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JUNE

THE

ARGOSY

JUNE, 1914

THE ARGOSY

JUNE, 1914

Gold Grabbers

by
William
Wallace
Cook



Complete Book-length Novel *of the West*

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holds Royal
Warrants of
Appointment
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Four Queens
and
Three Kings

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R. J. REYNOLDS
TOBACCO CO.
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THE ARGOSY

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A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE

GOLD GRABBERS.....WILLIAM WALLACE COOK 481

An old Argosy favorite returns this month with a mining story that is essentially dramatic, worked out with well-drawn characters and backed by a plot that combines great interest, colorful background, and exciting climaxes. Mr. Cook's work is always characterized by painstaking care in truthful details and accuracy in local color. This is the story of a young man who becomes involved in a mystery surrounding the looting of a mine owned by a financier who was once his "pardner" as a prospector, but who has dropped some of his ideals as he acquired a fortune. There is a woman and love interest—altogether a fine combination of clean, interesting story.

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

THE THING THAT WAS CAESAR'S.....GEORGE BRYDGES RODNEY 562

War in Mexico, war in the Balkans—always war in the trail of the silver box which a Chinese priest had aboard a plague ship in the China Sea. This silver box was made from the thirty pieces of silver which was the price paid to Judas for the betrayal, and it had been in Cæsar's legions. Captain Rodney wrote "Sailing with Morgan" and his same fine style and realism are found in this stirring tale, which is long as the ordinary novel. It is as good as a trip to China, and Rodney has been over the ground.

NINE SELECTED SHORT STORIES

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ISSUED MONTHLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President EDWARD H. THRENTON, Secretary GEORGE W. H. POPE, Treasurer
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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Rates in The Munsey Magazines

	Live Ads	Special Commission Rate
The Munsey	\$2.00	
The Argosy	1.30	\$4.49
Railroad Man's Magazine80	Less 3% cash discount.
All-Story Cavalier60	
Weekly40	
July Argosy Form Close May 28th.	\$4.70	

"A New Piece In Fiction" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the classified departments of the Munsey Publications. Mailed anywhere on request.

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EXCLUSIVE TERRITORY NOW BEING ALLOTTED FOR Little Giant Lift and Force Pump. Only thing of its kind; it has free field wherever there's plumbing. Removes all stoppages in pipes, saves plumbers' bills, prevents noxious gases. Everyone wants it, everyone can afford it, everyone can operate it. As strong in business world as among homes, selling at top speed. 50,000 already in use. I can grant you absolute monopoly and fix you for life, if you are the right man. Address at once, J. E. Kennedy, Dept. A.C., 30 East 42nd Street, New York City.

WHAT ARE YOU SELLING? If we had your address we'd show you how to sell more, send you free pocket sample and largely increase your profits—not one week, but weekly. 38, Mig. Co., 200 W. 42nd Street, New York.

SILK HOSE FREE to Agents Selling Famous Triplewear guaranteed hosiery. All grades cotton and silk direct from mill. Great money making proposition. \$30 week. Write to-day. Triplewear Mills, Dept. H-5, No. 12th, Philadelphia, Pa.

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AGENTS—ONLY ONE IN THE WORLD. KEROSINE (Coal-Oil) Self-Heating Lamp. Absolutely fireless. Women will adopt it. J. E. Daugherty make \$300 in one month. Your territory open. Write quick for terms. Thomas Iron Co., 207 West Street, New York.

WE'VE GOT A NEW PRODUCT With New Sales Plans. (New Managers and live wire salespeople. Will make you sit up and take notice. We've got the goods! Write Toxax, 227 Lexington Street, Utica, N. Y.

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PHOTO PILLOW TOPS, PORTRAITS, FRAMES, SHEET Pictures, Photo China Plates. Reports credited. Prompt shipments. Samples on catalogue. Free to agents. 30 days' credit. Jas. C. Bailey Co., Desk C-1, Chicago, Ill.

SAVE YOUR LEGS.—WHY WORK SO HARD FOR SO little when our line assures you large profits and the work requires such little effort. Investigate this. Samples free. Luther Gooden Co., 208 N. 5th Avenue, Chicago.

AGENTS, SIGNMEN—Make \$5-\$10 daily handling our Metal-lic Letters, best cheap. Independent; your own business. No experience required; we show how. Sample, instructions. Free. Standard Sign Co., Ardenbick Bldg., Brooklyn, N. Y.

HONEST MAN WANTED IN EACH TOWN to distribute free advertising premiums; \$15.00 a week to start; experience unnecessary. Construction requires. Address McLean, Black & Co., 4 S. Beverly Street, Boston, Mass.

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Agents—The Biggest Seller Out. Beer in concentrated form. A good glass of Beer wanted by everybody. So convenient—cheap—show it, sell them all. Carry right in your pocket. Guaranteed demand—big profits—no money. Just a postal for Free Sample proposition. The Andrew Co., Dept. 1032, Cincinnati, O.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

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\$50.00 A WEEK UP. ALL THE FREE CLOTHES YOU Want to Wear simply to advertise us. Write today for self-measuring blanch, style chart, big book of samples, etc. Send to money. A postal card telling us how you pay expense on everything. American Wholart Mills Co., Dept. 602, Chicago.

GREATEST, Most Wonderful Offer Ever Made—\$4 eleven- piece Felted Hat and \$1 Fanning Set—all sells for \$1.25. 100% profit. Make \$10 daily sure. Write to-day. Pierce Chemical Company, 906 W. Lake Street, Chicago, Ill.

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AGENTS—\$40.00 A WEEK. Starting new hosiery proposition. Guarantee for one year. First wear twelve months or replaced. Free U. W. Noile make \$30 in one day. Write to terms. Thomas Mfg. Co., 267 West St., Dayton, O.

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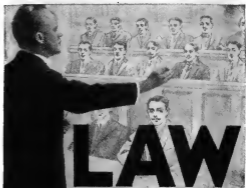
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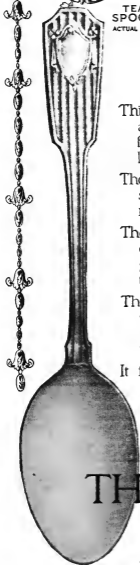
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No. 3

Gold Grabbers



by
William Wallace Cook

(A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE.)

CHAPTER I.

A \$10,000 STAKE.

ON the rocks again, Bremerton?"

The man in the worn corduroys fairly writhed. Deane was the sort of fellow who could press your palm cordially with one hand while he smote you between the eyes with the other. A glance must have assured him that his caller was "on the rocks."

He had not asked a question; he had stated a self-evident fact and allowed the rising inflection to cloak a sneer. That the remark might cut more deeply, he had used the word "again."

Bremerton's glance crossed Deane's like steel striking flint. Sparks flew, but silently. Deane withdrew his eyes, his double chin shook with a rasping chuckle, and he scratched a match and held it to his cigar.

There were times when Bremerton loved Deane like a brother, and other

times when he hated him just as heartily.

Years past, when they were blanket-mates and roaming the deserts on the lookout for a "strike," Deane had been a good deal of a man. He had risked his life then to save Bremerton from a cloudburst in Arapahoe Cañon; and when Bremerton hated him most there came into his ears the roar of flood waters, and there flashed through his memory the picture of a friend, fighting a good fight—and for *him*. In Bremerton, that vision from the past always checked the hot, intolerant word.

Deane had fought his way to the top. True, as the architect of his own fortunes he had shown little regard for the fortunes of others; but he had been successful, vastly successful, and the papers that printed so much of him as a mining king made never a mention of wrecks left in his wake.

The steely glitter faded from Brem-

erton's eyes, and he drew a long breath and sank back in his chair. He had had his chance to rise with Deane. If he had joined him in "jumping" a certain claim, together they would have made a pauper out of a mutual friend and have divided a round million of loot.

But that was not Bremerton's way, even if it were Deane's. Bremerton had principles, and those principles had chained him to the foot of the ladder. In the five years that had passed since Deane began to rise, Bremerton had been poor, then moderately fortunate, only to become poor again.

Now he was at the lowest ebb. That is no great hardship for one who has not yet turned thirty; but, contrasted with Deane's dazzling success at thirty-five, there was something pitifully wrong in it all. For Bremerton was the more industrious, the more able, the better man in every way.

Deane's telegram had reached Bremerton just when he was at sixes and sevens regarding his next meal. He had sold his burro and pawned his watch to pay car fare to Denver.

So there he sat in the luxuriously furnished office of the mining king, contrasting his poverty with the wealth of his one-time comrade and being forcibly reminded of his repeated failures. Yes, he was on the rocks—and again.

"Silas," said Bremerton quietly, "you wired me to come, and I'm here. What do you want?"

"Now we're getting at it, old man," returned the other, waving his hand toward an open cigar-box on top of his mahogany desk. "Help yourself to a weed, and we'll smoke and talk. By George, Lee"—and the fat, red face creased into an amiable smile—"it does me a heap of good just to have you around once in a while!

"Great times we used to have, eh? Remember when the burro kicked you into the dry wash?"

Again the chuckle, while the red face grew redder. "By thunder, I can see

your legs yet, kicking skyward as you went over the bank! Up in the Harqua Halas, that was, with the grub mighty slim and our hopes almighty big.

"We were always dreaming we were no more than three feet from a million dollars; and when we woke up we always found that we were a million feet from three dollars. Oh, I don't know! I enjoyed them days."

"Why did you send for me, Silas?" persisted Bremerton, in no mood for reminiscences.

Deane shook his thick shoulders, denied himself to a caller announced by the office-boy, and allowed the mellowing influences of friendship to fade before the demands of business.

"Got a mine I want you to take hold of, Bremerton. It's down near Phoenix. If I can make a good showing with that mine I can unload it for half a million."

"Any gold in it, Deane?"

"I'll swear to that. One of the finest prospects in all that pockety country. A year ago it was paying big. Since then it has begun to slump. Can't get a man down there who's able to make a showing. The—ah—the men I send don't last."

There was something in the gleaming little eyes of Deane, just then, which Bremerton could not fathom.

"Why don't they last?" Bremerton inquired.

"Hanged if I know! The last super was shot and is now in the hospital. The one before him was also shot, but didn't have a chance to get to the hospital. Neither of 'em got enough bullion out of the proposition to offset the pay-roll."

"Why were they shot?"

"Somebody was mad, I expect. Somebody *has* to be mad, don't they, in a shooting scrape? There's a gang down there that's trying to run things and freeze me out."

The fat under jaw met the upper with a snap. "I made up my mind that I'd get somebody down there that would trim the gang—and that's why I wired you."

"Is there anything crooked about the way got hold of that property, Silas?" inquired Bremerton quietly.

"Not on your life!" and Deane's expression became exceedingly virtuous. "I got the property at a bargain, of course, intending to turn it over to a syndicate. I'll make handsomely if I can let go for half a million; but in order to do that the bullion has got to come as it did a year ago, when I took over the proposition. You go down there, Lee, and straighten things out."

"I won't stand for anything off-color, Deane."

"Confound it, that's why I want you! You can forget more in a minute about mining and milling than any expert knows in a year. I'll make it worth your while, old man. You ought to get things coming our way inside of a month. After that, keep up the good showing for six months and I'll unload."

"What am I to get out of it—except a chance to go to the hospital, if I'm lucky?"

"Oh, bosh! When you grab hold, the gang will have the first real man to deal with that I've sent down there. They'll hunt their holes, and you won't have a mite of trouble. I know *you*, or I wouldn't give you this chance.

"Of course, Bremerton, you ain't so darned old, but I guess you *sabe* it's getting pretty near time you took a start. Eh? Sure! Now, look here. I'm going to give you five hundred dollars a month, and allow you six months to make that mine a winner. How does that hit you?"

"That will amount to three thousand dollars," observed Bremerton, "provided I last for six months."

"You'll last, all right. Thunder! If you've got any white feathers concealed on your person, then it's all happened in the last five years. Time was when they called you Lee Reckless, and neither hell nor high-water threw a crimp into you."

Bremerton stirred uneasily. Reck-

less he had been called, but not justly. Occasionally he had made the most of a desperate situation, but not without care—never recklessly.

"If you want a reckless man, Deane," he said, "you don't want me."

"Come, now," insisted the other, "I guess I know who I want. This is a man's job, and you're the man for it. I'm never far wide of my trail when I size up a bunch of circumstances and pick a chap to handle 'em. But if you don't want this chance—if you are not in need of money—"

"You know I'm in need of money," was the sharp response, "and you know I'm only waiting to grab at something in the way of a chance. And that," Bremerton added a trifle grimly, "is why I'm afraid of you, Deane. I hope, for old friendship's sake, you're not trying to take advantage of my necessities."

"When you twang the sentimental string, old partner, you sure get me going! I'll crowd a stranger to the wall—it's his lookout whether or not his eye-teeth are cut—but the needs of an old friend will always hit me close to the heart. Lee, won't you see, *can't* you see, that I'm trying to do something for you?"

"Why, you and me drank out of the same coffee-can years ago; and once, when I was nigh petered in the desert, you wrung the last drop from the canteen and gave it to me. Say, do you imagine that all the money in the world could make me forget a few of those things? Dash it! I'm not so walled in with dollars that I can't break through to help a chap I think more of than I would of a blood-brother."

Bremerton listened thoughtfully. By turning a losing proposition into a winner he would help Deane to half a million. Balanced against that was the three thousand dollars he was to receive for the risk and the trouble.

As though he had read his old friend's thoughts, Deane leaned forward and dropped a confiding hand on his knee.

"But five hundred a month," he went on, "isn't all I'm willing to do for you. There's a bonus in the work. Make a showing, help me to unload, and there's a ten-thousand-dollar stake for you to tuck away in your jeans. Maybe that wouldn't be a boost, eh? Bremerton, it would start you on the way to Easy Street."

"Tell me more about the mine, Deane."

"Hanged if I do! It's down there, and you can see it for yourself. Make a personal acquaintance with it. I'll give you a letter and a power of attorney; you can handle the proposition just as though you owned it."

"What is the name of the man who is now in the hospital?"

"Lacey—Gordon Lacey."

"I don't want to butt in and take his job away from him."

Deane fell back in his chair with a choppy laugh. From under a paper-weight on his desk he took a yellow slip.

"Read that," said he. "It's a telegram I got from Lacey the same day I wired you. Oh, I guess you're not taking anybody's job away from him."

The telegram was brief and to the point:

Accept resignation. I am done and probably done for.

GORDON LACEY.

"I'll advance your first month's pay, Bremerton," said Deane as the telegram was quietly returned to him.

"All right," returned Bremerton. "I'll take the job."

"Hooray! When will you start?"

"To-morrow morning. Now, then, tell me the name of the mine, just where I'll find it, and give me any other particulars that will help me."

For fifteen minutes the two were in close and earnest conversation; but, in the talk, Deane was strangely reticent about some things and full of detail regarding others. When Bremerton left the office he had a check for five hundred dollars, the confident good wishes of Deane, and a vague idea that

he was taking rather a desperate leap in the dark.

After all, it was that ten-thousand-dollar stake that settled the question, so far as Lee Bremerton was concerned.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRIGHT FACE OF DANGER.

ON his feet and in health, Gordon Lacey must have been a fine figure of a man. With an eye keen for the architecture of bone and sinew, framing that mystery of the spirit which makes a human being worth while, Bremerton read the late superintendent of the Mariquita Mine for what he was.

Days in hospital, with strength ebbing and flowing about the misty Borderland, had pinched and whitened the face of the sick man. Yet, close though he was to physical wreck, Lacey was superb.

It was nine in the evening when Bremerton came to him. The young interne at the office desk was doubtful whether the patient could be seen. With Lacey the danger-point was past, and he was mending, but up to that hour he had been denied to visitors. Besides, it was too late for visitors, anyway.

"Five minutes is all I ask with him," pleaded Bremerton.

A nurse was called and sent to the ward. She returned with the announcement that Lacey insisted on a brief interview with the man who was stepping into his shoes at the Mariquita. So Bremerton went up, and the man in the white bed and his visitor exchanged looks and were straightway on friendly footing.

"You may have just five minutes, Mr. Lacey," said the nurse, glancing at the open-face watch on her breast.

"Five minutes will do," and the patient peered at Bremerton with a haggard smile.

"What can you tell me that will be of help, Lacey?" Bremerton asked.

"I don't want to tax your strength, and I should not have come at this hour if another would have served. It was after seven when I reached Phoenix, and by sunrise to-morrow I shall be on my way into the hills. In a few words give me the gist of the situation."

"What did Deane tell you?"

"A good deal, but nothing bearing on the real trouble. With two superintendents dealt with as you and the other have been, in a mining district supposed to be peaceable and law-abiding, there's a deep grievance somewhere. What was it Deane left unsaid?"

"It is all a mystery to me, Bremerton." Lacey picked thoughtfully at the bedclothes with his gaunt, trembling fingers. "You took the job on Deane's plain say-so that everything was square?"

"Yes."

"So did I. I have had hard places before and got the whip-hand of them, but this work at the Mariquita came near being my finish. When I first came I tried to fill out the gaps Deane left in his story.

"He secured the mine from Carruthers, who at one time lived here. I tried to locate Carruthers, but he had decamped rather suddenly, and no one knew where he could be found.

"After I had been on the job a few days Mallory came and told me *his* side, and used threats. I always look with suspicion upon a cause that is bolstered up with threats. I was short enough with Mallory, and then I was downed with a cowardly shot from the brush."

"Who is Mallory? Deane did not mention him."

"Mallory bonded the mine from Carruthers, and failed to come across with the cash when the time limit expired."

"Ah!" murmured Bremerton. "And what did Mallory tell you, Lacey?"

"No use going into that. The old scoundrel will see you soon and tell you the same thing. What I want you to

know, what I want you to understand, is this: if ever you looked on the bright face of danger, and felt the ground opening beneath you and your feet slipping toward bottomless deeps, remember your peril when Mallory's girl confronts you, as she surely will."

"A woman!" A faint smile crossed the strong, sun-browned face of Bremerton. "How is Mallory's girl mixed up in this?"

"Sometimes I have thought she is the very soul of all the plot and counterplot which brought poor old Griggsby to his end and came so near getting me."

Bewildered lines puckered around the sunken, gleaming eyes: "But I don't know; I don't know. Angel or she-demon, I did not last long enough at the Mariquita to discover. When she smiled I found my danger greatest. She sent for me, told me she wanted to give me information of value, and in riding to meet her I was snared like a helpless rabbit."

Lacey's voice quivered with earnestness as he added: "As you value your life, Bremerton, beware of Mariquita Mallory!"

Bremerton would have laughed; but out of respect for this strong spirit that had tried and failed, he kept the laugh in his throat. A few women he had known, and all of the best, and he had yet to find one who could make a fool of *him*. His one love was the silent places—God's great outdoors, where mountain and plain were ribbed with gold, his for the finding. A woman could have no part in that.

"I can see you think I am babbling like an idiot," went on Lacey, still gravely and earnestly; "but if I could tell you nothing else, that one thing I want you to know: beware of Mariquita Mallory. Mallory himself you can take in your two hands and deal with him as an honest man deals with a scoundrel; but a woman, a beautiful woman—Bremerton, that is different."

The nurse came toward the bed, her eyes on the watch.

"I am afraid you must stop now," said she. "Only five minutes, Dr. Preston said, Mr. Lacey."

"Just one thing more, Bremerton," the sick man continued. "I had to leave King, the cyanid expert, in charge. He is a capital cyanid expert, but a poor hand with men. The quicker you reach the mine the better."

He lifted and held out his hand. "Remember what I have told you about Mariquita Mallory. Good-by and good luck."

Bremerton clasped the hand cordially and gratefully and left the ward. Once clear of the hospital building he looked up at the round moon in the blue velvet sky, hesitated a second, then laid a course that carried him directly away from the hotel.

He was not a stranger in that town. Two years before he had outfitted there for a prospecting trip into the Harqua Halas. Now he wanted to get away by himself and think.

His word had been given to Deane, and he had taken Deane's money. For better or for worse, he had plunged into this undertaking at the Mariquita Mine.

The key-note of his character was loyalty, and nothing could shake his determination to give to Deane's interests the best that was in him. Lacey's words, however, had plunged him into a train of reflection none too pleasant.

His aimless feet brought him presently to the town ditch, where the waters rippled musically and the moonlight silvered the cottonwoods, and where from the soft recesses of the night came the notes of a whippoorwill.

Out of the dim past his memory constructed a similar scene. He had gone into camp at a water-hole; there were cottonwoods like those whose white trunks now rose around him, and then, as now, a whippoorwill sang in the distance.

But on that night, as he recalled, he had been awakened by the cracking of

a twig, and had fought in the moonlight with a roving Mexican who had tried to steal his burro and his grub-pack.

Suddenly he paused, straightened erect, and listened. As by the water-hole so long ago, here by the Phoenix town ditch he heard a stealthy footfall behind him. Instinctively his hands clenched, and he braced himself for an encounter. Another moment and the mood passed. With a low laugh he leaned against the trunk of a tree.

"Well, friend," he called, "are you following me, or does it just happen that you are on my trail?"

The dark figure which his eyes had glimpsed came out of the shadow and into a splotch of moonlight. A large man in a broad-brimmed hat stood out against the dusky background clear as a silver print. The head was shaggy with hair and beard, and in the dark of the hat-brim two eyes glowed like points of flame.

"My name's Mallory," said a husky voice, "and I've been following you ever since you struck town. Mr. Bremerton, ain't it?"

So this was Mallory, appearing as Lacey had foretold, only somewhat before the time Bremerton had expected him.

"Yes, this is Bremerton. I'd like to inquire, Mallory, why you have favored me with your attention?"

"We'll get to that," was the answer as the speaker drew closer. "You've just been to the hospital. Picked out a comfortable place there against the time you're ready for it?"

"Did Griggsby pick out a place? If he did, what good did it do him? He never lived to get to the hospital, did he?"

"I don't know about Griggsby, and I don't know who put Lacey where he is. All I do know is that Deane will never get any good out of the Mariquita Mine, and those who try to help him will never get no good out of it, either. Deane is a cutthroat, a pirate, a black-hearted swine who—"

"You are talking of a friend of mine, Mallory," Bremerton interrupted sharply.

"Friend?" A husky, jeering laugh came with the word. "A fine friend of yours, when he sends you into such a trap as that at the Mariquita.

"You're wonderin' why I'm so interested in your movements, Bremerton. I got a reason. You'd no sooner signed on with Deane than I knew of it. A telegram from Denver was relayed to me in the hills. I came to town, and have been waitin' for you. Since you got here I have trailed around after you, looking for a chance to give you a bit of advice. Just out of kindness of heart, that's all."

Recalling Lacey's remarks about Mallory, Bremerton observed in a tone of chilling finality:

"When I want your advice, Mallory, I'll ask for it."

"No, you won't," the other returned. "You've dropped into the little pit Deane has dug for you, and you don't even *sabe* that he's *muy malo*. I allow you think I'm the villain in these here tragedies at the Mariquita, but you're wrong."

Mallory stepped still closer. He put out a hand as though to lay it on Bremerton's arm, but Bremerton stepped back.

Now that Mallory was within arm's reach of him, Bremerton could see that his beard and hair were iron gray, and that his face was old—old in ways of the world, perhaps, as well as in years.

"You act as if I was a rattler," went on Mallory, "and soundin' a warning before I strike. Man, you're way wide of your trail. The warning I'm giving you is for your own good.

"There are others who will strike if you do not listen. You're young, Lee Bremerton. Five hundred dollars a month for six months and ten thousand as a bonus if you make good—what are they?"

"Just a bait to lure you into the same fate that overtook Griggsby! Leave the Mariquita Mine alone! You can

make nothing of it, and in the end it will wring you dry and toss your bones on the scrap-heap."

"Clear out!" ordered Bremerton. "I'll have none of the threats you call advice and warning."

The old man drew a deep sigh and, without a word, turned away. He passed like a specter through the pool of moonlight and melted into the shadows beyond.

Scarcely had he vanished when footfalls reached Bremerton's ears. Swift and catlike they came from either side and from behind.

Bremerton was a man who always stood his ground. He squared himself now to meet what was to come. Vague, shadowy shapes were closing in, gliding toward him swiftly from three different directions. If *that* was Mallory's game—

CHAPTER III.

THE SILVER BALL.

THERE was no challenge, no parley. Out from among the white-trunked cottonwoods hurried fantom shapes and in grim silence fell upon Bremerton. One moment he saw them coming, and the next moment he was among them and fighting.

He had only his bare hands. His assailants were armed with clubs; and one of them had a quirt, for its thongs fell stingingly over Bremerton's face and throat.

The hot blood leaped in the prospect-or's veins. These cowards—four or five or half a dozen of them—were upon him in a crowd with their whips and their bludgeons.

They were like a pack of wolves. Outraging every principle of fair play, they would smother him under a weight of numbers and give him no chance for himself.

Circumstances like these were more than enough to arouse all the savage resentment in Bremerton's nature. In a flash he became the Lee Reckless of

those old days with Deane—a cornered wildcat—a cave man with his back to the wall—a fury, with all the seething elemental passions uppermost.

His foes were many, and he must take them one by one. While he charged a single vague shape, he was forced to run a gantlet of blows that staggered and dazed him.

Yet one man crumpled under the weight of his fist, and as the ruffian groaned and pitched forward the prospector whirled and charged again.

Feet crunched and slipped in the gravelly soil; sharp, labored breathing rent the air in staccatolike notes, and over all rose the sodden thumps of the clubs. Again and again the prospector wrenched himself clear of the press.

Perhaps not one blow in half a dozen reached him, for the gloom and the excitement sent many of them wild; but the bludgeons that found their mark had a cruelly crushing strength behind them.

While he drove before him another of his foes the rest hung upon his back and belabored him viciously. Nothing kept him from his quarry. At the edge of the town canal the retreating enemy was forced to make a stand.

Bremerton glimpsed the man's swarthy, scowling face in the moonlight. The fellow had raised a club for a telling blow. Before the club could fall Bremerton grasped it and wrenched it away. Almost simultaneously his hard fist darted at the shadowy face, and the man went over the brink of the canal and into the water with a splash.

Bremerton whirled, smashing right and left with the club. Another man was struck and beaten to his knees. The prospector trampled him roughly to get at his companions.

A stick aimed at Bremerton's head glanced and struck his right arm. The arm fell limp and useless as though a bone had been snapped.

A sickening pain convulsed the prospector's whole body, but he rallied magnificently. He had lost his weapon,

and for offense and defense he had now only his left hand.

Slowly his physical powers were failing, but his resolution grew as his strength diminished. He sprang at another of his assailants, and just at the moment a pair of arms encircled his knees and he was thrown from his feet. Then the pack closed in. On his head, his shoulders, his back, rained the blows. His left arm protected his face, but finally that arm, too, dropped away.

With a choking gasp he measured his length on the ground, lying there helplessly while he fought to hold his fading senses.

The attack ceased. Some one knelt beside him and whispered hoarsely in his ear:

"This is all for now; but go out to the Mariquita Mine and worse will follow. Remember what—"

The voice died out in Bremerton's ears. A pall suddenly encompassed his faculties, and he neither heard nor realized anything more.

He drifted back to reason presently and found himself alone. His head throbbed and his whole body rebelled when he attempted to move. He ground his teeth to stifle a groan.

By degrees his brain cleared. Mallory had threatened, and Mallory's men had been handily by to make clear to him that the threats were to be taken seriously.

"They've had their chance at me," muttered Bremerton hoarsely, "and some day I'll get my chance at them."

He tried to lift himself to his knees, but the white stems of the cottonwoods danced mistily around him, and again he flattened out on the earth. Water would revive him. If he could get to the canal—

He crawled in the direction of the ditch, digging into the ground with his fingers, and pulling and pushing himself on. Pains, like daggers, stabbed him in a dozen places. For all that, he found he could use his arms and legs, so it could not be that any bones were broken.

He was coming out of that one-sided battle much better than he had any reason to hope. Although bruised and sore, he was not seriously injured.

For several minutes he lay at the edge of the canal, scooping up the water and splashing it over his face. Little by little his strength returned.

The night wind whispered soothingly among the cottonwood leaves, and the song of the whippoorwill echoed from the peaceful shadows.

But what was this? The bird, out yonder—what was it singing? With a painful effort he lifted his bruised and battered body on one elbow and stared in the direction of the misty alfalfa-fields.

Mara-keet-ah! Mara-keet-ah!

His face grew troubled. A hot trickle from a flesh-wound on his forehead overflowed and blinded his eyes. Removing a handkerchief from his pocket, he held it in the water and then passed it over his feverish face.

"I'm a crazy fool!" he mumbled.

What the whippoorwill said to the stars had long ago been established. Only his disordered fancy could make anything else out of it. His wits surely had gone far afield to imagine "*mara-keet-ah*" the burden of those flutelike notes.

What under heaven had possessed him, sick and suffering as he was, to think of "*Mariquita*" in connection with that scrap of melody?

Mariquita! Angel or she-demon—Lacey did not know which. Why, in that hour, was she in his thoughts?

Lacey had been riding to meet the girl when he was shot from the brush. Very possibly, there by the town canal, she had inspired that clubbing of the man who was to take Lacey's place. Bremerton, sopping the blood from his face with the wet handkerchief, cursed the name and her who bore it.

At last he arose to a sitting posture, wrung the linen dry, and bound up his temples with it. He was a rifle-shot from the main street of the town, and he must get back to his hotel.

A glow of electric lights hung in the sky, well beyond the shadows of the cottonwoods. His eyes measured the distance between the canal and the far-flung maze of the arcs and the incandescents. For a man with two good legs under him, the way was not far; but for Bremerton, in his present condition, it was very far indeed, and perhaps impossible.

He tried to lift himself erect; but only half succeeded when he sank to the earth again. As yet he had not mastered his aching nerves and muscles. He could crawl, at least, if he could not walk.

On hands and knees, swaying uncertainly as he went, he made his slow passage toward the edge of the cottonwoods. On the scene of his struggle with Mallory's bravos his groping fingers encountered something which puzzled him.

The object was round, about the size of his fist, and tied up in a cloth. At first he thought it a slung-shot, dropped by one of the miscreants who had worked their will with him.

He was curious enough, however, to grope in his pockets for a match, and then by its light to make a more thorough examination.

Yes, at a time when another would have thought only of his physical torments, Bremerton could give time and strength to trifles. In prospecting for gold a thousand trifles, carefully weighed, might lead to a "strike." Years of prospecting had taught him the value of the little things, and he did not neglect them.

The cloth enclosing the round object proved to be a red cotton handkerchief, carefully tied. He removed the cord, the folds of the handkerchief fell away, and a small globe of frosted silver lay revealed.

An exclamation of wonder escaped Bremerton's lips. The silver ball was a sphere of amalgam-gold coated with quicksilver, just as taken from the plates of a mill and squeezed in a chamois skin. The squeezing had

driven off some of the "quick" and given the mass its spherical form.

Of course, the ball had been dropped by one of Bremerton's assailants. It proved that at least one of the rascals was a mill man, or indirectly had something to do with a stamp-mill. This in itself was no identification, as there were hundreds of such men in that part of the country.

With the aid of another match, Bremerton examined the ball more closely. Its upper surface was a curious formation of small ridges where the folds of the chamois had been gathered together and strong pressure applied with the hands. The lower half of the sphere was smooth, save for an indentation that resembled the letter "W." Or was it an "M"?

Bremerton scowled. By some chance the Mallorys, father and daughter, were so vividly in his mind that he instinctively looked for them everywhere. He growled over his folly, replaced the ball in the handkerchief, and stowed it away in a coat pocket.

Then he would have crawled on again had a sound not reached his ears and suggested caution. It was a sound of horses' hoofs approaching slowly from the direction of the road.

He could see the rider indistinctly, coming through the heavy shadows cast by the trees. The horse moved to right and left, in a zigzag course, as though its rider were seeking something. Bremerton wondered grimly whether he or the ball of amalgam was the object of the stranger's quest.

Suddenly, while he knelt there, watching and waiting, the approaching rider passed a spot upon which the moonbeams had full play. A gasp of amazement came from Bremerton.

The silvery light touched as with a caress the bare head of a woman. The hair, shining and luxuriant, was brushed smoothly back from the temples. In its strands the stem of a full-blown rose was entangled.

The woman's face was dim, yet Bremerton could see enough of it to

know that it must have been wondrously fair. Her form was erect and gracefully, and she was mounted in a man's saddle and rode as a man would ride.

"If you happen to be looking for me," called Bremerton grimly—"this way."

The girl started, peered in the direction from which the voice had come, and quickened the pace of her horse.

"If you happen to be Lee Bremerton," said she in a voice at once soft and musical, "then I *am* looking for you."

He laughed huskily and jeeringly.

"I am very much alive," he returned, "which is probably a great disappointment to you—Miss Mariquita Mallory."

The ill-natured remark seemed to make no impression upon her. Drawing her horse to a stop, she dismounted calmly and stepped in front of Bremerton.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRL WITH THE ROSE IN HER HAIR.

BREMERTON knew this girl was Mariquita Mallory. In his mind that conviction was as fixed as fate. First had come her father, then her father's men, and now why not the girl herself? It seemed peculiarly fitting.

"Not too close!" he ordered sharply. "About where you are will be near enough."

Fear was a mental poison which his strong soul had never known. Some day, when his brain was sick and he was physically broken, he might know it; but it would not be a woman who caused his heart to fail and his courage to wane.

He commanded the girl to keep her distance, because his whole nature was in hot revolt against her and her father and their schemes of violence.

She gave his words no attention. Serenely she glided to a spot from which she could have reached forth and touched him, had she wished to do so.

"Are you badly hurt, Mr. Bremer-ton?" she asked softly.

"No," he answered shortly. "It was cowardly to set a pack of hoodlums upon an unarmed man like that."

"I agree with you, and as soon as I heard of it I came here. I want to help you, to be your friend. May I have the chance?"

There was a wistfulness in her voice which did not escape him. Lacey's warning still rang in his ears, however, and he thought she was playing a part—for purposes of her own.

"Clear out," he called roughly, "and leave me to myself. That's all I ask of you."

"Are you able to get back to your hotel?" she persisted.

"Yes."

He staggered to his feet. Swaying drunkenly, he was compelled to lay hold of a tree and support himself.

"*Madre mia*," the girl breathed, "how you must have been beaten! Oh, the fiends, the cowards!" She clasped her hands convulsively. "And you think—you think that I had a hand in this contemptible night's work!"

He could not see her face, there in the shadow, but her voice went through the phases of sympathy and indignation and reproach. Her acting was superb.

"There's no guesswork," said he sternly; "it's all a matter of fact. You're a woman, and I don't want to forget that in my talking with you. Will you go?"

"In a little while. I can't leave you like this. Are you still intending to go out to the Mariquita Mine, Mr. Bremer-ton?"

"If you and your father have any idea you can scare me, you will have to guess again. I'm going to the mine, and I'll get the goods on those who settled for Griggsby and sent Lacey to the hospital. Tell your father that. I don't suppose I have any more sand than Griggsby or Lacey, but I'm tougher, and I'm going to last long enough to do the work that brings me here."

A breath like a sigh came from the dark, slender figure confronting Bremer-ton.

"If you were not suffering," said the girl, "if I did not know you were in physical pain, I could tell you things which would make a change in your plans. I think you are a man of courage, and the brave are usually just. I can imagine that what you have heard about my father and me has not caused you to feel very friendly toward us; but don't be hasty. Reserve judgment, Mr. Bremer-ton."

"A man who will trap another with a crowd of hoodlums, as your father trapped me, wants anything but justice. If he had his deserts he would probably be in the Phoenix jail this minute; and, for all I know, you'd be there with him. You can't handle me as you did Lacey, or—"

"Stop!"

The word flashed at him daggerlike. A temper the girl had carefully concealed up to that moment darted, keen and sharp, to the surface of her nature.

For an instant Bremer-ton was surprised, and then he reflected that his rough speaking had torn away the mask and given him a glimpse of the real Mariquita Mallory.

There was a throb of sorrow and undernote of grief shuddering through that blaze of anger, but it passed him.

"Don't say something," the girl went on in a stifled voice, "that you may one day be sorry for. I am here to help you—let me repeat that again."

"And let me repeat that I want none of your help. While I am at the Mariquita, the less I see of your father and you the better."

After a brief space Mariquita stepped to her horse and laid a hand on the bit. Then she led the animal close to Bremer-ton.

"Get into the saddle," she said crisply, "and ride to your hotel. Leave the horse at the post in front, and I will either come after him myself or send for him."

Her persistence irritated Bremer-ton.

"You and your father are enemies of Deane's, and so of mine," he answered. "I don't intend to begin my work by placing myself under even a slight obligation to you. Take your horse and go away. I can shift for myself."

She stepped back into the moonlight. Her right hand lifted to the level of her eyes and a small revolver glimmered in her fingers.

"Mount!" she ordered. "This will settle the obligation business. If necessary, I can force you to be sensible. Mount and ride to your hotel, and leave the horse as I told you."

The gleam in her eyes matched the silvery sheen of the leveled weapon. Her erect, graceful figure, the moonbeams shimmering on her hair and on the rose in its thick coils, the beautiful face framed strongly in lights and shadows, and over all her dominant and resolute bearing, conspired to form a picture that stirred Bremerton strangely.

What a woman! One moment soft and gentle and pleading, and the next moment fiery with determination and enforcing her commands at the muzzle of a revolver!

The novelty, the inconsistency of it all broke over him presently, and he laughed. Nevertheless, he lifted a foot to the stirrup and climbed weakly into the saddle. He rode away, leaving Mariquita there in the moonlight.

The last he saw of her, the revolver and the hand that held it swung at her side, and he fancied a smile wreathed her shadowy lips.

It was midnight when Bremerton dismounted in front of his hotel and walked unsteadily into the office. The night clerk gasped and stared at him wonderingly.

His clothing was torn and earth-stained and in disorder, and his face was puffed and bruised, and a reddened bandage was swathed about his forehead.

"The key to seventeen," said Bremerton, bracing himself at the counter.

"Great guns!" murmured the clerk. "What has happened to you?"

He had not been on duty when Bremerton arrived, and he hastily ran his eye down the page of the open register.

"I should think, Mr. Bremerton, that you need a doctor. Let me help you up-stairs and then I will call a—"

"I can get up-stairs alone," cut in Bremerton; "and don't bother about a doctor. I'm not in such bad shape as you seem to think."

He took his key and started for the stairs. "In about five minutes," he added, halting a moment, "send up a boy with a pitcher of ice-water and some telegraph-blanks."

"If you have been beaten up and robbed by thugs, we ought to get the police busy."

"I haven't been robbed. Just had a little hard luck, that's all; and I don't want the matter to go any further. It's a case of least said soonest mended. Understand?"

"Certainly, Mr. Bremerton, but—"

Bremerton waited for no more, but slowly ascended the stairs to his room. He was weak and dizzy, and after he had snapped on the electric light he fell sprawling on the bed. His aches and pains seemed to have been lost in a paralyzing nausea that filled his body.

Had he not been in the pink of physical condition, hardy and robust from years of wandering through the untracked wilderness, that beating must surely have been the death of him. Breathing hard, and with every muscle relaxed, he lay on his back staring up at the ceiling.

The Mallorys had taken this method to frighten him away from the Mariquita Mine. They little knew the temper of the man they were dealing with. So far from intimidating him, his resolution to help Deane was merely strengthened.

For years he had breasted the blows of circumstance. The more difficulties he encountered and conquered the greater his pride in any success. he

might achieve. Fear and discouragement were for weaklings. And Lee Bremerton had never been a weakling.

Strangely enough, the events of the night brought him a certain measure of relief and satisfaction. He had vaguely imagined, from Deane's reticence in certain matters, that some sharp practise lay back of the murderous enmity for Deane's men at the mine. That Deane was none too scrupulous in forwarding his own interests Bremerton understood thoroughly.

Those who resort to cudgels and a night attack are never the ones with a just cause behind them. So, by implication, Deane's right to the Mariquita property had been proved. This was what afforded the prospector his relief and satisfaction.

Mallory's daughter was a good deal of a puzzle. Certainly she was a splendid actress. At first she had assumed a friendly attitude, hoping no doubt to deceive him, to win his confidence, and then to work upon his sympathies.

But he had angered her by a few words that emphasized his knowledge of her true character, and she had burst into sudden flame like a powder magazine touched by a lighted match.

Sick as he was, he rather prided himself on having forced aside the mask for a glimpse of the real Mariquita Mallory. Yet, in spite of his positive convictions, there was something about the girl that defied a complete understanding of her.

"When I get over the effects of this clubbing," he assured himself, "I'll be able to think to better purpose. Lacey was undecided in his estimate of the girl, but told me to beware of her. He appears to be a clear-headed sort of fellow, and I can't see why he was undecided. My little experience with Mariquita Mallory has left me with no doubt at all. Still, if I knew more—"

A sensation hard to define overshadowed his conclusions. It was a sensation that baffled analysis.

The mine was called the "Mariquita." The name could scarcely be a

coincidence. Of course, the girl had inspired it. Yet how and why, if this person, Carruthers, had originally located the property?

Had Carruthers known Mariquita Mallory? Had he been so greatly impressed with her that he had given her name to his mine?

These were trifling thoughts. As questions, they merely harassed a mind which was unequal to any sort of struggle with them.

A light, quick step sounded in the hall, accompanied by a musical tinkling of ice in a pitcher. A knock fell on the door, and a boy entered the room with water, telegraph-blanks, and writing materials.

"Wait," said Bremerton.

His brain whirled as he rose from the bed and seated himself at a small table. A drink of ice-water refreshed him somewhat, and he slowly wrote out the following message:

SILAS DEANE, DENVER.

Arrived Phoenix this evening. Work promises to be interesting. Off for mine to-morrow.

BREMERTON.

He gave telegram and money to the boy and sent him away. Then, as well as he was able, he looked after his injuries and went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

A QUESTION OF NERVE.

NOT always, in real life, do names fit the characters of those who bear them. As a case in point, Mortimer King, cyanid expert at the Mariquita Mine, was anything but regal, anything but manful and two-handed in his sway over men and affairs.

From A to Z he knew his cyanid work. There were keenness and penetration in his mild, washed-out blue eyes.

From a glass of "solution" held up to the light he could almost determine by sight alone how many pounds of potassium cyanid should be thrown into

the big vat to bring its contents up to "standard." And there were those who said that, by merely glancing at a handful of "tailings," he would figure you their worth in ton lots to a cent.

But he was not even primer-wise in a knowledge of human nature, and he was a child in tact and diplomacy, and a mere babe in arms when it came to meeting a hard situation with judgment and energy.

Lacey had known this when leaving King in charge. Racked with pain and half delirious when borne away from the Mariquita, he had been in no condition to pick and choose a successor *pro tem*.

Even so, he had yet had no second choice. Whatever his other shortcomings, King was the only man at the mine who, in the absence of the superintendent, would be loyal to Deane.

Two weeks Lacey had been gone. They were weeks of mental distress for King, who realized fully his own incompetence. If affairs had gone badly under Lacey, they nearly went to smash under King. About all the cyanid expert hoped for was to hold the mine organization together until the new man arrived to fill the place vacated by Lacey.

Troubles began almost before Lacey had been carried over the hill in the mine buckboard. The miners struck for higher pay, although they were receiving better wages than were being paid at any other mine in that district. They struck, apparently, just to be contrary and worry Mortimer King.

With no mining going on, the ore-haulers had to be laid off; with no drills to point, the blacksmith and his helper were out of a job; and with nothing to mill, the millmen were forced into idleness.

Then the spirit of unrest laid hold of the cyanid workers, and one by one they drifted away to loaf with the others. King was at his wits' end and telegraphed wildly to Deane.

Everything's going to pot. Where's the new man?

And to this Deane answered in characteristic vein:

Keep your shirt on! New man on the job Thursday morning.

King began counting the days until Thursday. On Wednesday some unknown person smuggled a supply of red liquor into camp. Steve Bryden, otherwise known as "Big Steve," began imbibing, and slowly and systematically working himself up to concert pitch.

He made an art of getting "in tune," as he called it.

In twenty-four, thirty-six, or forty-eight hours, according to his own pre-arranged schedule, he would strike high C. Then, as King very well knew, the super *pro tem* would have difficulty keeping his scalp on, let alone his shirt.

The cyanid expert would have sent to Phoenix for the sheriff. There was nobody to send, however, and he dared not leave the mine himself.

Wednesday night Big Steve got a sledge-hammer from the deserted blacksmith-shop and joyously broke all the windows in the bunk-house. "Just wanted to tease somebody," he explained when King ventured a feeble remonstrance.

The little devils in his drink-madened brain were growing. The Mexicans fled to their jacals and herded their wives and children behind closed doors. The Americans and half-bloods moved their blankets to a dry wash and posted a guard.

Wun Sing, the cook, barricaded himself in the chuck shanty. From the laboratory King, torn with conflicting emotions, watched the trail from town and hoped against hope.

It was known that Big Steve had a dark past. But he had not acquired it in his sober moments. Not much of good could be said of him when his brain was clear, although in that state he was never openly lawless. In drink, all his evil flew brazenly uppermost, and his black folly knew no bounds.

Barring King, the Americans at the

Mariquita Mine were a poor lot. Laborers of the better class would not work there, for the taking off of Griggsby had given the property a hard name.

King's presence was a necessity. He was the accredited agent of a Denver company that owned cyaniding rights, and King saw to it that royalties were paid from every clean-up.

Big Steve was not the worst of the Americans when sober, but he was far and away the worst of them when "tuned." And from the others King could expect no aid. He was thrown wholly upon his own resources; and these, as already observed, were weak and scattering.

Thursday morning Big Steve carried his pleasantries a little further. Breaking down the door of the chuck shanty, he drove forth the luckless Wun Sing and chased him out of camp.

So, along with the mine, the mill, the blacksmith-shop, and the cyanid "plant," the chuck shanty went out of business. King lived on sardines and crackers. How the other Americans lived he did not know, nor care. He had himself to worry about.

His naked eye could not reach far enough. From the laboratory he was now scanning the trail with binoculars. That was Thursday morning, and why did not the new superintendent come?

The sun passed the meridian and slowly descended upon a stricken camp. King's despair grew as the day faded and no one arrived to take over his responsibilities.

Reason told him to flee under cover of that Thursday night and while there was yet time. Duty warned him to remain, in spite of Big Steve and what Big Steve might do. Yes, he would stay; he *must* stay. But he wished he had something to shoot with.

The cyanid expert did not close his eyes between sunset and dawn. At eight in the morning he crept cautiously toward the end of the pipe-line to renew his water supply.

Then Big Steve, rushing from the

chuck-shanty and brandishing a blade which Wun Sing used for peeling potatoes, drove the unhappy expert pell-mell in the direction of the headquarters adobe.

The office-door was locked. King himself had secured it, and at that moment the key was in the laboratory. White and shaking, the expert turned and flattened out against the adobe wall.

"Yah!" taunted Big Steve, pausing a dozen feet away and leering with his bloodshot eyes. "What're you good for, say?"

His voice was thick, but he kept his feet steadily. His whole bearing was one of terrible menace.

"Clear out, you big brute!" answered King, shaking the tin water-bucket. "Don't you dare come nearer me with that knife! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. By George, I'll report you for this!"

It was a gallant effort to hold his own. What it cost the little cyanid worker a man of more Spartan fiber could never know.

"Y'ain't got no more sand than a chipmunk!" howled Big Steve. "Y'ain't even an apology for a real man! I'm plumb annoyed at having you around. King, you little wart, here's where you cash in."

A line of heads rimmed the edge of the distant dry wash. A swarthy, ragged, palpitating group watched proceedings from the Mexican quarter. All knew that Big Steve had reached the climax of deviltry, that the grand finale was about to be staged, and that immediately following it his reign of terror would be overwhelmed by a period of sleep and helplessness.

But would he kill the little man with the water-bucket? Not one of those who looked on from a distance would have given a copper cent for King's chances. King, probably, would not have given much more himself.

Slowly, deliberately, Big Steve advanced upon his intended victim. The millman's face was puffy and splotched

with red, a crazy glare filled his eyes, and as he moved onward he tucked up his right sleeve with his hairy left hand.

"You King, there! Run!"

One of those at the edge of the dry wash offered the advice. It was useless, however. King's nerves had buckled under the strain, and he was pinned to the adobe wall by the growing horror of his dilemma. He was like a rabbit fascinated by the diamond eyes of a rattlesnake.

Approaching hoofs sounded suddenly from near at hand. Neither King nor Big Steve seemed to hear them.

The trail into camp wound around the end of the office building, and a horse carrying a double burden presently emerged into view. An erect figure in corduroys and laced knee-boots, face decorated with several small squares of court-plaster, occupied the saddle; at the cante, astride the double war bags, sat the Chinaman Wun Sing.

One glance at the state of affairs by the headquarters adobe was enough for the Chinaman. With a gurgling cry of fear he tumbled from the horse and fled to a safer distance.

At the dry wash and in the Mexican quarter a fresh interest was injected into the situation. Here was a stranger, possibly the new man who was taking Lacey's place. He had no more than struck camp before being called upon to dispute with Big Steve the right to rule. What would he do? How would he conduct himself?

Intensely stirred by the progress of events, the Americans came out of the dry wash and advanced a few rods. The Mexicans also took places for a nearer view.

For King the uncanny spell was broken. A cry of relief broke from his lips, and he flung up his arms and crumpled weakly down on the office door-step. Big Steve had withdrawn his attention from the cyanid expert and fastened it upon the newcomer.

"You're the new boss, hey?" the millman flung savagely at the rider.

"I am," was the crisp response.

"Not so's you can notice it!" whooped Big Steve. "I've been the boss here for three hull days, and the job pleases me a heap. I don't share it with nobody. *Sabe* that? P'int t'other way and say *adios* before I turn loose at you!"

"Clear out," said Bremerton calmly. "You're drunk."

"Not so drunk I can't fight." Big Steve waved the knife about his head. "None of the bosses last at the Mariquita! Come over here, if you got the sand; come over here and git scalped."

Bremerton flung the reins over his horse's head, swung down from the saddle, and started toward Big Steve. He neither hurried nor lagged. He merely strolled in Big Steve's direction, unarmed apparently, and with his compelling gray eyes fixed unswervingly upon the face of the trouble-maker.

More than one of the spectators caught his breath and felt a chill of grisly foreboding. King tried to shout a word of advice and warning, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

Big Steve had planted himself firmly on his stocky legs, and his right hand, with the short, ugly blade, was poised for a blow. He stood like a man of stone while Bremerton drew close.

Then a most astounding thing happened. Quick as chain-lightning, Bremerton gripped the upraised wrist and wrenched it downward and sideways. The knife fell from Big Steve's fingers, and, over the captured right arm, master and man looked into each other's face.

CHAPTER VI.

BREMERTON'S "FIND."

BIG STEVE was accustomed to having his own way when his brain was fogged with liquor. No doubt the surprise of finding some one who was not afraid of him had taken him aback for the moment and given Bremerton the advantage. With a bellow of rage

he wrenched his arm free. Bremerton kicked the knife toward King and stepped back warily.

"I'll kill you for that!" fumed Big Steve, running his words together in a way that made them almost unintelligible.

He was losing his steadiness, and he staggered as he rushed at Bremerton. The latter moved to one side, thrust out a foot, and the millman stumbled over it and lurched headforemost to the ground. He struck heavily, and his forehead came in contact with a stone which was half embedded in the gravelly soil. A wheezy gasp escaped him, a tremor ran through his huge body, and he flung his arms wide and lay still.

Bremerton stared at him a moment in silent contempt. Turning to King, he asked:

"Is this the fellow who chased the Chinaman out of camp?"

"Yes," was the answer. "Big Steve has been on a tear ever since Wednesday. Jove! That was a nery thing you did. I wouldn't have been in your shoes for all the gold in Arizona."

"Who is he?"

"Amalgamator in the mill—one of the best amalgamators in the business. He has his peculiarities, though."

"There's no room here for a man of his stripe. When he sleeps off that jag send him to me for his time. Here, you!" Bremerton beckoned to the men near the dry wash. "I need some of you."

They came forward with alacrity. What they had just seen had inspired a certain amount of respect for the new superintendent.

"Carry this man away," ordered Bremerton. "One of you put out my horse and bring the riding gear to the office. One minute, first."

He whirled and ran the man over with a sharp, appraising eye. "What were you doing over there while that big ruffian was trying to massacre the little fellow?"

The men shifted about uneasily. One of them finally spoke:

"Pilgrim, when Big Steve's in likker we-all makes it a p'int to hide out and watch keerful. Meddlin' with Steve at them times is uncommon risky."

"Mean to say you were all *scared*?"

"Wall, now, I don't reckon I'd say skeered. There's a mighty sight of diff'ence between being skeered and exercisin' plain caution with a madman like Steve when he's on the rampage. I allow you plumb hypnotized him."

"You've been drinking, too," said Bremerton, quick to read the signs. "Hereafter, when any of you want to get drunk, you'll do it in Phoenix, and not at the Mariquita Mine. I'm taking Lacey's place, understand? While I'm in charge there'll be no whisky in camp. Remove that man and look after my horse."

"On the jump."

Bremerton pulled the saddle-bags from behind the cante and passed to the office-door. King, anticipating a demand for the office key, had hurried to get it from the laboratory.

"When things began to go wrong here; Mr. Bremerton," he explained, "I thought I'd better lock up the office."

"You are Mortimer King?"

"Yes."

The new superintendent stepped through the doorway into the square little room where the clerical work was carried on. King had paused to watch three of the men pick up Big Steve.

Two or three articles dropped from the amalgamator's coat while he was being lifted. One was a bag of tobacco, another a flask, and still another was a square of dingy chamois skin.

"Better gather up that stuff and take it along," said King.

"Hold on a minute," interposed Bremerton.

He hurried out of the office and set his heel on the flask. For a moment his eyes rested on the chamois skin. An exclamation escaped him and he stooped and picked it up. He stuffed the chamois skin into his pocket as he went back into the office.

"Now, Mr. King," said he, "just what is the situation here? I found the Chinaman camping out at a water-hole between here and town. He told me a little, but only enough to make me anxious for more."

Bremerton sat down in front of the roll-top desk, took pipe and tobacco from his pockets, and prepared for a smoke. King drew up a chair, sank into it, and composed his agitated nerves.

There was something about the new superintendent that inspired confidence. Courage and determination are qualities which never fail to command the wholesome respect of enemies and the trust of friends. As the weaker vessel, King deferred humbly to Bremer-ton, glad that Deane had secured such a man to captain the dubious fortunes of the mine.

A strong face shone vividly in the light of the match Bremerton trailed over the pipe-bowl. Bruised, discolored, and with here and there a black patch, along with its grimness, the face contrived to reflect an amiable as well as a dauntless spirit. Little Mortimer King warmed to the man and did not hesitate to confess his own failings.

"I was a pretty poor stick for Lacey to leave in charge, Bremerton," said he. "I have no sense or sand in dealing with the near-desperadoes on this mine's pay-roll. The men knew it, and Lacey was hardly carried over the hill before they began to take advantage."

"Don't bear down on yourself, King," returned Bremerton. "Sometimes the difficulties that are one man's meat are another man's poison. A few in this world are equipped for one thing, and a few for some other thing. The Master Potter fashions the clay from designs and patterns of His own. It is not our business to go behind the returns and try to puzzle out the reason. Go on and tell me about the situation here."

King was surprised to find Bremerton as forceful in thought as well as in action. He did not know of the

lonely years Bremerton had spent in the wilds, communing with himself as he trod the unblazed trails, or guessing at the heart of things as he lay on a blanket looking up at the stars.

The cyanid expert began at the beginning. He told of the strike among the miners, and how the failure of the ore supply had paralyzed all the other activities of the camp.

As an idle man is always ripe for trouble, King's report led up logically to the whisky-drinking and the cutting loose of Big Steve. Bremerton listened quietly and, when King paused, remarked:

"It's a wonder you didn't cut and run."

"But I was left in charge!" exclaimed the expert. "It was my business to stay here, no matter what happened."

A quizzical light filled Bremerton's gray eyes, yet he nodded soberly.

"I see. When a man does his best there is nothing more to be said. When did you have your last clean-up at the mill?"

"Just after the miners quit work. The millmen hung on for a while, and I kept them busy scraping the plates."

"How did the clean-up pan out?"

"Slim. It's always slim and not what it ought to be. That's what bothered Lacey and—and poor old Griggsby. We mill ten tons of rock, working both shifts. The ore-feeder throws out every tenth shovelful as the ore goes into the hoppers. I quarter the samples down and get a value of twelve dollars and some odd cents to the ton—"

"No bonanza rock about that," cut in Bremerton.

"There's been no bonanza rock milled since Deane took over the property. If it's here we haven't been able to find it. The tailings, coming from the plates, assay something over two dollars to the ton.

"The difference of about ten dollars a ton, or a hundred dollars for a

twenty-four hour mill-run, should be left on the plates. But it isn't there."

The best we can show, the best we've ever been able to show since Deane secured this property, is seven hundred to a thousand dollars for every two weeks' clean-up."

"Fifty dollars a day," mused Bremerton; "not enough to pay expenses. You're being robbed."

"Griggsby thought so, and Lacey was of the same opinion. But they couldn't prove anything. The leak, wherever it is, has been too well covered. You are right in saying we don't pay expenses with the mill. The cyanid plant is just able to cover the shortage. That, of course, doesn't leave anything for Deane—and he's not running a mine for the love of it."

"No, King, he doesn't do much of anything for the mere love of it," Bremerton remarked dryly. "We'll go into all this later. I haven't been myself for a couple of days, and the ride from town rather fagged me. I think I'll rest until after dinner. Where do I bunk?"

King got up and opened a door off the side of the room.

"Here is where Griggsby and Lacey had their sleeping quarters," said he. "If you'd rather not sleep here, though, there's a more comfortable place down at the laboratory."

"This will do. Tell the miners to see me after the noon meal."

"I'll have them here—if they'll come."

"The man that doesn't come hunts another job. Impress that on them."

King left the office. As soon as he was gone, Bremerton got up, went to the table and removed a handkerchief-wrapped package from one of the saddle-bags. He unlocked the desk and pushed back the roll-top.

A litter of papers lay under his eyes, just as left by Lacey. He brushed the papers aside, untied the handkerchief, seated himself, and leaned forward to examine the ball of amalgam.

"It's a clue, all right," he muttered.

"Here's a bit of luck right at the start-off. Let's see how that 'M' matches the mark on the mended chamois."

The chamois skin dropped from the pocket of the unconscious Big Steve was an old one. Almost in its very center a jagged, 'M'-shaped tear had been mended with needle and thread. The sewing had been done by whipping the thread over and over along the edges of the tear, leaving an upraised surface.

This surface mark matched the indentation in the bottom of the amalgam ball perfectly. It was evidence, indisputable evidence, that the mended chamois had been used in squeezing some of the quicksilver out of that particular lump of amalgam.

Circumstances pointed a damning finger at Big Steve. They led also to interesting speculations regarding the finding of that stolen silver ball among the cottonwoods by the Phoenix town canal.

While Bremerton bent thoughtfully over the desk, a sheet of paper met his eye on top of the heap he had pushed aside. Picking it out of the litter, he read the following, written in fine feminine chirography:

MR. LACEY:

If you will come to me at the arroyo, at nine this evening, I will tell you something of great importance to yourself. Trust me this once and you will not regret it.

MARIQUITA MALLORY.

Bremerton dropped back in his chair, a savage exclamation on his lips.

"It's the note that lured Lacey into a trap!" he murmured, and dropped it on the desk and struck it with his clenched fist.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATE OF A PICTURE.

BREMERTON'S long, hard ride from Phoenix had almost worn him out. He had spent the whole of the preceding

day in bed, and every movement of his bruised limbs had brought him pain. In the small hours of that Friday morning he had dressed, bargained at the nearest corral for a horse, and before sunrise had put miles behind him on the way to the Mariquita Mine.

At first his stubborn will had to goad his battered body into action. As his ride progressed, however, his stiffened limbs and flagging muscles yielded with growing grace to the grim purpose that drove them.

His iron physique, dormant for a space, recuperated swiftly. He was like a machine which, slow to start at first, presently yields to the spell of motion and runs with increasing ease and power.

Not until he entered the headquarters adobe had he been conscious of any feeling of fatigue. He had dismissed King and planned to lie down for a brief rest. But he could not leave the desk until he had tested the clue of the amalgam ball and the cha-mois skin; and now that brief note from the Mallory girl aroused feelings that made rest impossible.

He got to his feet, leaned against the top of the desk, and swept his eyes around the office. There, in premises just taken over by him, Griggsby and Lacey had lived and worked—Griggsby and Lacey, the unfortunate men who had preceded him in the service of Deane.

The letter-files on the shelf, the map on the wall, the cabinet of ore specimens, the letter-press, the table in the center of the room, the picture of the martyred Garfield hanging near the door—all these trifling details of the room appealed to him strongly. They constituted surroundings which Griggsby and Lacey had known to their sorrow. A black memory was over everything—and the Mallorys were the cause!

Bremerton, frowning darkly, swore to himself that he would bring home to the girl and her father the consequences of their deeds. Making a win-

ning proposition of the Mariquita Mine was but a part of his work; the other part was to make sure that Justice had her due. For the killing of Griggsby, the wounding of Lacey, and the work of that cowardly gang by the Phoenix town ditch, some one should pay!

Bremerton passed to the open door and leaned there, looking out upon the camp. The mine lay in a shallow valley bordered with bleak hills covered with cactus clumps. The ramshackle structure housing the ten-stamp mill stood at the left, perched on the top of an incline of the valley floor.

Flanking the mill on one side were the cyanid tanks, and hard by the tanks was the shake-roofed, shake-sided laboratory building. In the middle distance was the bunk-house, with its shattered windows. To the right of the bunk-house stood the chuck-shanty.

Beyond Wun Sing's headquarters was a cleft in the valley wall, in which were huddled the jacals of the Mexicans. Between mill and bunk-house were posted the derricks, with their whips, and the shaft-house, with its hoisting engine.

The whole valley was gouged and gophered and sprinkled with heaps of country rock. The road from the shafts to the head of the mill had been powdered white by hoofs and wheels and gleamed in the sun like a trail of whitewash.

There was nothing alluring in the scene, nothing even picturesque. The valley wore a forbidding, threatening look. Like a long, black serpent, the pipe-line trailed past the Mexican quarter, coiled around the chuck-shanty, and reared an ugly, spouting head midway between the bunk-house and the headquarters adobe. A branch of it crawled on to the cyanid tanks and the mill.

Silence brooded over the place. The men from the dry wash were loafing about the bunk-house, and there was activity manifested among the Mexicans.

Big Steve had ceased to rule the camp, and the laborers were taking heart. A new superintendent had come, and while he might not last long, yet his protecting arm was over the property for a time, at least.

"And Deane's price for this junk-heap," muttered Bremerton, "is half a million! I am the connecting link between Deane and that money — his last chance, his only hope for a big clean-up. Well, we shall see. If there's anything better than ten-dollar rock here I'm going to find it."

He left the door, took an automatic revolver from one of the saddle-bags, and carried it with him into the sleeping-room. There was a musty smell in the cramped quarters, and he raised a window. Before lying down on the cot he placed the weapon handy by, on a chair.

With a sigh of relief he stretched himself out on the blankets of his creaking bed. He relaxed every tired muscle, but he did not want to sleep, and his mind kept busy. Mentally he catalogued the successive steps of the work before him.

First, the mine must be put in running order. Next, the leak in the mill must be investigated. Following that, he would learn why the property had been called a bonanza with only ten-dollar rock finding its way to the stamps.

A duty which might come first or last, or distribute itself over the entire process of rehabilitating the mine, was searching out the stealthy forces engaged in a death-grapple with Deane.

To reorganize the workers and keep in motion the wheels of mining, milling, and cyaniding was the smallest part of Bremerton's problem. Judgment and determination would take care of that.

Probing the thievery in the mill would not be so difficult, now that Bremerton had a reliable clue. Big Steve was not a man to be discharged, the superintendent now decided, but to be retained, kept at work, and

watched. He was the key to the missing amalgam.

With only a ten-stamp mill to grind out rock whose gross assay value was but little better than ten dollars to the ton, the Mariquita Mine could never approach the splendid proportions of a bonanza property.

Here there was something wrong. Deane was altogether too smart a speculator to be hooked by a job of salt. When he secured the mine he had certainly known what he was doing.

Nor would the Mallorys fight so savagely to keep Deane out of his rights if the object of that fight was such a poor-paying proposition as showed on its face. They must know something, that old plotter and his girl. Yet what was it they knew?

Bremerton's one answer to this question was, a fabulously rich lead — a lead known to the Mallorys, but lost to Griggsby and Lacey. While Mallory had worked the mine under bond it had paid huge returns.

Those returns had captured the grasping fancies of Deane. Deane's men, however, had failed to make the mine pay anything more than running expenses. The only explanation of such a state of affairs was a rich vein on the property, which had defied the efforts of Griggsby and Lacey to find it.

It was possible that such a vein might have been worked out and exhausted. Disputing this theory was the fact that the Mallorys would not fight for a mine whose ore was hardly worth the trouble of digging and milling. No, the Mallorys had an object in keeping up that struggle with Deane.

There was a reef of gold which, uncovered once, must be brought to light again. As Big Steve was the key to the missing amalgam, so the Mallorys were a key to that lost lead.

Bremerton's thoughts covered these various topics slowly and methodically. He wanted to be sure of his ground as he mentally paced it off. Two or three hours passed, and he finally became

aware that his eyes were absently regarding a framed photograph on the adobe wall.

Absorbed in his reflections, he had looked at that picture without seeing it. Now, abruptly, he recognized the original of the photograph, and sat up suddenly on the cot.

Another picture, framed among the cottonwoods and lighted with the moon's beams, flashed out before him. This picture on the wall was the same, even to the lustrous tresses with the full-blown rose tangled among them.

Getting to his feet, he walked around the foot of the cot and snatched the picture from the wall. It was framed in cactus-wood, and he stared at it with hard eyes.

Had Griggsby placed it there? Or Lacey? He could not bring himself to think that either of his predecessors had been so foolish.

Very likely it was a souvenir of the days when Mallory was working the mine. Griggsby and Lacey had merely left it hanging on the wall.

Bremerton muttered a fierce imprecation and drove his fist through the frame. Twisting the cactus-wood apart, he flung the fragments out of the window. Then he picked up the picture, tore it in pieces, and flung the scraps after the wreck of the frame.

"I've no room here for even a picture of Lacey's she-demon," said Bremerton with a scowl. "A fine souvenir for me to look at! The eyes of a wildcat! Every glance of them would remind me of the note that lured Lacey into a trap!"

Some one entered the outer room. A shuffling footstep crossed the floor, halted, and a thin voice called:

"Missa Blemton!"

He stepped out of the sleeping apartment and found Wun Sing holding a covered tray and smiling blandly.

"What do you want, Sing?" he asked.

"Me blingee chuck. Missa King tallee me you sick. Plaps you likee eatee chuck in office, huh?"

"King's got it wrong. I'm not sick. I'll eat with the men, Sing. Take the food back to the chuck-shanty."

Wun Sing's face showed chagrin and disappointment. He wavered a moment, then turned and shuffled toward the door.

"Awri," he remarked.

Ten minutes later Bremerton sat at the head of a long table in the chuck-shanty. At his right sat King. Some twenty faces, not one of the sort to inspire confidence, ringed the table from King around to Bremerton's left.

"Boys," observed King a little doubtfully, "this is Mr. Bremerton, the new superintendent."

One or two ducked their heads. A few more grunted. The majority merely stared and said nothing at all.

"Don't say anything if it hurts," said Bremerton, with a quiet smile. "You may not be glad to see me, but don't do any guessing until we're better acquainted. It must be rather pleasant for you to have a hot meal after a day or two of living on scraps in the dry wash. If you had helped King keep order in camp, Wun Sing might have remained on the job."

These words seemed to startle some of the men. A few exchanged glances, but others bent sullenly over their plates.

"Are these miners and millmen, King?" inquired Bremerton casually as he began eating.

"Both," was the reply; "along with the blacksmith and a couple of ore-haulers. The rest of the men are keepin' house in the Mexican quarter."

The men ate like famished animals, but they cleaned their plates in a hurry and passed out of the shanty.

"They'll wait outside for you, Bremerton," confided King in a shivering whisper, "miners and all. I told them you wanted to see them. If you don't raise their pay they'll start a riot."

"I'll not raise their pay and they won't start any riot."

Bremerton picked up his hat from

the floor beside his chair, got to his feet, and proceeded calmly through the door. Filled with dire forebodings, the little cyanid expert arose and followed.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHOMBO OF THE KNIFE.

BREMERTON realized very well that his first real fight was just ahead of him. Every man at table had passed under his keen scrutiny and been mentally tagged. So artfully was it done that the men themselves did not know it, nor even King.

Here was a tool, there a sneaking fomenter of discontent, yonder a weak character who ran with the biggest pack. Two had the courage to be openly defiant, and but one of this pair was marked for a leader.

So Bremerton registered that tableful of workers. On the swiftness and sureness of his judgment he based his plans for dealing with the strikers.

The men had formed themselves into a compact group a few yards from the door of the chuck-shanty. Their number had been increased by the arrival of Mexican miners from the jacals, and quite a formidable gathering awaited the new superintendent.

It had been the privilege of all these miners to see Deane's latest recruit in action. They had been afforded a test of his mettle, and a wholesome regard for his powers had been engendered in their minds.

But there was a difference between Big Steve Bryden, charged with deviltry and aimlessly demoralizing the camp, and a crowd of underground workers who presented a solid front of opposition and were swayed by a common cause.

There was courage in numbers, and the miners were eager to see how Bremerton would meet this second test. If he weakened, they would walk rough-shod over his feeble authority.

Bremerton had halted just outside

the chuck-shanty door to fill and light his pipe. It looked like an attempt at bravado, a bluff at hiding an attack of nerves, and some of the strikers laughed jeeringly.

"King," said Bremerton, "who is the man with the rings in his ears?"

"That is Chombo Gonzales," was the murmured response, "half American and half Mexican. He's a foreman among the diggers, Bremerton, and a bad man to get stirred up."

"And who's the one with the scar on his right cheek?"

"Collins, 'Red' Collins, another foreman. Red is on the day shift and Chombo looks after the night men."

Bremerton was positive that Chombo and Red were the two keys to that little difficulty. If the two foremen were properly taken care of the trouble in the underground workings would quickly adjust itself. The superintendent moved out toward the men.

"What's the reason your men are not getting out the ore, Collins?" he asked.

The red-headed foreman felt flattered at being singled out in this way by Bremerton. It gave him an importance which Chombo resented with an ugly flash of the eyes.

"The boys think they ain't paid enough," said Collins. "Three dollars a day for ten hours is what they get, and they demand four."

"Why?"

"Because we want it, that's why!" put in Chombo, jumping clear of the ranks and making it plain that he was to be considered in the discussion.

Bremerton turned on the half-blood and eyed him calmly.

"I'm talking with Collins," he remarked. "When I'm ready to talk with you you'll have a chance to relieve your mind."

"You can't muzzle me!" cried Chombo. "I'll say what I please and when I please."

Bremerton peered at him ominously for a moment, then swerved his gaze back to Collins.

"How much are other mines in this district paying their miners?" he inquired.

"Two and a half and three," was the reply.

"Then three dollars for ten hours is about the top price?"

"In other mines, yes, but it's worth more to work at the Mariquita."

"I understand the Mariquita is the safest mine in the district, no shoring necessary, and quarters fairly comfortable. Why it is worth more to work here?"

"Because," said Collins, "the camp has a black name. For one thing, too much shootin', now and then, that's liable to go wild; for another thing, Deane got it on a plain steal, and he ought to give up as much as can be gouged out o' him."

"As for the shooting, Collins," returned Bremerton, "I'm here to look out for that. It's no concern of yours nor of any of the others. As for the way Deane got hold of the property, that is none of your business. The miners are paid a good price for working here, and that's enough."

"You can't crowd us with no such talk!" shouted Chombo excitedly. "We'll have our rights or we'll have nothing. We—"

"I'll give you your rights, Gonzales," cut in Bremerton. "Come to the office in ten minutes and get your time."

Chombo stared, his lean body crouching and his ugly little eyes blinking.

"*Por Dios!*" he gritted. "You can't fire me!"

"But I have," asserted Bremerton. "You've done your last stroke of work at the Mariquita Mine, and as soon as you're paid off you will take yourself out of camp. I'll not have a cur of your stripe hanging around here."

Chombo had been fingering at the breast of his flannel shirt. King suddenly uttered a cry of warning.

Quick as thought the half-blood's right hand had executed a movement backward and forward, and from his tawny fingers had shot a bright gleam of steel.

Bremerton fell sidewise. The gleam grazed his shoulder, flew on to the side of the chuck - shanty, and struck and hung with a steady glitter. It was a knife, blazing in the sun, and the point was embedded in the board wall.

The tragic silence that followed the knife-throwing lasted for a brief moment. Bremerton righted himself, lifted a hand, and the stillness was broken by the sharp report of a revolver. The sound faded into a cry of pain, and Chombo stood reeling on his feet, his left hand clasping his right arm and a trickle of red oozing from between his fingers.

"Try that again," snapped Bremerton, "and I'll be more particular about my shooting. King," he added, "take him to the office and pay him off, then watch while he gets a good start along the trail. Collins, step over this way!"

Chombo was cowed and had nothing to say. The rest of the miners watched while King, trembling and distraught, moved toward the office with the half-blood staggering behind him.

The cyanid expert was expecting a clash in which Bremerton would get far and away the worst of it. Bremerton, however, remembered how those men had kept to the dry wash and the Mexican quarter while Big Steve was on parade, and he knew they dared not resent his treatment of Chombo.

The red-haired Collins moved in Bremerton's direction, but he came humbly and obediently, as one who had just endured a shock and was slowly recovering his wits. The superintendent led him aside.

"How much are you getting as foreman, Collins?" inquired Bremerton.

"Three and a half."

"The miners are getting every cent they are entitled to. I guess you know this mine is barely paying expenses, and if the pay is raised all around I shall have to call on Deane to cover a shortage."

"That's Deane's lookout, not ours."

"It's my lookout, not Deane's. Make no mistake on that score. You are a man of influence, Collins. I can see that. If you tell these miners they're getting the limit, they'll believe you. In your case I'm willing to make an exception. If you can get them back to work and keep them at work, from now on your wages will be five dollars a day. You need not say anything about that if you don't want to. This is the only concession I will make. If those men don't begin getting out ore this afternoon, they can come for their time this evening."

Greed showed in Collins's narrowing eyes. "I'm to have five a day, am I?" he demanded.

"Yes, so long as you keep the gang at work."

"You're on, Bremerton, but keep it quiet. I'll see that they go to work."

Without paying any further attention to the strikers, the superintendent walked on to the office. Chombo was moving off along the road, tying up his arm with a red cotton handkerchief as he went. King, his face pale under its tan, stood in the office door.

"Letting Chombo go," said he, "will raise the deuce among the Mexicans. They're a clannish lot, Bremerton. I wish I'd explained that to you before."

Bremerton laughed softly as he pushed past the little cyanid man and dropped into the chair in front of the roll-top desk.

"Would you put up with Chombo, after what happened, if you had been in my place?" he asked.

"Whatever I'd have done would probably have been the wrong thing," was the answer. "But it's the devil's

own job, here at the Mariquita, to know what's best to do in the pinches."

"It strikes me that the first step is to get rid of the trouble-makers. I've fired one and bribed another, all in the interests of peace. The ore will begin to come, King."

"The men are going back to work?"

"Yes."

"Well, by gracious!" King was looking out of the door. "Collins seems to be arguing with the men, and they're moving toward the shaft-house. How did you do it, Bremerton?"

"I made it worth while for Collins to line up on our side. The work must go on here. After I've got better acquainted with the situation it may not be necessary to handle Collins with gloves. We'll see about that later. Start the cyanid gang at once. If you have any further trouble with them, call me."

King, taking fresh heart, left the headquarters adobe and started toward the tanks. He found his own workers in a most receptive frame of mind. Not one of them had any fault to find over the treatment of Chombo.

Later in the afternoon the teamsters were hauling ore to the platform at the head of the mill. The stamps were pounding, and a batteryman was temporarily looking after Big Steve's part of the work.

Only a few hours had passed since the new superintendent had arrived at the demoralized camp, and already the work of mining and milling had been resumed, and the big vats were being loaded with tailings for another "run."

"If Bremerton can only last," King was saying to himself, "we'll do something here yet."

The night shift took hold of the work in mine and mill, when the day crews left off, and Bremerton slept that night with the roar of the stamps filling the valley—ten 850-pound hammers, each falling at the rate of ninety-eight times to the minute,

beating out Deane's gold for Deane's ultimate success with the Eastern syndicate.

Big Steve was sleeping off his spree in the bunk-house, the vengeful Chombo might be plotting somewhere in the hills, and the "gang" under leadership of the Mallorys was probably making ready for the next move.

None of these things bothered Bremerton. It was his part to take his difficulties as they came, and deal with them as his judgment counseled at the moment. He had made a good start and, for the present, that sufficed.

CHAPTER IX.

A DECLARATION OF WAR

SATURDAY and Sunday passed without bringing any fresh difficulties for the new superintendent. The camp, which clung to that seared and blighted valley like a barnacle to the hulk of some weatherbeaten ship, resounded with the peaceful activities of mining and milling.

The distant hills were blue and serene, and gave not the slightest hint of harboring enemies who were eager to stalk and slay.

Bremerton settled comfortably into the routine of his work. He came and went about the mining property with the perfect nonchalance of one to whom fear and worry are unknown.

Bart Case, otherwise known as "Smear," one of the ore-haulers, remarked upon the super's calmness and apparent ease of mind. He addressed himself to Dutch Fred, the other teamster.

"The fool ain't got sense enough to know he's a marked man, Dutch."

"Vat I care?" was the passive response. "He's a goner in two weeks, I bet you."

"What'll you bet? I don't care nuther, but it'll be plumb interestin' to

bet and then watch for what happens. Lay you a dozen bags o' smokin' he's still on the job come two weeks Saturday."

"I don't get smoking much easier as dot, Smear. It's a go."

In this manner Bremerton's tenure of life become a gamble among the men. But Smear was unjust. The superintendent was not a fool. He understood thoroughly that he was gambling with fate. The stake was large, however, and he was cheerfully taking a gambler's chance.

Monday morning two events came to pass. One Bremerton was expecting. The other was a surprise.

Directly after breakfast, Big Steve, hollow-eyed, his cheeks flabby and of a sickly yellow tinge, tramped heavily into the office and ranged himself alongside the desk. He emitted a rasping cough by way of claiming the superintendent's attention.

Bremerton was studying a penciled map of the Mariquita property. He did not look up until Big Steve had brought a hamlike fist smasing down on the desk top.

"Think I'm going to wait here all day?" demanded the amalgamator. "I'm after my time."

Bremerton sat back and regarded the huge form fixedly.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he asked.

"Yes, it's me, and I'm here for my money."

"Going to quit?"

The flabby jaw fell open and the sunken eyes stared.

"Ain't that what you said?" demanded Big Steve. "Didn't you tell the boys to break it to me that I was fired?"

"I believe I did, but I've changed my mind. Bryden, we need an amalgamator. I'll merely assess you for the bunk-house windows and keep you on if you've a mind to stay."

Big Steve drew his thick fingers across his head, in a puzzled way; then, thinking Bremerton was afraid to discharge him, he laughed craftily.

"Oh, I'll stay, but I don't pay for no bunk-house windows."

"It's only fair that you pay for them, but I'll not insist. Go up to the mill."

The amalgamator tramped out a little more heavily than he had tramped in. The new boss was afraid to give him his walking papers!

He looked back at the door and chuckled in his hairy throat. Some time he'd have another chance at Bremerton, and they'd see which of 'em could run that camp. He was pawing the bruise on his temple and still chuckling as he walked to the head of the mill.

King, little as he knew about the management of men, thought that Bremerton had made a grave mistake. At any cost, Bryden should have been made to go.

Among themselves the men wondered. Most of them came to the same conclusion as Big Steve and thought that Bremerton was afraid to get rid of the amalgamator.

Others, who remembered Chombo and the way Bryden had been manhandled at the climax of his lawlessness, could not accept the easier conclusion and were at a loss to understand the queer move.

The superintendent was well content to let the matter rest as it was, so long as his real reason for keeping Bryden in the mill was not known. He was also chuckling over the incident when a beat of approaching hoofs drew his eyes to a near-by window. From the rim of the valley a rider was advancing along the trail.

The rider was a woman. She sat her horse manwise, and her graceful figure swayed rhythmically as she galloped. Bremerton's face hardened.

"Talk about nerve!" he muttered. "I told her to keep away from me, yet here she comes. Well," he added grimly, "when she's done with this visit she'll never make another."

He started to rise, preparatory to leaving the office and meeting the girl

outside. Something held him to his chair, however, and glued his eyes to the window.

Mariquita Mallory presented a picture, beautiful by contrast with that seared and blasted valley. It was not that she rode with skill and grace. It was the girl herself that added a touch to the ugly environment—a softening, exquisite touch which caught and held Bremerton's eyes in spite of him.

There was a place in the Mogollons where the sun sets as nowhere else in the whole world. He had camped on the spot for a week just to see the flaming ball go down, watch the crimson and gold fade and then feast his eyes on the purple afterglow.

It was a far cry from the Mogollons to the Bitter Root range in Montana, and yet Bremerton knew of a height in the Bitter Roots where the sun never rose as it rose there.

In the Southwest the brazen shield pops upward from the desert's rim as though flung abruptly from a mighty hand. One moment it is dawn, and the next, day.

But over that height in the Bitter Roots it comes slowly, flinging out streamers that grow and grow until the whole east is filled with orange and yellow, and the faint western stars are blotted out one by one.

Bremerton had a soul for the finer things of life. He saw beauty where others would pass it by. With the eye of an artist he watched that free, galloping figure.

The girl wore a broad-brimmed hat. Her costume was mannish in other ways, and yet, oddly enough, there was that about her which made it feminine to the last degree.

Bremerton was still staring as she drew close. Their eyes met through the dusty window. She smiled and waved a gauntleted hand. His face grew stony with the dark thoughts that suddenly surged within him.

He did not get up and leave the headquarters adobe to meet her.

Whirling the chair to face the door, he watched while she dropped the reins, dismounted lightly and stepped across his threshold.

"Good morning, Mr. Bremerton," she said, still smiling.

He noted the clear, soft, brown face, the comely roundness of the cheek, the arch of the throat, the Castilian languor of the big, dark eyes.

Moonlight has a magic of its own, but it could not add to the charms of Mariquita Mallory. There, in broad day, she was infinitely more attractive than when Bremerton had seen her among the cottonwoods.

"Why don't you say something?" queried the silvery voice. "Am I welcome, or am I not?"

Like dagger thrusts the words of Lacey pierced Bremerton's brain. *When she smiled I found my danger greatest!* And Mariquita Mallory was smiling.

"I told you," said Bremerton, "to keep away from me."

"You couldn't have meant it though," she laughed, "not really." She dropped her head on one side and looked at him critically.

"You're in much better shape than when I say you last. Weren't you glad I made you take Silverheels and ride to the hotel? And you've never said *gracias*. Perhaps I've come to give you the chance to say that."

"Then I thank you for something which I do not look upon as an obligation," he returned.

"That is gratitude with a string tied to it." She laughed. "But no matter. When we're better acquainted, Mr. Bremerton, I think you're going to like me. I don't mind saying that I'm rather predisposed in your favor already. I know what you have done here—how you clipped the spurs of Big Steve and winged Chombo. You've made a very good beginning, Mr. Bremerton. Are you willing to listen to me?"

"If you're going to say anything against Deane—"

The black eyes kindled, the smile faded and left the lips stern.

"I am—just that," she cut in.

"Then I am not going to listen to you."

He got slowly out of his chair, and approached her.

"Miss Mallory," he went on, "you are a woman, a very beautiful woman, and you are not going to make me forget that I am a man and fighting a man's fight. It is a fight that I shall win.

"You and your father are Deane's enemies. I have reason to believe that you fight Deane's friends from cover, with a reckless disregard of life and consequences.

"But you and your father are not going to stand in my way. Take my advice and leave this part of the country before I bring home to you something which will call for a penalty. Save yourselves while there is time."

There was interest in her eyes and she did not seem displeased.

"You are taking the wrong trail," she returned earnestly. "I can explain that to you, if you will let me. You cannot afford to make a mistake, Mr. Bremerton—a mistake so hideous and far-reaching as this of yours is bound to be. Let me tell you—"

"Not a word. Miss Mallory, you must know I could not believe you."

"You have been talking with Mr. Lacey?"

"Naturally I saw him as soon as I could after reaching Phoenix. That is no secret to you or your father. I was spied upon from the moment I left the train. Otherwise, that gang of hoodlums would not have been ready for me."

His voice was tinged with bitterness. She stepped back and her eyes began to glow again.

"I have told you we had nothing to do with that villainous attack upon you!" she cried.

He waved his hand.

"I have a fair amount of reason and judgment," he replied, "and you

had best give me credit for that right from the beginning."

"Deane will never be able to accomplish anything here," she declared sharply, "no matter who takes up the work for him. I should hate to see you go the way Griggsby went or suffer as Lacey has suffered. I want to help you!"

"Then keep hands off. Call away your gang. By doing that, you will not only help me but help yourself a good deal more."

"We want peace, but not at that price. If it is to be war between you and my father and me, it is war of your own bringing."

"Call it what you will, I am here to serve Deane."

"Then you are serving a scoundrel!" she flamed. With a superb, dramatic gesture, she pulled the gauntlet from her left hand and flung it down in front of him.

"You will bring that back to me on your knees before you are done with the Mallorlys!" she cried, and whirled and ran from the office.

He picked up the glove curiously, wondering, while the beat of her horse's hoofs died swiftly away along the trail that led out of the valley.

CHAPTER X.

DOUBLE-DEALING.

"ACTRESS," muttered Bremerton—"actress to the core!" He threw the small glove upon the table with an angry gesture.

"So I am to take that back to her on my knees, am I?"

He pictured himself crawling at the feet of Mariquita Mallory and humbly lifting that gage of battle which she had flung at him. A grim smile curled his lips. "I wonder if she takes me for a coward or a sentimental fool?"

He felt as though he had just come off the stage after taking part in a scene from a melodrama. His annoyance was keen, and he was surprised a

moment later to find himself beside the table and again holding the glove in his hands.

The girl was two-faced; in his own mind there could be no doubt about that. And yet there was something undeniably attractive about her, something winsome, appealing.

He would have given a month's pay to hear the truth in the matter of Deane's deal for the Mariquita Mine. But from what unprejudiced source was the truth to come? Certainly not from the girl.

Lacey had found her "most dangerous when she smiled." Bremerton ground out an exclamation and crushed the glove in his strong fingers.

Unlocking a drawer of the desk he dropped Miss Mallory's property into it, along with the ball of amalgam and the mended chamois skin, and turned the key on the collection.

The gleaming ball reminded him that he had work to do, and he left the office and mounted the low incline that led to the mill. A man on the ore platform was shoveling rock into the crusher. The superintendent picked up a piece at random and examined it.

It was fairly good ore, but not the kind that would make the Mariquita worth half a million dollars. He tossed the sample into the hopper and climbed through an opening in the rough board wall and descended three or four steps to the ore loft.

The stamp-stems of the two batteries were lifting and falling with a force that shook the old mill in every part.

The uproar was deafening, so close at hand. The crusherman was also the ore-feeder, and while he was busy on the platform outside Bremerton had the ore-loft to himself. Making his way between the batteries of dancing stamp-stems, he halted at the edge of the loft and looked down into the body of the mill.

Directly beneath him were the mill-plates, covered with a thin sheet of flowing water. The water was stained

with the powdered ore, washed away from the stamps and carried through the battery screen to the plates.

The quicksilver on the plates captured the gold from the muddy tide and held it fast. For one reason or another, a small quantity of the yellow metal would not "catch," and the water carried it out of the mill and away to the tailings piles.

Giles, the batteryman, sat in the aisle between the plates, keeping a vigilant eye upon the boxes, and smoking as he watched. At the rear of the mill Big Steve leaned against a bench, tying a fresh cloth over the wide mouth of a bottle of "quick."

Through the door leading into the engine room Bremerton could see the engineer—who was his own fireman—heaving crooked lengths of mesquit and *palo-verde* into the fire-box.

It was a scene of peaceful activity, and offered not the slightest hint of dishonest motives on the part of any of the workers. And yet, if there was a "leak," and if through it amalgam was dribbling away from Deane, then more than one man in that mill had a hand in the plot.

Bremerton became suddenly aware that Big Steve had finished tinkering with the bottle of quicksilver and was looking upward at the edge of the ore-loft. A complacent, slightly contemptuous grin creased the flabby face of the amalgamator. Bremerton met the uplifted glance quietly, and Big Steve dropped his eyes and shouted something to Giles.

The batteryman bounded up the steps to the loft and began "hanging up" the stamps. One by one, with a piece of board, he lifted each stamp in one of the batteries and left it hanging and idle. There is a knack in the work, and Giles proved his efficiency by doing it deftly and quickly.

The roar of the mill was now decreased by half, and Bremerton was able to compliment Giles without shouting at the top of his voice. Giles was minus an eye, but the eye that was

left gleamed with pride as he listened to the approval of the new superintendent.

If Big Steve had a confederate, Bremerton was sure it could not be Giles. He had not the air of a man with a guilty conscience. If there was any fault to be found with Giles, it was because he could not see as much crookedness with one eye as he might have seen with his normal equipment.

Bremerton descended a flight of narrow stairs to the body of the mill. Big Steve was just coming out from under the ore-loft, where he had been turning the water off from the battery.

He pulled a stubby whisk-broom from his pocket and stepped to the side of the plate. "Looking over the mill?" he asked of Bremerton casually.

Bremerton nodded. Big Steve began passing the broom over the plate in wide, vigorous circles. The amalgam ridged and loosened under the sweeping splints. Big Steve laid aside the broom and took a square of rubber from his coat.

"Cleaning up a little?" asked the new superintendent pleasantly.

"Got to," was the reply. "She don't stick. Liable to shuff off and ride out with the tailings in chunks."

Bremerton knew better. The amalgam was safe enough and there was no need of removing any from the plate. Big Steve was lying. This was part of his method in "lifting" Deane's gold.

He pushed the rubber across and across the plate, molded two balls of amalgam in his hands and laid them aside on a piece of chamois skin. After that he scattered quicksilver from the bottle upon the plate, dressed the plate down with the broom, called to Giles to start the stamps again and went into the little amalgamator's room off the side of the mill.

Bremerton followed and watched. Big Steve, by manner rather than words, seemed to consider his presence an intrusion.

"How many times a day do you

make this partial clean-up, Bryden?" the superintendent asked.

"Four."

The amalgamator was gathering a ball up in the chamois. His big fists clamped down on it tight and the "quick" oozed through the skin and dropped into a bowl.

"Two balls each time?"

"Gen'rally."

Big Steve removed the first ball, laid it on a shelf behind him, and then began squeezing the second ball. Working at the amalgamator's back, Bremerton drew a knife from his pocket, opened the blade and, with its point, made a cross on the lower surface of the first ball of amalgam. The maneuver was entirely lost on Big Steve.

"I don't reckon we'll get two balls every partial clean-up this run," said the amalgamator suddenly, as though his heavy wits had been struggling with Bremerton's question and his own answer. "Ore's purty low-grade, compared with what it is usually."

Bremerton strolled out of the little room, across the body of the mill, through the engineer's quarters and around to where King was working at the cyanid tanks.

"What does Bryden do with the amalgam he takes from the plates during the day, King?" Bremerton inquired.

"Turns it over to me when he knocks off work in the afternoon," was the reply. "Night amalgamator does the same thing in the morning. Why?"

"Oh, nothing! I'm just getting the run of the details. After supper, this evening, bring Bryden's amalgam to the office."

The little expert's eyes widened.

"You don't think for a minute that Big Steve—" he began, but the superintendent cut him short.

"Don't bother about what I think, King. Whatever it is, be sure it is nothing to your discredit. Just bring up the amalgam this evening—and keep the matter quiet."

Bremerton went back to the office

and resumed his study of the Mariquita property as outlined on the map. Deane's holdings comprised several claims, all known by the one general name, and completely filled the little valley and lapped over upon the hills that bordered it.

Where was the bonanza ledge, the golden reef which had dazzled Deane while the mine was in the hands of Mallory or Carruthers? Bremerton could have sworn that it was somewhere under that scoriated valley, and just as surely as it was there so surely would he one day discover it.

For the rest of the morning and all the afternoon he smoked and reflected, the map under his eyes. His next step was to go over the property foot by foot and endeavor to locate the lost vein. Next day he would begin.

Following supper, and after the day men had retired to their quarters and the night men had gone into mine and mill for their work, King came with a canvas bag and rolled four balls of amalgam out upon the office table.

"Is that all Big Steve turned in?" Bremerton inquired.

"Certainly," replied King with a pained look. "I hope, Bremerton, you don't think I'd hold out anything on you?"

"Bosh! It's not your trail I'm on. How does the ore now running through the mill compare in value with the ore of the last run?"

"It is almost identically the same, so far as value is concerned."

"And the amount milled is the same?"

"Yes."

"Bryden says it is his practise to have a partial clean-up four times during his shift, and that generally he gets two balls of amalgam from each plate every time he takes the stuff off. According to that, there should be sixteen balls of amalgam in this lot. Where are the other twelve?"

King appeared astounded.

"He never turns in any more than this. Bremerton. Probably Big Steve

is a bit hazy, yet, and didn't realize what he was saying. Or you may have misunderstood him."

"He was sober enough and I didn't misunderstand him." Bremerton looked at the balls. The one he had marked was not among them. "Well," he added presently, "of all the brazen stealing I ever heard of, this is the limit."

He leaned back in his chair, peered into King's startled face and laughed.

"What was the matter with Griggsby and Lacey that they did not find the 'leak' in the mill?" he went on. "It is so confoundedly simple that a blind man could locate it."

"I'm not blind," parried King. "It got past me, Bremerton. And Griggsby and Lacey worried their heads off about the failure of the clean-ups to tally with my assay figures."

"Take the amalgam back and put it in the laboratory safe, King," said the superintendent quietly. "I'll explain matters to you later on. I know why the bullion doesn't tally with your assays of the mill-run, but there are a few other things I don't know and which I must find out as quickly as possible. Keep your own counsel. We'll get to the bottom of this, and something will drop, and drop hard, before many days. It's a wonder, by glory, that this mine is doing as well as it is, everything considered."

King took his bag of amalgam and went back to the laboratory. He was sorely puzzled and half-inclined to doubt Bremerton's statement regarding the discovery of the "leak."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOUTH OF THE ARROYO.

OF Griggsby, Bremerton knew little, but for Lacey, Bremerton cherished the respect which one man of resolution and ability will always feel for another of his kind. A square look was all Bremerton had needed to get Lacey's measure. And how had it been possible

for Big Steve, so clumsy and barefaced in his thieving, to pull the wool over Lacey's eyes?

The deeps of human nature are a tangle of mystery. Why or wherein Lacey had failed, or what he might ultimately have accomplished had he been left to go on with his work, Bremerton could not pretend to guess. But this matter of Big Steve and the missing amalgam had yielded so readily to investigation that the blindness of Bremerton's predecessors—especially of Lacey—was a thing for wonder.

Bremerton reflected that his very first day at the mine had given him a clue. That clue had infallibly involved Bryden. This advantage, however, did not tell the whole story of Griggsby's and Lacey's carelessness or incompetence.

"It may be," thought Bremerton, "that Big Steve worked differently when Lacey was in charge. The truth may come out sometime. I can't believe that Lacey was so gullible as the developments seem to indicate."

He need not bother about Lacey. It was his own battle and not Lacey's he was fighting. There was work to be done that night.

Closing and locking the desk, he got up and walked into his sleeping room. When he came out into the main office he had the automatic pistol in his hand. He examined the weapon for a moment under the light, then dropped it into his pocket.

With a whiff down the lamp chimney he filled the room with darkness. A moment later he passed through the door and turned the key in the lock behind him. Moving on the bunkhouse through the gloom, he took up a position behind a heap of stones—a position from which he could watch the quarters of the sleeping day-shift.

He wanted to be at the mill so that he might test the night amalgamator as he had tested Big Steve. That part of his plans would have to wait, for the present. It was Big Steve's trail he was following, and he must run it out.

There was no one abroad in the camp at that hour. The night men in the mill and in the underground workings had no cause to leave their posts.

The blacksmith had pointed a supply of drills for those in the levels and stopes, and the teamsters had heaped the ore platform with plenty of rock for the stamps.

Those of the camp who were not on duty slept while the mill roared and the ore gathered at the bottoms of the shafts. Bremerton ran no risk of discovery.

Such risks as there were would come later, if the superintendent's vague hopes were realized. Big Steve, sure of himself and careless in his villainy, was still the peg upon which Bremerton hung his plans.

Where had Bryden put those twelve balls of amalgam? Even he would realize the danger of secreting them in the bunk-house. He would not let the night pass—so the superintendent reasoned—without clearing away the evidence of his crookedness.

The time dragged slowly. A lessened clamor from the mill suggested the hanging up of a battery and the removal of amalgam from the plates. The night amalgamator was cutting his cloth according to Big Steve's pattern, and all to the financial loss of Deane.

The Mariquita Mine, it seemed, was being assailed from without and within. The Mallorays and their gang were not Deane's sole enemies. There were traitors in camp with whom there must be a reckoning before a search-light could be turned on the methods of the Mallorays.

"All in good time," muttered Bremerton grimly, "and meanwhile one thing at a time."

The old mill, crashing and clanging, gleaming yellow through every crack in the rough walls and pouring its smoke straight toward the stars, was a weird and fascinating object.

It crouched on the crest of its little hill like some sulky, misshapen devil, growling as it gnashed at the ore and

wheezing as it spewed the thick fog out of the tall, black stack.

Bremerton was oddly attracted by that ramshackle structure, flaming and howling in the night. His eyes shifted from the mill to the bunk-house and back again almost continually.

Perhaps he had been at the rock heap two hours, perhaps three, when a moving blot emerged from the bunk-house shadows and glided toward the trail that led out of the valley.

Bremerton chuckled. His vague hopes were being realized. As the shadowy blur lost itself behind the headquarters adobe and reappeared in the starlight beyond, he left his hiding place and cautiously followed.

Once clear of the ruck of the camp the form from the bunk-house was thrown into clearer prominence. It was the form of a large man—Big Steve without a doubt—bearing a sack over his shoulder.

The amalgamator followed the trail. Bremerton, more circumspect, dodged from one clump of greasewood to another at the trailside.

At the top of the rise to the south, Big Steve turned directly out of the road and moved westward, along the ridge. Bremerton kept below the crest of the uplift. At a distance, it might have been, of a quarter of a mile, the man with the bag descended the opposite slope and passed from sight.

The mill-clamor was hushed so that the shrill cries of the coyotes could be heard. Creeping things, to which Bremerton gave no heed, scuttled out of his way. He looked down from the ridge-top upon a narrow level of desert, at the farther side of which were more hills and the mouth of an arroyo.

Big Steve was laying a straight course for the arroyo. He paused once to emit a whistle. The signal was answered. Against the arroyo, black as a pocket, a point of light flared, fluttered and died out.

Bremerton crawled over the top of the ridge and, with redoubled caution, let himself down the slope. Here and

there on the level were bits of chaparral. From screen to screen of bushes he moved and finally was as close to the mouth of the arroyo as he could go without inviting discovery.

He heard a mumble of words. Big Steve was talking with some one whom he had met. A match was lighted, and the speck of fire hung over a pipe between the amalgamator's lips. Hardly a breath of air was stirring, and that faint glow did not waver.

Big Steve sat on a boulder. The figure beside him bent to pick up the bag he had carried from the bunk-house. The face of the stooping form came within the dim circle of light from the match. It was Chombo's face, and the light glittered on the rings in his ears.

There was a sling of white cloth suspended from the half-blood's neck, and in the fold of it his right hand rested. There could not be the least doubt regarding the identity of Chombo.

Here was positive evidence of conspiracy. Chombo had assisted Big Steve in his stealings while employed at the mine, and he was still active now that he had been discharged.

How many of those rough workers at the mine were honest and loyal to Deane? The scene at the mouth of the arroyo suggested the question to Bremerton, and he was in a mood to distrust every man in the camp except King.

Where double-dealing was possible, owing to laxity of those in control, nearly every one would be found with a hand in it. It was up to Bremerton to make the thieving impossible. The first step to that end would be accomplished by making object-lessons of Big Steve and Chombo.

When the two in the mouth of the arroyo separated, the amalgamator returned toward the mill by the way he had come, and the half-blood faded into the dark of the narrow valley.

Bremerton allowed Big Steve to go his way and pressed forward into the arroyo. His object was to discover, if he could, where the stolen amalgam was taken by Chombo.

In this he failed. Chombo had vanished completely, and to prowl aimlessly around in an attempt to locate him might have resulted in disaster to the superintendent.

An examination of the arroyo could wait until the following day. The heavy gloom made a night search worse than useless.

Bremerton started back towards the ridge. As he was climbing the slope, a rider galloped along the ridge-top, coming suddenly from nowhere and flinging along in the direction of the trail.

His jaws clamped hard and his brows wrinkled as he stood and gazed. The rider was cut sharply in silhouette against the lighter background of the night sky. That swinging, graceful figure, the broad-brimmed hat, the fluttering hair— He could not be mistaken. It was Mariquita Mallory!

The girl was swallowed up in the shadows as suddenly as she had appeared. Bremerton muttered angrily.

Why was she there? Had she a part in that scoundrelly work at the mill? Was there really but one set of enemies fighting Deane? Were the foes within the camp linked in devilry with those outside? Were they all working together to drive Deane out of that mining district?

Somewhere, deep down in Bremerton's soul, lurked a sense of disappointment. He realized that he had been hoping against hope that Mariquita Mallory, in the face of all that had happened, might be as innocent of actual wrong-doing as she had professed to be. But evidence was piling upon evidence to prove the contrary.

Big Steve, the thief, had met Chombo, another thief, in the hills. The girl was there, not present at the meeting, but handily by, to take from Chombo the bag of stolen amalgam. Quite likely the bag lay across the saddle in front of her as she galloped away.

"She'll not make a fool of me as she did of Lacey," Bremerton growled.

He had said that before. Why was

he harping on it? Did he feel himself slipping and was he unwittingly making a stand against an event altogether possible?

His spirit was up in arms against himself. While climbing the slope and striding along the ridge his thoughts circled around ways and means for gathering both Mallorys in the same snare he was preparing for Big Steve and Combo.

"If she's in this," he vowed, "she'll pay for it. I warned her. Whatever the cost, these foes of Deane's are to be put out of business. They can't wipe me out before I've had my way with them."

When he had got back to the headquarters adobe and had locked himself in the stuffy rooms, he looked at his watch and found that it was two o'clock. His work for the next day, and for many days to follow, was cut out for him. It was time he was in bed.

His thoughts, however, gave him no rest. He fumbled for his keys and started to open the drawer containing the ball of amalgam and the other things, and angrily caught himself up short.

"What do I want to look at that stuff for?" he mentally asked himself. And he had no logical answer for the question.

The Mallorys were hand-in-glove with the amalgam thieves. Otherwise, how it was that he found that first ball of amalgam on the scene of his struggle by the Phoenix town ditch?

"She's as guilty as the rest of them!" he muttered savagely.

With that conclusion firmly in mind he dismissed the whole subject of his night's work and went to bed.

CHAPTER XII.

ENTER MICHAEL O'HARA.

THE entrance of Michael O'Hara upon the gloomy scenes of this chronicle was excellently timed for Bremer-

ton. A sordid struggle, inspired by the greed of men, blackened by treachery and tragedy, and with a plaintive note of injustice to some one somewhere ringing through it all, needs the touch of an O'Hara to renew faith in the fitness of things as they are.

He should have been "played on" with a rollicking quickstep, but not too wild, not too clashing. A nocturne, perhaps, in two-four time, dreamy in places, but with here and there a laugh at the world for its follies.

Mostly the strings, if you please, with a lilting of the wood-wind, and once or twice—but no more—the drums and the brasses. That was the spirit of the O'Hara, the soul of him.

But there was trouble in setting it to music. For this reason, maybe, he chose personally to express himself through his own flute.

He came suddenly. It was a habit he had. And gently and unobtrusively. That was another habit.

Bremerton had first discovered him in the desert. His burro was dead, his food and water were gone. With his back to a sahuara cactus, he was waiting for the Reaper—waiting and trying to breathe out his soul through the flute with "The Harp That Once Thro' Tara's Halls."

For two years after that he and Bremerton were inseparable. They found gold, those two, but it was the gold in each other's heart. They struggled, they starved, they broke rock and ripped holes in the flinty earth, and they settled down at last to sink a shaft on the "Light of Hope," their only find.

But the light went out and hope died and they had a hole in the ground for their pains. Between two days O'Hara decamped, leaving a note and sixteen silver dollars for Bremerton.

The note said briefly: "I'd fight for you, I'd die for you; but all hell can't make me saddle you longer with the cursed luck of the O'Haras."

The sixteen dollars were all he had in the world. And when he went it

was afoot, leaving the burro and all the meager grub-pack for Bremerton. High and low Bremerton searched for him, but whenever O'Hara effaced himself he did it thoroughly. No trace of the Irishman could Bremerton find.

For many a month after that Bremerton's heart was sore. O'Hara had come into his life shortly after Deane had gone out of it, and the flute-player's loss was a blow.

The friendship of the right man for another who is right is one of the greatest gifts of God. And it never ends, here or hereafter.

On the morning after his night's work in the hills Bremerton was wakened by soft music outside his door. Thrilled, he sat up on the cot and greedily drank in the melody. He was happy, but he was not precipitate. The ways of the man outside were known to him and he deferred to them.

To the strains of "Mollie O" he got up deliberately and put on his clothes. When he was quite ready he went into the outer office and unlocked and opened the door.

A hatless man with red hair sat on his door-step playing a flute. Not by the wildest flight of fancy could the man be called handsome. His nose was short and his upper lip was long.

His eyes were a washed-out blue, and while one of them looked straight at you the other surveyed the landscape. He was lean and long; doubled up as he was, his knees all but touching his chin, his length was painfully in evidence.

But he was comfortably clad. In fact, his whole appearance radiated prosperity. It was not an effusive prosperity, but an ample amount for creature comforts.

With one eye fixed on Bremerton and the other looking around the corner of the adobe, he continued his playing. Bremerton took a chair and sat down.

After "Mollie O" had been played up and down and across, with trills and variations and the chorus three times

repeated, the player took the flute from his lips and pushed it into a new, green cloth bag.

"Come in, O'Hara," said Bremerton calmly. "I owe you sixteen dollars."

"Divil a cent do you owe me," and the wide mouth of O'Hara opened in a roar of laughter. "I'm owing you a thousand this minute, Bremerton, and no one has been able to see me for dust in the rush I've made looking for you. Luck's changed a little, a very little, for O'Hara, or I'd never have ventured to run onto your trail. The debt, you mind, could have been canceled by post."

He pulled himself up from the step, shook his angular frame, and came into the little room. Twisting a package of bank-notes out of an inside pocket, he flung it to Bremerton.

"Well, by glory!" Bremerton stared at the money as though hypnotized.

"A thousand plunks!" said O'Hara, grinning. "Count 'em."

"Where have you made a raise, Mike? And why in blazes am I entitled to a share in it?"

"So you'll be lookin' a gift horse in the mouth, will you? Shame on you for tryin' to dodge good money at the hand of a friend! It's no safe I've been crackin', no strong-arm work in it at all, at all.

"Och, my boy, you could never guess. We thought it a limestone stringer, with not much under the grass-roots but heartache and disappointment. Sure, we never made a bigger mistake.

"Lee, the old Light o' Hope has made good to the chune of a couple of thousand. By the same token, your half is there in that wad. Now will you behave?"

Bremerton looked incredulous. O'Hara hastened to explain.

"This is the way of it, and on my soul you can't be more surprised than I was when the miraculous truth hit me in the face. 'Tis six months gone

since I was near that God-forsaken spot where we lived and labored and lost faith. I went to see that beautiful hole over which we'd cracked our backs, and — will you believe me? — it was deeper than when we left it, and a bit of a cross-cut had been run, and six men were takin' out ore that would have made your eyes bulge. The claim had been jumped, so help me. And why not, with no assessment work done for a year? Oh, the fools we were not to be thinkin' of that cross-cut!"

Bremerton was dumfounded. And yet he need not have been. Occasionally such things are happening in the mining country, and as long as men dig for gold they will continue to happen.

"But the two thousand?" said Bremerton. "If the claim was jumped, I don't see why the newcomers had to buy it."

"Tis there the laugh comes in," proceeded O'Hara, crinkling his crossed eyes. "It was in my name, do you mind, and you had a quitclaim to half. My location was filed, but you hadn't taken the trouble to file your quitclaim. They knew of me, those claim-jumpers, and they imagined trouble where none could be made, and gave me the two thousand to sheer off. I got it without passin' my hat!" and he wrapped his long legs around the chair and nearly choked with mirth.

Never before for Bremerton had fortune gone to such lengths to give him a bit of a smile. He appreciated the humor of it, yet, if he had not, the wild joy of O'Hara would have forced a laugh out of sheer sympathy.

"The best part of it, Mike," said Bremerton, "is that luck has turned for you."

"Faith," was the response, "the longest lane is bound to have a turn. Not being able to turn for the worse, it had to be for the better. As soon as I had the money in my jeans I set off looking for you. The devil's own chase you led me.

"Here you were grub-stakin' for a month in the hills, and there you'd come in, with your chuck gone and the burro no more than skin and bones. Maybe it was carpenter work you did, or clerkin' in a store, or drivin' stage until you'd amassed enough capital for another *pasear* in the wilds.

"Och, lad, but you're a hard one to come up with when the gold fever's in you and the heart of you cryin' for the lonesome trails! But I kept along until I found the place where you skinned yourself of your property to buy a ticket to Denver. Then I knew," and the smiling face went long and the faded, mismatched eyes grew dull. "I knew, by my soul, that you'd knuckled under to Deane."

O'Hara had no use for Deane. An honest Irishman, no matter if he is out at elbows, will think of his conscience twice for every once you mention a pirate.

"Only," continued O'Hara, "I wished to High Heaven I'd got to you with the thousand in time. For what have you sold yourself, Lee? A paragraph in the papers let me know you were here, and that Deane had hired you to lay out this property butter-side up. What was the price?"

A grim smile flickered across the other's lean face.

"If you think I've sold my birth-right for a mess of pottage, Mike," said he, "you'll have to guess again. Now listen. I'm going to tell you something I'd confide to no other living soul, and I want you to get it straight."

He went into his arrangement with Deane exhaustively. Not only that, but he followed his own trail down from Denver, to the hospital with Lacey, to the cottonwoods by the Phœnix town canal, to the mine, and, at last, to the mouth of the arroyo.

Bremerton could speak to O'Hara as to no one else. His beliefs, his hopes, his intentions were all laid naked before the eyes of his friend. He had no need to tell of his confidence in

Deane, for that tingled in every word of his talk.

But he did declare his black suspicions of Mariquita Mallory, and there was a false note struck again and again as he emphasized his convictions. O'Hara loved to drink in the music, but he hated the discord.

"Man, dear, but you're out of chune!" and he wobbled his red head gruesomely. "The girl is a fiend, of course. Didn't Lacey say so? He has judgment and penetration, although, to be sure, he couldn't find the hole in the mill where the amalgam ran out; but that was simple, and Lacey's eye was all for complications. It's human nature and bitter true that we'd rather take a week hunting for something than travel 'cross lots for an hour and pick it up.

"But if there was any doubt o' the girl's duplicity, you settled it. Beyond a shadow of surmise, in the twice you talked with her and the once you saw her gallopin' through the night you smoked out her true char-ac-ter.

"Oh, the black trick she played on you there by the town ditch! Forced her horse on you at the muzzle of a gun—made you ride when you could not walk—bullied you into a comfortable trip back to your hotel! Troth, I'm in hopes to be spared till I can get even with her for that.

"It was worse, though, when she came here and wanted to be friends. You were right in not letting her speak of the mine or give you the whys and wherefores of the sorry-work that has been going on here. She might have exploded some dynamite under that trust you have in Deane.

"Then what? No matter. Where's the glove? Begorry," and a wry smile came into the homely face, "I'd like to take it back to her myself and tell her a few things. Bremerton, I've a mind to camp down on you for a while. You need me. But I'll be no dead-head; I'll work."

"But you don't understand—"

"I understand more than you think.

Before long there'll be more broken heads in these diggin's than there ever was at a Donnybrook fair. For one of my disposition the outlook is distinctly allurin'. I'm going to work here."

"Where are you going to work?" laughed Bremerton.

"In the mill. About to-morrow you'll be needing a new amalgamator, and I'm the man for the job."

"Then that's settled, and I could ask nothing better. There goes the gong at the chuck-shanty, Mike. Come on to breakfast."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HAND OF THE LAW.

BREMERTON planned a surprise for Big Steve and Chombo. The law was to be invoked against them and the case relentlessly pressed. Such a move would constitute an object lesson for all the enemies of Deane.

King was sent to Phoenix directly after breakfast to communicate Bremerton's plans to the sheriff. As a cover to the real nature of his errand, it was given out in camp that he had gone to town for a couple of carboys of sulphuric acid.

In looking over the odds and ends of equipment in the office the superintendent had found an old dark-lantern. He had the lantern cleaned and filled by Wun Sing and made ready against the night's operations.

At ten o'clock in the evening Bremerton and O'Hara quietly slipped out of camp and made their way along the trail to the top of the ridge. Three men were waiting for them on the ridge-crest—Ransom, the sheriff, and two deputies.

"I'm mighty glad," said Ransom, after a few minutes' talk, "that something is going to be done out here. Thugs and plug-uglies have been doing about as they please at the Mariquita, and the law has had blamed little to work on.

"The sneaking coyotes have covered their tracks well, and even when Griggsby went I couldn't lay hold of the first thing in the shape of a clue.

"The coroner's verdict, that he 'met his death at the hands of some person or persons unknown,' still stands. It's a blot on the good name of this county and this mining district; but now, with your help, I'm in hopes to accomplish something."

"There'll be a clean-up, Ransom," declared Bremerton shortly, "and you can gamble on that. Where did you leave your horses?"

"We've got a buckboard back a ways on the trail."

"You understand the scheme. Captain Bryden and the half-breed is only part of it; in addition to that, we've got to recover the stolen amalgam."

"I get you. Maybe your idea will work, and maybe it won't; but we'll try it out."

All five of them pushed into the chaparral at the trailside. The night wind rustled the greasewood branches, and as it rose and fell the muttering of the mill rose and fell with it. The clear-cut stars gleamed in the sky like scattered diamonds, and only beneath them the trail was a lone, whitish blur and the ridge-top a shadowy stretch of brush-clumps and massed boulders. An hour dragged, and then—

"What's that?" whispered Ransom in Bremerton's ear. "It's a horse, and coming from the wrong direction."

"Wait—don't make a move."

The galloping came close and a horse and rider paused within a dozen feet of those in the chaparral. Rising in the stirrups the rider looked over into the valley for a moment, peering and listening; then, with a sharp turn to the right, was off and out of sight along the ridge.

"A woman, by thunder!" murmured the amazed sheriff. He swore under his breath. "Is there a woman mixed up in this, Bremerton?" he demanded.

"How do I know who's mixed up in it?" returned the superintendent fretfully. "There are others besides Big Steve and Chombo, I suppose, and maybe to-night will give us a line on them."

With one hand he touched O'Hara. The latter was sitting comfortably, his long knees hunched to his chin and his hands clasped around them. He laughed softly but said not a word.

The Irishman's tide of sentiment had set in toward Mariquita Mallory. This weakness of the girl's for night-riding, and at times when the nights were bedeviled with treachery, had in timely fashion been brought home to O'Hara. Bremerton expected surprise and consternation. His expectations had been met with a laugh that expressed unreasoning, unshaken faith.

Another hour dragged, and then through the deep, rolling diapason of the mill a sliding foot whispered in the sand. A dark figure was climbing out of the valley, a sack over the shoulder.

"Get ready!" said Bremerton to the sheriff.

A tense moment followed. Ransom took something from his pocket and rose crouching to his feet. Bremerton brought the lantern around in front of him and made ready to open the shutter.

The figure won to the top of the trail and turned toward the length of the ridge. In that moment the shutter clicked and an eye of light streamed from the bushes. Big Steve whirled with a gasp in his throat. The bag dropped and he stood blinking in the glare. Then a hand swept under his coat toward his hip.

"None of that!" The bushes crashed and Ransom landed heavily in the trail. "I've got your number, Bryden, and here's where you lose. Bring that hand back in front of you!"

The hand came back, but with steel glittering in the lantern-light. The

amalgamator, at bay, would have made a fight of it, even against such odds. O'Hara's long body shot clear of the chaparral as though propelled by springs, and with the swiftness of lightning he caught the steel and tore it away.

"That pulls his fangs for him," remarked O'Hara, stepping back. "He has no sense at all or he'd know when he's trapped."

"What's this?" puffed Big Steve. "Who's stoppin' me?"

"The sheriff," replied that official briskly. "Andy!"

Both deputies were out of the bushes by then, and Andy hurried to the prisoner with a pair of handcuffs. Big Steve showed his mettle and his desperation and began a wild fight against the inevitable.

"Leave him to me," said the flute-player, and caught the thick, hairy wrists.

With a strength no one but Bremerton knew he possessed, O'Hara slowly but surely brought the hands of the prisoner together in front of him.

"Don't be in a rush with those come-alongs, Andy," cautioned O'Hara. "Bremerton wants his coat, do you mind. There's another one to be dealt with."

The words caused Big Steve to remember Chombo, and he lifted a roar of warning. The other deputy came up behind and slapped a hand over the prisoner's mouth.

"Off with the coat," said Bremerton, bringing the light closer. "I don't think the yell caused any harm."

With the sheriff's help the coat was stripped from the amalgamator's shoulders and the handcuffs snapped in place. Bremerton put on the coat over his flannel shirt, and picked up a black slouch hat that lay in the trail.

"Take him off to the wagon," he went on the deputies.

A twisted handkerchief was tied between Big Steve's jaws as a precau-

tion against any further use of his voice, and the two men half dragged and half carried him along the road.

Ransom borrowed the lantern and turned its light into the open mouth of the sack.

"Caught him with the goods, all right!" There was a throb of satisfaction in his husky voice. "Bremerton, we've a dead open and shut so far as that fellow is concerned."

"We'll get the others in the same way," was Bremerton's response.

"There's only one more, Lee," put in O'Hara quietly. "Make sure."

"We will make sure of it, Mike." Bremerton stuffed his own hat in the front of his coat and put on Big Steve's. "We've got to proceed carefully, from now on, if we locate the amalgam." He picked up the bag and threw it over his shoulder. "Shut off the lantern," he added, "and follow well in the rear."

"Wait a bit." O'Hara stepped closer to his friend. "This is the part of your scheme, Bremerton, that has little appeal to me. The breed may think you're Bryden for a few moments, but how will this play get you the location of the amalgam? If you think you can act the part of Steve and get Chombo to talk, then you're far wide of your trail. Again, suppose Chombo heard that yell of Big Steve's? If he did, he'll be waiting and ready for you."

"Chombo will be in the dark of the arroyo," explained Bremerton. "We can't hide out and wait for him, as we did for Steve, and the three of us can't approach the mouth of the arroyo without arousing the breed's suspicions. There's a flat to cross, and practically no cover. This is the only move we can make that will lay Chombo by the heels, and I may get a tip regarding the amalgam."

"And you may get something more than you expect," muttered O'Hara.

"Not from Chombo. He has only one good hand."

"Well, go ahead," cut in the sheriff

impatently. "Whatever happens, Bremerton, we'll be at your back."

The superintendent started along the ridge. Indistinct as he was in the starlight Chombo might easily mistake him for Steve Bryden.

Following the route the amalgamator had taken the previous night, Bremerton descended the slope, crossed the little plateau and paused only to give the whistle signal.

The signal was answered, and he advanced swiftly to the arroyo's mouth. A figure disentangled itself from the gloom, as the superintendent dropped the bag and seated himself on a boulder, a stealthy figure that crouched forward only to halt warily and at a safe distance.

"Steve?" questioned a voice.

"Yes," answered Bremerton.

The word was lost in a report, and fire flashed in the mouth of the arroyo. Bremerton gasped, swayed and slowly sank downward at the side of the boulder.

A wild laugh burst from Chombo. His form straightened and he plunged forward. Ransom and O'Hara could be heard stumbling across the flat, coming uncertainly but at speed, each with his own forebodings about Bremerton.

Chombo bent and grabbed for the bag of amalgam. In the same instant, Bremerton's arms went around him.

"Thought you had me, eh?" growled Bremerton. "Not that time!"

The two were struggling when Ransom and O'Hara came up. In short order the half-blood was flung to the ground and pinned there by the sheriff.

"Lee," asked O'Hara anxiously, "how bad is it?"

Bremerton laughed.

"Chombo knew something was wrong," he answered, "and some one was handily by to pick me off. But the shot went wide."

"Och, you schemer!" chuckled O'Hara, mightily relieved. "You

dropped, and the breed rushed for the sack. Then you nailed him. It was well done, for I thought in my soul you had followed Griggsby."

"Good work," said Ransom approvingly. "Chombo," he added to his surly captive, "I'm the sheriff, and you're under arrest. We have your confederate, Bryden. Now, where's the loot? I'm making no promises, but it will surely not go harder with you if you tell us about the amalgam."

"You'll let me go if I give ye the amalgam?" panted the half-blood.

"No. You may help yourself, though, if you make a clean breast of this."

There was a brief silence, during which Chombo seemed to be thinking.

"Get off," he gasped, "let me breathe. You hurt my arm."

Ransom groped through Chombo's clothes for weapons, confiscated a knife, and finally got to his feet.

"The lantern, O'Hara," said he.

The yellow gleam fixed itself upon the form of Chombo, and under the threatening muzzle of the sheriff's gun he struggled to his feet.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER THE ADOBE WALL.

"You did this!" said Chombo between his teeth. His black eyes, gleaming with hate, turned on Bremerton. "Some day I am going to kill you!"

"That'll do you," came sharply from Ransom. "Better think of yourself, Chombo. It'll be some years before you're foot-loose and able to camp on anybody's trail. What about that loot?"

The half-blood swore softly and shifted his arm to a more comfortable position in the sling.

"What can I do?" he complained fiercely. "You are three and I am only one. I'll take you where you can find the amalgam."

"How far is it?"

"Half a mile, maybe."

"Just a minute," put in Bremer-ton. "Who fired that shot from the arroyo?"

"*Carramba!* Some things I will not tell. That is one."

"It's clear enough to me, anyhow."

"The girl on the horse?" queried the sheriff.

"Easy, easy," cautioned O'Hara. "Facts are what we want, not guesses." He whirled on Chombo and flung the light full in his evil face. "Don't add a lie to the rest o' your misdoings," said he, "but tell us who shot at Bremerton?"

Cunning flashed in the shifty black eyes. "Señorita Mallory."

"You spawn of the pit!" cried O'Hara. "I throw it back in your teeth. You're too ready to tell when you swore you wouldn't. The truth is not in you. If he'd lie about one thing, Ransom, he'd lie about two, and I would not go a step with him to find this amalgam."

"We'll give him a chance to make good," answered the sheriff. "If he's got any black scheme in his mind, he'll pay for it."

"Come with me, that's all," said Chombo surlily. "If you find I'm lyin' you can make me pay."

"He's playing fair," observed Bremer-ton. "Let's be going."

With O'Hara on one side of him and Ransom on the other, Chombo led the searchers into the arroyo. For several minutes they stumbled through the darkness, then climbed a steep slope, traversed the length of a "hog-back," plunged downward into blackness again, and came finally into a small cañon. The walls were not high, and from somewhere ahead could be heard a drip, drip of water falling into a pool.

A turn in the gulch brought them out on a flat covered with a sparse growth of oaks. They were now close to the dripping water, and a small house could be seen under the shadow of the trees.

"Oak Flats," remarked Ransom, "I know the place. The only water this side the Mariquita. Which way, Chombo?"

"The adobe barn back of the house," said the prisoner.

The small house was dark and still. Twenty yards away, backed up against the rugged gulch wall, stood the barn. A corral, fenced with okatea stakes braided with wire, was close to the barn. As they passed the corral a horse whinnied.

"Must be some one at home," commented Bremerton.

"If so," returned O'Hara, "they're in bed like honest folks. My word for it, this half-breed is *muy malo*. I'd not be trusting him under oath."

"Wait!" snarled the prisoner.

He conducted them around the side of the adobe barn, then kicked his foot against the base of the wall. His foot struck wood, and there was a hollow, resonant sound.

"Take away that board and look!" hissed Chombo. "Then tell me I'm a liar."

Bremerton dropped to his knees, and while the beam of light played over the base of the adobe wall he removed a square section of board. A cavity was revealed. He reached into it and fished up a ball of amalgam the size of his fist.

"Tally one for the breed!" muttered Ransom. "You're right, Bremer-ton; he's playing fair. How much of the stuff is in the cache?"

With both hands Bremerton began scooping out the amalgam. The heap grew into a small mountain of frosted silver before he brought out the last ball and rose to his feet.

"As I figure it," said he, "the Mariquita mill has been systematically robbed since the days of Griggsby. There's not a tenth of the stealings in that pile."

"Figure some more," came the sneering voice of the half-blood. "Would all the amalgam be left in that hole under the wall, or would it

be taken away when there was enough to make it worth while, retorted, run into bars, and sold?"

A quick, light footfall was heard, at that moment, and the men turned. O'Hara shifted the gleam of the lantern, and the slender, erect figure of Mariquita Mallory was etched clearly against the somber background of the oaks.

She came steadily, bravely on, her wide-brimmed hat pushed back and the rebellious tresses twisting about her forehead and throat. Her face was set in resolute lines. A quirt swung from her slender wrist, and her horse could be seen dimly in the distance.

"This is hardly a time for visitors," said she. "May I ask what you are doing?"

O'Hara stepped forward. With a courtly gesture he removed his hat.

"Miss Mariquita Mallory?" he inquired in a voice as soft as any note of his flute.

Her large eyes swerved to him wondering, and she inclined her head.

"And these are your premises, the place where you live?"

"Yes."

"Then be so kind as to bear with the lot of us. The man there," and he flashed the lantern upon the prisoner, "has been caught takin' goold from the Mariquita mill. He led us here, saying he'd show us where he'd cached some more of it. And, faith, he has. 'Twas under the adobe wall. Bad cess to the blackguard for hiding his loot on the property of honest folks!"

The girl stood like a statue. Her gaze passed from O'Hara, encountered Bremerton, then fell on the sheriff, and finally rested on the pile of amalgam. O'Hara threw the light from point to point as the wide, wondering eyes traveled over the oddly assorted group.

"That — amalgam — was found there, under the wall?"

The words were quick and breathless, and they ended in what was al-

most a sob. A gloved hand arose to the white throat and the fingers closed.

"Be sure, Miss Mallory," said O'Hara hastily, "you have nothing to fear at all."

"Why — why should I have anything to fear?"

"You know me, I think, Miss Mallory," spoke up Ransom with a touch of sternness. "I'm the sheriff. If you can tell us anything about this half-breed, now is the time."

The hand dropped from the throat and the lithe figure straightened. The head went up, the shoulders back, and the girl faced the sheriff squarely.

"Has the half-breed told you anything about me?" she demanded.

"He says you shot at Bremerton from the arroyo, and he—"

"Man, man," burst wildly from O'Hara, "what was the need o' that?"

With measured steps Mariquita Mallory approached Chombo, where he stood at Ransom's side. Quick as thought her right hand flew up and the quirt fell stingingly across the half-breed's face. With bosom heaving and eyes flashing she leaped back.

"Say it again!" she cried. "Here, before me, say it again!"

Hate and rage and pain twisted Chombo's villainous face.

"Oh, will you say it?" breathed the girl fiercely. "There is no one to help Mariquita Mallory, no one but Mariquita Mallory herself. A woman's good name—what is that to a prowling dog in these hills? What is it to any of you?"

Her flaming eyes swept the faces of the men. "Does it mean nothing to me, to be lied about, and slandered and my name made a by-word on the lips of honest men? Shame to you that you listen to the wretch, and double-shame that you leave it to me to drive the lie down his miserable throat. But I can do it."

She whirled back to Chombo again, and once more her arm went up and the quirt-thongs trailed over her shoulder. "Was it true? Answer!"

"No!" said the half-breed, and cowered with his good arm doubled before his face.

The excitement, the frenzy, went out of the girl in an instant. Her arm fell at her side and her body, seemingly spent, by that gust of passion, drooped limply forward.

"Mr. Bremerton," she murmured sadly, "some day you will be sorry for all your suspicions; some day, if I can bear this long enough to make it clear to you. If that amalgam was stolen from the Mariquita mill and brought here, it was done for a purpose. That purpose was to bring nearer the jail with which you so gallantly threatened me that night by the town canal.

"This home," she waved her hand about her, "is my home and my father's—a mud hovel—the only place we can call our own. We should have better—some day we will have better, if we get justice and can live and fight till it comes. Do what you can, Mr. Bremerton," she said scornfully, "to cheat us out of our rights, but never again take the word of a half-breed thief against Mariquita Mallory."

A dead silence ensued when the girl had finished. Ransom was dumfounded, Bremerton amazed, and O'Hara humble and apologetic. It was the Irishman who first ventured to speak.

"Miss Mallory, what you say goes to the heart of all of us. But, believe me, you have not the right of it. When the half-breed said what he did, I gave him the lie. And Bremerton—sure, you don't know the heart of him yet. Some day, as you said, you'll come into your rights, and on that day you'll know Lee Bremerton as I know him."

A smile played about the girl's full lips.

"You are Irish?" she asked.

"All but the brogue," he laughed.

"My father is Irish and my mother was Mexican?"

"And you think I didn't guess? Faith, your name was enough to tell me that."

"You are a friend of Mr. Bremerton's?"

"Friend? That doesn't tell the half of it. He saved me in the desert, and for two years we thirsted and starved together. Such a life does not make for friends, do you mind, but for brothers."

"Then show Mr. Bremerton how wrong he is in his dealings with the Mallorys. That is the greatest kindness you can ever do him—and me!"

She pulled away her glove and reached out her right hand. O'Hara accepted it with a knightly courtesy.

"Trust me for that," he answered.

Mariquita once more faced the sheriff.

"Take that amalgam away with you," said she. "You will find ore-sacks in the barn."

With that, she left him, returned to her horse and led the animal toward the corral. They watched her until she had passed from sight.

"So that's old Mallory's girl!" murmured Ransom, in a bewildered tone. "Hanged if I ever knew she had such a temper."

"Temper?" countered O'Hara. "Not a bit of it. It's spirit, fine and high, and nothing else."

"She ought to be on the stage," growled Bremerton; "she'd make a hit as an emotional actress. But let's sidetrack the heroics and get away. Give me the lantern, O'Hara."

O'Hara gave him the light without a word, and he went into the adobe barn to get the ore-sacks.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TEST.

IN due course, Dutch Fred bought, brought out from town and duly delivered to Smear Case one dozen bags of smoking tobacco.

"I make no holler," said Fred, "but I don't got a fair shake."

"Whyever didn't you?" inquired Case.

"Dot Irish feller mit der crooked eyes come around since der bet. He is a masgot for Bremerton. I bet nodding against masgots. He is vat beat me oudt of dot smokin', yah, so."

Case chuckled; and as he walked away loaded with tribute, he added insult to injury with this gem of song:

"It takes the Irish to beat the Dutch!
What the Irish can't accomplish it
don't amount to much!
With your scientific tricks,
You can never fool the Mick—
You can bet your life the Irish beat
the Dutch!"

For the first time since Deane had acquired the Mariquita Mine the property was more than paying expenses. This was a matter for congratulation, although it was not going far enough. It was no showing on which to effect a sale of the mine for half a million dollars.

Bremerton's task was to bring the output of bullion up to the bonanza point set by Mallory. He had unearthed a file of Mallory's bullion certificates, and these he had compared with assays of rock from the lead on which the miners were now at work.

The ore was different. Mallory had not worked out a rich "pocket" on the present vein. He had dug in virgin and bonanza ground. But where was it?

While the camp was being reorganized and shaken down to a commercially profitable basis, Big Steve and Chombo had come to trial for the larceny of the bullion and had been sentenced to the penitentiary.

Between arrest and conviction a remarkably short time had intervened. And the sentences imposed were strangely inadequate.

Sinister influences had been at work in behalf of Big Steve and Chombo. A lawyer of prominence had managed their case, but he had hastened rather than checked the law's course.

As soon as his clients were finally behind the bars, it was known that he had begun disbursing small sums, as

pensions, to the immediate families of the two men.

Bremerton had hoped that one or both of the thieves would make a confession involving more of Deane's enemies. In this he was disappointed. They held their peace and took their medicine, and Bremerton felt sure that somebody had made it worth their while.

Indirectly, it seemed certain that the convicted men were part of the strong and desperate organization that was fighting Deane. With this murderous and persistent gang Bremerton could not but connect the Mallorys. Absolute proof, however, was lacking.

While Bremerton "gophered" and hunted for clues of the lost vein, and pestered his mind with doubts and theories in other directions, O'Hara cheerfully tinkered with the mill-plates and in off-hours played his flute.

Apparently the Irishman had not a care in the world. Now and then he would drop in on the night amalgamator, in the small hours of the morning, exchange small talk with him and covertly watch for dishonest work.

But if the amalgamator on the night shift had been crooked, the fate of Big Steve had induced him to reform. This, which came nearer being a care for O'Hara than anything else, settled itself comfortably and left nothing on his mind.

In Bremerton's second month at the mine, at the close of a Monday afternoon, a Mexican boy rode up to the office and asked for the superintendent.

Bremerton was just coming in from a day's fruitless quest for the lost vein, and the boy handed him a note, offered no explanation one way or the other, and immediately galloped away.

Bremerton read the note and smiled queerly. After supper that evening, while O'Hara was getting out his flute, the superintendent halted the music for a talk.

"What are you doing to carry out your part of the agreement, Mike?" Bremerton inquired suddenly.

The other looked up blankly.

"It's a rolling stone I am, and utterly irresponsible," said he. "What's a contract to such a man? But you have me curious, Lee. What agreement is in your mind?"

"The one you made with Mariquita Mallory. You were to show me how wrong I am in my estimate of her and her father. Weeks have gone and you have not made a move?"

O'Hara trilled a few notes, then laid the flute on his knee.

"Sure, it was an easy job, and I saw it from the start. You're makin' no wrong estimates. What you say, Bremerton, is one thing, and what you believe, in that case, is another entirely."

"You're not giving me credit for being honest."

"I'm giving you credit for trying hard to be loyal to Deane."

"We might as well thrash this out, Mike. Your attitude toward Mariquita Mallory is so different from mine that it bothers me."

"Tis not different at all," and the flute went to his lips while he ran the scale.

"There's no use arguing with an Irishman."

"Then why are you bothered?"

Quizzing wrinkles showed around the twinkling, crossed eyes. Bremerton frowned and reached for a pigeon-hole of his desk. Removing a folded paper, he handed it to O'Hara and asked him to read it.

"H-m," said O'Hara. "I'd give something handsome if such an invite could come to me. Did Lacey accept?"

"That's the note from Mariquita Mallory," explained Bremerton sharply, "that lured Lacey into a trap. On the way to make his call he was shot from cover. Only yesterday he left the Phoenix hospital, almost a wreck of a man, to go East and get back his strength."

"Now, wasn't that the devil's own luck? He couldn't be shot comin' back, could he? Not at all. He had to get it going, and that robbed him of a few

blessed moments with the only woman I've ever seen who's distinctly worth a man's time. For me, now, I'd count it a pleasure to run the gantlet of a dozen ambushes just for a smile from the girl."

At that moment Bremerton was nearer to being out of patience with his friend than at any time since he had known him.

Jumping to his feet, he strode up and down the office. Calmly the Irishman blew into the flute, and out of it came softly the air of "Mollie O." It was always a favorite in his more serious moments.

Bremerton sat down again and waited until he had finished. O'Hara took his time, and a smile came to his lips as he again favored his friend with his attention.

"Your fur was standing, Lee," he remarked, "and I thought it would calm you. You can't stay mad at me, and you know it. Let matters drift. Before long you'll be coming around in this Mallory business."

"Here's something else for you to read," said Bremerton, handing him another note.

O'Hara took the paper and read:

MR. BREMERTON:

You must listen to me now. You are in danger, and I can help you. Come to our house in the morning at eight. You will not be sorry if you do, for this time, trust

MARIQUITA MALLORY.

"Och, the luck you have when you don't deserve it!" commented O'Hara, his faded eyes glowing. "The poor taste she has, sending for you when she might have sent for me."

He sighed heavily. "But a red-headed freak who can't look at a girl with both eyes at once mustn't expect too much in this world! Bremerton, I congratulate you."

The superintendent leaned forward and stayed the hand that was reaching for the flute.

"Cut that out for now," said he sharply. "Do you understand this?"

"Perfectly. You'll go, and the girl will be getting you out of one danger only to draw you into another. For the peace of my soul, I'd rather face a battery of masked guns than come company front with those big black eyes. There's the danger for you, and I've known it all along."

"Don't talk like an idiot!" growled Bremerton impatiently. "This is a lure, just as the note to Lacey was a lure. Can't you see it?"

"He says that," murmured O'Hara, "and calls me an idiot! My poor man," he added, "you are not yourself. That's one thing I can see."

"Of course I'm going—"

"Of course you are!"

"If for nothing more than to convince you that you're wasting a lot of sentiment on a scheming, treacherous woman!" continued Bremerton hotly.

"You can't take that back," said O'Hara dryly; "but I'd not say it again. With me it will go no further."

"We'll put the girl to the test."

"It's you that will be put to the test, not Mariquita Mallory."

"If an attack is made on me while I'm riding to Oak Flat, you'll be convinced that the girl is not what she would have you think."

"Nothing of the kind. I'll be convinced that Deane's enemies have watched their chance to catch you away from home. Even two coincidences wouldn't spell the truth."

"Be reasonable," implored Bremerton. "Don't let your heart run away with your head."

"And don't you, Lee Bremerton, let the cursed plots of Deane run away with your sense of right and justice. Make your call. If you're shot out of your saddle and brought back here with the breath gone out of your body, it will not be the girl I'd go hunting. Mark that!"

"Whom would you hunt?" queried the superintendent curiously.

"Why, the fiends who would cause that girl to bear the brunt of their own black deeds! Lee, you began your work

here with a mistaken idea. You can make mistakes—I have seen you do it before.

"You went out of your way to think wrong of a woman. It comes hard for you to think it, and deep down in your heart you are not convinced; but Deane's money has worked its spell, and you've got to do something to earn it.

"Deane! Deane! He's the man who has built himself up by knifing his friends! He has piled high his dollars by blasting the hopes of others, by back-stabbing, by schemes that won't bear the light, by—"

"No more of that, Mike!"

"—by talking fair to your face and hitting you with a club from behind! A robber so black that Big Steve and Chombo are white as the saints by comparison! And he has hooked you—because I was slow in getting around with that thousand! Can I ever forgive myself for that?"

The washed-out blue eyes snapped, the red hair seemed to stand on O'Hara's head, and the blood rushed into the thin cheeks. The Irishman half rose and shook a clenched fist at the ceiling.

"He saved my life once," said Bremerton, his bronzed face almost white; "and he wouldn't play anything but square with me."

"Square!" sneered O'Hara. "He has forgot how to be square! When he took the wrong turn of the trail he went money-mad. Play square with you! Lee, you're a tool. One of these days you will find it out, and then, blackguard that he is, I tremble for Silas Deane."

Without speaking a word, Bremerton turned on his heel and strode from the office. The notes of the flute followed him through the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CUL-DE-SAC.

O'HARA was right. Bremerton's attitude toward Mariquita Mallory

was one of distrust, not of absolute conviction. At the first he was sure that the note to Lacey was a part of the tragic plot against him.

Now he was uncertain. This second note revived his suspicions of the girl's motives. It offered a chance to test her character, and as such he welcomed it.

If he were set upon while proceeding to the Mallorys', then he would know the girl for what she was. In his own mind there would be no "coincidence" about it.

For him, perhaps, there was grave risk in the undertaking. He thought little of that. On an open trail in broad day he could use his eyes and his wits, and lurking foes would not easily get the better of him.

The mill was sounding the six-o'clock whistle as he rode out of camp. The stamps clattered to a standstill, and from rising ground Bremerton looked back and saw the night shifts emerging from mine and mill and the day shifts straggling from bunk-house and Mexican quarter.

Boom! Boom! came muffled explosions out of the distance. They were the blasts fired by the miners so that levels and shafts might be clear of fumes before the other gang went underground.

From six to seven, at the beginning and the end of each day, the work closed down for breakfast and supper and the changing of shifts.

Bremerton spurred over the top of the trail. For a quarter of a mile he would follow the main road to town, then turn into a branch that led to the cañon and Oak Flat.

The rough country contiguous to the valley had been piled with monuments, filed on, and now belonging to Deane as part of the Mariquita property.

Bremerton had combed those adjacent uplands in his search for the lost vein, and had found no "blowouts" or other promising indications.

He believed the outlying claims com-

prised merely a barrier against those who would poach on the Mariquita preserves.

He was thinking less of that morning errand than of the mysterious bonanza ledge when he reached the point where he was to leave the main trail. An east-and-west swale crossed the road, and his course lay through the swale and toward the west.

A road-runner darted out of the bushes on the right. The horse gave a startled snort and reared backward. At the same moment a sharp report rang out on the left, and Bremerton felt the wind of a bullet against his face.

On so small a thing may a man's life hang! The road-runner had startled the horse, and the horse had reared; and, at just that moment, the shot had been launched from the brush!

Had Bremerton's head been inclined a foot forward, Deane would have been looking for another superintendent.

This flashed through Bremerton's brain. But he had not much time for thought. The lurch of his mount had loosened the cinches, and the saddle turned.

He made a wild effort to keep on the horse's back. Finding this to be impossible, as the shot had still further alarmed the horse and set it to plunging, he tried to kick free of the stirrups and strike the ground on his feet.

One foot was freed, but the other became entangled. He fell heavily in the trail on his shoulders, kicking desperately to get clear of the clinging stirrup.

The horse, frenzied by the unusual turn of events, continued to rear and fling its heels. The outlook was dark indeed for Bremerton then, for he was in imminent danger of being trampled to death.

A hoarse shout came from the chaparral. A crushing of brush was heard at half a dozen widely separated points. This, of course, was all lost

upon Bremerton, for the more imminent danger claimed his attention.

Suddenly the horse whirled to the right and ran into the swale, dragging its rider over the rough ground and through the greasewood. Bremerton was bumped against stones, lashed with brush-branches, and threatened at every leap with the pounding, iron-shod heels.

He felt his senses going, and surrounding objects slid past him in a confused blur. Dimly he was aware of beating hoofs close at hand—not those of his own runaway horse, but others.

One thought rose paramount in his befogged mind. They had him! At last those mysterious forces he had defied were closing in on their quarry!

The horse stopped. Some one dismounted. The next moment his released foot fell and his body lay prone upon the ground. There followed a preliminary trampling of the earth, ending in a tattoo of hoofs that faded into silence along the swale.

"Mr. Bremerton!"

He realized that his horse was gone; that another horse stood quietly a few yards from where he lay, and that on her knees beside him was Mariquita Mallory. He sat up, bewildered.

"Bring on the rest of the gang!" he said presently.

He felt for his automatic revolver, but it had been lost out of his pocket. There was nothing left with which to defend himself, and he must take whatever was to come.

"Can you get up?"

The girl put out her hand. With her assistance he gained his feet.

"Where are the rest of them?" he demanded, glaring in the direction of the trail.

"They are behind," she answered, "and crowding us close. Come, we must hurry."

"Crowding us close?" he returned.

"You may not believe it," she said, with a trace of bitterness, "but they would not spare me any more than

they would you. You'll have to trust me now, Mr. Bremerton, and you must pull yourself together and do your best."

She straightened and peered anxiously up and down the swale; then she bent her head to listen. What she saw or heard was beyond Bremerton, but a look of wild alarm crossed her pallid face.

"Quick!" she whispered, and seized his arm convulsively.

He yielded himself passively into her hands. Whether she was a friend or foe made little difference just then. He knew his danger could not be more acute either way.

Leaving her horse, Mariquita pulled him toward the bank of the swale. There she dropped to her knees and began climbing through the thick brush. The quirt, trailing from her wrist by a leather loop, got in her way. She jerked it from her arm and flung it aside.

He followed her on all fours up and up through the mask of the chaparral. His brain was clearing and he wondered why she had abandoned her horse—why they had not both mounted the animal and galloped away. If she was really trying to befriend him that would have seemed like the safest course.

He could not hear a sound in the depths of the scrub behind them. What had become of the man who had fired at him at the fork of the trail?

Perhaps the murderous scoundrel had been frightened away by the failure of his plans; perhaps the girl was being carried away by her fears—she was a woman, and he had not much faith in a woman's resourcefulness at such a time.

In spite of his doubts, however, he made no protest. On hands and knees he crawled after the girl to the top of the bank. He would have spoken then, but she looked at him wildly and placed a finger on her lips. He started to rise, but she pulled him down.

Crack!

From somewhere in the swale came the bark of a firearm. A bullet snapped through the bushes. The golden echoes had hardly died into silence before they were taken up by another report.

This came from farther up the swale, but the snarling lead struck at the same point that had drawn the first shot.

Then again and again, from widely varying locations below, bullets were hurled at that one spot on the top of the bank. The girl's face was white, and yet she seemed to have herself well in hand.

"There's nothing else for it!" she whispered through tense lips, more to herself than to Bremerton; "we must take to the blind gully—it's our only chance."

She turned and once more began worming her way onward. At a distance of fifty feet the ground broke abruptly into a sheer descent ahead of them. They looked into a narrow, steep-walled gully.

Bremerton had seen that gully before. On the opposite side Deane's outlying holdings embraced the up-and-down wall, and the last monument of the Mariquita property was heaped at the wall's base.

"We've got to get down there, Mr. Bremerton!" declared the girl.

"I can do it," he answered; "but you—"

"I can go wherever you can. Don't let that worry you."

"They'll have us bottled up once we're in the gully. I know the place, and it's a veritable *cul-de-sac*. We can get into it here, but we can't get out. Once we're down there they can take their time picking us off."

"No," and she spoke with an effort, "I know something about this *cul-de-sac* that you don't."

She began letting herself over the rim.

"Wait," he interposed. "I'll go first and help you."

"After being dragged by your horse as you were you may have all you can do to help yourself."

"I'm all over that," he answered, and lowered himself to a protruding stone in the cliff's face. "Come after me closely," he added. "I'm used to this rock-climbing."

Foot by foot they descended, a projecting rock here, or a weather-worn seam in the wall there, affording them treacherous rounds in the cliff ladder.

The girl was clear-headed and steady, and at this Bremerton marvelled. Surely he had known very little about her up to that moment.

Time after time he reached upward to place the small foot in a place of comparative safety, and occasionally he lifted his voice in warning where the hand-holds were weak or the footholds crumbling.

When they neared the foot of the wall lead once more began to fly. The marksmen kept themselves in hiding, drop-shooting from an angle that made their work more unnerving than dangerous.

Bullets struck against granite and glanced, singing, into space. A few ranged upward and inward and one spent ball passed through Bremerton's sleeve.

"Now where?" asked Bremerton, as he and the girl stood side by side at the foot of the wall.

His voice was even, almost colorless. Mariquita's strained glance rested on his face curiously.

"You are a good deal of a man, Mr. Bremerton—in some things," said she.

"This is no time for foolish talk," he answered sharply.

"Nor for foolish actions, perhaps, such as the one I am about to do. This way, and be quick."

She ran across the boulder-strewn bed of the gully and gained a screen of chaparral on the other side. He followed. The firing, strangely enough, had slackened and the dash was entirely successful.

"Come in here," called the girl from a granite overhang.

He stepped under the rock. In the half gloom a hand reached his and led him on and on into blank darkness.

As he stumbled forward he reached out with his free hand and ran it gropingly over a ragged wall. Wonder gripped him. They were in a tunnel. Hard on the heels of wonder came a flash of hope and exultation.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WOMAN'S SACRIFICE.

"WHO ran this tunnel into the gully wall, Miss Mallory?"

Bremerton, in his excitement over this new discovery, forgot the dangers that had driven them into that subterranean refuge. His voice rang joyfully between the narrow walls, and the girl must have realized the trend of his thoughts.

"My father and I," she answered quietly, "dug and blasted our way into the heart of the hill."

"It's Deane's ground! This is the lost vein, the bonanza ledge, I've been hunting for! I had an idea all the time that you and your father knew where it was—that you must know where it was.

"What did you do with the waste you took out of the bore? No one could look into the gully and even suspect that mining operations had been going on. Why did you mask the work? Why have you made a secret of it?"

She had dropped his hand. Almost fiercely her voice leaped at him—

"I had to bring you here in order to save your life. Are you going to take advantage of the sacrifice and wreck the Mallorys completely? Caruthers knew nothing about this vein. I found it. Our only weapon against Deane, all we could use in defending our rights, has been this secret of the hills. Are you going to turn that weapon against us?"

Under the torrent of those hot words something like shame rose in his breast. She had saved his life at the expense of a golden secret, carefully guarded. Was he more indebted to her, who had rescued him, than to Deane, his employer?

Mariquita interpreted his silence as favoring her interests and her father's. Her voice lost some of its sharpness as she went on.

"We are safe here. The wretches in the gully will not show themselves—they never do. They plot and kill from cover. Once seen they could be run to earth, identified, and made to suffer from what they have done and are doing.

"Eager as they are to destroy you, Mr. Bremerton, they are more eager to keep themselves out of any entanglement with the law. They know how hard the law would deal with them—on Griggsby's account. Just a moment! There are candles and matches here, and I want you to see everything and to know everything. I think you will listen to me now."

He could hear her moving around near the opposite wall. Presently she came back to him.

"A light might be seen from the overhang," said she, "so we will not make one until we round the angle of the wall, a little way ahead. Come!"

She took his hand as before and led him forward and around a sharp turn. Half a dozen steps farther, and they halted again.

"First," Mariquita observed, "let me tell you how I happened to be in the swale. I don't have to tell you what happened to Lacey in answering a similar note of mine. You thought evil of me in that matter. It was in my mind this morning.

"I knew you were threatened, and that a blow might fall while you were on the way to the cañon. But I had to ask you to come to me, for you had made it impossible for me to come to the mine. I was anxious to learn whether you had faith enough in me—

whether your friend could persuade you—to answer that note in person.”

“I didn’t need O’Hara’s persuasions,” he broke in grimly, “for I should have come, anyway. I wanted to test you—to find out whether a move would be made against me, as it had been made against Lacey in the same situation.”

“So”—bitterly—“when that shot was fired at the fork in the trail you considered the case against me proven!”

“I had no time to consider anything. The saddle turned and I dropped in the road. But never mind that, Miss Mallory. Go on.”

“I had been watching the gang as well as I could, and I knew they were watching you, and only waiting for a chance to catch you off your guard. Since you sent Big Steve and Chombo to prison your skulking foes have been hot for reprisal.

“They realized that I was trying to help you, and they would have blackened my motives in your eyes if they could. Chombo tried it that night you found the amalgam. The stuff was hidden in that place so that, if discovered, you could not but think ill of the Mallorys.”

Her voice caught in her throat, and her quick breathing there in the underground quiet smote on his ears.

“I was anxious about you, Mr. Bremerton,” she resumed, steadying herself, “for I realized only too well what you would think if anything went wrong on your way to the cañon. I rode to the swale by a roundabout course and was waiting for you to come. I saw what happened.

“As your horse charged past me, dragging you by a stirrup, I turned my own horse and followed. The thing I did not expect, but feared in my heart, had come to pass. If you had been killed, your friend O’Hara would have blamed me; but if I could do something to save you, then you and O’Hara would be compelled to believe in me. That is why I stopped

your horse, and that is why I made the sacrifice in bringing you here.”

“You wrong O’Hara. Nothing could make him suspect you of treachery. He hasn’t the same responsibility at the mine that I have,” Bremerton added dryly. “It wasn’t my life particularly but your own good name that concerned you.”

“Don’t think that! Deane has robbed us, and all we hoped was to effect some settlement with him on the score of his lost vein. But he has no heart, no conscience. The more he was harrassed, and the harder the work at the mine was made for him, the nearer he might be forced to a compromise with us. But the slaying, the shooting, the robbing—oh, in the name of justice, do not connect my father and me with that!”

“Who has done it all?”

“Others. I don’t know who they are, and I don’t know the motives back of it, for they work in the dark. If you could discover who is paying the relatives of Big Steve and Chombo a pension, you would get a clue that might help unravel the mystery. We’ll not go into that now. My father and I are not to be identified with those wretches. You are to make sure of that, once and for all.

“My father knew you were coming to Phoenix. We went to town as soon as we heard, and he followed you about and took the first opportunity to warn you. No work was going on at the Mariquita Mine; and I think—I cannot be positive—that there were some from there concerned in that attack on you by the town canal.”

Remembering the ball of amalgam, and how it had ultimately led to the unmasking of Big Steve, Bremerton made no doubt that the girl was right. The conclusion was interesting, but led to no substantial results.

“My father, after he left you that night in Phoenix,” the girl pursued, “heard the rush of men among the cottonwoods. Oh, the God’s pity that the attack should have happened then,

of all times, so that blame could be laid at my father's door! He came at once and told me, and I rode to the canal to see how matters had fared with you. For my trouble I had only hard words and cruel suspicion. That is what hurts a woman—some women. It—it hurt me. I wanted you to understand the situation, Mr. Bremerton, and I smothered my pride and rode to the mine for a talk with you. It would have been better if I had stayed away.

"Under the strain of all this wrong and injustice my father's health is breaking. He has fought for years with misfortune, and just at the moment when success was, within his grasp it was snatched away by Deane, treacherously, deliberately, cruelly. If he had done what he should that night in Phoenix, father would have sent the police to the town canal. But he was not himself; and when he had brought word to me it was too late.

"As soon as we came back home from town, I began trying to learn something about these others who are fighting Deane. Night after night I have hovered about the mine. I saw Big Steve go to the arroyo and meet Chombo, but I could not follow Chombo and find what he did with the amalgam.

"The night of the capture I was close to Chombo when the shot was fired at you. I could not see the man who fired, but I heard him scrambling away. I took after him, but he evaded me in the pitchy darkness of the arroyo.

"When I got back to Oak Flat I found you there, and O'Hara and the sheriff. Can you put yourself in my place and realize how I felt to hear from the sheriff that Chombo accused me of shooting at you? I had just worn myself out trying to run down that skulking, cowardly scoundrel."

A feeling of sympathy for the girl had grown in Bremerton's breast as she talked. He was glad of the dark and that he could not see her face. Had there been anything more to impress

him in her favor, his sense of duty toward Deane would surely have suffered.

"No doubt I have been mistaken," said Bremerton slowly. "After my interview with Lacey, though, the mistake was natural. I am willing to set aside our past differences, Miss Mallory, and we can make common cause against these prowling devils who shoot from ambush, and rob and work under cover. Do you want it that way?"

"What will be the end of our work?" she asked doubtfully.

"We will drive them out," he answered resolutely, "and bring to punishment those who murdered Griggsby and sent Lacey to the hospital."

"But apart from that?" she persisted.

"Why, with the bonanza vein to draw on for ore, I will equal the showing you and your father made at the Mariquita! Deane will unload the property for half a million, and—"

"And," she cut in icily, "you will receive five hundred dollars a month for your work and a bonus of ten thousand dollars! The half million belongs by right to my father and me. It goes to Deane; and we get—what?"

Bremerton had no answer for that. His knowledge stopped short of the Mallorys and their so-called "rights." Deane was his friend, his employer. When Bremerton gave his word about anything, it was as good as his bond.

"You have nothing to say," murmured Mariquita. "Now that you have listened so far, Mr. Bremerton, you must hear the rest of it. First, though, it will be well to go to the overhang and reconnoiter. I do not imagine that the men in the gully have the slightest idea what has become of us, but it is just as well to be on the safe side. If you will wait here for a few minutes—"

"I'll do the reconnoitering," he cut in, and groped his way back around the turn and to the mouth of the tunnel.

At the lip of the overhang he could hear the distant growling of the stamp-mill. It was faint, however, and if there had been any stirring about in the gully he would have been aware of it.

It was impossible for him either to see or to hear anything of his mysterious enemies.

When he returned he found that the girl had lighted a candle. The light fell over her face, bringing out and accentuating each softly molded line. Her large eyes met his wistfully, appealingly, as she put the candle in his hand and pointed to the breast of the level.

"There!" she whispered. "Look at the vein—the one I found—the one my father and I developed—the ledge that makes the Mariquita Mine worth half a million! Examine it, Mr. Bremerton."

He walked to the breast, brushed his hand over the surface of the rocks, held the candle close, and bent forward. Another moment and he staggered back astounded, scarcely breathing.

He knew—none better—the full worth of what he saw. Prospecting was his trade, and often he had horn-spooned samples of crushed ore and found values that would have turned many a man's head. But never had he seen anything to compare with the indications of that bonanza lead!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WILES OF A TRICKSTER.

"RICH?" said Mariquita passively.

"Rich!" he gasped. "Well, it's the richest thing this side of the Comstock lode! And the vein's a foot wide and a true fissure. Such veins increase in values as you go down on them. What will the assays be a hundred feet, or a thousand feet, below? It's a—a—"

Words failed him. His voice trailed off into wondering silence.

"There's not much outcropping on

top of the hill," she said, her even tones contrasting queerly with his hoarse, vehement words. "I picked up just one insignificant piece of 'float' and trailed the clue until I had uncovered a mere 'stringer.'

"But that stringer was so rich that father and I covered up the opening and obliterated every sign of mineral. Every man at the mine was discharged and not one suspected a 'strike.'

"I guess we were wrong in doing that. The theory was correct, but it did not work out well. I worked side by side with father, digging that tunnel. We were months at it, and we guarded every move we made. The waste from the tunnel we pitched into a hole beside the overhang and covered it with brush.

"When we began to take out ore we hauled it in sacks up the side of the gully. Father fired and ran the engine at the mill, and I stood over the plates, dosing them with 'quick.'

"We'd run a day, then have a clean-up, and spend a week getting out more ore. You'd hardly believe, Mr. Bremerton, the way the amalgam ridged itself up on those plates! The gold tumbled out of the sieves and banked up so high in front of the battery-boxes that we had to scrape it away every half-hour.

"Father was like a boy. Twenty years dropped from his shoulders. He skipped back and forth between the engine-room and the batteries, and every once in a while he would stop to pat me on the shoulder and laugh, 'Girl, we're made! A palace and all the big things in life for you, 'way out there in the East! At last, so help me, the Mallorys are coming into their own.'

"But he was too quick with his hurrahs. We had spent so much time on the tunnel that we couldn't mine and mill enough ore to pay for the property."

Into the mild depths of her eyes came a swift change. She clutched her hands and wrung them convulsively.

"Ah, the sorry way luck turned for us!" she whispered. "With more than enough gold in sight to pay Carruthers a thousand times over, we had to go to Deane for a paltry twenty thousand dollars. He put us off, played fast and loose with us, until finally he had the mine, and we were worse off than nothing."

Her eyes snapped fire, and her hands fell at her sides and clenched fiercely. "A blacker-hearted scoundrel never lived than Silas Deane!"

Bremerton had been given time to calm himself. He studied the flame of the candle for a moment, then fixed the candle on a ledge in drippings of its own grease.

"You are to tell me all about that now," said he. "Why not sit down and be comfortable?"

"It's not a comfortable subject—for me," she answered, standing in front of him as he dropped on a boulder by the hanging wall. "I'm getting ahead of my story, too, and starting at the middle, where I should have gone back to the beginning."

"It was not always the Mariquita Mine, Mr. Bremerton. When Carruthers found it, and consolidated the several claims, it was known as the Apache. Carruthers built the mill and laid the pipe-line, and opened up the vein you are now working on. You have already discovered that the vein is very ordinary, and leaves no more than a small margin of profit. It looked pretty good to father and me, though."

"An uncle in the East had died and left me two thousand dollars. One Christmas Day father took over the property at twenty-five thousand dollars. Carruthers was to have my two thousand dollars down and three thousand dollars more the first year. Then, on the next Christmas Day—it was at noon the time expired—if the remaining twenty thousand dollars was not paid the mine was to revert at once to Carruthers. You're a mining man and you know how such deals go.

"We paid expenses, and by careful planning got out of the old vein enough more to give Carruthers his five thousand and complete the first payment. Then, in midsummer, I discovered the new lead."

"I've told you about that. Father and I were afraid that Carruthers, if he knew what we had found, would discover some way to void his contract. If we had been less suspicious, and had kept some of the men to help run in the tunnel, we could have taken out and milled ten times more than we needed to pay Carruthers. But we were afraid of him. For that reason we did the work ourselves and kept our golden secret locked up in our own hearts. Early December came and we had nothing for Carruthers. Then, in an unlucky moment, father thought of Deane."

Mariquita paused, fought down her rising emotion, and presently continued.

"Father had a passing acquaintance with this—this 'mining king,' as they call him. He believed that we could go to Denver, show Deane our bullion certificates, and get from him as much money as we needed in exchange for a tenth interest in the property. So we went to Denver."

"Deane was more than friendly—that is always his way, I'm told, when he's planning deviltry. He listened to father, took his bullion certificates, verified them in course of a week, and then asked how we could make such a good showing with a ten-stamp mill on ten-dollar rock."

"Father did not let him into our secret, but told him pointblank that after the Mallory's got the claim hard and fast and he was in for a tenth interest he would be given further light. 'I'll take care of you, Mallory,' said Deane. Those were his very words, Mr. Bremerton. 'I'll take care of you, Mallory, and don't you lose any sleep.' Day after day he put us off, reassuring us, luring us on with false hopes, until the 25th of December came.

"Carruthers was in Denver at the time. We surprised him once with Deane on one of our many trips to Deane's office. Oh, we were blind, blind, not to have suspected trickery! But father had faith in Deane up till ten o'clock that last day. It—it—" the girl's voice quivered in her throat—"it was then that Deane threw off his mask and curtly told father he had no money for him, and that he would have to look elsewhere for it.

"Look elsewhere! Where could we look? We knew no one in Denver but Deane and Carruthers. I thought father would go crazy. He grabbed Deane by the throat, and I believe he would have killed him if I hadn't interfered. Some clerks came and threw father out of that gilded den of crookedness, and we spent hours trying to get the money for Carruthers. Meanwhile—meanwhile—"

The girl choked and walked up and down the level for a few moments to get control of herself.

"Meanwhile," she finished, "Carruthers had transferred the Mariquita Mine to Deane for fifty thousand dollars! Do you know what this friend of yours did?"

Her eyes flamed, and she leaned toward Bremerton with her face set and strained and her breath coming in short, labored gasps.

"This friend of yours, this man who hired you to come down here and make a showing with the mine that would enable him to sell it for half a million, this mean, false-hearted scoundrel had been browbeating Carruthers all the while he had been feeding my father with hopes and promises.

"He told Carruthers that the Mariquita Mine was enormously rich, and he declared that if Carruthers would not give him an option on it for fifty thousand dollars he would give my father the money to get it for half that sum. Carruthers could take his choice.

"So far as Carruthers is concerned, I do not think he was much better than

Deane. It was the case of two rogues plucking an honest old man. Carruthers must have squirmed. For him it was either let the mine go to father or to Deane—a mine worth half a million, and for which the best he could get was a paltry fifty thousand.

"There were high words in that fine office, but Deane won—Carruthers had to give in. Father and I came back to Phoenix, and all we had in the world were a few tools, a few head of horses—and the secret of that rich vein.

"So long as that new vein could not be discovered, the Mariquita Mine was worth little. Already our work in the gully had been well hidden, but we went by night and made the hiding more secure.

"Poor Griggsby hunted until he was worn out, and Lacey, too, searched high and low. But neither of them suspected the wall of that *cul-de-sac* of containing mineral.

"And you had no better luck, Mr. Bremerton. There are absolutely no mineral indications in or around the gully. The original claim there was only an outpost for the Mariquita property, anyway."

Sadness, almost despair, crept into her voice as she proceeded:

"Father and I went back to our little ranch in the cañon. We watched the developments over in the valley. We wanted the superintendents Deane sent out here to fail, and we lived in hopes that Deane would at last be forced to come to us and give us a half interest in the property for telling him what we knew. After a time we discovered that other and secret enemies were fighting Deane, hampering his operations in every conceivable way and seeking to drive him out of the district.

"Night after night, while Griggsby was here, the pipe-line was cut; thieving must have been going on in the mill, too, for the bullion output was barely enough for expenses; the mill was set on fire and barely saved; there

was discontent among the men; then, on top of all this, Griggsby worried about the lost vein and his inability to make good. Finally, and the girl shivered, "he paid the penalty for helping Deane.

"Lacey was sent down. He was energetic and able, and he ruled with an iron hand. But he was not successful. His best men left, for the Mariquita Mine was getting an evil name on account of Griggsby. He had to hire the riffraff of the district in order to do any work at all, and that move brought its own troubles.

"Father and I, while all these other enemies of Deane's were at work, watched and hoped. Would Deane give up? Would he come to us?

"Father heard of a plot against Lacey. We were both sick of the shooting and the bloodshed, hard though our thoughts were toward that master schemer in Denver. I sent Lacey a note and asked him to come to our ranch and hear some important news. He had distrusted us all along. For all that, though, he started to come to us, and—and those others seized that as their chance to strike.

"Afterward you appeared. Some one in Denver—a man in Deane's office—informed us about that. You know what we have done and tried to do since you reached the mine, Mr. Bremerton. This lost lead has been our only weapon in a hard, hopeless, one-sided fight against a powerful and influential man. Now"—a sob rushed to Mariquita's lips as she said it—"you know our secret. Ought I to have let you die rather than bring you here? Are we—my father and I—entitled to any consideration at your hands? I have told you the truth. Are you for us or against us?"

There, in the dimly lighted level, her face and manner grew all appealing. With tears running down her cheeks she reached out her hands in mute supplication.

Bremerton's eyes wandered to the breast of the level, to that foot-wide

streak of bonanza ore which the girl and her father, by the hardest kind of labor, had laid bare. The superintendent's gaze returned to the slender, beseeching form and tear-stained face in front of him. He got slowly to his feet.

"I shall prove what you say, Miss Mallory," he answered then in a husky, unnatural voice, "and if it is true, as God hears me, I will see that you get your rights! But you must wait—you must be patient—you must have confidence in me, and— No, no, not that!"

Before he could draw back she had flung herself on her knees at his feet, caught one of his hands, and pressed it to her lips.

CHAPTER XIX.

O'HARA GOES GUNNING.

BREMERTON had not been gone an hour from the mine when King, wildly excited, came running to O'Hara. The Irishman had just climbed to the ore platform on his way into the mill, and the sharp cries of King brought him to a quick aboutface.

"What's to pay?" demanded O'Hara, startled by the look and manner of the cyanid expert.

"Bremerton's horse has come back, O'Hara, and with an empty saddle!"

"When was this?"

"Just now—just this minute! I ran from the corral to find you. They've got him, O'Hara! By George, they've got him!"

O'Hara took the pipe from his teeth and knocked out the ashes against the side of the mill. His thick eyebrows lowered over the crisscross eyes and his big, thin-lipped mouth twisted, but with no attempt at speech.

With one hand he groped in his pocket for his tobacco-sack. With deliberation he filled the bowl, put away the sack, and scratched a match.

"Do you hear?" piped King, failing to understand why he had not

created a sensation. "Bremerton's horse has come back, and—"

"Never you mind," cut in O'Hara in his softest tones; "it's my business, and not yours, and I'll be seeing to it. Go to the bunk-house and get Collins's Winchester. Fetch it to the corral after makin' sure there are loads in it."

"Why—"

"Don't shilly-shally. This is no time for whys. On the jump now."

O'Hara thrust his head through the opening that led to the ore-loft and shouted for Giles. The battery man came bounding up the steps.

"Giles, I'm called away," said O'Hara, "and until I come back you'll be doin' the amalgamating along with the rest of it."

"Sure."

"There's a cracked shoe in No. 1 battery. Keep your eye on it."

"I will."

O'Hara's struck another match, trailed it over his pipe-bowl, and jumped from the ore platform. The pipe was going under forced draft as he hurried in the direction of the corral.

Bremerton's horse, still restive, stood with the looped reins thrown over a corral-post. The saddle swung underneath, the stirrups resting on the ground.

"Not so bad maybe," muttered O'Hara. "The saddle turned with him, and it's possible he's had no more than a spill. Whoa, Basham!" he added, stepping to the horse and beginning to readjust the riding-gear.

By the time King reached the corral O'Hara had the reins off the post and was mounted and waiting.

"It's loaded," the little expert fluttered, handing the gun to O'Hara.

"Good enough!"

"You're—you're not going alone to look for Bremerton?"

"Not? Watch me! Keep a still tongue between your teeth, King, and look after the work. I'll be back when I get here."

He dug in with his heels. The ex-

cited horse snorted and reared, and then was off like an arrow along the trail. King watched the long body humped over the saddle-horn until horse and rider had vanished over the "rise."

The mill began to pound, and the pounding gradually merged into a long, continuous roar. The expert tossed his hands helplessly and apprehensively, and turned back toward the office.

"It's the beginning of the end," he muttered, "but hanged if I stay here while some one else comes to take Bremerton's place! I've had enough of this, goodness knows!"

O'Hara's thoughts were busy. It was clear Bremerton had not gone far before the saddle turned with him—the riderless horse had been too quick in getting back to the mine. No doubt it was this side of the cañon that Bremerton had taken his fall.

As soon as he was over the side of the hill O'Hara pulled the horse down to a slower pace. His eyes focused on the trail and keenly watched it as he proceeded. The dust was fetlock deep and he knew it would show signs.

He found what he was looking for near the place where the trail forked. The marks were as clear as words in an open book.

First, there was a clutter of hoof-prints. Running through them was a broad streak as though a heavy bag had been dragged at the end of a rope. Then, too, the horse pricked up its ears and seemed to have fears in that particular place. O'Hara's face hardened.

"Begorry," he murmured, "it's worse than I thought. Lee was thrown and dragged straight into the swale if the marks don't lie, and this mount I'm on is the one that snaked him along. How did he get loose? And if he got loose and is all right, why don't I meet him? I wonder if I'm going to see something in that swale that I don't want to see?"

The horse trembled and did not

want to go into the swale. O'Hara forced the animal, and as they moved along the bushes gave mute evidence of Bremerton's progress through them.

Near the spot where the torn and disordered chaparral ceased to show further signs O'Hara found a horse, patiently standing with the reins drooping from the bit-rings.

Unless the Irishman was greatly mistaken that waiting horse belonged to Mariquita Mallory. At once his mind was flooded with puzzling questions. Guess as hard as he would, however, he could make nothing of that odd situation there in the swale.

Dropping the reins of his own mount, he slid to the ground and began beating up the brush. He found nothing at all, and this was a sort of negative satisfaction.

Just as he had about finished his searching a dull report clashed on his ears, a bit of lead whispered, and the brim of his hat twitched.

"So that's the way of it!" he exclaimed, and let go with the Winchester from the hip.

His ears were keen even if his eyesight could not serve, and a heavy slug whistled toward the point from which the shot had been fired at him. A cry broke from the depths of the brush.

O'Hara located the point on the swale-bank and hastened toward it. When, as near as he could judge, he came to the spot he saw no one. Save for the murmuring of the stamp-mill the swale was steeped in deathly silence.

"Faith, this is a brain-twister!" muttered O'Hara, rearing head and shoulders above the bushes and peering about him. "Show yourselves, you imps of the Old Nick!" he cried. "Or come again with a shot so I may be after locatin' you!"

His invitation was not accepted. No form materialized out of the depths of the chaparral, and there was no more firing.

"Now, what would you think of that?" soliloquized the Irishman, re-

moving his hat and surveying the hole through the brim. "Sure I touched up the omadhoun that gave me the souvenir, but where in the name of the saints is he? Whisht!" he added abruptly, listening.

He heard something. Whatever it was it was feeble, and the faint murmuring of the mill almost drowned it. Clapping the hat on his head, he proceeded on over the swale-bank, pausing and straining his ears at every other step.

His course brought him to the brink of the gully. His gaze, running along the abrupt break in the earth, rested wonderingly on the end of a rope.

The rope was tied to a scraggy iron-wood growing near the brink, and was hanging over the cliff's face.

O'Hara laid aside the gun, dropped to his knees, and looked downward. Then he gave an exclamation. Near the bottom of the swinging rope, a yard from the base of the wall, lay the motionless form of a man. But it was not Bremerton; no, not Bremerton! O'Hara breathed again.

"Is it the blackguard who shot at me?" thought the Irishman. "Did my bullet drop him over the edge, or was he going down the rope and did he fall?"

It was a matter for immediate investigation. O'Hara went to the iron-wood, sat down with his heels over space, twisted his long legs in the rope, took the Winchester under his arm, and began to slide. Hampered with the gun, he made awkward work of it, but reached the foot of the wall safely.

The prostrate form, lying limply and with arms thrown wide from the shoulders, proved to be a man whom O'Hara had never seen before. His hat lay at a little distance, and his hair was dark and streaked with gray.

A stubble of beard covered his cheeks and chin. His eyes were closed. He was plainly unconscious, although a groan was now and then wrenched from his tense lips.

"No shot of mine touched him," muttered O'Hara after an examination. "He fell from the wall, and that's the whole of it. Was he or was he not the fellow who cut loose at me with that bullet? And how, in the fiend's name, is he mixed up with Bremerton and Mariquita Mallory? Sure, I'm staggered with what I know and don't know."

The clothing of the injured man was rather better than that usually worn by miners. A Mexican carved-leather band was around his hat, and at his waist was a belt with a holster and a heavy navy revolver. His hands, although browned from exposure, gave no evidence of hard labor.

Here was a mystery, and O'Hara hated mysteries. Yet he was compelled to grapple with this one, for it seemed to bear directly upon what had happened to Bremerton.

He tried to arouse the stranger, for a few words from him would go far toward clearing up the situation. His efforts failed and he rose to his feet in perplexity.

While he stood there, cudgeling his brain, he was electrified by a shout from across the gully. Whirling on the instant, he was amazed and overjoyed to see Bremerton coming toward him. And behind Bremerton was Miss Mallory. He advanced to meet them.

Bremerton's hat was gone and his clothes were dusty and torn and in much disorder. All the indications pointed to a desperate experience of some sort on his part.

"The sight o' you does my eyes good, Bremerton!" cried O'Hara. "I was not expecting to find you with your feet under you, but down and out somewhere in the scrub. Your horse came back to the mine without you, and the saddle in such shape that I knew you had had a spill. Troth, man, but I'm glad things are no worse. Miss Mallory," and he smiled and doffed his hat, "seeing you is a surprise and a pleasure. I found your

horse in the swale, though, so I ought not to be surprised."

"Miss Mallory saved my life," began Bremerton, "and—"

"Och, the luck you have!" smiled the Irishman; "not that your life is saved, do you mind, but that Miss Mallory saved it for you. But if there's saving to do, she is the kind to be depended upon. Now, can you tell me who is the man at the foot of the wall?"

O'Hara turned and pointed toward the crumpled heap of humanity. The girl stared, smothered an exclamation of horror, then ran forward. When Bremerton and O'Hara came to her side she turned a white face to them.

"Stranger to me," commented Bremerton. "Is he to you, Miss Mallory?"

"No," she answered in a strained voice. "I have seen the man several times, Mr. Bremerton."

Her eyes wandered to the rope, followed it down, and rested again on the sprawled-out form. "He is Dave Carruthers," she added.

CHAPTER XX.

A PLOTTER UNMASKED.

CARRUTHERS!

To O'Hara that name meant little. To Bremerton and the girl, time and place considered, it was deeply significant. Bremerton's glance sought Mariquita's face, and he read there a reflection of his own thoughts.

Here was Deane's wily and implacable foe. Here was the man who, bullied into selling the mine for a tithe of its value, had striven to regain by lawless methods what he had lost by legal sharp practise.

He had fallen from the rope while lowering himself into the gully. There seemed no doubt of that. A hard fate had finally unmasked him.

Bremerton knelt and made a hasty examination. He got up, shaking his head ominously.

"If I am any judge, he is close to the end of his trail," said he. "Miss Mallory and I heard shooting, O'Hara," he went on. "Were you concerned in it?"

O'Hara explained.

"He fell from the rope," hazarded Bremerton, "and those with him were frightened away. I think the way is clear for us now. We must get Carruthers to the mine. If possible, he must be revived so he can talk. Miss Mallory, you can climb out of here by means of the rope?"

"Yes," she answered, and started toward the wall.

"Wait, please," interposed Bremerton. "O'Hara should go first with the rifle. That will guard against possible surprises. If the horses are still there, O'Hara, when I am ready here, you can hitch the upper end of the rope to a saddle."

The Irishman nodded and climbed the rope readily enough. Bremerton tied the gun to the dangling end, and it was drawn rapidly upward. When the rope was thrown down again, Mariquita made the ascent, watched anxiously by Bremerton.

There was no call for anxiety. With strength and skill the girl drew herself from crevice to projecting stone the full length of the wall, and was helped over the brink by O'Hara.

Bremerton then dragged Carruthers closer to the wall, tied the rope snugly under his arms, and called to O'Hara to hoist away. The limp, twisting body rose gruesomely in the air, and Mariquita caught it at the top of the wall, and by main strength drew it over the ledge.

Finally the rope was thrown back to Bremerton, and he won to the crest with little difficulty. Both horses were in the swale.

"Get into the saddle, Mike," said Bremerton. "I'll lift Carruthers up to you, and you can support him in front of you for the little distance we have to go. I'll walk." He turned to the girl while O'Hara was mounting.

"Miss Mallory," he went on, "will you ride to Phenix and send out a doctor and the sheriff?"

"I want to do anything—everything—I can," she answered.

"This is all we can do now. Remember what I told you," he finished earnestly; "and, whatever happens, do not doubt me."

There was a pathetic curve to her lips as she looked at him trustingly and smiled.

"I could not leave the fortunes of the Mallorys in better hands, Mr. Bremerton," said she and hurried away to her horse.

She was away at speed while Bremerton and O'Hara were attending to Carruthers. It was a slow journey they had back to the mine, but they reached their destination and had the injured man in Bremerton's bed long before the noon whistle sounded from the mill.

Neither Bremerton nor O'Hara had done any talking on the return journey. King, who hurried to the office, did enough talking for half a dozen.

"Carruthers! What in goodness' name was the matter with him?"

"What had happened to Bremerton?"

"Was he rescued by O'Hara?"

The superintendent wearily parried the expert's questions.

"All in due time, King," said he, "you'll know everything. We've sent for a doctor. Just now, though, you might help O'Hara try to bring Carruthers around. I've got to fix up a little."

Bremerton attended to his bruises and scratches, and went through with his fixing up. When he had finished, Carruthers was no nearer consciousness than he had been before.

"He's obstinate about getting back to earth," O'Hara reported. "Faith, it's a doctor's job, or the undertaker's, and we'll have to wait. Why did you send for the sheriff, Lee?"

"It's important for him to be here in case Carruthers revives and has anything to say."

"You've got me guessing. Why the importance?"

King had gone his wondering way. Bremerton and O'Hara sat by the bed, watching the injured man closely. It was high time O'Hara understood the drift of affairs, and Bremerton gave him his full confidence.

The struggle Mariquita and her father had gone through with Deane, Deane's treachery to them, and his covert bullying of Carruthers were bluntly stated. An angry red rushed into the Irishman's face and his eyes gleamed as he listened.

"You got all that from lips that couldn't lie!" he exclaimed when his friend finished. "What have you to say to it?"

"Nothing—yet. I want more proof that Deane is the unscrupulous devil the girl has painted him."

"Oh, but you can strain at a point! Where are you to get this proof?"

Bremerton nodded toward Carruthers. "He'll furnish it."

"If he's ever able to talk, he may. There's nothing certain."

"Then I'll get the proof from Deane."

"How?"

"In my own way," said Bremerton, gazing out of the window.

O'Hara hoisted around in his chair and peered at his friend through narrowing eyes.

"And if you get this proof," he queried, "what will you do?"

"Throw a thousand dollars of Deane's dirty money in his face," snapped Bremerton. "That much he has paid me, and you have made it possible to give it back. Then I'll go further, by Heaven! and see that the Mallorys get what they're entitled to."

"Fine!" exclaimed O'Hara. "Glory be, 'tis the finest thing in life to see a good man get right with himself. I knew it would come! You can throw the money in Deane's face if you will, although I doubt the sense of that; but you'll never get the Mallorys their rights. Deane has gone to school for

his bunco games, and you don't know your A B abs about the dirty work. Lock horns with him on that point, Bremerton, and both you and the Mallorys will get the worst of it."

The mill whistle blew. The clamor of the stamps died to silence and a general movement set in toward the chuck-shanty. Bremerton remained with Carruthers' while O'Hara went for his meal; then O'Hara relieved Bremerton.

When the latter returned to the office he was surprised to find the Irishman with the contents of Carruthers's pockets on a table in front of him.

"When you're looking for evidence," explained O'Hara, "personal belongings are common property. Now here's this solid-framed forty-five-caliber Colt. Three empty shells in the cylinder. One load just missed you at the fork of the trail, thanks to the road-runner; another raked the bushes while you and Mariquita were getting out of the swale; the other, maybe, put that hole in my hat."

"That's guesswork, Mike," returned Bremerton.

"Close to the mark, though. If you ask for a motive, isn't there a good one to tack onto Carruthers? When rogues fall out the devil gets his dues. Here's a watch with a nugget fob. The hands quit telling the time at seven twenty-five. That's when he dropped. And here's a note-book with interesting readin', Lee."

O'Hara picked up a small memorandum-book and turned the leaves.

"Listen to this, will you. 'To Pennyworth, on account of Bryden and the half-breed, \$500.' Who's Pennyworth?"

Bremerton pricked up his ears.

"Pennyworth is the lawyer who had charge of Big Steve's and Chombo's fight in court," said he. "Is there anything more?"

"Not a scrap; and this must have got in by mistake. Now you know who financed the defense for those blackguards and who's paying pensions for hush-money. I guess this

is proof enough, even if Carruthers is never able to speak a word."

Bremerton went out into the other room and, for a whole hour, tramped the floor. O'Hara knew that his loyalty for Deane was dying hard. At the end of the hour an automobile dashed up to the headquarters adobe and the doctor and the sheriff sprang out.

"Dr. Morton, Bremerton," said Ransom. "What does all this mean?"

"You'll find your man in there, doctor," observed the superintendent, nodding toward the bedroom. "We have Dave Carruthers, and he's badly hurt and unable to talk. We'll know more about what it all means if we can get some information from him."

"Carruthers! He has always been a wildcatter, and none too strong on the moral points."

Ransom took off his hat and knocked the dust out of it. "He slipped out of sight a few months ago, and I thought he had left the country. Was he—shot?"

"No. There was a rope over a cliff and he was found unconscious at the lower end of it."

Bremerton was in for some more explaining, but he was tactful and said nothing about the overhang, the lost vein, or Mariquita's account of her father's dealings with Deane.

The superintendent's recital hinged upon the shooting at the fork of the trail, his accident, the rescue by the girl, and the coming of O'Hara.

The sheriff muttered an exclamation and thumped a fist into his palm.

"By gorry, we're on the track at last!" he declared. "Carruthers, and not the Mallorys, has been picking this bone with Deane. Mallory isn't the one to hide out and go sniping for this mine's superintendents. But Carruthers could do it without the flicker of an eyelash. We're getting down to cases now."

Bremerton got the note-book and showed Ransom the entry regarding money paid to Pennyworth on account of Big Steve and Chombo.

"That cinches it!" averred the sheriff. "He was back of that crowd, and he wouldn't separate himself from good money without a reason."

Dr. Morton came out of the bedroom. He had shed his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves.

"What's the word, Morton?" queried Ransom.

"He's done for," was the reply. "Mangled as he is, I can't understand how he has lived as long as this."

"Will he recover consciousness? Do you think—"

O'Hara showed himself suddenly at the bedroom door and beckoned. The doctor hurriedly returned to Carruthers, and Bremerton and Ransom followed. The eyes of the injured man were wide open. After wandering from face to face they came to a rest on the sheriff's.

"You're too late, Ransom," said Carruthers faintly. "I've fooled you for months, and now I'm off on the long trail and fooling you for good. Bremerton was more than I bargained for; and yet I—I came within one of getting him. He—"

The voice failed. While O'Hara lifted Carruthers's head, the doctor picked up a glass from the table and put it to his lips.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN WHO LOST.

"GET a pencil and paper, Bremerton," said Ransom, "and take this down."

Carruthers's strength rallied under the stimulant. There was that in his eyes, however, which told the others unmistakably it could not be for long. He began to talk as soon as O'Hara had laid him down, and it was all around the few points which the sheriff wished to have made clear.

"I feel as though there wasn't a whole bone in my body," moaned Carruthers. "Why couldn't I go out without realizin' what had happened?"

What did you bring me back for, when I was slippin' away so easy? Now the black horror is gripping me by the throat, and—and—I'm scared of it, men, scared of it. I ain't old! Thirty-eight, that's all. And here I'm crossin' the divide with the best of my life ahead of me!"

Self-pity seized him. His face hardened like stone and his dull eyes smoldered. Clenching his fists, he broke into gasping torrents of words whose import sickened those who listened. Ransom laid a muffling hand over his mouth.

"In Heaven's name, Carruthers," said he, "remember where you are. You haven't long to stay. Don't pass out with curses on your lips! Let your final act go toward undoing some of the wrong." He bent down so that he could look in the feverish eyes. "Tell me about Griggsby," he added.

"That's why you're here, eh?" snarled Carruthers. "Well, you might have saved yourself the trouble. Not a word about anything. I fought for my own against that black-hearted Deane. He's won and I've lost! I'd barter my soul for one year more of life—just a year."

He fell to raving again. O'Hara got up and passed into the other room. Returning softly with the flute, he sat down by the head of the bed and began to play.

It was the intermezzo from "Cavalleria Rusticana." Never had Bremerton heard O'Hara play as he played then. The tender melody floated about the room, and there went with it a rustling as of unseen wings.

Ransom stood like a man entranced. Morton pulled down his sleeves and walked to the window. Bremerton bowed over his pencil and paper, weirdly thrilled by the pathos and the pleading of those whispering notes.

The twisted lines straightened in Carruthers's face. He fell silent. Presently his eyes closed and he lay still. O'Hara made an end of the music and laid the flute on his knees.

"God!" breathed Carruthers, opening his eyes. "I've heard that before, somewhere. What piece was that?"

"Only a bit of an air to make you see things differently," said O'Hara. "It does that for me and, by the same token, I thought it might for you."

For a second Carruthers lay thinking. Then he turned his head so he could look at the Irishman.

"Play it again," he begged.

"Sure, and as long as you please, but not till you've talked with Ransom."

"I want to know about Griggsby, Carruthers," spoke up the sheriff. "What you say can do you no harm."

"Blame nobody but me for what happened to Griggsby and Lacey," said Carruthers. "The rest of the boys had nothin' to do with it. I went farther with Griggsby than I meant to, and that's the God's truth."

"I knew Mallory had struck something rich at the Mariquita, and I wanted him to lose. I asked Deane to help me beat Mallory out, and he said he would keep him dangling until the last minute, and then turn him down cold."

"So he did, but not until he had got me with my back to the wall. It was either sell out to Mallory for the twenty-five thousand or to Deane at double that. He had me, and he knew it; but I swore he would never get any good from the mine until he deeded me a half interest."

"That is what I was fighting for, Ransom! For that I laid low in the hills, fighting the work at the Mariquita. I did whatever I could to make Deane sick of his bargain, and to force him to come to me. I know I'd have had him, too, if it hadn't been for Bremerton."

"Mallory's girl got Bremerton away from us. I tried to follow them into the gully and find out where they went, but—but I slipped from the rope as some one fired at my men in the swale. That's—all—I—"

Carruthers's voice died in his throat.

He looked at O'Hara and his lips framed a silent word. Ransom nodded to O'Hara, then went to Bremerton, took the hastily scrawled transcript and read it over while the flute's music once more throbbled through the room.

Over and over, while the tide ebb'd, O'Hara breathed the Intermezzo into the dead wood and warmed it into life. The doctor, watching Carruthers, finally went to the bedside and bent down to touch his wrist.

"That will be all," said the doctor to O'Hara; "he's past hearing you."

The sheriff had cracked the shell of a troublesome mystery. His professional satisfaction was jarred, a bit incongruously, by a sentiment perfectly human and somewhat awkward.

"That's the way I'd like to go out myself, when I have to," he murmured. "We've got a melodeon to home. Give me the name of that piece, O'Hara, so I can have my daughter learn it."

O'Hara, with pity in his pale eyes, stood looking down at Carruthers.

"Faith," said he, "there's good in the worst of us and bad in the best of us, and there's some hope for the man who goes beyond with the love o' music in his soul."

He laid the hands on the breast and gently drew the blanket over the face. "We're but cogs in the wheel, anyway," he added, "and the machine keeps running even if a cog here and there is not what it ought to be."

"Come out in the other room, all of you," requested the sheriff, "while I read what Bremerton took down. It's fresh in your minds, you know, and I want you to sign as witnesses."

They grouped about Ransom in the office and listened while he read. After that each set his hand to the document.

"Here's a black spot cleared up," went on Ransom. "Beats all I never thought of Carruthers in this matter of Griggsby. But that's the way. The plain truth is so plain, sometimes, we're apt to dodge it."

He turned to Bremerton. "Thanks to you, Bremerton, from this on Deane

will have clear sailing. Do you know, I'm blamed glad of one thing."

"What's that?" inquired Bremerton.

"Why, that the Mallorys had no hand in the lawlessness out here. There was a spell when it looked dark for them. No objection to having—that"—he nodded toward the bedroom—"here until I can get the undertakers out?"

"Certainly not."

"Then suppose we hike, Morton?"

"I'll be ready in a minute, Ransom," said the doctor.

He went to the end of the pipe-line and washed his hands. When he had returned to the office and slipped into his coat, the sheriff had the machine ready. Bremerton, meanwhile, had picked up a pad of telegraph blanks and written the following:

SILAS DEANE, *Denver.*

Have cleaned up on the other crowd and located bonanza vein on Mariquita property. Important you come on at once. Notify and will meet you Phoenix.

BREMERTON.

He went out of the office and handed the message to the sheriff.

"Send that for me, will you, Ransom?" he asked. "Let it go collect."

"Glad to oblige," said the sheriff. "Will get it on the wires as soon as I hit town."

Bremerton and O'Hara watched the car vanish over the rise in the trail; and then the Irishman, after a long look at his friend, turned on his heel and moved off toward the mill.

The news spread through the camp that Carruthers, the man who had located the mine and added to his holdings until they embraced the whole valley and the neighboring hills, had gone his way and was lying in the headquarters adobe.

When the day men came off duty and the night men went on, all eyes sought the little office building, awed and curious. The same eyes presently shifted to Bremerton and paid him a

tribute of respect and high consideration.

Carruthers represented the evil powers that had skulked in the hills, fighting Deane's men savagely and murderously. With Carruthers, those powers had been laid low, and all the credit was given to Bremerton. A better spirit manifested itself among the workers.

In the evening Bremerton and O'Hara carried their chairs out of the office and sat by the door. The Irishman fluted the airs dearest to his heart and the other smoked reflectively. By and by the flute was laid aside and O'Hara himself filled a pipe and blew fragrant wreaths into the still air.

"I've wired for Deane," announced the superintendent.

There was no demonstration from O'Hara. Leaning back against the adobe wall he puffed serenely at his pipe.

"I say I have sent for Deane—asked him to come on immediately," repeated Bremerton.

"I knew you'd do that, or go to Denver, one or the other," said O'Hara. "What will you do, Lee?"

"What would you do, Mike?"

"Divil knows. I'm expecting, though, that you'll keep your head and be sensible. None of the Lee Reckless in your accounting with Deane, man. You were to blame, along at the first, by getting into this so easy. Don't forget that."

"Carruthers," mused Bremerton, "got only what was coming to him. His fight with Deane was a case of diamond cut diamond, and, right or wrong, wouldn't have been strained whichever way the cards fell.

"But, between the two of them, the Mallorys were crushed and beaten and flung to the scrap-heap. The rights most to be considered were not considered at all. There's the point that involves and concerns—*me!* I took Deane's word and helped him rob the Mallorys of what was justly theirs."

Self-reproach weighed heavily in the

words. The wrath of a man who had all his life tried to be square, only to have a friend besmirch his ideals and sully his honor, swirled in the tones of Bremerton's voice.

"After all, Lee," said O'Hara soothingly, "'tis no crime you've done. You stepped aside in taking Deane's say-so, when you should have gone under the surface indications. We all do that same, more or less. When we're in wrong, the part of a wise man is to retire gracefully and in order. Which is the same as saying with as little trouble as possible. In my opinion, the Mallorys are beyond help, so far as this mine is concerned."

"We'll see about that!" and Bremerton's face hardened and his teeth clicked on his pipe-stem.

"You'll not take my advice, I know, in your present temper; but, so help me, I'll be around, and I'll have a hand in what happens if you go too far. Mind that."

At that juncture a long, black wagon rolled along the trail, turned, and came to a halt in front of the office. Two men got down from the seat and one approached Bremerton.

"Mr. Bremerton?"

"Yes."

"The sheriff sent us out."

"Come with me," said Bremerton, and led the way into the office.

CHAPTER XXII.

GORMAN, OF THE NIGHT SHIFT.

It was next day that a man rode out from town with an answer to Bremerton's message.

Shake. Knew you'd turn the trick. Meet me Phoenix Friday morning.

The superintendent smiled grimly. Deane was coming, and he was destined to receive a few surprises—not all of them pleasant.

On Thursday afternoon Bremerton sent to the bunk-house for Gorman, the night amalgamator. This millman was

the key to some things which the superintendent wanted to know.

Gorman usually slept in the forenoon and loafed in the afternoon. Bremerton's messenger found him, and he came straight to the office.

He was a rat-eyed, weasel-faced little man whose main object in life seemed to be to keep out of sight. The most devious way between two points was the shortest for Gorman.

He entered the office so silently that Bremerton did not know he was there until he was seen beside the desk.

"On deck, Mr. Bremerton," said Gorman nervously.

"Sit down," said the superintendent.

The millman cuddled into a chair and looked about him shiftily. He had the air of one who was expecting something disagreeable to happen.

"If you're under the impression, Gorman, that I don't know you're a thief, you are mistaken."

The quiet, conversational tone was weirdly out of harmony with the sentiment expressed. Bremerton's manner disarmed Gorman for a moment, and then, when the burden of the words had sunk in, he bristled angrily.

"Nobody can talk to me like that, by gorry! Insults like them I never stood for and never will. Gi'me my time."

"Don't be a fool," returned Bremerton. "You know that, if you had your deserts, you'd have been caught in the same net that snared Big Steve and Chombo. While Steve was here, you turned in no more amalgam than he did; since he's been gone, you've been turning in three times as much as you did before. I was pretty sure you were stealing, but I had no time to bother with you. Now that you're evidently playing fair, I have no inclination to make you trouble. All I want you to do is to talk."

Some men with a guilty conscience can bluff successfully. Gorman was not one of that kind. For long he had been afraid he was suspected.

"I ain't admitting a thing," said Gorman; "but what do you want me to talk about?"

"Where were you on the night I reached Phoenix? King was in charge here, and somebody had brought a supply of whisky into camp. Not much work was going on. I guess you remember."

The millman wriggled uncomfortably.

"I don't get you at all," he answered. "I been at the Mariquita right along."

"Don't hem and haw and side-step," returned Bremerton. "I'm not intending to take any action against you. I'll be more kindly disposed, however, if you come out square-toed and tell me what you know. Were you and Big Steve directly connected with Carruthers?"

Gorman took a red cotton handkerchief from his pocket and drew it across his face. He was undergoing an ordeal, and showed it.

"I'm straight now, Mr. Bremer-ton," he whimpered. "I'm tryin' to do what's right. You ain't going to put me through if I tell the truth?"

"No."

"Do I get fired?"

"Not so long as you keep straight."

"Well, then, Chombo worked with Carruthers, and Big Steve worked with Chombo, and I worked with Steve. That's the gospel of it, and I'll kiss the Book. I didn't want to go in on it. Backed away from the propersition for quite a spell. Steve allowed, though, that they was going to get their toll of amalgam from the night shift, and if I didn't come over, then some night I'd turn up missin' and there'd be an amalgamator in my place they could depend on. I was scared into it, Mr. Bremer-ton; that's all."

"Who disposed of the amalgam?"

"Chombo got it to Carruthers, and he turned it into cash. We all got our whack, and it was purty profitable. When Chombo had the pin pulled on him, Steve sneaked the stuff out of

camp. But I reckon you know about that."

"Have you any idea why the stuff was cached at Oak Flat?"

"It wasn't always cached there; Chombo picked out that place."

"Why?"

"I don't know only what I heard from Big Steve."

"What did you hear?"

"Why, that if you found out anythin', Carruthers wanted to make it look bad for the Mallorlys."

"H-n!" murmured Bremerton and sat back in his chair. Following a moment's reflection, he went on: "Who left the Mariquita Mine that night the crowd beat me up at the Phoenix town-ditch?"

"Not me," said Gorman hastily; "I wasn't among 'em."

"Was Steve Bryden in the gang?"

"No. Steve was jest gittin' busy with the likker. I heard that Chombo was with that outfit. I'm purty sure no one else from the camp had a hand in the doings."

"A ball of amalgam was dropped by one of the crowd."

"Then it was Chombo dropped it. He was holdin' out a little on Carruthers right along."

Thus one dark point was cleared up. Bremerton believed that the fellow he had knocked into the canal was Chombo.

"What men did Carruthers have with him out in the hills? Do you know that, Gorman?"

"They was men who had been bounced from the mine. Griggsby let one or two go, and Lacey ditched the others. Carruthers gathered 'em in, and they was more than willin' to help him. He made it worth their while."

"Where are those men now?"

"Why, when Carruthers went out them fellers began to run—and I allow they're still a runnin'. You can gamble a blue stack they won't show up around here no more, Mr. Bremerton."

"I can't think of anything else,

Gorman," said the superintendent. "You're in luck to come out of that amalgam deal as well as you have. Keep that in mind. That will be all."

The millman arose and passed softly toward the door. He halted there for a final word.

"I'm to stay on and have no trouble?"

"So long as you do the right thing, Gorman, you needn't worry."

"I know I'm in luck, and I'm standin' pat on an honest deal. Much obliged to you, Mr. Bremerton."

He faded out of the office, and the superintendent was positive that the fangs of Deane's last enemy had been drawn. From that time on there would be only clear sailing for those in charge of the Mariquita Mine. Everything was propitious for that final accounting with Deane.

Thursday afternoon Bremerton had Dutch Fred put a pair of cayuses to the pole of the mine buckboard. When the rig was ready, and the superintendent was about to climb into it for the ride to Phoenix, O'Hara came down from the mill.

"You're off after Deane, Bremerton?" asked the Irishman.

"Yes," was the answer. "He'll reach Phoenix in the morning, and I intend to bring the rest of this business to a close in short order."

A worried look crossed O'Hara's face.

"It's not your plan, is it, to do anything in Phoenix or on the way out?" he continued.

There had been something that Bremerton had wanted to say to his friend for several days. Here was a good time for it.

"Mike, you're not my guardian. No man could ask for a better friend, but there is a dead line which even a friend cannot cross without making trouble. My business with Deane is my own affair, and I'm going to handle it in my own way without let or hindrance from you. Don't meddle. Keep hands off."

"I'll not let that hot head of yours take you to the divil entirely," flared O'Hara. "So help me, I'll not have you doing time for roughing it with a yellow dog like Deane. Smoke that in your pipe."

O'Hara turned back to the mill. Bremerton stared after him speculatively, then climbed into the buckboard and drove away.

At the fork in the trail he was surprised to find Mariquita mounted on her horse and evidently waiting for him. She rode out into the road ahead of his team.

"You have asked Deane to come here!" she exclaimed.

"It was necessary," he returned. "You get your information direct from Denver, I suppose?"

"You already know, Mr. Bremerton, that we have a friend in Deane's Denver office. Why, why have you done this?"

She spoke vehemently, passionately, and clearly was doubtful of Bremerton's motives.

"I told you, Miss Mallory, that you would have to trust me," he said calmly. "You are not doing it."

"You have sent for Deane to show him that—that lost lead?"

"Yes. I want him to understand that the work he gave me to do has been accomplished."

"How will that help *us*?" she cried. "By showing him how valuable the mine is, how are you going to benefit my father and me?"

"I have my plans. You know Deane pretty well, and I guess you realize that what I have ahead of me is anything but child's play. I am going to do what I can. That, Miss Mallory, is all any man can do. Are you going to lose confidence in me?"

She rode alongside the buckboard and leaned sidewise to offer her hand.

"No," she said softly and with a wan smile, "for you are the only one who can do anything with Deane. Help us, and it will be worth your while. If you win an interest for us

in the property, I have come to tell you that a part of it will be yours."

He dropped the hand as though a serpent had stung him.

"You don't know me very well," he answered. "I can't be bribed, Miss Mallory, and I'm sorry you thought so."

He picked up the lines and drove on. Until he was out of sight the girl sat motionless in the saddle, looking after him.

Bremerton had work that evening in Phoenix. He called on a lawyer and had a certain paper filled out and made ready for signing.

On his way back to the hotel he stepped into a hardware-store and bought a small revolver to take the place of the "automatic" he had lost.

The dealer wanted to sell him a box of cartridges. Bremerton, however, did not buy.

"All I want is the revolver," he said.

With the legal paper in the breast of his coat and the unloaded revolver in his hip-pocket, he retraced his way to the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEANE ARRIVES.

THE train from the north was due at seven o'clock. It rolled up to the station promptly on time, and Deane was the last passenger to get out of the Pullman. The porter obsequiously handed him a black Boston bag, receiving in exchange for it a silver dollar.

The mining king was a picturesque figure as he came down the platform. His black Stetson, long-tailed coat, and flowing tie compelled attention.

A wonderful diamond sparkled in the white frills of his shirt and a massive chain wriggled across the front of his low-cut vest. Another stone, conspicuous for size and brilliancy, was very much in evidence on the third finger of his left hand.

Good living and lack of exercise had doubled his girth since the prospecting days with Bremerton. His walk was the cautious, flat-footed waddle of the fat man, although he carried it off with a touch of distinction.

All in all, he was a most impressive spectacle. It was plain that he knew it, and equally plain that he liked it. His money had brought with it power and influence, and no man was more in the Western lime-light.

The reporters for three different newspapers had reached him ahead of Bremerton. They wanted interviews.

"Blamed if I can travel a dozen miles out of Denver without having a bunch of you cimarrons tight at my heels," he complained good-naturedly. "Now, boys, I haven't a pesky thing for you to put in the papers. Maybe I'll have news for you before I leave. If I have, I promise to herd you all together, treat every one fair, and not play favorites. Try one of these, will you, and just forget I'm in town till I'm ready to loosen up."

He drew a silver-mounted cigar-case from the breast of his coat and offered it around. Then he caught sight of Bremerton.

"Howdy, pard!" he cried, breaking away from the newspapermen, dropping his satchel and grabbing the tall, gaunt figure in corduroys with both hands.

"You done it, by thunder, and 'way this side of the six months! Lee, you're the clear quill. Looking finer'n silk, too. What did I say, huh? Did I know what I was doing, or didn't I? Where's a cab? Let's go to the hotel and sit in at the chuck-table. I'm hungrier'n a Ute squaw on government rations."

Bremerton picked up the satchel, Deane hooked arms with him, and they went on to the waiting line of carriages. A little later they were being hurried to the best hotel in town, Deane talking effusively and giving his friend no chance for a word.

There was the plaza, same old

court-house plaza, where he and Bremerton had sat in the shade years ago, wondering where they would strike for next. Yes, and, by gorry, there was the same identical umbrella tree they had sat under. Didn't it beat all how the old times came back?

Below the corner of First Avenue was the wall of the town corral where they had kept their burros; and say—wouldn't it rattle your spurs?—right there was Coffee Al's, where they had spent many a quarter for grub. Good grub, too; better grub than any Deane had ever had since—or, anyhow, it tasted better.

"I guess it's a sure-enough fact, Lee," philosophized Deane, "that the more money you got to spend for things, the less you appreciate 'em. Oh, them sure was good days!"

The mining king sat back into his coat and relapsed into a mood of flabby and morbid reminiscence. He came out of it shortly and dropped a fat, friendly hand on Bremerton's knee.

"Why don't you tune up, old partner?" he asked. "I don't reckon you've peeped since we got together."

The recollection of old times, when Deane was different and a comrade worth having, had wrenched hard at the purpose Bremerton had in mind. He brushed the feeling aside and looked into his friend's face with a smile.

"I've been holding my tongue and listening to you, Silas," he answered. "Not much chance for me to put in a word when you get started."

"That's right, I guess that's right," and Deane chuckled. "This is a regular picnic for me. Old scenes, old friends, and a pot of money into the bargain. Enough to make a fellow grow young and feel his oats, eh?"

They got down at the hotel and Deane handed the black bag to a waiting boy.

"Careful with that, son," he warned. "There's two pint bottles of old Scotch in that grip, and if anything happens to 'em I'm ruined."

Deane wrote his name on the register. He began placing Bremerton's under it, but the latter protested.

"I'm booked at another hotel," said he.

"You're going to be booked at this one, too. We're going to have breakfast together."

"I've already had breakfast."

"Why didn't you wait? Dash it, you're treating me like a hired man more than a pard. You'll eat again, that's all."

Bremerton's name went down, and Deane insisted that he accompany him up to his room. The black bag was opened, and Deane pulled out a flannel shirt, a slouch hat, a pair of khaki trousers, and a pair of laced knee-boots. He laughed like a boy as he showed the outfit.

"Bet your life, old pard, I brought my war clothes along. After I eat I'm going to get into 'em, and you and me will go pottering off into the hills same as we used to. Great!"

"It won't be hardly the same, Si," said Bremerton. "Instead of walking and driving our pack-burros we'll ride in a buckboard."

"Haven't they got any automobiles in this man's town?"

"Automobiles are a cultivated taste, and the superintendent at the Mariquita can't afford so much style. You're only a counterfeit at this old-time game, Deane. Two days of the old life would kill you."

"Maybe you're right. Help yourself to this—every swig is warranted to take ten years off your shoulders. It's prime. A man in Denver gets it for me special."

Bremerton did not drink. He wanted a clear head while he was with Deane. While his friend's back was turned he unscrewed the cap and let it go at that. Deane faced around, took the flask out of his hands, and helped himself generously.

In a few minutes they went down to breakfast together. Deane raided the bill of fare while Bremerton content-

ed himself with a cup of coffee and griddle-cakes.

Not much was said about the mine. It was a subject for private discussion, and that dining-room was altogether too public a place.

After the meal Bremerton left Deane to get into his "war clothes" and went after the team and buckboard. It was ten o'clock before they took the trail into the hills.

"Now," remarked Deane, when they had left the town well behind them, "we can get down to cases, Lee. You've pleased me a heap the way you've managed things. Old Griggsby was a false alarm and Lacey was a weak sister. You grabbed the big difficulties by the scruff of the neck and chucked 'em into the discard. Knew you would."

This, in few words, was Deane's estimate of the man who had died trying to serve him, and of the other who had gone down to physical wreck in his employ.

"You don't know what Griggsby would have done if your enemies hadn't picked him off," said Bremerton sharply; "and Lacey is a whole man; I've seen him and I know."

"Oh, well, yes, if you want it that way," returned Deane impatiently. "Success, though, is the only thing that counts. You pulled the old workings through to glory, and there wasn't much fuss about it, either. Reel that off to me."

Bremerton proceeded to "reel it off." He took a good deal of satisfaction in making the case as bad as it was.

Beginning with the assault by the town canal, he followed with the capture of Steve and Chombo, then told of the shot at the fork of the trail, and finished with the fate of Carruthers.

Skilfully he left Mariquita Mallory out of the narrative. Not once was her name mentioned. His discovery of the lost lead was dealt with indefinitely—treated as an accident.

For all this he had his reasons.

Mariquita and her father would become prominent enough before he was through with the mining king.

Deane was absorbed in the recital. The fire went out of his cigar again and again. He breathed hard in the pinches, and by the town canal and at the fork in the trail his fat hands clenched and he swore under his breath.

But his fat face beamed while Bremerton was describing that foot-wide vein back of the overhang.

"I'll take my oath, Lee," he commented earnestly, when the telling was done, "I never thought Carruthers would rough things up like that! (What's become of the law in these parts, anyhow? Can't it protect a man in keeping his own? Never mind that, though. A miss is as good as a mile, and you skinned the gang! It makes my blood sing just to hear you palaver about it. A month's running on that bonanza ore and the mine's as good as sold. Half a million, by thunder, and it cost me only fifty thousand. That's business, Bremerton. That's the way to get rich."

There were no regrets for that mound over Griggsby in the Phoenix cemetery, and not a word of commiseration for the unlucky Lacey.

Deane's eye was single to that half million. It completely filled his perspective. Bremerton knew that if he had fallen at the fork of the trail his money-grubbing friend would have experienced few twinges and few regrets.

The roar of flood waters in Arapahoe Cañon was almost silenced. Deane had strangled his finer sentiments with a rope of gold. The Deane that was and the Deane who now sat at Bremerton's side in the buckboard were two different men.

This realization did much to reconcile Bremerton to the course he had mapped out for himself. In the interests of right and justice he could deal with this swaggering, purse-proud trickster as he could not have dealt with his old, loyal prospector-friend.

Deane offered Bremerton a cigar. Bremerton declined, and filled and lighted his pipe. For some time they traveled in silence. Finally Deane aroused to observe:

"I consider, Bremerton, that another month of you at the mine will be enough. I'm getting out for fifteen hundred less than I calculated on. Eh?"

The superintendent's eyes narrowed. "What's that?" he asked.

Deane repeated his words. Bremerton had heard them plainly enough the first time, but he wanted them repeated.

"You mean," said he, "that I was hired for six months for three thousand dollars, and that, inasmuch as I have made good in half the time, I am only entitled to half pay. Is that it?"

"Something like that," replied Deane, giving a canny glance out of the tails of his eyes.

"Are you going to split the ten-thousand-dollar bonus in two as well?" asked Bremerton dryly.

"Well, what do you think?"

"I don't know, Deane. I shall have to give it a little reflection."

"Of course I intend to do the right thing," burst out the other in a flurry of virtuous determination. "I'll not be small with a friend, and you can gamble a blue stack on *that*. Think it over, old pard. I'll leave it to you. Whatever you say is right goes with Deane."

Here was the final straw. For risking his life, for robbing the Mallorlys, for making the mine worth half a million, Deane could haggle with his old friend over the paltry sum that was to be paid!

Yes, certainly, Bremerton *would* think it over.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TIGHTENING THE COIL.

A FLURRY of excitement passed through the camp with the arrival of

Deane. Every worker wanted a look at the "big boss." He was discussed frankly by a few. These maintained that he won his games by jumping men over the business checker-board, sacrificing ruthlessly in his dash for the king-row.

They said that his employees were catspaws for pulling his golden chestnuts out of the fire; that he had not the nerve for executing his own schemes; that he bought men in open market and played them selfishly and unscrupulously for his own lawless gain.

Talk of this kind, however, left no sentiment of disgust or disapproval in its train. Deane's success and his wealth dazzled the eyes and confused the understanding. The mining king was a rugged and prominent figure all up and down the Pacific slope, and men shut their eyes to his past and gave him a hand for what he was.

O'Hara took no part in the buzzing gossip in the mill. He listened passively while Giles and the engineer shouted confidences to each other about the mine-owner. The Irishman had tact as well as the courage of his convictions.

In the late afternoon Deane and Bremerton visited the blind gully and searched out a place where the visitor could be lowered with least danger and physical effort to himself. Then they went to the overhang and examined the bonanza lead.

Deane was astounded, overjoyed. He talked of running up the price on the syndicate, and of profiting more largely by his superintendent's work. His greed outran his delight, and his stuffy voice jingled with prospective dollars.

He swaggered up and down the tunnel. He bragged about what he had and what he was going to have, the things he had done and the things he would do; and he wound up with:

"Darn it, Bremerton, I don't know but I'll take the bit in my teeth and insist on giving you every sou of that ten thousand!"

They returned to the mine in time for supper, and Deane insisted on sitting at table with the grimy, sweat-stained workers.

He tried to be a good fellow, and monopolized the conversation with jokes and witticisms. The jokes were coarse and the witticisms far-fetched, but they never failed to draw a laugh.

Following supper, and cigars smoked in front of the headquarters adobe, Bremerton made ready to tighten the coil. As a preliminary step, he invited Deane to step into the office.

O'Hara's respect for himself would not allow of association with Deane. He kept away from the headquarters adobe, but watched it carefully from the shadow of the bunk-house.

When the mine-owner and the superintendent retired into the office the Irishman approached the little mud-walled building and took up his position at a point where the mumbling voices reached his ears.

The matter of what Bremerton was about to do worried him. He knew his friend so well that he was expecting drastic measures; and these, he was confident, Deane would fight. Out of that clash what was to come?

When the voices grew high, when passion pitched them in the high key that meant a narrowing of argument and a resort to force, O'Hara was planning to interfere.

Bremerton might go too far with Deane—it was conceivable—and the Irishman would step in and call a halt before his friend went to extremes.

While biding his time, with every nerve tense and every faculty alert, O'Hara heard a sound of galloping. He sprang into the trail and was suddenly confronted by Mariquita Mallory.

"Saints defend us!" he gasped. "Miss Mallory, you will please forgive me for saying it, but this is no place for you."

"Where is Mr. Bremerton?" the girl demanded; "where is Deane? I want to talk with them. I watched

while Deane was taken into the gully and shown the bonanza lead, and I came here to do what I can to get our rights."

"Och, wurra, what a night it is!" sighed O'Hara. "Will you be listening to me, Miss Mallory? It will do you no good to see Deane. Bremerton has him in the office now, and will fight it out with him. He has his plans—devil knows what they are—and if Bremerton can't do anything then nobody can. Will you please go away? I'm afraid for you here."

"I'll not go away," she declared. "I'll stay on the ground till it's settled. Why are you here, Mr. O'Hara?"

"Faith, now, it's just to be handy in case I'm needed. A better man than Bremerton never lived, and I can't let him get the worst of anything or—"

"You think he's in danger?" murmured Mariquita quickly; "you think he's risking his life trying to get our rights for us?"

"Never—not in the way you mean," and O'Hara laughed shortly. "Why, Lee could take this fat mining king with one hand and strangle the breath out of him. Begorry, it's that, or something like it, that worries me. That's the worst of the law, do you mind? You can't kill a human, coyote though he is and no matter what he deserves, without complications with sheriffs and courts and prison walls. If necessary, I'm here to save Bremerton from that."

"Then I'll stay with you and help you."

In spite of his protests she stayed, leaving her horse by the corral and then sitting beside O'Hara on the rock-heap where he had posted himself. They listened silently to the drone of voices, and once Deane's tones rose high and his words came to them distinctly.

"You're working for me! What are the Mallorys to you that you're so keen for them?"

Mariquita's hand clutched O'Hara's arm convulsively and a sharp breath fluttered through her lips.

"He'll stand to his guns, this Bremerton," whispered O'Hara. "I know him, I tell you."

Again Deane lifted his angry voice. "You're a d—traitor, that's what you are! You was on the rocks and I gave you a chance. This is what I get for it!"

"The likes of him to be talking to Bremerton like that!" gritted O'Hara. "Here's where I begin expecting trouble. Don't say anything, don't do anything; just listen and leave it to me, Miss Mallory."

So, anxious and apprehensive, they waited and listened. Meanwhile, in the office matters were approaching a climax.

Deane had followed Bremerton into the office wonderingly. There was that in Bremerton's face which Deane remembered to have seen there out around San Simone once when they were cornered by Mexicans bent on taking their burros and camp equipment. The look and manner of the superintendent puzzled Deane.

Bremerton lighted the lamp and placed it on top of the desk; then he waved Deane to a chair.

"Silas," said Bremerton bantering-ly, "you're a shrewd one. You wouldn't tell me in Denver how you got hold of the Mariquita Mine. I asked you if it was a square deal, you remember, and you said it was."

"Well, wasn't it?"

"It was clever," and a false note of admiration rang in Bremerton's voice. "You kept Mallory dangling while you put on a side deal with Carruthers."

"Mallory was an old fool," chuckled Deane, whose ear was too gross to detect the false note. "I let him nibble and then jerked the bait away from him. But I didn't do that, by thunder, until it was too late for him to raise the money in other quarters."

"Carruthers was harder to man-

age. He was as big a fool, though, as Mallory. He could have extended the time for Mallory, but he was afraid. I had offered him twenty-five thousand better than Mallory was to give him, and his greed got the better of his common sense. Then, after it was all over, Carruthers got sore and began to holler. A lot of good that did him."

Bremerton sat quietly and listened and marveled. This was his old friend who was talking, a man who had shared his blanket and his wavering fortunes for years!

"Here's something for you to store up for future use, Bremerton," went on Deane, with the air of one who wished to see another prosper along the lines he had made his own.

"You've seen how I pulled this off. Quit being so blamed conscientious and profit by the lesson. Get busy on a scheme of your own. Nothing on earth to hinder you from getting where I am but your fool notions about what's right and what's wrong. Do the other fellow for a spell and don't let him do you. *Sabe?*"

"Oh, I *sabe*, all right!" answered Bremerton. "Maybe it seems strange to you, Deane; but I'd rather have my fool notions than all your pile of dirty dollars."

"What's that?" snapped the other. "You're willing enough to take my dirty dollars, by thunder! Yes, and you helped me here. Don't forget that. You're really the one who put this scheme across. That lost lead will do the trick. Griggsby couldn't find it, and Lacey couldn't find it. You got onto it, and you were my last bet."

"You've paid me a thousand dollars," continued the superintendent. "Here's the money. I don't want it."

He flung the package of bank-notes brought to him by O'Hara on the table in front of Deane. The latter grew red and apoplectic.

"What's this, what's this?" he muttered choppily.

"It's the money you have paid me. Now, you can't throw it in my face that I've profited by your dirty work. My hands are clean for what's to come. I have something also to tell you, Deane. I want to appeal to your sense of justice—if you have any left in your gold-seared soul.

"It was Mariquita Mallory who saved me from Carruthers that morning at the fork of the trail. My horse was dragging me through the swale. She stopped the brute. Yes, and when Carruthers and his gang were shooting at us and driving us from cover to cover, Mariquita Mallory took me into the gully.

"We would have been picked off by the bullets had she not led me under the overhang. That is how I came to discover the lost vein. It would never have been found otherwise, and this property would have continued to be nothing more than a poor proposition and dear at the fifty thousand you paid for it had Miss Malory not taken me into that tunnel."

Deane stared at Bremerton, his little eyes glimmering. But he had not a word to say.

"You see how it is, Deane," the superintendent continued. "Merely as a matter of right, a simple case of justice, I'm asking you to deed a half interest in the mine to Mariquita Mallory."

When that had taken length, breadth, and depth in Deane's mine he gave vent to a roar of wrath.

"You're working for *me!* What are the Mallorys to you that you're so keen for them?"

"I'm not working for you, Silas. To-night I resign. Carruthers is out of the running, the bonanza ledge is found, and there is nothing between you and half a million but a little time for putting rich ore through the mill. I want to say, however, that I am not going to help you rob the Mallorys when all the credit is due the girl. Get that?"

Deane gave vent to another roar

and floundered out of his chair. He shook a fat fist at his old friend and leaned across the table to shout:

"You're a traitor, that's what you are! You was on the rocks and I gave you a chance. That is what I get for it!"

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE HAND OF A FRIEND.

BREMERTON'S gray eyes gleamed like polished steel. In just one second he was all energy and flaming resolution. A bound landed him on his feet, and he threw himself half across the table to look into Deane's face.

"Yes, I'm a traitor," he said between his teeth. "The best thing I've done since I came to the Mariquita Mine is to turn against you. The Silas Deane of five years ago is dead; you're not even the shell of him. You're a knave, a thief, and a liar! Don't you make a move, Deane. Sit down—there, at my desk!"

A move of the right hand and Bremerton was looking over the sights of a revolver. Deane's little eyes grew filmy, the purple died from his flabby cheeks and left them a sickly, pasty white.

This mining king had never been a coward. He knew Bremerton, however. That voice, that look, meant that Bremerton was no longer Bremerton, but Lee Reckless.

The change from the quiet, self-restrained man to another whose will was his only law, and whose hand would stop at nothing, had been consummated in a flash.

Deane slumped heavily against the table. Slowly he raised a hand.

"For Heaven's sake, Bremerton," he whispered hoarsely, "come out of that! I'm your old partner—remember Arapahoe Cañon? Remember them days when we—"

"Sit down!"

The command was sharp and metallic, like the snapping of a trigger.

Deane wheezed and rolled backward into a chair. The point of the revolver followed him.

"Is this what you got me out here for," he mumbled—"to threaten and bullyrag me on my own property?"

"I brought you out here, you miserable excuse for the man I used to know, to force you to do one thing—just *one thing*—that you can look back on without regret when you take the Long Trail. Do you think my nerve will fail, and that I will hang back? Say!"

Deane's thick shoulders quivered. He crouched forward, his elbows on the desk, and spoke weakly over his shoulder:

"No! In your present temper you'd—you'd do anything."

"That's the right point to start on. Don't get me wrong. And don't you dare mention Arapahoe Cañon! The words, in your mouth, are an insult to the Silas Deane who was my friend. You killed him, you bragging, murderous hound! For that alone you're not fit to live!"

"You're—you're crazy," came gurglingly from Deane.

"I've worked for you here; I've risked my neck for you; and I've given back the money for which I sold myself. Before I wash my hands of you, though, there's one thing more."

Bremerton groped for the breast of his coat with his left hand. Not once did he take his gleaming eyes off Deane.

"There's a deed to a half-interest in the Mariquita Mine," Bremerton went on. "You'll sign and convey a part of this property to the person who is entitled to all of it—Mariquita Mal-lory."

He flung the document down on the desk. This blow at the mine-owner's most vulnerable point brought back his courage—for a moment.

"Not if you kill me!" he muttered. "It's my property, and you'll not rob me. A deed like that wouldn't hold good in law nohow! Haven't you sense enough to know that?"

"It will hold good—this deed.

You'll never dispute it. If you try that, you'll know that I'm alive and camped on your trail. Pick up that pen and sign your name!"

Again Deane turned his ghastly face over his shoulder. The muzzle of a blued barrel was within a yard of him, and back of the barrel was a man primed with a reckless disregard of consequences.

Deane's hands trembled. He picked up the paper and bowed close to read it. It fell from his shaking fingers and dropped to the floor.

"I'll—I'll sign under protest," said Deane. "Pick it up for me."

"Get it yourself. I'm wise to your tricks."

Deane bent over, grunting and wheezing. The chair slipped from under him and he went to his knees. Then, reaching for the deed with his left hand, he brought his right to the front of the blue flannel shirt. The thick fingers caught at a hand-grip.

The sharp-eyed Bremerton caught the move, but it was too late to interfere. The table was between him and Deane.

"Oh, you cur!" cried Bremerton; "you shadow of the man that—"

Deane pressed a trigger. A bullet tore its way through the front of his shirt and ranged upward over his left arm. Bremerton's hands dropped, and he swayed a moment.

"Tricky to — the last!" he gasped. "That gun—under the shirt—I didn't know—"

He fell sprawling backward with a force that made the adobe walls shiver and sent the lamp-flame flaring into the chimney. A scream came from somewhere. Deane did not hear it. Approaching footsteps crunched the gravel. And Deane did not hear them.

Mechanically he picked up the deed and straightened erect. Walking around the table, he stood looking down on Bremerton with staring, uncomprehending eyes.

O'Hara sprang furiously into the room out of the night. One look at the

form on the floor and he jumped at Deane.

"I thought it was you, not Bremerton!" he cried. "I'll kill you for this!"

"No," rasped Deane, lifting his revolver and leveling it. "You'll not kill me. Stand where you are!"

The Irishman's long body doubled forward, the muzzle looking him between the eyes. He choked, and the fingers of his extended hands closed helplessly into the palms.

Mariquita was in the room, but she seemed lost to what was passing between the two men. Her concern was all for Bremerton. Kneeling, she took his head in her arms. Softly she pushed back the hair from his temples and kissed his brow, his cheek, his lips.

"For me," she whispered — "for me! Oh, I want you to live so I can repay you for this! I want you—"

She paused, her broken voice trailing off into quiet. Softly from Bremerton's gripping fingers she removed the revolver.

"Look!" she said. "There are no loads in it!"

O'Hara reached for the weapon, examined it, and, with sneering contempt, exhibited it to Deane.

"He was bluffing you," said he; "and, like a friend, like an old partner, you called his bluff. Oh, if that can get under your skin, think of it now, carry it about in your head for years to come. But look for Mike O'Hara. You owe me something for this night's work, Deane, and it's a debt you'll pay!"

Deane backed away from the harmless revolver as from a rattlesnake. He was staring at it as he reached the door; and he was still staring as he stepped backward into the night, the folded paper in one hand and the leveled revolver in the other.

Another moment and he was gone. He passed King in the doorway, and King whirled in a frenzy of consternation and ran off toward the bunk-house.

"Deane has killed Bremerton!" he shouted.

His voice died out in the sullen hum of the mill. King, still shouting frenziedly, raced on to the sleeping day-shift with his news.

O'Hara would have gone in pursuit of Deane had not Mariquita stopped him.

"It is not Deane but Bremerton who should have our attention now, Mr. O'Hara," said she. "Help me!"

The Irishman was like a man in a dream. He and the girl, between them, gathered Bremerton up in their arms and carried him to the bed in the other room. Then an oath burst from O'Hara and he ran out into the night.

Half-clad men were rushing from the bunk-house. The mill clattered into silence, and Gorman led a wild group over the ore-platform and toward the office.

"Who did it?" shouted Gorman. "Is it true?"

"True as gospel," answered O'Hara. "Deane shot Bremerton down. Find Deane—don't let him be after getting away. He's in this camp!"

But Deane was not in the camp. He had taken Mariquita's horse, which was ready at his hand by the corral, and had fled.

All the live-stock was pressed into service for the chase. O'Hara took one cayuse, and Red Collins another. Case went bareback on one of his horses, and King took the other. Dutch Fred's team was likewise requisitioned.

"The doctor and the sheriff, we need them again," called O'Hara as he galloped away. "King, that's your work!"

The little cyanid expert, for once in his life, felt equal to anything. He started on the long ride to town.

For the rest of that night mining and milling were forgotten. The men clustered in groups around the headquarters adobe, talked while waiting for the searchers to return, and looked through the window at the prostrate, silent form on the bed.

Mariquita was doing what she could. She was all womanly tenderness, and

whenever her hands touched Bremerton it was like a caress.

Giles, the one-eyed, tiptoed into the room. He carried his hat in his hand.

"D'ye think he'll live, mum?"

"Oh, he will; he must!" the girl answered. "Have you sent for a doctor?"

"King went, but it's a long trip, and it will be sunup afore any one from town gits here. What can we do, mum?"

"I can do everything," said Mariquita.

"And he's goin' to pull through?"

"Yes, yes!"

Giles tiptoed out again and spread the news. A faint, husky cheer came from the men.

Bremerton had proved himself a man, and his hold upon the workers had strengthened even beyond his own knowledge.

Slowly the dark hours slipped away, and Mariquita sat by the unconscious Bremerton, clasping his hand and waiting and hoping for the return of consciousness. One by one the searchers came back. Deane had eluded them.

O'Hara resolutely took his place at Mariquita's side. He was somber and grief-stricken for his friend and all consideration and kindness toward the girl.

"Go home, Miss Mallory," he begged. "'Tis too much for you. You're like a ghost."

"Don't ask me to leave him," she answered. "I can't."

O'Hara looked at her closely, and a flash of understanding broke over him. He smiled softly.

"If that's the way of it," said he, "then sure you must stay."

They fought hard for hours to bring Bremerton back. Ragged streamers of dawn floated over the eastern hills before they succeeded. The first face Bremerton saw was Mariquita's. His blank eyes slowly filled with realization.

"I did my best for you, *novia*," he muttered.

The girl's eyes burned. Leaning down, she took one of his hands in both her own and held it to her white cheek.

"*Novia!*" she whispered. "Is it true, then?"

He disengaged his hand and groped at the breast of his flannel shirt. He found there only a bandage.

A troubled look came into his eyes.

From her own bosom the girl took a glove, stained red at the fingers.

"Here," went on Mariquita. "I found it—I—" Her head went down on the pillow beside his. "*Novio mio,*" she added in a stifled voice, "what matters the mine or anything else, now that *we know?*"

He smiled up into O'Hara's face.

And then the throb of a motor-car awakened echoes in the silent camp.

The car halted in front of the office, and Ransom and Dr. Morton and—O'Hara could scarcely believe his eyes—Deane came into the room.

"What in the name of—" began the sheriff, then saw Mariquita and bit off his words. "What's been going on here? Who shot Bremerton? Deane brought us word, and we hit only the high places coming. What's back of this black business?"

"Deane can tell you!" cried O'Hara. "Deane shot Bremerton! The nerve of him, to come back here like this!"

Deane was haggard and about spent. What he had passed through he alone knew.

"It was an accident," said Bremerton.

"Lee!" protested O'Hara.

"It was an accident," insisted Bremerton.

Deane turned away and staggered out into the other room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE time came when Michael O'Hara, sitting under the oaks in the

cañon with his flute, paused in his playing to think of what had been and of what was to be. The old *wanderlust* was strong within him, and the beckoning hills would have had him long since but for Bremerton. He could not vanish before his friend was on his feet and the future way made straight for him.

'Twas coming four weeks now since the "accidental" shooting. Deane had gone away immediately, but conscience had spoken to him that night. Why else had he gone for the sheriff and the doctor and come out with them to the mine?

His heart was sore for his anger and his hastiness. He wanted to know that his old friend would live. He wanted to see with his own eyes that he had not opened the gates for a dauntless spirit.

Well, he saw. Troth, and he heard Bremerton speak and insist on the words that cleared him. After that he went away and not once had he been heard from.

Another superintendent—from Colorado he was—came in a week. He had a smooth, boyish face, and his brown eyes turned often to Mariquita, who would not leave Bremerton's side. But the girl thought only, lived only, for the man under her care; and the brown eyes were disappointed.

It was easy sailing for the new super. The mill was grinding bonanza rock, and was closed down every other day for a partial clean-up. Men with guns stood guard by the plates, and people from Phoenix came to see that new wonder in the Phoenix Mountains—a mine whose performance outran expectations.

It was no place for a sick man, what with the stream of visitors and the excitement. So in a week Bremerton was moved to Oak Flat in the cañon. Mariquita would have it that way, and it was admitted that no one had a better right to dictate.

Red Collins and Gorman had charge of the transfer, and their aids

were Dutch Fred and Chase. O'Hara stood vigilantly by, and there were certain safeguards insisted on by Mariquita.

A hammock was stretched between two saddle-horses and in it lay Bremerton. Without a jar he was carried over the trail and to the house among the oaks. The girl made it plain to O'Hara that he was to stay with his friend, and together they had been there nearly three weeks.

Red Collins or Gorman or Giles—once it was King—rode over from the valley at frequent intervals to inquire about Bremerton and to leave news about the mine.

The remarkable showing which the property was making brought Deane many offers.

They eclipsed the half-million mark toward which they had striven at the first. There was no telling now what some one might pay for the Mariquita.

"A fortune might have been yours, *querida*," said Bremerton to the girl once when he was beginning to sit up.

She leaned over the back of his chair, her soft arms encircling his neck and her happy eyes looking down into his face.

"What is money, Lee," she asked, "to the other prize I have found? No one could buy it with all the gold in all the hills of this world!"

"It's not your prize," he doggedly averred; "but mine."

Out under the oaks, with his flute on his knees, O'Hara was wondering what Bremerton was to do. New responsibilities were coming to him, and how were they to be shouldered?

Then, along the cañon trail, came horses and a buckboard with two men riding.

The men turned in at the flat, and the rig halted near O'Hara. The Irishman got up with his faded, crooked eyes agleam.

One man had descended from the buckboard and was coming toward him. It was Silas Deane.

"Don't draw, O'Hara," said Deane.

"Faith," said the other, "I'm not heeled. If I had something to draw—"

"You have something," and Deane's little eye twinkled. "Draw on your imagination. What am I here for?"

"Divil a bit," said O'Hara, scowling. "Who can do any guessing about you?"

From the open door of the house at that moment came Bremerton. Mariquita walked beside him, and his arm was over her strong young shoulders. They came toward O'Hara and Deane, and the mine owner watched Bremerton closely.

An easy chair in the shade had been arranged, and Mariquita made Bremerton comfortable in it and then turned with hostile eyes to the visitor. Bremerton had looked at Deane without speaking.

"To what, Mr. Deane," inquired the girl, "do we owe this call?"

"I have a good bid for the mine, and I think we had better sell."

"What have I to do with that?"

"As much as I have. For nearly a month you have owned a half interest in the Mariquita Mine. The deed was recorded the day following the—'the accident.'"

O'Hara was like a man in a daze.

Mariquita was breathing quickly and her trembling hands sought the back of Bremerton's chair. Bremerton merely studied Deane's face.

"Bremerton made me see a light," explained Deane. "He showed me how to be square. I want his goodwill, Miss Mallory, and I want yours and your father's. I reckon I acted like a coyote. I have enough and to spare, and neither chick nor child to leave it to. The man in the buckboard is a notary. If you are ready to sign this deed I've brought along, tomorrow you and your father will have enough in bank to make the rest of your lives easy."

Bremerton struggled to his feet and put out his hand. His face was glowing with happiness.

"Silas, my old partner!" he exclaimed. "You have come back! I can hear the flood waters in Arapahoe Cañon! This time, though, you have saved more than my life."

"How's that?" queried Deane, gripping the hand.

Bremerton turned to take Mariquita in his arms.

"Whisht!" murmured O'Hara, taking Deane by the sleeve and drawing him away. "Can't you see how it is? I knew it from the start. I'll shake with you, too, Silas Deane. Neither you nor I can be Lee's best friend any more. The girl, God bless her, is nearest his heart. You've made their future safe and you ought to be happy."

O'Hara wiped his eyes.

"Where's that devilish flute?" he asked, looking around blindly.

THE END.

A HEALTH.

I FILL this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex
The seeming paragon;
To whom the better elements
And kindly stars have given
A form so fair, that, like the air,
'Tis less of earth than heaven.

Her every tone is music's own,
Like those of morning birds,
And something more than melody
Dwells ever in her words;
The coinage of her heart are they,
And from her lips each flows,
As one may see the burdened bee
Forth issue from the rose.

Affections are as thoughts to her,
The measures of her hours;
Her feelings have the fragrancy,
The freshness of young flowers;
And lovely passions, changing oft,
So fill her, she appears
The image of themselves by turns—
The idol of past years!

I fill this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex
The seeming paragon—
Her health! and would on earth there stood
Some more of such a frame,
That life might be all poetry,
And weariness a name.

The Thing that was Caesar's

by

George
Brydges
Rodney



A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

Author of "Sailing with Morgan"

CHAPTER I.

I DON'T mind telling *you*, Oakes, but, mind you, there is not another soul in the world I *would* tell! I have seen the place. It is not a case of buying a pig in a poke.

"Of course, it was ten years ago and more that the thing happened, but— Just think of it, man! A rope of opals and rubies three feet long and not one of the opals smaller than a good-sized chestnut! Pearls, too, as thick as the seeds in a cacao-pod and a handful of rings, any one of which is worth a king's ransom—"

He stretched out his hand for the siphon and slowly filled his glass, setting it back in the bamboo ring of the chair arm. Oakes carefully clipped the end from a cigar and looked at Hemingway.

"Why didn't you get some of 'em and bring 'em away?"

"Why weren't you there to help carry 'em off? We had all that we could do to save our hides. I had worked my way down from Tibet; where More and I had gone the year before for sapphires.

"We didn't get very many, and what we did get were mostly worth-

less on account of flaws. We had the devil of a time gettin' out on account of the Goloks bein' on the war-path.

"You see, in comin' down-country we took the Great China road that Sven Hedin wrote of and so come down past Lhassa, keepin' to the hills to the north all the way till we came to the Bayankhara-ula Range.

"From there we worked northwest through the Tossun-nor country till we came to Si-ning Fu in Kan-suh.

"It was no joke gettin' down that far, either, for that road has always been deemed dangerous on account of those very Goloks. We traveled mostly by night and so hit the headwaters of the Hwang-ho, where we got a sampan and so came down to Peking—"

"A little matter of a fifteen-hundred-mile trip through a practically impassable country, disposed of in something near six sentences," commented Oakes, leaning forward and waiting expectantly for further speech till the flaring match burned his fingers. "And then what?"

"And then when we got to Peking we found the White Flag rebellion was in full blast, and a week later we were besieged in the legations in the

city. It was after the siege had been raised and the international forces occupied the town that I came across the things—the stones.”

“How?”

“Ever been in Peking?” asked Hemingway.

Oakes shook his head. Hemingway swept on, caught on the flood of the full tide of narrative.

“There are two cities, the Inner and the Outer or Chinese City. The Inner City is called the Tartar City. The Inner City is not really an inner city at all, though you would think so from its name. It adjoins the other city on the north and its walls overlap it by extending to the east and west of it; beyond the walls of the Outer City—the *wai ch'eng*, as the Chinese call it.

“Inside the Inner City—the *wai ch'eng*—lies *Hwang ch'eng*, the Imperial City; and inside this, again, the Holy of Holies of all China, with its four great towers, with the bronze bells that are now known all over the civilized world, lies the *Tsae-kin ch'eng*—the Forbidden City. You know all about that, and the story of the siege of the legations, and the heroic fight that was put up there by men, women, and children is no news to you.

“We had a perfect hell of a time there during all the spring and summer of 1900. Well, when the sack of the city took place, I was with More and a little Frenchman named Lavallo. More was killed a few days later in repelling an attack on the walls, and after that, when the city was thrown open, Lavallo and I looted pretty freely, just as every one else was doing.

“I tell you this frankly, for we only did what every one else did. We had at one time a good many thousand tael notes on the Bank of North China, but we thought the bank was destroyed beyond repair, so we threw them away.

“A couple of French officers picked them up, and a little later the bank paid cent per cent. So you see what chances occurred every day.

“One night Lavallo came to me in my room, and after shutting the door he pulled out a box that he said he had picked up from the street and, laying it on the table, said:

“I picked this up as I came up the street. There was a fight just ahead of me, where a great pig of a Russian soldier was beating a Chinese priest. I stopped him, and he went off, muttering. The priest ran away as fast as he could without stopping to thank me; and seeing that the Russian pig had dropped this box, I picked it up and brought it here. It is not worth much, but there may be something inside it. It's ill looting behind either the Russians or the Germans. They're bad enough when the common soldiers are by themselves, but when their officers are along they're worse. The officers take all that is valuable, and the men get the rest. Let's see what there is in it.”

“With that he wrenched open the box and turned it upside down upon my table, and there cascaded out on the table the necklace of rubies and opals that I told you of, a lot of rings set with diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, and a lot of other stuff that was less valuable.

“I saw at once what had happened. I had been in the Forbidden City once and got permission to go through one of their temples—the temple of Tsze Keng Wang. It was a mass of richness such as you cannot even imagine. Every person who had prayed there for the past ten centuries, and who imagined that their prayers had been granted, had given to the temple some votive offering, a ring or a bracelet or a precious stone of some sort, and the resultant wealth was displayed in long chests about the walls.

“I saw 'em. Hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of jewels strung on small brass rods inside ordinary wooden chests, with plain glass covers, like portable bookcases.

“When the place was looted, of course the priests distributed the stuff.

Carried it off and hid it, you know, so that it couldn't be looted. It was while the priest was carrying off the box that the Russian soldier caught him and took it, and then dropped it, and Lavallo picked it up.

"There was a lot of stuff looted in Peking that summer. You know the story of the sack. Even your American troops did not come out with perfectly clean hands, I have heard, although they were by far the best of all.

"The stuff that Lavallo poured out on my table that night fairly made me sick.

"It is ours, Hemingway — ours to divide. You and More and I played the game together while he lived, and we will play it fairly to the end, if the good God pleases."

"It was more than decent of the little chap, for I had no possible claim on his share, though we had divided, share and share alike.

"We will have to hide it somewhere till we get a chance to carry it away," he said. "To carry it on our persons would be to tempt Fortune too much. She is a fickle jade—"

"So we hid it—" He lapsed into silence and poured himself another drink.

"Well," said Oakes sharply, "go on!"

"Lavallo was killed three days later by a Boxer hatchet man, and I got enteric fever and was sent down to the coast. I have never been able to get back, though I have tried a score of times.

"I am broke. I will be perfectly frank with you. I always am broke, and have never been able to raise enough to get to Peking. My family sees to that," he went on bitterly, "and my funds are always just enough to pay my bills here, but not to get away.

"I am tired of being a remittance man. I want to make up for a part of the past at least. I have heard that your firm has the contract for building a railroad for the imperial Japanese government in Korea. If you will give

me a job and take me with you, I will go to Peking and get these stones—this loot! And we will divide the spoils. It is a matter of about sixty thousand pounds, I should say. Will you stake me—I mean, take me?"

"Are you quite certain that you know where it was buried?"

For answer, Hemingway grinned affably at him and pulled from his pocket a square wooden box, which he placed upon the table.

"This is the box," he said slowly, as he turned the wooden box upside down upon the table, disclosing to the wondering gaze of the American engineer a silver box, upon which his eyes fastened eagerly.

It was an oblong box of silver that was very disfigured and black with age and disuse, possibly an inch and a half in depth. The top was studded with a tiny turquoise flower in each corner, and the center of the lid was nearly entirely covered with the raised figure of a headless fish.

Many dents upon the top and along the edges of the box showed that it had not received the best of treatment. It was about four inches long by about two and a half inches in width.

Oakes promptly opened it, and when he examined the inside he found that it was scarred by a series of curious, almost undecipherable marks, like scratches, which he could hardly see without the aid of a transit-glass.

"We took the stones from the box and put them in an old shot-bag. It did not take up so much room. Later we hid the bag," explained Hemingway. "We hid it in the very best place that we could think of. We displaced a stone in the wall of the *wai ch'eng*, where no one surely would think of looking for it—the Outer City, you know — and we put the bag containing the stones in the earth behind it, and I think they will stay there till the Judgment Day, unless I go to get them, now that Lavallo is dead—"

"And Lavallo died in Peking three days later, you say?" said Oakes soft-

ly. "Think there's any danger that he may have told some one else about the matter before he died?"

"He died too quick," said Hemingway, grinning. "He was cut down in the middle of the street by a hatchetman. No. No one knows but me, and I won't tell—till the time comes. Will you take me, Oakes?"

"I'm not very keen on buried treasure," said Oakes. "I tell you frankly, Hemingway, that I do not think much of your plan. When you come right down to plain facts, the things were stolen by some one, and I have never yet seen good come of loot. The stones should be returned."

"Certainly they should be," agreed Hemingway easily. "The only question is: to whom? The Chinese government doesn't own them. Is it the Brahmin temple from which they were taken or the Buddhist, or were they Christian property? If you ask them, each one will claim them. No, no, Oakes, they belong to no one; and I can see no reason why I, who need money and who know where these things are, should not profit by the knowledge. Do you?"

"Putting it in that way, I do not. I'll be very glad, Hemingway, to have you go with me. 'Fraid, though, I can't offer you very much in the way of pay beyond expenses. You see, we have a contract with the Japanese government to build an extension to the railroad that runs into Chenampho, and we are ready to start as soon as we can get our coolie labor imported from Swatow. I sail on Saturday for Swatow by way of Hong-Kong—American Maru to Hong-Kong, where I take the coolie boat Atlanta for Swatow. Will you sail with me?"

"Certainly, and I'm greatly obliged to you, too. I understand, then, that you will have no objection to my taking a trip to Peking to look into this matter?"

"Yes, that will be all right. Shall we turn in and get some sleep? Let's have a peg for a night-cap and then

good night. You look as though you needed sleep."

Good reason had Hemingway to look fatigued. That very day he had ridden thirty miles on a devil-foaled Philippine pony to enable him to catch the little native launch that plied between Paete and Manila on the off chance of catching it.

On top of that there had been the fifty-mile lake trip, sitting cross-legged on the stinking deck in default of chairs, surrounded by natives carrying pigs, tiny native clams, and cholera germs to the Chinese market in Tondo, while over all hung a heavy aura of the nauseating fish-paste eaten so generally by the natives of the lower class.

It had been an off year with Hemingway. Bidden to leave Vladivostock between two days, he had gone, leaving an unsavory reputation and a properly repentant woman, to say nothing of an angry husband in the person of the Baron Micheal Pandroski, whose office as commandant had enabled him to hasten the departure of the handsome young Englishman whose attentions to the beautiful if indiscreet *baronne* had set all tongues to wagging in the "Paris of the East."

Together with McLeod, the huge, red-headed Scotchman—his "bunkie," now that More was dead—he had drifted up and down the coast, first on the flood tide of prosperity, again flung by the ebb of failure high and dry, once in Saigon, again in Aine, till finally a lottery row in Manila threw him fairly upon his beam-ends and on his friendship with Oakes until the arrival of his next remittance from home.

He had the very best intentions in the world—that always just failed of complete fulfilment. A man had once caustically summed him up in the sentence: "Hemingway has every gift in the world except the one gift of making use of what he has." To meet a woman was, with him, to make love to her, not because he was in love with her, but because it had become a habit with him—and he had always done it.

To do him justice, it was just as natural for him to pursue with delicate attentions an habitu  of Grant Road as it had been, under kinder stars, to send flowers to a d butante in St. John's Wood.

The handsome face and the blond cleanliness that had made him the *arbiter elegantiarum* of a certain exclusive Hussar r giment gave him welcome in all the treaty ports, though not always among the most exclusive circles; for Hemingway was looked upon somewhat askance by the better elements in the English colonies since the day when, on the eve of Younghusband's advance into Tibet, being selected for detail with that party, he had sent in his papers and had resigned from the service without vouchsafing a word of explanation. It took just that to kill him effectually among his craft, for no one is quicker than a soldier to detect shirking in a comrade.

There followed letters from home that, while supplying him with means of livelihood, barred him effectually from revisiting, during his father's lifetime, the long, green slopes of the Mendips or the blue waters of the Axe, for which his very soul longed with a longing that is not understood save by those in like case.

He had reflected long upon the suggestion that he had made to Oakes before he made the proposal. Thirty thousand pounds, good English pounds—his share of it—would mean ease and luxury along the edge of Asia till such time as he could in decency return home.

Perhaps he might explain—he could explain it satisfactorily. He had simply tired of the life, and he had made out his resignation before he had been notified that he was to accompany Younghusband, and after that obstinacy alone impelled him to refuse to do what was demanded of him—explain.

And then his father, too, had assumed that there was something discreditable in the matter, and had never even asked him for his version of the

matter. He longed to hear once more the soft slurring of the cabs through London mud. The voices of the night—London night drew him with hands of iron; and

Roweled him afresh toward the devil
and the flesh

as he turned away from the glass on this particular night after he had said good night to Oakes.

Oakes was moved by a different feeling. He had met Hemingway casually from time to time, and as the meetings grew more frequent he had grown to have a genuine liking for the tall Englishman.

He knew him to be a remittance man, but he had met them all over the East and had found them in the main to be pleasant, companionable fellows.

Decent enough men, withal, but who were cursed with the curse of Reuben: "Unstable as water, they shall not excel." The proposition of seeking for the buried gems he took little stock in and did not seriously consider.

Either they must have been discovered long before or else Hemingway was unconsciously making "the wish the father to the thought" in saying that they were worth sixty thousand pounds.

Certainly he did not propose to neglect his own legitimate business in order to go chasing a will-o'-the-wisp over all north China. Still if he could give Hemingway a permanent place with him, that would give him occupation and that would pay his expenses and give him the chance he wanted to get to Peking, and at the same time give Burton and Oakes the benefit of a man who was familiar with many of the coast dialects, he was more than willing to do it.

Burton looked very grave when his partner told him the next morning of his plan to take Hemingway with him.

"You don't know a thing about him, Jim. He may be and probably is what they themselves call a 'Boulder' for all you know—"

"Sure thing. He may indeed," commented Oakes, with the happy grin that endeared him to all with whom he came in contact. "I've known lots of 'em that were. But he's got to live, hasn't he? And as long as he does the work that we pay him to do, what do we care about his love affairs? Give him a chance, Fred."

And big Fred Burton, growling good-naturedly behind his desk, said presently:

"Oh, well, Jimmy, have it your own way. It's your own funeral, after all. When do you sail?"

"To-morrow, Saturday. I'll take the American Maru out of Hong-Kong. From there—I have wired to arrange it—I'll take passage on the Atlanta herself. You know she is signed on to carry our coolies from Swatow to Chenampho."

Burton nodded. All the details of this contract had been left to Oakes.

So it happened that the outward-bound American Maru bore on its northward trip one James Oakes, C.E., builder of bridges, and his cabin-mate, Geoffrey Hemingway, gentleman adventurer, tramp royal.

Burton waved a leisurely good-by to them from the dock-head, and then turned away to his office upon the Escolta.

CHAPTER II.

"SOLDIER'S weather — there and back again," accompanied them on that trip to Hong-Kong, where the Atlanta picked them up, and where the master, Innes, a burly sailorman of the true North Sea type, gave them rough but cordial greeting.

The owners of the Atlanta had contracted with Burton and Holmes to secure for them the laborers that they would need in Korea for the railroad work that they had undertaken that was to begin as soon as Oakes should reach Chenampho.

Afraid to rely upon the local supply

of native Koreans, who are only too often under the control of the nearest head-man and who are allowed to labor just as long as that head-man gets his stipulated amount of "cumshaw," or graft, Oakes had decided that with the consent of the imperial Japanese government he would import his coolies from Swatow, and Innes had taken the matter up with the zeal that characterized his every act.

"Eight hundred of 'em, Mr. Oakes. The comprador wrote me that we can get 'em on board in two hours after we make port. We'll sail to-night."

So they dropped Hong-Kong and the Peak behind them and headed southwest across a summer sea with the heave and swing of the China Sea pulsing the great iron hull as the Atlanta sagged steadily south, only to head north again when she should have her cargo.

The Swatow Roads are broad and shallow, and the little Atlanta lay quietly at anchor bowing to her own reflection in a nest of silver ripples of her own making when Captain Innes came to Oakes as he sat in his long chair by the port canvas dodger of the bridge.

"The American consul has come out to see you, Mr. Oakes. He's in my cabin now—"

Oakes rose quickly, and as he passed up the companionway to the bridge itself he was aware of a tall figure, heavily coated, that stood in the shadow of the ladder.

He entered the cabin, and Innes, intent on hospitality, took glasses and decanter from the racks while the waiting consul explained his errand.

"I'm Locke, the American consul accredited to Swatow, Mr. Oakes. I understand that the Atlanta is under charter to you for her northward run. I have spoken to Captain Innes about this matter, and he has referred me to you.

"I am very anxious to get passage north to Taku for Miss Downs. She is a cousin of my wife, and is on her

way to join some relatives at the American legation in Peking. I understand that you will touch at Shanghai, so I wish to ask if you will allow Miss Downs to take passage on the Atlanta as far as Shanghai. She can easily get from there to Taku, and there is no regular boat here for a month. It is important that she should reach Peking as soon as possible.

"My dear man, of course," said Oakes pleasantly. "I'm only afraid, though, that Miss Downs will find the trip far from a pleasant one. You know we carry coolies north."

"Yes, I know, but Innes and I are old friends, and he will look after her. Innes tells me that he will sail as soon as the ebb is making. Feeling sure that you would accede to my request, I brought Miss Downs and her luggage along in my sampan. She is waiting on the deck. I will ask her in with your permission, Innes."

He went out upon the deck, and, coming back presently with a tall girl whom Jim remembered vaguely to have seen on the decks as he came in, he introduced Oakes to her.

"Mr. Oakes says he will be very glad to be of service to you, Marjorie. Let me present him to you."

She extended her hand cordially, and Jim, getting a good glimpse of her, was suddenly glad that he had so graciously acceded to the request that the consul had made so informally.

"I hope you will be comfortable, Miss Downs. You may rest assured that all three of us will do all that we can to make you so. May I introduce my friend, Mr. Hemingway?"

So Hemingway, too, seated himself, and the little party chatted informally after the manner of English-speaking peoples in the Far East, till finally Mr. Locke, all things being arranged, bade the girl a courteous good night.

"I will leave you now, Marjorie. Be sure you let us hear from you at Shanghai. Your cabin is probably arranged now if you wish to turn in. Isn't it, Mr. Innes?"

"The boy is fixing it now. Good-by, Locke. I'll look after Miss Downs as if she were my own daughter. There's your sampan now, knocking at my paint work as if she's waitin' for a summons to come aboard. I hear 'em gettin' the anchor already, so you'll just be sayin' good-by."

The flat little sampan lagged astern in the last gleam of lights from the open cabin ports, and the girl standing with her new acquaintances at the rail watched it fade away into a blur of blackness astern.

A ripple among the nested stars under the Atlanta's fore-foot told that she was working out under her own steam, and presently the clang of the bells from the engine-room told them that the quartermaster on the bridge had signaled for half-speed ahead, and the Atlanta, with her berth-deck packed with over eight hundred coolies and her cabin list of three, passed slowly out into the blackness of the outer roads.

Coolies, however, are only one degree more uncertain than dynamite, which the Atlanta also carried. A sweltering dawn ushered in the new day, and Marjorie, sipping her early morning tea in her stateroom, was suddenly aware of excitement on the decks outside.

She heard the patter of naked feet on the boards—then a long hush, followed by a hasty colloquy, and—the call was passed for all hands to muster. She heard the call for the muster, but attached no importance to it, for it is a necessary precaution on a ship where each of the eight hundred coolies carried knife or hatchet in spite of a careful search for hidden arms, for Swatow and Canton both know that neither can be fairly classed as a safe port. No port can be where the Six Companies hold undisputed sway.

She sat and listened with a strained look upon her face, and presently, setting down the cup, she stepped out upon the deck in time to hear the mate and a quartermaster demanding in no

uncertain terms to be told the whereabouts of the doctor.

The doctor was found pawing over a coolie in his cabin, carefully examining him under the jaws and arms. He turned as Oakes and the master came in.

"He's got it, sir," he said shortly.

"Good Heavens! And us with eight hundred aboard. Why, they certified to the outfit when they came aboard! And we not twenty hours out of Swatow. Why, Enloe, no port along the coast will let us in—"

Dr. Enloe nodded grim acquiescence.

"And us with Miss Downs aboard—"

"Don't leave me out," said Oakes grimly. "I'm under contract with the Japanese government to begin work on the Chenampho Extension, with a forfeiture of a thousand dollars a month if I do not begin on time. Pleasant outlook," and he smiled about as happily as a man smiles when told that he is about to be hanged.

"What'll you do, captain?"

"Oh, mark time up and down the coast, I suppose, till it wears away. There's no necessity to tell Miss Downs."

It could not long be kept from her. They had overlooked the fact that cabin-boys will talk, and that Miss Downs, being no "Flapper," but a qualified nurse on her way from the pest-hole of Swatow to Peking, knew the pidgin English of the coast quite as well as the master himself.

By consequence, Oakes found himself stopped on the way to his stateroom by a tall, fair-haired girl, who questioned him and Enloe directly, and to whom they could not avoid a direct answer.

"You must not think I am afraid of it," she said slowly. "I have seen it too often to fear it. I am sorry for the poor coolies down there 'tween decks. Can I be of any assistance down there in the hospital, doctor?"

"Good Heavens, Miss Downs! Do

you mean that you are willing to go down into the hospital and take charge of the two cases there if it should be necessary—"

"Bubonic?" she asked tersely.

Enloe nodded.

"Yes," she said. "Wait." She disappeared for a few moments, and presently reappeared clad in a trim-fitting nurse's uniform.

"Show me the way," she directed.

Oakes and Hemingway looked at her admiringly. This was man's efficiency. They followed her into the dim recesses of the lower deck, where the bunks were arranged for the coolies.

It was dark in the 'tween decks, and the air reeked with the acrid smell of Oriental humanity, which is like nothing else under heaven.

A quartermaster, standing guard at a bulkhead door, motioned toward the little hospital, away in the stern of the vessel, over the kick of the screw.

"They've took him aft, doctor," he said.

So they trailed aft again, to find the gaunt figure of a huge Chinaman lying on one of the canvas bunks swinging to the heave of the ship, his torso gleaming like wet copper in the seaglare that came through the open ports, mingled with the smell of fresh paint and Chinese cooking. The doctor asked a question.

"He says," said Dr. Enloe, "that he is not a coolie. He says that he is a priest and that he shipped as a coolie because he had no money with which to pay his passage to Taku. He says that his temple will pay. He wishes to go to Taku. He says he will show his mark to prove the truth of his statement—"

The sick man stripped his arm to the shoulder, showing in very truth upon his breast the little red triangle that marks the men of the Shan-tse clan, than which there is no higher class of priests in all north China.

The smile with which he attempted to greet them was wiped out in a sudden spasm of pain. Enloe bent over

him and spoke again. Then he turned and spoke to a cabin-boy, who promptly ran up the companionway, returning in ten minutes with a little, black morocco case, which he handed to the doctor. Enloe opened it and took from it a tiny hypodermic syringe and was about to set the little needle when Hemingway, who had been quietly observing him, spoke:

"No use, doctor," he said softly. "He won't let you stick him with that. They never will, you know. The one thing that every Chinaman fears—more, indeed, than he fears death itself—is any abrasion of the skin made in cold blood by a doctor. They dread an operation more than they do death. I quite understand that your object is to relieve his pain, but— Shall I translate for you?"

"If you please, Mr. Hemingway." The doctor looked very obviously surprised.

Hemingway spoke rapidly for a few moments.

"I have told him," he said presently, "that you have requested me to tell him that he is very ill indeed and that you desire to give him a treatment that will alleviate all pain. Is that correct?"

Enloe nodded. The priest spoke rapidly for a moment.

Hemingway listened intently.

"He says," he went on, "that only the gods know what devils reside in the *Yung-gwaisai's* medicine; that if it were good dust of powdered deer's horn or even crushed toads' heads, he could understand, but that all the traditions of the clan—the Shan-tse, that is, of course— forbid any puncture of the skin by which the soul might be released from the body; he says that if it is desired to make him sleep, then do it by the means that have been employed by his father's fathers for a thousand generations — the brown flower."

"Opium? I have the extract, of course—"

"He will not take that. He will

only take the preparation to which he is accustomed. Wait a bit and I'll see if I can't get some from one of the coolies on the lower deck."

He ran quickly aft and, seeking the stinking levels of the berth-deck, raided the coolies. The resultant handful of brown pills he took to his stateroom, where he went to wash his hands and emptied the opium pellets into the little silver box that he had showed to Oakes in his house in Manila.

He then went quickly back to the hospital, where he found his friends still grouped about the semiconscious Chinaman. He handed the box, wrapped in a coarse handkerchief, to Enloe, who carelessly unwrapped it, dropping the box upon the floor.

The tinkle of the sounding metal rang like a bell. The priest started at the sound and sat up staring. Enloe spoke to him soothingly and held up the box.

"It had opium in it," he said in English. "Some one explain to him in the vernacular."

He held the box in front of the priest so that he could see it plainly.

The man raved and Enloe, bending over him, listened intently, calling in the interpreter from time to time. Hemingway was standing back of the little group, looking out of an open port. The Chinese boy, who was interpreting, bent over the man.

"He say— It ees no— What you say—good? Him say take blox away. That no him pidgin; him no wantchee take, him pliest; him holy man of gods—"

Again the man broke into open revilings of the visibly terrified boy.

"He says," says Hemingway rapidly, "that you must take this box away. That some one has stolen it, and that this box is the cause of the plague on board of us now. He says, too, that had he known that the box was on board this ship that no power on earth would have brought him with us—"

"Where'd he ever see it?" asked Oakes skeptically.

Miss Downs smiled the close-lipped smile of tolerant unbelief.

"He says it was in the Forbidden City, in 1900, when the foreign devils desecrated the place! And we know *that* to be true, Oakes!" Hemingway drew his breath hard. "He says it was with Gordon in the Taiping rebellion in the South in 1860; and that it came there from India, where it caused all the trouble that led to the great mutiny. He says it was the cause of the war across the Black Water, when the gray coats fought the Feringees—that's the Crimean War—and that he has heard it caused trouble across the Atlantic—that's the Far Water—"

"For the love of Mike, let's see this trouble-maker!"

"Oh, it's the same old box that I showed you in Manila."

Hemingway handed it to his friend, who scrutinized it carefully, listening mechanically to the ravings of the sick man. Suddenly a shout from the decks made them all start and look at each other and then run up the companionway that led to the deck above.

"Oh, doctor!"—the shout was from the bridge—"get all the people from the hospital and come as quickly as you can. There's trouble among the coolies—"

There was, indeed, trouble among the coolies, the first sign being not the milling around that one would have seen among Occidental people, but the quiet gathering in groups along the bulwarks that terminated in a rush at Oakes as he followed Miss Downs along the decks.

Three men rushed at him—one, a great burly six-foot Chinaman, shaking from his sleeve a vicious-looking butcher knife. Oakes promptly knocked him flat and trampled him unmercifully as he fairly shoved Marjorie ahead of him up the ladder.

There was a roar of voices in the engine-room hatch and a curt command floated up to him above the reek of oil and hot water.

"Rig your fire-hose to No. 2 valve. Now, Foster—turn on your main steam!"

It came not a moment too soon. The rush of the coolies had got as far as the break of the poop when two burly quartermasters ran hurriedly to the port gangway, dragging with them, by the crossbar, the heavy brass nozzle of the fire-hose that was used daily to wash down the decks.

Almost in the very faces of the surging crowd Nolan, the square-shouldered, turned the key and the jet of saturated steam struck the head of the crowd.

It melted as the ice melts in a lake thaw, but with screams and curses, and a moment later a similar stream on the starboard side drove back the crowd on that side, and the scalded, furious Chinamen slunk forward.

But the now furious master did not stop there. The stream of hot water and steam, backed up by the Black Gang with eight-inch spanners, drove the now frenzied crowd below decks, and the gratings were lashed in place to a chorus of shrieks and yells from below, accompanied by a knife or two that fell back tinkling from the heavy teakwood gratings.

"Oh, you would, would you? I'll show 'em! Play cold water on 'em now, Mr. Gray. Soak it to 'em! Now, what the devil started that row, anyway? It just shows that you can never trust the Cantonese."

An hour later the doctor and Miss Downs went again to the evil-smelling hospital, where they found the priest semiconscious, with two other sullen-looking Chinamen squatting on the deck by his side.

They listened attentively to the mutterings of the sick man, and finally summoned Hemingway, who could put his words into better language than the Chinese boy.

The three bent over him, listening eagerly to the broken whispers that came from the fever-blackened lips; and to his low-voiced, rapid speeches,

that wandered off into odd clucks and gurgles as the opium began to bite.

"It has always been—so. It—will—be—to the—end of time. It was—stolen. Every seven—years—it has been taken and—no man—can tell what comes. Yes, yes, yes. The gods are great and—the spirits of the fathers—cannot lie. They have told me—so many years ago that man cannot count. Oah, yes, they told me—it was stolen and the track of the stealing is like the trail of the death lashings of the great python that we killed above the Great Wall when—when—I was yet a young man. War I say—war and pestilence and famine. Aye, famine, too! The famine that Farther Hind knows—and all by reason of innocent blood. *We* know! We priests of the Shan-tse! We who eat no eggs, because eggs are life—we who drink no milk, because milk is but white blood when all is said. We priests who eat only lentils and drink water—a pure heart and a tender hand shall rule the world, says Confucius. Are we wiser than our fathers?"

Whether it was the overdose of opium, for Enloe had given him three of the pills, or some other reason, none could say, but as they sat watching they saw the glare in his eyes die away and the steady, even light of sanity break as dawn breaks at sea. The Chinese interpreter took up his task, pushing officiously to the head of the cot.

"Him say—take the blox—the accursed blox it—bling all time trouble, and take to some place where it can no more be steal. No, no, no! Not throw away." He almost shrieked as Enloe, as the shortest and easiest solution to the problem, was about to throw it through an open port. "Him say no can throw away—it come back. Him say it cannot—what you say?—be destroyed. Him Shan-tse! Him know.

"How him know? Him Lhasa man, where all mans know all things; where mans makes talkee with gods by little, little mills that blow an' blow

as the gods send wind. Blow prayers east; blow prayers west. Mebbe so him say wind blow prayers staight up to—throne of all the gods—"

"H-m! Maybe. Maybe it's opium or just his mind wandering. What else him say, Song Loo?"

"Him say—*Yung-gwaizai*—foreign devils take blox—take Shanghai lock up in wonder house—"

"But what is it for Heaven's sake—"

"Yes, that it. Heaven's sake! Him say that. Him say Englishman in Shanghai keep wonder house—him can tell. That no my pidgin. Him no can makee pleesee talk no more—"

Sure enough, when they bent over him, they saw that the old man was dead.

"Wonder house?" mused Miss Downs. "What is the wonder house, doctor?"

"Oh, the wonder house? Why, the museum, I think—yes, that must be it. I seem to half-way remember that that is what the natives call it. Let's go on deck."

For seven days the Atlanta sweltered north and south, up and down the coast—that coast that never showed more than a dim line of brown smudge against the western sky.

On the first night the old *bonce* was dropped astern with a grate-bar at his feet and Marjorie cried a little as she saw that sharp fin astern that had followed them clear from Swatow, turn suddenly as the great fish up-ended in his hunt for that long bundle that churned up iridescent bubbles as it tailed away in the wake astern.

Terrible enough on land, death seems absolutely unnecessary at sea and, to tell the truth, she had grown to like the quiet, old priest who suffered so uncomplainingly and who spoke of the Lords of Life and Death as though they were his own personal friends.

So they tramped up and down the seas waiting till the cool southwest

monsoon should blow away the plague when they headed up again on their course.

"I'd like to stay out the full ten days," said Innes when Oakes asked him what day they would head up for the coast. "But we can't stay out any longer and that's a fact. The chief reports that one of his water condensers has broken down beyond any chance of repair and we'll run short on water if she stays out any longer—No, sir—we've got to run in an' take our chance of the quarantine—They aren't much on it along the coast this year anyway."

So they turned the Atlanta's nose northwest and finally ran into their place off the Shanghai Bund.

CHAPTER III.

"But why in the world should you leave us here? Isn't the good ship Atlanta good enough for you to go to Taku in?" asked Oakes.

Miss Downs had packed her trunk and was about to request a quartermaster to call a sampan when Oakes asked the question.

"You see, Miss Downs," he went on, "both Hemingway and I are going to Taku. The Atlanta has to touch there to get a permit from the Chinese Government as well as from the Japanese Government to take Chinese coolies into Korea, so why not go with us to Taku? From there on we will see that you reach Peking in safety.

"I really do not think that you need worry about the rest of the trip. We have surely paid our debt to Fortune in the death of the Chinese *bonse*. What do you say? Will you go with us? You will not be able to get a steamer out of Shanghai anyway for several days—How do I know?—I see that there's nothing in here now but a French Messageries, and she doesn't run any further north. You'll save all kinds of time. Do."

"Are you sure you will not regret it if I say 'Yes'?" queried the girl smilingly. She had grown to like the two men exceedingly. Of the two, Oakes seemed the more dependable but there was a certain fascination about Hemingway that she could not explain.

Always pleasant and courteous in his demeanor, thoughtful and considerate in his actions, he had made what might well have proved a tiresome trip a veritable pleasure jaunt for the girl and she turned to him instinctively. Oakes noticed this and bit his lip with vexation as he repeated his question.

"Very well, then. Since you are so kind as to allow me, I shall certainly take advantage of your good nature and—stick by the Atlanta—What is that, Mr. Hemingway?"

It was a package that he was holding out to her.

"Just a little farewell gift that I had brought up on deck to give you before I knew that you are to stay with us as far as Taku. Rather thought you'd like a bit of a keepsake, you know. It's not much, of course. It's the silver box that the old *bonse* said caused the trouble. Would you care for it?"

"Care for it? Of course I would. But I mustn't take it. You value it yourself, do you not?"

"It is simply an interesting relic to me," said Hemingway thoughtfully. "Shall I acknowledge it? I am just a little bit superstitious about the thing, I fear. Will you think the worse of me for that, I wonder? Really, Miss Downs, I will appreciate it if you will take the thing."

"I'll tell you what I will do," she said laughingly. "I will go with you to the wonder house, as the old priest called it, and we will find out what we can about the box and its history."

"If any one in the East can tell us anything about it, it will be Dr. Emlen, the curator of the museum," said Hemingway. "He is probably

the best and most widely known of all the corresponding members of the British Museum in London. I'll call a couple of rickshaws—"

It was not difficult to find the museum, but it proved very difficult to get an interview with the curator, who was busy setting up specimens of bears from Patagonia.

"I hope you will not think me rude if I say that I am really very busy," he said as he shook hands with his visitors when Oakes had introduced himself. "Is there anything that I can do for you?"

"I merely want to ask you a question, sir," said Oakes a little shortly. It is never pleasant to be told that the man you have come to see does not want to see you.

"Have you ever heard of a silver box that is supposed to carry with it a kind of curse?"

And before he knew it, Oakes, under the questions of the curator who showed himself greatly interested indeed, had told him all that had occurred since the day when Hemingway had showed him the box in Manila. Dr. Emlen was very obviously growing more and more interested as the tale progressed.

Oakes told him of the death of the old *bonse*, of the trouble with the coolies, of what the interpreter had said. He had talked for a half hour.

"How long have you lived in the East?" asked the doctor finally.

"About five years—almost entirely in Manila, though," said Oakes.

"And you have never heard this story of a silver box—of the silver box?"

"Never. Why? What is it?"

"You have lived out here, too, Mr. Hemingway. Have you never heard any curious tale—so outrageous a tale that it would have been discarded from the fairy books for children as improbable? Have you never heard of it?"

Hemingway's brow was wrinkled in deep thought as he replied: "Now

that you speak of it, I *have* a vague sort of recollection of some story or tradition that More and I picked up among the people of the Hindu Koosh—but the tortures of the Holy Inquisition could not make me remember what it was. What is it?"

For answer the curator led the way to his private office and pulled forward some chairs. A great oak table filled the entire center of the room and on it were a number of small, square packages that were wrapped in strong brown paper evidently ready for shipment.

Oakes laid the box, ready wrapped among the other packages, upon the table and he and Hemingway sat down. Marjorie leaned forward in her chair, frankly interested in hearing the explanation.

"Just one moment," said Dr. Emlen. "Wah Lin"—to an attendant—"take those packages that are on the table to the addresses that are written on a piece of paper lying beside them. Now, gentlemen, if you and Miss Downs will accompany me I will show you something—"

He led the way into a dark little alcove where he opened a black wooden chest. Pulling open a shallow drawer in this he took from it a little book that was covered with red leather and hurriedly shuffled the pages.

"Ah! Here it is." Another pause of ten minutes elapsed during which he read to himself. "Now—here you are—listen"; and he read from the little book a minute description of the silver box whereat his visitors wondered not a little.

"How long have people known of this box?" asked Marjorie. "It must be very old."

"Marco Polo wrote of it when he was in China and it has always been a tradition that it existed at the Court of Prester John, the mythical prince who reigned about the time of Charlemagne I believe. Come! Let us get the box and compare it with the description that I have read you. This

is but the beginning. I have much that is interesting to tell you concerning it. You are indeed fortunate in—"

He led the way back to the main office where he had welcomed them and after entering the room he closed the door softly behind them. Oakes turned to the table to get the package to open it when he heard a gasp from Marjorie.

All the packages had been taken from the table—the silver box was gone.

They looked about them astonished. Dr. Emlen was thunderstruck.

"That bally fool Wah Lin has taken that package of yours containing the box along with those that I told him to post—"

He hastened to the door in a vain attempt to intercept the boy before it was too late, but Wah Lin had already disappeared and the curator, worried, came back to his seat.

"It is an easy matter to reclaim it from the post," said Oakes. "I'll call a rickshaw—"

"Wait a moment, Mr. Oakes. It is not so easy a matter as you imagine. If the authorities discover what it is that you seek, you will never get it. That box was one of the priceless articles in the temples of the Forbidden City and all China has been searching for it for the past ten years.

"They have a proverb to the effect that the peace and welfare of the empire depend upon it. Do you remember what the old *bonte* told you?—it is true.

"Go at once to your hotel and do not leave it until I call for you. I will do all that can be done to recover the box—I can not begin to tell you, Miss Downs, how I regret this occurrence.

"Wah Lin is apparently a fool of the first water. I wish I could induce you to go through our museum before you go. We have many things that I feel sure would interest you.

"For instance there is this head of

a wild carabao that came from Luzon. You will observe that they differ from the domestic species in that their horns grow out perpendicular to the frontal bone of the skull; sticking straight to the rear—a very unusual thing in horned animals. Look!"

The head, a magnificent one, hung above the door of the office and the girl fairly started at the look of life-like bovine rage that fairly blazed from the china blue eyes.

A pair of long, four-foot horns projected rearwards from the skull so that the entire head had to be hung a clean six feet from the wall in order to give room for the spread of the horns.

"I spent four months in the jungles of Luzon hunting for this specimen. They were said by the Spaniards to be the gamest animals in the archipelago. They said that the wild carabao would not cross a line of white tape laid upon the ground, so the natives and the Spaniards in hunting them would take a line made of the inner skin of the bamboo and stretch it across a trail and then drive the wild carabao down the trail.

"They told me that they would always halt when they came to the tape. I had the tale from a native hunter, and I tested it very thoroughly. Incidentally I may say that I found out that there was no manner of truth in it. The beast whose head you see promptly chased me up a tree, and I stood not upon the order of my going I can tell you.

"As a matter of fact, however, the number of these animals is very small indeed and they are greatly sought after, as good game animals always are all over the world.

"Now remember, you are to go to your hotel and remain quietly there until you hear from me. If you have not heard from me by four o'clock then come to the office and I may have something to tell you about the box."

The rickshaw was waiting for

them, a great double one, and Marjorie spent a pleasant afternoon with the two men running about the suburbs of Shanghai, which are very beautiful after the English fashion, with their clean kept lawns and neat cottages set well back among the clumps of hardy northern bamboo and hard wood trees that need the cold air of northern China to bring them to full maturity.

"What next?" The rickshaw drew up before the entrance to the hotel. "Tea, of course, and after that we will ask if any word has come for us from Dr. Emlen."

So they sat at ease in the cozy little tea-room where all the world of Shanghai gathers for its tea and toast and marmalade, and after Oakes had smoked a cigarette he went to the office only to discover that no word had come for them. A little disappointed, Marjorie stepped out upon the broad veranda, almost colliding with a running coolie, straw-hatted, breech-clouted, who was hastening up the steps.

A hasty glance at the running man showed her that it was the very boy, Wah Lin, who that very afternoon had carried the packages from the office of the curator in the museum.

His trim clothing had been discarded in favor of the G string and the straw hat so much affected by the rickshaw coolies and his face had lost the healthy brown color that had been so noticeable earlier in the afternoon.

"Can see missee? Wantchee missee 'long two Melican man come Wonder house quai quai (quickly) must clome. Doctol him velly bad. No can see Wah Lin—" and to Marjorie's astonishment the boy burst into tears.

She called Oakes and listened intently as the boy—for he was no more than a boy—poured out his story.

"Doctol say: 'You Wah Lin tlake plackage mebbee bling him plost. Mebbee so my fliends catch him. Him say me catch all plackages on top-side

table. All time doctol wantchee send plackage, Wah Lin cally him. This time doctol say Wah Lin catch all plackage—not leave one—Wah Lin see Melican man put plackage top-side table—doctol wave his hand—Wah Lin tlake all plackage—take post quai—quai—

"Then Wah Lin think mebbee so not good take other piece blox—me go tell doctol mebbee, so Wah Lin not tlake light plackage—no can see doctol—him there but Wah Lin no can see.

"Wah Lin think more better you come take look see"—and in his insistence he fairly pushed Marjorie and the two men into the waiting rickshaws, and trotted along beside them as the sweating coolies hastened along under his low-voiced imprecations, till finally they dropped the handles with a clang on the curb outside the doors of the museum, thereby nearly precipitating the inmates upon their respective noses.

Oakes hastily seized Marjorie round the waist, saving her from a fall.

"Confound that fool of a coolie," he growled. "He might have injured you seriously."

The prospect of an injury to the pretty Marjorie was a not entirely unimportant matter to the young engineer.

The great bronze door was fast closed and there was no reply to his banging. When he realized that no one would answer his repeated knocking, he twisted the knob and, followed by Hemingway and Marjorie, entered the building, heading straight for the private office.

He was surprised to note that the attendants had all left the building, for there was no sound in all the long halls and the ticking of the great clock was the only sound that broke the stillness of the hot afternoon, and when he coughed slightly it sounded so loud that he fairly jumped.

"H-m! Nobody at home," he exclaimed jocularly. "Come on Miss—Marjorie—"

It was the first time he had ventured to depart from the formal "Miss Downs," and the girl's face flushed slightly as she followed him down the little hall to the door of the office. Without pausing to knock, he turned the knob and entered quickly and—stumbled over Dr. Emlen.

The body lay upon the great bear-skin rug before the door. The man lay face up in a pool of his own blood, and even in the surprise of the moment Oakes found time to fairly push Marjorie back into the hall as he dropped to his knees.

"Wait a moment," he said quickly. "Wait in the hall, if you do not mind. I'll call the two of you in a moment."

Obediently she withdrew to the corridor and stood with Hemingway, while Oakes bent above the figure and turned it over. Marjorie had not seen the body.

The great head of the carabao that had hung above the door lay upon the floor by the figure, and it required only a cursory glance to tell him how the accident had occurred.

The wire that held the head suspended from the wall had rusted through and had broken, and the great mass of bone and horn had fallen at just the psychological moment when Dr. Emlen stood beneath it.

The distance that it stood out from the wall was just sufficient to allow it to turn in its descent, so that the horns were pointed downmost as it fell, and the whole mass had evidently struck the unfortunate curator squarely upon the top of the head, killing him instantly.

Hastily but still reverently, Oakes picked up the body in his arms and made shift to carry it to the long sofa that stood against the far side of the room. He was not strong enough, however, to lift the limp body in the way a dead body should be lifted, so he called Hemingway to his assistance.

As the two men raised the body they staggered slightly, for Dr. Emlen was a heavy man. Hemingway, slip-

ping on the rug, heard a curious metallic tinkle on the floor, and mechanically turning his head as he moved, he saw—the silver box.

Had he been suddenly struck in the face he could not have been more astonished. He motioned to it as Oakes turned his head, and that gentleman, stooping, picked it up.

They laid the body upon the divan and stood for a space studying the box from every possible angle, and then, without a word, walked slowly out into the hall, where the anxious Marjorie was awaiting them.

Oakes handed her the box and told her briefly that the curator had met with a serious accident through the falling of the carabao head from the wall.

Naturally enough, she wished to go to him, and was only deterred when Oakes told her gently that no assistance would avail, and, leaving the attendants, whom they finally roused from their outhouses, to notify the proper authorities, they got their rickshaws and rode back to the hotel.

"I simply cannot understand," said Marjorie slowly, her brows wrinkled in deep thought, "how the box came to be there. I wonder where he got it from? I wonder—but no, that could hardly be—"

"What?"

"Wah Lin said that the doctor had not been out of the museum to-day, and that he had told him distinctly to take that box of ours to the post along with all those other packages that were on the table. I do not believe that! It would be simply stealing."

An exclamation from Oakes made her turn and stare at him. "What is it?" she asked.

"Do you remember what that old Chinese priest said on board the Atlanta? He said that the silver box is stolen always, and that it always brings bad luck to the person who steals it. It looks as though the old *bonze* was right. I'm glad, though, that none of us has stolen it.

"I'll tell you what let's do with the thing. Let's send it to the British Museum, if it is so much of a curio as Emlen said, and write them all that we have heard about it. We can make up the package at the hotel."

Marjorie demurred. The box was a curious keepsake and was a memento of a most interesting adventure, and the superstition that was evidently attached to it, whatever it was, made it only the more interesting.

Of course it was utterly absurd to believe for a moment that any ill luck could actually attach to such a thing as a silver box, and as for herself she did not believe it.

"I would like, however, to find out where it came from and what its history is," she said. "But, really, since you gave it to me I would rather keep it as a keepsake from two very good friends." She wound up with a smile that disarmed any disappointment that they felt at the failure of their scheme to send the box away.

When they reached the hotel, Hemingway went at once to the office and came over to Oakes and Marjorie with an anxious face.

"The clerk says that they have been looking everywhere for you, Oakes. There is some complication afoot. The Japanese consul has been here twice to see you. Have you seen him since you landed?"

"No. I sent him word that I have the written permission from the home government in Tokyo—Yeddo, you know—to take eight hundred coolies to Chenampho, and that in view of the fact that I must get work started at once on the Chenampho Extension, I would appreciate prompt attention to our clearance papers.

"Of course, Shanghai is only a port of call for us, anyway, and they cannot do anything here to help or hinder us.

"Chenampho is our real destination. I wonder what he wants? I suppose I had better go and see him. If anything has happened to tie up our work

it may cause incalculable worry and expense."

At the Japanese consulate he found that Hemingway's fears were only too well founded. A courteous if somewhat peremptory gentleman assured him that under the existing instructions it was absolutely impossible for the coolies to be landed, as the ship's papers and the reports of the surgeon showed that bubonic plague had been found on the ship within a week.

The Japanese authorities could not afford to take any chances on the plague getting a foothold in a country like Korea, where hygienic precautions were only enforced by the natives when they were backed up by the heavy hand of the Japanese imperial government.

"I would suggest," he said pleasantly enough when Oakes had laid the whole matter fairly before him, "that you allow me to cable to Yeddo for definite action and orders, and that we request to have these orders sent by cable to Taku. From there to Chenampho is but a short run, and you will be saving time by working up the coast toward Taku, instead of paying wharfage and port dues here. If, as I do not anticipate, there should be trouble about landing the coolies, you could subcontract them to a contractor on the Manchurian Railroad."

Oakes grinned. "But, man," he said, "we cannot trade coolies from Swatow along the line like a foundered horse."

The Japanese consul smiled the inscrutable smile of the East. "Many things can be done at Taku that seem impossible at Shanghai," he said pleasantly. "You will sail in the morning, is it not? I fear that if there should be any further delay you might find it excessively inconvenient. I realize, too, sir, that the imperial Japanese government is most anxious to have the work on that line fairly begun before cold weather closes the passes. Shall you sail in the morning?"

Oakes grimly assented and, with

Marjorie and Hemingway, found his way back to the Atlanta, where Captain Innes was awaiting them.

"If he told you that," said Innes, when Oakes had told him of his conversation with the Japanese consul, "it means that there is some complication that he cannot disclose, but is waiting for orders from Yeddo. We will not wait for morning, Mr. Oakes; we'll get our anchor up at once."

So they did, and Marjorie was more than pleased to see the anchor lights wink and go out in the smother, and to feel the lift of the hull beneath her feet as the Atlanta felt her way carefully down the harbor toward the outer sea.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Taku Roads lie open to every wind that blows from the east and have been the gathering place for every tale and idle rumor that has tramped down wind since the days when Sin Fou first descended upon the Japanese coasts, many years ago.

From time immemorial the long stretches of bare, brown, rock-covered coasts have been the Lost Land of Lyonesse to the Oriental peoples, rich with story and with legendary lore from the fishing wharves of Hakodate to the colder beaches of Ainio.

Hemingway stood upon the Atlanta's fore-castle, scanning eagerly the sea-line as the sharp bows cut cleanly through the muddy water on the way to the inner reaches that were held so firmly by the British gunboats when the forts were stormed in the attack on the world-famous Taku forts for which the British government bestowed inconspicuous little silver medals for conspicuous acts of bravery.

He was frankly worried. Not for nothing had he watched the unremitting attentions with which his friend had set about the paths of the pretty English girl. Not for nothing had he

made plans of his own; but now, to save his life, he could not see how those plans of his could beget their own fulfilment.

"London, Mayfair, Calcutta, Gibraltar, an' the East," he growled to himself; "South Africa an' Zanzibar—stone broke—broke as high as the surf breaks on McGillicuddy's Reeks, an' now to be all upset by a girl from Swatow port. An' the veriest hell of it is—me with an interpreter's job to Oakes, an' he my friend—it's a hell of a fix. One thing's sure—he's square an' she's superfine—an' I'm busted, as Oakes says, anyway.

"What would she think if I were to offer her my name an' misfortune an' no income except what my family gives me? Nice sort of a surprise to spring on a decent English family, I don't think."

A thought evidently struck him, for he smiled grimly as he watched the leadsmen whirling the lead in the star-board chains, nosing their way up-channel.

"Why, she'd as soon think of marryin' me as an angel would think of marryin' a devil from the pit. Now, Oakes, he's as solid as his name—right heart of oak, too. No, sir! Mr. Hemingway—late Captain Geoffrey Hemingway, of His Britannic Majesty's Seventeenth Regiment of Hussars, it's about up to you, as our American cousins say, 'To fade away.'"

The Atlanta picked up her buoy, came to gently, and awaited the arrival of the port captain's boat. When he saw the little launch puff its way fussily off from the landing, Hemingway picked his way back to his cabin, entered gently and closed the door.

Oakes, standing with Marjorie by the rail, saw the boat come alongside, and, seeing an American and two Japanese sitting in the stern-sheets, was about to go to the head of the sea-ladder to welcome them when he was restrained by the warning voice of Captain Innes from the bridge above his head.

"Steady, Oakes!" he called. "Don't go to the ladder. The American's all right, of course, but just as a matter of form make the two Orientals look you up. Stay where you are, my boy."

The American ran lightly up the ladder, and, seeing Oakes, he came forward, raising his hat slightly.

"I beg your pardon," he said politely; "but can you tell me if Miss Downs is on board?"

Marjorie came forward quietly. "Yes," she said, "I am Miss Downs."

"I am Mr. Shenstone, Miss Downs. Mr. Mills wrote me from Peking last week about you—"

Marjorie nodded and waited.

"They came down last Wednesday," said Shenstone. "Mrs. Mills's sister, who was on her way out from San Francisco, was taken ill suddenly at Yokohama, and they came down last week and sailed on Friday. They said that I was to impress upon you by every means in my power that you must sail to meet them in Yokohama on the steamer that is due to sail the day after to-morrow—the Lorelei."

Marjorie gasped.

"Good gracious!" she said hurriedly; "I seem to be literally a sea-waif. If it had not been for Mr. Oakes here I do not know how I could ever have reached this place, and now I am to be passed on again to another vessel, making all kinds of worry and anxiety for you again. I seem to be a modernized version of the Wandering Jew, with no one to say: 'Tarry thou till I come.' When does the Lorelei sail, Mr. Shenstone?"

"The day after to-morrow, I think. You are quite comfortable aboard ship here, are you not?"

"Yes, indeed. Thanks to Captain Innes and Mr. Oakes. But I can go ashore, can I not?"

For a moment Shenstone did not answer her directly, but turned to Oakes and to Captain Innes.

"If I can see you gentlemen for a moment," he said tentatively.

Innes led the way quietly to the

bridge. As he passed the girl Oakes laid his hand gently upon hers.

"You are not to worry the very least bit in the world," he said gently. "If Captain Innes, Hemingway, and I cannot look after you, then there are not three men on this coast who can."

There was that in his voice that made Marjorie blush, even in the dusk, and for a moment she felt herself coloring warmly as she watched the three men pass up the narrow companion ladder to the bridge above.

To say that she was not aware of the fact that Oakes was in love with her would be crass nonsense. Every woman knows that. In his case love had come like a storm at sea—with the difference that the rush of the storm had not been presaged by the fall of the barometer.

Then, too, he had no well-defined law of storms by which to work his plans, for the man does not live who has been able to reduce or elevate love to a science. She walked aft and stood by the rail, tapping her foot gently on the deck as she waited for Oakes to return.

When the three men reached the shelter of his own cabin, Innes turned to Shenstone.

"What is it, old chap?" he asked. "We've known each other too long to beat about the open roads when there's an anchorage in sight. What's the trouble, an' why don't you want Miss Downs to go ashore?"

Shenstone poured with one hand a drink from the decanter that Innes proffered him, while with the other he wiped the sweat from his forehead—it was a cool evening, too—as he replied nervously:

"Mills took his wife and daughter to Yokohama because there has been an outbreak of the plague in Peking. All the interior is quarantined against the capital, and so are the coast towns. I saw it start a month ago, when the rats came down in swarms. You know how the rats always come ahead of the plague?"

Innes nodded gravely. "I've seen 'em," he said. "Go on."

"He said it would be just a question of time till all the Japanese ports'll be quarantined against us, and that I was to get Miss Downs out before an embargo is laid on all vessels. He said not to let her know the real reason, because there is no reason to alarm her—"

Innes and Oakes chuckled openly over the bare idea of Marjorie becoming alarmed at the thought of the plague, while Shenstone looked at them wonderingly. Innes in a few words explained what had happened on board of the Atlanta.

"My word," broke in Shenstone. "That explains, then, the reason why those two Japanese wanted to get aboard here. One of them is, I think, an army officer, who belongs to the Department of Transportation. I don't know who the other one is. They evidently know that you have had the plague aboard, but how they got the news Heaven only knows—"

"That may have something to do with how the news got out," Oakes broke in grimly, pointing to a yellow undershirt that was lashed to the fore-stay and that whipped and snapped in the harbor breeze that rippled the water. Innes swore.

"I'll bet you what you like, Oakes," went on Shenstone, "that you never land your coolies or else that—here they come, now!"

The two Japanese came softly up the ladder and were met at the top by Captain Innes with: "What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"I—ah—am Colonel Itasura of the imperial Japanese general staff. Our home office has directed me to see a Mr. Oakes"—here Oakes introduced himself—"and to say that orders will be issued directing all officials to further the landing of your coolies in Chenampho, and instructing me to give all the aid in my power to assist in the enterprise—"

Oakes gave a sigh of relief. Be-

yond a doubt the road was clear. Colonel Itasura stepped back to the rail and was frankly not interested in any further proceedings. The other man came forward.

"I—am—of the—what may be named the Japanese Labor Bureau, an' I am came to see of the honorable gentoeman—" he began in a labored attempt to speak what even courtesy could scarcely call "broken" English. It was pulverized.

Oakes, relieved of all anxiety and worry about his coolies, grinned in the darkness.

The Japanese went on imperturbably: "If maybe can see me all to next day, required arrangements can without delay be did. Am at Grand Hotel if the honorable gentoeman will to use my poor house—"

"Better tell him that you will see him there about nine in the morning, Oakes. Then, after they have gone, I want to see you for a moment."

Oakes assented cheerfully, and Innes from the top of the companion-way shouted a gruff "good night" as the launch shot shoreward across the shallow waters of the roads.

Innes watched the young American go down the ladder, and then glimpsing Marjorie, who was still standing by the rail, he smiled a little.

"I'm just morally certain," he growled into his beard, "that a colonel of the Japanese general staff did not pull out here across a stinkin' harbor to carry news to a man like he says he did. It's clean against rules. They've been trained after the German fashion, an' he *might* condescend to talk to Oakes ashore if he called respectfully at his office; but this—no, sir! I don't believe it! There's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. I must see Oakes—but I will not disturb him now."

He smiled a satisfied smile as he saw, in the shadow of the deck-house, the tall figure of the girl, with Oakes bending over her as they leaned out across the rail into the dusk.

Their low-toned laughter floated up to him as he stood, and he chuckled softly at his own thoughts, which were of a little cottage on the Pevensey levels, where the level floor of the Channel stretches out to France, where the chalk-land slopes up to the line of wooded hills behind. He sighed lightly as he passed into the snug little cabin and closed the door behind him, leaving the kindly darkness of the decks to Marjorie and Oakes.

Hemingway, standing in the doorway of his cabin, was suddenly aware of the two standing in the open by the rail, and for a moment stood watching them. He was aware of a sudden pang that told him, if indeed he had needed the telling, that his air of nonchalance was all pretense and self-delusion, and that Marjorie was very dear to him.

It needed but the sight of her with another man, and that man his best friend, to teach him that. In that short moment he realized that the barriers between them, that a while ago seemed of his own making, were in truth very real ones, and that it was in all reality not alone his poverty nor even the fact that he had lost his reputation in his profession. There was another and far more real bar, and it cut him like a whiplash.

Not for nothing is it given to a man to have the wanderlust so that all the open trails of the world are familiar to him. Not for nothing is it given to a man to be cursed with the curse of Reuben: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel!"

When one has tasted brandy and soda, milk becomes unpalatable, and when a man has fought for his own hand through all the purlieus and back alleys of the world, he has a natural repugnance for tramping stolidly down the crowded thoroughfares, hand in hand with a woman, no matter how he loves her.

Hemingway put it more whimsically as he glanced sidewise down the decks

and saw his friend so frankly occupied with the girl that they had both grown to love.

"I rather imagine that the Johnnie was right," he mused, "when he said:

"The race is run by one and one, and never by two and two."

"An' anyhow you figure it out, I doubt if she'd do more than say a big, loud 'No!' if I *did* ask her. No, sir! You can take a sampan right here an' make the shore an' get to Peking without sayin' a word about it; have a try for what you buried up there, get what you want, and be back again in twenty-four hours, an' no one will be the wiser.

"Then, when you have got what you went after, you can divide with Oakes and have a show for your white alley—*after your friend has had his chance*. A man with thirty thousand pounds can do much that is refused to a poor man.

"Can't you see, you bloomin' ass, that you are fightin' against yourself—that what you're afraid of may very well come to pass, and that he may win out, and that as much as you like him an'—yes—well—her, too, you can't even say 'God speed' to the man who has stood your friend. Oh, but you're a dog in the manger, Geoffrey Hemingway, but—

"Better the sight of eyes that see than the wanderin's of desire.' Oh, boy!"—this to the boy in a passing sampan, which shot under the shadow of the rail in the darkness—"kung tse wan lao sampan."

Even in the growing darkness he could see the grin dividing the boy's face as the sampan bumped into the landing-stage. Hastily stepping to his room, Hemingway tore a page from his note-book and scribbled upon it a few hasty lines, then, stowing his heavy revolver in his pocket, he went out upon the deck and walked softly to Oakes's cabin.

The door stood open, and in the half-light from the water he had no difficulty in finding the pillow, to

which he pinned the note which he had written, after which he slipped noiselessly down the sea-ladder and, entering the waiting sampan, bade the boy row silently to the shore.

For Oakes and Marjorie the time passed—

In heart-beats, not in figures on a dial,

and she was not at all conscious of being tired when Oakes said, with a fine air of possession, at which she flushed again even more warmly:

“It’s time for you to turn in, Miss—Marjorie. I mustn’t let even my own selfishness keep you longer in this damp air. Be sure to take some quinin. Good gracious! You can fairly taste the fever in the air.”

The land-wind was blowing fairly from the native portion of the city, and the reek of sweltering humanity came down in a veritable cloud, like the smell of a pack of kenneled hounds.

Marjorie bade him good night and went to her cabin, her pretty lips smiling and her mind full of bridges and girders, steam shovels, and coolie strikes, and Manila tales mingled with little quips and odd expressions that made her think more than once of the square-shouldered American engineer who was so obviously engrossed in his work that he had absent-mindedly laid his hand over hers and had even squeezed it—here she colored again.

Work! That was apparently the key-note to the American character. Oakes had told her—and in the telling had builded better than he knew—how he and Burton had met in the Venezuela mountains, and had decided then and there to make a bold stroke for fortune.

How they had tried to take up lumber claims in the Philippines, but were forced out by lack of capital and by political deals—only he did not mention the last—how they had taken up little contract after little contract, too small for real contractors to touch, and how, by hard work and sheer per-

sistence, that did not allow itself to know when it was beaten, they had got at last their first piece of really big work that, when completed, would give them international recognition.

Not all of his time, however, on this particular evening was given up to this Odyssey of the Orient, for every Odysseus must have his Penelope, and Oakes had made up his mind unalterably to the winning of his Penelope.

When she had closed her door for the night he filled a contemplative pipe and, having no match, entered his cabin to get a light.

The moment that he switched on the electric light he saw the piece of paper that Hemingway had pinned to his pillow. Wondering vaguely what it could be, he scanned it carelessly; then eagerly. A moment later an excited man tore up to the bridge and threatened to beat in the panels of Captain Innes’s door.

“Hemingway has slipped off and gone ashore,” he explained lamely to Innes as that officer looked sleepily at him from the lighted square of the open door.

“Well? And then what?”

“Well, don’t you see? He did not know of our talk with those people. He didn’t see that shirt waved from the forestay—God knows whether it was done on purpose or by accident.

“Don’t you see that, since they know that we’ve had the plague aboard, that if man or woman goes ashore from the Atlanta before they give us pratique that there’ll be a row on with the port authorities. Besides that, Hemingway’ll be arrested if they catch him—and detained if the port is quarantined against Peking. Give me a boat an’ I’ll go ashore and get him.”

“Pretty scheme that’d be. Then they’d grab you as sure as a gun’s iron. Back you go to bed, young man, and sleep till eight bells. Then we’ll go to see your man at the Grand Hotel and leave Mr. Hemingway to his own devices. If any one can take

care of himself, he can, you know. What did he say?"

And Oakes read:

"I have gone ashore to try my luck alone for what we came for. Say nothing to any one about it. I will be back in thirty-six hours. Good luck.

"HEMINGWAY."

There was not another word, and Oakes, suddenly remembering the warning in the note to say nothing of the errand which had taken Hemingway ashore, crumpled up the paper and thrust it in his pocket as he said "Good night" and, stumbling sleepily down the ladder, found the way to his berth.

CHAPTER V.

THE musical tinkle of six bells from the mast brought Oakes back to consciousness. He lazily verified the time by his watch, and went out upon the deck where he found Marjorie awaiting him. She was dressed for shore, and she was plainly greatly disappointed when he said:

"I think, Miss Marjorie, that if I were you I would defer my visit to the city until this afternoon—at least do not go this morning—"

"If you advise me not to go ashore this morning of course I will take your advice, but do you object to telling me why you think I had better not go?"

"Certainly I will tell you. After all it is a purely selfish reason. You see we have reason to believe that the authorities ashore know that we have had the plague on board.

"Everything depends upon my getting these eight hundred coolies ashore in Chenampho. Apparently the Japanese authorities are helping us all they can because it is a government contract that we have. Innes says he is sure there is some other influence at work.

"We know that the labor unions have taken the matter up. You know

that Japan has a nominal protectorate over Korea, and of course every one in the East knows that Russia watched Japan in Korea as a cat watches a mouse—in short I am to meet the officials at nine o'clock. Would you mind very much waiting on board till I come for you? I will as soon as I have seen my men."

"Of course I will wait for you. I have plenty of books."

So Marjorie ensconced herself in a long deck-chair after breakfast while Innes and Oakes had themselves rowed ashore and went to the Grand Hotel where they sent their names in by the boy.

After being left for a long half hour to cool their heels in the hotel, they were taken to an up-stairs office where they found their two visitors of the night before. Colonel Itasura was seated at a flat-topped desk and the other, the smaller of the two Japanese, stood near the window that overlooked the shipping and the bay.

"Ah—Meester Oakes is it nod? I am ver' hoppee saar to say that I see you good," and the little civilian beamed at him from behind his glasses. The soldier half rose from his chair and bowed formally, saying in precise English:

"Am I right, sir, in assuming that you speak French?"

Oakes bowed.

"Then, sir, with your permission, we will transact our business in that language as I do not speak English sufficiently well to carry on a business conversation in that witty and learned language." Then rapidly shifting his chair and his tone he went on in French:

"How many coolies have you brought on board the steamer, Mr. Oakes?"

"We have eight hundred and ten, sir. We shipped eight hundred and nineteen."

"Where are the other nine?"

"Died at sea."

"Of what?"

"Bubonic plague."

Questions and answers were quick-ly and accurately recorded by the other.

"How long ago did the last coolie die, sir?"

"Seven days ago—"

Colonel Itasura sat back gazing at Oakes and tapping on his front teeth with a pencil.

"The legal period of quarantine is ten days, sir. That is, a ship must either not run into port, or running in must be held in quarantine for ten days after the last case has developed. This I understand has not been complied with in your case. Am I correctly informed?"

"It has unfortunately been impossible to comply with it. Our condensers broke down and we had to put in on account of lack of water—"

"Unfortunately, sir, a yellow flag displayed from your mast when you came in aroused the suspicions of the Korean consul. You did not then comply with the letter of the law—"

The little Japanese civilian, still smiling, drew nearer to the desk. Innes stood like a rock by the door listening carefully to the conversation. Seeing the hesitation on the part of his friend, he came forward and very ostentatiously dropped a check-book on the Hong-Kong and Shanghai bank before him, saying rapidly in a low tone:

"It's worse than I thought, Oakes. It's a clear case of hold-up. You don't often find an officer mixed up in a thing like this, but when you do it's an open and shut case. Play low, as we say in whist, till you get their lead—"

Suddenly Oakes saw the game. Carelessly opening the check-book, he drew a piece of note-paper to him and remarked casually:

"I understand that in such case the matter can be adjusted by an unofficial fine of so much per capita for each coolie so brought in. Am I correct?"

Colonel Itasura rose deliberately.

"I am not instructed in this matter. Mr. Takayashi here is empowered to complete the details of the transaction. I will bid you good morning, gentlemen," and bowing formally he left the room.

Takayashi promptly took the vacant place at the desk and smiled ingratiatingly at the two white men.

"Now, sir," said Innes sharply, taking the reins of control from Oakes, "I understand my friend here to say that he understands it is necessary for him to pay a fine for each coolie who is on board the Atlanta before these men can be allowed to land at Chenampho to work on the government contract. Is that correct?"

Takayashi grinned his acquiescence.

"How much is this precious fine?"

"Two yen for each man so admitted—"

"H-m! Sixteen hundred and twenty yen. Suppose it is not paid. Suppose we do not pay it, but rather choose to default in the work—you are a Japanese, are you not, Mr. Takayashi?"

"Oah yess. I am also what you say him—citizen of all the world—but you will pay this so small fine and the reason I will now show—see yonder flag."

He pointed to a building over which the white flag with the blue St. Andrew's Cross showed where the Russian government had its representative.

"Do you think that that government wishes the railroad built in Korea? Sixteen hundred yen fill many a mouth, sare. And there are two mouths to be—what I say—fill? First—come Russian mouth—then I too have a leetle honger—"

"Whew!" Oakes drew a long breath. "It's worse 'n I thought. A loyal Jap soakin' up for a bribe to divide up with a Russian. If we pay it—but that's not to be considered except as a last resort—if we do not pay

it—what then? Ask him that, Innes? Suppose we don't pay?"

Before the question could be put, Takayashi, still smiling, had answered it.

"Ah! That is for the Honorable Meester Oakes to decide. We are telling that the materials are been shipped, the plans made, the contracts signed an' that—"

"Aye! Just so! There you are, Oakes. Wait a bit—"

Then, turning to the still grinning Japanese, he asked as calmly as he could, for inwardly he was boiling:

"Who will receipt for the money—you or Colonel Itasura?"

"Oah! There is not of necessity for the receipt. When the fine is paid the coolies can be took to Chenampho. Is it not?"

"A check for how much?" asked Oakes in his most businesslike tones, drawing the check-book toward him.

The Japanese grinned affably at him in reply. "Eet ees not of checks at all that we do business. The cash mus' been paid under the tack—"

"On the nail, he means," said Innes. "Of course we might have known that. Checks can be traced. Cash cannot be. I wonder how much rake-off our army friend is getting. Don't you see it all, Oakes? It is the clearest case of hold-up I've ever seen."

"The Russians get onto the fact that the contract has been let to you. They notify the Chinese authorities to hold you up on account of the plague quarantine and then these friends of ours decide to compromise with the Russians. You've got to get these coolies in on time in order to begin work promptly on your contract. What do you stand to forfeit if you do not start on schedule time?"

Oakes told him.

"If you pay this hold-up, then you can take your men in on time. If you do not pay it, you can't. Even if you take them in you will probably find that Russia has another card up her sleeve, and that after you have gone

to the expense of actually starting the work you will be held up on some other count. My friend, Russia does not mean to have Japan build that road. Mark my words."

"Suppose," said Oakes carefully, "that I complain to the higher authorities."

"No evidence. They won't take your word against the word of an army officer, and Itasura'll deny every thing till the cock crows thrice. Now, Mr. Takayashi, if the fine is not paid what will become of the coolies?"

"They will be kept in the camps for the coolies who work on the railroad away back of the town till the Chinese compradors have made them agree to work for them. Those who do not desire to work for the compradors will be sent to Swatow port again at the expense of the men who brought them here, an' those who stay here will be kept in camp at your expense till the steamer go south or till they begin work. The steamer will be held for damages."

"Sweet for my owners," commented Innes. "I'm afraid you'll go bust, Oakes. What'll you do?"

"Don't know yet. I'll meet you here in a couple of hours, Mr. Takayashi," he said presently. "When I return I will either have the cash with me or else I will let you know my decision."

Accompanied by the still smiling Takayashi, he and Innes went to the door, where their Oriental host bade them farewell in a series of genuflections and stood watching them as they passed down the stairs and strolled out from the water-front.

Oakes was angry. There was no mistaking that fact, also there was no denying that he saw the folly of losing his temper. The Japanese labor union, if indeed it was the work of a union, apparently had them firmly in its clutches, and Oakes was sufficiently familiar with Oriental business methods to know that in such case they are a good deal like a child with an

orange—extracting every drop of juice before throwing aside the worthless skin.

"It isn't that I fail to realize what will happen," said Oakes tersely. "I know only too well what the upshot will be. If I pay this outrageous demand or even one cent, and it is a graft so simple and plain in its direct application that it would make a New York alderman sit up and wink;—if, I say, I pay this, it will be only the beginning of a scheme by which I will be supporting every idle Japanese and Russian in all Korea.

"They will let the coolies get to Chenampho, and then they will see to it that strikes take place that will take official action to settle and that'll cost more money, and the Koreans will always have us on the count that we evaded the quarantine laws—"

"They've got no laws except what they make while you wait," growled Innes. "What'll you do?"

"I don't know yet. Let's get some luncheon."

They needed it, and it was not particularly appetizing, but they sat and sipped leisurely enough at the long glasses of amber-colored Scotch-and-sodas that the boy brought them, and it was not till the sun was well down toward the life of low western hills that Oakes made up his mind. He turned to Innes.

"When does the Lorelei sail for Yokohama? Do you know?"

For answer Innes scanned the line of the water-front where stands the tall flagpole on which is hoisted the great red ball that when pulled to the very truck announces the arrival of a steamer. The pole thrust its ugly length into the very eye of the sun, but there was no ball upon it. Obviously no steamer was within reach.

"Let's go to Forbes & Lyon and see their sailing list. Why do you want to know?"

"Because we musn't forget about Miss Downs. If they grab the Atlanta and hold her, they'll hold Miss

Downs up with the vessel, and that'll be decidedly unpleasant for her. Let's go take a look at the sailing list."

An obliging clerk showed it to them and they discovered that the Lorelei was not due for two days.

"What's due to sail to-day? Anything?"

"The Futami Maru, outward bound for Hong-Kong, Thursday Island, and Sydney," said the clerk. "She sails at eight, as soon as the ebb makes."

"What cabin list has she?"

For answer the clerk again overhauled the passenger sheet before saying:

"There are no cabin passengers booked for this run, sir."

"Reserve two firsts. I will call later and arrange about them."

"Still I do not fathom your intentions," said Innes, wondering.

"Not yet? I'll explain. I want you to go aboard the Atlanta and tell Miss Downs all that has happened and tell her that the Lorelei, by which she was to go to Yokohama, is not due for several days yet.

"I want her to sail on the Futami Maru this evening. I want to get her on board of the Futami Maru and out of the way before any unpleasant complications arise. It would be the devil and all to pay if she were caught on the Atlanta and refused permission to leave while you and the Atlanta are held up indefinitely in quarantine. They'll hold you up till I either pay the fine or till your owners put up a howl. She can get to Yokohama as easily from Hong-Kong and easier than she can from here and far more comfortably too. Tell her that and get her on board the Futami Maru yourself, Innes. Mind that. What'll you do?"

"Oh, I suppose I'll sweat out my soul till I hear from my owners. We'll get all kinds of damages for this, of course. Incidentally, I wonder who's hide'll suffer for it—Japan's, Russia's Korea's or—China?"

"China, of course," said Oakes

grimly. "Whoever plays, China pays. She'll make 'em sweat for it some day, and don't you forget it."

"I wonder what they'll do about the coolies?" drawled Innes.

"There's the answer to that." Oakes pointed to a launch that puffed its way seaward in the stern-sheets of which were plainly visible the blue-and-yellow uniforms of the Chinese harbor police. Evidently a system of espionage was to envelop the Atlanta.

"You'll have to hustle to get Miss Downs off. Take a launch and start for the landing as if you are taking her ashore and then when you get beyond the cordon of the police boat turn sharp off and make for the Futami Maru. I will not go near that grinning Ronin till I see you and Marjorie make your getaway."

So Oakes sat and watched till he saw Innes run lightly up the sea-ladder of the Atlanta, and when the launch shot around her quarter and headed for the Futami Maru, that was even then getting steam on, he went slowly back to the hotel and asked for Takayashi.

He found him seated as before, apparently as immovable as the great bronze Daibutsu at Nikko before which all pilgrims pray, though he welcomed the returned American with a yellow-toothed grin.

"I see that the police have established a line about the Atlanta," said Oakes by the way of an opening.

"A precaution merely, sare. Some coolies might escape, and the Atlanta being a plague ship—"

"No more a plague ship than you are an honest man," began Oakes hotly.

"—an' if ze fine be nod paid in ze morning, ze coolies from Swatow vill be blaced in quarantine an' let out to the compradors to work on the railroad of the Empire off China what need of coal so mooch. Is it of clarity so like the leetle glass?"

"Damned clear," growled Oakes. "Let's put it plainly, Mr. Takayashi.

If I pay you sixteen hundred and twenty yen the Chinese government will let the Atlanta sail to Chenampho with my coolies.

"If I pay this money I will be establishing a precedent which will allow every petty thief of an official in all Korea to take toll of our profits and we will be well robbed by every one from Shimonoseki to Mukden.

"If I do not pay it, my coolies will be landed and kept in camp after they have been placed in quarantine, until they consent to work on the government railroads. Who have the contracts for that construction?"

"Oah! One Colonel Itasura has one contract and I—Takayashi—supply the labor contract—"

Oakes's lips twitched even in his wrath. He could not but see the grim humor in the situation.

"You've done it up pretty well between you. Of course I see now that you have known all along that Russia never meant that road to be built and that I would not be allowed to go ahead.

"Also you have figured that you can get coolie labor very cheap this way, and you, of course, have to divide with your Russian and Chinese friends.

"No, Mr. Takayashi, the firm of Burton & Oakes is a very young firm, and of course lacks capital, but it shall not start on its first big work by paying bribes to every yellow-faced thief from Saghalien to Sunda. It'll be better to let the Imperial Japanese forty thieves work out their own salvation—"

As he talked he watched carefully the shipping till he saw Innes in the launch swing 'bows on' to the Futami Maru's landing stage. Even then the shore boats were clearing away and he saw another launch put hastily out from the Bund and shoot at full speed across the quiet waters of the Roads.

"I'd just like to tell you, though, for your soul's good, that you are killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

It sure is a goose all right, too," he interpolated. "You will never get capital to come here if you do not adopt methods a little less glaring than these that you have tried on me. It just happens that you have miscued on me.

"We have not yet committed ourselves irrevocably to the work, and our credits are established, not with the Bank of Japan, where they might be attached, but in the branch of the Hong-Kong and Shanghai at Shanghai itself.

"I simply want to tell you, sir, that you and your precious friend, Colonel Itasura, are a pair of blundering, crude, seventh-century thieves. Is that plain enough? Ordinary, bungling, commonplace thieves. I shall go straight to Yeddo and lay the whole matter before your department of labor and learn what the elder statesmen of Nippon think of such a scheme. I will not pay you one cent."

"Ah! An' ze yong leddee of English? She will lige being keepped on ze plague sheep wisout landing for so long as ze imperial government off China choose—"

But Oakes, without wasting more time, for the Futami Maru was nearly ready to drop her buoy, had started down the stairs, and did not see the little yellow-faced captain of industry as he ran to the window behind him, from which he waved a white flag, that was immediately answered from the launch near the Atlanta. In reply the launch sagged slowly into the Atlanta's starboard quarter, and an official ran quickly up the side.

Oakes went to the *hatuba*—the boat-landing—as quickly as he could walk without attracting attention on the street, and his launch pushed off for the Futami Maru.

She had cast off her moorings by now, and as he signaled his steersman to go yet faster he was suddenly aware of the other launch that was making for the same goal.

The two boats were running on the

two long legs of an isosceles triangle, with the Futami Maru at the apex.

"Who in the world can that be? It's no official, or there would be the yellow triangle flag at her stern in a Chinese port."

Stern down in a wake of her own making, the other launch shot up astern of him a few hundred yards away, and Oakes was astounded to see a white man standing in the stern sheets waving wildly at him.

Closer and closer yet she came, till the two ran at half speed under the quarter of the Futami Maru. Seizing the side-ropes, Oakes sprang to the deck, where Marjorie stood waiting to welcome him with warmly outstretched hands.

"Did you have time to get all your things?" as asked as casually as he could.

"Oh, yes. I had no trouble at all. Captain Innes explained it all to me, and I came at once, of course, and I rather imagine, from the excited signals that they are making from the hotel to the Atlanta, that I did not come a moment too soon. I nearly left this in my haste."

She held out toward him the little silver box that Hemingway had given her. Oakes took it in his hand and turned to observe the signal that she spoke of.

The other launch had swung to its boathook and, even as he looked, it dropped astern in the wake that was beginning to ripple behind the steamer.

A man ran hurriedly up the ladder as three sailors strove to haul it up into place to lash it fast, and as Oakes turned he saw the disheveled head of Hemingway appear above the rail.

Oakes gasped his disbelief and dropped the silver box tinklingly upon the deck.

CHAPTER VI.

UTTERLY taken aback for a space, Oakes and Marjorie stood at gaze,

staring at Hemingway as he came up the deck. He grinned back at them unembarrassedly as he shook hands with them.

"Get my note all right?" he asked Oakes.

Oakes nodded for answer, still so surprised he could not speak.

"Had the deuce of a time," went on Hemingway. "I'll tell you all about it as soon as we get clear of the harbor. What in the world is that thing doing here, Miss Downs?"

He pointed squarely at the box that still lay upon the deck between Marjorie and Oakes. "I tell you frankly, Miss Downs, I am really beginning to believe that the thing is unlucky. Look at this."

He raised his pith helmet, disclosing a long welt upon his head that was evidently the result of a heavy blow.

"You're not the only one who's had hard luck," said Oakes grimly. "It looks as if our contract is ended."

"The silver box again," commented Hemingway.

Oakes started. "By Jove!" he said presently. "It is a remarkable coincidence, isn't it?"

"It is," said Hemingway grimly. "And these coincidences are getting to be too frequent to suit my book."

"But you haven't told us how you got that head on you. What—"

"Wait a bit!

"Once aboard the lugger an' the girl—

"There goes the bell for 'Full speed ahead.' Good old boat! I'll tell you my yarn in a minute. I'll tell you this much now, and that is that I'm jolly glad to be back."

"But what has happened?" asked Marjorie, with pardonable curiosity. Oakes drew the chairs out into the open, where the sun was brightest, and they sat over their tea while Hemingway took up his tale of what had occurred from the time when he had left the Atlanta till he boarded the Futami Maru a short half-hour before.

"I couldn't make out from your

note exactly what had happened," began Oakes.

"So, naturally enough, you thought I had given you leg bail," said Hemingway, grinning. "Well, I didn't. Look here, Miss—Marjorie! This fellow"—he laid his hand affectionately on Oakes's knee—"found me in Manila, where I was pretty much on my beam-ends, as old Innes would say. I was down and pretty much out. I knew of a find in Peking, where I had placed some loot after the sack of the city in 1900, and I knew that no one knew of it save two men, and that one of those two men was dead. I was the other.

"I told Oakes of it, and he brought me up here to give me my chance to get it. If I got it, it meant a whole lot to me. If I failed it meant renewed poverty and a hand-to-mouth existence up and down the coast."

"And if you had succeeded?" asked Marjorie softly.

"Success would have meant another chance for what all men value and love. Tell me first, Oakes, what has happened to you that I find you two in this vessel, who should be on the Atlanta. And what does a police-boat at the Atlanta's rail mean? What's been going on? You fire first. I'll take the second fire. 'Gentlemen of the French Guards, pray fire first,' you know. Go on."

Oakes told him as succinctly as he could, and as he talked the Englishman's eyes fairly blazed.

"Do you really mean that they held you up in that barefaced way?"

"Just that."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Take Miss Downs to Hong-Kong and from there to Yokohama—if she insists on going there, and then lay the whole thing before the Japanese Imperial Council. If I know anything of the signs of the times, Japan is far too anxious to have that railroad completed to allow any such matter to delay it.

"Of course, by the time I get the

matter straightened out the coolies that we took north will be beyond my reach, but we ought to be able to get others, and under the circumstances they can hardly refuse me an extension of time on the contract."

"Has it ever occurred to you," said Hemingway, "that what your friend Takayashi told you is probably Gospel truth? I mean about the complications. Here it is in a nutshell:

"Japan wants the road built in order to develop Korea. Russia knows that when Japan puts her foot down in Korea it is put to stay, and that every sleeper—ties, as you Americans call 'em—that you lay on that road binds the land so much firmer to Japan.

"In the future war which is bound to come between the two countries Japan will begin her operations where the railroad ends. *That* is why Russia does not want the road built. *That* is why China has been approached and probably compelled by pressure from St. Petersburg to hold up the Atlanta.

"And in all probability Takayashi and Itasura are acting under orders from Tokyo itself to make your contract fall through in this way, so that the imperial Japanese government can 'save its face,' so to speak. So that the world will not know that the designs of the imperial government were blocked by Russia. See?"

"Good Lord! And I thought I knew a little, too." Oakes tapped his head disgustedly. "Yes, I see. Fortunately, we do not lose anything in cash. We were really doing the work on account of the international prestige it would have given us, for we are a very young firm.

"Burton never cared for this job. He is anxious to go into oil in Mexico. We have a concession under way now near Tampico that we have had excellent reports of, and it may well be that it will pan out well. We're tired of working so far away from home, and if we can get that oil concession it means that we can get to work on the in-field, so to speak.

We are at work now closing out our island work, and this would have been our last work for any one but ourselves. Burton wants to retire after next year if he can. How'd you get to Peking?"

"Caught the early morning train, and so went up third class with a lot of down-country Chinese pigs, three French officers of marine, and a drunken American sailor—"

"And then—"

"Oh, yes! And then when I got off I found myself the cynosure of all eyes. You see a white man who has no ostensible business in a Chinese city is not looked upon with eyes devoid of suspicion.

"I went to see the British ambassador, and told him that I had come to Peking to look into the matter of a claim for some lost property. That was true enough. The only reason that I had for doing that was that I wanted to establish myself among white men on a semiofficial basis in case anything should happen to me.

"Also, I knew that if the officials at the legation thought I was after property they'd think I meant to forward a claim through them so they'd let me alone—keep as far away from me as they could.

"After that when they had seen me and could swear it on a book in case a Chinese official should swear that no such person as I had ever been in Peking, I went to the saloon that you find in every Asiatic city—the Flag of All Nations.

"Just as I thought, I found there the very man I was after, the American sailor who was at liberty—takin' the liberty of washin' his neck—inside, I mean—with *sam shu*, which is the very vilest rice brandy that I know of.

"I stopped him before he got more than half-seas over, and I asked him if he wanted to earn ten dollars. Incidentally, it was very nearly the last ten dollars that I had. You might have thought I was asking him if he

wanted the Kohinoor, he was so quick at taking me up. I told him to meet me at the Imperial Hotel at eight o'clock. That was last night, of course.

"When he came it was pretty well on toward dark, so I took him up to my room and gave him another drink and told him that I had been up here in 1900, and that during the sack of the place I had been compelled to hide some important papers that I had come back to get, and that I wanted to get him to accompany me so that it would not be necessary for me to go through the Chinese city after dark alone.

"I sent him out to get some Chinese clothes, because I knew that if he bought them the shopkeeper would think, being a sailor, that he was buying them for curios. He came back about nine o'clock with 'em, and we went out of the hotel and put the things on in a dark alley.

"There was no trouble about that part of it. The real trouble lay in getting through those crooked streets unobserved.

"Let me tell you right now that all our complaints about the native streets being poorly lighted are unfounded. If you want to find out how really well lighted they are just you try to get through them unobserved.

"We had the devil of a time. There are more dogs in a Chinese city than there are fleas on a Russian, an' any one of 'em can bite the calf of your leg off an' get away with it while you wait. That's a valuable piece of information. They bite like wolves—snap an' run.

"It took time, let me tell you, to work our way through the *Wai ch'eng*—that is the Outer City—to the walls of the *Nei ch'eng*—the Tartar City—and when we got there we found that by ill luck there was a big bazaar sale going on in some long sheds that had been erected near the walls of the *Wai ch'eng* where it sticks out beyond the Tartar City, so

we had to wait in the darkness till the people should go home, and we thought they were going to stay up all night.

"Then Felton (that's the American) wanted a drink, an' we had a free fight under the walls, an'. I had to throw him down an' sit on him for a while till he got quiet. By this time it was all of eleven o'clock and the natives had all gone home.

"Of course, I had the paper that I had drawn that showed me the exact location of the place where Lavalley and I had buried the things; but I couldn't see it without striking a match, and I didn't like to do that, but I had to do it.

"Mind you, all this was done between the rounds of the Chinese watchmen, who were tapping their way along the stone-flagged walk at the top of the ditch with their iron-tipped sticks, tinkling their night-bells and chanting out for all thieves to hear that they themselves were members of the Thieves' Tong, and that it was therefore to the honor of all thieves that the place should not be robbed. You know how they do—"

Oakes nodded and beckoned to the boy to bring a "peg" to Hemingway. He mixed it, sipped, corrected, and drank and went on, Marjorie leaning forward, listening frankly, her eyes glistening.

"I found the place easily enough, for its location was indelibly impressed upon my memory. It was a wedge-shaped stone that was set in the angle of a bastion about four feet from the ground just where the base of the wall ran into the scarp of the ditch.

"There was a very narrow beam on which I could stand while I worked, so I climbed out upon it and pried away with my knife and a short-handled hatchet that I had brought along with me.

"I rather imagine I was the best part of an hour at that work, with Felton sitting quietly on the side of

the ditch, looking for the watchman when he should make his rounds, so that I should be warned in time to escape being seen.

"For a good hour I clung to that wall like a fly in order to get the twenty minutes' work that I needed to get the stone out. Of course, it was not laid in mortar. We had cut that out when we took it out ten years before, and reset the stone in soft earth—"

He paused and drank the rest of his peg, setting the glass down slowly.

"—and then when it was all done I put the stone back, so that no one could see what we had been doing, for the Chinese would have made it the subject of an international complaint if they had seen me digging away at the walls of the Holy City, and I went back to the hotel.

"I spent the rest of the night there and made the American sailor, Felton, stay with me, and caught the morning train down. On the way down I heard some one say something about some trouble having been reported about the Atlanta's cargo, and then, just as I was about to put off to go aboard of her, I saw the police-boat, and when you put off to the Futami Maru I took a chance till I saw it it was really you in the launch and—here I am," he wound up lamely enough.

"Here endeth the second lesson," said Oakes gaily, putting his hand upon Hemingway's shoulder. "To be frank, old man, I never thought much of your plan. It was too chimerical; too much to expect that wealth to stay there for you.

"I have always felt that either some one else had found the cache or that you had lost it, or that Lavalley had gone back there unknown to you. I'm awfully sorry about your disappointment, old fellow; but see here! Burton and Oakes aren't yet quite broke. I want you to go back with me when I go, and we'll find that there is a yolk in the egg yet—"

"Do you mean to offer me a place with you?" asked Hemingway, surprised.

"I mean that we need a man who has been trained to handle men, and that the three of us can open the world's oyster and get the meat out of it yet, if you care to come with us. There's our Mexican concession that we simply must have looked after, and that immediately, for it will take us a year to close out our Manila end of the business—"

Hemingway looked at him from under bent brows. "Know my record?" he asked.

"Don't need to," said Oakes shortly. "When I want a man to help me, I don't want to know about his love-affairs. What do you say?"

"May I look at that box, if you please, Miss Downs?" asked Hemingway irrelevantly.

Surprised, the girl handed it to him. He rose slowly from his seat, stretching his six feet of height, and so stood looking smilingly down upon his friend and the girl they both loved so well.

"Funny thing about this old box," he said reflectively. "That old *bonze* was sure that evil luck was attached to it. 'Member what he said? That every time the box was stolen it brought evil luck upon all connected with it until it was stolen again? Wasn't that it?"

Marjorie nodded silently, her eyes fixed on Oakes.

"I'll be back in a moment," said Hemingway. He stepped back from his chair and entered a cabin the door of which stood open. They heard him rummaging about the room, but they paid no attention to him, but sat looking into each other's eyes.

His reappearance on the deck startled them, and a quick flush of warm color to her cheeks told Marjorie that she had been sitting staring and stared at for at least two minutes without a word having passed. Oakes presumably had the same thoughts, for his face, too, was flushed.

He put out his hands, and had barely time to close his fingers over hers when Hemingway came again to their chairs. What he had seen from the open door he did not of course say, but his eyes were a trifle clouded as he seated himself in his long chair and, leaning forward, placed the silver box in the girl's lap.

"Thank you," he said gently. "That box is the very one that Lavallo brought to me on that awful night in Peking City nearly thirteen years ago. Open it."

Idly enough Marjorie obeyed, opening the lid, her eyes still upon Oakes's face, so that she did not see what he saw.

"Look! Look, darling!" The word slipped out too late to be stopped. Coloring again even more brightly than before, she dropped her eyes to her lap and gasped in disbelief as there cascaded out of the box a mass of color that made her draw her breath.

"What did I tell you?" asked Hemingway exultingly. "Opals and rubies, didn't I say?"

He lifted gently a three-foot string of them. "And pearls like seeds in a cacao-pod. See them!"

His fingers lingered lovingly among the little, white, opalescent jewels.

"And rings—"

"But," said Oakes, when he had got his breath, "I thought you said there was nothing in the cache?"

Hemingway roared with laughter. "I never said a word about it. You jumped to the conclusion that I had been disappointed because I didn't throw the stones at you as soon as I came aboard, and I couldn't help keeping it for a surprise.

"No. I got what I went for. I gave a ring to Felton, the sailor who helped me, but I lost the best jewel of all. Yes, it was the best. The very best in the world, I think; certainly the best I have ever seen.

"I hold you to your promise, Oakes. I want that job in Mexico—or Peru, or Lapland, or anywhere else," he went

on whimsically. "I'm tired of wandering through all the seas of all the world.

"Did you ever read McAndrew's hymn? It's the finest poetry that I've read in ten years from the Bitter Seas to Ballarat. Thirty thousand pounds for each of us, Oakes, and a job for me. Don't forget that. Oh, but this crack on the head does ache!

"Better the sight of eyes that see than the wanderin's o' desire."

"How'd you hurt your head?" asked Oakes sympathetically.

"A stone dropped on it while I was at work on the wall. Lock those stones up, will you, old man, when you and Miss Downs are tired of looking at them. I think I'll turn in for a bit. I'm all in."

They sat and looked, not at the stones that indeed lay unheeded in Marjorie's lap, but straight into each other's eyes, and in that look there was a wondrous dawning; and presently, without a word having been said, Oakes, rising gently from his chair so that his movement was as soft as falling feathers, leaned forward, his eyes still held by the glow in hers, and kissed her.

Her hands flew to her face. "Oh!" she said beneath her breath. And again: "Oh! I never even dreamed it; I never—even—dreamed it—till now."

And inside his cabin, Hemingway, who had unwillingly seen the whole occurrence in his mirror as he lay upon the locker, striving not to see it, murmured softly to himself:

"I was right about having lost the best of the lot, the finest jewel of the world; but I'm thinkin', old man, that you didn't lose it at Peking. You lost it before you ever started; and your friend and she have found it—the rose of the world and you; you, worthless remittance man, you can go to hades—or Mexico!"

He closed the door softly and turned on the electric fan so that he should not hear the murmur of the low-toned talk outside that would have told him that

Marjorie and Oakes had indeed found what he had never lost—the rose of the world.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR the ordinary cabin passengers the life on the Futami Maru would have perhaps proved tiresome, but Oakes and Marjorie did not complain. There was always a sheltered spot under the bridge where the keen wind off the Pe-chi-li Gulf, backed with the weight of the ice-floes of the Kurile Sea, could not strike them, and in the long, moonlit evenings the stacked boats threw a shadow.

So they passed down the coast through the wonderful Yellow Sea, with its rimming edge of brown searim behind which the Chinese people have sat entrenched behind four thousand years of ignorance and filth.

Down past the Orphan Isle, where the Chinese maiden was cast ashore a thousand years ago, and where, in commemoration of the holy life she led, temples were erected that even now cling to that well-nigh inaccessible cliff as an eyebrow clings to a man's face.

Still farther south, past the innumerable rivers where the tiny junks tossed like chips on the yellow floods that poured seaward, discoloring the very sea itself for miles.

Past Tsushima, where the sailors of Japan, a few years ago, had taught the Russian Bear that valor and singleness of purpose have not yet lost their power in the world.

Past Shimonosaki, where the great lighthouses winked at them in the smother and let them by, and ever as they went the romance of the East was with them, as it is with all men who touch the edge of that most wonderful sea, only one degree less wonderful than that fairy sea that lies still farther to the east—the Inland Sea of Japan.

Their days and nights were tinged with romance that they did not share even with Hemingway; though, to do

them justice, they did their best to include him in the new-found happiness that had come to them. Hemingway, however, would have none of them; but, now that he had found himself, held himself aloof from very sympathy.

He knew that at best he was but a rank outsider in such a case, and, being quite frank with himself, he knew that the very sight of the two was well-nigh more than he could stand, in spite of his new-made resolutions.

So Hemingway hibernated on the bridge, where the master made him welcome; for Hemingway was rich in the wealth that passes current over all the world—good stories well told—and he shared his supply with the officers who lived upon the hurricane-deck, while Marjorie and Oakes sat on the saloon-deck below them, reading the quaint old books that the ship's library held.

Books that told them of Japan and China in the old days, and that gave fair translations of the deeds of the Forty-seven Ronin, which is the Nipponese version of the "Knights of the Round Table."

"It is all so full of mysticism," said Marjorie happily, as she settled back among the cushions that Oakes deftly arranged for her in the long chair. "I do not know a thing of the literature of the East, yet I do know, from my talks with the old Chinese teacher when I was qualifying as a nurse for Oriental service, that they esteem us barbarians.

"For instance, we have no records in all our boasted civilization that can compare in point of age with the book of Shu-King, which was old when Nineveh was being built.

"Just think of a people who could gravely discuss the evils that arose from such modern innovations as saddles which would tend to render the horsemen effeminate and scythed chariots like the Persians had which were the last word in rapid transit. Yet they introduced banking into

Europe, even if they did use the most cumbersome system of coinage in the world—the tael.

"It was probably pig-tails then when they spent it for pork. Which accounts for another thing for which they are noted. Marjorie, if you pinch me, I swear I'll kiss you, even if the Chinese cabin-boy is looking."

Day followed day through all their golden hours till they had dropped the coast and the Yellow Sea was but a memory. The Futami Maru carried two sets of officers, as, indeed, did all the ships of the Japanese merchant marine before the days of the Tsushima fight, and long after it, too, when all the world had been taught that Japan could produce her own sailors, who could vie with any European nation in skill and seamanship.

It was on a hot night in August that Oakes, Marjorie having gone to bed, strolled forward into the "eyes" of the ship to smoke his last pipe and to dream of that little house that he had bought on the Calle Real Ermita in Manila, where the sands of the bay rim the sea-circle with a golden edge and where the white-flecked waters run in masses before the *terral*, as the Spaniards call the land-wind that whips in from Paranaque in the long, hot evenings of the dry season.

It was a warm evening, and the steady forefoot churned the phosphorescence into glowing masses. He leaned further and further over the bows, and as he leaned he became suddenly aware of a strong, peculiar smell that for the moment he could not recognize.

Finally he knew it for the smell of burning sugar-sacking. There was no mistaking the stinking reek of the sugar-gas that would have betrayed it for a hundred miles.

He sniffed again, and, becoming convinced that some one was working a smudge in the fore-castle, probably to get rid of rats, he went slowly aft.

At the top of the ladder he ran into Watts, the first officer.

"Better look out for rough weather to-night, Mr. Oakes. The mercury has dropped to 29.7. The old man's taken the ship."

Oakes whistled. He had not noticed before that while he had been dreaming on the fore-castle head the moon had gone out in the smother and the spindrift was running in masses before the gale.

Also there was a heavy heave and roll to the ship that he had not noticed an hour before.

He knocked at the door of Marjorie's stateroom.

"We're in for a little blow, I think. I thought I'd better caution you, so that you could stow anything that may get loose and break. The wind's coming up, and Watts says we'll have a bit of a blow before morning."

He went to his own room to profit by the advice he had given Marjorie. On the way to his room he roused Hemingway, whom he found slumbering on a long chair on the deck, undisturbed by the pitching of the vessel.

"Better turn in, old man. We're in for some rough weather, the chief tells me. I've sent Marjorie to bed"—for the girl was now Marjorie to both of them—"an' told her to make fast everything that can fetch away. You know better than I that a white squall here off the Chinese coast, with practically no offing, may well be no joke."

Hemingway nodded sleepily, shook himself into full consciousness, and stumbled off to his cabin, where he promptly took the advice that Oakes had given him.

Two hours later they were in it with a vengeance, as Oakes found when he tried to avoid the wash-basin that rushed at him out of the darkness, and which smote him craftily upon the side of the head.

He had scarcely recovered from that blow when there came a tremendous crash of thunder that made the whole ship tremble and recoil, followed by a

long crackle of lightning that sounded like rifle-fire.

A crash as of wire rope flung hastily to the deck brought him quickly to his feet, and the patter of bare feet on the deck made him open his door.

The lash of the rain in his face stung like shot, but he could see that there were no lights visible. Voices on the bridge drew him staggering to the foot of the companionway. The dim figure of a man caromed into him and nearly knocked him off his feet.

"Get out o' here! Ain't it bad enough havin' the damned hooker struck by lightnin' an' every compass-needle chasin' itself like a cat chasin' its own tail at play, without buttin' into every cock-eyed, pig-tailed pirate off the Canton coast?" And the chief engineer shoved him angrily to one side.

Oakes whistled softly and crept back to his own cabin. The hours of the night passed slowly and at the first streak of gray dawn he was out on deck.

It was a very different scene from that of the night before. The ship was wallowing in the sea-way, plunging deeply into the heavy cross-sea so that the green water broke aft of the fore-castle and all forward of the main-mast was a sodden space.

The steam-winch was gone from the deck, and the gangways forward were clogged with a mass of broken gear that resembled nothing, or, as the ordinarily taciturn English mate put it: "It's a reg'lar Chinese raffle; nothin' at hand and everything on top."

"What's the trouble, anyway?" Oakes asked of that officer.

"Trouble, is it, Mr. Oakes? Trouble enough. She was struck by lightnin' about four bells in the mornin', an' every compass on board is smashed. The whole electric apparatus is knocked out. We're runnin' by dead reckonin' now, an' a sweet job we're makin' of it—"

"Where are we?"

"God knows, Who knows all things. I made her position yesterday. You can guess what we're off our course. Losh man! What's that?"

It was a dull, rumbling crash that threw Oakes and the mate prone upon the deck, and it was followed by a succession of other shocks such as a sled makes when running over rocks on a snow-slide.

The mate sprang to his feet and made for the engine-room hatch, and reached it just as the first assistant engineer sprang out of the scuttle and took his stand at the door with an iron spanner in his hand.

"Get back!" they heard him cry. "Get back, I say—every mother's son of ye! Get back, I say!"

He struck viciously at a head that thrust through the hatch.

The man dropped, and the engineer wiped his face methodically with a handful of dirty cotton waste.

"Scared stiff," he said, grinning apologetically. "The whole black gang's tryin' to stampede. That's why the chief sent me up here to whack the first head that shows itself through the scuttle. He's workin' 'em over now with a shovel."

The yells and imprecations from the foot-plates in the furnace-room that came up the open funnel told that the chief was doing his selected work with scientific thoroughness, learned from much experience.

Oakes, disturbed, went to the saloon-deck, where Marjorie was standing, waiting for him.

"What is it?"

"I don't know yet. Wait—"

It was the shrilling of the boat-swain's whistle along the decks, followed presently by the rush of four men forward with some planks and canvas.

"Struck a derelict! Look!" Oakes pointed out over the starboard bow, and Marjorie's eyes followed his finger.

There, a hundred yards away, flush with the mass of gray-green water,

they saw a sodden hulk that wallowed in the seaway like a sow in a pond.

Even as he looked the sodden hull opened out and a mass of water-soaked logs cascaded out into the long, gray rollers beneath the forefoot of the *Futami Maru*.

Hemingway's tall figure came up behind them in the gray light. Staringly his gaze followed Oakes's motioning hand out across the sea.

"Whew!" he said slowly. "My word! What a bally mess! I don't know much about sea matters, but I must say that it looks to me as if the particular little cross-legged gods that the Chinese say control these seas must be a pretty busy lot of gods just now. Look at that mess forward, will you?"

"Where've you been? Sleeping?" asked Oakes.

"Not on your life! I've been sittin' on the hatch-cover of No. 1 hatch, where the liquor is stored. No use taking a chance, you see. I knew the Japs wouldn't drink it, but there's no use trustin' the Chinamen or the low-down square-heads that they've got forward. We'll know in a few minutes what the damage is. Here comes the carpenter now."

The carpenter made the best of his way through the crowd of sailors on the fore-castle head and forced his way aft to the bridge-ladder. They saw him in hurried talk with the master, after which came the dreaded two long whistles from the engine-room, and they heard the beat and stamp of the engines as the steam was thrown into the pump-gears. A gush of clear seawater immediately shot overside.

Oakes looked at it critically.

"She must be leakin' like a basket! Gracious! She must have started a dozen plates for her pumps to be throwin' like that from the bottom—either that or she's got a phenomenally clean bilge. Listen—"

It was a dull, heavy report that seemed to come from directly beneath their feet.

"That's a bulkhead gone."

His face was a little pale as he turned to Marjorie. "I don't want to worry you, sweetheart," he said simply; "but no one can tell what the damage may be. It cannot hurt to be prepared for the worst. Go to your cabin and put on your warmest clothes and plenty of them. Fill your brandy-flask and get what you value most of your possessions. Put them where you can get them in a second and then come back to me here on deck as soon as you can."

The girl looked steadily at him for a moment and then went to her cabin. As soon as she had left him Oakes slipped into his own stateroom, took some papers from his trunk, wrapped them in a piece of oiled silk, carefully loaded a heavy .45-caliber Colt's revolver, which he thrust into its holster, and buckled it about his waist.

Emptying a box of cartridges into his coat-pocket, he went out again upon the deck, where he found Hemingway, who had also been making preparations to leave in the boats—a thing that they were confident was now merely a matter of minutes.

He patted his hip as Oakes came up, and the American saw that the bulge under his coat was exactly similar to his own. He nodded comprehendingly.

"I've got the same," he said in a low tone. "How're you going to pack those jewels? Marjorie gave them to me to give to you."

He held out the silver box in which Marjorie had repacked the jewels, and which she had tied up carefully with heavy cord. Hemingway took it without a word and stowed it in the pocket of his coat.

"Really," he said, speaking above the roar of the water, "I'd like to throw this bloomin' box overside. I'm really gettin' a bit touchy about it. Old Jonah that it is."

Oakes was about to speak when the master came to the head of the ladder.

"I say, Mr. Oakes," he called in a

low but penetrating voice, "you'd better get Miss Downs ready for what may happen—"

"All right, sir. And what'll that be?"

The master's face was grave as he replied slowly: "Well, sir, we struck that derelict when we were running at full speed, an' that's a good eighteen knots. Maybe you can figure it out for yourself when I tell you that there're four plates started squarely under our bows—opened out like a cock-eyed Chinese lotus, sir—her garboard strake must be curled up like a shaving off a plank.

"The two forward bulkheads have gone clean away, an' God knows what else ails her. I mean to jettison the cargo out of the No. 3 hatch an' fill the after-compartments with water, so's to bring her head up so we can fother the bad plates with canvas to keep the water out—if we can. Great guns—there's somethin' else gone!"

It was a sudden crash aft, followed by a dull whirring from the overhang where the screw was racing with the flutterings of a diseased heart. As they rushed aft they ran into the chief engineer.

"By all the gods o' Clyde," he shouted, "if this is na the eend o' the world! She's e'en picked up one of them damned logs with her screw, an' there'll be no more blades to the propeller than there is hair on an egg—losh, man! If her back is na broke 'tis more than we can expect—"

"How're your engines holdin' the intake, Mac?"

"Hold, is it? My faith, man! We've pumped half the Pacific Ocean through her in the last half-hour. You'd better overhaul your boats, sir. We'll be in them afore two hours ha' gone."

He spat angrily into the breast of a great green comber that snapped aft along the side, hurling the hissing foam into his very face. The master walked heavily forward.

Oakes went thoughtfully to the sa-

loon deck, where Hemingway and Marjorie were standing.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE day dragged on and passed with leaden feet. Early in the afternoon the crews of the different boats had been busily at work filling their tiny craft with the stores that belong there by the laws of the sea.

Filling the bottoms of the boats with salt water to tighten the seams, stowing bread-bags, and filling water-casks, and the officers assigned to the command of each were kept busily at work, seeing that the full equipment was on hand, for even twenty-four hours in an open boat on the broad Pacific is apt to be no joke.

An examination of the boat compasses showed that not one was in a serviceable condition. One indeed had been fairly fused into an almost unrecognizable mass of scorched brass and twisted steel by the lightning.

All day long Oakes and Hemingway stayed with Marjorie, trying to hearten her up, for the strain was slowly but surely telling upon her, and she was more than ready now to lean upon Oakes and to look to him for assistance and directions.

Dusk came, and along with it the sea, that had been beaten flat with the weight of the rain, rose again and swung the crippled Futami Maru till she lay helpless in the trough of the sea, rolling scuppers under with every swing.

To make matters worse, a heavy sea-fog had rolled down with the dusk and the stuttering shrieks of the fog-horn went echoing away from bank to bank of the fog-reek.

The crew gathered near the boats, openly waiting the order to "Abandon ship." Finally a tremble forward like that accompanying a severe chill gave a mute warning that the Futami Maru was really doomed.

"No. 1 boat lower away—"

The speed had diminished to a quarter of her normal. A sailor sprang to the rail and flung a bucket of grease over the sheaves of the blocks that carried the boat-falls. They whined complainingly as the boat was lowered a few feet, and was then brought back to the level of the decks.

The officers were frankly worried, for—as all the world does *not* know—it is no child's play to lower a small boat from the chocks on the spar or saloon deck to the water thirty feet below without smashing it to kindling-wood upon the plates.

Sailors can do it, but nowadays sailors do not go to sea. They write sea-stories for the magazines, and farmers run the big ironclads, which accounts for the accidents that sometimes happen when the gods who look after seafarers are asleep or hunting or absent on a journey.

The crew was piped away, for the Japanese liners much affect the man-o'-war's discipline, and seated themselves at the oars and the fall-ropes screeched dryly as the boat fell foot by foot toward the gray water.

Three boats took most of the crew, who were ushered as carefully into the boats as though they had been princesses of the blood. The master kept his hand ostentatiously thrust in his coat-pocket and the mates openly boasted iron belaying-pins.

They had no mind to have repeated the affair of La Bourgogne when women had their hands cut off at the wrists by sailors who did not have behind them the thousand-year-old traditions of the sea, which teach that "blood is the price of admiralty" when all is told.

"Now, Miss Downs—you for the next boat—along with Oakes and Hemingway. Ready? What is it?"

Well might he ask. Well might he pluck from the pocket of his heavy sea-coat the short revolver that blazed in the faces of the terrified mob of angry men.

A long heave of the steamer threw

her head well down in the belly of a huge "gray-back" that came surging aft along the decks, whirling the cold spume high in air.

They heard the sobbing rush of the water down the engine-room hatch and the answering roar from the boiler-room that told that the water had reached the fires below them. Human nature could stand it no longer.

As between the fear of the water that snapped and snarled at their boot-heels and the dread of the weapons that their officers were freely using, the last had no terrors for them, and the crew rushed the boats.

The doctor was rushed off his feet and fell through three decks from the open square of the main hatch on the spar-deck. The master was cut from right to left by a huge, long-limbed coolie who wielded a hatchet, and the two mates were hurled over the rail to the open boats, where no one made any attempt to rescue them. Oakes drew Marjorie from the rail.

"They're as crazy as loons now," he said. "We're far safer up here than in the boats with the officers gone. Stand fast, my dear! Stand fast!"

She looked at him appealingly, and his face whitened under the tan as he tried valiantly to smile reassuringly.

It was openly so poor an attempt that she said quietly: "Never mind, Jim. Remember Sir Humphrey Gilbert? He said when the Golden Hind went down—do you remember what he said?"

Oakes nodded silently, his eyes on her.

"Look!" she said presently. "They are gone!"

It was true. A great, rolling wreath of sea-fog mercifully shut down upon the scene just as the curtain of a theater rolls down before the eyes of the audience, and sea and boats alike were swallowed up in the night.

The steamer rolled heavily in the seaway, and in a few minutes Oakes, finding that she sank no lower in the water, went forward and carefully lowered a bucket overside, fastening the end of the line to a broken stanchion.

"I want to see how fast she is going down if she is going down at all, which I don't believe. If she goes any lower the bucket will float on a loose line. You two stay here till I come back. I want to see what has caused all this."

Marjorie shivered and obeyed, holding nervously by Hemingway's arm while Oakes went forward and crawled carefully down the iron ladder bolted to the hatch combings.

On the deck below he found nothing. On the deck below that nothing, and below that he dared not go, for there were no lights, and he could hear boxes and barrels crashing and banging about in the water below him; and he could not afford to imperil any of their few remaining chances. He climbed back again to the deck.

"What is it?" asked Marjorie as they came forward to meet him.

"I don't know. The only explanation that I can offer is that one or more of the bulkheads must have held when they least expected it, and it alone is holding us up. Of course, if that is it the least rough weather will force the bulkhead and we—"

"Are we safe, then?"

"About as safe as a cat in a basket would be if it were flung out there. I'm going forward to look for a sound boat. You stay here, my dear. Come on, Hemingway."

The boats had been nested forward of the engine-room hatch, but they had all been either injured in the storm or else by careless handling by the crazy crew.

They did find, however, a great gray life-raft, made of steel, that was too heavy for them to move with their hands, so they did the best that

they could, which was to lash some blankets and provisions to the sides and the slatted bottom.

This done, they took some long oars for levers and rollers and pushed and pried and levered till they finally by dint of great exertion got it near the side where the bulwark had been flattened for a space of twenty feet.

"If the worst comes to the worst," said Hemingway, wiping the sweat from his eyes, "we will have something to hang on to. I'm far from satisfied yet, though."

He ran up to the bridge, where on entering the master's cabin he found what he sought—a rack of rifles well oiled and with the magazines filled, as he found when he tested them.

Liners on the Pacific that run with Lascar or mixed crews south of the line take no chances, and the bridge on most of them is a miniature fort. He picked two, took the bolts from the rest, and threw them overboard, and then went down to join Marjorie and Oakes.

Darkness had fairly settled down and the girl was overcome with nervousness, as well she might be. So Oakes made her go into the first open cabin that they saw, where she lay down upon the locker, and he covered her with a pile of dry blankets that he took from the upper deck rooms.

"I don't suppose you'll sleep much," he said as cheerfully as he could; "but you must try, anyhow, for we will need all of our strength to-morrow."

He bade her good night and went out upon the deck and rejoined Hemingway.

The night passed slowly and the hours seemed interminable till four o'clock of a very gray dawning ushered in the new day. As the sea rim became visible inch by inch the two men went up on the wrecked bridge, from which vantage point they could get a better view of the horizon.

Here Hemingway left Oakes scanning the sea-line with a glass that he

had found in the master's cabin, and he went to join Marjorie. It was not until she was tired out with the staring out to sea over the now blazing water that she heard Oakes call excitedly:

"It's land! It's land!"

"Where? What?" they called, running toward him, hand in hand like two children.

For answer he pointed steadily westward. "It's hardly more than a shade," he said, "but it is land of some sort. Look!"

Her gaze followed his finger. It was only a blur of silver gray against the southwestern sky, and she could have cried from vexation, though she could not have said just what she had really expected to see.

"What land is it, Jim?"

"Heaven knows! It might be anything from Saghali to the Paumotas. I don't care what it is so long as it's something that hasn't got loose bulkheads in it and that doesn't stand up on its bows and stick its stern up in the air like—like—like a hen in a dust-bin. Let's get something to eat."

They got it—cocoa and biscuit that they found in the steward's cabin, and, coming back on deck, found that they had raised the land so that it stood out an unmistakable island.

The two men scanned the charts, but, being no sailors and not knowing their last observation, had no idea of their exact location. An isolated palm-tree looking for all the world like a disreputable, worn-out feather-duster, stood up against the sky, and behind that they could see a pile of rocks well covered with heavy verdure.

They could form no idea of the size of the island; they only knew that it was as welcome a sight to them as is a drink of water to a thirsty man. The problem was how to get ashore.

The big hull, bows down in the water, they knew right well would never drift to the beach. As they drew closer they found that only a light surf was running and that the current was

carrying them toward a long point that jutted out scythelike from the middle of the island.

It was covered with rocks and foliage, and as they slowly drifted in they saw a thin line of white water extending clear across what looked like a harbor mouth. Hastily Hemingway made a line fast to the steel life-raft and tied the other end to a ring-bolt, so that when launched the raft should not drift beyond reach.

Then with some short pieces of line he tied the two rifles to the floor of the raft and routed out a box of ammunition from the bridge. These, with a few blankets taken from the cabins, all the provisions that they could find in the galley, and the small water-cask that belonged on the raft, were hastily but thoroughly lashed in place, and with Oakes's assistance, he ran the oar-rollers under the unwieldy craft, and by the aid of a couple of heavy hand-spikes, they managed to lever the raft half-way over the side, where it hung balanced so that they could shove it overside.

Both men were stripped to their shirts, and the stinging sweat trickled unnoticed into their eyes.

"That white water means a reef of sorts, and it's ten to one she hits on it. If she does, we're *Allon verloren*," as the Dutch say '*Gastodos*'—used up! Do not look so forlorn, Marjorie. We're a long way from being dead yet," said Hemingway.

"For Heaven's sake, look there!" He was hanging his coat on a belaying-pin as he spoke, and his mouth fairly opened with surprise as his finger unconsciously pointed to the main companionway that led from the dining saloon. There in the door, not fifty feet away from them, stood the figure of a Chinaman.

"I must have the D. T.'s," said Hemingway stolidly. "I searched all these cabins—or thought I did—Here you! John Chinaman! You clome top-side quai-quai sabbee—"

The boy, his face still bearing the

inextinguishable grin of the coolie class, wet, hungry, and bedraggled, came forward.

"My glood bloy—my no catchee bloat. You know me. No sabbee Kow Lung—me clabin boy take care numbel ten cabin—"

He was openly disturbed, and his eyes were as red as the eyes of an angry mongoose. Oakes, watching him, determined that it was opium working. Six years working with the coolies had taught him something of their habits, and he knew the boy could have had very little, if any, food.

"Why you no catchee bloat and go longside pleecce claptain?"

"My try catchee bloat. Lascar mans him take oar hit him me top-side head. My no got head all same this."

He tapped the iron stanchion plate that supported him.

"My no got head now. Take look see—"

He unwound his cue and bending forward his shaven poll they saw a long, dark welt that ran across it as clean cut as though it had been drawn with India ink.

"Poor fellow," said the girl. "I suppose he means to tell us that some one hit him over the head with an oar when he was trying to get into one of the boats. We'll take him with us."

"Why, of course," said Hemingway. "Kow Lung, you go catch clothes and put on raft and hurry up about it."

He motioned to the raft, and the deft Chinese boy, promptly ducking aft, came presently with his bundle, which he lashed along with the other things that Hemingway had secured.

Realizing suddenly that the raft must be shot overside when the sunken bows of the steamer should touch the reef, Oakes saw that she might not right, but might come to the surface upside down, so they had to work frantically to unlash all their little stock of belongings so that in case of the upsetting of the raft they would not lose them.

They had hardly done this when a low, muffled crash and jar told them that the sunken bows had grounded, and they saw, rather than felt, the stern swing slowly in till, with a low grinding jar, the whole hull lay right along the reef over which the low surf broke as white as a rain-washed bone.

They pushed and pried at the lever that moved the raft, and it took all the strength of the three men, Kow Lung's toes spreading like the sticks of a fan as he pushed, to tilt the raft over till she began very cumbrously and heavily to slide by her own weight.

"Stand back now! Over she goes! Thank the good Lord—"

They had cause. The mass of gray painted steel shot overside and, landing on its own cigar-shaped nose, disappeared under the quiet waters, to presently come up stern first exactly where it sank.

They brought it back with the line, and gathering all their scanty belongings, to which Kow Lung added an ax and some rope, they lowered Marjorie to the raft, and, getting out the unwieldy oars, pulled heavily toward the shore.

"I want to get you safe ashore first of all," said Oakes, "and then we can go back for some more supplies—something in the way of a tent, for instance. There's no telling how long we may be here. I have no idea what the place is—"

"What's the matter, Kow Lung? You work your oar, confound you, and never mind pokin' me in the back with the loom of it. What's the matter?" growled Hemingway, for the boy had dropped his oar and touched him upon the shoulder.

He turned quickly and let his gaze follow the boy's finger. Far off, along the shore, he saw the faint shape of a mast and lateen sail stand out against the sky.

He dropped his oar in his excitement. "By Jove!" he called cheerily. "I call this luck. Look, Oakes! Marjorie! We're as good as rescued al-

ready. Look! There's a sail— Well, Kow Lung," he said testily, "what is it this time?" for the boy was again touching him upon the shoulder and was staring at the strange sail from under the sharp of his hand.

"My no likee," he said slowly. "My no likee"—and watching till Marjorie turned her head, he made a significant motion of his head toward the strange sail and quickly passed his hand across his throat.

"What?" Hemingway stared at him. "What?"

"You know Canton-side? All time up country mandarin kleep slodier man in boat. How you say? Junk him never go sea now. Him stlay 'long shore, up river. All time steamer trade now. Junk him no good only for river maybe island work. What you call sailor man pickee up tlings on beach no get lost—just dlift ashore?"

"Wrecker—go on."

"Him Chinee mans in junk—"

He pointed again at the rapidly nearing lateen sail. "Him see leck out there"—indicating the wreck of the Futami Maru by pointing at it with his chin negro-fashion. "Him wantchee come take mandarin catch him, hang him. If him wantchee bloat out there more better him catchee us and make dead—sabee?"

"My sabee. He says," said Hemingway, turning to the wondering Marjorie, "that our friends yonder are a form of wreckers or river pirates and that they are after the wreck of the steamer. He says that we had better get ashore unobserved, as it will be bad for us to be detected. You see, if they are really sea-thieves or wreckers and are after the Futami Maru, they know right well that the underwriters will send a wrecking party to strip her, and that if we are allowed to witness her looting by these river pirates we can testify against them. See? Under Chinese law the looters will be hung. You can guess what they'll do to us—"

"Make for the land, Kow Lung.

They haven't seen us yet. Their decks are not yet above the sky-line. Pull like the devil, Kow Lung."

Obeying the injunction, Kow Lung and Oakes as well pulled like seven devils, and they presently felt the iron shoe of the great raft take the sand of the silver beach with a grating sweep, and they sprang out knee-deep with the rope, and, drawing the unwieldy float up the beach, Oakes helped Marjorie out upon the shore.

A moment later they saw the unwieldy junk sweep round the point.

CHAPTER IX.

A HEAVY wind was blowing in from sea, and it brought the junk in at a speed that seemed impossible for such an unwieldy craft. The raft was sighted before it beached, and a yell from seaward, followed by the swinging overside of two unwieldy sampans, told that the wreckers or pirates, whichever they might be, meant to pursue.

At least twenty men crowded into the flat-bottomed sampans, and before the junk lost her way, and her clumsy wooden anchor, bearing four hundred-weight of rough rock to sink it, had taken the bottom, the long sweeps were sculling the sampans shoreward at a good rate of speed.

Oakes fairly whirled Marjorie up the beach to a spot where they had espied a pile of rocks that promised best as a defensible point.

The beach was boulder-strewn in many places, and in the particular place that they had selected the boulders were almost perpendicular to the sea-line.

One or two narrow cracks between the rocks wide enough to admit the passage of one person at a time led to the summit of the pile, which rose perhaps thirty feet above the beach.

For the rest, Oakes and Hemingway well knew that the moment the subtropical sun should play upon those

rocks they would become as hot as Tophet; so they motioned to Kow Lung to bring the water-cask.

With Marjorie once ensconced among the rocks, the two white men went hastily back to the raft for what they could best carry.

Oakes took the rifles and some of the loose "raffle," as Hemingway called it, while the tall Englishman wrapped the ammunition and what food he could carry in a piece of canvas, and, slinging his coat over his shoulder, seized the ax and scrambled back among the rocks, where he stood and passed things up over the rocks to Kow Lung, who promptly laid them in safety and rejoined Oakes on the beach.

They had to make two trips to get what little plunder they had from the beach up the rocks, and when they had had made the last trip they sank, exhausted, among the stones that at even that early hour had become almost unbearably hot.

Raising himself on his hands, Oakes saw the two sampans beach about four hundred yards below them. He drew one of the rifles to him and, after examining the magazine, threw back the bolt, clicked a cartridge into the chamber, and set the sight for four hundred yards.

"I believe I could do it from here," he muttered as he settled himself comfortably behind the rifle-butt; "and yet if there is any chance, even the remotest, of settling the matter without a fight, we must do it. We have Marjorie to look after. It must be a battle of diplomacy, and until that fails—Kow Lung," he broke in, "keep your head below the top of the rocks. They can pick you off like clams at low tide if you stick your gourd up like that—what?"

"No glood makee flight—Chinee-man can come too quai-quai. Got many men. Maybe so you wantchee makee talkee Kow Lung ash China-man what him say. Hey?"

Oakes nodded assent, and Kow

Lung sneaked down the narrow path to the edge of the cover, behind which he carefully secreted himself while he hailed the advancing sampan crews in a shrill, piercing voice.

They halted and a raucous voice answered him. Kow Lung howled to Oakes in a singsong voice.

"Him Chinee captain makee talkee. Him say this flight no good pidgin business. Him no wantchee kill *Yung-gwaizai*—foreign devils. Him say mebbe some you give Chinee mans all you got him lettee you go."

"We haven't got anything but—No! I'll be hanged if I'm going to tell him what we've got," he growled to Hemingway.

"Wait a bit." It was Hemingway who spoke. "We may be able to buy them off, Jim. God knows I hate to do it; but we have the stuff to buy them off with in those stones that I found in Peking. What do you say? Shall we offer them a part of them to let us alone? Personally I hate to give it to them, but I think we must do it—for—for Marjorie. Suppose we try it, anyhow?"

"If you were to offer them the whole lot of the jewels and everything else that we have in the world," said Oakes grimly, "you can't buy them off, and you know it as well and better than I do.

"If you offer them a part of what we have, they will immediately assume that we are keeping back the more valuable part. They will not keep their promises.

"Of course, you know these coast people better than I do, old man—we might offer them a ring or two. That will look as if we had taken them off our fingers for a ransom. Yes; let's do that. Try them with a couple of rings, Hemingway."

Hemingway nodded acquiescence and crawled off to the place where he had laid his coat on top of the canvas that held their little store of ammunition and provisions. Oakes was vaguely aware that his friend was tossing

articles aside in a frenzied way, and presently Hemingway came creeping back, his face white and his lips angry.

"Fool that I am," he said bitterly. "I put that box in the pocket of my coat when you gave it to me on board ship, and now the thing has gone. I suppose it is at the bottom of the sea. I must have either dropped it in the water when we left the ship or else it is somewhere on the beach. Anyhow, it's gone. We can't buy 'em off now."

"Maybe you dropped it somewhere up here," said Oakes hopefully. So they searched every foot of the little rock-pile, but with no success; and all the time Kow Lung argued and squabbled with the giant Chinaman at the foot of the wall of rocks. He was shrieking loudly now to Oakes for an answer to their proposition.

"You tell him, Kow Lung," shouted Oakes finally, "that we will give him nothing but bullets and blows, and that if he tries to attack us here in this place he'll lose all of his men in doing it."

"You can add, too, that speaking personally I will fill him individually so full of holes that he'll look like a Philadelphia transfer street-car ticket. I think that'll bother him some to translate," he grinned to Hemingway, who grinned in answer as he tested follower and bolt and ranged a half-dozen filled clips beside him among the rocks.

It did bother Kow Lung. They jabbered away for ten minutes in a series of grunts and squeals that would have made the Tower of Babel sound like a pigsty; and when it was all over Kow Lung crawled back up the rocks to say:

"More better lung lady stay more close. Alleady claptain say no lettee her go. Him say more better kill *Yung-gwaizai*, then take her and makee sell mandarin up river. Time White Flag war him buy Flench womans. Mebbe so him bling plitty girl him get many taels—gold taels. Can sell Melican woman to mandarin—"

"That," said Hemingway, white to the lips, "is cold truth. You have no idea, Oakes, what these devils are. Why, rather than have Marjorie fall into their hands alive I would kill her myself."

"While I am on the subject I want to caution you that if it comes to a close-quarters fight with them, keep your last two shots for your *fiancée* and for yourself."

"If they get her they will sell her as a slave to some up-country official after torturing us. Make no mistake about that. When More and I hit the headwaters of the Hwang-ho we got the story of the Chee Wan Mission."

"It had been attacked about three weeks before we came through the country, by the White Flaggers, of course—the Boxers, you know. The men were all killed and the women were carried off."

"We never heard what had become of them till about six months later. After the Pau-ting-foo fight a Russian officer, who had been raiding the country with a sotnia of Cossacks, found that three women had been exposed for a week in a bamboo cage, until a mandarin who had never seen a white woman bought them. They disappeared in his harem, of course. Yamen, you know."

Oakes's brown face whitened under the tan. He thanked God that Marjorie was too far away to hear this talk, and he quietly scaled down his sights to three hundred yards.

"Can you shoot, Kow Lung?" he asked quietly.

"My no can do. Can use knife plitty good. One time me carvee Chinaman eye out by hatchet. Time my tong flight in Canton-side. My come Canton-side. All Chinamans b'long tongs can use hatchet," and the boy grinned cheerfully at Oakes.

"All right. If you can't shoot there's no use my givin' you a revolver. What's he want now, Kow Lung?"

For the captain or leader of the Chi-

nese river looters was howling again for the services of Kow Lung.

The boy scrambled down the rock, and, obedient to Oakes's injunctions, called to the man to halt and talk from where he was. Presently he came back looking so genuinely scared that Oakes himself felt vaguely alarmed.

"Him say may be so you give pleecee woman, him go off in sampan. You no give girl, him kill all."

"What else 'd he say?"

"Him say if Kow Lung no makee true talkee, when him catchee Melican man then him take Kow Lung an' clut him mouth to here"—he indicated his ears—"cut tongue out, burn out eyes."

Oakes could not repress a shudder. He knew well what the future held for them if they fell into the hands of these savages. They must stand them off to the last; kill as many of them as they could, and then the very last shots he must use on Marjorie and himself.

Surrender, of course, was not to be considered. He knew from hearsay and from what little he had seen during a short trip to the Middle Kingdom, what Chinese tortures were.

He had once seen a man who for the trifling offense of lying to his mandarin had had his mouth cut as far back as the ears and his tongue torn out. He had paid a dollar unthinkingly once to have the man remove the bandages—and he had never forgiven himself.

He cuddled his rifle lovingly to his shoulder and said in a low voice:

"Kow Lung, you makee number one talkee to Chinamans. You tell him if Chinamans go back I no kill—if Chinamans no go back I kill one time so soon him makee move come top-side beach. Sabbee that?"

"My sabbee. That good *joss*. My tell him." And Kow Lung jabbered away for ten minutes.

At the end of that time they saw three of the crew move slowly up the beach obviously intent on gaining the cover offered by some rocks at the

water's edge a few hundred yards away—but on their flank.

"We'll put stop to that right now," muttered Oakes. "I don't propose to be flanked out of here until we are good and ready to leave."

He sighted deliberately at the leading man, who was farthest from him, and as soon as his sights came in line with the thick body he slowly pressed the trigger. The man fell with a scream, wallowing in the wet sand, beating the beach with hands and feet; and Marjorie, leaning over Oakes's shoulder, uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, Jim, how could you?"

Hemingway growled grim approval from his rock.

"A good shot," he said lightly. "God send for us this day that we do not miss."

Oakes fired again, and the second man sat down upon the sand shot through both hips. Then, turning quickly with what cartridges he had left in his magazine, he began to industriously brown with Hemingway the mass of the crew, who were standing thunderstruck upon the open shore.

Good cause had he to thank the years when he had spent his time and much of his spare money in rifle practise, and good cause, too, had Hemingway to bless the days on Wimby Common when he had sworn more than once at the weight of his carbine, contending foolishly, as he now saw it, that a Hussar needed cold steel alone and not rifles.

His captain in those early days had tried to sweat and swear the folly out of him, and that, together with the desire that every Englishman has to excel at all out-of-door sports, had developed him into a good shot.

He was not, though, a shot like Oakes, who inwardly blessed the active, open air life that his profession had compelled that gave him now the rock-like muscles to settle his rifle steadily, the delicate finger pressure without which no man can shoot, and above

all the instantaneous response of brain and eye and finger that enabled him to place those steel-jacketed messengers where they were most needed.

He saw five men go down, and he was vaguely aware of Kow Lung gazing at him in an awe-struck way that at any other time would have compelled his mirth.

"More better use gun than ax. Eh, Kow Lung?"

"More better." Kow Lung nodded grave approbation as he quietly stepped back of Oakes to avoid stepping on his shadow. "Ax good, though. My no see man shoot like that one time. Maybe so you can shoot all day; can keep Chinese mans black of sampan, an' no let him glet water; so makee him go 'way. Maybe so him all die."

"By Jove, that is a good idea. But even if we can keep them behind the sampan till dark, what can we do then—what can we do then?"

And all through the long, hot hours of the morning, while the two rifles held the sweating, swearing wreckers behind the sampan, his mind dwelled upon that phase of the problem that now presented itself to him.

They on their part were not silent. They had arms and the best intention in the world of using them as their scattered volleys told, but the range was long—for them—and their aiming was poor, and the bullets either tore up the sand between the shore and the rocks or whistled harmlessly overhead, making Marjorie duck her pretty head more than once to the ugly whistle as they passed.

"When you can hear them, they have passed you," said Jim quietly. "It's those that you do not hear that do the harm. Keep well down, Marjorie. If they see you it will give them an idea of the true range and they might get one of us by accident. In the mean time—I'll—just—see what I can do to stop—that."

"That" was a man of the crew who, encouraged by the cessation of the rifle fire from among the rocks, had

got a piece of board and with it was scraping a shallow trench in the sand, along which he evidently proposed to crawl to the shelter of the rocks, where he could have a flanking fire on the defenders.

The steel-jacketed bullet ripped its way through the loose sand, and they heard the man grunt from the force of the impact as he stretched out once and—lay still.

Hour after hour passed till noon was a thing of the past and the long shadows of the afternoon drew cool across the rocks. Suddenly Kow Lung rose to a kneeling position and stretched out his hand to the east.

"Take look see!" he whispered. "My think Kow Lung see smoke. Look see!"

It was smoke beyond all doubt. A thick plume of heavy, greasy black smoke fairly oozed above the line of the brush at the end of the island; a column of smoke that even the heavy sea-wind did not disperse.

"It's a steamer of some kind," muttered Oakes, bending once more to his rifle. "I only hope we can attract her attention. Here, Kow Lung—take the blankets yonder and—Here!"

He opened the butt-plate of his rifle and emptied into the hand of the waiting Kow Lung the little oil-can that all rifles carry in the hollow of their stocks.

"Put that oil on the blanket and set fire to it, Kow Lung. Make good fire. Good joss number one time. Sabee?"

"My sabbee." The oil trickled slowly over the end of the blanket, and for a moment Kow Lung cupped his hands as the tiny flame caught. It wound its way up through the light blanket, and presently Oakes, looking over his shoulder, saw a column of heavy black smoke shoot up into the sky behind him.

In that moment he was aware of a sudden stir behind the sampan. They, too, had seen the smoke at sea and, better than he, they realized what it meant.

Not for nothing does Great Britain maintain the most efficient coast guard in the world about her many beached possessions. Not for nothing do her ships guard the sea-lanes of the seven seas. The column of smoke shot fifty feet in air, and Oakes, seeing the sudden gathering of the men behind the sampan, knew that it could mean but one thing.

Afraid to launch the sampan for fear of the rifle fire from the rocks, they had but one course open to them. They promptly took it, and the two white men with dire misgivings saw suddenly the group break away from the boat in a wild attempt to rush the rocks with their knives.

Instantly the two rifles opened upon them with deadly effect. It was not the wild firing of recruits or of desk-trained men who do not know one end of a rifle from the other.

It was the cool, collected fire of men who had lived in the open and who could gaze unwinking into the very eye of the sun if need be, and they bent all their faculties to the task in hand.

It was no long-range shooting now, for the rear sights were laid flat; and shooting at the very feet of the rushing group, the two white men fairly dazed them with the blaze of their fire.

Five men got to the bottom of the line of rocks. The others had either run back to the sampan or else they lay between the boat and the boulder-strewn hillside.

That some were only pretending, Oakes and Hemingway were sure; but it was with the most confident air in the world that, seeing the men run in under the dead space of the lowest line of rocks, Oakes reached back for his revolver and passed it quietly to Marjorie. She leaned over a big rock to take it, and Oakes, bending over, quietly kissed her.

"Use it if you have to, little girl," he said. "It'll be over in a few minutes now in one way or the other. Give me that ax, Kow Lung."

Hemingway had been busily engaged in undoing the leather sling from his rifle. He twisted it deftly into a loop longer than the rifle itself and thrust his arm through it to the shoulder, grasping the rifle by the small of the stock.

"It's a great mistake," he growled, "to think that a clubbed rifle is any good. I'll show you a trick worth ten of it! Look!"

He thrust the sling-bound rifle forward, turning it as he thrust.

"Observe it, my son. The front sight is of forged steel an inch and a quarter high. If properly used it can cut a man's eye out as neatly as an operating knife—as I'll show you in a few moments.

"Now, then, Kow Lung, you tell 'em," he said nervously. "Tell 'em we're all set *and* waiting! Just a little farther to my right, Oakes. You cut right-handed, I presume. Most men do so when you have once swung to a cut; your left side will be defenseless—see? *Sodeska*, as our little friends up Kobe way say. Now, boy, you translate for me to that sea-thief yonder, and tell him that I say, as the old Johnnie said at the battle of Lake Regillus:

"Lay thou on for Clusium
While I lay on for Rome."

Kow Lung grinned somewhat yellowly and passed the ax as directed, and when, a moment later, Oakes, ax in hand, stepped into the narrow passageway at the crest of the pile of boulders, he was suddenly aware of a silent figure that squatted near him, an unsheathed butcher-knife in his hand.

"You want your share of it, too, do you, Kow Lung? I won't forget this, boy. Maybe so T'zai no can take."

Kow Lung grinned at the casual mention of the god of the Tibetan sacrifice and licked his lips. The next minute they were rushed.

Very quietly the rush was made, but as the first man came round the rocks Oakes swung at him. No other swing

was needed, for the light ax cut from left to right and caught the man squarely upon the shoulder, cutting him from shoulder to hip. At that moment Oakes turned berserk.

"Guard my back!" he shouted to his unhearing companions, for the turmoil and the shock of the fight drowned his words. Though they did not hear his words, they caught the full significance of his rush; for they both knew that in a fight like this, offense was the surest means of defense.

Hemingway followed his lead, though, more carefully, for he knew that he must guard his friend from those terrible knife-thrusts that shot upward at him, the white steel showing viciously as the long blades flicked to and fro across the mouth of the pass.

Twice Oakes went down, his foot slipping on the pebbles, and twice the six-foot Englishman stood over him, vast, imperturbable, thrusting that terrible rifle-barrel into the blood-stained faces of the mob.

It cut like a chisel as he thrust, and he always thrust for the face. Only once did he vary from his policy of strict defense, for he knew well enough that the ax was the real weapon of offense!

The rush of the hatchet men and of the men with knives, reenforced from the sampan, suddenly gave back for a space. There came a shout from below him at the mouth of the pass, and he saw the crowd open and close again behind a lithe, clean-limbed Chinaman who sprang to the attack.

He had neither knife nor hatchet, but a weapon more dangerous than either in that narrow place, for he carried an eight-foot halberd like those that are shown in the illustrated papers as carried in state parades by the King's Beefeaters in the Tower of London.

With the long weapon at the charge, he sprang up the pass at the tall, white man who stood guard over his exhausted friend, while Kow Lung, crouching at his feet, quietly collected all the rocks that he could reach and

tested the point of his knife on the ball of his thumb.

Hemingway never waited for that attack. With a soul-stirring shout that moved all who heard it, he leaped forward, thrusting as he leaped. The halberd, seized by the left hand at the moment of contact, was swept aside like a straw; and full and fair, thrust by the muscular arms with the weight of his two hundred pounds and the terrible impact of his down-hill rush behind it, the sharp sight and the long, clean muzzle went home in the soft tissues just below the chest.

Went home in those soft tissues and came out at the back, but no longer clean; and with a yell that was more of terror than of rage, the crowd shrank back down the hill, while Oakes, on his feet again now, joined Hemingway in his rush.

Slowly but surely the wreckers gave back, for no man could live beneath the whirlwind of blows and thrusts that the two men sent home in their very faces, and unlucky was the man who stumbled, falling into the quiet but deft hands of Kow Lung.

Slowly but certainly they stumbled back over the dripping rocks over which they had with such difficulty won their way ten minutes before. They well knew, though, that such demonlike fervor could not last, and they but waited for the breathing space that they knew must come.

It came, as they well knew it must; but in the moment that they gathered for the final rush that should end the two *Yung-gwasi* among the rocks, there came the crackle of rifle fire behind them, and they were suddenly aware that some one, and a very capable some one, too, had taken a hand in the game. They broke and ran for the shelter of the trees, leaving the little group breathless among the rocks.

It seemed to Oakes that they stood there for years before they saw the black bows of the steamer shove around the point that marked the entrance of the little harbor.

The volley from her decks had been fired from the vantage-point of the offing just beyond the point from which place the little squad of marines gathered on the fore-castle got a clear view of the beach and of the fore-shore. Oakes voiced his thanksgiving when he saw the steamer drop a boat.

A moment later some twenty men had landed with an officer upon the strip of sandy beach that had been occupied by his opponents a little while before.

CHAPTER X.

THE sight of the red tunics of the marines and the white-legged officer who leaped out knee-deep in the surf, too impatient to wait for the beaching of the boat, sent the red blood tingling anew through their veins.

A little while before the two white men had had the gravest fears for what the night should bring, for they had known that night would be the really crucial period for them, when the ready rifles would have been rendered useless by the darkness. Now, however, all their fears were dispelled like the morning fogs at sea when the sun sucks up the mists.

Standing upon no ceremony, Oakes and Hemingway fairly dragged Marjorie from her place of safety among the rocks and ran to the water's edge. A lieutenant of marines—Royal Marine Light Infantry—was standing by the bows of the boat, knee-deep in the surf, hastening the landing of his men. He stumbled ashore as the three came down the slope.

"My word," he said, holding out his hand to Oakes. "That was a narrow squeak, old man. Who are they?"

"God knows! Wreckers or pirates, it's all one on this coast. We were on the Futami Maru bound for Hong-Kong—"

"Yes, I know. We picked up her

longboat yesterday. We figured that if there were any other survivors they might have landed here. Those darned Chinese river pirates infest the whole coast from Kow Loon to Fung Chow. It's a good thing for you that we happened to be within reach—"

Oakes introduced him to Hemingway and Marjorie, and the youngster gazed with unmistakable admiration at her as Oakes with a most apparent air of proprietorship helped her into the boat.

Kow Lung, evidently curious as to the effect of the rifle-fire of the two white men, wandered slowly up to the beached sampan and bent over it in careful examination while the young lieutenant listened eagerly to Hemingway's succinct account of the fight.

"So you see it was just a question of how long we could stand 'em off. Of course, we would have changed our position after nightfall—good Lord! Look at Kow Lung!"

It was time. Kow Lung was flat upon his back on the upper beach and a burly Chinese pirate, who had sprung suddenly into life from the wreck of the sampan, was stabbing viciously at him with a seven-inch knife.

Even as they gazed, paralyzed by the surprise and suddenness of the attack, the blow went home and they saw, as the man tore off at full speed up the beach, the slim figure of the boy turn over twice in his agony, quiver, and lie still, the long knife still in the body.

A corporal dropped upon his knee and sent a vengeful bullet after the fleeing man. It caught him ere he reached the shelter of the rocks and dropped him. The three men ran hastily to Kow Lung.

"As dead as Julius Cæsar," said the officer of marines, dropping the nerveless hand.

Oakes said nothing. He remembered the faithful service, the uncomplaining endurance, and the indomi-

table pluck of the boy, and he raised the giving body in his arms.

As he pulled it into a more becoming posture on the sand-dune he heard a tiny metallic tinkle on a stone. He stopped, dropped the body, bent over, and picked up from the sand at his feet—the silver box.

He gasped the unmistakable surprise that he felt. Hemingway frankly swore. The officer looked at them inquiringly, and Oakes, not liking to display the feeling that instinct told him the other would attribute to nervousness, said nothing. He quietly picked up the box and dropped it into his coat-pocket and turned to his rescuer.

"What'll we do with our game?" he asked. "Bury it?"

"God forbid!" said the other piously. "Let 'em lie where they are. I don't propose to work my men overtime buryin' a lot of thieves who ought to be hung up as we nail hawks to barn doors at home. We'll bury your man, though. From what you say of him he deserves it if ever a man did."

The boat was sent back to the steamer and two men dug a shallow grave high above the scattered mangrove-bushes above the water's edge, where Kow Lung was left after a private and unofficial prayer by Oakes for the repose of his soul. Afterward a boat came ashore and took them aboard the vessel.

"I haven't asked you yet what your vessel is," said Oakes apologetically. "The truth of the matter is that events have come so quickly in the past forty-eight hours that I do not seem to have had time to breathe leisurely. What is she?"

"His Britannic majesty's revenue cutter *Arethusa*. We were running down the coast to Hong-Kong when we picked up a boat-load of men who reported that the *Futami Maru* had gone down. We ran over to where they said they were when the accident happened, and then Captain Stark thought that some of the other boats

might have landed on Fan Tee Island, so we came over on the off chance. Oars, men!"

The boat ran easily up to the star-board gangway, and the officer helped Marjorie carefully up the side. They were welcomed warmly by the officers grouped at the gangway, and were taken at once to the cabin, and Oakes, for the second time that evening, had to recount the details of the fight.

"By Jove, sir," said Captain Stark when he had pushed the decanter again to Oakes, "you don't know what you have escaped! Do you know what they would have done to you had they taken you?"

Oakes nodded quietly. Marjorie was frankly curious.

"You were in no danger of death, Miss Downs. They would have sold you as a slave to some up-country mandarin. You would have disappeared from the sight of civilization forever. You two men and Kow Lung would have been played with in some such playful way as putting you on a platform and cutting you up inch by inch with a saw. Oh, they're pleasant people in their idle hours!"

Marjorie forbore to ask any more questions except to ask Captain Stark as to his destination and when they would probably arrive.

"Hong-Kong," he said; "and we should arrive there the day after tomorrow if nothing happens, and I think upon my word that you three have paid your debt to fate for this trip. You deserve a respite."

When Marjorie had gone to the cabin that the thoughtful Englishmen assigned to her Hemingway drew Oakes off to the end of the long table in the wardroom, where they were alone. Oakes drew from his pocket the silver box and laid it on the table before his friend.

"Look here, Oakes," said Hemingway frankly, "I wish to have a talk with you for a moment. Here's this — thing — this darned thing — for I can think of no better name for it."

He tapped the box that had accompanied them in every misadventure since the day they left Manila.

"It has not even been opened. Well—peace be to his ashes—Kow Lung paid for it. He must have gone through my coat-pockets before we left the Futami Maru. I bear him no grudge. The cord is still on the box. Let's overhaul it and see if its contents are still all right."

Without waiting for his friend's acquiescence, he drew his knife and cut the cord and emptied the contents upon the green felt table-cloth. The mass glittered gaily enough upon the somber cover, and the two men could not repress a sigh of delight as they realized what ease and luxury that little heap of precious stones meant for them.

"I move," said Hemingway, "that when we get to Hong-Kong we have the things appraised, and then we can divide equitably. What I wanted to ask you is this: Were you in earnest in offering to send me to Mexico for your firm to look after your oil concession there? I tell you frankly it means a lot to me. Of course, I have made my pile now, as you Americans say"—he patted the pile of jewels—"but I simply cannot go home to England and settle down there. I would die. Die out of hand. I've got the habit. Don't you remember?"

"For to admire and for to see,
For to be'old this world so wide,
It never done no good to me;
But—I can't drop it if I tried."

"If I go home to London I can read the handwriting on the wall plainly. I'll be a typical little Englander, spending my life between my lodgings and my clubs. I want to keep away from there till my mental muscles, so to speak, have adapted themselves to my changed fortunes. Do you take me?"

"I do. I do want you to go for us to Mexico. I feared I would have to go myself and—well, I'm not quite ready to go—yet. As I have told you, we

have a very valuable oil concession near Tampico, and I rather fear that with affairs in their present chaotic condition in Mexico, that if the new revolution that is headed by General Huerta is successful, the concession will be sold to the highest bidder.

"If he succeeds he will need money, and he will not care how he gets it. He'll grab everything that is held by Americans that he can. You see, we are not so quick at resenting injuries as England is. We need a man on the ground, and I shall be glad if we can count on having you go there for us."

"I'll go," said Hemingway shortly. "You can count on me—absolutely." He stretched out his hand across the table. "And now go on deck. I think some one wants you up there."

He grinned engagingly at Oakes as that gentleman found his way up the steps, but as soon as the door closed behind his friend he crossed his arms and sat with close-set lips and unseeing eyes, staring at the bulkhead before him. There Wilson, the paymaster, found him when he came below, and the two took an observation—through the bottom of a tumbler.

Later, as Oakes and Marjorie walked the deck, he told her of the recovery of the silver box.

"I don't like to avow a belief in such nonsense," he said grimly; "but I tell you right now that I will not feel really at ease until we get the thing in some other hands than ours."

"It is merely coincidence, of course; but what that old Chinese priest told us on board of the Atlanta about it has certainly come true. It has brought nothing but ill-luck since the time we first saw it. I will feel safer when we land on the Hong-Kong Bund."

"I feel that you are right," she said softly. "I wish we were in port now."

There were still other reasons why Oakes wished they were in port, and he urged them so successfully and so pointedly that when Marjorie was

finally summoned by the steward to supper, which she had promised to take with the junior officers in the steerage mess, she went down with such a flood of warm color in her cheeks that the president of the mess came to Oakes with:

"I say, old chap, I've always heard that these seas were full of romance and all that, but I never saw any of it. It remained for an American engineer to round it all up on a deserted sand-bank in the China Sea. There's no use *our* hunting for it. Romance is dead." And he laughed slyly.

Oakes grinned and quoted:

"When all was said
Romance brought up the nine fifteen.

"Why, you fellows live in one day more romance than I can imagine. It is such an every-day affair that you do not even recognize it when you see it. You want to go home to England and raise spotted cattle behind green fences in Somersetshire and walk through green English country lanes to Sunday evening services. Say good night to a pretty girl swinging on a gate—moonlight night—moon as big as a cheese sitting on top of a haystack—tell the girl you love her—is that romance?"

And grinning he left his interlocutor wondering how Oakes could have read his thoughts.

Early the next afternoon they raised Hong-Kong. Oakes was standing with Marjorie when they picked up the pilot, and after a whispered colloquy he left her and made his way to the bridge. When he came back he said mysteriously: "Captain Stark says it will give him great pleasure."

They looked at him inquiringly.

"Gentlemen," he went on, "we will have to trust you to pardon the informality of the invitation, but I cannot wait any longer. It will give us great pleasure to have you all come to the office of the American consul to-morrow morning. To put it in the quaint but expressive words of the *St. James's*

Gazette: 'A marriage has been arranged between Miss Downs and Mr. Oakes to take place at eleven o'clock to-morrow.' And the deuce of a time I had arrangin' it, too."

He got no further, for with one accord they rushed him to the ward-room, where the king's sherry, which naturally enough was not sherry at all, but a very good *brut*, was produced, and both of them were made to respond to a rousing toast. They were a hospitable lot, those Englishmen, as most Englishmen are—away from home.

"I shall have to cable Burton about the Chenampho fiasco," said Oakes as they landed. "I will have to keep the cables hot till we settle what to do about that. I reckon first of all I'd better go see the Japanese consul. We'll take Marjorie to the hotel and then go and attend to this other matter and see if we cannot straighten the thing out. If it can be done without my going to Yeddo, why so much the better."

So, Marjorie being established in solid comfort at the hotel, the two men visited the office of the Japanese consul, where they spoke so forcibly that they induced that gentleman to cable a short but pointed message to the department of state and in less than four hours the answer was forthcoming, that owing to reasons, the precise nature of which it was impossible to disclose at present, the Japanese government had decided to postpone indefinitely the completion of the Chenampho extension but would reimburse the contractors in full of all moneys expended by them with interest to the first of the next month at six per cent.

Oakes drew an easy breath. "That," he said slowly as they found their way to the hotel bar, "lets us out without loss and I'm more than glad of it. Now my boy I have to undertake a more difficult piece of work than storming the capital of Rome even. I want to see the American consul about getting married. We want to be married under the American flag. Marjorie says that

since she is to become an American she may as well begin by being married on American soil. Of course diplomatically it isn't that, but it'll do.

Late as it was they stormed the consulate and made the desired arrangements with the jovial consul, so that eleven o'clock the next morning found Marjorie a trifle pale, but very charming indeed, with the consul's wife who would have it that no trouble was really a trouble—when she had talked with the lovely English girl and had heard of her adventures and who took entire charge of the arrangements, so that Marjorie laughingly told her she had made a mistake as to the bride.

"And now what are your plans?" asked the smiling consul when, the ceremony over, the little group of guests had gathered in the long drawing-room.

"Why, I mean to cable my partner in Manila that I want to run home for a couple of months if he can spare me for so long. Our contract with the Japanese government has fallen through, but we have some interests in the States that really require some attention. Burton's wife is coming out on the next army transport, so he will not want to go home so soon—"

"On an army transport? He can't be in the service, is he?" asked an Englishman.

"Oh no. The army transports are really liners that are run for the benefit of any civilians who have political pull enough to secure transportation on them and save the price of a ticket."

And he winked at the laughing consul, who winked ponderously in reply.

"Oh I say now! Aren't you rotting me?"

"Far be it from me. And when I hear from him I will arrange a trip home by way of Suez with the French galleries and London to top off with. You see my wife wishes her family to see what a really wild specimen of the *genus Americanus* she has annexed. I'm to be 'exhibit A.'—"

"And by the way, Hemingway," he

added, turning to his friend, "now that it is settled that you go for us to Mexico, it will be better and more comfortable for us all and far pleasanter for Marjorie and me if you can sail with us on the *Nigeria* this afternoon for home. We can go together as far as London and I will be able to go deeper into the matter of that Mexican business with you."

Hemingway nodded, his fingers tapping the table nervously. "By the way," he said, "now that we are going home together by steamer, let's send that silver box and all that it contains to London by express, and settle it all up there. If we sell the stones we can get far better prices there than we can out here, where stones are always more or less at a discount. If we send it by express we will be rid of all responsibility for it—and incidentally any more bad luck," he added under his breath.

They waited anxiously for the reply that should come to the cable that Oakes sent to Burton in Manila, and when it came Marjorie found another surprise, for it was addressed "Mrs. James Oakes, Care of American Consul, Hong-Kong," and all that it said was: "Saint James five one," which occasioned them much trouble till they could procure a Bible wherein Oakes, after tearing three pages out in trying to find the Epistle of Saint James in the Old Testament, was finely induced to turn to the New. Once discovered it read:

"Go to thou rich man. Weep and howl for the troubles that have come upon thee."

Whereat they both scoffed openly.

Remained but two things to be done, and on the first of these the two men were most insistent; that the silver box which rightly or wrongly they had begun to consider unlucky should be sent to London by express, there to be held till they should call for it.

To this at first Marjorie would not consent; but, seeing that her husband was really in earnest in his desire not to have the thing in their possession

during the voyage, she gave way gracefully, as all wives should, and the little parcel was finally deposited with the company for its final trip.

That afternoon they sailed on the Nigeria for Liverpool.

CHAPTER XI.

It was the southwest monsoon that took them out, and they interestedly watched the panorama of the shipping that was spread before their eyes as they passed out of the harbor eastward bound at last.

They loafed along the Indian Ocean, spent the usual hours in sight-seeing in the ports of the middle sea, perspired their way through the red-hot sandbanks of the Red Sea, and so at last, in the course of time, Algeciras and Gibraltar behind them with the wind of a cold northeaster whipping them in the face, backed with the ice floes of the Arctic and the weight of the North Sea, they came at last to their own place.

"It's good! It's good! There's no place like home when you have done your work," said Marjorie softly, clinging to her husband's arm as the ship staggered port and starboard under the weight of a huge swell that swung her like a hammock.

So at last they passed up channel and into the great docks that gaped for them, and finally taking the train found themselves that night in London, the haven of their rest, for they meant to spend a few days there before going down to Marjorie's people in Dorset.

Early the next morning while his wife still slept, Oakes met Hemingway in the office of the hotel. Hemingway was to leave that evening for Tampico and he wanted to say good-bye to his friend.

"It's a good thing that I did come with you on the Nigeria. If I had missed this steamer that sails today I could not have caught another

for three weeks. The Nova Zembla pulls out to-day."

"Yes," agreed Oakes. "There's another reason, too, why I'm glad you can get off so soon. From all that I can learn affairs are in a very bad condition in Mexico just now. Huerta is fighting Madero with all the forces that he can gather, and no one knows what the result will be except that they all regard Huerta as an adventurer.

"Then, too, Zapata is up again in the south. It seems to be a sort of a family row. Hittin' every head that is stuck out of a door, and God help the man who goes in as a peacemaker. He'll get the whole family on him. What time do you sail?"

"At three. The express offices will not be open for two hours yet, Jim, so I'll leave to you the matter of getting those jewels out and attending to all the details of their sale. As far as I can judge—and I am a pretty good judge of diamonds—at least the value of the rings, pearls, and bracelets is about equal to the value of the opal and ruby string.

"Some of the rubies have flaws in them. It is a pity to break up that necklace. Why not keep that as your share of the thing and give it to Marjorie? Wouldn't she like it?"

"She'd be crazy over it," said Oakes. "No, no, old man, we can't do that. We'd be robbing you. I'll get the box and have the jewels appraised and sell the entire outfit and deposit the money to your credit in the bank. What about the box? I tell you what, Hemingway, I'm in favor of sending the thing to the British Museum. If Dr. Emlen told us the truth about it that day in Shanghai they'll be glad enough to have it, and I want to get rid of it. What do you say?"

"Say? I say that I'll agree to anything so that it does not accompany me on any more trips. Of course it is all nonsense about its being unlucky but I'd give a good deal to know its history. Can you and Marjorie meet me at the steamer?"

"Why, of course. Do you think we'd let you go without a Godspeed? By-by till sailing time."

The two men shook hands warmly and Oakes went to the reading-room till it should be time to join Marjorie for breakfast. While he waited he wrote a letter to the office of the express company and sent it by a messenger to claim the package that he had sent from Hong-Kong.

He was very clear indeed in his own mind as to what he meant to do. He meant to take those jewels out of the box, place them in the hotel safe, and take the box to the museum as soon as he and Marjorie should have had their breakfast.

It had caused enough trouble—if, indeed, the box had caused it. So when the messenger returned he took out the jewels, wrapped the empty box in heavy brown-manila paper, tied and sealed it, and carried it to the office where he gave the jewels, tied in a heavy canvas sack, to the clerk for the safe. He took the box with him to the breakfast-room when Marjorie's voice over the telephone summoned him to meet her.

Breakfast over, he called a cab. She wondered a little when she heard him give the order: "To the British Museum."

"What are you going there for, Jim?" she finally asked, unable to restrain herself any longer.

"We are going to get rid of this silver box, my dear, if I never cock another gun. The blamed thing is an incubus to me, and I confess to a most uncomfortable feeling as long as it is in our possession. Yes—I said Professor Errol," he said to an obsequious attendant. "It is important that we see him on a matter of some urgency."

They were led down dark alleys, through rooms filled with the accumulated wealth of centuries that made them pause frequently to look at the contents of those wonderful cases, till finally they came out into a sunlit court on the far side of which stood a little

brick office opening from a long brick building that was covered with ivy in which a thousand sparrows nested noisily.

The interior of the office was littered with empty packing-cases, and at a long table two gentlemen were seated working industriously at copying papers; one from a great manuscript book that lay open before him, the other busily engaged in tracing a map from a huge atlas that stood open upon a low stand by the table.

As they entered a gray-bearded man came in from the study in the rear of the building. He carried in his hand the card that Oakes had sent in and he scrutinized it frequently as he slowly crossed the room. He shook hands somewhat warmly as he said:

"I am informed, sir, that you wish to see me upon an important matter."

Tentatively he looked his question.

"Yes, sir, I have a bequest that my wife and I wish to make to the museum. It is a little silver box that we were given under rather curious circumstances during a sea trip in the Orient. It sounds like a ridiculous thing to say it, but there is apparently a superstition connected with the box.

"They say that bad luck follows its owner wherever it goes, or some such folly. I really do not even know the superstition. Certainly, we have found the thing unfortunate—to say the least. Frankly, sir, we wish to get rid of it, and I thought this museum was pre-eminently the proper place for it. Did you know a Dr. Emlen, who was curator of the museum in Shanghai?"

"Very well indeed. I have for years maintained a correspondence, more or less desultory, with him. I understand that he lately met with a serious accident that, most unfortunately, terminated fatally. In his death we lost our very best corresponding member."

"I know all the details of that accident, sir. I was present a few moments after it happened," and Oakes told him a part of what had occurred.

Professor Errol's eyes narrowed to pin-points and his fingers nervously combed his long beard.

"And you say," he burst forth excitedly, "that Emlen said that this museum has been looking for this box for fifty years? Sir, there is only one box that the British Museum has sought for fifty years, and that box it has not sought in the spirit of a collector, but of a benefactor to the human race."

The two men who were seated at the table, attracted by the unusual excitement in the professor's voice, stopped their work and looked at him interestedly.

"Come into my private office, if you please, Mr.—er—er—Oakes."

He led the way into a little office at the rear of the building. Allowing Oakes and Marjorie to precede him through the doorway, he paused long enough to say to the two men at the table:

"I trust you will pardon me for leaving you in this way, gentlemen. I will return in a few moments. Ef-fendi Hashid," he said to the young Turkish officer who was busily engaged in copying some extracts from the copy of the Koran that Sir Richard Burton brought from Mecca at the peril of his life, and which is the pride of the museum to this day, "you will find that the quotation that you seek is not original with Mohammed. It is antedated by another to the same effect in the "Night Thoughts of Selid Kham," and the idea that he writes of so eloquently is referred to by Pryn-carnes, who wrote in Greek in 711 B.C., thirteen hundred years before Mohammed."

The Turkish officer voiced his thanks profusely. Professor Errol turned to the other inmate of the room.

"Señor Cardona, I am only sorry that I have not been able to put my hands on that monograph on sacred relics on which you place so much weight. It is a rare and very valuable

treatise. If you will kindly remain here I will probably have something of great interest to tell you in a short time. Now, if you please, Mr. Oakes." And he led the way to the inner office.

"We frequently have enthusiasts come here for information of the most intimate personal character that they cannot otherwise obtain. That young Turkish officer whom you saw me speak to has been here for the past two weeks, trying to discover from what original sources the Koran was derived. It is remarkable that most of our religious truths have come from the East. The Koran, for instance, is very largely a reproduction of the Book of Heaven, that was old when even China was young, and yet I can think of no way that Mohammed could have heard of it.

"The other gentleman, Señor Cardona, the middle-aged one, is a Mexican who has spent years in the study of sacred relics. He has given me much information about them. You, Mr. Oakes, who, I understand, have been in Manila, have you ever heard of the statue of Our Lady of Antipolo?"

"Nuestra Señora de Antipolo? Of course." Oakes nodded interestedly.

"There is not an American who has ever been in the archipelago who has not heard of that famous statue, before which every woman who longs for a child prays during the long *fiesta* that lasts during the first three weeks in May; the famous statue whose first home was Acapulco, in Mexico, whence it was sent with the great Spanish galleons sailing west across the wild Pacific waste to insure a calm voyage and a safe return to the plate fleets of King Philip.

"He has told me a great deal of the first trip that that statue made when the fleet of Alcazar went ashore on Timar and the crew drifted north on a raft and, first of all Spaniards, landed on the lost island of Cipango—which we now call Japan—and how

the Japanese to this day call their bread *pan*—the Spanish name—for they had never seen bread before the Spaniards landed.

"He also says that rumor has it that the statue itself is made from a tree cut on the fabulous island of St. Brandon—do you know it? The legendary island in the Atlantic that was settled by the saints and children of old time, which appears and disappears at will?"

Interested in his own discourse, Professor Errol led the way to a long hall that connected with the alcoves of the main museum, in which row after row of glass cases showed as far as the eye could see.

At the end of this hall a curtain cut off a little space from the main hall itself, and in it were placed several chairs. Seating Marjorie in one of these, Professor Errol motioned to Oakes to take a seat, and he himself sat down, leaning forward in his chair.

"Now," he said, "I have brought you here so that we should be free from any danger of interruption. Before I tell you anything or show you what I have to show you, I want from you a full and complete account of all your adventures from the moment when you first saw this box to the present time. Omit no detail, no matter how seemingly unimportant it may be."

So Oakes, beginning when Hemingway had come to him in his house on the Calle Real in Manila, told briefly but vividly his tale, and as he told it Marjorie amplified it from time to time.

They told of the plague on the Atlanta; of the delirium of the old *bonse*; of his death and of what he had told them about the box; of what Dr. Emlen had said and of his tragic end; of the labor troubles in China and the diplomatic struggle about the completion of the railroad; of the sinking of the Futami Maru and of the fight on Fan Tee Island; of their rescue by the Arethusa, and, finally, how

they had sent the box home by express rather than take the risk of carrying it with them, fearing—for they were now very frank about it—that there might be some grain of truth in all the superstition.

He talked for an hour, and when he had concluded his Odyssey Professor Errol, whose eyes had never left his face, asked briefly:

"And you say that you have never heard of this box before?"

"Never. Why?"

"Where is Mr. Hemingway now?"

"We are to meet him at the steamer. It sails at three for Santa Cruz in Mexico. Leaves on the Nova Zembla. Why do you ask?"

Professor Errol looked at his watch and sprang to his feet. "I would give much to talk with him. I simply must get his confirmation of all these details. And he must tell me what he knew of the history of the box before it came into your hands.

"You say he was a—a—well, we may as well call it a gentleman adventurer—before he met you? My dear sir, if my surmise is correct, I am not at all surprised that he has had no luck, as you call it," he added as an afterthought. "Can we see him?"

"If we go at once," said Marjorie, peeping at the open watch that lay in Professor Errol's open palm, "we should have a few minutes with him."

Professor Errol drew a long breath. "Come, then," he said. "We will get a cab and go. When we return here I will have much to show you and tell you. Let me ring for an attendant."

A soft-footed servant entered in answer to the bell. To him Professor Errol said quickly:

"Ambrose, call a four-wheeler for me and get the little square package from the table in the inner office. It is a small, square package wrapped in very dark brown paper, and it is on the table where the two gentlemen are writing. Make haste, Ambrose."

The servant left hastily. He knew his master. They heard him hail a

passing cab, and then ensued a silence during which no man spoke. Professor Errol rang the bell again. The servant reentered the room, looking somewhat confused.

"Hi arsk your parding, sir, but did you say the package was hon the table?"

"Yes, of course. Hurry, Ambrose. It is on the table where the two gentlemen are writing."

"Sir, they ain't no gentlemen there! They've gone, sir, an' there ain't no box on the table—"

Professor Errol sprang to his feet and rushed into the room that they had left a while before. Men and package were gone.

Astonished, he turned to Oakes and Marjorie. "This is overwhelming!" he said breathlessly. "Of course, I knew that sooner or later it was bound to be stolen—it is the history of the box. But it never occurred to me that it could be taken so soon. In fact, I did not for the moment remember that part of the tale. I know now, though, that some catastrophe is at hand—"

"Yes, yes—quite so—of course. Any one could see that. Now if you will sit down here and tell us all about it," began Oakes in a persuasive tone that made his wife look apprehensively at him for a moment. Then his own thought flashed through her brain, and she sat down quietly in her chair.

Professor Errol noticed his manner and laughed sardonically. "No, my dear sir, I am not crazy—not a bit of it. Tell Mr. Norton that I wish to see him at once. At once, Ambrose, and call another cab. I will wait here."

Though he waited, it was manifestly with great impatience, and presently a young, keen-faced man entered through a side door, hat in hand.

"What is it, sir? Did you send for me?" he asked briskly.

"Yes, yes, Norton. I must go to the docks on most important public business. You must take a cab that you will find at the door and go at once to the Turkish embassy and ask

for the Effendi Hashid, the military attaché. A few moments ago a package was taken from the outer office by one of two men—either by Effendi Hashid or by Señor Cardona—and it must be found. Describe the contents, if you please, Mr. Oakes."

Oakes did so in a few words.

"Do you understand, sir, what it is that you seek? I will tell you for your own further guidance what it is that you seek. This very day Mr. Oakes has presented to this museum, and there has been stolen from it a few minutes ago, *the box of Augustus—the thing that was Caesar's!* I am going now to see the man who gave it to Mr. Oakes. Now do you understand? Get it, if you have to go to the north pole for it. Go!"

No further word was needed. Electrified at the words of his chief, Norton fairly leaped at the cab at the door and was off down the street before the others had fairly realized he had left the room. Oakes started to speak, but Professor Errol cut him short.

"I ask your pardon, my dear sir, but time is most important just now. I see a hansom at the door. I will take that. I simply must see your friend before he sails. You and your wife can take another cab and follow me to the docks. The South Atlantic Transport Line, I think you said. The Nova Zembla. Meet me at the docks."

Before either of the two could demand an explanation of this mysterious conduct he was off, leaving Oakes and Marjorie staring, frankly puzzled, into each other's eyes.

"As mad as a March hare," said Marjorie presently. "They are all crazy, I believe. What a mercy it is, Jim, that he has not seen the jewels that you have. He would have gone clean demented over them. We must go, Jim. All the crazy people in the world must not keep us from seeing Mr. Hemingway to say good-by. There is a cab now. Hail it."

Jim did so, and a moment later the two were whirling down to the river

through the narrow streets to the dock offices of the South Atlantic Transport Company.

"There is Mr. Hemingway now, and I do believe that Professor Errol has hold of him."

It was true, and the worthy professor would not release his new acquaintance even when Oakes and Marjorie claimed him.

"You will make an affidavit, then, covering all the incidents that you know about. Thank you, Mr. Hemingway. Now just one more question—what?"

But Marjorie and Oakes, not to be done out of a farewell to Hemingway, pushed the professor aside, and the four of them were almost upset by a cab that whirled up out of the gray sunlight and, stopping almost at their very feet, decanted—Mr. Norton.

"It's not there!" he almost shouted, so obviously excited that the people in the street paused and looked at him and the "bobby" on the beat wandered toward that part in the most ostentatiously unostentatious manner.

"It's not there," he said again. Then, lowering his voice a little, he said to Professor Errol:

"Effendi Hashid was taken out of the cab very ill. He and Cardona left the museum in the same cab, and Hashid was taken ill. Cardona took him at once to the hospital. I telephoned there at once, and they said that he had just been admitted and that he was unconscious. Appendicitis is apprehended, they said. He had nothing with him but an umbrella—no package at all."

"Then Cardona must have taken it," said Professor Errol excitedly. "Either Effendi Hashid or Cardona took it—there is no other way—where does Señor Cardona live, Norton?"

"No. 11 Oldham Terrace. I'll telephone there, sir."

He dashed into a neighboring telephone-booth, and a few minutes later reappeared, casually smoking a cigarette. Pausing a moment to buy a

paper from a newsboy who ran between his feet, almost throwing him to the ground, he came back to the now excited professor, who was fairly raging at the enforced delay, and who was even angrier than before at the nonchalant manner affected by his subordinate.

"Well—well—Norton! Is this any time to—"

"It's all right, sir. I got 'em over the telephone. His landlady says that he gave her notice last week, and that he left her to-day to take the steamer to return to Mexico. She says that he has booked on the Nova Zembla to sail to-day."

Professor Errol gave a sigh of relief. Oakes and Marjorie, both talking at once, were excitedly telling Hemingway of the happenings of the morning when they heard Norton, who had opened the paper and was scanning the head-lines, give vent to a suppressed exclamation, and they saw him grasp Professor Errol so tightly by the arm as to make that gentleman squirm.

"Well—well, Norton! What is it? Read it out. Nothing of more than ordinary interest, I presume—there's our man, Cardona! See him! Over there—he is passing up the gang-plank now. Come, gentlemen, we will get him when he has gone on board and can no longer escape us. What was it in the paper, Norton?"

Norton said slowly, quoting the head-lines of the afternoon paper:

"*War!* Turkish troops cross the Bulgarian frontier."

The professor stopped as if shot, stopping dead in his tracks.

"I might have known it," he said slowly. "I might have known it. It was stolen this morning—to lift the curse—the curse of the world—what use to pray for international peace among the peoples? Come, gentlemen, we must get it at all costs. I will explain—it is our chance to make the peace of Dives come true."

He turned and dashed up the gang-

plank of the Nova Zembla, whose decks were filling rapidly with eager-voiced passengers.

The three men and Marjorie followed him wonderingly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE Mexican did not see Professor Errol approaching, and it was not until that gentleman laid his hand upon his arm that he noticed him. When he felt the grip upon his elbow he turned sharply, and had the grace to color warmly at the reproachful look that the old gentleman gave him.

"I did not expect this from you, Señor Cardona. I did not expect this return for the welcome I gave you as to a brother craftsman. Why did you take that package containing the silver box from the table in the museum?"

If Señor Cardona had ever had any intention of denying the taking of the box in question that intention was frustrated by the keen-eyed Norton, who, in frank disregard of all the rules of courtesy, laid firm hold on the light top-coat that hung on Señor Cardona's arm.

"He has it in his pocket now," he said in a low tone. "It is in the pocket of this top-coat now. Here it is."

He took from the coat-pocket a small, brown-paper parcel, so obviously the package that had been taken from the office table in the museum that day that each member of the party felt really ashamed to have detected in a petty theft one who bore so unmistakably the hallmarks of a gentleman.

"I presume that you heard what we said about this box," said Professor Errol, tucking the package calmly into his own capacious pocket, "and that your zeal as an antiquarian and as a collector of relics led you astray. I have seen one or two cases like this before. I am sorry—exceed-

ingly sorry, sir—because, you see, I trusted you. Have you any explanation that you care to make? I suppose I ought to give you in charge, but I simply cannot do that. I hope that the shame of having been detected in such a flagrant violation of the rites of hospitality will be sufficient.

"It is enough for me to have the box back. Mr. Oakes, I will now leave you free to make your adieus to your friend. This matter, sir, was not a personal one in any way. It is one that concerns the welfare of the world. You must pardon the vagaries of an old man, my dear *madame*," he went on, bowing before the surprised Marjorie. "I am over seventy, and my one lifelong ambition has been—this." He tapped his pocket. "I have worked and sought and waited for it as—as—as a lover waits for his sweetheart. It is my one hobby," he repeated, laughing.

"But what is it?" asked Marjorie. "Each time that you have started to tell us about it something has interfered. Tell me what it is that can make so simple a thing as this little box so much desired."

"The telling must be once again deferred," said Professor Errol, still smiling. "If you have no objection, I will take this box with me at once to the museum, where I will put it in the strongest safe that the place has till the government can take it over, and—then—I—will—rest—"

His voice trailed off into odd little silences, broken by his heavy breathing. They looked at him astonished, and suddenly realized that the strain and excitement of the morning had been too much for so old a man. Norton called the cabby who had driven him to the docks, and together they helped the old gentleman to the seat of the cab.

"I will take him to his rooms at once," said Norton, "and, Mr. Oakes, if you will come around to the museum in a day or two I am sure Professor Errol will be glad to see you

and to explain this remarkable occurrence. I do not know enough of the details to speak authoritatively. Good-by, sir. Go on, cabby."

The cab turned the corner and rattled off up the street, and Hemingway turned to Oakes.

"Well! Of all the confused, mixed-up affairs in which I have ever taken part this is the worst—look! There goes Cardona runnin' for his state-room like a rat chased by a terrier. Wonder what's bitin' him? There goes the landing-bell, old man! Good-by—good-by, Marjorie—"

As his hand tightened over hers the girl suddenly knew what her eyes had never told her before, and her face flushed warmly as she bade him farewell. For a long moment the tall Englishman stood looking squarely into her eyes, then he slowly bent forward and kissed her.

"It is good-by—really good-by," he said slowly. "As the old Romans used to say, '*Vale et vade*'—greeting and farewell. I am going to Tampico and—I am not coming back."

He gripped Oakes's hand warmly and fairly pushed them both down the landing stage. The little tug at the steamer's nose pushed her slowly out into midstream, and they saw the pilot on the bridge take the ship. A moment later she was passing down the stream toward the open, level floors of the Channel, and Oakes turned to his wife.

"I never even suspected it," he said enigmatically. Marjorie did not reply.

A little later, when they had seen the last of the red ensign on the Nova Zembla's taffrail as it passed around the last bend in the river, Oakes turned to Marjorie:

"Well, there goes another link in the chain that binds us—we can't see the old professor for a few days, so let's go to the hotel and get the jewels and take them to the best man we can find to have them valued. They're too valuable to leave in an office safe."

So they drove to the hotel, and, having got the bag, they asked the name of the best authority on precious stones.

"I would recommend Ellis & Wheeler, sir," said the clerk politely. "Their shop is just around the corner. I think you will find them very reliable. I know that Mr. Wheeler, who is their buyer, was buyer for Mr. Barney Barnato in the matter of the purchase of African stones, and his reputation is very high."

Oakes and Marjorie walked around the corner to the next street and, entering the great shop, asked for Mr. Wheeler. They were asked into an inner room, and presently they were joined by a fussy little red-faced man who, in a most courteous manner, asked their business.

"We were told to ask for Mr. Wheeler," said Oakes. "We wish to see him about the appraisal or the valuation of some precious stones. I am told that he is the best authority in England on the subject."

"I doubt that," said the little gentleman, laughing. "But I am Mr. Wheeler, very much at your service. I shall be very glad to be of service to you. Have you the stones with you?"

"Here they are, sir." Oakes pulled the bag from his pocket and emptied the contents upon the table before Mr. Wheeler, where the afternoon sun fell slantingly across the little heap of colored stones.

Mr. Wheeler first of all picked up the great necklace of rubies and opals and held it to the light, passing it from hand to hand while he carefully examined it in every conceivable light, first with the naked eye, and then with a glass.

Finally placing the necklace in a scale-pan, he weighed it carefully; then laid it to one side as he passed on to the examination of the rings, breathing hard as he worked.

He examined each one very carefully, laying each in turn by the necklace, and finally passed on to the

pearls. A half-hour passed in the examination before he turned to Oakes with a puzzled look upon his face.

"I cannot imagine, my dear sir, how you ever came by these. I have never seen their like. Would you consider it impertinence on my part to ask where they came from and how you came by them?"

"Not in the least," said Oakes frankly. "They are a part of some loot that came from a Chinese temple during the Boxer troubles of 1900, and belong to a friend of mine, who has asked me to sell them for him, as he has gone away. What are they worth, sir, at a conservative estimate?"

Mr. Wheeler looked puzzled for a moment and strode up and down the floor, swinging his glasses by their string.

"I am sorry to tell you," he said presently, "that the very greatest amount that any one would pay for these stones would be at the outside—four hundred pounds—"

Marjorie uttered an exclamation of incredulity. Mr. Wheeler turned to her, palms out apologetically.

"My dear *madame*," he said quietly, "there is not a genuine stone in the lot. It is the most flagrant thing that I have ever seen. Until you told me where they came from I could not understand it. I thought at first that you had purchased them, and I was about to advise you to report the matter at once to the police. When you told me where they came from that explained all—"

"I don't follow you," said Oakes, his forehead wrinkled with surprise and disappointment. "Are there no genuine stones in China?"

"Very few in the Chinese temples. The Chinaman is frankly a person who places great importance upon appearances alone. It is no unusual thing for them, even at their great state dinners and entertainments in Peking, to place handsome favors at

the dinner-place of each guest, and then after dinner to request the guests to return them.

"It is sometimes exceedingly embarrassing to the guest who has thought that the favors were personal gifts. They do the same thing in making gifts to their gods in thanks for favorable answers to their prayers.

"A valuable or rich gift, we will say, is given by some high official to a temple. A copy of it is at once made and the paste copy is placed on exhibition to show the richness of the temple. The result is that every rich gift has its counterpart in paste, and they are kept in ordinary glass-covered cases where people can see them, while the real gems are kept in an entirely different place. This very deception to which you have fallen a victim shows what a good plan it is for the temple. Your stones are each and every one of them—paste. I place the outside valuation at four hundred pounds."

"Thank you very much," said Oakes, speaking as a man stunned. "I am sorry to have troubled you. I suppose there is no possibility of a mistake?"

Mr. Wheeler shrugged his shoulders. "Consult any one else. Do not accept my one opinion, but I will stake my reputation upon what I have told you. Good morning, sir."

"If that isn't the very hardest luck," said Oakes despondently. "Poor Hemingway had counted so much upon what he would do when we sold those stones! I must cable him at once as soon as the Nova Zembla has had time to get to Santa Cruz."

The next day they went to the museum, but found to their disappointment that Professor Errol had not been in the office since the day before. Asking for Mr. Norton, they were told by that gentleman that the old professor had been seized with an attack of grip as the result of his exposure and excitement, which had really been too much for a man of his age,

and that he would not be able to see any one for several days.

Disappointed and upset over the episode of the jewels, they returned to their hotel, and it was not until after dinner that Marjorie, who had been really upset over Hemingway's loss, felt herself again.

"I am so sorry for him," she said for the tenth time. "He had counted so upon them to reestablish himself when he should come home to live—and then—they would have helped you, too—wouldn't they, Jim? But then you take *your* loss very philosophically," she said gaily, swiftly changing her tone as her husband slipped his arm about her and drew her to him.

"Why shouldn't I?" he asked quizzically. "I'm not dependent upon a lot of red and white and green stones for my happiness. It is the things that are unseen that make a man happy and contented. I'm sorry for Hemingway, of course, but—all the Chinese temples in the world are not worth—this."

Marjorie laughed as she returned his kiss.

As a matter of fact it was eight days before a telephone message told them that they could see Professor Errol in his office. They went to the museum and were shown into the same room where they had first met the old antiquarian. This time he was seated at his desk and made no attempt to rise.

"I trust you will pardon me," he said courteously. "I find that I am still very weak but I wished very much to see you in the matter of that silver box. I have not yet opened the package. I put the box as it was in the safe, and it has not been touched since the day we caught that miserable thief with his ill-gotten gains. You can never know until you hear what I have to tell you what a priceless boon you have bestowed upon the world in locking up this silver box. Will you kindly hand me that package, Mr. Oakes? You can see it in the open

drawer of the safe. Yes, that is it—the one in the brown-paper wrapper."

Oakes handed it to him and the old man, laying it upon the table, cut the cord with a pair of desk shears. Tearing open the paper he held up the package and emptied out upon the desk before him—a tin cigarette box that, falling open, covered the desk and floor with sand.

Thunderstruck, the old man fell back in his seat, pale and shaking. Oakes sprang to the table by the window and pouring a full glass of water from a caraffe that stood upon it, returned and held it to his lips, coaxing him to drink as one coaxes a child.

"Again—again—again! Am I always to be deceived? Am I never to find the thing that I have sought for fifty years—and a week ago I had it in my very grip and did not know enough to keep it. Don't you see, sir? Oh *madame*, is it not clear—that man Cardona *did* have the thing—the war between Turkey and Bulgaria proves that Hashid really took it first and then Cardona was with him in the cab and when Hashid Effendi was taken into the hospital Cardona took it from him. By the way, Hashid has since died—the virus still works—and then Cardona wrapped up this box in the paper that held the box so that it would look like the real package and sealed it even with the same colored wax, while he sent the real box by post or else took it with him on the Nova Zembla—Who is that at the door? Come in," and he sank his bowed head upon his hands and trembled as though in an ague.

An attendant entered carrying a blue telegraph form.

"Sir, a messenger boy has just brought this wire from the hotel. He says that the *commissionaire* at the hotel told him to bring it at once to Mr. Oakes. It is a cable message."

He held out the paper.

"How in the world did he know we were here?" said Oakes, opening the envelope.

"He was standing by us this morn-

ing when you told the porter where we were coming," said Marjorie. "Don't you remember the porter asked you where to?"

"Oh, yes." He opened the message. "By jove, professor! You are playing in luck this day! The message is one that will interest you! See, it is from Hemingway! Listen!

"SANTA CRUZ, Mexico.

"Have just landed. Cardona shifted packages on you and still has silver box. Shall I arrest him for theft?"

"HEMINGWAY."

"Tell him yes—yes—yes," said the old man panting in his excitement. On his lips there was a little froth.

"I must have it if it costs a fortune. It must be placed where it cannot again be stolen—The Curse of the World—Carnegie is wrong—all the peace advocates are wrong—get it—The Curse of the World. Cable at once, Norton! Shields! Come quickly—you must go—"

He sank back tremblingly in his chair while Norton thrust a glass of brandy to his lips. As he coughed above the liquor he forced out between the swallows, as though each word were to be his last—

"Get it—Norton cable at once to the British minister in Mexico—he knows—the thing must be got and locked up for the sake of the peace of the world. Do you understand? I do not want it for its own value. The safety of the world depends upon it. Did you carry it with you on your travels, Mr. Oakes?"

"Indeed we did not. As long as we did we had trouble wherever we went. We got superstitious about it.

"Aye! That's it—very good, sir, very good! Go on."

"So we shipped it by express from Hong-Kong to London. Why do you ask?"

"Merely because I would dearly like to know what befell those unfortunate persons who had the handling of it in transit. This box that we have lost has been the traditionary cause of all the

trouble that has existed since the time of Cæsar—Tiberius, I mean.

"When it has fallen into the hands of individuals it has caused loss and death and suffering. Internationally, war, pestilence, and famine has followed it as slime follows a snail, and when it has been carefully hidden away by the few who knew of it, it has always been stolen.

"Tradition says that it has always been stolen every seven years and that some international calamity occurs then. Certainly, it seems so. It is said to be the cause for the existence of the plague and the cholera. They run in seven-year cycles, you know. They are supposed to follow the tracks of the Wandering Jew—"

"But what is it, sir. The Chinese *bonse* told us that it is accursed—"

"He was right. If there is anything in this world that is accursed then it is this silver box," said Professor Errol. "If it be possible for inanimate objects to carry plagues, a cause of death, a cause of war—then it is this. And, to be perfectly honest, I am not at all sure that tradition is wrong.

"We know that a coin can carry germs of disease and death so small that we really cannot even imagine them. Synthetically, if I be shown the Atlantic Ocean I can argue back to the existence of a drop of water. If we know that a coin can carry so large a thing as a germ, does not logic tell us that the greater must contain the less? Why then can it not carry something infinitely less tangible?"

"A mental germ, so to speak, that by some twist or turn or perhaps a curse laid upon it by the Almighty shall be potent forever to work harm—just as a microbe does for a little space.

"Superstition has it that this silver box was with Attila, the Scourge of God, was with the Moors in Spain when the Crescent so nearly triumphed over the Cross for so many years; was with Saladin when the Saracen held the Holy City.

"Then there is an hiatus—no man

knows what became of it or where it was during all the years when Europe was in darkness—probably with Genghis Khan in the East.

No doubt it was still working like the poison in the egg of the fabled cockatrice that killed all it looked upon. Hand me that long case behind you if you please."

Oakes picked up the long glass-topped mahogany case that he pointed out and laid it on the desk before the old curator whose hand passed tremblingly from compartment to compartment. Finally his hand hovered over a small square case. He opened it and took from it a small silver coin which he handed to Oakes.

"Examine it. Examine it carefully. It is a tetradrachm of Antiochus—silver—look at the design on the obverse—note it well. Do you remember the scratches that you described so accurately as being on the inside of the box?"

"Yes—"

"Those undecipherable scratches that meant nothing to you would have been as plain as print to my trained sight. They stood for Cæsar Augustus Imperator—"

"And then—still you have not told me—what is this box that you speak of?"

Like a very tired old man, Professor Errol leaned back in his chair.

"My very dear sir when I have told you what I have told you there remains but little. I have told you what should clear the matter up if you had ever heard of this box. What would you say if I should tell you that this box—this silver box, as mythical for years as the Holy Grail that Galahad sought of old, is older than that very Holy Grail.

"That silver box that was stolen by the Mexican Cardona has passed from land to land; from race to race for two thousand years, bearing God's curse of war and famine with it. It has seen the Roman soldiers storm the walls of Jerusalem! It has seen Judas Iscariot flee from the temple after—after he

had flung down the very silver of which the box is made at the feet of Caiaphas, the high priest, telling him to take it back, for it was the Price of Innocent Blood—"

Both Marjorie and Oakes drew back from him as they would have drawn back from a maniac.

"Why—what do you mean? Are you— What is—"

"It is the Price of Innocent Blood. It is the silver that was paid for man's salvation—"

"For man's salvation? Still I do not understand—"

"No? It is very simple. Do you not understand, sir, that that very box that I have sought so long is actually made of the thirty pieces of silver that Judas Iscariot took back and would not keep—the silver that was finally used to purchase Acedama, the Field of Blood where no grass grows to this day. Why for twenty centuries the priests have taught that certain virtues attached to certain holy relics like the fragments of the True Cross and the Holy Veil of Treves—can you not see, now, why this thing has carried a curse—"

"If it is true—if it can be true—" Oakes's voice was very low and solemn. "Do you really mean that this remarkable tale is true? That the box is what you say it is?"

The old man nodded, too weak and exhausted for further speech.

"We will come back at some time to-morrow when you have had time to recover from all this excitement. I am sure it has been bad for you. What in the world is that newsboy yelling about? Look at the crowd. Open the window some one—"

It was Norton who threw open the sash so that the raucous shout of the newsboy filled the room:

"Revolution in Mexico!" the boy shouted: "President Madero murdered in cab on way to palace by agents of Huerta—all the details of the brutal crime—"

"There," the old man at the desk

sprang to his feet trembling with excitement. "There—the infernal thing is loose again—and could we have locked it up there might have been peace in all the borders—peace for men and women to live and work and spend their lives in happiness and all prosperity as God ordained from the beginning—to have lost it! I cannot bear it—my one chance to have brought universal peace into the world—cable, Norton—cable. Tell them to send it—there can be no peace till it is gone—the *Thing That Was Caesar's*."

The last words were almost a shout. He slipped back into his chair sitting sidewise and Oakes looking at him saw that his face was gray and cold. The man was dead.

Norton sprang to lift him and laid

the long body on the divan. The young American took his wife into his arms where she cried quietly.

"We will go now," he said after a time.

A little later, while driving home in the cab, he read the head-lines that gave the details of the most brutally unnecessary murder in all modern history—the murder of Madero.

His exclamation made his wife look up.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"I wish the thing had been kept locked up here," he said gravely. "The devil, I suppose, will now break loose in Mexico. We've got trouble enough there now."

He took his wife in his arms and kissed her.

THE END.

AH! HOW SWEET IT IS TO LOVE!

AH, how sweet it is to love!

Ah, how gay is young desire!

And what pleasing pains we prove
When we first approach love's fire!

Pains of love be sweeter far
Than all other pleasures are.

Sighs which are from lovers blown

Do but gently heave the heart:

Even the tears they shed alone

Cure, like trickling balm, their smart,
Lovers, when they lose their breath,
Bleed away in easy death.

Love and Time with reverence use,

Treat them like a parting friend;

Nor the golden gifts refuse

Which in youth sincere they send:

For each year their price is more,
And they less simple than before.

Love, like spring-tides full and high,

Swells in every youthful vein;

But each tide does less supply;

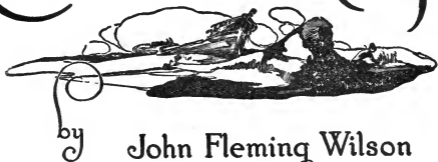
Till they quite shrink in again.

If a flow in age appear,

'Tis but rain, and runs not clear.

John Dryden.

Creation Reef



by

John Fleming Wilson

I.

THE Alaska salmon season was closed. The last case of bright tins had been stowed into the hold of the big ship *Indian Star*; the manager of the cannery that stood in the tidewash under the hill locked his office door, tossed the key into the water, and waved his arms toward the ship.

Captain Merkel waved back, a small boat came out for the last party of us, the anchor chanty rose into the colorful air, sails dropped from the yards, and on the strong stream of the ebb tide we swung out of our summer's harbor and joined the great fall flight of the fishing fleet southward.

"That ends this trip," said Manager Evans, grimly surveying the crew he had fought with and ruled for five months. "And I'm glad of it!"

"So am I," said his wife, reddening as she saw her husband's eyes follow the slim figure of Meta Braun, his stenographer.

"We'll make the Golden Gate in sixteen days," the captain interrupted. He hadn't observed his superior's daily life for several months without gaining a deep sympathy for Mrs. Evans.

As one man to another, he saw no reason why he should specially blame

Evans for liking Meta, whose youth was spiced with quick wit and a sufficient dash of the flirt to make her worth watching.

But he hated to see Mrs. Evans lose her temper. She flushed so slowly and painfully under her tan, and when an outburst did come lost her good looks for a week. And she was exceedingly strong and beautiful.

"Yes," he went on deliberately, "we'll fetch down in sixteen days with this nor'wester whooping us along."

Meta Braun drew in a long, easy breath, glanced upward at the drumming sails, and looked directly at Mrs. Evans.

"Only sixteen days more!" she said with an almost imperceptible drawl that brought the color again into the other woman's cheeks.

"And then?" demanded Rolf Anderson, the head bookkeeper.

Miss Braun glanced at him and shook her head. "I don't know," she replied with childlike wistfulness. "You know I hate to go back into an old office after this being out in the open and seeing the water and the mountains."

In that moment Mrs. Evans's deeper instincts told her that Meta Braun was really lovable, that she wanted

care and a little mothering. Impulsively she touched the girl on the shoulder.

"We'll all go back next summer, Meta, together."

"I don't know whether I'd care to come back," was the reply in an indifferent voice. Thus the moment of reconciliation passed.

The Indian Star managed a brilliant run to Dutch Harbor, swept through the Pass into the Pacific, and fled down the slope of the world toward home, now lifting a sister sail on the horizon and calling to her by signals, now seeing far-away lights at evening to mark the position of still some other cannery tender.

"We shall see Mount Tamalpais in eight days," Merkel triumphed at the dinner-table.

"H-m!" said the chief mate, staring into his plate. His tone was indescribably cynical.

The captain glanced at him sharply, raising his eyebrows in silent interrogation.

Nelson nodded back. "And it's the change of the moon, too."

So passed the word that the wind was due to haul against us and make a foul ending to our voyage.

That night a heavy squall from the southwest carried away the foretop-gallantsail and made a hard watch of it for the crew, reenforced as they were by the fishermen and cannery helpers.

In the gray of the forenoon Merkel's skill and Nelson's terrific driving energy availed nothing. At noon the Indian Star was riding to the drag of her cable, dismasted, with smashed decks, out of the track of all ships.

Out of the forty persons aboard a dozen had been swept overside, including the captain, who went over with the broken spokes of the wheel still in his faithful grasp.

I myself felt the disaster beyond repair. What hope was there for us in a sinking and helpless vessel, adrift on the loneliest ocean in the world?

There wasn't even the slim prospect of making land in the small boats; the mate and I figured that we were eight hundred miles from the coast—an impossibility in the storm that threatened to rage for weeks to come.

We debated it up and down during that miserable day until the fall of night made up a doubly dreadful scene.

"Luckily, she rides high and doesn't take any water over," Nelson said. "But as she fills up"—he knuckled the table furiously with his brine-drenched hands—"why haven't we a ship left? God!"

At that moment, as if invoked by the appeal, entered the cook, a Chinese known to us as One Hop. He bore in his slender brown arms a steaming bowl of soup. This he deftly adjusted in the fiddles and then remarked imperturbably, "*Chow!*"

Nelson stared at him, and then nodded. The routine of life was resumed. I dragged Evans and Mrs. Evans out of their room, where they were foolishly trying to pack valuables; I found Meta Braun sitting very quietly on her bunk, and brought her, too, out to sit at the reeling table. We ate ravenously, warmed by the hot soup.

"There's one thing," Nelson remarked with a curious inflection of humor, "we can't starve with all this fish in the hold."

Evans nodded sourly. His wife said nothing for a moment, but seemed suddenly shocked.

"And—and we're short of provisions?" she demanded, turning pale. "How—how long will we be, Mr. Nelson?"

The mate—now, of course, in command—fell into profound thought. When he spoke it was gently, almost as though he wished to save himself from the pain of too sudden realization of the truth.

"Not long," he said. Then he smiled reassuringly, competently, and left for the deck. I followed him, to stand by the stump of the mizzenmast

and there cling to the newly stretched lifelines and peer into the darkness.

It seemed as if that darkness moved past us in a terrific and steady stream, as if it flowed from the very heart of night.

The wreck rode to the drag of the cable in uneven swings. Now she took a wave on the starboard bow, now on the left. Once in a while a sullen crash and sharp quiver of the hulk told of a surge met squarely.

Through the heavy glasses in the ports of the low deck-house came a slight glow, showing that the survivors of the crew still felt confidence in their shelter.

"She's riding it well!" I cried in Nelson's ear.

"Not long!" he bellowed back. "Ship's old—leaking—sea rising."

And then we were joined by a third figure, Meta Braun. She emerged from the companionway and was outlined dimly against the sheen from the open door.

Nelson—we must have been invisible to her—waved his arm in useless protest against her risking her life on the careening deck. She stepped out and we caught her between us.

To my amazement, she was not trembling. She balanced herself easily on the streaming planks, and her tones were steady when she said: "Will the ship go down to-night?"

Neither of us answered the query. Meta went on presently: "You see, if the ship is going down, I want to be up here." The feeling was natural; I sympathized. But then she added an amazing reason: "It would be awful while I was drowning to be grabbed by Mrs. Evans."

"Well," said Nelson quickly and decidedly, "we're safe enough for to-night." He stepped into the darkness and started to claw his way forward to the half-deck.

Meta Braun crept closer to me. I had never paid her much attention, apart from an occasional admiring glance, but in this new relationship I

felt that it was too bad that it was only during the windy blackness of what was likely to be my last night in this life that I had realized the desirability of love and returned affection and a woman by a bright fire.

"I wish," she said very distinctly, "that you would put your arm around me and hold me very tight—just a moment. You see, I'm so afraid I'm going to be scared!"

I took an extra turn of the lashings about us both, and she snuggled into my wet arms and put her head on my shoulder. So we stood for five minutes, two atoms in a world of murk, swept by the steady and unflinching stream of the wind and dashed upon by stinging spray and shaken terribly by the dying throes of the strong ship. Then she twisted herself from my arms with a whispered "I'm all right now!" and went below.

When Nelson crawled back, a few moments later, I could perceive from his tones that he had discovered some new peril to us. We leaned toward each other around the staff of the broken mast and he put his lips to my ear.

"Something is going to happen! The ship's not behaving the same—no chance for the boats—breaking up."

My own senses told me he spoke the truth. The wreck of the Indian Star no longer rode so freely. There was a curious drag now and again, a subsidence of her huge mass without a proper recovery.

Nelson and I stood a little while together, peering into the pitchy darkness and trying to feel what had happened. Then I saw something that made me gasp. A black, mountainous surge that rose right above us suddenly flashed into white, and the roar of its breaking was reenforced by other roars.

The deck under our feet shook as the hulk struck in the surf, and Nelson and I plunged down the companion-steps and into the cabin just as another terrific comber broke and submerged us under untold tons of water.

The old ship rolled far over, and then righted swiftly, only to roll furiously over to port again. Then she was lifted up and let down to strike once more.

It seemed an hour that we stood in the dark and reeking cabin waiting for the end. It came in a wild rush, amid the crashing of heavy timbers, the snapping of teakwood planks and an inrush of foamy water from above.

And the very end was a subsidence of the racket. The motion ceased. Nelson turned up the flickering wick of the bulkhead lantern and we stared at each other—the Evanses, Anerson, Meta Braun, and myself.

While the gale still bellowed overhead and we could hear the swift rush of water past the ship's side, we all distinctly heard the voice of Nelson saying: "Land! Land! We're ashore, by all that's holy—and *there's no land here!*"

"Are we dead?" demanded Meta shrilly.

The cabin door slid back resoundingly and a half-dozen figures threw themselves down among us. It was part of the crew, and they were shouting:

"Land, sir! Go ashore, sir! Get away from this wreck before she breaks up!"

Then Nelson resumed his duties as master of a vessel and, with an alert yet composed step, left the shattered cabin for the deck. The crew clambered after him. I was afraid to investigate, for there *was* no land in these latitudes.

II.

It was land, as we saw in the first glimmer in the morning. The wreck of the Indian Star had been driven across hundreds of miles to strike on a small, uncharted islet, whose outline was that of a cock's comb. The miracle of that was lost in our thankfulness that the shore had been sheer enough to allow the heavy hulk to be driven up beyond the heaviest surf.

We clambered over the side and dropped to the shale just so soon as the light was sufficient. Nelson assembled us in the windy dawn and addressed us solemnly.

His remarks were made with the tilted hulk as a background—a grim commentary.

"We're on an island that no one ever heard about," he said. "How we got here doesn't concern us now. But we *are*. The Indian Star is a total wreck, so entire that we must hasten to secure what provisions may be left. And"—he lowered his tones—"this islet is absolutely barren, so far as I can tell now. So we *must* get provisions off the ship to last us until we are picked up."

Our commander stopped a moment here, and then said with unaffected simplicity: "God help us all!"

Examination of the wreck soon showed us that what we would save from the sea must be quickly saved. One Hop's galley was gone, and with it the gear. The lazaretto was a mass of sand and brine. All told, we couldn't accumulate more than enough flour and biscuits to last us a month.

Evans surveyed the little heap lying under the rough shelter we had built out of wreckage and smiled at his wife. "Salmon!" he murmured. "Two thousand tons of salmon, and that's all!"

She nodded, brushing her hair wearily from her eyes. "Yes; and Meta and I walked pretty nearly all the way around the island and, Tom, there isn't even a spear of grass!"

"Volcanic," Anerson explained briefly.

Now we all knew the history of the rise and subsidence of volcanic islands in Bering Sea, and Anerson's commonplace remark brought a pallor to Mrs. Evans's face that gave me a slight glimpse of all that lay ahead of us of fear and dread and the incredible toil of enduring a vacant horizon.

But no more was said until One Hop had succeeded in preparing us a meal

that looked oddly scant and insufficient after the somewhat plentiful fare on the ship. However, everybody showed good temper, and the sailors worked hard and willingly, difficult as it was in the high wind.

By nightfall our shelter was fairly complete and dry; we had picked up plenty of salmon cases spewed out of a great hole in the wreck's side; Nelson had personally directed the gathering of broken planks for fuel, and my part had been to plan storage places and prepart for the safekeeping of our salvage.

Luckily, we had our clothes and the women the small trinkets that make existence less wearisome. We also had plenty of bedding, even for the sailors.

That evening, after a hearty meal on salmon, Nelson and I withdrew from the rest to consider our future. It was gloomy enough.

"We're down the latitudes pretty well," he told me. "But I'm blessed if I can figure it closely. Look at that current that sets past that little point! It might ha' fetched us a couple of hundred miles farther south than I reckoned."

He glanced at the inky sky and shook his head. "And it's going to blow some more. The wreck'll be gone in another day, my son."

"I suppose no ships ever take this slant, either," I suggested.

Nelson sniffed. "Right you are; they don't. You can see that this island is as bare as a skull. No bird ever roosted here; there's only a few muskels on the rocks, and—well, human nature on a bare rock like this isn't what it is in a city. Evans had trouble enough with the men while we were at the cannery. We'll have hell here. And the women!"

In the windy dusk we contemplated our irremediable fate.

"One thing," Nelson resumed presently; "there are a couple of fishing-boats stowed in the forehold, just under the hatch. If we can, we'll fetch 'em out to-morrow."

"There isn't a compass left," I said bitterly.

"Ah, we have the stars," he said simply.

So we all lay in the lee of our miserable refuge and slept. In the morning I wakened to find Meta Braun sitting beside me. It was barely light, but the air was almost warm.

"The sun will shine," she remarked.

"Then we'll save more stuff," I assured her.

"Salmon!" she breathed.

"Oh, we can catch fresh fish," I returned.

"But we'll never have any bread or any butter or any milk or any eggs!"

"Look here!" I said sternly. "This is better than being in the sea-ooze. Be brave!"

"Can I be brave?" she cried.

Appeared at that instant One Hop, silently holding out to her a toasted biscuit with a freshly opened can of salmon, warmed.

"Littee missee ketchum chow, more better," he murmured.

So we ate our breakfasts and prepared this time to dig the last treasures out of the wreck. Our whole salvage didn't amount to much—a very much smashed twelve-foot skiff, a lot of rope and wood, nails and oarlocks, and a few carpenter's tools, canvas, and, most precious of all, a lamp and a case of heavy oil.

Evans and Mrs. Evans checked it all up. "We can build a boat out of this, and we've provisions enough for years, if the salmon will keep, and I think it will, for we canned it ourselves, and you all know it was good fish well packed."

Mrs. Evans held out her small, perfect hands to the little blaze by which we sat that night. "It is cold," she murmured. "Captain Nelson, will there be a hard winter here?"

"No," said Nelson; "we're in the semitropics—no snow at all."

"That will be better," Meta put in. "I suppose it's the gale that makes us so chilly."

"Yes," agreed Nelson. "But the storm is over for this time." He sighed. "But the Indian Star is gone, too."

A couple of the sailors stepped up from the darkness that rimmed the fire and asked for a word.

Permission given promptly, the man stated that he and his mates felt that there must be no misunderstanding of their position.

"You see," he explained, "some one has got to travel on and find a ship to take the rest off. We've been talkin' it over, sir, and we can fix up that skiff plenty good enough to fetch *some-where*."

I saw Nelson's face grow wooden. He merely nodded. I, as well, knew what was coming, and I knew, as well, that the logic that the crew would use was irrefutable.

The speaker's face hardened also as he proceeded:

"The skiff and—"

"And," repeated Nelson, "what else?"

It was an extraordinary moment. Destiny was at the door, demanding her rights. The seaman lifted his weather-burnt countenance to the dark firmament, as if in silent appeal to the justice of fate. Then he said bluntly: "And the flour and biscuit and such, sir."

It had been said. We were to be left without either boat or other food than tinned fish on an absolutely sterile islet in a lonely sea. And this was right and proper—the equity of the sea.

The damaged skiff could carry only the eight survivors of the fo'c's'le hands. It would never carry us of the afterguard, much less the women. And in order that the skiff might stand a chance of arriving somewhere—on which our own safety also depended—its crew must have bread and whatever else we had that could give them strength for their voyage.

There was a profound stillness. Evans opened his mouth several times,

but said nothing. Mrs. Evans merely stared at the shadowed figure of the grim sailor, while Meta Braun seemed lost in thought. Nelson finally spoke abruptly, as a commander to his men:

"Take the skiff and the grub. You ought to make the Hawaiians, with any kind of good weather. Tell 'em we're here. I'll give you the approximate bearings. Start as soon as the skiff is repaired and the weather fair. Go south."

"Aye, aye, sir," came the hoarse growl of the men, and they retired to their own little fire, where One Hop blinked over his little pipe in true Oriental acceptance of fate.

Anerson groaned. We all glanced at him. His somewhat saturnine young face had taken on a deeper hue than usual. Meta peered at him under drawn brows, studying him.

There was no cowardice in his expression; but I thought I read in it a determination that might make him an ugly customer for Nelson to handle if disagreements arose.

III.

So it happened that the Evanses, Anerson, Meta Braun, and myself and Nelson stood on the little easterly promontory of our barren islet the next evening and watched the swirling current bear the skiff with its eight occupants swiftly away to the southward.

There had been only the briefest of farewells, a few curt instructions from Nelson, and then a silent withdrawal of the boat under the stars. At last it vanished, and we walked slowly back to the camp, past the broken hull of the Indian Star, now almost overwhelmed by sand.

Anerson stepped along by himself, moodily kicking at the rough scoria. The Evanses were hand in hand, talking earnestly with Nelson. Meta Braun and I halted just above the wreck.

By the starlight I could see that she was profoundly affected by what we

had just passed through, though all day long she had been cheerful, if silent. Now she turned her eyes to mine and said simply:

"There have never been any birds nor any living thing here!"

"Utterly uninhabited and lifeless," I returned.

"No bird ever dropped a seed from its bill, even a tiny one!"

"No."

She cast her gaze down on the grit at her feet. "And nothing has ever been born here!" she breathed.

"God-forsaken!"

"No," she corrected me gently. "God hasn't come yet. We're just in one of God's new empty houses. Not even a seed has grown!"

"It's the old question of the owl and the egg," I said, trying to jest. "The seed or the plant—which is first?"

"Only one seed, and we could have a new creation, couldn't we?" she responded in a lighter tone. "Maybe we could find a seed."

"We'll have plenty of time to hunt for one," I couldn't help saying.

By the camp-fire, now replenished by the assiduous Chinaman, we found the rest of the party busy opening some salmon. Evans was testing it carefully.

"Best ever," he announced. "Ruthie, you and Meta will have to get up a salmon cook-book."

"Every recipe would read the same, seeing we've neither flour nor eggs nor cracker-crumbs nor milk, Tom."

But her tone was cheerful, and we made a fair meal, One Hop apparently satisfied with the menu he offered us. But after we had eaten and drunk our fill of the slightly sulfury water supplied by the springs on the islet, despondency descended again.

The following two days we devoted to a minute examination of our new home. We allowed not a crevice in the rocks to go without careful scrutiny. Nelson even waded along in the water and dived along the rocks.

The universal finding was—nothing alive. Even the mussels below high-water mark proved to be dying, and the most assiduous fishing disclosed nothing.

"Natural," said Nelson. "This bit of land hasn't been long up from the sea-bottom, and even the fish would give it a wide berth."

"If we could build a boat out of this stuff we have here," Anerson suggested hopefully, "we might fish offshore and have a better chance at something. Any fish for a change?"

"What I'd like to find is a pound of sugar," remarked Mrs. Evans, spreading her little hands out in dismay.

Meta smiled faintly. "I'd rather have a dozen lemons, seeing it's to go on salmon. Next time I'm wrecked I'm going to have all the seeds with me."

Nelson stopped short as he passed and looked down at her. "Seeds? Seeds? There ought to be seeds somewhere around. Why not look for 'em?"

"Just one seed!" she said eagerly. "Just one might do!"

I shall never forget the next three weeks. Imagine us all waking before the dawn to search for seeds.

We examined the beach, in hopes that some stray grains might have floated in from the wreck. We ransacked all our clothes, knelt under the hot sun at midday peering into the cracks in the wreckage.

It is incredible how engrossed we became in this exploration; how the yearning for just one germ of life grew in our hearts, how it seemed as if our very passionate seeking *must* succeed.

At the end of the three weeks Anerson's savage temper broke completely. He tossed his salmon away and sulked, bursting almost immediately into a frightful paroxysm that compelled Nelson and myself to exert every ounce of our tact. When the scene was over he retired bitterly to the

promontory and was seen no more that night.

For there was no seed on the island. Meta sat beside me and cried softly. "An empty place!" she mourned hysterically. "Nothing will ever be born here or grow or live!"

And as she wept scalding tears One Hop stepped silently into the circle and held out, as he stooped before her, a single grain of corn.

Mrs. Evans's shrill laughter rang horribly out into the night, and her shriek sounded to the very stars:

"My God! My God! One seed! One seed!"

She collapsed into Evans's arms, her pallid face to the inexorable heavens.

But Meta Braun cuddled the irregular grain in her soft palm, and there was a light in her eyes such as I had never seen except in a mother's gaze. I could barely catch her whisper: "It will live!"

One Hop laid his yellow, wrinkled finger-tip gently on the grain of corn.

"Bimeby bread, littee missee."

"Yes, yes!" she assented eagerly.

"Where you ketchum, Hop?"

"Pocket ol' clo', missee. Bimeby bread."

Nelson bent his brows and shook his head. "I know how you feel about it, Miss Braun. But it's only one seed."

She folded the grain in her handkerchief and said quietly: "It *must* grow." And it did, and its growing brought God into an empty house.

IV.

THE next morning when Rolf Anerson came back to the camp and was told of the discovery of the single grain of corn, he smiled sardonically and devoted himself in silence to his salmon.

But Meta Braun, after a long conversation with One Hop, departed to a little nook under the low crest of the islet. I found her busily rubbing into fine dust the scant soil she had dug up with a knife. She had a little round plot about three feet in diameter.

"I hope it will grow," I said awkwardly.

"Oh, Hop and I'll make it grow," she returned, smiling.

"But it will be years before we have anything worth while, even if it does come up and have ears on it. And what of the sunshine? And the soil mayn't be all right, either."

At this moment arrived the Chinese, carrying a pail of water and a piece of canvas. Together they prepared the bed for the solitary grain, and then Meta planted it delicately.

"Bimeby bread," said Hop briefly. And as if this were the sacrament of germination we departed.

Thereafter the cook slept and ate by this precious grain. I don't know what all he and Meta talked of nor how they forced pidgin English into the channels of their ideas.

But one morning I found them both kneeling over a small spear of green. When the announcement was made in the camp we made a pilgrimage to the spot.

Mrs. Evans, who had refused food, except the oil from the salmon, for two days, became hysterical. Evans himself stolidly supported her on his shoulder, and later he and Anerson carried her back to the shelter. She had fainted.

Ten days later I was amazed to see six shoots in the damp ground. Meta was busy earthing them up.

"Where did they come from?" I demanded.

She slipped over into a sitting posture and smiled down at them. "That's Hop's and my secret. But when they are bigger I'll show you all about it."

When half a hundred shoots were growing blithely under the warm sun, the camp suddenly awoke. I believe that had it not been for the interest we all took in this bringing of life to the sterile islet none of us would have survived that month.

But now Hop and Meta took us partly into their confidence and showed

us, too, how to earth up the slender shoots so that they sent out little root-lets, which, when carefully separated from the parent stock, became stalks themselves. In another month each of us had a garden of his own, and it was only Anerson whose crop didn't prosper.

At last Hop and Meta refused to give him any more. We all saw that scene when he was rebuffed. It was in the early dawn. The stalks were now almost two feet high, thriving richly in the carefully worked soil. And there were over three hundred stalks now.

Mrs. Evans had been helping Meta after tending to her own. Evans and Nelson were at their own patches, working with rude wooden plows. Anerson, whose patch had not increased strode up, made his usual remark about "poor place," and demanded an extra dozen for his share.

Meta looked up, and I saw wide-eyed astonishment on her face. Then a cloud came over her bright and searching gaze. She shook her head, bending lovingly over the fresh hills.

"No," she said definitely.

I wondered at the strange look that Anerson had. He asked again insistently.

"No," she repeated.

You must understand that we were nearly crazed from our diet. I thought that Meta had finally succumbed to the dragging evil temper of the whole camp.

I saw Anerson's malignant and malicious expression change to one of rage. But he restrained himself and went away, muttering. Meta gazed after him with puzzled eyes.

"I wonder why his won't grow?" I demanded.

She crept over to me and looked me squarely in the face. "If you will put your arm around me and hold me tight while I cry!" she whispered.

For the second time in my life I took her into my arms. She sobbed on my shoulder. I could hear her piti-

ful murmur: "My poor little seed! My poor little seed!"

But she did not tell me what had made her refuse Anerson further shoots.

What intensified the mystery—for you understand that in a community like ours all is mysterious that is not known to all—One Hop also showed a very apparent dislike of Anerson, and would hardly serve him with his portion of salmon.

"Blamed funny thing all around," Nelson growled. "Well, three months of this would tangle anybody's mind and temper."

"I wonder—" I began.

Nelson turned savagely on me. "Stop wondering about *that*," he growled.

I had touched on the one forbidden topic—had the men in the skiff arrived at last and reported us or had their frail craft tossed them into the devouring sea?

A thousand times that question had been on the tip of our tongues. By common consent we had never uttered it.

Now that we really had fields of corn, with ears coming to maturity and a prospect of starchy food once more, Meta relaxed her efforts and allowed me more of her company.

But for all the hours I spent with her and all the speech we had, I discerned that she preserved inviolate the mystery of her thoughts. She brooded constantly, but happily. Her face daily grew more tender, until I could scarcely bear the sight of her thinness.

For we had all got such a loathing for salmon that we ate only enough to keep us alive, or to satisfy an unnatural craving. Yet there was one gratification I had—she was barely civil to Anerson, who now openly and violently made love to her.

It seemed as though she saw some secret in his dark soul, discovered some dreadful cancer in his heart. Several times I saw her flinch when

his hand accidentally touched hers over our rude table.

The result was, of course, that he turned his hatred on myself. I could not allow personal feeling to interfere with my duty to save outward unity and peace, so I refrained as much as possible from being in his company and took no notice of his sneers and innuendos. But the breaking point was nearing, and Nelson and I secretly scanned the empty sea around us with burning eyes.

We had kept careful count of the days of the week and of the dates. Time had elapsed sufficient for the skiff to have arrived at Honolulu and for a rescue steamer to come for us. But Nelson refused to discuss the matter. So at last I took it up with Meta one blowy morning while she tended the corn.

She dropped her rough hoe and looked at me long and intently when I had briefly stated the fact that every day made hope of rescue fainter.

"Yes," she admitted. "That is true. And Mrs. Evans will not live long."

She wrinkled her brows a little, glanced at the fat stalks amid which she stood, and then came to a sudden decision. She picked up her knife and told me to hold out my hands. Into them she piled ear after ear of milky corn. Then she smiled faintly.

"My little seed!"

One Hop received this accession to the larder with the first expression of triumph I had ever seen on his brown visage, and within the hour we were ravenously devouring the corn and chewing even on the silk and the stalks.

But I noticed that Meta ate dreamily, nibbling daintily at the little grains and wrapped in meditation.

"There's enough to keep us off that salmon a while, anyway," said Nelson.

"And the sugar means my wife's life," Evans whispered to me.

So that day passed, a celebration. In the evening, under the rising moon,

Meta walked with me on the other side of the island.

She was very thin and pale, and for the first time I noticed how feeble her step was. My heart swelled within my breast. Then all my blood grew hot with desire to take this slender form into my arms forever and always see that gentle and tender smile and have the love of those eyes so full of mystery.

As simply as a child, she turned to me swiftly, with her eyes afloat.

"Take me in your arms and hold me while I cry," she whispered.

"For sorrow?"

I felt her quiver and a hot tear scalded my cheek.

"No," she whispered. "For joy! My little seed! My little motherless grain of corn! And I saved it and it grew."

Mothered it? *Mothered it?* I touched her gently on her loose hair. And in that thrill I seemed for an instant to catch a glimpse of her pure and womanly heart, of all her dreams, of her lovely meditations.

"There is something else you've made grow, too," I found myself saying hoarsely. "Will you take it and mother it, Meta darling?"

She twisted herself out of my arms and stared at me, wonder on her face. Then the color flooded to her brow and she held out her own arms, gloriously calling to her mate.

As we came back to the camp across the little cornfield we met Anerson. He stopped in front of us, and I saw the dark menace of his contorted visage.

"Now for the settlement, Meta Braun," he said hoarsely. "And with you later, my fine fellow," he added, scowling at me.

Meta brushed me with her fingers, and I obeyed and stood still.

"Why have you avoided me?" he demanded of her, his veins swelling.

She faced him gallantly in the moonlight, her hair blowing about her throat.

"Because you didn't protect that poor little seed of corn. You pulled up the little sprouts and ate them. Hop saw you. You killed little living things! You killed growing things. I hate you!"

For a moment I was tempted to spring at his throat. But the expression of her face held him entranced. The look of ugly rage and imperious temper faded into a peculiar, curious respect.

He gazed at the stalks about him, waving in the night wind. He bowed his head. The great mystery of growing life seemed to lighten his dark spirit in that moment, the tremendous secret of how empty lands are filled with life.

We left him standing among the corn.

Nelson was still up and busy with One Hop by the light of the fire. As we came into the lit circle he stared up with a peculiar and triumphant expression on his bronzed and bearded face. He pointed to his feet. A freshly caught fish glistened there.

"An albacore!" he said huskily. "That means the fish are coming and the island is permanent."

"All same come from Ja-pan," said Hop, shaking a wise head. "Bimeby maybeso birds fly."

Meta looked up at the Evanses hurrying up to view the miracle. I felt the quiver in her low tones as she said: "God's filling his empty house!"

Mrs. Evans glanced quickly at her and a sudden blazing tenderness came into her weary eyes. "*And you, too!* You dear child!"

She held out her arms, and Meta swept into them, sobbing, "Yes, yes!"

When they were gone, crying over each other womanlike and softly, Nelson stood up and looked at me.

"Holding master's papers, I am competent to perform marriages, my son. Shake hands!"

But One Hop, the Chinese cook, bent smiling over his work, silent inscrutable; and up the hill Anerson stood amid the great stalks, alone in the garden he had no share in.

CONSTANCY.

Out upon it, I have loved
 Three whole days together!
 And am like to love three more,
 If it prove fair weather.

Time shall molt away his wings
 Ere he shall discover
 In the whole wide world again
 Such a constant lover.

But the spite on 't is, no praise
 Is due at all to me:
 Love with me had made no stays,
 Had it any been but she.

Had it any been but she,
 And that very face,
 There had been at least ere this
 A dozen dozen in her place.

'Sir John Suckling.

The Badmashes of the

“Bloody Border”

by

W. R. Foran

A Tale of
Northern India

THE northwest frontier of India has not lightly earned its title of the “Bloody Border,” for to the tribesmen, war, pillage, and plunder are the very meat of existence. They are never so happy as when out on forays and engaged in sanguinary conflicts with their neighbors, or plundering *bunniahs* (traders) and *pozwindahs* (itinerant merchants), or waging relentless war with the British troops.

There is always something doing on the border—the back door of India—and there is always work for the keen soldier.

It is here where honors and promotion beckon with an inviting hand; and the Indian army—God bless them!—are eager to answer the call.

The Waziri hillsmen had justly won their title to fame as *badmashes*—a term applied in India to anything from a naughty boy to a hardened criminal; and it was because of their utter lawlessness that these wild men had long been looked upon as “the badmashes of the badmashes”—something entirely superlative in the matter of villainy.

It was a great day for young Lieutenant Andrew Chauncey Nugent when they sent him up from the frivolities

of Poona to join the 126th Ferozepore Sikhs at the border town of Nowshera.

He had left his famous British regiment to join the Indian army, for there was better pay and better scope for fighting—and what real soldier does not seek the fields of labor where most fighting is to be found?

He considered himself lucky to join such a renowned regiment of native infantry, and he had good cause to congratulate himself. Had they not Lucknow, Ali Masjid, Afghanistan (1878-1879), defense of Chitral and China (1900) enscribled upon their colors?

Had they not the king-emperor himself for colonel-in-chief, and was not their badge the plume of the Prince of Wales above the royal and imperial cipher?

And, even better still, they were styled “the King George’s Own.” Surely, it was a regiment of regiments, and all its members were proud of belonging to it. Its past record assured it a place—and a foremost place—in the fighting line.

In due course Andy was sent with his company of one hundred and fifty bearded Sikhs to hold the advanced position at Fort Apozai—a newly

constructed outpost on the rim of Waziriland.

He was more than pleased with himself. To be selected for outpost duty on the Bloody Border spelled a chance—a real, live, fighting chance—for fame and promotion.

It was also a great feather in his cap, for such work was more generally given to older officers, men accustomed to the ways of the hills and its infamous peoples. But Andy had soon proved to the entire satisfaction of his superiors that he was a youngster who had absorbed the lessons of India through book study and careful investigations from those who had served there, and that he was eminently fitted for the work in hand.

It is on the border that the Distinguished Service Order and the Victoria Cross—the British soldier's two most coveted honors—always dangle alluringly before the eyes, and no one was more alive to this fact than Andy.

Besides, there was a girl in the case, a slender young beauty and the daughter of the commissioner of public works at Bombay—whenever isn't there, when a tall, handsome, red-coated, gold-braided officer is breaking his neck to get his captaincy and a few other coveted distinctions?

The plain fact of the matter was that Andy Nugent desired above all things on earth a prefix as well as affixes to his name, and more particularly a substantial increase in his financial resources, so that he could the sooner embark on the matrimonial sea.

Some men might have fretted at being sent so far away from the object of their avowed adoration; but not Andy. He knew fully well there was no earthly chance for a young subaltern in the gay and giddy haunts of cities; but there was most certainly on the cold and bleak border, where men shot first and inquired your business afterward.

And the girl, accustomed to the ways of men and soldiers from long

association with empire building, had sped him on his way with smiling and trustful face, while her heart was filled with forebodings as to his safety.

It is the way of the women in India and other corners of the vast British empire to suffer these sacrifices uncomplainingly—and it is well for the empire that they do so.

Andy had heard a lot about the Waziris—and little to their credit. He knew that they never lacked the leisure nor the desire to rob their neighbors and pillage. He also knew that they generally selected the seasons of the rains for their deviltry.

The severity of the winter, more or less, kept the *badmashees* to their hill castles, and the *powindahs* and *bunyahs* ceased their tradings, goings, and comings during the heavy snows. They, therefore, contented themselves during the winter in settling their own internal and bloody feuds in the way best known to themselves—by knife, sword, and rifle.

He had only been a matter of a short month at Apozai when the first hint of the rains prepared him for the cessation of the temporary peace.

Through his native spies he learned of the coming of the Suleiman Khels to the pasturage of the valleys of Gosmal and Zhob—and he knew that there was now joy in the hearts of all Waziristan, for the latter tribe were their eternal foes and prey.

If they had only known it there was also joy in the hearts of Andy and his men, for their coming foretold the opportunity for real work such as they craved.

He took counsel with the political officer who had been sent up to Apozai with him. He was a smug, self-complacent man of long service in India, who had acquired a totally unwarranted contempt for the military and their ways, but a wholly unjustified conceit for the effectiveness of the diplomacy popularly supposed to be part and parcel of the civilian's duties.

"Now that the rains are breaking," Andy suggested to the political officer one evening as they sat on the veranda of the latter's bungalow in the fort, "there'll be trouble in Waziriland."

"Not at all," disagreed the political emphatically. "You'll learn, my boy, when you've been a little longer on the border, that we political agents have the tribes well in hand. We've tamed the erstwhile *badmashes* completely, and there's not been any trouble of note for a year at least."

"I'm glad in a way to hear you say so," Andy answered wearily, as he stifled a yawn with his hand. "But I really think you're mistaken. I may not have been long on the border, but I assure you I'm no fool and know quite a bit about the gentle Waziri and their neighbors."

"But," protested the political with a pitying smile, "we've given them enough money to keep them contented for a long time building towers and homes. Furthermore, the recent moving up and down through their country of troops has had a most beneficial effect upon them. That idea"—the political expanded his chest and beamed upon the young officer of Sikhs—"was my own, and my ideal of true diplomacy. Force in display, but not in action, is my motto for taming the border."

Andy rose languidly from his Bombay chair and stretched himself luxuriously. "Then you'll admit we soldiers have our uses sometimes," he suggested quietly.

"Naturally," hastened to admit the political. "You soldier men are very useful in quelling a rebellion that has gone beyond the reach of diplomacy, but we politicals have to do all the missionary work and thinking. We really settle the affairs of the border."

"Oh, indeed!" Andy rejoined, still holding himself well in hand. "May I ask," he inquired politely, "who settled the Chitrah, the Tirah, the Malakhand, and all the other border tribes? That's what I'd like to know."

The political officer reddened even through his deep tan and haughtily stared at the presumptuous soldier.

"As I was saying, when so rudely—so very rudely—interrupted by you, Mr. Nugent," he remarked, with great coldness of tone, "part of their most estimable good conduct and submissiveness may be due now to the settling of some of their internal affairs, or even to the increasing protection we are offering the *powindahs* and *bunniahs* trading through their country."

"But never forget, Mr. Nugent, the primary cause of their good conduct for the past year is due to the tact and diplomacy of the political agents."

"You youngsters are far too hasty, and think the only way to coerce the tribesmen is by armed and brutal severity. Try a little kindness and tact for a change, for it'll repay you a thousandfold, besides being so much more pleasant."

"But what's the use of maintaining armed force on the border unless it's to be used to keep the tribes in order?" Andy asked hotly.

"Merely as an example and in case of extreme danger and need," answered the political.

"Naturally," agreed Andy sweetly, "and the funny part of it all is that there is always danger and need."

Andy prepared to take his departure, for he was weary of listening to the political's conceited and absurd oration on border affairs.

"If ever you want any advice, Mr. Nugent," the political remarked blandly, as he rose to say good-by, "just come to me and I shall be glad to explain things to the best of my ability. *Experientia docet*, you know. You're very young and—ahem!—I fear somewhat hot-headed."

"Thanks awfully, I'm sure," Andy chuckled softly. "I'll be glad to learn wisdom at your feet."

When the youngster was out of earshot he burst into a loud guffaw of amusement and disgust.

"Of all the darned and infernal cheek!" he exclaimed aloud. "Those old fossils jolly well think they know every bally thing, but I'll teach them the arm of the military is more far-reaching and more efficacious with these brigands than all the confounded tact in the world. Kindness—bah! the natives think it's a confession of weakness."

He hurried over to his quarters and summoned his Sikh orderly. "Go tell the *subadar* I would speak with him at once," he ordered curtly. The man saluted and hastened to obey, and presently the fierce-looking, black-bearded giant of a native officer stood respectfully saluting at the door.

"Come in, Gurdit Singh!" Andy invited cordially. He had quickly learned that his right-hand man was a most trustworthy and excellent soldier, and he respected his age and experience, as proved by his medals and rank.

"What news have you of the movements of the tribesmen in the hills?"

The tall, erect figure looked down keenly at the boyish young face of his commanding officer and there was a smile of contentment. His eyes were those of a hawk, keen and penetrating; his body lean, thin, tall and wiry; and in his mind he had stored knowledge of things dearly learned that would have made the wisest men in Europe wiser.

He was a reader of men and men's hearts, and from him nothing was hidden. Generous to even his life with a friend, for an enemy his heart was void of mercy; and his proved courage at sixty was as fresh, as full of dash and spirit, as that of any youngster in the Indian army—nay, of any army of the world.

He had the double and unusual gift of silence and a fluent tongue. In craft he had no master and certainly no equal, and he had learned early in life all the habits and customs of the "Bloody Border"—of those who moved and wrought within its frowning crags and valleys.

Into his forty years of army service

he had crammed a generation of knowledge, and he never ceased to apply it to good advantage and to the *izzat* of the regiment, which was to him both parent and family.

"Many things have I learned, *sahib*," he answered quietly, with a knowing chuckle. "And if only part be true, then there is work ahead for you and I, and our men."

"What news have you, *subadar*?"

"The *badmashes* are up to their evil tricks again, with the starting of the rains."

Gurdit Singh waved his hand out toward the giant hills which surrounded the little fort on all sides.

"Look at that country, *sahib*," he advised, "and tell me what you see in it—but a playground for such as *badmashes*."

Andy rose from his chair and walked silently over to the door and looked out upon the mountainous country. It was a region of utter desolation, with scarcely a tree to be seen anywhere; it was all rock, rock, rock—of all sizes, shapes and kinds, so that they hid even the earth from view.

An occasional coarse, parched tuft of grass dotted here and there among the rocks was alone the faintest inkling of vegetation.

The mountains ran across and across the countryside in bewildering confusion, their crests for the most part—where not covered with snow—black, iron-loaded crags of fantastic shapes, with one side a steep slope of rubble and rocks, the other a smooth surface of glazed mud banking a sheer precipice.

The sunset alone gave a tinge of color to their somberness, and the monotony and desolation were unspeakable. It is a fitting country for the *badmashes*, and it is the "Bloody Border" most undoubtedly.

"A fine country to hide in, *subadar*," Andy answered thoughtfully, when he looked over the hill country, "yet scarcely easy to cross or undertake military operations within its confines."

"You speak like a wise man, the father of men, *sahib*," Gurdit Singh chuckled delightedly. "Yet, on the border, one must play the *badmashes* as they play you, if you wish to win. Listen, *sahib*," the old man came closer to Andy and spoke in soft tones, so none might overhear.

"The *badmashes* are up to their devil's work once more. Only three days ago, my spies tell me, four *bunniaks*, returning to Tang from Mogul Kot, fell into an ambush of the Waziri midway on the road. They were killed and their money, rifles, camels, and stores looted. The following day two other *bunniaks* were set upon, killed, and robbed of their all.

"A messenger reached me this evening and reported that another *povindah* had just met with a like fate at their villainous hands. Truly the *badmashes* require their tails to be twisted. Things are stirring, *Huzoor*, on the border and there is work for us to do."

Andy whistled softly. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together. "That jolly well looks as if diplomacy and tact had tamed the Waziris. What an almighty ass that political Johnny is, to be sure!"

"Whose Khel is it that we must blame for these outrages, *subadar*?" he asked, with an eager light in his eyes, for he knew as well as the old soldier knew that arms must be used if order and law were to be maintained on the border.

"The Washud Khel, *Huzoor*, of which that son of a pig, Sher Afzal, is sultan."

"He's been at the bottom of all the devilry on the border for the past two years, isn't it so?"

"So my men tell me, *sahib*."

"All right, *subadar*, I'll attend to this matter immediately."

The old soldier saluted stiffly, and there was a proud smile on his lips. He was a good judge of men, and could tell by the gleam in Andy's eyes that it would go hard with Sher Afzal when he fell into the hands of the British.

Andy quickly thought over the situation, after the native officer had withdrawn. If he had his way, he would lead a party of his men to Wano, where the robber chieftain ruled from his castellated tower on the lofty peaks of Kajari Kach above the mouth of the Aghzmanda River.

By crafty night attack or open assault by day, he would storm the nest of the robbers, capture those who surrendered and kill those who resisted, but above all he would capture Sher Afzal alive and swing him high above his towers to rot until his jangling bones were a perpetual reminder to the hillsmen of the far-reaching powers of the *raj*. But he knew that the political would never sanction such drastic measures.

He wondered if the latter had heard of these new developments in the border's affairs and, anxious to ascertain this fact, hurried once more to the bungalow of the civilian official.

Quietly and with keen relish, he told the story which his *subadar* had just given him. The political listened attentively, with a frown on his face.

For several minutes after the young soldier had finished his recital of the wrong-doings of Sher Afzal and his bloodthirsty followers there was silence, and then the political rose to his feet with anxious face, and began to walk up and down the room in hurried, jerky strides. Finally he swung round impatiently upon the soldier.

"It's too bad Sher Afzal has not profited by the lessons I have so carefully explained to him," the political remarked. "I'll have to start out at daylight and proceed to Wano to expostulate with him and get him to give up the culprits and the loot."

"Do you think for a moment he will do it?" laughed Andy. "He'll blame all the raids and other matters down to his neighbors and calmly lie to your face."

"Probably, but I shall try to bring him to a sense of what is due to the *raj* and get him to see reason."

"You're in charge, of course," Andy agreed, with envious eyes. "But I jolly well know what I'd do. I'd sack his old castle and raze it to the ground and hang him above his own gate."

"Diplomacy first, Mr. Nugent. When will you learn this? I shall start at daybreak, and so kindly see that I have an escort of a *havildar* and ten sepoy to go with me to Wano."

"Very good, sir!" Andy shrugged his shoulders and bade his chief good night.

Just as the sun rose guiltily above the crests of the towering hills, the political and his small escort of Sikhs sallied forth from Fort Apozai and headed down the narrow road toward Wano.

Andy watched them until they were out of sight. A slight chuckle of amusement at his side made him turn swiftly on his heel to see who was so amused. The *subadar* was watching the departing official with a humorous twinkle in his old eyes.

"Salaam, *sahib!*" he greeted Andy, as he saluted stiffly. "There goes a fool's errand, and I have tidings from my spies in the hills that you should know. We must act swiftly if we would save yonder civilian from an evil fate."

The old man chuckled again, and came closer to Andy.

"What is wrong now, *subadar?*" Andy asked, with keen interest in his tone.

"These hillsmen are like cackling hens and can't keep a secret. Word has come to me that Sher Afzal will send a party of twenty of his robbers to ambush an expected *bunniah* at the mouth of the Aghzhmanda. To-morrow they will leave Wano to be in waiting; and yonder party will fall into the trap. The *badmashes* will not turn up their noses at the gifts of Allah, and twelve good rifles and ammunition to go with them are too great a prize to be allowed to go begging. They will fall upon the party and capture them, if they do not murder them."

"By gad! *subadar,*" Andy exclaimed,

"we'd better send a man to warn the political and tell him to turn back."

Gurdit Singh saluted respectfully. "Nay, *sahib,* let the work go on. I have a plan to beat them at their own game and give them a lesson they will never forget. Have I the permission of the Presence to unfold my plan?"

"Fire away, *subadar!* If it seems good to me, we will carry it out, for you know the hills better than I do."

"*Huzoor,* let you and I and twenty men hasten across the hills, by a path which a guide I have can show us, and so come down on the flank of the ambushers. Stealthily creeping into position, as close to them as we can without being seen or heard, we can take a hand in the game. So shall *izzat* come to you, to me and to the regiment—and the *raj* be saved ignominy."

Andy's face brightened. "You are sure, *subadar,* the path you know will lead us there in time to prevent murder being done?" he asked eagerly.

"Of a certainty, for even I myself know this tribal path. Our men can march as quickly as the hillsmen," the old soldier asserted proudly. "If the latter can cover fifty miles across the mountains in twelve hours—as they've often done—so can our Sikhs, *Huzoor.*"

"Then we'll do it, *subadar.*" Andy tapped the butt of his revolver, without which no man in the hill-country is ever parted sleeping or waking. "Go, quickly, and select the best men, and in five minutes I shall be ready to lead you."

Within ten minutes Andy, the *subadar* and twenty picked sepoy, all marksmen and veterans of the border wars, had hastened out of the gate of the fort and were scrambling down the hillside into the valley.

Then up the rocky face of the opposite peaks they climbed, carefully taking advantage of every bit of cover so as to hide their movements from any of the watchers upon the hills, who might be posted to keep tab on the goings and comings at Apozai.

Like mountain sheep they clambered up the almost precipitous side until they reached the summit. Here Andy called a brief halt to let his men regain their wind and also to search the hills for signs of any of the Waziri outposts.

But his glasses revealed no sign of human life. A lonely *chikor* with drab body and brilliant head showed silhouetted for a moment against the monotonous peaks; a few black or brown birds soared high above them, and at their coming a little seesee bird flew hastily away—of other signs of life there were none.

Andy gave the word to march and they set off at a quick pace across the boulder-strewn crest in the direction of Kajari Kach. There was no time to be lost if they were to reach the ambush in time to be of effective assistance in preventing the massacre and looting of the political and his escort.

No word was spoken, but all eyes were skinned to search every inch of the hill-country where an enemy might lurk in hiding, and each man held his rifle ready for instant use.

Hour after hour they continued on their way. To their left they could finally make out the white walls of Wano, and each man silently murmured a threat of vengeance against its proud and bloodthirsty ruler.

They headed more to the right, so as to give it the widest possible berth. The castle fort stood jauntily perched upon the topmost peak of a glistening, snow-decked crag and showed clear to the naked eyes for many miles. From its lofty walls the country for many miles round about it could be watched, and they, knowing sentries were on its walls day and night to give timely warning of the approach of danger, crept doubled up so as to avoid being seen.

Their khaki uniforms made them almost invisible at such a distance—but Andy was taking no chances.

Toward sunset they came to the ridge above the road which winds

along the side of the mountain, following the course of the Aghzhmanda. It was here that the Waziri were supposed to be lying in wait for the *bun-niahs*, and it was here that the political and his escort would come at daybreak on his way to interview Sher Afzal at Wano.

Carefully hiding his men among the boulders so as to watch the road and the hills, Andy prepared to wait the course of events. Night descended bleak and cold, and they shivered in their heavy woolen overcoats, but each heart burned warm and fierce for the fray.

Silently they watched and listened. While half of the men dozed as they lay, the other half maintained a strict guard to prevent being surprised. Andy and the *subadar* held whispered council during the dreary, long watches of the night and finally agreed upon their plan of attack.

Shortly before the coming of day Andy was awakened from a light sleep by a touch upon his arm. A sepoy had crawled on his belly like a snake to where Andy and the native officer were stretched out flat beneath the shelter of an immense boulder.

"*Sahib!*" the man whispered gleefully, "there are sounds of men approaching—somewhat to our right. I hear their footsteps and light conversation."

Andy motioned to the man to return to his post and awaken the others in case of emergency, while he crawled silently over to a boulder which overlooked a native track leading to the road from Wano.

Presently his listening ears caught the sounds of light footsteps coming down the path, and a few minutes later some twenty fierce-looking hillsmen passed in single file before his watchful eyes.

Each man carried a modern rifle—the gift of diplomacy and tact of the political officers, who thought it well to arm these heathen robbers, so that they might aid in maintaining order

on the frontier—and on their backs was fastened a small goatskin bag of flour; round their waists were cartridge-belts containing all the ammunition they chanced to possess, and each man was dressed in a dirty *poshtin*, sheepskin coat, fastened together by an even dirtier *kummerbund*. By the faint light of the early dawn all these things were plain to the young officer, and he smiled contentedly.

"*Huzoor!*" came the voice of the *subadar* in a whisper at his side. "Sher Afzal marches with his men on this raid. Good luck attends us!"

"Good!" came Andy's whispered comment, and he smiled more broadly. This was unheard of good fortune, for they would now be able to kill two birds with one stone.

The bandits had passed out of hearing before Andy cautiously ordered his men to follow them down to the road. He considered it advisable to avoid the path, for other hillsmen might be following or returning to Wano.

Inch by inch they crept down the rocky hill, until they came to some boulders from which they could get a clear and uninterrupted view of the road and yet be within two hundred yards range of the robbers.

The stage was all set for the drama now, and it waited only for the cue of the political's arrival to ring up the curtain. Andy chuckled softly himself as he thought of the surprise in store for the latter when he found himself looking down the barrels of some twenty Waziri rifles.

The *subadar* presently touched him upon the arm. His hand pointed out to the roadway beneath them, which shone white in the rays of the rising sun. Andy's ears caught the sound of footsteps coming along the road, and of the iron-shod hoof of a pony. Then his eyes caught a glint as the flash of the sun lit upon a steel-barreled rifle.

The Sikhs had seen it, too, and had silently pushed forward their rifles to cover the road. Andy waited and

watched. His cue had not yet come, and he wanted to see the hold-up and the political's surprise before he intervened to prevent a tragedy.

As the latter's party came round a bend in the road beneath where Andy and his men lay hid the *badmashes* suddenly stepped out into the middle of the road and covered the political and his escort with the rifles he had himself given them.

They were careful of their hardly earned and much-prized cartridges, and so did not open fire, preparing to finish the work with cold steel.

The political, who was riding his pony somewhat ahead of his escort, with no effort to protect his line of march from sudden attack, came to a noisy halt and demanded in the language of the hillsmen why he was thus interfered with in his journey.

The escort, taken completely by surprise, looked from one to the other waiting for word as to what was required of them.

Six of the *badmashes* advanced toward the political, while the others covered their advance. With a swift movement two of them leaped upon the political and dragged him from his horse, while the others kept the escort covered.

This was Andy's cue to act. With a wave of his sword, which he had drawn ready for action, he started hastily down the hillside, and a few minutes later stood in the road in the rear of the main body of the Waziri. Half of his men remained, by the *subadar's* instructions, on the hillside.

The other half followed their young leader. Their coming had been so sudden and noiseless, and the Waziri so intent upon their prey, that no warning had been given to the *badmashes* of the danger which now threatened them in the rear flank.

Immediately he reached the road Andy saw that it would be impossible to open fire on the Waziri, for they were in direct rifle-fire between them and the political's party. While he

stood hesitating what to do for the best his sepoy solved his doubts for him by silently fixing bayonets.

With a shout of encouragement Andy leaped forward to the attack, waving his sword above his head and with revolver clutched in his other fist.

"Come on, *Shabbash*, sons of devils!" Andy roared. And his men followed him across with flashing bayonets.

The fourteen *badmashes* in the road turned quickly to see what this unwelcome noise might mean, and before they could open fire the Sikh sepoy were upon them, stabbing and digging at them with their bayonets.

Now, the *badmashes* were no cowards. They had proved that for centuries, and they rose to the occasion as one man. The tallest of the gang threw himself bodily in Andy's path and met his sweeping sword cut with his rifle.

Then by a quick upward thrust of his knife he endeavored to slit his foe up the stomach; but a sepoy was prepared for this and ran the Waziri through the middle with his bayonet.

Andy charged, shouting to the political to attack in the rear of the *badmashes* with his escort.

A second later a volley rang out from the political's end of the road, and the Waziris broke and ran. As they leaped up the hill where the *subadar* and his men lay in waiting, they were met with a crushing volley.

Five of them fell in their tracks and lay still, with the red blood gathering faster and faster upon the black surface of the hills.

Andy and his men charged through the running hillsmen, cutting and thrusting as they went. The political's escort had attended to the six *badmashes* who had first attacked them, and now joined in the general fray with shouts of joy.

Like rabbits the *badmashes* who still lived ran to earth and hid behind boulders. "Take cover, men!" Andy

roared at the top of his voice, for he knew they were by no means through with the fight.

This was the time when the hillsmen put in their best work, when they were hidden behind rocks and sniping the foe.

But he spoke too late. With a groan the political fell, shot through the thigh, and two other Sikhs fell, writhing and twisting on the road, with bullets through their stomachs.

Andy and the remainder of his men sought cover among the boulders and waited. He knew that the *subadar* would soon be taking a hand at this game, and he felt certain he would not wait in vain. And in the roadway only the dead marked the presence of mankind.

"Sahib!" warned a voice at Andy's side; "show not one particle of yourself. The *soors* will soon creep out of their burrows again!"

But Andy had not yet learned his lesson and raised his head to take a peep at the countryside to see what was now happening. The drone of a bullet past his ear made him quickly bury his face in the ground again. The sepoy beside him chuckled.

"Darn, by Jove, that was a near one!" Andy cursed, and waited for more to happen. And in a few seconds it came. From eight boulders there suddenly came a puff of white smoke and a report; and each shot got its answer in full measure. For some time they continued the harmless amusement of snap-shooting without injury to either side.

But by this time the crafty old *subadar* had worked his men down the hill to within a few yards of the *badmashes*. As he and his men opened fire upon them the latter turned and bolted.

Andy and his men joined the *subadars* in a well-directed volley, and three more men fell in their tracks.

The remaining five, seeing the game was up, decided to deliver themselves into the hands of the *raj* and seek

what mercy they could find. They threw down their rifles and yelled for mercy.

Andy rose to his feet and called to his men to surround them and take them all prisoners and to do them no harm; but no sooner did his figure appear outlined against the sunlight than the treacherous *badmashes* picked up their discarded rifles and fired one last volley into their foes.

Andy felt a hot, tearing sensation through his side and wobbled groggily on his feet. But, pulling himself together, he bravely led his men at a run toward the supposedly surrendered hillmen.

They had dropped their rifles again and were pleading for mercy.

The *subadar*, despite his advanced years, was the first to reach the prisoners, followed quickly by Andy and his men. In a minute they were all disarmed and securely bound by the belts of the sepoy.

"It is good, *sahib*," The old *subadar* grinned delightedly as he turned to *salaam* Andy respectfully. "We have taken Sher Afzal—" He broke off suddenly as he saw the deathly pallor of his young officer, and with a bound was at his side.

He was just in time to catch Andy in his arms as he fell back, swooning from pain and loss of blood from his wound. Gently the old man placed him on the ground and prepared to bind up the wound.

His eyes were very tender and his hands worked with the deft sureness of a surgeon. In a few minutes Andy revived.

"It's nothing serious, *Huzoor*," Gurdit Singh encouraged as he worked, "and you'll soon be on your feet again. It is a clean wound."

"I'll be all right in a bit, *subadar*," Andy grinned weakly. "Go, take some men, and attend to the political and the other of our wounded."

His task finished, the old *subadar* rose respectfully to his feet. With an imperious wave of his hand he di-

rected a sufficient number of the grinning Sikhs to guard the prisoners well while he hurried over to the political.

The latter was moaning feebly, but still conscious. The *subadar* bound up his shattered thigh and stanching the flow of blood, then hurriedly inspected the rest of his wounded men. All were dead except one, and he died as Gurdit Singh reached his side.

Being now in active command, the *subadar* gave quick and sure orders to his men for the disposal of the dead Sikhs—whom they buried beside the roadway. With the dead men's rifles they improvised some crude stretchers and placed the two wounded officers on them, ready to march back to Apozai.

As they started on their return journey the *subadar* quietly and without any venom gave the *coup de grâce* to all the wounded Waziri hillmen, leaving the dead where they lay.

He waved aside as unimportant the protests of the political that foes should be buried just as much as friends, for he claimed that his men had already done a full day's work and were tired, and that they had a long and tiring march before them.

At a sign from the *subadar* two men of the rear guard fell out and remained behind. At a bend of the road farther on Andy observed a number of lazy curls of smoke arising from where the fight had taken place. He summoned the *subadar* to him and inquired what was the meaning of them.

"There are no vultures, *Huzoor*," the old man chuckled with huge, grim delight. "But a greasy *poshtin* burns well." And the *subadar* winked knowingly and laughed deep in his throat.

Andy made no further comment, for he knew the Sikhs were very fond of cremation, and he had read tales of the Afghan wars. He understood what had happened, and accordingly ordered that means of disposal carried out.

And presently the two Sikhs who had dropped behind to cremate the

dead laughingly overtook the party and took their appointed places.

By daybreak they had reached the fort, and the two wounded officers were handed sorrowfully over to the care of the surgeon at the Apozai post, while the prisoners were securely chained in the guard-room.

A week later Andy was able to hobble painfully around, and went to call upon his chief. He found the political propped up in bed, industriously writing his report to the chief political officer at Peshawar.

"I have recommended to the chief," the political announced vindictively, after he had told Andy that his wound was progressing as well as could be expected, "that Sher Afzal should be hanged with all his band in our hands as a lesson to these hillmen."

"Good!" Andy nodded, smiling. "That is the way to tame these *badmashes*. By the way," he inquired sweetly, "how about diplomacy now?"

"Hang diplomacy!" exploded the political angrily. "I have just written the chief that a little punitive expedition in the hills among these swine would do no harm."

"Splendid, sir!" Andy agreed happily. "Only, for Heaven's sake, do not let them send one until I'm fit to go along. I think you'll agree with me that armed force is much better."

"You go to the deuce, Nugent!" the political replied with a sheepish grin. "I must say, however, I'm awfully grateful to you, old chap. I heard how you set out to save me, and I have made a strong recommendation in your favor to headquarters. Your action was most gallant!"

"Oh, not at all, sir!" Andy protested. "Honestly, it was all Subadar Gurdit Singh's affair. He secured the tip, made the plan, and helped me carry it out."

"Then I'll recommend him for the Order of Merit, for he deserves it."

A month later Sher Afzal and his four comrades paid the penalty of their crimes. Their courage was ad-

mirable, and it made the Sikhs mutter their admiration.

It was late afternoon, and the sun had almost dipped behind the crests of the hills, when they led the chieftain and his four men out onto the temporary gallows, fastened a noose about each neck, and waited for the signal from Andy which would end the lives of the *badmashes*.

A curious throng of fierce hillmen, hearing of their leader's fate, had come into the fort to see the end.

Andy watched the sun until the golden disk dipped out of view. He raised his hand, and the instant he did so the five bodies were shot through the trap before the eyes of the wondering Waziri, who had momentarily expected to see the game called off.

As their deep murmur of horror rose above the silence the souls of the *badmashes* went to eternity. The might and power of the *raj* was vindicated, and the *badmashes* tamed.

After such a lesson no punitive expedition would be necessary for a long time—not until the lesson had been forgotten, which does not take long on the Bloody Border.

Leaving the dangling bodies of the five men for all to see their disgrace, Andy turned to grip the hand of the grinning *subadar*.

"*Salaam*, Subadar Gurdit Singh!" he said softly and with pride of the old man shining in his eyes. "Great honor has come to me and you and the regiment through your deeds. The colonel *sahib* has written me a letter which says that you for your everlasting *izzat* shall wear the *Bahaduri* (Order of Merit), and I the *Mihrbani* of the *sahibs*. *Salaam!*"

"Thanks, Sahib Bahadur!" Gurdit Singh saluted respectfully, then bent and with great dignity lifted the subaltern's hand to his lips. "The *izzat* of the regiment is ours and the *izzat* of our own is the regiment's."

And as man to man they shook hands heartily, Andy had won the first step on the ladder for promotion.

Bricks Without Straw



by Hugh Johnson

THE higher ups were "after" our good old blustering colonel. They wanted him to thread the labyrinth of native politics, and subdue the fanatical Moro tribesmen by diplomacy—a thing that he protested could not be done.

There was another count. He was an old Indian fighter, and he consistently refused to take up the new German school of scientific soldiering.

He could mix a julep to tempt a Turk, and quote Tom Moore by the lineal yard, but he did not know "De Gallifet" from "Die Vacht am Rhine," and when they sent a soft-spoken exponent of the new era to suggest that he either get abreast of the times or apply to retire, he plied the lad with juleps and sent him back uncertain whether the old man had promised to brush up on the Germans or to *give* a German on the anniversary of the battle of Wounded Knee, though convinced that there had been *some* promise.

This was at the very flood of the great unrest when Yolo was seething with Mohammedan intrigue, as India seethed before the mutiny.

It was ticklish business for the regiment, and after it had had one outpost massacred and seen three of its men cut up in the open market, outside the walled city, and in the midst of their armed comrades, it began to realize the dynamite charge it was sitting over.

The colonel couldn't understand it. If they had been Apaches who would get out and take the war-path, he would have gone out after them, and he would have brought them in. But they weren't. There was just the dark jungle, with its ugly menace of skulking murderers—nothing tangible, nothing above board, only the silent danger, the everlasting threat.

After the third outrage the colonel grew frantic. He rounded up half a hundred dattos and priests of the Prophet and read them the riot act—said that he held them accountable for *juramentados* running amuck; said he'd hang them to their own roof-trees if it happened again.

Then wasn't there a hullabaloo! The murderers were madmen, the dattos said, touched by the finger of Allah, and no one must be held respon-

sible. Also, the colonel was interfering with their religion, a thing the Americans had promised not to do.

They complained to Manila, and the old man received an official douche of very cold water. He was expected to oppose intrigue with intrigue—to conquer without fighting—and he wouldn't do it.

He did nothing. Conditions got worse, and the higher ups sent that scintillating corypheus of all that is new and scientific in the military art, Captain Frederick Fancher, late of the general staff, to take a troop under the colonel, and, I fear, to make confidential and unofficial reports, so that it might be known just when to relieve the old man, which relief would leave Fancher in command by virtue of seniority—we had no majors.

The colonel guessed this mission at once, and the colonel was as frank as a barber-pole. He asked Fancher outright, and Fancher, who hadn't expected that, but who could not dissemble, told him.

"All very well," roared the colonel. "Your father and I were comrades for twenty years, and he died at Las Guasimas with his hand in mine and a charge concerning you on his lips. I've known you since the days you played ride-a-cock-horse on my knee, and I have nothing to say against your motives—but I do say, darn a school that could so pervert the boy you were."

That is how Fancher started. Of course he hated him. We could see nothing good in him. As the days went by we grew colder, and at last he was not our comrade at all. He was *a stranger and an enemy in our camp*.

But he was something of a fighter himself. That didn't deter him. He went straight ahead, doing what he thought was right. But the feeling strengthened, and at last our respect for his family was all that saved him from Coventry.

Fancher had a little six-year-old elf of an acorn-faced, tow-headed son.

He was small for his age, was Buzzy Fancher, with a pink and white face that no sun could brown, in which his drooping red mouth, and his china-blue eyes made three fascinated O's of wonder at the perfectly delightful world about him.

He was simply a miniature of his mother in face and mind and fashion, for hers was one of those rare souls that retain the simplicity and the open-hearted admiration of childhood. Between the two was a bond of perfect understanding, and that strange touch of spirit across space, naturally present in the mystery of motherhood, but so real between Daisy Fancher and her boy that she could—to the amazement of other mothers in that nerve-racking station—allow Buzzy the limits of the walled city and remain tranquil.

Buzzy's particular crony was old Conroy of "K" Troop, the colonel's orderly. No one could tell better Indian stories than Conroy, because he had lived the stories at first hand. The little boy haunted the stable, and there in the grain-room it was:

"Conroy, *uff* you don't mind, let's hear about the time my gran'daddy went into Chief Joseph's camp in the lava beds." Which tale began:

"It was after the fust day's scrap, an' the redskins got twenty outa fifty good men in K Troop, when the colonel called Gran'daddy Fancher in.

"'Captain,' s'e, 'captain, I want you to pick the bravest solger in the bloody regiment,' s'e. '*You know the one I mean—a fine, han'some young solger wot can ride like a Sioux an' shoot like a 'Pache, an' wot ain't afraid of nothin' that moves in earth, air, or water.*'" Buzzy's eyes were always bulging by this time, but he managed to ask breathlessly:

"And gran'daddy picked *you*—"

"W'y, I was *there*; wasn't I, Buzzy?"

"Ye-es."

"Very well, then."

It was concerning Conroy that Fancher's first serious clash with the colo-

onel came—and Conroy *was* enough to turn a troop commander's hair white. For five days after every payday there was a complete hiatus of the colonel's ancient orderly.

True, he always came back, per accurate schedule, more and more nervous as the years went by, but clean and shaved to the blood, to report, as he said, at his post of duty. This French leave-taking was subversive of discipline, but upon complaint the colonel was wont to say:

"Old Conroy! Absent from his post of duty! I'll string the old reprobate up by the thumbs. I'll cut his stripes away. I'll take his buttons and drum him out of the regiment to the tune of the 'Rogues' March.'"

But that was as far as justice ever got. The colonel would have sacrificed his own commission before he would have harmed a hair of Conroy's head. Fancher brought a set of court-martial charges in and listened to this ancient formula unmoved.

"Colonel," he said crisply, "that man's example would ruin any troop. If he won't reform, I shall keep on sending him before courts-martial. With five convictions, the law says he shall be dishonorably discharged from the service. He'll have to brace up or go."

The colonel tapped his desk nervously. He was a little afraid of Fancher's influence.

"That man taught you to ride, Fancher," he said, "when you were Buzzy's size. He served your father and he has served me for years. You may get him, as you suggest, but I warn you now, you'll get me first."

"That may be, sir," returned Fancher respectfully enough, "but unless these charges take their regulation course, I shall have to complain to the general."

Complaining to the general was Fancher's club in everything, and the colonel had no alternative course.

Conroy was tried once and he was tried four times in rapid succession.

He was brought to the edge of ruin, but he believed and still maintained that somehow the colonel would save him.

The regiment was ready to sacrifice Fancher on any altar, and one day when he said "Good morning" to Bower, the adjutant, Bower turned on him.

"You needn't trouble to speak to me, Captain Fancher," he said. "A man that can't be loyal to his colonel isn't worth the brimstone that'll burn him, and a man with no consideration for such a soldier as Conroy has been—a soldier who was earning honor in battles, not books, when that man was bawling for a bottle—has for a heart an amœbic oyster, and I'm not fond of fish." Fancher did not flare back.

"I'm doing what I conceive to be my duty, Captain Bower. It isn't a proper matter for discussion," he said, for he knew that there lay, folded in his breast-pocket, a cipher telegram that would condemn him even more deeply in the eyes of his comrades, though they could only have read:

—flimsy pomeranian howls. Sculptor snatches Brown. Banting nauseates elephants. Emma is a hog.

Which meant roughly:

—orders retiring present commander issue twentieth. Advices indicate more uprising imminent. Advise commander of plans these headquarters in so far as they touch on his conduct in averting war—

"Advising commander" was no gentle task.

"Soft soap these murderers?" the colonel blustered. "Kotow to that squint-eyed imp of hell that ordered the assassination of Sergeant Fellows! I will not. I'm sick of this business.

"There's one way to get obedience from these people, and that's to give them the drubbing of their lives. And you mark my words, Captain Fancher"—the old man was boring each one of them into his open palm with a down-jabbing thumb—"the next out-

rage from them, and I'll do it, orders or no orders."

"Dr. Francis Liebler," said Fancher calmly, "has enunciated the principle that, no matter what their atrocities may be, retaliation upon savages is not justified. They must be handled with firmness, kindness, and justice. The superior mind of the white man must be called upon to do what his superior fighting powers can never accomplish."

"And I enunciate the principle," roared the infuriated colonel, "that, after the next one of my people is cut to red shreds by one of these opium-befuddled hellions, there'll be open season on Moros until a treaty is made that will stand and protect. I'll hear no more, Captain Fancher."

"It'll never do, sir," said Fancher sincerely. "I hope you won't so harm yourself. That's why I spoke."

On his seventh birthday some one gave little Buzzy Fancher a copy of "Treasure Island." Sadly and reproachfully *Chief Joseph* and a host of lesser blanketed and befeathered figures folded their tents and departed from the heart of the little boy's affections, to give place to the sinister shapes of *Black Dog* and *Billy Bones* and *Long John Silver*.

Poor Conroy was reduced from the vanity of personal narrative to laboriously spelling out the fascinatingly outlined log of the Hispaniola. The adjutant donated an old campaign-hat, pinned up on one side with a skull-and-bones pin; the troop saddler was called into service to fashion a broad-buckled belt, pistols, and cutlases of wood, and Conroy, with the stub of a pencil, tattooed lugubrious legends on the field of Buzzy's blue-veined little arm.

The Seven Seas hold no better place than Yolo in which to be a pirate. Under the crumbling bastions of the old Spanish fortifications that wall the American town from the Moro quarters are damp dungeons where real pirates have languished.

From the watch-tower in the citadel bearded Castilians, in clanking armor, have scanned the azure waters beyond the snowy beach of the tropical bay for the low and rakish craft of the searovers against whom the ocean-wall across the straits was built.

In that very tower Buzzy used to sit and watch the sea-shell road that stretches away from the portcullis and the gate through a double row of royal palms, and up, climbing and twisting, here a snowy slash on the hillsides, there a diminishing ribbon of pearls, until at last, only a tiny silver thread, it disappears into the mystery of those jungle-covered hills where very real bandits, brandishing wondrous weapons and garbed in the silken splendor of the Arabian Nights, still charged red-handed to the foray. That road beckoned and promised and called.

One day Buzzy tiptoed through the cool living-room of Fancher's quarters to reconnoiter the patio where his father worked at papers and his mother took her sewing.

"Clack—clack—clack—clack." That was his daddy's mad walk across the tiles; so Buzzy waited and finally heard his mother's low, consoling murmur and his father's tones, troubled and complaining.

"I'm sorry, Daisy; I'd do anything to save Conroy, and I don't want to supersede the colonel; but I warned Conroy. Worse than that: I threatened him. I gave him his chance, and he wouldn't take it.

"And now he's gone again. You can't permit the old men to go on these debauches—that's just what they are—and still expect the recruits to toe the mark.

"As for the colonel's pig-headed adherence to an outworn policy of vindictiveness and brutality, that's the general's affair, not mine."

It was no place for pirates; and Buzzy, troubled, went off to the main gate to see Sergeant Whalen, who was on guard that day, and to ask what his daddy meant about Conroy.

The sergeant was away inspecting relief, but the sentry advised that Buzzy wait. So the little boy sat on the parapet, dangled his legs over the black moat, and watched a lizzard crawl across the lichened face of the glacis.

Presently a grinning, tongue-lolling dog came up and wagged a friendly tail at Buzzy, who climbed down with alacrity to perfect so promising an acquaintance.

He picked up a little stick, and the dog raised expectant ears, inviting him to toss it, which he did. The pup retrieved it, but curveted and squirmed just out of reach, and finally squatted in the dust as though unaware of Buzzy's presence, and proceeded to masticate the stick.

Upon the boy's approach the dog contorted himself most enticingly; but Buzzy got the stick and threw it again. This time it went through the gate, and both Buzzy and the pup raced for it.

Now, had Buzzy walked through that gate, the sentry would have halted him. But he and the dog had been playing about the gate for ten minutes, and the sentry was thinking about a girl who worked in a candy-store in Sansome Street, San Francisco, anyway.

Just outside the portcullis an enticing foot-path winds down through a bamboo thicket along the moat. It was cool in the black shade, and the whole outer city was *tabu*, and therefore thick with adventure.

In the dark heart of the bamboo thicket Buzzy came upon Hira Lahl, Datu Mabuktil, and Pangan Mandi reclining in silken splendor, their way krises, their wicked barongs, their slithering kampilans on the grass beside them.

They were chewing betel-nut paste and regarding the flecks of blue sky over their grass-pillowed heads. Like three automatons worked with a single string, they bent at the middle and sat up, regarding the bare-legged, sandaled

small boy who stood sturdily watching them.

Hira Lahl had brass earrings, and his face was so pock-marked as to seem to have at some time received a charge of bird-shot at close range. Datu Mabuktil is a greasy old scoundrel, and looks the part. One of the eyes of Pangan Mandi had been ruined by the slash of a barong, whose scar still puckered up the right side of his face in a hideous leer. Their skins were of the color of an old shoe and of the same texture.

Taken together, they made the most villainous-looking trio to be seen in a voyage from Borneo to Batan; but Buzzy hailed them cheerily.

"Belay there!" he said, and the three looked stupidly up. "Didn't you never pirate none?"

Hira Lahl drew his thick lips back from his stained teeth; but—

"*Enh - henh — enh - henh*," grunted Pangan Mandi. "*No sabey*."

"*Si, sabey*," insisted Buzzy, and showed them his cutlases and pointed to their own on the grass. Ruefully he compared his coarse tattooing to the pale designs that fairly covered them.

"You sabey, piecee eight? You sabey *Jolly Roger*? You sabey *Jack Ketch* and *Davy Jones*?"

They seemed to be scarcely listening, but they began whispering excitedly enough.

"You *Black Dog*," said Buzzy, indicating his fancy; "you *Billy Bones—Old Pew*; and me *Long John Silver*."

"*Blah-Daw*," grunted Pangan Mandi in the soft, mealy Malay intonation—"Llee *Boh*—Oh *Pfuh*—" and they whispered together again.

"Stow that whisperin' between decks," ordered Buzzy; "and now," said he, "we'll go and we'll scuttle a ship."

"It is the son of the captain pig," exulted Mabuktil, "*'Illu hu akbar!*"

"Scr-r-r-achetty — scr-r-r-ratch—" went Fancher's pen across the official letter-paper, and from its point ran

down the opinionated words, the fact-frozen phrases, the cock-sure sentences:

The situation here is not serious: it only seems so. Yet the present too aggressive administration may lead to trouble . . . outworn policies of bluster and bluff . . . fine old soldier who has seen his day . . . peaceful pastoral people, grossly maligned. . . .

Once his wife looked up to study his seriously intent face, and a sad little smile came and lingered, forgotten on her lips, for moments after it had left her eyes. Then that thought passed.

Her brisk fingers slowed and ceased their employment. Her work lay idly in her lap, and her face took on an expression that caused her husband, who had been abstractedly watching her, while his mind searched for a word, to drop his pen.

"Why, Daisy!"

"Oh!" she said. "Was I day-dreaming? It's nothing." But she rose and went through the living-room to the street door, where she stood looking back and forth.

Then she came back and absent-mindedly put away her work, incidentally crushing some of Fancher's papers, which had dropped to the floor, in her work-basket.

"Here, Daisy! I'm using them."

"Oh, what in the world!" And then, after five minutes:

"Fred, I wish you'd go and look for Buzzy—and please hurry!"

Fancher looked up in astonishment. There was Buzzy's Visayan nurse. There was a houseful of servants. His wife was not a nervous woman, and she had never made a request like this before, but some look in her eyes startled him.

"Yes," he said—"yes, I'll go."

He went to the troop, but the first sergeant had not seen Buzzy. In a ten-minute conversation concerning troop affairs, he almost forgot his mission, remembered it, and then, when one of the men volunteered the information

that Buzzy had been playing near the main gate, an unaccountable uneasiness hurried Fancher's steps in that direction.

The sentry, a scatter-brained youth, stood at a "port arms" while Fancher questioned him.

"Oh, yes; Buzzy is right here now," and he craned his neck in a direction. "He's right—over—there—" but he looked in that direction and turned deathly pale. Buzzy was *not* right over there. "I mean—"

Fancher did not wait. Yes, there were Buzzy's footprints in the inch-deep dust about the gate. He called, and there was no answer.

The footsteps led away. He dashed into the guard-house for a revolver (no one was allowed in the Moro town without one) and hurried through the gate.

Half an hour later he came back, dispirited and alone. He ran toward the colonel's house, making a détour to avoid his home, but he met his wife in the street. She had no hat. The lower part of her face smiled, but her eyes seemed to have lost their expression.

"You haven't found him, Fred," she asserted.

"Not yet," said Fancher hoarsely. He stood for a moment, not knowing whether to go on or to wait, for he began to see that she was in no condition to be left alone.

Then Bower came riding past, and Fancher ran to his stirrups, whispering excitedly. Bower turned and put spurs to an astonished pony. Within five minutes assembly was sounding on the barracks parade and the troops were clattering into ranks. The colonel galloped up to Fancher's quarters, where that distracted officer met him at the door.

"Oh, Bobs," he pleaded, unconsciously, reverting to his childhood name for his father's comrade, "she won't speak to me, Bobs. Come in to her. She won't speak to me at all."

In the twilight gloom the colonel

found Daisy Fancher. Her limp hands were crossed in her lap. She was very erect and motionless. She did not turn her glance when the colonel entered.

Her face was wiped clean of expression, except that her eyes, those round, china-blue eyes of a child, were fixed on some such far-off vision as the children of Hameln must have seen when they followed the Pied Piper into the mountain.

Her lips were slightly parted. She was gone. She was no more there than was little Buzzy. The colonel watched her face for a moment, and then he led Fancher outside.

"I'm going to turn out this regiment," he said. "I'll bring in everything that walks on two legs in Morotown. If that baby isn't in his mother's arms by midnight, I'll show these devils frills to the *juramentado* game that they never dreamed of."

There was nothing of bluster and bluff in the colonel's grim face, and Fancher had forgotten his theories of the power of mind.

"Bobs, I must help," he begged. "I must *do* something. I can't sit there. Let me go."

The men of the Thirty-first had seen their dead, as the soldier saying is. They had sat in raging silence while the murderers, protected by some fiction of diplomacy beyond the ken of the troopers, went unhung.

Little Buzzy had been in the barracks more than was good for most children, and the soldiers idolized him.

The dismounted troops, rifles slanted across swinging shoulders, cartridge-clips clinking in their bandoliers, trotted out through the gate at a thudding double. It was the chance they had awaited. They surrounded the town.

Soon the dark streets were filled with a disturbed populace in an exodus toward the post. The reconcentration was effected with a rough thoroughness that left no doubt in the minds of the reconcentrated concerning the serious intentions of their captors.

Like some sinister magistrate of the Inquisition, the colonel sat at his desk in the room that had once belonged to the warder of the wall-dungeons, a flaring coco-oil lamp at each elbow throwing into deep relief the heavy lines of his seamed and set old face.

As each sullen tribesman was brought before him he made his lugubrious promise and threat in person, and with such picturesque wording, such wealth of vigorous gesture, that the interpreter was an unnecessary formality.

Behind him Fancher, pacing restlessly across the flags, halted as each questioning went forward, waiting anxiously for a word of hope that never came.

At first the imprisoned Moros squatted defiantly in the cell corners; but as the dungeons packed, they congregated in stifling groups, talking excitedly.

At eleven o'clock a dismounted troop marched past the smoky lanterns of the sally-port and grounded arms with a rattling bang on a concrete walk, in plain sight of the cell gratings.

They stood at ease in ranks, talking in low tones or gesturing (as, being soldiers, they were bound to do) in unmistakable prophecy of what was going to happen at midnight.

The whispering in the cells became more excited, and once a headman held all attention for a full five minutes in a gibberish of speech.

"The Americans have turned Moro," was part of it. "The colonel-headman has promised to do to us precisely as we would do to him and with as much mercy. If any have knowledge, let him speak."

Never since the awful day when an outraged Spanish *comandante* unloaded a gunboat, stricken, he averred, with the prevalent Moro murder-madness called *juramentado*, its weapons trained without mercy on the town—never since that day had the Moros seen the white men in so dangerous, so fatal a mood.

A deputation waited on the colonel. They were Moros in an unknown guise. They disclaimed knowledge of the kidnaping. It was the work of outlaws who should be brought to book.

The colonel was their father and their mother, he was the man in the moon, and the great king crocodile of the trackless swamps. Would he relent? They would make a treaty.

They swore on the beard of the Prophet there should be no more running amuck in the market. They offered hostages. They would scour the hills.

"You'll scour Hades," answered the colonel with diplomacy. "I'll do the scouring here. There won't be enough of you left to make a treaty. Go back."

There is no telling what might have happened at midnight, and speculation is unnecessary. At eleven-thirty the telephone from the main gate guard rang, and the sergeant, almost too excited to speak connectedly, got through a message that was understood.

"Private Conroy, at the main gate-guard—sober a day ahead of time—and he's brought in little Buzzy."

"I couldn't tell you where it was, and you oughtn't for to ask," was Conroy's story. "I wuk up, by the taste and the sound, just after a hospital sergeant had poured three quarts of Squibbs mixture down me at the battle of San Juan Hill.

"It wasn't a battle, though. I was some place in the *bukids*, and just ahead of me a pinwheel was spinnin'. By and by it slowed and stopped, and I see it was a coco-lamp in a nipa house.

"I wanted a drink of water worse'n Dives, and I crawled up cautious and looked in. The place was full of Moros. The room where the window was was filled with 'em, and one old squaw was whoopin' sick—cholera for all I know—they're that onconsigned.

"She was too dippy to see and the rest of them was sleepin'. Through

the door where the light was a one-eyed Beelzebub and a pock-marked scarecrow was squatted on their hunkers, a board balanced on their four knees, a playin' chest, and so deep in the game they wouldn't ha' heard the crack o' doom.

"What nearly bugged me over was that, sittin' not three feet from me, his eyes as big as dollars and all dirty with tears, was little Buzzy Fancher.

"I was afraid to breathe for fear he'd be scairt and say someth. He didn't. That boy's smart. He'll be President some day. He just dropped to his hands and crept to me.

"Well, you can move when you're in a room and attrac' no attention, but go in or out of it and it's goin' to be noticed. I didn't lose no time.

"I streaked, and as we went I heard that chest-board drop, and voices in a hullabaloo. We had a start of 'em, but not enough.

"'Up a tree!' says Buzzy, 'like *Frank*, in 'The Red Rover'—they go under you, you know.' It was the only chancet, so up a tree we went, and they streaked under us almost too quick to think about.

"But we moved too soon. Some old lame trailer was hobblin' behind. He heard the rustle and looked up. I dropped on him, and before he could squeal I twisted his neck and we doubled back.

"It may be fun for Buzzy, sneakin' through the dark woods with your heart turnin' to a lump of ice every time you step on a twig or see a gray, barked stump loomin' up like a banshee in your front—but it ain't no fun for me.

After a while we run into Corporal Sleak's squad on the edge of town, and that's all they is of it—only I'd like to ha' been here and help hustle Moros."

Buzzy's father carried the boy back home and held him there, while the three surgeons held a consultation, in which they finally decided that it would be safe to let his mother see him.

She was still sitting where the colonel had found her, and the *medicos* said that she was suffering from paralysis of the great cerebral cortex, superinduced by mental shock, or some such bosh as that.

Buzzy, his grubby little finger in his mouth, stood for a moment at the door, with that sheepish, abashed grin that children who have been surprised in some near-naughty act sometimes give, and her eyes wavered to his face. She started a little, perhaps—perhaps she looked dazed.

"Why, Buzzy dearie," she said. "Why in the world aren't you in bed? Why, we'll just have to get after Tachia with a sharp stick. Why, you ought to be in bed."

That was all. Seven hours had been as completely sponged from her consciousness as though she had been asleep—and with no more ill effect.

The colonel didn't retire. The Mo-

ros had felt the relentless grip of the mailed fist, whose existence they had considered mythical.

They wanted no more waiting in wall dungeons for the appearance of a *juramentado* machine-gun, and they remained quiescent for a year, which, by the way, is a record for those latitudes—and it was all done without a battle, after all.

So pleased were the powers that they offered, and the colonel accepted, his general's star.

His name will remain in the honor roll of wise commanders, a result that was not hindered by Fancher's last confidential telegram to his chief: "*Pomeranian peaceful. Brown snatches sculptor. Banting titillates elephants. Emma is no hog.*"

Which actually read: "Masterly stroke of commander completely clears situation. Sultan seeks treaty. Suggest substantial reward—"

DEATH THE LEVELER.

THE glories of our blood and state
 Are shadows, not substantial things;
 There is no armor against Fate;
 Death lays his icy hand on kings:
 Scepter and Crown
 Must tumble down,
 And in the dust be equal made
 With the poor crooked scythe and spade.
 Some men with swords may reap the field,
 And plant fresh laurels where they kill;
 But their strong nerves at last must yield;
 They tame but one another still:
 Early and late
 They stoop to fate,
 And must give up their murmuring breath,
 When they, pale captives, creep to death.
 The garlands wither on your brow,
 Then boast no more your mighty deeds;
 Upon Death's purple altar now
 See where the victor-victim bleeds.
 Your heads must come
 To the cold tomb:
 Only the actions of the just
 Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

James Shirley.



Crowned Heads

by P. G. Wodehouse

KATIE had never been more surprised in her life than when the serious young man with the brown eyes and the Charles Dana Gibson profile spirited her away from his friend and Genevieve.

Till that moment she had looked on herself as playing a sort of "villager and retainer" part to the brown-eyed young man's hero and Genevieve's heroine.

Etiquette had kept the four of them together on the way up; but once Palisades Park was reached, she had imagined Genevieve would stroll off with her latest conquest, leaving her to amuse and entertain the latter's extraordinarily ugly friend.

It had always happened that way on her previous expeditions with Genevieve, and Katie had come to accept her minor rôle as a matter of course.

She knew she was not pretty, though somebody (unidentified) had once said that she had nice eyes; whereas Genevieve was notoriously a regular beauty, incessantly pestered, so report had it, by musical comedy managers to go on the stage.

Genevieve was tall and blond, a destroyer of masculine peace of mind. She had the haughty look, the nodding pompadour, the languid smile.

She said "harf" and "rahter," and might easily have been taken for an English duchess instead of a cloak-model at Macy's. You would have said, in short, that, in the matter of personable young men, Genevieve would have swept the board. Yet, here was this one deliberately selecting her, Katie, for his companion. It was almost a miracle.

He had managed it with the utmost dexterity at the merry-go-round. With winning politeness he had seated Genevieve on her wooden steed, and then, as the machinery began to work, had grasped Katie's arm and led her at a rapid walk out into the sunlight.

Katie's last glimpse of Genevieve had been the sight of her amazed and offended face as it whizzed round the corner, while the steam melodeon drowned protests with a spirited plunge into "Alexander's Rag-time Band."

Katie felt shy. This young man was a perfect stranger. It was true she had had a formal introduction to him, but only from Genevieve, who had scraped acquaintance with him exactly two minutes previously.

It had happened on the ferry-boat on the way to the Palisades. Genevieve's bright eye, roving among the throng on

the lower deck, had singled out this young man and his companion as suitable cavaliers for the expedition.

The young man pleased her, and his friend with the broken nose and the face like a good-natured bull-dog was obviously suitable for Katie. Etiquette is not rigid on New York ferry-boats.

Without fuss or delay she proceeded to make their acquaintance—to Katie's concern, for she could never get used to Genevieve's rather abrupt way with strangers.

The quiet life she had led had made her almost prudish, and there were times when Genevieve's deportment shocked her. Of course, she knew there was no harm in Genevieve. As the latter herself had once put it, "the feller that tries to get gay with me you can make sure is going to get a call-down that'll make him holler for his winter overcoat."

But all the same she could not approve. And the net result of her disapproval was to make her shy and silent as she walked by this young man's side.

The young man seemed to divine her thoughts.

"Say, I'm on the level," he observed. "You want to get that. Right on the square, see?"

"Oh, yes," said Katie, relieved and yet embarrassed. It was awkward to have one's thoughts read like this.

"You ain't like your friend. Don't think I don't see that."

"Genevieve's a sweet girl," said Katie loyally.

"A darned sight too sweet. Somebody ought to tell her mother."

"Why did you speak to her if you don't like her?"

"Wanted to get to know you," said the young man simply.

They walked on in silence. Katie's heart was beating with a rapidity that forbade speech. Nothing like this very direct young man had ever happened to her before.

She had grown so accustomed to regarding herself as something too insignificant and unattractive for the notice

of the lordly male that she was overwhelmed.

She had a vague feeling that there was a mistake somewhere. It surely could not be she who was proving so alluring to this fairy prince. The novelty of the situation frightened her.

"Come here often?" asked her companion.

"I've never been here before."

"Often go to Coney?"

"I've never been."

He regarded her with astonishment.

"You've never been to Coney Island? Why, you don't know what this sort of thing is till you've taken in Coney. This place isn't on the map with Coney. Do you mean to say you've never seen Luna Park, or Dreamland, or Steeplechase, or the diving ducks?"

"Haven't you had a look at the Mardi Gras stunts? Why, Coney, during Mardi Gras, is the greatest thing on earth. It's a knockout. Just about a million boys and girls, having the best time that ever was. Say, I guess you don't go out much, do you?"

"Not much."

"If it's not a rude question, what do you do? I been trying to place you all along. Now I reckon your friend works in a store, don't she?"

"Yes. She's a cloak-model. She has a lovely figure, hasn't she?"

"Didn't notice it. I guess so, if she's what you say. It's what they pay her for, ain't it? Do you work in a store, too?"

"Not exactly. I keep a little shop."

"All by yourself?"

"I do all the work now. It was my father's shop, but he's dead. It began by being my grandfather's. He started it. But he's so old now that, of course, he can't work any longer, so I look after things."

"Say, you're a wonder! What sort of a shop?"

"It's only a little second-hand bookshop. There really isn't much to do."

"Where is it?"

"Sixth Avenue. Near Washington Square."

"What name?"

"Bennett."

"That's your name, then?"

"Yes."

"Anything besides Bennett?"

"My name's Kate."

The young man nodded.

"I'd make a pretty good district attorney," he said, disarming possible resentment at this cross-examination. "I guess you're wondering if I'm ever going to stop asking you questions. Well, what would you like to do?"

"Don't you think we ought to go back and find your friend and Genevieve? They will be wondering where we are."

"Let 'em," said the young man briefly. "I've had all I want of Jenny."

"I can't understand why you don't like her."

"I like you. Shall we have some ice-cream, or would you rather go on the scenic railway?"

Katie decided on the more peaceful pleasure. They resumed their walk, sociably licking two cones. Out of the corner of her eyes Katie cast swift glances at her friend's face.

He was a very grave young man. There was something important as well as handsome about him. Once, as they made their way through the crowds, she saw a couple of boys look almost reverently at him. She wondered who he could be, but was too shy to inquire.

She had got over her nervousness to a great extent, but there were still limits to what she felt herself equal to saying. It did not strike her that it was only fair that she should ask a few questions in return for those which he had put.

She had always repressed herself, and she did so now. She was content to be with him, without finding out his name and history.

He supplied the former just before he finally consented to let her go.

They were standing looking over the river. The sun had spent its force, and it was cool and pleasant in the breeze which was coming up the Hudson.

Across the river a mist had risen, softening the grim outlines of the city, so that a gas-works, seen dimly, looked almost romantic, like some medieval castle.

In the swimming-pool behind them, belated bathers still splashed and shouted. Others sat silently on the railing, perched like great birds.

Not even the shrill cries of children riding upon the "teaser," combined with the strains of three bands and the forceful music of the distant merry-go-round, could quite destroy the peace of the evening. Katie was conscious of a vague feeling that she was almost melancholy. It had been a lovely afternoon, and she was sorry that it was over.

The young man shuffled his feet on the loose stones.

"I'm mighty glad I met you," he said. "Say, I'm coming to see you on Sixth Avenue. Don't mind, do you?"

He did not wait for a reply.

"Brady's my name. Ted Brady. Glencoe Athletic Club." He paused. "I'm on the level," he added, and paused again. "I like you a whole lot. There's your friend Genevieve. Better go after her, hadn't you? Good-by."

And he was gone, walking swiftly through the crowd about the band stand.

Katie went back to Genevieve, and Genevieve was simply horrid. Cold and haughty, a beautiful iceberg of dudgeon, she refused to speak a single word during the whole long journey back to Sixth Avenue.

And Katie, whose tender heart would at other times have been tortured by this hostility, leaned back in her seat in the surface-car and was happy. Her mind was far away from Genevieve's frozen gloom, living over again the wonderful happenings of the afternoon.

Yes, it had been a wonderful afternoon, but trouble was waiting for her in Sixth Avenue. Trouble was never absent for very long from Katie's unselfish life.

Arriving at the little book-shop, she

found Mr. Murdoch, the glazier, preparing for departure. Mr. Murdoch came in on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to play draughts with her grandfather, who was paralyzed from the waist and unable to leave the house except when Katie took him for his outing in Washington Square each morning in his bath-chair.

Mr. Murdoch welcomed Katie with joy.

"I was wondering whenever you would come back, Katie. I'm afraid the old man's a little upset."

"Not ill?"

"Not ill, upset. And it was my fault, too. Thinking he'd be interested, I read him a piece from the paper where I seen it about these English suffragettes, and he just went up in the air. I guess he'll be all right now you've come back. I was a fool to read it, I reckon. I kind of forgot for the moment."

"Please don't worry yourself about it, Mr. Murdoch. He'll be all right soon. I'll go to him."

In the inner room an old man was sitting. His face was flushed, and he gesticulated from time to time.

"I won't have it," he cried, as Katie entered. "I tell you I won't have it. If parliament can't do anything, I'll send parliament about its business."

"Here I am, grandpapa," said Katie quickly. "I've had the greatest time. It was lovely up there. I—"

"I tell you it's got to stop. I've spoken about it before. I won't have it."

"I expect they're doing their best. It's your being so far away that makes it hard on them. But I do think you might write them a very sharp letter."

"I will, I will! Get out the paper. Are you ready?" He stopped and looked piteously at Katie. "I don't know what to say. I don't know how to begin."

Katie scribbled a few lines.

"How would this do? 'His majesty informs his government that he is greatly surprised and indignant that no notice has been taken of his pre-

vious communications. If this goes on he will be reluctantly compelled to put the matter in other hands.'"

She read it glibly as she had written it. The formula had been a favorite one of her late father when roused to fall upon offending patrons of the book-shop. The old man beamed; his resentment was gone. He was soothed and happy.

"That'll wake 'em up," he said. "I won't have these goings on while I'm king, and if they don't like it they know what to do. You're a good girl, Katie."

He chuckled.

"I beat Lord Murdoch five games to nothing," he said.

It was now nearly two years since the morning when old Matthew Bennett had announced to an audience consisting of Katie and a smoky-blue cat which had wandered in from Washington Square to take pot-luck that he was the King of England.

This was a long time for any one delusion of the old man's to last. Usually they came and went with a rapidity which made it hard for Katie, for all her tact, to keep abreast of them.

She was not likely to forget the time when he went to bed President Roosevelt and woke up the prophet Elijah. It was the only occasion in all the years they had passed together when she had felt like giving way and indulging in the fit of hysterics which most girls of her age would have had as a matter of course.

She had handled that crisis, and she handled the present one with equal smoothness. When her grandfather made his announcement, which he did rather as one stating a generally recognized fact than as if the information were in any way sensational, she neither screamed nor swooned, nor did she rush to the neighbors for advice.

She merely gave the old man his breakfast, not forgetting to set aside a suitable portion for the smoky cat,

and then went round to notify Mr. Murdoch of what had happened.

Mr. Murdoch, excellent man, received the news without any fuss or excitement at all, and promised to look in on Schwartz, the stout saloon-keeper, who was Mr. Bennett's companion and antagonist at draughts on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, and, as he expressed it, put him wise.

Life in the little book-shop had then gone on exactly as before. No hitch occurred to mar the smooth working of the new régime.

If courtiers, playing draughts with a monarch, do not behave like Mr. Murdoch and Mr. Schwartz, the fault is theirs. Nothing could have been more admirably tactful than the chagrin of Mr. Murdoch when he lost a game unless it were the masterly manner in which Mr. Schwartz, spurning opportunity, refrained from winning. Both were awarded titles before the end of the first week.

Life ran comfortably in the new groove. Old Mr. Bennett continued to play draughts and pore over his second-hand classics. Every morning he took his outing in Washington Square, where from his invalid's chair he surveyed somnolent Italians and roller-skating children with his old air of kindly approval.

Katie, whom circumstances had taught to be thankful for small mercies, was perfectly happy in the shadow of the throne. She liked her work; she liked looking after her grandfather; and now that Ted Brady had come into her life, she really began to look on herself as an exceptionally lucky girl, a spoiled favorite of fortune.

For Ted Brady had called, as he had said he would, and from the very first he had made plain, in his grave, direct way, the object of his visits.

There was no subtlety about Ted, no finesse. He was as frank as a music-hall love-song.

On his first visit; having handed Katie a large bunch of roses with the

stolidity of a messenger-boy handing over a parcel, he had proceeded, by way of establishing his *bona fides*, to tell her all about himself.

He supplied the facts in no settled order, just as they happened to occur to him in the long silences with which his speech was punctuated. Small facts jostled large facts. He spoke of his morals and his fox terrier in the same breath.

"I'm on the level. Ask any one who knows me. They'll tell you that. Say, I've got the cutest little dog you ever seen. Do you like dogs? I've never been a fellow that's got himself mixed up with girls. I don't like 'em as a general thing. A fellow's got too much to do keeping himself in training, if his club expects him to do things. I belong to the Glencoe Athletic. I run the hundred-yard dash in evens last sports there was.

"They expect me to do it at the Glencoe, so I've never got myself mixed up with girls. Till I seen you that afternoon, I reckon I'd hardly looked at a girl; honest. They didn't seem to kind of make any hit with me.

"And then I seen you; and I says to myself, 'That's the one.' It sort of came over me in a flash. I fell for you directly I seen you. And I'm on the level. Don't forget that."

And more in the same strain, leaning on the counter and looking into Katie's eyes with a devotion that added emphasis to his measured speech.

Next day he came again, and kissed her respectfully but firmly, making a sort of shuffling dive across the counter.

Breaking away, he fumbled in his pocket and produced a ring, which he proceeded to place upon her finger with the serious air which accompanied all his actions.

"That looks pretty good to me," he said, as he stepped back and eyed it.

It struck Katie when he had gone how differently different men did things. Genevieve had often related

stories of men who had proposed to her, and, according to Genevieve, they always got excited and emotional and sometimes cried.

Ted Brady had fitted her with the ring more like a glover's assistant than anything else, and he had hardly spoken a word from beginning to end. He had seemed to take her acquiescence for granted.

And yet there had been nothing flat or disappointing about the proceedings. She had been thrilled throughout. It is to be supposed that Mr. Brady had the force of character which does not require the aid of speech.

It was not until she took the news of her engagement to old Mr. Bennett that fate did not intend to be so wholly benevolent to her as she had supposed.

That her grandfather could offer any opposition had not occurred to her as a possibility. She took his approval for granted. Never, as long as she could remember, had he been anything but kind to her.

And the only possible objections to marriage from a grandfather's point of view, badness of character, insufficient means, or inferiority of social position, were in this case gloriously absent.

She could not see how any one, however hypercritical, could find a flaw in Ted. His character was spotless. He was comfortably off. And so far from being in any way inferior socially, it was he who condescended.

For Ted, she had discovered from conversation with Mr. Murdoch, the glazier, was no ordinary young man. He was a celebrity. So much so that for a moment, when told the news of the engagement, Mr. Murdoch, startled out of his usual tact, had exhibited frank surprise that the great Ted Brady should not have aimed higher.

"You're sure you've got the name right, Katie?" he had said. "It's really Ted Brady? No mistake about the first name? Well-built, good-looking young chap with brown eyes?

Well, this beats me. Not," he went on hurriedly, "that any young fellow mightn't think himself lucky to get a wife like you, Katie; but Ted Brady—Why, there isn't a girl in this part of the town, or in Harlem or the Bronx, for that matter, who wouldn't give her eyes to be in your place. Why, Ted Brady is the big noise. He's the star of the Glencoe."

"He told me he belonged to the Glencoe Athletic."

"Don't you believe it. It belongs to him. Why, the way that boy runs and jumps is the real limit. There's only Billy Burton of the Irish-American that can touch him. You've certainly got the pick of the bunch, Katie."

He stared at her admiringly, as if for the first time realizing her true worth. For Mr. Murdoch was a great patron of sport.

With these facts in her possession Katie had approached the interview with her grandfather with a good deal of confidence.

The old man had listened to her recital of Mr. Brady's qualities in silence. Then he shook his head.

"It can't be. I couldn't have it."

"Grandpapa!"

"You're forgetting, my dear."

"Forgetting?"

"Who ever heard of such a thing? The granddaughter of the King of England marrying a commoner. It wouldn't do at all!"

Consternation, surprise, and misery kept Katie dumb. She had learned in a hard school to be prepared for sudden blows from the hand of Fate, but this one was so entirely unforeseen that it found her unprepared, and she was crushed by it. She knew her grandfather's obstinacy too well to argue against the decision.

"Oh, no; not at all," he repeated. "Oh, no; it wouldn't do."

Katie said nothing. She was beyond speech. She stood there, wide-eyed and silent, among the ruins of her little air-castle.

The old man patted her hand affectionately. He was pleased at her docility. It was the right attitude, becoming in one of her high rank.

"I am very sorry, my dear; but—oh, no; oh, no; oh, no—" His voice trailed away into an unintelligible mutter. He was a very old man, and he was not always able to concentrate his thoughts on a subject for any length of time.

So little did Ted Brady realize at first the true complexity of the situation that he was inclined, when he heard the news, to treat the crisis in the jaunty, dashing, love-laugh-at-locksmiths fashion so popular with young men of spirit when thwarted in their loves by the interference of parents and guardians.

It took Katie some time to convince him that—just because he had the license in his pocket—he could not snatch her up on his saddle-bow and carry her off to the nearest clergyman after the manner of young *Lochinvar*.

In the first flush of his resentment at restraint he saw no reason why he should differentiate between old Mr. Bennett and the conventional bann-forbidding father of the novelettes with which he was accustomed to sweeten his hours of idleness.

To him, till Katie explained the intricacies of the position, Mr. Bennett was simply the proud millionaire who would not hear of his daughter marrying the artist.

"But, Ted dear, you don't understand," Katie said. "We simply couldn't do that. There's no one but me to look after him, poor old man. How could I run away like that and get married? What would become of him?"

"You wouldn't be away long," urged Mr. Brady, a man of many parts, but not a rapid thinker. "The minister would have us fixed up inside of half an hour. Then we'd look in at Mouquin's for a steak and fried just to make a sort of wedding-break-

fast. And then back we'd come, hand-in-hand, and say, 'Well, here we are. Now what?'"

"He would never forgive me."

"That," asserted Ted judicially, "would be up to him."

"It would kill him. Don't you see, we know that it's all nonsense, this idea of his; but he really thinks he is the king, and he's so old that the shock of my disobeying him would be too much. Honest, Ted, I couldn't."

Gloom unutterable darkened Ted Brady's always serious countenance. The difficulties of the situation were beginning to come home to him. He began to perceive that this was not a matter which could be carried through with the high hand and the defiant laugh. The more he examined the problem the less capable of solution did it seem.

"Maybe if I went and saw him—" he suggested at last.

"You *could*," said Katie doubtfully.

Ted tightened his belt with an air of determination, and bit resolutely on the chewing-gum which was his inseparable companion.

"I will," he said.

"You'll be nice to him, Ted?"

He nodded. He was the man of action, not words.

It was perhaps ten minutes before he came out of the inner room in which Mr. Bennett passed his days. When he did there was no sign of jubilation on his face. His brow was darker than ever.

Katie looked at him anxiously. He returned the look with a somber shake of the head.

"Nothing doing," he said shortly. He paused. "Unless," he added, "you count it anything that he's made me an earl."

In the next two weeks several brains busied themselves with the situation. Mr. Murdoch scratched his head, thought tensely for three days, and then said that it had got *his* goat.

Mr. Schwartz nodded ponderously—it was his habit to treat life's problems with ponderous nods—brooded awhile, and stated that it had "godt also his goad."

Genevieve, reconciled to Katie after a decent interval of wounded dignity, said that she supposed there was a way out if one could only think of it, but it certainly got past her.

The only approach to a plan of action was suggested by the broken-nosed individual who had been Ted's companion that day at Palisades Park, a gentleman of some eminence in the boxing world, who rejoiced in the name of the Tennessee Bear-Cat.

What they ought to do, in the Bear-Cat's opinion, was to get the old man out into Washington Square some morning. He of Tennessee would then sasshay up in a flip manner and make a break. Ted, waiting close by, would resent his insolence. There would be words, followed by blows.

"See what I mean?" pursued the Bear-Cat. "There's you and me mixing it—I'll square the cop on the beat to leave us be, he's a friend of mine. Pretty soon you hand me one on the plexis and I take th' count. Then there's you hauling me up by th' collar to the old gentleman, and me saying I quits and apologizing. See what I mean?"

The whole, presumably, to conclude with warm expressions of gratitude and esteem from Mr. Bennett, and an instant withdrawal of the veto.

Ted himself approved of the scheme. He said it was a crackerjack, and he wondered how one so notoriously ivory-skulled as the other could have had such an idea.

The Bear-Cat said modestly that he had 'em sometimes. And it is probable that all would have been well had not it been necessary to tell the plan to Katie, who was horrified at the very idea, spoke warmly of the danger to her grandfather's nervous system, and said that she did not think the Bear-

Cat could be a nice friend for Ted. And matters relapsed into their old state of hopelessness.

And then, one day, Katie forced herself to tell Ted that she thought it would be better if they did not see each other for a time. She said that these meetings were only a source of pain to both of them. It would really be better if he did not come round for—well, quite some time.

It had not been easy for her to say it. The decision was the outcome of many wakeful nights. She had asked herself the question whether it was fair for her to keep Ted chained to her in this hopeless fashion, when, left to himself and away from her, he might so easily find some other girl to make him happy.

Had not Mr. Murdoch spoken of girls in Harlem, and even in the distant Bronx, who were dying to make him happy? It was not right that she should spoil his life. Her mind was made up. She would send him away.

So Ted went, reluctantly, and the little shop on Sixth Avenue knew him no more. And Katie spent her time looking after old Mr. Bennett (who had completely forgotten the affair by now, and sometimes wondered why Katie was not so cheerful as she had been), and—for though unselfish, she was human—hating those unknown girls, whom in her mind's eye she could see clustering round Ted, smiling at him, making much of him, and driving the bare recollection of her out of his mind.

The summer passed. July came and went, making New York an oven. August followed, and one wondered why one had complained of July's tepid advances.

With the beginning of September came the first faint suggestion that this could not last, and that the fall would soon be here to make life endurable again. New York was still an oven, but there was hope in the air.

Katie had almost welcomed the heat

which had brought death to some and the uttermost limit of discomfort to most. She found that it had the merit of killing thought. One moved languidly, dizzily through the days.

It was not easy to sleep at night, but it was also difficult to concentrate one's mind on anything, even on Ted. She found relief in a temperature which mounted day by day. Old Mr. Bennett, for his part, reveled in it. He loved warmth.

It was on the evening of September 11 that Katie, having closed the little shop, sat in the dusk on the steps, as many thousands of her fellow townsmen and townswomen were doing, turning her face to the first breeze which New York had known for two months.

The hot spell had broken abruptly that afternoon, and the city was drinking in the coolness as a flower drinks water. Clean and steady the breeze blew up from the bay. Not all the dust of Sixth Avenue could spoil it.

The rumble of the Elevated trains smote the ear with less painful jarring. From round the corner, where the yellow cross of the Judson Hotel shone down on Washington Square, came the shouts of children and the strains, mellowed by distance, of the indefatigable barrel-organ which had played the same tunes in the same place since the spring.

Katie closed her eyes and listened. It was very peaceful this evening, so peaceful that for an instant she forgot even to think of Ted. And it was just during this instant that she heard his voice.

"That you, Kid?"

He was standing before her, his hands in his pockets, one foot on the pavement, the other in the road; and if he was agitated, his voice did not show it.

"Ted!"

"That's me. Can I see the old man for a minute, Katie?"

This time it did seem that she could detect a slight ring of excitement.

"It's no use, Ted. Honest."

"No harm in going in and passing the time of day, is there? I've got something I want to say to him."

"What?"

"Tell you later, maybe. Is he in his room?"

He stepped past her and went in. As he went he caught her arm and pressed it, but he did not stop. She saw him go into the inner room, and heard through the door, as he closed it behind him, the murmur of voices.

And almost immediately, it seemed to her, her name was called. It was her grandfather's voice which called, high and excited. The door opened and Ted appeared.

"Come here a minute, Katie, will you?" he said. "You're wanted."

The old man was leaning forward in his chair. He was in a state of extraordinary excitement. He quivered and jumped. Ted, standing by the wall as stolid as ever; but his eyes glittered.

"Katie," cried the old man, "this is a most remarkable piece of news. This gentleman—a most remarkable piece of news. This gentleman has just been telling me—extraordinary. He—"

He broke off and looked at Ted as he had looked at Katie when he had tried to write the letter to the parliament of England.

Ted's eye, as it met Katie's, was almost defiant.

"I want to marry you," he said.

"Yes, yes," broke in Mr. Bennett impatiently, "but—"

"And I'm a king."

"Yes, yes, that's it—that's it, Katie. This gentleman is a king."

Once more Ted's eye met Katie's, and this time there was an imploring look in it.

"That's right," he said slowly.

"I've just been telling your grandfather. I'm the King of Coney Island."

"That's it. Of Coney Island."

"So there's no objection now to us

getting married, kid—your royal highness. It's a royal alliance—see?"

"A royal alliance," echoed Mr. Bennett.

Out in the street Ted held Katie's hand and grinned a little sheepishly.

"You're mighty quiet, kid," he said. "It looks as if it don't make much of a hit with you, the notion of being married to me."

"Oh, Ted! But—"

He squeezed her hand.

"I know what you're thinking. I guess it was raw work, pulling a tale like that on the old man. I hated to do it, but gee! when a fellow's up against it like I was, he's apt to grab most any chance that comes along.

"Why, say, kid, it kind of looked to me as if it was sort of *meant*. Coming just now, like it did, just when it was wanted, and just when it didn't seem possible it could happen.

"Why, a week ago I was nigh on two hundred votes behind Billy Burton. The Irish-American put him up, and everybody thought he'd be king. 'And then suddenly they came pouring in for me, till at the finish I had Billy looking like a regular has-been.

"It's funny the way the voting jumps about every year in this Coney

election. It was just Providence, and it didn't seem right to let it go by. So I went in to the old man and told him. Say, I tell you I was just sweating when I got ready to hand it to him. It was an outside chance he'd remember all about what the Mardi Gras at Coney was, and just what being a king at it amounted to.

"Then I remembered you telling me me you'd never been to Coney, so I figured your grandfather wouldn't be what you'd call well fixed in his information about it, so I took the chance, and he fell for it right away. I felt mean, but it had to be done."

He caught her up and swung her into the air with a perfectly impassive face. Then, having kissed her, he lowered her gently to the ground again.

"And say," he said, "come to think of it, I don't see where there's so much call for me to feel mean. I'm not so far short of being a regular king. Coney's just as big as some of these kingdoms you read about on the other side; and from what you see in the papers about the goings-on there, it looks to me that, having a whole week on the throne like I'm going to have amounts to a pretty steady job as kings go."

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO A LOVER.

WHY so pale and wan, fond lover?

Prythee, why so pale?

Will, when looking well can't move her,

Looking ill prevail?

Prythee, why so pale?

Why so dull and mute, young sinner?

Prythee, why so mute?

Will, when speaking well can't win her,

Saying nothing do 't?

Prythee, why so mute?

Quit, quit, for shame! this will not move,

This cannot take her;

If of herself she will not love,

Nothing can make her:

The devil take her!

Sir John Suckling.

Pay Day in Palaor



by Patrick Gallagher

BASILIO SALAZAR frowned upon the Panguingue card, and intuitively his brown fingers caressed the blade of his bolo. The card lay on the soft, red earth, a few inches away from his unslippered, stumpy toes.

The heavy knife—inseparable companion of the Filipino of the *bosque*—was balanced across one of his knees. The native was sitting at his ease on the rear steps of his American master's bungalow. There was murder in his heart and in his eye.

The card, with the three curiously colored cups painted upon its upturned face, represented the cause. Basilio had gambled and lost more than he could pay.

The blue-bladed bolo represented the means of avoiding judgment by silencing his creditor. His mind made up, he slipped the knife, long as a sword and heavy as a butcher's cleaver, down one of the legs of his loose pantaloons, left the bungalow, and went whistling up the trail.

The brief dusk of the tropics was gathering over *barrio* and *bosque*, village and semiwilderness. He knew the habits of old Cospito, to whom he

owed the money he could not pay. Guardedly he approached the gambler-miser's shack, sniffed about it like a hound on a hot scent; the silence told him that, as he had expected, Cospito had retired early.

The *bejuco* floor of the nipa-thatched dwelling was propped high above the swamp and puddles upon which its bamboo pole supports raised their slender but strong columns at each corner.

In the open space between the swamp and puddles and the interstices of the floor strips, mosquitoes buzzed and centipedes dropped from their nests.

Into this space, bolo in hand, crept Basilio, one ear cocked close to the floor strips, brown fingers feeling for the depression made by the recumbent sleeper above him.

Cospito, like his poorer compatriots, disdained the American or European luxury of a bedstead. The woven fiber *petate*, or sleep-mat, and the fragile floor, with its many gaps, alone separated his snoring bulk from the prowling man with the bolo.

Fingers, ears, nose, soon located the precise position of the miser doomed

to the knife because he had won at a game of cards money that the loser could not pay.

Basilio satisfied himself that Cospiro was lying face downward. This made it easier to avoid error in choosing a vital spot.

The precise place determined, the blade of the bolo was inserted between the *bejuco* strips—cautiously, slowly, strong brown fingers guiding the point. Then, with both hands claspings the hilt, the bolo was driven straight up, held in place until blood flowed, given the "Spanish twist."

The dying sleeper groaned and was still. Basilio cleaned and secreted his weapon.

Whistling softly with satisfaction, he hurried back to the bungalow of the American. Not a twinge of conscience disturbed him. What is the life of a man when it menaces one with slavery which the custom of the country decreed as the cost of bankruptcy?

Thus, reasoning against unreason, Basilio closed his red incident. But he would be late in preparing supper for his master, and the American, Lieutenant Marker, would surely scold and perhaps fine him for the inconvenience.

Words would not hurt—a Spaniard would have birched his feet, but (he shrugged his shoulders carelessly) the Americans had banned the *bastinado*. The loss of ten or twenty cents, however, at the approaching end of the month was a matter of grave seriousness. He must have an excuse ready.

"Basilio! Hey, Basilio! Where the devil are you, boy?"

Tom Marker, tall, young, sun-stained, was standing at the bungalow porch, calling lustily for his *muchacho*, his dust-laden blue and khaki uniform showing that he had just returned from a hike in the hills. Cattle-thieves and other more serious bandits gave the little detachment of constabulary plenty to do.

"Here, *señor*," Basilio answered,

hurrying by the back way through the bungalow. "The *señor* called?"

"Yes, you little thief, the *señor* has been shouting himself hoarse calling for you. Where have you been this hour and more? No supper ready, I suppose, or burned to a cinder. Haven't I told you, boy, I won't stand for your monkeying around the *barrio* playing Panguingue, drinking *bino*, or fooling with that Carmelita girl when I'm paying you to look after this shack of mine? Drunk again, hey?"

Basilio rubbed the sole of one foot against the other shin and grinned sheepishly. He thought it well to simulate a modest degree of intoxication, but remembering the risk of a fine, he held to the excuse he had already adorned to fit his agile tongue.

"No-hoy, *señor*, but it is the water in the well that is unfit to drink. I feel sure, *señor*, it has been poisoned. So I go to the spring, and it is a long way, *señor*, and the bucket heavy. Perhaps a glass of *bino* at Pascual's, *señor*, it was but a little thing. But the *señor* will pardon Basilio, who but thinks of his kind American master's health. There are so many of those bad men who do not wish the American lieutenant well."

"No doubt. Well, hurry supper and lay out my white uniform. I am going to call upon a young lady; you monkey—now what's got you?"

Basilio, having dexterously removed from his left instep by means of the sharp nail of the right great toe a fleck of mud derived from the village road, was showing both rows of teeth in a smile which threatened to dislocate his jaws.

"Nothing, *señor*, but the *Señorita* Edwards is most charmingly beautiful."

Marker, his previous annoyance forgotten, was busy getting out of his soiled field clothes preparatory to a good scrub and a change of linen. When one is very much in love one rather likes to hear the adored one

praised—even by an inquisitive Filipino "boy."

"And, supposing she is, what has that got to do with *you*?" exclaimed the lieutenant.

Quick as a flash, Basilio's expression changed from gay to grave. He shook his head from side to side very slowly as he said: "There are many who think the *señorita* most beautiful."

"Of course, Basilio. I don't mind telling you—no, not those shoes, the patent-leather ones—even in God's country there are not many girls you could put alongside Miss Edwards." That's why every American around here is so crazy about her."

Basilio looked at his reflection in the highly polished shoe and grunted an agreement. "Also Don Julian," he added without emotion.

"Also Don—who?" almost glared the young officer through a lather of soap and water.

"Don Julian Santos, *señor*—son of the hemp planter. He is very rich, is it not so? And Carmelita says he has told her he will perhaps ask the American lady who is so beautiful to stop teaching those tiresome children and live all the time doing nothing in the big house of his father's plantation."

Basilio had managed to finish his village gossip in spite of a bar of soap which landed harmlessly in his shock of straight black hair.

Marker laughed at his passing fit of jealous anger. The debilitated figure of the debauched and prematurely aged half-breed son of the native planter was not calculated to impress a young soldier as a serious rival.

Why, the girl with her healthy, clean ideas would regard the very suggestion as an insult. She was not of the kind that married such part-Spanish, part-Filipino *mestizos*, as they were called, to be ostracized by the American women in the islands.

"Basilio!" he said sharply.

"Yes, *señor*."

"You tell Carmelita from me that

if I catch her or you repeating anything like that again I'll put you inside that nice steel cage they've just shipped down from Manila. You savvy?"

"Yes, *señor*, Basilio savvy."

"See you do."

Supper over, Lieutenant Marker lost no time in making his way to the bungalow of Miss Edith Edwards, teacher of the little district school. Beginning with the first hour of her arrival, about six months before, the half dozen Americans stationed in and around Palaor had fallen head over ears in love with the golden-haired, russet-cheeked, blue-eyed Massachusetts girl.

But all had been laughingly held at a safe distance. When not busy teaching her Filipino pupils most of her time was spent with her younger brother, Dick, whose hollow cheeks and unnaturally bright eyes told of the ravages of consumption. Dick was twelve; Edith was just entering her twentieth year.

But sorrow and responsibility had made her a woman, the more bewitching because she hid her troubles under a mask of light-heartedness.

Most of her little savings had gone to pay doctors' fees in the hope that Dick's life might be saved. Now, believing there was no hope, her one desire was to give the boy as much comfort and happiness as the means at her disposal allowed.

As Tom Marker turned in at the green painted wicket he saw the girl seated, as usual, with Dick on the veranda. The boy's waxlike skin brightened with a warm flush of pleasure as soon as he recognized the visitor. Marker was a hero in his eyes, and on his "good days"—which had recently been few and far between—the lieutenant taught him to ride and shoot.

"Just in the nick of time, Tom!" he cried, as Paulina, Edith's Filipino servant, drew forward a low wicker

chair for the one young American who did not weary her mistress by sudden and persistent protestations of love. "I've just got sis to promise that I'm to be an officer, too, as soon as I get bigger and stronger."

Edith smiled sadly over the little invalid's shoulder.

"That's straight, Miss Edwards?" Marker asked as he stretched himself at his ease alongside Dick's chair.

"Oh, yes Mr. Marker! It's a bargain. But Dick has promised to be very careful from now on, so as to get well soon, and not go tramping off by himself in the woods and getting chilled by the rain-storms, as he did last week."

"And mighty good exercise in discipline, Dick boy. If you're going to command soldiers, you must first know how to obey, which reminds me"—taking from one of his pockets a small field edition of the United States army manual—"here's that book I promised you, Dick. Just came down to-day from Manila, so I thought I'd bring it around."

The boy's eyes again sparkled with delight, but his first words of thanks were drowned by a fit of coughing, which left him pitifully pale and weak.

Edith urged him to go to his room, as the night air was damp and foggy; but he pleaded to remain a little longer on the veranda, reading his book by the light of the oil-lamp suspended from one of the supporting beams of the sloping eaves.

Edith and Marker left him absorbed in the technicalities of the soldier's duties and drills, walking out of the little garden together, down the western bend of the trail which ended at the lake shore. They talked about indifferent things until the girl touched upon the peace, now to all appearances permanently established on the island.

"Yes, worse luck," Marker agreed. "Of course, it's a good thing for the government and the natives, and all

that. But for a constabulary man there's little glory or chance to do anything in a place like Palaor. Now, if I were only up in Luzon, in Samar or in Mindanao, there'd be a better show for promotion.

"Where you're cooped up in a hole like this they never hear of you, and you get lost in the shuffle. After that last little racket our fellows pounded all the fight out of the insurgents in this neck of the woods. Nothing worse than a cattle-lifting case has come up for months."

"But," insisted Miss Edwards, "isn't that the object of the constabulary? Isn't all the horrid scouting and fighting and killing and imprisonment just to make peace and keep it?"

"I suppose so. But it's only the fellows who keep in the scrapping who work their way up to the top. The others don't count."

They had reached the edge of the lake. The girl seated herself on a flat boulder within a few feet of the purling, starlit tide. After a brief silence the man said softly:

"Edith!"

The girl blushed to her temples. It was the first time he had called her by her given name. She said to herself she ought to be vexed, but her heart told her she was pleased. She had been calling him "Tom" in a big-brotherly fashion for weeks past, and he had seemed to accept the situation—so unlike the others who had plagued her with sudden efforts at close intimacy.

A tiny voice within her whispered advice to preserve the friend by frowning upon the lover. But she did not. Instead, she said very shyly:

"Yes, Tom."

"Edith dear, if I were to go away from here would you miss me very much?"

Her eyes were upon the silver path tracked by the young moon on the undulating water. She was purposely avoiding looking up at him; but she knew he was bending over her, and

now very gently he drew her idle hand between his two tanned palms and sat down awkwardly enough beside her. She sensed her power over him and was pleased.

In bashful, broken sentences he told her what was on his mind. It was a simple avowal, and its very simplicity pleased her. There was a depth of honest sincerity in the brief, "I love you—I want you, Edith"; and what followed was the unselfish pleading of a real man's devotion.

He did not ask her to pledge herself to a poorly paid lieutenant of constabulary. But he did want a chance to win his way to her heart.

He had an offer of a transfer which promised quick promotion. Would she wait a little for him to provide the means of making her happy? That was all he asked. And before he finished her head was nestling dangerously close to his shoulder.

With a little start of displeasure and embarrassment she came to herself. Like a woman, she first adjusted her ruffled curls and then laughed lightly as she rose to her feet. The laugh ended abruptly. She seized his hands and held him the length of her slender arms away from her.

"Tom," she said—and she was glad the night shadows hid her accusing blushes—"you've been a very good boy—yes. I suppose I ought to tease you and keep you guessing. But I won't. No"—he had moved to draw closer to her—"keep your distance, sir."

"I like you, Tom—*very* much. Do I love you? I'll have to ask myself that and make sure."

Then a shadow crossed her eyes, and she winced as if in great pain. The emotion passed, but it left her pale and very serious.

"No, Tom," she said with grave finality. "It can't be, anyhow. You forget Dick."

She released his hands and stood gazing out over the lake, turning her head away from him.

"I promised dad and mother to look after Dick, Tom. I'm all he has. He needs me. Please go away now and leave me."

"But that's just it, Edith. Dick needs both of us. You know, little girl, I don't want to put it that way—I know it wouldn't and shouldn't influence you. But if you think I could make you happy, darling, why not give me the chance to help you look after Dick? You know how much I like him, and I know he likes me, too. We could be so happy, the three of us together!"

She shook her head slowly, decisively.

"No, Tom. That would not be fair. I could not ask you to take up another burden. I love to work for him, but he's my brother and I'm the only one he has to look after him. Please don't make it harder for me. It seems hard to lose your friendship just when I was beginning to like you so much. But I cannot do what you ask."

Marker was touched by the girl's loyalty and independence. And now he was the more determined to lift from her delicate shoulders the care of the little invalid whom he had come to love for his own sake as well as for his sister's.

Controlling himself as well as he could, he asked her to think over his offer, resting assured that Dick's health meant much to him—that the boy needed his sister and would soon grow strong if she were only relieved from the work which kept her most of the day at the schoolhouse.

"Take your own time," he said; "a week—a month, whatever you think right."

Inwardly she felt glad of the respite. Her heart had responded at a bound to the pleadings of the man. His unselfishness touched her.

"Give me a week, then, Tom," she said with a wan little smile. "I'll think over what you have said, but please don't rely too much on my

changing my mind. I like you, Tom, far too much to be unkind, and it's not fair to cripple you when you are just starting to make your own way. No good ever comes of marriages like that."

Tom denied this strenuously, but desisted when Edith closed the argument by changing the subject abruptly.

"I want you to do a favor for me, Tom—a great, big favor. I would not ask you, but I know I can depend upon your doing it just the way I want. You know those Santos people?"

Tom nodded an affirmative. He wondered what was coming. Surely that little half-breed monkey, Julian, hadn't presumed to annoy the American girl with his pretensions? Marker had dismissed Basilio's gossip as idle village chatter. But he made up his mind he would hammer a sense of decency into the yellow youth's hide.

"Of course, it's absurd, Tom. But the more you do for these people the more impossible they seem to get. To please the Santos children I went out with them one day to their hacienda. And ever since Pablo, the youngest child, has been bringing to school the most ridiculous notes from his brother Julian, who is old enough to know better.

"I have lectured Pablo and refused to take the notes, but that seems only to have made matters worse. To-day Julian was waiting outside as I left the school, and it was as much as I could do to get rid of him without a scene. I want you to talk to him, but—*only to talk to him, mind!*"

Tom had clenched his fist. The *mestizo's* conduct was insufferable. The girl saw his rising anger and laughed in a spirit of mischief. She saw she would have to bind "her big boy" *only to talk to Julian*. And she did. Reluctantly, Tom promised.

"And"—as they left the lake to return to the bungalow—"this night next week, dear?"

"This night of next week, Tom, I'll give you your answer. Until then

you must stay away. I must think very hard, dear. There is Dick and there is you. I can't hurt either of you, and I've got to ask myself, Tom, do I love you. If you're very, very good, sir; I *will* ask myself that question; and I'll try to give you the answer you seem to want—if you do want it so very, *very* badly. Do you?"

She had taken his hands again and was holding him away from her. Tom, being human and very much in love, almost broke down the fragile barrier.

She was laughing again, in the seventh heaven of girlish delight; and he was protesting his love with a wealth of exuberance, if little eloquence. She stopped him with a peremptory gesture, ran a little way from him, and left him with this promise:

"Meet me here this night week. Let me go home now by myself, and please don't try to see me for a whole week. Will that be very hard?"

She laughed and threw him a rose she had been wearing over her hair.

"Tom dear"—how prettily she accented the adjective!—"I am going to ask myself, really and truly, do I love you."

She was gone.

Marker felt himself very red, very hot, very happy. Was there ever such a girl? he asked himself as he rolled and lighted a cigarette and then strode hopefully up the winding path on his way home to his own bungalow.

The night wind whistling by him shook the broad fronds of a banana-tree. Marker was too happy, too intent upon his own thoughts to see the figure which crouched behind the sheltering leaves.

As his footsteps died away the leaves were parted, a young half-breed emerged and shook a thin, yellow hand in the direction taken by the lieutenant.

"So," said Julian, son of the planter Santos, "it is this American dog who would steal from me the exquisite heart of my soul. 'Susmarie, no!'"

He spat upon the trail and brushed some dust and dead grass from his silver-buttoned white linen suit. Parting his long, straight black hair with a pocket comb, he fixed his American straw hat jauntily on his head.

His black eyes glittered with an evil glow from their deep sockets in the pallid, pitted, shrunken skin. He relieved himself of a vile Tagalog oath and drew a clasp-knife from his pocket, opening and patting the blade.

"Son of a pig"—he was sitting now on the boulder—"it is a little thing to pluck his heart out and fry it. *Pero*, it is surely so. And she would laugh at me! What is it Pablo writes in his book—'He laughs last'—yes, that's it. It shall be as the American school-book says—'He laughs best who laughs last.' Yes, Señor Marker, it shall be so."

Muttering imprecations, Julian Santos hurried home to his father's hacienda to plot the best and safest way to kill the American lieutenant, whose avowal to the girl he had overheard, concealed in the shrubs and tall grass overhanging the lake shore.

"A week from to-night," he kept repeating to himself, "a week from to-night! No. He shall not talk with her again."

At the hacienda next day Julian heard of the murder of old Cospito. All the village was talking about it, he was told, and wondering how much of the old man's money had been taken by the murderer.

The barking of the dead miser's dog had brought a fish-hawker to the shack. It was plain that Cospito had been killed during the night while he slept.

"The American lieutenant," said the friend who brought out the news, "makes much of the affair. He has a guard about the house and asks many questions. What fuss because a man has been killed! You owed him many pesos, is it not so, Julian? How much you owe Cospito?"

The planter's son grunted his indifference. But in his heart he wondered if the murderer had taken or destroyed the notes he had signed to raise money on the security of his father's plantation from the old usurer.

It would be awkward if they were found and shown to his father. He shuddered at the thought that these papers might cause him to be suspected. The guilty thoughts he had been maturing rendered him doubly fearful. He made up his mind to go into the village and see what was actually known.

As he approached Lieutenant Marker's bungalow he heard a high, treble voice, accompanied on a mandolin of peculiarly villainous shrillness, singing a love-song in the mixed Spanish *patois* of the islands.

"Basilio, the lieutenant's *muchacho*," Julian said softly with satisfaction. "He will be sure to know much. I must talk with him."

He found the servant sitting on the rear porch, absorbed in the addition of a new stanza to his song and extemporizing a change of accompaniment. Julian spread his handkerchief over an empty packing-case and seated himself, waiting until the musician finished his song and set down his instrument.

"It should go higher at 'love of my eyes' and the chords of the accompaniment shake—with feeling—and descend. But it is an excellent song, Basilio."

The *muchacho* felt in his pocket for a fresh betel-nut, placed it between his teeth and chewed it as he replied:

"But the song is good, Don Julian. Yes, I have spent much time on it."

"Old Cospito was good at song-making, but his mandolin was cracked and the strings thin with age."

Basilio grunted agreement.

"He sang; but he had iron around his heart to keep away the *señoritas*, Don Julian. Ugh! He was a fool!"

"Who killed him, Basilio? Has the American lieutenant found the man?"

"Who should say? But no—the lieutenant is still seeking the man."

"He will have left much money?"

"It is certain."

"And many notes and papers?"

"The lieutenant has locked them in his safe."

Julian asked many questions, but received little light. He went on his way, leaving Basilio to continue his song-making.

Basilio was not troubling his head about the hunt for the man-slayer. He felt himself safe. Suspicion might point in another quarter. That was no affair of his.

Another man might be tried, condemned, hanged. What matter? Men died every day. One more or less was of little consequence. The important thing was to remain unsuspected and forget old Cospito, who was dead and so could not testify before the American judge.

The murder provided Marker and his men with much to do. Also, there was talk of a raid threatened by several hill bandits who had resumed operations after months of enforced quiescence. Here were opportunities to prove his efficiency, and Marker worked night and day to make good.

Edith's parting words had filled him with new hope. He told himself he would be willing to wait through any period she might stipulate, but deep down in his heart he felt the yearning which he knew would demand a speedy wedding.

Meanwhile, his twofold man-hunting duties helped him to keep his promise not to go near the bungalow or the schoolhouse for a week.

He counted the hours, the minutes, which still divided him from her. Also, he kept his promise to talk to young Don Julian.

Marker met the half-breed by accident on the afternoon of the second day of waiting and working. Santos tried to avoid him; he feared the strong arm of the American.

But the latter gripped him, and—just in time—remembered that his hands were shackled by the girl's com-

mand. They itched to pitch into the dissipated little yellow coward, who writhed away from him. Marker curbed his anger and spoke with deadly coolness.

"Listen to me, Master Santos," he said. "You have been annoying a young lady; I won't mention her name in your filthy ears. But if you as much as look at her when she passes you again, I'll shake the last breath of life out of you. You savvy?"

"Yes, *señor*; the *señor* must be mistaken. I will not look near her," Julian whimpered. His hands and legs shook with fright.

"See you don't," Marker said, walking on and leaving the half-breed mopping the sweat from his brow.

"Don Julian looks sick," Paulina said, coming along the trail with an earthen pitcher of water balanced on her head. Miss Edwards's servant approached the *mestizo* from the direction in which the lieutenant had gone.

Santos was doubly exasperated. The girl must have witnessed his humiliation. She would tell her mistress, of course, and he, Julian, would be laughed at again.

Paulina would gossip. The whole countryside would know how he had quailed before the arm, feared the very tongue, of the American.

"It is nothing," he answered, hurrying away.

Paulina laughed and almost dropped her pitcher.

As soon as she reached the bungalow she hastened to the veranda, where Miss Edwards was sitting, reading.

"It was so funny, Señorita Edeeth. So frightened he looked; and the Señor Lieutenant just shook one great finger at him and spoke to him so soft and quiet. But you could see he meant it—oh, yes, every word."

"Meant what? Who was frightened? What in the world are you talking about, girl?"

"Why, Don Julian to be sure, *señorita*. And he shook both legs, and the sweat was rolling off him like water

from the spring. And the lieutenant but said—

"Paulina!"

"Yes, *señorita*."

"How often have I told you not to come to me with gossip of that kind? Be off to the kitchen, girl, and boil the kettle for the tea."

"Yes, *señorita*."

As soon as her little servant's back was turned, Edith laughed until her sides ached. So her "big boy" had kept his word and just talked to the nasty half-breed. What had he said, she wondered.

She was dying with curiosity to know what had passed between the lieutenant and Julian. Even while she had been scolding Paulina and preventing her maid from telling her, her ears were burning with eagerness to be told.

But she felt it incumbent upon her to curb Paulina's tendency to gossip and "carry tales," and—inconsistent woman!—she knew her little brown maid of all work. Paulina would never rest until she had told her all she had seen and heard. She would choke, otherwise, from the force of suppressed knowledge.

And next time, Edith consoled herself, compromising between duty and feminine curiosity, she could listen first and lecture afterward.

She was pleased to think that Tom's warning had been enough to scare the life out of the impertinent *mestizo*. She would have been less satisfied had she known what diabolical schemes were taking shape in the half-breed's dark mind.

Julian had gone on into the village, nursing his anger with that seething vehemence common only to men who lack physical stamina. Now he would not rest content with simply putting the American officer out of the way. The American girl had laughed at him—she would laugh again as she heard how he had been frightened. Let her! He would make her cry her heart out before he was through with her.

He went to Pascual's place and drank several glasses of the raw native spirit called *bino*. While he was drinking a constabulary soldier came in and greeted him with much show of friendship. He knew the man well. Gabriel, his name was. Born a peon on the Santos estate, the American occupation of the islands had given him his freedom.

He had enlisted in the constabulary, but Julian knew very well Gabriel was an insurgent at heart and the source through which the hill bandits received timely information of any movement threatening them.

He remembered also how, but a few weeks before, Lieutenant Marker had placed Gabriel under arrest for the loss of an ammunition-belt under very suspicious circumstances.

Santos had good reason to know where the belt went—he had sheltered the bandit who received it from Gabriel. The latter had escaped with a heavy fine, the evidence against him being weak and his inevitable *alibi* buttressed by the oaths of several sympathizers.

Julian regarded the chance meeting as an auspicious indication that the fates were working for him. Here was the situation as he reviewed it over his wine-glass:

He must kill the lieutenant.

The American girl must be abducted.

The notes he had given to dead Cospito, secured by his inheritance, were in the lieutenant's private safe. They must be regained or destroyed.

The hill bandits were eager to raid the *barrio*.

Gabriel, his pay for several months ahead forfeited to meet the fine and the value of the "lost" belt and shells, must feel venomous toward Marker and be laying his plans to join his hill friends.

Five days hence would be the first of the month—pay-day. The evening of that day was the time set by the American girl for her meeting with Marker and the giving of the answer

which Julian vowed should never be spoken.

In addition to the ordinary monthly consignment of silver coin and bills, there was coming a sum of several thousand pesos to cover the cost of road work undertaken as a means of relieving local distress.

There had been a storm in the north, and the interisland transport might be late. If the money came in time to be deposited in the care of Lieutenant Marker on the first of the month, but *too late to disburse that day*, the safe in the officer's bungalow would offer to the bandits a tempting prize.

The success of the plan sketched by Julian depended upon this combination of circumstances.

While on his way to meet his sweetheart Marker would be off his guard, and a knife in the back under cover of darkness would settle him.

The safe was heavy and strong. It was of ancient pattern, innocent of secret combination, but its two keys were constantly in the possession of the young officer. These keys must be secured.

The loot would tempt the bandits to assist in the murder of Marker and the abduction of Miss Edwards.

Julian returned Gabriel's greeting with warmth and invited the recreant soldier to join him. Very cautiously he sounded his man; confirming his suspicions, he proceeded boldly to dangle his bait.

For more than an hour they talked together, and they parted with a thorough understanding. They were to meet on the afternoon of the day appointed for the raid, Gabriel meanwhile securing the cooperation of the hill bandits.

The afternoon of the fateful day arrived. Basilio Salazar, body-servant of Lieutenant Marker, was picking some fruit from a banana-tree a little way off the trail. He had forgotten all about his red hour; Cospito was buried, unavenged; suspicion had

passed by the *muchacho*; two new verses which satisfied him immensely had been added to his song.

He was feeling quite light-hearted, because it was very evident the lieutenant was too happy to think of fining him as much as a half-cent piece this pay-day.

The island steamer had signaled her coming. Within an hour or so the constabulary escort would deposit the money at the quarters of the lieutenant. Basilio was about to whistle a bar of his song when the caution inherent in the Filipino of the *bosque* sealed his lips.

He had heard a light footfall and a few minutes later his ear caught the voices of two men talking in the provincial dialect.

They spoke so softly that only a stray word or two was carried to the man behind the tree. But those stray words were ominous. The listener's jaw dropped and his eyes blinked with fear.

He bent low under the tall grass and espied part of a khaki uniform. As the two in the trail went by he heard one man say:

"We'll get him to-night—sure. Yes, but he cannot escape."

Then one of the men mentioned Basilio's name. The voice seemed familiar, but Basilio could not place it.

"Some *secreto* of the lieutenant's," he told himself. How quietly, surely, this American government worked. It was unreasonable. Why bother about a man who was dead?

But they were after him to kill him with the slow death after much questioning and the trial in the court-house. He might soon be dead like old Cospito! His heart was pounding against his ribs. His teeth were chattering together.

Unconsciously he bit his tongue. Sweat rolled off his forehead and cheeks. He felt a peculiar weakness in the middle of his spine.

A passing peep of khaki, a vagrant

whisper, "We'll get him to-night; he cannot escape . . . Basilio," had stripped from him his brown skin of stoicism and bared his miserable nature in all its naked cowardice before a troop of threatening fantoms. "We'll get him to-night!" dinned into the ears of his craven spirit.

He dropped the fruit he had plucked and fled at random into the *bosque*.

As suddenly as he had followed the instinct of his kind to hunt cover, so did he pause and then retrace his way to the trail.

The fever of fear exhausted, the craft of the *barrio* servant came to the aid of the *bosque* savage. Before his mind a plan flashed which he told himself would confuse the pursuing constabulary and at least give him a good start to seek the hill haunts of a bandit friend.

No twitching of conscience troubled him. He had not a thought of regret for the blood he had shed. But the gooseflesh was on his neck as he felt around it the thick hempen cord of the hangman.

As he hurried in the direction of Lieutenant Marker's bungalow he perfected his scheme for flight. There was a banca, or small native dugout, tied up at the landing a few rods beyond the point where the trail ended on the shingle beach.

He would take the *banca*. Once across the lake, his way would be clear and easy. The bandits would welcome a recruit who could give much information as to the methods and forces of the American officer.

And then would come the free life of the outlaw, which he had always envied and looked forward to. There would be no more cleaning of mud-spattered riding boots for the American lieutenant.

He could drink his fill of the native brands of "red eye"—*mino*, *tuba*—kill, kidnap, and plunder to his heart's content. He smacked his lips at the prospect. Stealing silently up to the rear door of the bungalow, he entered.

Meanwhile the two men who had hurled Basilio from the pleasant plateau of placid forgetfulness into the bitter waters of fear continued their walk toward the village.

They parted company at Pascual's place after Julian had treated his accomplice, Gabriel, to a bumper of *mino*. Julian had insisted upon trusting to a knife-thrust from behind, the bandit bolomen lying in wait to finish the job if necessary.

He felt brave in the assurance of numbers behind his arm, and hate made him eager to monopolize the murder of the big man who had cowed him by a look and a word—who possessed the heart of the beautiful teacher. Gabriel urged caution and the bullet.

"He is very strong, very brave," said the recreant soldier. "You had much better shoot. But it is your affair. I will hoot like the owl as he leaves the *casa*."

"That is good," Julian nodded. "My knife will strike between the shoulders—so." He made a gesture with his right hand. "Then, we shall throw the body into the ditch and go with the keys to his *casa*."

"Basilio must be silenced—he is not to be trusted. All he thinks of is his song-making and the *señoritas*. A man will talk to the woman and she to the town. The money will be shared equally, but I must have the papers and the girl."

"She will scream and spoil all. Why bother? There are many women."

"I shall tie her mouth—leave her to me," Julian directed. "Go, now, and keep watch."

Gabriel left the wine-seller's to loiter near the lieutenant's house. With much satisfaction he saw the constabulary escort deliver the sealed bags containing the money, Lieutenant Marker in personal charge of the little party. Julian walked on toward the lake.

Night settled down, dark, starless,

threatening. The moist air seemed stationary. The wide-winged vampire bats sensing the brewing storm, flitted wildly among the trees, bruising their ratlike bodies against trunk and branch, brushing with their hot, noisome breath against the cheek of the wayfarer, and swinging by their taloned wing-tips or hind feet, head downward, from the clustering foliage overhanging the trail.

Julian was satisfied—the steamer, the dark, screening night, all favored his project. He assured himself that the bandits were in ambush, chose the place from which he would jump behind Marker, and waited for Gabriel's signal.

Gabriel had posted himself where he could watch the lieutenant's house without risk of disturbance or detection. He yawned with weariness as an hour passed without Marker showing himself.

Then, just as he was becoming impatient at the delay, he saw the familiar white dress uniform of his officer, the red shoulder-straps, with their broad gold bars, the gleaming buttons and buckle of the belt. The campaign hat, with its broad brim, was tilted forward, partly screening the face—a habit of the lieutenant's which Gabriel remembered. He huddled back in the brush and hooted in imitation of an owl.

He heard the doomed man stride past him, all unconscious of danger.

Gabriel followed at a safe distance, gradually drawing closer. He was just in time to see the pantherlike spring of Julian, the knife upraised and lowered like a flash.

He heard a sharp cry of pain and saw the wounded man turn and grapple with Julian. Then, as he ran forward, the bolomen swarmed into the trail.

The white uniform was spattered with blood, but its bleeding wearer was uppermost, Julian's knife gripped in his hand and the blade pointed at the *mestizo's* heart.

Neither Gabriel nor the bandits

were quick enough to avert the blow. But the renegade glimpsed a slight figure crossing the trail and running toward the gate of Miss Edwards's bungalow.

Gabriel was just in time to trip and seize the intruder. He recognized Dick Edwards and feared that the lad might give the alarm. He gripped the boy by the throat. Dick's eyes glared as he recognized the soldier and realized his treachery.

Bracing his weak muscles with all his might, he caught at the knife in Gabriel's belt, slashed the brown man's hands, and freed himself.

He glanced at the other combatants and groaned with grief and anger. Five bolos were slashing the last vestige of life out of the prone body in the white uniform slit to ribbons and revealing ghastly wounds.

He was too late, he told himself, to help his friend. His sister's danger gave him speed and strength. He swung through the gate, ran up the path, and collided with Edith, pale and frightened, on the veranda.

"That cry, Dick—the noise! What has happened?"

The boy, sick with sorrow and anxiety, drew his sister from the exposed front of the house. He was white, and Edith realized that something terrible must have happened. The boy saw that if he was to save his sister he must act first and tell her the truth later.

"Bandits," he whispered. "Get Paulina. We must escape at once by the back way. We haven't as much as a bolo or revolver here. The only chance is to get to the post and rout out the constabulary."

Edith was quite calm now. She had read in Dick's face, as he sprang upon the veranda, the knell of all her hopes. The hour, the tryst for which she had been about to leave the bungalow, the screams and clash of steel out beyond the gate, her knowledge that the hill bandits were again in a dangerous mood, the recent murder and the

man-hunt in progress, all spoke of a conspiracy to destroy her lover.

He would go toward the lake unarmed to receive her answer. When Dick ran panting into her arms and she looked into his horror-swollen eyes, she told herself she had lured a brave man to his death.

That she was innocent of evil intention, that she would willingly have shed her own blood to save the man who was now all the world to her, went for nothing. The loss was beyond the measure of consolation.

And instinct warned her that the Santos incident had precipitated the crisis. She had heard much of the treacherous disposition of the average half-breed. But Dick's answer rekindled hope. She gathered that he had seen the fight at close quarters.

If Marker had been killed or hurt he would surely have told her. Yet she dreaded to ask about Tom lest the answer sweep hope away from her.

Outwardly composed, but pierced with anxiety in heart and mind, she accompanied Dick to the rear of the house, where the Filipino maid was cowering in a frenzy of terror. The brother and sister encouraged Paulina and cautioned her to slip quietly away with them.

Dick leading, they moved swiftly through the wood behind the bungalow, made a swift circuit, and regained the trail a short distance from the constabulary barracks.

The old stone building erected for the *rurales* of the Spanish days had been burned out some months before. A temporary barracks and prison had been put up hurriedly and the nearest bungalow leased for the officer in command. That was why Marker kept his official safe under his own roof.

Dick found the native sentry asleep. Arousing the man with a thump in the ribs, he had the little garrison astir and under arms within a very few minutes.

He spoke hurriedly and privately to the sergeant—an experienced and re-

liable soldier—and the loyalty and energy of Marker's second in command was quickly evidenced.

Dick was thankful that Edith did not understand the native dialect, and as glad that he could use it as freely as a native. His conversation with the sergeant was carried on in Tagalog so that he might tell what had happened without betraying the truth to his sister until she was safe in the officer's bungalow and the sergeant and a strong detachment could be spared striking a blow to avenge their murdered commander.

The native officer left six men under Dick's orders to protect Miss Edwards and the money in the safe.

As soon as the column moved down the trail and sentries were stationed around Marker's house, Dick put his arms around his sister and asked her to be very brave—he had something to tell her.

He got no further. He felt her hands and cheeks grow cold as ice. Her eyes looked glassy. She lay a dead weight against him and collapsed as he helped her to a lounge.

He sprinkled water on her face and did all he could to restore her, but she remained apparently dead in the silent house, the only sound from without an occasional rasping of a pebble under the foot or carbine of one of the sentries.

Dick yearned to be with the sergeant and his men to take toll from the fiends who had ambushed his brave friend and robbed his sister of the man she loved.

He called Paulina to help him revive Edith, and when their united efforts failed to arouse her the boy's distress was pitiful. Was he to lose sister and friend on this same black night?

He heard the sharp, even tread of the military quickstep. The constabulary were returning. He winced as he thought he would never again listen to Tom's clear voice drilling and directing his men.

"Halt! Double-shackle those prisoners, sergeant! Double the regular guard over the cage. A pretty good night's work, Guzman!"

"Yes, señor."

Dick started and let go of Edith's hand. Was he dreaming? Surely, that was Tom's old cheery voice dismissing his men to quarters! Yet, how could a dead man talk *even Tagalog* to living soldiers? He had seen his friend's body, gashed and bleeding, under the flashing bolos of the outlaws. It was a physical impossibility that any man could survive such wounds.

While the boy's mind was wavering between a wild hope and wondering awe he heard a brisk step on the loose boards of the veranda which caused him to cheer like a nipper watching his first "big league" ball-game. Tom, dust to the ears, telltale rents in his blue shirt and khaki field uniform, caught him and swung him to his shoulder.

This was the picture Edith saw as she opened her eyes—the most wonderful picture her heart could have longed for, her mind imagine.

"Tom!" was all she said, and the name seemed to come from far away.

"Yes, Edith dear."

The lieutenant released Dick and knelt by the girl's side.

"What is it, dear?"

He took her hand, and the pressure of his fingers sent the blood coursing once more through her body.

"We thought"—she whispered and then stopped, unable to put the horror that had stricken her into words.

"I understand," said Marker; "but it was a lucky error, after all. Only for Dick and you sending Sergeant Miguel and his men down the trail, they sure would have got me. That was Master Basilio in my Sunday best. I was taking the statement of a man who saw him hanging around old Cospito's shack the evening before the murder was discovered, when my musical *muchacho* dolled up in my glad rags and gave me the slip. I followed as soon as I could, partly to get him and also to get something else. Do I get it, darling?"

Dick had, discreetly, slipped out to the veranda. The girl was her bright self again. She was quite a long time giving Tom his answer, but ultimately she surrendered at discretion.

It was Marker who called in his new brother.

"Dick, old boy," he said as the delighted lad was making a desperate effort to hug two people at the same time, "I think we'll put you through West Point yet."

TO LUCASTA, ON GOING TO THE WARS.

TELL me not, Sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you, too, shall adore;
I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more.

Richard Lovelace.

The Pink Prune Plays



by

Clinton H. Stagg

A Tragedy of "Small Time" Vaudeville.

FOR three whole days Charlie Jayson and Molly Trainor had been booked in the same theater before either was aware of the other's existence except as automatons in the same puppet show, which proves that true love has no advance agent, and follows the lines of the part in nine cases out of ten.

Charlie Jayson had four dogs and a monkey that were just a little bit above the level of the "four-a-day," but hadn't yet appealed to the supercilious eyes of the "two-a-day" managers and the big money.

Molly, in a simple frock that set off her girlish figure and accentuated the childlike beauty of her face, sang old-time songs with a pretty wistfulness that brought tears to eyes and old dreams to minds that had grown cynical. But Molly hadn't landed the big wheels, either.

The dingy back stage of a four-a-day, five, ten, and fifteen theater, seems a queer place for Romance to crook her beckoning finger, but you must remember that Romance never

did allow the scenery to spoil the play. In fact, where reality is the most tawdry she loves to step in and give her Midas touch of pure gold.

The goddess had come, without cue, back stage in the Orpheum on the fourth day. Charlie had his "troupe" gathered around him while Molly waited for the Three Smasher Sisters to do their last toe fling and exit with many screeches of exultation and some music.

Molly was humming the chorus of her opening song when she felt a pull at her dress hem. She looked down and smiled into the wizened face of Socrates, the wise old monk that played second lead in Charlie's act. Then she gravely shook the proffered hand of Socrates, who was really but a guise of Romance.

She looked up to the proud face of Charlie Jayson. "Isn't he just too cute for anything?" she murmured.

"Big time boy!" asserted Charlie with much pride. And he noticed that her eyes were the prettiest blue he'd ever seen. Mighty fine nose, too.

"He looks as wise as a vaudeville agent," she laughed. "And isn't that the most curious pink color under his eyes, right there where the wrinkles make him look like a prune in a grocery store!"

A sudden fancy made her laugh ring out. "He *does* look like a pink prune!" she averred.

Charlie Jayson had fought for the dignity of Socrates before when people had laughed at him, but now, very strangely, he found himself laughing with the girl and acknowledging that she was perfectly right and that Socrates resembled a pink prune. She had the whitest teeth and the reddest lips when she laughed!

Then the Smasher Sisters flung their heels at the first orchestra row and the piano player started vamping Molly's first song. Charlie stood in the wings and watched. He'd never seen Molly's act before.

And as she stood there, simply, unaffectedly, and sang the songs of yesteryear in her trilly voice, they had a soft sweetness and a quality of tenderness which struck straight to the heart after the ears had been dinned with the raucous, nasal shrieks of the Smasher Sisters and their rag-time.

"Darn shame she has to hand that stuff t' these low-brows!" gulped Charlie when she had finished the last soft notes of "My Old Kentucky Home." Charlie had been born in Haverstraw, New York, and his boyhood days had been spent in Poughkeepsie. Consequently, that song always aroused a funny choky feeling.

Charlie didn't have any chance to speak with her when she finished, because as she bowed herself off before the curtain Charlie was posed with his dogs and Socrates behind the curtain for his act.

But she did not go directly to her dressing-room. She stood in the wings and watched him, her blue eyes dancing with merriment at the antics of Socrates and her hands softly applauding the stunts of the dogs.

Her presence was a stimulation and incentive. Never had the Jayson act gone so well and so flawlessly.

"Dandy!" she murmured enthusiastically when he had finished and stood in the wings beside her, with Socrates perched on his shoulder and gravely chattering his opinion of the giggling girl who had been in the second orchestra row, left. Socrates had a weakness for girls who occupied orchestra seats and giggled.

"Old Socks never played better in his life," grinned Charlie, turning his head a bit to look at the monk, who thereupon clambered down and politely extended his hand to the girl.

"Why," she exclaimed, as she clasped it once more, "he knows everything we say!"

"And then some!" declared Charlie, his mind vainly trying to figure how a frock that seemed to lack everything stage dresses were supposed to require could be so beautiful. Then he saw her suddenly shrink back against a drop, and as he looked to find the cause he *heard* it.

"Bah! Monkey! Ape of a man!" The hissing sneer came from a low-browed man who had stepped from the shelter of the drop. His bullet head was hunched down between his great shoulders that bulged and knotted with the huge muscles that played under the bare skin that was but half covered by the tawny leopard's hide that was over one shoulder with a big gold clasp.

"Ape of a man!" he repeated snarlingly; then he turned to the girl. "You will dine with me to-night." It was not a question, the way he put it, but a harsh-voiced statement of an incontrovertible fact.

He went a step closer. She fell back, eyes raised appealingly to Charlie Jayson's face. There could be but one interpretation of that look.

"Miss Trainor has allowed me the pleasure of her company." He said it quietly enough, but there was menace in the very quietness. And the quick

glance she darted him was of great thanks.

The heavy face went a dull red with rage. "Match-stick of a man!" he growled; and he finished it with something in his own language, the very sound of which seemed to have a curious tightening effect on the whole inside of Charlie Jayson.

He didn't give an inch as the bullet head was thrust forward, the huge arms doubled threateningly.

Charlie's fists, puny beside those of the strong man who posed with two-hundred-pound cannon-balls as the final curtain dropped, doubled defensively. The girl cowered against the drop with a low cry of fright. "I'll br-reak you like the stick you are!" The big arm raised—

Then a catapulted brown ball of hate and new-born viciousness leaped through the air, an eery, animal snarl and the claws and the sharp teeth of Socrates buried themselves in the wide, bared shoulder.

The very momentum of that leap seemed to stagger the big man, and a deep growl, even more animal-like than the monkey's snarl had been, rumbled from the deep chest.

"Soc!" cried Charlie Jayson in sudden fear. The monkey's danger had driven all other thoughts from his mind. The animal had leaped at the enemy of his master and the girl who had shaken his hand so gravely without idea of fear or bulk or danger.

But Charlie Jayson's heart stood still, and for silent seconds he could not move a muscle.

The enemy shook himself as a buck might try to throw off the clinging catamount; then his growl of anger became low-toned words of fury.

He twisted around, a sweep of his huge hand and arm and the monkey was hurled from him, shivering the whole drop as he struck the giving canvas before he fell at the girl's feet, chattering and moaning with the peculiar babylike sounds of his kind.

The man whirled, a foot upraised to

finish the work his hand seemed to have begun so well. But Charlie Jayson came to life then. A red curtain seemed to have dropped before his eyes so that its flaming crimson filled the whole world. The brute had hurt Socrates!

It didn't matter that the man before him was billed as the strongest man in the world! It made no difference that Charlie Jayson weighed a hundred and forty with his clothes on!

There was no thought that the bulging muscles which could bend an inch bar of iron over a knee could break his back like a rotten stick.

The strong man had hurt his monkey!

For an instant Charlie Jayson balanced on the balls of his feet! Then he shot forward; a hundred and forty pounds of nerve and venom, a taut-corded bunch of determined vengeance. And two hundred and forty pounds of steel-thewed bulk gave way before him.

"Darn you!" gritted Charlie Jayson, with all the pent-up viciousness the man's attitude to the girl had started and his hurting of Socrates had finished.

There was death in the steel-gray eyes of Charlie—death that glinted and glowed with its fire. There was murder in his clenched fists and his set teeth that made the jaw muscles stand out in ridges over the bones.

Perhaps the strong man had seen death in other eyes before in his country of vendetta and slashing knives. Perhaps it had missed him by inches and the fear had never left him.

Or perhaps it was because he was only an overdeveloped bunch of muscles that covered a yellow core, but he never thought of the "match-stick" of a man who leaped toward him, or of the steel cables of muscles that played under his own skin. He only thought of death as it darted from the gray eyes of Charlie Jayson.

He fell back, his jaw dropping to make his cry of fright but a mumble.

One step! Two steps! Charlie Jayson was upon him—and the harsh voice of the stage-manager broke in angrily, furiously:

"Ten dollars apiece for that! Wanta break up the show? Get to your dressing-rooms!"

The voice of unquestioned authority tore away the red curtain from Charlie Jayson's eyes and waked him from his enraged trance. He realized that the orchestra was playing furiously; that the act on the stage had lost semblance of being an act and had become only a mask for the confusion back stage.

He saw an open-mouthed group of stage-hands watching. His eyes took in Molly, supporting her trembling body with hands on the shaky drop, and Socrates, cowering at her feet, still chattering his childlike moans.

"All right!" he snapped, and a jerky, sarcastic laugh came from his lips as he saw the face of the strong man. "It was worth it!" he sneered. Then he picked up the monkey with a tender sweep of his arms and hurried up the spiral iron stairs to his dressing-room.

He slammed the door shut behind him; he grabbed up his street coat and made a soft cushion on the trunk for Socrates. With fingers that shook, despite his efforts to keep them steady, and a sick fear that gripped at his heart, he examined the monk.

A prayer of thanks escaped him. Socrates wasn't hurt; he was only shaken up and frightened. The loose canvas of the drop had saved bones, and the agility of a thousand generations had done the rest.

Even as Charlie straightened up, the monkey imitated him, chattered a few gutturals, and gravely extended his hand to show that they'd fought together and were pals.

"You little son-of-a-gun!" grinned Charlie happily. "Wanted to scare me, eh? You darned little cuss!"

Thankfulness for the monkey's lack of hurt made him forget everything

else, and he hurried into his street clothes, with the able assistance of Socrates, who always acted as valet and usually proved more of a hindrance than a help. But both enjoyed it.

When Charlie was ready for the street Socrates unprotestingly crawled into his wicker carrying-case and closed the door behind him for his journey down the spiral staircase and under the stage, where a shifter made an extra dollar that week for taking care of him.

Just as Charlie Jayson's hand was on the knob of his door a timid knock sounded. He opened it to face Molly Trainor. She went a shade paler as she saw the case and the sudden gravity that her unexpected presence had inexplicably brought to Charlie's face.

"He isn't—dead?" she stammered. "I hurried dressing—because I wanted to know. He looked so helpless and pitiful there—and I couldn't seem to move!"

"Not a scratch!" laughed Charlie, for a laugh seemed to be the thing she needed just then. He understood now why the gravity had come; it was because she had looked so pale, and just a trifle helpless, too.

She was a mite of a thing in her simple street clothes, with a big muff that only made her look smaller in comparison. Sudden anger rose toward the interrupter of the little scene off stage.

"Blame that stage-manager!" he snapped. "Another second—" He glowered because it was not necessary to finish the sentence with words.

"I was so frightened!" she cried, with an unconscious tremor in her voice. "And you were so wonderful!" Her whole face lighted up in the way that sent a glow inside of Charlie Jayson that had never been there before.

"Can't we make that lie truth?" he asked in sudden bravery.

"You mean—" Her eyes, trained by her life to defend her, probed deep.

"A bite to eat?" he finished as she paused.

"Yes," she said very softly, for Charlie Jayson's eyes had told her that he was a white man and square.

"Great!" he exclaimed; then the shaking of the wicker carrying basket that had been going on ever since the door had been opened demanded recognition.

"The little cuss wants to shake your hand again," he laughed, lifting it so that she could take hold of the hand of the extended brown arm.

"Oh, the dear little pink prune!" she laughed in glee at the whimsy. "What is his name?" she demanded.

"Socrates, Soc, Old Socks," enlightened Charlie.

"I don't like those names," she declared gravely. "He's just a dear little Pink Prune!"

"I guess I like that better myself," nodded Charlie, and, curiously enough, he found that his conscience was perfectly clear on the point of giving such a ridiculous name to his pet and partner.

So it was as the Pink Prune that they bade him good night in his quarters under the stage, not far away from the great dumb-bell and the huge iron cannon-balls the strong man used in his act.

Charlie felt the shudder that went over her body as she saw them when she had taken his arm to go out.

"I'm afraid of him!" she confessed tremblingly, and both knew whom she meant. "He's treacherous, and you—"

Charlie laughed the rest of the sentence away. "He's of the knife-and-dark-alley kind," he said, and he added, with just a bit of curiosity: "He seemed to know you quite well."

Once more came the tremble of her body that made him want to take her in his arms and murmur soft words of reassurance.

"He's terrible!" she said with sudden vehemence. "We were together in Allentown last week, and Jefferson

the week before. He bothered me continuously. I couldn't seem to escape him."

"You will now," promised Charlie grimly.

That hour over the small table was the shortest, pleasantest sixty minutes of time Charlie Jayson had ever spent. It was only an hour, because that was as long as Molly would stay.

He took her to her home then, and he was glad that it was with a private family and not one of the cheap theatrical boarding-houses that the "profession" frequented.

He was at the theater early next day, and somehow the dinginess of the back-stage seemed to strike him more forcibly than ever before. The faded drops with their cracked paint, the naked, scarred bricks, the dirt and untidiness of the back-stage of the cheap theater that he had never even noticed before stood out in all their tawdry grossness.

"Rotten place for a woman!" growled Charlie, as he went down under the stage to see the Pink Prune, with the thoughts of the softness of Molly's voice and the laugh in her eyes as she had repeated those two ridiculous words.

The shifter who attended the monkey had never more than grunted before, because he had the usual stage-hand's contempt for the boss of an animal act, but to-day he was even gracious.

"S too bad yuh didn't smear that wop's map!" he grunted. "Cinch, because the yeller that's inside ain't even got the black spots uh that hair kimoni he wears. The darn mutt!"

Charlie nodded, but said nothing. "Darn him!" growled the shifter viciously. "The big cheese goes to sleep in his dressing-room every night. Says he's gotta grab a few minutes after his act so's his muscles'll loosen up. An' wit' a cigarette!"

He took the monk from his basket. She should be getting in about now. And he met her as she entered. She

performed her hand-shaking rite with Socrates gravely, and he actually seemed to grin as she called him by his new name.

The strong man came in as they were standing there. He stopped an instant, his cruel lips twisting in rage and his pig eyes closed till they were coal-black slits.

Charlie's muscles stiffened. The monkey, on his back, cowered down under his arm, but screamed furious monkey-talk. Only for an instant did the enemy stop, muttered something in his own language, and strode on.

Molly's small hand clutched at Charlie's arm. "You will be careful!" she breathed warningly, and her eyes were very close to his. "You won't seek a quarrel?"

"Yes," he said, and he found himself speaking very earnestly. "Yes."

She thrust out her hand, manlike, then hurried away to her dressing-room. He waited to pick up the wicker basket and the newly christened Pink Prune and followed.

Just mounting the spiral iron stairway was the strong man. Apparently he did not see Charlie, but his progress up the staircase that was too narrow to allow any passing was snail-like, and every step he took was an insult to the man behind him.

But Charlie Jayson remembered his promise; he shut his teeth and kept the words he wanted to say behind them.

At the top of the stairs the strong man shot him one nasty glance, then hummed an air from an opera as he took out a cigarette, swinging his room key on a red tag, while he lighted it and hurried to the end of the gallery where his room was.

The monkey, who had been shaking the basket violently with the anger that the nearness of his enemy aroused, subsided. Then Charlie stopped for a minute to look at dressing-room door No. 3.

That was Molly's room, as a glance at the key-board in the stage entrance

had told him that afternoon. For a moment he gazed at it dreamily, then the first sounds of the overture downstairs told him the necessity of hurry.

He handed the dressing-room key to the monkey, who climbed down his arm to insert it and turn the lock. That was always the animal's first duty as valet, just as his last was to lock it. Charlie pulled the door open, and he shook his head in mild wonder at the ideas of theater architects.

"Door's heavy and thick enough for a jail!" he muttered, just as he had muttered that same thing for three days—when he wasn't thinking of something else.

Then he closed the thick wooden door that seemed so incongruous, considering the flimsy structure of the old theater, and obeyed the mandate of the squeaky orchestra far below.

The speed with which Charlie worked to get into his stage togs would have qualified him for a quick-change artist, and he had his reward in a brief conversation with Molly before she went on.

Once more her songs brought the chokiness to his throat and the blur to his eyes, and again he bewailed the low-browness of the five, ten, and fifteen audience as compared with the wonderful Molly.

And Molly, from her former vantage-point in the wings, gave her soft applause of encouragement. But while Charlie posed with his troupe as the "rag" fell, she hurried to her dressing-room.

Jayson performed another record-breaking change. It had been his habit to loaf in his dressing-room between the two afternoon performances, and save two changes of costume. But to-day the dingy six-by-eight seemed unbearable—and there might be a chance to walk with Molly.

But for all his hustle, when he was in his street clothes and had given the protesting monkey to the scene-shifter and reached the stage entrance, he found Molly's key on its hook.

"Miss Trainor go?" Charlie asked casually of the crooked-backed stage-door guard.

"Shoppin', she said," growled the guard around the stem of his black-clay pipe. And he added with a touch of friendliness that stage-door guards have been known to show toward Sir Henry Irving, Jim Jeffries, Edwin Booth, and Christie Mathewson, but never to lesser of their craft: "Why didn't chu poke that wop in the slats?"

"No chance," grunted Charlie without interest. Nature was presenting a curious phenomenon to Charlie Jayson just then—that of a dark and dismal day under a cloudless sky with a bright, burning sun.

"Fool stage-manager!" growled the guard again. "Wop's yellin' as a gold four-sheet. He has to lap up booze between every act so's he'll have nerve enough to do his own stunt. Puts a red tag on his room key so's he kin pick it out when his eyes is whoozy!" He added a snort of disgust at such subterfuge.

Another absent grunt from Charlie as he pulled his hat down over his eyes and started out. Somehow the stage entrance seemed to have taken on the stifling atmosphere of his cell of a room in the loft.

But though he walked until dangerously near his cue-time, the so-called beneficent Providence had failed to live up to the reputation. He caught no glimpse of Molly Trainor.

He saw an irate stage-manager, though. "Stick to the house between shows!" growled that autocrat. "On'y got twenty minutes; an' I don't want to hold no curtain for you. Done enough; crabbed that strong-arm act last night and the Thompson patter-sketch, too."

Charlie was hurt at the unfairness, but he had learned his little lesson of silence several years before. He forgot it, however, when he got under stage and found the monkey chattering in his cage.

Socks—Jayson still called him that

in his mind—acted mighty strange and clung desperately to Charlie's arm on the journey up the iron stairs.

"Smatter boy?" soothed his owner. "New stunt to leave you alone in the afternoon, eh?"

That was the way Charlie sized it up. He didn't know that surreptitious cans of beer occupied all the scene-shifter's attention that afternoon, and that the strong juggler, with all the mean viciousness of his kind, had reduced the Pink Prune to a pitiful state of fright with the great iron cannonballs rolling around the cage.

He'd been careful not to hurt the monkey, for there was the inborn fear of the stage-manager and detection—also that look he had seen in Charlie Jayson's eyes.

And the next performance, despite the presence of the white-frocked Molly, was a nightmare. The Pink Prune did nothing right and everything wrong.

Charlie, with the blindness of love, took all the blame. He had left Socrates alone in the afternoon for the first time in years. Even the stage-manager, almost frothing at the mouth as he delivered his scathing call-down, failed to arouse him.

"He isn't fair!" whispered Molly, and her honest eyes crackled as she caught a glimpse of the sneering strong man on the other side of the stage awaiting the finish of the Thompson sidewalk sketch.

Molly had a shrewd suspicion of what was the trouble, but that look in Charlie's eyes had frightened her a bit, too, and she dared say nothing.

"Can't blame him." Charlie Jayson was honest enough. "His acts are being crabbed, and he's a house-manager that only sees the box-office slips. And the Prune was awful!"

A note of anxiety came to his voice as the animal snuggled under his arm. "I wonder if he's sick?"

"Let me take him?" Molly asked, holding out her arms. "I'll keep him in my dressing-room until the next

turn. I had a bite this afternoon and I'm not a bit hungry."

The way Socrates jumped to the outstretched arms decided the question. Charlie choked down some food at a dirty little restaurant and hurried back in time to make the big man step aside to pass him. He looked more vicious than ever; his cheeks were a dull red, and his eyes burned.

"Got his nanny all right," grinned the stage-door man grudgingly. "Been lappin' 'em up to keep his nerve. Took in a whole quart bottle."

"Fool," was Charlie's only comment as he hurried up the stairs.

He knocked on the door of No. 3, four rooms away from his own dressing-room at the right end of the gallery.

"Just a darling!" was the bright-eyed Molly's characterization of the Pink Prune as she handed him over. "He's kept me busy playing with him."

Charlie breathed a prayer of thanks when he saw the monkey. All the old life and audacity of the monk were back on the job.

"You certainly are some doctor!" he laughed joyfully.

"I'm going to take him again between acts," she announced. "I've got a lot of mending to do and he's a great help."

Charlie knew from experience the extent of the animal's "help."

"He's too much of a bother," he declared.

"Now!" she held up a warning finger. "The doctor orders, and the doctor must be obeyed."

"All right," he agreed meekly. "But we can have that bite to eat again?" There was an eagerness in that question there was no mistaking.

"Yes," she nodded, and in her voice was that same curious quality of softness he had noticed before in her use of the affirmative, and in her tender home-songs of the old days.

The first performance of the Pink Prune that night left nothing to be

desired, and Molly clapped her hands joyfully and gleefully bore him away to her dressing-room.

And to make things glow brighter for Charlie Jayson, he heard the stage manager ripping it into the strong man for "boozing."

One quick glance told Charlie that the strong man was plainly intoxicated, but as he paused to watch it seemed to have no effect on the act unless it was one of stimulation, for he tossed the great weights around like feathers.

The second performance was raw again, and Molly's eyes puckered in a scowl as she saw the juggler swaggering around the wings, turning to stare at the monkey whenever Charlie didn't happen to be looking his way.

She sought the stage manager, told him, and he curtly ordered the strong man back stage. The black looks and the blacker words she could not understand made her fear, but she forced a smile back to her lips as Charlie finished and repeated the invitation.

This time she shook her head soberly. "I'm afraid we'll have to put it off to-night. I've a fearful lot of mending to do, and Gus has promised to let me out."

"I'll wait," he announced firmly, and there was no gainsaying him.

So he and the Pink Prune waited. He kept his heavy door ajar and heard the other actors come, recognizing some of their footsteps on the shaky floor of the loft, especially the heavy, lurching steps of the strong man.

The Pink Prune seemed to recognize them, too, with some strange instinct of his animal nature, and covered against Charlie's leg in fear. Suddenly the cause of the monk's bad work came to him like a flash. Why he hadn't thought of it before, or why he should think of it now, are one of the mysteries that psychists must explain.

"The dirty pup!" he cursed, leaping to his feet in rage. He pulled open the door, and two of the Smasher Sisters whistled a chorus of a rag as they went out.

He drew back. Time enough, when every one had gone, to see him. He couldn't stand another fine that week, for even ten dollars makes a hole in the salary of a "four-a-day" man. And if there were others around it would get to the ears of the manager.

There was no fear in Charlie Jayson's mind. Hadn't the strong man shown the yellow heart before?

So he listened and counted, and when the last had gone he rose resolutely and closed the door, but Socrates jumped to his shoulder and would not be put off.

Charlie was in a state of rage that refused to consider a thing like that. He paused at Molly's door and could hear her moving around the small room. He walked to the end of the long, dark loft to where the cigarette smoke was strong.

He saw that the heavy door of the strong man was ajar, and the key, with its red tag, was in the lock. He remembered then the scene-shifter's words. That's how he left his door so that the man could wake him and put him out after he had taken his "rest."

He smelled the smoke, then he heard a snore. But what did he care? He'd wake him up! He put the fear of God and the fist of a white man into his yellow heart!

Plugging the Pink Prune! There could be no crime compared with that. Another step nearer the door—then he stopped suddenly. Soft, very low and sweet he heard Molly Trainor's voice trilling a chorus of an old-time song.

His promise! He hadn't thought of that before. He listened, the words came indistinctly through the closed door, but all the infinite tenderness that was in Molly's wistful voice struck him. If he broke that promise he would hurt her.

And he didn't want to hurt her. No! He couldn't. Nothing could be worth that. And he turned quietly and walked the length of the gallery back to his room.

On the big trunk once more his chin

rested into his clasped hands. What a voice she had? And eyes? And lips? He'd never seen a girl like her! A new thought came to him like a flash of light, a thought that is as old as the ages, as young as the unborn things of heaven and earth.

There never was a girl like Molly Trainor before! And he—why, the two-a-day was only a little way off. Certainly. And then—so the dreams that a million minds have conjured came and went.

Forgotten was the dirty, boxlike room. Forgotten was time. Socrates, who had vainly tried to be playful without response, had scampered out through the open door.

A sudden draft, or perhaps the paw of the animal, had closed it. But Charlie Jayson never noticed. He was with his dream and nothing existed that was not part of his dream.

He found himself unconsciously sniffing at some odor that had forced his thoughts from their narrow channel. *Smoke!* He was across the narrow room in a jump.

He flung open the door and staggered back before the great wall of acrid smoke that drove in. *Fire!* The flimsy shell of building that had defied the laws of the insurance companies and the city for so long was burning. The monkey! Molly Trainor!

Why hadn't she given the alarm? But the doors were heavy—and she had been busy with her work, too engrossed to notice, perhaps, as he had been with his dream.

A spark drifted from somewhere along the gallery, caught in a tinder, oil-paint covered drop. It was a wall of flame instantly.

In the depths he heard the fear-cry of the scene-shifter, heard his running steps. He shouted, but there was no answer. He ran to the door of Molly's room and pounded. A faint cry answered!

He turned the knob. Thank God, it was unlocked! The smoke was thicker

there than it had been outside, the flames were eating at a wall. They had probably come up the lines of thin partitioned dressing rooms. The strong man and his cigarette! That was it!

As Charlie Jayson, panting, lungs bursting with the smoke, leaned over to lift Molly, a curse that was terrible in its passion escaped him.

He remembered the opened door of the juggler's room. He had escaped—escaped without warning the two persons who remained. He had left them to die in a trap his carelessness had kindled.

"Molly!" he cried, and there was a sobbing catch in his voice. "Molly!"

"—confused," he only caught the last word of the gasping sentence. "Tried to make you hear—find door!"

So that was it! He had been dreaming like a fool! And the girl had been pounding on the walls because through her confusion and the smoke she could not locate the door!

He had been dreaming, and the girl had been slowly suffocating. He cursed himself bitterly, as he had cursed the man who had looked murder from his pig eyes a dozen times, who had left them to die like this.

He swung Molly's light body to his shoulder. At the door he instinctively shrank back. The canvas drops, the fly-loft, the dressing-room passage were flaming right to the circular iron stairway.

He darted back to the room for a coat, pulled it tight over Molly. He started ahead. Staggered, fell to his knees as the smoke seared his lungs and lips and eyes.

Crawling, half dragging, half carrying the girl, he went forward. There were the stairs! He had to make them, to make each dizzy, winding turn to the depths and safety.

He felt something touch his face as it darted out of the smoke. The monkey! He'd forgotten the monk!

"Down!" he gasped. "Down, Basket!"

He could only see the dim outline, but Socrates cowered closer.

"Down!" he rasped, with all the power of his smoke-filled lungs. He took a supporting arm from Molly, slapped the monkey, and drove him toward the stairs.

A weird scream sounded as the Pink Prune reached the top iron step, and Charlie knew that already they were getting hot. But a shove of his hand drove the animal on without even seeing where he landed. The animal could take care of himself.

Outside came the clang of gongs, the shriek of whistles. So they were on the job at last! On the job to save the other buildings, for it was too late to save this one. The steps were hot!

The iron hand-rail bit into his palms with its heat. But he must go on! *Must!* Somewhere came the pounding of wood. It was over him! Yes!

Already the firemen had reached the roof and were working with their axes. Was there more chance there? He looked back, straight into a Hades of fire. No! He must go on! *On!*

He heard a scream. They were trying to find out if any one was there. But he couldn't answer. Breath was too precious, too choking, to waste. Down! One step! Another!

A strip of burning canvas fell on the coat that protected Molly. He stopped to beat it out with his hand. They were falling all around him now.

He must hurry! Hurry! Perhaps Molly was dead? No, she couldn't be dead. God wouldn't let her die now. The dream must come true!

Down! Why had they made the stairs so narrow? He couldn't make it. The turns and twists were making him dizzy. He hadn't room to carry Molly.

The pounding had stopped overhead, or was it only the ringing and buzzing in his ears that drowned the lesser noise? There were the lower flies. Flames! All flames! He drew back before them! He couldn't pass! *Couldn't!*

What did they want to bother with the roof for? Why weren't they below there? He heard a sudden swish, a hissing sizzle that sounded like a thousand whistles released at once. Water! They'd got a line in! They were working. And on the hot iron steps that seemed to bite to his very bone he prayed:

"O God, send it right! Let them know!"

His face felt a hot drop of water! Another! The prayer was being answered. A great knife seemed to cut the flames below him. New strength came! Down! Another step!

Then a stream of water caught his shoulder and whirled him around, then steadied across the narrow iron stairs. He cursed in his heart, for his lips could no longer frame words. He could not pass that stream!

A full force of the high pressure would stun him; perhaps kill the girl who was in his arms. But it held, steady, a four-inch thing of deliverance. Seconds, minutes, hours! Then the hands that were directing it from a window hidden in the pall of smoke turned it.

Down! The water had given him new life! His clothes were soaked with it, and the steam arose from them as they touched the rail. But there was the stage—and a soft-footed specter in shiny black! Two of them!

A roaring voice sounded in his ears, but he could not make out the words, for the buzzing and ringing had come again to drown everything else.

He felt the stairway quiver and shake beneath him. It was falling! Then two wet arms encircled the body of Molly; he felt the relief of the weight. She was safe! Safe! And he was tired! Terribly tired! Funny how soft the hot iron was—funny—

He seemed to have slept for centuries, and to have dreamed dreams of wonderful things, of Molly, of beautiful homes, of two-a-days; but there had always come the burning, searing fire

to destroy them. He opened his eyes, and they smarted; his face felt raw.

"—'round all right!" Once more he heard only the end of a sentence. Where had he heard one before?

Something that burned trickled down his throat, and it seemed to give him life and thoughts. It was Molly who had uttered that broken sentence!

He tried to straighten up, but the hand of the ambulance surgeon forced him back.

"Where's — where's Molly?" he gasped. It was the first time he had spoken that name aloud, and it sounded as sweet as the songs she sang.

"Gone to the hospital," the surgeon answered with crisp curtness.

No holding hand could keep Charlie Jayson down now. "She isn't— isn't—" He couldn't say the word.

The surgeon remembered that he was human then. "No," he said very kindly. "She'll be all right in a few days—thanks to you and you're a man!" He took his hand from Charlie's shoulder and rose with a smile. "Here's another friend of yours."

Charlie turned his head, and the brown, hairy form of Socrates snuggled up close to him. The ambulance surgeon turned away. Charlie lifted a hand to pat the monkey. Then, with great care, Socrates held a brown paw out to show what he had hidden.

It was a key with a red tag!

Charlie stared down at it uncomprehendingly a second, then slowly dawning horror came. Like a flash of lightning it came. The drunken sleep of the strong man, the lighted cigarette, the door ajar with its red-tagged key, Socrates's trick of locking and unlocking his master's door, and hatred.

He understood then the pounding above! The strong man, waked from his whisky-sleep, dazed, bewildered, frightened, trying to pound his way out with his failing strength, the cry he had half heard!

And here was the key with the red tag!

The Pink Prune had paid!

The Taking Off of Martin Nash



Frank X. Finnegan

"WHITEY" was fast asleep in the shadow of a tombstone, with his head pillowed on a grass-covered mound of some long-forgotten citizen of Indiana.

He slept there because the grass was heavy and soft, the June night was balmy, and, to the unafraid, a graveyard has as many advantages as an open-air dormitory. It is quiet, restful, secluded.

And Whitey Boone was unafraid, because the little country cemetery had been as familiar to him through most of his eighteen years as the dusty road that led past it to the straggling town of Tolmans from the open country to the south.

It was close upon midnight when Whitey crawled over the low stone wall and burrowed into the grass for a resting-place. He was two hours overdue at his own bed in the attic of Lem Applegate's farmhouse, and he was quite well aware that getting into Lem's house or barn or cow-stables after they were locked for the night would be a task only slightly less difficult than entering the Farmers' Trust Bank at Tolmans after midnight.

Whitey had spent those stolen hours in the wild dissipation of walking around the scarred and moth-eaten

pool-table in the bar of the Commercial Hotel with other gay young blades, it being the night that Applegate had grudgingly paid him his twenty dollars for a month's work, and thereafter he needed the rest that he sought among the sagging headstones.

He was awakened by the murmur of voices, and his first sensation, when he realized that he was in the graveyard instead of being in his own bed in Lem's attic, was the stiffening of the shock of blond hair that had given him his nickname.

Voices in a cemetery at two o'clock in the morning are as out of place as Whitey knew himself to be, and it was by a most desperate effort that the boy opened his eyes several seconds after he was broad awake.

What he saw did not tend to allay the terrors that had seized him in his waking moment. It was the flickering light of a lantern slowly moving down the aisle next to the one near which he lay, glancing off the white tombstones as it passed them one by one and showing dimly the outlines of two men who carried the lamp between them.

After a time the dancing light stopped, and Whitey heard the murmuring voices again as the men peered

about at the graves beneath their feet, lowering the lantern as though to find their bearings.

Then they moved slowly across a narrow pathway toward where he was lying and stopped again within twenty feet of the mound that hid him.

"Here it is," one of them said, and there followed the thump of spades and a pick-ax dropped from their shoulders.

The lantern was set on a grave, where its feeble ray fell upon the spot beside which the men stood, and then each seized a spade, sank it into the soft earth, and began digging.

Whitey lay motionless, almost afraid to breathe. Had the two been the ghostly apparitions he had expected in his first instant of terror he could not have been more desperately frightened. He had a vague hope for a few moments that the two shadowy figures were neighboring farmers, belated in the town and taking a short cut through the cemetery.

But when they began operations on the grave and he heard the spadefuls of dirt strike the ground in a rapid succession of thuds, the horrifying truth slowly permeated Whitey's dull brain.

He had heard grisly tales at the gatherings in Jessup's cigar-store of body-snatchers who worked in the dark of the moon when honest folk were abed and won fabulous rewards in their desperate calling. And here were two of them before his starting eyes!

For a half-hour the lad lay watching, while the men toiled in frantic haste, throwing out a mound of earth on either side of the grave. They were shoulder-deep in the hole by that time, and as they paused to rest a moment and exchange the only words they had spoken since setting to work, the light of the lantern fell full upon their faces.

Whitey almost shouted aloud in his surprise and consternation, for the two daring grave-robbers were the

sons of Martin Nash, whose farm lay across the road from Lem Applegate's.

He stared at them in disbelief as they leaned on their spades and wiped their perspiring foreheads. This second view left no chance for doubt.

There was Joel Nash, with his closest eyes and forbidding face—Joel, who had thrashed Whitey two years before for letting Applegate's cows break into the Nash corn-field. And beside him stood Andrew, two years his junior, but a giant in strength, who had been baiting muskrat traps with Whitey the week before.

He knew both men as well as he knew old Lem, on whose farm he had been a "hand" since he was old enough to hold plow-handles, but not in his wildest dreams had he thought either one the daring outlaw they were proving themselves to be.

After a minute or two they bent to their task again, and Whitey suddenly heard the thud of a spade against the top of a coffin box. They were nearing the end of their labors.

Joel crawled out of the grave and dragged the pick-ax back into the hole. With a shudder Whitey heard the splintering of boards and the wrenching loose of nails and screws, but he watched the Nash boys with a fascinated stare until Joel climbed out again, and Andrew, exerting all of his strength, passed up to him something long and black and fearsome that he dragged hurriedly into the darkness outside the zone of the lantern light.

Then, with flying spades, they filled the grave again, heaving in the light sand so speedily that before the watching boy realized it their work was done and they were roughly shaping the mound into the form in which they had found it. This done, they rolled the body into a horse blanket which they had brought with the tools, extinguished the lantern, and, carrying their swaying burden between them, made their way down the wide central path to the gate.

Whitey, looking and listening with tense eagerness, heard the sound of a horse's hoofs and creaking of a wagon as they drove away. Then he dropped back on the grass, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and discovered that he was cold and trembling.

It was nearly an hour later when he clambered over the wall of the cemetery and set out on the mile walk to Applegate's farm. The Nash farm was in the same direction, and if Joel and Andrew were going home with their grisly burden, he wanted to give them plenty of time to stow it away before he got into that neighborhood.

He had no desire to be under the slightest suspicion of having seen the brothers on their midnight trip, and long before he reached the road and stepped off into the darkness he had decided that so far as he was concerned the events of that night were buried forever in his memory.

All thought of sleep was gone from his busy brain, and when he reached the farm he curled up beside the back door and sat there until dawn, thinking of the spectacle he had witnessed and vainly trying to determine what it meant.

When old Lem Applegate arose with the sun he was surprised to find Whitey already putting about at his morning chores.

But before the day was ended the lad's thoughts were directed into another channel by a new sensation. Martin Nash was found burned to death in his barn.

It was Applegate himself who told the details of the tragedy to an eager group of listeners in Jessup's store that night, his prospective importance as a witness at the coroner's inquest the next day impelling him to make the drive to Tolmans to tell the boys about it in advance.

"The way I come to be there," he said, "Martin sent his boy Andrew over to me along about noon askin' if I'd come over right after supper and

talk about that back forty acres I've been wantin' to buy.

"Martin talked about sellin' it for a year or more, but we couldn't agree on a price, and I thinks to myself: 'Well, the old man's finally gettin' sensible and he's goin' to let that forty go at a reasonable figure.' Martin had a couple of pretty bad seasons on that place of his, and I just about figured he needed the money.

"When I got over there the boys were both gone to town with the team and Martin was settin' out on the porch smokin' and waitin' for me. Mrs. Nash come out with her sewin' after I'd been there a while, and we all set there talkin' about one thing and another for maybe half an hour.

"Martin didn't get down to business about that forty acres, but he never was what you'd call a direct man, and I s'posed he'd get around to it after a while, so I kept on talkin' about crops and so on.

"Finally he gets up and says: 'Just set where you are, Lem. I've got to do the milkin'. Them boys o' mine has both cleared out and left the old man to do the work. I won't be a minute,' he says, and goes into the house for a lantern. Well, I didn't have anything particular to do and I knew I was in for a spell of settin' around anyhow, so I set still, talkin' to Mrs. Nash. It was gettin' pretty dark by that time, and Martin come to the door with his lantern lit and told me again he wouldn't be only a jiffy milkin' the two cows.

"Well, sir, we set there maybe twenty minutes, when all of a sudden Mrs. Nash looks over her shoulder and lets a yell out of her.

"'Fire!' she says. 'The barn's on fire!'

"I jumped up, and blamed if the barn wasn't goin' up like sixty. First thing we thought of was Martin and the cows, bein' that the horses was away, and we run for the barn. The cows were all right, runnin' around loose in the yard and bellerin', but

there was poor old Martin, layin' in the middle of the worst of it, right inside the door, with the fire all around him.

"Of course I tried to get him out of it right away," Lem went on, while his hearers crowded around on one another's shoulders to follow the startling relation, "but the fire was so blamed hot right there I couldn't get near him for a while.

"I wrapped my coat around my head finally and crawled in a ways, Mrs. Nash screamin' and yellin' her head off all the time, and at last I dragged him out. But the poor old feller was so burned you wouldn't know him only for his clothes.

"By that time my man Boone was there, and the folks come across from Dow's place to help, but we couldn't do nothin' to save the barn. She went up in smoke, and if the wind had 'a' been the other way the house would a gone too.

"We carried Martin into the house, and I telephoned to Ridley for the coroner to come, knowin' it was a case for him. I tell you, I don't never want to see anything like that again."

It was two months after the funeral of Martin Nash that a land-buyer appeared in the Tolmans neighborhood, making inquiry for farms that were on the market at reasonable prices.

His name was J. Derrick Green, and he represented a Chicago syndicate which, he said, intended buying up large tracts of farming property for speculative purposes. Mr. Green talked lightly of the millions that were behind him in his conferences with the bankers and farmers of the district, and he was surprised to find prices holding firm in the face of his tentative offers.

Tolmans was willing to sell, but Tolmans wanted its price, and Mr. Green regretfully concluded he could not do much business in that particular section of Indiana.

But before he abandoned the field he called at the Nash farmhouse to

make a bid for the property. It was on the market, he had been told by half a dozen neighbors, and incidentally the story of the Nash tragedy had been detailed to him in all its high lights by several willing narrators, including Lem Applegate himself, chief actor in the drama.

Mrs. Nash and the boys were anxious to leave. The shadow of old Martin's tragic death hung over the farm, they had told the neighbors in effect, and they wanted to get away from it.

They had collected some insurance on Martins's life, and this, with a fair price for the farm, would enable them to start afresh in some distant community where they would not have constant reminders of the tragedy.

All this had been told to J. Derrick Green before he drove up to the Nash place in his bright, red-wheeled buggy and went in to make a proposition for its purchase. And all this he was busily revolving in his mind when Mrs. Nash, alone in the old farmhouse, showed him into the dim, close-smelling parlor and went down into the fields to call her son Joel.

Green looked around the old-fashioned room curiously. It was furnished with the red-trimmed haircloth chairs and sofa that Martin Nash had bought forty years before when he fitted up the place for his bride.

In the corner stood a walnut what-not, its shelves loaded with shells and curios, and a red plush photograph album rested on the center table. The room was typical of the parlors in the older farmhouses of the neighborhood, but something on the wall caught and held the attention of Mr. Green as he sat waiting.

It was a crayon portrait of a man close to sixty years old, sparse of hair and with the chin-whiskers that marked the farmer.

That it was a picture of Martin Nash the visitor did not doubt. It was a badly executed enlargement of a photograph, and after looking at it

musingly a few moments, Mr. Green did a peculiar thing. He walked to the center table, opened the clasps of the album, and looked hurriedly through it for the original of the crayon enlargement.

He found it on the third page, quickly slipped it out of the holder, and put it into his inside pocket. When Mrs. Nash returned a few minutes later with Joel behind her Mr. Green was seated near the window examining a number of documents he had taken from his pocket.

"Ah, Mr. Nash!" he greeted Joel suavely, "I am Mr. Green—you may have heard I was looking at farming property in the neighborhood."

Joel nodded and slouched into a chair. His mother seated herself near the door and nervously plaited the corner of her apron on her knee, watching the visitor anxiously.

"Yes, Applegate was telling me about it," Joel said. "I suppose he told you we were willing to sell."

"He and others," the land-agent admitted. "I have been told of the—ah—sad circumstances of the case. Your father was a fine-looking man," he added.

Involuntarily Joel and his mother raised their glances to the crayon portrait. Involuntarily Mr. Green hugged the photograph in the inside pocket a little tighter.

"Well, he wasn't any beauty," Mrs. Nash said; "but he was a good provider. We never wanted for anything while Mr. Nash was with us."

She touched her eyes with the corner of her apron, and her son, with a side glance at her, turned to Green and lowered his voice confidentially.

"That's why we want to sell the place," he said; "mother hasn't been herself since it happened. We thought it might be a good thing if we moved away off where she could sort of forget it."

Mr. Green was properly sympathetic.

"I understand," he said; "you're

thinking seriously of going West, I suppose?"

He thought he detected a little involuntary start of both mother and son, as though their bodies had stiffened for an instant.

"No; we hadn't thought about the West particular," Joel said almost sharply. "Any place where the land is good and prices ain't too high will do for us."

"Of course," his visitor acquiesced, "you're quite right, too. I spoke of the West because somehow that's where one naturally expects a farmer to move. Most of them travel in that direction, you know, when they pull up stakes back here. And what are you willing to sell for, Mr. Nash?"

"Well, the place is worth a hundred and twenty-five an acre," Joel said; "you know that. You've been finding out prices all around here. But we'll let it go for a hundred and ten. There's eighty acres," he added.

"A very reasonable figure," Mr. Green admitted; "I'll take it under advisement and communicate with my people in Chicago. Good morning, Mrs. Nash. You'll hear from me again in a few days, probably."

The next day Mr. J. Derrick Green was driving along the road from Tolmans in his red-wheeled buggy when he overtook the rural mail-carrier trudging slowly on foot in the dust.

Mr. Green had made it his practise to develop friendly relations with every one he had met in the neighborhood, and the gray-haired old postman, whom he encountered every day on some highway, was one of his admirers. Now he pulled up his high-stepping horse beside the toiling old man.

"Hello!" he called cheerily. "That old nag of yours still sick?"

"Yes; he's still laid up," the carrier returned. "'Pears like something's the matter with one of his hind legs. Doc Horne says he prob'ly won't be able to travel for a week. I've got to hoof it in the mean time," he added with a good-natured grin.

"Here, climb in and I'll give you a lift," Green suggested; "I'm going your way for a couple of miles. You get plenty of exercise."

"I certainly do," the old fellow asserted, promptly accepting the invitation — "specially since that horse of mine got sick. I wouldn't mind if you'd loan this here outfit of yours for a week or so, Mr. — I didn't ever get your name," he concluded inquiringly.

"Green is my name," the land-agent volunteered.

"Mine is Cleary," the carrier went on; "you must have heard of me in your goin's around through this district. I'm the man that saved the flag at Shiloh."

"Oh, indeed!" Green exclaimed. "Of course I've heard of that. I've been wanting to meet the hero of Shiloh."

"Well, I'm the fellow," Cleary declared. "Our Congressman's been tryin' to get me a medal for the last fifteen years, but the best he got me so far is this here job on the rural free delivery."

He had spread out part of the contents of his mail-sack on the seat between them and begun to sort the letters. Mr. Green, though keeping half an eye to his mettlesome horse, found a remarkable interest in the addresses on the envelopes. He watched them closely as they were uncovered one by one.

"Buyin' any of these farms around here you're lookin' at?" the garrulous carrier inquired in the midst of his work.

"Not many," replied Green. "I looked in at the Nash place yesterday."

"I heard they was goin' to sell out," said Cleary. "They're figurin' to leave Indiana."

"Yes; so they told me," Green responded. "Where do you suppose they're going?"

The question was a natural one, and he asked it in an offhand manner that would have disarmed any suspicion

that he was especially interested. But old Cleary, the gossip clearing-house of the neighborhood, would have answered him as freely in any instance.

"Well, they ain't said anything-right out, so far as I've heard," he replied; "but I wouldn't be surprised if they moved out to Colorado. They've been negotiatin' with somebody out there, I guess, and it's prob'ly about buyin' land."

"At least, they been gettin' a letter from some place in Colorado about once a week lately, and I know they ain't got any relations out West, because they got any mail from there before."

"That's a fine country," Green ventured; "at least, where it's been irrigated it turns out great crops. I wonder if it's that part of the State they have in mind. Irrigated farming is altogether different from what you see around here, you know."

"I don't recollect just what the town is," Cleary said, pawing over his letters; "it's a queer name a feller wouldn't remember easy. Why, here's a letter for Joel now!" he added as he fished out an envelope addressed to Joel Nash in a shaky scrawl. Green took a look at the postmark.

"Ashkowa," he read; "no wonder you wouldn't remember that. Sounds like an Indian name. They have lots of them out there."

"That's the place!" Crowley declared; "I've seen it three or four times on Nash's letters, but I'm blamed if I could call it right off from memory at that."

The remainder of the conversation, until Mr. Green dropped his talkative passenger at a crossroads, was of crops and farm values and other topics wholly unrelated to the Nash family and its probable movements.

But when Mr. Green returned to his hotel in Tolmans that night he wrote a letter to a man named Sneed in Denver, and before he mailed it he slipped into the envelope the photograph of Martin Nash that he had abstracted

from the family album in Mrs. Nash's dimly lighted parlor.

During the next few days the land agent cultivated Whitey Boone. He found the lad eating a wedge of Mrs. Applegate's pie under a tree in a far corner of old Lem's acreage, when he should have been hoeing potatoes, and dropped down into the grass beside him for a chat.

He astonished Whitey's palate with the first good cigar it had ever experienced and then led him on to gossip about Martin Nash and his career; how the farm had barely given a living to the family, and how Martin had been hard pressed for money a year before, when he lost his cows through disease, and how Lem Applegate, realizing the need of the Nash family, had been striving to buy the forty acres he coveted at a trifling price.

The next day the genial Mr. Green happened by again for a little talk with Whitey about Joel and Andrew, but the lad was not nearly so communicative on that score.

He looked over his shoulders nervously when their names were mentioned, and his replies to the careless questions of his new-found friend were halting and evasive. But if Mr. Green noticed that fact he gave no hint of it, and the two smoked more of the fragrant cigars Mr. Green always carried and parted the best of friends.

When the land agent reached his hotel that evening there was a telegram waiting for him. It was dated at Denver, and signed "Sneed."

Have party under arrest. Acting ugly, standing pat and will fight extradition. Save much work if you can clear up at that end.

Mr. Green sat up late that night and smoked an extra number of his excellent cigars, staring at the wall of his little bedroom and thinking deeply.

The next day, when he drove out the familiar road to Applegate's farm, he encountered Whitey Boone near the cemetery wall, walking to town

with a broken section of harness. The land agent stopped his rig and saluted him gaily.

"Hol' up a minute, Whitey," he said, "I want to ask you something," and he climbed down and joined the lad in the shade of an oak that had its roots in the little graveyard.

"That's what you're most always doin'," laughed Whitey; "seems like you ought to make your livin' askin' questions."

"Well, I do, in a sort of way," Mr. Green admitted, "but I want to ask you this because you know pretty much what's going on around here. You remember the night Martin Nash was burned to death?"

Whitey nodded, wonderingly. They had already discussed that affair in all its phases.

"Didn't somebody die in this neighborhood a little while before that date—within a week or so?"

The lad probed his memory, frowning down at the cemetery wall.

"Why, yes," he said then, "old Bill Stearns did while he was sleepin' in Sutter's saloon one night. But *he* didn't amount to nothin'—why, the town had to bury him! He didn't have any folks or anything around here."

"Do you know where he was buried?" the land agent pursued.

"Sure," said Whitey confidently, "right here in this graveyard. I come over and watched the funeral—and there wasn't much to watch, either. You ain't any kin of old Bill, are you?" he asked with sudden interest.

"No, I'm not, Whitey," Mr. Green said, "but the reason I'm asking you is I don't think old Bill is in his grave any more."

Whitey gasped and turned pale with fright and apprehension. He reeled against the wall.

"You—you mean it was *his* grave they robbed?" he stammered.

"Who robbed?" demanded Mr. Green, so shortly and authoritatively that Whitey fell on his knees, sobbing.

"Oh, don't ask me, Mr. Green!" he wailed, "I can't tell you! Honest, I wouldn't tell for a mililon dollars! They'd kill me! They wouldn't never let me live if I run away a thousand miles! Don't make me tell on 'em! I swore an oath to myself I wouldn't never tell!"

Green reached down and helped the boy to his feet. Then he laid a kindly hand on his shoulder and looked into the terror-stricken eyes.

"You don't have to tell me, Whitey," he said, "I know who did it. It was Joel and Andrew Nash."

Whitey gasped, but did not attempt to deny the assertion. Instead, he clung to the big man's wrist and looked furtively across the cemetery to see whether they were being observed from a distance.

"Now I'll make a bargain with you," Mr. Green went on, "if you'll just point out to me the grave they broke into—you know where it is, all right—I won't ask you to tell anybody else anything about it, and I won't tell that you know. Do you understand?"

The frightened lad shook his head and managed to control his voice after a few convulsive efforts.

"Yes, I understand, Mr. Green," he said, "and I'll show you where it is. But I won't be a witness! I won't never—"

"I said you wouldn't need to," the other interrupted; "just point out that grave to me and then you can run along with your harness. And if you can manage to keep your mouth shut as well as you've done so far nobody will ever know that you know anything about it."

"In here," Whitey said, vaulting the low wall. Green followed him through the half-sunken mounds and through the narrow paths, and in a few moments they stood beside the mound that had been desecrated. It was a mere oblong heap of sand, unmarked by even a board and without a blade of grass upon it—the town's tribute to its pauper dead.

"This is it," Boone whispered; "I was laying in the grass right over there and I saw the whole thing. I'm—I'm goin' to town now," he abruptly concluded, as he hurried back to the road, caught up his burden, and shuffled hurriedly away in the dust.

A few hours later Mr. Green, who had been metamorphosed into a distant and indignant kinsman of the late Bill Stearns, was standing beside the open grave from which two grumbling laborers were rapidly throwing the earth. At either side of the land agent stood Coroner Weston and Deputy Sheriff Broome.

"I'm only doing this to oblige you, Mr. Green, and because you've agreed to pay all expenses and damages," the coroner said for the fifth time, "and not because I believe there is anything in your story."

"I just want to make certain," Mr. Green said soothingly. "I've got these rumors so direct—"

"It's absurd!" snapped the deputy sheriff, "because you fellows in the city have all these kinds of crimes, you think everybody is a thjef and a grave-robber. This is a law-abidin' community—"

Just then the shovels of the perspiring diggers struck the top of the coffin box. The trio at the edge of the opening crowded forward eagerly, and when the sand was cleared away they saw the boards splintered and broken.

With one bound the two officials were down in the grave with the laborers, while Mr. Green stroked his mustache and looked on. Eagerly the coroner examined the rifled coffin.

"It's empty!" he shouted; "by dads! you're right, Mr. Green. There's been dirty work here!"

"More than you think," observed Green, as he extended a hand to assist the coroner to the surface. Broome was boosted out by the two diggers and stood with the others, panting hard with excitement.

"What's to be done?" he whispered mysteriously.

"I'll tell you what's to be done," Mr. Green said calmly; "just come with me, both of you, up to the Nash farmhouse. I want you to arrest Joel and Andrew Nash for this little job of grave-robbing."

"What?" the astounded officers shouted.

"That's what," the land-agent said with a half smile. "Come on; I'll be responsible."

In the dimly lighted parlor of the old Nash house Joel and Andrew sat huddled in their chairs, glowering at the floor.

Beside Joel was Coroner Weston, bristling with importance; and the deputy sheriff had Andrew under guard, his revolver lying in his lap.

Mrs. Nash, her apron thrown over her head, was hedged into a corner, where she wept and wailed.

"Before they take you two to the lock-up," Mr. Green was saying, "I have just a couple of things to say; you will know how much chance you have of lying out of this. Your father, Martin Nash, insured his life for fifteen thousand dollars less than six months ago. He needed money badly. He was hard up in every sense of the word.

"You were all in desperate straits for money to go West with and make a new start. Then you hit on this scheme and waited for your chance to put it over. That chance came when old Bill Stearns died and was buried as a pauper. You two broke into his grave and carried the body up here; I've got a witness to that if I ever need him. But I won't, because you're both going to plead guilty and take your medicine.

"You dressed old Bill's corpse up in your father's overalls and boots and planted it out there in the barn. Then you fellows took the team and rig and hid down in the woods somewhere to carry your father off to a train.

"He invited Lem Applegate over here so you might have a witness to his supposed death if you needed one, and he torched off his barn, ran to where you were waiting, and was driven to some whistling tank to catch a Western train, while the good people around here thought they were rescuing his remains from the fire.

"Your mother collected the fifteen thousand dollars insurance money, and I might as well tell you now that what's in the bank—all of it except the two hundred you sent out to your father at Ashkova, Colorado—is held up by a court order right now.

"And your father is under arrest in Denver on a charge of swindling the insurance company, and he'll be back here the day after to-morrow to join you in jail, instead of buying irrigated land in Colorado with that fifteen thousand. Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

Joel raised his head with a snarl.

"Yes," he said; "I'd like to know who the devil you are."

Mr. Green extended a card with elaborate courtesy.

"My name is J. Derrick Green," he said, "and I'm a special investigator of suspected claims for the Mastodonic Life Insurance Company. Oh, I do lots of this, Mr. Nash. Your work was really rather coarse. I guess you can take them away now, Mr. Sheriff. We won't bother Mrs. Nash. She has troubles enough."

FREEDOM.

BETTER to dwell in Freedom's hall,
With a cold, damp floor and a moldering wall,
Than bow the head and bend the knee
In the proudest palace of slavery.

Moore.

A Lucky Sign



By

Winifred Arnold

THE real-estate agent breezed into the office of F. H. Roberts & Co. like a whiff of the west wind, picked up a loose sheet of paper on the floor, straightened a calendar on the wall, said "Good morning" to two men and a girl, opened a roll-top desk, and sat down before it to sort a handful of mail, "all," as the office-girl put it, graphically but inelegantly, "in one jerk of a lamb's tail."

The *Real-Estate Journal*, lying on top, was torn open with a swift, decisive thrust—of a hat-pin! Now will you take a guess at the real-estate agent's sex? And, "What do you think of that?" she sniffed.

On the front page a very fair reproduction of her own piquant little visage stared her in the face, with this description in bold-faced type: "Miss Sarah L. Reynolds, The Leading Lady Real-Estate Agent of Chichester, New York."

"Lady Real-Estate Agent!" she sputtered in the rapid little way that lent a new force to Mr. Roberts's favorite description of his young sales-

woman: "A live wire." "*Lady* Real-Estate Agent! In the same class with lady drummer and lady chauffeur!

"Well, I'll have them know that I'm just plain real-estate agent, without any qualifying 'lady' about it; and one of these days I'm going to have them print that same thing—the picture may be a few years older—but the word 'lady' is the only one they'll cut out! So!"

Mr. Roberts and the other man, Mr. Burton, rose and bowed with exaggerated deference, and the "Lady Real-Estate Agent" came to herself with a little chuckle.

"Clearing to settled," she announced briskly. "What's on the cards for me this morning? Only to finish up that Clark Street deal?"

Mr. Roberts looked a trifle worried. "I'm sorry, Miss Reynolds," he said. "I know you hate to bother with the rental end of it, but Powers has just telephoned that he's down and out this morning and can't be here, and I was going to ask you to take his place. This is the last gasp of the renting business till spring now."

Sally nodded cheerfully, "All right, chief. I suppose you'll give me the whole commish on anything I draw just for being so good?"

"I sure will," returned Mr. Roberts with a relieved laugh, "and wish you a fat one into the bargain. Come on, Burton, we've got to see that Steele Street party at nine-fifteen sharp."

The real-estate agent proceeded to house-clean in the roll-top desk, rearrange the listing files, and "jolly" three "prospects" over the telephone.

The morning dragged by. One or two prospects straggled in—but it wasn't her day; two or three telephone calls, but the office-girl answered.

"Not a single nibble on the rental hook," groaned Miss Reynolds at last, "and me wasting a perfectly good morning! I don't wonder it made Mr. Powers sick. It would me just sitting around with nothing doing. Luck is certainly 'ag'in' me this morning!"

"And you saying that with Mr. Burton's horseshoe pin lying right at your feet ready for you to pick up!" cried the office-girl reproachfully, "Don't you know a lucky sign?"

"I never have believed in signs, Miss O'Hara," laughed Sally, retrieving the horseshoe pin with a swift little pounce, "but if this brings me luck on this perfectly rotten day I'm a convert forever."

Just then, as if a well-trained stage manager had the matter in hand, the office door opened—a trifle timidly, as if the person outside were not used to opening office doors—and there entered the most radiant vision that had ever blessed Sally's eyes.

Not that the vision was at all gay. Oh, no; the sweeping draperies of her modish "silhouette" were of the dullest, most elegant black.

But the style, the cut, the finish! Nobody but a real Parisian couturière could have achieved that delicate precision of line, that elegant perfection of detail.

"I felt," said Sally later, "as if my own new tailor-made had been cut by

the blacksmith, sewed with a reaper and binder, and pressed with a snow-plow! And I had been proud of that suit, too."

But there was nothing in the glance of the big blue eyes under the chic little black toque that would remind any one of her shortcomings—sartorial or otherwise. They took in the whole office with a most friendly expression, and then they returned happily to Sally.

"Oh, a woman in charge!" exclaimed a voice like a cello-string thrilling through honey. "I'm so glad, for now I know I shall get just what I want. You rent houses, don't you?"

"Indeed I do!" cried Sally delightfully, as she offered a chair.

"How nice," thrilled the voice. "I want a furnished house for the winter. I would like to come in about a month, and stay through March. I want a really nice house in the very best location—just the sort of thing you'd pick out for yourself."

"Surely," cried Sally, in unconscious imitation of the honey tones.

"My mother"—the vision's voice dropped with an exquisite pathetic thrill—"was a little girl here in Chichester, and she always adored the place. So when my husband died—I forgot to introduce myself, didn't I? I am Mrs. Ronald Charteris."

She extracted a perfect little calling card from a perfect little suède card-case and handed it to Sally, who noted that the address was in the most correct of side streets off Fifth Avenue.

"When my husband died I made up my mind that as soon as my business affairs were settled I would come back to Chichester to live, where I would seem so near to my dear mother. Still I knew, of course, it was wiser to try it out first, so I thought I'd rent a house just for the winter, and if I liked it I could buy a place in the spring."

Sally's heart leaped at the glory that

was set before her. "To rent, perchance to sell!" she soliloquized jubilantly, and already she paraded in her own mind's eye clothed not at all like Solomon in all his glory, but with quite a striking likeness to Mrs. Ronald Charteris. Even "live wires" have their feminine sparks.

"The very best East Side location?" she inquired briskly. "About what rental are you willing to pay, Mrs. Charteris? The upper East Side will, of course, be expensive."

Mrs. Charteris looked helpless. "Oh, of course," she agreed. "I don't know anything about business, but I expect to pay what is right. Four or five hundred a month, I suppose? More, of course, if I have to, Miss—er—" She hesitated prettily.

"Reynolds," supplied Sally in a tone that hinted at her favorite joke, "my middle name's Missouri."

Mrs. Charteris caught the inflection. "I ought to have given you my attorney's letter first," she apologized. "I'm so unbusinesslike," and, fumbling in a faultless wrist-bag, she produced a sheet of paper on which one of Gotham's well-known legal firms stated in sufficiently explicit language that Mrs. Ronald Charteris could be relied upon to pay any bills that she might incur.

Sally flushed scarlet, but Mrs. Charteris apparently bore no ill will.

"So that's all right now, isn't it?" she smiled. "I shall stay at the Cherokee for a few days till we get the matter settled. You call me up there when you get what you think I'll like and I'll come for you in a taxicab. You'll do your very best for me, won't you?" she pleaded, extending a slim and dainty hand as she rose to go.

"The commission," stated Sally succinctly to the office-girl, as the door closed, "will be one-fourth of the month's rent. Do you catch that, Miss O'Hara? I'm a convert to the horse-shoe pins, all right."

But the office-girl's mind was lifted above such sordid considerations.

"Gee! I never knew just what angel-face meant before, Miss Reynolds," she breathed, awestruck. "She looks just like a Madonna in church, don't she?"

But Sally had recovered her balance. "In a shrine of solid eighteen carat gold," she returned gaily, "which is better still. Your signs are all right, Miss O'Hara. Cross my back, please, and catch three black cats to let loose while I do a little imitation of Daniel trying to rent the lions' dens. I wager real lions are easier to manage than social ones!"

Miss O'Hara must have failed to catch the black cats, for none of the social lions were in a renting mood, though dauntless little Sally thrust herself recklessly into "den" after "den"; first the list she had marked "possible," then the "barely possible," then the "highly improbable," ending at last in a burst of bravado with the "entirely out of the question"!

None of the jaws snapped, though, for there was something about Sally's five feet of business ability, concealed under a curly blond exterior, that widened them into a grin instead; but Sally objected seriously to being taken as a joke, and she got frightfully weary of hearing: "Why, really, my dear Miss Reynolds—I couldn't think of letting a perfect stranger into my house, but I shall be awfully interested to know whether you do find a place for her."

"They don't believe I will," cried Sally bitterly, as she rehearsed her third day's experiences to her faithful "pal," Pauline, "but I shall, just the same, and don't you forget it. They talk as if five hundred dollars a month was a mere 'bag o' shells,' Pauline, but among them all there must be one that won't look at it that way, believe me, and I'm going to find her! Mrs. Charteris cried to-day when I told her I hadn't found a place yet. I felt cheaper than a bargain basement."

In the middle of the night Pauline

was dragged from her slumbers by a ruthless hand.

"Oh, Pauline," caroled Sally's voice through the darkness, "wake up like an angel and listen. I've got a hunch. I dreamed of picking four-leaf clovers on a lawn, and then I looked up and at the house and Mrs. Charteris was standing on the front steps.

"Don't tell me there's nothing in signs. It's that darling little bungalow beside the tennis club that John Westwood built for the niece that kept house for him when she married Jack Bartlett.

"Jack won't let her take any money from her uncle, you know, and she'll be mighty glad of that five hundred dollars per I'm sure. The house is small, that's why I didn't think of it before, but it's perfect in every detail and plenty big enough for one woman and all the servants she ought to need. I'm going to see Mrs. Bartlett in the morning."

Mrs. Bartlett proved more than amenable to reason. Jack was a dear, she confided frankly, and the most generous boy in the world with what he had, but she certainly did miss Uncle John's "fat checks," and five hundred dollars a month for five or six months would be a perfect god-send. Would Miss Reynolds kindly go and get Mrs. Charteris at once?

Miss Reynolds went, not only as kindly, but as swiftly as she could. In fact, nothing but her friendly habit of nodding to all the policemen she passed saved her from being dealt with severely for "speeding."

Mrs. Charteris insisted on a taxicab as usual, though Sally longed to exhibit her to the dazzled eyes of Chichester in her little roadster, but she did not brighten at the prospect of the bungalow, as Sally had hoped.

"I simply cannot live in a tucked-up little house," she said with a child-like droop to her mouth, and Sally's own lip almost trembled under the pathetic thrill of the voice.

"Oh, but it is such a *darling* little place," Sally persisted; "just wait till you see it."

Mrs. Charteris waited, but even after inspecting every perfection the bungalow could offer, she still drooped sadly and shook her head. "It is lovely, but so small," she pleaded. "Where could I put my maid, where could I put my chauffeur, where is the garage for my cars?"

Mrs. Bartlett dashed eagerly after her departing gold mine. "Oh, Mrs. Charteris, that could be managed!" she cried. "I'm sure I could get Uncle John to let you keep the car in his garage, and your chauffeur could board with his. My back lawn adjoins his, you know, his grounds extend the whole length of the block behind those other houses and we have a gate between."

"Uncle John?" questioned Mrs. Charteris uncertainly.

"Mr. John Westwood," explained Sally eagerly. "You've heard of him, of course, the Nodal man, you know, Chichester's multiest millionaire."

Not to have heard of Mr. John Westwood was truly to argue yourself unread—in magazine advertising, anyway.

The pathetic droop slipped away from Mrs. Charteris's figure and face like magic.

"Mr. Westwood!" she cried. "Mr. John Westwood! Is he your uncle? My dear, if you can make that arrangement about the garage and the chauffeur, I'll pay eight hundred dollars; but it must be in the lease. The house, as you say, is perfect."

That night Mrs. Ronald Charteris left for New York with the lease tucked safely in the faultless handbag.

"I know so little about business," she explained prettily to Sally. "I never sign anything without showing it to my attorneys. Will you let me kiss you good-by, my dear? You have done *so much* for me. I never can thank you enough!"

"You'll never see that lease again," jeered Mr. Roberts and Mr. Burton. "Nobody is going to pay eight hundred dollars a month for any bungalow from here to Frisco."

But Sally stoutly defended her client. "It will be back in two days," she insisted. And it was. Moreover, it was accompanied by a certified check for the first month's rent, signed by Violet M. Charteris.

"And it was my horseshoe pin that did it," groaned Mr. Burton, as Sally waved the check triumphantly in his face. "Why didn't the pesky thing ever do such a turn for me, I wonder?"

Sally laughed. "I'll tell you when I come back," she answered gaily. "I'm going to go and pay this check to Mrs. Bartlett this minute. She's planning to take Mr. Bartlett's sister and go to the south of France for the winter. She's not a bit well."

Mrs. Bartlett was not in, but the next day a jubilant note arrived, enclosing Sally's commission and requesting her to come up and drink a cup of tea with her "grateful Mary Westwood Bartlett."

Business was rushing on the one side, however, and pleasure on the other, so it was almost three weeks before the celebration came off, and the moving time was close at hand.

The postponed tea, however, was excellent; so were the sandwiches and cake which accompanied it; but the refreshments might almost as well have been hay infusion and hard tack, so absorbed were the two young women in chanting the glories of a winter in southern France and the angelic charms of Mrs. Ronald Charteris.

Upon this love-feast entered Mrs. Harvey Wentworth Porter, very imposing of appearance, but very short of breath, and gasping out threatenings and slaughter above her two-and-a-half pink chins—the half being the original one.

"Sarah Louise Reynolds!" she snorted. "You here? I declare if

I hadn't played dolls with your mother I wouldn't speak to you. Have you any realizing sense at all of what you've done for Chichester's most exclusive society and for poor Mary Bartlett most of all?"

"Poor Mary Bartlett" gasped in her turn, and "Sarah Louise Reynolds" followed suit.

"You don't either of you know?" inquired Mrs. Porter, sinking into a chair and abandoning herself to the delight of imparting information.

"Well, I hate to be the one to break it to you"—Mrs. Porter certainly qualified for the Sapphira Society at that moment—"but I suppose somebody must.

"Mr. Porter has just come back from New York, my dear—came this morning, and he was full of something that he heard down there. He was having dinner at the St. Regis with a lot of men, and in trailed that Mrs. Charteris, Sally here had in tow so long.

"And as soon as they saw her one of the men began telling what he called 'the best joke ever on the four hundred of Chichester'—vulgar thing! He said, Mary Bartlett, that some 'poor fool' had rented her a house in the center of the fashionable district, right by the tennis club, and 'adjoining John Westwood's.'

"There's no possibility of mistake, my dear, for they all seemed to know her; and she's the most notorious woman in New York! She's Violet Marvin—the woman that won that scandalous breach-of-promise suit two years ago, you remember.

"She's married a man named Charteris since, she claims, and divorced him; but they call her *Champagne Vi* usually, my dear, because she bathes every day in a full tub of champagne! Does it for her complexion!

"And that woman, Mary Bartlett, is going to live for months in your sweet little house—filling your tubs full of champagne and Heaven knows what all, and she's going to camp

right down beside that tennis club— you know how the men congregate there in the winter-time for their smokers—and, *worst of all*, she's got her hooks out for your Uncle John! The man said as much to Mr. Porter. Thinks that's why she's coming."

"She sha'n't have my Uncle John!" cried Mary Bartlett stoutly. "I'll warn him, I'll—I'll—"

"Warn him," sniffed the older woman; "warn any man that a first-class adventuress is on his trail, and what will he do? Run right into her arms. No, you'll have to take him away, that's the only hope."

"I won't let her have the house," announced Mrs. Bartlett decidedly.

"You'll have to," retorted Mrs. Porter; "that's one of the things that that wretched man was laughing at. It was such an absolutely unbreakable lease!"

Mary Bartlett looked inquiringly at Sally, but that usually resourceful young lady was plunged deep in thought and merely nodded sadly.

Then John Westwood's niece proved what a thoroughbred she really was.

"Well, of course, you aren't the least bit to blame, Miss Reynolds," she said generously; "you were fooled completely by that siren, just as I was; but I must say I wonder what a firm like her lawyers means by playing into the hands of a woman like that."

"Just what I said to my husband," agreed Mrs. Porter; "but he said they were clever enough, all right, but they were out for all the money there was, and a woman like that always had plenty and could put good things in their way besides."

"Mrs. Porter," said Sally suddenly, "have you told anybody else about this?"

Mrs. Porter shook her head. "No, I thought I ought to tell Mary first."

"Will you promise not to tell anybody else before Mrs. Charteris comes?" persisted Sally. "Please, you played dolls with my mother, you

know, and it means an awful lot to me not to have this thing get out if I can."

It came hard, but Mrs. Porter finally promised, though she grew fairly purple in the face with the struggle.

Sally rose. "Don't you worry a minute, Mrs. Bartlett," she said with much more confidence than she felt.

"We've got to beat that woman out some way, and we're going to do it. My, but it does go against the grain to be fooled like that! Is Mr. Porter at his office? I'm going down to see him first of all. We need *Chichester's* best legal talent in our business."

Mr. Harvey W. Porter was so deeply immersed in his own affairs that Sally had to use immense strategy to see him at all, and then was forced to introduce herself and state her business three times before the meaning of her remarks entered even his outer ear.

"What in thunder?" he demanded. "Come in here during business hours to ask me if I've repeated a bit of silly gossip. What kind of an old tabby do you think I am, anyway? Find everything at sixes and sevens when I come back from New York, and then you come here asking me if I've been around peddling gossip. No, I haven't repeated your silly little scandal to anybody but my wife, young woman. I've got *business* to attend to!"

"But this means business to me," persisted Sally; "you *will* promise not to say a word, won't you, dear Mr. Porter? My business career is at stake, honestly."

Impressed by the solemnity of the appeal, Mr. Porter finally lent ear and promised—even going to the extent at last of dictating a letter to Mrs. Charteris's "attorneys," in which he requested a release for Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett in the most imposing legal language.

The attorneys proved, however, suavely obdurate. Their client, they

begged to state, was already on her way to Chichester *via* Chicago; but she would, they were sure, insist on holding to her rights.

They regretted that the arrangement was no longer agreeable to Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett; but they saw no possible course for them but to vacate and make ready for their tenant as per agreement at the end of the current week.

During the next few days Miss Sally Reynolds drove through the streets of Chichester with her lips set and her brows drawn together in a frown.

"Prospects" came and "prospects" went, and Sally showed what a "natural-born" real-estate agent she was by making two extremely good sales "with one hand tied behind her," for all the time in the back of her mind she was struggling with the problem of Mrs. Charteris.

Finally the last afternoon arrived, and Sally, faint yet pursuing, went to pay a "call of condolence" on young Mrs. Bartlett, prepared to eat humble pie or dirt to any extent the occasion required.

She found that young matron in tears.

"Oh, Miss Reynolds," she sobbed, "my little house will never seem the same again! I shall feel as if it had been quarantined for scarlet-fever and smallpox, and hydrophobia and Heaven knows what else!"

"They've been having scarlet-fever in a house we've listed over on Phelps Avenue," answered Sally irrelevantly. "The sign has been on the place for weeks and weeks now, and they say we might just as well give up all hope of selling it for at least a year." She paused with brightening eyes. "Mrs. Charteris comes to-morrow," she said slowly, "but if I should find a way out just at the last minute—Mrs. Bartlett," she announced impressively, "you would have no earthly right to hold that woman to her bargain if she should protest—

about the condition of your house, for instance." Then, with a sudden little chuckle at the sight of Mrs. Bartlett's dazed face, she jumped to her feet and flew over to the writing-table.

"Quick, quick!" she cried. "Make out a check for eight hundred dollars, payable to V. M. Charteris—I'll send you back my commission—and sign these releases. Hurry do—I've seen another lucky sign!"

Mrs. Bartlett obeyed mechanically. "Why, certainly—I— What do you mean? Here they are, Miss Reynolds. I wouldn't touch a cent of her disgusting money, so Uncle John, bless his heart! is going to take me to Europe himself. Jack had to give in for once, as it was a question of saving uncle. But protest—about my house—what do you mean, Miss Reynolds?"

Sally stuffed the papers in her bag triumphantly. "I don't dare to tell even you," she answered. "I'm so afraid somebody might stop me. It's a last forlorn hope—so don't count on it too much, and give me your key to hand over to her in case it falls through. And be out to-night, sure. I must go this minute. I have important business on the West Side."

The next morning at nine-thirty she drew up before the little bungalow just in time to meet Mrs. Ronald Charteris, whom she helped from her taxicab with surprising cordiality.

"Is everything all ready for me?" cooed Mrs. Charteris, fixing her Madonnalike orbs upon Sally in a way which made that alert young woman almost doubt her own skepticism. "And you have the key for me?"

Sally pulled herself together. Certainly Mr. Harvey Porter must know what he was talking about.

"Oh, yes," she returned briskly, "I was awfully afraid Mrs. Bartlett wouldn't be able to get out on time! She's not at all well yet, but her uncle is going to take her away for the winter."

"What uncle?" demanded Mrs. Charteris.

"Why, Mr. John Westwood," answered Sally lightly.

Then, with a smothered exclamation, she stepped swiftly to the other side of the doorway and pulled at a little placard that hung there. It came away in her hand, leaving one torn corner hanging to a tack.

Mrs. Charteris's maid, Angélique, who was next in line, sprang forward.

"Madame, look!" she cried shrilly, snatching the card which Sally was trying clumsily to stuff under her coat. "Look, madame! It is ze smallpox—in zis house!"

Mrs. Charteris turned swiftly. "Smallpox!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean? Smallpox?"

By this time Sally had recovered herself. "Oh, no!" she cried. "Oh, no! Not smallpox. Only scarlet-fever. There isn't the slightest danger, Mrs. Charteris. The house has been thoroughly fumigated."

"Only scarlet-fever!" screamed Mrs. Charteris in a voice from which all the honey had departed. "'Only scarlet fever!' And you dared, you dared to bring me into a house reeking with that!"

"Oh, but smell the disinfectants!" pleaded Sally.

The disinfectants were there fast enough, the hall smelled to high heaven, but their odors had anything but a soothing effect upon Mrs. Ronald Charteris.

She proceeded to express her opinion of Miss Sally Reynolds in terms which Sally afterward declared rendered her quite immune from being called a "lady real-estate agent" any more.

"But don't you understand? It's all right. Her uncle is taking her away!" pleaded Sally again when the first lull came in the storm.

"Where to?" The Madonna look had dropped away like a mask.

"Oh, somewhere in Europe for the whole winter," urged Sally eagerly.

"There's not the slightest danger of contagion, really, my dear Mrs. Charteris."

"I wrote your lawyers," declared Sally. "They said nothing would make you give up the house—and the lease was quite unbreakable—and you had paid your rent—and the check was cashed—"

"I do not care how much I have paid!" declared Mrs. Charteris. "I will not live in this house! I will not live in this town!" and again her language was such as no "lady real-estate agent" should have listened to.

"You are quite right, Mrs. Charteris," Sally agreed soothingly. "I told Mrs. Bartlett she had no right to hold you to your bargain if you objected; and here is a release which I made her sign in case you should protest—as of course you had every right to do. I have a check for you, too," she added, holding out a fountain pen suggestively in one hand—and two papers in the other. "If you would sign it now before she changed her mind."

"Mr. Westwood is taking his niece abroad for the winter? You are sure?" snapped Mrs. Charteris.

"Absolutely," answered Sally.

"Give me the pen," ordered Mrs. Charteris, and after a swift perusal of the documents she signed them, then turned and walked quickly down the path and into the waiting taxicab.

When she was safely out of sight Sally stooped and picked up the tell-tale red sign from the floor where the irate Angélique had thrown it.

"I wonder if I'd better go and tell Mrs. Bartlett first and apologize for the disinfectants," she murmured, "or if I ought to take this right back to the house on Phelps Avenue. I can tell the policeman I came to take down our sign. It's Sergeant Riley luckily." She patted the red card with an exultant smile.

"Do I believe in lucky signs?" she cried triumphantly. "Take it from me, my dear little scarlet-fever one, I sure do!"

The Gift of Song



by

Kathleen L. Worrell

IT was one of those blue-gray April days, when the mists creep up from the greening fields and the woods are sweet with arbutus.

Joe Parker, repairing the pasture lot fence, paused in his work to take a deep breath, vaguely conscious of the resurrection glory of the spring that was thrilling up through the roots of the grasses.

His glance swept the land around him with deep satisfaction. It was his own little farm, his share of the world, earned by his strong young hands, by sacrifices made in the years when sacrificing hurts. But he overlooked that part of it.

"God has been mighty good to me," he thought, as he lifted the lichen-covered rails into the sagging cross-posts. The illusive scent of violets and brier blossoms came tantalizingly to his nostrils.

A partridge flew out of the grass with a loud whir and the dog sprang up with a baffled bark. High overhead a meadow-lark began to sing. Joe looked up at the little gray singer. His face clouded and the content faded out of his eyes. "I wonder what is keeping Lena," he thought, gazing anxiously in the direction of the clearing.

The lark sang on as if all the joy of the world were in his little heart. Joe rested his elbows on the top rail. The worry lines in his face deepened.

"It's just a question of my being able to hold out," he said to himself. "I've done my best. I've tried not to think of myself, but only of what is best for her, and I can't see as it helps any. Oh, I wish—and I know it's a mean wish!—that there wasn't any singing in the world!"

A mellow, clear "Ho-o-o" sounded through the brush. Joe's eyes lighted.

"Ho-o-o!" he called back in his hearty, rough-throated voice.

A tall, straight-shouldered girl in a pink dress came into the clearing. She was carrying a basket and a little tin pail.

"I'm sorry I'm so late," she said brightly. "You must be hungry."

"Starved!" he laughed.

She took a linen square from the basket and spread it over the top of a stump. Joe watched every move of her slender fingers as she laid out the lunch. Presently the troubled look came back into his eyes. "What have you been doing this morning?" he asked.

Lena hesitated and bent lower over the basket. A faint flush came into

her cheeks. "Mrs. Hillary was over," she said in a plainly self-conscious tone.

Joe straightened angrily. "I might have known that," he said sullenly.

His tone flicked her. "Can't she come whenever she likes?" she demanded.

Joe made no answer. He was pouring coffee into the tin cups with a hand that trembled. "What did she have to say?" he questioned.

The girl turned away her head and remained silent.

"I know very well what she said," he burst out. "She told you what a shame it is to waste your life on this little old farm when you could do big things in the city with that wonderful voice of yours. Most likely she told you that you could sing in grand opera!" His laugh rang out rather unpleasantly.

The larkspur blue of her eyes misted as she looked up at him. "Oh, Joe," she pleaded, "I wish you wouldn't feel that way. Mrs. Hillary is only trying to help me. She says that I can do something with my voice if I get a chance. I know you don't believe it, but if I had a chance—"

"A chance!" he echoed. "Yes. A chance to wear yourself out. And for what? In Heaven's name, for what? God intended woman to stay in the home man provides. That is the natural way. Why can't you be contented?"

The girl looked at him with the watch-fires of life burning in her valkyr eyes.

"God intended the work and the dreams to go together," she said through pressed lips. "Didn't He put the flowers in the same ground that grows the things we need to eat? I have shared your work; have you ever shared my dreams? You will not even let me sing when we are alone together. You laugh when I talk of making something of myself. You make fun of me!"

Joe shook his fist in the direction of

the village. "It's all that woman's fault," he said hoarsely. "She put this into your head. I wish to Heaven she had died before she ever set foot among us."

The girl sprang to her feet. "Don't talk about her like that! She is the only one who understands or cares."

With a sob she turned and ran off into the clearing. Joe watched her until the pink blur of her dress faded into the green brush. His head sank on his breast. The dog came up and pressed his brown nose against the blue sleeve. The man's eyes and the dog's were strangely akin as they gazed into the distance.

Lena went on until she came to where a group of pines grew close together. There she sat down on a crumbling log and had her cry out. It was very still under the branches. The forest threw its spirit of enchantment around her.

Tired winds that seemed to have come from a great way off fell cool on her throbbing forehead. Pale sunlight glinted illusively through the swaying boughs like a playing wood-nymph's golden hair.

She picked a crimson wine-cup from the moss and looked into its red heart like a crystal gazer. She thought of what Mrs. Hillary had said. It would mean years of work, hard, grinding study, and in the end a great success, perhaps. One could never be sure.

The tears welled anew in her eyes. She did not care so very much about fame and success, the outside world was so strange and so big. But it hurt to think of always being here where nobody heard—or saw—or cared. The wonderful dream of her future unshared!

She thought of a sermon that she had heard not long ago. It was on the Parable of the Talents. The words of the text came back to her:

"Behold, Lord, here is Thy talent which I have kept laid up in a napkin."

"That is how it is," she said to her-

self. "He is the napkin and he doesn't know it. He is smothering my talent and he doesn't care!"

Joe walked slowly home in the sunset. The clouds lay piled in a misty golden light. The beauty of it hurt him. They might have been so happy together in that peaceful little corner of the earth but for the gift!

When he walked into the kitchen he noticed a white cloth on the table in place of the usual red and white check. A bowl of violets stood in the center. The fire crackled cheerfully in the stove, the teakettle was boiling. He could smell the browning corn bread. A sudden sense of the loneliness of the coming years overwhelmed him!

He sat down by the table and rested his head in the hardened palm of his hand.

Lena came in with some eggs in her apron and went into the pantry without looking up. When she came back, Joe held out his hand.

"Come here, dear," he said gently.

She went over and knelt on the floor beside his chair.

"And you really want to go?" he asked.

She nodded.

"I always knew that it had to come," he said slowly. "I seemed to feel that it wouldn't be any use to struggle against it, but I couldn't help it. It meant your going away from me! I wish I hadn't now. It would have been so much better for me and for you, too—maybe.

"How I used to hunger to have you sing to me when we sat behind the morning glory vines in the dusk, but I didn't dare encourage the gift for I was afraid of it. It made me tremble every time I heard you sing. I kept saying to myself: 'Some day it will take her away from me.'

"I never told you about it, but that time I went to the city I heard 'Carmen.' I wanted to know what those high-priced singers sounded like. When she came out and sang, I

thought to myself: 'So they call that a wonderful voice—well, they ought to hear my girlie.' Then I felt chilled all through. After that I was more afraid than ever. That was when I began to make fun of you."

Lena straightened herself and looked at him with dazed, cheated eyes.

"And you never told me," she said. "You never—told me."

"I was afraid," he faltered.

She put her hands on his shoulders, her eyes were glowing.

"I have seen myself standing up there in all the brightness singing *Isolde*. I could feel the hearts of the people beating! And you were sitting in a box."

He pressed his cheek against hers with a wan smile.

"Imagine me in a box at the opera—me with my hands and feet! But I can see you standing there in the light, all right. I have seen you like that a thousand times when I staggered along behind the plow."

The girl flung her arms around his neck. "Joe," she sobbed, "the beautiful dream—to think of dreaming it together!"

She threw back her head and looked at him with starry eyes. "I will learn all those beautiful things and we will sit out behind the morning-glory vines, and it will all be true. And there won't be any hurt or disappointment like there might be if I went."

His heart flamed into his face. "Sweetheart, you'll stay?"

She laid her head in the hollow of his shoulder.

"I have carefully considered the matter, and now I find that I think more of the napkin than I do of the talent," she said.

The drying teakettle began to hiss. The burning smoke drifted out of the oven. But the two sitting close in the twilight did not notice. They were dreaming of glorious triumphs with never a shadow of struggle or pain in them.

The Log-Book

By the Editor

HAVE all the good stories been written?

Have all the tales worth telling been told, are all plots old, has every change been worked on human nature so that there is no new villain, no original hero, no new combination of emotions, no new thrills for the reader?

There are days when it seems that there is no more originality, after the pile of manuscripts from all the world have been scanned and the editor feels as if he had eaten hash from the original turkey of the original Thanksgiving Day of the Pilgrims—or was it the Puritans?

Originality covers a multitude of literary sins. An idea is an idea, hand it out as crudely as you may—it won't be hidden—it is as welcome to an editor as a first-order alternate flash light-house on a lee shore and the lookout can hear breakers but doesn't know where.

From some of the manuscripts I get it appears that the authors, or would-be authors, get an idea (out of memory, not out of their brains) and, without analyzing it at all, sit down and forthwith produce a novel of one hundred thousand words and fifty chapters.

It takes, say, six months to write it, and say ten minutes to see that it is the same old thing over and over again, and that about one hundred writers have worked changes on it for the past hundred years, collected their money, died, and been buried, and their headstones now almost dust.

It seems to be the hardest thing in the world to get writers to think. They slash along with all the old

tricks, the old "props" of lost cities, lost gems, cursed bracelets, mistakes of somebody obvious to the reader, coincidences as long as a tolls-repeal speech, and a climax with about as much surprise in it as there is in finding an egg after a hen has cackled all over the ranch.

The trouble is that after they have labored over what proves to be a bit of Rider Haggard, Robert L. Stevenson, Eugene Sue, Balzac, Charles Dickens, and a few others, they are amazed that the editor fails to get so enthusiastic that he throws a double-jointed fit and dies on the spot from sheer joy.

And bear this in mind: there are not so very many new plots, but there can be art and care and thought and fresh treatment and good characters and suspended interest, and the old tricks can be avoided.

In these days of the moving picture there is more necessity for fresh treatment and surprising climaxes than ever—all the old masterpieces are being done over in the film.

When we go to see "Oliver Twist" on the films we don't go in order to be startled by plot changes, but to see an old favorite in new form, which will revive memories of other days.

It seems as if every dime novel that ever was written has been put into moving pictures alongside "The Three Musketeers," "Les Misérables," and "The Count of Monte Cristo."

Everything is grist to the "movie" mill—speed is the thing in everything. Sometimes I wonder what will become of the English language, as I see people who could just as well be deaf and dumb watching moving pictures.

They are wonderful, and the art is being improved every day, but I doubt if the flickering people of the camera will ever take the place of the printed page and the sentences of the great masters which make mental pictures for the reader that no "movie" impresario can ever hope to duplicate on a film.

And if the picture is laid in some foreign land you glimpse things without knowing what they are—the significance of a holy man of the desert turned toward Mecca at evening, the meaning of the caste mark, the raising of a hand at some shrine—it takes the story and the author to tell you things worth while about the country in which his story is laid.

There are more new plots to-day than Dickens or Balzac ever dreamed of—the telephone adds a possibility, just as the automobile, wireless, the flying-machine, the steamship, electricity, and all the other new inventions have invested plots with new and once undreamed-of complications and dramatic situations.

All this is because you are to get an adventure story next month which has fresh treatment and thought, art, and care in plotting. It is

John Solomon—Supercargo

BY H. BEDFORD-JONES

That by itself would not necessarily be a very thrilling or inviting title, but we have already met *John Solomon* in "The Gate of Farewell," so his name in the title will recall him to everybody who read "The Gate of Farewell," and if you miss *John* it won't be my fault.

"John Solomon—Supercargo" is a sequel, so to speak, of "The Gate of Farewell." It is really the second novel of a trilogy in which *John Solomon* is the leading character in more ways than one.

The third one, "The Seal of Solomon," is scheduled for October, and while the July story is complete in

itself, and does not depend on the one which has appeared or the one to be handed you in the fall, you never will know *John Solomon*, or realize just what the blue-eyed little cockney stands for, unless you get the final story.

But bear in mind that "The Seal of Solomon" is another story all by itself, and that "John Solomon—Supercargo" is also a complete, full book-length novel in which its own particular story ends without the shadow of a doubt.

These three *Solomon* stories were not planned as a trilogy—they are not the old-style "follow up" plots, for each story grew out of the other, and when the first was written there was no thought of a second, and when the second was completed there was no idea that there would ever be another *Solomon* yarn—but *John* insists on getting mixed up in all sorts of Oriental intrigues and mysteries, and what's the use stopping him until he catches a bullet in his teeth some day and it slips and—that'll be an end of him.

To those of you who liked "The Border of Blades," "The Waters of Strife," and the other Bedford-Jones stories, here is something new and different from all the others, just as "The Waters of Strife" was different from the Indian tale.

Incidentally I have purchased another long book-length by George Washington Ogden, author of "The Well Shooters." It is a story of the famous land rush in Oklahoma, and the title is "Claim Number One." It is an Ogden story plain and simple, and there isn't much more to say about it. Ogden grew up in that country, and he can't be told anything about it in the early days. Some time along about September, Gerald. Oh, yes, I have some more Jackson stories, and when you see "Red Robin" you'll sit up and take notice and say "Who'd a thunk Jackson could do it—it's a new twist for him." So it is.

Now I want to tell you about the complete novelette,

The Red-Eyed Death

BY CAREY WADDELL AND CARRINGTON BOYKIN

It is a mystery story of the first water. It moves like clockwork, it keeps you guessing, it is written in fine style, and although it runs nearly fifty thousand words, I never raised my eyes until I got to the end.

It is new, fresh, you see the characters walk and talk, and they seem as real to you as the people in the flat overhead doing the tango at two in the morning.

Don't let the title scare you away. I backed away from it the first time I saw it and made a mental reservation as I started reading that *that* would have to be changed.

By the time I finished the yarn I realized that it had the one, only, and real title it ever could have or ever would have, no matter how much I or anybody else might attempt to tinker with it—it's just that and nothing else—and there's a reason. Fine hot weather reading, believe me, and I suffer high-brow spells just the same as human beings do, too.

Jim Fellon comes back in July—with such a punch that he must have had a horseshoe in each fist when he wrote the novelette you'll get. It's some Western mix-up—and pretty funny, if I do say it.

Then Foran is on deck with both feet and oilskins with an Indian story. Oh, well, I'll bank on the shorts in July. Run up the Blue Peter, quarter-master—we're outward bound.

FROM THE ADMIRAL'S DESPATCH BAG

Do you realize that in the last year I have introduced you to an almost new set of writers? That Jackson, Bedford-Jones, Ogden, Katharine Eggleston, Hocking, Fellom, Foran, and James Francis Dwyer are a new crew?

Those people have written *THE ARGOSY* in the last year, for better or worse, and, of course, have caused a great deal of controversy, a natural result after any sort of a change. And from a magazine carrying three to four serials it has been transformed into a complete magazine and is now well on the way to new triumphs.

Here are the readers clamoring to be heard:

From Another Skipper

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

As I have a log to keep every day, I see you also have the same job, so guess we are brothers under the skin. I want to get down a few of my pleasing thoughts concerning the best magazine I read out of ten I take every month—yours, from truck to keel, is the best.

If I leave port without the latest ARGOSY I feel unlucky for that voyage, and you know a sailor's superstition, anyway, and

makes us feel as though we should double the lookout so as not to land in Davy Jones's locker. It's just like morning coffee—I have to have it.

Slack away on some more sea stories. "Scud o' the Banks" was fine. Fred Jackson's stories are rated A1 at Lloyd's, so let's have some more. Any one who doesn't like them is like an old sailor—he kicks when it's fine weather and he kicks when it storms.

Just battened down "Waters of Strife." Fine yarn, but lost some watch below reading it. May you steam with all cargoes and weather all storms.

J. H. HALSEY.

S. S. El Mundo,
New York.

Love Versus Lovecraft

In Lovecraft's epic, liber primus,
He surely did his best to trim us,
And now with satire he has stunned us
In his last work, liber secundus.
We wonder now with what conceit
He'll trample on the "Winged Feet,"
For sure he's bound to make a fuss
And give us liber tertius.
If this calamity befall us
We'll swallow it "cum grano salis."

If by mischance some fair, false maid
Has havoc with his feelings played,

He should in silence bear the pain
 And from his jeers at love refrain.
 Perchance he thinks in his smart way
 That woman is of meaner clay;
 That love is but a thing of jest,
 He stands, a cynic, self-confessed.
 P. S.—'Twill be a pleasant treat
 To get our stories all complete.

JOHN RUSSELL.

404½ Zack Street,
 Tampa, Florida.

Sympathy for Editor

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

In a recent number you state: "It is up to the Jackson fans to get busy." As Jackson's work appeals to me very strongly, I am "getting busy." I have been reading your magazine for the past ten years, and have yet to find a poor story.

I may come to a class of story that I don't care for, but I know that there are thousands of readers who will. If the general reading public would look at fiction in this light there is little doubt but that the poor editor would have less fear of Matteawan as his ultimate abode; but this is beside the point. Jackson is good, and you know he is good, and if you had your way—but here's the whole thing in a nutshell:

The editor sat in his office-chair
 One foggy, drizzly day;
 His brow was furrowed with grief and care;

His hair was all shot with gray.
 He'd a Jackson manuscript in his hand
 And he didn't know what to do.
 If he got a bouquet from, perhaps, Durand
 There'd be kickers in Kalamazoo.
 The story was Jacksonesque in style,
 With a real "Rider Haggard" plot,
 And the editor knew it was well worth while

No matter who said 'twas not.
 So, the editor groaned and scratched his head,

And his thoughts, I'm ashamed to tell,
 Were: "An editor's better off when dead
 Even if he's in — New York.

E. E. JENNINGS.

Clarksons, Ontario.

Regular Jackson Fan

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

I have just finished reading "The Well Shooters," and believe me when I say this is some works. I sure do miss our Freddie Jackson.

When it comes to love stories being soft

and mushy, why our Freddie couldn't get a look-in on our dear, beloved Geo. W. Ogden; but that is the kind of stories we all like, unless it is some old timer, who is too old to recall his first love-match. Give me Freddie every time—some class to that boy.

H. HARGROVE.

Fort Worth, Texas.

Wants Serials Again

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

It is a shame the way THE ARGOSY readers criticise one of the best authors you have. I mean Jackson—his stories are good.

I could not see why you used to publish the Hawkins stories, as they were no good, and the author should have gotten the hook long before he did. I am glad we are rid of him. I think that all the other authors that you have deserve credit for their good stories. "Fierce Elton" was fine, as also was "The Well Shooters." "The City of the Unseen" was the only story that I did not like very much.

I am through criticising the authors and will take a whack at the editor—or should it be somebody else? I would like to know just why you discontinued the serials.

The readers always had to have THE ARGOSY so as not to miss a part of a good story; now they can go without one or two issues; of course they know they are missing good stories, but they can afford to miss them because they do not know just what they are missing.

When you had the serials I simply could not wait until the next issue was out and used to walk four or five miles to get it, and it was a great disappointment if it was not there, but now a fellow does not miss it so much and he can readily pick out another magazine that will do in a pinch.

I would like to see THE ARGOSY with one or two serials run in two or three issues so as not to drag it out too much.

E. F. MAREK.

2317 Pacific Avenue,
 Tacoma, Washington.

Argosy Best Magazine

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

"The Well Shooters" was a fine story, also "The City of the Unseen." In every way your magazine is the best made. Give some complete novels by Albert Payson Terhune. I am waiting patiently for your next issue; it seems a year between two issues, but when it does get here it is worth

its weight in gold. I like your method of no serials—keep up the good work.

Yours very truly,
ROBT. HENDLEY.

632 South Hull Street,
Montgomery, Alabama.

Every Number Improves

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

In reading the Log-Book from month to month I notice few letters from my part of the country. I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for about eight or ten years.

It has been my custom to read all short or complete stories first, and waiting for the end of a serial before starting to read it. In this way I find I can spend one or two evenings reading a complete story.

I like detective or mystery stories.

The new idea of not having any continued stories from now on is fine, and I think most of the readers of THE ARGOSY will think so too.

As soon as I have read one book I start looking forward to the arrival of the next, as each number seems to outdo the last.

Yours very truly,
JAS. H. PONNAV.

519 Corbett Building,
Portland, Oregon.

Lovecraft In Irons

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

I note in the Log-Book that you say that "it is up to the Jackson fans" to say whether or not we shall have any more stories by this author, and I write to say that I think Mr. Jackson's stories are the very best you publish, Mr. Lovecraft to the contrary notwithstanding, and I sincerely trust that you will not listen to the unjust criticism of Mr. Lovecraft and his ilk, but continue to keep Mr. Jackson on your pay-roll.

"Winged Feet" was the best ever. Among my favorite authors are Fred Jackson, Albert Payson Terhune, Edgar Franklin, Bedford-Jones, and Lebhar.

So, please put Mr. Lovecraft in "irons," and place Mr. Fred Jackson in the position of first mate and let the good old ARGOSY sail on.

Yours very truly,
C. M. TURNER.

Calera, Alabama.

"Well Shooters" Pleased

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for a long time, in fact, ever since I was a

small boy, which was a long time ago. I am a great reader of fiction, and am quite a critic on stories in general. But I am not much given to criticising your magazine simply because there isn't much to it but good stuff.

I am an automobile expert and a cracker-jack "rag-time" piano player, and stories pertaining to either of these always interest me. I must admit that some authors make glaring mistakes when operating autos in their narratives just as I have made in operating this confounded typewriter, as you will notice.

THE ARGOSY is getting better with each issue, and I always turn to it when in search of a good story. I like Fred Jackson's stories and hope he keeps it up. I also liked "The Well Shooters," which I have just read. You can always depend on Albert Payson Terhune's stories making a hit with me.

Wish I had the next issue in my hand right now.

U. A. FRASE.

70 Willow Street,
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Renews His Subscription

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

I have been a constant reader of THE ARGOSY for the last four years, and get better satisfaction out of it than any other magazine I ever read.

Speaking of what we all like best would say I am highly pleased with the way THE ARGOSY is brought out in its new clothes. "The Well Shooters" is fine. It takes the lead of anything yet. Give my best wishes to George Washington Ogden, and tell him to come again with another Western story. I herewith send my renewal.

J. H. RIVERS.

De Queen, Arkansas.

Wants Bennett's Opinion

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

I am writing to let you know what I think about the complete novel "Winged Feet," by Fred Jackson. I hardly know how to express my thoughts, but one thing I do know is, that the story was a dandy and it must have made a hit.

As a rule Jackson's stories are all hits, worth every minute of the time it takes to read them, but that last was better than any of his I have read. In looking over the Log-Book I have read letters that are in opposition to this author, and of course every reader has a right to express his

opinion. In the February issue there is a letter from Mr. F. V. Bennett, of Illinois, who opposes Mr. Jackson. Now I do not care to discuss whether he is capable of telling a good story when he sees one, but I would like to have his opinion of this story in the Log-Book.

RICHARD DALEY,
South Boston, Massachusetts.

Wants More Jackson

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

Although I have read hundreds of ARGOSIES, I must pay tribute to a master mind after reading "Winged Feet," by Fred Jackson. He is great, and those wise ones who sneer at him couldn't come within a thousand miles of him were they to try their pens. If Jackson is cut out, so is a little old reader in Kansas. If I knew his address I would write him personally. THE ARGOSY is the best fiction magazine published.

EDWIN M. FREELAND,
Quartermaster's Engineer, War Dept.,
218 East Seventh Street,
Junction City, Kansas.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Don't worry about Jackson. If you write him in care of me, I'll see that he gets your letter.

Radiograms

I am going back to THE ARGOSY, and here is my subscription for a year. "Mesquite Ranch" was fine.—W. S. EDMONDSON, Mulberry, Arkansas.

We shake hands with the editor for his fair play and neutrality. Have read THE ARGOSY ten years, and it is the best yet.—J. L. BAILY, 412 South Boston Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I am for Jackson, Bedford-Jones, and Katharine Eggleston. Make the Log-Book longer.—C. W. HAELIC, Bound Brook, New Jersey.

I have read THE ARGOSY for years and am glad to see that it is constantly improving. The March number was the best I have ever seen.—JOHN DELLERE, Benton City, Washington.

Your short stories are mostly good, "Desert Loot" was fine, but I did not like "Mesquite Ranch."—C. L. BAXTER, Cleveland, Ohio.

"Mesquite Ranch" was fine.—HARRY STUART, Los Angeles, California.

"The City of the Unseen" was fine. It was so utterly improbable.—MRS. C. E. LONG, Grandvital, P. O., Manitoba.

I read THE ARGOSY years ago, but missed it for years until March. I am back in the fold—that was a fine bunch of stories.—R. R. SHAW, Canton, Illinois, R. F. D. 5.

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I enjoy the Log-Book more than any other part of the magazine unless it is a Jackson story.—P. R. PEARSON, 3447 Herndon Street, Chicago.

If you keep on improving the quality of ARGOSY stories as you have recently you'll be getting out a magazine that can't be beaten in a month of Sundays.—R. REED, Vancouver, British Columbia.

I have read THE ARGOSY six years and never saw it in better shape than it is now.—E. G. TRAPP, Chicago, Illinois.

I want to thank Fred Jackson for "Winged Feet."—L. M. WILLIAMS, 302 South Walnut Street, Sherman, Texas.

"Mesquite Ranch" some story. Keep the good work going.—R. G. THORBURN, Prescott, Arkansas.

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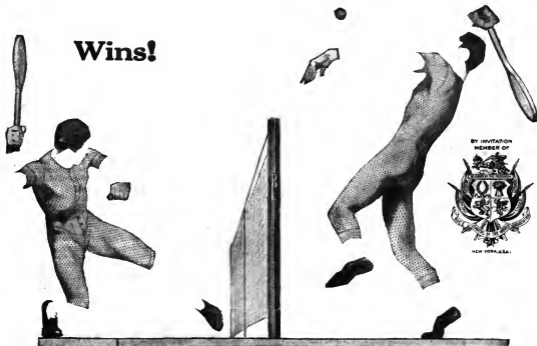
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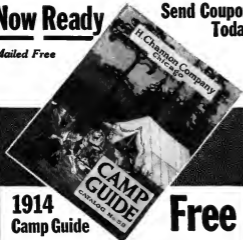
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