons are of various types, but all are without power or the means of controlling the direction of flight.

Airplanes are heavier-than-air craft, and are classified, according to the number of their wings or planes, as monoplanes, biplanes, triplanes, multiplanes, and the Langley tandem type. Airplanes designed to rise from or light on water are called seaplanes, and are subdivided into two classes, "boat seaplanes," which have a central hull like a boat, and "float seaplanes," which have one or more floats or pontoons. Airplanes or seaplanes with their propellers in front are "tractors;" those with their propellers in the rear, "pushers."

If you have occasion to speak of the pilot of an aérostat, call him an "aéronaut," but if you refer to the operator or pilot of an airplane call him an "aviator." Among other approved terms are "soar," which means to fly on a level without power, and "zoom," which means to climb rapidly at a steep angle.



With the Governor's Regards

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "A Voice from Ethiopia," "The Game at Polly's," Etc.

Wherein the bean ball, the pyramids, the eighteenth amendment and more than the usual proportion of good, old-fashioned human nature get all mixed up with the great national pastime.

IT was on a Saturday that "Butch" Flack, our star first sacker, was beaned on the left temple by a pitched ball. After breakfast on Sunday "Cluck" Hotchkiss, the club's boss, said bossily to the club's business manager, meaning me:

"We'll waft over to the hospital and have a look at that possum-playing bum. By now he'll just about be dredging into his third relay of ham and eggs."

"Or maybe he'll be helping the orderlies tidy up," said I. "Butch couldn't have been hurt much. The ball that hit him wouldn't have penetrated a battleship turret more than three or four inches."

"That's it—pamper 'em, pamper 'em!" growled Cluck. "Why, next to bunking off in a brewery where they're still making the four-per-cent stuff, that roach would rather loll around a hospital than anywhere else. He's a nut on nurses—plumb loony over the set of their caps, the cool touch of their mitts when they take his temperature, and all the like of that. This is the third time he's framed hospital lay-ups on me in the six years I've had him: first time when he claimed to have a wrenched knee from a slide to third; second time when he bribed

some down-and-out hophead doctor to say he was threatened with appendicitis—"threatened with!"—and now when a lobbed ball love-taps him on the knob. Oh, I'm jerry to that finch—every so often he's got to be beamed upon by nice-eyed nurses that kid him along, or he thinks he's cheated."

"Lobbed ball and love tap fit Butch's case perfectly," said I, glad to prod Cluck into working it all out of his system before we reached the hospital. "Probably, before yesterday's game, Butch rigged it with the pitcher to pretend to put something on that high inshoot that socked him into Birdie-land. Not a soul in the world heard the Big Bertha impact of the ball against Butch's dome except thirty thousand shuddering people in grand stand and bleachers—"

"Yonder's a florist's shop," jeered Cluck, pointing from the taxi. "It's a wonder you wouldn't drop in and get an armful of American Beauty roses for that bug's bedside table."

The house surgeon, being a fan, permitted us, as a concession, merely to tiptoe into Butch's room for a stay of a scant half minute. Butch—burnoosed with a bean bandage that made him resemble, with his ball-

yard tan, the Mad Mullah—was babbling softly and incoherently, eyes wide open and staring, like a very small sick child. Cluck, the poorest bluffer at being hard-boiled that I ever knew, staged a clumsy camouflage by blowing his nose. The club's boss, as a matter of straight fact, would have jumped into molten lead, whistling a tune, for Butch. The two were the nearest thing to a Damon-and-Pythias sketch that we had on the team.

"Concussion and fracture," said the house surgeon. "A considerably messed-up Butch, to say the least. He'll probably be prattling as he is now for a week or so yet. Then he'll come out of it all right, but with a nervous system too much ripped up to permit of his playing any more ball this season. Lucky it's September instead of spring, eh?"

That "lucky" condolment, perfectly well meant as it was by the sympathetic surgeon fan, furnished Cluck a fine cue for one of his soliloquies, *sotto voce*, during the taxi ride back to the hotel.

"Lucky!" Say, was that feeble-minded knifeman talking to me?" he broke out by way of making himself feel easier in his mind. "Me—lucky! I'm so lucky that if the Venus de Milo was taking a swim in the fountain basin of City Hall Park I'd be stalled at Ninety-eighth Street and Broadway in a taxicab with four flat tires."

I tried to soothe him by pointing out that, seeing he was a married man, even such a searing misfortune as he pictured would really make for his soul's good. But he didn't hear me.

"What's the difference whether it's September or spring—whether it's Arbor Day or the Fourth of July—when you lose a ball player that works for his wages?" he chanted on. "That big sturgeon stretched out back there with his skull swaddled up like a camel driver's has done twice as much as anybody else, barring a pitcher or two, to put and keep my ball troupe where it stands to-day: hitting three-ninety straight into the first week in September, covering his sack like a dog catcher with a net, captaining the club like old 'Pop' Anson; and now, with the team in the third socket, only twenty-eight points behind the leader a month before the wind-up, they've got him—with not a man on my bench that knows any more about playing first base than about playing the bass fiddle! They've got him coiled up on a cot in a repair garage, goo-gooing to himself like a baby in its push carriage—"

The rave was automatically truncated when the taxi pulled up at the hotel curb.

"How about getting into telegraphic touch with our gumshoe expert?" I shot randomly as we made for chairs in a shadowy corner of the hotel lobby. "Bill Cranston, able kidnaper that he is, might at this very moment be packing a perfectly good first baseman around in his watch pocket."

"That would be a flossy idea for you," groused Cluck, "if the old crab would ever let me know from week to week whether he's scouring the Java Sea or scouting near Janesville, Wisconsin. The last heard of him he was in Arizona, pretending to be looking over a couple of lizards in one of those cactus leagues. If, as he claimed, he was heading from there for San Diego, why, on this Sunday morning he'll be playing faro bank at one of those brace gameries across the line in Tia Juana—"

"Tee-uh Wan-nuh me elbow!" came a low rumble from one of the deep leather chairs.

Old Bill Cranston, our club scout and the "Kit" Carson of all ball-club scouts, sat within reach of our hands, fanning his face with his winter-and-summer Stetson.

Consider the lead-off portion of Bill and Cluck's converse as having been skipped.

"Wearing a suit of the zebra duds, is he?" Cluck addressed Bill, following their opening buzz.

The person referred to was a first baseman of promise whom Bill, after Cluck had lamented his fine present prospects for the cellar, had mentioned.

"Doing a two-year bit," replied Bill. "He'll be out in a year and eight months from now if the calendar isn't changed or something."

"That makes him a handy substitute for Butch, with nobody to cover number one bag to-morrow," was Cluck's querulous but almost justifiable criticism. "What's the idea? Are you thinking of coaxing this lag to saunter out of the pen, where he's got a year and two thirds yet to do, to play ball for me the rest of this season?"

Bill refused to be chatty with Cluck on that point. He had merely stated, he said tersely, that he knew where there was a phenomenally promising first bagman. He had seen this cooped artist perform in a penitentiary game on the day before. Immediately, therefore, on reading in Saturday's evening paper of the beanning of Butch,

he had headed for New York to report to Cluck about the striped party who understood the technique of the initial sack. That, said Bill, let him out, he hoped.

"But it doesn't let your caged phenom out, so far as I can see from here," was Cluck's rebate to that.

"Finding 'em is my job—signing 'em is yours," grimly answered Bill.

There being no answer, swift or otherwise, to that, "What's this bag-one wonder doing his two-spacer for?" asked Cluck.

Bill grinned.

"For taking a ride in his own flivver, so far as I could make out," he replied.

On Cluck remarking, not without reason, that several millions of Americans of both sexes, including himself, could be hoose-gowed for that, Bill explained.

"This boy—he's only twenty-two and his name's 'Biff' Shugrue—rented his Henry, a beautiful, rust-tapestried nineteen-thirteen example, to a friend of his for the summer while he, Biff, the owner, went on tour with the ball club of the Laundrymen's League, of which he was a member," said Bill. "Biff's buddy, after promising to be kind to the bus, put it to work in his bootlegging business. So Biff's peace ship, upon being captured with a cargo of hooch, was confiscated by the State. When Biff heard of this he quit his one-burner ball club cold and romped home to see about it. This fenderless, burned-orange-hued fliv, you understand, was the only thing in the world that Biff actually owned—which made it natural for him to think a whole lot of it. He tried to explain to the State prohibition-enforcement people that, since he himself had had nothing to do with the hooch-hauling industry and hadn't known that his car—he called it a car—was being used that way, they ought to give him his car back. All that they gave him, though, was the waft. So Biff, seeing red—or maybe it was rust—busted into the State storage garage where his confiscated bus was tethered and drove it home."

"And they sent a clean boy away for two years for doing a human-being thing like that?" demanded Cluck.

"That's what they did—not omitting to mention the pleasing but also damaging detail that when the bus confiscators tried to arrest him on the charge of being an automobile thief Biff, still with rust in his lamps, strewed portions of several of them all over

the neighborhood of his home. So the State, being put to considerable expense for the hospital bills of its bus-grabbing officers, soaked Biff a two specker in the State coop."

"And you saw Biff covering first in a game there yesterday?" inquired Cluck.

"Covering it," said Bill the scout, who seldom praises his finds, "is saying it with a lisp. He's one of these cubs with the reach of a shipyard crane; and anything that he doesn't scoop out of the gravel or gather overhead has got to be a banshee ball. Outside of that, he only hit a thousand yesterday, including a homer and a three bagger, against a pitcher that knew a lot. Meaning, to make a bite of it, that this lad with a cell number would make, properly guided, a ball-playing scoundrel."

Cluck, for thirty seconds or so, looked contemplative. Then:

"Bill," he inquired, "what for are you teasing and tormenting a poor old worn-out stuffed shirt with an exploded ball club, meaning myself, by all this ballyhoo about a ball player that's wearing a State hair cut? Is it because you entertain, at the back of your secretive knob, the slightest idea that I could get hold of this phenom?"

I was sitting next to Bill and I wondered why, with a perfectly innocent expression on his face, he gave me a furtive kick on the leg.

"You may have heard of such a thing as a pardon," said Bill to Cluck.

Cluck, biting another inch or so off a tortured cigar, blinked bewilderedly.

"Oh, a pardon, eh?" He reached over, took Bill's chin between thumb and forefinger and pulled the old scout's face around to get a focus on his eyes. "Stop mumbling, Bill. Let's have a peek at your ace in the hole, if you've got one. What d'you mean—pardon?"

"Nothing much," said Bill, who has never yet been goaded into garrulity so far as anybody knows, "except that there might be a million-to-one chance that under pressure from the right party this caged kid could be granted a pardon. Needing a first-base-man just now a little more than you need your right eye, it ought to be worth your while to play any old kind of a long shot."

"Bill, listen," said Cluck impressively. "Long Shot is both my Comanche and my confirmation name. I'd gamble American gold dollars against Russian paper rubles if I could figure that would get me a know-how

somebody to squat on sack one for my ball troupe from now till the season's finish. So shoot, Bill! What's the answer to that trick crack of yours—a pardon for this trapped Turk by the name of Shugrue 'under pressure from the right party?'"

Here, to my surprise again, Bill kicked me another mystifying dig on the leg with his rubber heel.

"There's no pardon board in the State where Biff is doing his bit," he informed the still-blinking club boss. "That puts it up to just one man to turn a lag loose when he wants to—or when some friend of his asks him to."

Cluck, now past the blinking stage, was staring fixedly at his scout; but, as he said nothing, Bill went on:

"That man's the governor of the State. And the governor of this State is an old side kicker of yours."

Even in that dim part of the hotel lobby I caught the queer blaze that suddenly appeared in Cluck's eyes. And when he spoke he was—an odd thing for him—spluttery with the swift rage that had grabbed him.

"Is it Jack you're talking about?"

Cluck, leaping out of his chair, mentioned, as if it throttled him, the name of the then governor of an important State of this Union—a governor of such uncommon versatility that, more than a quarter of a century ago, he was one of those high-rated ball players that the cigarette manufacturers of his era made the little photographs of which us kids, buying our smokes for a nickel the pack, used to collect and cherish and swap.

"Who else'd I be talking about?" answered Bill. "I don't see why Jack, if the thing lay to his hand, wouldn't do anything for you that you asked of him, seeing that you were ball yarders together along about the time Andy Jackson was fighting the Seminoles—"

But Cluck, standing taut in front of Bill's chair, was holding up a gnarled and knuckle-busted hand to enjoin silence.

"Me ask a favor of that fellow?" the club boss rapped at Bill, het up in that self-poisoning quiet way that I'd never noticed about him before. "I'd do that, maybe, if I was hog tied in Hades and he was the only sizzler in the neighborhood that had a knife. But not before!"

Whereupon Cluck, all vinegar from the thorax down, whirled on the balls of his feet and elbowed a path to the elevator.

I heard old Bill Cranston, himself a renowned ball player of the gone time, chuckling softly beside me. So this began to look like one of those puzzling forenoons.

"Thought I'd take a little rise out of him for calling me a crab," Bill said to me, after a silence which he appeared to enjoy a great deal.

"Well, the ticket's cashed—he rised, you noticed," said I, willing to spar for an earful. "But, seeing the two of you chose to rehearse your freaky little comedy sketch with only me for an audience, maybe you'll feel like hepping me up to the meaning of the plot."

"That's just the devil of it," said Bill. "I don't know the answer—the reason, I mean, for Cluck's ancient grudge against Jack Whoozis, now the governor of that name. None of us—referring now to the old-timers that played ball alongside both of them in their day—has ever been able to get at the real dope back of Cluck's anti-Jack grouch. But the grouch, you see, still is in a fine state of preservation."

I mumbled something about its seeming to be embedded in amber.

"In granite, make it," Bill corrected me. "And a twisty feature of the thing—as I happened to find out only yesterday—is that the soreness is all on Cluck's side. For upward of twenty-five years these two men have been coming face to face occasionally at baseball banquets and the like—old Jack being invited to all such blow-outs not only because he's an important man in a frock coat nowadays but because in the old years he figured so big in the game as a player. Well, the best Cluck has ever staked Jack to at these meetings has been the same kind of a scowl he flashed in his chair here a few minutes ago when I mentioned Jack's name. And every time, I noticed, Jack gave Cluck back a grin for his scowl."

"Showing, doesn't it, that Cluck must consider himself the injured party of the scenario?" I wedged in, angling for more.

"Figure out for yourself what it shows," said Bill. "All I know is that his nobs the governor, far from disliking or even disapproving of Cluck, takes kind of a puzzling kidful view of him. Maybe you've discovered, as you mooched along, that when a bird takes a kidful view of you he's anyhow open to an argument. Which fetches us around again to Cluck's agonizing need for a first

sacker—and therefore, once more, to Biff Shugrue."

The thing was getting plottier every minute, so I gave Bill the yes-yes-go-on plea, though wholly unable to figure out why he was uncoiling it all on me.

"You see," went on Bill, "I had a long-distance chaw on the phone with Governor Jack last night, about Biff, when I read, after leaving the penitentiary, about Butch Flack being skulled in yesterday's game."

"In a few years," I egged him on, "you'll reach the part where I nudge in. Proceed, I pray you."

"Knowing Jack pretty well, from the days when we played professional catch and such like on ball lots," said Bill, "I told him how Cluck's troupe, with Butch dismantled, would be needing right away and in the worst way a boy to brood over bag one. And I asked him smack dab how 'bout his turning loose one Biff Shugrue, an approved party for the job, now doing a two stretch in his State's mill—just by way of giving Cluck a timely lift."

"Gambler from the heart that you are. And then?" says I.

"Well," said Bill, "the governor, he just laughed. It wasn't a very good connection, at that, but I heard him laughing."

"Encouraging, eh?"

"After a space, though, me getting the goad of our old friendship into play, he laid off the chortling and began to ease me a line of that 'it's impossible' stuff. When I asked him why it was impossible he sidetracked me with the question, 'Does Cluck know you're asking this of me?' 'No,' I had to tell him, 'Cluck doesn't know a thing about it—he doesn't know there's such a ball-playing lag alive as Biff Shugrue.' 'I thought not,' was his comeback to that and I heard the fat old rascal laughing again over the wire. 'I tell you what, Bill,' he tacks on to that, 'you tell Cluck to ask me to do the thing you're requesting. Not,' he quickly followed that up, 'that I'm promising to do it—I don't think I can do it—but, anyhow, you tell Cluck to ask me to turn this imprisoned boy loose, just to see what happens.'"

"Well, you saw what happened," was all I could think of to say. "Isn't it getting on toward lunch time?"

"Listen to me, son," said Bill, getting a tight grip on my nigh arm with one of his ball-fractured old mitts. "This long-stand-

ing rough stuff, whatever it is, between Cluck and this old-time ball player that's now a governor, doesn't mean anything to us. The only thing I know, being this ball club's scout—and the only thing that you ought to know, being this ball club's business manager—is that we've got to have a first baseman and have him pronto, if we expect to figure anywhere, much less in socket one, at the blow-off. Well, having dug up a first baseman, I've done my end.

"There the kid is, unjustly caged, and therefore not impossible to be sprung. You've met Jack Whoozis a few times, but you can't know, as us old birds that knew him when he only needed a couple of shaves a week, what a regular guy he is, governor or no governor. You grab a roller right away—never mind saying a word to Cluck about it—and go give Jack the word about what big-time stuff it would be for him, in spite of Cluck's fool grudge against him, to quietly scribble an order for this Shugrue lad's release to permit of his playing ball for Cluck. I don't say Jack'd fall for it, but he might—any hombre that laughs over a phone when talking about a thing like that is accessible to reason. Get me? Go right away! Start this evening—it's only a night's ride on the train—so's you'll be fresh in the morning to give a good yank at Jack's heartstrings. Well?"

I won't say that it looked so good as—for instance—playing Man-o'-War to finish third. But then, again, old Bill Cranston, unaccustomed himself to going on fools' errands, wasn't the man to send anybody else on one.

"There's an old aunt of mine, sick a night's ride from here, that maybe'll leave me money," I told Cluck when I found him at lunch. "I'm dropping out to see her on the immediate roller, and if she gets well or something I'll pick up the troupe day after to-morrow night in Chicago."

"Maybe," growled Cluck, a man of one idea at a time, "you'll lamp, out of the car window, some hayer that makes motions like a first baseman. If you do, jump out of the window and grab him, will you?"

"First of all, maybe you won't mind answering a question: Did Cluck send you here to me on this errand?"

I'd expected that, of course, from the dope Bill Cranston had given me.

"No, sir," I could answer instantly, being

all coiled for that query. "My coming to you was Bill Cranston's suggestion."

The governor, tipping back from his huge desk in the big swivel chair, which he completely filled, smiled. It was a sort of guessing, retrospective smile, but there was humor back of it and it looked good to me. Impressive man, I thought, as I'd always thought before on the few occasions when I'd met him more or less formally. Very quiet spoken, subduedly genial without bunkology, a man of a pleasant and nonoppressive dignity—studying him there in his fine office in the State Capitol you'd have had no trouble at all in understanding how he'd made his way from a pitcher's mound to a governor's chair.

"I suggested to Bill Cranston," said the governor, with that harking-back smile still flickering over his big smooth face, "that he tell Cluck himself to ask me to interest myself in the matter that Bill called me up about and that you are now pressing upon me. I wonder if Bill did that?"

It was my turn to grin.

"Yes, governor, Bill did that little thing," said I. "I was present when he did it."

"Well?"

"Well, governor," I had to reply, being pinned that way, "I won't say that Cluck actually hit the ceiling, though his top cowlick may have slightly brushed the plaster."

The governer laughed outright—a deep-chested, thoroughly enjoyed basso rumble.

"What I like about Cluck Hotchkiss—and there are plenty of other likable things about him—is his capacity for sustained ferocity, so to speak," he said at the end of this worth-listening-to laugh. "There's bound to be a lot of character, plus a sort of easily forgivable wrong-headedness, about a man who for twenty-seven years on end can remain consistently sore over a triflē—and a triflē based upon a misconception at that."

Getting warm, I thought. It sure looked as if I was about to hear, from the most authentic of all quarters, the reason for Cluck's long, long grouch against this ball player now become a governor.

"Seeing that Cluck's acute present need for a first baseman has come about from a beaning incident," the governor went on, "there'd be a sort of poetic—or maybe it would be ironic—justice, now, in my making an effort to help him out—considering that it was a beaning affair—"

He chopped it short right there, as with a cleaver, and made a complete shift.

"But I'd have to think out some unusual—it would almost have to be ingenious—way of doing Cluck this particular favor," was the governor's way of fetching himself up when I was flattering myself that I was going to get the inside earful. "I can't release this Shugrue lad by the scratch of a pen. It seems I've done too much of that sort of thing—so, at least, the press and pulpit have been telling me."

Here, it appeared, was my cue to pull the eloquence number. The Shugrue boy, I started to say, seemed to have got a pretty raw deal—

"I know that. I made inquiries about the case after Bill Cranston called me up," the governor broke in on me. "The youngster—I'm speaking privately now, not as a public official—shouldn't by rights be in State's prison at all. But that doesn't alter the situation in which I would be placed if I were to free him out of hand. A court convicted him—that settles it in the estimation of the average mind. And most minds, perhaps you have noticed, are pretty average. Ever since I've held this job I've been accused of belittling or minimizing or neutralizing—take your pick—the work of the courts by freeing convicted men. I confess to a weakness for giving a man—*any* man!—another chance. But during the past year they've been riding herd on me for that weakness. They're shouting that, being myself a low-brow and a roughneck"—there was real fun in his eyes when he said this—"I'm all the more disposed to turn that kind of people loose on the community. Perhaps you've heard that I'm being pilloried as the Pardoning Governor?"

I grabbed a good-natured laugh from him by replying that my having heard that was one of my main reasons for petitioning him in the case of Biff Shugrue.

"So," he said in a tone of finality that froze me in spots for the time, "I simply must not—cannot!—challenge or defy public opinion in my State by pardoning a boy who has done only four months of a two-year sentence, no matter what the merits of his case may be. Especially," he added with a recurrence of the big-man smile, "when it would be immediately found out by the knockers of the Pardoning Governor that the pardoned Biff Shugrue was being tried out by a major-league ball club."

Wouldn't that, I ask you, have looked to anybody like curtains as to the whole Biff Shugrue proposition? It looked so much that way to me that I was beginning to rise from my chair.

"However—" said the governor.

I sat down again.

The governor touched a button at the side of his desk and his messenger appeared.

"Jim," the governor addressed the messenger, "get Mr. Oomtara"—naming a name which I mustn't—"the warden of the penitentiary, on the long-distance phone and tell him I'd like to have a talk with him here at four o'clock this afternoon."

"Competent man, sensible fellow and a good friend of mine—Oomtara," said the governor to me when the messenger had left the office. "I appointed him warden and he's more than made good. A humane man and a man with imagination, is needed for that job, and Oomtara's qualified in both respects. I'd like to have you meet him." He looked at his watch. "Perhaps you'd care to ride about for a few hours—my car is at your disposal—and be back here at four this afternoon? Good! You'll enjoy meeting Oomtara."

I didn't make it—who would have? But I knew enough, I hope, to obey a governor's directions. The governor's limousine, driven by a chauffeur who knew all the high spots and places of call where it could be got, was a noble vehicle to ride in and I saw a lot of nice country and several cheerfully decorated interiors.

When I reentered the governor's office on the minute of four he was in close confab—the two heads weren't more than eight inches apart—with a smallish, coppery-whiskered man with a humorously brown eye in his head and a way of showing the Billiken grin beneath the cheaters that might have suggested to anybody that all was not yet lost.

"As a former newspaper man, you'll be interested in some things Mr. Oomtara might tell you about our model State penitentiary," the governor, in introducing us, said to me.

I sought, by a careful tail-of-the-eye scrutiny of the governor's face, to catch the significance of this. I might as well have tried to get at the back of the mind of a Chinese mandarin by gazing at his photograph. For a countenance of such great and fully ex-

posed area the poker face of this governor easily surpassed any within my recollection.

"Newspaper men have always given me all the best of it," said Warden Oomtara, crinkling pleasantly back of his ambush while he staked me to the shrewd up and down. "I've never had anything but good will and accommodation from the newspaper lads who cover the prison doings."

The two still had me pinned. But a slow-minded man can anyhow stall or else keep still. I did a little of both.

"Now," said the governor, busily rustling the documents on his desk, "you two get into conference. You'll be finding, no doubt, many matters of interest to talk over. Take my car. I won't be needing it to-day—going to walk home for the exercise." He held out his hand to me for what plainly was meant for a dismissing handshake. "Very glad to have met again one of Cluck's close associates," the governor graciously said to me. "I'll be obliged if you'll give that obstinate old lad my very kindest regards."

Exit from the governor's office, puzzled to the core, the present speaker, accompanied by a coppery-whiskered warden of a State prison who seemed to take everything as a perfect matter of course. We had reached the corridor when the governor, remarkably light on his feet for a heavy man, came pouncing after us.

"Oh, by the way, gentlemen," he said, "any determination which you two may arrive at on any subject you take up need not be communicated to me either orally or in writing; just consider it a matter as between yourselves."

And so back into his office, that governor, his poker face accompanying him.

After a long, enjoyable ride in the governor's limousine the warden and I left the State capital on the train that evening.

I was just about thinking of getting out of bed on the following morning—it was a fine, hearty bed in the warden's handsomely appointed house close to the penitentiary—when there came a rap on my door. Enter, upon being invited, Warden Oomtara with an armful of morning papers. He dumped these newspapers upon my bed so that I could not fail to see the headlines.

"As I was telling you yesterday," said the warden, "all the newspaper lads have been mighty fine to me. You'll see how decently they write about all our prison conditions

here in their accounts of the break for liberty which a bunch of our lifers made along toward nine o'clock last night."

The gnomic grin showed back of the coppery excelsior barricade as he backed for the door.

"After you've looked the papers over," said he, with his hand on the knob, "we'll talk about things at breakfast."

So I read and read and read, under the flare headlines in the whole stack of papers, how nobly Biff Shugrue—none other!—had distinguished himself, thereby setting his feet well on the path of freedom, during the uprising among the life-serving murderers bent upon liberty, on the night before.

It was not merely bewildering, it was beautiful, to read of the feats which Biff, practically single-handed, had accomplished in baffling the determined purpose of these imprisoned fiends. After two of them, mysteriously getting out of their cells, had thrown red pepper into the eyes of the keeper on their tier, Biff, it appeared, had thrust a long gorilla arm through the door bars of his own cell, pulled the prone keeper to his cell door, got the agony-suffering keeper's keys from his pocket, unlocked himself from his own cell and then, in the corridor, had successfully borne the onslaught of the two lifers, who were armed with heavy pipe wrenches which they had somehow secreted in their cells. Two more lifers, also murderers, appearing then in the corridor from cells on an upper tier, Biff, himself now armed with a pipe wrench in each mitt, had tackled this pair too and beat them into submission. Not, however, without suffering such severe injuries himself that he had to be treated in the prison hospital.

Moving reading. But the best was yet to come.

This Biff Shugrue, it became manifest from the newspaper accounts of his case written by Warden Oomtara's friendly newspaper lads, had been, from his first day in prison—despite the fact that the law had given him an extremely rough deal, the nature of which was recited at length—a model prisoner. His lionlike bravery in rescuing the disabled keeper from sure death and in preventing what might have been the escape of large numbers of the most hardened desperadoes from the prison bade fair to earn Biff a virtually immediate pardon, seeing that most of the leading citizens of the prison town already had wired their appeals

to the governor in Biff's behalf, et cetera, et cetera.

"Is Biff much hurt, then?" I asked the warden when I found him at his coffee and bacon and eggs downstairs.

"Scratches, you might call them," he replied. "I wouldn't be surprised if he'd be perfectly able to travel on a train by evening—it's this evening you're starting, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"Any minute now," went on the warden, "I'm expecting word from the governor in answer to the report of the affair which I wired him last night. It'll be an odd thing, in my opinion, if so fair-minded a man as the governor doesn't pardon Biff, for services rendered, out of hand."

The warden was not disappointed in his estimate of the governor. Which is why, when I took the train for Chicago that night, Biff Shugrue—who, if he had any scratches, didn't show them—went along with me.

I went straight to the Chicago ball meadow with Biff, the team being at morning practice. We found the club boss seated alone in a grand-stand box, a figure of apalling gloom as he watched the inexpert antics of the second-line pitcher whom he was trying at first base. But he squeenched his eyes puzzledly when he caught sight of the limber, long-armed husky, "shipyard crane" standing shyly beside me.

"No, Cluck," I answered the question in the boss' eyes, "I didn't have to jump out of the car window to grab this one. Mitt Biff Shugrue, who's a little gift to you from a very old and a very good friend—with the governor's regards."

You've found out, perhaps, how much harder it is to accept a favor from a fellow you're sore against than from a man you like. I expected Cluck to gulp; and he ran to the dope. For a good ten seconds, I should say, he swallowed hard on nothing nutritious, to say the least. Then he gave a cordial greeting to the abashed Biff, who presently, in a jury-rig uniform, was vindicating Bill Cranston's appraisal of him by a zippy first-base practice that made Cluck's eyes sparkle.

"Rascal, ain't he?" commented Cluck, almost with a break in his voice when Biff, to whom the other infielders purposely threw very wide for testing purposes, permitted nothing to get past him but the breeze.

"Looks like a swat hound too, what?" he gloated again in a smother of managerial emotion when Biff, taking his turn at bat, leaned so hard on a mean outslant as to push it against the middle fence.

I pulled from my pocket a couple of those newspapers the warden had dumped on my bed the morning before and handed them to Cluck, pointing to certain particular headlines. I could see at once that the supposititious or apocryphal prison outbreak in which Biff had figured—newspaperly speaking—was dead-new stuff to Cluck: he'd been too low in his mind, I learned later, even to look at the papers on the day before.

He read a couple of the Biff-extolling accounts of the heap-heavy doings at the prison, with their confident predictions that the governor of the State would, in compliance with an earnest popular demand, immediately grant a pardon to the hero of the affair. Then, removing his reading glasses, Cluck staked me to a long, quizzical north and south.

"So that's where you went to see your sick aunt, was it?" he croaked.

My aunts, I told him, claimed and exercised the right to be sick wherever they chose.

"But d'you mean to tell me," demanded Cluck, "that that old larruping"—but he canceled that before it popped—"that Jack Whoozis framed this thing, or permitted you to frame it, for me?"

I stated the facts briefly, but not, I hope, without proper expository warmth. The governor's sympathetic good will in the matter, the difficulty of his position by reason of his reputation as a too-easy pardoner, his summoning of the warden for a ways-and-means confab followed by his suggestion of additional conference between the warden and myself—you may permit yourself to believe that I uncoiled all this, point by point, without any particular effort to mask my own opinion of Governor Jack.

Cluck caught the picture as it movieized before his mental eye. But he didn't say much—then.

Late that night, though, on returning to the hotel from a show, I dropped into Cluck's room. He was lying on top of the bed in his pajamas, with a little brindle bull pup that somebody had given him that afternoon, coiled sleepily in the hollow of his arm.

"Better wire an inquiry to-morrow about

Butch's condition," he suggested after a little desultory gab. I told him I would do that.

"Bad job, being beaned," said Cluck.

Having a hunch that something was coming, I allowed that, yes, it was a bad job.

"Only happened to me once when I was playing ball. But that once was a plenty," he went on.

"Lay you up?"

"Didn't know my name for a week. Happened in Egypt."

"Egypt, Illinois?"

"Egypt, Africa. Smack-dab in the shadow of the Sphinx."

"Didn't know they had a ball yard so close to that dummy."

Cluck Hotchkiss, if you want to get anything out of him, has got to be nagged that way. Of course I knew perfectly well that, as a famous young first baseman and a great hitter, Cluck had made the grand tour with the noted aggregation of American ball players that went around the world in the middle nineties.

"A man's got to be up around fifty before he finds out what a blamed fool he was as a young fellow," went on Cluck.

This didn't sound germane at all. So I yawned. That's another good way to dig stuff out of Cluck—yawn on him.

"There were a whole lot of topnotch American girls, traveling with their folks, at the hotel in Cairo—Shepheard's, isn't it?—that time," he went on. "Classy girls, most of them college trained, but not so up-stage because of that that they weren't willing to have a decent-behaving bunch of American ball players make a fuss over them. There were plenty of them to go 'round at that—a girl for each player and some over for spares. But, with my usual punk luck, I picked one that another fellow of our gang already had selected. Just for the fun of it, and being an American girl that knew how, she played the pair of us off against each other, with the result that in about three days we were glaring at each other at meals."

Getting warm again! But I had to wear the mask of ennui, so to chirp, or Cluck might have canceled on me.

"A moonlight donkey ride over by the Pyramids was fixed for one night," he went on, "and this other bird and I did a lot of maneuvering and maybe off-side work to grab that one girl for the burro excursion.

Well, somehow, I win. She went with me—properly chaperoned, of course: all that nice-girl stuff in Egypt was chaperoned play. We had a grand little old donkey ride. I was loony over that girl and told her so. You know how a cub of twenty-three or so'll rave when he's out under the moon with one of 'em that's hooked him—and that Egyptian moon has got a trick or two of its own. Wasn't there a rummy by the name of Mark Antony that found that out?"

"Never mind the deceased ones. You were saying—"

"Well, next day we had a game out there on that sand lot close to the Sphinx. Every American in Egypt was there of course. The girl that I was a squirrel over was there with bells, with her people. It was the first game of the Egyptian series she'd had a chance to see and I'd intimated to her on the night before what a phenomenal hitter I was and how I was going to paste the ball all over the Desert of Sahara next day just for her entertainment. The bragginess of a boy! I was the more bratty, you can believe, because the pitcher I was going to show up, according to me in conversation with her, was the other guy who'd been giving her the rush."

Cluck tickled the bull pup's head for a while, and I feared he was going to curl up on me, but I staked him to a yawn and started to rise, whereupon he resumed:

Look for Mr. Cullen's racing story, "A Bet on Captain Gaston," in the next issue.



A GREAT RACE

OF all the famous events on the racing calendar perhaps the most thrilling, as well as the most dangerous to horse and rider, is the Grand National Steeplechase, held each spring near Liverpool, England, over a course of slightly less than four and one half miles. A large field, dangerous jumps, heavy betting and desperate riding always are features of this racing classic. Many of the riders are wealthy amateurs. This year the race was run in a driving rain. Thirty-two of the best timber toppers in England went to the post. Five finished, and of these two had fallen and been remounted. Two horses broke legs and had to be destroyed. The winner was Music Hall, a nine-year-old gelding which managed to keep its feet throughout the race. In last year's race the winner, Shaun Spadah, was the only horse to complete the course without a fall. This animal fell at the first fence in this year's contest. Great sport—but hard on horses' legs and riders' necks.

"Well, that's about all. I didn't show that pitcher up—not none! But what he did to me was several plus. Up to that very day, on the whole tour, I'd been clouting close to five hundred. But on this day that cool dog whiffed me disgracefully three straight times, making me feel so hangdog, with that girl sitting there with a sort of inquiring look on her face, that I ached to sink through the sand each time I had to lug my bat back to the bench. Fourth time up, 'Where do you want it?' the pitcher, grinning, asked me. 'On the knob, you four carter!' I rapped back at him. He wound up slowly and carefully, and—*Bl-l-lup-p-ppp!*—that's where I got it, smack under the front of the pompadour, exactly where I'd asked for it."

"And so," I cut in there, "you've been lummoxing up and down the world all these years with the belief under your hat that Jack Whoozis deliberately beamed you that afternoon in Egypt?"

"Don't mallet a man when he's down," said Cluck. "I wired Jack this afternoon that I didn't believe that any more. There's his reply on the bureau."

I picked up the governor's telegram, which read:

Thanks for your wire old horse. I'd rather regain one lost friend than make a hundred new ones. Good luck and very kindest regards

JACK



The Thunderbolt

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

Author of "The Green Scarf," and other stories.

As a business unit Barnaby Lamb had twice the requisite amperage but his voltage amounted to almost nothing. It puzzled him—as the same thing may have puzzled you—to see second-rate men climb to first-rate successes while he held the foot of the ladder. Then that tinkering old philosopher, Peter Wye, taught him the principle of the lightning's power. Barnaby applied it to business and overnight became The Thunderbolt.

(A Four-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE.

BARNABY LAMB had a natural thirst for knowledge, which was enhanced by a conviction that knowledge was power. At twelve years of age he had taken a course in philately and also knew all the birds of North America. By sixteen he had mastered photography and was the owner of a "Library of Machine Shop Practice" in nine volumes, octavo. At eighteen, his thoughts growing commercial, he acquired proficiency in shorthand. And at twenty, having definitely determined upon a career, he held a nicely engraved diploma from a correspondence school of advertising.

At odd times between, he had dabbled in electricity, jujutsu, household medicine, elementary law, and the power of personality. His uncle, who had provided the necessary funds, said that Barnaby's countenance should adorn our postage stamps, rather than George Washington's.

Barnaby was not only studious; he was earnest, energetic and faithful. He knew that without those qualities the success he craved would never be his. He was always at his desk before he was required to be there and not infrequently he toiled in the evening.

He secured his first position when he was twenty-one, with the Watts & Walpole Agency. Promotion was not rapid but it was constant. When he was twenty-eight he was in receipt of thirty-five dollars weekly. And then, one day, he was uncereemoniously discharged.

On Wednesday morning, Mr. James Bradley, of Bradley Brothers, had sent over copy for an advertisement, together with a note to the effect that he was going to New York on the "Century" and wanted to see proofs before he left.

Barnaby, who had risen to the eminence of handling such details for the Bradley account, seized his hat and started for the

typesetters. But before he could leave the office a telephone message from Mr. Bradley instructed him to wait—advising him that revised copy would presently be sent over in substitution for the first piece.

Not unnaturally, as Barnaby pointed out later to Mr. Watts, he waited. The following morning—Thursday—the new copy arrived by mail. Again Barnaby made haste to the compositors, only to find that, pending uncertainties as to how many hours constituted a week, compositors had ceased to compose.

Barnaby was resourceful, however, and he was well aware of the importance of Mr. Bradley in the scheme of things. So, by cajoling the foreman, a lofty individual who rarely stooped to setting type, and becoming himself liberally besmeared with ink, he finally got the advertisement set and proofs pulled.

By running most of the way he reached Mr. Bradley's office at a little after five—to find that gentleman "gone for the day." He left the proofs and, conscious of a task well done, he went home to study the fifth lesson in the course he was taking in memory building.

His chagrin can be imagined when, the following morning, Mr. Watts summoned him to his office and, after a few preliminary and quite futile efforts to be calm, exploded with the information that the Bradley account had been shifted to Daniel Wegg, Incorporated.

"B-b-but that can't be true!" spluttered the dumfounded Barnaby. "Only last night I was in his office. I—"

"You got there too late," answered Mr. Watts in a terrible voice. "Bradley flew off the handle and called in Wegg this morning."

"B-but—"

"It was a sweet account, too!" said Mr. Watts mournfully.

In vain did Barnaby repeat, with a wealth of circumstantial detail, the facts of his supposed belatedness. In vain did he offer documentary evidence. Mr. Watts was interested in neither explanations nor evidence. Mr. Bradley had been angered. It was sufficient that his anger was ruinous; the cause of it, or its justice, did not matter.

"I—I'm sorry," faltered Barnaby.

Mr. Watts shrugged his shoulders. "You can't be caught napping in this business, Lamb."

"But I *wasn't* napping!" protested Barnaby.

"You were—you were late with those proofs."

"I wasn't late. That is, I—"

"You were."

Barnaby flushed at the contradiction. "I mean I—that is, I—"

Mr. Watts picked up a pile of papers, plainly indicating that the interview was terminated. "No use making excuses, Lamb," he said, frowning. "Business is like war—" He realized suddenly that a way had presented itself out of a situation which he found most unpleasant. He put down his papers and grew confidential. "That's what it is, Lamb, my boy. It—it's hard on the poor sentry who falls asleep at his post. But you've got to think of his comrades, depending on him, and of discipline and—and—"

Barnaby grew pale, as the significance of the simile dawned upon him.

"Mr. Watts—sir—I—I've served you faithfully for s-seven years. I've always put the firm's interests before my own. I—oh, Mr. Watts, sir, surely—you can't mean—"

Mr. Watts shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry, Lamb. You *have* been, for the most part, a good worker. I appreciate it. I—I'll be very glad to have you use the office for mail and that sort of thing until you find a new connection. And if I can be of any assistance to you, you won't hesitate to call on me, will you?" With a benignant smile, Mr. Watts held out his hand.

Barnaby seized it and to Mr. Watts' secret surprise thanked him earnestly. It had not occurred to him that Barnaby might really believe what he said.

Relieved that the painful interview had terminated so pleasantly, he urged Barnaby, most cordially, to "drop in and see us—often."

Barnaby gulped to keep the tears back and promised gratefully that he would. With a final wring of his ex-employer's hand he went out into an outer office become suddenly cold and drear.

It might have comforted him could he have overheard a conversation which took place, a little later, between Mr. Watts and Mr. Walpole.

"It was no fun giving Lamb the gate," said the former, blowing his nose violently. To which the other partner replied: "It

won't be any fun going broke, either. Where else can we cut?" This question was answered by Mr. Watts with an intimation that one of the copy men might be released.

"In which case," he added unfeelingly, "you'll do more advertising and less poker, Bill!"

But if such knowledge of what had really inspired the blow of his dismissal might perhaps have softened it for Barnaby, it remained none the less true that he knew only the fact; and so he suffered from the biting agony which afflicts the victim of ingratitude. His soul was a torment of bitterness and fear for the future. Despite Mr. Watts' smooth assurances of aid, he knew vaguely that the times were hard and that a new position would be hard to secure.

As he sat at his desk, characteristically deferring the packing of his personal belongings until he had written out, in elaborate detail, full instructions for whomsoever might be his successor, Jim Bullitt, with his fur-lined overcoat thrown back, revealing a gorgeous green and magenta necktie held together by a pearl small enough to be real, stopped and clapped him on the back.

"Why so glum?" he demanded cheerily. "What's the matter, Ba?" Bullitt, a solicitor of great achievements, had dubbed Barnaby with the punning sobriquet that was used by everybody in the office, with the exception of Mr. Watts, who always called him Lamb, Miss Mackall, the bookkeeper, who addressed him as Mr. Lamb, and Mr. Walpole, who never addressed him at all.

"I—I have resigned," answered Barnaby in a whisper.

Bullitt's face expressed his surprise. Then he laughed boisterously. "Bunk!" he said shortly. "So they tied the can to you, did they? Well—a lot o' good men are gettin' it these days. Hard pickin's, kid. I'm sorry."

"I—I always thought they were satisfied with my work," muttered Barnaby ruefully, staring at his desk.

Bullitt's ruddy countenance broke into a tolerant smile.

"Your work hasn't got a thing to do with it, Ba."

Barnaby looked up, puzzled. "Nothing to do with it? What do you mean?"

Bullitt patted him on the shoulder. "You know more about advertisin' in your little finger than I'll ever know in my whole body, Ba. But knowledge comes cheap, old dear.

I'm just a knock-down-and-drag-out salesman, I am. But when they fire the salesman, they put up the shutters!"

Barnaby shivered. Under the best of circumstances the self-confident effrontery of men like Bullitt crushed him, even though he was able to solace himself with a secret contempt for their raw ignorance. Now even that comfort was denied him. Bullitt knew next to nothing about advertising, as he knew next to nothing about most things of any consequence. But he was big and strong, he was crudely sagacious, he had a certain sense of drollery and a talent for applying it to his own advantage; he was aggressive, stubborn in denial of defeat and he radiated that confidence which only a consciousness of achievement can give. He was a "producer," and he knew it. It was the gossip of the office that he made as much and frequently considerably more than either of the partners.

The fact had always puzzled Barnaby; and never more than now. Bullitt was, if not lazy, certainly very "easy-going." He rarely put in an appearance in the morning before ten o'clock; and during the summer months he played golf at least once during the week. The ordinary vacation period was, in his case, supplemented by a fortnight in the winter. And yet, there he was, placid in the fixity of his position. It was disheartening.

Barnaby sighed heavily. Then he reached for the newspaper—as yet unread. He seldom had time for the morning paper before evening. With fingers that trembled slightly he turned to the classified pages.

Bullitt watched him, a smile of amusement on his full lips. "You're wrong, sonny," he said finally. "That's not the way to go about it. Nobody advertises for *good* men."

Barnaby blinked. "You mean—I should advertise?"

"Worse!"

"I don't see why." Barnaby struggled feebly to assert himself. "Don't you *believe* in advertising?"

Bullitt grinned. "Sometimes—when there's anythin' in it for me."

"Well—there must be good positions vacant. Why shouldn't I announce that I was looking for one?"

"Because, my boy, that's just what you'd get. Oh, I know what's in your mind. 'Wanted, job where brains and loyalty count. Age, twenty-four—'"

"I'm twenty-eight," said Barnaby stiffly.

"All right---age twenty-eight, then. 'Graduate International Correspondence School of Advertisin'. Thoroughly experienced in merchandisin'. Good copy and plan man. Opportunity more important than salary.' And so forth and so on." Bullitt burst into noisily ironic laughter.

Barnaby was astonished. "I don't see anything so funny in that. It—it's just about what I *would* say."

Bullitt's laughter was uncontrollable. "Oh, you—you *lamb!* Of course it is. And what do you think you'd get?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. What would I?"

"Well, some wise bird would see your ad and he'd say to himself: 'Twenty-eight an' lookin' for a job. A bush leaguer. Single. That means he doesn't need much jack. Qualifications—Bunk—they *all* have them.' That's what he says. And the stuff about opportunity—why, that merely proves that he can get you cheap. And so, if he's needin' a nice, high-class office boy to help file the cuts, he'll answer your ad and maybe hire you for thirty or forty dollars a week."

Barnaby was stunned. That paying the wage which had been so satisfactory to him and from which he had been so cruelly wrenched could be considered as "getting him cheap" had not occurred to him. And Bullitt, in effect, had called him a "high-class office boy."

He had not been altogether under illusion as to his position in the establishment of Watts & Walpole. That is, although he had esteemed himself as playing a rôle of responsibility, he had been aware that it was distinctly minor. It was shocking, however, to be reminded of it so brutally.

In a voice that trembled slightly with humiliation he managed to ask, "How should I go about it?"

"Easy," answered Bullitt, sitting on the edge of the desk and talking down to him. "Just leave it to me. Naturally, I see a lot of the boys in the game. I'll pass the word around that I've got a prize for some lucky bird. Why, Ba—it's a cinch! I don't want to pin any violets on myself, but if I can sell blue sky I guess I can sell you, eh? I'll paint a picture that'll make their mouths water! Listen—how's this for a line: 'Say Bill'—business of bein' confidential—I've got a bird that's a knock-out. Knows advertisin' from soup to nuts an' works like a

horse. Quittin' his job because it isn't big enough for him. Lookin' 'round for the right place to light. Goin' to take plenty o' time, too. It's a chance to hook a live one, Bill. Smartest kid of his size I know, Bill. Just loves *detail*—eats it up! That'll go big with any man—next to salesmen, it's the detail boys that are the berries."

"But—it—it isn't altogether true, Bullitt," protested Barnaby. "I don't know as much about the business as you make out. I—I think you put it a little too strong."

Bullitt stared blankly. "Strong? Why, you poor fish, it's not half as strong as I'd really put it. And what if it isn't true—in the little details, I mean? How are you going to check it? If I say I know all about advertisin' and you say I don't, who's goin' to decide? If I get the bacon and you don't, that's the answer, isn't it?"

Barnaby nodded. "I suppose it is."

Bullitt rose from the desk, flicking imaginary dust from his well-creased trousers. "There, old kid—that's settled. I'll have a job for you in no time. Just leave it to me. If I don't tie you up to some sucker for five thousand dollars a year, I'm no salesman, that's all."

Barnaby watched the retreating figure of the solicitor through eyes gone hazy with emotion. Five thousand a year—tossed off as lightly as if it had been as many cents! And Bullitt had spoken with such easy assurance—it was as if the thing were already done, the miracle a fact. Almost one hundred dollars a week! Fifteen dollars a day! He seized a pencil in his shaking fingers and reduced the magic figure to hours—to minutes. He had never been so thrilled in his whole life.

It was perhaps fortunate that he did not know how completely the troubles of Barnaby Lamb had already faded from the not overretentive memory of Mr. Bullitt.

CHAPTER II.

BARNABY IS SURPRISING.

When a man is very cast down he does one of three things. He broods in solitary futility, turns to drink or lays his weary head on the bosom of a woman whose interest in himself he believes to be considerable.

Barnaby was incapable of doing nothing; he did not drink and could not have gotten it if he did; and so, in addition to being the move he would have made first anyway,

the last of the three alternatives drove him, in his pain, to the side of Peggy Whitredge.

His adoration at that shrine had been of long standing. He and she had grown through childhood together in the same Ohio village, his uncle and her father having been more than commonly intimate. But his uncle had remained content with the little drug store, bequeathed to him by his father, whereas Whitredge, prospering in the manufacture of gray-iron castings, had emigrated to the metropolis. His own explanations of the move had to do with such things as superior railroad facilities and better labor markets: but the real reason was that the young mistress of his destiny, Peggy, saw nothing left to conquer in her birthplace.

The deserted village had had many unkind things to say about her, nearly all of which were untrue. For one thing, the villagers had assumed, obviously, that she was a snob; which she was not. At least Barnaby maintained, with more heat than he manifested on any other topic, that she was not. And certainly Barnaby should have known; for despite the rapid rise of the Whitredges to an eminence social as well as financial he never felt for an instant any diminution in the warmth of the welcome he received at the Whitredge fireside.

He had loved Peggy since his earliest recollections. Until she went to the city and he followed, he had never doubted for an instant that they would ultimately be married. But as her name began to appear with increasing frequency in those columns reserved for the chronicling of social activities he suffered growing pains of fear. Her coming-out ball had all but destroyed his lingering confidence. Attired in a dress suit, rented for the occasion at an exorbitant figure, and surveying the magnificence of the hotel ballroom, chartered for the evening, he had been forced to certain painful reflections upon his salary at Watts & Walpole's.

There was some comfort, however, in the thought that Mr. Whitredge had been a poor boy and that Peggy was of the stuff to which mere riches are of little consequence. She had confirmed him in these consoling thoughts by giving him the supper dance, over great competition, and according him a gentleness of consideration which could not have been greater had he been a prince of the blood.

When the ball was over he had gone home with Peggy and her father. And while that sadly fatigued parent was administering to himself the solace of a little spirits, Barnaby had yielded to the witchery of Peggy's beauty and had solemnly and formally asked her to be his wife. She, still in the thrall of her first grown-up ball, her head swimming with the adulation poured upon her all evening, had not said him nay. On the contrary, she had assured him that she loved him dearly—and had meant every word of it!

Only, poor Barnaby did not know that on that wonderful night she could truthfully have said the same thing to the whole world. He, with the egoism of the world, had assumed it to mean an acceptance of his plighted troth and he had tossed wakefully all the night in a delirium of joy.

It was only her blank amazement, later, when he had hinted shyly at an engagement ring, that had apprised him of the prematurety of his happiness. It did not, however, altogether shatter his hopes. And so, when the unkind blow fell from the hand of Mr. Watts, Barnaby still believed, in blind trust, that somehow, some time, he and Peggy would wed.

It was natural, therefore, that that evening he should make his way to the portentous mansion on the Shore Road which sheltered the Whitredge father and daughter. Despite Bullitt's cheerful promise and the new aspect it put upon his court of Peggy, he was too grieved at the injustice of the treatment he had received at the hands of Mr. Watts and too resentful of Bullitt's complacent superiority to be altogether happy. More than anything else, at the moment, he craved a woman's soothing of his sorely wounded vanity.

He greeted the butler who opened the door to him as an old friend, for so he considered him. The fact that their respective incomes were approximately the same, with perhaps a shade in the butler's favor, gave Barnaby a sense of equality. He had found the butler a pleasant man and he had never understood why his proffer of friendship did not secure a more cordial response. On several occasions, when other young men had been about, it had pained him to observe that Wynne treated them with manifestly greater deference than he was himself accorded.

The thing had puzzled him. To the

others a butler was merely a mechanism which opened doors, assumed coats and served at table. They never showed the slightest comprehension that a butler could have a soul and a name, children even, and that the children, being also human, could have ailments. And yet, instead of resenting this patent attitude, the singular Wynne appeared to favor it. Barnaby, who was essentially a humble soul, ascribed the phenomenon to his own personal unattractiveness. It did not occur to him that by his insisting upon relations of equality with the butler the latter had responded with the inevitable absence of respect we feel for those who are no better than we are.

"How's the little boy?" inquired Barnaby pleasantly. "He ought to be out by now."

Wynne, who was what his mistress was not, a most thoroughgoing snob, merely yawned. "Uh-huh," he responded.

Barnaby stood transfixed as Peggy came down the broad stairway to greet him. Her gown, of smoke-gray chiffon, overlaid with embroidery of orange and silver in a curiously Oriental arabesque, clung to her slim figure as though it were a growth of nature—peculiarly hers, as its plumage to a bird. The clear pallor of her skin was relieved by a hint of color in her cheeks and her blue eyes glowed warmly under blond hair just verging on the brunette. Despite Barnaby's hallucinations, no one had ever called Peggy "handsome," and few even described her as "pretty." But it was curious how often men turned to look at her as she passed on the street; and women frequently referred to her as "knowing how to dress."

She held out her hands to Barnaby. He seized them with a fervor that made her draw quickly back and a faint flush widened the spots on her cheeks. "What makes you look so tragic, Binny?" she asked with a nervous little laugh.

He followed her into the great, walnut-paneled library, lined with books in rich, unfingered leather bindings. "I bring you news—both bad and otherwise," he said.

She looked her surprise at the seriousness of his tone. "Bad and otherwise? Which comes first?"

"The good, I guess." He hesitated, wondering how best he could translate Bullitt's optimism convincingly. "A friend of mine is going—that is, he *thinks* he's going—to get me a job at five thousand a year. Think what that'll mean, Peggy!"

"Oh, Binny—that's *wonderful!*"

"You understand what it means?" He looked at her with entreaty in his eyes.

"Why—is there something mysterious about it? What do you mean?"

"I—I can support a wife on that," said Barnaby with significance.

Peggy pursed her lips. She looked down at her slippers. At length she raised her eyes—to catch those of Barnaby fastened on her hungrily.

"It—it would depend a good deal on the kind of wife, I think," she said softly.

"Peggy!"

She rose and stirred the embers in the fireplace.

"Why are you leaving your present place?" she asked over her shoulder. "I thought you liked it so much there."

His face clouded. "I did. But—well, a job's a job. And five thousand a year's worth moving for."

"I think it's perfectly splendid, Binny!"

"Thanks." The altogether unsatisfactory turn their conversation had taken caused a note of sarcasm to creep into his voice.

"Where's the new place to be?" asked Peggy in all innocence.

He flushed. "I—I don't know—exactly."

Peggy laughed merrily. She had a disconcerting way of going straight to the heart of things. "Oh, Binny—daydreaming again!"

"Not at all," he answered a little sulkily. "A friend of mine is arranging matters. Nothing may come of it, to be sure. On the other hand, he seemed—".

"If it falls through, you'll stay where you are?"

"No." He vouchsafed no further response and for a time there was silence between them.

She studied him, an instinctive compassion clouding her eyes. Then, yielding to intuition, she put her hand lightly on his shoulder. "What's the matter, Binny dear? Something's wrong. Tell Peg."

Barnaby bowed his head and said nothing.

"Tell Peg," she urged.

He looked up at last, staring into the fireplace.

"I've been fired," he said without evidence of emotion. "I think I was fired because they needed to economize and I was the easiest to get along without."

"Oh, Binny, I'm so sorry."

"Bullitt—that's my friend—says he can

get me a much better job. Maybe he can. I don't know. I believed him, I suppose, because I wanted so much to believe him. When he said five thousand a year, what do you suppose I thought of first?"

"I can't imagine. What?" she answered before she thought. Then she bit her lip at having thus fallen into his little trap.

"I thought of you, Peg. It was like opening the door of heaven and saying 'walk in.' I'd almost given up hope that things would—would work out. I saved every penny I could. You'd be surprised how much it amounts to already. But I didn't have enough to marry anybody on—certainly not you. I didn't see how I was going to have enough for years and years. And then Bullitt—oh, you can't imagine how I felt!"

"Poor old Binny!" She stroked his bowed shoulder. "I know there's justice in the world. I just *know* there is. You've worked so hard. You're so good and fine and loyal—and you have *such* ability. Your dream will come true one of these days, don't you fret."

"My dream?" He echoed her with a hint of bitterness in his voice. "That's just one thing. It's *you*. I could live on nothing with you and be happy enough. But I can't live without you. I just can't!"

She studied him for a moment in evident perplexity. Suddenly faint lines of resolution appeared at the corners of her mouth. "I think I'm handicapping you, Binny," she said firmly.

"No!" His denial was of sacrilege.

"Yes I am. You aren't fair to yourself. You—"

"Peggy"—he interrupted with wistful irrelevance—"you *could* live on five thousand a year?"

She was a gentle-hearted girl and the tears came into her eyes at the words she felt obliged to utter. "I could, yes. But I *wouldn't*, dear boy. I spend more than that now just on myself. Oh, *much* more! And I'm always hard up."

Barnaby's face fell. "Some sacrifices—" he began weakly.

She shook her head. Having inserted the knife in what she esteemed to be necessary surgery she proceeded to twist it. She decided to make it a clean job and a complete one.

"I haven't the slightest desire to make

sacrifices, Barnaby. I'm quite normally selfish."

"Then you—you don't care for me?" His lip quivered.

"Hold your head up, Barnaby," she ordered sternly. "Look at me. You know that nobody in this world, except your mother, ever cared for you more than I do. But you don't want me. You wouldn't, I'm sure, if you really knew me."

He smiled at that. "Don't I know you?"

"No. If you did, you wouldn't talk of marrying me on nothing a year."

His face darkened. "Oh—I see. It's money, is it!"

"Oh, rats!" She stamped her foot in exasperation. "If I loved a man enough to marry him, I'd do the supporting if he couldn't. Great guns, Barnaby, don't you see how little you know me?"

He shook his head helplessly. "I never did see why you should seem to care for me—even the little you did. I was only glad—"

"There you go, Binny. You don't flatter me!"

"Peg, I idolize you!"

"Twaddle, Binny dear," said Peggy coolly. "You idolize me the way you'd idolize your mother. And I don't want to mother the man I marry. Oh, dear, dear—you're *so* stupid! Can't you *see* how vain I am? Can't you understand that I want the man I fall in love with to be loved by all women and run after and flattered to death, so that when he says he wants *me* I'll just be flattered out of my senses? Can't you see that, Binny?"

Barnaby grinned disconsolately. "I can't see any prospect of women running after me."

"I'm not so sure they wouldn't, if you wanted them to," she said thoughtfully. "You're good looking, you're not without brains, certainly, and you have a pretty way with your tongue when you let yourself go. If you—"

He interrupted her harshly. "I never knew you were so ambitious."

"I? For what?" There was honest curiosity in her question.

He shrugged his shoulders, as if he felt it useless to specify.

She answered for him. "Money, perhaps? I have it. Social position? I can buy it. Power in affairs? No. For the love of a man—a *strong* man—yes, Binny. I am

ambitious for that. Oh, Binny, don't mix it up with money! I don't care what my man does—if only he does it—if only he *stands out*. If he's a business man, I want him rich. If he's a poet, he may be penniless—but he must write great poetry. Why, if he's only a fool, he must be a perfectly colossal fool! Can't you understand?"

"I understand only that I have lived an empty dream," answered Barnaby. "The thought of attaining you as the fulfillment has always—"

"You thought only up to the wedding, Binny dear," she said softly. "You never went beyond."

"Perhaps not. I thought that the love I had for you was enough."

"And love *isn't* enough!" she cried. "It's not a thing in itself. It's an expression of a host of other things—splendid things—useless and meaningless perhaps, in themselves, but glorified when they turn into love. The cocoon is so practical and useful—but the beauty is all in the butterfly. Oh, Binny—if only I could express what I mean!"

"I think you express yourself very well," he said stiffly. "I understand."

"I'm quite sure you don't," she murmured sorrowfully.

"I do. It's the desire of the moth for the star. I'm not worthy of you. I've been silly to think I was. I thought because I loved you so much it made up for the things I wasn't. But I can't stop loving you, Peggy. I always shall."

"Binny!" The tears, never far from the surface, were in evidence now. "You're so gentle and kind and lovable. If only the one thing lacking—"

"Success?"

She twisted her handkerchief helplessly. "I don't know, Binny. Honestly, I don't know."

Barnaby sat lost in reverie. He was aroused by the butler's voice:

"Mr. Douglas Mackenzie, Miss Peggy."

Barnaby rose, and his lip curled. "There's a man for you, Peg—a successful man. Why not marry him?"

Peggy's smile was inscrutable. "Possibly I shall."

For an instant, Barnaby was startled and showed it. Then he took refuge in sarcasm. "He inherited a hard-working grandfather."

"His manners are incomparable," interrupted Peggy sweetly.

"He's spent a lifetime perfecting them," was Barnaby's answer. "I suppose you'll want to add that he was the greatest football player of his time?"

"At least you admit he *was* the greatest. That's a good deal."

"I suppose you'd marry him for *that*?"

"Why not?"

"Peggy! You—you're impossible!" Before Barnaby could add anything to that helpless expostulation the subject of their discussion entered the room.

He was a tall man and well made, with dark eyes set deep under a broad, not very high forehead. Above, was a luxuriance of thick black hair that showed a tendency to curl. His features were sharply defined, particularly his mouth, which was scornful.

"Good evening, Peggy." His diction was precise. Years at school in the East had freed him of the throaty carelessness that marks Middle Western speech.

"Hello, Doug. You know Barnaby, of course?"

Mackenzie acknowledged the other man's presence with an indifferent nod, and a "how do you do."

His words, despite their construction, were in no sense interrogative. Barnaby therefore made no reply. His distaste for the newcomer suddenly became acute. The perfection of the man's poise had the effect almost of an affront. Barnaby felt unaccountably awkward; and the consciousness that Mackenzie was entirely indifferent to whatever effect he might be producing was positively infuriating. Following ineptly upon Peggy's confession of his potential charms, the disdain of his manner was intolerable.

Overcome by a sudden gust of rage Barnaby spoke: "Your inquiry, sir, betrays an interest in my health altogether gratifying. Thank you, I am well."

He was thoroughly surprised at himself. His words were urbane enough, but some perverse imp within him contrived to make the tone in which they were uttered distinctly offensive. He could not for the life of him explain why, but he wanted, enormously, to shake the other man's galling composure. And almost he succeeded.

Mackenzie's lip lost its curl for an instant and he looked blank. Then with a shrug of the shoulders and an easy smile he turned to Peggy. "I'm delighted to hear it," he said.

Barnaby's momentary flare of courage

died out. He colored painfully. "G-good night, Peggy," he stammered. "I—I have to go."

Peggy, slowly recovering from her astonishment at Barnaby's singular outburst, tried to detain him. He had piqued her curiosity more than he knew. This odd young man, so kind and dependable and good and so utterly impossible otherwise, had revealed a momentary flash of something in his soul she had never suspected. She wanted to see more.

But Barnaby, to whom it had been almost as much of a revelation as it had been to her, was too aghast at his own temerity to venture on any further exploration just then. The mildly amused smile on Mackenzie's lips was too maddening. He was afraid—afraid of what he might do and frightened by what he had done.

Despite her very earnest protests he mumbled something about a mysterious engagement and very clumsily took himself off.

"Your friend Lamb is an odd fish, isn't he," said Mackenzie when Barnaby had gone. "What made him look at me like that?"

"I never thought he was at all odd," answered Peggy with a touch of defiance. "And I wasn't aware that he was looking at you."

"He acted rather peevishly, I thought."

"Did he?"

"Well, if it doesn't trouble you, I'm sure it doesn't trouble me." Mackenzie drew a delicately chased gold cigarette case from his waistcoat. "And now, dear Peggy, let us talk about matters closer to my heart."

"I never knew he had so much spunk!" murmured Peggy absently.

CHAPTER III.

OLD PETER'S SECRET.

Barnaby had two friends. The one he loved the most had failed him utterly. So it was with some trepidation that he went out the following evening to see the other—Peter Wye.

To the inhabitants of the little suburban town in which he dwelt Peter was known as a "character." He was much better known than the mayor and in some respects quite as respectfully treated as the local physician. And although his life was, so far as any one knew to the contrary, quite

blameless, he enjoyed the mistrust of almost every one in the village.

He was treated respectfully because he relieved the heads of countless households of tasks they did not love. He restored voice to mute doorbells, made washing machines run and stopped faucets that ran too much. His occupation, according to the census taker, was "odd jobs" and his skill was as great as his versatility; and having no concern with the elevation of labor or the iniquities of capital his service was in inverse ratio to his charges.

But his habits were peculiar and his speech, when he accorded himself the infrequent pleasure of using it, distinctly shocking—even to those who had enjoyed his acquaintance for a long time. It was shocking because, despite the legitimacy of his greasy overalls and his split finger nails, his language, both as to vocabulary and diction, was superior even to that employed by the Congregational minister who had made a cult of language.

To have a rather soiled and shabby old man, bearing a tattered carpet-cloth bag of tools, appear at the kitchen door in response to a frantic call for assistance in calming a flooding basement and to have him say "is it not," instead of "ain't," was in itself unsettling. But to have him, while repairing a lamp socket in the living room, pick up a copy of Newton's "Magnificent Farce," with the remark that it was not up to the "Amenities of Book Collecting," was altogether overwhelming.

Peter was admittedly mysterious. But whatever the mystery was, no one had ever succeeded in penetrating it. He lived alone on a little plot of land over in the valley, which he indubitably owned, in a little house which he had built himself. But what he did in the hours when he was not restoring health to inanimate objects, no one knew.

Barnaby had made his acquaintance in the most accidental way imaginable. He had been spending a week-end with Peggy at the Whitedge summer place and on the way in he had chanced to take a seat which was occupied by Peter. As luck would have it, the locomotive of their train had blown out a cylinder head between stations, with the result that he and Peter had had an hour or so in which to know each other.

Barnaby had been captivated by the refreshing uncompromisingness of the old man's philosophy; and Peter who, though he

would never have confessed it, grew lonely at times was well pleased by the intelligence and simplicity of his young companion.

This chance encounter had ripened into a profound intimacy, with deep affection on both sides. Though neither, perhaps, suspected it, both were lonely souls, doomed to loneliness however crowded their respective worlds might become. And the sympathetic understanding each had for the other was very precious to them both.

As he trudged through the snow from the station Barnaby smiled a little bitterly to himself at the queer trick of fate that sent him for solace to the cabin of an old tinker. It was further than the mere miles would indicate from the opulent abode of Peggy Whitredge.

Peter opened the door at his knock.

"Enter, young sir!" he cried, his gnarled old face breaking into smiles. A huge fire was crackling in the fireplace, built of field stones. "There's warmth for the outer man. And for the inner, a bottle of some excellent Château Wye—laid down by myself no later than last fall."

Barnaby sank wearily into the chair, built stanchly and comfortably out of a bit of old awning, which the old man pushed toward him.

"I'm down and out, Peter."

at no pains to conceal the quality of his own emotions toward that gentleman. He did not, however, have anything to say of his response to Mr. Mackenzie's polite solicitude for his health. Something—he could not tell what—caused him to be reticent on that point.

When he had finished, Peter nodded his shaggy head. "It is good that you came to me," he said cheerfully. "It is good."

Going to the big stone jug on the mantelpiece he filled his pipe and tamped it down with a broad thumb all angles and squares of ancient scars.

"Barnaby," he said, after a thoughtful pause. "Do you know anything of electricity?"

"Why—yes, a little," answered the mystified Barnaby.

"A little will do. Now, lad, what I'm going to tell you I've thought for this year gone. I have, however, said nothing, because it seemed better that I wait until you spoke. I wanted you to learn the need of the key before I gave it to you. Now, I think, you see the lock you have to open."

"Peter—you old oracle! What are you driving at?"

"I am not an oracle, laddie. Oracles were hired to tell lies. I am a philosopher and my truth is free."



"So? When you're warm, and the chair fits you, tell me about it."

Briefly, and on the whole accurately, Barnaby recounted the circumstances of his dismissal from Watts & Walpole. Colorlessly, for he had begun to entertain some suspicions, he told of Mr. Bullitt's promises. And in a voice that shook just a trifle he told of his futile call upon Peggy. He mentioned the presence of Mr. Mackenzie and he was

"Go on," laughed Barnaby, his unhappy soul yielding to the warmth and sympathy he always found in the little cabin. "Go on, Peter."

"Indeed I will," answered Peter, puffing hard at his pipe. "But first I must ask you—do you know what an outrageous faker the lightning is?"

Barnaby laughed. "No, I don't know the intimate habits of lightning."

"Well, you should. There's a great lesson in' it. Understand *potential*, laddie, and you will understand life. Look at that lamp there, burning bright and being of some use in the world. Do we get excited about it and write poems of wonderment to it? We do not. We take it for granted. And all because its voltage is a wretched hundred and ten. But consider the lightning. A stupendous thing! Millions of volts—and perhaps a nickel's worth of useful energy! Because it makes a loud noise and a bright light, we respect it. It appalls us. We talk about it. We're thrilled by it. Now do you get what I'm driving at?"

"Dimly," said Barnaby. "Go on."

"You're high in amperage, my boy—uncommonly high. You have all the qualities necessary to make you useful. But there isn't any pressure behind them. They're useful only to other people—and not very useful to them. You'll go through life being turned on and off at other peoples' whim; and when you're finally burned out you'll be quickly tossed into the ash can."

"I'm not enough of a thunderbolt, eh?"

"Exactly! With your amperage and a voltage to match—why, boy, you can run the world! Look around you. Who sits in the seats of the mighty? Is it the earnest workers? It is not. It is the lightning flashes that work the workers."

Barnaby was profoundly shocked. "That's the most immoral philosophy I ever heard," he said seriously.

Peter shook his head vigorously. "It's not immoral at all. It's immoral to you only because you've lived an unreal dream. You've fancied that virtue was all powerful in itself. It isn't. Early to bed and early to rise, for example, doesn't by any means guarantee wealth and wisdom. Such habits merely make it easier for a man to exert the qualities that alone can achieve the ends of wisdom and wealth."

"You're a cynic of the worst kind!"

"People who tell the truth have always been called cynics by the people who were afraid of the truth," answered Peter calmly. "Why do you call it cynical to say that being virtuous may make success easier, whereas being sinful may not prevent the achievement of success? Why muddy the waters—the clear crystal waters—of practical truth, with morality?"

"Looks as if I'd been on the wrong track."

"Nonsense! You've been storing up ma-
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terial and refining your equipment. You've now reached the point where you ought to begin to use it. But if *you* don't use it, be assured that other people will. Take this course you're studying—memory training, isn't it? The man who sold it to you probably had an atrocious memory. He merely had wit enough to take advantage of a prevailing notion that the memory can be trained. He—"

"Are all virtues, then, just prevailing ideas?" asked Barnaby ironically.

"No! No! No!" Peter was exasperated. "Can't you understand? Listen. I am honest. That is to say, I do not steal. But I am honest and I do not steal, not because I esteem honesty a good policy—because I am occasionally doubtful of that—but because it *pleases* me to be honest. I know, too, that if I steal the chances are at least equal that I shall be punished. On a mathematical basis, therefore, it is obviously the part of wisdom to refrain from too much individualism in the matter of property. On the other hand, my experience of the world teaches me that honesty, in itself, is no assurance of glory or riches. In other words, that interpretation of morality is negative."

"Now I think I do see," exclaimed Barnaby, with a strange light in his eyes. "I have been negative."

"Precisely!"

"That's just what Peggy meant, too!"

"I have no doubt of it. You could not thrill her. She knew you to be good and useful. But even a first-rate football player thrilled her more."

Barnaby swallowed another glass of wine.

"Peter," he cried excitedly, as if he had just made a discovery, "that chap Bullitt—he's a thunderbolt. He's ignorant. He doesn't know *anything*. But he's so big and strong and loud that he—he—why, he just knocks 'em over!"

"And if he *did* know?"

"Why—he'd be invincible!"

"Ah—now you're getting it!"

Barnaby rose and stood staring into the blue and orange mystery of the fire. His cheeks were flushed and he spoke with a manifest effort at restraint. "I've worked hard, Peter—and I was tossed away like a canceled postage stamp."

"Turning out the light, laddie. I told you."

"I loved with all my heart," went on Bar-

naby, ignoring the interruption. "And I was laughed at. In that chap Mackenzie I found much to envy. I was respectful and he sneered at me. I—"

"We've had enough electricity," broke in Peter. "Let us shift to Freud. I think you've been suffering from an inferiority complex, my boy. Haven't you?"

"Maybe. I don't know what that is."

"Well, when Mr. Watts discharged you, you wanted to get down on your knees and beg him to reconsider. Now—be honest—didn't you?"

Barnaby reddened. "Yes—I almost did, too."

"Precisely. And when you protested your love to Peggy you told her you knew you weren't worthy of her."

Barnaby's flush deepened. "I—I'd rather you wouldn't talk of that."

"And this Greek god Mackenzie—the thing that angered you in him was the fact that you considered him so much cleverer and handsomer and more self-possessed than yourself. In short, laddie, you suffer from an inferiority complex. You are infinitely wiser than Mr. Watts, you are much more charming than Mr. Mackenzie and the probabilities are that Mistress Peggy—"

"Please—Peter! Talk about anything else, but leave that."

A whimsical smile flitted over the old man's lips. "Confidence, laddie—confidence. As the poet sayeth, it is conqueror of men."

Barnaby did not hear him. He was thinking, with a new analysis, of Mackenzie. Why should the sheen of his hair and the breadth of his shoulders be counted an asset? They had come to him from God. He, Barnaby, had received gifts, too. He was not unlovely to look upon. Why did he feel so ineffectual in the other man's presence?

Suddenly he leaped to his feet. "Peter—you old criminal—you've swept away the last fragments of my world!" he cried.

"Take mine," answered Peter quietly.

Barnaby was silent for a moment. Then a curious new light dawned in his eyes. "I might do worse," he muttered, half to himself. "I've failed in everything I've set my hand to. I have given my code a thorough trial. It doesn't work. Very well—suppose I try yours."

"Careful, laddie," warned the old man. "When the inferiority complex has a reaction it's apt to be extreme."

"So be it," declared Barnaby with a harsh quality to his voice. "I have been full of virtues. I shall forget them. I have abased myself. Now I shall domineer. I have been insulted. Well, by all the devils you have aroused in me, I'm going to do a bit of insulting myself! Peter, look upon poor Barnaby—the meek, bleating Ba—for the last time! He dies—so! And in his place—behold the *thunderbolt!*"

Peter eyed him, unsmiling. "Barnaby," he said solemnly, "I do not know what will happen. Either you will rule the world—or the world will destroy you. But in either case, it will be of your own doing. If the world crush you, it will be because it fears you, not because it despises you."

Barnaby laughed and threw his shoulders back. "Peter, I am *free!* I have been tied to ambition, to virtues and to love. I'm tied no longer. I don't give a damn what anybody thinks of me, nor of what becomes of me. I'm free, I tell you—*free!*"

The old man nodded. "You may live in the gutter, laddie, like me. Or, you may live in a palace. But if you are free, you won't care in the least *where* you live."

"Good night, Peter," said Barnaby. "Tomorrow I rise on a new world. It will be *my* world. I shall look differently, think differently, talk differently. No one will recognize me. I—do you think I have gone mad, Peter?"

"My boy, I think you have merely waked up. Come and see me when you have put on your wand and wings."

"I'll show you high boots and a rapier!" cried Barnaby. "This night I cut adrift from all I've known and been. I—I nail the Skull and Crossbones to the masthead!"

Peter followed him to the door of the little cabin and stood watching him as he swung off down the street toward the village. Under his beard his lips were twisted in a quizzical, speculative smile.

"It's kill or cure," he muttered as he went back and poked up the dying embers of his fire.

CHAPTER IV.

HE BECOMES AN ACTOR.

Mr. Bullitt was more facile of speech than retentive of memory. Though the proffers of assistance he had made to Barnaby were sincere enough, he forgot almost instantly that he had made them. It was not until

he encountered Barnaby on the street, a few days later, that his conscience troubled him.

"Well, well, if it isn't good old Ba!" he exclaimed, with the cordiality for which he was distinguished. "Where in the world have you been keeping yourself?"

"As far from my old friends as possible," answered Barnaby cheerfully.

"Gee, you look quite snappy, kid!" Bullitt's gaze was full of wonderment. Barnaby's appearance was indeed changed. His clothes, though not new, had undergone an unwonted amount of attention. But what Bullitt was really mostly impressed with was Barnaby's general new air of confidence. "You look like a different man, Lambie!" he cried.

"I am," was Barnaby's cryptic response.

Bullitt suddenly remembered his promises. "By the way, Lambie, I haven't forgotten about getting you a job. But I've been so gosh-dinged busy, I really——"

"I never thought you meant it," said Barnaby calmly. "Did you?"

"Did I?" Bullitt contrived to look hurt. "Of course I did. D'you think I'd say a thing like that and *not* mean it?"

"You often do."

Such thinly veiled and altogether singular skepticism disconcerted Mr. Bullitt and made him feel very uncomfortable.

"You act as if I'd just been talkin' to hear myself talk," he said aggrievedly.

"Not at all," answered Barnaby. "I took it for granted that the assistance you offered was merely a way of telling me what an important fellow you were. I never took it to mean anything else."

"Well, I'll be blessed!" Bullitt was quite nonplused. "What's got into you, Lambie? You—you're different, somehow."

"I told you I was."

Bullitt's usual readiness of speech deserted him for a moment. He had an unpleasant suspicion that in some subtle fashion this youth Lamb was patronizing him. He did not like to be patronized.

"So you thought I was just bluffing, eh?" he said at last. "Pretending to have influence when I didn't have it, eh? Well, you're all wrong, Ba. All wrong. I told you I'd get you a job and I will. You——"

"At five thousand a year, no doubt?"

"Well, maybe not quite that—to start, anyway. Now listen, you beat it right over and see Dan Wegg. Tell him I sent you, see? He'll give you a job, all right."

"Shall I say that you told me to ask for five thousand?" asked Barnaby with great innocence.

Bullitt laughed noisily. "Not if I were you, Ba, I wouldn't. Your own line—opportunity more important than salary—and that stuff—will go bigger. Dan's no philanthropist."

Barnaby held out his hand. "Thanks, Bullitt. I don't know how far your kindness is dictated by your vanity, but I won't analyze it. I'll see Wegg."

Before the dumfounded Bullitt could recover his composure, Barnaby had disappeared in the crowd surging around the street corner.

"Well I'll be horn-swiggled!" muttered Bullitt. "What d'you suppose he meant by that? Queer little bird if there ever was one!"

Still shaking his head, he went to a public telephone booth, and called up his friend Daniel Wegg.

"Say, Dan," he said when the connection was established. "Jim Bullitt speaking. Say, they've just let out a youngster up at our shop that you ought to hook up to. Huh? Oh, I know. Sure. But this is different. Y'see, the kid's been doin' most of the detail work on that account you stole from us—Bradley Brothers. What? Oh, sure—I was just kiddin'. But honest, this lad—Lamb's his name—was the works. He's got a brain and he works like a horse. It's a chance, Dan. What? Oh, 'round thirty dollars a week, I guess. Sure, that's not much, if he helps you hang onto Bradley, an' believe me, old dear, you're goin' to need a lot o' help! Bradley dented us—an' we're hard to dent! Yep—Lamb's his name. Nice-lookin' lad, too. A'right, Dan, I'll send him over. Thanks. Goo'-by."

His complacency wholly restored, Mr. Bullitt hung up the receiver. So Lamb had fancied him without influence, had he! Well, he'd soon find out. Poor little devil! So helpless without a strong hand to guide him. But smart! He was that. No question about it.

Barnaby smiled as he hurried away after his encounter with Bullitt. How surprised the big man had been! That he was conscious of a change, even if he could not define it, was manifest.

"It works!" chuckled Barnaby delightedly. "Even that great thick-head saw it!"

But the demeanor he had exhibited had not been achieved without a tremendous effort. His first impulse had been to greet Bullitt with effusion and to ask humbly what efforts he had been pleased to make toward securing a position. The plainly derisive note he had sounded instead had come painfully. But it had come, that was the main thing. And Bullitt had unmistakably heard it. Like a child with a new toy, Barnaby laughed softly. "I've got to try it on somebody else," he said—so loudly that people turned and stared after him.

The offices of Daniel Wegg, Incorporated, occupied an entire floor of a newly constructed tower of commerce—a tower, fittingly—which had been raised as an evidence of and in testimony to the potency of publicity. Barnaby was very much impressed with its gleaming white pinnacle, rising high over neighboring edifices. It was the visible embodiment of the jargon he had thought and talked so long: "Volume sales—short profits—quick turnover." It was the modern version of the pyramids. It marked an enormous stride in civilization. The slaves of ancient Egypt had raised colossal monuments to their rulers by the sweat of their backs. This latter-day glory of stone had risen quite painlessly on tribute of nickels from the world.

The interior of the offices of Daniel Wegg, Incorporated, were sumptuous—in striking contrast to the economic simplicity of the Watts & Walpole working quarters. A spacious reception room was all that the visitor was permitted to see. But its rich oak paneling, hung with heavily framed "originals," the massive center table strewn with magazines, the generous number of overstuffed leather chairs and the thick rug underfoot suggested a wealth and prosperity to be felt rather than seen: and the constant passage of people through the several doors opening on the reception room was a stimulating evidence of the great activity beyond.

Barnaby was affected by this atmosphere, as most people were affected. But he realized, instinctively, that if he let it conquer him he was lost. And so as he addressed himself to the young woman at the information desk, dressed primly in black with a bit of white ruching at her neck, he made a supreme effort to be casual.

"Mr. Wegg, if you please."

The young lady's gaze was one of chronic mistrust. Long service at this post had

caused her to divide the world of men into two groups—those who had some justification for their desire to see Mr. Wegg and those who had none.

"You have an appointment?" she inquired coldly.

It was Barnaby's impulse to admit the truth. But the chill of the young person in black checked him. It angered him unreasonably. What, he asked himself, would James R. Bullitt do under similar circumstances? Would he be apologetic? Barnaby almost laughed aloud at the thought. Then, with a look at the young woman as cold as her own, he said evenly:

"Do I look like a person who would see any one *except* by appointment?"

Her gaze wavered and broke before his. Evidently this man was not an ordinary solicitor. It was possible, indeed, that he was a client or a prospective client.

"Have you a card?" she asked and her tone, if not warm, was warmer.

"You may say that Mr. Lamb is here—as he promised to be," answered Barnaby with an easy indifference.

As if the matter were settled he turned to the magazines on the table. The young woman hesitated a moment longer. Then she took up the telephone at her elbow and began a whispered conversation.

Barnaby, thumbing the pages of a magazine, saw nothing. His mind was upon this singular rôle he was playing—a rôle which was becoming extraordinarily easy to play. With a gesture of ennui he tossed the magazine on the table and glanced around the room at the visitors waiting for admission to the precincts within. His lip curled contemptuously. He thought of the infantile satisfaction Mr. Walpole had taken in making solicitors wait upon his pleasure. Doubtless behind those closed doors too, ominously marked "Private," were minds of an equal littleness of caliber, equally ready to enhance their own semblance of importance by playing the petty tyrant.

His cynical reflections were terminated by the young woman at the desk who, having finished her mysterious conversation, came toward him with a deference as marked as her preceding hostility.

"Will you come with me, Mr. Lamb? Mr. Wegg will see you immediately."

Barnaby obeyed a whimsical impulse to hesitate momentarily and to glance at his watch, frowning slightly. Then, as if to say

that he still had a minute or two to spare, he nodded and followed her through the door she held open for him. A few steps down a corridor and he found himself in the office of Mr. Wegg.

A compact, middle-aged man in a gray suit of aggressive checks, very sharply creased, rose from the broad desk and shook his hand warmly.

"Mr. Lamb, I'm glad to see you again. Sit down, sir. Have a cigar."

Barnaby, wondering where Mr. Wegg had ever seen him before, suffered himself to be all but thrust into a huge leather armchair, much larger and more expensive than those in the reception room, and accepted one of the Partagas from the box held out to him.

There was silence for a moment, Mr. Wegg manifestly struggling for a proper commencement of this interview and as manifestly quite helpless before the task. Barnaby, inwardly delighted, tried to prolong the problem.

"Your watchdog outside wasn't overly cordial," he observed dryly.

Mr. Wegg turned slightly pink. "I—I have so many demands upon my time," he murmured. "She—she—I'm quite sure she didn't recognize you."

"Seeing that she never saw me before, that's hardly surprising."

Mr. Wegg covered his perplexity by laughing heartily. "That's a good one, Mr. Lamb. You're a joker, I can see that."

Barnaby nodded acquiescence. "I've decided that life is one long practical joke," he said soberly.

Mr. Wegg's lips continued to laugh but his eyes were puzzled. "Let me see—what was it we were discussing?"

Barnaby, seeking strength for his next plunge, leaned back in the leather chair and blew smoke rings toward the ceiling.

"We weren't discussing anything," he said with more calmness than he felt. "We hadn't begun."

"Yes—yes, of course." Mr. Wegg decided to wait.

"I believe Jim Bullitt has spoken to you of me."

Barnaby was startled by the effect his words produced. Mr. Wegg suddenly sat up very straight and the pinkness of his cheeks became a dull red. The genial smile faded abruptly from his lips.

"Oh! So you're the chap that's looking for a job! I thought—"

Barnaby laughed outright. "And you thought I was a prospective client? Oh, Mr. Wegg!"

Mr. Wegg lost his temper completely at this concise statement of the truth. "You—you got in here by misrepresenting yourself!" he exclaimed, his voice choking.

"Not at all. I got in here because, in the first place, the damsel at the gate was afraid to keep me out and, in the second place, because I was successful in arousing your cupidity—or perhaps I should say merely your curiosity?"

Mr. Wegg by this time had turned purple. "This is the damnedest experience I ever had!" he roared. "Do I have to sit here and be insulted in my own private office by an—"

"But I'm not insulting you," interrupted Barnaby. "I merely—"

"You g-g-get out of my office!" stuttered Mr. Wegg, no trace of his former suavity remaining.

Barnaby raised a deprecatory hand. "In due course, sir. But first let us clear away the various misapprehensions under which you labor. It is hardly my fault that you mistook me for what I was not. Neither is it my fault that you make the mistake of being different things to different men. That is a flaw in your character, Mr. Wegg, that may prove fatal!"

"Well, I'll be j-j-jigged!" Mr. Wegg's helplessness was almost ludicrous.

"Don't, I beg of you," continued Barnaby, "make the mistake of judging other men by yourself. For example, you have given me to believe that you like a certain fawning servility in those who serve you. Mr. James Bradley, however, does *not* like it."

Mr. Wegg's little eyes blinked suspiciously. "What do *you* know about Mr. James Bradley?"

For reply, Barnaby took his hat and stood up. "I believe you told me to get out of your office," he murmured absently.

For the first time, Mr. Wegg laughed without any effort.

"You're the strangest bird I ever bumped up against, Lamb! You've got more gall than ten men!"

Barnaby dropped his eyes demurely. "On the contrary, Mr. Wegg, I haven't a par-

icle. I merely contrive to make you think i have."

"Well, it's worth giving you a job—just to see what you do with it."

"But I'm not looking for a job."

Mr. Wegg's surprise was patent. "Why, Jim Bullitt—"

"Jim, as usual, was inaccurate. What he meant to say was that I am looking about for a buyer of my services."

"Your services, eh?" Mr. Wegg's eyes narrowed shrewdly. "Well, what d'you want for 'em?"

Barnaby shrugged his shoulders. "Crudely put, Mr. Wegg. I'll answer with another question—a bit crude too. What is the Bradley account worth to you?"

Mr. Wegg was nonplused and showed it. "Jim said you—you just wanted a job," he repeated helplessly.

Barnaby flicked the ash from his cigar.

"You secured the Bradley account through no merit of your own, but through the misfortune of its late custodians. You too will presently lose it unless you have some one who understands the singular complexities of Mr. James Bradley."

Mr. Wegg was thoughtful. He had been highly successful in his business. That success was by no means an accident. Applied to specific problems—particularly if they were objective—his brain moved rapidly and well. Evidently Jim Bullitt had been entirely mistaken in this young man. How he had made the mistake might be ascertained at a later date. Steps, more immediate, must be taken. Beyond all doubt, this chap Lamb was queer. But equally beyond all doubt he appeared notably acute. It was not at all beyond the realm of possibility that some other agency would find his acuteness worth an investment. He made a rapid computation in his head. Then, with a smile become suddenly warm, he looked up at Barnaby.

"How about five thousand?"

With an iron effort of will, Barnaby forced himself to look dubious. "To start?"

"Hum—yes—to start."

Barnaby felt like fainting. He dared not return Mr. Wegg's interrogative gaze. Instead, he stared at his cigar, struggling to retain mastery of his emotions. He wished Peter were at his side to counsel him. What would Peter want him to do? "Remember, lad—you're a *thunderbolt!*" he fancied he could hear the old man say. And then, al-

most without volition, he found his lips moving and he was saying boldly:

"If you lost the Bradley account, I suppose I'd be on the street, eh?"

Mr. Wegg smiled wryly. Unquestionably the young man was shrewd. "Why—er—we could make some sort of agreement as to that."

"A year's contract?" said Barnaby.

"Why, yes—a year's contract."

Barnaby became thoughtful. "Bradley Brothers are in their infancy as advertisers. With proper nursing—"

Mr. Wegg's eyes sparkled. "Do you really think so?"

"I know it. And so, if I'm to play the nurse, I'll want nurse's wages."

"You mean—"

"Some sort of a bonus arrangement."

Mr. Wegg pondered, rubbing his chin.

"I guess we can fix that up," he said finally.

"I believe our relations will prove mutually profitable," said Barnaby loftily, accepting another cigar. "And now—suppose we get down to details."

It was nearly an hour later when he emerged from Mr. Wegg's private office. As he walked down the corridor, fragments of a conversation from one of the other offices arrested him. He halted, a quizzical smile on his lips.

"What experience have you had?" he heard a severe voice say.

"I was five years with—." The tremulous reply was drowned out by the sudden clatter of a typewriter.

Presently he heard the word "references." His lip curied, and he went on. But for Peter and his wisdom, he, Barnaby, might now be talking hopefully of references and experiences. It was significant that Mr. Wegg had mentioned neither.

He left the offices of Daniel Wegg, Incorporated, with a sense of profound contempt for the rest of the world and a feeling of utter amazement at himself.

He had become an actor.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

When he reached the street Barnaby made for a telephone booth. First he called up Peggy Whitredge and found her not at home. Then he made trial of Peter Wye; and, although it was not an hour at which the old

man would be likely to respond, his familiar reedy voice presently came to him over the wire.

Excitedly and with all the incoherence he had successfully avoided in his conversation with Mr. Wegg he told the old man what had transpired.

"You see, laddie, it *works*," responded Peter. "He can who thinks he can—and all that. High potential breaks down resistance. Didn't I tell you?"

"Think of it, Peter—five thousand a year!" broke in Barnaby. "And a bonus!"

Peter was silent for a moment. Then he said. "Remember lad, the words of a very wise man when he drove out demons: 'See thou tell no one!'"

"Yes," said Barnaby, not quite understanding.

"No one," repeated the old man earnestly. "This is a secret between you and me. Understand? *No one!*"

All at once Barnaby understood, and he hung up the receiver. Peter was right. No one would understand. And if one did understand, the charm would be broken. He shivered as he reflected how close he had come to breaking it. Had he told Peggy and had she laughed—as quite certainly she would have laughed—the golden mantle would fall from him in rags and he would be the miserable "Ba" Lamb again.

He wondered, as he threaded his way through the crowds on the street and studied the faces seething around him, how many knew old Peter's secret.

No, he would not tell Peggy—not yet. But that decision did not preclude his seeing her, surely. And though he might not reveal the cause of his transformation, that did not preclude his showing her the fact.

A new thought occurred to him as he stood before his mirror that evening, arranging his necktie. Confidence was conqueror of men, as Peter had insisted. People usually yielded to those who expected yielding. They often had merely to make their expectation clear. There was the condition precedent, without doubt. By speech and action and appearance, the will to dominate must be made evident.

He studied the reflection of his cravat with unwonted care. It was a little worn. That led him to a consideration of his suit. It, too, was a little worn. His face fell. He was not ill looking, he told himself dispassionately. In fact, if regular features and a

clear skin counted for anything, he was a trifle above the average. His carriage was good and his chest had depth to it. But his appearance, as a whole, was undistinguished—there was no question about that. Suddenly he made a decision. A man might be so thoroughly shabby as to achieve distinction. He might stand out by the very reason of his shabbiness. But it would not do to be only a trifle shabby. Two kinds of men were memorable—Beau Brummel and the millionaire eccentric who dispensed with socks.

Barnaby nodded sagely to himself. Then he chuckled. It took too much money to do without socks! A mere five-thousand-dollar man would have to have noteworthy socks and plenty of them! He took off his everyday necktie, gazed at it regretfully for a moment, and dropped it in the wastebasket. Then he put on the expensive knitted blue that had been reserved, hitherto, only for occasions of special moment and knotted it with great care.

When he had finished and had exhausted the possibilities of the whisk broom and rag, he looked at himself again. He was not satisfied. "If you were hit by a street car," he said to his reflection, "the papers would speak of you as 'neatly dressed.' That will not do, old boy. Never! You've got to be so well dressed that they'll never speak of your clothes at all. They'll call you a 'prominent clubman!'"

His eye fell upon one of the volumes of his Memory Course, lying open on his writing table. He was days behind in his schedule and he realized with a little shock that the fact did not trouble him. He shrugged his shoulders as he closed the book and put it with its companions on the shelf. His passion for improvement was quite dead. His interest had been diverted to other channels with a suddenness and entirety that still baffled him. His lips formed the refrain of an old tune: "What's Going to Happen When He Goes the Other Way?"

He patted the shoulder of an imaginary figure at the writing table.

"Good night, Mr. Lamb," he whispered. "Have a good time with your books. You're an honest man and I'm a swindler. But the world raises monuments to swindlers and it puts you on the street. Good night, you poor, deluded simpleton!"

He had not apprised Peggy of his coming. He did not know just why he had

not. On the one hand, he wanted to see her alone. But on the other, he was quite resigned to the probability that he would have to share her society with some one else—Douglas Mackenzie, perhaps. As a spectator of events he rather looked forward to the first encounter of Mr. Mackenzie and the singular Mr. Lamb.

As Wynne, the butler, opened the door in response to his ring, Barnaby experienced the emotion that an actor experiences when he hears his cue. He threw back his shoulders and his face assumed the mask of courteous condescension which aristocrats appeared to reserve for menials. He nodded briefly to Wynne and then, chuckling inwardly, tossed coat and hat to him with the gesture he had often seen upon the stage. He regretted that he lacked a stick.

Wynne's surprise, if he experienced any, was brief. He had performed his function for too many years to be affected by subtle variations in manner. During working hours he was professional to the exclusion of the human. He hung up Barnaby's coat and went to announce his presence to Miss Whitridge. That done, he withdrew below stairs and resumed his interrupted perusal of the evening papers.

Barnaby found nothing lacking in the warmth of Peg's greeting. But momentarily it almost made him lose his new-found poise. It was relatively easy to play his part before Wegg or Wynne the butler. It was easy because he had found that by merely trying he could despise them with great thoroughness. But it was very different with Peggy. He had worshiped so long at her feet that one look into her eyes sufficed to throw him back to the point from which he had started. He felt himself flushing; his tongue, instead of being the vehicle for the smooth rhetoric he had contemplated, uttered only banalities and he was conscious of an awkwardness, physical as well as mental, that numbed him. And then, again, he seemed to hear Peter's voice, repeating the injunction that he tell no one his secret. Secrecy was the essence of his program's success. He must play the rôle to all the world or not at all. The world must include Peggy.

He looked at her, become singularly contemplative.

"Peg," he said, "you can answer a question for me. Have the various and sundry proffers of—"

Her face clouded. "Oh, Binny—please!"

He smiled faintly. "I'm not going to propose again, Peggy dear. I merely wanted to know if your refusal to be intrigued by the thought was dictated, wholly or in part, by considerations of a nature—shall we say, financial?"

The fluency with which he spoke, almost suggesting rehearsal, surprised and puzzled her. "What do you mean?"

"I mean—well, on numerous occasions I have offered you a love which was penniless. Suppose—suppose I had offered you a love decently bolstered with the where-withal?"

"Oh—so that's it."

"Well?"

"You mean—would I marry you if you were well off?"

"No—merely 'doing well,' as they say."

She was conscious that he was watching her narrowly and she wondered why. It made her hesitate over her response. Then she looked up into his eyes with the candor that was as much a part of her as her voice.

"Binny dear, I'm surprised that you ask me that question," she said quietly. "You ought to know what I think of money. If the man who makes me love him comes to me with his pockets full of gold, that won't stand in the way, I assure you. But if he comes to me quite penniless, that won't stand in the way, either. I have enough for two."

"In short—it's the *man*."

"Of course. It's the woman with you, isn't it?"

Instead of answering, he pressed her with another question. "And the man—you are waiting for him to appear?"

As if in response to his query there came the faint ring of a bell, somewhere in the house, followed by the sound of the front door closing. A moment later Wynne appeared. "Mr. Douglas Mackenzie," he announced.

Barnaby's lips twisted in a wry laugh. "Ah, he comes—and so opportunely!"

Peggy colored slightly. "He may think the same of you."

A new note came into Barnaby's voice. "No, Peggy," he said softly. "He has never worried about *me*. But he's going to!"

"Behave yourself, now, Binny." She gave him a playful thrust.

It angered him enormously. It indicated just how seriously she took the threat he had suggested so darkly. It was too evident that he inspired her with no sort of alarm.

She did not believe him capable of the unexpected. Well, he thought, gritting his teeth savagely, she would presently be enlightened.

Peggy went forward, hand outstretched, as Mr. Mackenzie entered the room.

"Hello, Douglas." She welcomed him with the open friendliness that made so much of her charm. "You know Mr. Lamb, of course," she added quickly, as the newcomer's answer indicated consciousness of no presence other than her own.

He turned, stared blankly at Barnaby and then nodded with a polite smile. "I'm very glad to meet you," he said suavely.

Barnaby inclined his head. "It must be a great affliction," he murmured sympathetically. "But really, I should think you would wear glasses, Mr. Mackenzie."

Mackenzie's jaw dropped. "I—I beg your pardon——"

"Or perhaps it's merely absent-mindedness," went on Barnaby smoothly. "It must submit you to many embarrassments."

Mackenzie realized suddenly that something more than indifference was demanded of him. His face grew red.

"What in the world are you driving at?" he demanded explosively.

"I was really driving at nothing," answered Barnaby. "I was referring merely to your regrettable shortness of vision."

"I'm not shortsighted!"

"Oh—aren't you?" Barnaby's surprise seemed genuine. "Then there must be some other explanation."

"Explanation of *what*?" Mackenzie was extremely angry and showed it.

"Of the curious fact that despite numerous introductions, you find it impossible to recognize me."

Mackenzie flushed deeply and growled something unintelligible. Then, with a contemptuous shrug of his broad shoulders, he turned and addressed himself to the wondering Peggy.

She had made no effort to control what seemed the beginnings of a "situation," partly because she was too curious to see what Barnaby would say or do next and partly because she was too astonished for words. It was too preposterous! Here was the meek and gentle Barnaby, for whom her affection had always been more than a little maternal, being suavely and deliberately insulting to Douglas Mackenzie—a man

whose ability to awe the world was seldom questioned.

She did not hear what Mackenzie was saying. Her eyes were fixed in fascination upon Barnaby. For the first time in their long friendship, she was not sure what he was going to do next. When she saw him hold out his hand to her, she was quite prepared for a new shock.

"Good night, Peggy," he said. "You are obliged by the social code to endure such tedium as fate has set for you. No such obligation rests upon me. Good night." Then, with an ironic smile, he turned to the other man. "Good night to you, also, Mr. Mackenzie. I trust that at our next encounter you will admit either that you know me and dislike me intensely or that your eyesight is bad."

Peggy, hastening to cover whatever reply the outraged Mackenzie might make, urged Barnaby, in nervously conventional phrases, to tarry on his going. He merely laughed outright.

"You haven't the slightest desire for me to remain," he jeered. "You're altogether too afraid of the consequences."

Before she could make response to that thrust he had bowed and was gone.

Mackenzie's relief was evident. "Your friend talks like an—an actor," he said with a thinly veiled sneer.

"Yes," answered Peggy, staring thoughtfully into the fireplace. "I think he is one."

Barnaby, making his way homeward, would have been interested in that remark. He walked briskly, whistling disjointed fragments of old songs. At intervals he laughed aloud, so that passers-by turned to stare. The young man appeared highly amused at something. He was.

He tried to be fair to Mackenzie. It was quite possible that the man really had not remembered him. There had, in fact, been no reason why he should. But there was a reason now! Barnaby chuckled gleefully. Contrast was the thing! The blue jay's song was raucous and his habits execrable—but everybody knew the blue jay.

He was too immersed in his thoughts to pay any heed to his surroundings, which in that neighborhood and at that hour was unwise. The well-lighted avenue was behind him and he was striking west toward the boarding house he called home. As he passed an alley, a figure emerged from the

darkness. The nearest street lamp was fifty yards away. Something gleamed in the darkness and there came a command, "Stick 'em up, buddy!" uttered in a singularly soft tone.

Barnaby lost no time in complying. He knew he ought to be frightened, but curiously enough he was not. Prior to his rebirth he had been frightened of everything. Now he declined to be afraid of anything.

"Where's your pocketbook?" demanded the highwayman, the fingers of his left hand playing through Barnaby's pockets.

Barnaby chuckled. "You've picked the wrong man, partner. I haven't any. Neither have I jewelry, except a supposedly fourteen-carat collar button."

"Shut up!" growled the bandit.

Barnaby went on, unmoved. "My watch, furthermore, is an Ingersoll—nickel where it is not baser!"

The stranger's search was evidently corroborative. "You *are* flat, aren't you," he said with evident disappointment.

"Not quite," answered Barnaby cheerfully. "You missed a quarter in my vest pocket. I had intended to spend it on an egg sandwich."

"Keep your quarter!" The man turned away.

"I see," said Barnaby. "You do business only in a large way. As an avocation, no doubt?"

The highwayman seemed to change his mind. "Gimme that quarter," he snapped savagely. "If you hadn't talked about egg sandwiches, you could 'a' kept it. But, I'm hungry!"

"Help yourself—or let me take my hands down. They're tired, anyway."

The man's answering laugh had a strangely musical quality. "You're the blamedest nut I've run into!" he declared.

"You'll remember me, won't you?"

"Sure I'll remember you. Why?" The man sounded puzzled.

"Oh, nothing. I merely wanted to be sure, that's all. You see, I had an idea. I tried it out once this evening; and now I'm trying it again on you."

The man started to edge away into the darkness, hesitated a moment, and came back. "I guess you're bughouse for fair. Here—take your quarter. I don't want it."

"Wait a minute," urged Barnaby. "Don't go. Let's analyze the matter. It appears to have something to do with egg sand-

wiches. I was about to invest the money thus; and you proposed to do likewise. Well, there's enough for *two* egg sandwiches. The quarter *was* mine. Now it is yours. But in five minutes it would have belonged to neither of us. Suppose we consider that quarter as jointly owned. Let us go together and turn it over to the Greek on the corner."

The man laughed unpleasantly. "You want to get me pinched, eh? Nothin' doin'!"

"Not at all," insisted Barnaby. "You'd be surprised if you knew how much I sympathized with you. The fact is, I've never been intimate with a holdup man. I should like to know you better."

"You'd tip me off to the first bull you saw." The man seemed a little undecided.

"And suppose I did? The fellow would either be unpleasant as regards my sanity or he'd take you in charge. In either event, I would suffer. Come on. Tell me your adventures. I'm by way of being something of a holdup man myself!"

The man still hesitated. Then he laughed. "All right, I'll come. You're a game guy, right enough. I'll take a chance you're square, too."

"I'm not game at all," answered Barnaby. "I'm merely indifferent. However, it's results that count. Haven't you found it so?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about."

It was not until they were seated at a glass-topped table in the brightly lighted lunch room and the beneficent effects of a well-made egg sandwich had made themselves felt that the stranger lost his reserve.

Under the light he proved to be a young man of about Barnaby's age and, except for a huge scar on the left side of his face, which showed clearly through his three days' growth of beard and gave a grotesque distortion to his eyes and mouth, he was not ill favored. His voice, which had so attracted Barnaby at first, was soft, with a hint of the South in it.

He would volunteer nothing, however, so Barnaby pressed him. "Where did you get that scar?" he asked.

The man was silent for a moment, staring at the empty plate before him. Then his lip curled. "I wasn't payin' attention to where I was goin'. I—I ran into somethin'."

"You must have been going pretty fast."

"No, but *it* was."

"What was *it*?"

"Well, I'm not absolutely sure, but I *think* it was a one-pounder shell."

"Oh," said Barnaby softly. "You were overseas, then. What outfit?"

"Black Jack's Own," was the curt reply. "Twenty-eighth Infantry, D Company."

"Regular before the war?"

"No. Joined up in seventeen."

"Tell me the whole yarn, won't you?" Barnaby's interest was sincere and the man's reserve slipped away.

"There's a nickel of our quarter left," he said with a smile. "Let's match for a cup o' Java."

"It's yours without matching if you'll tell me how you got into——"

"Ssh!" warned the man, glancing around furtively.

"Your present profession," finished Barnaby.

"Well," said the stranger, "it came easy enough. I was a clerk in a general store in—down in Virginia. They said they needed soldiers, so I joined up and went over in July. I stopped one that winter and got laid up for a month or so. Then I went back and got along fine until we were mopping up at Montfaucon, down in the Argonne, where I got another gold stripe. That did me in. I'd got a touch of gas, too, so they kept me in the hospital for a devil of a while. When I got out, there wasn't much to me an' I couldn't work steady. I didn't have any trade, either. Then they began to fire help all over the country an' it was hard to get any sort of a job. Well, there was one trade I knew. I knew how to use a gun an' I wasn't afraid o' gettin' hurt—so when I couldn't make a livin' one way, why I reckoned I'd just make it another."

"Is it a good living?" asked Barnaby softly.

The man grinned. "Well, I'm in business for myself. I'm not workin' for anybody."

"You've got a sense of humor. What's your name?"

The man's face hardened. "It's a good name where I come from. I ain't usin' it here."

Barnaby pursed his lips reflectively. "I suppose, when you tried to get a job, you asked for something to do—anything at all—didn't you?"

"Of course! There wasn't anything I wasn't willin' to do."

"Exactly. You even begged for work, didn't you?"

"I'll say I did!"

"Just so. And everybody was very decent

about it—but somehow, there wasn't any job. I know."

"What do you know about it?" The man was frankly incredulous.

"Well, if you had held me up——"

"Ssh!"

"Pardon. If you had *met* me last night instead of this, you'd have found me out of a job—and none in sight, either. But I found a way."

"Employment agency?"

Barnaby shook his head. "Simpler than that. When you want anything, say so. Don't *ask* for it."

"I don't get you."

"It's simple. If a man stops me on the street and says he's hungry, I give him a quarter if I feel like it and nothing if I don't. But if he pokes a gun into my ribs, I give him everything I have."

"Your idea's to hold a man up for a job, eh?"

"Don't laugh! That's exactly what I do mean. If you *ask* for a job, maybe he gives it to you and maybe he doesn't. And if he does give it to you, it's likely to be a pretty small job. But if you get to him and show him where it's to *his* interest to give you a job—and a good one, too—he won't argue any more than I did when you demonstrated that it was to my interest to stick my hands up!"

"You *are* nutty, aren't you!" exclaimed the stranger.

Barnaby shook his head vehemently. "I'll prove to you how nutty I am."

"How?"

"By doing what you've proved you can't do yourself. I don't know your name. I don't know your habits. I don't know what you can do. But I *think* you're honest. I *think* you've got a logical mind. And I'm quite certain you've got a sense of humor. Equipped with that, I'll have a job for you within twenty-four hours!"

"Don't wake me up," sighed the ex-soldier dreamily.

"Indeed I will wake you up!" cried Barnaby. "Now then, you've got to give me your name—some sort of name, anyway."

The man frowned, shaking his head. Then he chuckled. "How about Smith—John Smith?"

"No! No! It's got at least to *sound* real."

For the first time the stranger laughed without restraint. He laughed so loudly

that the waiter, dozing by the cigar counter, was roused from his somnolence.

"What's so funny?" demanded Barnaby with some asperity.

"Don't you think it's funny that a name like that should happen to be my real one?"

"Oh! And you were afraid to tell it? My dear chap, you're perfectly safe. But—haven't you got a middle name?"

"Yes—Andrew."

"Won't do. John Andrew Smith—J. Andrew Sm— No, you've got to have a decent name."

"It's a perfectly good name. I'm satisfied," said Smith with some truculence.

"But it isn't distinctive!" complained Barnaby.

"That's my fault—not the name's."

"Maybe you're right," admitted Barnaby with reluctance. "It makes your job harder, though. Now then, in general, what do you know most about?"

"Storekeeping, I guess."

"What kind of stores?"

"General stores. You know—or maybe you never lived in a small town?"

"Born in one. Yes, I know the kind. Everything from tacks to tires. Couldn't be better!" He slapped his thigh in enthusiasm. "Smith, if I don't have you on somebody's pay roll by to-morrow night, I'm playing the wrong system, that's all. And it—"

"What's the system?" Smith spoke with the tolerance usually exhibited for mental debility.

Barnaby ignored the question. "There's one thing more," he said. "You may have to wear that impossible name, but you can't wear that impossible overcoat!"

"I suppose you'd like me to wear my other one—the one with the sealskin collar?" asked Smith.

"How about your suit? You could do without a coat if your suit's halfway decent."

For reply, Smith threw back his overcoat.

Barnaby whistled ruefully. "You *are* ragged, aren't you. You couldn't get by with that—never in the world." He tapped thoughtfully on the table, his forehead wrinkled in perplexity. Then he looked up and shot a searching look at his companion.

"How honest are you, anyway?" he demanded bluntly.

"You ought to know," answered Smith with a grin.

"Oh, I don't mean *that*," exclaimed Barnaby with impatience. "I mean if somebody trusted you—if somebody cared—well, if a fellow bet on you, what would his chances be?"

The ex-soldier's face suddenly went hard and his scar was sinister.

"Say, buddy, don't you think you've kidded me long enough? I'm bad," he said harshly. "I'm bad all the way through. If you had any jack, I'd take it from you now. An' if you put up a fight, I'd just as soon bump you off as not. I tell you, I'm bad!"

The wrinkles of doubt left Barnaby's face. "That's fine," he said cheerfully. "I wasn't quite sure about you. But you're all right. And I'm not kidding you. I want to experiment with you, maybe—but you won't lose anything by it. Now listen. I'm not exactly rich, but I've saved up a little money and I'm willing to invest it in an idea. Tomorrow morning, you and I are going downtown and we're going to dress you up. I'll pay the bill. Then I'll show you how to get a job and you can pay me back, with a reasonable interest attached, when you've got the money. What do you say?"

"What do *you* get out of it?" demanded Smith shrewdly.

Barnaby smiled.

"I never gambled before in my life. I always wondered why men did. But I want to begin. I don't know anything about horse racing. But I've got some ideas about human nature—new ideas. I want to take a man and train him and see how fast he can run. If I lose, I'll learn something. Whereas, if I win—well, I'll learn a lot more. When you know me better you'll find out that I'm a great fellow for learning things. And I'm always interested in taking up a new subject."

Smith smiled cynically. "I can't see where *I* risk anything. If you're fool enough to bet on a down-and-out—"

"You miss the point," cried Barnaby earnestly. "I'm not going to bet on *you* at all—except incidentally. I'm going to bet on my judgment."

"Of me?"

"No. Of one Mr. Daniel Wegg."

"Who's he?"

Barnaby chuckled. "He's the man who's going to give you a job!"



Dare, Dare, Double Dare!

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Trail of the Spider," "Ten Thousand, You Said?" Etc.

His friends bet him five thousand that he couldn't do it and escape jail. With a two-dollar bill and the unwitting aid of Aunt Hilda he got their money—and Bob Anderson's goat! Marion, of course, approved.

BECAUSE his fellows dealt so largely in superlatives in their business enterprises, manufacturing what they advertised as super-hats, automobiles, tinware, trunks and books—for the Calumet Club boasted one or two popular authors—Billy Burgess was forced to accept a superlative proposition in the form of a wager. This was when Anderson, the young and affluent "Aluminum King" offered to bet a thousand dollars that Billy could not leave Chicago with two dollars in his pocket, travel to Kansas City without doing any work or begging by the way, burglarize a residence, bank or post office and return to Chicago with the proceeds of his nefarious operations—these not to total in value less than a thousand dollars—and do it all in a month's time.

Billy shook his head.

"I'll admit I need the money, but a thousand wouldn't tempt me even to look at Kansas City. Take another drink, Bob, and think it over. Tell you what I will do! If you chaps will make it a thousand apiece—appoint a stakeholder, give him your checks now and let him decide whether I have made

good or not, I'll go you. That'll be five thousand. I won't turn a wheel for less."

"Oh, you could get there and back on the two bucks," said Pason, the teller of the First National, "but as to robbing a residence and getting away with the job—I know you're a nifty little explorer, yet I doubt that you ever did any second-story work."

"Thanks for the flowers, especially at this season. No, I never climbed a porch. You see, I've always felt that the bankers had the edge on me there. Besides, it's not dignified to shin up a veranda post. Looks a lot better to sit in a cage and take it away from 'em."

"Billy is hedging," declared Anderson.

"Not on your aluminum! I'm game. A thousand apiece."

"Against what? What do we get out of it—whether you win or lose?" queried Porter, the automobile salesman.

"Get out of it! Man, you'll get a stronger kick out of it than you will out of that high ball you're philandering with. Suppose I win? Then I earn the money—every cent of

it! Suppose I lose? Then you still have your money and the satisfaction of kidding me the rest of my life. Anyway, it was Bob's proposition—not mine. You guys are always picking on me, trying to get me to furnish excitement for you. Horse racing is dead. Automobile racing is the bunk. You have all the liquor that is good for you and there isn't a new show in town. Oh, I'm onto your curves! I'm the goat. But I'm no cheap goat."

Anderson toyed with his fountain pen poised above a pink check. "Come one, come all!" he said, grinning. "Who says Billy Burgess' word isn't worth five thousand bucks?"

"Not in written form," declared Billy. "But morally speaking—millions!"

"And I suppose, if you were to put it through," said Porter, "you'd get a story out of it and sell it for as much as you'd win on the wager. Oh, well, I sold ten cars to the Standard Stove Company this morning. I'll risk a thousand on little Billy's nerve. But say, old top—I won't go bail if you do get pinched. None of us will—eh, boys?"

"Not a cent! It's Billy's funeral from start to finish."

"Noble consensus of opinion," scoffed Billy. "Go on, do your worst!"

Ames, or Ames, Scott & Armitage, who was the quiet member of the coterie but whose gameness was never questioned, pulled a Russia-leather check book from his pocket. "I'll come in. And I'll lay you another thousand, on the side, that Billy makes good."

"Got you!" declared Anderson. "How about you, Dunton?"

Herbert Dunton, one of the charter members of the club, who hadn't taken in what had been going on, glanced up from his paper.

"Red Cross or Russia?" he queried. "If I must, I'd rather subscribe to some local charity."

"Tell you all about it later. It's local, all right! And if it isn't charity, it's a pretty sure bet that it will be when Billy gets back." Anderson outlined the proposition briefly. Dunton sighed.

"I'd give a thousand to get rid of him," he said, smiling.

Dunton and young Billy Burgess were inseparables; Dunton, quiet, reserved, genial; Billy, active, outspoken and always "starting something"—often enough merely by

his presence. For Billy had been many things in his varied career—reporter, story writer, railroad man, stock salesman, photographer and hobo.

His university record had been brief and brilliant—so brilliant in fact that he dazzled the eyes of the faculty until they "couldn't see him" as a student. Neither the university nor Billy regretted the parting. With the itch for wandering oppressing him, he spent two years gratuitously inspecting the roadbeds of various transcontinental railroads. Then he buckled down to work. Recently he had found himself as a writer of short stories. He was one of the few individuals whom the Calumet Club actually invited into their animated precincts. Billy was popular. And he was usually broke.

Simpson, the fifth member of the luncheon party at the Calumet that noon, said that he was willing to hazard a thousand dollars on the issue of the adventure, but he declined to countenance the burglary clause. "Unless," he asserted as a compromise, "unless Billy is willing to return whatever he has stolen to the owner. And he wouldn't risk that."

"Sure I would!" chirped Billy. "Of course, that will be after you fellows have seen it and approximated its value. Understand, Bob stipulates that whatever I lift must be worth at least one thousand dollars. Now seeing that you chaps have been so darned careful to stipulate all the fussy little details, I'm going to be a little fussy myself. I will return whatever I happen to swipe to its owner—providing you fellows all agree as to its actual value; jewels, money, clothing or whatever it happens to be."

"There's a joker in that clause," said Porter, frowning.

"Explain yourself," said Bob Anderson.

"All right! Now you just about know that I could leave here with two round dollars in my jeans and make it to Kansas City. That's old stuff. What you fellows are betting against is the chance that I'll burglarize a house or store, get loot worth at least a thousand and fetch it back here to Chicago without getting caught. You'd like to see me peeking through the bars of the hoosegow and imploring you to pass in a few decent smokes. Oh, I know this bunch! And say, don't I take all the chances while you chaps loaf around town here, clipping coupons and piling up the profits? No. I won't turn a wheel unless you agree to set

an actual valuation on whatever I steal—that is, within at least a hundred or so. And if you do, I'm to return it. If you can't, I'm to keep it. Now go ahead and tear up your checks. There used to be some real sporting blood in this club."

"Supposing you swiped an Oriental rug," suggested Dunton.

"You've bought enough of 'em to know what they are worth," said Billy.

"Or a phonograph," suggested Porter.

"Or a pair of antique portières." This from Simpson.

Billy pretended to consider these suggestions. Suddenly his face lighted. "I'll tell you what! I'll agree to steal something that every man here values highly, knows a lot about and in fact is as familiar with as he is with his own right hand. And, of course, I am out of the judging. So far I have not been able to afford the special luxury I have in mind."

"Fair enough!" exclaimed Anderson.

"Pool the dough. Pason can hold the stakes," said Ames.

Ames took the five checks and gave them to Pason.

Billy grinned. "Kiss them good-by. Pason is a receiving teller."

"When is this thing to be decided?" queried Simpson.

"Within a month from to-day," declared Bob Anderson. "We lose our little 'Bright Eyes' for a month."

"Or longer," added Billy. "Judging by the cheerful manner in which you parted with your simoleons, you must consider it worth the money to get everlastingly rid of me."

"We haven't parted with the cash, yet," asserted Porter.

"And you've got to come back here to prove up," said Anderson. "Don't overlook that."

Dunton rose. The party broke up, Billy gravely shaking hands with each member.

"I know it's sudden," he said. "But I'm leaving for Kansas City on the four-thirty this afternoon. By the way, Bob, just why did you specify Kansas City?"

Bob Anderson grinned as he swung into his light overcoat.

"It just happens that I am bound thitherward myself," he said. "Going to open a new branch in that town. I expect to be there two or three weeks. I hope you make it that far, at least. I want to be there when

you pull that burglary. Wouldn't miss it for a farm."

"What train?"

"I had figured on taking the eight-fifteen. But as you have specified the four-thirty, I have a mind to go along and see how you do it—on two dollars."

"Suit yourself. I don't say I'll make it clear through on that train, but I'm going to start on the four-thirty."

"Nervy child! Well, I may see you soon, then."

Billy Burgess hied him to his rooms, packed a suit case, attired himself with the care of one anticipating a comfortable journey in a Pullman, tucked a two-dollar bill in his pocket, filled his cigarette case and locked the front door.

At four-twenty-five that afternoon he purchased a ticket to Peru, Illinois, which left him some small change out of his two dollars. Unless some unlooked-for good fortune came his way, his real journey would begin at Peru. He knew better than to attempt to beat his way out of the Chicago yards. But Peru, between there and Rock Island, would be a fairly safe town from which to board a freight, if necessary. He was prepared to dispense with his suit case in the event of having to hop on a freight—or unexpectedly off—or should he need immediate funds—in which latter case he could sell it and its contents.

At just four-twenty-eight Bob Anderson, followed by a red cap laden with expensive hand baggage, boarded the train. Billy, unobserved, saw him and grinned to himself. Bob would undoubtedly look him up after the train started. And Bob did, finding Billy in the smoker, reading a current magazine. Bob sat with him and they chatted casually. Presently the conductor entered the forward end of the car. Billy pulled out his ticket.

"I get a stop-over on this," he declared, laughing. "Understand they've cut out the stop-over clause from all tickets, this year."

Anderson, who traveled much, argued that such was not the case. To prove his assertion he produced his own ticket.

"Read it yourself," he said. "Only don't forget that I'm handing it to you to read, not to keep."

Billy studied the long ticket thoughtfully, turned it over, frowned and just before he gave it back tore a small piece from one corner of it, which he tucked in his vest

pocket. The conductor took up the tickets, retaining Billy's and handing Anderson's back to him.

"You're correct about that stop-over clause," said Billy.

"And you're up to some deviltry," declared Anderson. "You're altogether too meek and lowly this lovely autumn afternoon. Do you intend to eat, this journey?"

"Well, rather! Got a half dozen apples in my suit case; and if it comes to the worst—is there a diner on this train?"

"Didn't notice."

"You chaps with lots of mazuma never do. Now I have to notice everything—to get by. Bet you don't know the number of your berth in the sleeper."

"You're in fine shape to bet. Quit kidding, for I've got my eye on you, son."

"Oh, well—I saw the berth number on your Pullman ticket. Lower No. 11, car No. 5, when you pulled it out with your transportation ticket."

"Correct. But what has that got to do with Peru?"

"Can't tell yet, Bob. But along about Rock Island I'll let you know."

"Thanks! Say, this smoker is the limit! Good thing you aren't going any farther than Peru. You'd smother."

"Thanks for them kind words, stranger. Go on back to your bloated plush Pullman and let me cogitate a while."

"I'll do that. Meet you in Africa, Billy."

"Make it a Harvey House and buy me a meal and I'll listen to you."

"Never! The bunch would excommunicate me for aiding and abetting the party of the first part. I am merely an innocent bystander. So long, old chap!"

"The same to you, Bobby."

When the train stopped at Peru Billy Burgess did not budge from his seat in the smoker, although he had no ticket beyond that destination. Bob Anderson stepped off the Pullman and sauntered forward, curious as to whether or not Billy disembarked. But Billy did not appear. Anderson walked back and boarded his car. The train pulled out. The conductor, passing through the smoking car, paused at Billy's seat. Anticipating a request for his ticket, Billy began to go through his pockets, frowning and muttering. Finally he looked up.

"Rotten luck. First I lose my hat out of the window and then I lose my ticket. Lucky I have a cap in my suit case. That

is, I suppose I have, if that sporty stranger that tried to talk to me a while back didn't get it. Mighty nervy chap. We were just out of Chicago when he planted himself beside me and started a long-winded talk about the rotten service on this road. Asked to look at my ticket, claiming that the company had refused to allow him a stop-over privilege, at Peru. And do you know, he darned near flim-flammed me! Yes, sir, I should have known better. He handed me back his ticket for Peru and was putting my ticket in his pocket, when I realized what he was up to. And he was slick about it. Just like one of those card sharpers. I—"

"The man in the gray suit that was sitting with you gave me a ticket for Kansas City. He's in lower No. 11, car No. 5—Pullman."

"The dickens you say! He told me he bought a local ticket for Peru—that they wouldn't allow him a stop-over."

"Well, I guess you'll have to pay your fare, if you're going through," declared the conductor.

"What! And let him get away with his little game? I tell you he's a crook. Smooth, all right, but he's wrong. Hold on!" Billy withdrew his thumb and forefinger from his vest pocket. "I guess that will hold him!" he ejaculated as he handed the conductor a tiny, three-cornered bit of paper—the corner of the ticket which he had torn from Anderson's transportation while examining it. "I gave you my ticket for Kansas City," stated Billy.

The conductor looked puzzled. "You ought to have a slip for your ticket, if I took it up," he said.

"Must have lost it when I leaned out of the window. Had the whole assortment in an envelope. Say, just run through your tickets and see if mine didn't have a torn corner. I remember tearing it, when I took it from that slick stranger that asked to see it. He would have liked to hang on to it, but I was too quick for him."

"I haven't got it," declared the conductor, running over his tickets. "Something queer about this. I'll talk to the Pullman conductor."

He moved on, not satisfied with Billy's story and yet not unwilling to believe it, should more conclusive proof be available. Billy had a way with him. He had almost believed the fabrication himself when he was delivering it. He hoped to get at least as far

as Rock Island before the question was settled. He was putting mileage between Peru and his final destination, in any event. And wouldn't Bob Anderson shake the rafters when he heard the conductor's recount of the tickets!

Billy lighted a cigarette and settled back. Presently the conductor touched his shoulder.

"Man who has lower No. 11 says you are mistaken about the tickets. Says you're broke and trying to beat your way to Kansas City. The jig is up, young fellow. He has his Pullman ticket, and the slip for his transportation. You'll have to think up a new one."

"I will—and it will be a lawsuit against this company for damages, loss of time, inconvenience, slander and assault, if you so much as lay a finger on me. Didn't you find my ticket, with the corner torn off?"

"The Pullman conductor had it."

"What did I tell you?"

"That's all right. But that don't prove anything."

"Well, this little piece of paper does," declared Billy energetically. "And I'm going to hang on to it and use it as Exhibit A in the liveliest lawsuit you ever heard of—or I'll give up practicing law and go to punching—er—tickets."

"You a lawyer?"

"Well what did you suppose I was? A card sharp? No. Just go ahead. Take that smooth gentleman's word for it—and see what a lovely little hole I'll make in the passenger traffic earnings of this road when I collect damages."

"You needn't get hot about it. I'm trying to find out the right of this thing. Just cool off while I go back and talk with your friend."

"Don't you call him my friend!" thundered Billy, "or I'll sue you for defamation of character. Why, this man here"—and Billy turned round and indicated a gigantic Swede who sat behind him—"he heard that smooth guy talking to me—must have. I'll produce this gentleman as a witness. How about it, Ole? Didn't you hear me tell that man in the gray suit, a while ago, that I was going to Kansas City?"

The Swede nodded ponderously. "Aye!"

"And didn't you hear him say something about Peru?"

"Aye!"

6A P

"And didn't you see him take a ticket from me?"

"Long one—like this, aye!" said the Swede. And he measured with his huge hands. "I dank he keep that ticket."

"Well, he either kept it, conductor, or you have it, or perhaps I'm crazy. Doesn't matter. I have one witness, at least."

Still rather doubtful, the conductor departed to again interview the gentleman in the gray suit. Billy turned and handed the Swede two cigars. The big Swede winked knowingly.

Upon approaching Bob Anderson the second time, the conductor met with a rebuff. Anderson was not a bad chap in his way, but he was inclined to be arbitrary, especially with any one he thought he could bulldoze. He was engaged in conversation with a tourist when the conductor asked, politely enough, to speak with him.

"If it's about my ticket, again, I'm through with this monkey business. I bought my transportation and you collected it. Don't bother me about it again. If you do, I'll see that you get put off this run the minute I get back to Chicago."

The conductor flushed but kept his temper. He turned and strode out. There was a difference. The man in the smoker had become incensed because he felt that he had been held to account for the missing transportation. He had threatened to sue the company. This other man, in the gray suit—and he did look like a pretty smooth article, now that the conductor came to think about it—had been intolerant and had threatened to have him fired. Yes, there was a difference. The conductor's sympathies slowly veered toward Billy. He went forward, sat beside him, engaged him in conversation.

Billy, with a hurt look in his eyes, responded slowly but with subtle disingenuousness. He was all but broke. In fact he had had to content himself with his present mode of travel, much against his inclination. He was used to better things. A family misfortune had suddenly placed him in stringent circumstances. He was so worried that it was no wonder a confidence man had been able to get the best of him. As for the matter of suing the railroad—he had spoken in heat. He wished to retract, and hoped he had not so far forgotten himself as to make any personal references. If he had, he wanted to apologize. And he was quite will-

ing, now that he had thought it all over, to step off the train at Rock Island, or sooner, if the conductor felt that there was the shadow of a doubt as to his integrity.

The conductor said little, but it is a fact that he did not again approach Billy for a ticket or in any way suggest that he disembark before they reached Kansas City. Nor did Bob Anderson appear to complicate matters. Bob felt that he had better keep away or there would be no telling what Billy might spring next. He knew that Billy Burgess was capable of having him jailed if it would in any way further his own attempt to win the wager.

Next day, after a hard night in the smoker, Billy stepped into the Kansas City station and was lost in the crowd. And there is where his real work began. He had a suit case containing a change or two of under-wear and socks, his shaving things, a carton of cigarettes and a magazine. After a cup of coffee and a sandwich, he had something like thirty cents in change. And all he had to do to win the five thousand dollars was to burglarize a store or office or residence, steal enough to show a valuation of a thousand dollars or over, get out of town and make his way back to Chicago—and not get caught. That was all!

Billy kept fairly busy that afternoon. First he checked his suit case in a dinky little saloon above which were rooms to let at twenty-five cents a night. Then he meandered out and walked. He walked out to the residence section, walked about the residence section, even explored some of the alleys, familiarizing himself with these thoroughfares of the iceman, the milkman, and the garbage man. He walked until he was so tired that upon returning to his lodgings—as he called the three-foot space between his bed and the wall of his room—a glass of beer and the free lunch acted as an immediate soporific. He had no quarrel with the topographical mattress and the cotton blankets that night.

Like all lusty adventurers, he was up and out early, not searching for the Ponce de Leon or anything like that, for real hunger is a practical adviser. When your stomach is empty, keep your mind occupied, is an adage that has helped many an itinerant past many a meal hour. So Billy, while walking briskly out toward the residence section, kept his mind occupied, with the eventual result of almost forgetting his hunger.

Long before he reached the plutocratic homes of Oil, Corn and Cattle, so to speak, a child of his imagination was not alone born, but had reached maturity. As follows:

Breathes there a bo with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said:
"I have a little breakfast planned,
Down where the milkman's bottles stand;
This is my own, my special scheme,
O quart of milk, O pint of cream!"
And when his soul for reading yearned,
Who has not from the sidewalk turned,
While still alight the morning gas,
And swiped the paper from the grass?
So doth the early hobo find,
Food for his stomach and his mind.

Billy took his own advice, approaching a pint bottle of cream that stood unattended just within the gateway of a brick wall fronting one of the alleys of the rich. It was thick cream; and Billy had wisely provided a pocketful of oyster crackers filched from the free-lunch counter. So much for breakfast. Vacating the alley he strode round to the freshly barbered front lawns and chose his morning paper. A brisk walk and he arrived at the park, where he selected a bench and indulged in a smoke.

Slowly the autumn sun pierced the smoky mist of morning. Billy grew a bit drowsy. He unfolded the damp newspaper and ran over the headlines with a practiced eye. Then he turned to the page which told of the social functions of the Kansas City elect. He noted that Mr. Robert Vincent Anderson was in town and that the popular young Chicago millionaire was the guest of the Brysons.

Bob Anderson had been paying court to Miss Marion Bryson for some time. So had Billy Burgess, in his way. The Brysons were an old, wealthy family. The Andersons were a new wealthy family. Either family would have been more or less astounded to learn that Josiah Bryson's niece, Marion, was actually engaged to young Billy Burgess; but such was the case. When Billy had told his friends in the Calumet Club that he needed the money he was poignantly truthful. Yet not one of them dreamed that he had been saving every cent he could, for over a year, that he had something like six thousand dollars snug in the bank when he accepted the wager. Billy needed the extra five thousand dollars to get married on. That had been decided while Marion and he had been playing golf together on the Calumet links, a year ago.

Marion would have married Billy then if he had asked her. She knew that he had a promising future in his chosen field of story writing and that he earned a living income. She also knew that he had not saved a penny of it.

"Why don't you try and save ten thousand dollars, Billy?" she had asked. "Just try it, for fun. I shall be awfully interested in the experiment."

Billy had taken the hint. Six thousand of the ten he had safe in the bank. Bob Anderson's half-jesting wager had set Billy to thinking hard. He knew that Bob journeyed to Kansas City frequently—and knew why. One of Marion's frank letters had included the reason.

Billy folded his newspaper and stared across the autumn park.

"The rascal!" he said presently, grinning. "Tried to get me to pull this stunt, here in this town, half believing that I would do it—and hoping that I would get caught at it! No wonder he was so insistent about raising the boodle! I get my name in the papers as a housebreaker and old Bob shakes his head and weeps crocodile tears while he tells Uncle Josiah and the family that he loves me like a brother—but that he always knew I was a bit wild. Fine! He's playing the game just like he plays the aluminum game and he's made his pile at that."

An hour later Billy was in the Brysons' garage talking to the family chauffeur. He had entered through the rear wicket, for obvious reasons. He learned that Mr. Bryson would use the limousine that afternoon—that he and a guest, a Mr. Anderson, were going out somewhere to dinner. Billy also learned that Miss Marion Bryson was driving out to the golf links that afternoon in her own roadster.

Billy wrote a note and asked the chauffeur to give it to Miss Bryson. The chauffeur was tinkering with the motor of the limousine and neither he nor Billy heard Miss Marion until she was at the door of the garage. Billy raised his hat formally.

"Good morning, Miss Bryson! I was just telling Charles——"

"I think you had better let Charles get the car ready," she said, and turned to the chauffeur. "And Charles, if you have time I wish you would see that my car is ready for me at two this afternoon. The last time I took it out the motor was not hitting on all six."

Marion Bryson could have requested the chauffeur to pull down and assemble her roadster and have it ready for her at two that afternoon—and he would have tried to do it. Marion had that kind of a way about her. She turned to Billy. But he anticipated her.

"Charles, would you be kind enough to step up to the house," he said, "and ask Mr. Bryson whether he wants the car at two, or two-thirty? Mr. Anderson is a friend of mine—and I believe he said two-thirty. You needn't mention that I called."

"Yes, sir. In a minute, sir."

Charles knew his business. Marion turned to Billy and frowned her disapproval. Billy shrugged his shoulders.

"Marion, I've simply got to drive out with you to the links this afternoon. Won't you invite me? I know Bob is here—superior attraction and all that—but this is mighty serious."

"Billy! Explain."

"I'll do so!" And Billy promptly kissed her. Marion immediately became a different Marion.

"But why didn't you let me know you were coming? And why this Sherlocking with our chauffeur?"

"That's to be all told this afternoon. You'll be surprised. And Marion—things have been going splendidly with me—so well, in fact, that that's what I came down here to talk about. Dreadful scandal in the Calumet, though. You'll enjoy it." Billy smiled. "Honest Injun!" he said—an old byword of theirs, differentiating light chatter from serious.

"Then—here comes Charles—I'll expect you at two, this afternoon."

"No golf togs with me," said Billy. "But it isn't golf that I want to talk about."

At the appointed hour Billy called at the Bryson home and asked for Marion. He was a bit surprised that Mrs. Bryson pleaded a headache, sending her regrets by Marion who seemed strangely preoccupied herself. Billy saw that something was wrong, aside from the possibility of his unexpected arrival having disarranged the social plans of the family. Heretofore he had always felt that Marion's aunt liked him, or at least tolerated him as Marion's friend.

He said nothing until they were in the roadster and whizzing out toward the golf club. Marion drove, her cheeks pink from

the fresh autumn air, her gray eyes steadfastly fixed on the road. Not until they were well out of town did she speak and then only when Billy asked her if his failure to appear in golf togs really made any difference.

"Don't be silly!" she said. "It isn't togs. It's Bob Anderson."

"Did he forget his golfing regalia, also?"

"Billy Burgess, I'll not listen to another word about golf. I'm not going to the links. And I don't want to talk."

"You don't have to, Marion. I'll talk. Bobby been pressing another suit?"

Marion smiled in spite of herself. "Not another—the same old suit. Aunty seems to be literally throwing me at his head. Oh, it's quite understandable! I'm the poor relation—and Mr. Anderson is the aluminum prince. Disgustingly wealthy. Did you coin that phrase?"

"But Marion, it isn't really serious?"

"Yes—it is. Aunty tried her best to arrange the afternoon for me. She actually suggested that Mr. Anderson was an enthusiastic golfer—at luncheon, when she knew that Uncle Josiah had already arranged for that trip to the foundry. Aunty's headache is not entirely imaginary. She told me, just after luncheon, that she was terribly disappointed in me."

"It's too darned bad. But cheer up, Marion. Your faithful William is here to protect and—"

"But why are you here? You haven't explained."

"Then let's drive to some spot where we can have a quiet chat. There's a road that looks interesting—and it's not traveled much."

Marion swung the car into the crossroad and sped down its winding vistas until they came to a grove of autumn cottonwoods. She stopped the car. Billy turned to her.

"Marion, before I tell you what brought me down here, I am going to ask you to keep a promise you made me—nearly a year ago."

"In Chicago?" queried Marion, flushing.

"Yes, Marion. We understand each other. I have done pretty well this past year. I haven't saved that ten thousand yet, but I have saved six—and I expect to have the balance when we get back to Chicago."

"But—Billy!"

"And they're not going to throw you at Bob Anderson's head again." Billy put his arm round her. "Because, we're going to

get married just as soon as I can get the license—this evening. You said you were 'a poor relation' or something like that. So am I; but your wedding present from me is not going to be aluminum. You said you had faith in me. Great Scott, Marion, do you think I could ever let you lose that faith? I didn't intend telling you the whole story till later. But now that Bob has shown his hand, I am going to tell you just what kind of a friend he is to me."

And Billy told her of the wager in the Calumet Club, of Anderson's apparently casual decision to go to Kansas City at once; in fact, he told every detail of the matter, including the stipulation in regard to his taking not more than two dollars for expenses.

"That's the way with that bunch," Billy concluded. "They thought they would have some fun at my expense—kind of make me the goat. But Bob was serious about it, with all his kidding. He specified that I must burglarize some one in Kansas City. Didn't mention any other town. And really, Marion, that was one reason why I took him up. I thought he was up to something—and it seems I was correct."

Marion turned and gazed at Billy's eager face. She smiled. "Billy, have you had luncheon to-day?"

"Don't I look happy?"

"Have you had luncheon?"

"Well—no."

"Then you're going to—with me—at the clubhouse." Slowly Marion drew off her glove.

Billy glanced at her shapely white hand. Then he seized it. "First time you've ever worn it—in public?"

Marion nodded as she withdrew her hand from his and gazed at the engagement ring. "I think," she said softly, "that it had something to do with aunty's headache."

In a half hour they were seated at one of the little tables in the clubhouse, both enjoying their luncheon, for Marion confessed that she also had eaten nothing since breakfast. After luncheon Marion excused herself and while Billy loafed in the smoking room, she interviewed the club steward, who had the clerk make out a statement of club dues and incidentals against Miss Marion Bryson. Marion paid it, writing a check for one hundred dollars in excess of the bill. And once more on the road, with Billy driving, she tucked the money in his coat pocket.

Billy immediately stopped the car. But Marion told him to drive on.

Then, because she was Marion, she could not promise to meet him that evening at eight o'clock; nor did she invite him to dinner, which would have been quite consistent, as he had often dined at the Brysons'. However, Billy insisted that he would call at eight.

"There's a dandy little trunk on the back of this roadster," he declared. "You know I have never motored from Kansas City to Chicago. It could be done."

Marion said nothing and Billy was happy. There was no protest when he drove into town and stopped at the city hall. He was barely in time to secure the license. When he rushed out he was dumfounded. The roadster was gone. He glanced wildly up and down the street, oblivious to the fact that a newsboy was trying to speak to him.

"Hey!" called the boy, "if you're the guy that drove up in that red speed buggy with the swell dame, I was to say to you that she couldn't wait because she had a whole lot of somethin' to get ready before eight o'clock. She give me a dollar."

"You saved my life!" declared Billy. "Here's another dollar."

"And now," muttered Billy as he turned and walked down the street, "to find the obliging parson. Guess I'll grab a directory."

With the stealth of an actual second-story worker, Billy Burgess entered the alley back of the Bryson home and almost had heart failure when a man in uniform stepped from the shadows and watched him. It proved to be Charles, the chauffeur, however, and he gestured up the alley.

"I was keeping my eye on Miss Bryson's car," said Charles. "Seems she left it in the alley here when she got back this afternoon. Mebby you'll keep your eye on it a while, sir, for I'm due at the Witchita Hotel in twenty minutes."

"Go right ahead, Charles. Going to pick up Mr. Bryson and his guest?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll bet you ten dollars the limousine doesn't break down somewhere between the Witchita and here."

"Going or coming, sir?"

"Coming back, of course. Here's the ten."

Charles tucked the bill in his pocket.

"Good luck, sir. You'll excuse me if I say that Mr. Anderson is a cheap skate, sir." And Charles promptly withdrew to the garage.

Billy found the roadster parked just past the rear gate to the Bryson grounds. He turned on the little instrument-board light. A suit case was strapped on top of the trunk. Billy walked round the car, feeling of the tires. He glanced at his watch. It was five minutes past eight. He walked back and entered the grounds. Charles was running the limousine from the garage. He stopped the motor.

"Forgot to tell you, sir. Miss Marion is in the drawing-room, alone."

Billy went back to the roadster, stepped into it and drifted down the alley. He swung round the corner, switched on the headlights, swung round another corner and stopped in front of the Bryson residence. He was admitted and shown to the drawing-room. Marion rose. She was gowned in an expensive evening costume. Billy was a bit surprised.

"Sit here, Billy," she said indicating a chair. "I've been thinking about—about the —wager. I wonder if it is fair to aunty and uncle if—"

"Marion, dear!" came in a quavering voice from the head of the stairway.

"Yes, Aunt Hilda."

"Was that Mr. Anderson who just came in?"

Billy glanced at Marion and she glanced swiftly at Billy.

"Say 'yes,'" whispered Billy. But Marion shook her head.

"No, aunty," she replied.

"I thought I heard some one come in," came in a petulant voice.

Marion hesitated. Billy signed to her to say nothing further, as an experiment.

"It is positively unbearable," whispered Marion, turning to Billy.

"I should say so! It's also fifteen minutes past eight. I have arranged to be—that is to keep an important engagement at half past."

"Don't let me detain you," said Marion, gazing at him queerly.

Billy was nothing if not adequate.

"You won't, Marion," he said.

He stepped to the hallway, seized a fur coat from the rack and swung back into the room. In spite of her protests he made

Marion put on the coat—in fact he did more than assist her into the garment.

"Now your hat! And your gloves. Hurry! Some one is coming downstairs!"

Marion became suddenly alert. She darted through the doorway, seized her hat and gloves and Billy took her arm and whisked her outside. For the fraction of a second she hesitated. Then, her chin up, she walked with Billy to the car.

"I think it just had to happen this way," she said, glancing back at the Bryson home.

An hour later Mr. and Mrs. William Burgess were speeding toward the suburbs of Kansas City in a long, high-cowled red roadster that snorted at the miles with loud contempt.

About twelve that night, as Josiah Bryson and his guest Mr. Robert Anderson, belated by the stalling of their car, entered the Bryson residence, they were startled by the appearance of Mrs. Josiah, red-eyed and inclined to be hysterical. Marion had left the house, some time during the evening, and had not returned! Her car was gone. The servants knew nothing about it. The maid who answered the door was positive no one had called. It was dreadful! There would be a scandal. Marion had been so unapproachable of late—

Bob Anderson tugged at his neat mustache and glared at the floor. Josiah Bryson strode up and down the hall, muttering. Mrs. Josiah, finding nothing else to do, fainted—or at least thought she had.

Josiah Bryson had a long and earnest talk with his wife that night. Among other things, he declared emphatically that she was to blame for Marion's sudden disappearance.

"You have Bob Andersoned her until she couldn't stand it any longer," he said, glowing. "I don't blame the child. But I wish to Heaven I knew where she was!"

Their conversation was interrupted by the popping of a motor cycle out in the silent street. The popping ceased and presently the bell buzzed. Uncle Josiah answered the door.

A moment or two later he came upstairs slowly, a crumpled bit of paper in his hand. He spread it out as he entered his bedroom. It was a brief message:

Mr. Burgess and I were married, this evening. Will write to you from Chicago.

MARION.

Uncle Josiah stepped across to his wife's bedroom and handed the message to her. Mrs. Bryson read the message, gasped, and called for the smelling salts.

"What are you going to do?" she quavered.

"Wire 'em congratulations—just as soon as I find out where they are stopping. I rather like Billy's nerve—bucking the aluminum trust and the aunty-fix-it association. Good night, Hilda."

Mr. Robert Anderson did not prolong his stay in Kansas City. He rather hoped that the news of the elopement would be headlined throughout the country. But strangely enough, it was not even mentioned in a paper. Uncle Josiah had a long, strong pull in his home town and he used it.

Two weeks after leaving the Calumet Club, Billy Burgess appeared at luncheon with four of the five original members of the wager committee. Bob Anderson was the missing member, he having suddenly decided to spend the winter at Palm Beach. Pason, the teller produced the checks. Billy excused himself and presently returned with a Russian sable coat which he asked the committee to value.

"Did you actually steal it?" queried Dunton.

"Well—I took it by mistake," declared Billy.

"Explain."

Billy explained, beginning with his experiences aboard the train and concluding with the assertion that he had borrowed a roadster with which to return to Chicago.

Dunton glanced round the table. "Does he win?"

Ames, Porter and Pason nodded.

"Facts are," said Pason, "our bright-eyed friend left here with two dollars in his pocket, made it through to Kansas City, entered the Bryson residence without the owner's permission, annexed a Russian sable coat worth at least ten thousand dollars and returned to Chicago with it—to say nothing of having brought back in it one of the most charming girls on this green earth. I should say he wins! But I might suggest that we return Bob's check, under the circumstances."

"Of course," said Billy, grinning, "you can't exactly call it burglary. I—"

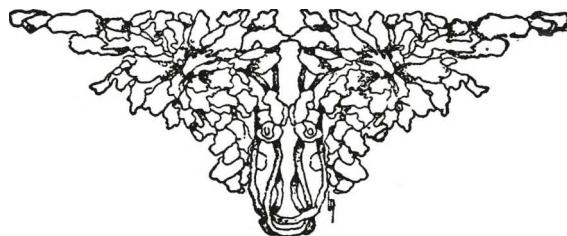
"I think Bob would, if he were here," said Dunton.

"I took the coat, thinking it was Mar—my wife's."

"Well, congratulations!" said Pason, shaking hands with him. Ames and Dunton rose and also shook hands with him. Porter was signaling to the waiter. "Congrats, old man!" said Porter. "I'm going to order a magnum of Piper, or—"

"Wish I could," declared Billy, rising, "but Mrs. Burgess was to call for me at two o'clock and I can just make it. We're going to drive down to the express office and send this coat back to its owner. You see my wife's coat is just like this one, only a few sizes smaller. Natural mistake, when a fellow is in a hurry."

In the next issue you will find another Knibbs story, "Buck Varney's Friend."



PREVENTABLE FIRES

THE unusually great fire loss in the cities of the United States in the last twelve months or more has caused the starting recently of a movement in various parts of the country toward legislation settling the question of individual liability for preventable fires. The cities of Cleveland and Cincinnati have lately secured ordinances making those directly responsible for preventable fires liable for the damage resulting from carelessness or neglect on their part. Legislation toward the same end is planned in various States.

In a statement very recently issued by the National Fire Protection Association from its headquarters in Boston, it was said that the fire loss for the year 1921 exceeded that of any previous year in the history of the United States. While the final figures were not then available, it was stated that the total loss will be well over a half billion dollars and that over seventy-five per cent of the usual fire loss is preventable. Public indifference, carelessness or ignorance is charged with being responsible for most of the country's fires. Matches and smoking, it says, are in the lead in immediate causes of fires totaling in the neighborhood of eighteen million dollars yearly.

The association makes an appeal to the people of this country to spread the gospel of fire prevention. Definite progress has been made in the direction of enabling nonprofessional users of motion-picture films to distinguish the safety films from the guncotton variety. It is said that there are at present two concerns making safety films for the American market.

The question of the oil pollution of harbor waters, which at times causes disastrous fires, is specifically taken up in the association's statement. Conditions in some cases have been changed, it was said, making it less convenient to dispose of the fuel oil from oil-burning vessels or other sources, through throwing it into the water than by disposing of it in other ways.

Fire-prevention lessons, under the auspices of the association, will be taught in schools throughout the State of Pennsylvania, beginning with September of this year, through arrangement with Doctor T. E. Finnegan, superintendent of the department of public instruction of Pennsylvania. National legislation to improve conditions in New York and other harbors is also planned. It was further stated that the activity of the United States attorney's office in connection with violations of the law has already helped the situation.



The Terrible Truth

By Frederick Moore

Author of "Beyon't the Law," "Wild Wisdom," Etc.

It's easy to tell beautiful fairy tales about yourself when the wide Pacific heaves between you and your past—but you should leave your wife at home.

(A Novelette.)

HOWETT, you've lied to me!" declared Captain Swinlow. The skin over his high cheek bones had at all times that red, raw appearance which follows the rupturing of tiny veins. But now the whole of his face was equally crimson with anger, and his dark eyes were set and burning. "When you came aboard the *Tamil* at Manila, you told me positively that you had the money for your passage to S'pore and for your wife's passage. Now didn't you? *Didn't* you?"

His lips pressed hard together under his heavy, black mustache, he waited challengingly for the answer, his legs, clad in white canvas, planted wide apart, his chest heaving under a collarless, blue-plaid cotton shirt, and a hand on either hip, at the bottom edge of a tailless mess jacket.

The other man, as spotless in his clean and carefully pressed white-duck suit, his white shoes and green-lined, pipe-clayed sun helmet, as the fine white sand upon which they were standing, had both in his attitude and in his expression, a touch of superiority.

"I did nothing of the sort," he contra-

dicted with cool restraint. "I told you in Manila that I'd give you the passage money in Singapore and so I shall." He was a man of perhaps forty, with pink, well-rounded, clean-shaven cheeks and a small brown mustache. Frankly and steadily he looked at the skipper out of mild blue eyes.

"Don't try that high-and-mighty business on me!" warned Captain Swinlow. On his black hair which, just over the ears, was cropped to his tanned skin, he wore a black "pilot cap," the outline of his hair seeming to be only an extension of his headgear. Now, with a jerk, he gave the cap's visor an aggressive, rakish tilt. "I recollect *exactly* what you said. And this talk about havin' the cash in S'pore puts no fat on *my* ribs! I've heard it before. You can't name the bank or any person that's holdin' the money for you. And it's your aim, when you're on the dock, to let me go whistle!"

Howett gave a look about him—at the narrow strip of dry beach blazing under the tropical noon sun, at the heavily topped coconuts fringing the sand, at a patch of light green to the northward that hinted at

a mangrove swamp and at the steep and tawny side of a towering headland rising just beyond. Then he made a careless, yet significant, gesture.

"And so," he observed, "whether you're right or wrong, to punish me you're going to land Mrs. Howett out of the dinghy"—he nodded at the boat which, its prow cleaving the shingle only a few feet away, had brought them to shore out of the schooner—"and leave her here. Do you think that's the way to treat a woman?"

The skipper gave a toss of his head, and laughed.

"So you're goin' to jump behind your wife's skirts, eh?" he demanded scornfully. "Figured you could put the trick over that way! Well, if she wants to, Mrs. Howett can go back aboard with me."

Now Mrs. Howett spoke. She was a woman of about thirty-five, though she looked older than that. Her skin was sallow, her cheeks were drawn and her lips were without color and drooped at the corners. On her face was a weary look. But in her gray eyes was an expression of brave patience that was almost pathetic. It hinted that she was accustomed to such difficulties as the one at present confronting her.

"Oh, I shouldn't *think* of leaving my husband!" she declared.

The captain turned to face her.

"Ma'am," he said earnestly and not without genuine sympathy, "I certainly don't want to hurt your feelin's, or make things hard for you, because I judge you've got your troubles—"

She interrupted him. "You're quite wrong," she asserted proudly. "But I might have plenty—if I had some other man for my husband."

Her meaning was plain and again the skipper laughed.

"Guess I have my own ideas about Howett," he said. "And I can tell you—"

She lifted a hand in protest.

"I don't wish to hear your ideas about my husband," she declared with more than a suggestion of resentment in her pleasant, well-modulated voice. "I've been married to him almost ten years. That's considerably longer than you have known him and I think I'm justified in attaching no importance to your opinions. I know what kind of a man he is."

But she did not look at Howett.

"Maybe you know him and maybe you

don't," returned the skipper. A faint smile played about his mustached lips.

"And both of us," went on Mrs. Howett, "are surprised that you're making so much of such a small matter as a double passage from Manila to Singapore. Haven't we told you that you'll have the cash when we reach port?"

"Talk is cheap," retorted Swinlow warmly. "But it takes money to buy grub. You two've been eatin' my best cabin stores all the way from the Philippines—fact is, you been gittin' liner meals. And you planned to go on eatin' 'em till you're where you want to git." Now he swung round on Howett again. "You figured you could do it because you had Mrs. Howett along. Well, I'm sorry for her, all right, but I don't intend to let no man use his wife in order for to bilge *me!*"

Mrs. Howett spoke up again. "My husband hasn't any intention of cheating you!" contradicted Mrs. Howett more sharply than before. "Hasn't he told you so, time after time?"

"Oh, sure he has!" the captain answered over his shoulder. "But ain't your husband the same man that bunked a Manila customhouse broker named Nichols out of a Chinese check?"

Calmly Howett stared Swinlow in the eye. "I don't know any man named Nichols," he denied. "And I never did."

"Well, anyhow," continued the skipper, "slick promises and grand millionaire manners don't impress *me*—if there ain't no cash behind them—because I have to talk cash when I face my owners."

At that, Howett showed sudden temper and began to shake a finger before Swinlow's face. "You'll have to talk more than cash the *next* time you face your owners!" he threatened. "The minute I reach Singapore where I plan to go into partnership with—"

"Who with?" The captain folded his long arms across the blue cotton shirt.

"That's none of your business! But get this: I'm going to sue you—and the schooner—and her owners—for leaving me and my wife on this lonely island!"

Swinlow nodded and grinned.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Go ahead! Sue! I'll call your bluff! And if you win, I'll do the payin'! That's how sure I am about you! It's been my experience that when a man ain't got enough coin t' rattle in his

pocket, but wears a red sash, and silk shirts and a fancy deck swab fallin' down around his hat, he's just nothin' but a dead beat!"

"Captain Swinlow!" cried Mrs. Howett. "Do you have to insult us as well as leave us on a deserted island to starve?"

"My dear," broke in Howett quickly, "I can't be insulted by a mere skipper."

The "mere skipper" ignored this reminder.

"You won't starve, Mrs. Howett," he answered kindly. "If there was any danger of that, I'd leave stores with you. No, Leopard Island is lonely, all right, but there's an old white man named Ransome livin' 'round the other side of that bluff. I guess maybe your husband can graft off'n him for a month or two."

"But if Mr. Ransome doesn't wish to take us in—hasn't room to spare—or—or—"

"Or won't want to be grafted off of?" supplied Howett, with a touch of irony; then, reassuringly to his wife, "My dear, I think we shall have no difficulty when it comes to getting a few necessities until we can sail for Singapore or have some funds brought to us here. And, really, considering Captain Swinlow's unreasonable attitude in this matter of granting us a little credit, seeing that we are in temporary financial difficulties"—his voice took on a note of regret that had in it no resentment—"really I prefer to leave his filthy schooner and remain here."

"Glad to hear that!" retorted the skipper. And to Mrs. Howett, "Then, ma'am, you're probably ready to leave the boat?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" she answered promptly.

She rose at once. She was as smartly dressed as her husband, in a substantial, well-tailored skirt of white linen, a blouse of some thinner white stuff and a starched white-canvas hat which she wore with the brim turned down all the way around.

Two sailors who had rowed the dinghy ashore had been waiting quietly while the captain and the Howetts talked. Now one of them took from the boat two wicker suit cases and set them on the sand while the other proffered a helping hand to Mrs. Howett. This second man hung his head, as if he found the situation embarrassing. But Mrs. Howett stepped overside with an air of untroubled serenity.

The boat was pushed off the shingle till it was once more afloat in the gentle surf, the sailors holding it by the painter.

"I'll wish you good afternoon," Captain Swinlow said then, but rather to Mrs. How-

ett than to Howett, and clambered into the boat and sat down in the stern sheets. It was evident that he was glad the business was settled.

Mrs. Howett did not reply, only nodded slightly. As for her husband, his right hand was pressed against his right side, where there was a slight bulging of the crimson sash and his fingers fumbled nervously, while his blue eyes, somewhat narrowed, stared at the back of Swinlow's red neck as the dinghy swung round and headed for the schooner. But presently, as if rousing himself, "Go up into the shade, Nettie," he said; and picking up the luggage, he moved slowly toward the fringe of coconut trees.

As his wife preceded him to the thick, overhanging jungle edge, the soft, hot sand ran in over the tops of her low shoes. She turned when she was out of the sun and saw him floundering toward her. "You pick up more sand ballast than I do!" she laughed.

Howett grinned at her. "That's the stuff!" he exclaimed proudly. "You're a brick, Nettie! And I'm glad you can feel so gay about it. Just keep up your spirits and everything will come out tiptop!"

"Why, it's a lark!" she returned. "If Captain Swinlow spoke the truth when he said there's a white man on the island, we'll be all right."

By now Howett was beside her. He set down the cases and looked after the departing dinghy.

"How I longed just now," he said, speaking low, "to pull out my little automatic, as that cold-blooded rascal took his seat, and bore a neat hole with a bullet right in the back of his turkey-red neck!"

"Chester!" cried his wife, shocked, yet laughing.

Howett settled himself not too comfortably on one of the suit cases.

"A blue little spot of a hole," he continued, half humorously, "that would let out some of his meanness." Then, running a handkerchief over his forehead, "It's rotten luck!" he went on. "Here we have nearly two thousand dollars in a Singapore bank, waiting for us and we've got to ask charity from strangers."

She struck an attitude. "Marooned!" she exclaimed dramatically.

Howett looked up at her. "Yes, and you look very pretty at the business," he de-

clared. "Against this green, in your white, with your cheeks so pink—"

"The Lobster-red Beach Combers, Incorporated!" she laughed back. But she did not look at him. A moment later something like dismay clouded her eyes as, glancing toward the dinghy, she saw it disappear around the stern of the *Tamil*. "Chester," she said, her voice trembling slightly, "you *did* know a customs broker in Manila named Nichols."

"Yes, indeed." His reply was prompt and frank. "And no doubt Nichols has told Swinlow about being skinned by some one. But *I* certainly never stung him. And if I'd admitted knowing Nichols, do you think I could have convinced the captain that I wasn't guilty?"

"I suppose not," she agreed slowly.

Howett was also watching the schooner from which was coming the rumble of the anchor chain as it was being rolled up on the capstan. His expression showed rage and hate, yet he did not voice either.

"He said he'd take his money when he got to Singapore," he remarked quietly. "He was anxious to get us aboard, I fancy. It probably gave him an excuse for laying in the fresh beef and the rest of it. But when he was well to sea with us, he tried to hold me up—thought you had some jewels, maybe, and that you'd rather part with them than be put ashore here. Well, we have no jewels. We have only each other."

Mrs. Howett smiled. And again she did not look at him.

"We'll manage," she assured him gayly.

"Of course. Swinlow was the maddest when he got us on the beach just now. Up to then, he thought we'd give in—thought we were bluffing. That's why he landed us on this side, where there's not a sign of a human being, instead of around on the other side. He wanted to scare you." Now, the dinghy having been swung aboard, the schooner was filling away. Once more, Howett stared after her. "He's a confounded scoundrel!" he declared. "That's what he is! And he hasn't heard the last of me yet!"

Mrs. Howett hastened to take his mind from his anger.

"When we get a boat to Singapore," she reminded him, "we'll be able then to go where we like. In the meantime we'll take things as easy as possible—even enjoy our-

selves, Chester. So now"—seeking relief in action—"let's try to find that plantation."

She stepped into the sun, her face to the jungle and her back to the sea. To her right were those headlands. Upon the slope leading up to them—a slope bare of growth and lava-strewn—was a thin brown line that zigzagged to the top. "Isn't that a path?" she asked.

Howett went forward to join her and followed her pointing. "Yes, it is," he agreed. "And we'd better take it—it's the only thing around here that looks like civilization."

"If we climb to that cliff," went on Mrs. Howett, "we may be able to see the plantation Captain Swinlow spoke of."

"To judge from here," said Howett, "it's the highest spot on the island. So we'll probably see the whole of Leopard—and that'll give us our bearings."

"It's going to be a hot climb," she returned as her eye followed the steep, unsheltered trail. "Can't we find a long stick of some kind? We'll string the suit cases on it and I'll be able to help."

But Howett would not hear of her sharing the load, declaring that one suit case balanced the other. "You keep along in the shade," he advised her, "and we'll hunt the lower end of the road. But I'm afraid we're going to have some wading through mud. There are mangroves ahead. See that lighter green patch?"

"Come on," she answered cheerily. "We'll take off our shoes and stockings if we have to." She started away along the upper edge of the beach and he picked up the suit cases and followed.

They skirted the jungle's rim for a quarter of a mile. As they went along they heard from far back in the dense shrubbery the cries of scrub fowl, startled by the approach of human beings, and the sound of wings as the birds took cover. And they caught the lazy droning of trumpet beetles.

Howett stopped every few yards to put down the luggage and rest his arms. Then, in spite of his protestations, each time Mrs. Howett took up the suit cases and tugged them along for a rod or two.

"I want to gain every foot I can in the quickest time," she urged. "We don't know yet how far we'll have to go after we reach the top of the cliff. And we'll be hungry soon."

"Yes and I don't want my dear girl to have to sleep out to-night," added Howett.

The mangrove patch finally gained, they found a dense tangle of roots and descending creepers that grew to the surf line. Seaward, when nearly abreast of the headland, that crescent reef abruptly broke off; and round the end of the protective barrier the sea had come in and formed a swamp.

But from one side of the swamp to the other, furnishing a second sign of human presence, they found stepping stones placed conveniently in the rank mud. At once they felt heartened. Also, here and there, they discovered a length of rude railing made of bamboo pole lashed in among the descending shoots of the mangroves, to keep the path clear.

Past the swamp, they turned away from the sea and began to climb. Now they were out in the open and here the trail was faint. Presently, when they stopped for a brief rest, they could look down upon the flowering top of the jungle. But it was noon and the blinding sun seemed to have driven butterflies as well as birds to cover, so there was little sign of animate life.

But on the heaving sea to the west they glimpsed the schooner, forereaching to get a good offing from the island before she drove for the northward. However, neither Howett nor his wife appeared to see the vessel. With a cheery word to her husband Mrs. Howett again pressed on, making her way among the loose lava stones. Higher, where the trail was worn deeply into the surface of the hillside, she broke through the red covering soil into rotten volcanic ash.

She was first to gain the rounded top of the headland where a great flock of tern were wheeling and screaming in fear of the strangers. On this high point she could feel a breeze, strong and refreshing, and—what was even more gladdening than a cooling wind—get a view of the entire island.

It was evident that Leopard had not been named because of its shape, which was long, from north to south and narrow across, but because everywhere it had a mottled appearance. That mangrove swamp ran back across the waist of it, gradually diminishing in width the farther it wedged toward the east. That side of the island which the Howetts had just left was the uninhabited portion; from the opposite base of the headland stretched lowlands—flat and more yellow than green. And on them could be seen the moving brown figures of men.

"Rice fields!" she called down to her hus-

band, who was still laboring heavily up with the luggage. "And natives at work!"

"Hooray!" he called back.

"And, oh, it's like a beautiful picture!" she added.

She turned about. Between her and the edge of the cliff were only a few yards of ground. These were aglow with a yellow flower which was not unlike a honeysuckle. It spread in all directions on a vine. She gathered a few of the blossoms; then, stepping to the cliff edge, she looked down fully three hundred feet to where an oily sea was heaving gently against the jagged base of the precipice.

"Nettie!" gasped Howett, as, red and puffing, he came up to her. "Step back!"

He dropped the suit cases, grasped her by an arm, and drew her away from the verge.

"Do you think it's dangerous?" she asked. "I was keeping on the path."

"I think it overhangs," he answered. "If that's so, the fact that there's a path wouldn't help you much. And then these terns—they have their nests under the edge here, probably. Suppose one were to flop into your face? Over you'd go, likely!"

Together, from a safer spot, they examined the eastern shore. Jutting out from a ribbon of gleaming beach, and then curving inward again, ran a rude pier or breakwater. Where it was broadside to the sea the rollers broke over it in a smother of white froth. But it made a lee, on the smooth, shining waters of which bobbed at anchor a score or more of native outrigger canoes.

"That scoundrel of a Swinlow!" Howett exclaimed. "He could have landed us on this side. Didn't I tell you he thought I was bluffing about having no cash with me? He wanted to dump us at the worst possible spot—to make us come through if we had anything. He knew we wouldn't mind being left at a settlement."

They could see the *Tamil*, to the north, lifting along gracefully on the starboard tack to round the island and proceed on her course southward. Howett shook his fist at it. But Mrs. Howett was still studying the landscape.

"Isn't it all exactly like a relief map!" she observed.

Along the shore line were rows of coconut trees, their brushlike tops swaying in the wind. These bordered that strip of beach

which curled away for a couple of miles and was ruffled by a white surf and disappeared where there rose another headland, this one not bare, as was the one upon which they were standing, but clothed thickly with jungle.

"There's a building close to the water," pointed out Mrs. Howett. "But it doesn't look like a white man's house."

Howett laughed. "There's a white man down there, just the same," he asserted. "If there wasn't, you wouldn't see any brown ones working—especially in the middle of the day."

His coat was dark with perspiration. He took it off and his wife hung it over her arm. Then, as once more he picked up his load, she led the way.

"There are bowers of green just below," she pointed out. "I want to get you into the shade of the lower trail."

They found the descent easy. Soon they came to a dim and steaming forest. There was a wide belt of this. Midway of it, near a huge banyan tree, the down-trending limbs of which sought root in the earth, they halted to take off their shoes and rid themselves of the last ounce of white sand, red dirt and volcanic ash. Then, crossing a gentle swale, they moved on again.

They came out of the forest upon flat ground. They were among palms now—a great grove of them—for they stretched to the beach and to that building which they had seen from the headland and which was plainly a warehouse. Under their feet was a carpet of dead brown leaves; and fallen coconuts lay all about. To their right was a palisade fence of bamboo poles. And behind this, set among papaws and some other heavy foliage on a bench of higher ground, was a large bungalow.

It looked like a mammoth basket turned upside down, for the brown roof, as it sloped away from its central peak, was ribbed with bamboo poles laid on the outside of the nipa to keep the thatch in place; the wide verandas, supported by other poles, showed only a little between the low-hanging eaves and the latticed railing which was covered with blossoming vines.

"The lord of the isle!" announced Mrs. Howett, relieved and happy.

"And I think that's the gentleman on the far corner of the veranda," answered Howett, lowering his voice.

"Yes," she agreed. "It's a white man and

he's looking at the *Tamil* through a telescope. We'd better go in at once."

She made as if to start toward the house.

"Nettie!" As before, Howett spoke somewhat cautiously. "Now—we don't know just what kind of people we're going to meet and we may have to use a little judgment. So let me do the talking, will you? And—don't act surprised over anything I may say."

"But, Chester," she protested, "if—"

However, she got no further. For at that moment a pair of yellow dogs fell to barking at them from behind the fence, with much friendly wagging of bushy tails. Some brown men, who wore shirts but no trousers, were at work in the grove, gathering something into jute bags. As they heard the dogs they sounded a halloo to the man on the veranda; whereupon he stood up and turned his telescope upon the strangers and exclaimed in surprise.

He was an old man and his voice was thin and weak.

"Be still!" he called to the dogs. "Lie down there!" As the dogs quieted, he hastened along the veranda to the front steps to wave the Howetts a welcome. "Well, where in the world did *you* people come from?" he marveled.

The Howetts did not attempt to answer, but moved toward the house. As they advanced, the old man somewhat feebly descended his steps and made along a path of broken coral to his gate. His hair was long and silvery. He wore a long beard that rested against a blue shirt of Chinese cotton. His trousers were of faded khaki, his jacket of pongee, braided around the collar and across the pockets. His bare feet were thrust into slippers of brilliant red. As he pushed open the gate and stood waiting, his head kept up a gentle nodding, as from palsy.

As Mrs. Howett reached him he held out a frail and trembling hand, and squinted at her eyes as gray as his own and quite as kindly. In them was even some concern.

"Well, well!" he said, his thin cheeks lifting in a smile. "I don't often have visitors appear out of the jungle! But come in! Come in!" With a word to the dogs bounding excitedly about him he bowed and made way in the gate for Mrs. Howett to pass through.

When Howett had followed his wife into the yard he set down the cases.

"My name is Howett," he said, smiling and taking the other's hand. "This is Mrs. Howett." Then, as the old man shook hands a second time, "We had no wish to intrude but we could not do otherwise. We were aboard a schooner called the *Rocket* and were on our way to Singapore. But there was so much drunkenness aboard and Captain Goss, as well as his mate and the sailors, acted so badly that I demanded to be put ashore—to protect Mrs. Howett against insult, perhaps worse."

The old man looked shocked.

"Captain Goss?" he repeated. "I haven't heard of him—or his schooner. But there's no telling what these trading skippers will do. Of course we get all sorts of men down in these seas, just as you do anywhere else."

"His conduct was shameful!" stormed Howett. "And I shall make a full report of it to the proper authorities when I have the opportunity. Also, I shall sue! Yes, sir! He landed us around on the far side. That was pure spite. He wanted to treat us as badly as possible—put us in a mean predicament!"

Mrs. Howett was standing beside the old man, her eyes lowered and on her face an expression of embarrassment. The old man smiled at her reassuringly.

"But you need not worry about all this, madam," he said.

"I shan't unless I feel that we shall greatly inconvenience you," she answered earnestly.

"Inconvenience!" he exclaimed. "Why, my dear woman, you're welcome here until you find it pleasanter to leave. My name is Ransome—Henry Ransome; and I'm an American planter—copra—and enough rice for my natives. At present I'm the only white soul on Leopard. That's because my daughter's away at college in California. So you may find it dull here with an old man like me. But it's quiet and peaceful and I've got plenty of books, if you enjoy reading, and several cameras, if you know anything about taking pictures. And I'm glad you've come! I get lonesome sometimes."

"You're very kind to put it that way," Mrs. Howett returned. "And I hope I'll be able to do something for you to repay you."

"Of course you will!" he assured her heartily. "Come right up to the house. I'd help you up with the satchels, Mr. Howett, but I'm not very strong any more. I expect Suzanne in about two months. I shall be happy to have her back. For I'm getting

rather old—rather old." As he led the way to the veranda, he kept up that gentle nodding of his head.

The wide veranda was like a partly inclosed room, with its matted floor, reclining grass chairs, a hammock and a low table covered with books. Under its low rafters birds were chirruping. And the soft air was heavy with the perfume of the flowers which covered the latticed railing.

"If you'll rest here," said Ransome, "I'll see about tiffin." He disappeared into the house then and his guests could hear his thin voice lifted in some outlandish tongue.

Howett could scarcely wait until the old man was out of hearing.

"Nettie, we're in luck!" he whispered, dropping into a chair and throwing off his helmet. "Pipe this bungalow! And he's giving orders to servants!"

Mrs. Howett put an admonishing finger to her lips.

"Sh!" she breathed cautiously. "Do be careful, Chester!" Then speaking in an ordinary tone, "We certainly are fortunate! And to be made so welcome! I feel very grateful."

Grinning, Howett lay back in his chair luxuriously and lifted his feet to the extended support.

"Swinlow did us a good turn!" he boasted. "This is the jolliest thing that has happened to us in a long time! Hear that surf droning down there—so lazy and soothing! Oh, Nettie, is this an easy place to spend a couple of months? Can we be comfortable, do you think? Well, I guess!" He gave his wife a slow, sly wink.

"But we must take the first schooner for Singapore that we can get," she reminded him. "You know, we're self-invited guests."

"Oh, of course, of course!" he agreed, laughing. "I'm just having a little hurrah about our luck, that's all. Naturally, we'll take the first schooner bound for Singapore."

A native came patterning around a corner of the veranda. He was young and light of build, with a sleek, golden-brown skin and straight, black hair that shone as if it had been oiled. His feet were bare. Wound snugly about his waist and loins he wore a sarong. He brought a water cooler of red stone and some drinking glasses were balanced in the crook of an arm. With shy glances he served the strangers with a brown liquid which tasted of ginger.

"Isn't this delicious and refreshing!" commented Mrs. Howett.

"*Bueno! Bueno!*" agreed Howett, trying his Spanish on the boy. Reaching into a pocket, he produced a silver peso and flipped it to the servant.

The boy's eyes sparkled with delight. "Marster! Marster!" he cried at Howett excitedly; then, turning, sped away. A moment later he could be heard exclaiming in that strange tongue to others who were out of sight, but who joined their voices to his.

"My tip's making quite a hit," observed Howett. "You see I don't want the servants to be sorry we've come. Naturally we'll add considerably to their labors, so I think I'd better throw them the little we've got while I'm here."

"Oh, by all means!" assented his wife.

Their host now came back. "We'll have lunch soon," he announced, "and perhaps you'd like to go to your room now." Then, as Mrs. Howett rose promptly, "It's just been dusted and set to rights. You see"— whimsically—"I don't have many visitors; and without a woman to oversee them my house boys are liable to neglect as much as they can."

"To judge by the boy who brought us our ginger beer just now," said Howett, "I should say you had first-class servants."

"They're not dependable," replied Ransome. "They're like children. Haven't any ideas of real value and are greedy. In order to keep them from understanding what was being said around the house I learned the Leopard dialect when I first came and taught them as little English as possible. Not that I've ever caught one of them in treachery. But a lie means nothing to them and of course they're lazy. I get on with them because my *werd* is law. On Leopard, I'm czar."

He had led the way into the big, shadowy main room of the house. It was unceiled and high overhead could be seen the thatch and bamboo rafters. At the rear, as well as in front, the living room opened on a veranda; big squares cut in the swale walls hung on upper hinges of rattan and were propped outward on poles at the bottom to form *pajangs*, under which entered light and air.

The other rooms of the building were to right and left of the large one. These—three to either hand, with lattice doors—were partitioned off by split-bamboo walls

ten feet high. Above these rooms could be seen their rounding ceilings, made of strips of white cotton cloth which were fastened to long, bowed-up bamboo poles. The effect was somewhat that of a succession of huge tents built inside the main structure.

The hardwood floors were polished and almost entirely hidden by mats. Set about were Chinese teakwood chairs, their black wood elaborately carved in dragon patterns. A broad table held a reading lamp, set atop a mammoth turtle shell. About the shell were littered books, reading glasses, a model of a native outrigger canoe, a typewriter and a camera.

On the walls were curious spears, blow-guns, a half dozen *parangs* and shelves loaded with enormous sea shells. And there was also a mingling of choice prints, a few water colors and oils, some illustrations cut from newspapers and magazines and many photographic studies of island subjects.

Before one of the paintings Ransome halted. It was the handsomely framed, full-length portrait of a girl about seventeen—a tall, slender girl with delicate features and a profusion of bright blond hair that fell about her shoulders like an aureole. Her eyes were dark and large. Her mouth was small and curved like a child's.

"This is my daughter," he said, smiling affectionately at the portrait. "This is Suzanne."

"Oh, how beautiful!" cried Mrs. Howett. "Why, Mr. Ransome, she's an exquisite creature!"

"Splendid bit of painting," pronounced Howett. Head to one side, lips pursed, arms akimbo, he had the air of a connoisseur.

"Suzanne's always been beautiful," declared Suzanne's father. "Now, at twenty-two, she's more beautiful than ever. When her mother died—my daughter was eleven at the time—I realized that she was the kind of girl that must be given every advantage. So"—with a sigh—"she's lived most of her life away from me."

"Oh, then she wasn't brought up here on the island," said Mrs. Howett.

"Half of her life she's been away at school," answered the old man. "In France part of the time, in Italy a while and now in California. Every year or so, I've gone halfway across the world to see her."

"And now she's coming home to you!" exclaimed Mrs. Howett. "What a joy that will be to you!"

"Yes." The old man beamed. "But she's coming to take me away. For I'm not going to hide her away down here. I've spent enough time on this island, I think. Anyhow, I'm getting too old to have so many responsibilities. And I've been in the tropics too long at a stretch. So, as I've made enough for all our needs in the future—and a little more—I'm going to sell out to a syndicate, on my way out of the South Seas, and go with Suzanne to New York and Paris."

"She's a dream!" raved Mrs. Howett. "She'll be the toast of both cities! You're really to be congratulated!"

Turning to smile at his wife, Howett said, "Well, I've got a rather nice girl of my own, don't you think, Mr. Ransome?" he asked. He laid a hand on his wife's shoulder.

"Excuse a fond husband!" she retorted gayly.

But again she did not meet his look.

Ransome turned from the portrait to Mrs. Howett, his dim, old eyes studying her face.

"It is pleasant," he said, "to meet happily married people." Then he moved aside to the central room of the three that were on the north side of the building and swung open its lattice door. "This is Suzanne's room," he explained. "You'll find it cool at night, for it gets the breeze off the sea. When you've freshened up, you'll find luncheon waiting."

He departed, waving a deprecating hand as Mrs. Howett renewed her thanks for his hospitality.

Once more Howett could scarcely let their host get beyond hearing distance before he was again whispering triumphantly to his wife about their good fortune.

"Say, we've struck it soft!" he cried. "My dear, it means money and lots of it. I'll bet that during the years he's been here he's made a fortune! Why, the old bird lives like a king!"

Again Mrs. Howett warned him to be careful. "I've no doubt he's a rich man," she whispered back, "but I don't see, Chester, what business that is of ours, except that he can afford to entertain us a little while."

"That's what I'm driving at," returned Howett.

"He's splendid!" she went on. "With his white hair thrown back and his gentle eyes,

he's like some old poet or prophet. And the girl! Isn't she simply wonderful?"

"W-e-ell," and Howett's tone was begrudging, "she's good looking, I suppose. But she's got a weak mouth." As he set about washing up and changing into fresh linen his manner was strangely preoccupied.

The room was large and furnished with a wide, cane-bottomed bed—over which mosquito netting was stretched—and a couple of grass chairs, a carpet of matting and a small table with a reading lamp. To one side, seated on a low chest of drawers, was a Japanese doll, its dress long since faded, its hair gone. As Mrs. Howett, her hasty toilet complete, gave a look around before following Howett out, she smiled at the quaint apartment.

"I'm not sorry," she said, "that Captain Swinlow put us—"

Howett caught her arm, warning her to silence. "Think before you speak!" he commanded in a sharp whisper.

"Yes, Chester," she answered hastily. Then keeping him beside her for another moment, "But I'm sorry you felt you had to give Mr. Ransome the version you did. I don't like subterfuge. And I—"

He was all good humor again.

"I know! I know!" he replied. "You're a dear, straightforward soul, Nettie, and you always forget a fib. But in this case, what I did was absolutely necessary. Could we have told Ransome that we were put off the schooner? Swinlow isn't here to contradict us, so there isn't any use of planting suspicions in this old gent's mind. Now, is there?" He drew her to him.

"Probably you're right," she capitulated; "and I'll try to remember it was the *Rocket*—and Captain Goss."

"That's a good girl. Besides, what difference does it make to Ransome whether he has my version or the true one? If I'd told him the truth, he might have refused to take us in—sent us to some native hut. I was thinking of you, dear. With me it's a case of safety first."

"I suppose it's all right. But, Chester, let's not mislead Mr. Ransome any more than we have to."

"There isn't any reason to mislead him further, is there? So that's settled." He made a gesture of finality.

Luncheon was eaten on the front veranda. Ransome's cook had evidently exerted himself for the occasion; and the native butler

had brought out shining linen and china made in France, solid silver, cut glass, and had further beautified the table with flowers. Mrs. Howett, hungry after her long walk across the island, spoke mostly of her appetite and the delicious food. But Howett, strangely enough, could find it possible to talk of going.

"How often do schooners come in?" he asked his host.

"Well," answered Ransome, "that depends somewhat upon whether I fly a signal or not."

"I see. They come only when you want them."

"I run up a flag. If a trader sees it, he knows it means that I want to communicate with him; and, if necessary, he waits until the wind favors and comes in. But if a vessel does come in, Mr. Howett, don't feel that you must hurry away."

"You're mighty kind," declared Howett, with every mark of gratitude in his voice. "But, of course, we mustn't trespass upon your hospitality too long. We must go on the first vessel that comes by—the very first one."

Later, when he was alone again with his wife, he let her know his real attitude about their going.

"I rather overdid the business of protesting that we must get away," he admitted. "I knew it couldn't do us any harm, because it'll be a long time before a schooner comes by, so we're secure. And it makes the old gent feel that we aren't willing to roost here on him forever. Naturally, then, he urges us to stay. See the idea? And I want to stay, Nettie—mainly on your account. My girl is tired. She needs a good rest."

But the following morning, as the three were seated on the veranda after breakfast, Howett found that his host had taken him at his word.

"Isn't this the seventeenth?" Ransome asked. "Goodrell's schooner, the *Sarawak Princess*, is due to pass Leopard this very week, on her way to S'pore from the coast of Dutch Borneo. Goodrell makes the trip about every three months and it brings him in sight of my headland. He was in here a couple of years ago and he told me then that if I ever needed him, just to give him my signal. So I'll fly it and no doubt he'll come in and pick you up."

In spite of his habitual composure Howett gave an involuntary start and the look he

darted at his wife showed not only dismay at the news but a warning—she was not to take part in the conversation.

"That will be mighty handy for us," he returned, contriving to put enthusiasm into his tone. "And, by the way, where is your signal station? It sounds quite nautical."

"It's not a regular station," explained the old man. "As you came down from the cliffs you must have seen a giant banyan that is up behind here, on the other side of the little hollow. There's a sapling near by that sticks up above the jungle and I run up my hoists on a halyard rove over the highest limb." Then, as Howett stood up and walked to the corner of the veranda. "But you can't see the sapling from here," Ransome went on. "It's around a bend. From seaward, though, it's visible to any vessel which comes in sight of the north end of the island. I use the answering pennant of the international code, with the H flag under it. It's sure to make Goodrell come in—or send a boat. I'll go and attend to it now."

He went inside and presently left the bungalow by a rear door, some bits of red-and-white bunting in his hand.

Not till then did Howett speak.

"I did it!" he said, smiling a trifle ruefully. "Didn't I? After I wanted so much to have you enjoy the place at least for a fortnight!"

"Oh, that's all right, Chester," answered his wife. "I think we ought to go. He's been charming about our arrival, but we're intruders—guests without his choice in the matter. And I'm really relieved. Particularly as he hasn't urged us to stay. And, of course, we'll send back something—a nice gift of some sort—as a token of our appreciation."

"I should say so! We'll shop for it straight off, the minute we hit S'pore. And now—what do you say—shall we take a walk?"

But Mrs. Howett pleaded that walking would be too warm to be pleasant. And so, before Ransome returned, Howett set off alone, going in the direction of the beach and strolling idly. From the warehouse, which was made of corrugated sheet iron over a strong bamboo frame, he was able to glimpse the native village. This collection of huts was built in a low, sandy stretch about half a mile away. Two ridges sheltered the thatched houses—one which cut,

the sea from view to the eastward, and a second which lay across the head of the great mangrove swamp. Howett paused to look into the little sandy valley.

But when he continued on northward and had turned a bend of the beach so that he was out of sight of the bungalow, he walked faster and like a man with a definite purpose. Presently he turned from the sea and broke in through the jungle toward the right. Soon he was upon the trail coming down from the headland and at the very point where he and his wife had stopped to take off their shoes. And here, blowing high above the trees, was Ransome's signal.

The halyards, old and brown, were tied to a low limb. Selecting a lava stone which had a sharp edge, Howett pressed one of the lines against the sapling and rubbed at it till he had frayed the line through, which gave it the appearance of having been worn apart. The flags, set free at the end of the running line, fluttered down into some bushes.

Howett made no attempt to secure the bits of bunting. But to make sure that they were out of sight from the trail, he pushed into the thick leaves and vines. As he came out again upon the narrow way he found himself face to face with his wife.

He brought up short and caught his breath in surprise, for a moment deprived of speech. Then, "Oh, hello, dear girl!" he said gayly. "I've just been snooping around in there for some flowers for you—orchids I thought they were—but they turned out to be just some spotted leaves."

Her straight look was disquieting. "Chester," she began, flushing angrily, "I don't like being taken for a fool!"

"Net!" His tone was shocked and reprobating.

"Why this falsehood about orchids?" she demanded. "When the truth is you've just torn down the signals!"

Now he had himself in hand again and his argument was prompt.

"I don't want to leave the island," he admitted. "I want you to have a few weeks of rest and quiet here, where you're so comfortable. Is *that* what you call being taken for a fool?"

"I call the orchid talk making a fool of me," she answered, still looking at him squarely. "Why tell me an unnecessary lie?"

"Lie!" he exclaimed. "Why, Nettie!"

You've never used such strong language to me before in all your life! What possesses you?"

"A dislike of trickery," she declared. "Oh, you've done it before and I've pretended not to see it. But this time I caught you. I saw you cut that line."

"I didn't tell you what I meant to do because I knew you'd object. The old man doesn't really want us to go so soon. So what harm have I done—except to block our being taken off and to keep up a bluff?"

"Let's not mislead, Mr. Ransome," she urged. "Let's tell him frankly that we want to stay a month or two. And that when we get to Singapore we'll send back to him whatever we owe him for his hospitality."

He stood a moment, his eyes on the ground; then, with a sudden air of determination and in a tone of gentle regret, "Nettie, I've been trying hard to protect you from worry," he began, "but now I see that you must know the worst."

"By all means," she returned quietly. "Anything is better than this kind of thing." She gestured in the direction of the fallen flags.

"My dear, if the *Sarawak Princess* were to come for us and take us aboard, the captain might ask for cash in advance for our passage. I'd have to tell him that we haven't it and he might send us back ashore."

"And he would be within his rights. But suppose you told him quite frankly that your money is in Singapore and that he'd be paid the moment we got there?"

"Captain Goodrell probably wouldn't believe me any more than Swinlow did," he argued.

"But here's a suggestion," she continued earnestly. "Let the *Sarawak Princess* come in and send a letter by her to Singapore asking that your money be sent to us here. That might take a month or two—even three. But, as you say, we're not in a hurry and when the money came we could pay Mr. Ransome and our passage too."

Once more he stared at the ground. "There's something in what you say," he conceded. "It's a pretty good idea."

"Then let's do it!" she pleaded eagerly. "Come on, Chester! Put the signal back!"

"Why not leave the signal where it is for now," he suggested, "and take a night to sleep on this new scheme?"

"No! We don't have to sleep on it. It's

the only decent thing to do. Chester! Put the flags back!"

"Wait," he countered. "Wait one night. It won't make any difference, because the schooner won't be along for a couple of days, anyhow. Come, dear." He was as suave and affectionate as usual. He took her wrist, and attempted to lead her away.

But she stood her ground. "I don't like the situation I'm in," she told him firmly. "I shan't be able to look Mr. Ransome in the face if we don't put his flags up again. I shan't be able to sit down to the luncheon table. And if you don't put the signal back, I shall!" And without further ado, she pulled her arm free of his hold and started into the brush.

"Nettie!" He followed her and seized her again, this time with all his strength, pulling her back into the trail. "Do as I tell you!" he ordered angrily. "Don't interfere—"

She was panting with resentment at his using force and with her effort to free herself. "You're keeping something from me!" she declared. "Because there isn't any reason why you shouldn't put the signal back and send for the money."

At that, he released her. "I *am* keeping something from you," he confessed. "We're in a far more desperate situation than you imagine. And now you force me to tell you, though I've been trying to shield you. Nettie, there isn't one cent waiting for us in Singapore!"

She fell away from him a step, staring, aghast. "What? Not *any*? Are you telling me that to compel me to let you have your own way?"

"I'm telling you the truth," he answered soberly. "And—"

"Truth!" she interrupted angrily. "How am I to know that! You say one thing to gain a certain purpose. But when it suits your convenience, you tell something absolutely different! And what you said to Captain Swinlow— Oh, he was justified in putting us off here! You *were* going to cheat him out of our passage money!"

Howett raised both hands in a gesture of helpless resignation. "I was going to get my wife to Singapore under the best possible conditions," he returned. His tone was righteous. "Later, I'd earn the passage money for Swinlow."

"And that partner you told him about—is there such a man expecting you?"

"No, there is not."

She turned away, tears brimming her eyes.

"You can't tell people all your business, Nettie," reasoned Howett gently. "You have to carry on with your head up or you'll get snippy treatment when you can stand it the least. Swinlow was a sample of what's handed you when a man finds out you're broke. Did he care a curse about putting a woman ashore? And take this mealy mouthed Ransome, here. He could be mighty mean and grasping if we were turned back on him by Goodell—and he discovered that all we've got is a change of clothes. No! He thinks we're a couple of swells. My dear girl, a man *has* to keep up a good front. Call it lying if you want to, but it's a part of the game of life. You're a woman, and you don't understand."

She nodded slowly. "Oh, yes, I do," she contradicted. "The trouble is that I understand too well."

"Where I make *my* mistake," he continued, again using his sorrowful tone, "is in planning things so that you'll get on without having to fret and endure hardships."

"The *worst* hardship," she returned, "is never knowing whether you're being honest with me or not."

"All right!" He spoke determinedly. "After this, you'll know *all* details, no matter how unpleasant they are! I shan't ever again try to protect you from worry! All I get for it is abuse!" He went stamping away down the path.

She did not follow at once but stood looking after him. "So we're here as a couple of beggars!" she called out after him bitterly. "Captain Swinlow called us dead beats and that's exactly what we are! And the longer we stay, the worse we'll be! Our clothes will get shabby! And Mr. Ransome will have to know that we've lied! I wish his daughter would come, so we can get away on the schooner that brings her! And I wish I'd never stepped aboard the *Tamil*!"

Howett did not pause to retort. His very sun helmet had a virtuous tilt.

The following morning, waking at dawn, Mrs. Howett found that her husband had already left their room. But almost immediately, on going to the shuttered window to look out, she caught the low droning of voices—Howett's and his host's. The two men were on the front veranda.

A few moments later she was closer to

them, standing just inside the living room. And now she could hear plainly what her husband was saying.

"I'm absolutely in earnest, Mr. Ransome, when I tell you I want to buy," he was assuring his host. "What figure are you holding the lease of the island at?"

"The syndicate's offered twenty-eight thousand," replied the old man. "But that price is almost giving the place away. You see, the concession from the government has nearly six more years to run. And just letting things go to seed, as the saying is, I'm able to clear fifteen thousand dollars a year. Think what could be earned if the people who took it over from me were to push things!"

"Twenty-eight thousand dollars doesn't scare me at all," asserted Howett. "What goes with the concession?"

"All the buildings and other improvements, such as the jetty and my new groves down the beach—and they'll pay well if they're well handled. The copra trade has been improving steadily in the last few years. I get as much now for a single cargo as I used to get in a whole year, when I first came. Then there's considerable abaca—hemp. But I haven't done any stripping for a long time—it took all of my men to handle the copra."

"Well, Mr. Ransome," said Howett, "I take it that you'd just as soon sell to a private individual as to the Manila syndicate."

"Yes," Ransome returned.

"Then let me buy your property. When the *Sarawak Princess* comes in, instead of going to Singapore, I'll get away an order for the money I've got banked there. The minute it comes, I'll hand you a binding payment and give you a draft for the balance and you can execute a bill of sale. Then when you and your daughter go, you'll leave behind two people who love Leopard Island and will treat your natives the way you have been treating them. And starting from to-day I can learn the hang of things, can't I? Get acquainted with the workmen—and the different plantations and so on?"

"I don't see why not," agreed Ransome, speaking slowly. "You can easily learn all there is to learn in a couple of months. As far as the copra goes, it's a matter of picking the nuts, splitting 'em and drying. You may want to buy drying and pressing machinery—because then you'll be independent

of the weather—especially when you've a big crop just at the beginning of the rainy season. And if you have the capital, there's another thing I'd advise—"

"Advise me by all means! I'll appreciate it."

"You ought to have your own schooner—and land your copra in Manila. It would bring as much as a third more. I've been a little easy-going with the traders and they've got my stuff cheap. But having your own vessel would make you independent on price—and pay. You ought to be able to pick up a good schooner for a few thousand."

"Oh, I'll want my own boat," declared Howett. "And I'll put in the machinery. I'm going to try and make a good clean-up in the six years and then get out. And, by the way, I'd like to have you explain to your natives that I'm taking over here—that I'll be their new master when you're gone."

"Yes, I'll make that all clear to Kaber, my *serang*," promised Ransome; "and, as foreman, he'll see that the others understand. You may have noticed the man—oldish, with a few hairs on his chin, and a turban. He's a Mohammedan of sorts—comes from the Sulu group. If you've been up in the Moro country you know the type."

"Please make Kaber understand that he's to stay on as *serang*," suggested Howett. "I'm absolutely settled about it all, Mr. Ransome, because Mrs. Howett loves the place. In fact, that's my chief reason for wanting to buy. She isn't a strong woman and I want to give her a few quiet, restful years."

"She will find Leopard Island quiet and restful enough," Ransome answered, laughing.

"Then it's a bargain?"

"It's a bargain."

They rose and shook hands.

"I suggest that you say nothing to my wife at this point," said Howett; "that is, until I've talked it over with her. She's had a bad case of nerves, once or twice, and I always take plenty of time before breaking even happy news to her."

Mrs. Howett did not hear Ransome's reply. Before the two men could enter and discover her near presence she tiptoed away, her face more than usually pale, her eyes wide with amazement and concern.

During breakfast Howett scarcely glanced at his wife and ate his papaw hastily. In his whole attitude was something like sup-

pressed excitement. Mrs. Howett did not look at him and scarcely spoke.

This silence on her part was interpreted by Ransome to mean that she was not feeling well.

"I'm having a hammock rigged up for you," he told her, "just outside your room, on the north veranda. That's the coolest spot around here and you can rest to your heart's content."

"You're very kind," she returned, her voice trembling.

After breakfast she had no opportunity of speaking alone with her husband. With a last jovial word of advice about taking things easy, Howett set off with Ransome along a straight path which, beginning at the southern end of the palm grove, led up, then down, through the dense jungle, to the native village.

Left to herself, Mrs. Howett paced the verandas. The three house boys came from the detached building behind the bungalow, which was both cook shack and their sleeping quarters, to set the porches to rights. They were all strikingly alike—round, sleek heads, bright, tucked-up *sarongs*, slim, scurrying bare legs. She disregarded them. Over and over, half aloud, she rehearsed what she would say to her husband.

But neither that afternoon nor that evening was she able to discuss with him what she had overheard. For Ransome was always somewhere in the bungalow; and, so far as conversation was concerned, the house, with its unsubstantial walls, afforded little privacy.

It was not till twenty-four hours later that she found herself alone with Howett, Ransome being in plain sight at a good distance. She came at once to the point.

"You told Mr. Ransome yesterday that you'd buy his concession for twenty-eight thousand dollars," she began.

"Ah! So you were eavesdropping!"

She ignored that. "Why do you adopt that lordly manner with him?" she asked resentfully, "and pretend to have plenty of money, and keep on about the *Sarawak Princess*, when you've pulled the signal down and know—perfectly—that the schooner won't come in? Chester, you must drop all this swank and swagger and not continue to play a double game on a poor, helpless, old man!"

His pink face darkened with sudden rage, and he burst out at her defiantly.

"I'll play what game I want to!" he declared. "And don't you hold me back or interfere with anything I do! Do you hear me? I'm trying to get us out of a mean hole and all you can do is nag at me and wrangle! Well, the bit is in my teeth! And if you don't give me a free hand, you'll—you'll be sorry!"

"Are you threatening me?" she asked.

"You can call it that if you want to! I'm sick of your confounded conscience and your scruples and all the rest of your insincerity!"

"You think I'm not sincere—not honest?"

"Like all women, you want it soft, but you'll take a soft life and keep your mouth shut—if you think that I don't know that you *do* know where the money comes from. Well, it's high time you cut out hypocrisy! Do you mean to tell me that you are innocent of the fact that I've supported you for seven years on gambling?"

She looked at him for a moment, then nodded slowly.

"I—I've suspected how—how you made your money," she admitted. "But, as you say, I didn't *know*, and so I just closed my mind to my doubts and fears. I suppose I've loved you too much to want to admit, even to myself, that you were doing wrong—much less to accuse you of it. But now that I do know—now that you've confessed it, of course I can't go on living on money that isn't honestly earned."

He laughed. "Rats!" he said coarsely. "I saw you once looking at a pack of cards of mine that were marked. Didn't I?"

"Yes." She whispered it. "At Batavia. But you've always explained my doubts away—and—"

"Nothing of the kind! I've explained. And you knew all the time I was lying! And you were willing to let me lie and salve your scruples with lies. But now, when I've got a prize in my hands, something really worth while, you begin pulling this goody-goody stuff!"

"What you say is true," she went on sorrowfully. "I've lived on bad money and lied to myself. And so it's time that I stopped."

"It's time!" he returned scornfully. "From now on, at least be honest with yourself—and with me! You'll get along a lot better and so will I. But whatever you do, let me tell you one thing—and I mean it! You've always hampered me with your silly ethics, even if you've kept still about them.

And I've passed up many a good thing because I was afraid you wouldn't stand for it. But I'm sick of it and I shan't do it any more! *I'm going to have this island!*"

"How? With only a few pesos in your pocket?"

"I don't know just how but I'm going to work it out. The old man's had a fortune out of it—all he needs. Now he's done with it. He's just a shell—ready to die. Well, I'm going to step into his shoes!"

"Do you mean you're going to rob him?—a good old man who's sheltering us and feeding us? The men you gambled with—they knew they were taking a chance and could watch their own interests. But you're tricking Mr. Ransome. And I'm not going to stand for it!"

"No?"

"No!" she repeated. "He shall not be swindled! No matter what happens, when he comes back to the house I'm going to tell him the truth!"

He gave a toss of his chin and chuckled.

After that they sat for more than an hour in silence, Howett smoking and reading, Mrs. Howett watching the stooped figure of their host as the latter moved hither and thither among some natives working near the jetty. Even when, the heat of the day increasing, Ransome started slowly up toward his bungalow, Howett made no remark—did not so much as even turn toward his wife.

As the old man joined his guests and seated himself wearily, Mrs. Howett at once carried out her avowed purpose.

"Mr. Ransome," she began earnestly, "we've planted ourselves upon you here in a way that has made it impossible for you to do otherwise than entertain us. For that reason I'm determined that you shan't be deceived about us."

Ransome's white head snapped back and he turned wondering eyes upon her.

"Yes, Mrs. Howett?" he encouraged. "What do you wish to say to me?"

"This: My husband has been talking about buying your concession. I heard him say yesterday morning that twenty-eight thousand dollars wasn't an amount of money that bothered him any. Well, the fact is that we haven't a dollar in the world—we didn't even have our passage money to Singapore. And that is why Captain Swinlow, of the *Tamil*, put us off his schooner on the other side of the island."

A silence followed. Ransome stared at

the matting, his head nodding more vigorously than its wont, while his fingers played on the arms of his chair. Howett smoked calmly, looking out to sea. Sitting erect and tense, Mrs. Howett watched both men.

Presently, "Yes, I knew it was the *Tamil* and Captain Swinlow," admitted Ransome quietly.

Even then Howett attempted no explanation of his falsehood. His chin a trifle higher, his head farther back, as if he were taking the most comfortable attitude possible, he blew smoke rings into the warm, still air.

Mrs. Howett went on. "I love my husband," she said, "but I see his faults. One of them is that he likes to talk big—to mention large sums of money and make absurd pretensions about commercial connections that he hasn't at all. Why, we shan't even be able to pay you for our stay here. And so I can't let you be misled about the buying of the concession. You must go ahead with your dealings with that Manila syndicate."

"M-m," breathed Ransome. His face was clouded. He was plainly embarrassed. "I don't care about your expenses here, Mrs. Howett—of course! Please don't think of them again."

"Thank you. And if you will realize that Chester and I are absolutely penniless—well, then there's nothing more to say."

Now Howett suddenly sat up. "So you're finished, are you, Nettie?" he inquired, as if he were more amused than anything else over her revelations. "You're done, eh?"

"Yes."

"In that case"—he turned to Ransome—"I suppose I may have an opportunity of answering this—well, this rather extraordinary stuff that Nettie has just delivered herself of." He laughed.

Ransome looked bewildered.

"Of course, Mr. Howett," he agreed. "But let me say that no matter what the truth is, so far no harm has been done at all, because I haven't, as you know, had any chance of calling off my negotiations with the Manila people. Everything is exactly as it was before you mentioned taking over the concession."

"I shall purchase your concession with twenty-eight thousand dollars in cash," asserted Howett quietly. "So you needn't worry about what my wife has told you. The fact is, I run my own affairs and let her

in on mighty little concerning any financial deals. Some years ago I discovered that it was impossible to let her know when I was in funds. She says she loves me, though she knows my faults; well, that goes double. She is the sort of woman—there are plenty of them—who can't rest as long as there's a cent in the bank."

"Chester!" exclaimed his wife, aghast. She stood up.

He looked at her boldly. "While you were unloading your tender conscience to Mr. Ransome and telling him what you thought was true, I kept still," he reminded her, "didn't I?"

She drew a deep breath, faced Ransome for a second, then resumed her chair.

"Nettie is what you'd call a spendthrift," Howett went on. "That is why we're in the South Seas. More than once she's spent the superfluous funds that I'd figured on using in some business deal. And at last I lost heart and realized that I'd never get ahead if I was on a stated salary known to her. She'd blow it as fast as it came in. Since leaving the United States, however, I've been able to save—unknown to her. And I've got the money. It's not in my breeches pocket but it will be available when the time comes to pay it over. That's all there is to it."

"Where is it deposited?" asked Mrs. Howett. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to tell Mr. Ransome that."

"What Mr. Ransome wants is the cash," returned Howett, coolly. "He doesn't care what bank it comes out of. And to be flat-footed, Nettie, I'd rather not have you know where the money is."

Now she laughed. "Well, Mr. Ransome," she said, "you must be puzzled by this contradictory information. And all I can say in conclusion is that Chester, since our marriage, has never been on a salary. He has earned our expenses by gambling on steamships and in smoking rooms on trains. He's never, to my knowledge, had a bank account. So I could scarcely use it up, could I? As for being a spendthrift, you can judge of that, I think, if you'll inspect my suitcase. I have no expensive clothes, no jewels—nothing."

Ransome turned to her, his look appealing. "This is all somewhat painful to me," he confessed, "as misunderstandings between married people always are to a helpless third person. I shall be glad when Suzanne ar-

rives—oh, very glad! And you and Mr. Howett can take the ship that brings my daughter. If you haven't the passage money, I shall be pleased to pay it for you."

"Thank you," she answered. "And there is just one thing more: Chester referred, yesterday morning, when he didn't know I was listening, to my nervous condition. I don't know what he means, because I'm a strong, healthy woman and have never had more than a day's illness since I first met him. But sometimes I almost think he's not mentally well."

At that, Howett burst into good-natured laughter. "Oh, you poor old dear!" he remarked pityingly. "I'm not mentally well, eh!" And he went into another outbreak of laughter.

Ransome studied him a moment.

"But about the *Tamil*—and Swinlow?" he asked. "That's one thing, Mr. Howett, that you haven't cleared up."

"As I have told Nettie, more than once," replied Howett, "I gave you an incorrect version of our leaving the schooner solely on her account. I didn't know you, Mr. Ransome—didn't realize how kind and fine you were. I was afraid to admit that we were a couple of bums—"

"Oh, not that!" contradicted Ransome.

"But how did I know you wouldn't refuse us shelter if you knew the low-down—and turn us into some hut? I was at my wit's end! I haven't any cash with me—and the thing happened so suddenly that I didn't have time to think it out well. But I'm sure I've done the wrong thing. I'm sorry."

"That's all right," Ransome returned. "It really doesn't matter." He rose then, wearily. "I think I'll go and lie down a while, if you'll excuse me," he added. As he passed Mrs. Howett he gave her a glance of mingled disquiet and warning.

Left alone, the two on the front veranda spent the next few hours in a silence broken only by the turning of leaves, as Howett read, and by the snap and creak of Mrs. Howett's chair, as, from time to time she moved restlessly. In silence, too, they ate their luncheon. Ransome did not join them, but remained in his room.

After dinner that night Howett announced to his host his determination to spend the night on the veranda, saying that it was cooler there and adding that he believed Mrs. Howett would be more comfortable alone. To that Ransome made no objection.

When he had said an early good night and left the porch, Mrs. Howett turned to her husband.

"Chester," she said, "I intend to ask Mr. Ransome to allow me to remain here with him and his daughter after you go. It's a—a terribly sad decision that I've come to, Chester. But I feel that from now on our roads must divide."

He laughed. "Suit yourself," he returned pleasantly.

"I think I've always known that a break would have to come some day," she continued sadly. "You don't care for me, Chester. Your anxiety isn't real. Your compliments aren't sincere. And I haven't been honest with you, either. I defended you to Captain Swinlow that day on the beach, when I knew you were in the wrong. And I feel sure you cheated that Mr. Nichols. A woman is like that—she'll overlook crookedness and trickery as long as a man's faithful to her. That's been my sin; and now I'm being punished for it. I deserve all I'll suffer."

Howett rose abruptly, sought the hammock which had been swung across the north veranda and climbed into it. "Good night," he called as he settled down.

Alone in Suzanne Ransome's room, Mrs. Howett wept silently for a time, then slept. Late in the night she woke suddenly. She lay for a while, listening intently, hearing only a sleepy frog chorus from the distant swamp. Getting up softly, she stepped to the window opening and looked out. The moon was at its full and beyond the veranda the night was like day. The porch was in plain view. Across it the hammock swung empty.

As quietly as possible, she stole back and lay down, wide awake and nervously alert, but not so much as turning on the cane bed. No sound came from outside the bungalow; but, within, a lattice door was closed—and as if cautiously.

Outside, Howett might have been seen slipping along the veranda in his stocking feet until he gained his hammock. Soon he was breathing regularly and heavily.

But Mrs. Howett could not sleep. As she lay, open-eyed and wondering, she heard the low, mournful whining of a dog.

She did not close her eyes again. At daylight, when the house boys came pattering through the living room from the back to the front veranda, fetching the breakfast

service, and the grinding of the morning coffee sounded from the cook shack, she got up and dressed.

"Did you sleep well?" Howett called in to her, as cordially as if there had been no dissension.

"Well enough," she evaded. "And did you find the hammock comfortable?"

"Tiptop!" he assured her, heartily. "And I'm going to have a swim before chow. Hand me a towel, Nettie, will you?"

That same moment, from the main room, there rose a shrill cry.

"Marster!"

Wails followed, and frantic calls. There was running and a clamor of alarm.

"Good heavens! What's the trouble!" exclaimed Howett. In his slippers, with the bath towel still over an arm, he stepped through the window opening into the bedroom, then swung wide the door leading into the main apartment.

Across it, the door of Ransome's room stood wide. On its sill were crowded the house boys, jabbering excitedly, breaking out in weeping, beating their breasts. At sight of Howett, one came running to him.

"Marster! Marster!" he sobbed.

With a smothered exclamation Howett sprang past the man and looked into Ransome's room over the shoulders of the natives blocking the door. Then, drawing the two servants out of the way quickly, he closed the door and faced about.

"Nettie," he said solemnly, "Mr. Ransome is dead."

"Dead!" Her face lost its color. She went back to her bed and sat, propping her head on shaking hands.

Howett was all concern for her. "What a shocking thing to happen while we're here!" he mourned. "But, my dear, don't let it make you ill. He was so old, you know, and so feeble—"

"His daughter— Oh, that poor girl! Coming home to him—and now—now—" She began to tremble violently.

"Nettie!" comforted Howett. "Don't go to pieces like that! Control yourself! And stay right here. I'll attend to things." He was cool and collected. When he was dressed he called the servants together and gave some orders, using a few words of the broken English which made up the limited "pidgin" of the island—using also a few words of the native dialect.

He brought his wife some breakfast him-

self. "The boys are so upset and crazy that there's no doing anything with them," he declared. "I fixed this bite up." His manner was quite brisk.

"Oh, I can't eat!" she said brokenly. "Please don't leave it! Just the thought of food makes me ill!"

"I've sent to the settlement for some men to dig the grave," he announced. "I picked out a high spot just beyond the great banyan, where the ground is loose and dry. The funeral will be this afternoon."

"But a service for him, Chester?" his wife asked. "Will he be buried without that?"

"Couldn't you read it, dear?" he suggested.

"Oh, I can't!" she exclaimed. "I wouldn't be able to see the words! I'd break down!"

"We'll have a service when Miss Ransome comes," he decided. "The captain of the schooner that brings her can officiate. So don't fret about not having it to-day, will you? We are using a linen dressing gown for his winding sheet. He looks more like a poet than ever."

"I can't see him!" she cried. "I—I couldn't stand it!" She buried her head in her arms.

He argued with her gently. "But isn't it fortunate that it happened while we were here? Suppose the old man had been alone? Or if Miss Ransome had been here alone with him? We're going to be on hand to break the news to her and make things a bit easier for her. Think what a comfort you'll be to the girl, Nettie."

"You know quite a little of the island language, don't you?" she commented.

"I've been learning," he replied. With a reassuring pat on the shoulder he took up the tray and hurried out.

Soon, about the bungalow, crowds from the settlement began to gather—men, women and children—until the yard was full. They called up questions to the house boys, the only natives Howett permitted to come upon the veranda. The jabbering was high-pitched and continuous. And there was much lamenting.

"They loved the old man!" Mrs. Howett exclaimed the next time Howett looked in upon her solicitously. She was quieter now and noted that he was carrying three, wide, coverless boxes, stacked one upon the other. The top box held papers.

"Why, what's that?" she asked. Then saw that what she had taken for boxes were

three drawers from the table in the living room.

"I'm taking precautions," he replied; "I'm making sure that none of the old man's effects are tampered with. Can't trust these natives. The first chance they get they'll be rifling, in the hope of finding money. Some of these papers may deal with the lease or other important business matters. Miss Suzanne would find it awkward if they were to be destroyed or lost." He went out and a few minutes later was busily clicking Ransome's typewriter.

Early in the afternoon, with measured tread, several of the older men of the island carried the body of their master out of the bungalow, across the rear veranda and along that ascending path toward the newly dug grave. Then there burst forth the laments of the natives swarming about the house. In a double stream, which met at the back gate and was narrowed to a slender, drawn-out procession, they followed the bearers, their dark faces shining with tears.

When the funeral party was out of sight Mrs. Howett slipped from her room and hurried to the death chamber. In the night, Howett had been gone from his hammock. What she meant to search for was evidence that might tell of a struggle—of the manner in which the old man had met his death.

The bed remained as it had been when the master of the house was lifted from it. On a chair to one side were Ransome's clothes. His hat hung from a hook on the lattice door. Otherwise, there were no signs of disorder in the room.

She began to look about, pulling out drawers but not disturbing their contents, and taking care to push them back. She lifted articles to look under them. Close to the head of the bed stood a small table. On it was a little, round teakwood tray, holding ashes, the ends of some burned matches and the butts of a few cigarettes. As she picked this up she found beneath it a sealed envelope which had been addressed on the typewriter. It bore the one word, "Suzanne."

Tears swam in Mrs. Howett's eyes. "He wrote to her!" she said brokenly. "He's had this here always, probably, in case anything happened to him! Oh, dear old gentleman!"

But the next moment, with a cautious glance through the door, she ran a trembling finger quickly under the flap of the envelope,

broke it open and drew out the letter. It was typewritten on a single sheet of foolscap, and ran:

MY DARLING DAUGHTER: I haven't been feeling well for several days. Of course I shall be better soon. However I shall write you while I have the strength, for I am very weak at times and it may be possible that I'll not live to see you again, though you must be getting close to home by now.

But, dear Suzanne, if I'm gone by the time you arrive, you'll find a friend of mine here—Chester Howett—a splendid, honest, likable chap, one whom you can trust absolutely. He's been with me several weeks. If anything happens, Howett knows that I want to lie up on the slope by the banyan. Don't mourn too much, my darling. And it is my wish that you do not go away at once, but stay a little, to give Chester whatever help and information you can about the island.

No terms of endearment concluded the letter. And the manner in which it was signed was most curious. Ransome had written his name in full—twice. Each "Henry Ransome" was in his wavering, uneven hand. Yet neither signature was parallel with the last line of the message. One of the names cut across the lower right-hand corner of the paper. The second was written as far to the left as possible. It was almost at right angles to the last line.

Mrs. Howett stared at the page.

"I'm not even mentioned!" she exclaimed, astonished. "Only Chester! There's not a word about a woman's being here—to a girl who's coming alone! What a strange thing for a father to do!"

And then, almost fainting as the truth began to dawn upon her, she thrust the letter into her bosom, half staggered to a chair on the front veranda and sank into it. Once more she began to tremble. Then she wept.

She was lying, limp and pale, when half an hour later, the people of the island, silent now and with bowed heads, streamed back toward their village. At sight of the natives the dogs, chained to a palm inside the front gate, leaped up, barking. Howett's voice called to them, bidding them to be quiet.

"Why, Nettie!" he exclaimed tenderly as he discovered her in tears. "What's the matter? It's all over now! Try to pull yourself together, dear!"

"I blame myself for not reading the burial service over the poor old man!" she said. "Why do I always shrink from a thing that's a little hard! Oh, I'm weak! Weak!"

"You're a sweet, tender-hearted woman!" declared Howett. He sat down near her.

Suddenly she straightened, dry-eyed.

"But I shan't be a coward any more!" she said resolutely. "I shan't shrink from doing a thing that's unpleasant! And I'm going to ask you, frankly, Chester: Why did you write Miss Ransome a letter this morning?"

He blinked at her. "A letter?" he asked. "To Miss Ransome?"

"You're gaining time!" she declared sharply. "You know you wrote her a letter—on the typewriter—using a sheet of paper that Mr. Ransome had signed his name on twice, when he was trying a new pen. Don't deny it! Because I saw him trying the pen. You put that sheet into the machine. Oh, you haven't forged his name! You're much cleverer than that! You've written in a fake letter over a genuine signature! And you thought I wouldn't go into his room—"

"And sneak!" supplied Howett, his blue eyes hard.

"And sneak," she went on. "You sealed the letter and you didn't think I'd open it. You do the tricky thing—and you count on my sense of honor for your safety!"

He laughed. "It's always easy to make use of a tender conscience in that way," he acknowledged good-naturedly. "But—what have you done with the letter?"

"I destroyed it," she lied promptly.

Unaccustomed to anything but the truth from her, he did not disbelieve her. "Did you, really!" he exclaimed. "Oh, well, no matter. Poor old dad died before he could write a farewell line."

"Oh, you cruel creature!" she breathed. "I'm finding you out with a vengeance! But you'll discover that from now on I can be just as tricky as you!"

"Good!" he exclaimed. "If you're going to be just as tricky as I, then our fortune's made!" He had leaned forward eagerly and had lowered his voice as he spoke.

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Howett asked.

"I'll show you!" Out of a pocket he produced a folded slip of paper. "Here's another page on which Ransome tried pen points," he explained. "Above his signature, I've typed in a neat little bill of sale!"

"Bill of sale!" she faltered.

"Nettie!" he cried. "I told you I'd have this island! Well, I've got it!"

She stood up. "But surely you wouldn't take it all away from that girl?"

"I'm not worrying about her!" he answered. "I'm thinking of you! She's got plenty without the few thousands this concession would bring. You and I have nothing. They've made their fortune out of exploiting these natives. Well, it's *our* time to collect! Are we going to let this chance slip and spend the rest of our lives as beggars? Not much! And you won't have to perjure yourself or put your soul in danger. All that I ask you to do is keep your mouth shut. The young lady will come, read the bill of sale, which is a receipt, and then go away. And that'll be the end of it. Here you and I will stay, masters of Leopard!"

She looked at him squarely. "No, Chester," she answered firmly, "I won't be even a silent confederate in robbing Miss Ransome. I've shut my eyes to a good deal in these last few years. That's all the more reason why I should be straight and honest now. And I want you to give up this scheme! It can't lead to anything but bad!"

He nodded slowly, looking up at her. "Perhaps you're right," he agreed. "And it may be possible to turn the trick in another way—a perfectly honest way. I mean this: Miss Ransome may see her way to letting me stay on here as a superintendent and run the island for her. That would net her a good return and give us a living to boot."

In sudden relief and joy, Mrs. Howett went up to him. "Oh, Chester, that is the better plan," she assured him. "And let's follow it! Chester, things will go better for us if we'll try to do what's right! They will! I feel it! And how I'll work! You'll see! And I won't leave you!"

He stood up, slipping the bit of paper into a pocket. "It's worth trying," he said earnestly. "And of course you'll work. You've always pulled your half. Anyhow, if it'll make you happy—"

"It will! It will! Oh, Chester!" She sank down once more, weak with hope and gratitude.

"Say! You know you're hungry," he told her. "That's what's the matter! Just wait here while I bring you something to eat."

It was a full quarter of an hour before he returned. Then he brought a tray on which was a covered bowl.

"The boys seem to be all in," he remarked. "I can't get a thing out of one of them. So

I fixed this up for you myself. And, dear, I want you to eat. You haven't had a bit of food this whole day. Come! I've brought you some warm broth and these little biscuits you like so much. And while you're eating, if you'll excuse me, I'll take a jog down to the warehouse. I want to see Kaber about some work that must be done to-morrow." Touching her hair affectionately, he hurried away.

She uncovered the bowl. It was half full of turtle soup and in it showed small bits of the dark-greenish meat. Hearing the clink of the dish, the dogs began again to pull at their chains, whining and pleading to be noticed. To quiet them, she cooled two of the larger portions of the turtle and tossed them over the veranda railing. Her throw fell short and only the nearer dog of the pair was able to secure the meat. He wolfed it down.

She lay back, for a moment, watching Howett cross toward the iron warehouse. Again a dog began to beg. After cooling another bit of the turtle she rose and walked to the end of the veranda and called to the dog which was farther away. Then she made a discovery. The dog which had eaten the first two portions was lying stretched out flat on his side—absolutely quiet.

"Dead!"

As she cried out, Howett halted and looked round—then started back on a run. At the same moment a house boy appeared at the rear corner of the veranda. She ran to him, seized him by the arm and drew him forward along the porch.

"The dog is dead!" she cried. "He eat turtle! That man"—Howett was just outside the gate and she pointed down at him—"he put poison in it! He killed your master! He killed Mr. Ransome!"

She was able to say nothing more to the boy. Alarmed by her wild attitude as well as at the sight of Howett's furious expression, as the latter sprang up the coral path, the servant twisted out of her grasp and fled toward the cook shack.

"What's the row?" demanded Howett. He was breathing hard from his run. His eyes darted to the tray, then back to her.

"You didn't mention me in that letter to Miss Ransome," she accused. "That's because you didn't intend that I should be here alive when she returned! You brought me poisoned turtle meat! Look! The dog is dead!"

He stared down where she pointed.

"And you killed Mr. Ransome!" she went on.

He swung round toward her. He had his wind once more, now, and could answer. "Well," he remarked quietly, "what if I did?"

"God forgive you!" She backed away from him.

"The old man was on his last legs," he continued. "He couldn't have lived more than a few months at the best. And, anyhow, what are you going to do about it?"

His very calmness staggered her. "What can I do?" she repeated dully. "What can I do?"

"Do you know something?" he asked her. "You—you are the one to blame for his sudden death."

"I! Equally guilty with you! What a monstrous thing to say!"

"After I'd told him I was going to buy his concession, you informed him I hadn't any money. That made an ass of me. How could I go on eating at the same table with a man who regarded me as a liar—and worse? I have *some* pride! So, you see, you forced my hand. There was nothing else to do but get him out of the way before the girl came."

"And get me out of the way, too! Because I'd tell of your awful crime!"

He shrugged. "Oh, your testimony wouldn't do me much harm in a court," he returned. "In the first place, as you're my wife, you wouldn't be allowed to go on the stand against me. In the second place, if you were to involve me, I'd involve you. My dear, we'll go fifty-fifty on the old man's demise."

Horror looked from her eyes. "I didn't force your hand!" she declared. "From the minute you saw that poor old man here alone, you planned murder! That's why it didn't matter what I said to him about you or what he said to me—since we were both to be poisoned. And, perhaps, with me out of the way, you think you can marry Miss Ransome?"

He smiled. "Well, I'll confess the idea has occurred to me."

"I knew it! The thought was in your mind when I asked you about the portrait and you said her mouth was weak. Oh, what ghastly things I'm learning about you! And I thought I knew you! But I've never

guessed *half* of the truth! You're a monster!"

He bowed.

"Thank you," he said ironically. "I admit that I have my points. Of course, up to now, our well-known civilization has rather hampered me a bit. And I've kicked around the South Seas for years, not getting ahead—just getting older. Well, I'm middle-aged. There'll come a time soon when I *can't* get around and my hands won't be so cunning with the cards, or my eyes so sharp. And then what? I'll be down and out! On the beach! Eh? Not if I know it! I'm taking a desperate chance. If I lose, I lose. But if I win—"

He drew a deep breath. Then, after a short silence:

"Anyhow, for a while I'm going to do as I please. If I see something I want, I'm going to take it—whether it's a life or just property. And I don't have to think about arrest, or jail, or the rope. This blessed spot is free of them! Here's what I call real liberty!"

"Liberty!" she echoed hoarsely. "Not for the old man in his grave! Not for me!"

"Just for me," he told her. "Here on Leopard, with Ransome out of the way, my word goes! Get that? I'm czar! And all the natives here realize it, I think. Anybody—and that includes you—who stands in my way, I'll put underground." He stepped aside into their room, shutting the lattice door after him.

"Oh!"

For a moment she stood wild-eyed and helpless. Then, suddenly running across the room, she seized the handle of a big native creese that was hanging on the wall, drew it from its sheath and fled to the door opening on the rear veranda.

"Where are you going?" He came to stand in the doorway. His right hand was hanging at his side.

She did not answer, but dashed toward the cook shack.

Howett followed her as far as the door. There he raised that right hand. In it was an automatic. Deliberately taking aim, he fired at her—three times.

She cried out in horror and terror. Running on through the palm grove she made toward the jungle, plunged into it and vanished.

Howett took out the magazine of his smoking weapon, put three cartridges into it,

returned it to the butt of the automatic and sauntered leisurely to the front porch. The uncovered bowl caught his eye. He carried the tray out to the kitchen. Not a single house boy was about. He emptied the turtle broth down a drain.

There were two other important things to be done. Quick-foot, he made up the trail to that sapling beyond the banyan and the new grave and pulled out of the bushes both the signal flags and the severed line. These he carried back to the house, where he hid them. Next he gathered together all of his wife's clothing and toilet articles, stuffed them into her suit case, lugged the case to a fire pit which was behind the servants' hut and set a match to her belongings.

He spent the remainder of the afternoon searching the bungalow. From an old trunk he brought forth a bag of small silver coins—old Spanish pesetas, new Philippine five and ten-centavo pieces and some Chinese money of silver and brass. Out of the sack he liberally supplied his pockets. Soon afterward, tucked in under a rafter of Ransome's room, he found a dozen lumpish packages, wrapped in sheet lead. Unrolled, they proved to contain paper money—twenty-peso notes mostly—carefully done up in the yielding metal as a protection against rodents.

He did not count the notes but turned his attention to Ransome's account books which showed the wages paid the *serang* and the natives. When he knew how much the servants and the various outdoor workers received, he first disposed of the dead dog, then made off to the settlement. As yet he could speak only a half dozen words of the Leopard dialect. But, as he gathered the brown men together, his attitude that of the new master, he did not need speech. For he gave out a generous supply of coins.

The money rallied the people to him. When he returned to the bungalow the house boys went with him. Under his supervision they prepared Ransome's room for him and moved his luggage into it. This step he took for two reasons. It dissipated any superstitious fear that the servants might hold for the apartment; also, so far as a possible intruder from the jungle was concerned, that spot was the safest in the house.

Thus, on Leopard Island, in the brief space of twenty-four hours, there had been established a new and an open-handed, régime.

It was successful from the start. The

gathering and splitting of coconuts went on at a rate which doubled Ransome's record. In a white shirt, belted with scarlet, shaved and combed, wearing his pistols and a pair of high boots into the tops of which he stuffed the bottoms of his immaculately clean trousers, Howett was among his workmen early and late, learning their tongue, gaining their confidence and friendship, encouraging them to their best efforts and never failing to reward them more than liberally.

Even when the swift dark of the tropics settled over the island he was not done for the day. About him, ranged in a half circle, he stood his personal servants and for two or three hours he pursued his study of their tongue—tirelessly. When the house boys were dismissed they went with an extra payment of Ransome's coin.

After that the new master of Leopard Island would steal out of his house and lurk along the edge of the jungle, automatic in hand.

But as the days and nights went by he discovered not even a sign of Mrs. Howett. And he got no report of her having been seen by others. The jungle had received her. Out of it came no sound to tell whether she was alive or dead.

On the twentieth day after her disappearance, at about two in the afternoon, while Howett was superintending some work at the warehouse, the natives in a copra clearing of a sudden sent up a shout. Following their pointing, Howett made out, to northward and well up over the horizon, a topsail schooner.

He took a telescope and went down on the beach. From there, studying the ship, he saw that she was heading so as to come close to the island on the eastern side. She was on the starboard tack, with a quartering breeze; and if she held the course she was steering it would bring her off the jetty in a couple of hours.

"Suzanne Ransome!" he exclaimed.

At the copra clearing Kaber assembled the men of the island; and Howett, who now could talk the simple dialect well enough, delivered a first, short speech.

"Comes now she who is named Suzanne," he told them, "the daughter of the old lord. Among my people, when a man has died, all, thereafter, for a time, go forlornly. Therefore, return thou to thy huts and stay in them most quiet." To the house boys he added, "Follow to the shore with me.

But speak no hint to the daughter of her great sorrow, lest, being too sudden, it sicken her."

He pocketed the automatics he had been wearing openly. Then, telescope under arm, he climbed the trail to the north headland. But, arrived there, he spent less time in watching the schooner, as she came bounding on, than in searching the slopes about him, and the ribbon of beach to the east. However he saw no one emerge from the jungle to await the vessel; and when he descended to the jetty he wore an expression of complete satisfaction.

Before long he was able to make out some figures on the quarter-deck of the schooner. They were leaning on the rail on the port side. One, in white, was plainly a woman and she was watching the island through a glass. More than once she raised her arm above her head and waved. Each time, in answer, Howett swung his helmet.

It was well along in the afternoon when the schooner luffed and hove to several hundred yards off the jetty. At once a boat was lowered, indicating that the schooner did not intend to anchor. Remarking this, Howett's expression of satisfaction increased.

"I can handle our young lady if no meddling skipper comes ashore," he told himself.

The dinghy, with Suzanne Ransome seated in the stern sheets and her trunks and satchels piled in the bows, was coming in under the lee of the jetty, rowed by two native sailors. The girl was not waving any more but was staring at the stranger who was waiting for her. Every little while she turned her head toward the native village in the distance, where scarcely an islander was in sight.

As the small boat pulled close to shore she called out.

"Where is my father?" she asked. "I am Miss Ransome. Where is daddy?"

Howett uncovered. As yet he could not see her face clearly, shaded as it was by a broad-brimmed, straw hat. But he could see the blowing fair hair.

"Mr. Ransome is somewhere up behind the house," he answered.

"Oh!" White teeth flashed in a smile of relief. "Please put on your helmet," she added.

The dinghy rode into shallow water. At a sign from Howett his house boys ran splashing into it and each seized a load of

luggage, thus lightening the boat. The third servant took hold of the prow, dragging it into the sand. The sailors unshipped their oars and sprang out to the beach. Then Miss Ransome stood up.

She was the tall, slender girl of the portrait, with the same delicate features and dark eyes and the same bright hair pufing out at either temple under her sun hat. Now, however, there was no touch of the childish expression in her face. Her beauty, so perfect that it was almost startling, was the beauty of a woman.

Her manners were charming. Before Howett could introduce himself she had rested a gloved hand on his arm and stepped to the sand, then she held out the hand cordially to him. "So daddy has somebody with him at last!" she commented gayly.

"I've been here for some weeks," was Howett's answer as they shook hands. "My name is Chester Howett." All of the luggage was now on the beach. He motioned the house boys to shove off the dinghy.

But Miss Ransome checked them a moment, giving her command in the dialect, and opened her purse.

"No! Please! Let me!" said Howett, understanding her purpose. Quickly he fore stalled her by giving each of the boatmen a fee so generous that it sent the pair to their oars with satisfaction as Howett's servants set the dinghy afloat.

Miss Ransome faced toward the schooner and fluttered a handkerchief in a farewell salute. Whereupon a cheer went up from the vessel and the ensign dipped once. Laughing and waving again, she backed a few steps, then turned.

"And now for my dear daddy!" she exclaimed. "Is he well, Mr. Howett?"

"Quite well."

There was a short wait while Howett superintended the division of the luggage. During it the girl looked toward the settlement. "What's happened to all the natives?" she asked. "I thought a nice, jolly mob of them would be down to welcome me."

"It's been so long since you were here," returned Howett evasively. "But—how well you speak the dialect! Mr. Ransome was saying the other day that he rather thought you wouldn't remember much of it."

"I learned it as a child," she pointed out. "And somehow just getting back on home soil has recalled it to me."

They started toward the bungalow. Be-

fore them went the servants, toiling slowly with their loads. Howett kept behind the boys, suiting his pace to theirs.

She fell into step at his side. "Then you're father's new overseer," she said.

"I'm in charge—yes," he replied deferentially. "Tell me, do you see many changes in the place?"

"Everything looks about as I remember it," she said; "except that the trees seem smaller than they used to." She laughed at that. "And the path to the house is cut in half!"

"It's far enough, just the same," he returned; "especially in this heat. Don't try to make it too fast, Miss Ransome. I'm afraid you've forgotten how careful one has to be in the tropics." He halted, as if to get breath, and looked back.

By now the dinghy was close under the schooner.

But Miss Ransome was impatient. She started on alone. As they came near to the gate a dog began to bark in greeting and stood on his hind legs to look over the fence. "Oh, daddy's got a collie!" cried the girl. "Isn't he a handsome fellow!"

"Yes, but he's lonely," Howett declared. "There ought to be another one here. Isn't he a fine, friendly beast?" He paused outside the fence to lay a caressing hand on the dog's head. Then once more he glanced seaward. The schooner had picked the dinghy up and was already standing off on a tack to windward to get a good offing and was gaining way rapidly.

Miss Ransome went on to the gate.

"Daddy!" she called across it. "Dear daddy!" She tried to open the gate but it had caught, somehow. She stood aside as Howett bent and worked with the fastening.

The house boys had continued up along the fence on their way to the rear veranda. Now only the girl and Howett were in front of the house.

"Why isn't father on the porch?" she asked. There was a note of concern in her voice.

Howett swung the gate wide and permitted her to pass. She hurried along the path and up the steps, taking off her hat as she went and calling as before. The front door stood open. She entered the main room.

"Daddy, dear!" she sang out. "Where are you? It's Suzanne!"

Howett followed her out on the back

veranda. Now his expression was doleful. His eyes were lowered.

She turned to him. "How strange!" she exclaimed. "He knew I was coming? Didn't he? Is he in the grove? Mr. Howett, something's wrong!"

"Yes." He nodded sadly. "Miss Ransome, it's very painful for me to have to tell you, that—that—oh, I can't bear to grieve you, when you've just come home, so filled with hope and—"

"My father is dead!" she interrupted. Her voice was surprisingly even.

He bowed.

Slowly she turned and reentered the bungalow. She was pale but she did not weep. At the center of the main room she paused, and looked about her.

"He is not here!" she faltered, as if talking to herself. "Oh, daddy! Daddy!" She sank to a chair, staring at the floor.

Howett came to stand a few feet from her. "He died about a month ago," he said; "in the night, peacefully. He had been feeble for a long time; but perhaps he did not tell you that."

She did not reply; and he fell to walking to and fro, his head lowered, his hands behind his back.

"How I've dreaded this!" he told her feelingly. "A hundred times since he died, I've stood in front of your picture there and sorrowed to think what I'd have to tell you."

Suddenly she rose and faced him. "At the jetty," she began, "why didn't you tell me father was gone then? Why did you wait? I could have asked the schooner to stay over and take me to Singapore. And here I am alone!"

"My dear young lady!" exclaimed Howett, as if amazed. "It never occurred to me for a second that you'd wish to go away at once! I thought, of course, there'd be things here that you'd want to attend to—and—"

"But you told me my father was somewhere up behind the house!" she reminded him. "Now I know what you meant! And, oh, that was cruel!"

"Don't say that!" he implored. "Could I tell you, there on the beach, that your father was gone? I felt *that* would be cruel. And so, I suppose, I've done the wrong thing! Well, it's just like a fool man to make a mistake under such circumstances. And I'm sorry! Truly sorry. But I felt you should be here, in the old home, before you knew. So I told the natives not to meet

your boat. I knew they wouldn't be able to keep the sad news from you—and—"

Again she interrupted—with a gesture of impatience, sank to the chair once more and burst into tears. "Oh, my poor daddy!" she sobbed. "Always so good to me! And he died here alone!"

Howett went to the front door and stood there, leaning and looking out. Presently, when she had somewhat regained her composure, he came slowly back. "There were certain arrangements that I knew you'd wish to make, Miss Ransome," he said. "I mean, before you left again. Because, you see, when I first came here, I bought the Leopard Island concession from your father."

"Oh!" A handkerchief to her cheek, she looked up at him. "I understood he was to sell." After a moment's thought she added, "So this isn't my home any longer."

"Please make it your home as long as you feel inclined," he urged. "But there must be things you'll wish to take when you go—packing to do, and so on." From a pocket he took a folded paper, spread it out and handed it to her. "The bill of sale," he explained.

She read it carefully, handed it back without comment and rose. "Wh-where is my father's grave?" she asked tremulously.

"Come."

Howett led the way. The sun was yet in sight above the jungle. The palm grave was mottled by the shadows of tree bole and feathery top. But in the forest there was already gloom and the birds were still. When the two reached that swale which dimpled the slope the girl stopped and Howett helped her gather some yellow and purple flowers. Then they went on, not speaking. The girl kept glancing ahead. In her look was both grief and dread.

The freshly heaped mound was covered with large, curiously shaped bunches of coral. As Miss Ransome caught sight of it, with a choking sob she hastened her steps, knelt and spread the blossoms on the grave. Then again she wept silently.

Helmet in hand, Howett waited near by, the picture of reverent and sympathetic sorrow. The sun was now dropping below the hill line above and the sky was aflame. In the close-grown forest, with the swift going of the light, there fell a profound silence.

Of a sudden, this was broken. From somewhere not far to the right, a loud, hoarse call sounded.

"*Suzanne Ransome! Suzanne Ransome!*" The girl started up. Howett pivoted, staring, dismayed, into the jungle.

"What's that?" the girl asked in consternation, backing toward him. "Some one called me! Did you hear it?"

Howett had himself in hand again. "Don't be frightened," he said reassuringly. "That's only the crazy woman. She can't do you any harm. But let's start back."

"Yes! Yes!" She hurried in advance down the narrow trail. "A crazy woman!" she repeated. "Who? But you don't mean a white woman? Oh, my heart is in my throat!"

"I don't wonder. I was startled, too. That's the first time I've heard her for days. I thought she was dead."

They were crossing the swale again. Now once more the hoarse voice sounded. There was no inflection to it. Over and over, in a key that was lower than before, it repeated the same thing, like the croak of a parrot.

"*Don't trust him! Don't trust him!*
Don't trust him! Don't—"

Howett broke in upon the cry.

"Yes, she's a white woman," he said. "And I think she's complaining about the captain of the ship that put her off here. She was landed on the beach around on the other side, about three weeks ago, and has been roaming the jungle ever since."

"Poor thing!" cried the girl, shocked and pitying. They were at the rear gate by now. She halted and turned. "And how shameful that anybody should leave her here—desert her!"

Howett went ahead into the yard. "I don't want to worry you," he said, "but I'd be careful, if I were you. You mustn't leave the house unless I'm along. And you'd better come this side of the gate."

She followed the suggestion. "But we must do something for her," she declared. "We can't let her stay out there till she perishes."

"I've tried to help her," he protested. "I went out and had a talk with her—tried to bring her in. But she wouldn't let me get near her even. So I just left some food for her. It was about all I could do."

"We must do that again," declared Miss Ransome. "Do you remember where you left it? And could you find the place again? To-night?"

Again came that hoarse monotone.

"Poison! Poison! Poison! Poison!"

"Oh, isn't that frightful!" cried Miss Ransome, shuddering. She hastened across the rear veranda and into the house.

"I must go and see if I can help her," said Howett. "You stay out of sight indoors."

"Ask her if we can't put up a hut for her," suggested the girl.

"That's a good idea," he agreed. "Evidently she's been treated pretty bad. But now that you're here, I'm sure we can do something for her. She'll trust a woman."

He went out, closing the rear door. But he did not stop at the cook shack to get food. Instead, he circled the house and unfastened the dog. Leading the animal on its chain, again he made toward the jungle. When he reached its black wall he took from a pocket one of the automatics.

Back in the Ransome house all was in darkness. Left alone in it, a sudden terror possessed the girl. The news of her father's death, her sorrow, the sight of the lonely grave, that voice out of the black forest, the story of the lurking maniac—all were a part of that terror. Added to it was a natural uneasiness at being there in the bungalow where was only a man strange to her. With him, or without him, she could not remain. She caught up her hat and purse, hurried out of the front door and sped down the steps to the gate.

There she halted. The new moon was already gone into the west and only the starlight filtered down among the palms. She could hear the dull booming of the surf and, coming from the mangrove swamp, the broken chant of the frogs. Presently from far up on the trail sounded Howett's halloo, muffled by the intervening jungle. She slipped a hand into her purse. There was a small pistol. She closed her fingers about the butt of it. Then as noiselessly as possible she let herself out of the yard and made toward the village.

Gaining the beach, she could see the fires that were burning in front of several of the native huts. About the fires dark figures squatted, while smaller ones raced hither and thither and children shouted and laughed. She headed toward the village.

Howett was skirting the jungle, now, making toward the upper end of the mangrove swamp. He did not attempt to enter the unpathed jungle, for beyond its edge all was a vast and complete blackness. What he did

was to allow the dog to choose its own course. At times he pulled the animal to a stand, and the two listened.

But down through the little valley toward the flickering fires, some one was keeping pace with the girl—traveling along the border of the brush, watching, pausing behind tree trunks when she paused. However, when Miss Ransome approached the first fire and spoke a greeting in the island dialect, the lurking watcher halted.

A happy, excited gabble answered the greeting. Then as the girl went forward into the circle of light the natives gathered about her, surprised but pleased, and from the farther fires others came trooping. The naked children hung back, shy with the stranger. But the women, and particularly the older ones, caught at her hands and hailed her affectionately by name.

It was while she was standing, the center of a growing crowd, that a shadow separated itself from the blackness of the near-by underbrush and stole close. And the girl, looking over the heads of the low-statured brown people who were pressing about her, saw, creeping forward into the firelight, a strange and startling creature.

It was a woman, gaunt and hollow-eyed, her face pale with suffering and from long days spent in the jungle, and marred by scratches and by the stings of insects. The clothes that hung upon her thin body were soiled and tattered. Her hair was matted upon her shoulders. In her right hand she carried a creese.

The natives saw her. There was an alarmed scattering and a hubbub of warning cries. Mothers swept their young ones into their arms and out of harm's way. Men snatched up sticks and stones, prepared to drive off the intruder. Miss Ransome, however, though frightened, did not flee.

"Don't be afraid of me!" pleaded a hoarse voice. "I am Mrs. Howett—his wife. It was I who called to you when you were at your father's grave." Her sunken eyes were earnest and sane.

The girl hesitated, then gestured the other to come closer to her and sit. "I want to talk to you," she said, "and I want to help you."

"Thank you." Mrs. Howett chose a mat. "I would know you anywhere, because you're so like the portrait. Only—you're more beautiful even than that. Oh, believe me when I say that I was driven out because

I tried to help—to save—your father. And I'm here now to help you."

Food was brought—a bowl of coconut milk and a larger bowl of rice. "I'm famished," Mrs. Howett confessed. "I've lived on fruit since I left the bungalow. And I haven't found fruit very sustaining—especially as I haven't been able to rest or sleep on account of the mosquitoes." She drank the whole of the milk, but ate only a few mouthfuls.

She would not put off her speaking too long. "I don't know what Chester Howett's told you," she said, "but undoubtedly he's given you what seems to be a straight, honest story. I know what a cunning mind he has. And I know that he's put these natives against me"—she nodded at the little company that was keeping back out of the light of the fire—"because they run from me when they see me and they've not been willing to take me in or give me a bite of food."

"But Mr. Howett is out searching for you this very moment," said the girl gently. "He wants to help you. And he took food with him for you."

Mrs. Howett raised a protesting hand. "I wouldn't eat any food he offered me," she answered. "Miss Ransome, he tried to poison me!"

"And why do you think that?" asked the girl. There was doubt in her look.

"Why? Because I'm in his way. Just as your father was in his way."

Miss Ransome drew back and glanced over a shoulder, as if to assure herself that she was not alone, that help was close at hand if she needed it.

"Oh, don't go!" cried the older woman. "And for both our sakes listen to me! You mustn't go back to the house to-night—not to stay there alone with him! And you mustn't eat food that he gives you! He brought me turtle meat. The collie I fed it to died—instantly! Ask these natives if a dog didn't die!"

The girl motioned one of the elder men to her, questioned him, received his answer and once more turned to Mrs. Howett.

"He says that the spirit of my father wished to have join him the spirit of the dog."

"Ah!" Mrs. Howett was gratified. "Then at least you know that I've told the truth about one thing! A dog did die! And I must try to make you realize that my

husband has suddenly become a dangerous criminal." She glanced seaward toward the low ridge and over her shoulder at the wall of black which was the jungle. "I'm afraid even to sit here in the light of this fire," she declared. "He might shoot me from ambush!"

"Don't fear"—gently—"he wouldn't hurt you. And he wouldn't risk wounding one of these people."

Mrs. Howett laughed bitterly. "You don't know the kind of a man you're dealing with!" she exclaimed. "I accused him of killing your father and he answered, 'What if I did?'"

The younger woman was all pity and patience. "But why should Mr. Howett want to kill my dear old father?" she asked. "Don't you think you may be mistaken about that?"

"No!" cried the other. "I'm not mistaken! Chester Howett wants this island! He has no money—why, he couldn't even pay our passage to Singapore and Captain Swinlow of the *Tamil* put us off on the western beach." Then quickly she related the events that had followed their coming; the falsehood about a Captain Goss and a ship called the *Rocket*; the talk of buying the concession; the quarrel between husband and wife; her denunciation of Howett to the aged owner; his sudden death and burial and her own escape out of harm's reach. "And he fired on me as I ran," she concluded. "Think of that, Miss Ransome! On me, his wife! After all these years together!" Out of her tired eyes streamed tears.

"Ah, too bad! Too bad!" soothed the girl. "But, poor lady, try not to think of it any more to-night! Won't you? And I—"

Mrs. Howett got up. "What shall I do!" she cried helplessly. "You don't believe me! And I suppose he hasn't shown you the bill of sale yet."

Miss Ransome stared. "How did you know about that?" she asked. Then, without waiting for a reply, "Yes, he showed it to me. It was signed by my father."

"Signed!"

Now Mrs. Howett was doubly excited; but her voice and her words carried conviction as she told of the trying of the new pen points and of the manner in which Howett had filled in above the signatures with the typewriter.

Miss Ransome was plainly impressed. "How extraordinary!" she exclaimed. "And I'll admit that I think he acted strangely about breaking the news of my father's death to me. But—please, go on."

Finding herself on more solid ground, Mrs. Howett hastened to follow up her gain. "If Chester bought the concession, where is the purchase money?" she asked. "It ought to be among your father's effects—because we've been here only a month and your father didn't have a chance to get it away to a bank. Chester will say your father buried it. And if you dare to oppose him, he'll put into *your* food some more of the cyanide of potassium that your father used in his photography!"

"Oh, I can't believe Mr. Howett could be as wicked as that!" exclaimed the girl.

The other woman nodded her matted head. "It's heartbreaking!" she said. "I couldn't believe it, either, if I didn't know what I know. And that is this: He wants this island—with you, if he can manage that—but if he can't, he'll put *you* underground." She reached into the front of her ragged waist and brought out a folded paper. "Here's something I found on your father's table while the funeral was being held," she explained. "Read it."

Miss Ransome stooped to let the fire of coconut *coir* shine upon the page. She read the letter through—then reread it. "This is my father's handwriting," she admitted. "I couldn't be mistaken about it. But the letter! That's very queer!"

"Yes. Notice that it doesn't mention me. And at the time it was written, I was in the bouse, occupying your room. If your father had written it—"

"Oh, I'm sure enough daddy didn't write this," asserted Miss Ransome. "In his letters he always called me by a pet name—'Zanne.' That's what I called myself when I was little. And here, you see, he doesn't; but he would have—especially if he were telling me good-by." Her voice trembled.

"Your father never saw this, though it's dated back a couple of weeks before we arrived; but it was written the morning after your father died—by Chester Howett. By it you can see that I'm telling you the truth when I say that my husband tried to kill me. He didn't mention me because he didn't intend me to be here—for, before you arrived, I was to be dead."

"Mrs. Howett!" breathed the girl, shocked

and astounded now that she had begun to grasp the significance of what she had heard. "You're beginning to believe me!" cried the elder woman, gratefully. "And you can! Anyhow, believe that I'm trying to protect you! What did he tell you about me—when I called to you up there in the woods?" And after she heard Miss Ransome's story, "Insane! Ah, Chester would think of the one thing that could make you doubt every word I'd say! I, a poor, tattered thing, starving in the jungle, running wild, begging of the natives! But if I were insane, would he have shown me the bill of sale? And how could I know about your room? And your father?" She leaned forward eagerly as she described Henry Ransome and told over what he had told of his daughter.

Then, while Mrs. Howett drank again and ate, the younger woman called the principal men to her and, using the island dialect, talked to them quietly but at some length, telling them of Howett and his plans—while they wondered and gaped and exclaimed, some of them regretfully, others with shifting and guilty looks.

"Our gods give that we see not evil from this!" cried one old man. "But the stranger spake that he is our very mindful friend. And—we listened."

It was now that Howett interrupted the meeting around the fire. He was at a distance, in the direction of the iron warehouse, where, at the end of the little valley there were some clumps of bamboo.

"Miss Ransome!" he called. "Miss Ransome!"

A short silence. Mrs. Howett shrank close to the ground, gazing up at the younger woman. "Answer!" she whispered.

Miss Ransome could scarcely control her voice.

"Here, Mr. Howett!" she replied.

"We must get possession of the house while he is out of it!" again whispered Mrs. Howett. "Quick! Bring him this way! Then send some natives by the path through the jungle!"

The girl assented. "Come up here, please, Mr. Howett," she requested.

Then she gave rapid directions to the younger men of the island, who, a moment later, were darting into their huts for their blowguns, spears and *parangs* and the next moment were scuttling along that straight path. It was so densely walled on either hand that even in the utter blackness the

hurrying line could not stray from it. And close upon the heels of the last men went the two women.

So that when Howett approached the fires, cautiously, lest he be trapped he found only women, children and aged men. Standing in fear of his power, desiring his favor and, in their simpleness, bursting with their news, certain of the old natives promptly told him all that had just taken place in the village and where the women and their body-guard had gone.

Howett heard the story with angry threats. "The gods shall take away the breath of your young men!" he promised. "I wait only for the sun, when I may look the ungrateful in the eyes! Then it shall be known who commands the island!"

The old men cringed, excusing the fault of their youthful ones. "Our ears ache of their ignorance," protested one. "But, *Tuan*, soften thy thoughts to thine elder servants!"

It was Miss Ransome who, her small weapon in hand, first entered the bungalow, daring to go where the superstitious natives would not. No lamps were lighted. And as silently as possible men were stationed at intervals along the four sides of the palisade fence to give warning, should Howett seek to intrude, and to repel him. Other natives were set to patrolling the verandas. And while Miss Ransome stole from place to place, keeping watch on the guard, Mrs. Howett, by dint of much soap and water, a comb and brush and fresh linen and other clothing from the younger woman's supply, succeeded, despite having to make her toilet without a light, in bringing herself back somewhat to her former appearance.

The two shared the duties of the long night hours.

"But we can't go on like this," Miss Ransome declared. "We'd break down in no time—with the lack of sleep and the strain. But particularly because of the strain. You know, Mrs. Howett, though I'm fond of the natives here, and I believe they're fond of me, I don't really trust them."

"Nor I," added Mrs. Howett. "For the reason that your father didn't. No, we must make Chester Howett our prisoner."

"And then we'll watch for a ship!"

"We'll signal for one," amended the elder woman.

So far as Howett and his wife were concerned, conditions were now absolutely re-

versed. The bungalow was in her hands and it was he who was having to sleep out for the night. But not in the jungle. From the village he went to the warehouse, unlocked it, entered and prepared to make himself comfortable until well toward morning, his pistols within easy reach.

Just before the sudden dawn of the tropics could disclose him to any watchers he left the warehouse for the beach and moved along it, half circling in the direction of the headland, until he came within sound of the waves, where they broke against the high, overhanging cliffs. Now he was northward of the house. He turned away from the sea and, climbing, struck into the jungle, going southwest and making toward the banyan and Henry Ransome's grave. He came out upon the trail just as the first sleepy bird calls foretold the light. He leaned against a tree, watching and waiting.

With the coming of morning the bungalow awoke to unaccustomed life. Its double circle of armed guards stared about in all directions, looking for that new master who was now in flight. Those who had been sleeping rose and brought food for all from the cook shack, up from which the thin blue smoke of the breakfast fire was rising as straight as a palm stem.

It was now that Howett approached the back fence, keeping the rear buildings between him and the house. When he was within fifty yards, he came boldly into sight and called softly.

At once he was discovered. He retreated a few steps, again hiding himself, while an excited gabbling at the kitchen swelled to shouts. Next, Miss Ransome's voice was lifted, giving an order. Then, with a running patter of feet, the natives strung out in a long skirmishing line. Leaving a small guard at the house, with instructions to raise an immediate alarm should Howett succeed in eluding his pursuers and get back to the bungalow, Mrs. Howett and the girl fell in behind the line and slowly the ascent was begun on this strange man hunt.

Seeing the natives advancing, Howett left his hiding place and went upward. Flankers were sent into the jungle, to right and left of the trail, to cut him off should he make a break into the dense growth. But he kept to the trail and he did not go fast—only fast enough to hearten the brown men into following steadily, not quickly enough to tempt them into full cry or to attack. He

did not even hold his weapons in his hands. He was making for open ground at the top of the headland.

"I'm so glad we've discovered him so soon!" Miss Ransome told Mrs. Howett. "I dreaded his hiding for days and not being found. But the whole thing's going to end this morning. We'll have him!"

"Somehow, I'm afraid we'll lose," returned the elder woman. "I know how crafty he is." She looked pathetically haggard and worn.

"We shan't lose!" asserted the girl stoutly. "So don't be anxious. If he fires, I'll fire. And if he injures a native—well, you'll see what the others will do to him!"

"But I hope they won't kill him," Mrs. Howett declared. "Oh, don't think I'm weak or silly! I know he's bad, but I don't want to see him murdered."

"I've told the natives to take him alive," said Miss Ransome. "That is, if it's possible. But I'm worried. We must keep our wits alive every second! He isn't leading the way up here for nothing. He's got something planned. I wish I knew what it was!"

On the eastern slope, as on the farther, there was a thinning of brush toward the summit of the headland. When the natives who were pushing their way through the jungle reached this outer growth they halted in it, remaining half concealed. Now they were less bold than when hidden by thick foliage—less inclined to meet trouble. To skulk behind the white man was one thing; to attack in the open, another.

From time to time, as he climbed, Howett had cast a glance backward over his shoulder. When he was on open ground and saw the skirmishers slow up and come short, he also halted, then faced about and folded his arms. He was not more than two hundred yards away from the islanders. He smiled down at them.

"Don't let our men stop!" warned Mrs. Howett. "They ought to get around on the farther side, too, so that he can't escape to the west!"

Kaber was beside Miss Ransome. Quickly the girl gave an order to the *serang*, who left her side to carry it out; then the intervals between the natives were widened, so that the crescent they formed reached all the way westward to the cliff edge.

"Now! He's hemmed in!" the younger woman said with satisfaction.

"Does he mean to charge, firing?" Mrs.

Howett asked. "And get through?" Worn out with her long stay in the jungle, with loss of sleep and anxiety, she could scarcely stand.

But Howett was evidently not considering a rush; and, for some reason, appeared to be well satisfied with matters as they were. Having eyed the half circle of men calmly, he faced about again, and climbed higher. As he went from them, the brown men slowly followed. To bring them close, he sauntered to the flower-edged path which led across the crown of the headland and stood looking out to sea. Before him was only the sleek and heaving water.

While he had his back to them, the islanders, little by little, lessened the distance between themselves and him, the line straggling and wavering. When he swung round once more, they brought up. His self-possession puzzled and disconcerted them. They began to gabble among themselves.

"Don't let them get too near!" pleaded Mrs. Howett. "They might force him to throw himself over the cliff. Go tell them not to press him!"

But Miss Ransome addressed only Howett, stepping ahead of the natives to do so, the *serang* at her side.

"You must come and allow your hands to be tied," she declared. "If you'll obey at once, no harm will be done you."

He ignored her. Giving that half circle a disdainful look and using the Leopard dialect he began to speak, tauntingly:

"And so!" he cried. "The men of the island will, from to-day forward, be ruled by women chiefs!"

Abashed glances and murmurs of denial met this. The *serang*, with a sheepish smile at Howett, fell away from Miss Ransome.

Howett noted this. Now he spoke directly to the foreman.

"Kaber!" he cried. "Thou who art truly a man! Shalt thou be sent hither and thither with the dog? Will thou build the fires like a woman? And have it that thy women shall sit nearest the fires? Ha-ha! Thou, who hast been in battle, a man who knoweth that women have not even a soul!"

"By the Prophet, no!" answered the *serang*.

"Don't let him talk to them!" counseled Mrs. Howett.

"It's easy to understand why you could treat Mrs. Howett so shamefully!" Miss Ransome asserted with spirit. "Because

you haven't any respect for women and are ready to turn these natives against us—us—women of your own kind!" Then, facing the islanders, she cried: "This is he who hath slain the good man, my father—my father who put rice into thy mouths and gave thee medicines and much cloth!"

Howett laughed. "Rice and medicines and cloth!" he answered. "But who hath given thee double money? Ha! And what is that tale of slaying? Told by her who is afflicted in the mind! She who fares like a madwoman! And shall the men of the island be denied fair payments for that a woman hath no wits?"

As before, Miss Ransome appealed to the brown men.

"I say that my father perished as perished the dog!" she declared. "It came about through the touch of a deadly white flour upon the tongue. Go up, I command you, and seize this one. Go up!"

There was a slight, half-involuntary movement forward. But the line wavered back again, while one native whispered with another and fumbled with his weapons.

Howett quickly strove for their attention. "Come up!" he shouted. "And slay him who gave the most silver in all thy lives! Is it not the truth? What gave the old one to the men of Leopard? Toil! And a tax on the rice! And much striving in the heat for naught! And now these women"—he nodded carelessly at his wife and the girl at her side—"would ask their servants to breast the shining iron things that make me like sixteen men!" And he showed them the automatics.

The natives farthest from the two women were now pressing forward toward Howett, their manner respectful.

"Come up!" he called to all, beckoning. "Give attention to what I shall take oath to do for thee! To each and every man, double the money given by the old master! And, Kaber, to thee—"

"*O-ee, Tuan!*" Kaber stepped toward Howett and gave a toss of his spear in salute.

"Double—and then once again! And tonight—a feast!"

"A feast! A feast!" Half a hundred voices shouted it. Weapons were waved. And as Mrs. Howett and Miss Ransome

stood staring, speechless, appalled at seeing themselves outmatched, brown feet danced toward the flower-bordered path.

"And look!"

It was Howett who spoke again, a wide smile on his pink face. He had thrust both pistols into his belt. Now his hands went into and out of his pockets, then were flung before him in the air.

The sun glistened on a score of metal disks—money! And at the sight, with one accord and with cries of delight, the whole body of natives swept forward in a mob; fell to their knees and, scrambling, pushing, shouting, fought upon the path for the coins.

"We've lost!" said Miss Ransome again. "You're right, Mrs. Howett! He's clever! But, what'll become of us?"

"More! And more!" Howett shouted. About his feet he scattered the silver pieces.

The brown men half rose, plunged forward another few steps and as a solid mass again dropped and tore at the herbage.

"Marster!" they cried.

And now it was that the two women heard a sound of rending.

It came as if from beneath them. Close after it rose a hollow grinding. With cries of dismay the natives, clutching Howett's silver in their hands, scrambled away from the path—just as the section of ground upon which Howett was standing split off from the top of the headland and, with a heave, like a solid swell of water, shelved seaward. The forward rush of the natives had broken the ground and the slaty rock beneath.

The moving earth pitched Howett forward upon his face. It jerked Kaber's feet from under him, throwing him prone upon his brown back and his turban to one side.

As Howett fell forward, his pink face blanched, his eyes stared in wild surprise and his mouth opened wide in a scream; madly, with both hands, he caught at the flowers—the frail vines, which broke, leaving in his fist only leaves and blossoms.

Then the fingers of his left hand shut like steel upon the prostrate Kaber's leg, dragging at the helpless *serang*. The grinding grew to a roar. The rock ledge carried away.

Atop it, as on a wave, went the two men. And above them, as they disappeared, showed that one free hand of Howett's—waving the flowers.



The Silly Season of Lemuel Scragg

By Thomas McMorrow

Author of "The Bluebeard Window," "The Forbidden Country," Etc.

What will happen after the end of the world? Scragg wasn't curious, but the prophet Mulvaney showed him, anyhow.

WHEN Scragg was fifty he had twenty thousand dollars. That's a lot of money, but he had gotten it honestly enough—just honestly enough. He had fought for every nickel, gouged for it, laid awake nights to scheme for it and given his competitors the elbow under the chin; the hardware business is business. But now he had it, and no questions asked.

Scragg was set in his ideas. Life was just one blamed fight after another and if a fellow wanted to keep his feet he had to cultivate a permanent crouch. And, strangely enough, if you see it that way, life had accommodated itself to Scragg's idea of it. It had snatched off his front hair, broken his teeth, pulled down the corners of his mouth, bent him over and half closed his worried eyes. It kept him eternally on the defensive, with his elbow up.

When he was fifty and wealthy, as aforesaid, Mrs. Scragg moved him out to New Rochelle where she thought the natives were richer and nicer than the Scraggs. That is a lovely trait of woman, among many: she wants her neighbors to have more money and culture than she has herself.

Perhaps you will have heard of New Rochelle: forty-five minutes from Broadway—

on the George M. Cohan line? George wrote a good song and he had his time-table right, but the rest of his lyrical remarks don't describe New Rochelle. It isn't the place where the Reubens all dwell. The typical New Rochellean is a New York City business man, living in a brand-new Colonial seven-rooms-and-tiled-bath, hot-footing it every morn for the seven-fifteen and calling the missus every eventide on the party line to beg off coming home.

The local real-estate agents lay more stress on the mossy old families that date from St. Bartholemew's Night; and I'm going to have something to say about those families, too; a man can't go wrong in writing fiction if he follows the lead of the realtors—if he follows them not too far. There are many mansard roofs and quaint cupolas and winding drives and sweeping lawns in New Rochelle, but it is not absolutely true that the denizens of these show places are yearning to make a bosom friend of you as soon as you have proven your sterling quality by paying two thousand down on a seven-room stucco Colonial.

Scragg paid two thousand down and moved into his stucco seven. There was a first mortgage on his place of five thousand dollars, which was all that the savings bank

considered safe; there was a second mortgage of one thousand, that being all that the former owner of the fifty-foot plot cared to risk; and a third mortgage of six thousand, this being all that the builder had the impudence to ask for as profit. Scragg owned the rest.

Mrs. Scragg chivvied him next into buying a touring car, a five passenger, five hundred and seventy-five dollars, f. o. b. Detroit; two seats were for themselves and three for the mossy old families who were going to crowd them at once or the realtor was a liar. The *Westchester Gazette* announced the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Lemuel Scragg, prominent New York hardware family, and a number of the best-known natives called; the milkman called, the butcher called, the baker, the newsdealer and the ice-man. The rest of the tradesmen along Huguenot Street sent cards; but the mossy families held off shyly. Mrs. Scragg got into her touring car and drove around to take them out for a ride, but they were not in.

She called on the Van Boskercks, the Minnicks, the Delareys, the Duplessises and the Schalcrosses; they were out, all of them.

She was disappointed and so was Scragg.

All his life Scragg had wanted to be a gentleman and now he had the time and money to gratify the whim; but his neighbors here in New Rochelle seemed to be the same cantankerous breed as his former neighbors in New York City. They were just as ungracious and quarrelsome. They forced him to fight, as he had been always forced to fight, against his natural human inclination to peace and good will. He was really a friendly soul, full of the milk of human kindness and he felt like taking the mossy families by their necks and crashing their heads together for their blindness.

He was disappointed in the mossy families, but his immediate neighbors of the stucco Colonials had run true to form; they were just as mean as he had expected them to be.

Doctor Macartey, his neighbor in back, had taken offense merely because Scragg had asked the constable to tell the doctor not to burn leaves behind his house. Cashman, beside him, had some similar ridiculous grievance. Scragg waited in grim patience to see what flimsy excuse to quarrel Dowd would seize on; Dowd was his neighbor on the other side.

Scragg stood in his dining-room window and gnawed his graying mustache and watched Dowd's house. It was Saturday and Scragg had just finished his breakfast and was in a benevolent frame of mind. He had not met Dowd yet and was trying to think well of him. He was eager to be friendly with him and only required that Dowd should show his good faith by making the advances.

Dowd had built a handsome rustic fence between their plots and had not called on Scragg to bear any of the cost; and that had commended him to Scragg. It would be very pleasant to lean over that fence of a summer's evening and smoke a pipe with Dowd, and compare kitchen gardens and talk of this and that while darkness came on.

Dowd appeared on his porch; he was an elderly man, stout and red-faced.

Scragg had a plan to make his acquaintance. He would take his survey and steel tape and go out and run the line of the rustic fence to see that it was where it belonged; Dowd would naturally be interested, and would step over and talk; and there they would be.

So he took his blue print and his tape and went out to the blue-stone walk before his property and set to measuring. And Dowd watched him. Presently Dowd descended from his porch and approached. There was a slight frown on his ruddy face; his expression was not belligerent, but neither was it cordial.

"Right, isn't it, neighbor?" he called.

"No, it's not right," said Scragg, rising from his knees. "It's at least six inches over on my land, that's what it is!"

"Not a very serious matter," said Dowd soothingly. "That six inches isn't worth fifty dollars, the way they're selling lots on this street."

"Now, look here, Dowd," growled Scragg. "Don't try to come anything like this over me. So this is why you didn't ask me to pay for my half of the fence, is it? And when it comes to what my land is worth that's for me to say, and not for you, understand?"

"Don't get hot about it, neighbor," said Dowd, turning more ruddy. "The fellow I hired to put up the fence made a little mistake, that's all. No great harm is done."

"It isn't a question of what harm is done!" insisted Scragg doggedly. "The point is

that you're trespassing on my land and you've got to move that fence back right away. Right away! You hear?"

"And supposing I don't?" asked Dowd softly.

"Supposing you don't! So that's the attitude you take, is it? Well, I'll make you do it—you hear? I'll go to law about it and I'll make you move that fence if it costs me ten thousand dollars!"

"Go as far as you like," said Dowd, moving away. "Go to law about it and I'll lay down dollar for dollar with you. But don't touch that fence until you get an order from the court or I'll have you arrested."

Scragg ran into his house and snatched up the telephone and called his attorney in New York City. He explained the situation to him thoroughly, if excitedly.

"So you see it's a perfectly clear case!" he spluttered, in concluding his statement. "Get busy and make him take that fence out of there to-day!"

"Quite impossible, Scragg," came the lawyer's voice. "It's a perfectly clear case and we can make him move that fence, if you want to spend the time and the money. But, you see, the title to real estate is involved and that means we must sue in the supreme court, in a formal action in ejectment. Considering the present condition of the calendar and the time that can be wasted in motions and appeals, the time will run into years and it will be a very expensive proposition. A very expensive proposition, Scragg."

"I don't care what it costs!" yelled Scragg. "There's a principle involved here and I don't care if it costs ten thousand dollars!"

"Oh, very well, Scragg. Send me three hundred on account and I'll start the ball rolling. Good-by!"

Scragg met his wife in the hall, dressed to go out.

"Where are you going?" he growled.

"Where do you suppose?" she returned with equal politeness.

"Don't snap at me, Mary," he said aggrievedly, feeling that he needed her. "I'm sorry if I offended you."

"I'm going shopping to the city," she said, kissing him. "I'll bring back something nice for your dinner!"

He tried to read a book, but couldn't bend his mind to it; he threw it aside and went out for a walk, passing Dowd's house; Dowd

was lounging in a rocker on the terrace, and grinned tantalizingly at him.

Scragg struck into a quiet road which ran straight away between fallow and orchard lands. He plodded along for twenty minutes, striving to compose his mind. He passed the Van Boskerck place, which is on the outskirts of New Rochelle. The Van Boskercks are the heads of the local aristocracy; they are the first "County Family." Everybody in that county who is anybody knows the Van Boskercks or pretends to. Scragg quelled a childish impulse to heave a stone at the terra-cotta lion over their wrought-iron gateway.

There was an abandoned barn on a ridge just beyond the Van Boskerck place, one of those crazy structures where tramps make harbor and boys come to set blazes and see the fire engines. A large number of people were gathered about it as Scragg came abreast of it. The people were dressed in long white garments, like old-fashioned nightshirts.

"What's the idea?" he demanded of a man who was crossing the road on his way to the barn. The man was also in a white dress and was bareheaded and barefooted. "Is it some secret society?" asked Scragg.

"Heaven is at hand, brother," replied the man, looking up at him from under overhanging eyebrows. And he jumped the ditch and ran toward the old barn.

Having nothing better to do Scragg followed him.

About two hundred people were on the main floor of the rickety building and many more were shuffling around in the hayloft overhead. They were all dressed in these long cotton shirts, coming down to their bare feet, and their faces were very sober. In their midst stood a tall man with an immense beard flowing down his chest and a mane of hair on his shoulders.

Scragg recognized Mulvaney, a traveling preacher who was currently supposed to be crazy but harmless. He belonged to no recognized sect and was a kind of hedge parson. He had created much excitement among simple people by proclaiming for several months past that the Day of Judgment was at hand. Scragg had heard him proclaim a few days before that the end of the world was due on the next Saturday morning at eleven o'clock.

"Seal not up the words of the prophecy," cried Mulvaney. "For the time is at hand!"

"Hallelujah!" cried his congregation.

"Behold, heaven comes quickly, and brings its reward, to render to each man according as his work is!"

"Hallelujah!"

"Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may come to the tree of life!"

"Hallelujah!"

When Scragg had seen him last he was extremely dirty, with tousled hair and beard; now he had washed himself and he was really an impressive and pathetic figure.

Scragg was a member of the Village Improvement Society and had a general license to rove around and probe into people's affairs. This business appealed to him as very irregular and an unwarrantable departure from due routine and precedent, which of course it was, even as the end of the world will be. He pushed up to Mulvaney.

"What is all this tomfoolery?" he demanded sternly.

"The end of the world is with us, brother," said Mulvaney with simplicity.

"Has a permit been issued?" inquired Scragg.

"A permit! And who shall issue a permit for the end of the world, brother?"

"The village trustees, of course," said Scragg dogmatically. "Otherwise you have no right to go ahead. But this talk of the end of the world is all poppycock and you know it!"

"Hearken to the voice of the mocker, walking after his own lusts!" cried Mulvaney. "The mocker demands to see the promise of the day, saying 'From the hour that the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were.'"

Scragg looked about him into the rapt faces and didn't like his situation and let himself slip back among the devotees who were pressing in on Mulvaney. None of them offered him violence nor paid any attention to him once he had withdrawn himself from the center of the floor.

He glanced at his watch, and chuckled. It was eleven o'clock, and it was Saturday morning. The time had come for Mulvaney to make good. Scragg was somewhat sorry for him, fearing that he had let himself in for trouble at the hands of his disappointed followers.

But Mulvaney was not afflicted by the least doubt. There was the confidence of ecstasy in his voice as he raised his two fists saluting the appointed moment.

"Behold, brothers," he cried, "the new heaven and the new earth is here! The holy city is coming down out of heaven! Behold, the blessed tabernacle is with men, and Heaven shall dwell with them forevermore, and they shall be blessed people! Every tear shall be wiped from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain! They that have eyes to see let them see. Behold, all things are made new!"

"Hallelujah!" the people shouted and they lifted up their many faces in expectancy.

And then something happened.

Scragg's eyes were fastened on Mulvaney's face, from which shone a flame of belief great enough to fire almost the coldest skepticism. Scragg leaned forward with parted lips.

The old barn was suddenly lit by a glare like the eye of day and there was a roaring and Scragg felt himself whirling through bottomless space. He fell and fell, but howsoever far he fell he saw still above him the countenance of Mulvaney. They two were alone in a void which had no limits, flying giddily, and Mulvaney's face was framed in a kind of cloud. He was talking to Scragg, insistently and persuasively, but Scragg could not hear a word for the incessant and uninflected roaring.

The noise died down suddenly and Mulvaney's voice came to him.

"Heaven be praised!" he cried. "At last you have come up from the valley of the shadow!"

"What—is—it?" asked Scragg, raising himself onto his elbow but continuing to stare into the masterful eyes above him.

Mulvaney put a hand upon Scragg's forehead, and caressed his temples and a pain that had been there went away.

"You are better now, brother," he said soothingly. "You are beginning to remember, are you not? You were in the old barn with me when the world came to an end."

"I remember that," nodded Scragg.

He looked about him. He was lying in bed in his own chamber in his own stucco Colonial. Through the open window he saw Dowd pushing a lawn mower; he even caught the pungent scent of the cigar that Dowd was puffing.

"Things seem to be as before!" he ex-postulated.

"They *seem* to be," nodded Mulvaney, smiling brightly. "You are grasping the truth, brother. The old world has gone forever, according to the prophecy, and it is the new heaven and the new earth upon which your eyes have opened, but your eyes are still clouded by the shadows of old memories. Believe, my brother, believe stoutly, and the scales will fall from your eyes!"

"It is strange," murmured Scragg.

"Have faith, brother!" Mulvaney adjured him, clasping his hand and looking into his eyes. "I, too, am troubled by these illusions, but I hold fast to faith, remembering that this is the new earth, and that the kingdom of blessedness is now among us. We are all born anew. Hallelujah!"

"But things look so much the same!" repeated Scragg more strongly.

"Illusion, brother," Mulvaney assured him. "You see yet as through a glass, darkly. It is the new heaven and the new earth, for the prophecies have been fulfilled. Sorrow and pain are gone and the wicked have ceased from troubling."

"I don't seem able to grasp it," muttered Scragg, knitting his brows and staring at the commonplace figure of Dowd behind the clicking lawn mower.

"I go to spread the joyful tidings," said Mulvaney and he strode from the room. Scragg saw that he was again dressed in his clay-stained rags.

Slowly Scragg pulled himself to his feet. He was dressed as he had been when he last remembered himself in the old barn. He was dizzy and was not conscious of the weight of his limbs, though they seemed to hold him back from his impulse to soar into the air. Slowly he let himself down the stairs, step by step. He stumbled out onto the porch and held on to the railing. He stared at Dowd.

There was a matter of a—a rustic fence. Yes, there was the fence. He had quarreled with Dowd about it. There was really no sense in quarreling with Dowd about the fence—or about anything else, for that matter. Dowd was only an illusion. Why—why he could blow Dowd away with a mere breath! He did look very real, though.

Scragg left the porch and walked over to the fence and leaned on it and called to Dowd.

The lawn mower ceased rattling. Dowd approached. He looked like an angry man.

"Dowd," said Scragg, speaking with an effort, "I quarreled with you over this silly fence. That was a fool thing to do, because it really doesn't make a bit of difference now. I was a fool to get so excited about it, brother."

"You mean you don't want me to move the fence?"

"I don't care whether you do or not," said Scragg, mastering a tendency to float away. "It's all imaginary, y'unnerstan'? What—what was the row about, anyway?"

"This is very handsome of you, Scragg," exclaimed Dowd, putting forth his hand and catching Scragg's in a hearty clasp. "You talk like a white man; and I'm ashamed of the way I went on this morning, but I just couldn't naturally help answering you back the same way you spoke to me. I'll have that fence moved back the first thing Monday morning. Yes, and I'll plant a nice hedge of golden glow along there, so it'll be worth looking at. That's the kind of man I am, Scragg!"

Doctor Macartey was raking leaves under his horse-chestnut tree.

"Why'n't you burn 'em up, doc?" called Scragg. "Touch a match to them. Get 'em out of the way!"

"I thought you objected to the smoke," said the physician, leaning on his wooden rake.

"Illusion," said Scragg. "Jolly smell, burning leaves. Very fond of it, matter of fact. Only I thought you were imposing on me. I always had a chip on my shoulder, those times. Very silly."

"How are you feeling now?" asked the physician, coming forward to his hedge. "I saw you coming up the road a while back with a queer-looking customer and you were walking all abroad. I was going over to see what I could do, but I thought perhaps you wouldn't like it."

"I'm all right," said Scragg. "See you again, doc!"

He walked toward the road.

"Isn't drunk, is he?" asked the physician of Dowd.

"Certainly not!" said Dowd indignantly. "He spoke very sensibly indeed. He's a fine man, Scragg."

Scragg walked down the road. Any one looking at him could have seen that he was walking, though Scragg believed that he was floating along without effort. He could have walked up into the vacant air as easily as

mounting a flight of steps, if he had wished to; but there was really no point in doing it.

He walked in the middle of the road, making no attempt to avoid approaching vehicles; they were only hallucinations, he thought. And, sure enough, they rushed toward him with great noise and honking and then passed him without harming him. They made him laugh.

A man in a smart, tweed walking costume waited for him by the roadside.

"That last automobile very nearly ran you down," said the stranger.

"Not at all," said Scragg. "There wasn't any automobile there. It was just an illusion, brother. It was all in your eye!"

"That is a highly philosophical view," said the stranger, laughing and looking at Scragg with new interest. "But I must admit it is strictly true. All I know about that automobile was a sensation in my eye and ear."

"Precisely," said Scragg.

They were passing a farmhouse. A large mongrel appeared from under the stoop and stalked toward them, stiff-legged, with the hair erect on his heavy neck and a terrifying snarling in his deep throat.

"There's that cursed cur of Farmer Powell's!" exclaimed the stranger, pulling away toward the other side of the road and casting about for a stick or stone. "Watch out—he tore a tramp nearly to pieces last week! Look out, man!"

"What are you afraid of?" asked Scragg, grinning vaguely. "There really isn't any dog there; it's just an illusion. Yes, I think I see it, too, but I know that I don't!"

"Nice old doggie," he said, advancing upon the fierce brute and putting forth his hand to pet the head upon which the ears were flattened in rage.

"Look out for your life!" cried the stranger, hurrying to his aid, empty-handed as he was.

The animal's snarling increased in loudness and he seemed upon the point of springing at Scragg; and then the hair suddenly sank on his neck and the stiffness went from his legs and he shrank back and slunk away whimpering.

"You see?" said Scragg.

"I do," said the stranger, wondering.

"I used to be afraid in the old days, too," said Scragg amiably. "But now I know that troubles are all imaginary and if you don't believe in them they don't exist."

"You seem to be saying something that the prophets have told us for thousands of years," said the stranger, frowning in an effort at concentration. "Have you read, for instance, Schopenhauer's work entitled 'The World, as Will and Appearance?'"

"No," said Scragg indifferently.

"Schopenhauer sets out much the same theory of the world," continued the other. "He says that nothing exists but Will and that matter is only Appearance—illusion, as you say. Thus every man makes his own world, since things outside himself are only a reflection of his own thoughts. To the wicked man the world is wicked, to the just man it is just—and so on."

Scragg yawned. His eyes were closing.

"Do you live about here?" asked the stranger as they came to the gateway to the Van Boskerck place.

"In New Rochelle," murmured Scragg.

"You must call on me, or permit me to call on you," said his companion. "My name is Van Boskerck. I am very anxious indeed to continue our acquaintance. May I hope—"

"Don't bother me," said Scragg. "Good day."

He continued walking along the road until he came opposite the old barn. He stood still and stared at it stupidly and then he crossed the ditch and stared at it again, kneeling at the edge of the field.

Slowly he sank down to the ground. With his head pillow'd on his arm he lay in the soft grass and fell asleep.

When the setting sun shone into his face it awoke him. He looked at his watch; it was seven o'clock. He remembered having walked down that road with a stranger and he remembered that his shadow had been gathered about his feet, like a garment that had slipped down. It must have been about midday that he had walked in the road with the stranger. He had lain in the field for many hours.

He struggled to his feet to go home; his neck felt stiff and sore and he had a bad headache.

A man came to him from the barn; he recognized Van Boskerck's gardener, who had sold him geraniums and marigolds to plant about his stucco Colonial.

"Hello, Mr. Scragg!" called the gardener. "How do you feel now?"

"Not so good," said Scragg.

"I thought you were killed," said the gardener.

"How's that? What happened to me?"

"Why, you were in the barn with that crazy loon Mulvaney. Don't you remember? And one of his crowd fell through the rotten floor of the loft and lit on you and knocked you out of time. Mulvaney picked you up and helped you home to your house."

"I seem to remember coming to in my own house and talking to Mulvaney," said Scragg. "I was knocked galley-west and he talked a lot of rubbish to me; and the last thing I recall is wandering along the road here talking to somebody. I think he said his name was Van Boskerck."

"Likely," said the gardener. "I heard him telling old missus about some man he'd met in the road."

"He must have thought I was a fool," muttered Scragg, mortified. "Well—so long, I must be getting along home."

He started down the road. Farmer Powell had not yet tied up his vicious mongrel; as Scragg came opposite the farmhouse he saw the beast issue from under the stoop and stalk stiff-legged toward the road. The hackles were rising on the dog's outstretched neck and a threatening snarling came from his throat.

Scragg whitened and shrank back.

"Get away, you brute!" he yelled and he kicked out at the mongrel.

Luckily a tree was at hand with low limbs. Scragg leaped for it as the dog leaped for him. Scragg caught a limb in a frenzied clutch and swung himself away from the ground, leaving behind him a mouthful of his best gray trousers.

The dog tore and worried the bit of cloth while Scragg shouted for the farmer to come and rescue him. But Farmer Powell was not at home; he was also a member of the Village Improvement Society and he was away at the other side of New Rochelle as a member of a committee calling on people to oil the road before their doors and make things pleasant for travelers.

Scragg saw Van Boskerck coming and shouted to him. Van Boskerck stopped at a pile of road material and gathered an armful of jagged blue stones and advanced on the dog, bombarding him. The dog yelped and ran back to his lair.

"Is that you, Scragg?" called Van Bos-

kerck, laughing. "What happened? Did the dog turn out to be real after all?"

Scragg descended from the tree.

"I guess I was talking like a fool to-day, Mr. van Boskerck."

"I didn't notice it."

"It's nice of you to say that, but I don't want you to get a wrong impression of me. You see, I had an accident and I was a bit off my chump. You'll find me a level-headed chap, now that I am myself again."

"I'm glad I came, anyway," said Van Boskerck after a momentary silence. "The gardener told me he saw you out here and I hurried out to ask you to be sure and—"

"Yes?" said Scragg eagerly.

"Then you don't think that every man makes his own world?" said Van Boskerck, casting back. "You don't think that the world is all in a man's eye, as you so neatly phrased it a few hours ago?"

"I suppose I talked like a fool," mumbled Scragg, blushing. "You'll find there's no nonsense about me, when we're better acquainted, Mr. van Boskerck. I take the world as I find it. Life is a fight, that's what it is, and a man has got to keep hitting away or he'll get a broken head. A fellow has got to keep his eye skinned, and that's a fact. But say, Mr. van Boskerck, what's the matter with you and the missus running over to my house for dinner some night? And afterward we'll have a good old-fashioned chin on the piazza. What do you do? I'm in the hardware business. You'll be surprised what interesting things I can tell you about the hardware business. I don't want to brag, but I never met a man who couldn't sit for hours and listen to me talk about the hardware business. Talk a tin ear on them, as the saying goes. Ha, ha! Did you get that one? Tin ear—hardware, see? Ha, ha! What do you say?"

"I have always been intensely interested in hardware," said Van Boskerck, "and I promise myself a wonderful time. I'll come to dinner some evening with Mrs. van Boskerck, by all means. It will be a great pleasure and you are very kind."

"Shall I ring you up on our phone?"

"No, don't do that. I'll call you, if you'll be good enough to let me fix the date. It can't be in the immediate future, but I will keep it in mind for the very first opportunity. Good evening, Mr. Scragg!"

He turned about, and retraced his steps toward his mossy home.

"I've fixed *that!*" chuckled Scragg.

He turned into Sylvan Road, on which smart and hard-finished thoroughfare his stucco seven abutted.

Dowd was standing at his gate, having an after-supper pipe. He smiled and nodded to Scragg.

"You'll laugh on the other side of your face very soon, my fine fellow!" cried Scragg. "If you've got the senses you were born with you'll move that fence back where it belongs, right away!"

Dowd took the pipe from his mouth and looked at his neighbor with darkening countenance.

"What way to talk is that, Scragg? I don't like it!"

"If you don't like it you can do the other thing," said Scragg bluntly.

"I'll do the other thing," said Dowd angrily. "I may take that fence out of there, but you'll know you've been in a fight! You can go as far as you like."

Mrs. Scragg was sitting on the porch.

"What kept you, dear?" she asked.

"What do you think kept me?" said Scragg irascibly.

"I'm sure I don't know," she retorted, tossing her head. "And I don't care, either, except that the dinner is cold."

He walked into the house. Mrs. Scragg sighed and picked up a bottle of liniment from the railing and stepped to the screen door.

"Doctor Macartey——" she began.

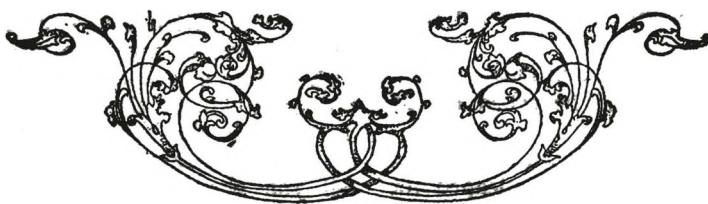
"Is that fellow at his tricks again?" cried Scragg, hurrying to the window. "Confound him, there he is burning leaves and trying to smother us all!"

He went to the telephone.

"Let me have the police station!" he shouted. "Quick!"

He drooped, with the instrument in his hand. He was very weary, but he knew that he must not let down. He hated quarreling, but it could not be avoided, unless he wanted to let people trample on him. It was a very disagreeable world, but there was no use to repine; he had simply to set his jaw and take it as it was.

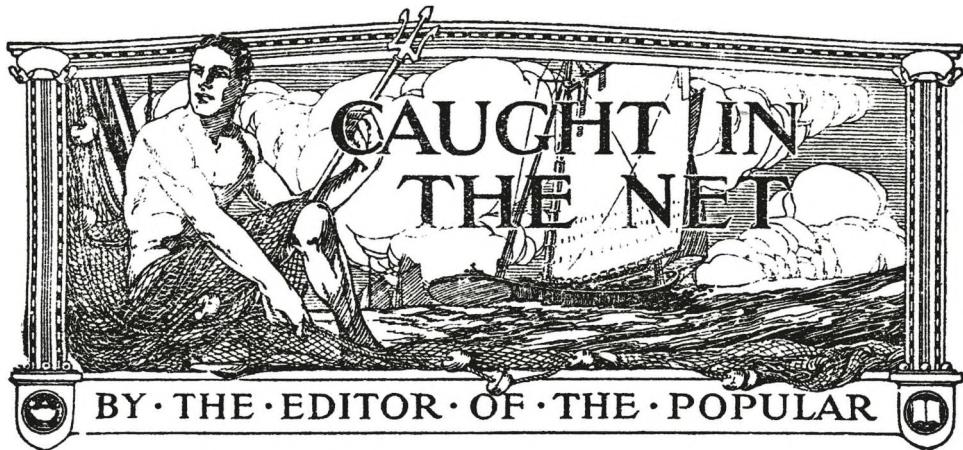
Other stories by Mr. McMorrow will appear in early issues.



SOUTHERN HIGHLANDERS

THE mountaineers in western North Carolina and adjoining States present a distinctive type of Americanism. The grandfathers of those in North Carolina fought and won the vital battle of King's Mountain during the Revolutionary War. And they did it without pay, furnishing their own ammunition and food. For the World War the present generation enlisted in large numbers and formed the bulk of one of the divisions that broke the Hindenburg Line.

They are slow to "warm up" to strangers, and they cling to old customs. They still sing old songs that have been forgotten in Scotland and England where they were originally sung. At times they do surprising things. Near Asheville, North Carolina, last winter, two of them were arrested by a deputy sheriff who attempted to bring them in to jail on a hand car. When a few miles had been covered the hand car jumped the track and turned over, pinning down the deputy but throwing the prisoners free. Instead of fleeing, they lifted the car from their captor, helped him to put it back on the track, climbed on it again and calmly accompanied him into town and into jail.



OUR NEW OFFICE HOLDERS

NOW that the ladies share the well-known vote with us, one begins by a natural association of ideas to wonder how largely they are going to share the offices filled by the suffrage which they have been granted. Present-day straws, as showing which way the wind will eventually blow in this matter, are not quite as definitely indicative as they might be. Examples of office holding by women are of course already fairly numerous. New York City now boasts of a lady county registrar and a lady congressman is already by way of being a more or less everyday matter. Particularly calculated to give the mere male pause, though, is the recent result in the municipal election in that North Dakotan town of Des Lacs where all the offices voted for were filled by women, including marshal and justice of the peace! Going closer to the root of the question of office holding was the action not long ago of the New York State Assembly in passing the Livermore bill, on the recommendation of the governor, giving representation on county political committees to women. To get a firm grasp on the "machinery" of politics would seem to be to get a firm grasp indeed on office holding—and to be an earnest of much of it presently about to be done by the ladies.

And yet! Which is to say, consider the recent case of Charlotte, Iowa, where one of the fair sex was running against a trousered candidate for the office of mayor. It is asserted, though we cannot vouch for it, that a number of Charlotte mothers, with marriageable daughters, announced—and in this were supported by the daughters themselves—that the girls' young men must support the women's ticket or stop courting the young women. Which strikes us as being too grimly like coercion for comfort! This in passing, however. The point is that in the defeat of the lady candidate which, as it happened, ensued, election officials claimed there was "dirty work at the crossroads." In brief, these officials gave it as their opinion that while a majority of the men did vote for the women's ticket, it was the heavy female vote that defeated the mayoralty candidate, Mrs. McDermott, and elected mere Mr. Kane, the opposing candidate for the office. If the ladies are going to be prone to knife their own sex in this ruthless way, who can tell just what is likely to happen? Even when they once get into office it seems that we cannot be quite sure of the fact as an indication one way or another as to the probabilities in this matter of office and the ladies. Witness the classic example of the right to change the mind afforded by the two women councilmen of Three Oaks, Michigan, who, declaring that they would "rather wash dishes than argue over a paving contract," forthwith resigned after a year's service.

Such variegated "straws" as these leave us a little vague in our ideas on the subject in general. It would be embarrassing to have a presidentess abruptly decide that the cares

of White Housekeeping were too exacting to allow of doing two jobs at once and so step out of office. However, it is early to have any final opinion at all on this question. We must just wait and see.

THE STATE AS PARENT

TO what degree, in the end, or even in the not too remote future, is "The State" likely to become "the universal parent?" Civilized man, to be sure, has always regarded himself in the mass as more or less of a child. He has recognized pretty freely, in spite of all his strivings for "liberty" and "self-expression," that it was wise to make certain rules for himself, to arrange for a certain amount of the shaking of an admonitory "police" finger at him and for the laying of that finger heavily on him when necessary. The idea of "freedom" carried with it, in his mind, certain sane reservations. He realized the advisability of a few checks and balances on it. To-day however, one is sometimes moved to wonder if the checks and balances will not eventually loom somewhat larger than the freedom itself.

Time was when this sort of wondering was nothing but a toying with a theory of socialistic possibilities by no means imminent. At present, on the contrary, it seems rather more like toying with a buzz saw of probabilities. The latest great instance of governmental "parentalism" needs little pointing out—and in regard to "prohibition"—to put it more or less euphemistically—we have nothing argumentative to say one way or the other here. We have friends, so to speak, in both places. Considering it outside of its moral and hygienic aspect, however, it undoubtedly is another step toward our becoming children of the State. Nor has the tendency to make us so by any means ended with this step. We are disposed to laugh at it, but the idea of blue laws is not "off the boards" yet. Another instance of the parental tendency was briefly in evidence recently in the country's metropolis when a clerical mistake let loose on the ladies of the city a short-lived order against their smoking in public. As a matter of fact, the ordinance on which the order was mistakenly based had never been passed by the city council—but it had none the less taken form and been submitted to them.

There is no need here to go farther into what has occurred or may occur along these lines. There is no doubt that the tendency in question is somewhat pronounced among us. How far is it to go? How far is it well that we should become "children" of the State? Are we too much so already for our own good? Many men, many opinions. But haven't we read somewhere that self-reliance doesn't come by precept and that "character" is not made by law?

PATENT LEGISLATION

OUR official revival, under the terms of the peace treaty with Germany, of the patent convention entered into with that country in 1909 has brought up an interesting question as to the limiting of the time a patent can be held if the invention which it covers is not fairly speedily commercialized. The argument for a defined limitation of such holding of a patent right comes from Secretary of War Weeks and is based on our experience in respect to the manufacture of certain necessary patented articles at the time of our entry into the war and during the two or three years immediately prior to our entry. A most serious difficulty arose in production here, at that period, owing to the great number of German owned and controlled United States patents which were unlicensed and unworked in this country. They were "bottled up" when we had most need of what could have been made under them.

Incidentally, when we went into the war, it did not help much, lacking patents under which to operate, to seize such German-owned corporations here as had ceased to manufacture. Eventually we got around the difficulty, but the magnitude of the job and the delay incurred made an unpleasant impression on the war department which has not been forgotten.

Secretary Weeks, backed by a number of important American industries, doesn't want us to run the risk of being caught in the same fix again—his apprehension of it having

been sharpened by the knowledge that within the last year or so many patents have been taken out here by German subjects covering articles having to do with national defense. It was in connection with this situation in general that the Stanley bill was put before Congress, under which inventions not commercialized within five years could be appropriated by nonowners of patents on payment of royalties fixed by courts.

Against this law, however, the American Patent Association has come out strongly and the history of many great inventions is cited to show how they would unjustly have been taken away from their originators if there had been any law compelling the commercial use of the products of the inventions within five years' time. Edgar H. Cottrell instances the case of the rotary multiple color press by which printing in several colors at one impression was achieved. It took ten years of constant experimentation and expense before the first salable press was produced. Discussing the history of other inventions William W. Dodge has stated that a certain typewriter, familiar to the public, consumed years of the first term of the patent before it could first be placed on the market; and he added that the famous Ingersoll watch was under process of experimentation for five or six years after the granting of its first patent before it became a salable article.

It seems to us that any limiting law capable of safeguarding our national defense requirements in the field of patents and at the same time satisfying all of our patent holders would be pretty difficult to make. Both sides to the controversy appear to have a strong case. Perhaps it would be better to meet the situation as to national defense needs by amended or special patent treaties with all foreign countries in respect to patents taken out here by their nationals. Killing two birds with one stone, as by the Stanley act or similar legislation, sounds very well, but the attempt sometimes results in our wondering if both of the birds are killed permanently.

MAKING A NATION OF SHARPSHOOTERS

A NY one-hundred-per-cent American will tell you that we are the best rifle shots in the world and, if you don't agree with him, he will—as the candidates for political office say—point with pride to Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett and those sharp-shooting farmers who at Lexington a hundred and forty-odd years ago fired the shots that were heard around the world. This belief is pleasant but not founded on fact. On a basis of the ratio of good shots to population Switzerland leads the world with a lot to spare. In that little republic the youngster is given a rifle and a supply of ammunition at about the age that the American lad gets his first baseball and bat, and from then on receives plenty of opportunities to shoot often and lots of incentive to shoot straight.

That Americans are good natural shots is the opinion of all competent judges, but as shooting skill, even if inherited from pioneering forbears, must be developed by practice the government, through the National Rifle Association, has for some years been trying to make rifle shooting a popular sport among civilians. That these efforts have been successful is proved by the fact that last year the national matches at Camp Perry, Ohio, drew a large field of competitors, many of them civilians who shot for amusement. The increased attention given shooting with the small-bore rifle using inexpensive 22-caliber ammunition has done much to make this development possible. The younger generation is learning to shoot, too, and since the formation of the Winchester Junior Rifle Corps in 1917 more than 60,000 boys and girls have been awarded that organization's medals for shooting skill. Club, high school and college teams are numerous and new ones are being organized each month; and the heights of proficiency to which these young experts can attain is shown by the records of last year's Yale University ten-man team. Two of these Blue shots averaged better than 99 out of a possible 100 for the season, five better than 98, and three better than 97. Of course all sensible people hope that this skill will never have to be used for anything more serious than friendly competition; but in any case records such as these make it seem highly probable that before long Americans, as a people, will be as good shots as they are fond of saying they are.

IF TOBACCO BECOMES TABOO

NOT long ago, the police authorities tried to stop women smoking in public places. In certain Western colleges a student who is discovered smoking may suffer a penalty for his indulgence. Passing through a State west of the Mississippi, the passengers of a railroad are not permitted to buy cigarettes until their train has passed the boundary line.

Moral effects of any reform are always difficult to measure because where one bad habit is snuffed out, another—and perhaps worse—may spring up to flourish in its place. But the economic effects of any profound change in the customs of a people are more easily estimated. How much the prohibition of liquor has cost the United States in money is beginning to be realized. It has contributed both to the burden of taxation borne by the average citizen and to the calamity of unemployment. Conservative figures place our liquor prohibition costs at more than \$400,000,000 annually, and that sum makes allowance for the deduction of soft-drink taxes and the fines and contraband seizures made by the government in its course of enforcement. That \$400,000,000 revenue sacrificed by the government in the cause of prohibition has to be made up from other sources. The effect on labor of the enactment of the eighteenth amendment was to throw about 300,000 out of employment, according to reliable statistics.

However far from the truth these estimates of lost money and labor may be, we want to weigh carefully any other sweeping reform that is projected into the national arena. From all accounts, we learn that tobacco leads on the list of coming prohibitions. There has been State action on the matter, as we discovered in a trip out West, and it is a pet taboo with many powerful organizations. If the antitobacco advocates can make it a national issue, they will, at the earliest opportunity.

Tobacco has been looked upon as a solace for rich and poor alike. It is one of the chief gifts of the red man to civilization. On our farms there are upward of a billion and a half pounds of tobacco raised each year, having a farm value of about half a billion dollars. Manufactured into various products, the value of tobacco multiplies itself several times. Big factories and retail stores engage tens of thousands of workers in the manufacture and sale of tobacco, to say nothing of the host of workers kept busy in related industries which produce such accessories as pipes, containers, matches, cigarette paper, et cetera, et cetera.

Obviously, the ramifications of this one item of general consumption make it one of the great industries; and before declaring the use of tobacco illegal it would be well to consider it from other angles besides that of personal aversion or fanatic enmity.



POPULAR TOPICS

THAT Americans whose families have been in this country for from three to eight generations are taller than their fellow citizens whose families have been here for a shorter time is the opinion of Doctor A. Hrdlicka of the Smithsonian Institution. He says that the average height of the men of these "old" families is five feet eight and one half inches, and of the women five feet four inches. This is above the average height of any large group of white people in Europe.



PRESIDENT HARDING has solved the caddie problem. He likes to try out golf shots in a secluded part of the White House grounds and has trained Laddie Boy, the world's most-photographed Airedale, to find the balls and bring them back to him.



THREE is a thought worth careful consideration in the advertisement of a New York gymnasium which reads: "The great American sport is watching other men exercise, which accounts for the prevalence of our great American disease—stomach trouble." True talk! Why not do your own playing?

WELL, that Andean plesiosaurus we heard so much about a few months ago has managed to escape the gentle attentions of civilization for a while at least. The expedition sent from Buenos Aires to give the prehistoric animal a warm welcome to the twentieth century has returned, having found no traces of the game it sought. Even exploding dynamite in the lake that was supposed to be his haunt didn't make him appear. Next year the expedition is going to try again.



DID you know that goldfish are a fire hazard? Neither did we, until we learned that they were the cause of a blaze in Vancouver, Washington. The bowl containing them was placed in the sun on a window seat and became so efficient a "burning glass" that the wood of the seat was ignited.



THAT motion pictures will some day be broadcasted by radio is the prediction of L. C. Porter, president of the Society of Motion-picture Engineers. Already, he says, pictures have been transmitted by wireless, and he considers it but a short step from the transmission of a single picture to the transmission of a series of pictures which joined together make a motion-picture film.



BEFORE the *Palio*, a picturesque horse race held each summer in Siena, Italy, each jockey takes his horse to a church and horse and rider receive a blessing. In America we do it differently. We usually "bless" race horses *after* the race.



A NEW rule in the British navy makes it possible for the admiralty to place on the retired list any officer suffering from "peculiarity of temper." Wonder how a rule like that would work out in business life?



ANOTHER disillusion! A gentleman of more learning than gallantry tells the world, via the Eastern Osteopathic Association, that our old and greatly admired friend Venus de Milo was a neurasthenic. "Her stomach," he adds, going into what seems to us rather intimate detail, "wasn't in the right position. With her posture it wouldn't be possible for a person to have a normally placed stomach." So that's that!



NOW enters the lady rat catcher. Two young women from Virginia have adopted this useful but not very pleasant vocation, and by its practice expect to travel from city to city and see America. Barium carbonate, used according to United States Public Health Department directions, is their substitute for the pipes of the Pied Piper.



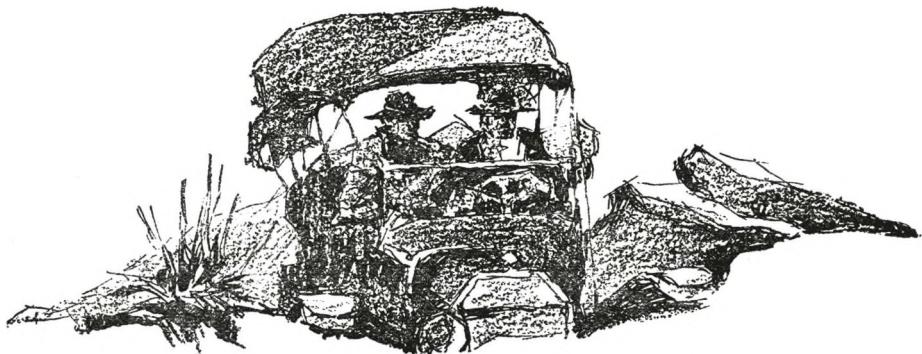
AFTER fifty years of strict training, Mr. John J. Tanner steps into the limelight and claims the long-whiskered championship of the universe. His beard is three yards long and he has to wrap it around his waist to keep it under control. Back in 1870 his whiskers measured a mere two feet, but he was ambitious. Ten years ago they had attained a length of six feet. Another five years added two feet. Four yards of beard is Mr. Tanner's ultimate ambition.



MILLIONAIRES—as millionaires—are't one of our enthusiasms, but we did feel a thrill of admiration when we read recently that Mr. John D. Rockefeller has in the last twenty years given one hundred and thirty million dollars for the advancement of education in the United States.



OVER in France the umbrella has discarded respectability and become a dangerous weapon. One rainy day recently two men were killed with umbrellas in quarrels in which their opponents reverted to their days of soldiering and used the rain shedders in bayonet fashion, inflicting mortal wounds.



Goat Pro Tem.

By B. M. Bower

Author of "The Joshua Palm," "Even the Desert," Etc.

Can you imagine any fitter place to be stranded with thirty gallons of the finest imported contraband than the outskirts of a blistering tank town in the middle of a howling desert? Yet Casey Ryan was badly peeved—and he was no prohibitionist at that.

IN the desert, where roads are fewer and worse than they should be, a man may travel wherever he can negotiate the rocks and sand and none may say him nay. If any man objects, the traveler is by custom privileged to whip the objector, if he is big enough, and afterward go on his way with the full approval of public opinion. He may blaze a trail of his own, return that way a year later and find his trail an established thoroughfare.

Casey Ryan was of the desert. Desert customs held him fast, had grooved deep habits which were looked upon by Casey as his inalienable rights, not to be questioned or rebuked by any man.

In the desert Casey gave trail to none nor asked reprisals if he suffered most in a sudden meeting.

In Los Angeles Casey was halted and rebuked on every corner—so he said—hampered and annoyed by rules and regulations that desert dwellers never dreamed of. In six months of tamed life in the city Casey Ryan had therefore acquired a reputation among traffic officers and pedestrians and a brief speaking acquaintance with judges who failed to warm under the Casey Ryan grin.

His dark-blue, high-speed car showed

sundry dents and scratches; and a certain mechanic in a certain garage had volunteered to work for Casey by the month, and had advised him to buy his front fenders by the dozen and get a reduction on the price. Casey neither hired the mechanic nor took his advice, because certain unpleasant incidents had sent him out of town for three weeks or more, where certain other unpleasant incidents had brought him back again, chastened and willing to lead a different life.

So here he was, with a fresh hair cut and hoping the traffic cops would not remember him; thinking, too, that Los Angeles looked pretty good after all. He was resolved henceforth to lead a blameless life. It was time he settled down, thought Casey virtuously. He meant to start in fresh with a new deal from a new deck and show the Little Woman that Casey Ryan could and would keep beyond gunshot of trouble.

He was driving down West Washington Street and doing twenty-five where he shouldn't; but so far no officer had yelled at him and he hadn't so much as barked a fender. Down across Grand Avenue he lurred, scarcely noticing the terrific bounce when he crossed the water drains there. He was still doing twenty-five—a mild pace for

Casey Ryan—when he turned into Hill Street.

Busy with his good resolutions, Casey forgot to signal the left-hand turn. In the desert you don't signal, because there are never any cars behind to care whether you do or not. West Washington and Hill Street crossing is not desert, however. A car was coming behind Casey, one of those scuttling Ford delivery trucks. It locked fenders with Casey and the two cars skidded toward the curb, caught amidships a bright-yellow, torpedo-tailed runabout coming up from Main Street and turned it nearly on its back, its four wheels spinning helplessly in the quiet, sunny morning. Casey himself was catapulted over the runabout, landing in a seated position on the corner of the vacant lot beyond, his self-righteousness considerably jarred.

A new traffic officer had been detailed to watch that intersection and teach a driving world that it must not cut corners. A bright, new traffic button had been placed in the geographical center of the crossing and woe be unto the right-hand pocket of any man who failed to drive circumspectly around it. New traffic officers are keenly conscientious in their work. At twenty-five dollars per cut, sixteen unhappy drivers had been taught where the new button was located and had been informed that twelve miles per hour at that crossing would be tolerated and that more would be expensive.

Not all drivers take their teaching meekly and the new traffic officer admitted to himself that the driving world was composed of idiots and criminals. He clicked his teeth when Casey Ryan came down upon the crossing with double the legal speed; and after the smash he ran over and yanked off the dented sand of the vacant lot a dazed and hardened malefactor who had committed three traffic crimes in three seconds: He had exceeded the speed limit, cut inside the red button and failed to signal the turn.

"You damned, drunken boob!" cried the new traffic cop, and shook Casey Ryan.

Shaking Casey Ryan will never be safe until he is in his coffin. He was considerably jolted but he managed a fourth crime in the next five minutes. He licked the traffic cop rather thoroughly and was profanely volunteering to lick the whole darned town when he was finally overwhelmed and captured alive—which speaks well for the Los Angeles police.

Wherefore Casey Ryan continued his ride downtown in a dark car that wears a clamoring bell the size of a breakfast plate under the driver's foot and a dark-red L. A. police-patrol sign painted on the sides. Two uniformed, stern-lipped cops rode with him and didn't seem to care if Casey's nose was bleeding all over his vest. A uniformed cop stood on the steps behind and another rode beside the driver and kept his eye peeled over his shoulder, thinking he would be justified in shooting if anything started inside. Boys on bicycles pedaled furiously to keep up and many an automobile barely escaped the curb because the driver was goggling at the mussed-up prisoner in the "Black Maria."

The Little Woman telegraphed a friend at San Francisco that night. The wire was brief but disquieting. She had merely said, "Casey in jail serious need help," but the friend caught the "ark" and thanked God it was on time.

The Little Woman and the friend spent two frantic days getting Casey Ryan out of jail. The traffic cop's defeat had been rather public. More than that, the thing was in the papers and people were reading and giggling on the street cars and in restaurants. Wherefore, the L. A. P. was on its tin ear.

Even so, much may be accomplished with the right sort of persuasion. On the third day the charge was changed from something worse to "reckless driving and disturbing the peace." Casey Ryan was persuaded to plead guilty to that charge—which was harder to accomplish than mollifying the L. A. P. Casey paid two fifty-dollar fines and was forbidden to drive a car in the county of Los Angeles, State of California during the next succeeding period of two years. He was further advised—unofficially but nevertheless with complete sincerity—to pay all damages to the two cars he had wrecked and to take a trip somewhere until the thing blew over.

You can't blame any man for declining to make good resolutions after a setback like that.

II.

At the corner of the Plaza where traffic is heaviest a dingy little automobile loaded with a camp outfit stalled on the street-car track just as the traffic officer spread-eagled his arms and turned with majestic delibera-

tion to let the east-and-west traffic through. The motorman slid open his window and shouted insults at the driver and the traffic cop left his little platform and strode heavily toward the auto, pulling his book out of his pocket with the mechanical motion born of the grief of many drivers.

Casey Ryan, clinging to the front step of the street car on his way out to the apartment house he called home, swung off and beat the traffic officer to the auto. He stooped and gave a heave on the crank, obeyed a motion of the driver's head when the motor started, and stepped upon the running board. The traffic officer paused, waved his book warningly and said something. The motorman drew in his head, clanged the bell and the afternoon traffic proceeded to untangle.

"Get in, old-timer," invited the driver whom Casey had assisted. Casey did not ask whether the driver was going in his direction, but he got in, chuckling at the small triumph over his enemies the police.

"Notice how this car changed her mind about gettin' you tagged, soon as Casey Ryan took 'er by the nose?" he asked cheerfully.

"Are you Casey Ryan?" The driver took his eyes off the traffic long enough to give Casey an appraising look that measured him mentally and physically. "Say, I've heard quite a lot about you. Bill Masters, up at Lund, has spoke of you often. He knows you, don't he?"

"Bill Masters sure had oughta know me," Casey grinned. In a big, roaring, unfriendly city, here sounded a friendly, familiar tone; a voice straight from the desert as it were. Casey bit off a chew of tobacco, hunched down lower in the seat and prepared himself for a real confab with a man who spoke the language of his tribe.

He forgot that he had just bought tickets to that evening's performance at the Orpheum, as a sort of farewell offering to his domestic goddess before once more going into voluntary exile as advised by the judge. Pasadena Avenue heard conversational fragments of, "Say! D'you know—" and "Was you in Lund when—"

Casey's new friend drove as fast as the law permitted. He talked of many places and men familiar to Casey, who was in a mood that hungered for those places and men in a spiritual revulsion against the city and all its ways.

Pasadena, Lamanda Park, Monrovia—it was not until the car slowed for the Glendora speed-limit sign that Casey listed himself on his shoulder blades and awoke to the fact that he was some distance from home and that the shadows were growing rather long.

"Say! I better get out here and telephone to my wife," he exclaimed suddenly. "Pull up at a drug store or some place, will you? I got to talkin' and forgot I was on my way home when I throwed in with you."

"Aw, you can phone somewhere else. There is street cars runnin' back to town all the time or you can catch a bus anywhere along here. I got pinched once for drivin' through here without a tail light; and twice I've had blow-outs along here. This town's a jinx for me and I wanna get it behind me."

Casey nodded appreciatively. "Every darned town's a jinx for me," he confided resentfully. "Towns and Casey Ryan don't agree. Towns is harder on me than sour beans."

"Yeah—I guess L. A.'s a jinx for you all right. I heard about your latest run-in with the cops. I wisht to heck you'd have cleaned up a few for me. I love them saps the way I like rat poison. I've got no use for the clowns—nor for towns that actually hand 'em good jack for dealin' misery to us guys. The bird never lived that got a square deal from 'em. They grab you and dust you off—"

"They won't grab Casey Ryan no more. Why, let me tell you what they done!"

Glendora slipped away behind and was forgotten while Casey told the story of his wrongs. In no particular, according to his version, had he been other than law-abiding. Nobody, declaimed Casey heatedly, had ever taken *him* by the scruff of the neck like a pup and shaken him and nobody ever would. Casey was Irish and his father had been Irish and the Ryan never lived that took sass and said thank ye.

His new friend listened with just that degree of sympathy which encourages the unburdening of the soul. When Casey next awoke to the fact that he was getting farther and farther away from home they were away past Claremont and still going to the full extent of the speed limit. His friend had switched on the lights.

"I gotta telephone my wife," Casey exclaimed uneasily. "She'll be down to the

police station ag'in, lookin' for me. And I want the cops to kinda fergit about me. I slipped over my time limit talkin' along."

"Aw, you can phone from Fontana. I'll have to stop there anyway for gas. Say, why don't you stall her off till mornin'? You couldn't git home for supper now if you went by wireless. I guess you wouldn't hate a mouthful of desert air after swallowin' smoke and insults like you done in L. A. Tell 'er you're takin' a ride to Barstow with an old friend. You can catch a train outa there and be home to breakfast, easy. If you ain't got the change in your clothes for car fare," he added generously, "why, I'll be glad to stake you just for your company on the trip. Whadda you say?"

Casey looked at the orange and the grapefruit and the lemon orchards that walled the foothill boulevard. All trees looked alike to Casey and these reminded him disagreeably of the fruit stalls in Los Angeles.

"Well, mebbe I might go on to Barstow. Too late now to take the missus to the show, anyway. I guess I kin dig up the price of car fare from Barstow back." He chuckled with a sinful pride in his prosperity, which was still new enough to be novel. "You don't catch Casey Ryan goin' around no more without a dime in his hind pocket. I've knowed the lack of 'em too many times when they was needed. Casey Ryan's goin' to carry a jingle louder'n a lead burro from now on. You can ask anybody."

"You bet it's wise for a fellow to go heeled," the friend of Bill Masters responded easily. "You never know when you might need it. Well, there's a Bell sign over there. You can be askin' your wife's consent while I'm tellin' you."

Innocent pleasure—the blameless joy of riding in a car toward the desert, with a prince of a fellow for company—was not so easily made to sound logical and a perfectly commonplace incident over a long-distance telephone. The Little Woman seemed struck with a sense of the unusual and she asked questions which Casey found it difficult to answer. That he was merely riding as far as Barstow with a desert acquaintance and would catch the first train back she apparently failed to find convincing.

"Casey Ryan, tell me the truth. Aren't you going farther than Barstow? And do you want me to believe that you are coming back on the next train?"

"Sure as I'm standin' here; I'm only goin'

to Barstow. When Casey tells you a thing is so, you got a right to put it down for the truth. I never lied to you yet, ma'am. I'm goin' to Barstow fer a breath of fresh air. I expect to catch a train outa there and be home to breakfast. That's straight goods, I'm tellin' yuh."

Though the Little Woman may have doubted, Casey really meant to do exactly what he said he would do.

III.

"Wanta drive?" Casey's friend was rolling a smoke before he cranked up. "They tell me up in Lund that no man livin' ever got the chance to look back an' see Casey Ryan swallowin' dust. I've heard of some that's tried. But I reckon," he added pensively while he rubbed the damp edge of the paper down carefully with a yellowed thumb, "small cars is outa your line, now. Maybe you don't toy with nothin' cheaper'n a twin six."

"Well, you can ask anybody if Casey Ryan's the man to git big-headed! Money don't spoil *me* none. There ain't anybody can say it does. Casey Ryan is Casey Ryan wherever you meet up with him. You might mebbe see me next hazin' a burro over a ridge—or you might see me with ten pounds of flour, a quart of beans and a sour-dough bucket on m' back. Whichever way the game breaks you'll be seein' *Casey Ryan*; and you'll see him settin' in the game and ready to push his last white chip to the center."

"I believe it, Casey. Dogged if I don't. Well, you drive 'er a while; till you git tired, anyway." He bent to the crank, gave a heave and climbed in, with Casey behind the wheel and looking pleased to be there and quite ready to show the world he could drive.

"If I drive till I'm *tired*," he retorted, "I'm liable to soak 'er hubs in the Atlantic Ocean before I quit. And then I'll mebbe back 'er out and drive 'er to the end of Venice pier for you."

"Oh, I believe you; make no mistake. Up in Lund they're talkin' yet about your drivin'. They say there's no stops when you git the wheel cuddled up to your chest. No quittin' and no passin' you by with the merry laugh and a cloud of alkali settlin' on yuh. I guess it's right. I always wanted to meet up with you."

"That there last remark sounds like a traffic cop," Casey snorted, merely to hide his gratification. "And there's men in Lund that'd give an ear to meet me in a narrow trail with a hairpin turn and me on the outside. They'd like it to be about a four-thousand-foot drop, straight down. Lund as a town ain't so crazy about me 't they'd close up while I was bein' planted—or stop all traffic for five minutes even. Don't go kiddin' me, young feller. A show benefit was sprung on Lund wunst, to help Casey Ryan. And I had to give a good Ford to the benefitors so's they could git outa town ahead of the howlin' mob. Bill Masters is all right, but——"

Meanwhile, Casey swung north into Cajon Pass; and up that long, straight, cement-paved highway to the hills he showed his new friend how a car could travel when Casey Ryan juggled the wheel. The full moon was pushing up over a high peak beyond the pass. The few cars they met were gone with a whistle of wind as Casey shot by.

He raced a passenger train from the mile whistling post to the crossing, made the turn and crossed the track with the white finger of the headlight bathing the car blindingly. He completed that S turn and beat the train to the next crossing, where he "spiked 'er tail," as he called it, stopped dead still and waited jeeringly for the train to pass, the engineer leaning far out of the window to bellow his opinion, which was unfavorable, to the full extent of his vocabulary.

"Nothin' the matter with this car, as I kin see," Casey observed carelessly when he was under way again.

"You sure are some driver," his new friend praised, letting go the edge of the car and easing down again into the seat. "Give you a car and all the gas you can burn and you can show a lot of clowns that think they're experts what a real driver looks like. I'm glad that moon's quit the job. Makes it easier drivin', don't you think? You can hit 'er up now fast as you like. After that crossin' back there I ain't expectin' to tremble on no curves. I see you're qualified to spin 'er on a plate if need be."

Casey therefore let her out and the little car went like a scared lizard up the winding highway through the Pass. At Cajon Camp Casey slowed, thinking they would need to fill the radiator. But the young man shook his head and gave the "high ball"

—which, if you don't know it already, is the sign for full speed ahead.

Full speed ahead Casey gave him. They roared on up the steep, twisting grade to the summit of the Pass. Casey began to feel a distinct admiration for this little car. The car was heavily loaded—Casey could gauge the weight by the "feel" of the car as he drove—yet it made the grade at twenty-five miles an hour and reached the top without boiling the radiator; which is better than many a more pretentious car could do.

"Too bad you've made your pile already," the young man broke a long silence. "I'd like to have a guy like you for my pardner. The desert ain't talkative none when you're out in the middle of it and know there ain't another chump like you in a day's drive. I've been goin' it alone. Nine tenths of these birds that're eager to throw in with you thinks that fifty-fifty means you do the work and they take the jack. I'm plumb fed up on them pardnerships. If you didn't have your jack stored away—a hull mountain of it—I'd invite you to set into the game with me, I sure would."

Casey spat into the dark beside the car. "They's never a pile so big a feller ain't willin' to make it bigger," he replied sententiously. "Fur as I'm concerned, Casey's never backed up from a dollar yet. But I ain't no wild colt no more, runnin' loose and never a halter mark on me. I'm bein' broke to harness and it's stable and corral from now on and no more open range for Casey. The missus hopes to high-school me in time. She's a good hand—gentle but firm, as the preacher says. And I guess it's time for Casey Ryan to quit bellerin' around the country and settle down and behave himself.

"Twenty years ago you needn't have asked me twice, young feller. I'd 'a' drawed my chair right up and stacked my chips a mile high. Any game that come along, I played 'er down to the last chip. Twenty years ago —yes, er ten!—Casey Ryan woulda tore that L. A. jail down rock by rock and give the roof to the kids to make a playhouse. Them L. A. cops never would have hauled *me* to jail in no wagon! I mighta loaded 'em in behind, and dropped them off at the first morgue and drove on a-whistlin'. That there woulda been Casey Ryan's gait a few years back. Take me now, married to a good woman and gettin' gray——"

Casey paused and sighed, gazing wistfully back at the Casey Ryan he *had* been and might never be again.

"No, sir, I ain't so darned rich," he went on. "I've got a thousand dollars or so in my inside pocket, just to kinda convince me I needn't worry about a grubstake. I ain't had money so long but what it feels good to count it over, now and then, and soak it into my bones that I kin afford to settle down and behave myself like the missus wants. When I git to thinkin' it's time I hit out into the hills prospectin' or somethin', that roll stands right on its hind legs and sasses me back and says I got enough to keep me in bacon and beans long as this old carcass'll last, anyway. And the missus, she's provided for. So I guess—"

"A guy grows old fast when he quits the game and sets down to do the grandpa-by-the-fire. First you know a clown like that is gummin' his grub, an' shiverin' when you open the door and takin' naps in the daytime like kids do. Let a guy once preach he's gettin' old—"

Casey jerked the gas lever and jumped the car ahead viciously.

"Well now, any time you see *Casey Ryan* needin' a nap after dinner—"

"A clown *gits* that way once he lets go in the prime of life. I've saw it happen time and again." The young man laughed irritatingly. "Say, when I tell it to Bill Masters that Casey Ryan has plumb played out his string and laid down and quit, by gosh, and can be seed hereafter *settin' with a shawl over his shoulders*—"

The little car nearly turned turtle at that insult. Casey jerked it back into the road and sent it ahead again at a faster pace.

"Well now, any time you see *Casey Ryan* settin' with a shawl over his shoulders—"

"Well, mebbe not you," broke in the young man; "but the bird sure comes to it that thinks he's too old to play the game. Why, you'll *never* be too old! Take you twenty years from now and I'd rather bank on a pardner like you'd be then than some young clown that ain't had the experience. From the yarns I've heard about you, you don't back down from nothin' and you're willin' to give a pardner a chance to git away with his hide on 'im. I ain't had the years you've had to play the game, but I've got to the point where I'm plumb shy of throwin' in with a feller. Them's the birds that's always stuck me fer the whole roll

an' beat it with never a thank ye. I'd rather be held up by the law than by some clown that's workin' with me."

He paused and when he spoke again his tone had changed to meet a material matter. "Stop here in Victorville, will you, Casey? I'll take a look at the radiator and mebbe take on some more gas and oil. I've been stuck on the desert a few times with an empty tank—and that learns a guy to keep the top of his gas tank full and never mind the bottom."

"Good idea," said Casey shortly, his own tone dropping its tension of a few minutes before. "I run a garage over at Patmos wunst, and the boobs I seen creepin' in on their last spoonful of gas—*walkin'* sometimes for miles t' carry gas back to where they was stalled—learned Casey Ryan t' fill 'er up every chance he gits."

But though the subject of age had been dropped half a mile back in the sand, certain phrases flung at him had been barbed and landed full on the target of Casey Ryan's self-esteem. They clung and rankled there. He had squirmed at the picture his new friend had so ruthlessly drawn with crude words but bold, of doddering old age. Casey resented the implication that he might one day fill that picture.

He began vaguely to resent the Little Woman's desire to tame him and teach him "the ways and the wisdom of the town." Perhaps Casey, had he ever heard that wistful poem, "Hill Hunger," would have fervently added to his inner rebellion the line, "I would press adventure hard to her deepest lair." It was a pity Casey never read poetry. He might have found therein expression for some of the dumb yearnings that filled his soul at times.

As it was, he rolled a smoke and wished that the Little Woman would settle down with him somewhere in the desert where he could keep a couple of burros and go prospecting in the hills, where sagebrush could grow to their very door, if it wanted to, and the moon could show them long stretches of mesa land, shadowed with mystery, and drop out of sight behind high peaks. He felt that he might indeed grow old fast shut up in a city. It occurred to him suddenly that the Little Woman was unreasonable to expect it of him. Her idea of getting him out of town for a time was to send him up to San Francisco to his old writer friend, Jack Gleason. Casey had promised to go, he

had even believed himself perfectly willing to go, but now the plan somehow jarred.

If it wasn't for the Little Woman he'd be darned if he wouldn't throw in with this young fellow, whom Casey judged to be a prospector of the younger type. His pessimism concerning pardners gave weight to Casey's opinion. When he got back home in the morning Casey thought he would have a serious talk with the Little Woman and get right down to cases and tell her that Casey Ryan was built for the desert and that you can't teach old dogs new tricks.

"They been tryin' to make Casey Ryan over into somethin' he ain't," he muttered under his breath while his new friend was in the garage office paying for the gas. "Jack and the Little Woman's all right, but they can't drive Casey Ryan in no town herd. Cops is cops. And they got 'em in San Francisco same as they got 'em in L. A. If they got 'em I'll run agin' 'em, best I kin do. I'll be the goat pro tem. ag'in, sure as you live. I'll go back and have it out and show 'er where Casey Ryan's been made a goat of in the past and where he ain't goin' to be in no future."

The young man came out, sliding silver coins into his trouser pocket. He glanced up and down the narrow little street, already deserted, cranked the car and climbed in. "All set," he observed cheerfully. "Le's go!"

Casey slipped his cigarette to the upper left-hand corner of his whimsical Irish mouth, forced a roar out of the little engine and whipped around the corner and across the track into the faintly lighted road that led past shady groves and over a hill or two and so into the desert again. His new friend had fallen into a meditative mood, staring out through the wind shield and whistling under his breath a pleasant little melody of which he was probably wholly unaware.

Perhaps he felt that he had said enough to Casey on the subject of a partnership being desirable. Perhaps he even regretted having said anything at all. He seemed to have forgotten Casey completely and to be weaving thought patterns in which Casey Ryan had no part at all.

Casey drove mechanically, his rebellious mood slipping gradually into optimism. In spite of his past unpleasant experiences he was presently weaving plans of his own. The young fellow beside him spoke as if he

had been losing in the game of life. Casey thought that it might be a good idea to take this new friend in with him and develop a certain rich silver prospect he knew of, over in the Panamints. He would wait, however, and see what the young fellow had of his own. They could compare prospects, see which looked the best, and then decide which one they would follow up. Casey himself had learned to be shy of partnerships; but any man with a drop of Irish in his blood and a bit of Irish twinkle in his eye will turn his back on defeat and try again for a winning.

They had just passed over a hilly stretch with many turns and windings. The moon was blotted out half the time, making the desert black mystery around them. For half an hour they had not seen any evidence that other human beings were alive in the world. But when they went rattling across a small mesa where the sand was deep a car with one brilliant spotlight suddenly showed itself around a turn just ahead of them.

Casey slowed down automatically and gave a twist to the steering wheel. But the sand just here was deep and loose and the little car's front wheels gouged unavailingly at the sides of the ruts. Casey honked the horn warningly and stopped full, swearing a good, R yan esque oath. The other car, having made no apparent effort to turn out, also stopped within a few feet of Casey, the spotlight fairly blinding him.

The young man beside Casey slid up straight in the seat and stopped whistling. "You can back up a few lengths and make the turn-out, all right," he suggested.

"If I can back up, he can. He's got as much road behind him as what I've got behind me," Casey retorted stubbornly. "He never made a try at turnin' out. I was watchin'. Any time I can't lick a road hawg, he's got a license to lick me. Make yourself comf'table, young feller—we're liable to set here a spell." Casey grinned. "I spent four hours on a hill once, out settin' a road hawg that wanted me to back up."

The man in the other car climbed out and came toward them, walking outside the beams cast by his own glaring spotlight. He bulked rather large in the shadows; but Casey Ryan, blinking at him through the wind shield, was still ready and willing to fight if necessary. Or, if stubbornness were to be the test, Casey could grin and feel secure.

The big man walked leisurely up to the car and smiled as he lifted a foot to the running board, and leaned toward Casey with his eyes going past him to the young fellow.

"I kinda thought it was you, Kenner," he drawled. "How much liquor you got aboard to-night?"

Casey, slanting a glance downward, glimpsed the barrel of a big automatic looking toward them.

"What if I ain't got any?" the young man parried glumly. "You're takin' a lot for granted."

The big man chuckled. "If you ain't loaded with hooch it'll be because one of the boys met up with you before I did. Open 'er up—let's see what you got."

The young fellow scowled, swore under his breath and climbed out, turning toward the loaded tonneau with reluctant obedience. "I can't argue with the law," he said as he began to pull out a roll of bedding wedged in tightly. "But, for Pete's sake, go as easy as you can. I'm plumb lame from my last fall!"

The big man chuckled again. "The law's merciful as it can afford to be and I've got a heart like an ox. Got any jack on you?"

"I'm just about cleaned; and that's the truth. Have a heart, can't you? A man's got t' live."

"Slip me five hundred, anyway. And half the stuff you got along. How much is your load?"

"Sixty gallons—bottled, most of it. Two kegs in bulk." The young man proceeded stoically with the unloading.

"File out thirty gallons of the bottled goods by that bush. You can keep the kegs." His eyes shifted to Casey Ryan's unreadable face and dwelt there curiously. "Seems like I know you, too," he said abruptly. "Ain't you the guy that was brought in with that Black Butte bunch of moonshiners and got off on account of a nice wife and an L. A. alibi? Sure you are! Casey Ryan! I got you placed now." He threw back his head and laughed. But Casey observed that his watchfulness did not relax for an instant.

Young Kenner, having deposited his camp outfit in a heap on the ground beside the car, began lifting out tall, round bottles, four at a time, and stacking them neatly beside the large sage bush indicated by the officer. Standing upon the running board where he had a clear view, his big automatic

in his right hand and another gun in his left—a gun which rested coldly against Casey's stomach—the big man watched the unloading. It was evident that for all his easy good nature he was counting the bottles as they were lifted out. There was no chance to trick him and young Kenner did not try.

When a hundred and twenty bottles had been removed from the car and stacked in the black shade of the bush the big man nodded and young Kenner unemotionally began to reload the camp outfit. The big man's attention shifted to Casey again. He looked at him curiously and smiled broadly. A woman would have noticed his white, even teeth and would have called his smile pleasant; but Casey, glaring back at him, saw nothing but a hateful minion of the law who was once more making Casey Ryan the goat.

"Sa-ay, that's a good one you pulled! You had all the county officials bluffed into thinking you was the victim of that Black Butte bunch, instead of being in cahoots. That alibi of yours was a bird. Does Kenner, here, know you hit the hooch pretty strong at times? Where's that piece of change, Kenner?"

"Can't you find some way to leave me jack enough to buy gas and grub?" young Kenner asked sullenly, reaching into his pocket. The big man looked at him steadily, still smiling, and shook his head slowly.

"I'm doing a lot for you boys, when I let you get past me with the Lizzie, to say nothing of half your load. I'd oughta trundle you back to San Berdoo—you both know that as well as I do. I'm too soft-hearted for this job, anyway. I'll have to have five hundred, anyway, to square myself if this leaks out. Hold up the roll and count it so I can see."

A ten-dollar bill was left in young Kenner's fingers when he had counted five hundred. The officer signed him to keep it and turned his eyes again to Casey while he dropped the money into his coat pocket.

"All right, I guess I can't do any more for you. Just back up till you can get around my car. Turn to the left where the sand ain't so deep and you ain't likely to run over the booze."

Wherefore, with the big man standing at his shoulder on the running board, Casey Ryan did what he had rashly declared he would never do. He backed the car, turned it to the left as he had been commanded to do, and drove around the other car. It was

bitter work for Casey. But even he recognized the fact that the "settin'" was not good this evening. Back in the road again, he stopped when he was told to stop and waited with a surface meekness while the officer stepped off and gave a bit of parting advice.

"Better keep right on going, boys. I'd hate to see you get in trouble, so you'd better take this old road up ahead here that'll bring you out at Daggett and miss Barstow altogether. I just come from there and there's a hard gang hanging round on the lookout for anything they can pick up." And he added, as he waved them good-by, "I sure would hate to see you boys get in trouble!"

Casey drove half a mile before either said a word. Then young Kenner gave a snort.

"That's 'Smilin' Lou,' and he most always lays for us clowns in Cajon Pass," he said. "He's a mean boy to monkey with. Talk about road hawgs, he's one you can't outset!"

Casey clamped his jaws together and drove on across the shadowy desert.

IV.

"So that's the kinda deal you asked me t' set in on!"

Casey broke a long silence. He had felt in his bones that young Kenner was watching him secretly, waiting for him to take his stand for or against the proposition. "I'd like t' know who passed the word around among bootleggers that Casey Ryan is the only original easy mark left runnin' wild, and that he can be caught and made a goat of any time it's handy! Look at the crowd of folks bunched on that crossin' this afternoon. Why didn't you pick some one else fer the goat? Outa all them hundreds of people, why'n heck did you have t' go and pick on Casey Ryan? Ain't he had trouble enough tryin' t' keep outa trouble? Naw—Casey Ryan's went and blowed hisself t' show tickets, and he's headed home peaceful and on time, so's he can shave and put on a clean collar and slick up t' please his wife and take 'er to the show! Nothin' agin' the law in that! Not a thing you kin haul 'im to jail for! So you had t' come along, loaded t' the guards with hooch, stall yer car on the car track and tell Casey Ryan t' git in! Couldn't leave 'im t' go home peaceful to his wife—naw, you've got t' bring 'im away out here an' git 'im in wrong with a

cop ag'in! That's a fine game you're playin' —that's a *darned* fine game, I must say!"

"It's as good a game as any," young Kenner stated calmly. "Take your own story, for instance. You been dubbin' along, tryin' to play the way the law tells you to, and the saps has been flockin' to you like a bunch of hornets, every bird tryin' t' sink his stinger in first. Ain't that right? Keepin' the law has laid you in jail twice in the last month, by your own tell. Why, lemme tell you, Casey! A clown like you that's aimin' t' keep the law and live honest is the easiest mark in the world. Them's the guys the saps lay for an' dust off in the shape of fines and taxes an' the like of that. Wunst in a while they'll snatch you fer somethin' you never done and run you in, just t' keep you scared and willin' to donate next time.

"Now, you take me, for instance. I play agin' the law and I'm cleanin' up right along and have yet t' take my mornin' sunlight in streaks. I never slept a night in jail yet. I've hauled hooch all over the country and I never yet was dusted off so hard by the law that I didn't come through with a roll of jack they'd overlooked.

"Take this high jackin' to-night, for instance. Smilin' Lou is one of the hardest saps in the country t' satisfy. Look what he took off me! And yet"—young Kenner turned and grinned full at Casey—"I come out a long jump ahead of him. I carry nothin' cheap, nothin' but good booze that the liquor houses failed to declare when the world went dry—and real honest-to-gosh European stuff slipped in from Mexico. Now you're in, I'll tell you the snap.

"You can count on high jackers like Smilin' Lou leavin' you at least half your load, maybe a little more if you set purty an' come across like a gentleman. They don't aim to force you out of the business. They grab what the traffic'll bear an' let you go on and make a profit, so you'll stay. Now, I got a card up my sleeve for this game. I load in the best stuff first; and anything real special I put in kegs with double sides and ends which I fill with moonshine. You never can tell—they might wanna sample it. Smilin' Lou did once; and since then he leaves the kegs be. So they git a good grade of hooch from the liquor houses and they pass up the best imported stuff that can be got to-day. I got regular customers for that—and you can gamble they pay the

price!" He laughed at some secret joke, which he straightway shared with Casey.

"Right under this front seat there's a false bottom to the tool box. You noticed I got my gas tank behind—a twenty-gallon tank at that. So, under the front seat I'm carrying forty pints of French champagne. More'n all that, this cushion we're settin' on has got a concealed pocket clear around the edge; and that's ful of hop. So you see a man can make an honest livin' at this game, even if he's high jacked every trip. Now you're in I can show you all kinds of profit."

The muscles along Casey's jaw had hardened until they looked bunched. His eyes, fixed upon the winding trail in front of him, were a pale, unwinking glitter.

"Who says I'm in? You ain't heard Casey Ryan say it yet, have you? I don't wanna spoil nobody's fun—but you better wait till Casey says he's in before you bank on it too strong. He may be an easy mark and he may be the official goat pro tem of every cop and bootlegger that crosses his trail; but you can ask anybody if Casey don't do his own decidin'. Before you go any further I'll tell you just how fur Casey's in this game—and that's as fur as Barstow. When Casey says he'll do a thing, he'll come pretty near doin' it or he'll have a darned good reason fer changin' 'is mind. I ain't playin' no bootleg game, young feller. Make me choose between bootleggers and cops, and I'd have t' flip a dollar on it. Only fer Bill Masters bein' yer friend, I dunno but what I'd take you right back with me t' L. A. and let you sleep in a jail wunst—seein' you've never had the pleasure!"

The young man laughed unperturbedly. "Flip that dollar for *me*, Casey, to see whether I shoot you now and dump you out in the brush somewheres or take you along and make you play the bootleg game and like it. You was drivin' this car yourself when Smilin' Lou stopped us, recollect. He had you placed as one of that Black Butte gang quick as he'd lamped you. You was caught with the goods to-night, old-timer, and it's the second time inside a month. You set still a minute and figure out just where you stand with the law. How come Smilin' Lou overlooked cleanin' you of your roll when he took mine, d'you think?"

"He was treatin' you white and givin' you a chance t' come back strong next time, that's why. They got so much on you now,

after to-night, that he knows you've got just one chance to side-step doin' a stretch in the pen. That's to play the game—with perfection. Smilin' Lou and his bunch sure gets sticky fingers when they meet up with you, but to my knowledge they never yet throwed down a guy that come through on demand. They're stackin' up a pile on the side that's too safe and easy t' make it worth while puttin' the boys away and spoilin' a graft.

"Smilin' Lou stood there and sized you up same as I did, and somethin' like this: 'Here's Casey Ryan in the game—a clown that's safe anywhere in the desert States,' he thinks to himself. 'He's got honest prospector wrote all over 'im. He's got friends wherever he goes and he can get by where a town guy couldn't. He's got a rep a mile long as a fightin', square-shootin' Irishman. He's a drivin' fool and he knows the desert like he knows ham 'n' eggs. Tie on some picks and shovels and put Casey behind the wheel and only the guys that are in the know would ever get wise in a thousand years.'

"That's the way Smilin' Lou sized you up, same as I done. Why, look what he said about you havin' 'em all bluffed in San Berdoo! Grabbed you with a bunch of moonshiners—and you fightin' the saps harder'n any of 'em, so they had t' hog tie you t' git you in t' headquarters—and then, by gosh, you slips the noose and leaves 'em thinkin' you're honest but unlucky!"

"You may wanna play your game alone, but I'm thinkin' strong that you ain't so innocent as you act. I wouldn't put it past you to have a private still of your own cached out somewhere in the hills. Your stall's too strong, old-timer. It's too darned convincin' t' git by with me. So you 'n' me is pardners till I say when. Fergit your still and we'll clean up some real jack together. Minin' ain't in it, no more, with hooch peddlin', if you plays it right. And I admits it gits lonesome hittin' out across this desert alone."

"You'll git lonesomer 'fore I'm through with you," gritted Casey savagely, shutting off the gas. "Bill Masters kin like it or not—I'm goin' t' lick the livin' tar outa you right now and then you kin take your load of hooch and go t' blazes. The walkin' ain't all took up—I'll hoof it down here t' the next station on the railroad and ketch a ride back to L. A."

Young Kenner laughed shortly. "I

wouldn't set you afoot for anything! Feel that gun proddin' you in the ribs? You take this cut-off road up here and drive till I tell you to stop. As you may know, it takes a man with nerve to peddle hooch. Well, I'm called an expert in deliverin' the junk. I can't help wonderin' how your wife'd feel toward you if you was found with a hole drilled through your middle and the load of booze in your car. Gosh! That'd jar the faith of the most believin' woman on earth. Well, now, you think that over, Casey—and drive purty, see?"

Casey drove as "purty" as was possible with a six-shooter pressed irritatingly against his lowest floating rib, but he did not dwell upon the spectacle of himself found dead with a carload of booze. He clamped his jaws together, wished to Heaven he hadn't let the Little Woman talk him out of packing a gun and waited for his chance.

Young Kenner was thoughtful, brooding through the hours of darkness with his head slightly bent and his eyes, so far as Casey could determine, fixed steadily on the uneven trail where the headlights revealed every rut, every stone, every chuck hole. But Casey was not deluded by that quiescence. The revolver barrel never once eased its pressure against his side and he knew that young Kenner never for an instant forgot that he was riding with Casey Ryan at the wheel waiting for a chance to kill him.

By daylight, such was Casey's driving, they were well down the highway which leads to Needles and on through Arizona. Casey was just thinking that they would soon run out of gas and that he would then have a fighting chance at Kenner when he was startled almost into thinking he had spoken his plan.

"There's a twenty-gallon tank on this car and a five-gallon reserve. I've got a special carburetor that gives an actual mileage of twenty-two miles to the gallon, on ordinary desert roads. I filled 'er till she run over at Victorville. Figure it yourself, Casey, and don't be countin' on a stop till I'm ready to stop."

Casey grunted, more crestfallen than he would ever admit. But he hadn't given up—the give-up quality had been completely forgotten when Casey's personality was being put together. He drove on, around the rubbly base of a blackened volcano long since gone cold and bleak and bored his

way through the sandy stretch that led past Patmos.

Patmos was a place of unhappy memories, but he drove through the little hamlet so fast that he scarcely thought of his unpleasant sojourn there. Young Kenner had fallen silent again and they drove the sixty miles or so to Goff's with not a word spoken between them. Casey spent most of that time in mentally cursing the little car for its efficiency. He had prayed for blow-outs, a fouled timer, for something or anything or everything to happen that could possibly befall a car. He couldn't even make the radiator boil. Worst and most persistent of his mental discomforts was the hard pressure of that six-shooter against his side. Casey was positive that the imprint of it would be worn as a permanent brand upon his skin for the rest of his life.

Young Kenner's voice speaking to him came so abruptly that Casey jumped.

"I've been thinking over your case," he said cheerfully. "Stop right here while we talk it over."

Casey stopped right there.

"I've changed my mind about havin' you for a pardner," young Kenner went on. "You'd be a valuable man, all right, but when an Irishman gets stubborn bitter, my hunch tells me to break away clean. You people are all right when you're with a man solid, but I can't be bothered keepin' you under my eye all the time. And I never bump a man off if there's any other line of defense.

"Now, the way I've doped this out, I'm going to sell you the outfit for whatever you've got on you. Fork it over and I'll give you the layout just as she stands."

"You better wait till Casey says he wants t' buy!" Under more favorable conditions, Casey would have licked this man. Swallowing resentment all night had made his voice husky and his eyes as unblinkingly venomous as a snake's.

"Why wait? Hand over the roll and that closes the deal. I didn't ask you would you buy, see? I'm givin' you a run for your money, is all. I could take it off you after I'd shot you through the middle and drive in here to this little burg claimin' I'd caught a bootlegger that resisted arrest. See? So, hand over the jack, old-timer. I wanna catch that train over there that's about ready to pull out."

Casey fumbled for a minute inside his

vest and glumly "forked over." Young Kenner inspected the folded bank notes critically, smiled and slipped the flat bundle inside his shirt.

"You're stronger on the bank roll than what you let on," he remarked contentedly. "I don't stand to lose so much after all. Sixteen hundred, I make it. What's in your pants pockets?"

Casey, still balefully silent, emptied first one pocket and then the other. With heavy sarcasm he dipped into his watch pocket and produced a nickel slipped there after paying street-car fare. He held it out to young Kenner, still gazing straight before him.

Young Kenner took it and grinned. "Oh, well—you're rich. Drive on now; and when you get about even with that caboose slow to twelve miles till I hop off; and then hit 'er up ag'in and keep 'er goin'. If you don't, I'll grab you for a bootlegger, with the hull train crew to help me if I tip 'em

off. They'd be willin' t' sample the evidence, I guess, and be witnesses against you. And bear in mind, Casey, that you got a darned good little car and a valuable cargo for sixteen hundred and some odd bucks. If you meet up with the law, you can treat 'em white and still break better than even on the deal you just consummated with me."

They were coming abreast of the caboose and at a final prod in the ribs Casey slowed down. Young Kenner dropped off the running board, lighted running with his body slanted backward and his lips smiling friend-lywise.

"So long and good luck!" he cried and headed for the caboose.

At a crossing two miles farther on Casey came larruping out of the sand hills and was forced to wait while the train went rattling past, headed east on a downhill grade. A young fellow up in the cupola leaned far out and waved his hat, as the caboose flicked by.

A "Casey Ryan" novelette, "Bootlegger's Luck," appears in the next issue.



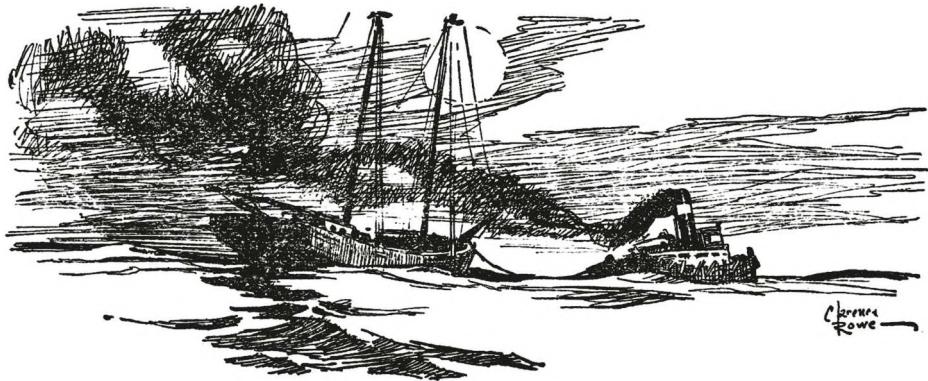
THE DISTINGUISHED JANITOR

IN one of the small but "select" apartment houses in the national capital's northwest section, that part of the city where the diplomats and most of the government officials have their homes, the janitor is a man who was once a member of Congress. He takes his comedown in life philosophically and explains that he is merely an example of what the political game may do to a man when it goes against him.

After serving three terms in the House of Representatives, he was defeated at the polls. During his six years in Washington he had lost all his law practice "back home" and found himself, when past fifty years of age, confronted with the job of starting all over again. Discouraged by the prospect, he appealed to what friends he had to secure his appointment to a position in one of the executive departments of the government. He landed a clerkship that paid eighteen hundred dollars a year and held it until the administration changed hands. With his party out of power, it was only a matter of months until he was out of his job, which was not under the protection of civil service.

Then followed weary months and wearier years, with the former statesman doing odd jobs of all sorts and having desperate difficulty in making enough money to feed himself and his wife. A lawyer without a practice, a politician without a following, he was trained for no particular line of work. He tried clerking in stores, selling patented articles on commission, life insurance and bill collecting. Finally he was reduced to accepting the janitorship.

"What has my experience taught me?" he echoed the question put to him. "Well, above everything else, it has convinced me of the folly of any man's going into politics to make money. There's no money in it. In fact, to be a good lawmaker, a man should have independent means before he ever begins a political career."



Me and Slane

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "Vanderdecken," "The System," Etc.

"A ship's all the wife a sailorman wants," opined the sagacious Captain Brent. But Buck wouldn't believe. He had to try his hand ashore with Jinny Slade. And she taught him that Brent spoke truth.

III.—THE OTHER ONE

SYDNEY is one of the finest towns in the world and it has the finest harbor, unless you call San Francisco Bay a harbor; it has the most hospitable people and a gayety and push all its own; also, in the matter of temperature, when it chooses it can beat any other town except maybe Calcutta.

"A hot shop," said Brent. He was seated at a bar adorned with colored bottles; and a girl with peroxide of hydrogen tinted hair had just handed him a lemon squash with a hummock of ice in it.

"You aren't looking yourself, captain," said the girl.

"No, my dear, I aren't," replied Brent, "not if I look as I feel." He relapsed into gloom and I offered him a cigarette which he refused.

"I'm going to a funeral," he explained.

"Sorry," said I. "Not a near relation, I hope?"

"Well, it might be a relation, by the way I feel; but I've none. When a man gets to my age he leaves a lot of things astern." He sighed, finished the last half of his drink

in one mighty gulp, wiped his mouth and got off his chair.

"Walk down with me a bit of the way," said he.

We left the bar and entered the blaze of the street. It was eleven o'clock in the morning.

"It ought to be raining," said the captain as we wended our way along King Street toward the wharves. "Happy is the departed one that the rain rains on, is the old saying. But, rain or shine, if there's happiness for any one, her whose funeral I'm going to is happy. She did her duty."

"What did she die of?" I asked, by way of making conversation.

"Old age," replied Brent. He had a black tie on but his garb was otherwise unchanged; his mourning was chiefly expressed by his voice and manner. And as we drew closer to the whiff of the harbor and the scent of shipping he took off his Panama and mopped his bald head now and then with a huge red handkerchief.

That handkerchief was always the signal of worry or perplexity with Brent; and

now, right on the wharves and feeling for his state of mind, I halted to say good-by.

"Wouldn't you care to see her?" he asked.

"No, thanks," I replied. "I ought to meet a man at twelve and it's after eleven now—and—"

"He'll wait," replied the captain. "It's only a step from here and she's *worth* seeing. Kim on."

He took me by the arm and led me along, reluctantly enough, toward some mean-looking buildings, the relics of old days, then on under the bowsprit of a full-rigged ship and so on to a decayed slip of a wharf beside which an old schooner lay moored.

"That's her," said Brent.

On her counter in letters almost vanished stood the word *Greyhound*.

"The *Greyhound*!" said I. "Is this the old schooner you and Slane owned?"

"The same," said Brent. "She's to be towed to the breakers' yard at eight bells—noon. They gave me word so that I might have a last look at her."

So this was the funeral he was to attend. He mopped his face with the red handkerchief, contemplated the deck beneath him, heaved a sigh and then, "Come down," said he. "I've told Jimmy Scott to leave me something in the cabin."

He dropped on to the deck and I followed him. There was no watchman to guard the corpse. I looked at the standing rigging all gone to ruin and the sticks that had survived many a gale and the grimy decks that once had been white; then I dropped down to the cabin after Brent.

The ports were open and water shimmers from the harbor water danced on the maple paneling; the upholstery had been eaten by rats and a faint smell filled the place like the ghost of the odor of corruption; but there was a bottle of whisky on the table, a couple of glasses and a siphon.

"If I hadn't met you, I'd 'a' brought some one else," said Brent, taking his seat before the funeral refreshments, "but there's not many I'd have sooner had than you to give her a send off. You remember I told you that Buck had her from Pat O'Brien who didn't know her qualities. No one did in those days. Why, a chap by name of Gadgett come aboard first day we had her and said she ought to be condemned—said she wasn't seaworthy—and that's fifty-one years ago." He took the cork from the bottle and poured. "Fifty-one years ago and now

I'm having my last drink and smoke here where Buck and me have often sat—and him now in the cemetery. Well, here's to you, Buck—and here's to her!" We drank and lit up.

"Well, she's had her day," said I, trying to say something cheerful. "It's like a wife that has done her duty—"

The captain snorted.

"Wives!" said he. "A ship's all the wife I've ever had and I don't want no other; it's all the wife a sailor wants; and if she's decently found and run, she never lets him down. I told that to Buck once. I told him the *Greyhound* was his lawful wife and he'd come a mucker if he took another. He wouldn't believe me; but he found it out. You've never seen him. He died only four years ago and he hadn't lost a tooth, hadn't got a gray hair on his head. Six foot he stood and he'd only to look at a girl and she'd like him. But he wasn't given that way after his marriage."

"Oh, he got married, did he?" said I. "I always fancied from what you told me of him that he was a single man. Did she die?"

"I expect she's dead by this," said the captain. "No knowing. But if she ain't she ought to be. We fell in with her, me and Slane, the year after that dust-up with Sru I told you of. We'd lost money on that job, but we'd pulled up over a deal in silver that had come our way through Pat O'Brien and Buck had thirty thousand dollars in the Bank of California and I'd got near ten in my pocket. I didn't trust banks."

"For all that money we lived quiet, not being given to drink, and we were fitting the *Greyhound* out for a new job when one night, at a sociable, we met in with Mrs. Slade. That was the name she gave herself, a fine, fresh-faced young woman not thirty, with eyes like Cape mulberries—they had that red look in the black of them—and with a laundry of her own that they said was bringing in five hundred a week profit. She harpooned Buck. Clean through. You've seen a chicken running about with a woman after it till she catches it and wrings its neck? That was Buck. He was no more good after she'd got the irons into him."

"One night I had it out with him. I said, 'The powers that be has given you a ship to tend and take care of. She's been true to you and brought you in the dollars—and look at the way you're usin' her! Why we ought to have had her out of dock by this

and the cargo half on board her. And she over there at Oakland and you foolanderin after a widow woman!"

"She's a girl," says he.

"Well, woman or girl don't matter," I says. "You ain't the age for marrying nor the sort of chap to make good at the game." We went at it hammer and tongs, me trying to pump sense into him like a chap trying to pump up a burst bicycle tire; but at last, somehow or another, I began to get the better of the business and bring him to reason and by two in the morning I'd brought him to own he was a fool and marriage a mugg's game—for him. I went to bed happy and next day he turned up at noon with a flower in his coat and looking as if he'd gone queer in his head.

"What's the matter with you?" I says.

"I've just been married," says he.

II.

"That's the sort of chap a woman had made of him. I've heard it said a woman is the making of a chap. It's true. If she's a good woman she'll make a man of a fool and if she's bad she'll make a fool of any man, seems to me. Jinny Slade was bad. I've got instincts about things and maybe that's what made me so down on the business from the first. Them mulberry eyes of hers rose my bristles, somehow or another; but now she'd fixed him there was no use talkin.

"They took up housekeeping in Francis Street over the laundry. And not wishing to mix up in their hymeneal bliss I didn't see much of Buck for a month or more. The *Greyhound* was out of dock and I brought her over to her moorings at Tiburon and I'd sit here just as I'm sitting now, time and again, thinking of old times and the fool Buck was making of himself. For we'd lost the cargo a trader had promised us and our business was going to smash.

"One day I was leaning on the rail fishing with a hand line for want of something better to do when a guy comes along in a boat—Newall was his name. He'd known us for a couple of years, casual, and he'd just put off from an Oregon boat that lay anchored a bit out.

"How's Buck?" says he, resting on his oars.

"Buck's married," I says. "Married this month and more."

"Well, I wish him luck," says Newall. "And who's the lady?"

"I tells him.

"Holy Mike," he says. "Jinny Slade—what made him do it?"

"I told him I didn't know unless it was the devil; and then I asked what he knew about the party.

"Well," says Newall, "I'm a cautious man and I'm not goin' to lay myself open to no law court actions for *defination* of character. I'm not goin' to say nothing about the woman except that she oughta been flung into the bay two years ago with a sinker tied to her middle—and even then you wouldn't have saved her first husband, which she poisoned as sure as my name's Dan Newall; no, nor the men she ruined in that gamblin' joint she run in Caird Street with a loaded r'lette wheel that'd stay put wherever you wanted by the pressin' of a button under the table; run by a Chinaman it was, with her money.

"In with the crimps she was; and if I had a dollar for every sailorman she's helped to shanghai I'd buy a fishin' boat and make my fortune out of catchin' the crabs that are feedin' on the men that's drowned themselves because of her.

"Laundry!" he says. "Why, a laundry's big's from here to Porte Costa, with every Chinaman in California workin' overtime for a month, wouldn't wash the edges of her reputation! And Buck's married her. Strewwth, but he's got himself up to the eyes! What sort of blinkers were you wearin' to let him do it?"

"I don't know," I says. "Alligator hide I should think was the sort he was wearin', anyhow. Question is what am I to do now?"

"Take a gun and shoot him," says Newall, "if you want to be kind to him. Has she got any money out of him?"

"I don't know," I says.

"Been married to him a month," he goes on. "She'll have every jitney by this. Well, if you're set on tryin' to do somethin' for him, get the last of his money from him, if he's got any, and hide it in a hole for him before she kicks him out plucked naked."

"Off he rowed; and pulling up my line I left the *Greyhound* to the Kanaka watchman and took the ferry over to Frisco.

"The laundry was banging away, the Chinese all hard at work. Mrs. Slane wasn't home—was over at St. Jo for the day, so the

forewoman said. But Buck was in and upstairs; and up I went.

"They'd got a fine sitting room on the first floor with plush-covered chairs and brand-new old-fashioned-looking furniture and a bowl of goldfish in the window and pictures in big gold frames on the walls. Buck was sitting in an easy-chair reading a paper and smoking a cigar.

"'Hullo,' he says, 'here's a coincidence! For I was just comin' over to Tiburon to see you.'

"'Oh, were you!' says I. 'Wits jump sometimes and here I am on the same job. How's the world using you, Buck?'

"I tried to be as light-hearted as I could but it was hard work. Buck had gone off in looks and it was plain to see things weren't going easy with him. You can always tell when a chap has something on his mind. And while he was getting out drinks I sat putting my thoughts together and only waiting to begin. I'd fixed to do a big grab and get ten thousand dollars out of him as a loan to hide away for him against the time he got the kick-out, plucked naked, as Newall had said.

"He pours the whisky.

"'Buck,' I says, taking the glass, 'I've come to ask a favor of you. I want a loan.'

"'How much?' asks Buck.

"'Well,' I said, 'I've ten thousand dollars of my own, as you know, and I've been offered a big opportunity of making a hundred thousand. Safe as houses. I want ten thousand to put with mine. I wouldn't ask you to risk yours if I wasn't risking mine.'

"'What's the spec?' he asks.

"'Can't tell you that,' I said. 'I'm under promise. But you know me and I give you my word of honor your money is as safe as if it was in your pocket—safer.'

"'Well, I'd do it if I could,' he says. 'You know me and that I'm not lyin' when I speak, but I can't. Haven't got it.'

"'But, Buck,' I says, 'why, only a month ago, you had thirty thousand dollars in the bank.'

"Buck nods and goes on to say, 'I haven't got it to put my hand on,' he says. 'My wife is keepin' it for me. She says what with those New York banks goin' bust, last spring, and one thing and another, banks aren't safe and she wants to invest it. She's over at St. Jo to-day lookin' at some property.'

"'Where's she got the money?' I asks.

"'In that safe,' says he.

"Sure enough there was a big iron safe in the corner of the room, half hid by a screen.

"Seeing how the land lay, I said no more, and he changed the subject, going back to what he was saying when I first came in, about how that he had been coming to see me that afternoon about a matter of business. He wouldn't say what the business was but he wanted my help and he wanted it that night. He also wanted the boat of the *Greyhound* brought over to Long Wharf.

"'Just bring her over yourself,' said he. 'No, we don't want help. Just you and me will manage it; and bring the mast and sail and some grub. Never mind what I want her for. I'll tell you later. It's a payin' business, as you'll find.'

"With that I took my leave of him and hiked off back to Tiburon, for the day was getting on and I had none too much time to get things together.

"I was bothered and that's the truth. Buck had gone off, wasn't the same chap. And by his manner, when he asked me to meet him with the boat, I knew it wasn't pleasure sailing he was after. I near scratched the top off my head thinking what he could be wanting with that boat, but it was beyond me and I gave it up. Taute was the name of our Kanaka watchman, same chap we had with us when we did that gun-running job down at Taleka, and when I got back to the *Greyhound* I set Taute to work getting some grub together and a new spar for a mast, as the old one was sprung. Then, getting along for evening, I rowed over to Long Wharf.

"Long Wharf was pretty busy just then, what with wheat ships cleaning up before towing to Berkeley for cargo and Oregon timber ships and such. There was a schooner lying there belonging to a chap I knew, so I just tied up to her channel plates and crossed over on to the wharf, where I sits on a bollard kicking my heels and waiting for Buck.

"Along he comes, just on dark, and without a word he follows me across the deck of the schooner into the boat.

"Tell you I felt queer. We'd sailed pretty close to the wind together, me and him, gunrunning and what not; but this job seemed different—sort of back-door business with the harbor police or the Fish Patrol waiting to lay for us if we hitched up on it any-

where. I'd been used to blue-water doings and big things and it got my goat to feel we were after something small and shady. It wasn't small by any means, but anyhow that's how I felt.

"I said nothing, though, taking the oars and Buck taking his place in the stern sheets. Then we pushed off, Buck steering and making as if he was laying a course for Oakland. A few cable lengths out we took the wind and put up the mast and, Buck taking the sheet, off we set, still laying as if we were bound for Oakland. I'd sooner be out anywhere than in the lower bay after dark, what between them damn screeching ferryboats and the motor launches and such. Every monkey in Frisco with brass enough seems to have some sort or another of a launch or yacht and to spend his leisure trying to run folks down. We were near cut into twice, seeing we had no light. But after a while, getting off the main track and Buck shifting his helm, we got along better.

"He was steering straight for Angel Island now. We passed Raccoon Straits and kept on, the breeze freshening hard and the boat laying over to it. The sky was clear and a big moon was coming over the hills. Wonderful fine the bay is a night like that, with all the lights round showing yellow against the moon and Frisco showing up against Oakland.

"However we weren't out to admire the view and we held on, at least Buck did, till we were near level, as far as I could make out, with Reed's and aiming for Red Rock, the wind holding well. We passed a Stockton boat and an old brig coming down from Benicia or somewhere up there. Then away ahead and coming along square as a haystack I sighted a Chinese junk. Buck let go the sheet and, lighting a lantern he'd brought with us, ran it up.

"'What are you doing that for?' I asked him.

"'Show you in a minute,' says Buck. 'Give us the boat hook.'

"I handed it along and he told me to have the oars handy and then we sat while the junk came along at a six-knot clip, boosting the water, and the great eyes in the bow of her showing in the moonlight as if they were staring at us—but not a soul to be seen or a light on deck.

"She snored along to starboard of us, not more than ten yards away, black as thunder against the moon, and she was showing us

her stern when something went splash over her side, followed by something else as if two chaps had done a dive, one after the other.

"On top of that and almost at once a Holmes light was thrown over and went floating along blazing and smoking and showing a man's head squatting beside it.

"'Man overboard,' I says.

"'Row,' says Buck.

"I turned my head as I rowed and saw the junk going along as if nothing had happened; and then I saw the thing in the water wasn't a man's head but a buoy. We closed with the buoy and Buck grabs it with the boat hook and brings it on board. It had a rope tied to it and he hauls it in, hand over hand, till up came a bundle done round with sacking. He hooks it over the gunnel and into the boat.

"'That's done,' said he.

"'It is,' said I.

"I didn't say a word more. We got the sail on her and put her on the starboard tack, heading straight for Angel Island.

"Then we shoved through Raccoon Straits. It was getting along for morning now and I felt stiff and beat, with no heart in me or tongue to tell Buck what I was thinking of him for dragging me into a business like this. I was only praying we might get out of it without being overhauled.

"We had Tiburon lights to starboard now and, a bit to port, the riding light of the old *Greyhound*, when, all of a sudden, we see a light running along toward us and heard the noise of a propeller like a sewing machine in a hurry.

"'Police boat,' says Buck.

"My heart rose up and got jammed in my throat and I hadn't more than swallowed it down when they were alongside of us and there was Buck sitting in the stern sheets with the bundle under his legs and a chap in the police boat playing a lantern on him.

"Then the chap laughed.

"'Oh, it's only you, Buck,' says he. 'What are you out for this time of night?'

"'Smuggling opium,' says Buck.

"The chap laughed. He was Dennis, well known to us both, and he shut his lantern and gave us the news that he was after some Chinese smugglers who had their quarters at Valego. Fearing their shop was to be raided they were due to run some stuff into Tiburon that night, according to his information.

"Well, we've just come down from San Quentin," says Buck, "and I didn't sight anything, only a big junk that passed us making as if she was going to Oakland. Good luck to you."

"Off they went and five minutes after we were tying up to the *Greyhound*."

III.

"We got the stuff on board, right down here where we are sitting now, and Buck undoes the sacking and there stood six cans of Canton opium, worth Lord knows what a can."

"I got the whisky out and had a big drink before I could get my hind legs under me to go for him."

"Well," I said, "this is a nice night's work. S'pose Dennis hadn't been in that police boat? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Don't you see you've been trading on your good name? If Dennis hadn't believed in you, we'd both be in quad now with the shackles on us. And look what you've done to the *Greyhound*."

"What have I done to her?" he fires.

"Done to her!" I says. "Why, you've made her disrespectful, that's what you've done to her!"

"Lord, is this the first shady job she's been in?" says he. "Why look at those guns we run—what's the difference?"

"Guns aren't dope," I says; "and whites aren't Chinese. You've been hand in fist with the Chinese over this. But there's no use talking. It's done."

"I knew it was the wife at the back of him. That was the cause of it all, so I didn't rub it in any more. I remembered Newall's words about her and the men she'd done in, and I saw as plain as paint that laundry of hers was only a blind for Heaven knows what. I just had another drink and then I asked him what he was going to do with the stuff now he had it on board. He said he was going to stick it in the lazaret for a few days, till things were quiet; and then he'd get it ashore, can by can, and he'd do it all himself and not ask me to help him."

"We stowed the stuff into the lazaret and had a snooze; and somewhere about noon next day he goes ashore leaving me on board."

"I couldn't eat nor sit still, couldn't do anything but smoke and walk the deck. I reckon when a man's in trouble there's noth-

ing better than tobacco; it gives him better advice than all the friends in the world."

"There I was with that stuff in the lazaret and who knew what moment some gink or another would give the show away and the police would be aboard. I wasn't thinking of myself so much as Buck; and after him I was thinking of his wife and wishing I had her aboard to drown her."

"But worry as much as I liked I couldn't see a way out. The only chance was to break him off from her and get him away, for this was only the beginning of things and I knew it would end in perdition for him. She'd managed to get some power over him with those mulberry eyes of hers; and how to loose it was beyond me."

"I slept aboard that night and, somewhere getting along for morning, I sat up in my bunk with a plan full made in my head. I must have been thinking it out in my sleep, or maybe it was the Almighty put it into my mind; but it was a peach. Question was, could I work it?"

"First thing I did was to make a dive for the lazaret and get those opium tins out; getting them on deck I dumped them one by one and at every plash I said to myself, 'There goes a bit of that woman!' It was just before sunup and there was nobody to see."

"Now," I says to myself, "the old *Greyhound*'s a clean ship again and Buck will be a clean man before dark if I have to break the laundry up and her on top of it!"

"Getting on for breakfast time I sent Taute ashore for some things and did the cooking myself; then, toward noon, I rowed ashore and took the ferry for Frisco."

"I was as full of nerves as a barber's cat. It wasn't what I was going to do that rattled me but the knowing that if I didn't pull it off, Buck would be ruined for life."

"When I got to the laundry I couldn't go in. I walked up and down the street saying to myself, 'Bill, you've gotta do it—no use hanging in irons—you've got old Buck to think of. Make yourself think what you're going to say is true. Now or never! In you go, give her the limit!'

"In I goes. The head woman said they were upstairs and up I went. They'd finished their dinner and Buck was smoking a cigar. The woman was still at the table, peeling an apple."

"Buck," I says, "it's up! The police are after you! I've run all the way to tell you."

Dennis has given me word and you've still time to save yourself if you're quick.'

"The woman gives a squeal and flings the apple on the table.

"Great Scott!" says Buck.

"Then I turns on his wife and gives her the length of my tongue for leading him into the business and she ups and gives me the lie, saying she had nothing to do with it, winking at him to back her, which the fool did—but so half-hearted you could see he wasn't telling the truth.

"Well," I said, "it doesn't matter. The question is now to get him out of Frisco. Dennis has given me three hours to get the *Greyhound* out with him on board her and save him from the penitentiary. Has he any money?"

"I've got his money," says she. "Buck, stir yourself!" she says. "I'll pack a bag for you and here's the notes you give me to keep." She goes to the safe and unlocks it and takes out a bundle done up in brown paper and he stuffs it in his pocket and she packs his bag and off I drags him.

"Out in the street I told him to wait a minute and ran back and there she was in the room locking the safe.

"I ought to have told you," said I, "they're after you too. Clear out of Frisco, git by the next train or they'll have you."

"Who's give me away?" she cries.

"The chinks," says I. And at that she let a yelp out of her and falls on the sofa in a dead faint. I opened the safe and there I sees a parcel the identical of the one she'd given Buck. I puts it in my pocket after a squint at the contents. Then I put her feet up, and lit out to where Buck was waiting for me in the street and, catching him by the arm, I dragged him along down to the wharves where Taute was waiting with the boat. We got over to the *Greyhound* and then the three of us set to work to get that schooner out of the bay—a six men's job, but we done it.

"All the time we were handling her and getting across the bar I was thinking hard enough to split my head open. Outside I came to a conclusion.

"Buck," I said, "you're free of her now."

"Who?" says he.

"Your wife," says I.

"Then I told him all I'd done. I thought he'd have knifed me. He was for putting back right away till I played my last card. I was only working on suspicion, but I was right.

"Put your hand in your pocket," I says 'and pull out that bundle of notes your wife gave you. If the tally is right, I'll go straight back with you and apologize to her.'

"He pulls out the parcel and opens it. It was full of bits of newspaper and old washing bills. Then I pulls out the other parcel I'd nicked and there were his notes."

Brent relit his pipe and puffed for a moment or two in silence. Then:

"He never saw her again," he said. "When we put back to Frisco, the laundry was shut and she gone. He didn't want to see her either. The old *Greyhound* was enough for him after his experience of Jinny Slade. And now the *Greyhound*'s going too."

We sat for a while in more silence and tobacco smoke. Then Brent looked up. The coughing and churning of a tug came through the open skylight and the hot hazy atmosphere of the cabin.

"That's them," said Brent.

We came on deck. Then we climbed on to the wharf while Scott's men went aboard, true undertakers' assistants, callous, jovial, red-faced, gin-breathing. We watched the tow rope passed and the mooring ropes cast off, saw the tow rope tighten and the bowsprit of the *Greyhound* turning for the last time from land. We watched the smashed-up water of the harbor streaming like a mill race under the bat-bat-bat of the tug paddles and the stern of the *Greyhound*, with the faded old lettering, turned toward a wharf for the last time.

As the vision faded, Brent heaved a deep sigh, thinking maybe of his partner and old times.

"Well," he said, turning away, "that's the end of her. What gets me is that the other one may be alive and kicking her heels and enjoying herself. No knowing. It's those sort that lives longest, seems to me."

Another story of Mr. Stacpoole's "Me and Slane" series in the next issue.





The Valley of Ghosts

By Edgar Wallace

Author of "The Day of Uniting," "The Daffodil Enigma," Etc.

(A Four-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XXVI.

MEETING MRS. BONSOR.

GET thee behind me, Satan," said Scottie sternly.

"You haven't grown religious too, have you, Mr. Scottie?" asked "Big" Martin in some anxiety.

Scottie was sitting on his bed in the little house in Castle Street and his companion was that same attendant who had scuttled upstairs at the sound of Andy's knock. He was not naturally of a retiring disposition but before announcing the arrival of Andrew Macleod, he had, in his argot, taken a "dekkō" at the visitor through the front-room window. And the "dekkō" had produced a slight palpitation of heart.

He was called Big Martin because his height did not exceed four feet six inches and there was a time when there wasn't a handier man than Big Martin in the profession for getting through a small scullery window.

Of late, however, good living had broadened him sidewise and frontwise and, like many another specialist, he found now that his special qualities had failed and that he was wholly unfitted for the general practice of his calling.

Scottie he had served in many capacities. He was an indefatigable reader of newspapers and a remarkable collector of information and could reconnoiter a house with greater acumen than anybody Scottie had known in the course of a long and interesting career. It was Big Martin who peddled buttons at kitchen doors and heard all the

domestic gossip which was so useful to his various employers.

Scottie was above this kind of work. He had specialized in dealers in precious stones and now required a more highly efficient intelligence department than Big Martin could supply. Yet Big Martin was useful in a way. He maintained the establishment in Castle Street during Scottie's absences, he ran errands, made beds and could at a pinch cook a simple meal.

"No, I haven't got religious," admitted Scottie, breathing on his spectacles and polishing them with a corner of the sheet, "but I have got careful. Have you ever heard the tale about the pitcher and the well?"

"No," said Big Martin suspiciously. "Is there a catch in it?"

"There is a catch in it," said the other grimly and added, "I have made enough money to live quietly."

Mr. Martin wrinkled his face. "If you don't do it, somebody else will," he said. "She's asking for it, walking about with all them diamonds."

It was fate, thought Scottie.

"You needn't tell me anything about her," he interrupted the intelligence department, "I've met her socially. Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor, near American. Suite 907, Great Metropolitan Hotel."

"A bank couldn't buy her pearls," urged Big Martin. "They're as big as that." He made an "o" of his forefinger and thumb. "Diamonds! You never saw anything like it, Mr. Scottie."

"I know—but she keeps them in the hotel

ate," suggested Scottie and the other made a discouraging noise.

"Not she! My cousin's in the kitchen there; that's how I got to hear about it. She peels potatoes!"

"Who, Mrs. Bonsor?"

"No, my cousin."

Scottie was thoughtful. His fingers were busily playing a tune on his knee and his gaze was absent.

"No, I don't think so, Martin," he said. "MacLeod would know it was me; and besides—" He hesitated and was about to go on, but changed his mind.

Big Martin would not understand Scottie's views in relation to Stella Nelson. It would be untrue to say that Scottie was reformed or, if he was reformed, that he harbored any penitence for his past ill deeds. The principal factor in whatever reformation had come about was the factor of personal safety. There was really no reason why he should take the risk. He was fairly well off. The Regent Street haul had sold well—one of the purchasers was a witness who helped to prove his alibi—and he had got another nest egg which, together with his more recent acquisitions, would keep him in comparative comfort all the days of his life.

"I'll go and have another look at this Mrs. Bonsor," he said and Martin rubbed his hands joyously. "Not that I believe she's such an all-fired fool as you make her out to be. Where does she come from?"

"Saint Barbara," said the other.

"Santa Barbara—so she does," corrected Scottie. "She told me—maybe she knows some friends of mine on the Pacific slope. And talking of friends, Big Un, I saw you last night coming out of Finnagin's with a perfect gentleman."

Big Martin looked uncomfortable.

"He's a reporter," he said.

"What a bit of news!" said Scottie sarcastically. "As if I didn't know he was a reporter. What did he want?"

"It was about a job I was on four years ago," said Big Martin. "I got eighteen months for it. Harry Weston's job."

"I know it. And if he hadn't remembered it he would have looked it up—any cop would have given him particulars. Well?"

"He was quite friendly—asked me what had become of Harry. We just chatted."

Scottie's lip curled.

"As if he didn't know that Harry is doing

seven years in Parkhurst! Well, you chitterer, what did you chat about?"

Big Martin was now thoroughly alarmed. What had he said?

"If I die this minute, I didn't say anything about you. He knew you were here and asked how your hand was." Scottie groaned. "But I didn't tell him—he's a good friend of yours, Scottie—said that if you was ever in trouble to send for him. Those were his very words."

"You didn't tell him that MacLeod knew all about it, did you?"

"He didn't want telling," said the other with satisfaction.

"You never could hold anything in your head," said Scottie, resigned, and began to change.

He dressed himself with care, found at the bottom of a box a small case filled with cards and selected one. It described him as Professor Bellingham and the address was Pantagalla, Alberta. There was no such town on the map as Pantagalla, but he had once lived in a suburban boarding house which bore that name and it seemed sufficiently Canadian.

Then he set forth to make a call.

The reception clerk at the Great Metropolitan discovered that Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor was in and the bell boy carried Scottie's card to her, while Scottie sat in an easy-chair, seemingly absorbed in his thoughts but in reality watching every man that entered or left the vestibule. The hotel detective he spotted at once. He wore that strained expression which all hotel detectives adopt and which is never wholly absent from the face of any detective.

Presently the bell boy came back and conducted Scottie to the third floor, ushering him into an expensive suite. Scottie knew exactly how much per diem that suite cost.

The lady who was standing by the window, looking out, turned at the entrance of Scottie.

"Good morning," she said very briskly, "Mr.——"

"Professor Bellingham," said Scottie deferentially. "We met before, you remember?"

"We surely did. I couldn't read your card without my glasses," she said. "Sit down, professor. Now isn't it nice of you to look me up?"

It was Scottie's experience that nobody was quite like what they were when he met

them before; he was not prepared for the surprising sameness of Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor. If anything she was now more expensively garnished than when he had seen her lolling in her large car. Her jewels were magnificent. When she raised her hand it glittered as a jeweler's window display. There must have been a ring on every finger, and there were certainly three diamond bracelets, which must have been worth a fortune, on one arm.

All Scottie's old predatory instincts were aroused. It was a sin and a shame that this woman should have all these wonderful possessions while he eked out a bare existence.

"I thought I'd come along and see you, Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor," he drawled. "I'm from Pantagalla, and seeing you were from Santa Barbara, why I thought it would be neighborly to come along and say how do you do. I know Santa Barbara very well—knew it before you rich people took it up and spoiled it. Ha-ha! My little joke, Mrs. Bonsor!"

"It's real kind of you, Professor——"

"Bellingham," he suggested.

"Professor Bellingham. It is such a nuisance—my maid has mislaid my glasses and I am as blind as a bat without them. It is a lonely city, this. I was here some years ago but it is all new and strange to me now and I shall be glad to get back home again."

"Have you been here long?"

"For a fortnight," said the woman, "and I haven't met a single nice person since I have been here. They are a lot of stuck-up people. I guess they haven't a cent to their names. Why, I called on a woman I met in San Francisco and the senator was real nice to her, and they didn't ask me to stay to tea—not that I drink tea," she added.

Scottie could well understand that Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor was not regarded as a social acquisition in spite of her wealth.

They chatted about Santa Barbara, about people—whose names fortunately Scottie knew—in San Francisco and Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor returned to her favorite topic, which was the inhospitable character of the people in foreign countries and the deterioration of the servant class.

"Why, this room is supposed to have been dusted this morning," she said, flicking a piece of fluff from the chair on which she was sitting. "Look at that—not a brush has touched it!"

Scottie was silent.

Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor could not read his card because of her defective eyesight and yet she was picking minute specks of fluff from the chair without any visible effort. Some curious eye disease, he decided, and never gave the matter another thought.

He made himself agreeable to such an extent that he was invited to come to dinner that night.

"I dine in my suite," she said. "The trash that you find in hotel dining rooms certainly gets my goat."

As he came down the steps of the hotel, a little jubilant with the success of his preliminary visit, somebody tapped him on the arm and he looked round into a familiar face,

"Andy wants you," said the detective. "He told me to ask you to step up to headquarters."

Scottie gave an impatient click of his lips but said nothing, and presently they were at the office.

"Hullo, Scottie, better?" Andy greeted him. "Take a seat, won't you? One of my men saw you were calling on Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor, the rich American woman at the Great Metropolitan. What's the idea?"

"Can't a man have his social recreations?" said Scottie, grieved.

"All that you want and more," said Andy brightly; "but I am acting in your own interests when I pull you in. This woman is a walking Kimberley diamond mine and I hate to see you fall into temptation. By the way, I've just come back from Beverley Green," he added carelessly. "Miss Nelson was asking kindly after you."

Scottie licked his lips.

"That is very good of Miss Nelson," he said slowly. "And about this diamond woman, Macleod, my intentions are strictly honorable. You don't know what comfort it is to get near to so much money or you wouldn't grudge me these few emotions."

"I grudge you nothing, Scottie," said Andy quietly, "but we've had her under observation since she came to town. We've already warned off two old friends of yours, Harry Murton and Dutch John and it wouldn't be fair to you if I let you think you were working free from the observations of guardian angels."

Scottie was silent.

"Does that mean I can't go and see her again?"

"You can go and see her as often as you like," said Andy; "but if she comes here

with a squeal about the diamond tiara that you were admiring only a few minutes before you left and which has mysteriously disappeared—why then, Scottie, I shall put you on the file!"

A slow smile dawned on Scottie's face.

"Hasn't anybody told you I am reformed?" he asked innocently.

"I've heard about it," replied Andy with a laugh. "Scottie, I'm serious. I don't want to see you get into trouble and I think under the circumstances that Mrs. Bonsor is a dangerous acquaintance. Your morals are my first consideration," he said piously. "You can certainly see her as often as you like, but it is a little dangerous, isn't it? Suppose some other hook gets busy and there is an emptiness in the jewel case—"

"Thank you, Macleod." Scottie gathered up his hat and got up. "I still think I'll see her. She is fascinating. Apart from her jewelery I mean. Have you met her?"

"No, I have not met her; she is not in my department," said Andy. "Steel is away on a holiday and I am taking his place—luckily for you—because Steel wouldn't have given you half a chance."

"Thank you," said Scottie again. "And by the way, Macleod, that reporter Downer is alive and active."

"So I know," said Andy. "He has returned to Beverley, or rather to a village a mile or two out. Has he been after you?"

Scottie nodded. "He's pumping a friend of mine. You know that he's wise to Miss Nelson being at Castle Street? You do? What a sleuth you are, Macleod! So long."

That night Scottie walked boldly into the Great Metropolitan, though he knew he was being watched, and the evening was a pleasant one. Mrs. Bonsor had taken to him and did her best to entertain her professor. He learned incidentally that the "senator," her husband, was not really a senator at all. He gathered it was a name bestowed ironically by certain citizens of California. This information cleared the way to a better understanding. Scottie had been puzzled to account for an educated man having married a woman of this character. She talked about her palatial home in Santa Barbara, of her cars, her servants, her garden parties; and every time she moved she scintillated.

"Scottie's been to see that Bonsor woman three times," reported a watcher to Andy.

"He dines with her every night and took an auto ride with her this afternoon."

Andy nodded.

"Put a man on to Big Martin and see if there's a job in progress."

He liked Scottie as an individual, but officially Scottie was a possible menace to human security.

One afternoon a police officer called on Mrs. Bonsor and when Scottie came to dinner that night, resplendent in a new dress suit, her manner was cold and her attitude distinctly distant.

"I nearly didn't let you up at all, mister," she said. It was ominous that she called him "mister." "But I thought I would have a little talk with you. The bulls are after you."

"After me?" said Scottie.

He was annoyed but not resentful. It was the duty of the police to warn this woman and he had rather wondered how long Andy would let him go before he did his duty.

"They say you are a crook called Scottie." She shook her head reprovingly. "I can only tell you that I am very much hurt."

"Why?" asked Scottie calmly. "I haven't stolen anything of yours and I would never take so much as a hairpin from your beautiful head."

Yes, Scottie said this, and in a sense meant it.

"I admit that I am called Scottie. It is not my name, but it is good enough to identify me in two or three countries. I admit that I am a crook, but do you realize what it means, Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor?" he said with a quaver in his voice, "for a man like myself to meet a woman like you—a woman of the world, young, comparatively speaking, certainly in the prime of life, who takes an interest in a—a—an adventurer? It isn't your money or your jewels. They don't mean anything to me. I could have got 'em the first day I met you, lady," he went on recklessly. "I came to see those stones of yours. Everybody was talking about them and I'm a geologist by profession. I admit it. But when I'd seen you and talked to you, it was like a dream. A man of refinement and taste in my profession doesn't meet a lady like you—not often."

"I'm nothing much, I'm sure," said Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor, unwilling to interrupt the smooth flow of Scottie's comfortable eloquence and yet feeling that modesty demanded such an interruption.

"I knew you weren't American the first time I spoke to you—they don't raise people like you on the Pacific slope"—which was true—"and when I'd seen you once I knew that I'd have to see you again. I fought with my foolishness—but every day you lured me back."

"Not intentionally," murmured Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor.

"Don't I know it," said Scottie wearily as he rose and held out his hand. "Good-by, Mrs. Bonsor. It has been like living in another world."

She took his hand, reluctant to end an interview which was not unpleasing.

"Good-by, Mr. Scottie," she said. "I'd like to see you again, but—"

"I understand," said Scottie bitterly. "It is what the world would think of you—what all these la-di-da people in the hotel would say."

Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor stiffened.

"If you think I care two cents for their opinions," she said shrilly, "why you're wrong! Come up to dinner to-morrow night."

Her words were a command, her mien a little majestic. Scottie did not speak. He bowed and went out quickly. She might have changed her mind if he hadn't. Half-way down the stairs he tried to recall the conversation in its entirety.

There were certain good books circulated among convicts designed to bring them to an appreciation of a virtuous life. He had made mention of these to Stella Nelson on one occasion. In these books there was recorded inevitably a speech usually delivered by the reformed "lag" to the gentlewoman who had, by her sweet influence, brought about his reformation.

In the main the thief of fiction expressed very much the same sentiments as the Scottie of fact. But he had forgotten something. He remembered it, now, with a "tut" of impatience.

"I didn't say anything about my mother!" he said.

Considering this omission later, he decided that on the whole it was well that he had forgotten. It would be advisable to hold something in reserve for the second interview. Nevertheless, he must take no chances; and turning into the nearest railway terminus he made for the news stall.

"Have you got a book called 'Saved by a Child,' or one called 'Only a Convict?'"

"No," said the youth in charge, "we don't sell kid books."

"'Kid' is exactly the word, my son," said Scottie.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GHOST OF A NAME.

Andy received the following letter from an attaché of the American embassy:

MY DEAR MACLEOD: I do not know Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor personally, but I have heard quite a lot about her. As you rightly surmise, Crafton-Bonsor was not a United States senator. In this country you have what you call "courtesy titles." "Senator" may be described in this case as a courtesy title! The original name of Crafton-Bonsor is difficult to unearth. He was called variously "Mike" and "Murphy" by old associates, but he was "Bonsor" Murphy and "Grafter" Bonsor, and from these two appellations he probably arrived at Crafton-Bonsor. He had some sort of political pull and in his latter days was universally known as "the senator." He died immensely rich and his widow inherited every cent.

Andy read the letter to Stella Nelson the first time they were alone.

He had performed his duty and Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor could now have no doubt as to her friend's character. So far from the knowledge having interfered with the association of these strange people, it seemed to have had exactly the opposite effect.

"She may be trying to reform him," suggested Stella, her eyes twinkling. "Bad men have an irresistible fascination for susceptible ladies—not that Scottie is bad or that Mrs. Bonsor is particularly susceptible. I remember her now; she came to Beverley Green and smashed up our beautiful lilac. Scottie told me her name afterward."

"He's at lunch, afternoon tea and dinner!" protested Andy. "I am not concerned with Scottie's lighter recreations and I suppose having warned the lady, my responsibility is at an end. But still—"

"Perhaps he loves her," suggested the girl; "and please, Andy, don't sneer. Scottie has always struck me as having a romantic disposition."

"I wouldn't deny it," said Andy. "That alibi of his—"

"Andrew! Don't be unpleasant! Besides you've got to meet her to-night."

"I have to meet her?" said Andy in surprise.

Stella nodded solemnly.

"Scottie has written to me to ask if he can bring her down to dinner and of course

I have said yes. I gave a brief description of her to father and he has been shuddering ever since. I think he will have an engagement at the club to-night, which makes it all the more imperative that you should be here."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Andy incredulously, "that Scottie has had the audacity to invite himself and his bejeweled friend to dine with *you*?"

Apparently Scottie had. And that evening Andrew Macleod made the acquaintance of a lady whom he had endeavored to serve.

Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor was arrayed in a tight-fitting plum velvet gown and, having seen her, Andy was smitten dumb. Never on one human being had he seen such a display of precious stones. From the diamond band about her red hair to the diamond buckles on her shoes she was overpowering. Standing beside her, a rajah in full uniform and wearing the jewels of state would have seemed mean and unadorned.

Scottie was joyous. His pride was so absurdly sincere that Andy could only gape at him.

"Meet my friend, Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor," he said. "This is Doctor Macleod, Mirabel." Andy mentally repeated "Mirabel" and gasped. "Doctor Macleod and I have had many contests, you might even call them fights, but I bear him no malice. He was the gentleman that warned you against me; and wasn't he justified?"

He took Andy's hand in his and shook it intensely. Mrs. Bonsor, on the contrary, favored Andy with a stony glance from her blue eyes.

"Meet Miss Nelson, Mirabel," said Scottie.

Something glittered on his finger as he waved the introduction.

"Glad to meet you I'm sure," said Mrs. Bonsor without enthusiasm. "Any friend of the professor's—Professor Bellingham"—she glared toward Andy—"is a friend of mine."

It was an awkward beginning to what Stella had hoped would be a very pleasant and amusing evening. It dawned upon her halfway through dinner—and the thought left her helpless—that Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor was jealous of her! But by this time that lady had overridden her earlier suspicions and antagonism and was chatting genially with Andy.

The poison was creeping into Scottie's veins. That sober man, whose unostentation was his greatest charm, had developed two large solitaire rings. Andy did not look at them too closely; nor was there any need, he decided, for Scottie would not display jewelry that had been fully described in the *Hue and Cry*.

"Yes, I am leaving next week," Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor was saying with a glance at Scottie. "I have had a better time than I thought I should, but naturally my beautiful home in Santa Barbara—the lawn is as big as this village—I showed the professor a picture of it and he thought it was wonderful—and it is only natural, of course, that, having a beautiful home like that, I want to stay with it."

She glanced again at Scottie. Scottie dropped his eyes to the tablecloth. There was something disgustingly modest about Scottie at that moment and Andy would dearly have loved to have kicked him.

"I hope you won't find the journey too lonely for you, Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor," said Andy. "You will miss our friend, the professor."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bonsor and coughed. Scottie looked up.

"I was thinking of going over to California to have a look round," he said and on this occasion it was Mrs. Bonsor who simpered.

"The fact is, mister," she said, "Stanhope and I——"

"Stanhope—who is Stanhope?" asked the baffled Andy, but he had no need to ask; the pleading eyes of Scottie met his.

"Stanhope and I are very good friends. I thought you would have noticed the ring." She held up a plump hand.

There and then Andy noticed about twenty. He made a good recovery.

"May I offer you my congratulations," he said heartily. "Really, this is surprising news, Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor."

"Nobody was more surprised than myself," said that lady cheerfully. "But you'll understand, mister—I always forget your name—I used to forget the senator's sometimes—you understand how lonely a woman in my position can get. Besides I want Stanhope to begin a new life. There is a peach of a mountain near my house where he could—what's the word, Stan?"

"Geologize," murmured Scottie.

"That's the word," said Mrs. Bonsor.

"And if that doesn't suit, there are some dandy mountains within a car ride."

"So you are going to leave us?" smiled Andy. "And I suppose that in a month's time you will have forgotten Beverley Green and Wilmot and the murderous Abraham Selim and—"

There was a crash.

Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor had fallen to the floor in a dead faint.

It was some few moments before she came to.

"It was the heat of the room," she gasped after her eyes had opened. She was now a disheveled, untidy woman, her jewels awry. "I—I think I'll go back to the hotel. Stanhope"—it was pathetic to see how much she relied on him—"will you order the car?"

Her face had gone suddenly old and gray, against which the carmine lips looked ghastly. Andy expected any minute to see her collapse again. He thought it was a serious heart attack at first. She was of the build that is susceptible to such trouble and he was relieved when she showed signs of recovery. He and the concerned Scottie assisted her to her car.

"The drive will do me good," she said with a nervous little laugh as she glanced round. "I am sorry to give you all this trouble, Miss What's-your name, and I wanted to hear about that murder, too. Who was killed? Abraham Selim?"

"No, a man named Merrivan. It was foolish of me to mention that ghastly business," said Andy.

"Oh, that didn't worry me. Good night, mister."

When the pair had left, Andy went back with the girl to the unfinished meal.

"Abraham Selim," he said softly.

She frowned. "Do you think it was the mention of that name that made her faint?"

Andy nodded.

"There is no doubt about it in my mind," he said, "but why should the name of the murderer of Merrivan have that result?"

He sat studying the pattern of the cloth for a long time and she did not interrupt his thoughts.

"I really think I must interview Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor," he said slowly, "for unless I am greatly mistaken that lady can tell us more about this murder and its motive than the murderer himself."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MAN IN THE DRESSING GOWN.

Andy stayed at the house until Mr. Nelson returned and strolled across the green to the Guest House, where he had reserved his old room. He was the only visitor in the house and Johnston hailed his arrival with unfeigned pleasure.

"Thank goodness you've come," he said. "I was afraid you wouldn't be here for another hour."

Andy shot a swift professional glance at the man; his face was drawn, his teeth were chattering.

"What is the matter with you, Johnston?" he said. "You seem to be under the weather."

"My nerves have all gone to pieces since this murder," said Johnston. "I get that jumpy I can hardly keep still and I never go to sleep until three o'clock in the morning."

"Why not?" asked Andy.

The man laughed hysterically.

"If I tell you, you'll probably think I am mad; and there are times when I feel that way, doctor. And I'm not naturally a nervous man—never was. I don't mind telling you in confidence that in my younger days I poached on every estate in this county. But—"

"But what?" asked Andy after an interval of silence.

"I'm a religious man, too, in a manner of speaking," Johnston went on. "I never miss the evening service and I don't believe in anything supernatural—spiritualism and all that sort of rubbish. I've always said that the spirits men see are the spirits they put inside of 'em."

"And you've been seeing ghosts, eh?" said Andy interested; "which means, Johnston, that you are thoroughly run down. I'll see Mr. Nelson to-morrow and ask him to recommend to the committee that you have a holiday."

Johnston shook his head.

"Perhaps you are right, sir. But—I'm a fool, I suppose—but I've seen things in Beverley Green that would make your blood turn to water, and you're a doctor. It is a valley of ghosts—that's what it is."

"Have you been seeing any of the ghostly inhabitants?"

The man licked his lips.

"I've seen Mr. Merrivan," he said.

Andy, who had turned with a laugh to go upstairs, swung round again.

"You've seen Mr. Merrivan? Where?"

"I have seen him as I've seen him dozens of times, standing at his front gate in his dressing gown. He used to come out in the old days in the early morning, just wearing his long, yellow dressing gown—before people were about, you understand—at five or six o'clock. And I've seen him out there on warm summer nights, standing with his hands in his pockets, taking the air."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Andy softly. "And you've seen him since his death?"

The man nodded.

"I saw him two nights ago," he said. "I haven't told a soul about it, but I've been sleeping badly and I usually take a walk round the Green before I go to bed. I have been as many as twenty times round the Green in the course of a night," he explained. "At first I used to go as near Mr. Merrivan's house as my nerves would let me; but after two or three nights, I found I couldn't go within fifty yards of it. Two nights ago I was strolling up and down, wondering who would buy the house. Mr. Wilmot has had all the furniture cleared out, the only things left being the curtains in the windows. I was loafing along thinking how desolate the place looked, when all of a sudden I saw a light and"—his voice shook tremulously—"it was in the room where the body was found."

"What sort of a light?"

"It looked to me like a candle, sir. It wasn't a bright light, as though somebody had turned on the electricity. As a matter of fact, Mr. Wilmot has had the electric current cut off."

"And then what happened?" asked Andy.

"Then, sir"—Johnston shivered—"well, I only saw a crack of light between the blinds and the wall and I was thinking that I was imagining things, when the blind was slowly pulled up—" He paused.

Andy waited until the man had overcome his emotions.

"I couldn't see him distinctly, but he was in a dressing gown and he was looking out into the garden. I was paralyzed, just stood stock-still and couldn't move. Then the blind was pulled down and the light went out. I saw it a few minutes afterward in the hall. There is a fanlight over the door. I don't know how long I stood there, pos-

sibly ten minutes, probably ten seconds—I didn't sort of realize that time was passing. And then, when I was just recovering myself, the door opened. There was only a faint light in the passage—and he came out."

"Merrivan?"

The man nodded.

"Or at any rate, somebody in a dressing gown, eh?" said Andy.

"Yes, sir."

"And have you seen it since?"

"I saw it again last night. I made myself walk toward the house. There he was standing at the front gate, with his hands in his pockets."

"Did you see his face?"

"No, sir, I didn't wait to see his face. I bolted."

"Have you told Mr. Wilmot?"

"No, sir, I didn't like to tell him—Mr. Merrivan being his uncle."

Andy thought over the matter for a long time.

"You are probably suffering from hallucinations due to a bad attack of nerves," he said. "I'll give you an examination to-morrow, Johnston."

It was eleven o'clock when he turned his light out and slipped into bed. For some reason he could not sleep. He had had a hard day's work and it was absurd to suggest that his nerves had been in any way disordered by Johnston's narrative. The man was certainly neurotic. He had seen the reflection of a light from some other house and had imagined the rest. And yet there would be no lights in other houses at that hour of the morning.

Turning over the matter in his mind, Andy fell into an uneasy sleep.

It was a scream that aroused him, a hoarse shriek of fear. He leaped out of bed and turned on the light and a second later there came to him the scuttle of hurrying footsteps along the passage.

He opened the door to confront Johnston. The caretaker's face was the color of chalk and in his terror he mouthed and gibbered incoherently, pointing toward the window. Andy ran to the window and threw it up. He could see nothing.

"Turn out the light, Johnston," he said sharply. A second later the room was dark. Still peering into the darkness, he saw nothing.

"I saw him! I saw him!" gasped Johnston. "He was there on the Green, under

my window, just walking up and down in his dressing gown! I opened the window and looked out, to make sure. And he spoke to me. Oh, my heavens!"

"What did he say?" asked Andy, shaking the blubbering man by the shoulder. "Speak up man, what did he say?"

"He asked for the key," wailed Johnston. "He called me by my name. 'Give me the key,' he said."

Andy slipped on an overcoat, ran down the stairs and out into the open. He saw nobody and, throwing himself flat on the grass to secure a sky line, he looked in every direction, but in vain.

Returning to Johnston he found the man on the verge of collapse and applied such rough-and-ready restoratives as he could secure. He succeeded in bringing him back to some semblance of manhood, but he held stoutly to his story.

"Why did he ask you for the key?"

"Because I have it," said Johnston. "Here it is, sir."

He took a key from a cupboard in his room.

"Mr. Wilmot gave me this. I was supposed to show people over the house—people who want to buy it."

"Give it to me," said Andrew and put it in his pocket.

There could be no more sleep for Andy that night. He dressed and went abroad on a tour of inspection. He met nothing human or supernatural in his walk across the Green. An eerie sensation came to him as he passed through the gates of the Merrivan house and by the aid of his flash lamp turned the key in the door. His footsteps echoed hollowly in the bare hall.

He hesitated only for a second before he turned the handle and threw open the door leading into Mr. Merrivan's "den." Every article of furniture had been removed, even the carpet had been taken up from the floor and only a few hanging strands of wire showed where Mr. Merrivan's etchings had hung.

He paused for a second to examine the dark stain on the floor board where the owner of the house had met his death and then he flashed his lamp on the window. In that second of time he saw something and a cold shiver ran down his spine. It was the glimpse of a figure in the garden outside, a figure dimly illuminated by the flash of his

electric torch. Another second and it had disappeared.

He jumped to the window and tried to force it up, but the side screws had been put into place and it was some time before he came out into the garden and followed the cinder path to the orchard. There was no sign of man or ghost.

"Phew!" said Andy, wiping his moist forehead.

Going back to the room he fastened the window behind him and closed and locked the street door before he returned toward the Guest House. And then—

"Well I'm—"

Andy stood stock-still in the middle of the Green and looked up to Stella's window. Once more in a moment of crisis her light was burning.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MRS. BONSOR SPEAKS.

This time he would not wait for the morning for an explanation. It would probably be a very simple one. And—a light had appeared in the hall room. That decided him. He only tapped gently on the door, but Stella answered him.

"Who is that?" There was a note of anxiety in her voice.

"It is Andy!"

"Andy!" He heard her fingers fumbling with the chain. "Oh, Andy!" she fell into his arms sobbing. "I'm so frightened! I'm such a fool!"

"Everybody seems frightened and foolish to-night," said Andy as he smoothed the brown head that lay on his shoulder. "What have you seen?"

"Have you seen anything?" she asked, looking up.

Mr. Nelson's voice called from upstairs.

"It is Andy, father. Will you come down?"

"Anything wrong?" Nelson was fastening his dressing gown as he descended the stairs.

"I'm just trying to find out," said Andy. "Beverley Green seems to be in a state of nerves to-night."

Mr. Nelson's dressing gown was purple, he noted, and he had the appearance of a man who has just been aroused from sleep.

"Did you knock before? I could have sworn I heard somebody," he said.

"No, daddy, it wasn't Andy," she shivered.

"Did somebody knock?" asked Andy.

She nodded. "I sleep very lightly," she said, "and I must have heard the knock the first time. I thought it was you and opened the window to look out. I saw somebody down below standing on the path. He was quite distinct."

"How was he dressed?" asked Andy quickly. "In a dressing gown?"

"Have you seen him?" she said. "Who was it Andy?"

"Go on, my dear, what happened?"

"I called out, 'Who is it?' and he didn't answer at first," Stella went on; "and then in a deep kind of voice he said 'Have you got your scarf?' I didn't know what he meant at first. Then I remembered the scarf which had been found in the orchard. 'Yes,' I said. 'Who are you?' But he didn't answer and I saw him walking away. I sat for a long time in the dark puzzling my head as to who it could be. It wasn't your voice, it wasn't the voice of anybody unless—— But that is absurd."

"Unless it was Merrivan's?" said Andy quietly.

"Of course it wasn't his, but it was very low and gentle, just as his was, and the more I thought about it the more frightened I became. Yes, I did think it was Mr. Merrivan's and fought hard against the idea. Then I put my light on and came downstairs, intending to call father and to get a glass of milk. Then you knocked, Andy."

"It is extraordinary," said Andy and told them what he had seen and heard in the night. "Johnston is a dithering wreck. You'll have to let him go away, Mr. Nelson."

"But who could it be? Do you think it was somebody trying to frighten us?"

"They succeeded very well if it was," said Andy.

"My theory is," said Mr. Nelson, who was never at a loss for a theory, "that you were all upset by that wretched woman's fit. I knew you were upset the moment I came in."

"Johnston wasn't upset," said Andy; "and I think my nerves are in pretty good order." He took the key out of his pocket. "Go along and have a look at Merrivan's house," he smiled.

"Not for a thousand," said Mr. Nelson fervently. "Now, off you go to bed, Stella. You'll be a wreck in the morning."

"It is morning now," said the girl, pulling

aside the blinds. "I wonder if Arthur Wilmot is awake?"

The same thought had come into Andy's mind; and, having extracted a solemn promise from Stella that she would go straight to bed, he left her and made his way to Mr. Wilmot's bijou residence.

It was a very long time before he aroused the milliner and Arthur Wilmot received the news with strange calmness.

"It is curious," he said. "I was in the house yesterday. In fact, it was I who put the bolts in the back window. They haven't been bolted since the murder."

"You have seen nothing?" asked Andy.

"Nothing whatever," said Wilmot. "If you'll wait a minute while I dress, I'll come over to the house with you. It ought to be light enough then to see whether there are any footprints in the garden."

"Don't bother your head about footprints," said Andy irritably. "A cinder path and an asphalted courtyard are not the best material to collect that sort of evidence from."

Nevertheless, he accompanied Arthur to the house and they made a thorough search of the rooms, beginning at the hall.

"Here's something." Wilmot pointed to the floor.

"Candle grease," said Andy, interested. "Have you had anybody here with candles?"

Arthur Wilmot shook his head.

They found another gout of grease in Merrivan's room and then they discovered a half-burned candle. It lay at the back of the deep fireplace.

"I didn't need this to know that something more substantial than a spirit had been in this place," said Andy. "Without professing to be an authority on ghosts, I always understood they carried their own illumination."

He wrapped the candle carefully in paper.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked Wilmot in astonishment; and Andy smiled.

"Really, for a man who suggests that I should look for footprints on asphalt you are singularly dense, Wilmot. This candle is covered with finger prints."

Evidently, the murderer, sane or insane, was attracted to the scene of the crime and probably his visits were of frequent occurrence.

Andy said nothing about his plans to Wilmot or to the Nelsons. His first business

now lay with Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor. But he promptly discovered that that lady was not visible. More than that, when Andy urged the imperative necessity for an interview, she flatly and firmly refused to see him. And Scottie was her messenger.

"Women's whims," murmured Scottie. "It is no good, Macleod. She is as hard as a neolithic fossil. I have done my best, but she won't see you."

"Now, Scottie," said Andy, "I have treated you fair and you have got to help me. What was Abraham Selim to her?"

Scottie gave an elaborate shrug.

"Never inquire into a woman's past, Macleod," he said. "'The past is dead, so let it die,' as the song says, 'and happiness is with the future.'"

"I am not concerned with the future but with Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor's past," said Andy unpleasantly; "and I intend seeing that lady or there is going to be serious trouble."

Scottie disappeared and was gone for nearly half an hour before he returned.

"She's ill, Macleod, there is no doubt about it. You, as a medical man, will see it with half an eye. But she'll give you two minutes."

Mrs. Bonsor was lying on a couch and Scottie had not exaggerated the tragic effect which Andy's chance reference of the previous night had produced upon the woman. Her plump cheeks seemed to have grown haggard, the insolence in her blue eyes had departed.

"I've got nothing to tell you, mister," she said sharply, almost as soon as Andy was in the room. "I don't know Abraham Selim and I don't want to talk about him. If he is a friend of yours—well, I don't admire your taste."

"Hasn't Scottie told you——" he began.

"Scottie has told me nothing," she said shrilly, "and I don't see why you should come up here into my private sitting room—Heaven knows they charge me enough for it—and try to pump me."

"Did you ever know Abraham Selim?"

She hesitated.

"Well, I did," she said reluctantly. "That was years and years ago. I don't want to talk to you about it, mister. My private affairs are my own private affairs. I don't care who you are, policeman or not. My character will bear investigation, believe me!"

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Andy waited until she was finished and then he said:

"Your name was Hilda Masters and you married John Severn at St. Paul's Church, Marylebone."

Her jaw dropped and she stared up at him. And then she began to cry and from tears she turned to laughter.

It was a wonderful Scottie that Andrew Macleod saw in that moment of the woman's despair. He was by turns tender and authoritative, soothing and sarcastic. Andy in his discretion left them alone for half an hour, at the end of which time Scottie came to him.

"Macleod," he said quietly, "she's going to tell you the whole truth; and stenography being my long suit I'd like to take it down for you. Mirabel"—he hesitated—"hasn't got what I might term my flair for high-class language and I guess it will look better if I put it into police-English than if you dig up the hotel stenog. She's a freckled-nosed woman with gold-filled teeth. I took a dislike to her the first time I saw her. Your surprise at my versatility does credit to your intelligence, but I used to do one hundred and eighty words per when I was a youngster and few key punchers have ever passed me in a straightforward bit of typing. I'm keen on this girl. She's not a girl to you, but you'll get elastic in your ideas as you get older. Will you let me do it? You fire in the questions and I'll sort out the answers and fix 'em together."

Andy nodded. And of this strange partnership was born a stranger story.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STATEMENT OF MRS. CRAFTON-BONSOR.

Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor's statement, as put into shape by Scottie, was as follows:

My name is Mirabel Hilda Crafton-Bonsor. I am not sure whether that was my late husband's real name. I believe that it was Michael Murphy. He was of Irish extraction and when I first met him he was a contractor in the city of Sacramento in the State of California.

I was born in the village of Uckfield, Sussex, but came to London when I was aged seven. My parents dying, I lived with an aunt, Mrs. Pawl of Bayham Street, Camden Town, and entered domestic service at the age of sixteen, going as parlor maid to Miss

Janet Severn of No. 104 Manchester Square. Miss Severn was a maiden lady and very eccentric. She had strong views about marriage and particularly about the marriages of the lower classes.

The only other person in the house besides Miss Janet and the other servants was Mr. John Severn, Miss Severn's nephew, and he was only there during vacations. He was a student at Cambridge University. I do not know the college but I know that it was Cambridge because I have posted a good many letters from Miss Janet to him and she always read out the address aloud before she gave it to me. I know the college had a religious name. Unfortunately I cannot read or write; and though I have since learned to write my name on a check I can do no more. That explains why I never read of the murder nor knew the names of the persons concerned. I used to see a lot of Mr. John when he was at home. He was partial to me, for in those days I was a very good-looking girl; but he never made love to me.

While I was in Manchester Square I met a man who was called Mr. Selim—Abraham Selim. He used to come to the servants' entrance once a week and I thought he was one of those people who sell goods to servants on credit. I afterward found out that he was a money lender who had a big trade in the West End among servants. The cook was heavily in his debt and a housemaid named Rachael was also in debt to him.

He was not a bad-looking fellow and when he found that I didn't want to borrow money, but had a bit of money in the savings bank—I being a saving kind and always was—he seemed to be stuck on me and asked me if I would go walking with him on my first Sunday out. I said yes, because I'd never had a fellow and, as I say, he was not at all bad looking. He met me the next Sunday. We drove to Hampton in a handsome cab. I must say that it was a grand experience for me. He gave me everything of the best and behaved like a gentleman in every way.

To cut a long story short he met me a good number of times and then suggested that we should get married. He said that it would have to be secret and I should have to stay on in my job for a month or two, as he had certain plans. I didn't mind that idea because I was perfectly comfortable with Miss Janet. So one Monday I had the day off and we were married before the

registrar at Brixton where he lived and in the evening I went back to Miss Janet's.

Then one day he came in a state of great excitement and asked me if I'd ever heard of a gentleman whose name I forgot. I told him I'd heard Miss Janet speak of him. He was her brother-in-law and she was not on speaking terms with him, because he had treated his wife—Miss Janet's sister—badly. He was well off, but from what I heard neither Miss Janet nor Mr. John ever expected a penny from the old man. I told my husband all that I knew and he seemed very pleased. He asked me if Mr. John ever made love to me and I was very upset at the question, for I was a respectable girl and did not hold with such things. He pacified me and said that perhaps he could make a fortune if I'd help him. He also said that when he married me he had no idea until I put an X on the register, instead of my name, that I couldn't read or write and said that was going to be a handicap to him.

But I could help him a lot if I could find out where Mr. John went in the evenings. I discovered afterward that he wanted this information in order to plan a meeting with Mr. John, whom he did not know. I did know that Mr. John was in debt. He'd told me that the cost of living at Cambridge was very heavy and that he had borrowed money and begged me not to say a word to his aunt.

I naturally thought that Abraham had got word of this and wanted to do a little business with Mr. John. If I had known what their meeting would lead to, I'd have cut my tongue out rather than tell Abraham the place where Mr. John spent his evenings—which was in a club in Soho where young gentlemen used to go to gamble.

About a week after Selim informed me that he had met Mr. John and had helped him.

"Whatever you do, don't tell him that you know me in any shape or form!" he said.

I promised and I wasn't likely to tell. Miss Janet was very strait-laced and there would have been trouble for me if she knew that I was married and was masquerading as a single girl. The Severns are a very old family and have a motto which means class people must never do anything mean. It was in Latin. And there was a bird's head on the note paper, holding a snake in its beak.

I don't know what business he had with Mr. John but Abraham seemed very pleased when he met me. He had given up calling at the house now and sent a clerk.

It is a strange thing that the clerk had never seen Abraham and I afterward found out that although Selim said that he had met Mr. John they had never been face to face. It was just about that time that Abraham began to be very secretive. I found this out when Mr. John told me that he had done a very good stroke of business with a man who had written to him.

"He thinks I am going to inherit an estate," he said. "I told him there was no hope, but he insisted on lending me all the money I wanted."

I told Abe this when I saw him but he only laughed. I remember the evening I told him very well. It was a Sunday and we had met at a restaurant near Kings Cross. I want to say that although I had been married to him over a month he and I had never met except, so to speak, in public.

It had been raining very heavily and when we came out of the restaurant he put me in a hansom and told the driver to drop me at the corner of Portman Square. It was about ten o'clock when I paid the cabman—Abraham always gave me plenty of money—and I had the shock of my life when I turned away from the cab and almost ran into the arms of Miss Janet. She didn't say anything then but when I got home she sent for me.

She said she couldn't understand how a respectable girl could ride in a hansom cab and where did I get the money from. I told her that I had money saved and that a friend paid for the cab. She didn't like it a bit, I could see that, and I knew that I should get notice next pay day.

"Please wait up for Mr. John," she said; "he will not be later than eleven."

I was glad to see the back of her when she went upstairs to bed. Mr. John did not come in until past twelve and I could see with half an eye that he had been drinking. I had laid a little supper for him in the breakfast room and I waited on him.

He was what we call in America "fresh"—called me his darling little girl and told me that he was going to buy me a pearl brooch.

And then before I knew what was happening he had taken me in his arms and was kissing me. I struggled with him but he was very strong and he had his lips against

mine when the door opened—and there was Miss Janet.

She gave me one look and pointed to the door and I went and glad I was to go. I fully expected the next morning to be packed off bag and baggage, especially as Miss Janet had sent up word to say that I was not on any account to do any work. At about ten o'clock she sent for me to the drawing-room.

I shall never forget her sitting there in her black alpaca with her little white lace cap and her beautiful hands folded in her lap. She had lovely hands.

"Hilda," she said, "my nephew has done you a great wrong, how great I have not inquired. I understand now why you have so much money and showed the cook five golden sovereigns only last week. But that is beside the point. You are a young girl in my house and under my protection. I have a great responsibility both to God and my fellows and I have arranged that my nephew shall do the honorable thing and marry you."

I simply couldn't speak. In the first place I'd started crying the moment she began to talk and in the second place her words struck me all of a heap. I wanted to tell her that I was already married and had my certificate to prove it. At least I hadn't got it but Abraham had. I think it was remembering this that shut me up.

"I have spoken to my nephew and I have sent a note to my lawyer giving him the necessary particulars in order that he may get a license from the bishop. You will be married at St. Paul's, Marylebone, on Thursday next."

And with that she sort of waved me out of the room. When Miss Janet moved her hand that way nobody breathing would have the courage to argue with her. When I came to my senses I wanted to go back and tell her the truth and I asked if I could see her. But the other parlor maid came back to say that Miss Janet was feeling poorly and that I could have the day off.

I went straightway to find Abraham. He had a little office above Ashlar's, the tobacconist. Ashlar became a rich man after, I believe, and has a building named after him. Abe was there, for a wonder, but it was a long time before he unlocked the door and let me in. He told me that he never saw clients personally and was rather annoyed with me for coming. But when I told him the fix I was in, he sort of changed

his tone. I said that I should have to tell Miss Janet, but he wouldn't hear of it.

"I always thought something like this might happen," he said. "Now, Hilda, you've got to be a good girl and do something for me. I've treated you very well and it is now your turn to help me."

When I found what it was he wanted me to do I couldn't believe my ears. I was to marry Mr. John!

"But how can I when I'm already married?" I said. "I should get put in prison."

"Nobody will ever know," he said. "You were married to me in another part of the town. I promise you that you shall leave him at the church and never see him again. Do this for me, Hilda, and I will give you a hundred pounds."

He said that if I married Mr. John we should both be rich for life, but he didn't say why. He was always a wonderful talker and he confused me so that I didn't know whether I was on my head or my heels. He made black look white, as the saying goes, and the long and the short of it was that I consented. I suppose I was a weak fool but I admired his cleverness and his education so much that I simply didn't think for myself.

I've often wondered whether he did this to get rid of me, but that doesn't seem right, because there was no reason why he should have married me at all. I think, now, that he wanted a pretty girl in the house, who was so bound up with him that she would do what he told her to do. I don't think he ever expected Mr. John would ask me to marry him, but perhaps he foresaw something worse than that. There wasn't a meaner, more cold-blooded villain in the world than Abraham Selim.

On the day before the marriage I went to see Miss Janet.

"Hilda," she said, "to-morrow you will marry my nephew. I need not tell you that I am not boasting of this marriage and I advise you to keep your own counsel."

"Now, as to the future, it is not reasonable to expect that Mr. John, who is a gentleman, will want to introduce a girl like you to his friends. You are totally uneducated and if your manners are nice, your terrible cockney accent is impossible."

It is strange how I remember every single word that Miss Janet said, though it is over thirty years ago. I felt very upset and crushed by her words, but I did pluck

up enough spirit to ask her what she intended doing.

"I am going to send you to a first-class establishment where neglected educations are improved. You will be there until you are twenty-two and by that time you will be fit to take your place by your husband's side without humiliating him or yourself."

In a way this fitted in with what Abraham had promised me. In fact, I thought that he had arranged it, but I can see now that if he had a plan this was Miss Janet's own.

Not until I walked into St. Paul's Church on the Thursday did I see Mr. John. I don't know now what passed between him and his aunt. I do know that he was very pale and very stand-offish, though polite. There were only about four people in the church and the ceremony was over quicker than I expected. I had learned to write my own name, so I didn't disgrace him by putting my mark. Why he married me, I don't know. I am prepared to take an oath on the Bible that there was nothing between us but that kissing of his and then he wasn't quite himself. But marry me he did. Perhaps the Latin motto of the family and the bird's head had something to do with it. It seems silly to me even now. Before I came to the church Miss Janet gave me fifty pounds and the address I was to go to. It was in Victoria Drive, Eastbourne.

I just said good-by to Mr. John and walked out of the church, leaving him and his friend—Miss Janet did not come—and I never saw him again.

Abraham had arranged to meet me and take me to dinner—or lunch as it was; it was dinner to me in those days. Sure enough there he was, waiting for me outside the King's Cross restaurant and when we got inside I told him just what had occurred.

"Let me have the certificate," he said and I gave him my new marriage lines. We did not talk very much more about the marriage, though I was a little nervous. I didn't want to go to Eastbourne and, what was more, I never intended going. But I was dependent on Abraham. I knew he would have a plan for me. He had. But it wasn't as I had hoped and prayed, that we should go into the country somewhere—which he'd promised, when I agreed to marry Mr. John—and begin our married life in reality.

When we had nearly finished the meal he pulled out a big envelope from his pocket.

"I've got you a good berth—first-class. If

you keep your mouth shut, nobody will know that you're a domestic servant. There's five hundred pounds in notes and you will have two days to get yourself some clothes."

I was bewildered. I didn't know what he was talking about.

"You're going to America," he said. "I have got you some letters of introduction from my friend, Mr. Merry-something." It may have been Merrivan. I think it was. I understood from him that Mr. Merrivan was a client. "They'll get you a job," he said, "and you have all that money."

"But I don't want to go and I won't go," I almost shouted at him. I know that I spoke so loudly that the people in the restaurant turned round and looked at us.

That made him mad. I've never seen a man who could look so like a devil as he did. It frightened me.

"You'll either go or I'll call a policeman and give you in charge for having committed bigamy."

I just hadn't the strength to fight him. I left by a ship called the *Lucania* for New York. From New York I went to a place called Denver City where one of my letters was addressed to. I was in a situation for a year. They do not call you a "servant" but a "help." I was a help for thirteen months and then I had an offer to go as working housekeeper to Mr. Bonsor, who was a widower with one child that died. When Mr. Bonsor asked me to marry him I had to tell him the truth and he said a marriage more or less made no difference to him. He had independent views about religion.

I never saw Abraham again but I know that he wrote to the place where I was working in Denver asking what had become of me. The people did not know. That was seven years after I arrived in the United States. I have not heard of Mr. John, but I know that Miss Janet died a month after I left, from pneumonia. I found this out by a notice Mr. Bonsor saw in an English paper.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAYING OF GHOSTS.

There was one person to whom the statement of Hilda Masters should be shown, thought Andy. For some time he had had a suspicion that Mr. Boyd Salter could throw more illumination upon his friend Severn's life and folly than he had cared to cast.

He sent a wire to the master of Beverley Hall asking for an interview and found a note awaiting him on his return to the Green, asking him to come up at once.

"I'll go up with you," said Stella. "You can leave me in the car outside."

Tilling, that anxious man, seemed a little more nervous than usual.

"You'll be careful with the squire, doctor, won't you? He hasn't been sleeping any too well and the doctor told Mr. Francis—that's our young master—that his nerves may go at any moment."

"Thank you, Tilling," said Andy, "I will be careful."

He was to find that Tilling had not exaggerated Mr. Salter's condition. His face was gray and sunken, but he greeted the detective with a smile.

"You've come to tell me that you've found my burglar," he said good-humoredly. "You can save yourself the trouble—it was that jewel thief of yours!"

Andy was not prepared for this piece of information.

"I am afraid it was," he said, "but I honestly believe that he came here without felonious intent. In fact he was trailing *my* burglar."

"And found him, eh?" said Salter slyly. "A mysterious gamekeeper."

"How on earth did you find that out?"

Salter laughed, and as he laughed he winced.

Andy saw and was distressed. The man had heart trouble.

"I won't attempt to mystify you," said Boyd Salter, enjoying his sensation, "Scotie—that's the rascal's name, eh?—disappeared the day after. Miss Nelson went away the same day. She went to a place called Castle Street and nursed somebody. Who but your disreputable friend."

A light dawned on Andy.

"You learned through Downer, of course," he said and the other nodded smilingly. "But the gamekeeper, how did you know about him?"

"Downer again, plus another rascal—Martin, is he called?"

Andy was too big a man to withhold the admiration which the clever Mr. Downer deserved.

"I hand it to Downer. He is certainly the best of the newsmen."

"He came down to see me," explained Salter, "and for his benefit I had all my

gamekeepers paraded and questioned. There was one man who admitted that he was in the kitchen—we have cocoa for them there when they are on night duty—and he thinks he must have gone out at about the time Scottie saw a man go out. That was as far as I got. Now what is your important news?"

"I have found Hilda Masters."

Mr. Salter looked up.

"Hilda Masters—who is she?"

"You remember, Mr. Salter, that in a secret drawer in Merrivan's room was found a marriage certificate."

"I remember. It was reported in the newspaper. The marriage certificate of an old servant—and it was afterward stolen from you by the ghost called Selim. Was Hilda Masters the woman who was married? And you have found her, you say?"

Andy took a copy of the statement from his pocket and laid it on the desk before the justice and Mr. Salter looked at it for a long time before he fixed a pair of folding, horn-rimmed glasses on his nose and began to read.

He read slowly, very slowly. It seemed to Andy that he assessed the value of every word. Once he turned back and read a page all over again. Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed in a silence punctuated only by the swish of a turned page. And Andy grew impatient remembering the girl in the car outside.

"Ah!" said Mr. Salter as he put the manuscript down. "The ghost of the valley is laid—the greatest of all those malignant shapes that haunt us, Doctor Macleod."

Andy could not follow him readily and the other saw he was puzzled and came to the rescue.

"Selim," he said, "revealed in his naked hideousness! The seller of souls, the breaker of hearts, the gambler in lives. This is he!" He tapped the manuscript and Andy saw that his eyes were unnaturally bright. But of all the miracles most startling it seemed that his face had filled out and the deeply scored lines in his face had vanished.

He must have touched a secret bell for Tilling came in.

"Bring me a bottle of green-seal port, Tilling," he said. And when the servitor had gone out he went on, "You have achieved a triumph—an even greater triumph than if you had laid your hand on the shoulder of

Abraham Selim. We must celebrate your success, doctor."

"I am afraid I cannot wait. The fact is Miss Nelson is waiting outside in my car."

Salter jumped up, turned white and sat down again.

"I'm sorry," he said breathlessly, "really it was unpardonable of me to leave her there and of you not to tell me. Please bring her in."

Andy hurried out to Stella in the waiting car.

"And you nearly killed him," he said to her; "at least the news that you were sitting outside did. I don't like the look of him, Stella."

Mr. Salter had recovered before they returned and was watching Tilling as he poured the precious wine into the glasses.

"Forgive me for not getting up," smiled Salter. "So you helped my burglar?"

"Did Andy tell you?" she asked in alarm.

"No, Andy didn't tell me. You will drink a glass of port, Miss Nelson? No? It was old wine when your father was a baby."

He raised his glass to her and drank.

"And Miss Masters, or Mrs. Bonsor, what is going to happen to her?" he asked.

"I rather think that she will not wait in London. She has confessed to an indictable crime, but it is so old that I doubt if we could move in the matter even if we would. From certain indications I should say that this much-married lady will make yet a fourth plunge into the troubled sea of matrimony."

Salter nodded.

"Poor soul!" he said softly. "Poor duped soul!"

Andy had not expected to find sympathy for Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor in the magistrate.

"She is not particularly poor," he said dryly. "Scottie, who is something of an expert, estimates her jewels as being worth a hundred thousand and there are sundry properties in the States. What I wanted particularly to see you about was Severn—have you any idea where he is? I cannot help feeling that Selim used the marriage for his own profit."

"He did," said Salter. "Selim represented to Mr. Severn that the woman was dead, and Severn married again and, I believe, had children. Once he was safely married Selim held his bigamy and the illegitimacy of his children over his head and extracted from him enormous sums of money. The contract

you found was a fake. Selim never paid my friend a penny. He merely canceled an old obligation—that to which the woman refers in her statement and substituted one more onerous. And as the years went on, his cupidity found new methods of extortion. You see, doctor, I am being frank with you. I did know more about Severn's concerns than I have stated."

"I never doubted that," replied Andy, with a smile.

"And you, young lady—you also are nearing the end of the great chase. You have not come through this past month without losing something?"

"And finding something too, Mr. Salter," she said.

He looked at Andy and from him to the girl.

"That is true, I hope," he said quietly. "Your little ghost—was it laid?"

She nodded.

"And Andy's? I suppose he has adopted all our ghosts—taken them on to his own broad shoulders? May you soon conjure and destroy the last!"

To the accompaniment of this good wish they left him.

Andy slept through the afternoon and as soon as it was dark he began his vigil in the long, empty room of Merrivan's house. The night passed without any interruption to his quiet. Soon after daybreak, as he was looking through the front window across the dusky green, he saw Stella come out from the house, carrying something in her hand, and drew back to cover. She made straight to the house, and to his amazement, knocked. He opened the door for her.

"I've brought you over some coffee and sandwiches, Andrew," she said. "Poor dear, you must be very tired."

"How did you know I was staying here?"

"Oh, I guessed that. When you didn't come last night, I was pretty certain you were on ghost duty."

"You queer girl. And I purposely did not tell you."

"And seeing me come into the house in the early morning, you suspected the worst?" She pinched his ear. "You heard nothing and saw nothing, I suppose?"

"Nothing," said Andy.

She glanced along the gloomy passage and shook her head.

"I don't think I should like to be a detec-

tive," she said. "Andy, aren't you ever afraid?"

"Often," said Andy, "when I think of the kind of home I'm going to give you——"

"Let's talk about it," said Stella. And they sat down in the haunted room until the sun came in at the windows and talked of houses and flats and the high cost of furnishing.

At eleven o'clock Andy went up to London and bearing no signs of his sleepless night, presented himself at the Great Metropolitan Hotel. There were yet one or two points that he wanted cleared up.

"Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor has gone, sir," said the clerk.

"Gone?" said Andy in surprise. "When did she go?"

"Yesterday afternoon, sir. She and Professor Bellingham went together."

"Has she taken her baggage?"

"All of it, sir."

"Do you know where it has gone?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. She said she was going to the sea for a few days."

It was a setback for Andy.

He called at No. 73 Castle Street in the hope of finding Scottie. He found, instead, the embarrassed Mr. Martin.

"No, doctor, Scottie hasn't been here for three days."

"And he didn't give you any instructions about running this den of thieves?" asked Andy.

"No, sir," said Martin. There was a complacency about his tone that told Andy that he was lying.

No useful purpose could be served by cross-examining one whose respect for the truth was conspicuously minus at any time; and Andy returned to Beverley Green and to bed.

At nine o'clock he let himself into the Merrivan house. During the day Johnston had placed an armchair in the room. It was a comfortable armchair and Andy found himself nodding.

"This won't do," he said to himself; and, walking to the front window, he opened it to let in the cool air.

Beverley Church struck one o'clock and still there was no sign of the visitor. He had removed the bolt from the back window, being sure that that was the way the stranger had entered when Johnston had seen him at the window.

Two o'clock and Andy's chin was on his breast and his mind was filled with confused thoughts of Stella and Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor.

And then he heard a sound and was wide awake in an instant. Looking toward the back window he saw a dark figure against the faint light. The electric current had been restored at his request, during the day, and he moved stealthily to the switch. The man outside was gently raising the lower sash. Higher and higher it came and then Andy heard the soft pad of feet striking the floor. Still he did not turn on the light but waited, and then:

"Get up and face me, Abraham Selim, you dog!"

The voice rang out thunderously in that empty room.

"Get up!" it called again.

Andy turned on the light.

Standing with his back to the open window, was a man in a yellow dressing gown; and in his extended hand, pointing straight at his invisible enemy, was a long-barreled revolver.

Salter! Boyd Salter!

Andy gave a gasp; Then it was Boyd Salter—that cool languid man who had fenced with him so skillfully, so surely!

His eyes were wide open, fixed, vacant.

He was asleep. Andrew had known that when he heard the slurred, harsh voice.

"Take that—you scoundrel!"

The figure hissed the word and there was a click. And then he saw Salter's head incline toward the floor. He was looking down upon the spot where Merrivan had been found; then slowly he went on his knees and his groping palms touched the body that he saw. And all the time he was talking to himself, little sobbing sounds of hateful gratification escaped him.

He was reconstructing the crime—not for the first time. Night after night Salter had come down from his bed and had gone over and over every incident of the murder. It was queer to see him searching a desk that was not there and unlocking a safe that had been removed; but Andrew watched him fascinated as he struck a match and set light, as he thought, to a heap of papers he had placed on the hearth. Then he stopped. It was at the spot where the letter had been found.

"You won't send any more letters, Merrivan damn you. No more letters put under doors. That letter was for me, wasn't it?"

He turned to where he thought the body was lying. *"For me?"* His gaze suddenly shifted. He seemed to be picking up something. *"I must take the girl's scarf,"* he muttered. *"Poor Stella! This fiend will not hurt you. I'll take it."* He put his hand into his pocket as though he were placing something there. *"If they find it, they'll think that you were here when I shot him."*

Andrew gasped.

Now it was as clear as light to him. Abraham Selim and Merrivan were one and the same person and the threatening letter which he had thought had been received by Merrivan had really been written by him. That was it! Merrivan was going out that night to leave the letter at the Hall, had written it, folded it and had no time to address an envelope before doom appeared to him.

Salter was moving slowly round the room. A few seconds later and he had passed through the window. He closed it behind him, but Andrew was out in the garden in a few seconds, trailing the sleepwalker as with stealthy strides he passed into the orchard. And then:

"Stand out of my way, damn you!"

It was Salter's voice and again came the click of the pistol.

So that was how Sweeny died. Sweeny was there. He had probably discovered the identity of Selim and was watching the house that night. It was so simple now—Merrivan had blackmailed Salter. But who was Sweeny? Sweeny the husband of Hilda Masters?

He followed the walker under the trees of the orchard and out through a gate in the hedge. Salter was on his own estate now and moved with that curious, deliberate stride which is the sleepwalker's own. Still keeping him in sight, Andrew followed. The man kept to a path that led to Spring Covert, then turned off abruptly to the left, crossing the grass land that would lead him directly to Beverley Hall.

He had hardly taken a dozen paces when out of the grass came a flash of flame. There was a deafening explosion and Salter stumbled forward and fell.

Andy was at his side in a second, but the figure was motionless.

He flashed his lamp and shouted for help and a voice almost at once answered him. It proved to be the gamekeeper he had met before, Madding.

"What's wrong, sir?" said Madding when he had recognized Andy. *"You must have*

tripped over one of those alarm guns. We have put several in the park to trap the poachers. My heavens!" he gasped, "that's Mr. Salter!"

They turned the stricken man on his back. Andy pulled open the pajamas and listened for a minute to Salter's breast.

"I am afraid he's dead," he said.

"Dead!" said the other, awe-stricken. "There was no shot in the gun."

"It woke him and I think the shock must have killed him. And on the whole, Madding, I think it as well that he died that way."

Andy came into the Nelsons' sitting room and sank wearily into a chair.

"The last ghost is laid."

"What is the last, dear?" Stella seated herself on an arm of his chair and laid her hand on his head.

"That's the last."

Andy took a newspaper cutting from his pocket and gave it into her hands.

"I found that in Salter's safe. Oh, yes, his boy, young Francis, has taken it very well. They expected such an end. They knew that he had been sleepwalking, by the mud they found on the legs of his pajamas. And they had a guard outside his door. But the old Hall has half a dozen secret stairways and he got away every time. What do you think of that cutting?"

She read the cutting again. It was from the *Times* of 1889:

"In accordance with the conditions of the late Mr. Philip Boyd Salter's will, Mr. John Severn, his nephew, who is his uncle's sole heir, will assume the name and style of John Boyd Salter. A statutory declaration to this effect appears in our legal advertisement columns of to-day's date."

"That is the story," said Andy. "Severn was Boyd Salter all the time. If I had had the sense to look up the will of his uncle I should have known a month ago. He died a happy man. For years he has lived under the shadow of his guilt and with the knowledge that if Merrivan spoke, his son would

have no title to the estate, which cannot be left to anybody but legal heirs. And when I brought him the statement of Hilda Masters—she married Scottie, by the way, the day before they left—a statement which proved the legality of his marriage with the mother of his son—do you remember how I told you that he then seemed suddenly to grow twenty years younger? You see he knew then, for the first time, that he had never been legally married to Hilda Masters.

"It puzzled me when he said that the biggest ghost had been laid. But he spoke the truth. That was the greatest terror. To save his boy from disgrace he killed Merrivan or Selim. To save him he got into Wilmot's house dressed as a gamekeeper and stole and burned the marriage certificate."

"How did he know it was there?"

"Downer revealed it in that shocking article he wrote about us."

"What happens to Selim's fortune—it goes to Arthur Wilmot?"

Andy shook his head.

"It goes to swell the wealth of Mrs. Professor Bellingham," he said. "It is rather tragic, isn't it?"

She laughed and slipped her arm about his neck.

There was a happy little interregnum of silence.

"Scottie is clever," she said suddenly.

"Clever? Well—yes. I suppose he is. Why do you say that?"

"Look how quickly Scottie got—the marriage license—"

A week later Mr. Downer heard the news. He neither grieved nor did he rejoice. He was a man of business and weddings and murders had one value. Getting the *Megaphone* on the wire he was put through to the city editor.

"See Macleod's married that Nelson girl. I can give you a column of real good inside stuff about that engagement. Sure I can get a picture of her. She'd do anything for me. Two columns? All—right!"

THE END.





Silk-Hat Dope

By J. H. Greene

Author of "The Mystery Ship," "Off Sudden Island," Etc.

Inspired by "Comeback" Conroy's private experiments, Warden Howe decides to try ether instead of discipline in his prison—but not the kind of ether that comes in a bottle.

COMEBACK" CONROY, serving a ten-year sentence for attempted homicide, was making a garden border of small granite boulders. It was easier work than hewin in the quarries and he had earned it by good behavior.

The prison was experimenting on the new humanitarian ideas of Warden Howe. The convicts wore no stripes, conversation was allowed at meals, "solitary" was abolished and there was a prison reading room and prison concerts.

Despite these privileges, despite the relief from old horrors whispered to him by the lifers—from the manhandling, the dark cells and the contract labor, Conroy was rebellious that morning.

For there were walls all around him, of gray granite, cold and pallid in the shadows, though glittering where the sunlight struck the stone. He was often out on errands to the gangs on the road, in the fields and quarries; but another wall held him there—his word.

That word had been passed to Warden Howe, the kindly but strict enthusiast whose daughter played and sang at the prison con-

certs. If that word had been passed to Deputy Carew, Conroy would not have felt so bound.

A curious mixture was this Conroy, compounded of as earthy elements as the granite he was handling. He was of street mud hardened in water-front battles, the common clay of crookdom with sparkles of elementary honor, proving that the nethermost mud has its laws.

He turned over a piece of rock in his hands, but with no wonder or curiosity; for Conroy, bred to battle with his fists and his cunning, had little training in such head-and-heart work.

"Looks like sparklers," he muttered, throwing the stone into its place and snarling, for it was sparklers that had brought him here.

He had been battering his way into the lightweights, a clever boxer, agile as an eel, with a feint and counter that was his own. He called it his dreamland jolt, and it had won him his first big fight with "Slugger" Swartz. Then ill luck dealt him a foul knock-out. He had put some of his winnings into a solitaire ring, which he discov-

ered later to be flawed with a little black speck of untransmuted carbon, spoiling its heart. In a quarrel with the man who had sold him the stone he had nearly murdered him and wrecked a chop-suey joint and—the law did the rest.

Therefore Conroy scowled as if he had received a body blow and he raised his wiry, stooped shoulders for a breath of air and a glance at the blue.

It was spring. The early robins were calling from the prison elms, the daffodils were sending up their first shoots, everything was burgeoning, even the dust from the quarries blew up and out and away.

But Conroy's response to the season was a low litany of bitter curses.

It would be easy to run away but his word to the warden was a word to a pal. The warden was the referee between him and the law, between him and the old-time brutality of Deputy Carew.

The gate clanged in the arch by the warden's quarters and Carew appeared, a burly, sour ex-policeman whose twenty-five years' conflict with thugs and thieves had ingrained in him the certainty that criminals were merely wild beasts and that he was their tamer. He was not so much brutal as stupid; his only faculty was force; he was an animal himself—but outside the cage.

Conroy dropped to his work. One soon learned to do that under Carew's gimlet glare. But his hands closed on twenty-five pounds of granite with the thought that here was a splendid knuckle duster. One lift, one fling from his long arms and Conroy the lightweight would be a match for Carew's two hundred pounds.

But Carew passed unharmed, grimly satisfied that a glance from him had bowed the convict to his work.

"Make them look down," was one of Carew's working maxims till the new ways came with the new warden.

Then Conroy rose, red and panting; for the temptation to assail Carew had assailed him as suddenly and as powerfully as any inspiration of beauty or virtue. It was like the old free desire to have a drink. It was his red streak that he used to be proud of till it got him into trouble.

He had won his first big fight when, battered, bruised and nearly out, a jab in the ribs had released him from his cautious boxing, and anger in his agony had turned him into a fighter. His red streak had flamed,

making him a winner and earning him his sobriquet—Comeback Conroy.

But it was the red streak that made him wreck the chop-suey joint and nearly murder the man who had sold him the diamond, that red streak so invaluable in the ring but dangerous at all times, especially in prison.

Across the sky Conroy was aware of the telephone and lighting wires, black bars across the free heavens. There had been no executions in that prison in his time, but the older convicts had told him one of those wires carried the juice to the chair. He believed them and had shuddered, for he had come near sitting in that chair. At the return of the thought, now, the red streak was quenched in him and again he bent to his work.

A voice called him as clear and as caroling as the robin's.

"How are the daffodils, Mr. Conroy?"

He knew the voice at the first syllable and he looked up to see Cissie Howe, the warden's daughter, peering through the barred windows of the Warden House.

She was a bud too, not much more than a child. Her blue eyes glinted like the sparkles in the granite and Conroy was conscious of his broken nose, his cauliflower ear, most of all of his recent resurgent red streaks, as he gazed at her.

"Just sprouting, miss," he answered removing his cap.

The girl could not see the beds well and pouted at the impediment of the bars.

"I'll ask father to have these bars taken out. We don't need them, do we?"

Conroy looked at the irons protecting the warden's household. They made the pretty little girl look like a convict and he resented them.

"Not while your father is warden, miss," he dared to say. And her smile in reply was years off his sentence.

He returned to the prison to wash for supper. The narrow passages, the walls sweating with half a century of iniquitous crime, closed in on him.

He passed an open door to the doctor's office. Looking in and breaking rules in doing so he saw the room was empty. Bottles on the shelves reminded him of a bar-room; and one of the bottles was half full of a brown liquor, like his old friend rye. He saw a poison label on the bottle and, coming closer, read "Tinct. Laud."

Conroy had never hit the needle nor the

pipe but he knew what laudanum was and that poison in sufficiently small doses was an anodyne. So he stepped in hastily and swallowed a mouthful. The liquor was sweet, scented with a strange odor that he feared would betray him. He could feel a soothing languor stealing along his veins. But the prison meal was generous enough to prevent the full narcosis of the drug.

After supper there was the library hour before cell time. Conroy contented, almost happy, sat at a table and picked up a paper. The first he took up was a daily and the convict next to him, a lifer named Costa, indicated a headline with his forefinger.

There was a crime wave outside. Thugger was the most popular form of athletics, highway robbery was a civic industry and murders were listed like stock reports. The only havens for panicky citizens, the only places free from lawlessness, were the jails.

An election was pending. Laxity of prison discipline was blamed for the anarchistic state of affairs; the convict—his reformation or his deformation—was a factor in party politics; and the ideas of Warden Howe were denounced and there was a clamor for the “solitary,” the dark cell, even the lash of the sterner ways of Deputy Carew.

Conroy did not wade through all this. He had heard the old hands discuss fearfully the possibility of the return of the old tyrannies, but he had never known them. He was partially a free man, luxuriating in his first shot of dope. True he had stolen it, thus forfeiting his “good time,” but the infraction brought its forgiveness, stilling all remorse and for the present the other sort of “good time” of dope offset the loss of the few months taken from his sentence.

His eyes fell on an illustrated magazine, on a picture of a bright-looking young lad and on the account of something he had done which had “got his face in the pages.” Keeping his eyes and his head down, to avoid betraying the content that possessed him, Conroy absorbed the print. And gradually, but the quicker for the stirring of his imagination by the drug, he read of marvels. Conroy had heard of wireless but it had been to him as remote as the moon. Now he learned how this boy had fashioned out of wire and out of an ice-cream container and some common brass paper clips something that enabled him to hear the call of distant ships and music and voices far away. It

appeared that thousands of other boys were easily doing the same, that any boy could do it.

The gong rang for cells and Conroy returned to his, stirred with that most ardent of all intoxicants, the burgeoning of a stunted imagination.

“That kid doping out that stunt!” was his comment. For to the young boy the full credit of all the science that was in the marvel was given by Conroy.

Next night he was at the magazine again, but carefully; for the spark that had fallen into his brain had been glowing all day, Carew was surprised at the speed with which he had finished the garden job and astounded when the convict had asked what he should do next. It was not safe to put the sparks of suspicion into the lumber loft of Carew’s brain, so he covered the electrical magazine with a sporting page, pretending to be reading of the coming lightweight battle between “Hurricane” Hicks and the champion, Mike Donovan. And thus, as surreptitiously as he had taken the laudanum, he read and re-read till every word, every diagram was stamped on the infantile texture of his gray matter.

He took it in absolute faith that so many yards of covered wire wound on a container and fastened to brass clips in a certain way would bring the music, the voices, the speech of the world into his cell. He had resolved to emulate that young “featherweight;” he too would make such a marvel. He would not break out of prison, but he could drag the world outside in to him.

The doctor’s door no longer tempted him, for if he were caught he would be put to harder and more guarded labor depriving him of the chance to pick up the material he needed. He had found a container in an ash barrel; but the wire and a necessary bit of galena were still out of his reach. The wire had to be covered. The galena he learned was some kind of crystal; it might be among the doctor’s bottles. And he needed a telephone receiver, too, but there was one in the doctor’s office for the taking and no one would suspect a convict of stealing a telephone.

One day from his desk in the rotunda the deputy sent him to the warden’s house for some reports. He pressed the bell, a piano stopped in a room close by and Cissie came to the door. The warden was not in and

Cissie offered to get him the volume and, besides, asked him in to the office.

While she was bending over the shelves Conroy saw a box of brass paper clips on the desk and silently he took a handful and slipped them into his pocket. Then Conroy's wizen, battered little face, more rodent than human, flushed with his first remorse as the girl handed him the book.

"You don't mind letting yourself out? My music is waiting," she said, leaving him in the passage.

There was a telephone on the wall and a hatrack by it. On the rack was a lady's hat; it was Cissie's; he had seen her wear it; and as her voice lifted its silver soprano in the adjoining room Conroy put out his hand to touch the hat—a wide-brimmed confection of gauze and ribbons. He only wanted to touch it, as he would pat a pal on the back. Cissie was a kind of pal to all the men inside. Conroy just wanted to pat her hat.

But the sentiment suddenly faded. For he was Conroy, the water rat fighting for his own, when his fingers felt wire; the frame of the hat was of wire and covered wire, too!

Conroy took a look along the passage, out into the yards; and a spurring message that was like the wireless he had been trying to grasp flashed in to him from the innumerable crystalline facets of the sunlit walls.

"Wire—telephone—galena!" The triple demands of his utmost need seemed whispered to him from all around. In an instant he disconnected the receiver, snapping it from the box, crushed the hat under his jacket and closed the doors behind him.

That night when in his cell he began prying small crystals out of the granite with a long, rusty nail and soon he had a handful of black, pink and gray fragments, just what he needed. For further study had taught him that almost any crystal would do instead of galena.

"Sparklers!" he murmured. "You got me in, but you're going to square yourselves!"

He was up before dawn, winding his coils, connecting his fasteners, adjusting the pin to just touch the surface of a crystal to form his cat-whisker detector, the very nerve center of his contrivance.

When the gong rang and he was called from the cell for the day's routine he faced that routine impatiently, whistling on his errands and running to his whistle.

He only had to fix up his aerial. One of those young "featherweights" had got results from hooking to a steam radiator. Conroy, with what was relatively a flash of genius, determined to try his water faucet.

That night he did so and with the telephone to his ear he carefully explored the face of the crystal with the pin, according to the featherweight's instructions.

He stood up to the grating in his cell door for light; and a quickly choked and blasphemous exclamation of pure joy was breathed out from the bars as Conroy heard murmurs and then music.

The apparatus worked!

Night after night Conroy experimented. The sounds he caught were blurred and faint, but he huddled with his receiver under his blanket lest even that should betray him.

It happened that on the night of a certain well-advertised prize fight the apparatus utterly failed him. He had been able to catch something of the broadcasts and had learned a little of adjusting to wave lengths; without knowing why, if he turned his container, some sounds came in and others faded out. He had hoped to get the ringside reports of the battle in question, but he could get nothing.

In his fumbling by the window he dropped his nail and the metal rang through the strained and guarded silence of the prison like an alarm. He had barely time to hide himself and his wire under the blanket when he saw Phelan, the guard, peep in, going from cell to cell, searching for the cause of the illegal disturbance.

Conroy, afraid to try any more, fell asleep and dreamed he was in the ring, covering, retreating, smashed against the ropes, when his second fighting wind came to him, his red streak of recklessness was kindled; and then he awoke, struggling with the smother of his blankets, to hear the roar of the ringside in his very ears.

Conroy did not know that his water pipe was too short an aerial and could not guess that his wire had protruded under his door to make contact with the long iron gallery running the length of the prison, thus giving him an aerial sufficient to catch the wave lengths from the ringside.

Now the sounds were much louder, clearer and sharper than any he had caught, and half awake, half dreaming, Conroy, listening in, was at that ringside. And he began root-

ing for Hurricane Hicks, bellowing his utmost into the silence of the jail.

"Use your right—life him, Jimmy, lift him—chaw him up! He's down—he's out! Hooray!"

His voice aroused him thoroughly and he had barely time to hide his receiver when Phelan appeared at his window. The heads of other guards soon crowded out the light and guns were shoved in the bars, for the jail was aroused, convicts were beating at their doors. The illusion of freedom coming, the panic of fire, the rumor that the old days were back and that some one was being beaten to death in his cell—all these thoughts ran along the corridors like an ignition.

Conroy tried to laugh it off.

"Sorry, sir. I must have been dreaming and talking in my sleep. I dreamed Hurricane Hicks knocked out Donovan and that I was there." And then: "Shut up, you fools—no one is hurting me—I was dreaming," he finally shouted to quiet the men in the cells.

Next morning he was haled before Carew and charged with provoking a riot.

"He says he dreamed that Hurricane Hicks knocked out Donovan in three rounds," said Carew slowly as Phelan made the charge. "Well Hicks did. See here."

Carew lifted the front page of the morning *Clarion* substantiating Conroy's dream. And Phelan's jaw dropped in wonderment. But the deputy saw only the breach of discipline.

"You've had it too soft, Conroy. You need hard labor to make you sleep sound. Put him back on the road gang."

Conroy had thought of telling Carew the truth. The warden himself encouraged any display of mechanical ability and to the warden he might have spoken. But this rubicund, blue-jowled policeman only aroused his red streak and he said nothing.

A guard came in to announce that nothing incriminating had been found in Conroy's cell and Conroy secure in the secret superiority given him by his contrivance, almost laughed.

Expecting his cell would be searched he had hidden his apparatus by hanging it out of his window with a gray thread from his blanket—which thread, matching the granite, had escaped the guards.

"Thank you, sir," he answered jauntily. "I am getting stale."

Carew stared as Phelan took Conroy off. A convict who rejoiced at harder labor was a disturbance to the deputy's mental ruts and therefore to be distrusted.

So Conroy was taken from his intermittent errands and light gardening and put to road making with the toughest of the prisoners and the severest of the guards.

But his compensation came every night. A little experimenting, the blind groping of a cave man's brain with no guiding theory to help him, only the hit or miss of accident, taught him the secret of connecting his wire to the iron of the gallery.

So he took his hard labor cheerfully, regarding it as training, regaining his self-respect, feeling top dog of the prison and all it contained.

"What's your hurry?" said Costa, the lifer, to him when the two were pounding gravel into the roadbed. "I've got life, you've got ten years. It ain't piecework at union wages. Why the speed?"

Conroy laughed at the old Black Hand and offered to do the shoveling and pounding all by himself, when the words, more than was usually allowed, attracted Phelan.

"Silence there! What's the trouble?" he asked.

"I can't keep up with this guy," said Costa, wiping his sweat-streaked face.

"Feeling good, ain't you, Conroy?" said the guard.

"Ready to take on all comers," answered Conroy. "Say—wonder if the warden would let me send a challenge to Hurricane Hicks. We could stage the bout here. Hicks was in trouble himself once, so he can't have no objection. Will you put it up to the warden? I believe he'd do it."

"I believe he would," answered Phelan with undisguised contempt, for he sided with Carew on Howe's methods.

Presently a car appeared on the main road. The deputy alighted to inspect the work and Phelan jocularly repeated Conroy's proposition, as a trainer of beasts relates their strange behavior, indifferent to their hearing of him.

But Conroy heard and, dropping his shovel, approached the deputy who, seeing him, instinctively put his hand to his hip pocket. But Conroy's speech and manner were as one man to another.

"You see, sir, the idea hits me harder the more I think about it. There's a lot of guys knocking this prison. Now if we stage a

about here, we'll show those politicians that a convict can be a dead game sport. That reformer guy that's knocking the administration says his gang will win by a ten thousand majority and he wants us back in leg irons, said we ought to be branded like they do in France. Get that, boys; he said it last night he did. Wants us branded he did."

Conroy carried away by the fervor of his indignation was addressing his disfranchised electorate, pausing on their shovels.

"How did you know what was said last night at that meeting?" asked Carew.

Conroy saw his error, stuttered, dropped his eyes and became all the convict.

"Dreaming again," sneered Phelan.

"Yes," said Conroy clutching at the straw. "I knew a guy once used to dream the ponies. I doped out my dream jolt that way. It was the night before the fight with Swartz. He had a longer reach than me and held his head way back. Me only chance was in-fighting. But I figured—all in me dream, you get me—a feint to the head and then a quick jolt to his ribs would bring his head down. It did—and his jaw came in reach and an uppercut gave me the fight. I'll show the idea; you may use it some time. Pretty, I call it."

The gang beheld Conroy shaping up to the deputy, and the promise of freedom ran through their ranks, closing them together, hands gripped on picks and shovels, as all massed for a rush.

But Carew was too ready. With one hand he threw Conroy under his feet, holding him with his heavy boot; with the other he drew his gun, making a half circle with it till every man had one momentary look in the barrel. More guards and more guns came at Phelan's whistle. The outbreak was checked. Deputy Carew was sometimes right.

Conroy, flung headlong into his cell, saw red, blood and flame, for he felt he had been dealt a dirty foul. From the peak of his pride, from the certainty that he was better than his jailers, a sharer in the outside of politics and amusement, planning to help his fellows and even aid the warden, he had been flung in the dust, dragged by the neck and thrown against the stones.

The door clanged. Phelan bade him come out and he was led to the rotunda to face the warden, the deputy and the doctor.

The proceedings were started by the doctor feeling his pulse, bidding him look him in the eye; and there followed the applica-

tion of a stethoscope. Conroy submitted stoically, wondering what all this meant.

"I find no trace of narcotics in this prisoner," finally announced the doctor.

"There's dope somewhere in this prison," said Carew contradictorily. "There's too much talking at work, too much noise in the cells. Don't know how they get it, but it's in them. And this man Conroy is one of the worst. It takes dope to make a man look me in the eye and Conroy comes near slapping me on the shoulder. Why don't you examine his arm for needle pricks?"

"I don't have to," replied the doctor shortly. "There is no cocaine in this man's eyes, no opium sweat in his pores; and the prison coffee's caffeine is infinitesimal."

Conroy saw vaguely that the doctor was coming back at the deputy and his newly awakened political sense, stirred by the throbings of a pin on a bit of stone, made him aware of the doctor's line-up with the warden.

His self-respect returned, he was top dog again, for he knew now the cause of this medical examination. The crime wave outside and the man-to-man methods of Warden Howe were clinching into a cyclone and he was the linchpin of that cyclone.

Phelan reported that all the men and the cells had been searched for dope but none had been found.

"Must be outside in the quarries," he added.

"Search the quarries, then."

Conroy looked out the window at a patch of sky. Robins were singing and swaying on a branch rocked by the breeze that came in scented with summer. The chirrups of tawny-throated songsters made the dogmatic tones of the stupid officials ridiculous. Conroy wanted to laugh, his hands ran over his mouth to hide a grin and his feet shuffled, wanting to dance.

"How's that, doctor?" said Carew. "Look at him—restless as a squirrel. Look at his face going red, look at his eyes. All that meant dope to me when I was on the narcotic squad. Handled all kinds of 'em, I did. I tell you it's in these walls warden and we've got to clean it out. That gang was ready to rush me to-day. Conroy made a speech to them, he did!"

So far the warden had not spoken. He usually waited, wanting to hear the convict's side. And then his words were a judgment.

"Have you had any dope, Conroy?" he now asked. And Conroy would have told him the whole story of how his infectious spirit of rebellion had entered the prison, but for Carew's contemptuous smile at Phelan.

"Yes, sir," he said defiantly, but looking at Carew. "I'm loaded to the guards with it."

"Where did you get it?" barked Carew, almost rising as he would have done in the old days to apply his third degree, to batter and bruise, to twist and dislocate till he got his evidence.

"It's your job to find out," answered Conroy, certain he was safe from violence. "It's something new. It ain't the pipe, nor the needle, nor the sniffs——"

"Who brought it in?"

"A little bird," replied Conroy, almost seraphically.

The warden was quietly watching, quite aware that something had entered the prison. But whether for good or for evil he could not determine.

"Did you threaten the deputy this morning?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Have you any complaint against him or any officer—or me?"

"Ain't got a grouch in the world, sir—except against them guys outside that are knocking you. And you take it from me, there ain't a man here don't want to line up at the polls and wallop any man——"

"That will do, Conroy," said the warden.

"Politics behind the bars!" sneered Carew as Conroy was removed.

"Why not?" said the warden. "I see no reason for depriving a man of his vote because he is a felon. It's punishment without representation."

"Would you like to go to Congress on the convict vote?"

"With all my heart, sir!" said the warden warmly. And Carew, scoffer as he was, felt rebuked by the fanaticism of his chief.

That night Conroy, under his blanket, happened to tune to a voice over a telephone asking for information about a rumored outbreak among the prisoners. It was from a newspaper. He heard Carew reply, recognizing his voice, and Conroy grew hot at the deputy's highly colored account of the attempted jail delivery.

"Liar!" he murmured, understanding perfectly Carew's political wireless.

The voices ceased and Conroy turned the top of his ice-cream container for what further news or entertainment the ether could bring him.

The darkness under his blanket became a sudden twilight and he looked up incautiously to meet Carew's flash light, a blinding glare crossed with black bars. Carew entered the cell, caught at what he saw in Conroy's hand and the coiled receiver snapped away from the telephone.

That cartridge-like case meant one thing to Carew—a bomb. But he felt easier at finding it empty.

"So your dope is the dynamite of the quarries?" he said slowly, trying to comprehend the mechanism, for he considered himself wise in bombs. He was calm, almost gay for him. For here was evidence to confound the warden's theories and he crushed the frail cardboard between his fingers and advanced to search Conroy.

But the convict, still indignant with Carew's lying, maddened by the destruction of the only thing he had ever made and a marvel at that, felt his red streak kindling. That box and its wires and its sparkler had lifted him from his ring, his alleys and his dives, the toy had become half human to him, for it spoke, sang and played to him in his lone dark hours. He had come to cuddle to it as he would to a baby or a dog; and the murder of it by Carew drove him to strike, in one vivid explosion of retaliatory murder, with a clenched fist gripped round his long, rusty nail.

Surprised and off his guard, Carew threw back his head, hitting the iron door, and then fell to the floor.

"Croaked you! It was coming to you!" Conroy whispered, for the nail and his fist were bloody.

He listened. There was no alarm. The deputy had fallen as softly as a sack; his voice had been low and gloating and the silence of the jail was unbroken. So Conroy put out his face, like a rat's from a hole, to reconnoiter. He had to break jail now—if he could.

He pulled his socks over his shoes to muffle them and stole down the corridor. Low voices came from the guards' room; mutters and heavy breathing from other dreamers in the cells. A door opened to his touch and he entered the doctor's office. It was empty. The hospital lay beyond another door; he could hear coughs and one bulb

was burning. The row of bottles was still there and the one labeled "Poison, Tinct. Laud." It was full, too, but he did not stop to taste, for he needed no drugs now; he was Comeback Conroy, up against the ropes, the black ropes that carried the juice to the chair where a finger to a switch gave the last knock-out. And he needed all his wits.

There were two ways out to the yard for him; one through the corridor, the other through the hospital. The former way was probably locked and there was greater risk of meeting a guard; so he decided on the hospital. He opened a cupboard and saw white garments, the jackets and aprons of the doctor and his assistants.

He put on an apron and jacket and a golf cap he found on a rack, picking up a rag reeking of iodoform; using it as a handkerchief to cover his face he entered the hospital. The lights were low, the patients asleep or unconscious. The guards over the sick men were drowsy and careless and Conroy reached the yard unremarked.

As he turned the corner and strolled leisurely to the front of the warden's house he knew he was seen by the guard from the box on the wall, but he also knew he was unsuspected.

The big gate under the arch was closed but the windows under which he had set the daffodils looked different. There was no gleam of glass in them; they were open; but more, the bars were gone, and he remembered how Cissie had wanted them removed. At once he saw his path to freedom. He would wait for a cloud to veil the moon, climb through a window and make his way through the warden's house to unbarred, lightly locked doors on the outside.

But as his hand grasped the sill a face appeared at the window, the face of a girl as shining to him as the moon emerging from a cloud.

Cissie started, not from terror but surprise, and then laughed, drawing her gown around her open neck.

"Hello, doctor! I had to say good night to the moon, too. Why—it's Mr. Conroy!"

The sinking of her voice to a shocked whisper told Conroy she knew why he was there, the intent of his disguise.

"You're trying to escape. Oh, please Mr. Conroy, don't do it! It's no use! You will only be caught. Go back and I—I won't say anything. Go back—you will only hurt father. He is so proud that no

man has broken jail since he has come. You will lose your good time. Please for my sake, for papa's, go back!"

Her pretty face, limned in silver and shadow, and framed by the stones, glowed against the dark interior, and the red streak died out of Conroy as he saw this child that called him mister. This daughter of a jailer who treated him like a man was the last bar between him and liberty.

He would have to force his way against her, perhaps struggle with her tender, shining arms, silence her robinlike pleading, desecrating her bedroom with violence, perhaps have to—

Comeback Conroy, wharf rat, dive-delivered spawn of society's ultimate mud, stopped at this last red conclusion. The bloody nail, his sole weapon, fell among the daffodils. He turned and without a word walked back into the jail till he reached the doctor's room.

He took off the doctor's white uniform and waited for something to happen and his eyes fell on the bottles. And then, calmly and unhurried, he drained the laudanum to the last drop. He did not sense the taste of it. His thoughts were on a child girl, a baby woman, a sparkler fashioned of moonbeams, singing to him from the prison granite, making him turn to a way he had never trod, spurring him to his last comeback.

He took the phone over the doctor's desk and called up the newspaper office he had listened in on—the one that Carew had lied to.

"Hello, *Evening Clarion!* A guy phoned you to-night about a riot in the penitentiary. Yes, this is the pen. No, I ain't Carew and I ain't the warden. I'm the walking delegate of the long-term prisoners, president of the Murderers' Union, Acting Deputy of the Amalgamated Thugs—"

Whether it was the drug acting on him or because he had cheated the chair, Conroy was gay, hilarious, freer than any man within or without those walls.

"Sure I'm a convict—Comeback Conroy—once in line for the lightweight championship, inventor of the daydream jolt. Never mind how I'm on the phone. You always said I was on the level, so take it from me that riot spiel was a frame-up. Carew is playing politics so he can get Howe's job. There ain't a whiter sport than Warden Howe—and them silk-hat crooks that are

trying to throw him out ain't fit to serve a sentence under him. A fellow that serves under Howe just can't be crooked. I know! I've tried.

"I've had a chance to break jail and I've come back. Get that and print it big. It's fellows like Carew keep men in the crook ring. I know 'cos I just killed him. Yes, I killed him with a rusty nail and you can dig up one of me old pictures to go with your write-up. I ain't lying. Call up in half an hour and I'll show you I ain't, 'cos I'll be crooked, too. Yes, I've got a bottle of poison in me pantry—so this is a deathbed confession. And that goes, don't it?"

The door was flung open by the guards aroused by the lifted voice of Conroy. They flung themselves upon him but he made no resistance as they handcuffed him.

"Take it easy, fellows," was all he said. "I'm out. I've croaked Carew, he's in my cell. But I'm on me way, too. I've drunk a pint of poison."

The prison forces were aroused, the warden appeared, Carew was borne into the office and the doctor tended him, while the guards stood over Conroy, who had to wait for his treatment.

But Carew was only stunned, the nail had not penetrated far. The wound was ugly but not dangerous and he was able to tell what he had found in Conroy's cell.

"Lemme speak," called Conroy, still on the floor where the guards had throw him. "It ain't a bomb, warden, it's a wireless. I made it in me cell out of a book. And it worked. That's how I doped out the fight before the papers. That was me needle and me pipe, Carew! Fellows has to have some kind of dope or they couldn't stand nothing. That's why I hit you. That's where you're wrong and the warden is right. Don't you weaken, warden. Don't let them take away the books and the concerts from the gang. It's all dope. Take away our dope and you might as well turn the death-house juice into every cell. Them guys outside has operas and bands and high-toned announcers and spelers—all kinds of silk-hat dope. And I just laid in a pipe line of me own and was

enjoying me own home-brew. But I'm sorry I jabbed you, Carew. It's the first time I ever loaded me mitt and—and—say, doc, I thought croaking was easy. That stuff of yours has some punch. I've got neuralgia in me cellar. Gimme something to speed it up, will you?"

The doctor came over to the writhing Conroy.

"You're not going to die, Conroy. I suspected some one of sipping my laudanum and I changed it to jalap."

Conroy's wizened features that had been almost transfigured as he addressed the warden were relaxed into a queer mixture of relief and pain.

"Me deathbed confession still stands, warden. It's some reprieve you've given me, doc. That jalap stuff is a champ with a blow. But I ain't never squealed in me career, so I can walk to me cell, Phelan."

After he had gone and the doctor had left, the warden picked up Conroy's receiver.

"Bill," he said, "neither you nor I could make this." The telephone rang and the warden answered it.

"It's from the *Clarion*," he said.

He listened earnestly and then, with a tolerant smile, answered:

"No, not quite right. There has been no riot, no murder. A convict made a wireless outfit all by himself out of odds and ends; it worked and—and a guard misunderstood, and—"

Covering the receiver he addressed Carew.

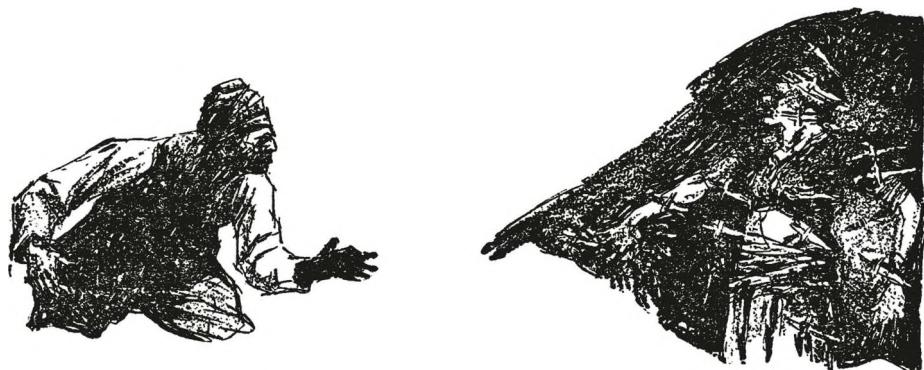
"How about it, Bill? Shall we let it go at that?" Carew nodded and said, "You win, Jim."

The warden offered his free hand and Carew shook it, a confession and an act of oblivion.

"What I have always contended," the warden then continued into the telephone. "Don't deaden, but create fresh interests. And if you can't reform, your law is failure. Yes, it's a great story. Send out a man and he can have it from Conroy's own lips. And this penitentiary is going to have an installation of its own. My men shall be free of the ether!"

Another story by Mr. Greene will appear in an early issue.





The Knife Thrower

By Hamish McLaurin

Author of "The Blizzard," "Two Arabian Knights," Etc.

When life became worth while Marietta didn't mind facing death.

HER experience of the world had stretched through twenty years of roving before it ever came home to Marietta that perhaps life had something much more desirable to offer than the doubtful privilege of standing against a massive wooden door several times a day while Zrinyi outlined her pretty figure with his wicked-looking knives.

Mamma Rosa had faced the knives while Marietta was a baby and had continued to do it until she got too ugly and too fat, whereupon it quite naturally had devolved upon Marietta to take her place. Then Mamma Rosa had died and there had remained only Marietta and the falcon-eyed Zrinyi to carry on the family profession.

To stand motionless and smiling while the heavy blades thudded into the soft planks and quivered there against one's bare arms or one's naked throat was not pleasant, of course, because there had been times when Zrinyi had wavered in his aim and then the steel had bit deeply into the skin and had torn the tender tissues underneath. One never knew at just what instant this might happen again. But that was life, as Marietta knew it. And in her world there appeared always to be hazards of some sort, no matter what means of livelihood one adopted.

The acrobats were in constant danger of a torn ligament; and the trapeze performers might safely count upon a broken neck if they stuck to the profession long enough. Fire eaters *did* get burned occasionally and sword swallowers *did* scratch their gullets, despite all their pretensions to the contrary.

In the gypsy days of her childhood, she recalled, the women who told fortunes were forever being arrested, on one account or another. So it was evident to Marietta that life was a chancy venture all around. Men were rough with their womenfolks and Zrinyi was only a little worse than the rest when it pleased him to be rough with her. But just the same she had always been inclined to see justice in his observations when he had pointed out to her how much better off she was than many other girls were and how much, *much* better things were going since they had quitted Europe and sought engagements in this fabulously prosperous United States of America.

It would have been folly to deny that this was so. Existence in the old days had been more than a little precarious. It had been made up of caravans, village fairs and traveling tent shows, with now and again an appearance at a seaside resort in the summertime or a brief sojourn in some city of importance where a carnival could be depended

upon to attract unusually open-handed patronage. This had been in Scotland and England, for the most part, save only the carnivals. Those latter occasions, of rapturous memory, had all been on the Continent.

Because Marietta knew vaguely that America was different from England and had, therefore, illogically assumed that it must be like the Continent, she had been eager to accompany Zrinyi thither; nor, in point of fact, had she ever regretted it.

True enough, their first two or three years in the United States had been not greatly different from the years which had gone before—their experience being confined to sundry carnival companies which played the county seats of the Middle West and to the side show of an inconspicuous circus which toured principally in the South. With all of these, just as in the days of the village fair, they had been obliged to give a show every time a reasonably thick sprinkling of patrons came into their tent. Thereafter, however, Zrinyi, who was no dunderhead, however much of a brute he may have been by birth and breeding, had recognized the advantages of displaying his skill upon the vaudeville stage and had taken effective steps to accomplish this ambition.

At the time Marietta fell in love with "Chuck" Bascom she and Zrinyi had been playing on the same bill with that genial young man for several weeks. Chuck "flang a mean rope," as he might have described his lariat throwing; and he could handle a gun like nobody outside of a "two-reel Western." The very fact that he was still playing on a "small-time" circuit was due, curiously enough, to his superlative skill as a rifle and pistol shot. He held this skill of his in such high regard that he refused to fake any of his shots and by his obstinacy in this respect he sacrificed the chance to make a big-time act out of his offering.

"Them fellers that do all that fancy shootin' from the balcony and all that, don't do it legitimate," he explained to Marietta. "F'rinstance, they stand a lighted candle in a box about a foot square, with the open side of the box toward the audience, and then they go up in the balcony and let on to snuff the candle with a bullet. It always gets a good hand because the poor old audience don't know that there's a loose metal plate in the box, standin' just behind the candle, and that when the bullet hits this

here plate the concussion creates a vacuum and the candle is blowed out, see?"

Marietta saw not at all, so far as the rifle trick was concerned, but she saw quite clearly that this American with the funny long hair on his leather trousers had a face the kindness of which contrasted most impressively with the malevolence of Zrinyi's. Therefore she bobbed her head comprehendingly and begged him to continue.

"If I had a eight-year-old kid and he couldn't hit a metal plate a foot square from a distance of fifty feet, I'd jest natcherly drown him," declared Chuck. "I can't stoop to that kind of shootin'. What's the sense in fastenin' half a dozen dark-colored toy balloons in a deep box frame and puttin' a tiny spot of white paint on the side of each of 'em and then bustin' the balloons with a repeatin' rifle? 'Nine bull's-eyes in five seconds,' they announce. Shucks! If you hit your balloon at all your white spot disappears, natcherly, and the customers think you've scored a bull's-eye. That's all right for them that wants it, but I ain't in the balloon-shootin' business. I can't see myself pullin' that kind of hooey; but I can stand on my head and shoot the ashes off a greaser's cigarette—and I've done it many's the time."

Marietta found in Chuck a type of performer quite different from any she had ever met. Most of the show folks whom she knew had been born in the profession, just as she herself had been, and were living out their lives in it as a matter of course.

It was not that way with Chuck. He had been born on his father's little ranch in Colorado and it was not until he had developed into what his admiring companions styled "a regular shootin' fool" that the notion of appearing behind the footlights had ever occurred to him. The ranch was his, now, and he still spent his summers there; but once having tasted the exhilaration of applause, the desire for more of it drew him back to the booking offices year after year.

Chuck, for his part, found in Marietta a girl totally unlike any others he had met and one who touched unexpected chords of sympathy in him. This had been so from the moment her path crossed his. Setting aside her distinctive Saxon beauty, there was that about her character which held a strong appeal for him. He liked the way she minded her own business, which was more than he could say for a great many of the women

whom he met around the theater; and furthermore, he read something in her eyes which made him feel unaccountably sorry for her. He could not have explained what it was that gave him such a feeling, but with the instinct of one who has studied people more than he has books he felt certain that something was sorely troubling her thoughts.

Perhaps Marietta's secret anxieties were the more apparent to the young rancher for the reason that they were anxieties which never had troubled her until lately and were therefore of a kind she had not yet learned to conceal. The trouble, as Chuck strongly surmised, lay with Zrinyi.

Zrinyi was twice Marietta's age and then half as much again and, so far as her limited knowledge of fathers went, that was what he had been to her. He had been Mamma Rosa's husband, that was clear enough, and Mamma Rosa had always called her "my littlest one," so Marietta had taken it for granted that she was Zrinyi's "littlest one" as well. Chuck found it hard to believe this, nor was he alone in his skepticism.

"You don't look no more like that old buzzard than a pinto looks like a Percheron," he told her. "You look more like a Svenska to me. Where did you say you was born?"

Marietta thought it was in England, but she wasn't sure.

"This old man of yours is a gypsy, ain't he?"

Marietta believed he was.

"Then I'd bet that new six-gun of mine against one of his greased curls that he ain't your father at all. He probably swiped you when you was a baby and you are now the rightful heir to the old manor house at Poppingham-on-the-Downs."

Marietta laughed at this, but a moment later a thought crept into her brain which she found not at all amusing. Marietta withdrew to think it over.

Yes, the possibility that Zrinyi was not her father, suggested more in fun than in earnest by this free-spoken young American, might certainly be accepted as an explanation of the distasteful situation into which she had recently felt herself being drawn. Zrinyi's behavior toward her during the weeks just passed had undergone a subtle and distressing change. He had dropped, to a noticeable extent, the brusque, authoritative, not to say harsh and ill-tempered manner which she had grown up to accept as the usual one for a parent to adopt toward

his children and had begun to treat her more as she had seen him treat certain other young women.

As if this ominous softening of demeanor were not enough, Zrinyi had given Marietta further cause for alarm by becoming unaccountably petulant concerning the little white powders he was constantly taking "for his headache." These headaches and the incessant need for their suppression formed a comparatively recent manifestation of the knife thrower's peculiar temperament. If by any chance he mislaid the little powders or if his supply of them ran low, he developed a blackness of temper and an erratic line of conduct that was beginning to cause Marietta much concern.

When Zrinyi had an abundant supply of the powders on hand he became possessed of positively diabolic skill with the knives and the bayonets and the hatchets which he sent hurtling across the stage. The blades would graze Marietta's motionless limbs by scarce the breadth of a spider's thread and their points would embed themselves in the planking to a depth that spoke plainly of the feverish power behind the throw. On such occasions, if the applause gave him the slightest encouragement, Zrinyi was wont to make Marietta place the palm of her hand against the boards, with the fingers spread apart, their tips pointing toward the floor. Then with four rapid passes he would leave a knife vibrating in each of the spaces formed by the fingers and thumb.

Marietta did not especially mind this when all was going well and Zrinyi was in good form, for she had lived too long in the land of tinsel not to relish her share of the applause. But it appeared from what the knife thrower told her that the particular headache powders upon which he depended were becoming increasingly hard to get; and at such times as he was obliged to go on short rations, so to speak, both his nerve and his accuracy deserted him to a degree that was rapidly becoming dangerous.

It must be understood that the knives were not sharpened as to their edges. Nothing was to be gained by unnecessary risk of that sort, but their points had to be kept sharp or the knives would not remain dramatically oscillating in the planking, particularly when the wood had become splintered and spongy over a considerable portion of its surface.

In the ordinary run of things a knife

thrower can graze his living target a thousand times and never break the skin, but just as the best of jugglers occasionally drop something and the highest-salaried outfielders sometimes muff a fly, so the most expert knife and hatchet hurler eventually pays toll to human fallibility by varying just a shade in the mechanical precision of his delivery. It would have been so with Zrinyi at best. Upon the introduction of the little white powders into the problem, the possibilities of error were immeasurably increased.

With steadily growing frequency Marietta was obliged to cover certain angry-looking little gashes with collodion and disguise them with "liquid white" and flesh-tinted powder before she could appear on the stage. So treated, they would not show from "out front." But Chuck Bascom saw them and his heart thumped with fury at the sight.

Owing to that quickened power of observation which a man acquires concerning everything that has to do with the person who has swept even the most casual fingers across his heartstrings, Chuck began to notice in Zrinyi's words and actions the same danger signals which had sent Marietta's thoughts winging back to the pretty girls of the gypsy camps and to Mamma Rosa weeping in the dark. When he could stand it no longer he made an opportunity to get Marietta by herself and speak what was on his mind.

"What's the matter with that old man of yours?" he asked. "He ain't quite himself these days, is he?"

Responding at once to the sympathy in his voice, Marietta proceeded to unburden her heart of its misgivings. She was pathetically eager to confide in some one and surprisingly naïve in her account of the symptoms which had marked Zrinyi's slow shifting of attitude toward her.

"I do not know how to say what it is I feel," she faltered, with a gesture of helplessness, "but I am afraid of him. All the time I am afraid."

"I knew it," said Chuck grimly. "I seen it on your face."

They were seated on a roll of matting behind the back wall of the "kitchen set" in which the heavy dramatic sketch of the bill was being performed. All lights were off, save those used in the act. For the moment nobody was around. Chuck laid a gentle finger on one of the unhealed slashes that

marred Marietta's delicately molded shoulder.

"How about these? Is he losing his eyesight?"

"No," admitted Marietta honestly. "He can see very good. It is his hands; they shake so. When he has headaches his hands go like this—so—all the time. When his hands go like that, he sometimes does not throw quite where he wishes the knife to go."

Chuck caught her by the elbows and stared at her in a sudden panic of apprehension. "A'mighty!" he muttered, as if the words pained his throat. "S'pose one of 'em got you bad!"

Marietta glanced swiftly into his face, understood what she read there and softly slid her arms around his neck. From that moment the black raven of evil began circling low over the theater, for Zrinyi was not a man to forgo without a struggle anything upon which he had set his heart.

Before the kitchen set was struck and they were obliged to make way for a full-stage act, Marietta had told Chuck all about the headache powders and how hard they were to obtain sometimes. At this a great light had broken across Chuck's comprehension.

"Why, this feller is a ski jumper," he exclaimed. "He can't have no fun 'til after a big snowstorm." And as this was profoundly cryptic to Marietta he went on to explain to her what "snow" was, in the language of the underworld, and what it did to those who became its devotees. He was careful not to lay too much stress upon the vagaries of such unfortunates, for fear of terrifying the girl, but he lay awake most of the night, conjuring up visions of what might happen to Marietta if the present situation were allowed to continue.

When he arose the next day, which was a Saturday and which marked both the close of his week's engagement and the end of his season, he had made up his mind to take Marietta away from Zrinyi if she would come with him. And the sooner the better. Marietta had told him that Zrinyi had no further bookings in sight either, so it would not be any great injustice to the man if he were forced to look about for a new assistant. Not that Chuck cared two bone buttons whether he injured Zrinyi or not, but there are ethics relative to the giving

of notice which no real performer violates if he can help it.

During the matinée that afternoon Chuck laid his heart, his hand, his ranch and his future at Marietta's feet—clumsily, haltingly, but with such compelling sincerity that Marietta wept great, splashing tears of happiness. She promised him her hand, but they agreed that it would be just as well not to acquaint Zrinyi with their plans until after the final performance that night. There was no way of telling just how the gypsy would take the news and it was as well to be on the safe side.

Had they only extended their precautions a little further, all might have gone smoothly enough to the end; but, loverlike, they could not keep away from each other. During the early part of the second evening performance they sought once more the darkened space behind the kitchen set and it was there that Zrinyi came upon them, held close in each other's arms. The black raven of evil had chosen to alight.

Marietta fled, terrified, to her dressing room. Chuck faced the knife thrower with a look of such jaunty and unwavering determination that the gypsy checked what at first seemed an intention to give instant battle and contented himself with uttering a stream of bitter execrations, spoken, fortunately for himself, in a tongue the rancher could not understand.

"All you said I is, *you* is,'" quoted Chuck cheerfully. "And now you better take that nasty face of yours away from here before I push it through the back of your head."

Quaking with fury, Zrinyi left the theater and remained away some twenty minutes or more. Upon his return he walked straight up to Marietta's dressing room. The life-long habit of obedience was still strong within the girl, in spite of what had happened, and when he demanded admittance she let him in.

Precisely what it was that took place in the next few moments Marietta never would tell, but performers close at hand heard a stifled altercation and the next instant saw the girl fling herself out of the door and stand panting against the wall of the corridor, gazing back into the dressing room with indignation. The knife thrower appeared immediately thereafter, running a leisurely hand through his oily ringlets and surveying the frowning onlookers with a look

of defiance. It was just then that the stage manager shouted up the iron stairs, warning Zrinyi that his act was on next.

"Aha!" exclaimed Zrinyi, bowing low to Marietta. "Your last performance, eh, my darling? Your last performance!" And he chuckled unnaturally. "Very well; we shall be there, shall we not, my pretty one? Shall we not?"

Marietta nodded and, still unable to speak, stepped back into the dressing room to fix her hair before the mirror.

In due course she presented herself at the edge of the stage, ready to go on, but a cold terror had penetrated to the marrow of her being and her knees turned to pulp at the thought of facing Zrinyi and his knives. In the glinting brilliancy of his eyes and the high pitch of excitement revealed by his voice she recognized the effects produced by a recent and powerful dose of the little white powders. That was nothing. She did not fear him on that account. If anything, she was glad he had taken the stuff. It made his aim just that much the more certain. But the man as he had revealed himself to her in the dressing room—ah, that was different!

It was this new, undisguised Zrinyi she was afraid of; this man whom she had frankly told of her love for Chuck and of her intention to marry him; the man into whose eyes, upon hearing this confession, had flamed fire—the man who knew her well enough to know that he had lost her and who would unquestionably get his revenge while yet he could. That was the Zrinyi at whose mercy she must place herself within the next few minutes.

Nevertheless, when the curtain rose, revealing the setting in which the act was presented, the training of a lifetime came to her rescue and she glided into the dance which preceded Zrinyi's entrance. Oddly enough it had never occurred to her to run away and let the show get along without the knife-throwing act as best it could, for with the bred-in-the-bone performer there is a duty toward his public which seems to transcend all personal considerations. The clown in "Polly of the Circus" epitomized this feeling in his pathetically reiterated speech, "You see, sir, the show has got to go on."

In order to make his performance acceptable to vaudeville audiences Zrinyi had dramatized it, making Marietta a recently

purchased slave girl and himself the caliph in whose harem she was immured. As a climax to the pantomime Marietta would hurl herself against the heavy door in a desperate effort to escape and the knife thrower would impale the scarf that floated from her throat with a dagger snatched from his belt. As if transfixed with fright, Marietta would then hold her pose against the door while her master hemmed her in on all sides with the glittering poniards which he took from a decorative collection on the wall.

Save for the fact that even to the stage hands in the wings the slave girl's fear was palpably genuine, the act proceeded as usual up to the time the first knife had been hurled. From then on Zrinyi seemed to become more deliberate than was his custom and the knives, as they lodged in the door, kept pressing Marietta's body closer and closer and closer with each succeeding shot. Exercising infinite pains and maniac cunning, the man deliberately went about the task of rendering his victim helpless.

One knife under the armpit; one over the shoulder. One under the other armpit; one over the other shoulder. One at one side of the neck; one at the other—thus they came with merciless precision and a force which time and again drove the points of the weapons clear through the massive panels.

Presently Zrinyi's lips drew back a trifle over his set teeth and he launched a blade which pierced the heavy coil of hair at the side of Marietta's head. The steel grazed the scalp and the girl flinched perceptibly.

Zrinyi saw her shrink and he smiled and spoke to her in the language of her childhood. "Quiet, littlest one," he warned her. "The end is not yet."

At this Marietta's heart congealed within her and the chill from it penetrated all her veins. Never had Zrinyi pinned her hair to the door before; never before had he looked at her as he was looking now. She dared no longer remain motionless; yet to move she must step forward, closer to Zrinyi, nearer to the fresh sheaf of knives he had just taken from the rack beside him, nearer, perhaps, to death. A frigid paralysis stole over her.

She closed her eyes. She heard the knives thud into the door but she no longer saw

them. She dared not face what she knew was coming. Something within her urged her to cry out, to fling herself upon the floor, to wrench away from the door before it was too late, but her terrified brain refused to give the order. Rigid, she remained in position without wavering—dumb, cold, well-nigh dead with fright.

Then, as if from a great distance, she heard Zrinyi's voice.

"Open thine eyes, littlest one," he was saying. "Open thine eyes. See—this is the last."

Fearfully, she did as he bade her, and when he once more held her eyes with his he continued softly.

"This is the last one, my darling, and this one"—his voice rose to a rasping shriek—"this one goes straight through thy soft white throat!"

His eyes gleamed in a manner terrible to see and his hand flashed back over his shoulder, the blade of a long bowie knife clipped between finger and thumb. From the wings resounded the biting report of a pistol and the next instant the knife thrower sank to his knees, clutching a shattered wrist. The bowie knife lay on the ground cloth behind him, rocking slightly as it came harmlessly to rest.

Marietta's head sank forward and she sagged against the door. But Chuck, still grasping his revolver in his hand, had an arm around her before the others on the stage had caught their breath. With one wary eye on the writhing Zrinyi, he supported her thus while the agitated property man tugged at the deeply embedded blades and the stage manager recovered himself sufficiently to ring down the curtain.

A hospital for the criminally insane received the knife thrower in due time and the publicity resulting from the startling incident at his final performance gave Chuck such bookings as he had never dared to hope for. In his act, as it is now offered to the public, there is a pretty girl who puffs nonchalantly at a cigarette, holding it between her scarlet lips while he shoots the ashes from its tip. The pretty girl is Marietta. She is still facing death two or three times a day but, curiously enough, she seems to enjoy it.



Names

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

IT'S when you name Cheyenne or Laramie,
Laredo, Magdalena, San Antone,
You set me thinking of what used to be—
I knew a blue-eyed girl in Laramie,
But, somehow, I just drifted on, alone.

Some one got shot in Laramie, one night:
It wasn't me—I just lit out of town
And headed South. I reckon I was right—
The Magdalena girl, her eyes were brown.

I didn't know that Southern country then;
But stuck it out a year, then came away
Homesick; I hit the trail for old Cheyenne—
I recollect her eyes were warm and gray.

I stayed one winter, then I heard the South
Calling again. I like a change of scene.
Laredo? Well, she had a rose-red mouth,
And eyes you couldn't read—just cool and green.

Laredo it was heaven, for a spell;
Then hard times hit the range and work was slack.
I wouldn't say that San Antone was hell,
But she was Spanish, and her eyes were black.

Some folks they settle down; perhaps they're wise,
Some folks adventure after fame or gold.
Well, I've seen heaven in a woman's eyes—
I didn't stay to see those eyes grow old.

So, when you name Cheyenne or Laramie,
Laredo, Magdalena, San Antone,
You're making music that sounds good to me—
There was a blue-eyed girl in Laramie,
But somehow, I just drifted on, alone.



The Useful Citizen

By Edward M. Thierry

Author of "The Grease Pots of Kimberley," "The Horse Editor's Side Line," Etc.

The mission school may have worked a number of miracles in the savage Kafir soul of Wembo, but it hadn't precisely robbed him of his reason.

IN the hot hour immediately after the mid-day meal, the hour when the stewing Kongo seems least endurable to white folk, there was only one figure in the dusty street. Coming along lazily was a tall, straight-backed black man, whose face was broad and glistening, his features emotionless. He was wearing faded overalls, with legs cut off so high that the garment barely touched his knees, and an undershirt with frayed sleeves and an unwashed appearance; his gait was slouching and the dust spurted up in little geysers between his toes.

"See him?" said Dykeman's host, jerking a thumb toward the solitary walker; "There's a sample of what education, missionary work—the priceless boon of civilization—can give these people. That boy is a product of Mr. Hawser's school. Yesterday an untutored savage, a useless atom among millions living useless lives and letting this vast, rich, unexploited Africa go to pot—criminal negligence, I call it; and to-day you see him transformed, a useful citizen, absolutely born again!"

"Yes?" said Dykeman, wondering.

Looking out from the shady veranda of the hotel he saw this single black figure, typifying native millions, against the background of city modernity built in a jungle landscape by a handful of white men. The picture somehow struck him as grotesque; he wondered what it looked like seen through the Kafir eye, what they thought about it. Everything looked so new and raw and rather unnatural, he thought; not precisely what the outlander would expect in the heart of the Dark Continent, a dozen degrees under the equator—railroads, hotels, cinema theaters, arc lights, store windows, banks, to say nothing of mission-school graduates strolling down city streets, thinking lofty, civilized thoughts and taking pride in having become useful citizens.

But this particular chap in question didn't look proud; he looked rather bored, even weary. And as he passed along he appeared not at all impressed, as Dykeman was, by the signs of civilization all about. Even the sun-baked expanse of the Avenue de l'Etoile du Kongo seemed in its very smoothness and its enormous width to ad-

vertise civilization; all of Elizabethville's streets were like that, as if the Belgian engineers laying out the town foresaw a mighty city rising there one day and felt they need not be niggardly of space, with the immense area of the Kongo to draw on freely. The mere natives uttered no protest and they might as well take in sufficient territory, making the streets imposing boulevards and endowing them with names of suitable dignity.

Elizabethville's houses were of brick, sun-proof and ant proof, for wooden buildings are the favorite fodder of termites. The Standard Bank, the Theater Parthenon, the Café Mon Repos, Beesley's store and places like that gleamed and glared in the white paint or the stucco fronts that distinguished the business section—where the Avenue de l'Etoile crossed the Avenue du Sankuru and the Avenue du Luapula, making a triangular square that the farseeing engineers thought might one day be to Africa what the Place de l'Opéra is to Europe. A worthy ambition, everybody said, this job of making over Africa and its people.

"Who is he?" Dykeman asked, looking curiously after the lonesome traveler.

"One of Mr. Hawser's conquests—a missionary ace—one of Mr. Hawser's prize pupils, schooled, churched, civilized, redeemed, a soul saved, a useful citizen to whom Mr. Hawser may, and does, point with pride. Do you know what that Kafir is?" Dykeman's host paused impressively. "He's a printer—I give you my word, a printer! Sets type for our weekly newspaper *L'Etoile du Kongo*—sets up the news of the day, sir, in French and in English! Five others like him in the printing shop. They practically get out the paper we read, everything except writing it. Think of Kafirs doing that! How's that for progress?"

Dykeman, murmuring surprise, said: "Indeed? Natives getting out a newspaper? Well!" He paused, as if his mind required time to digest an incongruous thought. He added: "The solution has been found then? But tell me, does it stick?"

"Does what stick?"

His host wore a puzzled look.

II.

Dykeman found the office of *L'Etoile du Kongo* in a side street. The editor, a squat, fidgety Belgian, was hunched over a flat desk just inside the door, where it was cool-

est, marking proof sheets. Along the wall was a row of tall cases where three Kafirs stood setting type by hand from typewritten copy held on spikes under shaded electric lights; their nimble fingers moved swiftly picking type out of small boxes in the case and clicking it into the printer's sticks they held. They glanced negligently at the visitor and went on with their work.

All were clothed in the same sketchy, haphazard manner as the tall figure at the middle case, whom Dykeman recognized as the man he had seen in the street. In the center of the room another native, working at the stone, was justifying a form preparatory to locking it for the press. Two others were fussing around a small, flat-bed press in the rear.

The editor proved a genial person, as deft in English as in his own tongue, and quite willing to vary the monotony of Kongo life, which his manner indicated had afflicted him with a chronic lethargy, by talking about his newspaper and his printing shop with a newcomer in Elizabethville. He did not appear to consider it at all unique that his employees—compositors and pressmen and make-up man—should be Baluba natives. That's what they had learned in the mission school, wasn't it? Oh, of course, a fine thing—if monsieur looked at it that way. They were a stupid lot generally. How these boys ever learned the printing trade one could never guess.

Clearly the editor was moved by no enthusiasm over the redemption of African natives from savagery, or next door to it; he saw no happy augury in their intellectual climb into the typographical trade; he had no such vision of progress as Dykeman's host at the hotel. Not once did he mention the word civilization; and when Dykeman did he looked decidedly astonished.

"Who is that tall fellow in the middle, setting type?" Dykeman asked.

"Calls himself Wembo," said the Belgian, glancing up carelessly. "He's been here longest."

"How long?"

"Oh, four years; about that." The editor frowned slightly. "Gets the most pay, too." He seemed to resent it.

When Dykeman asked if he might talk with Wembo the editor raised his eyebrows, then shrugged and called out in French. Wembo dropped his stick as if a fire gong had rung and came forward. His impassive

face relaxed under Dykeman's smile and friendly words. Yes, he spoke a little English, but he preferred French because he had learned French first. Oh, yes, he set up English type as well as French type; but the words were first typewritten, which made them easy to read, and so one did not have to know what a word meant or how to pronounce it to set it in type; yes, there were many words like that which he did not understand, but he set them up just as they were—so it really didn't matter whether he understood them or not. Wembo grinned a little as Dykeman interrogated him, but he was not in any sense loquacious.

"Not such hard work as carrying loads or working in the copper mines at Lubumbashi, is it?" said Dykeman. Mr. Hawser had told him Wembo had once pushed ore cars at Lubumbashi mine.

The Baluba shook his head.

"You must like it better?"

The Baluba nodded.

Dykeman said he supposed the white man was doing great things for the Kongo. To this Wembo said nothing; he gave one the air of not understanding precisely what was meant.

"Well, take the mission school," Dykeman said. "You learned your trade there, eh? That's one of the wonderful things the white man is doing for you chaps. You should be very grateful, don't you think? Tell me, Wembo, what is it you like most about working here in this civilizing way, doing easy work, constructive work, setting in type the news of the world, printing the newspapers that people read? Why do you like it, Wembo?"

Wembo looked perplexed and drew back a step when the Belgian editor leaned forward in his chair and gave a little snort of disgust.

"Money, of course!" exclaimed the editor, answering for him. "What else, monsieur?" He shrugged and spread out his hands expressively. "Why, this boy gets paid a hundred and fifty francs a month! Consider that, monsieur—in your American money that is normally thirty dollars! Consider that you can go almost anywhere in Africa and hire porters by the thousands for two or three dollars a month. And do they not also receive five francs a week for food, these mission-school printers? Indeed they do—and it is ample to buy the measly meal they eat. And they sleep in that shack out in

back and for clothes they take what old garments the whites throw away. You see, monsieur, it costs Wembo here absolutely nothing to live."

Dykeman laughed and said, "What of that? It's much cheaper for you, too, isn't it? You couldn't bring white printers out here and pay them a hundred and fifty francs a month."

"Oh, well—if you look at it that way." The editor displayed annoyance.

Wembo had returned to his printer's stick. Dykeman, watching the Balubas industriously getting together the forthcoming issue of the newspaper, remarked as he turned to go that he certainly thought education was a wonderful thing.

"These poor chaps are looking forward now, not backward," he said. "Wembo has become a useful citizen. So have the others. It's a fine thing."

The editor shrugged and went back to his proof sheets.

III.

Elizabethville was as hot and sleepy looking as ever when Dykeman visited it again a month later. He had been as far as Bukama, the end of the railroad, three hundred miles north, and had spent some time along the route visiting the mines that were rapidly making the copper industry preëminent in the Kongo. He had also stopped at Mr. Hawser's mission school near Kambove. Mr. Hawser had modestly accepted the congratulations he offered, smilingly acknowledging that he was much encouraged by the success of such useful citizens as Wembo, whom he remembered with distinct pleasure; and he was very hopeful that the work might be extended so that all Africa might be rescued permanently from the slough of ignorance and uselessness.

"It is only necessary," Mr. Hawser had said, proudly showing his visitor the hundred or more Baluba pupils working at the business of learning various trades in the mission school, "to plant the seed of civilization. It grows without hindrance, for there is a task and a place and an opportunity for every one of these natives, once he is educated in a Christian way."

And Dykeman, pausing between trains at Elizabethville on his way to Capetown and a home-bound ship, was able to add much in his notebook, now crammed with a wealth of material of many strange and fine things

about Africa that would make the series of articles he had been commissioned to write a perfect gold mine of information.

He was particularly glad that he would be able to write with the authority of an eyewitness of the tremendous human influence civilization was having in Africa, amounting to a spiritual and mental reclamation quite apart from the materiality of commercial enterprise, invention and other factors that had long since made the term Darkest Africa a misnomer. He was impressed with the apparent permanency of this powerful human influence.

Nothing he had seen had so captured his interest, spurring the imagination to picture a dormant race awake and doing, as the shop of *L'Etoile du Kongo* with its half dozen native printers getting out the paper. So he dropped around for another visit. He found the editor talking in gusty French, gesticulating, to a fat little Kafir at the middle type case, a person Dykeman was sure he had never seen before and whose work evidently was not wholly pleasing to the excited editor.

"Where's Wembo?" Dykeman asked.

"Gone back," said the Belgian, frowning. "I don't understand. Back where?"

"To his native kraal—where else? Back where they all go, monsieur. He left last week. I could see the signs and I knew it was about time, so I sent up to old Hawser's school and got another boy. That fat one there came only yesterday. The fool's fingers are all thumbs and he's the stupidest of the lot." The Belgian shook his head sadly.

Dykeman said, badly jolted, "You mean Wembo deliberately quit his job to go back to his old life? After he'd become such a useful citizen?"

The little editor looked hard at his visitor, and then smiled understandingly.

"Really, monsieur, then you actually believed these boys could be made into printers—that they would remain always? Ah, no, monsieur. It is not like that. I thought you were having your joke when you were here before and you talked so curiously. But—didn't I tell you then that they wanted only the money?"

"Yes, yes, of course," said Dykeman, perplexed. "We all work for money. But this is quite a different matter. Wembo was earning high wages and climbing the ladder. Why should he throw away such wages and ruin his chances for the future?"

"An easy question, monsieur, easily answered," said the editor. "Every centime Wembo got he sent to his father to buy cattle with. Cattle, not money, you know, is the native's standard of wealth. A little time at school, a few years of work, and when the herd of cattle is large enough he goes back. He is very rich with so many cattle, richer than any other young man in the village, and he can lord it now and buy wives with his cattle and live in ease and splendor, unhampered by the ways of white men. You can educate people, but you cannot pound ambition into them. Why should Wembo work? Why should any of them, except to get rich quickly? Not one I've had ever stayed here five years. See that bony fellow carrying the galley? He'll be the next one to go, for he's been here nearly as long as Wembo, and he must have many cattle saved up by this time. Comical, isn't it, monsieur?"

Not at all comical, Dykeman thought, when he came to make the necessary revisions in his notebook. Lost in the erasures was a splendidly inspiring story.

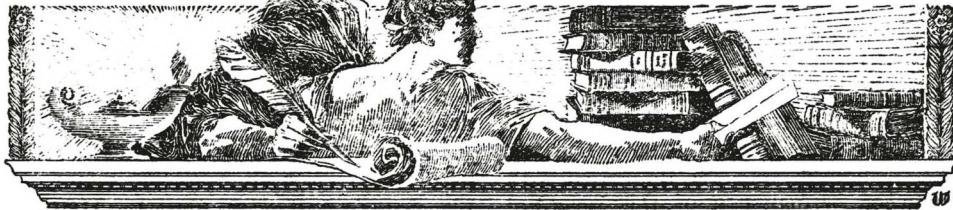


A TRIBUTE TO DELAWARE

SENATOR THOMAS J. HEFLIN of Alabama was in the midst of a speech in the upper House when Senator Ball of Delaware undertook to correct one of his statements.

"I thank the senator," retorted Heflin suavely. "I thank the gentleman from that great State which has three counties at low tide and two counties at high tide, for his advice."

A CHAT WITH YOU



HIGH up in the northern Pyrenees, fronting the deep grotto of Aurignac, clustered the skin tents and log shelters of the tribe. Heaps of 'bleaching bones and castaway stone implements marked this as a permanent dwelling of the Hunting Folk.

They hunted in the richest game preserve the world has ever seen. Europe was still unravished. Glacier covered were her Alps, and the northern peninsula—the place we call Scandinavia—still wore a sheathing of glittering ice and virginal snow. Those were the days of high winds and terrible dust storms and it was better to have a camp near a cave.

* * * *

The men of the tribe were off on a hunt and only the women remained in the fortress encampment. Fat, incredibly fat from a modern point of view, skin clad and patient, these belles of thirty centuries ago looked down into the blue valley of the Garonne and wondered how their men had fared. Mammoth hunting they had gone: and now, had they got the mammoth or had the mammoth got them?

* * * *

Keen Eye, slimmest of the girls, saw them first and screamed. An hour later they emerged from the trees into plain sight, marching Indian file up the slopes, great tall Cro Magnons all of them over six feet in height. Some carried spears and some

dragged behind them the skins and dismembered portions of their prey.

Here were the invincible braves, the might and puissance of Aurignac! At sight of them, marching steadily up the devious mountain way, there came a shrill cry of joy and pride from their women. Its wild, soprano wailing floated out over the valley like the cry of birds. Back through the pure, unsullied air came a harsh, yet stirring sound, something like our human speech, something like the cry of animals, yet altogether terrifying—the hunting cry of the men of Aurignac.

* * * *

As they emerged from the groves of spruce and ilex it was seen that two of them bore no burden. One was Old Man, the chief of the tribe, the other was a tall youth who marched with head bowed on his bosom in a moody preoccupation.

* * * *

Fattest One, social leader of the cave, viewed the young man with an appearance of disfavor.

"That Singer!" she cried, shrugging her shoulders under magnificent furs. "He is no man. What does he do? He kills no game, he catches no fish and yet he is tall and strong. Why does he live?"

"Ah, but he talks!" said Keen Eye.

"What is talk?" said Fattest One. "For the good of the tribe he should be killed.

To-night I shall speak to Strong One, my man. He loves me and will do what I say for am I not the fattest woman in all the Pyrenees?"

* * * *

That night, painted with ocher like our own Indians, the men sat about the great fire. Laying aside his marrow bone and standing erect Strong One gazed upon the wild, fire-lit faces and sinewy forms of his tribesmen.

"Old Man," he said addressing the ancient and rather sleepy chief, "has it not been said by the fathers that each must do his share for the common good?"

Old Man was conservative and a stand-patter by nature. He grunted.

"We have all done our part," said Strong One. "All but one. Short One dug the pit, Fleet One tracked the mammoth, Cunning One led him to the pit, feigning to flee before him. Loud One bayed like a wolf to drive him on. Even Stumbler, who cannot run, shot him with arrows which fly faster than a man can run. And when the mammoth fell in the pit who was it that smote him with great stones so that he died?"

"Who killed the mammoth?" roared the cave men in chorus.

"Who killed the great beast?" came the shrill voices of the women from the shadows behind. Of all the voices the shrillest was that of Fattest One. For the first time to-night she was wearing the necklace of bear teeth that her husband had given her. Attached to it as a pendant was the tooth of a saber-toothed tiger, the only one in Aurignac. Imagine how a million-dollar pearl necklace would feel to-day and you have the idea.

"I killed the great beast!" bellowed Strong One thumping himself on the chest.

Suddenly he crouched, hunched up his great shoulders and pointed a menacing finger at Singer who sat brooding over the fire.

He had always liked Singer well enough. His pretty wife had put him up to this.

"And what did Singer do?" he cried. "Nothing! And shall he not die?"

Again came the deep chorus of the men and the shrill song of the women:

"He who did naught must die."

* * * *

Disturbed in his meditations by the roar, Singer leaped to his feet.

"You ask me what I did," he said. "I did my share. I *saw*."

"Saw!" said Strong One. "What is seeing? How can a man help it? We all see."

"Not as I *saw*."

Full fed as they were they all bent forward at the sound of his voice. "I *saw* more than any. I *saw* it all as in a vision. I tell you it was as glorious as the clouds at sunrise. I *saw* the meaning and purpose of it, what the tribe meant and the good of it and the good of each one in it. I *saw* the wonder of life and man. Listen now to the tale of the hunt of Aurignac! Listen now to the song of the humming bowstrings and the wind that bent the poplars, and the shouting of the strong men. Listen Strong One, for this is a tale for thy children's children to tell for a thousand years. All the day long have I been making it up and it was hard to make the ending right but now I have it. Listen now, O Hunting Folk, to the best story that was ever made."

* * * *

They listened and wonder grew upon them. Under the spell of Singer's tale they beheld their daily and ordinary life as in a vision, magnified, exalted, refined and beautiful. He told the truth; indeed he had seen the tiniest things and remembered to put them in, but truth from his lips had a deeper, sweeter meaning and a nobler sound. Now, beyond all doubt, they knew themselves as men, not animals, the inheritors of all crea-

tion. They were conscious and saw themselves. The morning stars sang together.

The golden beauty of sky and forest, the violet glitter of the great ice field, the iridescent spray of the mountain waterfall—why had they not seen these things before?

Once more they hear the baying hunters, the mighty roar of the mammoth, the fury and crash of his charge. Again, rainbow arched across tree and shrubbery, they see the fleet arrows fall and the slim, erect figures of the gallant spearmen closing in upon the quarry. And now the pit has caught him, and now Strong One poised on the very edge hurls great rocks upon him.

And now they laugh when they see slow Stumbler slip and fall and almost perish. And now salt tears run down their rough cheeks when they see Stumbler's wife and baby left alone in the cave. And now they leap from their places and scream with delight when Stumbler is rescued.

For one crystalline and ineffable moment there comes the thought that at last they understand the mystery of life, the beauty and reason of it all, the meaning of it.

And now the vision fades and Singer stands before them, sweating and with heaving chest.

* * * *

For a moment silence, then a shuddering expiration of breath, then a roar of applause. The women had crept out of the cave during the recital and their voices could be heard above those of the men.

"Here," said Strong One, "take this bone and suck it. It is the best one I ever had. I love you, dear Singer. On every hunt you

must go with me and watch the brave things I do and tell of them afterward."

A dozen others clustered around Singer with similar gifts and similar requests. As he finally sank to his place something lashed through the air and dropped in ashes at his feet. It was the tiger tooth. Singer knew it well as the property of Fattest One. He knew that not so long ago Fattest One had wanted him killed. Keen Eye had warned him. And now! Were you a Cro-Magnon you would realize what such a thing meant from a pretty and fashionable woman.

Singularly enough as Singer picked up the tooth and turned it in his fingers he was thinking not at all of the charms of Fattest One, fair as she was.

What he muttered to himself was something like this:

"Women are queer. They are variable and changeable. That's a good line—variable and changeable. A knock-out. There's a story in this."

With his finger in the sand he drew the outline of a clumsy triangle.

* * * *

This is the tale of the first story ever made and you may find the skull of Singer in some French museum to prove the truth of what we say.

Singer did a lot for his tribe. Life was more interesting and more worth while because of him.

If any one asks you why you read a fiction magazine like THE POPULAR, tell them the story of Singer and the heroes of Aurignac.





Inspiring a Friendly Feeling for America All Over the World

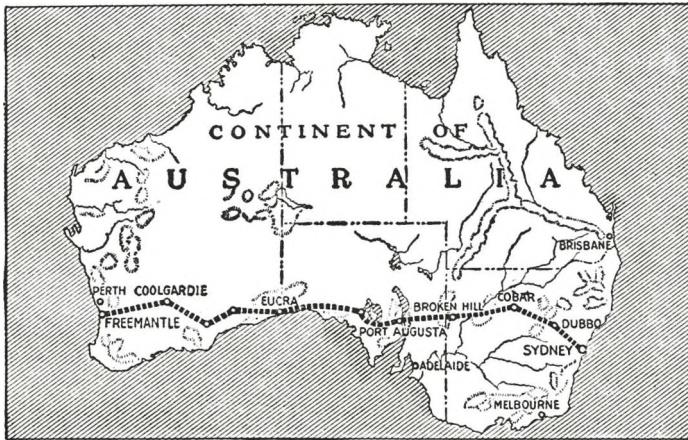
People of other Nations Accept Superiority of Hupmobile and Make It an International Institution

The high standing of the Hupmobile abroad, means even more, in a certain sense, than its strong hold on folks here at home.

American manufactured products have not always stood well in the old world, and the ungrudging admiration accorded the Hupmobile therefore carries a special significance.

The reasons for this admiration are precisely the same in Europe, Africa, South America and Asia as they are in America.

Americans admire the Hupmobile especially because of its dogged and undeviating good service under every conceivable condition.



Australia knows the Hupmobile favorably and well. The car has been exported to Australia almost ever since it was first manufactured. The map shows the route of the Hupmobile's record-breaking run across the Australian continent. The distance from Fremantle to Sydney is 2677 miles—almost as far as from New York to Los Angeles. The Hupmobile traversed the continent in 7 days, 2 hours, 17 minutes, excelling the best previous record by 45 hours, 18 minutes.

It is natural that the people of other nations should be slower to accept the superiority of an American product—but in the case of the Hupmobile this superiority is accepted without question.

It is not too much to say that wherever it goes, there is bred an increased respect for the honesty of purpose, and the thoroughness, of American manufacturing methods.

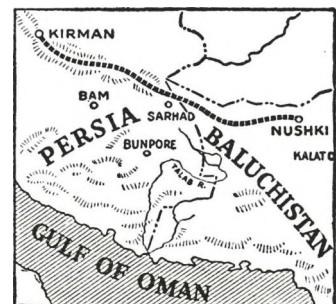
The American tourist abroad may find more lightly-constructed American cars in larger numbers, but he can be certain that no-

where will he find another American car as highly regarded as the Hupmobile.

It must be a source of satisfaction to any American to know that American products are generating a friendly feeling for America in foreign places.

It should be a special source of satisfaction to Hupmobile owners to know that the Hupmobile is not merely the car of the American family, but an international institution as well.

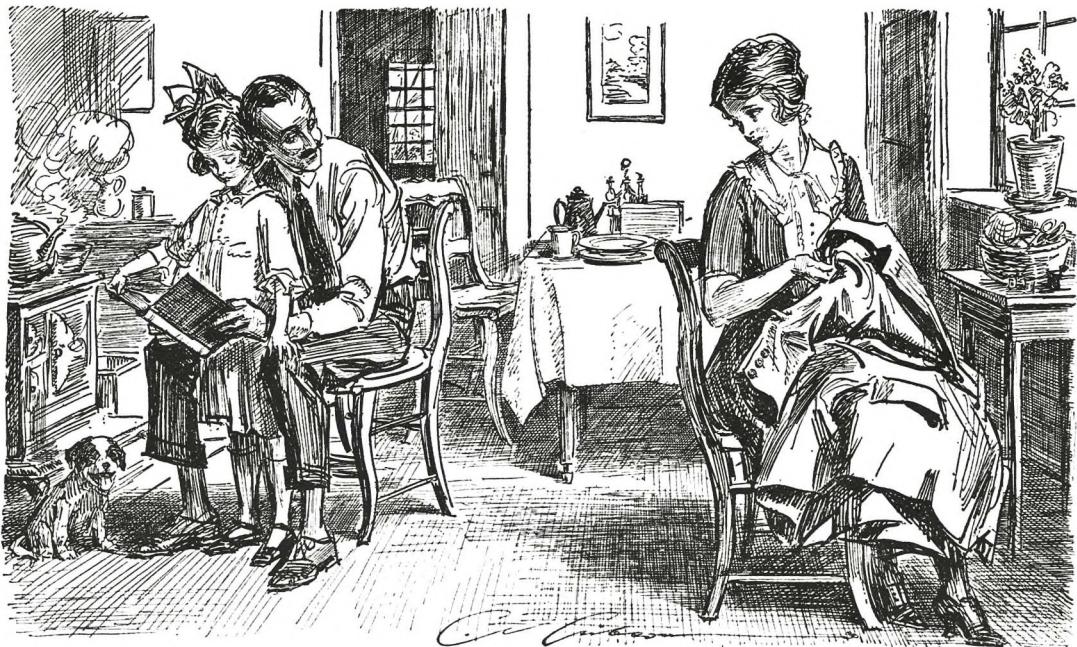
Hupp Motor Car Corporation
Detroit, Michigan



The dotted line shows the route taken by a detail commanded by Sgt. G. R. Cox, South Persian Rifles, in driving two Hupmobiles from Nushki, Baluchistan, to Kirman, South Persia. The first motor cars to travel this route, the Hupmobiles made the 800 miles of rugged mountain passes, rocky, dry river beds and clinging sand in 19 days, and were none the worse for their severe trip.

Hupmobile

It Pays to Keep Folks Well



341,000 Happy People—

in the United States and Canada sat down last year to their Christmas dinners who wouldn't have been there if the death rate for 1921 had been the same as it was in 1911.

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Anti-tuberculosis associations, welfare organizations, nursing orders and legislative bodies have all taken a hand. The results show that lives have been and *can* be lengthened by the wise use of money, and that such an investment pays dividends in dollars.

When a breadwinner is taken away—

the family is poorer. A community suffers a very definite economic loss when it loses a number of lives. It increases the cost of living to have workers die needlessly. It increases taxes—to say nothing of the sorrow and unhappiness involved.

It Pays to Keep Folks Well

As soon as people realize—

that the wealth of the nation depends upon the men and women who make up the nation, the tremendous financial importance of prolonging human life becomes clear to everybody.

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Even the unskilled laborer who works his full life-time makes the nation richer by several thousand dollars. It follows, therefore, that down to the smallest tax payer in the last small community, everybody is better off when lives are saved.

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has saved the lives of fathers, mothers and children.

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Take the figures home to yourself. Suppose you are a Metropolitan policy holder—one of these 55,000 saved from death—your family is richer by the money you earned in 1921 and has been saved expenses incident to illness and death.

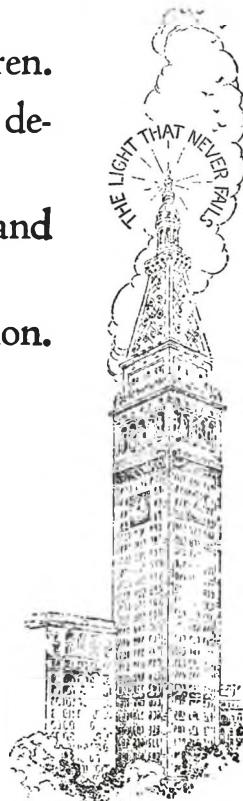
Other Metropolitan policy holders have been benefited by the premiums you paid in 1921, just as you have benefited by other lives saved.

The nation is better off for your contribution to the Country's wealth in 1921.

And, best of all, your family and friends are richer and happier by the fact that you yourself are still alive.

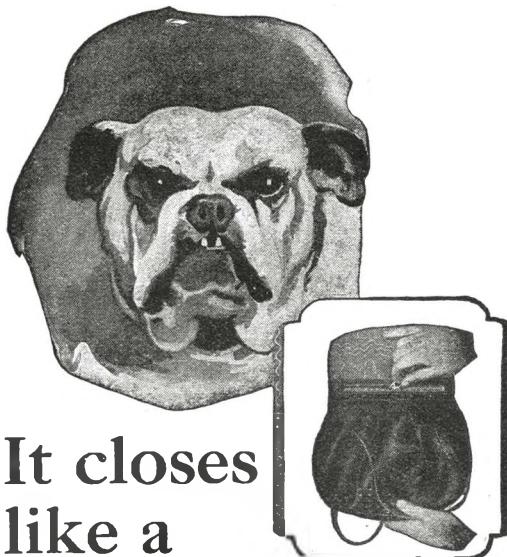
The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will send its booklet, "How to Live Long," to anyone who asks for it.

HALEY FISKE, President



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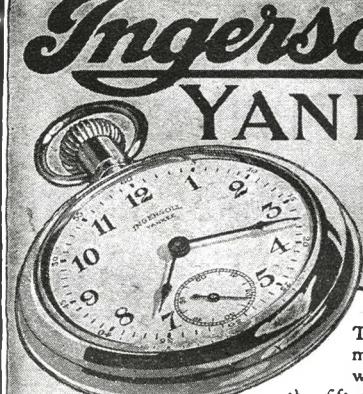
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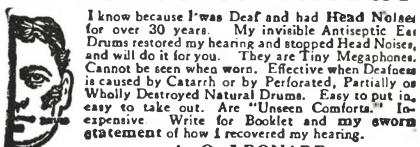
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Two tires for less than the usual cost of one, and a free inner tube with each tire! No double treads or sewed tires. Our big volume means best tire values. Act now and cut your tire cost in two. Thousands of steady customers are getting full mileage out of these tires and you, too, can get 12,000 MILES

You can see the mileage in our tires. Order and prove it—but order now! This is a special lot selected for record-breaking sale. Supply limited and going double quick.

Note the Bargain Prices on Two Tires of Same Size:

Size	1 Tire	2 Tires	Size	1 Tire	2 Tires
30 x 3	\$ 7.25	\$11.95	32 x 4 1/2	\$13.45	\$21.45
30 x 3 1/2	8.25	13.95	33 x 4	13.95	22.45
32 x 3 1/2	9.45	15.45	34 x 4 1/2	14.45	23.45
31 x 4	10.65	16.90	35 x 4 1/2	14.95	24.90
32 x 4	11.85	19.75	36 x 4	15.45	25.45
33 x 4	12.45	20.90	33 x 5	15.65	25.95
34 x 4	13.25	21.95	35 x 5	15.90	26.45
36 x 4	14.95	25.95	37 x 5	16.45	26.95

SEND NO MONEY! Shipment C. O. D. express or parcel post. Examine tires on arrival and if not fully satisfied return same at our expense and your money will be promptly refunded. State whether straight side or clincher. DON'T DELAY! ORDER NOW!

ALBANY TIRE & RUBBER COMPANY
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“I can hear you with the MORLEY PHONE. It is invisible, weightless, comfortable, inexpensive. No metal, wires nor rubber. Can be used by anyone, young or old.

The Morley Phone for the

DEAF

is to the ears what glasses are to the eyes. Write for Free Booklet containing testimonials of users all over the country. It describes causes of deafness; tells how and why the MORLEY PHONE affords relief. Over one hundred thousand sold.

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7 Diamond Solitaire Cluster \$5.00 A Month

Seven perfectly cut, blue white Diamonds are so closely set in Platinum, and so exquisite is the workmanship that the solitaire resemblance is actually startling. Looks like a single 2 ct. Diamond. Don't send us a penny—we'll send the Ring entirely FREE. If satisfied, pay \$5.00, then send the balance in ten months, \$5.00 a month. If not satisfied, return.

FREE De Luxe Diamond Book
gains in Diamonds, Watches and Jewelry—ten months to pay on everything. Write to Dept. 182-P.

**Special
Price
\$55**

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Velvet Grip Hose Supporters

both hold and protect the thinnest gauze stockings. The Oblong All-Rubber Button clasp—an exclusive feature of the Velvet Grip—will not rip or tear the sheerest hosiery.

Regardless of your manner of corseting, you will find it worth while to insist on having Velvet Grip Hose Supporters on your favorite corset.

Sold Everywhere

GEORGE FROST CO., BOSTON, Makers of
Velvet Grip Hose Supporters
for All the Family

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME

You can earn \$15 to \$50 a week writing show cards in your own home.—No canvassing.—A pleasant profitable profession easily and quickly learnt by our new simple graphic block system. Artistic ability not necessary.—We teach you how, and supply you with work—Distant no object. Full particulars and booklet free.

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Easy to Play Easy to Pay

BUESCHER

True-Tone Saxophone

Saxophone Book Free
Tells when to use Saxophone—singly, in sextet, or in regular band; how to tune; how to play; parts in orchestra and many other things you would like to know.

Easiest of all wind instruments to play and one of the most beautiful. You can learn the scale in an hour's practice and play popular music in a few weeks. You can take your place in a band within 90 days, if you so desire. Unrivalled for home entertainment, church, lodge or school. In big demand for orchestra dance music. The portrait above is of Donald Clark, Soloist with the famous Paul Whiteman's Orchestra.

Free Trial! You may order any (34) without paying one cent in advance, and try it six days in your own home, without obligation. If perfectly satisfied, pay for it on easy payments to suit your convenience. Mention the instrument interested in and a complete catalog will be mailed free.

BUESCHER BAND INSTRUMENT CO.
Makers of Everything in Band and Orchestra Instruments
4234 BUESCHER BLOCK ELKHART, INDIANA

Model 335 Stevens double-barrel shotgun. RETAIL PRICE, including tax, \$32.40. Other models \$19.50 to \$36.00.



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For three generations Stevens has built shotguns and small bore rifles for the American sportsman.

For three generations the accuracy and endurance of Stevens guns have remained unsurpassed.

You can buy a more expensive gun than a Stevens; but you cannot buy better shooting qualities. *Shotgun or rifle—a Stevens firearm is accurate.*

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For rifling, Stevens uses a special process, slow scraping system removing less than the thirtieth part of a thousandth of an inch with each pass of the rifling cutter.

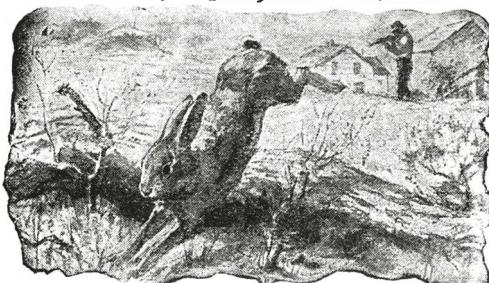
A slow method—but when finished a Stevens barrel is accurate.

When you buy a Stevens you are buying unexcelled shooting qualities and you are paying a reasonable price.

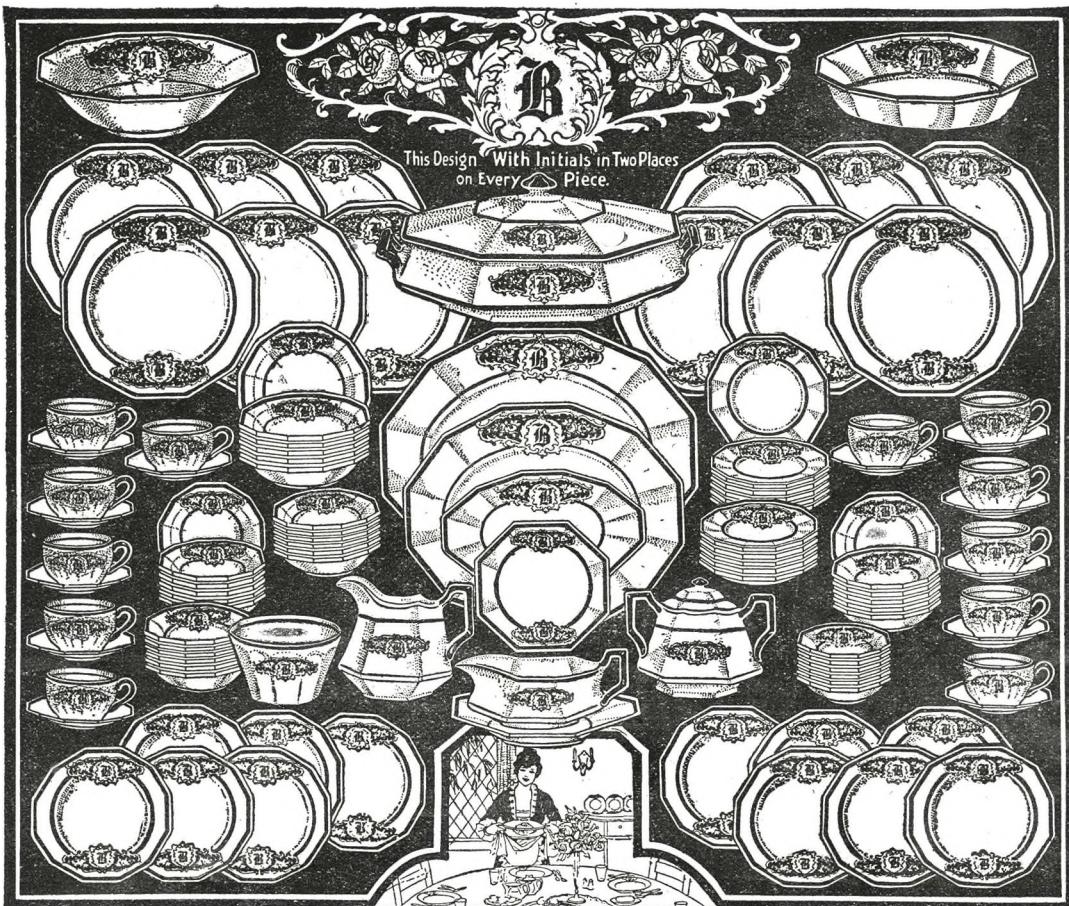
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Stevens



This Superb 110-piece Set, with initial in 2 places in wreath with 5-color decorations on every piece and gold covered handles, consists of:
 12 Dinner Plates, 9 inches
 12 Breakfast Plates, 7 inches
 12 Cups
 12 Saucers

12 Soup Plates, 7½ inches
 12 Cereal Dishes, 6 inches
 12 Fruit Dishes, 5½ inches
 12 Individual Bread and Butter Plates, 6½ inches
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1 Platter, 11½ inches
 1 Celery Dish, 8½ inches
 1 Sauce Boat Tray, 7½ inches
 1 Butter Plate, 6 inches
 1 Vegetable Dish, 10½ inches, with lid (2 pieces)

1 Deep Bowl, 8½ inches
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 1 Gravy Boat, 7½ inches
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Brings 110-Piece Gold Decorated Martha Washington Dinner Set

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Wonderful artistic effect is given by the wreath and rich design surrounding the initial. Your initial appears in 2 places on every piece.

All Handles Covered with Gold

Every handle is covered with polished gold. Shipping weight about 90 lbs.

Order No. 324DDMA13. Bargain price, \$32.85. Pay \$1 now, \$3 monthly.

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I enclose \$1.00. Send 110-piece Golden Martha Washington Dinner Set No. 324DDMA13. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If not satisfied, will ship it back and you will refund my \$1.00 and pay transportation charges both ways. If I keep it, I will pay \$3.00 per month until full price, \$32.85, is paid. Title remains with you until final payment is made.

Name _____

Street Address _____

R. F. D. _____ Box No. _____

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Give Initial Wanted (Any One Letter) _____

Eveready Spotlight with the 300-ft. Range



There's an Eveready Flash-light complete for every purpose from \$1.35 to \$4



WATCH YOUR STEP—AN EVEREADY FLASHLIGHT PREVENTS ACCIDENTS

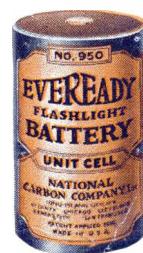
Carry an Eveready Spotlight every night!

The 300-ft. electric beam of this Eveready Spotlight *prevents* accidents by revealing danger. For motorists it's as necessary as a spare tire, to read road signs and meet emergencies; a perfect portable light for campers and Boy Scouts; for motor boating, canoeing, rowing; for every vacation need.

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Eveready Flashlight Batteries
give brighter light, last longer;
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In hot water or cold, in soft water or hard, there's nothing like Colgate's for the luxurious, moist lather that means an easy shave.

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