ADVENTURE TALES #1
Edited by John Gregory Betancourt
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Features

ISLAND FEUD, by Hugh B. Cave

In port after port, in lie after lie, the island trader had done his best to destroy Harty. Now he had a chance to finish the job--if he could!

THE MAN WHO COULDN'T DIE, by Hugh B. Cave

He was a beachcomber, a despised tropical tramp. She was a freak product of some teeming Oriental slum, lovely, half-starved and wholly savage. Together they faced the mystery, the terror, and the stalking horror of Fortune Island!

THE SPIDER STRAIN, by Johnston McCulley

Part of the legendary "Spider" series by the author of Zorro!

Verse

BRITANNIA VICTURA, by H. P. Lovecraft

THE SKULL IN THE CLOUDS, by Robert E. Howard

THE SINGER IN THE MIST, by Robert E. Howard

EXOTIQUE, by Clark Ashton Smith

AN OPEN WINDOW, by Robert E. Howard

BY ANOTHER SEA, by George Sterling

SOUTHWARD BOUND, by Edmund Leamy

OLD SONGS MODERNIZED, by Corine Rockwell Swain

TO ONE WHO GOES ABROAD, by Barry Kemp

THE STREAM, by Clinton Scollard

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THE BLOTTER
by John Gregory Betancourt

WELCOME to the first issue of *Adventure Tales*. The general idea of *AT* is to reprint some of the greatest adventure-oriented fiction ever written for pulp magazines (and sometimes the "slick" magazines). We're not talking about moldering old work by authors nobody has ever heard of, but rare and classic fiction that retains its original excitement and meets current high literary standards. Here you will find everything from fantasy and science fiction to mystery, suspense, and (as the magazine's name implies) high adventure.

For the premiere issue, we have drawn from *Argosy*--perhaps the most famous pulp magazine of all time--for two stories by Hugh B. Cave, our Featured Author: "Island Feud" and "The Man Who Couldn't Die." Don't miss the interview with Hugh, too, as he talks about his writing career and pulp magazines.

There are also stories by H. de Vere Stacpoole (best known as the author of *The Blue Lagoon*, filmed no less than five times, most famously starring Brooke Shields). "Under the Flame Trees" originally appeared in *Short Stories* magazine.

James C. Young, a well-respected pulp author who is unfairly forgotten these days, contributes "Rats Ashore," a nautical tale with horrific overtones.

H. Bedford Jones was in many ways the king of the pulp magazine writers, contributing hundreds of stories (under his own byline and more than a dozen pseudonyms) to all of the top adventure and fiction pulp magazines. Here he contributes "Skulls," a gruesome little revenge story, also from *Short Stories*.

Noted mystery author Vincent Starrett (1886-1974) contributes "The Evil Eye," the first entry in his Lavender series, about a Chicago detective. (We will have more Lavender stories in future issues.)

"Watson!" by Captain A. E. Dingle, is an early Sherlock Holmes pastiche. The good Captain was a frequent fixture in pulps in the early 20th century, contributing a long string of nautically-themed stories. Not surprisingly, Holmes and Watson find themselves at sea in this one, too. There is a sly sense of humor to it--and a twist ending that will leave Sherlockians gasping in surprise! It originally appeared in the October 10, 1921 issue of *Short Stories*.

H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and Clark Ashton Smith, with whom I assume most readers will already be familiar, contribute verse this time around, along with a few lesser-known poets. And the wonderful logos for the contents page, the Blotter, and the Morgue are by the incredibly talented Thomas Floyd.

YOUR editor (me) is John Betancourt. I run Wildside Press, the small publishing company which produces this magazine, and I also write novels now & again in my spare time.

This is actually the fifth magazine I have worked on. My love of magazine editing began when I got a job in college in 1983 working as an assistant editor at *Amazing Stories*, the classic science fiction magazine. (It used to be a pulp, of course, but had long been a digest when I worked on it.) From there, I went on to help launch the revival of *Weird Tales*. After I left *WT* for a book-editing career, I launched a non-fiction news magazine called *Horror*, which covered (perhaps not surprisingly) the horror field. *Horror* took too much time, so I turned it over to another small press (which ultimately folded *Horror* a half dozen or so issues later). Then I wandered back to *Weird Tales*, becoming the co-publisher (with Warren Lapine of DNA Publications). After that, I started *H.P. Lovecraft's Magazine of Horror*, selecting much of the first issue's content before passing the editorial reins on to Marvin Kaye. I'm still the

publisher of *HPL's*.

Which brings us to *Adventure Tales*. I love and collect pulp magazines, and over the years Wildside Press has done quite a few pulp-related projects--from *The Best of Weird Tales: 1923* to a line of facsimile reprints of pulp magazines (including issues of *Spicy Detective Stories, Spicy Mystery Stories, Ghost Stories, Golden Fleece, Phantom Detective*, and more.) *Adventure Tales* fits squarely in the middle of all the company's pulp roots (and pulp-revival aspirations).

Assisting me on *AT* are Wildside Press staffers P. D. Cacek, Sean Wallace, Diane Weinstein, and Darrell Schweitzer, plus Warren Lapine of DNA Publications. Darrell edits *Weird Tales* magazine with George Scithers and has an encyclopedic knowledge of pulp writers and fiction. Sean Wallace is a book editor with a love for classic pulp fiction. Warren Lapine, who runs DNA Publications, is assisting with circulation management. (All the stuff I don't want to do, like keeping track of subscribers and mailing out subscription copies.) Diane Weinstein is a terrific proofreader and is always happy to lend her considerable art direction skills. Together, I think we make a great team, and I hope that *Adventure Tales* becomes your new favorite fiction magazine. If not, it won't be for lack of trying!

One note for collectors: we are producing two distinct editions of *Adventure Tales*, one on newsprint for casual readers (it's much cheaper--only $5.99 per issue) and one on book paper for collectors who want to save it ($15.95 per issue). Because we need a minimum of 108 pages (our printer's requirement) for the book paper edition, we are going to add a little extra material in to fill it out. With the first book-paper edition, we will feature *The* Spider Strain, a short novel by Johnston McCulley (best known as the creator of Zorro). With the second issue, we will begin the serialization of a 60,000-word novel, *The Golden Dolphin*, by J. Allan Dunn. *The Golden Dolphin* will also be available as a book from Wildside Press if you can't wait to finish it!

You can subscribe to either version (or both). The newsprint edition is $19.95 for 4 issues; the book paper edition is $29.95 for 2 issues, postage paid in the United States.

Till next time...?

--John Betancourt

IN MEMORIAM: As this issue was about to go to press, we received news of the passing of Hugh B. Cave. He was a great writer and a wonderful person. He will be missed by all who new him. We are all grateful to have been able to work with him to create this special issue of *Adventure Tales* honoring him and his work.

BRITANNIA VICTURA

When Justice from the vaulted skies

Beheld the fall of Roman might,

She bade a nobler realm arise

To rule the world and guard the right:

She spake--and all the murm'ring main,

Rejoicing, hail'd Britannia's reign!

The mind of Greece, the law of Rome,

The strength of Northern climes remote,

On one fair Island made their home,

And in one race their virtues wrote:

The blended glories of the past

In England evermore shall last!

Untrodden wilds beyond the sea,

And savage hordes in lands unknown,

At Albion's touch rose great and free,

And bless'd the sway of England's throne:

Discordant tribes, with strife o'errun,

Grew Britons, and join'd hands as one!

When Greed and Envy stand array'd,

And Madness threats a peaceful earth,

Britannia's sons with sacred blade

Defend the soil that gave them birth:

Nor is their cause to that confin'd--

They fight for Justice and Mankind.

Tho' Fortune frown and trials press;

Tho' pain and hardship weigh the heart;

the dawn of vict're soon will bless

Each Briton who sustains his part:

For Heavn'n's own pow'r is close allay'd

To Virtue's and Britannia's side!

--H.P. Lovecraft

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS: The Man Who Held the Hero's Horse
by Mike Resnick

THERE have been a lot of theories advanced as to why Edgar Rice Burroughs remains a popular author more than 90 years after he first broke into print, when dozens of Pulitzer and Nobel winners (and a few Hugo winners as well) can't be found this side of Bookfinder.com.

A lot of people credit his imagination, and yes, it certainly worked overtime, coming up with Tarzan, Barsoom, Amtor, Pellucidar, Caspak, Poloda, and the rest.

Others point to his break-neck pacing. You follow Tarzan until he's unarmed and facing a ferocious man-eater at chapter's end, then cut to Jane until she's one grope away from a Fate Worse Than Death at the end of the next chapter, then back to Tarzan, and so forth. Works pretty well.

A few point to his remarable facility at creating languages. And truly, what *would* you call an elephant except Tantor? What could a snake possibly be other than Hista? What better name for an ape-king that half-barks and half-growls his language than Kerchak? Yes, he was damned good at languages.

But there's another aspect to Burroughs that lends enormous verisimilitude, especially to his younger readers, and it's an aspect that has been addressed only once before, by the late Burroughs scholar (and Royal Canadian Mountie) John F. Roy--and that is the interesting fact that ERB wrote himself into almost all his greatest adventures.

When I first discovered *A Princess of Mars* at age 8, I *knew* the story was true. I mean, hell, Burroughs was writing about his own uncle, the man who had entrusted him with the manuscript of his adventures on that distant and wondrous planet. Wasn't that proof enough that Barsoom existed?

Well, if you were young and impressionable, it was proof enough--but even if you weren't, it was a very effective and informal way of getting you into the story.

And while ERB was not a trained writer, at a gut level he knew it worked. He might not have known what "distancing mechanism" or "stream of consciousness" meant, but he sure as hell knew how to lasso a reader and pull him along, and his favorite and most effective gimmick was to tell you how he himself had been thrust into the company of this book's hero.

So here he was, the nephew of John Carter, gentleman of Virginia and Warlord of Mars, explaining how he can come upon this remarkable manuscript, how he had watched his uncle standing outside at night reaching out his arms to Mars, how he had followed instructions and buried him in a well-ventilated coffin that could only be opened from the inside, and only now understood the meaning of it all.

And it didn't stop with the one book. He meets John Carter again and is given the manuscripts to *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*. Some years later he meets Ulysses Paxton (a/k/a Vad Varo) by proxy when John Carter delivers Paxton's long letter (i.e., *The Master Mind of Mars*) to him, and he is visited by John Carter at least twice more. It is made clear that ERB is now an old man (as indeed he was), while the Warlord remains the thirtyish fighting man he has always been.

But ERB's interaction with his characters wasn't limited to Barsoom.

For example, he knows the man who knows the man who knows Tarzan--or some permutation of that. The very first line in his most famous book, *Tarzan of the Apes*, is: "I had this story from one who had no business to tell it to me, or to any other." A Burroughs scholar would probably conclude that the "one" was Paul d'Arnot, but it makes no difference. The point is that here is ERB, inserting himself in the

beginning of the story again to lend some degree of authenticity.

Did he ever meet Tarzan? He never says so explicitly, but he did meet Barney Custer, hero of *The Eternal Lover*, and his sister, and based on the interal evidence of the book, the only place ERB could possibly have met them was on Lord Greystoke's vast African estate.

It was while vacationing in Greenland that ERB came across the manuscript that became *The Land That Time Forgot*. (Yes, he was pretty sharp at finding saleable manuscripts.)

Burroughs gets around. *At the Earth's Core* finds him in the Sahara, where he stumbles upon David Innes, who in turn had stumbled upon the hidden world of Pellucidar and felt compelled to spend the night telling ERB his story. A reader in Algiers summons him back a few years later, where he is reintroduced to David Innes, who once again pours out his story, which was published as *Pellucidar*.

After moving to California, who should ERB's next-door neighbor turn out to be but the brilliant young scientist Jason Gridley, creator of the remarkable Gridley Wave, by means of which Burroughs received still more tales of that mysterious world at the center of the hollow Earth. (And Gridley himself later went to Pellucidar, which means the ERB rubbed shoulders with still another hero.)

Burroughs even wrote his company's secretary, Ralph Rothmond (who was later fired, more than a decade after ERB's death, for carelessly allowing a number of copyrights to expire) into one of the books. Rothmond introduces ERB to young, handsome, blond, heroic Carson Napier, the Wrong-Way Corrigan of space, who takes off for Mars and someone winds up on Venus. Napier remains in telepathic contact with Burroughs long enough to dicate *Pirates of Venus* and three-plus sequels.

There was just something about ERB that made heroes seek him out and tell him their strange stories, always on the condition that he not publish the tale until they were dead, or if he couldn't wait that long, to at least change their names. The last to find him and unload on him was Julian V, who narrated the tale of *The Moon Maid*.

ERB never met the author of *Beyond the Farthest Star*--after all, that would have been quite a voyage--but of all the people in the universe, the author was, perhaps unsurprisingly by this time, drawn to Burroughs, and mystically compelled ERB's typewriter to produce the story one night in Hawaii while ERB watched in awe.

The interesting thing is that though he associated with Tarzan and John Carter and David Innes and Carson Napier and many others, ERB never once performed an exciting or heroic deed in any of the books, and that lends a little verisimilitude too. These are extraordinary men, these heroes, and neither ERB nor you nor I can begin to match their skills or heroism, so it makes much more sense for him to tell us about it and for us to read and appreciate it. Fighting lions or green men or allosaurs is for heroes; reading about it is for the rest of us mortals.

And maybe that's why we loved and identified with Edgar Rice Burroughs. He didn't lop of heads with his longsword, or bellow the victory cry of the bull ape over the corpse of an enemy, or make his way to the center of the Earth. But he seemed to know the remarkable men who *did* do those things, and, by golly, he got to hold the hero's horse.

Most of us would have traded places with him in a New York--or Barsoomian--minute. T

ADVENTURE TALES INTERVIEWS HUGH B. CAVE

Hugh B. Cave surely needs little in the way of introduction to any fan of pulp fiction. Under his own name and pseudonyms such as "Justin Case" he wrote more than a thousand stories for magazines, before turning his attention to books. We were pleased when he accepted our invitation to be the Featured Author in the first issue of *Adventure Tales,* and he consented to this interview.

Adventure Tales: How and when did you enter the pulp field as a writer?

Hugh B. Cave: While still a student at Brookline, Massachusetts High School, I sold poetry and crossword puzzles to Boston newspapers and other publications, stories to Sunday School magazines, and did cartoons for the Boston YMCA News. One such poem, called "Men," originally published in *Sunset Magazine* on the West Coast, was set to music by Carlyle Davis, sung by him in Carnegie Hall, and published by the Oliver Ditson Company.

After high school I worked for a Boston publishing company for a year or so. One book of poetry that I had a hand in designing was by W. Adolph Roberts, editor of a pulp magazine called *Brief Stories*. He suggested I try a short story for *Brief Stories*, and the suggestion resulted in "Island Ordeal," my first pulp sale, which was published in July, 1929, when I had just turned 19.

There were more than a hundred pulp magazines being published at that time--so-called because they were printed on rough wood-pulp paper. I eventually sold a total of some 800 to 95 of them, then moved on into the higher-paying slick-paper magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* (to which I sold 46 stories), *Good Housekeeping* (41), *American, Redbook, Ladies Home Journal, Collier's, Liberty, Esquire*, etc. etc. Three hundred fifty stories in all. And my next two books, due out this year, will be Number 49 and Number 50 on my list of books published. Five of these are World War II books written as a correspondent. Two are books on Haiti and Jamaica. Twenty are novels. The others are hardcover collections of my pulp and slick-paper magazine stories. Some of these books and many of my shorter works have been reprinted in foreign countries. About a dozen of my books have been reprinted by John Betancourt's Wildside Press.

And along the way, two books have been written about me. These are *Pulp Man's Odyssey: The Hugh B. Cave Story* by Audrey Parente, published by Starmont House in 1988, and a brand new one, *Cave of a Thousand Tales* by Milt Thomas, due out this year, 2004, from Arkham House.

AT: Of all those stories, do you have any favorites?

Hugh B. Cave: Two favorites come to mind quickly. The first is a very short story called *Two Were Left*, which was originally published in *American Magazine* in June, 1942. It's about an Eskimo boy and his beloved sled dog who are marooned on a drifting ice floe and, when hungry enough, one of them will have to eat the other to survive. The story has been reprinted more than one hundred times in school books and anthologies.

The other is one of many tales I have written about Haiti after having lived there for five winters. I note there is a question about Haiti coming up in this interview, so I won't go into my adventures there now, but this story, called *The Mission*, first appeared in the old *Saturday Evening Post* of March 14, 1959 and was reprinted in *The Best Post Stories* of that year, in the first issue of the new *Saturday Evening Post*, and in seven foreign magazines. Just recently, when Haiti was in turmoil over its president, a group that wanted the world to have a better opinion of that country requeted permission to feature the story on a web-site. It's about a six-year-old country girl who, after the tragic death of her mother in a landslide, walks miles to Port-au-Prince, the capital, to find her "famous artist" father who actually existed only in

her mother's imagination. After the *Post* printed it, Doubleday did it as a handsome gift book, calling it "a little classic of the spirit."

The Post, by the way, reported that this story had received more reader mail than any story ever published in the magazine. Part of the story's success was due, I'm sure, to the portrait of little Yolande by artist Peter Stevens, which was featured in the Doubleday book also.

AT: For the collector, would you care to talk about some of your pseudonyms and their histories?

Hugh B. Cave: My brother Geoffrey Cave, four years older than I, was editor of his school paper when he attended a high school in Boston, Mass. But he didn't plan to make writing his career. Instead, he went on to business school and became an accountant.

Still, Geoff tried his hand at writing some pulp stories, using the name Geoffrey Vace, and sold some to Farnsworth Wright, famous editor of *Weird Tales*, for such magazines as *Oriental Stories* and *Magic Carpet*. So for a while, whenever I had two stories in any issue of any pulp, I would use his writing name, Geoffrey Vace, on one of them to win him more exposure.

In 1998 Tom Roberts, publisher of Black Dog Books, put out a neat booklet that he called *The Death-Head's March and Others: The Geoffrey Vace Collection*, by Geoffrey Cave and Hugh B. Cave." But Geoff didn't continue as a writer, the way I did. He gave it up to be an accountant.

Another pseudonym I used--and used much more often--was Justin Case. This was a name I developed for the Spicy pulps--*Spicy Mystery, Spicy Detective* and *Spicy Adventure*--because they paid me as high as six cents a word but I was aiming at the slicks and didn't want to use my real name. (I wonder if any real people named Case ever named a son Justin!) Black Dog reprinted some Justin Case tales as well, calling the booklets *Dark Door of Doom* and *White Star of Egypt* after two of the stories in them. And in 1997 Tattered Pages Press of Chicago published a handsome paperback collection of my Justin Case tales featuring a character I called "The Eel," calling it *Escapades of The Eel*.

And, finally, even in the slicks I occasionally needed to use a pen-name, in which case I called myself H.C. Barnett, Barnett being my mother's maiden name and my actual middle name. I can't think off-hand of any others I used, but there probably were one or two more.

AT: How has your interest in Haiti and voodoo influenced your work?

Hugh B. Cave: Let's begin with why I went to Haiti in the first place. At age 25 I married Margaret Long, a physical education teacher in the Providence, R.I. school system. We had two sons, Kenneth and Donald. When Ken was 10 and Don 5, the older boy began having some strange nightmares, and their doctor recommended we get him out of cold New England for the winter. As it happened, I knew a man who was teaching English in Haiti and asked him if he could find a house for us to rent. He found one in Petionville, and our Haitian adventure began. The boys attended an English-speaking school run by the U.S. Embassy. I began exploring the country and writing about it.

And then voodoo. We were told about a voodoo *maman* named Lorgina in Port-au-Prince, the capital, who was highly regarded. We obtained permission to attend one of her services, but, when we got there, found her ill with a badly swollen, painful leg. My wife, remember, was a phys. ed. teacher. "Go find me some olive oil and I'll try to massage the pain away," she told me.

Well, I drove all over Port-au-Prince in the middle of the night and finally found some in a little all-night eatery. Meg massaged the mambo's pain away. And Lorgina was so grateful she said, "Anything you want from me, just ask. Anything!"

What we wanted--what I wanted, anyway--was to learn about the real voodoo so I could write about it. We spent five winters there in Haiti, and I am happy to say that the same cook, same housekeeper, and same yard boy worked for us the whole time, and our boys did well in school. I came up with some short stories for various magazines and then wrote a book called *Haiti: Highroad to Adventu*re about which noted author Kenneth Roberts wrote to the publisher: "If there was anything printed about Haiti that I didn't read (when I was writing *Lydia Bailey*) either in French or English or in diaries, I couldn't find out about it; and Cave's *Haiti* seems to me to stand head and shoulders above all of them in its vivid depiction of the land and the people. If you want a quote, I suggest 'The most perfect depiction of present-day Haiti, the land and the people, ever drawn.'"

Then I wrote a novel, *The Cross on the Drum*, about the conflict between a voodoo houngan and a protestant minister (which ended with the two of them calling each other "my brother") and it was a Doubleday Dollar Book Club selection and a Literary Guild bonus book. And I wrote many magazine short stories about Haiti which have been reprinted in a collection of my West Indies tales called *The Witching Lands*.

AT: Despite your success in the slick magazines, you kept coming back to fantasy and horror themes in your work. I note that many of your later novels are, in fact, horror. What's the appeal of dark fantasy for you?

Hugh B. Cave: Well now, I have a hunch it all began when I was a kid singing in the men's-&-boys' choir at a church in Boston. We choir kids attended a camp for two weeks every summer near Cape Cod, as I may have mentioned before, and every night around a campfire our choir-master read us creepy stories by Poe and other such writers. I got to be very fond of them and still am. Most horror stories, it seems to me, have a touch of fantasy, and fantasy gives a writer space to expand in. I've done many other kinds of stories and books, but feel so "at ease" in the fantasy-horror field that I keep coming back to it.

AT: You mentioned that the "Spicy" magazines paid 6 cents a word for fiction. Wasn't that a lot of money for a pulp magazine? How did the other pulps compare?

Hugh B. Cave: My record-books show that most pulp magazines paid from 1 to 3 cents a word. I don't know what the "Spicies" paid other writers, but my Justin Case stories got a lot of covers and apparently were popular with the readers. Some have been reprinted in book form, as I mentioned before. I don't know what the "Spicies" paid other writers. My old records give only the title of each story sold and when it was published. Other pulps, such as *Short Stories, Adventure, Dime Mystery*, and *Dime Detective*, paid me more than a cent a word, I seem to remember, but I can't think of any that paid me what the "Spicies" did.

AT: When you were writing your pulp stories, what were your working hours? What was a typical day like for a writer in, say, 1935?

Hugh B. Cave: Before I married (which I did in 1935), I worked long hours at those old-style typewriters. (I remember having one whose carriage I had to lift up to see what it had typed from underneath!). Then along came electric machines and computers. When a story I'm working on grabs my interest really hard, I'm likely to work all day at it and sometimes even half the night. It has always been that way for me, even in my pulp-writing days. Now I have slowed down a bit. After all, I'm 93 as I write this. But if a great story idea comes my way, I'm still likely to work long and hard at it, and I still enjoy doing so.

AT: Is there a question you haven't been asked in interviews before, that you would like to answer?

Hugh B. Cave: Well now, no interviewer has ever asked, "Do you ever wish you had been something other than a writer?" If anyone ever does ask that, my answer will be a resounding "No!" because it has been a fulfilling and fascinating life.

After all, I started at age 16 or thereabouts and am still writing at 93. Amen.

AT: Thank you very much for your time!

THE SKULL IN THE CLOUDS

The Black Prince scowled above his lance, and wrath in his hot eyes lay,

"I would that you rode with the spears of France and not at my side today.

"A man may parry an open blow, but I know not where to fend;

"I would that you were an open foe, instead of a sworn friend.

"You came to me in an hour of need, and your heart I thought I saw;

"But you are one of a rebel breed that knows not king or law.

"You--with your ever smiling face and a black heart under your mail--

"With the haughty strain of the Norman race and the wild, black blood of the Gael.

"Thrice in a night fight's close-locked gloom my shield by merest chance

"Has turned a sword that thrust like doom--I wot 'twas not of France!

"And in a dust-cloud, blind and red, as we charged the Provence line

"An unseen axe struck Fitzjames dead, who gave his life for mine.

"Had I proofs, your head should fall this day or ever I rode to strife.

"Are you but a wolf to rend and slay, with naught to guide your life?

"No gleam of love in a lady's eyes, no honor or faith or fame?"

I raised my face to the brooding skies and laughed like a roaring flame.

"I followed the sign of the Geraldine from Meath to the western sea

"Till a careless word that I scarcely heard bred hate in the heart of me.

"Then I lent my sword to the Irish chiefs, for half of my blood is Gael,

"And we cut like a sickle through the sheafs as we harried the lines of the Pale.

"But Dermod O'Connor, wild with wine, called me a dog at heel,

"And I cleft his bosom to the spine and fled to the black O'Neill.

"We harried the chieftains of the south; we shattered the Norman bows.

"We wasted the land from Cork to Louth; we trampled our fallen foes.

"But Conn O'Neill put on me a slight before the Gaelic lords,

"And I betrayed him in the night to the red O'Donnell swords.

"I am no thrall to any man, no vassal to any king.

"I owe no vow to any clan, nor faith to any thing.

"Traitor--but not for fear or gold, but the fire in my own dark brain;

"For the coins I loot from the broken hold I throw to the winds again.

"And I am true to myself alone, through pride and the traitor's part.

"I would give my life to shield your throne, or rip from your breast the heart

"For a look or a word, scarce thought or heard. I follow a fading fire,

"Past bead and bell and the hangman's cell, like a harp-call of desire.

"I may not see the road I ride for the witch-fire lamp that gleam;

"But phantoms glide at my bridle-side, and I follow a nameless Dream."

The Black Prince shuddered and shook his head, then crossed himself amain:

"Go, in God's name, and never," he said, "ride in my sight again."

The starlight silvered my bridle-rein; the moonlight burned my lance

As I rode back from the wars again through the pleasant hills of France,

As I rode to tell Lord Amory of the dark Fitzgerald line

If the Black Prince died, it needs must be by another hand than mine.

--Robert E. Howard

THE PULP REPRINTS OF HUGH B. CAVE
by Michael Chomko

Hugh Barnett Cave was born in 1910 and seemingly began writing as soon as he could lift pencil to paper. While still in high school he was a published author, having sold a few stories to Sunday School papers and poetry to newspapers. Not long after obtaining his first and only job with a Boston vanity publisher, Cave made his first sale to the pulps. "Island Ordeal" was published in the July 1929 issue of *Brief Stories*. It was quickly followed by others sold to a variety of magazines. *Action Stories, Short Stories, Astounding Stories, Wide World Adventures, Outlaws of the West*, and *High Spot Magazine* all published stories by Cave during the next year. He was soon able to give up his day job and survive as a full-time author. By 1933, he had established markets with many of the leading publishers of the pulp industry, including Popular Publications and Street & Smith. According to his records, Cave published about eight hundred stories in the pulps, the bulk of them appearing prior to 1942. By then he was writing predominantly for the book trade and "slick" magazines, selling stories to such mainstream publications as *Colliers, Country Gentleman, Good Housekeeping, Liberty, Redbook*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Although other prolific pulpsters such as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Lester Dent, Frederick Faust, Walter B. Gibson, and Robert E. Howard had found their way back into print by the late sixties, it was not until 1977 that the pulp work of Hugh Cave would begin to reappear. It was then that the late author and editor, Karl Edward Wagner, hoping to preserve the work of writers he felt had been unjustly neglected, released *Murgunstrumm and Others*. This long out-of-print collection, published by Wagner's Carcosa House and illustrated by the great Lee Brown Coye, went on to win a 1978 World Fantasy Award. It's best described using the language found on the inside flap of its dust jacket:

Murgunstrumm and Others abounds with haunted houses, ravenous vampires, slobbering monsters, fiends human and inhuman, nights dark and stormy, corpses fresh and rotting. These stories exemplify the gothic horror thrillers of the 1930s--no-holds-barred lurid chillers of violent action and scream-in-the-night terror ... savored best on a stormy, lonely, night.

Largely drawn from the pages of *Strange Tales, Spicy Mystery Stories* (where Cave's tales originally appeared under the pseudonym Justin Case), and *Weird Tales, Murgunstrumm and Others* has been reissued by Wildside Press in both hardcover and trade paperback.

Although Wagner's collection helped to reÃ«stablish Hugh Cave as an author of dark fantasy--his short novel, *The Mountains of Madness*, was released earlier this year in a limited, signed edition by Cemetery Dance Publications--it would be another ten years before the next collection of Cave's pulp work would see the light of day. *Spicy Detective Encores No. 2*, one of a series of six tiny volumes, each about the size of a "Big-Little Book," reprinted three of Cave's "Eel" stories. Cave had introduced this character in the June 1936 issue of Culture Publications' *Spicy Adventure Stories*. Urged by his editors at Culture to supply them with more tales of the "Eel," Cave went on to produce about twenty stories featuring the character, all of them credited to Justin Case.

Published by Winds of the World Press in card-stock covers, *Spicy Detective Encores No. 2* is a collectible rarely seen on today's used book market. However, the three stories it reprinted are available in a more recent and extensive collection of "Eel" yarns. *Escapades of the Eel*, published in 1997 by Tattered Pages Press of Chicago, assembled fifteen of the best stories featuring the "gentleman correspondent" of *Spicy Adventure Stories* and private dick of *Spicy Detective* and *Spicy Mystery Stories*. Told in the first person using the tongue-in-cheek style of the spicy pulps, the "Eel" stories range from the wilds of Borneo to the urban jungles of Depression-age and World War II-era America.

In 1988, the next Cave collection saw the light of day--*The Corpse Maker*. Assembled by Sheldon Jaffery for the now-defunct Starmont House, it was a short, paperbound collection of seven stories drawn largely from the pages of such weird-menace pulps as *Dime Mystery Magazine* and *Terror Tales*. Jaffery's collection reproduces its stories directly from the pages of the pulps and features personable, yet informative introductions to each story. The title yarn was originally published in the second of the "weird-menace" issues of *Dime Mystery*, the magazine that introduced the genre to pulp readers. Like *Spicy Detective Encores No. 2*, The Corpse Maker is now a difficult book to find.

Nearly another decade passed before the Hugh Cave floodgates opened. It began with a collection that Carcosa House had intended to be the sequel to *Murgunstrumm and Others*. Fortunately, in 1995, following their success with collections of pulp fiction by Robert Bloch, Carl Jacobi, and Donald Wandrei, Minnesota-based Fedogan & Bremer rode to the rescue and released the long-delayed collection of Cave's best tales of weird menace, *Death Stalks the Night*. Featuring seventeen tales from shudder pulps like *Dime Mystery, Horror Stories*, and *New Mystery Adventures, Death Stalks the Night* like its predecessor, *Murgunstrumm*, was also nominated for a World Fantasy Award.

According to editor Karl Edward Wagner, weird-menace stories "were calculatedly gothic and grisly ... (with) no pretensions of art--just go for the throat ... (and) the wildest and weirdest menacer of them all was Hugh B. Cave.... Cave's weird-menace stories still have the power to chill and thrill.... This really is a curl-up on a dark and stormy night book." And you know, he was right!

In 1997, Fedogan & Bremer dipped again into the shudder pulps to harvest ten more stories by "the wildest and weirdest menacer of them all." Compiled by the author himself, *The Door Below* featured stories selected from throughout the author's career. Alongside such pulp stories as "Servant of Satan" and "The Thing from the Swamp," were tales written during the last three decades of the twentieth century, fiction "written most often for magazines published by people who fondly remembered the pulps and sought to keep those memories alive by recreating them." Thus, although "From the Lower Deep" and "Damsels for the Damned" could very well have been titles for stories featured in *Strange Tales* and *Spicy Mystery Stories*, both yarns missed those magazines by half a century.

Two paperbound collections from Tattered Pages Press--the previously discussed *Escapades of the Eel* and a companion volume entitled *The Dagger of Tsiang and Other Tales of Adventure*--joined The Door Below to make 1997 a banner year for Cave reprints. Assembled by Doug Ellis from the pages of *Short Stories, Top-Notch Magazine*, and other periodicals of the early thirties, *The Dagger of Tsiang* collects eleven "colorful tales of Tsiang House, a British outpost deep in the jungles of Borneo ... adventure at its finest, written by a master of the craft." Both of the Tattered Pages books are entertaining packages, assembled and published by a small press devoted to reproducing some of the best stories of the pulp era.

Another small press was next to reprint the work of the man sometimes known as Justin Case. In 1998, Black Dog Books, headed by artist, designer, and pulp fan Tom Roberts, published the first of its five Cave collections--*The Death-Head's March and Others*. Subtitled *The Geoffrey Vace Collection*, three of the four stories included were written by Cave's older brother, Geoffrey. Along the lines of Talbot Mundy's tales of India, the Vace stories were originally published in *Oriental Stories* and *Magic Carpet Magazine*, the adventure-oriented companions to *Weird Tales*. The fourth story of the collection, "Step Softly, Sahib!" was written by Hugh Cave, using his brother's pseudonym. "I did my best to keep that Nom-de-plume alive for him with stories in many different pulps ... always hoping he would one day return to his typewriter."

Other Cave collections from Black Dog Books include *White Star of Egypt*, which reprints a pair of tales from *Spicy Adventure Stories*; *The Desert Host*, the sole "sword-and-sorcery" story that Cave

contributed to the pulps, written for *Magic Carpet*; *Dark Doors of Doom*, a trio of weird-menace yarns from the pages of the spicy pulps, all originally credited to Justin Case; and *The Stinging 'Nting and Other Stories*, four adventure yarns first published in 1931 in two pulps rarely seen today--*Far East Adventure Stories* and *Man Stories*. Black Dog's Cave collections are digest-sized books with card-stock covers, available from the publisher for between five and nine dollars.

Although Hugh B. Cave is predominantly regarded today as a writer of dark fantasy, a large portion of his pulp era work was created for the mystery genre. At least one quarter of his pulp production was aimed at the rough-paper detective market. Beginning in 2000, modern readers were reintroduced to this versatile author's crime fiction through three reprint collections issued by the small presses.

Fedogan & Bremer celebrated the author's ninetieth birthday with the republication of Cave's nine "Peter Kane" stories, originally written for Popular Publication's *Dime Detective*. According to Don Hutchison's introduction to the volume, "Kane ... was introduced as (the) 'ace shamus of the Beacon Agency, chronic drunk, two-fisted, hard-headed private dick with nothing to live for except the next drink' ... a man who can down three liquid meals a day, get hit on the head more often than is really healthy, and still land on his feet right side up."

While the first half-dozen Kane stories, originally published in 1934 and 1935, owe a large debt to the weird-menace field for which Cave had then been laboring for several years, the final three tales set a more comic tone and feature rather puzzling plots.

Dime Detective was also home to another Cave hero, truant officer Nick Coffey. The protagonist of three stories contributed to the Popular magazine in 1940, Officer Coffey was a favorite of *Dime Detective*'s editor Ken White as well as Cave's agent, Lurton "Count" Blassingame. The stories concern good kids, driven into trouble via circumstances beyond their control. In 2000, Subterranean Press reissued two of the three Coffey stories in a chapbook limited to 250 numbered and 26 lettered copies, all signed by the author. The Sidecar Preservation Society issued the third Coffey story separately in 2001 as a fund-raising effort.

Black Mask was the premier detective magazine of the pulp era, the periodical where the hard-boiled detective story took root and evolved. Home to such greats of the mystery genre as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Erle Stanley Gardner, Black Mask would also publish ten of Cave's tales of detection, contributed to the magazine from 1934 through 1941. Ranging from the tough-guy cop of "Too Many Women," to the greeting card executive who investigates crimes as a hobby in "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," to his last story for the magazine, the Hitchcockian "Stranger in Town," Crippen & Landru's *Long Live the Dead* amply demonstrates Cave's versatility as an author.

Although *Black Mask* and *Dime Detective Magazine* were probably the best of the many detective pulps that were published during the pulp era, it was for *Detective Fiction Weekly* that Cave wrote most of his crime fiction. From 1936 through 1941, he contributed sixty-three tales of mystery and detection to the Munsey magazine. Crippen & Landru's *Come Into My Parlor* collects nearly a dozen of these stories, which, according to the author, were "among the best of the pulp stories I wrote."

"What I had, in many of my tales for Detective Fiction Weekly, were folks like you and you and you, who never wore a policeman's uniform or were licensed to be crime fighters. These characters were just everyday people who became involved in crime-fighting more or less by 'accident.' And when I began writing that kind of story, with a hero who was not a professional crime-fighter, but just an ordinary Joe like most of us, the editor of *Detective Fiction Weekly* liked them and so did the readers."

Both Crippen & Landru volumes were published in two states--a trade paperbound edition and a limited clothbound edition, signed and numbered by the author. Included with the latter was a separate

pamphlet, reprinting an additional Cave pulp story not found in the paperbound edition of that particular book.

With over eight-hundred stories moldering away in the crumbling pages of seventy-year-old magazines never meant for permanence, these seventeen collections reprinting over 130 stories have only scratched the surface of Cave's prodigious output. Hopefully, the appearance of *Cave of a Thousand Tales*, a biography of the author written by Milt Thomas and released by Arkham House in June of this year, will provide the impetus for further collections of this wonderful craftsman of the pulp era.1 After all, the Arizona Kid, Wildcat and Range Wolf, and Senor Bravo are all still having "Trouble Tamin' Tumbleweed" in the pages of *Western Story Magazine* and *Wild West Weekly*.

1 Starmont House published a short biography of Hugh Cave, *Pulp Man's Odyssey*, written by Audrey Parente, in 1988. It was followed in 1994 by Cave's autobiographical Magazines I Remember, based on his long correspondence with fellow author Carl Jacobi and published by Tattered Pages Press.

SKULLS
by H. BEDFORD-JONES

I

THE entire affair occupied an incredibly short space of time, considering what was involved. It happened in a corner of the smoking room of the *Empress of China*, the evening before we were to dock in San Francisco.

Looking back on it now, I suppose it is impossible to convey the full shock which accompanied the ghastly denouncement of Larsen's story, Larsen was sharing my stateroom; we were friends. He was returning after spending a year away out in western China, gathering specimens for some museum. A thin, dark, sallow man, he possessed that rare charm which comes of deep, strong character. He was full of surprises; and, I have since thought, full of an inexorable, grim puritanical sort of righteousness, as well.

Mainwaring, who occupied the odd chair in our corner of the smoking room, had taken a liking to Larsen from the start, and stuck with us the whole voyage. We liked him, also. He was lonely and homesick, poor devil, anxious to be back home. He had spent several years in the Orient, in the silk business; a big chap he was, bearded, with gently imaginative blue eyes and a great reticence of manner.

We had the place pretty much to ourselves that evening, since everyone was packing, Mainwaring showed us a couple of very fine old netsukes, abominably indecent, which he meant to bring past the customs in his pocket. At this, Larsen flushed slightly and rose.

"I'll show you chaps something interesting," he said, and left us.

He returned presently, bringing a small Chinese box. This he opened, and took from wads of cotton two shallow, oval bowls, handing once to each of us. I examined mine. At first I took it for rhinoceros horn; it had the same rich brown coloring and feel. Then I perceived the lines upon it, and knew the thing for what it was--the top of a skull.

"Hello!" exclaimed Mainwaring with interest. "You must have been up in Tibet to get hold of these, eh? I've heard the lamas use human skulls for bowls."

"Yes and no." Larsen lighted a cigar and leaned back in his chair, smiling oddly. "I got these at a lamasery, right enough, but it was across from the Tibetan border--up in the Lolo country in northern Yunnan."

Mainwaring glanced up from the skull in his hands. His brows lifted in quick interest.

"Oh! By the way, did you ever hear of an expedition that got lost up in that country a couple of years ago? Three Americans--I can't recall their names. I heard something about it at the time, but never learned whether they got out."

Larsen nodded. His eyes held an air of singular intensity, yet his words were calm.

"Yes. Oh, yes! The Bonner party, eh? I knew old Bonner very well indeed, years ago. And his nephew Stickley; a fine chap, and an excellent botanist, Creighton was the third of that party. Yes, I got the whole story from the lamas up there. Rather interesting, in connection with these skull-bowls."

"They got out, then?" questioned Mainwaring.

"No," said Larsen, inspecting his cigar ash. "No. They're still there--in parts." An indescribable gleam flashed in his eye as he said this.

"Yes, of course," I put in carelessly. "It was quite a famous case at the time--they were murdered by the Lolos or by bandits. If you've learned the truth of it, Larsen, I suppose you'll take it up with the government? Washington should do something about it."

Larsen looked at me, and his dark eyes held a devil.

"What do you really suppose, now," he drawled, "that Washington would do about it? Saint Paul mentioned two kinds of faith, I believe. You've just been up in Assam? Well, if some native had stuck a spear into you, what would have been done about it? No, no; I believe in faith through works, not in faith through notes. I shan't trouble poor Washington."

Mainwaring leaned forward. "Tell us about it, will you?" he asked quickly. His blue eyes were alight with eagerness, "What happened to them?"

"They died," said Larsen. "I got their papers, some of them, from the lamas, and then got the whole story. Well, I don't mind, if you fellows want to listen to a yarn; it has an intimate connection with those skull-bowls, as I mentioned."

We assured him that we did want to listen.

II

BONNER was an elderly man, fussy and crotchety--said Larsen--but a fine old chap in his way. Young Stickley, his nephew, was headed for the top notch in botanical fame; both of them were keen on exploring the Lolo country. Creighton, who joined their party, was after big game. He was a handsome brute, with plenty of money, and I understand he partly backed the expedition. Most people liked Creighton at sight.

At all events, they reached the Clouds of Heaven lamasery, an isolated place up in the hills. They reached there alone, for the mafus had abandoned them for fear of the Lolo men, who were raiding the hill people about that time. The lamas were hospitable, put them up in a small outlying temple, and the three of them went to work at their own lines of endeavor.

Third parties and accidents cause most of the trouble in this world. The third party in this instance was a Lolo woman, the daughter of a chief. She stepped out of the brush just as Creighton, who had seen her tiger-skin garment, thought he was being attacked by Stripes and let go with both barrels of his shotgun. You can imagine what the two loads did to the girl.

I imagine this smashed Crieghton's nerve completely. It would, you know, to bowl over a girl that way. Old Bonner took the matter in hand at once and paid over good indemnity to the Lolos; but indemnity would not satisfy the fellow who had been about to marry the girl. He swore death to the white men, and took to the brush with his arrows. The Lolo, like the Chung Miao, use a virulent poison on their barbs, you know.

After that, Creighton probably fancied that he discerned this warrior lurking behind every bush and tree. He ceased his hunting trips, and only went out in company with Bonner and Stickley. The picture of the dead girl must have haunted him frightfully.

Well, the end came very suddenly. The three of them went out to visit some traps Bonner had set for small animals. A mile or so from the lamasery, they were going up a narrow, steep hill-trail with one pack-mule. Creighton was ahead and beyond sight of the other two, trying to get a sambur they had seen when, abruptly, out of the brush stepped the warrior who had sworn to get them, the fiancÃ© of the dead girl.

Creighton might have warned his friends. He might have shot the man. He did neither. Instead, he gave one gasping, incoherent cry, threw down his rifle and fled. Broke for it--ran straight ahead like a madman.

The Lolo calmly waited there until Bonner and Stickley came along, all unsuspecting.

Then he gave them two arrows. They died there. The Lolo went on and caught Creighton by himself. From the story the priests told, he must have thrown Creighton over the cliffs, and at the last moment Creighton used his pistol. At all events, the lamas did not find Creighton's body, while they did bring in the dead Lolo, Bonner, and Stickley.

And that's the whole story--the tragedy of Creighton's broken nerve.

III

WHEN Larsen had finished, he lighted a fresh cigar and leaned back in his chair.

Mainwaring sat fingering the skull-bowl in his lap, pursing up his bearded lips and shaking his head as he listened. Presently he looked up, and his gentle blue eyes were wide, as though the tale of that tragedy had filled him with horror.

"But you said," his voice was husky, and he cleared his throat, "you said that there was some connection between the story and these skulls?"

Larsen nodded. A flash darted in his eyes and was gone again.

"Yes. Exactly. The bowl in your lap was made from Bonner's skull. The other was made from Stickley's."

Lord! How to describe the loathly horror that I felt at these words! It is one thing to play with the cranium of some forgotten, unknown savage; quite another thing to play with the brain-pan of a scientist, honored and revered, a man almost a friend.

Mainwaring turned absolutely livid. His beard moved. You know how a cat's fur erects? That way; his beard curled and writhed with the frightful feeling that was upon him. Sweat started on his brow. He reached out and laid the skull on the smoking stand, his fingers shaking. Then he came to his feet.

"I think," he said, taking a deep breath and shaking his head, "I think--it's too much for me to stomach. I--I don't like these ghastly stories."

He left us abruptly, striding out of the smoking room. Larsen looked after him, then turned his dark eyes upon me. I had set the other skull with the first.

"Gave him quite a turn, didn't it?" said Larsen. His voice was cold, brittle.

"Confound you!" I answered, nettled. "It gave me a turn. It'd give anybody a turn!"

"Take a cigar," said Larsen, extending one. "There's a bit more to the story."

I took the weed, but made a gesture of protest.

"Never mind the rest of the story," I said. "You're too cursed fantastic as a storyteller, Larsen. I don't fancy this Grand Guignol stuff myself in the least!"

Larsen smiled. "I must confess, my dear fellow, that I told a beastly lie. If you'd examine those bowls, you'd see they are about a hundred years old--the patina shows it. I bought 'em at the lamasery. Bonner and Stickley were decently buried."

At this, you may judge how I stared at him!

"Well," I said, angered at the way he had played on my nerves, "all I have to say is that you told a lie in rotten bad taste! Those two men were friends of yours, weren't they? Then--"

"That," he interposed cryptically, "was why I told the lie."

I did not understand in the least. There was a restrained tension in his manner that puzzled me. His fingers were nervous on his cigar.

At this instant we heard a sharp sound punctuating the steady throb of the ship's engines--a sharp, bursting sound about which could be no mistake. It was a shot.

"Ah!" Larsen came to his feet and took the two brown skull-bowls in his hand. "Ah! There is the rest of the story, old man, as I promised."

"What the devil d'you mean?" I exclaimed.

"That was our friend Mainwaring--shot himself. I thought he'd do it. That's why I told the lie in question. You see, Mainwaring was not his real name. His real name was--Creighton."

And Larsen departed, leaving me to enjoy my cigar as best I could.

THE SINGER IN THE MIST

At birth a witch laid on me monstrous spells,

And I have trod strange highroads all my days,

Turning my feet to gray, unholy ways.

I grope for stems of broken asphodels;

High on the rims of bare, fiend-haunted fells,

I follow cloven tracks that lie ablaze;

And ghosts have led me through the moonlight's haze

To talk with demons in the granite hells.

Seas crash upon dragon-guarded shores,

Bursting in crimson moons of burning spray,

And iron castles open to me their doors,

And serpent-women lure with harp and lay.

The misty waves shake now to phantom oars--

Seek not for me; I sail to meet the day.

--Robert E. Howard

EXOTIQUE

Thy mouth is like a crimson orchid-flow'r,

Whence perfume and whence poison rise unseen

To moons aswim in iris or in green,

Or mix with morning in an Eastern bow'r.

Thou shouldst have known, in amaranthine isles,

The sunsets hued like fire of frankincense,

Or the long noons enfraught with redolence,

The mingled spicery of purple miles.

Thy breasts, where blood and molten marble flow,

Thy warm white limbs, thy loins of tropic snow--

These, these, by which desire is grown divine,

Were made for dreams in mystic palaces,

For love, and sleep, and slow voluptuousness,

And summer seas afoam like foaming wine.

--Clark Ashton Smith

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UNDER THE FLAME TREES
by H. de Vere Stacpoole

I was sitting in front of Thibaud's CafÃ© one evening when I saw Lewishon, whom I had not met for years.

Thibaud's CafÃ©, I must tell you first, is situated on Coconut Square, Noumea. Noumea has a bad name, but it is not at all a bad place if you are not a convict. Neither is New Caledonia, take it all together, and that evening, sitting and smoking and listening to the band and watching the crowd, and the dusk taking the flame trees, it seemed to me for a moment that Tragedy had withdrawn, that there was no such place as the Isle Nou out there in the harbor and that the musicians making the echoes ring to the *Sambre-et-Meuse* were primarily musicians, not convicts.

Then I saw Lewishon crossing the square by the Liberty Statue and attracted his attention. He came and sat by me, and we smoked and talked while I tried to realize that it was fifteen years since I had seen him last and that he hadn't altered in the least--in the dusk.

"I've been living here for years," said he. "When I saw you last in Frisco I was about to take up a proposition in Oregon. I didn't, owing to a telegram going wrong. That little fact changed my whole life. I came to the islands instead and started trading, then I came to live in New Caledonia. I'm married."

"Oh," I said, "is that so?"

Something in the tone of those two words "I'm married" struck me as strange.

We talked on indifferent subjects, and before we parted I promised to come over and see him next day at his place a few miles from the town. I did and I was astonished at what I saw.

New Caledonia, pleasant as the climate may be, is not the place one would live in by choice. In those days, the convicts were still coming there from France. The gangs of prisoners shepherded by wardens armed to the teeth, the great barges filled with prisoners that ply every evening when work is over between the harbor quay and the Isle Nou, the military air of the place and the fretting regulations, all these things and more robbed it of its appeal as a residential neighborhood. Yet the Lewishons lived there and what astonished me was the evidence of their wealth and the fact that they had no apparent interests at all to bind them to the place.

Mrs. Lewishon was a woman of forty-five or so, yet her beauty had scarce begun to fade. I was introduced to her by Lewishon on the broad veranda of their house, which stood in the midst of gardens more wonderful than the gardens of La Mortola.

A week or so later, after dining with me in the town he told me the story of his marriage, one of the strangest stories I ever heard and this is it, just as he told it.

"The Pacific is the finest place in the world to drop money in. You see it's so big and full of holes that look like safe investments. I started, after I parted with you, growing coconut trees in the Fijis. It takes five years for a coconut palm to grow, but when it's grown it will bring you in an income of eighteen pence or so a year according as the copra prices range. I planted forty thousand young trees and at the end of the fourth year a hurricane took the lot. That's the Pacific. I was down and out, and then I struck luck. That's the Pacific again. I got to be agent for a big English firm here in Noumea and in a short time I

was friends with everyone from Chardin, the governor, right down.

"Chardin was a good sort but very severe. The former governor had been lax, so the people said, letting rules fall into abeyance like the rule about cropping the convicts' hair and beards to the same pattern. However that may have been, Chardin had just come as governor and I had not been here more than a few months when one day a big, white yacht from France came and dropped anchor in the harbor. A day or two after, a lady appeared at my office and asked for an interview.

"She had heard of me through a friend, she said, and she sought my assistance in a most difficult matter. In plain English, she wanted me to help in the escape of a convict.

"I was aghast. I was about to order her out of the office, when something--something--something, I don't know what, held my tongue while, with the cunning of a desperate woman in love, she managed to still my anger. 'I understand,' she said, 'and I should have been surprised if you had taken the matter calmly, but will you listen to me and when you have heard me out, tell me if you would not have done what I have done today?'

"I could not stop her, and this is what she told me.

"Her name was Madame Armand Duplessis. Her maiden name had been Alexandre. She was the only child of Alexandre the big sugar refiner, and at his death she found herself a handsome young girl with a fortune of about twenty million francs--and nothing between her and the rogues of the world but an old maiden aunt given to piety and guileless as a rabbit. However, she managed to escape the sharks and married an excellent man, a captain in the cavalry and attached to St. Cyr. He died shortly after the marriage and the young widow, left desolate and without a child to console her, took up living again with her aunt, or rather the aunt came to live with her in the big house she occupied on the Avenue de la Grande ArmÃ©e.

"About six months after, she met Duplessis. I don't know how she met him, she didn't say, but anyhow he wasn't quite in the same circle as herself. He was a clerk in La Fontaine's Bank and only drawing a few thousand francs a year, but he was handsome and attractive and young, and the upshot of it was they got married.

"She did not know anything of his past history and he had no family in evidence, nothing to stand on at all but his position at the bank, but she did not mind--she was in love and she took him on trust and they got married. A few months after marriage a change came over Duplessis. He had always been given rather to melancholy, but now an acute depression of spirits came on him for no reason apparently. He could not sleep, his appetite failed, and the doctors, fearing consumption, ordered him away on a sea voyage. When he heard this prescription he laughed in such a strange way that Madame Duplessis, who had been full of anxiety as to his bodily condition, became for a moment apprehensive as to his mental state. However she said nothing, keeping her fears hidden and busying herself in preparations for the voyage.

"It chanced that just at that moment a friend had a yacht to dispose of, an eight-hundred-ton auxiliary-engined schooner, *La Gaudriole*. It was going cheap and Madame Duplessis, who was a good business woman, bought it, reckoning to sell it again when the voyage was over.

"A month later they left Marseilles.

"They visited Greece and the islands, then, having touched at Alexandria, they passed through the canal, came down the Red Sea and crossed the Indian Ocean. They touched at Ceylon and while there Madame Duplessis suggested that, instead of going to Madras as they had intended, they should go into the Pacific by way of the Straits of Malacca. Duplessis opposed this suggestion at first, then fell in with it. More than that, he became enthusiastic about it. A weight seemed suddenly to have been lifted from his

mind, his eyes grew bright, and the melancholy that all the breezes of the Indian Ocean had not blown away suddenly vanished.

"Two days later they left Ceylon, came through the Straits of Malacca and, by way of the Arofura Sea and Torras Straits, into the Pacific. The captain of the yacht had suggested the Santa Cruz islands as their first stopping place, but one night Duplessis took his wife aside and asked her would she mind their making for New Caledonia instead. Then he gave his reason.

"He said to her, 'When you married me I told you I had no family. That was not quite the truth. I have a brother. He is a convict serving sentence in Noumea. I did not tell you because the thing was painful to me as death.'

"You can fancy her feelings, struck by a bombshell like that, but she says nothing and he goes on telling her the yarn he ought to have told her before they were married.

"This brother, Charles Duplessis, had been rather a wild young scamp. He lived in the Rue du Mont Thabor, a little street behind the Rue St. HonorÃ© in Paris, and he made his money on the Stock Exchange. Then he got into terrible trouble. He was accused of a forgery committed by another man but could not prove his innocence. Armand was certain of his innocence but could do nothing, and Charles was convicted and sent to New Caledonia.

"Well, Madame Duplessis sat swallowing that fact, and when he'd done speaking she sat swallowing some more as if her throat was dry. Then she says to Armand:

"'Your brother is innocent, then,' she says.

"'As innocent as yourself,' he answers her, 'and it is the knowledge of all this that has caused my illness and depression. Before I was married, I managed to forget it all, but married to the woman I love, rich and happy, with enviable surroundings, thoughts of Charles came and knocked at my door, saying, 'Remember me in your happiness.'"

"'But can we do nothing for him?' asked Madame Duplessis.

"'Nothing' replied Armand, 'unless we can help him to escape.'

"Then he went on to tell her how he had not wanted to come on this long voyage at first, feeling that there was some fate in the business, and that it would surely bring him somehow or another to Noumea; then how the idea had come to him at Ceylon that he might be able to help Charles to escape.

"She asked him if had he any plan, and he replied that he had not--that it was impossible to make any plan till he reached Noumea and studied the place and its possibilities.

"Well, there was the position the woman found herself in, and a nice position it was. Think of it, married only a short time and now condemned to help a prisoner to escape from New Caledonia, for, though she could easily have refused, she felt compelled to the business both for the sake of her husband and the sake of his brother, an innocent man wrongfully convicted.

"She agreed to help in the attempt, like the high-spirited woman she was, and a few days later they raised the New Caledonia reef and the Noumea lighthouse that marks the entrance to the harbor.

"Madame Duplessis had a big acquaintance in Paris, especially among the political and military people, and, no sooner had the yacht berthed than the governor and chief people who knew her name began to show their attentions, tumbling over themselves with invitations to dinners and parties.

"That, again, was a nice position for her, having to accept the hospitality of the people she had come to betray, so to speak. But she had to do it. It was the only way to help her husband along in his scheme and, leaving the yacht, she took up her residence in a house she rented on the sea road; you may have seen it, a big white place with green verandas, and there she and her husband spent their time while the yacht was being overhauled.

"They gave dinners and parties and went on picnics; they regularly laid themselves out to please. Then one night Armand came to his wife and said he had been studying all means of escape from Noumea and had found only one. He would not say what it was, and she was content not to poke into the business, leaving him to do the plotting and planning till the time came when she could help.

"Armand said that before he could do anything in the affair he must first have an interview with Charles. They were hand in glove with the governor and it was easy enough to ask to see a prisoner, but the bother was the name of Duplessis, for Charles had been convicted and deported under that name. The governor had never noticed Charles and the name of Duplessis was in the prison books and forgotten. It would mean raking the whole business up and claiming connection with a convict. Still, it had to be done.

"'Next day Armand called at the governor house and had an interview. He told the governor that a relation named Charles Duplessis was among the convicts and that he very much wanted to have an interview with him.

"Now the laws at that time were very strict and the governor, though pretty lax in some things, as I've said, found himself up against a very stiff proposition and that proposition was how to tell Armand there was nothing doing.

"'I am sorry,' said the governor, 'but what you ask is impossible, Monsieur Duplessis. A year ago it would have been easy enough, but since the escape of Benonini and that Englishman Travels, the orders from Paris have forbidden visitors. Any message you would like me to send to your relation shall be sent, but an interview--no.'

"Then Armand played his ace of trumps. He confessed, swearing the governor to secrecy, that Charles was his brother. He said that Charles had in his possession a family secret that it was vital to obtain. He talked and talked and the upshot was that the governor gave in.

"Charles would be brought by two wardens to the house on the Sea Road after dark on the following day. The interview was to take place in a room with a single door and single window. One warden was to guard the door on the outside, the other would stand below the window. The whole interview was not to last longer than half an hour.

"Next evening after dark, steps sounded on the path to the house with the green veranda, Madame Duplessis had retired to her room, she had dismissed the servants for the evening and Armand himself opened the door. One of those little ten-cent, whale-oil lamps was the only light in the passage but it was enough for Amand to see the forms of the wardens and another form, that of his brother.

"The wardens, unlike the governor, weren't particular about trifles. They didn't bother about guarding doors and windows. Sure of being able to pot anyone who made an attempt to leave the house, they sat on the fence in the moonlight counting the money Armand had given them, ten napoleons apiece.

"Half an hour passed during which Madame Duplessis heard voices in argument from the room below, and then she heard the hall door open as Charles went out. Charles shaded his eyes against the moon, saw the wardens approaching him from the fence, and walked off with them back to the prison he had come from.

"Then Madame Duplessis came from her room and found her husband in the passage. He seemed overcome by the interview with his brother.

"She asked him had he made plans for Charles' escape, and he answered: 'No.' Then he went on to say that escape was impossible. They had talked the whole thing over and had come to that decision. She stood there in the hall likening to him, wondering dimly what had happened, for only a few hours before he had been full of plans and energy and now this interview seemed to have crushed all the life out of him.

"Then she said: 'If that is so there is no use in our remaining any longer at Noumea.' He agreed with her and went off to his room, leaving her there wondering more than ever what could have happened to throw everything out of gear in that way.

"She was a high-spirited woman and she had thought little of the danger of the business; pitying Charles, she did not mind risking her liberty to set him free, and the thought that her husband had funked the business came to her suddenly as she stood there, like a stab in the heart.

"She went off to her room and went to bed, but she could not sleep for thinking, and the more she thought the clearer it seemed to her that her husband, brought up to scratch, had got cold feet, as the Yankees say, and had backed out of the show, leaving Charles to his fate.

"She was more sure next morning for he kept away from her, had breakfast early and went off into the town shopping. But the shock of her life came at dinner time, for when he turned up for the meal it was plain to be seen he had been drinking more than was good for him--trying to drown the recollections of his own weakness, it seemed to her.

"She had never seen him under the influence before and she was shocked at the change it made in him. She left the table.

"Afterward she was sorry that she did that for it was like the blow of an ax between them. Next morning he would scarcely speak to her and the day after they were due to leave for France.

"They were due out at midday, and at eleven Duplessis--who had lingered in the town to make some purchases--had not come on board. He did not turn up till half an hour after the time they were due to sail, and when he did it was plain to be seen that all his purchases had been made in cafÃ©s.

"'He was flushed and laughing and joking with the boatman who brought him off, and his wife, seeing his condition, went below and left the deck to him--a nice position for a woman on board a yacht like that with all the sailors looking on, to say nothing of the captain and officers. However there was nothing to be done and she had to make the best of it, which she did by avoiding her husband as much as she could from that point on. The chap had gone clean off the handle. It was as if his failure to be man enough to rescue his brother had broken him, and the drink which he flew to for consolation finished the business.

They stopped at Colombo and he went ashore. They were three days getting him back and when he came he looked like a sack of meal in the stern sheet of the pinnace. They stopped at Port Said and he got ashore again without any money, but that was nothing, for a chap coming off a yacht like that gets all the tick he wants for anything in Port Said. He was a week there and was only got away by the captain of the yacht knocking seven bells out of him with his fists and then handing the carcass to two quartermasters to take on board ship.

"They stopped nowhere else till they reached Marseilles, and there they found Madame Duplessis' lawyer waiting for them, having been notified by cable from Port Said.

"A doctor was had in and he straightened Armand up with strychnine and bromide, and they brushed his

hair and shaved him and stuck him in a chair for a family conference, consisting of Madame Duplessis, the old maiden aunt, Armand, and the lawyer.

"Armand had no fight in him. He looked mighty sorry for himself but offered no explanations or excuses, beyond saying that the drink had got into his head. Madame Duplessis, on the other hand, was out for scalps--do you wonder! Fancy that voyage all the way back with a husband worse than drunk! When I say worse than drunk I mean that this chap wasn't content to take his booze and carry on as a decent man would have done. No, sir. He embroidered on the business without the slightest thought of his wife. An ordinary man full up with liquor and with a wife touring round would have tried to have hidden his condition as far as he could, but this blighter carried on regardless, and, when the whisky was in, wasn't to hold or bind.

"Of course she recognized that something in his brain had given way and she took into account that he was plainly trying to drown the recollection of his cowardice in not helping Charles to escape. All the same she was out for scalps and said so.

"She said she would live with him no more, that she had been a fool to marry a man whom she had only known for a few months and of whose family she knew nothing. She said she would give him an allowance of a thousand francs a month if he would sheer off and get out of her sight and never let her see him again.

"He sat listening to all this without a sign of shame and when she'd finished he flattened her out by calmly asking for fifteen hundred a month instead of a thousand. Never said he was sorry, just asked for a bigger allowance as if he was talking to a business man he was doing a deal with instead of a wife he had injured and outraged. Even the old lawyer was sick, and it takes a lot to sicken a French lawyer, I can tell you that.

"What does she do? She says: 'I'll allow you two thousand a month on the condition I never see your face or hear from you again. If you show yourself before me,' she says, 'or write to me, I'll stop the allowance. If you try to move the law to make us live together, I'll turn all my money into gold coin and throw it in the sea and myself after it, you beast,' she says.

"And he says, 'All right, all right, don't fly away with things,' he says. 'Give me my allowance and you'll never see me again.'

"One day an old woman turned up at her house asking her to come at once to where he was living as he was mortally ill and couldn't hold out more than a few hours.

"She didn't think twice, but came, taking a cab and being landed in a little old back street at the door of a house that stood between a thieves' cafÃ© and a rag shop.

"Up the stairs she went, following the old woman, and into a room where his royal highness was lying with a jug of whisky on the floor beside him and a hectic blush on his cheeks.

"'I'm dying,' he says, 'and I want to tell you something you ought to know. I was sent to New Caledonia,' he says, 'for a robbery committed by another man.'

"She thought he was raving, but she says, 'Go on.'

"'Armand and I were twins,' he says, 'as like as two peas. Armand could do nothing. He stayed in Paris while poor Charles--that's me--went making roads on Noumea. Then you married him.'

"'But you are Armand,' she cries, 'you are my husband or am I mad?'

"'Not a bit,' says he. 'I'm Charles, his twin brother.

"'A year ago you and him came in a big yacht to Noumea and the governor sent me one night to have a talk with him. When we were alone he told me how his heart had been burning a hole in him for years, how he had married a rich woman--that's you--and how when he was happy and rich his heart had burned him worse so that the doctors not knowing what was wrong with him had ordered him a sea voyage.' Then Charles goes on to tell how Armand had come to the conclusion that even if he helped Charles to escape this likeness between them would lead surely to the giving away of the whole show, make trouble among the crew of the yacht and so on--besides the fact that it was next to impossible for a man to escape from Noumea in the ordinary way. But said Armand, 'We can change places and no one will know. Strip and change here and now,' he says, 'the guards are outside, I'll take your place and go to prison and you'll be free. I've got a scissors here and two snips will make our hair the same, and by good luck we are both clean shaven. You've done half your sentence of ten years and I'll do the other half,' he says. 'The only bargain I'll make is that you'll respect my wife and live apart from her and, after a while, you'll break the news to her and, maybe, when I'm free in five years she'll forgive me.'

"Charles finishes up by excusing himself for the drink, saying if she'd served five years without the chance of a decent wet all that time she'd maybe have done as he'd done.

"He died an hour after and there was that woman left with lots to thank about--first of all her husband wasn't the drunkard that had disgraced her, but he was a convict serving his time and serving it wrongfully.

"The thundering great fact stood up like a shot tower before her that Armand wasn't the drunkard that had disgraced her in two ports and before a ship's company, wasn't the swine that took her allowance and asked for more. That he was a saint, if ever a man was a saint.

"She rushed home, telegraphed to Marseilles and recommissioned the *Gaudriole* that was still lying at the wharves. A week later she sailed again for Noumea.

"On the voyage she plotted and planned. She had determined to save him from the four years or so of the remains of his sentence at all costs and hazards, and when the yacht put in here she had a plan fixed on, but it was kiboshed by the fact that the governor, as I have said, was changed. However she took up residence for a while in the town. People she had known before called on her and she gave out that her husband was dead.

"You can fancy how a rich widow was run after by all and sundry, myself included--not that I had any idea about her money. I only cared for herself. She knew this as women know such things, by instinct. She had asked for my help. I'm a strange chap in some ways. I had liked her enough to ruin myself for her by risking everything to give her husband back to her, and between us we had worked out a plan that was a pippin.

"It would have freed Armand only that we found on inquiring about him that he had already escaped--he was dead. Died of fever two months before she came.

"I heard once of a Japanese child that said her doll was alive because she loved it so much, adding that if you loved anything enough it lived. Well, in my experience, if you love anything enough you can make it love you.

"That woman stayed on in Noumea and I made her love me. At last I married her. You know her--she is my wife. She loves Armand still, as a memory, and for the sake of his memory we live here. It's as good a place to live as anywhere else, especially now that they have settled to send no more convicts from France."

AN OPEN WINDOW

Behind the Veil what gulfs of Time and Space?

What blinking mowing Shapes to blast the sight?

I shrink before a vague colossal Face

Born in the mad immensities of Night.

--Robert E. Howard

BY ANOTHER SEA

The Western gull is whiter than a dove

Or the ungathered foam.

I close the eyelids, and again I roam

The meadowlands of forty years ago.

I see the osprey circling far above,

Come back to the old nest from Mexico,

And we are young once more, O boyhood love!

The spray of that last wave is on my face.

Time breaks. We hide again

Beneath the cedar from the April rain.

O Youth's forgotten music, lost to me!

Ocean and sea wind echo now your grace;

But what one wave can tell us of the sea

Is more than all I learn of time and place.

Dear days, a little while our very own!

Dear mouth I never kissed!

The years between us gather like the mist.

It is enough to know you are no more.

It is enough to know I walk alone.

Still cries the ocean on that distant shore,

But farther than the osprey have you flown.

--George Sterling

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RATS ASHORE
by James C. Young

WE WERE twenty days out of Rio when Captain Andy remarked to me that he never had seen so few rats on the old *George Crabtree*. After that I kept a sharp eye, and it seemed as though only a few dozen rats were aboard us. This worried me, because we had rats aplenty at Panama and all the way to Rio. When I began to think about the thing I remembered that the rats had started to disappear before we reached Rio. That was a bad sign. The only place we had stopped in between was a little mudhole port called New Madrid. And suddenly I recalled that the rats were scarce after we pulled up anchor there.

"Have the boys noticed it, Mr. Spriggins--about the rats?" asked Captain Andy, speaking properly to me as first officer.

"Why, not so far as I know, sir," I said, "but there's no telling when they will. I can't understand it."

"Must have gone ashore at Rio," he observed.

"But I missed them after we left New Madrid, although there seemed to be plenty left. In Rio there were not so many, and now I can find only a few."

"They couldn't have ducked overboard," said Captain Andy, asking the question rather than telling me any news.

"No rats ever left a ship at sear which wasn't sinking," I said.

"Sinking?" repeated the old man. "But we are not sinking."

"Then where the devil--beg pardon, sir--are the rats?"

"Blessed if I know," was all he could say, walking away and shaking his gray head.

It might be thought strange for a man to worry about the rats missing from his ship. But I knew just how the men felt. There was likely to be trouble if they missed them. Maybe some of the crew knew it already. We were swinging up with the trade wind and would soon drop anchor at a port of call. If the men ever started to talk of the rats leaving us we would not get out of port again with the same crew. And crews were scarce.

In this pinch I advised Captain Andy to skip the port of call, but he said that he would make port, rats or no rats. In fact, he damned all the rats afloat and me, too, his first officer, which was not a proper way of speaking.

I found myself anxiously watching for some of those ugly rodents. Two or three times I went below to look for them, and called myself worse names than had Captain Andy. I felt like I was going into a decline or something, the rats bothered me so much.

On one trip I saw a big fellow sitting in a passageway on the third deck below, and I could have shaken hands with him, I was so pleased. Then a strange thing happened. I was not more than twenty feet away when the rat disappeared and I heard something slap against a case with a vicious swing. That looked peculiar to me. I went forward, to see what was the trouble, but found nothing. One minute the rat had

been there and the next he was gone--then silence. I decided that he must have jumped, and being an extra big fellow had slammed himself against the case. Anyway it was a small matter, though I almost hoped that rat had not hurt himself. I wanted a few to show the men in case of trouble.

Trouble came soon enough. We had a large crew for a freighter, but the prospect of losing a half dozen men was not a pleasant one for a first officer to have ahead of him. They called on me, properly enough, as being next in command to the old man, and wanted to know if they could leave ship at the first port we touched. That was a white man's way of doing things, and I tried to treat them civilly, asking about the trouble. They wouldn't say, but I could see, and they knew that I understood. It would have been mighty bad form for any man to tell his mate that he wanted to leave ship because the rats had gone. But I almost felt that way myself.

There was something wrong with the old *George Crabtree*. From the day that the men asked about their discharge every hand aboard was uneasy. We fouled a propeller on a floating spar and began to limp. Then one of our turbines started to show its temper and we almost stood still. Captain Andy swore longer and louder every day, which was not a proper way of speaking, to my mind.

Things were just about at this pass when I started to watch "Foolish" Thompson. He had been wearing a grin for a week, and was the only one of us who appeared to be pleased about anything. Some men's idea of fun is hard to explain. Thompson was that sort of man, the dare-devil kind, without any particular sense. He went through life grinning at everybody, always playing some trick. But he and I had reached the point where that grin had to end.

I got him in a corner, with a hand on his throat.

"What the devil are you grinning about?" I asked, eyeing him hard.

He wouldn't say anything, and I was ready to let him go when a remark of mine brought him to time.

"There's something funny going on below," I said, thinking to bluff the men through him, "and I mean to find out what it is mighty quick."

Thompson's face went a little white, and he said quickly:

"Be careful, sir, or you'll get hurt."

"Hurt?" I demanded. "What do you mean--mutiny?"

Then I saw his eyes change and guessed that it was something else, for he looked relieved, and answered: "Oh, no; not mutiny, sir. I didn't mean anything."

When I got through shaking and persuading him, he opened up with his yarn.

IT WAS this way, Mr. Spriggins," he said. "Me and Bill Toots and Sam Sparks, and a couple of other fellows from the engine room, went ashore at New Madrid. You know where that mountain is back of the town? We decided to go up on top and have a look at the country. It was a stiff climb, but we got there about noon and sat around in the shade to rest. 'Fore long Sam Sparks yells and starts to run. We looked about. Not far away and coming toward us was a big boa constrictor. He wasn't coming fast, just sneaking along the ground, and maybe wanted to see what we was like. But, believe me, Mr. Spriggins, he was coming plenty fast for us. We all ran and soon got out of his way. Then we turned and saw that snake moseying around where we had been sitting, eating our grub, which we had brought from New Madrid. That I couldn't take. I told the fellows we must go back and lay out that snake. They wanted to bolt at first, but decided to stick after we talked it over. Bill Toots, who used to work in a circus, got to

thinking about how much more that snake would be worth alive than dead. He told us we should catch and sell him. Right there we almost lost our crew, but some of them wanted to know who would buy such a thing. Bill said there were plenty of fellows in New York or New Orleans who would give us a thousand for the snake. He looked about forty feet long, and big as a barrel. Bill said he was a beauty, better than anything he had seen in the circus. I didn't express my sentiments on his beauty, but said I would help do the trick.

"That boa was stuffing himself on our grub in a way to make you mad. One or two of the boys wanted to back out when they saw what an appetite he had, but we kidded them along, me and Bill Toots, who knew all about these boas. He said the fellows who buy them might give us a couple of hundred extra on account of the boa's size.

"Well, we cut a lot of limbs, with forks big enough to put over your body, and started to do our job. I began to feel sort of sick as we got near the boa. He was the biggest thing in the snake line I'd ever seen outside of a dream. But that grub of ours must have made him sleepy. He wrapped part of himself around a log and stretched out a few yards, laying still as a dead one. We could almost hear him snore, Mr. Spriggins. He didn't pay no more attention to us than if we hadn't been around, just went right on with his nap.

"We watched that boa a long time before we starting anything. Then Bill Toots told us he would slip up and hit the boa a wallop to put him out. At the same time I was to slap down a notched stick on the back of his head and hold on for dear life. The other fellows were told to grab his tail. Then we would tie him onto a log.

"Everything worked fine. The boa was sound asleep. Bill got a club as big as my leg and let the old boy have it on the head. He never hit him to kill, only intending to knock the big fellow out. I was a little too quick and came down with my notch over his neck about one second before Bill landed. The boa almost tore my arm off with the jump he made, but Bill hit him so quick that it didn't do the boa any good to jump. I held the fork over his neck and some of the other fellows nailed him down along the body. Sam Sparks got the worst of it. He was on the tail end, and the boa hit Sam a crack which laid him in the shade. One of them big engine room huskies caught that tail and held on, see-sawing like a man holding a loose sail in a gale. Gee, it was awful."

"What happened then?"

"Mr. Spriggins, we got that snake on a log 'fore he really came to and tied him down some way. Then we started to carry the log, which wasn't very large. But the whole crowd of us had a tussle with it, that snake being so heavy. After a long time we crawled down the mountain, skirted around New Madrid and came to our dock after dark. From there we slipped the boa aboard when no one was looking--"

"And where is he now?"

"Down below, sir. He got off that log and is running loose."

Now I knew where the rats had gone!

CAPTAIN ANDY was just coming up from the engine room when I went in search of him. He and the engineer had been having a session with the turbine, and he was in a sweet humor--ready to bite a spike in two. I had to tell him, but it was a case of gaining time. So I asked about the engine, and began petting Maggie, the mastiff which dogged his heels. She had been part of the crew for so long that we almost regarded her as one of us. And Maggie was the old man's special pride.

The fuss I made over Maggie soothed his temper a bit, and I judged this to be the proper time and place.

So I said:

"Captain, there's a boa constrictor down below and running loose. He's cleaned out the rats and may start on some of us next."

"Boa constrictor?" questioned the old man. "Have you been drinking, Mr. Spriggins?"

That was no proper way of speaking to me, a man who never was anything but sober. I saluted, in a stiff kind of way, and said nothing. Then Captain Andy broke loose and dealt me a choice line of conversation. Thompson had slipped away. I had to tell the whole tale.

"Where is Thompson?" demanded the old man, "Put him in irons."

That would have been a bad thing to do, with the men already upset, and at least a half dozen of them knowing there was a giant boa below decks. I tried to turn the old man's wrath and finally got him to heed a little reason. He came around with the wind, and took charge of things like a captain should, and as he knew well how to do.

"Where is this varmint?" he asked.

"Third deck below, up forward, when last seen, Captain."

"Take Thompson and the rest of the men who put him on this ship and make them get him."

And that was about the largest order of my long time at sea.

"How are we going to do it?" I asked.

"Don't ask me," said the old man. "Let Thompson and those other fools find out."

We sent for the half dozen rascals, and I said a few words straight to the point. Then I gave them the bad news.

They fell back and looked sullen. So I singled out Bill Toots and inquired, "Bill, how did they work these things in that second-rate circus you used to follow around? What did you do when one of these big boas got on a rampage?"

According to Bill, he had no experiece in this line. I called for suggestions, but failed to get any.

"Very well," I said, "if you fellows could catch this boa, you at least can kill him. We will issue rifles to every man. Get your knives, too, and search the third deck. The first thing which you see that moves--shoot."

I was going to add, "or which you feel," but that did not seem to be a happy ending just then. As it was, the men went about their job mighty reluctant. A roar from the old man set them in motion. We issued rifles, some of the lot which had been put aboard during the war, and the men started on the boa hunt. We gave them pocket flashlights to light up dark corners.

I had to go along, of course, and brought up the rear, not so much from fear of the boa as to see that none of the lads dodged their task.

When we got down to the third deck everybody was jumpy. I could hear the men breathing hard. Then I remembered that this was the deck where I had seen the big rat disappear, and heard something slap against a case. The hair began to rise on my head. I had been within twenty feet of the boa--and didn't know it!

Now I understood what Foolish Thompson had meant about feeling sick when he got near the boa. I was pretty sick right at that moment. It seemed as though I could feel something cold slip about me, then tighten, and my senses begin to go. But I steadied a bit and started to talk. That was the next best thing next to whistling, and my courage certainly needed some whistling to help it along.

"Look here, men," I said. "We've got to get that reptile. Scatter out and work down the passageways. Shoot--and shoot quick--anything which you see."

Did you ever hunt for something in the dark which you didn't want to find? That was the way with us. Of course we had the flashlights, and the incandescents were burning here and there, so it wasn't wholly dark. The flashlights sent little beams of light ahead as we moved along between the big packing cases.

That was a devilish bad job. Unless the boa was in a passageway, we had small chance of finding him. He might be hiding behind a pile of freight, or stretched out on top of the cases. I got to thinking of this and was ready any minute for something clammy to fall about my neck. But we moved along the deck and found nothing. As the men came nearer to the bow bulkheads, they got mighty nervous. Still nothing happened, and after a half day's hunt we gave it up.

There was no boa on the third deck. At least--none we could find.

We had coffee on the other decks, with a thousand hiding places among the sacks. It took three days to finish the hunt among those sacks, and still no boa. Where he had gone was a question that everybody tried not to think about.

The captain's dog took part in the hunt, and we hoped for big things from her, figuring that she would be able to smell the reptile. But in all our search Maggie never once let out a yelp. Captain Andy suggested that the boa might have gone overboard. I doubted it, for there was a book in the cabin telling about wild animals and such things. I found the chapter on boas and the fellow who wrote it said that no boa ever took to the water. Besides, though I didn't tell anybody, I had come upon a rat, pretty well lashed up--and recently. The boa was still around.

I didn't lose any time clearing out from the neighborhood of the dead rat. But I got sort of ashamed afterward and led a searching party. No mate of the George Crabtree could lose his nerve and hold the job. I didn't mean to part with my berth just then, even though boas were out of my line.

It was Maggie who found the reptile. She had a crony down in the stoke hole and went to see him. While the man was playing with her she suddenly threw her head in the air and started to bark, with ears standing straight out.

Maggie was no coward. She had been fighting everything that came aboard the George Crabtree, man or beast, for many years. Before the stoker could stop her she had jumped on the coal and into the darkness of the bunkers. The next instant the men heard a terrible threshing, with Maggie barking and snarling. Then they knew where the boa had hidden.

I don't like to call those fellows names, seeing as they were a good crew, but I believe that every man ran. One or two reached the main deck, although most of them recovered their nerve and went back before we drove the other fellows down.

By the time I reached the stoke hole poor Maggie was dead. We could not hear a sound. Again our pocket flashlights and the rifles came into play. We crawled up on the coal, badly scared as men could be. But we meant to get that boa and end it once for all.

I have been a game man in my time because I had to be. But never was I so ready to run as the hour I

crawled about in the coal. We could not find the boa. He was gone, nobody knew where. Nothing could be done but give up the hunt.

We found poor Maggie, with her sides crushed. The boa had done for her at one stroke. When she was taken on deck and the old man saw her I thought he was going to weep. Two big tears came into his eyes, and he motioned the men away, saying nothing. We buried Maggie with honors, a weight at her feet just like any of us might have had.

As all things come to an end, like the poet fellow said, so our troubles with the engine got straightened out. We started to move again. The hunt for the boa went on, in a half-hearted way. I believe the crew felt better, even with the boa aboard, than when the rats were disappearing and nobody knew why except the fellows who brought that snake on to the ship. Most men will face things they can see, even such a thing as a boa constrictor. Of course none of us had seen him except the fools who kidnapped the devil, but we all knew he was there.

It had been an ugly day at sea and I was in command when a call from Captain Andy's cabin startled me. Many times he had proved himself a brave man, and that cry sent a chill through my heart. I left the deck in a run and scrambled down to the cabin. Something seized me about the legs as I ran, and I fell with a crash. The old man cried again, a kind of wavering cry that turned me cold all over, even as I hit the deck. But I had no time to consider anything. For I knew what had taken me around the legs.

I didn't understand it all then, but the devil had thrown me with his tail. I felt the coil tighten and the blood fly upward as the flow stopped below my knees. I reached for my knife--and couldn't find it. The boa was threshing about this way and then another, and every instant I heard the cry of the old man. Now I was crying out myself, calling for help loudly as I could. There is a recollection in my mind of flying footsteps, then my head struck the wall and everything went black.

I DIDN'T see what happened. Some of the men told me. Foolish Thompson had been in my watch on deck. He came down after me with the others. When they saw that boa all but Thompson ran for the rifles. Thompson was a dare-devil man.

He said when it was over that he had got us into the scrape and that it was up to him to get us out again. But he risked his life and did it like a man.

The boa had Captain Andy pinned to his bunk. It never wrapped around him, probably because the captain was laying on the bunk, one edge of which was flush to the wall. But that devil of a reptile just stayed there, half coiled on the old man's chest. Captain Andy couldn't move, the weight being so great. And every minute he expected the writhing death to get him. Still he had the courage to call out.

When Thompson went into the cabin the boa got busy. He left the old man with a spring straight at Thompson. But Thompson ducked and swung his sheath knife. He must have landed, for the fight began in dead earnest. Thompson may have been foolish most of the time, but he had sense enough to get behind a table and to hold a chair in front of him. That bothered the reptile. Every time it lunged Thompson struck back with his knife.

I was in a bad way, for the devil was threshing around with his tail. And every time the tail moved I hit something. But my mind had gone to Davy Jones and the rest of me was in a fair way to follow.

Some of the men returned and started to help Thompson. They were afraid to shoot, fearing to hit one of us. We were all mixed up with the big boa in the little cabin. The furniture was going to pieces, and the old man had been laid out by a lick from the boa.

Thompson said that I was nearing the end of my rope. Another crack or two and I'd have gone under.

Anyway he pushed over the table and drove the knife home with a blow which severed the boa's neck. That didn't end matters, for the villain's body kept writhing about the cabin. The men went into action and slashed the devil so many times that finally he quieted down and they pried me loose. I didn't see the cabin for several days, but they said it wasn't a pretty sight about the time they freed me. Besides a couple of cracked ribs and a body covered with bruises I was all right. The old man hadn't been hurt.

We went into port with a new third officer, Mr. Thompson by name, and Captain Andy bought a silver plate for the cabin wall, in honor of Maggie. But he has a bad temper, the old man, and whenever things go wrong nowadays he warns Mr. Thompson that any foolishness will land him in irons, which isn't a proper way of speaking to your third officer, I allows.

SOUTHWARD-BOUND

Lightning and rain and the roar of the thunder,

Splash of the prow through the curling sea,

Hiss of the wind 'round the mast and the rigging,

And a shaggy old ship sailing brave and free.

Pitching and tossing and twisting and turning,

Breasting the storm with a bone in her mouth,

Bravely she bears to the land of all dreaming,

And sweet through the storm is the smell of the south.

--Edmund Leamy

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THE EVIL EYE
by Vincent Starrett

"THE peoples of earth," said my friend Lavender, "are divided into four classes: criminals, victims of criminals, detectives, and readers of detective literature. Each division, of course, has its subdivisions; these are obvious. The fourth class comprises the majority of mankind, and is responsible for the other three; but the detective class is growing. Only the fact that for every detective there must be a criminal, and for every criminal a victim, prevents the detective class from increasing so hugely as to threaten the supremacy of the reading division."

I laughed. The speech was characteristic; typical of Lavender's whimsically ironic philosophy. He regarded me reproachfully.

"Even so," he continued, "how the detectives of London must jostle in the streets! From Holmes to the latest amateur is a far cry. And New York is as bad or worse. Here in Chicago," he added, "I am less handicapped by competition."

Outside, the snow was piling up in the streets, and the elevated railroad station across from the windows had lost much of its ugliness in its white and glistening insulation; it rose on gleaming pillars, a fantastic dream structure, above the whiter isolation of the street. Lavender's hearth fire snapped cheerfully as he stretched out his hand for the afternoon paper. Dusk was stealing over the city, but the incarcerated, leaping flames gave him sufficient light to read.

"There is nothing here," continued the fathomer, scanning the first page, "that cannot be duplicated in the newspapers of any large city. Indeed, they might as well be composed with a rubber stamp, they are so much alike, these stories, whatever their locale. It is only the occasional masterpiece of crime that makes the game of detection entertaining, and even in masterpieces there is a family resemblance, as you may observe at any first-class art gallery."

"You are bored at present, then?" I suggested.

"To the contrary," he returned, "I have the beginning, at least, of a very pretty puzzle. I have been retained in the Hurst case, which promises well. Hurst will be buried tomorrow, and my first important work will be done at the funeral. Are you partial to funerals?"

"No," I said with a grimace, "but I have a presentiment that I shall attend this one. Just what is the Hurst case? The newspaper accounts were delightfully vague. He was a bank teller; he was found dead in a deserted house, and he had not been murdered. Intriguing, but hardly sensational."

"The papers know a little more, but not much," said my friend. "They have been waiting for the bank to check on its losses, which now are definitely placed at more thousands of dollars than you or I ever are likely to possess. Otherwise, the known facts are very much as you state them.

"Hurst was paying teller for the Columbian National, a small but sound bank in the suburbs. Two days ago, there was an unusually large balance left after settling with the clearing house. Hurst, a thoroughly trusted man, took care of clearing house settlements for the bank, and afterward, it was his custom to lock up his own funds, merely telling the cashier that he had done so. On this occasion, he did not lock up the balance. What he did with it remains to be discovered. The money is missing. Hurst was found dead in a small, empty house at Henrietta and Division Streets."

"And was not murdered!" I again suggested.

"That is to be proved," said Lavender. "If you mean that there were no indications of murder, you are right; nor, as a matter of fact, has the autopsy divulged a hint of foul play. Yet I believe Hurst was murdered!"

"By a partner?" I asked quickly. "Hurst must have been party to the removal of the funds, Lavender!"

"Ye-es." He hesitated. "The obvious theories occur readily enough. He may have taken the money himself, have hidden in the empty house, and have been robbed and murdered by a second criminal who did not even know him. He may have been lured to the house, in some manner; or, as you suggest, he may have had a partner who is now responsible for his death. In any case, it is difficult to avoid the thought that Hurst took the money."

"The real problem, then, is the manner of his death?"

"Oh, I know how he died," Lavender shrugged. "He froze to death! You can't leave a man in a barn with the thermometer below zero, and expect him to pick up his bed and walk, in the morning. But what I should like to know, Gilruth, is what prevented him from leaving that house! He was not stunned. Apparently he had fallen asleep while in hiding. But what sane man would--or could--go to sleep in such a place, in such weather?"

I pondered this for a moment, and then asked, "What shall you do at the funeral?"

"Curiously enough," he answered. "I am looking for friends of Hurst rather than enemies. What the newspapers don't know, Gilly, is this--Hurst was not found by accident. The president of the bank himself received an anonymous message telling him where to find his missing teller. The police were notified, and Hurst was found--dead. Now, what does that mean?"

"That somebody, perhaps perfectly innocent, discovered the body and was afraid of being mixed up with a crime," I answered, after a moment.

"Not bad," smiled my friend. "The police would laugh at you, but it is not at all an impossible case. It is often fatal to overlook the obvious solution simply because it is obvious. Just the same, I think you are wrong. I figure it like this: If Hurst was found in the house, and robbed; or if he was lured to the place to be robbed, by someone unknown to him, there is little reason to believe this unknown criminal so tender-hearted that he would endeavor to save Hurst's life, or that he would be eager to start the police on the trail. It is a rather nice point, but it seems to me that the anonymous message was the work of a friend of the victim--willing perhaps to rob him, but unwilling to take his life. And so, in the hope that Hurst will be rescued alive, he takes the risk and sends off a note to the bank."

"And you think he will attend the funeral?" I jeered. "I don't!"

"Oh, he might," protested Lavender. "Why not, if he is not suspected? Wouldn't the absence of a particular friend call greater attention to that friend than his presence? And, anyway, there will be many friends present. I may pick up a word that will be invaluable."

He paused to light a cigarette.

"Look here, Gilly," he continued, "unless you are a real funeral fan, and wouldn't miss one for worlds, you can serve me better by staying away from this one. I'd like you to get into that empty house, early tomorrow, and stay there all morning. It's unlikely that the man we want will come back, but your objection has weight, and I admit that if he does come back it will be while all the rest of us are at the

funeral. I want to cover both ends. Savvy?"

"Yes," I said, a bit downcast. "All right, Jimmie! Where do we meet?"

"Say here, at noon."

"Noon," I agreed. "Shall I look for footprints at the empty house?" I added, with a chuckle.

He smiled shrewdly.

"You think that's funny, no doubt, but the fact is it's exceedingly strange. Somebody must have been there with Hurst, but there's not a footprint or a mark to show it! And in a sheltered part of the porch we did find footprints of Hurst! Chew on that, Gilly! Snow all around, too. It's as if he went there alone, and lay down and froze to death as calmly as if he were going to sleep in bed. Furthermore, there was a rather awkward print in the snow on the doorstep that could only suggest that Hurst had set down a satchel. And there was no satchel with him when he was found! And on top of that, there is the anonymous message. Who could see him--without approaching the house? Somebody must have been there who walked on wires or flew with wings."

"Fine!" I said. "A ghost story!"

"I've heard of stranger things," smiled my friend. "Don't you believe in ghosts?"

"No!" I replied. And then I added, "But I am afraid of them."

II

AS it happened, I attended the funeral of Samuel Hurst, after all, arriving not long after Lavender himself had put in an appearance. For I had found the police in charge of the empty house in Henrietta Street, and felt that in the circumstances my assignment was useless.

It was an unsavory neighborhood, and I speculated vainly on the strange conduct of Hurst that had brought him there to his death. Certainly it was not the sort of place he would frequent for amusement; or so I argued. But bearing in mind my friend's ceaseless instruction to "keep my eyes open," I had a look around the neighborhood before I left, although I was sure there was nothing that Lavender himself had not seen on the occasion of his own visit.

It was a polyglot district. A dozen nations were represented in the lines of shops in nearby Division Street, and children of half a dozen played in the surrounding arteries and vacant lands. The house in which Hurst's body had been found was practically on the corner; the actual intersection was marked by a vacant lot. It was a tumbledown shanty, two stories in height, and in a sad state of disrepair. It leaned perilously to one side, like an ancient ruin, and when a high wind struck it broadside it must have creaked alarmingly. The fantastic decorations of packed snow now added to its sepulchral appearance. In my youth I should have instantly set it down as a haunted house, and, avoided it with scrupulous care. On the other side of it there was a second vacant lot, and then a line of brick flat-buildings of the vintage of 1895.

I approached the decrepit door, and tried the handle. To my horror, it was instantly snatched backward, and the door opened inward disclosing a man in the opening, who looked upon me with a sardonic gaze. But a return of my reportorial instinct saved me from funk; my shocked mental processes began to function normally, and I recognized him, by sundry signs, as a plain-clothes policeman.

"Good morning, Sergeant," I said, politely. "I'm representing Mr. Lavender of Portland Street. I had no idea the house was occupied."

"Come in," he said, standing aside. "Jimmie's a friend of mine. I suppose you're Gilruth. Glad to know you." As I entered the bare room, he added, "My partner, Crawley!"

A heavy, elderly man nodded his head in curt acknowledgment.

But there was no reason for my presence, and I determined to get out. I apologetically explained that Lavender had thought the place needed watching.

"An' it's being watched!" observed the Irish Crawley sagely.

"Wherefore," I said, "I shall make myself scarce, and leave the job in better hands."

Gordon accompanied me to the door.

"What does Lavender make of this, Gilruth?" he asked confidentially.

"I don't know," I said honestly. "If you know Jimmie, you know he doesn't talk much till he's sure."

"He's right," nodded Gordon. "Well, look here, lad! There's a bit of gossip about the neighborhood here that I don't take much stock in, and it would do me no good to repeat it at headquarters. It's right in the line of young Lavender, though, and I'll give it to you. Just remember that you don't know where you got it, see? It's this: the folks hereabouts are afraid of this house! They cross to the other side at night, and that sort of thing. And why? Because somehow the rumor has been spread that it was marked by the 'evil eye,' and is death to them that cross its threshold. Moonshine? Sure! But there you are!"

He winked cheerfully, and I left him broadly smiling on the threshold whose sinister properties he had just described.

The nearest place in Division Street was a converted saloon, now a Greek ice-cream parlor. A pool room, a bakery, an undertaker's establishment, a restaurant, a pawn shop, and three or four groceries and markets filled the rest of the block, with old houses, like punctuation marks, here and there between.

The evil eye!

Well, it was an admirable locality for its exercise; I could not deny that. The most attractive window displays were those of the bakery and pawn shop, and into these I gazed for a passing moment. Noticing my seeming interest, the proprietor of the pawn shop hastened to his door and endeavored to engage my enthusiasm in his wares. He offered revolvers, binoculars, hour-glasses, pottery and retired musical instruments at a staggering sacrifice. But I refused to be tempted.

My mental map of the vicinity completed, I hurried to catch a car to join Lavender at the final ceremonies in the home of the late paying teller.

Lavender approved my course, when I had finished my recital.

"The police are getting wiser every minute," he remarked. "One of these days they'll beat me out in something big, and you'll transfer your allegiance. That's an interesting yarn about the evil eye, Gilly, and it stirs something in the back of my brain. Can't put a name to it, yet!"

We were on the veranda of the house wherein Samuel Hurst once had lived; his mother's home. Inside, the solemn services were going on, but Lavender preferred the colder atmosphere of the porch.

"Who were the fellows at the house?" he asked.

"The man who talked was named Gordon," I said. "His partner was called Crawley, I think."

"Pat Gordon," said my friend. "I know him. I don't know Crawley, but Gordon's a good man. Well, he may be nearer the truth than I am!"

At that moment the front door opened and a man stepped out. He shook Lavender's hand heartily.

"Beastly warm inside," he said, opening his coat to the keen air. "Poor old Hurst!" he added.

"May I present my friend, Mr. Gilruth?" Lavender asked. "This is Mr. Cousins, president of the Columbian Bank, Gilly."

I responded suitably.

"Look here, Mr. Cousins," continued my friend. "I came here to look over the crowd. I want a line on Hurst's friends. Are they all here? That is, can you say whether anyone is conspicuously absent?"

The bank president started and looked shrewdly at the investigator. His brow clouded. Then he turned to the door.

"I have only a vague idea what you are driving at," he said, "and it frightens me. But wait, I'll get Burns out here. He was Hurst's most intimate friend at the bank. He's sure to know."

In a moment we were talking to a clean-cut young Irish-American of more than the average intelligence. He appreciated Lavender's question at once, and rapidly considered. He looked speculatively at Lavender.

"Only two missing," he said, at length. "Of course, there are lots of chaps who knew Hurst who are not here; but of those that knew him best only two are missing. One is Henderson, who used to be in the same cage; but Henderson's been off sick for more than a week and probably doesn't even know Hurst is dead. The other is Amick, the third assistant cashier. He and Hurst used to be pretty thick, and it is a bit strange that he isn't around today."

"Used to be?" repeated Lavender.

"I didn't mean to insinuate anything," answered Burns, less readily. "I believe they were excellent friends to the last. It just happens that I hadn't seen them together so much lately."

"Both Henderson and Amick are well trusted men, Mr. Cousins?"

"Very much so! I should as soon think of suspecting myself--or Burns here!--as either of them. The fact is, Mr. Lavender, my whole staff has been with me for years, and it hurts to think that any of the boys might be--you know! We've got to find out, but I'm afraid of what you may have to tell me!"

"I understand," said Lavender. "Well, we must make no mistakes. I suppose I can see Amick at the bank, tomorrow?"

"Certainly! I can't imagine why he isn't here today."

"Then, as the services seem to be drawing to a close, I think Gilruth and I will leave you. Good-bye until tomorrow!"

The two men turned hurriedly within, while Lavender and I went down the steps and walked slowly to the nearest corner. A little group of those strangely curious individuals who seem to enjoy the sorrow of others had gathered in the snow at the corner. This group we joined, and ourselves waited.

In a short time there was a bustle on the veranda we had left, and immediately thereafter Samuel Hurst

came down the front steps for the last time, borne on the shoulders of six of his friends.

When it was all over, Lavender continued to loiter in the neighborhood. Apparently he saw nothing out of the usual, for after a few moments he turned away, and together we proceeded on our journey.

We walked briskly, for it was a cold day. The heavy snowfall of the day before had been cleared from the sidewalks, and our heels rang sharply on the icy pavements. Lavender's slight stoop and steady rhythmic tramping suggested that we were in for a long walk.

"Where to?" I asked, at length.

He halted.

"By George, I don't know, Gilly! I was thinking about empty houses and evil eyes!"

"The evil eye is sorcery, of course?"

"Yes," he smiled. "And the belief in witchcraft, in this day, is surprising, although it is largely confined to the so-called lower classes. A man possessed of a devil may have an evil eye, and by its malevolence may cause an arm to wither, a house to fall, or an infant to die. So runneth the tale. Our Henrietta Street mystery is in the very heart of that sort of nonsense, as it happens, and I am not surprised by the reputation of the place. A clever crook might use the superstition to advantage--if he wished to keep people away from the house, for instance. It is no longer an original thought, Gilly, but it is still a fact that if walls had ears and lips, they would hear much and could tell as much as they heard. At least, we shall find out who owns the place, eh?"

"We can easily find that out at the City Hall," I said.

"All right," responded Lavender. "I suppose the police already know, and I can't afford to be behind them."

We hastened to the corner and boarded the first car. As the bell was pulled for the coach to go ahead we were treated to one of those humorous spectacles that sometimes beguile the tired citizen who journeys to and from his labor on the surface lines. A man ran across the road and tried to catch the car before it had started.

He was too late, but with admirable determination he pushed his hat down upon his brows and gave chase, to the huge delight of the observers on the rear platform. He was a swift runner, however, and managed to overhaul us, swinging onto the platform with a grunt of satisfaction.

Everybody who witnessed the incident chuckled and felt better for it; but the moment I saw the man's face my smile died away. The face was perfectly known to me, almost intimately. Yet its identification bothered me. The situation is always provoking, and I thought desperately.

"What now?" languidly murmured Lavender.

"I know that fellow," I said, "and I can't place him."

"Then you know an interesting individual," he said, with a keen glance at the man on the platform, "for that fellow's an East Indian."

"What!" I cried, but as the exclamation left my lips I remembered. "Got it, by Jove!" I added. "Lavender, I saw that fellow less than two hours ago, in Division Street. He runs a pawn shop! He came to his door while I was looking in his window, and I actually exchanged words with him. What's he doing here?"

"I don't know," said my friend, "but the coincidence is interesting, if it is a coincidence. He may be following you. You didn't steal anything from his shop?"

I turned from him, disgusted.

"Forgive me, Gilly!" pleaded Lavender. "It really is an interesting coincidence, and we won't forget it. Just now, though, it doesn't fit in. You don't want me to arrest him for the murder of Hurst, do you? What is the charge? He is a pawn broker; he lives in Division Street. It isn't enough."

But I was hurt, and accompanied him in moody silence to the City Hall, where he gave over his railing and commanded immediate attention. Assistants rushed around pulling down huge canvas-bound volumes, which Lavender rejected. Then the right one was found, and with a triumphant twist of his single white lock, Lavender was bending over the book.

He had not searched long when a little exclamation of satisfaction caught my half attentive ear. It aroused my curiosity. I stopped sulking and eagerly swung about.

Lavender's finger was upon a line of writing in the book. I did not understand the lines of figures and what they stood for, but I could and did understand the significance of a name.

Here was the owner of the shabby property in Henrietta Street, where Samuel Hurst had come to his death.

A woman. Mrs. Frederick Amick!

III

LAVENDER lighted a cigarette, and leaned back against the desk. He described an elaborate pattern in the air with the smoke.

"At the very least," he said, "young Mr. Amick will have some explaining to do. This Mrs. Frederick Amick is more likely to be his mother than his wife, however, and her ownership of the empty house proves nothing after all. But it is interesting and instructive. It seems to point to something not yet clear, but on the point of clearing. I shall enjoy talking with Amick."

"You suspect him?"

"I suspect nobody definitely, but it seems plain that Amick has some connection with the case, possibly a quite remote one. And, of course, he may be perfectly innocent."

Whatever Lavender thought, however, there was one close at hand who had no doubts. Looking up, I caught this person's eye.

"Great Scott, Lavender!" I whispered. "Here's that East Indian again!"

My friend did not turn his head.

"What's he doing?" he whispered back.

"Looking at us casually," I said, "and trying to let on he isn't. By George, he's going to speak to us!"

I was right. The dark-skinned man now came rapidly forward.

"I ask your pardon," he said, in perfect--almost too perfect--English, "but am I addressing Mr. James Lavender?"

He looked at me, but Lavender answered.

"I am James Lavender," said the fathomer, and now he looked up and met the man's gaze.

"You will forgive me," continued the stranger, "but I have been following you for some time. I was not sure that you were the men I wished to see, although I recognize your friend as having been in my neighborhood this morning."

"You tried to sell me an accordion," I said, dryly.

"Yes," he smiled. "Selling is my business. And it was a good accordion, my friend. But I watched you, and saw your interest in the house where the young bank officer--Hurst--was found dead. Then I thought that you were the celebrated Mr. Lavender, for I knew you were not a policeman."

He turned to Lavender.

"I salute you, sir!" he said, with a bow. "If I may, I shall be glad to assist you. I have information."

"I shall be glad to listen to your information," said my friend, without eagerness.

"Thank you. It is this: It is known to me, through friends, that this Mr. Hurst who is so unfortunately dead, frequented the receptions of the celebrated Hara Singh, a countryman of mine, of whom no doubt you have heard."

He ended on an upward note, and Lavender nodded.

"A well-known charlatan," said my friend. "I do not know him personally, but by reputation. He is a mystic, I believe--an adept, a sorcerer, or something of the sort."

"At least, something like a wise man," said the East Indian. "We must not quarrel about the nature of his profession. He is honest, also, and he will have nothing to do with a crime. As he is my countryman, I know him; but he is far above me, and his movements I know chiefly through some of his servants.

"Through these friends of mine, Mr. Lavender, I am told that a young man named Amick also frequented the receptions of Hara Singh. Sir, it is my belief that Mr. Amick is responsible for the theft of the bank's money and the death of Mr. Hurst!"

He leaned swiftly forward, and tensely whispered, "Have you heard of the evil eye?"

I all but jumped, and looked hastily at Lavender. His eyes did not leave the face of the questioner. He seemed unexcited. His answer was a brief nod.

"This Amick is known to be possessed of the evil eye," continued the Oriental, his face working almost savagely. "His spell was upon the unfortunate young bank officer, who did what his evil friend commanded. How Mr. Hurst was slain I cannot tell you, but Mr. Amick can be made to tell. It is perhaps no secret to you that the house in which Mr. Hurst was found is owned by this Mr. Amick?" His glance sought the big book on the desk beside us. Lavender smiled.

"That is known to us, as you correctly infer," said my friend. "May I ask how it is known to you?"

"I have lived for years in the neighborhood," said the other with a shrug. "I know the history of every house. I know the man from whom Mr. Amick bought it. I have even seen Mr. Amick there, several times."

"You think, then, that Mr. Hurst was murdered, do you? And by Mr. Amick? How?"

Lavender's blunt questions shook the East Indian.

"My dear sir," he protested, "I have not said that! I do not know. I have told you that this Mr. Amick has the evil eye. That is well known to my friends. It would be easy for him to command Mr. Hurst to steal money, and then to command his friend to remain in the house until he had perished. It is a dreadful gift!"

He shuddered effectively.

"Is not your friend, Hara Singh, also possessed of the evil eye?" asked Lavender, shrewdly. "Does he, perhaps, teach its use?"

"There is nothing that Hara Singh does not know," replied the dark man earnestly. "But he has no friendliness for those who are thieves or murderers."

Lavender nodded absently. I knew he was doing some rapid thinking.

"What is your idea?" he asked at length.

"Sir," said the stranger, "Mr. Amick is going to the house of Hara Singh tonight. If you allow it, I, as your agent, shall also be there, and report to you what passes."

"And you are--?"

"My name is Daniel Alexander, in the English. I am an American citizen."

"All right, Daniel Alexander," said Lavender, suddenly making up his mind. "For this evening you are my agent. I shall depend upon you for a complete report of the meeting between Hara Singh and Mr. Amick. You must be careful. Come to my rooms tomorrow."

"Thank you, sir," said Daniel Alexander. "Tomorrow I shall be at your rooms."

He was out of the door in a few steps, and his tread was as silent as if he wore sandals. Lavender laughed softly.

"What do you make of your friend?" he asked.

"What do you make of him?" I retorted. "He's your agent. Whatever possessed you to listen to his scheme? I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him by the nose. I seem to have convinced you, at last, of his importance."

My friend's laughter increased.

"Rest easy, Gilly," he said soothingly. "When Daniel Alexander calls upon his friend, Hara Singh, this evening, you and I will be on hand to greet him."

"You know this Hara Singh?"

"I know enough about him to gain entrance to his home. Well, we have some rapid work ahead of us. We have two visits to make before evening, and the episode of the helpful East Indian has delayed us a bit. We shall have to hurry. First, we'll run out and see Henderson, the first of the two who failed to turn up at the funeral. He may be ill, as claimed, but we can't take anyone's word for anything. Later we shall visit Mr. Charles Amick, and still later the splendors of India."

WE gained little at the rooms of the clerk Henderson, and were enabled to cut the visit short. The old woman from whom the young fellow rented the rooms was able to confirm the report of Henderson's

illness. He had not been out for more than a week, and for several nights he had been dangerously ill. He was now convalescent.

"Out of his head, he was, poor fellow, for several nights," said the garrulous old body. "Knew he was bad, he did, poor chap, and kept telling himself he must wake up. I thought he was gone, sir, that time, but--"

She would have gone on indefinitely and given us the whole history of the case, including the story of her own life, had not Lavender checked her.

"Thank you, thank you!" he hurriedly interposed. "Well, we won't bother him. I'm sure he's in good hands. When he wakes, just tell him a friend from the bank was asking about him. He's had a doctor, of course?"

"Oh, yes, sir, every day, and I expect he'll be along again soon, if you care to wait, sir."

We got away at last, and to save time took a taxi to the bank.

"So much for Henderson," said Lavender. "Now we'll have that talk with Amick."

The president of the bank introduced us, and we found Amick to be a dark young man of the type characterized as "sporty." He was not pleased to see us, or so I thought, but Lavender paid no attention to his evident discomfort.

"Of course, Mr. Amick," echoed my friend, "I remember you quite well. I think I saw you at the funeral, did I not?"

"I think you did not," replied Amick, with deep suspicion. "I was not at the funeral, Mr. Lavender."

President Cousins at this juncture unwittingly asked the right question.

"No, Mr. Amick was not there," he broke in, apparently surprised that Lavender had forgotten. "I looked for you, Amick. I thought you and Hurst were pretty warm friends."

"We were, Mr. Cousins," said Amick desperately, "but the fact is, I simply couldn't go. I hate funerals, and to think of Sam--well, I couldn't do it. I wanted to remember him as I saw him last."

"When was that, by the way?" asked Lavender.

"The day before," answered Amick, with increasing suspicion. "He was here at the bank."

"I should like to know where Mr. Hurst spent the night before that," said Lavender. "That is, the night before the night of his death. You couldn't tell me, I suppose?"

"No, I'm afraid I can't," replied Amick, with better grace.

"Well, I'm obliged to you, Mr. Amick," said Lavender. "I don't like to bother people with questions, but we must do what we can with this unhappy business."

"I agree with you," said the assistant cashier, "and of course if I can be of service, I want to be."

"We are all entirely at your disposal, Mr. Lavender," said President Cousins.

The taxi was waiting, and we took it through the snowy streets to Lavender's rooms. Throughout the cold drive my friend sat in silence, for the most part, drumming on the window sill with the fingers of one hand.

The monotonous refrain got on my nerves.

"Well," I interrupted brusquely, "who is it? Amick or Daniel Alexander?"

"Or both?" he added, looking up. "There's more than one man in on this."

"Oh!" I said blankly.

WE dined at Lavender's rooms, and later climbed into evening raiment. "Tony old boy, this Hara Singh," quoth Lavender, "and we must be dressed for the part."

"Just who is Hara Singh?" I demanded.

"Crystal gazer, palmist, phrenologist, faker!" he responded, laconically. "Probably a millionaire, incidentally. The social set flocks there in droves. Nothing succeeds like successful humbug, Gilly!"

And so, shortly before eight o'clock, that evening, we departed for the Astor Street mansion of Hara Singh, the Master of Mysteries. We drove up in style, sent our driver on his way, then mounted the steps in leisurely fashion. With Lavender's thumb on the bell, a long muffled peal came faintly to our ears.

In the doorway, as the door swung open, stood a magnificently attired Oriental, in an imposing headdress. All the colors of the rainbow seemed to have been hung upon his lithe frame, and his small mustache curled upward like that of the ex-Kaiser.

He bowed deeply and stood to one side as we passed him. In the hallway beyond, a second and similar pageant of color bowed at our approach, and indicated a lighted room to the left. Everything was done in silence. A heavy incense hung in the air.

We passed through red hangings into a wide chamber decked in a fantastic fashion with Eastern designs and colors. Fine rugs were upon the floor, and fantastic footstools. Around the walls were gorgeous divans of inviting aspect, and Oriental weapons hung upon the walls.

At the head of the room, looking inward, beneath curtains of red velvet, a great crystal ball reposed on a pillar of marble.

A gigantic dark-skinned man entered the room as we looked around us, and in a high-pitched voice that curiously belied his formidable appearance, said respectfully, "Please to have seats, gentlemen. The master will be down in a moment. You have an appointment?"

"Oh, yes," lied Lavender, easily.

In several moments we heard soft steps on the stairs, and an instant later the hangings parted and the negro appeared.

"Hara Singh, Master of Mysteries!" he intoned shrilly; then rapidly disappeared.

A man in flowing white robes entered the chamber with quick, soft tread, and stopped short inside the threshold. I uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

Lavender seemed highly amused, as if something he had quite expected now stood before us.

The robed and whiskered Hara Singh was Daniel Alexander, dealer in revolvers and accordions in Division Street.

IV

A MOMENT of vocal silence followed; then the Master of Mysteries shrugged his shoulders with elaborate unconcern.

"Yes," he said, as if replying to a question, "it is I! Are you surprised?"

"Not at all," said my friend. "I have known since our recent conversation that you were Hara Singh, Master of Mysteries. Surely no one but a master so readily could have solved the mystery of the death of young Mr. Hurst."

There was a trace of mockery in Daniel Alexander's bow.

"You are jesting," he said reproachfully. "But you shall see! I am right, my friends, and tonight I shall prove it to you. Yes, I am Hara Singh, The Master of Mysteries, and also I am Daniel Alexander, the dealer in antiquities. There is nothing disgraceful in either profession, but it is not strange that I keep them apart. Foolish persons suspect a man who is known by two names; yet both my ventures have been profitable, and I do not care to sacrifice either. Some day, perhaps, Hara Singh will retire, and the world will know him no more. On that day Daniel Alexander will begin to be seen more often at his shop, and both he and his neighbors will be glad. The present life, my friends, is often fatiguing."

"I should imagine so," said Lavender dryly. "But your business is your own, Mr. Alexander. You offered to help us, and we are prepared to accept your assistance. And so we are here."

"I am sorry," he said, "but there is no help for it, now. I could have done better alone. You will only frighten the young man who is coming. Yet I cannot ask you to go away. Will you mind, my friends, if I conceal you during the interview?"

"A good idea!" exclaimed Lavender. "By all means, let us be concealed."

"Come then, for the young man is almost due."

With extravagant courtesy, he led us through the red curtains that fell on either side of the great crystal globe. We passed into a smaller chamber beyond, dimly lighted by an Oriental lamp in a far corner. Comfortable chairs were indicated by our host, and cigarettes were placed at our elbows.

"I shall order that drinks be served you," said Hara Singh, as he left us, and shortly thereafter the giant negro appeared with a tray of liquors and a small basin of ice.

"I fancy it is perfectly safe," smiled Lavender, noting my hesitation. The giant had vanished. "Here, I shall start the ball!"

He mixed himself a mild highball and tossed it off.

"No," he continued; "there is nothing to fear except the potency of the liquor. It is uncommonly good, and we must restrain our natural inclinations, my dear Gilly! I do not want to have to take you home in a condition suggesting collapse."

We sat in the semi-darkness, puffing at our cigarettes and waiting the advent of Charles Amick.

Inside of ten minutes the long muffed peal of the doorbell again thrilled through the house, and in a few moments we knew that our acquaintance of the bank was in the reception chamber a few feet beyond.

The soothing voice of Daniel Alexander, or in this case Hara Singh, came to our ears, as he greeted his visitor.

"It is some days since I have seen you in my poor home, my friend!"

The concentrated fury of Amick's utterance took me aback.

"It will be a good many days before you see me again, Singh!" he rasped harshly. "I'm through with you and your tricks!"

"My friend!"

The gentle voice of Hara Singh was filled with reproach.

"Don't play the innocent babe," snarled Amick. "I'm sick of it! I want to know only one thing from you--what happened to Sam Hurst?"

"My friend!" The voice of Hara Singh rose almost to a scream.

I glanced at Lavender. In the half-darkness, I could see that he was smiling wickedly.

"I'm not your friend!" screamed Amick. "If I were, no doubt I'd follow Hurst. Come quick, now! You'll tell me, Singh, or you'll tell the police. Sam Hurst was my friend, and if the police haven't sense enough to know where to look for his murderer, I have. Dead, and without a mark on him! I'm not a fool, Singh, and your Indian blarney doesn't go down."

There was a painful silence. Lavender rose to his feet and crossed the floor in two swift, noiseless strides. He peered through the curtains, and beckoned me to his side. An extraordinary sight met my gaze.

The men stood facing each other, their eyes fixed, their faces pouring perspiration. It was as if each, by sheer will, was endeavoring to force a break on the part of the other. The face of each was ghastly; but the face of Hara Singh was more--it was diabolic.

"My God!" I whispered. "The evil eye!"

Then spoke the voice of Hara Singh, soothing now, and tender as a woman's. "You force me to speak, Mr. Amick," it said gently. "Your violence does not frighten me. You are yourself the slayer of your friend! He was found dead in your house. You sent him there with the money. You are his slayer."

"Liar--liar--liar--" mumbled the changed voice of Amick. He seemed to be struggling with himself for articulate utterance, but the baleful eyes of Hara Singh continued to bore into his vision. "I did not kill him," muttered Amick. "How could I kill him? I was not near him. It was not my house--my mother's house--you sent him--"

His voice trailed away. "With your evil eyes you sent him there," continued the steady voice of Hara Singh.

"This won't do, Gilly!" said Lavender, in a quick whisper.

Swiftly he pushed aside the curtains and entered the chamber, thrusting his form between the eyes of Hara Singh and the shriveling Amick. He seized the bank officer by the shoulders and shook him vigorously. A nasty scowl disfigured the brow of Hara Singh, but he said no word.

"Come out of it!" roared Lavender, in Amick's ear. "Do you hear, Amick?"

The man addressed stared solemnly, then a light of intelligence flashed again from his eye. He squared his shoulders truculently.

"I know!" he cried. "Nearly gone, that time! Obliged to you--"

His vision cleared.

"Lavender!" he cried. Then quickly, "Where's that devil, Singh? He nearly had me."

He caught sight of the East Indian and lunged forward for the dark throat. Lavender held tightly to his arm.

"Wait, Amick!" said my friend, sharply.

He turned sternly on Hara Singh.

"There must be no coercion in this," he said. "If you have anything further to say to Mr. Amick, you must say it in my presence."

The East Indian shrugged.

"I am sorry," he said. "I have my own way, and you have yours. In a moment you would have known all. Now--" He shrugged again.

"What's the truth of this, Amick?" demanded Lavender. "I have heard this man accuse you of the murder of Samuel Hurst."

"He lies!" said Amick, laughing bitterly. "He knows he lies. He's trying to pull the wool over your eyes, Mr. Lavender. I know where Sam Hurst was the night before he was killed. He was here. Whose evil eye was on him then? Who sent him to the bank next day, with instructions to steal the money? Who lives around the corner from my empty house, and was there next night to receive the money? Don't waste time on me, Mr. Lavender. There's your man."

Hara Singh's voice was conciliatory.

"My friend," he said, "can it be possible that we have wronged each other? That we are both wrong? What you say is partly true. Mr. Hurst was here that night before, but he was here only for a moment. He had an engagement and went away. I hardly spoke to him, for he was in a hurry. He was going to the bedside of a friend who is ill--"

"Again you are a liar," said Amick. "The only sick friend Hurst had is Henderson, and Henderson is--"

The doorbell rang.

"I think Henderson is at the door," said Lavender, with a pleasant smile. "Keep your gun on Alexander, Gilly!"

Followed by the giant, Henderson entered the room.

"Amick!" he cried.

"Mr. Henderson," said Lavender, "it gives me great happiness to arrest you for the murder of Samuel Hurst, and the theft of the money from the Columbian Bank!"

The face of Henderson went a dirty yellow. Hara Singh stood motionless, but the face of Charles Amick lighted with a slow smile.

"By God, Lavender," he said, "you're all right! If you need any help, I'm right here!"

A sudden, low cry broke from Henderson's lips.

"Sam!" he whispered. Then his voice rose in high crescendo as he sought the eyes of Daniel Alexander.

"It is you who have done this," he cried. "It is you, Hara Singh, who have ruined us all. Until we knew you, we were friends. You turned us against each other; you played with us--your tools--your fools!"

He aimed a dramatic finger at the East Indian's stolid face.

"There is the real murderer!" he cried shrilly. "I--yes, it was I who sent Sam Hurst to his death. It is I whom the world will know as the slayer of my friend. But there is the assassin brain that schemed it all. And tonight he would have been a murderer in fact; he would have killed Amick if he had failed to master him by will. It was for this I came, at the request of this murderer and thief, to aid in slaying another friend!

"And now it is I who am to suffer, while he is only an accessory, a receiver of stolen goods! It is unfair!"

There followed a movement so rapid that even the quick-witted Lavender was taken by surprise, and suddenly instead of the rigid, pointing finger, the sinister eye--the evil eye--of a revolver looked into the eyes of Hara Singh.

Lavender's spring was an instant too late. The crack of the revolver and Alexander's squeal of terror seemed simultaneous. Then the smoking weapon was wrenched from Henderson's hand before it could be turned upon himself.

I bent over the fallen body of Hara Singh, with Amick, and knew that life was extinct. But a strange pity was in Lavender's gaze as his eyes rested upon the face of Henderson, and I knew that one good word for that unhappy youth would be spoken at the subsequent trial.

V

IT was a case of the 'evil eye,' all right," said my friend Lavender, as we sat together in his rooms, "but we call it nowadays by another name--hypnotism. All three of them were dabblers--Henderson, Amick, and Hurst. The affable Hara Singh was their instructor, and they became his victims. Henderson, poor fellow, used his knowledge evilly. He needed money, I suppose; they always do. The idea occurred to him, undoubtedly through Alexander, to get Hurst to commit the actual theft. Hurst, of course, was perfectly innocent. Henderson hypnotized him. No wonder the poor fellow slept in that house until he froze to death! He was in a hypnotic trance."

"You mean that Hurst robbed the bank without knowing what he was doing?" I demanded.

"Just that! Undoubtedly Henderson had experimented with him in many ways, and Hurst was an excellent subject. He had been hypnotized so often, I fancy, that Henderson could send him to sleep, as it were, by a mere snap of the fingers. In that condition, he could be made to do remarkable things, especially in the way of post-hypnotic suggestions. That is, Henderson could command his victim to perform a certain act at some future time; and, waking, Hurst would have forgotten the suggestion. But at the time set he would perform the act unconsciously, as though by his own volition. If the original command ordered him to fall asleep after performing the act, he would fall asleep.

"This sort of thing is all understood. It is easy to follow the case. Hurst visited his sick friend--who was shamming--and was hypnotized by Henderson. Henderson ordered him to take the money next day; then take it to this empty house, which Henderson and Alexander knew belonged to Amick's mother, and there fall asleep after delivering the satchel. Hurst did fall asleep, and slept into death.

"Alexander--who was Henderson's fake doctor--got the satchel, of course. Hurst, following instructions, dropped it from a window after carrying it to the house. It was picked up in the lot, outside the house, by Alexander, who also sent the anonymous message to President Cousins--too late to save Hurst. Henderson probably ordered the message sent."

"When did you first suspect Henderson?" I curiously asked. "Both Amick and I suspected Alexander, or Hara Singh, but never thought of Henderson."

"I suspected him vaguely from the first," said Lavender. "That is, from the day of the funeral. But there was nothing to base even a suspicion upon, really. Then when we called at the rooms he occupied and listened to that poor old dupe of a woman, I clinched it, although I had to check on it throughout, afterward. You remember what the old woman said? That Henderson had been calling on himself to 'wake up!'

"Of course, Henderson was doing nothing of the sort. He was doing his best however, possibly conscious-stricken, to wake Hurst--miles away in that empty house!"

"What science would have called it, had he succeeded, heaven knows!"

SOUTHWARD-BOUND

Lightning and rain and the roar of the thunder,

Splash of the prow through the curling sea,

Hiss of the wind 'round the mast and the rigging,

And a shaggy old ship sailing brave and free.

Pitching and tossing and twisting and turning,

Breasting the storm with a bone in her mouth,

Bravely she bears to the land of all dreaming,

And sweet through the storm is the smell of the south.

--Edmund Leamy

* * * *

* * * *

"WATSON!"
by Captain A.E. Dingle

"WATSON, my dear fellow, this inaction is maddening. I am *ennuied*," drawled a lanky, cadaverous individual reclining lumpishly in a long deck chair, a black cigar in his teeth, his brows drawn down, and his fingertips touching in approved Sherlockian fashion. A ripple of mirth passes around the small circle of which he formed the centre, and his expression darkened in outward resentment.

The man addressed as Watson glanced at the amused ones with a faint smile on his own face and replied indifferently, "Better take a dose of dope, my dear Holmes. The steward uncorks a rippin' brand of Scotch. Shall I call him?"

Holmes unfolded himself out of the chair without a reply and stalked away in the direction of the smoking room.

"He's on the scent!" chuckled a fiery-haired youngster.

"That's a scent you all can follow!" replied a merry-eyed girl, seizing the red one and dragging him off to play shuffleboard. Watson remained in his chair, and behind lowered lids his eyes glittered shrewdly.

Percy Anstruther's big steam yacht Vagrant never went to sea without a happy, careless party of youth aboard.

Percy himself was of the type dubbed porcine. Finding himself tremendously wealthy quite early in life, mainly by dint of ignoring the Golden Rule and playing up the Rule of Three--which he interpreted to mean, one for the firm--of which he was head--and two for Percy Anstruther--holding no scruples which might prevent profits accruing through some such idiocy as consideration for others, he soon decided, on retiring, that a steam yacht was the thing to gain him entry into the society of the exclusive set he desired to adorn. Percy knew enough to refrain from attempting the impossible; he paid high salaries, not wages, to the best of secretaries, the cunningest of chefs, the very paragon of stewards, and he possessed that native shrewdness which prevented him offending by any vulgarity of speech in select company, no matter how free he might be among his own kind. No amount of shrewdness could warn him of the bad taste, or inadvisability, of loading himself with costly, bizarre jewelry. He saw ladies and gentlemen of the class he envied, each wearing such gems as they possessed when occasion demanded. In his small mind there was only one reason for their not wearing more--the lack of possession; only one reason for limiting the times of wearing what they had--fear of losing them. And since neither fear of losing them nor limited possession applied to himself, Percy Anstruther's fat fingers were ever loaded with flawless diamonds, his fat neck glowed from the fires within a great single ruby in his scarf, his fat watch fob scintillated like a cluster of stars against his fat little paunch.

"I've got 'em, why shouldn't I sport 'em?" he had demanded many times in answer to suggestions from his friends. "I can afford to wear 'em, and the crook isn't born who'll take 'em away from your Uncle Percy. No, sir!"

Which all brings us back to Holmes and Watson; for it was the long, lean, cadaverous Holmes who first expressed entire agreement with Percy's ideas on the subject of fashion in gems. They had met, and become acquainted, at the great Casino of Ocean View, off which the Vagrant lay anchored while her owner and his guests disported in a dance or two, a turn or so at the wheel, or a little chopping,

according to individual taste. Percy, furthermore, strongly desired to become acquainted with somebody who would accept his hospitality without making him see and feel that he became a debtor by receiving the honor of the present company. He was gratified by the celerity with which he attained his object. There could be no doubt regarding the desirability of Mr. Holmes or his friend Watson. Those names appeared on the register of their hotel, and by them they were known and introduced to Percy by the croupier of the roulette table. There could be no cavilling at friends secured through such a sponsor. And, best of all, they quite certainly did not seek his acquaintance merely to have a finger in his pocket-book, for they politely insisted upon buying wine themselves; and their taste was proven when they ordered a brand which Percy always hesitated about, though he knew it was quite the thing, simply because he wasn't sure how to pronounce the name.

"I say, you chaps must come for a cruise with me," he had said eagerly at the third bottle.

"The ocean's rather a bore, old man, but perhaps we could endure it for a few days, ah, Watson?" Holmes had replied in a drawl which seemed incongruous with the sharpness of his big, steady eyes.

"Oh, just for a week, perhaps," Watson had conceded, with similar lack of eagerness, and the thing was done. They vacated their hotel that same day; the Vagrant steamed just beyond the blue skyline in the cool evening.

WITH a young party on board, it was inevitable that Holmes should speedily acquire the name of "Sherlock." For Dr. Watson to be dubbed "Doctor" followed as naturally as night follows day. At first they mildly resented it, although, queerly enough, Holmes rather deserved it than otherwise, for he was forever reading the detective books in the yacht's well-stocked library, and he could easily be led on to expound the methods of the famous sleuth of fiction. But soon they accepted the titles bestowed on them, and gradually Percy, seeing the fun the others got out of the little pleasantry, and seeing that his new guests suffered nothing actually by it, fell into the mood himself, and often cast out bait in the hope of getting Holmes into a tangle of explanations over some really trivial circumstance. Such as the time, for instance, when the crew's cook, who looked after the fowls carried to supply the owner's table with fresh eggs, reported the best layer missing, and the boatswain, at the same time, pointed out to the chief officer chicken tracks up the side of the freshly painted smokestack.

"You let the bloomin' chicken loose yourself while washing down decks," was the mate's emphatic decision. "You scared her trying to chase her back, and the bally thing flew up against the funnel before she volplaned overboard. You want to be more careful, bo'sun."

But Percy, urged on by his young friends, suggested to Holmes that there might be another solution to the missing chicken mystery. Holmes placed the tips of his long, white fingers together, drew down his brows, and nodded sagaciously. From the stokehold grating came the merry whistle of a happy fireman whose spirits were proof against the discomfort of his work. A windlass clanked, and two firemen just off duty drew up a can of ashes and dumped them down the lower-deck shute; from the galley door a sculleryman emerged, staggering under the kitchen garbage pail. Both containers discharged their waste into the blue sea at once, and tigerishly Holmes darted to the rail and keenly scanned the floating refuse. Then he resumed his chair, lighted a huge briar pipe filled with strong plug, and placed his finger-tips together again, while Percy Anstruther and the merry band of youngsters waited for his next utterance.

"You are right, Mr. Anstruther," he said crisply. "There is another, very different answer to that seemingly simple riddle of the chicken."

"Oh, surely you have not solved the mystery so soon?" protested Percy. His young friends giggled.

"My chain is almost complete, sir," Holmes replied. "You hear that peculiar whistle emanating from the

fire-room? I dare say it is the first time you have noticed it. But I, who note the meanest trifles, can assure you that there has been, is, method in that whistle. Where are the poultry pens? Right beside the stokehold ventilators, are they not? Very well. The messmate of the whistling fireman slyly opens the cage, the whistler pipes up a cunning note, the chicken creeps out, the cage is once more fastened, and the miscreant who opened and closed it darts below to join his fellow criminal. The whistling goes on, the poor deluded chicken follows it, and now it takes on the quality of ventriloquism. It seems to emanate from the funnel. The silly fowl walks up the smokestack, the fumes overcome it when it gets to the rim, and it falls down into the hands of the hungry pair waiting for its advent, singed and cooked ready to devour. That, gentlemen, is the solution of an apparent mystery. Quite simple."

A roar of merriment pealed out across the sea, and Holmes appeared annoyed.

"Fine!" laughed Percy, with the conscious superiority of having discovered a palpable flaw. "But tell us, old chap, how these awful criminals got the chicken out of the furnace? It would be burned up long before it reached the bottom of that chimney."

"You may amuse yourselves unravelling that point, gentlemen. I will give you a tip, though. I stepped to the rail just now. You imagined I did so idly, or simply to knock out my pipe. It was not so. I examined the refuse thrown over at that instant. Feathers, some burnt, some whole, floated away on a mass of ashes. It is the trifles which count in detecting crime. Now, Watson, I think we will investigate a rumor that the steward was seen breaking out a new case of Scotch this morning."

There was a medley of voices in the group he left. Some actually wondered if he really believed in his own deep cunning, since he was never seen to smile even while expounding his most outlandish notions. Others were only disgusted. There were two who warned Percy without reserve that before the cruise was up he would be touched for money by the Sherlockian Holmes and his friend Watson.

"Oh, I don't think that," objected Percy. "He's rather idiotic, of course, but I think the chap's only fooling himself. They're both gentlemen, anyway, and we're having some fun with them."

"Why not let us make up a real mystery, Percy?"

"Oh, goody!" cried a merry-eyed girl, dancing joyously. "Oh, let's! You can have a tremendous robbery, or something, and have all the clues point to all of us, and all of us have an alibi, and you can scatter my hair-pins and combs about, and--"

"That's the identical scheme!" chuckled Percy, shaking like a jelly in his mirth. "Let's dope out a plot."

"Presently!" interjected the red-headed youth, intensely. "Here's the Watson chap. Not a word!"

Watson strolled along the deck, having left Holmes in the smoking room, and he wore a grimace of mingled boredom and contempt. He glanced around the little group inquisitively, then addressed Percy.

"Holmes begins to irritate one, doesn't he, Anstruther? A little of his nonsense is amusing; too much is sickening. I wonder what he'd do if faced with a real case. Sometimes I think he's really keen on scientific investigation of problems, at others I feel disgusted at his childishness. The chicken twaddle, for instance."

Percy hesitated for a minute, then, smiling fatly in justification of his resolve, he said.

"I say, Watson, you must be a thought-reader. When you came along we were discussing playing a little joke on your friend to see how far he would dig into a real puzzle. You won't mind if we keep you out of it, will you? Might drop him a hint, you know, and spoil--"

"Not at all," replied Watson quickly. "Make your plans and start him going. I'll have my fun looking on, I

assure you. I hope you concoct a real mystery, though, with something far deeper than vanishing poultry as a motive. Good luck."

THE first outcome of a long and close secret confabulation was the sudden increase of Percy's jewelled embellishments. That evening at dinner he simply blazed with light from gorgeous gems, and in place of his customary offering of big, sleek Cuban cigars in a handsome snake-skin case after dinner, he preferred still choicer weeds in an amazing gold case on both sides of which his monogram leaped out at one in diamonds. Then, under pretence of showing the men some intimate curiosities, he took them into his great stateroom where, obviously through oversight, a stout cash box stood open on his table, crammed to the top with bank notes of high denomination.

"Confound that man of mine!" he exclaimed, closing the box, but leaving it on the table. "He's always leaving valuables about as if they were pebbles."

While exhibiting the trivial curiosities he had brought the men in to see, he shot keen side-glances at Holmes, and chuckled shakily as he led the way out to the after deck, omitting to reprimand his valet, however, for his carelessness.

"It's a gorgeous night," he remarked, when the space under the awnings resounded with tuneful music from an excellent machine.

"Let's have a bit of dancing, hey, folks?"

IN THE quietest hour of the most silent watch, about two o'clock in the morning, the yacht rang with sounds of dire mis-happening. A pistol shot shattered the stillness on deck, a heavy splash was heard over the side, and in a minute the decks were alive with alarmed seaman and excited officers; a huddle of sleepy guests milled about each other in well feigned panic. Watson was there, as panicky as the rest; and Holmes, true to his assumed character, took up the burden of discovering the meaning of that midnight alarm.

"Where is Mr. Anstruther?" he demanded, peering around like a scrawny hawk. "Find him, steward. Fancy him sleeping through such a racket! He's getting far too fat."

While Watson looked on in silence from the companionway door, and a little giggling group nudged each other delightedly, Holmes flashed a pocket torch about the decks and rails. On hands and knees at times, he nosed along waterways and peering overside into the silken blackness of the smooth sea. Presently he brought forth a huge magnifying glass, and the red-headed youth laughed outright. The sound seemed creepy in the darkness and quiet, broken before only by swish of water and that flickering circle of light from Holmes' torch. But the steward's sudden appearance and agitated announcement diverted attention again.

"Mr. Anstruther's--Oh, his room, it's horrid!"

Prepared as they were for such an announcement, it required all their self-control to prevent the conspirators uttering little gasps of sheer suspense, so vivid was the steward's terror. Watson glanced keenly toward the absorbed figure of Holmes, who was scrutinizing the steward pitilessly, every inch of the man's outward aspect coming under the inspection.

"That will do, my man," snapped Holmes at length. "You may show us the way to Mr. Anstruther's stateroom. Come, Watson, I may need you." The steward led the way trembling, and the muffled giggling burst forth again as the youthful jesters saw the Sherlockian one tumbling into the trap they had set for him. All the details of the plot had been left to Anstruther, and they were sure he had done a good piece of work, for he had outlined most of what he intended to do, but none had anticipated the perfection of

theatrical setting which seemed to leap out at them through the door of Percy's room.

"Ooh!" cried the merry-eyed girl, and shrank back with fright which was more than half real. Her companions too, playing out their hands, peeped inside, drew back, gasped and stared in simulated terror. Watson looked in, then stepped inside, his ruddy face wearing an enigmatical expression. Holmes alone maintained an utterly expressionless air as he waved everyone back from the threshold and took from his pocket a tape measure.

Well indeed had Percy done his part. The bed was upset, and the coverings strewed the carpet. One curtain flew loose through the wide porthole, the other hung by one hook, torn in halves. The table and writing desk in a corner were bare; the drawers, both hanging open almost out of the slides, lay empty. The stout cash box was on the floor, empty but one forlorn note of small denomination lay pinched under one corner of it. Across the room, near the bed, which was a four-poster and not a bunk, was a woman's hair comb, broken; a yard away lay a pyjama button, still a yard further a red and green grass bath slipper, obviously far too small for Percy to have ever worn. And, stabbing the dim light like a spear, a great red smear ran from a dark stain on the bed-head clear up to and through the open port.

Watson stepped over and touched the red smear with a finger, smelling it and peering at it under a light globe. A queer curl wreathed his lips, and he glanced curiously at Holmes who was on his knees with tape and lens. Afterward, when talking over the events of that night, some of the young men recalled that queer glance of Watson's, and remembered, too, that he contrived to get into the foreground quite as much as Holmes, yet without in the slightest degree seeming to want to. Anyhow, in all the after pictures of that night which rose up before any of the guests, the short, heavy figure of Watson loomed as large as the long, thin, stooping figure of Holmes.

"What's happened, d'you think?" whispered somebody. The merry-eyed girl giggled hysterically, and rejoined, "Give Mr. Holmes time. Don't you all see there's been a horrid crime committed, and that poor Percy has vanished? Don't breathe. You may disturb something, mayn't they, Mr. Holmes?"

For answer Holmes suddenly appeared before the little group in the door, his eyes ablaze.

He seemed to arrive from the other side of the room without, motion, like a shadow; and without warning he plunged his hand into the tumbled mass of shining hair over the girl's startled eyes. In the other hand he held the broken parts of the hair comb he had picked up from the floor.

"Same color," he muttered, matching comb with hair. "Where is your comb, miss?"

Confronted with the very thing she had suggested herself, the girl looked less happy than she had expected. Confusion seized upon her, and her saucy tongue failed her. She stammered, sheepishly enough, "That is it. I er--I lent it to Percy to, er--to--"

"That is all, thank you," Holmes interrupted her sharply. "I will ask for you when I require your statement. You may retire." A tiny murmur of protest rippled around at sight of the girl's crestfallen air as she turned away toward her own room; but then the hugeness of the joke struck all concerned, and they crowded close to hear what was coming next.

Holmes closely examined the carpet, the bed, the curtains; he even measured the length and breadth of the red smear on the side panel. He sniffed at some dust he scraped up, he struck his head through the porthole and peered up and down, fore and aft, like a raw-necked vulture seeking prey. Then, stepping to the centre again, he looked for a moment at the faces before him and at the red and green bath slipper. Suddenly he went to his knees before the red-headed youth and forcibly lifted his right foot knee-high. He flung aside the leather Romeo the young man wore and clamped the grass slipper to the foot.

"H'm! You, too, I shall know where to find when I need you," he remarked. "You may retire, sir; and I warn you that this very serious occurrence may lead into unpleasant places. If you wish to tell me anything, you may do so in the morning. That is all, thank you."

Now he held out the pyjama button, scanning the sleeping suits before him. One jacket lacked a button, and one only. Like a tiger Holmes sprang before the wearer, clapped the button to the vacant place, and glared terribly into the young fellow's face. "B-but, Holmes, it isn't the same pattern!" giggled another bystander, scarcely able to talk for repressed mirth.

"Married?" Holmes jerked out abruptly to the man who lacked a button.

"Surely," laughed the youngster, recovering his nerve.

"Pattern doesn't matter then," was the unexpectedly sophisticated reply. "You will be called in the morning, sir. That will do."

"Say, Holmes," put in the last onlooker, who, except for Watson, alone remained unspotted by suspicion. "I don't lack a shoe, nor a button, nor even a comb. Can't you discover some clue which indicates me as the brutal murderer?" There was a keen note of sarcasm in the man's suggestion. Holmes looked at him gravely.

"I shall permit nothing to escape my notice which bears on this monstrous mystery," he said. "Place your left hand here, please."

With excessive care he pressed the man's hand down into the nap of the thick carpet, and scrutinized the edges through his powerful lens; then released the man and told him to go, but, like the rest, to hold himself ready to be questioned.

"Meanwhile," remarked Holmes, "we shall turn in toward some port. This is a matter for the regular police, to whom I hope to be able to deliver the criminal."

"Sure you can't find something which incriminates Watson?" gurgled the young fellow just released. "This is such a scream it would be a shame to keep him out of it."

"You will kindly keep your witticisms for a more suitable moment, sir," was the dry retort, and the guest departed, leaving Watson gazing thoughtfully at the stooping back of Holmes.

"My dear Watson," the sleuth said presently, "pray ring for the steward." The steward answered the bell, and Holmes told him, without turning around, to go and order the captain to change the course for the nearest port, and to notify him immediately which port it would be. In answer, the captain appeared in person, and a very angry, irritable person he was. He opened fire at once on the sleuth.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded warmly. "Why am I not called in to be consulted about this? And who are you, to order me into port, I'd like to know. Where's the owner?"

"Mr. Anstruther has disappeared, captain. There has been some foul play. That is why I suggest running into port--"

"And this is the first I hear of it!" bellowed the captain. "Shooting goes on aboard my ship, somebody tells me my owner has gone, and I'm not asked for an opinion but told to run--"

"Just a moment, captain," Watson put in quietly; "I will explain a lot to you if you'll give me a moment outside. There has been mischief, certainly, but not so serious as might be. Come, let Holmes continue his investigation. I'll tell you about it."

He led the mollified skipper out to his own roomy cabin, and Holmes flashed a look of appreciation after them as he shut the door.

AN EXPECTANT party gathered about the table at breakfast in the morning, for daylight brought back all the brightness of the farce which night and its gloom had almost made to seem like tragedy. They awaited Holmes, who presently appeared looking haggard and pale after an obviously sleepless night. He crushed up a white pellet and stirred it into his coffee, which he drank before eating anything; then coldly, and with an incisiveness worthy of a graver situation, he plunged into a bald recital of his discoveries and decision. On deck, listening through the skylight, a gleeful yacht captain chuckled hugely, slapping his leg, utterly reconciled to the temporary loss of his employer.

"We shall be in port in a few hours now," Holmes began. "The culprit in this brazen piece of villainy will be taken ashore then, I promise you. You all heard the shot in the night, and--"

"How about the shoes and buttons and other haberdashery?" grinned the red-headed youth maliciously.

"I shall come to that, my young friend," replied Holmes, glaring fiercely. "You heard the shot, I believe. You all saw the scene of the crime--"

"That shot was on deck!"

"The scene of the crime," the sleuth proceeded as if no interruption had been offered, "and even my friend Watson could discern the obvious signs of violence there. You saw the odd slipper, the pyjama button, the broken comb, and the gory smear on the wall. Now there is one chance remaining for the guilty one to make reparation, and thereby perhaps gain leniency. I shall run over the facts, and on our arrival in port I shall summon the police to take the criminal, unless meanwhile he confesses.

"Now that slipper would fit only a child or a woman. That button might have come from a lounge pillow. The comb could easily have been picked up broken somewhere else and dropped in the cabin by the owner himself. I have some little skill in reading signs, and I say that pistol shot was fired out through a porthole, sounding thus as if it were on deck; the slipper is one of a heap of about fifty pairs of all sizes, kept by Mr. Anstruther for the use of guests who may have forgotten to bring bath shoes. The button assuredly came from the cushion in Anstruther's own arm chair, and the comb was probably dropped by him when he returned from the deck."

"Why, Holmes, you might be accusing Percy himself!" roared the party in mirth. Then, realizing suddenly that they ought to wear more of an air of gravity, since Percy was apparently murdered in his own yacht, and they were all more or less under suspicion, their faces fell, and they leaned closer to Holmes in deep attention.

"Making due allowance for youth and frivolity," Holmes proceeded coldly, "I will bear with you. Here is a tip, which you may find useful. Pray try to assist the course of justice, rather than hinder it because you do not see things as I see them. You would find the assassin and thief? Very well then. Look for a person of this description: A tall, lean man, rather stout, and about five feet eight inches high; he is florid and pale of complexion, and wears a number seven or number ten shoe. On one hand he has a crooked finger, which he can straighten whenever he wants to."

As one man the party got up from the table, and on every face was a sneer. They had expected something far better than this, else Percy would surely never have submitted to many hours of discomfort in order to play out the jest. The merry-eyed girl lingered behind to state, forcefully, her opinion.

"Mr. Holmes, I think you are a beast! If you are such an idiot as your silly words seem to indicate, you should at least have decency enough to refrain from uttering such nonsense at a time like this!"

She flirted out, and a slow, deep smile overspread Holmes' lean face as she disappeared. The captain, on deck, turned away to face a stammering, pop-eyed steward at his elbow.

"Mr. Anstruther, sir! He's down--"

"S-sh!" the skipper warned the man sharply. "Keep your mouth shut, steward. This is all right. Don't say a word."

"B-but, sir, he looks--"

"I tell you it's all right. It's a game he's playing. Keep quiet, I tell you."

Watson was having a similarly difficult time persuading his fellow guests to let the joke go on a little longer. They were, to a man and girl, for seeking out Percy and telling him it was useless to remain in hiding any longer.

"Why, Watson, it's too darned silly to be funny," cried the red-headed one. "It's simply idiotic to let old Percy sweat himself sick down in some dark hold just to draw this faker Holmes. I never heard such rubbish, even from half-witted kids."

"Don't spoil it," Watson advised quietly. "I know Holmes rather better than you, and I tell you he's only trying to scare you off while he makes out a case. If you leave him alone, say until we get to port, he'll have something amusing to tell you, even if it is all wrong. At any rate it will be a logical sequence of points comparing perfectly with all the clues."

"But how about poor old Percy?"

"I'll see him myself. He'll be agreeable, I know, since he arranged the joke himself. I'll take him down some wine and see what else he wants."

"Oh, then you know where he's hiding? He didn't tell us."

"I know, yes. Just keep quiet and watch awhile. You'll have something truly interesting to talk about soon, I promise you."

The yacht ran into harbor before noon, and as she steamed up the sail-dotted bay Holmes came on deck in town clothes. Every eye fastened on him, and smiles were carefully concealed.

"I am going on shore to bring the police, gentlemen," he stated sharply. "There is little time, but still time enough, for the culprit to reveal himself."

He turned away and stood at the rail. Behind him muffled giggles and chuckles broke out, and the merry-eyed girl chirped recklessly, "Oh yes, let him go! It'll be bully sport seeing the real police tear his silly old theories to rags."

Holmes seemed to notice nothing that was said, but presently the steward appeared absolutely dripping with the perspiration of fear, and in a moment all was changed from farce to earnest.

"Captain!" the man yelled to the bridge, "I've found Mr. Anstruther, and he's hurt! He ain't fooling, no, sir! He's been tied--"

Watson stepped forward, laid a hand on Holmes' arm coolly, and jabbed a pistol muzzle into his ribs. He faced the group with a smile.

"The steward is right, gentlemen. You thought to play a joke, but Long Holmes here turned it into a real

game. That is, he almost succeeded. But I have been keeping tabs on him for a long time, and I've got him now with the goods. Yes, I'm a detective. You might see after Mr. Anstruther. I shall come back and report to him as soon as I've placed my prisoner in safety."

Holmes twisted his neck and glared down at Watson with murderous eyes; but the smaller man kept his pistol pressed to the other's side until the yacht docked, then put it into his pocket, warned his prisoner, and marched him ashore and into a taxicab.

Percy was brought up from the darksome depths of the storerooms, blinking and furious, but more than a little frightened. He shook a fat, abrased fist after the disappearing taxicab when the captain told him who was in it, and launched into a feverish recital of his adventures.

"By the Great Horn Spoon!" he gabbled, reddening up like a turkey's wattles. "That chap's smart, but he ain't a patch on the quiet Watson. There's a sleuth for you! Followed his man, he has, for months, I'll go bail; why, I'll bet he made his acquaintance at Ocean View just to keep right after him until he pulled something.

"And nobody suspected him all the while Sherlock was turning our little game into a damn nasty reality. I knew something was wrong--kind o' felt it, y'know--but it was too late to do anything when the suspicion grew to certainty. I was hobbled then.

"Oh, I give it to Holmes, fellows, he fooled me nicely! I came into my stateroom as we arranged, scattered those fool clues about, and was just ready to gather up the loot and blow off the gun out of the porthole, when in comes Sherlock like a ghost, slams me up against the wall and busts my nose, wraps me up in my own bathrobe and ties it with the cord, and carries me down below. Then he passed up again, and I heard the pistol go off, and there I've lain ever since until just now."

"By George! It was a clever bit of trickery," exclaimed a wide-eared listener. "Lucky it failed, eh?"

"Yes, thanks to Watson. I knew that chap was the real thing," vowed Percy, dabbing tenderly at his swollen nose. "You got to hand it to him, though he didn't deceive me for a minute. He had just the look of a real, clever crime-hound. I'll do something handsome for him when he comes on board."

None of the party wanted to go ashore until Watson had returned. They lounged under the awnings, sipping long cool drinks and chatting over the affair. About half an hour after Watson had taken his captive ashore, a wide-winged flying boat flew overhead close down, circled once or twice as if inspecting the fine yacht, then flew swiftly seaward in the general direction of a long line of islands belonging to many different nations, lying far down over the horizon. Flying boats have ceased to be objects of intense curiosity, and nobody took more than a fleeting interest in the low-flying machine, until it had almost speeded out of sight in the sea haze and the radio man suddenly appeared in obvious excitement and handed Percy a message. Percy read it idly, re-read it with staring eyes, dropped it on deck and sprang to the rail, gaping into the blue sky for that vanished speck which was the flying machine. The merry-eyed girl picked up the message, smoothed it out, and with a hesitating glance at the stupefied Percy read it aloud to the shocked company.

"Thank you, Percy," it said. "We've had a lovely time, and bear you no malice for your friends' ridicule of our methods. We'll write you from Mars, or Venus, or some place. Ta-ta, old boy. Sherlock and the Doctor."

Faces gaped into faces in utter amazement, then all turned to Percy. But Percy was already taking the companionway stairs six steps at a time, bound for his ravaged stateroom from which a treasure in gems and cash had all too surely vanished.

TO ONE WHO GOES ABROAD

Guarded through enormous space

By the unseen Captain's eye,

Where gigantic shoals of suns

Fill the night with majesty,

Stars on every side awash,

Earth's our ship that travels far,

Plunging to the ports of God

Swifter than a falling star.

Go, then, if you will, and find

Other countries, other friends;

We've a common voyage sti

Down a way that never ends!

--Barry Kemp

THE MAKE-WEIGHT
by HAROLD LAMB

ARTHUR KENT breathed a sigh of relief as the last trick of the last hand was turned. He had been lucky. Indeed lucky, if neither of the other two players at the green-covered table in the billiard room of the officers' club had seen him cheat that last hand.

Checking up the score, Kent held it out for the others to see. His dark eyes were half closed, his full, handsome face impassive. The moisture around his eyes came only from the early evening heat that enveloped Rawal Pindi, in Upper India.

"'Fraid I'm winner, gentlemen. Sorry Captain Gerald has had enough."

The third man, a nervous subaltern, tried to smile as he wrote out an I.O.U. for seventy pounds. With a nod Kent folded the sheet of paper on the table and fell to shuffling the cards together until the subaltern had left the room.

Into the pack of cards he deftly slipped the three discards that he had secreted. He smiled, for now there would be no proving that he had cheated. Luck usually ran his way. His was a clever mind and quick to seize advantage--consequently he had made a name as political agent. True, two years ago when native under-officials had complained of extortion, Kent had been transferred from a Bengal province to the small frontier post of Dalgai, near Rawal Pindi. But here he had married a first-rate American girl with a little money.

"Well?" he observed.

Captain Fred Gerald, surgeon, attached to the cavalry regiment at Dalgai--called Daktar Sahib by the natives to whom he sometimes administered aid--took a five-pound bank-note from the breast pocket of his tunic and thrust it across the table. "I'm riding up into the gorges to attend a patient." His gray eyes hardened swiftly. "Wouldn't you better return that--paper to the young cub, and explain that a mistake was made in the score?"

"Eh?" Kent flushed as he grasped the other's meaning. "Kindly explain what the devil you're getting at?"

The Daktar Sahib counted off on his fingers "Three cards. You palmed them, you know."

A curious smile played under Kent's mustache. So he had been seen! And by the one man in the world who did not want to denounce him publicly as a card cheat. His luck was still good. He called to the one house boy who lingered near the window lattice by the table and sent him to fetch Gerald's stick and pith helmet.

When the two were alone Kent pocketed the promissory note.

"What do you propose to do about it, my dear fellow," he asked, a strained note in his full voice, "make a fuss or keep quiet?"

Gerald took his hat and stick from the boy who had returned, dismissed the native and rose. His alert, tanned face was emotionless. No one in the border station or Rawal Pindi guessed, for instance, that the surgeon worshipped the girl who had married Kent a year ago.

He paid her no marked attention, avoided meeting her in fact. The only one who suspected his feeling for Ethel Kent was the man who sat by the table before him--the man, in fact, whom he had just seen cheating.

No one better than the Daktar Sahib knew the rigid code of ethics that bound the men of the army stations of India. To denounce Kent would inevitably make misery for Ethel Kent.

The luck of the political agent still held good, you see. When Gerald started to speak, shrugged and turned away, Kent sprang up, his smile hardening. To the shifting mind of Kent it was whispered that the man who would avoid open quarrel with the husband must have an understanding with the wife.

For a long moment gray eyes clashed with black; the cold anger of the surgeon and the gnawing fury of the political agent were on the verge of being unleashed. The heat that day had been wearing. "I shall say nothing about the cards--now--Kent," the surgeon observed evenly, "for your wife's sake. I warn you, though. The hill natives have an apt proverb. They say that one who digs a pit for others will find that he has made his own grave."

Glad that the tension was broken, Kent pocketed the cards, veiling the suspicion that flamed in his eyes at mention of his wife. "You forget, my Daktar Sahib," he pointed out ironically, "the little thing called proof. Whatever your chums the hill beggars say, proof is required by the white man's law when you accuse a man. I have not forgotten that."

Gerald's deep eyes studied curiously the man who could make his way conqueringly in the world without thought of the rights of others. It did not occur to the straightforward mind of the surgeon that Kent's words were aimed at him. Because it was impossible for Gerald to conceive that any man could think evil of Ethel Kent.

"True," he nodded. "There is, however, one court that requires no proof of evil before administering justice. And that is Providence, or the judgment of God."

This chimed with Kent's inner thoughts. "Yes, may Providence or God or the devil judge between us, Captain Gerald. And may the officer of justice be whatever tool is handiest!"

Now, by one of those minute coincidences that link together the chain of life, both men started and stepped back, although they had heard no sound--were, in fact, alone in the billiard room.

Intent on each other they noticed only vaguely what seemed to be the dart of a snake out from the lattice of the open window upon the bare green table between them.

But it was not a snake. It flashed back through the lattice, leaving behind it, however, a folded square of torn, yellow paper.

On the upper side of the paper, traced in a curious, curving hand, was the name: "Kent Sahib."

THE blooming, thievin' beggar had the chit in the cleft of a stick. Pushed it in through the lattice-work, pulled back his stick and slipped down the veranda post, out into the bush before I had a fair look at him."

So said Kent, irritably, as he returned from his sally out on the upper veranda of the club. Twilight, aided by a mist of rain, had enabled the fugitive messenger to penetrate the Rawal Pindi compound unnoticed.

As the political agent deciphered the flowing Turki script on the paper, an oath came from his bearded lips.

"A dinner invitation, and a pressing one, for tonight. Also, from the worst murderer in the Hindu Kush." He jerked his thumb up over his shoulder at the lattice, behind which the curtain of rain concealed the outline of the giant foothills of the Himalayas.

Sparing of speech or motion--a trick of all old service men--Gerald took the missive up from the table where Kent had tossed it contemptuously and painstakingly read it through.

"The Kadi, Kent-Sahib, will come to the home of his unworthy servant, Jehan Khan. He will come tonight. He will be afoot, without his police. Inshallah."

"Sheer insolence," growled Kent. "Inshallah--by the will of God. I'll stay in Pindi, thank you. The Pathan, Jehan Khan, calls himself the descendant of kings, and has a nest somewhere up in the gorges that my men can't find. I might have marked it down once, but a hill native ran full into my horse at a bend of the kud--the precipice path."

The political agent was not lacking in courage. When the native had accosted him, Kent had struck the fellow with his riding crop. The blow, falling on the man's head, had knocked him down. "End over end, about a thousand feet or so," Kent was fond of saying.

He remembered it clearly, because there had been something peculiar about the eyes of the hill native. Kent did not know what it was, but from time to time he found himself thinking about those eyes--

"I am going there tonight," observed Gerald. "Fact is, I got the mate to this chit two hours ago. Only it said a woman needed my care."

"Then it's a trick! No Moslem would let you look at the face of one of his wives, let alone touch her. You don't really mean to go? You'll have a knife in your back if you do."

"Better to chance that than have a musket ball, long range, in my head if I don't. Jehan Khan invariably pays off a grudge. You see, I treated a wound of his once and said I'd do as much again." Gerald spoke lightly, while he puzzled over the duplicate messages received by himself and Kent. It seemed to be nothing more than a bit of effrontery; but long experience had taught the surgeon that nothing the Pathans did was without a distinct purpose. "Has Jehan Khan any score against you, Kent?"

The other shrugged and shook his head. Gerald's lips tightened at a sudden thought. "Has the Pathan ever threatened your wife?"

Again the hard smile came to the lips of Kent. "Ethel pretends to like the rascals that you dote on. She rides alone in the upper gorges, in spite of my warning--"

The smouldering light of suspicion was in his eyes as he watched Gerald stride away and heard him call quickly for his horse. When the Daktar Sahib rode out the compound toward Dalgai, Kent overtook him.

"Think I'll go with you," the political agent grunted, "as far as Dalgai."

"That would be best."

THEY pelted through the mud, heedless of the rain, and at the Kent bungalow in the cantonment, Gerald's sudden fear was realized. His few visits to the bungalow veranda were treasured up in memory, but this one was to endure in his thoughts so long as he lived. Ethel Kent had disappeared.

She had gone for her usual evening ride, the frightened native butler said. The mem-sahib had refused to take her groom. A half hour ago the police riders, sent out to seek her, had returned with the mem-sahib's horse, found lame by the ravine of the Panjkora River.

The Panjkora, Gerald knew, was one of Ethel's favorite haunts. He had met her there once and warned her it opened into the brigand's preserves.

The river? He knew Ethel was unhappy in her marriage with Kent. But she would not--

"Jehan Khan has carried her off," he said to Kent, who was staring at him blankly.

"The thieving dog! By God, he'll know a thing or two when I've finished with him. I'll take a company of my men, surround his eyrie--"

"Won't do, you know, Kent. You couldn't find it without guides; the Pathans would snipe off your fellows, and, don't you see, man, Jehan Khan holds your wife hostage?" Gerald unbuckled his belt, wrapped it around his revolver and holster and handed it to the trembling butler. "I fancy I'll have to accept Jehan Khan's invitation, on his own terms."

Kent started. He had forgotten the note.

"He said," Gerald summed up, "to come alone and on foot. We'll ride our horses as far as the Panjkora trail and send 'em back by one of your men. That is, if you are coming." He looked at the other squarely. "If you and Jehan Khan have any score to settle between you it would be better for me to go alone--"

A low laugh in the darkness answered him. Nor did Kent see fit to discard his revolver as he spurred forward.

At the cantonment entrance a shadow rose from the roadside and began to trot beside the two horses. The shadow was that of a tall Pathan in dripping finery, a long *jezail* over his shoulder. This did not surprise Gerald.

The Daktar Sahib was meditating on the strange turn of events. An hour since, secure among the police troopers of Rawal Pindi, an influential political officer had laughed at a Pathan's *chit*.

Now this same officer was hastening--in a gnawing rage and armed, but nevertheless hastening--to obey the summons of the Pathan.

JEHAN KHAN'S name signified the Lord of the World. A pretentious title, considering that Jehan Khan's domain consisted of as much hillside as he had been able to wrest from the -neighboring tribes who were his foes--and the Tower.

That was the secret of Jehan Khan's power. Jehan Khan had won it in a hand-to-hand scrimmage with another chief who had been tumbled headlong to his death in the Panjkora. The Tower was ideally situated for an execution, and was inaccessible except to his own men, impregnable, and invisible.

You see, Jehan Khan was a philosopher. In the small Koran that hung from his bull neck he had written two prayers--that he would never miss his aim, and that he would never allow a wrong to go unpunished.

Gerald, who had met the Pathan chief, considered that the Lord of the World had two redeeming traits. He reverenced his aged father; he kept his word. He was of course a most gifted liar, but when he made a promise he kept it. Witness, the coming of Arthur Kent to the Tower.

WHEN the shadow of the Panjkora gorge closed in on them their Pathan guides made known that the two sahibs must dismount and send back their two horses.

Kent demurred, but Gerald dismounted and set the example of cutting his mount with a blow of the riding-crop. When the horses had disappeared, galloping homeward, the Pathans produced from somewhere two shaggy, miniature ponies and the white men mounted and carried on.

"You would better," suggested Gerald, who had been pondering the episode of the ponies versus their

own mounts--nothing that a Pathan did would be without good reason--"rid yourself of that revolver. It might make more trouble for us."

"Not much," growled the burly political agent. "I may use it, and if I do it would be trouble for Jehan Khan, not for us."

Gerald said no more. He wished mildly to point out that the Pathan held Ethel Kent, beyond a doubt, and that the safety of Ethel Kent must be gained by mutual terms, not by weapon-play. And the safety of the woman was the one thing that mattered.

For this reason Gerald had discarded his own revolver. But Kent had a perfect right to keep his side-arms.

The political agent had the knack of shooting from the hip. He could, in this fashion, perhaps shoot more quickly than could Jehan Khan. But not more accurately.

Their ponies were threading up along a cliff path as broad as the extended arms of a man at the widest point. Afoot, or on plains-bred horse-flesh, they might slip on the damp stones and fall a thousand feet or so into the Panjkora in flood.

It was useless, Gerald found, to try to piece out the turns and twists of the way. The rain had ceased, but the cloud banks shrouded the moon, and the brisk wind that whipped at them seemed to come from every quarter of the compass.

They ascended, in time, beyond the timber line. The clouds enveloped them as their horses edged over a crescent-shaped rock bridge that gave the illusion of swaying above a limitless abyss. A stone was detached from the bridge and Gerald listened for its impact below in vain.

Gerald remembered that he had seen Ethel Kent once in the lower valley--a trim figure, hatless, her gray eyes intent on the hills that rose over the ravine like the buttresses of heaven itself. A flush under her eyes had told Gerald that she had been crying. He would have given an arm to have spared her that.

This love he had guarded rigorously from Ethel's eyes and the eyes of the world. She was another man's wife.

He wondered why she had come back to the spot. They had exchanged only a few words. She had smiled, wistfully as a child.

Here Gerald struck viciously at his boot and his horse shivered.

"Sahib," growled a voice, "for the love of God, take care. Not a year ago a man fell to his death from here, a holy man."

As the voice of the Pathan reached him there was a glimmer of veiled lightning and Gerald caught a glimpse of a *mazar*, a nativi shrine, close to the path on the near side. It was nothing but a heap of rocks ornamented with rags stuck on sticks planted in the rocks. On an outcropping of rock it overlooked the path, where, on the off-side, was a sheer drop.

Gerald saw, at the same time, the dark face of Kent peering at him. Then they passed around a bend in the cliff and halted. Gerald wondered whether his horse had been startled by the blow of the whip or whether there was an aspect of the supernatural about the spot.

He wondered, because he himself had had a distinct prescience of death at that moment, and Gerald's imagination was not usually sensitive to such impressions.

On foot again, they were led up a stony incline, passed by a sentry who challenged them in the darkness, and lifted to the shoulders of their guides. Ascending through what seemed to be a dense tamarisk thicket, they were hoisted into the aperture of a black structure that loomed abruptly out of the clouds.

"Long life to my guests!" said the Lord of the World, and he laughed as he said it. "Hast thou no fear?"

A torch revealed him to Gerald, a man broad of girth, his shoulders too big for his soiled coat. Yet the face under the gray turban was lean and hawk-like, and the fine, dark eyes were eloquent and unreadable as an animal's eyes.

What Kent noticed especially was the bandolier of cartridges over the bandit's shoulder, the heavy revolver in his belt.

"Where is thy father?" he responded in fluent Turki, scanning the array of bearded faces that clustered in the shadows of the castle hall behind the Lord of the World, "And where is the *memsahib*, my wife?"

Although the Pathan still smiled, his thin nostrils quivered.

"My venerable father," he explained, "is dead of the bite of a mad dog. The woman is here!" He motioned the two toward a room opening into the stone-flagged hall. "The *meiman khanwn*, my guest room."

It was a place that Jehan Khan had, or fancied he had, fitted up in the manner of Europeans. Three-legged chairs stood about in the most inconvenient places imaginable; a photograph of Colonel Younghusband, a bullet hole marking one eye, hung against the cheap print paper.

From the sofa under the portrait Ethel Kent rose, and her beauty was like a flower in the hideousness of the room.

"Captain Gerald!" she cried. She was tucking a strand of the bronze hair into place, and she smiled at the two men. Ethel must have expected her husband's coming, and the arrival of the Daktar Sahib surprised her.

He had noticed that she limped, and he kneeled to touch the stockinged ankle from which the riding boot had been removed.

"Not a bad sprain," she answered his unspoken question. "I merely wrenched my ankle when my horse threw me; I was riding near the mouth of the Panjkora ravine. But I could not walk and Jimmy, my horse, was lame too, poor fellow. The Pathans rode up then and made me come up here on one of their ponies."

"Didn't you offer them money to bring you back to our lines?" Kent demanded.

"They wouldn't. I can only speak a few words of Hindustani, and when I said that you would be angry and the policemen would punish them they only laughed."

Gerald, who had assured himself that the woman's hurt was no more serious than she had stated, turned in time to check the outburst that Kent was ready to launch upon their host. The taciturn Daktar Sahib had been thinking.

The messages from Jehan Khan had reached the club at Rawal Pindi in less than two hours after the seizure of Mrs. Kent. It was not accident that had brought the Pathan and his men on the scene. They must have been watching from one of the lookouts on the mountain slopes. Jehan Khan had prepared the messages before he had shown himself to Ethel Kent.

"Is this thy hospitality?" he rated the Pathan soundly. "A cold room for thy guests and no food offered?"

Jehan Khan seemed abashed. Under his directions a supper of cold mutton and *chuppaties* was brought, and a smoking blaze ignited in the brazier by the sofa. This done, Gerald asked him to order his followers from the room.

"Wilt thou share with us, Jehan Khan," he inquired, "the *chota hazri*?" (the little breakfast).

With a glance at Kent, the Pathan shook his head, his fingers playing with the thick mesh of his beard the while.

"Nay, my Daktar Sahib, the honor is too great."

At this Kent scowled and burst into long pent-up speech. "Dog and thief, dare ye hold the *memsahib* captive? Release us at once, and provide horses. Then come to the *Sirkar* to beg forgiveness for thy crimes, or thou wilt be thrown from the Tower to the vultures."

The Pathan's face darkened at the insult. It is not well to call a Moslem of rank a dog. His smile vanished in a trice and his eyes became hot coals. "I dare, *Sahib!"* Then he made a gesture as if putting aside an unpleasant thought. "Are any crimes written under my name in the book of the *Sirkar*? Nay. As for the *memsahib*, I knew not her speech and did but carry her to shelter for the night. Is that a crime?"

"Thou liest. The message written by thee proves it." Kent's anger beat impotently against the iron restraint of the native. "Thou hast a price; name it."

Jehan Khan smiled again. "A price for what?"

"My--our release."

"Has anyone said that thou and the other sahib and thy wife are not free to go?"

Kent was nonplussed. He had believed that the Pathan was holding Ethel for a heavy ransom, and had sent to Gerald and himself to arrange terms. He had come, with Gerald, because of the suspicions taking shape in his mind against the other.

"Thy message--" he repeated.

"It was to summon thee, Kent Sahib. Is the woman not thy wife? For whom should I have sent?" Jehan Khan enjoyed to the full the bewilderment of the massive white man. "Yet, since thou hast said it, I will take a small price for my pains as a make-weight." On the last word he hesitated briefly.

"Ah."

"A very small price: two thousand rupees."

"How much?" The exclamation broke from Gerald, who was frankly astonished. Two thousand rupees was barely the price of three reasonably good polo ponies.

"As I have said, rupees, two thousand. It will be a make-weight."

Jehan Khan repeated his words, and assented to Kent's swiftly framed conditions. The three visitors--as he insisted on calling them--were to be allowed to depart from the castle the next day; horses were to be provided; they were not to be followed.

"Good!" Kent closed the bargain, and felt in his pockets. He and Gerald had both come without such a

sum on their persons. "I will give thee a signed note for the money." His bluster returned, under assurance that Jehan Khan would not dare molest them. "Well for thee, Pathan, that thou dost obey me. Otherwise, this." He tapped the butt of his revolver.

Long and curiously the Lord of the World looked at the white man and his weapon, as if trying to read the thoughts of a child. His black eyes under heavy brows were wolfish. Clapping his hands loudly he summoned a native and ordered writing materials brought.

When the brief promissory note was written he checked Kent when the latter was about to sign.

"The Daktar Sahib," he explained softly, "will write his name alone. Thus and not otherwise will I know the *chit* will be honored."

This was his way of returning Kent's compliment of a moment ago. A Pathan never lets an insult pass unanswered. Tucking the paper into his girdle he bowed and retired.

"His price was cheap enough," grunted Kent, who had flushed. There were certain gambling debts for which he had signed notes at the club--notes still unhonored. "Why did you ask that scoundrel to breakfast with us?"

Receiving no answer Kent sat down and attacked the mutton cutlets vigorously. He flattered himself he had handled the situation well. To tell the truth he was rather relieved. There had been something spooky about their trip to the tower hidden among the clouds, and Jehan Khan's eyes ... Had he seen those eyes before? Well, the beggar knew his place now.

"Is there danger?" Ethel broke the silence in which she had been studying Gerald's grave face.

"We're quite all right," snapped her husband. "You'll keep your infernal rides within our lines, I expect, after this." It was her fault, he considered, that he would have to pay Gerald the hundred and thirty pounds when they reached Dalgai. And Ethel had had no money for some time. "What's the matter, Gerald? You look like the skeleton at the feast I mentioned at the club. Haven't you an appetite?"

"No, thanks." Gerald nodded reassuringly to Ethel. "Now, you must sleep. I'll chat a while with the Pathan."

He was thinking that, according to the Pathan code, if Jehan Khan had shared bread and salt with them, they would have been safe in his hands. But Jehan Khan had refused. Gerald knew that danger threatened one of them.

SOMEWHERE a wind sprang up in the precipices of the Hindu Kush. The snow peaks changed from black to gray to blood color.

The wind added its whisper to the mutter of the Panjkora. A great bird, hovering against the blue of the morning sky, seemed to be trying to peer down into the blackness of the Panjkora ravine.

A slender girl in a tattered shawl rode an ox from the huts of the village to the spring. Dogs barked.

Heedless of the cold of dawn, the Lord of the World sat cross-legged on the summit of his tower, caressing the stem of a hubble-bubble pipe. Gerald, also, paid no attention to the chill wind, save to thrust his hands instinctively into the pocket of his drill coat. He was noticing how, over the rocky eminence on which a native stood sentry, the shrine beside the trail was taking shape. It had not occurred to him before that the shrine could be seen from the tower-top, which was all but invisible from the trail.

Patiently he had been working to make the Pathan talk. His last speech had accomplished his purpose,

which was to plumb the depths of hatred in the other's soul. "Thou dost not make war upon a woman, Jehan Khan," he had said. "Yet thou didst watch for her coming to the gorge."

A direct question, he knew, would have been answered only by silence or an elusive lie. The Lord of the World puffed at the bubbling water-pipe and did not look up. "True," he acknowledged finally. "For a year have I watched the comings of the *memsahib*, the time when I could bear her here. As thou hast said, she will suffer no hurt."

So, Ethel was not the one. Gerald stifled a sigh of relief and waited. Silence, the patience of the white man, wrought upon Jehan Khan to give voice to the thoughts that had preyed upon him for a year.

"Hear, then, this tale, my sahib. Thou knowest I had a father who was the morsel of my life and a piece of my liver. Until misfortune came upon him and he was afflicted--aye, he was the drop of water that came to me from the river of God's mercy." Jehan Khan's handsome face was reflective, even gentle. And Gerald knew that he was telling the truth.

"When he was afflicted, my father prayed often at the shrine below," pointing to the heap of stones and the rags that lifted in the wind. "One day, for he knew well the way, he walked there alone with his staff. A rider, sahib, was coming up the trail and when my father did not run back the man struck him. An evil blow. It was only with the whip--a heavy whip--yet it caused him who was the life of my eyes to fall, and my father fell--outward."

The Pathan waved his hand over the ravine. "My father was blind. For two years he had not been able to see the way before his feet."

Gerald bit his lip, and waited. "Sahib, my father could not see to get out of the way of the horse. And the rider of the horse was Kent Sahib."

No longer did Jehan Khan blow on the ashes of the hubble-bubble. His eyes were like embers blown into life by a passing gust of wind. Gerald walked to the rampart of the tower. He was thinking of the Moslem law, a life for a life.

When Kent had knocked the native over the cliff, he had taken care to wheel his horse and ride back quickly to the cantonment. He had not noticed that the tower overlooked the site of the shrine. So he had not seen that he was observed, and he could not have known that the native was Jehan Khan's father. In fact Kent had painted the episode, in his version at the club, in colors that made it seem a brave piece of work on his part.

No matter. The death of the old hillman lay at Kent's door. Jehan Khan had taken up the pursuit of blood. Not all the gold in India would pay for the wrong. Probably Kent had not known that the old Pathan was blind. No matter.

The debt must be paid, and not with money. Jehan Khan would exact a life as payment. Gerald had no longer any doubt on whom the vengeance would fall.

"So," he said swiftly, "thou wouldst slay the sahib, when you have taken his money for his release?"

The shadow of a smile passed over the bearded lips of the Pathan.

"Did I say that? Nay, Kent Sahib is free to ride hence."

Gerald glanced over the plateau behind the tower, where a cluster of huts, fronting the pasture that nestled against a sheer wall of rock rising overhead a thousand feet or so. There was no way out of the domain of Jehan Khan except by the shrine and the trail up which they had come. This was guarded.

Even if they could overcome or steal by the guards they could not hope to escape, with Ethel lame. And they had no horses. Gerald perceived at once that flight was useless.

He reflected that Jehan Khan had not promised that Kent would reach the border alive. The Pathan's acceptance of the money might mean anything--dulling Kent's suspicions, for one. And his tale of a moment ago merely signified that he was so sure of his vengeance that he could afford to make known to the two white men the cause of it.

The vengeance would be all the sweeter, Gerald knew, if Kent was aware of its coming. No bribe could alter the Pathan's purpose. The political agent was doomed as surely as if a Christian court had sentenced him to be hanged.

And Ethel? Gerald went hot, then cold. Alone, the two men might have made a fight of it. Now that was impossible. If she and her husband were to be saved it must be done another way.

"Let the woman and Kent Sahib go unharmed," offered Gerald, "and let thy vengeance be upon me. I will remain. I am the friend of the man. Thou art a bazaar-bom thief and a murderer."

Jehan Khan laughed deep in his throat. "A brave man thou, but a fool. The beauty of the woman holds thee--not I. I have seen it."

"Then," cried the Daktar Sahib, "why didst thou summon me here?"

A direct question, that, and useless.

"Perhaps, Sahib, to witness what is to come to pass this day."

"And that?"

From below the tower came the low voices of men at prayer. Gerald heard the *Allah-Akbar* chant that is the dawn prayer of the Moslems.

"God is great," echoed Jehan Khan sententiously and that was all he would say. Gerald went to the door of the guest room.

Ethel came to the door and closed it behind her. She had heard his step.

"My husband is asleep," she said. "But I could not sleep. What did Jehan Khan say?"

Instinct told her that Gerald was not assured of their safety. He put aside her question by leading her to an embrasure in the tower wall overlooking the gorge. Sunlight flooded in on her, and the rarefied air brought a flush to her cheeks. The never-ceasing wind whipped strands of brown hair about her forehead.

"Oh!" she cried, her eyes resting on the splendor of crimson and blue. Their hands touched and Gerald's fingers closed on hers. She looked up at him swiftly.

Gerald's boyish face was alight, its mask of gravity gone. His eyes clung to hers, saw her cheeks whiten, and read the love that Ethel had hidden from him.

He could feel the pulse in her fingers that answered his own. He checked the whispered words that sprang to his lips and looked away. She must have known that he loved her. She did not withdraw her fingers.

Gerald had only to keep silence, do nothing, say nothing to Kent and the man would be slain, without a

breath of blame to him. But that could not be.

Kent, unable to save himself, must be saved by Gerald. The Daktar Sahib had already decided that, and how it was to be done. He would have to risk his life in the other's stead. A life for a life, was the Moslems' toll.

But the knowledge that Ethel cared for him quickened every fibre in him, and the Tower became a paradise, soon to be lost, but a paradise of the gods.

"YOU see, the beggar could pot you on the return journey from a dozen places. He might even wait until we're out of the gorge, where he has an outlook over the spot where Ethel's horse fell lame, you know. Evidently he counts on me as a kind of witness on his behalf that no harm came to you at the Tower. And the business of the money payment as a make-weight was to provide evidence that he didn't intend to murder you. You see the crafty old chap even had me sign the *chit*, so that he could collect payment afterward."

They were seated on a tangle of rocks and thorn bushes, overlooking the pasture where Jehan Khan's followers were selecting horses for their departure. Gerald was finishing a cigarette with relish, but Kent's cigar was cold in his fingers.

The bluster had gone from the political agent. Although it was fairly cold in the garden of the Tower, his face and hands were damp with sweat. Gerald's account of what the Pathan had told had shattered Kent's optimism.

He knew what it meant when a Pathan took up the pursuit of blood. Jehan Khan was squatted a score of paces away, apparently oblivious of them but actually intent on the fear that had transfigured Kent's face.

The hand of the political agent stole toward his revolver and then dropped to his side. From the corner of his eye he had seen a rifle muzzle raised from behind a boulder.

There would never be a chance to draw his weapon. Gerald had noticed his action.

"It won't do," he pointed out, "on Ethel's account. You'll take care of her--eh--after you and she get free?"

It was as much of an appeal as he could bring himself to make to Kent. The man at his side nodded. Ethel was then looking at the ponies. He could hear her singing, under her breath, actually singing. Of course Gerald had said nothing to her about the danger, but it annoyed Kent that she seemed so light-hearted.

Why, even then, the confounded Pathan was plotting his death. He did not see why Gerald had deliberately delayed their departure until late afternoon, almost evening. True, the other had explained that darkness would cover their flight. But--the delay was torment. Neither of them could guess what form Jehan Khan's vengeance was to take.

The natives, too, had gathered on rising ground overlooking the trail down which they must ride. They were sitting in the rear of the Tower, where a steep grassy slope led down from the pasture to the Panjkora path at the edge of the cliff, the path that disappeared around the bend behind which was the shrine.

"They're coming to look at me. What is the devil thinking of?" he cried.

"We can't tell." Gerald shook his head. "We'll act first."

The cigar dropped from Kent's quivering fingers. He had seen for the first time the eyes of Jehan Khan, stripped of the mask of good-humor, and they were like the blind eyes of the old Pathan he had killed.

And with that glance Kent's nerve forsook him. There was no outward sign of this, except an involuntary quivering of the lips, and the silence that held him.

But Jehan Khan, who missed nothing, saw Kent's eyes wander uncontrollably over the hillside and the precipice seeking vainly some way of escape from the hidden menace that would threaten him before nightfall. It was already the hour of sunset.

"Time," observed Gerald, tossing away the cigarette. Edith was safely mounted on a pony. "Remember, Kent, when I make a move, ride for it. Take Ethel's rein and be sure that she goes around the turn ahead of you, because there will be no passing each other on the trail and you have the revolver. The sentries on the rocks have come down into the crowd."

He rose, drawing the other man with him, and moved toward Jehan Khan.

"Once around the bend," his whisper continued, "you'll be safe."

But Kent's stare was glassy. In his mind he could see the face of the old man who had fallen from the cliff.

He moved mechanically to the horses, and with a sudden, jerky motion, took the rein of a docile pony that Jehan Khan himself brought forward. The Pathan's followers stood aloof on the hillside, well back from the slope that led down to the trail at the cliff's edge.

"Looks like a cricket match, eh?" Gerald observed to Ethel who was watching him with strained interest, a frown on her smooth brow. "Or rather, I should say, the crowd at a Derby--"

He had drawn near to Jehan Khan, when Kent, without warning, made his spring into the saddle of the waiting pony. The political agent clapped heels to the flanks of the startled animal. Jerking its head around, the man urged it into an uneven trot down the slope away from them.

Kent had given way to panic.

But Gerald, at the instant the other acted, proceeded to carry out his part of the plan they had agreed upon. A quick thrust of his foot sent the rifle upon which Jehan Khan had been leaning out of reach. Gerald's left arm passed between the Pathan's elbow and body.

Jehan Khan was held firmly, his back to Gerald. And the right hand of the Daktar Sahib plucked the revolver from the other's girdle, thrusting its muzzle under the Pathan's shoulder-blade over the heart.

"Stand where you are," Gerald cried in Turki, at the staring natives, "and do not lift a weapon, or Jehan Khan dies." Over his shoulder he added in English, "Ride for it, Kent. Let Ethel--For God's sake, Ethel, *ride!"*

For the first time he perceived that the other had fled without thought of the woman. And that Ethel had not moved. He could hear the hoof-beat of Kent's horse receding down the slope.

"Do not move," he said grimly to Jehan Khan, and to Ethel, "The way is clear, now. I'll hold the Pathan hostage for a while, you know. Follow your husband."

Ethel, however, did not stir. It was not that she was bewildered or afraid. She was an expert horsewoman, and the way, as Gerald said, was open for a space. The Pathans, taken by surprise and

temporarily leaderless, would be some time in cutting off the retreat down the cliff trail.

They could not shoot Gerald; he was too close to their chief. If they came nearer, Jehan Khan would be shot. The Pathan, in fact, was strangely quiet as if listening for something he had not as yet heard.

"I'm going to stay right here," said Ethel suddenly, a little break in her voice.

Gerald groaned under his breath. He had taken pains not to have her know the danger that threatened Kent. It had never entered his thoughts that Kent would leave her, or that she would not obey orders to seek safety with her husband; that she would choose, instead, to share Gerald's fate.

He had not taken into account the heart of the woman.

And then they both were voiceless. A scream had cut into the silence of the ravine, a scream that came from the bend of the trail around which Kent had vanished alone.

Ethel put her hand to her throat to stifle a cry. They could no longer hear the hoofs of Kent's pony.

Twisting around, and drawing Jehan Kahn with him, Gerald strained his eyes on a patch of the path that was visible beyond the shrine. The shrine itself and the turn of the trail were hidden from view. Minutes passed, and Kent did not appear on the patch of the cliff path.

The twilight of the hills was deepening rapidly into night. Silence held the watchers by the Tower. Gerald knew at last that Kent would not appear again to them. The man had cried out when he was abreast of the shrine.

Had his horse been startled by something at the shrine? Had Kent's fear overmastered him? Had the spirit of the dead Pathan confronted horse and rider? Gerald's thoughts were wildly futile.

"Sahib," the voice of Jehan Khan came to him, "thou art a brave man, but a fool. The thing that I foretold has come to pass and now there is no danger for thee or the *mem-sahib*."

It was not his speech or the gathering darkness that made Gerald release him. Ethel Kent had swayed in the saddle in a faint. Gerald caught her as she was falling, and faced the Pathans with the drawn, revolver. But Jehan Khan continued passive as before.

DURING the hours of early night Gerald rode down to the cantonments, a mute, frightened woman clinging to the comfort of his arms. The Pathans guided him as far as the end of the gorge. He saw no trace of Kent.

When Ethel had been left at her bungalow in the care of the women of the station, Gerald changed to a fresh horse and collected a party of white men to return to the Panjkora. Kent, he learned, had not been seen in Dalgai.

Kent's body lay, as nearly as Gerald could determine, directly under the Tower and the shrine of Jehan Khan. Beside the body was the pony, crushed by the fall to the rocks.

The night was far spent, and Gerald was swaying on his horse from weariness when they found what they sought on the rocks at the bottom of the gorge by the edge of the mountain torrent.

"How did it happen?" Gerald was asked.

He shook his head, inspecting by the light of a lantern the two forms that bore no sign of a bullet or any injury other than the fall. Kent's face was set, ghastly. Gerald covered it with a blanket and gazed long at

the pony's head. He bent close to search the curiously pallid eyes of the beast that Jehan Khan had brought for Kent to ride.

He had seen such eyes in horses before. But this one was dead, and there was no proof of the thought that had come to him.

"The Pathan gave Kent this pony to ride," he said wearily, "this blind pony. It must have trotted over the cliff at the first turn."

Gerald knew that it had been murder, but when he pointed this out to the authorities at Rawal Pindi, they knew and he knew that there was no way of proving in the white man's court that it had not been an accident.

In fact, the Pathan tendered his note at Dalgai, and it was paid. The only thing that the white men could do, they did. When the note had been honored they informed Jehan Khan that his Tower would be taken from him.

The Lord of the World laughed, and a year later when, divested of his stronghold, he was wandering through the hills he was ambushed and shot down by his tribal foes.

But by then Gerald was on leave in America, to seek out the home of Ethel Kent who had returned to her own country, and who was waiting for his coming.

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ISLAND FEUD
by Hugh B. Cave

MATT Martinsen's *Witch* was long overdue at Teala Town. When she came at last, with her sails shining white in the South Pacific sunlight, the whole town held its breath.

Tom Trefflan, the shopkeeper, saw me standing on my hotel veranda and came across the road from his establishment, blowing as he climbed the steps. "This is it, John," he said. "The day of reckoning."

Phil Pawley, the Burns Philip agent, hurried up from his office on the pier. "We're about to see history made," he declared. "I can feel it under my ribs."

The three of us turned, as one, to look along the shore toward the house of Doc Harty.

You've never heard the story of Doc Harty's downfall, I expect. It's too big a world. With wars and such hogging the headlines, the little human tragedies go unnoticed. Doc was too young, anyway, to be important.

Full of ambition and the milk of kindness, he came out to the islands to study beriberi for some medical foundation, and stayed on to work with the natives. For headquarters he chose Fanuwin, a handsome island whose people were a dreary lot, haunted by sickness. They eked out a living, the Fanuwin natives, by growing copra and selling it to Matt Martinsen for a third of its worth.

Doc Harty got rid of the parasites crawling about inside Fanuwin's people and taught them how to stay healthy. A labor of love. During the two years it took him, Martinsen called every three months in the *Witch.* They came to know each other well.

Martinsen's daughter, Ruth, came to know Doc well, too.

She was nineteen, and you had a hard time believing she was the daughter of a hard-bitten trader such as Matt. He was a glum, grim man with quick fists and a ready oath; she a slim, pretty girl with a look of far places in her eye.

An odd business, but no odder than many in the islands. The girl's mother had died when Ruth was young, and the child was brought up by an aunt in Sydney until old enough to know her mind. Back she went to Matt then, to keep his books and help with the work.

But at Fanuwin she seldom stayed aboard ship while Matt did his trading. Up the hill she would go to Doc Harty's little hospital, to help Doc with his patients. She should have been a nurse, Doc told her.

There were some on Fanuwin who predicted a wedding. Martinsen, when asked about it, only grunted.

Then...

One day Martinsen took his ship into Fanuwin and found no copra sacks on the wharf. To all his questions, the natives simply wagged their heads and pointed to Doc's house on the hill. The trader, his face a thundercloud, stormed up there.

"What's going on?" he demanded.

Doc Harty poured whiskey into two glasses--a ritual when Martinsen called--raised his and grinned. "Matt, you'll have to mend your ways."

"What?"

"You've given these people a rotten deal for years. Now they know the facts of Life. Either you pay the going price for their copra, or I arrange to have someone come here who will."

Martinsen heard but didn't believe. "Say that again," he challenged.

Doc repeated it.

The trader curled his lip and looked Doc up and down. Then, "You meddling young whelp!" he said in a voice he usually saved for his native crew. "I'll have you on your knees!"

"Now, Matt, you know well enough--"

The whiskey glass was in Martinsen's hand. He smashed it on the floor at Doc's feet, wheeled and stormed out of the house. But just beyond the foot of the veranda steps he paused. The inspiration for what happened later must have exploded in his raging soul at that very moment, even before his thinking had properly begun.

There on the hillside path, strolling up from town with a market basket on one shapely hip, was Doc's housekeeper, Loliti. Martinsen halted before her with a leer.

"Well, now, this *is* a pleasure!"

Loliti laughed, tossing her hair.

"To look at you," Martinsen said, "no one would dream you'd buried a husband. Widowhood's becoming to you, lass. Come along to the ship with me for a drink and a bit of talk."

Loliti went. And when the *Witch* departed next day at dawn, she was aboard it.

DOC Harty hadn't a ghost of a chance because, you see, it was Loliti, not Martinsen, who filed the complaint. Martinsen's name never officially entered into it at all. He was too shrewd.

The doctor was a wicked man, Loliti complained. Oh, very. She said this in Suva, in the office of a quite high official to whom the welfare of the natives on such islands as Fanuwin was a matter of gravest concern. She said it with such innocent-seeming grief that the gentleman paid profound attention.

"He made eyes at me from the time he came there," said Loliti, her own eyes brimming with tears. "Of course, I paid no attention. I was faithful to my husband, as anyone on Fanuwin will tell you. But then my husband sickened. He went to the doctor for medicine. And instead of getting better, he died.

"The doctor was kind to me after my husband died," Loliti went on. "He allowed me to be his housekeeper and paid me good wages. In my innocence, I did not know why. And then--ah, then--"

Martinsen must have coached her well in the two weeks she spent with him on the *Witch* between Fanuwin and Suva. Blessed with the lusty imagination common to girls of her sort, she could easily have embellished that portion of her tale beyond all belief and thereby lost her audience. She didn't. Her account was subtly touched with allusions to Doc Harty's "secret drinking." And how was a government desk man in Suva to hear the voice of Martinsen back of her sobs?

"But," said that gentleman, "how do you *know* the doctor caused your husband's death?"

"He told me."

"Told you!"

"When he was drunk one night and angry," said Loliti. "He called me names and said he wished he had never gone to the trouble of getting rid of my husband. I wasn't worth it."

She was questioned, naturally. From the first official she was passed along to a second, third and fourth. Each did his best to find a discordant note in the song she sang. A man of Doctor Harty's standing? Unthinkable! Still, the islands did strange things to some men, and Fanuwin was such a lonely place, so out of touch. In the end they sent for him.

He denied. He explained. Pale of face, seething, he called them fools. But even he, when faced with the girl, could not shake her story in the smallest detail.

It was unfortunate. No formal charge could be placed against him, of course. The girl had no proof. On the other hand, his own angry accusations ... there, too, the proof was lacking, wasn't it? A mess, the whole affair. Nasty mess.

Big thing was, a man shouldn't get himself involved in these things. They gave the government a bad name. Such a tale traveled--like a tidal wave, actually. And the usefulness of a man with a cloud over his head was limited--ah, yes, limited. Better not go back to Fanuwin. Not just yet. No shortage of men to carry on there. Some other place, perhaps....

Doc Harty didn't wait for them to find some obscure niche for him. He found a place for himself outside their jurisdiction: an island in our group where, he told us later, he thought he might begin again. But he didn't stay long. Knowing where he was, we got off an urgent plea when an outbreak of measles began to wipe out the native population of Teala. So the Doc arrived one day in an outrigger sailing canoe, with his medicines in a wooden chest and became the fourth white resident of our little island community.

He was worth all the rest of us put together. Day and night he labored, dragging us along as his assistants and making us labor, too. The measles were stopped. Doc, like us, stayed on.

Only once was the affair at Fanuwin mentioned. We were building Doc a house by the beach and Trefflan, glancing seaward, saw a fishing boat in the reef passage. "Doc," he said, "one day you'll look out there and see the *Witch* coming in. Martinsen calls every few months for coconuts. What will you do?"

Doc gazed at the fishing boat in silence for a moment. "We'll have rain if this wind doesn't shift," he said.

But among ourselves we speculated. "I know what I'd do," Pawley said. "I'd beat the dog to a pulp!" Amusing, this, from Pawley. He stood a shade over five feet and never stepped out of doors in a high wind.

"I think I'd put a gun to his head and make him sign a confession," vowed Trefflan. "And if he refused, I'd blow his brains out."

None of our business, you say? Agreed. But we knew what Martinsen was up to. A letter would come for Pawley from some storekeeper friend in the Solomons: "Dear Ned: Odd what you say about your Doctor Harty and the good he's done. Martinsen, the trader, was here only last month and *he* said..."

One would come for me from a hotel man in the Pandemonium: "This Harty you speak of--is he the same we have heard about from our friend Martinsen of the *Witch?* I would investigate if I were you. If they are one and the same, you have the worst sort of scoundrel on your hands..."

To sum it up, Matt Martinsen had been cruelly and systematically smashing what was left of Doc's reputation as he went his rounds. And people believed him. Even his daughter believed him.

Thus I had an idea we would not see Martinsen's *Witch* at Teala again. But I was wrong.

When she dropped anchor, I turned to Pawley and Trefflan. "Do you suppose Matt *knows* the Doc is here?" I said.

"He must," said Pawley. "Then he can't be afraid--"

"Give the devil his due. He's afraid of nothing."

Our pier hadn't depth enough for a ship her size. We watched the native crew lower a dinghy. Suddenly, "There's his girl," Pawley said. "There's Ruth."

"Where's the man himself?" I asked.

"Below in the cuddy, perhaps. Loading his revolver."

The dinghy didn't wait for Martinsen to load his gun, if that was what detained him. The girl dropped into it with her bright hair blowing in the sunlight, and the little boat made for the pin.

I glanced at Trefflan and Pawley, and we went trooping down the road.

Ruth knew us, of course. She'd been to Teala before, many a time. When I gave her a hand up to the pier she thanked me with a smile, then, facing the three of us, said thickly, "Doctor Harty is here, isn't he?"

"He's here," I said.

"I must see him. My father is ill."

"What's the matter with him?" Pawley asked.

But Ruth was not one to waste time in talk. "Where is he?" she said, catching hold of my hand. "Take me to him!"

It was just after ten in the morning and Doc's yard was full of natives awaiting their turn. When I walked in with Ruth in tow, he glanced up from a job he was doing on the big toe of a wide-eyed youngster.

Doc's eyes were suddenly as wide as those of his patient.

"Ruth!" he said, staring. Whether he saw the ghost of a dead dream or the daughter of a despised enemy. I can't say.

Ruth went straight up to him. "Fred," she said. "I need your help."

"What is it? One of the crew?"

"Not one of the crew. My father."

A line of crimson crept up Doc's face. "Your father!" he said in a whisper.

"He didn't want me to come to you," the girl said. "But he's desperately ill. A hatch cover fell on his leg, days ago."

Doc took in a breath and bent to his patient again. I couldn't see his face, but I did see him stop work once to steady his hands. Done at last, he sent the boy on his way with a friendly backside slap, then thrust some things into a bag, and, facing Ruth again, informed her with a grim nod that he was ready.

MARTINSEN lay in his bunk, his once ruddy face gray and shrunken, his eyes dull with pain. But there was defiance still, in his stare.

Without a word Doc drew back the covers and knelt to peel the layers of bandage from the leg. It was the size of an elephant's leg and pretty much the same shade of gray. He squeezed it, and the grayness turned fish-belly white.

"I can't help you," Doc said, his examination finished.

Martinsen reared up on his elbows. "Of course you can help me! You're the best doctor in the islands!"

"The best in the world couldn't save you."

Martinsen's gaze filled with desperation. "I can pay whatever you ask."

"Can you?"

"Anything! A statement of truth from Loliti--that's what you want, isn't it? To clear your name. I'll get it, I swear!"

It was an odd way for sworn enemies to face each other, one erect on sound legs, the other propped on his elbows in a pool of sweat. They did it, though; Martinsen pleading, Doc Harty pinning him to the bunk with a look of hate.

"All right," Doc said then. "I'll cure you. I can't, but I will."

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YOU'D say it was a miracle, I suppose. By every rule in the book, Martinsen should have died.

He didn't. He lived, and the leg lived with him. In three weeks the man was out of his bunk. In a fortnight more he was ashore, taking a daily constitutional about Teala Town to build himself up.

You think the man was grateful? Secretly he might have been, but not a hint of it ever passed his lips.

To Doc, who stopped daily to examine him, he would mutter blackly, "How much longer am I to stay penned up here in this mouse hole? Is this your revenge? I'm well, I tell you!"

"Not well enough," Doc would say.

The odd thing was that Martinsen did as the Doc told him. Despising the town, hating the hotel he lived in, mistrusting the lot of us so sorely he wouldn't permit his daughter to quit the ship and join him, he nevertheless stayed on. Even when the last, lingering twinge had left the leg and he was able to bound up and down my veranda steps at will.

"Why in heaven's name don't you give him his walking papers?" I demanded of Doc, when it seemed I was cursed with the man for all eternity. "If you had to live under the same roof with him, you'd say the word soon enough!"

"A little longer," he replied.

So Martinsen stayed, thriving on the good food and care until he was a picture of health. And what of his promise, that he would obtain a statement from Loliti to clear Doc's name? Not a word was spoken of it, except by the rest of us.

"He won't go through with it," predicted Trefflan. "He never meant to."

"He'll laugh in Doc's face," said Pawley. "Mark my words."

I thought they were right. And the waiting went on. Until...

Late one afternoon Doc came to the hotel. "I've sent word to your daughter on the ship," he said, "that you can pack your bag tonight. She'll be on her way here now, to lend you a hand. Mr. Martinsen, how are you feeling?"

"Right as rain," said Martinsen.

"Good. Then it's time we kept our promises--the one you made to me and the one I made to myself."

Martinsen, interrupted at a game of solitaire on the veranda, must have expected something of the sort, but even so he needed a moment to gird himself. With the utmost deliberation he turned another card and examined it. Then, "Promise?" he said softly, with an upward glance. "Why, of course. A statement from that housekeeper of yours--that's what we agreed on, isn't it? But such a thing will take time."

"I don't want a statement from the girl," Doc said. "I want one from you."

Well! Over Martinsen's round and ruddy face spread a look of such genuine incredulity as to lay bare the man's soul.

It was a lecture, that look. Plain as day it said, Now see here: a statement from a no-account serving girl is one thing, and perhaps I'd have gone to the bother of getting it for you if an opportunity turned up. But a statement from Matt Martinsen ... What a laugh!

The trader laughed.

"You refuse?" Doc said quietly.

"You're out of your mind!" returned Martinsen gruffly. "I didn't file the complaint against you; the girl did. What kind of fool do you take me for?"

"A healthy one, at least," Doc said. "I've made certain of that. So--"

Say this for Martinsen: he was no man to run from a fight. He rose to meet this one with a crooked grin, and began in the age-old tradition by upending the table against his adversary's legs. And having staggered Doc with his initial thrust, he quickly pursued his advantage. In the twinkling of an eye, with a knee in his groin and an elbow under his ribs, Doc was against the rail, white of face and gasping.

But the lightning jab was not enough. Doc recovered and threw him off, and then back and forth they went, locked in a contest as primitive as an island legend. The flimsy floor heaved under them like a sea in storm. The hotel seemed likely to topple about their heads.

I hold no brief for the philosopher who says right makes might. Before our anxious eyes, first one and then the other had the upper hand. Up and down the veranda they fought, on the steps, in the dust of the road. It was either man's battle until the end.

In the end, toe to toe in the roadway, they battered each other with leaden fists until one went down and

stayed. The one to go was Martinsen.

Doc Harty looked to us for help and we carried the man to a chair. And once more Doc stood before him, this time in triumph with pen and paper on the table.

"Write," said Doc.

Martinsen slowly raised a battered face. "No."

"Write, I tell you! A confession that you put Loliti up to it!"

"Why should I?" the trader retorted. "You've thrashed me. But to get a confession you'll have to hold a gun at my head and threaten to use it--and you're not the sort to make such an act convincing." Wearily he stood up, and the puffed lips turned a grin. "Go to blazes," he said amiably. So much for the philosophers!

Doc Harty stood silent. What could he do? What could any man do, short of murder? He lifted his hands and looked, puzzled, at the skinned knuckles, let them fall again and turned away. Down the steps he went. Across the road.

Martinsen, with a laugh, turned to go upstairs. And there by the staircase, awaiting him, stood his daughter.

She had come in the back way to avoid the storm on the veranda, I suppose. No matter; she had been there long enough to witness the final act of the drama. That was certain. Hands on hips, she faced him--no longer the young lady raised by a maiden aunt in Sydney, but a true daughter of Matt Martinsen himself. A less groggy Martinsen would have recognized the change and behaved accordingly.

He didn't. "Darlin'!" he cooed, advancing on her. "Run up and pack my things, like a good girl. We're leavin'."

"You're leaving. I'm not," said she, not budging.

He halted. "What did you say?"

"I said you can leave if you wish to, Matt Martinsen. I'm staying!" Tall and straight she faced him, her bright eyes hurling the challenge. "I'm staying here in Teala to marry the man I love!"

Martinsen looked and saw she meant it, and over his face for the second time that evening spread the look of incredulity. "No," he said in a hoarse whisper. "No...."

"He's twice the man you are," she said, driving the knife deep with her deadly calm, "no matter what you've made of him with your lies. And if he won't have me, then I'll sit on his doorstep until the whole world knows I want him."

"I--I won't permit it," Martinsen mumbled.

"Stop me then, if you can," she said, and went past him.

He let her go.

He sat. How long? Trefflan, Pawley and I, we asked one another later how long and could not agree on an answer. How long is forever? With chin on chest and gaze fixed blankly on the floor, he sat, the lamplight dimly registering the mask of defeat that hardened like concrete on his face.

At last he looked at us. "Something to write with," he said. "If you will."

I took him pen and paper.

He wrote. He signed his name and we, as witnesses, signed ours. Rising, he read carefully what was written, then passed the paper to me.

"My wedding present," he said with a sigh. "Give it to them, if you'll be so kind."

Ten minutes later we watched him go down the road with his bag, and when last we saw him he stood on deck, gazing shoreward, as the *Witch* said farewell to Teala for the final time.

THE MAN WHO COULDN'T DIE
by HUGH B. CAVE

THE route by which Mr. Weldon Witherby arrived at Fortune Island is, to say the least, rather obscure.

He began, apparently, in Rangoon, where in some minor political post he was viewed with at least a measure of respect. What happened to him there--a woman, perhaps, or a letter from home, or the shattering of his aspirations by some bit of official chicanery--need not have been a tremendous thing. Some men are so constituted that a mere shift in the direction of a light breeze will bowl them over.

At any rate, he left Rangoon quite suddenly and appeared some months later in Darvel Bay, which is Borneo, calling himself Whitby--until an exchange of solemn letters between government officials turned the black light of his past upon him and sent him on his way again.

He paused in Balikpapan, but rebelled at the taste of petroleum in his evening gin. He bobbed up in Celebes, across the Straat Makassar, to make his way afoot from Manado to Baoe-baoe--a remarkable achievement for one without a guilder in his pocket or even a decent pocket to put one in. And then, like a lemming plunging headlong into the sea, he vanished.

Many hungerings later, this sad little man turned up in Dili, dead drunk and three-quarters starved. At that stage of his journey his pace had slowed to something less than a crawl and the digressions were many.

A year or so later he arrived at Fortune Island aboard a very ancient coastal steamer, in the capacity of assistant to the Chinese proprietor of its 'tween-decks trading store. And he was put ashore because he was ill.

Now you know as much about Weldon Witherby's search for oblivion, and the reason for it, as is known anywhere, and a good deal more than did the four inhabitants of Fortune Island when he arrived in their midst. As a matter of fact, the four were not even aware that their number had been augmented until the steamer which dumped him had departed. For though Fortune is tiny, it happens also to be a mountain-top jutting fanglike from the sea, and at the time of Witherby's coming the four occupants were industriously digging on the far side of the mountain.

They were scratching, stubbornly and angrily, for treasure.

If the truth be known, Witherby had been put ashore on Fortune to die, to save his captain the inconvenience of a burial at sea. He was sick enough to die, and by all logic he should have. But he didn't.

Having slept out the worst of his sickness on the beach, he waked as from the dead to wonder where he was, and at three o'clock of a bright, moon-silvered morning, philosophically rose and walked. He walked until he found a softer bed under the fang of the mountain, and slept again. At dawn he emerged to blink at the sea.

The island looked as though it was uninhabited. Likely it was waterless and all but barren of things to eat. No ship would stop unsignaled, and--this being a region frequented by only the most bohemian of vessels--none was likely to investigate even if signaled. So, decided Witherby, he was marooned.

This settled, he hitched up his trousers and went looking for food. He had long since ceased to be surprised by the things Fate did to him.

HE WAS discovered an hour later when one of the four inhabitants of Fortune, a black-bearded fellow

named LeClair, saw him shuffling along the beach. The figure Witherby cut was not impressive. His feet were bare. Tattered khaki trousers and a frayed rag of undershirt were all the clothes he owned.

LeClair watched him for a time in amazement; then the black-bearded fellow hurried to his companions to tell the startling news. They were breakfasting, and the tidings came like a spear hurled into their midst.

"A white man, here?" echoed Morton, spitting out a mouthful of scalding tea. "You gone crazy, Frenchy?"

"It iss the heat and too much of this damn digging," declared Selinger, rocking back on his buttocks. "I haf said all along we should take a rest."

"Rest, be damned," muttered the one called Java Jones, rising high and thin to stand egg-bald in the sunlight. "I'll do my resting at Batavia, thanks, at the Hotel des Indes. Come now, Frenchy, out with it! What're you trying to tell us?"

So LeClair told it again and invited them to go with him.

When Mr. Witherby first saw them he was seated on the beach with a bit of volcanic rock in his fist, leisurely cracking open the last of a handful of clams and mussels. He was not unhappy. He felt better than he had for days. The presence of four white men on his uninhabited island puzzled him, though, and when they lined up before him he greeted them with only a cautious nod.

"Who might you be?" demanded Morton ominously. "And how'd you manage to get here to this Godforsaken spot?"

Witherby explained as best he could.

LeClair eyed him with suspicion. "What d'ye want here?"

"Why, nothing," said Witherby.

"You haf nudding and you want nudding, eh?" said Selinger. "How do you expec' to live, I should like to know, without food or water?"

"Oh, I'll try to get along."

"He's balmy," declared Java Jones. "Let him be. Or toss him to the squid and be done with him."

But Selinger, who had suffered more than the others from the toil and heat of the past weeks, thrust himself forward and planted himself before little Mr. Witherby with arms akimbo and a malignant smile upon his blistered lips. "We haf food and drink' enough to gif you some," said he, "but you will haf to earn it, my friend. You will haf to work!"

Morton did not like that. "Now wait a minute, Dutch. We can't have no stranger nosin' around--"

"He can dig, no? He does not haf to know what we dig for. And he can cook, maybe, and keep clean the camp." Selinger turned to LeClair and Java Jones for their approval, and found them nodding. Again he faced the little man on the rock.

"Well, Mister Widderby, what haf you to say?"

Mr. Witherby looked at them. All four, he observed, were cut from the same cloth, and a coarser weave would be hard to find. Moreover, he knew two of them by reputation, and what he knew was not encouraging.

The bald one, Java Jones, was owner and captain of a decrepit schooner, *Lily* by name, which had uglied the waters of every port from Serang to Samarai. By profession he was a hunter of treasure--all sorts of treasure, from the money-belt on a wreck-imprisoned corpse six fathoms deep to a wench who might fetch a price from the proprietor of some waterfront institution of pleasure.

If Jones' ship had brought them, one thing was certain: These four were on Fortune Island to harvest wealth of some sort.

Mr. Witherby knew Selinger, too, though the Dutchman would have been surprised if so informed. They had met one steaming day in Fakfak, which is a town where two whites, meeting, might be expected to display at least the mutual interest of shipwrecked sailors bumping heads in mid-Pacific. But in Fakfak Mr. Witherby had been penniless and Selinger up to his thick red neck in a scheme to acquire pearls without paying for them--and so the Dutchman's reply to the little man's pitiful plea for assistance had been a rude caress with the back of his hand.

As for LeClair and the one called Morton, Witherby did not know them, even by repute. But if their lots were cast with those of the two he did know, it was safe to assume they were blackguards also.

But could he afford to reject their offer? Supposing he did. For a time, no doubt, he might keep himself alive with shellfish and maintain a moist tongue with almost-fresh water from holes scooped in the sand. But not for long. And these four, if they possessed a camp and provisions, must also own the means of quitting the island when their work was finished.

Mr. Witherby did not relish the prospect of dying alone on a sunbaked needle of rock in the middle of a lonely sea. He chose the lesser evil. "Very well," he decided, "I'll work for my keep."

And thus for Weldon Witherby began an interlude of trial and tribulation unparalleled by anything he had previously lived through.

II

IT WAS apparent from the first that he was not to be accepted by the others as an equal, or even as a fellow human being. He had contracted to pay for his keep with labor, and labor they demanded of him from sun-up until the last bit of driftwood turned to ash in the evening fire.

He cooked for them and was cursed when the meals were not to their taste. He fashioned a broom and daily swept the camp. He managed to make a mansion of sorts out of what had been a pigsty, yet they complained of the time it took him.

He foraged for fresh delicacies to lighten their diet. Turtle-eggs he brought them, and fish and clams. And one day he returned in triumph from the hunt, with lobsters enough to go the rounds. But his own food, fresh or otherwise, was more often than not snatched and divided among his employers, while they derided him for his lack of industry.

"Y'r lazy, that's what you are!" accused LeClair. "Sneaky lazy, always slippin' off to busy y'rself with easy jobs. We ought to cut y'r rations, y' miserable monkey!"

"Dig!" said Java Jones bitterly. "That's why you were hired--to dig! And you do less of it than any of us!" Actually, he dug *more* than any of them, for when they pressed a shovel into his hands he could rest only at the risk of having a chunk of rock or bit of driftwood hurled at his head. He dug hour after hour, day after day, his hands gloved with blisters and head throbbing in the blowtorch blast of the sun.

And for what? Why, for a treasure that would not be his if he found it.

Two weeks of his servitude had passed before he learned what he dug for. Not that he lacked a normal curiosity; but the Fates had long since taught him the value of a still tongue, and so he waited patiently for his questions to be answered without his asking them.

Selinger answered them in an outburst of rage one day.

"I t'ink we are crazy!" shouted the Dutchman. "For a month now we dig, dig, dig, all over the damn island, and how do we know for sure that this drunken fellow from the *Gulbrason* was giving us the truth? How do we know this iss the right island?"

"Stow it," grumbled Java Jones. "Dig, dig, dig--"

"Shut up!"

But Selinger had spoken, and Mr. Witherby had all the information he needed. He knew about the *Gulbrason.* Who didn't? Her disappearance, months before, had been discussed in half the points through which he had wandered.

She had been a coaster, this *Gulbrason,* engaged like the rest of her humble breed in transporting commonplace cargoes and occasional passengers from one miserable port of call to another. But on this last spectacular voyage of hers she had carried, in addition to her captain and crew of four, only one man and a trunk.

The passenger's name had been McKillop, it was said, and he was a Scot, and he had come out of the black heart of Papua near Daru with diamonds. Many curious eyes had seen the diamonds with which he paid the *Gulbrason's* captain to transport him through the Arafura to Timor.

But no one had ever again seen the *Gulbrason.*

Mr. Witherby, on his leisurely journey into oblivion, had heard no end of speculation concerning the fate of the *Gulbrason* and her treasure. That she had poked her ancient nose into the year's worst storm was fairly certain, considering her date of departure from Daru and her probable route. That she had foundered with all on board was considered likely. Now, however, it was apparent that all of her crew had not perished. One, at least, had survived. And somewhere along the way Selinger or LeClair or Morton or Java Jones, or all of them together, had heard a tale to send them treasure-hunting.

MR. WITHERBY wondered idly what had happened. Perhaps the *Gulbrason* had gone down near Fortune Island, or been smashed to bits against it. Some surviving member of her crew might have dragged her treasure ashore and buried it. As for the fellow's ultimate departure from Fortune, that was not too difficult to reconstruct. He had built a raft, probably, of the ship's wreckage, and salvaged provisions enough to keep him alive on the journey.

Presumably the treasure would be safe, hidden in Fortune's lonely sands, until he chose to return for it. He need only keep his mouth shut.

But he had neglected to shut his mouth tight enough.

Mr. Witherby wondered one other thing: Where was the ship which had brought Java Jones and his three loot-seekers to Fortune? He got the answer to that a few days later, when still another of the quartet--this time Morton--flew into a rage.

"WHY don't the *Lily* come back?" bellowed Morton, turning from a long and sullen inspection of the sea. "With her here, at least we'd have fresh drinkin' water and food that's fit to eat! Who told 'em to stay away this long, anyway?"

"I did," said Java Jones. "And I'd a reason for it."

"What reason?"

"Well, several, you might say. First off, that fool from the *Gulbrason* no doubt blabbed to others beside us, and while maybe they wouldn't know Fortune Island from his description of it, they just might come close. With the *Lily* anchored here, we'd as well put up a signboard to welcome 'em. And second," said Jones over the curl of his lower lip, "I'd a hunch you'd want to quit if the diamonds didn't pop right up and kiss you. So I made certain you'd stick it out a while."

It made no difference to Witherby. He cooked and swept and dug. The sun broiled him, the shovel rubbed his hands raw, the hot sand baked his blistered feet. An ache, an agony, grew inside him, consuming him. He was nearing the end of his long, dreary march to oblivion. Even LeClair's monkey commanded more respect than he, was given more to eat. They used him, of course, as an escape valve for their own pent-up resentments, because it was a good deal safer to cuff Witherby than to snarl at one another. Seeing his exhaustion, they made him work the harder. Knowing him to be hungry, they whittled down his rations, then laughed at him when, to keep alive, he crept from the camp evenings and crawled about the island in search of purslane and gnetum seeds and other scraggly growing things to munch raw when the cramps bent him.

On these pitiful scrabblings for food, LeClair's monkey usually accompanied him. Why? They had something in common, perhaps. Witherby was at rope's end. His utter abjectness may have awakened in the monkey a feeling of kinship, for the monk was a grotesque little beast, moldy as an old hair sofa, scarred from quivering nose to twitching tail-tip by the missiles it had failed to duck during its precarious life among humans.

The monkey had no name, and for a long time Witherby sought to invent one. "We might call you Willy," he would say, limping along the shore in the moonlight with the monk perched on his shoulder and squeezing its hot little head against his pallid cheek. "I had a friend in Gorontalo once by that name, and we'd a gay time together until the constabulary nabbed him for stealing. Or Davy, now--how would that be? There was a lad name of Davy in Koepang who saw me through a sickness..."

But no name out of the past quite seemed to suit, and so he took to calling the monk "Little One." And many a night they sat somewhere on the black spine of rock that was Fortune Island, watching the wink of phosphorus on the empty sea while swapping monkey-squeaks and man-musings in their solitude.

Mr. Weldon Witherby, once of Rangoon, had arrived at last on the bottom rung of the ladder. He could go no lower. He was sick, friendless, and penniless. His status in life had become that of a galley-slave who, when no longer useful, would certainly be dropped over the side. And his sole companion was a monkey.

That he and the monk were still alive when the *Lily* returned to Fortune was something of a miracle, for she took her own good time, and during the last week before her return neither slave nor monkey was offered a share of the dwindling food supply. The digging had been abandoned by then. The four treasure-seekers asked only one thing more of Fortune: to be quit of the place.

THE *Lily* brought to Fortune two items of consequence: a falling barometer and a woman. The first was no surprise to the island's inhabitants. All that day their bleak prison had lain like a charred cinder in a fiery furnace, the still air so hot it scorched the lungs; yet the merciless sun was not red but a muddy saffron, the sky not blue but the exact shade of the revolver-barrel protruding from LeClair's belt. That a storm was due they were unhappily aware. The *Lily's* glass merely made it official.

As for the woman, she was a bit of extra business picked up by the *Lily's* crew as casually as other men

might pluck a coin from the dust while strolling. Witherby saw her when she was brought ashore in triumph by Markey, the mate, who had captained the vessel.

"She'll fetch a fancy price at China John's," said Markey, leering. "Snatched her when she came aboard to peddle, we did. And she took some snatchin', I can tell you!"

The girl spat at him.

She was nineteen or twenty, Witherby guessed, but of course her age was of little value in judging her; in the islands it's how you live, not how long, that matters. From the looks of her she had fought them every foot of the voyage.

Under the grime, though, and the rag of flowered cotton that covered her, she was remarkable for her beauty. A *half-caste,* she was, certainly: the end product, perhaps, of a chance meeting between some vagrant white, like Witherby, and an island wench. But half-caste or no, she had the look in her eye of one who would battle the devil himself for her rights. And Mr. Witherby, having visited the place known as China John's, pitied her from the bottom of his heart.

"What's your name?" Java Jones asked as she stood glowering at them.

"It's a queer one," said the leering Markey, "so we'd best give her a new one. How would 'Sally' do!"

"No," said LeClair. "It's time there was a mam'selle in that place. Call her 'Jeanette.'"

So they made a game of naming her, while the girl faced them with lips squeezed tight and eyes flashing defiance. Until, surprisingly, Mr. Witherby interrupted.

Said Witherby thoughtfully, *"Omnia ad Dei gloriam."*

They blinked at him. "What kind of talk is that?" demanded Jones.

"Only Latin," Witherby murmured. "I once knew it rather well. It means, of course, 'All things to the glory of God.' Because she is beautiful. Surely you can see that!"

"Omnia Dei--give us it again, Worthless."

"Omnia ad Dei gloriam," repeated Witherby slowly, his solemn gaze on the girl.

"Gloriam," echoed Java Jones. "That's all right, that is. Gloriam. It's a good name." He stepped toward her, nodding. "And now that you got a name, sister, it's time you learned pretty manners to go with it, say I. Because in the morning we clear out of this rotten hole, and I've my heart set on a pleasant voyage home."

As he reached for her and grasped her wrist, she whirled on him, and white teeth flashed to his arm. With a yelp of pain, Java Jones took back his hand as though it had touched the sun. Then, bellowing, he swung a fist.

Mr. Witherby, wincing, went quickly away. He was still absent some two hours later when the storm broke.

III

THEY had expected the storm, but it took them by surprise, all the same. That was because the usual preamble was missing. No whispered warnings danced ahead of this upheaval; the first challenge was a full-voiced bellow. One moment air and sea were still as a stopped clock; then the black cask of the sky

burst its seams and loosed on them a deluge, the wind sprang screaming from a hidden lair, and the sea rose up, thundering, to batter the island to which they clung. And these things occurred not one after another, in rational progression, but all in the mocking wink of a monstrous eye.

In an instant the camp at the base of Fortune's rocky fang was gone, wrenched from its moorings as if the manila lines that held it had been no stronger than the strands of a spider's web. The wind sucked it up with a noisy gulp and they saw it no more. In a moment more, they themselves were crawling like flies on the face of the mountain, or creeping crablike along its battered base, seeking shelter where they could find it, each man for himself. For even the *Lily* was gone then, scudding like a frightened wraith over the boiling sea.

LeClair was first to go. Terror sent him on hands and knees over slippery rocks to a niche in the mountain base that promised shelter, but into his refuge poured a sea that drowned him. The gay waves rolled him into the open again, made sport of him, and left him face down on the beach.

Then Morton. He sought the heights, but the wind plucked him from his climb and, like a seaman torn screaming from the main skysail-yard of a stricken ship, he plummeted to his finish. The others, Selinger and Java John, Markey and the girl Gloriam and the *Lily's* crew fled this way and that, screaming or cursing or sobbing out their terrors.

And what of Mr. Witherby? That unhappy soul, when the typhoon arrived at Fortune, was seated with LeClair's monkey on a sheltered bit of beach some distance from the camp, pondering, as might be expected, man's inhumanity to man. The storm upon him, he merely clutched the monkey closer and sat where he was--until the sea discovered his retreat and hissed in to drive him out.

He went then along the shore, grimly battling the wind for possession of the whimpering ball of hair that clung to him for protection. *He* was frightened, but where could a man go in such a place? Not up, or the howling wind-demons would flay the flesh from his bones. Not into the rock itself, or the sea would follow and drown him. So, then, the problem was simplified. If he found a sheltered spot, he would duck into it. If not, he would keep on walking.

HE CAME presently to the remains of Morton, flattened at the base of the cliff, and transferred from the dead man's pocket to his own a half-eaten square of chocolate. And then he discovered LeClair, on the beach where the waves had tossed him, and acquired some cigarettes and a revolver--both wet but potentially usable. And then Witherby saw the boat.

Precisely what little Mr. Witherby hoped to do in such a storm with a small boat and a pair of oars is not known. Perhaps he thought to row himself and his monkey out to the *Lily* and cut her loose, on the chance of finding a way out of his servitude. He knew the *Lily* was unmanned, and at that time he was unaware she had been swept away. At any rate, he saw the boat and ran to it; he tucked the monkey into it, and, with strength he had not known he possessed, he contrived to launch the craft, during a sudden lull in the storm's fury.

She was a cork, that boat. She defied the mountainous waves to upset her. With Witherby tugging at the oars, she bore her two forlorn passengers, man and monkey, inch by straining inch past the foaming rocks at the island's tip and into the clear.

But then the storm returned with renewed vigor, and Witherby perceived the futility of his efforts. He stopped rowing. With the monkey in his arms he huddled in the bottom of the boat and let the typhoon take him. Drowning, after all, was more pleasant to contemplate than a return to his previous status of slave.

Drowning, however, was not to be his lot. The green waves bowled him along through the remainder of

that devilish day, into the nightmare night that followed. His boat climbed their swollen sides with the tenacity of a crag-rat, plummeted from their crests with the grace of a plunging gull.

THEN the night was over, and the storm with it, and Witherby looked out on a watery world colored red by a friendly sun. "Little One," he said in wonderment, "look at us. We're alive!" Little One's reply was an ecstatic squeal.

But Witherby was too wise in the ways of Fate to be long fooled.

"Alive," he amended, "but for how long? Who's to lead us out of here?" There they were, in a boat on an empty ocean. The wind had passed. The sea was calming after its orgiastic excesses. But the calm was more frightening than the tumult.

During the awful hours of storm there had been hope of ultimate salvation behind the terrors of each passing moment. The boat, after all, was being blown somewhere and might in the end fetch up against land. Now peace had fallen from heaven, but in peace lay peril. For Mr. Witherby and Little One had only half a bar of chocolate to see them through the torments of hunger. Of water they had none at all. They would perish unless they reached land in a day or two.

Where *was* land? Witherby had not the faintest notion. How far they had been blown from Fortune Island, or in what direction, he knew not. The climbing sun told him where east lay--but he had no way of knowing what lay eastward. The world about him was all water, metal-bright, blinding, and boundless. And as the hours passed, the sun grew hot.

Witherby took up the oars and began to row. Presently he gave up. What was the use of rowing?

"Little One," he said flatly, "we're done for, I'm afraid. There's not a thing we can do but sit and wait."

And so began for Weldon Witherby the last and most wretched lap of the downhill journey which had begun for him in Rangoon. Fortune Island had not, after all, been the bottom rung of the ladder. Fate had tucked another one under him, giving him, you might say, the full treatment.

He was to be broiled alive. His departure from earth was to be no mere plunge over the finish line, but spectacular as a session at the Inquisition. Fate had the tools for it--a white-hot ball of sun, a dead-calm sea, and a shadeless boat. Witherby contributed his empty belly and a parched tongue. And for good measure there was Little One, who suffered as Witherby suffered and made the hours hideous with his whining.

That day ended somehow, and during the night, when it was cooler, Witherby sat at the oars again. His efforts scarcely moved the boat, but he pulled steadily, and between the dismal creaks of the oarlocks he talked to the monkey to keep it quiet. He told Little One of his aimless wanderings along the great dark wailing-wall of the southern islands, and of the ignominies he had endured along the way. No bitterness embellished the tale; Witherby simply strung the facts together in their proper sequence, bead fashion, and dangled the necklace before the monkey in hope of amusing it for a time. He told of the cuffings he had received in Madjene and the bootings in Boetoeng, of losing his last guilder in Boeroe and eating dead fish on the beach at Ambon. He told of sickness and taunts, of hunger, of being stripped naked and tossed into gutters by irate purveyors of drinks who resented his wheedling; and of the cafÃ© proprietor who had draped a live *krait* about his neck, while he was drunk, to amuse the customers. But in fairness to Fate, Witherby told also of the times along the way when, incredibly, he had stubbed his toe on luck of a better sort--as, for example, his finding of an unopened fifth of Scotch whisky on the shore near Fakfak, and his lavish two-weeks' stay in the home of a Mrs. Buxton, at Moresby, who had mistaken him for someone she once knew. "And what," Witherby asked of the monkey finally, "does it all add up to, would you say? Why, it's silly, that's all. What's a man to do if the Fates insist on dancing him up and

down on a string in such fashion? What's a man meant for, d'you suppose?"

"I'LL tell you," said Witherby, becoming philosophical as he tugged that strange boat over that strange moonlit sea, on and on toward nothing and nowhere. "A man's got to take it as he finds it, and keep as steady on his feet as he's able. Because the fact is, my friend, we're put here for a purpose we know nothing about until it's accomplished--if we know it then--and there's nothing we can do to alter the plan one jot.

"Take that fellow Enrikson that I've told you about--the one whose cutter went down in the Solomons. He was put here to fill the empty cookpot of some starving aborigine, and for no other reason. But did he know it? Not until they popped him into boiling water, he didn't. Or consider my friend Davy, in Koepang, who nursed me through a sickness and got sick himself and died. He was put here to keep me going, no doubt, though God knows why.

"And what are *we* here for? Who knows? Maybe we won't ever find out, though at the moment it looks as if both of us were meant to feed the sharks. If true, we've been brought a long way, I'd say, to do a paltry little. Or don't you know we've been followed by sharks for the past hour, Little One?"

Thus he philosophized, while rowing or while resting between spells of tugging at the oars. It was a harmless diversion. As for its worth to the shriveled-up ball of matted fur that sat by his feet, whining up at him, that was questionable. The monk was hungry and thirsty, and talk was a poor substitute for food and drink.

Then came the morning and the searing sun again. And more sharks. He watched them, swimming alongside in the sunlight, and shuddered. They were so efficient, those sharks, so gruesomely sure of themselves. He hated and feared them, and the thought of being destined to fill the stomach of one, or chewed up into small bloody bits and shared among the lot of them, made his own stomach twist with revulsion.

With only a vague notion, yet, of the terrors that lay ahead, Witherby pulled from his pocket the revolver he had taken from LeClair's corpse, and examined it.

It had been thoroughly drenched and the cylinder was sticky with salt. And, obviously, LeClair had been careless about keeping it loaded, for Witherby's exploring thumb discovered only one cartridge. One bullet against so many sharks? He sighed and put the weapon back into his pocket.

So that day passed, like the previous one, the sea a boundless waste of gleaming metal made white hot by the relentless sun, the boat moving only when Witherby seized the oars and moved it, which was seldom. And with hunger gnawing like a monstrous rat at his vitals, and thirst squatting like a hot cinder in his mouth, the man abandoned even his attempts to converse with the monkey. It was the end and he knew it. And what could he do about it? Why, nothing.

Well, he could do something, perhaps. Through the hideous hours of hunger and thirst, his stiff fingers fumbled with the revolver, again and again extracting the lone cartridge and replacing it. He could not throw himself overboard to put an end to the awful suffering, for with the sharks lying there in wait, such a move would be equivalent to casting himself alive into a gigantic meat-grinder. But with LeClair's gun, if the thing would still function, he might cheat some of the agonies.

All through that day and through the long night that followed, while lying racked with pain in the bottom of the boat, little Mr. Witherby pondered the problem and worked toward a decision. And listened, with a heart full of pity, to the whimperings of his small companion.

The night passed. The sun rose from a glittering sea. Witherby put forth all his strength and struggled to

his knees to look about. But nothing had changed. The sea was still shoreless and the sharks still waited.

For the last time, Witherby tucked the cartridge back into the cylinder of LeClair's revolver. He popped the muzzle of the gun into his mouth and clamped his cracked lips upon it. And then, remembering, he turned to say farewell to the monkey which for so long had been his sole companion in misery.

What he saw stopped him. The monk had crept from its tiny patch of shade under the stern seat to a point some eighteen inches from Witherby's feet, and was struggling to reach him. It no longer whimpered; it was no longer able to. All the agonies of thirst and hunger and shriveling heat that Witherby felt within his own frail body were mirrored in the poor glazed eyes that so beseechingly stared up at him.

He couldn't leave the monkey like that. It wasn't decent.

He put the revolver down and leaned forward to gather the creature into his lap. He stroked it. "I know," he said. "I know how you feel. I'd put you out of it if I could, believe me. But look. Look at them. Sharks! A dozen, at least, just waiting and waiting. If I put you overboard--even held your head under, to end the misery--they'd get you before you drowned. And I can't shoot you. You see that, don't you? There's only the one bullet."

The monkey clung to him, and the glazed eyes begged up at him.

"But then I'd have to lie here and die slow," said Witherby, and if there had been moisture enough left in him for tears, he would have wept. "I'd have to lie here hour after hour, waiting. Is that fair? I found the gun, you know--not you."

The monkey only wriggled closer against him.

Witherby sat in the broiling sun and racked his sick brain for some solution. He might throttle the poor beast or dash its head against the boat. But the thought turned his stomach. No, there was only one way out.

He lifted the quivering little animal from his lap and held it gently in the yellow glitter of the sun. With trembling hand he pressed the hot muzzle of the gun against its head and squeezed the trigger. The gun functioned. Little One's sufferings were done with. Witherby laid the corpse under the stern seat and dropped the useless gun overside. And down he flopped again to let the heat, the hunger and the terrible thirst have their way with him.

Late that afternoon he became delirious and would have cast himself overboard, sharks or no sharks, had he had the strength to rise. But he was too weak.

Toward evening, as the sun sank and a breeze stole wraithlike over the dead sea, he lost consciousness.

IV

WHAT happened to Mr. Witherby during the following eight hours has since been discussed in practically every bar from one end of the South Seas' wailing-wall to the other, by all sorts of people. Some of them consider it incredible, and seek to prove the point with elaborate diagrams of ocean currents, prevailing winds, tides, and what not. Others, on better terms with the fickle Fates who rule that region, are likely to remind you of the scores of even less believable occurrences recorded in the South Seas since Mendana first set foot in the Solomons.

At any rate, the boat in which Witherby lay unconscious was borne over the sea by bits and fragments of wind until it fetched up at an island. And what island? Why, the same jagged fang of black rock from which it had begun its eventful journey hours and hours before.

From Fortune, Witherby had fled, and to Fortune the Fates returned him, though he himself knew nothing of the return voyage, or of his safe arrival, until awakened from his long sleep by the ministering hands of an angel.

Opening his eyes, he looked upward into the angel's face and begged for water. But she had already poured water between his blackened lips, and he was only repeating a cry of despair spoken the past many hours in his delirium. And as the cooling water trickled down his throat, he recognized his benefactor.

"Why--why, you're Gloriam!" he whispered.

"If you want to call me that, I suppose you've a right to," she said. "It's the name you gave me yourself."

"Then I'm back where I started from!"

"You're on Fortune Island, if that's what you mean," said she.

"But--where are the others?"

"Dead. Every last one of them. And you'll be, too, if we're not careful. Come now"--and she bent over him again with a jagged tin can in her hand, and spooned some of its contents to his mouth--"eat this, Mr. Witherby."

Witherby ate and, incredibly, he recovered. Or perhaps not so incredibly, for in his long, slow journey to oblivion this strange little man had been knocked down so many times the business of getting up again was more or less a habit with him.

He gazed now into the girl's face and said wonderingly, reverently, "You are beautiful. Oh, but you are!" And then with a sigh of contentment, he slept.

The following day she showed him what the typhoon had done to Fortune. Or, more properly, what it had done to Fortune's inhabitants.

"They made the mistake of trying to run away," she said, shuddering. "Bullies always do when they're frightened, don't they? And, of course, that was the worst thing to do here. The Frenchman was drowned and one of them fell from the side of the mountain."

"And then the Dutchman, Selinger, found a hole in the rocks where he might have been safe, but Java Jones found him in it and tried to drag him out--there was room for only one of them. They fought like mad dogs for possession of the hole until a great wave settled the dispute by destroying them both."

"And the one called Markey, who brought you to this place," said Witherby. "What of him?"

"He tried to swim out to the ship, he and the others who were left. But there was no ship."

"Yet you survived! You--only a girl! How can that be?"

"Why, I sat. I sat and prayed to be saved. But"--and she smiled at him--"we'll die anyway, both of us, in the end. There's only a little water left, and you've eaten the last of the food. We won't last long."

"Wasn't there food in the camp?"

"Most of it the sea took. I found the water in a whisky bottle half buried in the sand, where one of the men must have dropped it."

"Well," said Witherby, "let's look." But she was right. Nothing remained of the provisions Java Jones and his crew had brought ashore from the *Lily* only a few hours before the storm's coming. The island was bare. Still, it was no barer than Witherby had thought it to be that dismal day, weeks before, when he had been put ashore to perish. And he had not planned then to die of thirst and hunger--at least not quickly. So he set out to find what was needed, leaving his companion to scoop a hole in the sand under Fortune's black overhang.

When he returned from the hunt an hour or so later, the girl had struck water. Not sweet water, but good enough to drink. And at her feet Witherby proudly laid an assortment of edibles--clams and sea-slugs, a wriggling squid, purslane and gnetum seeds and a snail or two. And he looked at her and grinned. He, Witherby, Fate's whipping-boy for so long, actually grinned.

"Why, we've everything!" he said. "We've the world at our feet, and each other too!"

Thus began their exile.

IT LASTED three weeks, for Witherby was not again eager to brave the sea without first taking all possible precautions. His biggest problem was a sail for the boat. To make one he had only poor materials--his trousers and rag of undershirt, plus his companion's flimsy cotton dress and scraps of clothing squeamishly stripped from those victims of the storm who still remained on the island. Little enough to tame an ocean wind!

But with what he had, he worked diligently, sewing the bits of cloth together with a fishbone needle and threads drawn from the fabrics themselves. And while he worked, Gloriam worked with him.

Those were idyllic days. The sun gilded Fortune's jagged peak; a gentle breeze brought scents of spice and frangipani from greener islands below the western horizon. When the work on the boat palled, Witherby and his fair companion foraged for food together, or swam, naked as babes, in the sparkling surf. Or sat and talked. When darkness dropped over their Eden, they talked sometimes for hours on end--Witherby of his varied adventures, she of hers, each with the frankness of poor, harried souls whose cards had been dealt mostly from the bottom of the deck. Only once before, when becalmed with LeClair's monkey, had Witherby reached that far back into the dark pockets of his memory; and he told her of that, too. Most surprising of all, he told of the gun and the bullet.

She only nodded. But if she had been beautiful before, when dragged ashore by Markey for Java Jones' inspection, she was beautiful now in another way. She was different, and what made her different was the wonder in her eyes as she gazed at this man who wept like a child at having slain a monkey. She had known many men in her time. In fact, she said as much, with a shrug that dismissed them as quickly as they came to mind. But never had she known a man like Witherby.

And never had Witherby known anyone quite like her.

The sail was finished. Into the little boat went every edible thing Witherby could find on Fortune--every root and nut, every scrap of bark or scraggly weed from which could be gnawed nourishment. Stored with them were the gleanings of the sea: sun-dried fish, mostly, with fresher tidbits for the first day or so. And then he dug anew for water, selecting a spot of shade high up on the beach near where Java Jones' camp had stood.

SHE stood beside him as he dug, to fill the whisky bottle and half a score other containers--shells, most of them--which she had painstakingly collected for the journey. And as he worked, she watched with a wistful smile on the soft curve of her lips, and a gaze that kept slipping off to explore the sunlit beach and high rocks where he and she had spent so much of their time together.

She was startled when, of a sudden, he stopped digging and shouted, "Look! I've found something!"

He dug again, his hands tossing up clouds of sand. The hole deepened and he reached deep into it. Then at her feet he dropped a chest, or trunk, wound round with ropes.

"It's what they were looking for!" he said. "We've found it. We've found the treasure!"

And so he had--for when his fumbling hands worked loose the ropes and raised the lid, there lay the possessions of the man named McKillop, his books and maps and clothes, and the diamonds he had brought out of the black heart of Papua months before. Java Jones and his hungry crew had heard the story aright from the *Gulbrason's* survivor.

Witherby spread the loot before him on the sand, and the girl Gloriam inspected it with him. And presently, sadly, she said to him, "You're rich now, aren't you?"

"Why, yes. I suppose I am."

"It's what you wanted--what you've sought all your life."

Witherby looked up at her and frowned. "No, I wouldn't say that. I've wanted something--but it wasn't wealth, I'm sure." He shook his head. "No, it wasn't wealth. But we'll take it, now that we've found it. We'd be fools not to."

He was stronger than he had been. Strong enough now to lift the chest in his arms and carry it to the boat without staggering. And as if to prove that wealth held no great interest for him, he returned at once to finish digging for water, and dug without rest until he found it.

"There," he said, filling the last of the containers. "Now we can go."

Thus they departed. The idyll was over, their stay on Fortune finished. A fragrant breeze filled their brave little sail, and the black fang of that isle of destiny slipped slowly behind. They turned for a last look--babes in the wood, departing their hiding place and venturing again into the forest. And both were frightened.

"Where," asked Gloriam, "are we going?"

"Why, I'm taking you home, of course."

"I have no home."

Witherby stared at her. "Then where shall I take you?"

"Why, wherever you're going."

"But I haven't given a thought to where I'm going. I really haven't." Shaken, he leaned toward her, afraid of his hopes, yet finding in her eyes the courage to let them live. "Where--where ought I to go?"

"Why, anywhere," she said. "So long as we go together."

And so they did. Everyone knows that now: how Witherby and the girl named Gloriam trudged up the road in Daru one golden morning dressed in what might have been clothing but more closely resembled the shredded sail of a Bajao outrigger--Witherby striding along proudly with a chest of sorts balanced on one sturdy shoulder, and the girl smiling at his side with her hand clasped in his. Everyone knows they were made man and wife that day before the sun set, and were on their way again next morning as happy as children.

Where they went from Daru is none of your business or mine, either, for they had new names then, to go with their new clothes, and plans, too, for leaving the past behind them. There are legends enough, Lord knows, in those parts, without prying. And truths enough to explain anything.

IT'S been said, for instance, that any man who turns to the wailing-wall of the South Seas in search of--well, in search of anything--will sooner or later discover what Fate wants of him. Maybe a king's ransom awaits him; if so, he'll find it. Or a place of honor in some cannibal's cook-pot--he'll find that, too. Or perhaps he was only meant to arrive at a certain place at an appointed time, to take his place for one brief moment in a game the gods are playing.

Witherby did that, all right. And if the gods seem to have taken their own good time about getting him there, remember that no man can play a part properly without first serving his apprenticeship.

An ordinary man, you'll admit, would have shot himself--not spent his last bullet on a dying monkey.

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THE MORGUE

We don't get letters ... at least not via the postal service, before the first issue has been published. So, to introduce the *Adventure Tales* letter column, staff-member Darrell Schweitzer seems to have obtained the following by, let us say, *other* means, perhaps related to the sort of mysterious rays and etheric forces which transported heroes to Barsoom and beyond in days of yore.

We would love to hear from readers about our first issue. Write to: Adventure Tales, c/o Wildside Press, P.O. Box 301, Holicong, PA 18928-0301. Or send an email to editor@wildsidepress.com.

Dear Editor of *Adventure Tales*,

So, it's "The Morgue," is it? That makes my cold, clay heart skip a beat. I mean ... well, I can hope ... (heh-heh, pant-pant) ... after all, if the letters column in *Argosy* was called "Argonotes," and *Adventure*, a magazine devoted to wholesome, manly outdoor tales had "The Camp-Fire," and *Startling Stories*, a scientifiction magazine, had "The Ether Vibrates" (Hooray for Sergeant Saturn!), does that mean your magazine with "The Morgue" is going to be *my* kind of magazine? Are all the characters going to be *dead* ?

Yours sincerely,

Norman the Necrophile

Nodding, North Dakota

Dear Norman,

Not quite. We like Sergeant Saturn too, and wish we could find out where he got his Xeno (the preferred drink of space-farers everywhere), and we hope you will like our magazine, but we're sorry if we've misled you. A "morgue," in the sense of a newspaper morgue, is a big, dark, musty room where back-files are kept, where one can spend hours or days reading through old publications in search of forgotten gems. That is what Adventure Tales is all about. We hope to find fascinating and exciting stories from back-issue magazines, many of which haven't seen the light of day in three-quarters of a century, but which need to be rediscovered. While there will no doubt be the occasional corpse in them, we cannot guarantee that all characters in all stories will be dead all the time.

--*The Editor*

Hey, You Mugs--

So there I was in a back-alley, face-to-face with the Big Operator himself, a crooked shamus who shoved his gat in my gut and said, "Who are ya callin' a shamus, Shamus?" while I tried to explain to him that the preferred term is Gumshoe, but unfortunately my shoes were glued to the gummy asphalt of these mean streets down which a man must go (even if minding his own business) and so all I could do was wobble back and forth like a punching-bag on one of those springy stands while he and his boys had their fun with me with their fists until they got tired and went away and left me appreciating through a red haze of pain that my experiences gave me a special insight into the meaning of the term *pulp.* It sounds like your magazine of pulp fiction is for me.

Yours whatever,

Sam Shovel, Detective (Deceased)

San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Sam,

We hope you will enjoy Adventure Tales during your period of recuperation, if that's what comes next. However, we should like to point out that much of the public, due to the influence of the movie Pulp Fiction*, has a somewhat narrower idea of the meaning of the term "pulp" than we do. It means a lot more than just hardboiled detective fiction featuring two-fisted heroes in trenchcoats and alluring babes in little more than their* cleavage, although such stories were indeed published in the original pulp magazines. "Pulp" was originally a technical term, for a kind of very cheap, high wood-pulp paper used for popular magazines in the first half of the 20th century. Pulp magazines were noted for their bright, lurid covers. Before the invention of television, or the *paperback revolution, all-fiction pulp magazines were a major form of mass-entertainment, though,* as is made clear in John Locke's excellent Pulp Fictioneers, Adventures in the Storytelling Business *(Adventure House, 2004), a collection of old articles by pulp writers, the term "pulp magazine" didn't come into common use until the late 1920s at least.*

The first pulp was Argosy, converted to an all-fiction, pulp-paper format in 1896, for most of its run a weekly. Argosy was aimed at the whole family, which featured stories of all types: adventure, western detective, romance, sport, and even "fantastics"--early science fiction. Eventually publishers attempted to slice up this market with specialized magazines, of which Detective Story Magazine was the first, followed by magazines devoted to every conceivable category, including some rather bizarre freaks such as Fire Fighters, Submarine Stories, Suicide Stories, and, we kid you not, the holy grail of pulp collecting, Zeppelin Stories, of which only two copies of one of its four issues are known to exist.

Science fiction as a category was born in this type of publishing, which gave the world Amazing Stories and Astounding Stories of Super Science (now published as Analog). Also Weird Tales, for that matter. As most pulp magazines tended toward hastily-written, formulaic stories, mass-produced without a great deal of stylistic polish, the term "pulp," applied to the contents of these magazines, began to acquire connotations it has not lost today, even when most of the general public has never read or even seen a real pulp magazine, which was printed on pulp paper, with untrimmed edges, in an 7" x 10" format (the page size National Geographic uses).

This does not mean, however, that much excellent fiction was not found there. One can readily point to the classic detective tales of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler in Black Mask, Ray Bradbury's The Martian Chronicles, most of it first published in Thrilling Wonder Stories and Planet Stories, or Isaac Asimov's The Foundation Trilogy from Astounding Science Fiction, and the widely-varied and excellent content of Weird Tales (H.P. Lovecraft; Robert E. Howard's Conan series; the early Ray Bradbury of The October Country; Manly Wade Wellman's tales of Appalacian magic), not to mention Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan of the Apes, which appeared in All-Story in 1912, to demonstrate that pulp magazines contained much fiction of very great and lasting interest. We intend to reprint some of the good stuff in Adventure Tales.

Stay out of sticky back-alleys, Sam.

--The Editor

Dear Sir,

Sometimes in letter-columns like this the old-time pulp writers would regale readers with thrilling accounts of their true-life adventures. In that spirit I offer you this.

It was 1919, or 1927, or one of those nineteen-somethings. I was in Zambouanga, or Port Moresby, or maybe I had been shanghaied to Shanghai. The details don't matter. I was in a dank, dirty dive of the sort frequented by the dankest, dirtiest scoundrels on Earth, eager for adventure. Well, most of them were eager for my wallet. I was the one after adventure. I found it. Several drinks, a treasure map, and a couple of *kris*-wielding Malay assassins later, I was on an expedition hacking my way through the jungle in the fabulous Plateau of Leng, by way of the Lost Valley of Fongo-Fongo. How a valley can actually be lost is only apparent if you've been there. I've been there. There was this crazy archeologist who came along, Indiana Something-or-Other, who carried a bullwhip and would always leap over a thousand-foot waterfall into a river full of crocodiles when there was an easy foot-bridge five miles down-stream. A show-off. But it wasn't the crocs that got him. It was the the gigantic jungle leeches the size of Volkswagons. We didn't miss him and at least he kept the leeches busy long enough for the rest of us to escape. In the end only I was left. I staggered out of the jungle into Kurdistan, which is nowhere near any jungle, so boy was I lost. I was out of my head. I hadn't eaten anything but fungus in fourteen years so I was kinda skinny. Everybody I saw looked really, really fat. When I met up with a local chieftain, whose name was something like "Muh-Fhet," I couldn't help but inquire, "Tell me Muh-Fhet, how much does the average Kurd weigh?"

Now they don't shrink heads in Kurdistan, but for me they made an exception. I look silly. The only thing I can wear to keep the rain off my noggin is a dixie cup. I went up the Amazon to try to find a witch-doctor who could help me, but the natives just laughed.

You know all about adventures. What do you think I ought to do?

Yours sincerely,

Col. Alonzo P. Argh, Sr.

Dear Colonel Argh,

The only things we can think of to suggest are these:

1) Get used to it.

2) Read our magazine to take your mind off your troubles!

--The Editor

THE STREAM

I must follow the stream that leads

Through the marshes and through the meads.

It, like mine, has a rover sou

In the depths and over the shoal;

Dimpling, and then darting far

Under the sun and under the star.

Now 'mid peace and now 'mid strife

I must follow the stream of life!

--Clinton Scollard

THE SPIDER STRAIN

Johnston McCulley

I

Love, and Mystery

IT WAS not the first time that John Warwick had felt very thankful that his training as a member of society, and in the world at large, had been such that it enabled him successfully to talk about one thing and think of something else entirely different at the same time.

He managed to maintain the conversation with the charming young woman at his side, and while he did so, he considered that there was something taking place in which he was greatly interested, and sensed that there would be something in the nature of a climax soon.

John Warwick guided his powerful roadster along the pretty highways on the bank of the river, beneath overhanging boughs of trees dressed in their autumn foliage.

Now he allowed the great engine to drive the car at a rate of speed that almost took one's breath away--and now he throttled it down until the car crept, purring, along the highway, seeming to rest before another burst of speed.

He was driving in that fashion for a purpose. Silvia Rodney, the young woman who sat at his side, believed that it was because Warwick was nervous, and she smiled happily, for Warwick's manner led her to believe that he was about to address her on a subject a young woman always likes to hear discussed by a man she more than admires.

Warwick's real purpose, however, was to discover just why he was being followed, and by whom. He had known for the past two hours that he was being followed by somebody. He was aware that he was being watched closely as he ate luncheon with Silvia Rodney at a little inn far up the river, but he had been unable to locate the person who had him under surveillance. And John Warwick had a perfect right to feel a bit nervous about it.

Known to the world at large as the one remaining member of an old and respected family of culture and wealth, the truth of the matter was that John Warwick was a criminal of a sort, a clever member of the band controlled and commanded by The Spider, a supercrimimal who had been the despair of the police of Europe in days gone by, and who still was active, though not to such a great extent.

Ruined by men who had called themselves his friends, John Warwick had joined The Spider's band at the supercriminal's suggestion, and had become a valuable man to the master crook. He maintained his position in society, for there he was of the greatest value to The Spider. He would be of value only as long as he remained free from suspicion. His successful work had antagonized criminals who were fighting The Spider, and Warwick knew that they would expose him if they ever got the opportunity.

Knowing that he was being followed and watched, John Warwick speculated as to the identity of the person or persons doing it. Were they officers of the law who had grown suspicious of him? Had he made some fatal slip that had put them on the right track? Or were they criminals antagonistic to The Spider and his band?

Warwick did not betray his nervousness and anxiety to the girl at his side, and nobody could have told from his manner that he was thinking of annoyance or trouble. He indulged in his usual brand of small talk, spoke of things to be seen along the road, chatted of the beauties of the scenery, gave the impression that he was a bit bored by it all--and, in reality, was very much alert.

"Great old season, autumn--what?" Warwick said now, glancing at Silvia.

"It is, indeed, John," the girl replied.

"True to all the forms of life--and all that sort of thing," he went on. "I always did admire a man or woman in the autumn of their existence--mellow with age, rich in experience, wise to the ways of the wicked world, and all that sort of silly rot! Live and learn--what? Quite so! A man gets really fit to live about the time he has to die. My word!"

"John Warwick, you are speaking like an old man, and you certainly are not one!"

"Thirty-four, dear lady!"

"I am twenty-six myself."

"Refuse to believe it!" Warwick declared. "Must be spoofing me, what? Don't look a day more than eighteen!"

"John Warwick, you are trying to flatter me!"

"My word! Couldn't be done, dear young lady! Not the proper sort of words in the old dictionary--none nearly strong enough. Webster chap should have met a girl like you--would have invented a lot more good adjectives!"

"John Warwick! I'll be angry in a moment!"

"Angry? My word!" Warwick gasped. "I always had a suspicion that girls liked to hear men say that sort of thing."

"But I am not a silly girl!" Silvia Rodney declared, pouting a bit--and she turned half away from him and looked at the river sparkling in the bright sunshine.

John Warwick managed to glance at her from the corners of his eyes--and sighed.

Silvia Rodney was the niece of The Spider. When Warwick first joined the supercriminal's band, he had made a pretense of paying a great deal of attention to her--it gave him an excuse for visiting so much at the mansion on American Boulevard where The Spider had his home and headquarters. This acquaintance had developed into love with a speed that was truly amazing. John Warwick, a man of society, hunter of big game, world roamer in days gone by, the man many women had sought for husband and could not capture, had fallen in love with the sweet, unassuming girl--and had been forced through circumstances to hold his tongue.

For from Silvia Rodney had been kept the knowledge of her uncle's true character. She had been taught to believe that he was the representative of a certain European power, and that he was working in the interests of humanity.

John Warwick was too honest to speak to her of love without telling her that he was a criminal of a sort--and The Spider had forbidden him doing that. He knew that Silvia Rodney returned his love, and was wondering why he did not ask her to become his wife.

Warwick had been a ruined man when he had joined The Spider's band. But, because of his excellent work, he had gathered a small fortune again; and The Spider, by way of reward, also had engineered a campaign on the Stock Exchange that had netted Warwick almost a quarter of a million dollars.

Warwick was all right financially now, yet he remained true to The Spider, not through fear of what might happen to him if he left the supercriminal's band, but out of gratitude to The Spider for his help.

There were times when John Warwick wished that he might marry Silvia Rodney and cease his nefarious work. It had not been so very nefarious at that. The Spider and his followers committed thefts, but generally on the side of right. Ill-gotten gains were what they generally took from their victims; and now and then The Spider contracted to obtain and return something that had been procured by improper means from its rightful owner. There were worse criminals than The Spider and his people, but nevertheless, what they did was outside the law.

Warwick stopped the roadster in a grove beside the highway and helped Silvia Rodney out.

"Dear young lady," he said, "we will walk about one hundred feet through these woods and come to a high place overlooking a bend in the river. It is the most beautiful spot in the entire state, especially at this time of the year."

Warwick led the way through the brush, and finally they emerged on the top of a giant rock at the river's edge. Silvia gave a little cry of delight at the scene that unfolded before them.

A great river was at their feet, curving into the distance, and the woods on both shores were dressed in red and brown and gold. In the far distance, they could see the city.

They sat down on a fallen log to watch the scene--and John Warwick sighed again.

"Why--why not say it, John?" Silvia Rodney whispered to him, after a time.

"Pardon?"

"Must I say it?" she asked.

"My word! Whatever can you mean?"

"John Warwick, there seems to be some deep and dark mystery about you," the girl said. "Perhaps it is forward of me to speak in this way, but I flatter myself that I am a modern young woman, not bound by every silly and narrow-minded convention--and I always like to have mysteries solved. John Warwick, you have been in--in love with me for a year!"

"Certainly, my dear little lady!" Warwick replied. "What man would not be?"

"John Warwick, I want you to know that I am speaking seriously. A woman always can tell when a man really is in love with her. And--and I should think--that a big, wise man--could tell when a girl--was really in love with him."

"My word!"

"And you know that I--well, that I am!" she gasped. "And yet you--you never speak of it. I suppose that it must be because I am not good enough for you."

"Oh, my word! You're a great girl--and I'm a regular rotter, really."

"I know better than that--you are nothing of the sort!" she declared. "And I'll not have you defaming yourself in that way! Perhaps it isn't at all nice for me to speak in this way, but I must have an explanation, John. I--I cannot go on in this way! Is it that you don't--want me?"

"Oh, my dear girl!"

John Warwick turned away from her and looked up the broad river. He had faced charging elephants and infuriated tigers, he had been in many a close corner during his work for The Spider, but never in his life before had he faced an ordeal such as this. The charming girl who sat at his side was more formidable, in her way, than a jungle filled with wild beasts.

"What is it, John?" she asked now. "Is it something that you cannot tell me?"

"I--I am not good enough!" he replied.

"John Warwick, I have been investigating you a bit. Alice Norton has spoken to me about you a hundred times, and she has known you from boyhood. You have been a good, clean man, John. You were a bit wild in college, and just after you graduated, but your wildness consisted mostly of globe-trotting and hunting lions, and things like that."

"I suppose so," Warwick sighed.

"There is nothing in your past life that would keep a nice girl from becoming your wife."

"My word! Regular paragon--what? Example to be held up to erring youth, and all that sort of thing!"

"Now you are trying to make me laugh and change the subject. And I refuse to do anything of the sort, John Warwick! We are going to have an explanation here this afternoon--or I never shall go riding with you again, or talk to you when you visit my uncle."

"Oh, I say! Condemn a chap, and all that?"

"I mean it, John!"

Warwick looked up the river again--and saw nothing. He was feeling very uncomfortable, to say the least. He was remembering his promise to The Spider, and he did not want to lose the sweet companionship of the girl at his side.

Silvia Rodney touched him on the arm. "Silly man!" she said.

"Beg pardon?"

"I think that I understand, John. You have wanted to speak to me for some time--I could tell. And you have not, because--well, because of my uncle, I suppose."

"But what could your jolly old uncle have to do with it?" John Warwick asked. "You mean that I am afraid he wouldn't give you to me, if I were to ask him?"

"I suppose you think that I am a silly girl who is blind and deaf and dumb," she said. "My uncle seems to think so, too. Why, John, I have known the truth for two years, at least, but never have let my uncle find out. I felt a bit badly about it at first--and then I discovered that my uncle isn't so very bad after all. He was bad in his youth, but now he and his men and women are working more in the interests of right than anything else. I know that my uncle is The Spider, the supercriminal!"

"My word!"

"It is the blood that flows through his veins," she went on. "His father was a famous criminal. My own father was associated with my uncle for some time before his death. I am resigned to those facts now, John."

"My word!"

"And you are not so very bad, you see. What have you done recently? You recovered an idol that had been taken from India. Uncle received money for that, of course, and so did you, yet it was honest in a way to have the idol returned. Then you recovered a famous painting that had been stolen, and so it found its way back to its original owner. You committed burglary to get it, and yet it was honest, in a way. So, you see, things are not so very bad."

"My word!" Warwick gasped again.

"And so, John, if that was the reason why you did not speak--"

"But I am a crook!" he protested. "Can I ask a sweet girl to become my wife when I am a criminal, when I am liable to arrest and incarceration at any moment?"

"John, if the girl loved you, she would be willing to run that risk."

"My dear lady! Since I have been working for your uncle, he has aided me in building up my shattered fortunes. I could maintain my place in society now and have a wife at my side. And I do want you, dear girl! But I cannot have you--unless The Spider releases me. If he would do that--"

"I feel sure that he will, John. He loves me, you know, and will do anything for my happiness."

"We shall ask him," Warwick said.

"You let me ask him, John. Let me tell him everything. I feel sure that it will be all right."

"You'll marry me, if The Spider releases me?"

"Of course!" she said. "So we--we are engaged, now?"

"I suppose so--provisionally."

"Well--" John Warwick faced her again, and saw her smile and her trembling lips. He took her into his arms quickly, and kissed her. "Let us hope and pray that The Spider will be merciful!" he said.

They got up and started walking back through the woods toward the roadster. Suddenly, Warwick remembered! During his conversation with Silvia, he had forgotten about his belief that he was being followed and watched.

Now he was doubly alert as they walked back through the brush. He glanced around the grove as he helped the radiant Silvia into the roadster, but he saw nothing suspicious. He started the car, turned it into the road beside the river, and drove it toward the distant city.

Once more he maintained a conversation, a more animated one this time, but he was busy thinking and planning. He was driving at a good rate of speed when they went around a sharp curve in the road; then he stopped the car suddenly, backed it up, and waited.

Presently another car shot around the curve--a roadster as big and powerful as Warwick's. Only one man was in it. His faced flushed as he caught sight of Warwick and realized that he had been caught. He bent his head and drove on furiously.

"What is it?" Silvia had asked.

"Had an idea that chap was following us," Warwick explained, "I've been feeling it for a couple of hours. Thought I'd catch him by stopping quickly and letting him drive past."

"Who was it, John?"

"I have not the slightest idea my dear," Warwick replied. "But I'll jolly well find out, you may be sure! Can't be having unknown fellows following me around, what? My word, no!"

II
Under Orders

ONE hour later, John Warwick was pacing the floor of the big living room in the residence of The Spider on American Boulevard.

Silvia Rodney was closeted with her uncle in his den on the upper floor of the house. Warwick was nervous. He dreaded his coming interview with the supercriminal, which he knew he would be forced to hold as soon as Silvia came down the stairs.

"Feel like an ass, what?" Warwick told himself. "Might be a silly college youth, and all that sort of thing! Peculiar how some things work out in this old world! Never seem to know what is going to happen next. My word!"

He paced the floor for nearly another half an hour, consuming cigarette after cigarette; and then a radiant Silvia came down the stairs and rushed into his arms.

"Everything is all right, John," she said. "And you are to go up immediately and see him."

"Think I'd better take a gun along?" Warwick asked.

"Nonsense!"

"Your jolly old uncle might turn violent, you know--me capturing his pet and only niece, and all that sort of thing. Might decide to have revenge, or something like that."

"I don't think you need fear him, John."

"Well, I'll toddle up the stairs and have the dreaded ordeal over with, at any rate. No particular use in postponing it, what?"

Warwick hurried up the stairs and knocked at the door of The Spider's den. A gruff voice bade him enter. Warwick did so and closed and bolted the door behind him, as was customary when holding a conference with the supercriminal in his office.

The Spider sat in the usual place behind his big mahogany desk, in his invalid's chair, his fat hands spread out before him, his flabby cheeks shaking, and his little, piglike eyes glittering in a peculiar fashion.

"Sit down!" the supercriminal commanded; and once more he spoke in a gruff voice.

John Warwick sat down, and the Spider looked at him until Warwick began to feel uncomfortable.

"Say it, jolly old sir, and get it out of your system!" Warwick suggested finally.

"There doesn't seem to be much for me to say, Warwick. I want to secure the happiness of my niece, of course. It was a great shock to me to learn that she was aware of the nature of my business. I had believed that she was ignorant of it."

"Deuce of a shock to me, too, sir," John Warwick admitted. "I had no idea that she had guessed the truth."

"Perhaps it is for the best that things have worked out in this manner," The Spider went on. "She tells me that you will not marry while you are continuing your career of crime."

"Certainly not, sir--never think of it!" Warwick declared. "It wouldn't be fair to her."

"I'm glad you look at it in that way. You have your fortune back now, of course, and can give her a good home. You need play criminal no longer--for you are playing at it! You are not a criminal at heart. I suppose that I shall have to release you as a member of my band, Warwick. All that you know, you will have to keep secret, of course, but I feel that I can trust you to do that. So I am going to give you your release, Warwick."

"Thank you, jolly old sir!"

"After you have attended to a couple more matters for me," The Spider added.

"Oh, I see! Something already planned--what?"

"Yes--two things. As soon as they are accomplished, you are to be a free man, and then you can marry Silvia and settle down as a respectable citizen."

"The old world isn't such a bad place after all--what?" Warwick said. "Man gets his reward in time, and all that sort of silly rot! Feel like a new man already! My word!"

"Don't be hasty, Warwick! These two things that I have mentioned are far from being trivial."

"Oh, I gathered that much!"

"You may begin work on the first just as soon as you please and do it in your own way."

"Orders, old sir and employer?"

"Exactly. I presume that you are acquainted with Mrs. Burton Barker?"

"I am," Warwick replied grimly. "Her husband was one of the group of men that robbed me of my fortune."

"Then this work should be a pleasure for you," said The Spider. "You may have observed that Mrs. Burton Barker wears a peculiar locket on a long gold chain."

"I have noticed it often, old sir and employer. No matter how she may be dressed, she always wears the silly thing. She's always twining the chain around her fingers and playing with it. I've wondered many times why she persists in wearing it when Barker could buy her all sorts of jewels, if she wished them."

"That locket happens to be an important bit of merchandise," the supercriminal said.

"I am to get the locket?"

"You are."

"As soon as possible?"

"Yes," The Spider replied. "And the sooner you can get it, so much the better!"

"It seems like a silly thing to steal!" Warwick declared. "You could buy all you wanted for about fifty dollars each."

"You couldn't purchase that particular locket at any price, and there is not another in all the world exactly like it!" declared the supercriminal.

"Some sort of history connected with the foolish thing?" Warwick wanted to know.

"Something like that, Warwick. You just get that locket as soon as you can and leave the rest to me. There will be ten thousand dollars in it for you--if you succeed."

"If I succeed!" Warwick gasped. "My word! Always succeed, don't I? Couldn't afford to fail--simply couldn't--when I am so nearly done working for you, could I? Fall down at the last moment, and all that sort of thing? Certainly not! My word, no!"

"Getting possession of that locket might not be as easy as it sounds," The Spider warned him.

"How is that, old sir?"

"It happens that there are some other persons very anxious to get their hands on it."

"Ah, I see!"

"And they are so anxious that they will go to about any length to get it, Warwick. You will have strong competition, in other words. This will amount to more than merely snipping a locket from a chain worn by a woman."

"What is the silly old locket, anyway?" Warwick wanted to know.

"I may tell you about that later," The Spider returned. "You'll have enough on your mind in planning to get it and outwit the others at the same time."

"And the others--"

"I can tell you absolutely nothing about them, Warwick. Another man is after that locket of Mrs. Burton Barker's, but he will not make an attempt to get it himself. He has assistants, however, and I do not know them. You'll have to be alert, on guard, and find out things for yourself."

"My word! Deep and dark mystery--what? And all over a silly bit of a locket that--"

"Allow me to tell you that it is not a silly locket, Warwick! It is a very important locket, and we must have it. Do you understand? We must get it!"

"Very well, old sir. I'll get the thing. I'm going to some sort of an affair at Burton Barker's place this very evening--going to take Silvia with me."

"Be careful, Warwick!"

"Invitations are already accepted, old sir and employer--and it'd look rather peculiar if she did not go. I always do my work best when everything appears natural--understand? Somebody might get suspicious if everything did not."

"But, Silvia--"

"She'll be in the way--bother me, you mean? Bless you--no! She probably will dance with a lot of chaps and give me time to do my work. I'll be more careful, too, if she is there--be afraid of making some silly mistake and wrecking our happiness. By the way, do these--er--other chaps of whom you spoke know that I am going after that locket?"

"They know that I am after it, and that you are one of my trusted men," The Spider replied. "And so, naturally, they will think that you are on the job when they see you at the Barker place."

"Suppose they will be there, too? Are they the sort that could go to a place like that?" Warwick asked.

"I haven't the slightest idea, Warwick."

"I'd better lose no time then, what? I'll get to work as soon as possible--nab the silly thing before anybody else can!"

"That would be best, I think. Do you want any help?"

"I fancy not," Warwick replied. "I'd probably work much better alone in such a case. I may use Togo, if it proves necessary. He is worth a dozen ordinary men."

"Very well; have it your own way and use your own methods," the supercriminal told him. "All I'm interested in is the proper result. I want that locket, Warwick. I must have it--and I don't want you to fail!"

"My word! You speak as though I always had failed!" Warwick complained. "Never failed yet, have I?"

"There is a first time for everything, Warwick," said the supercriminal, "and I am not eager for this to be your first failure. Keep your eyes open for the others. I am sorry that I can give you no definite information concerning them."

"Then I suppose I'll have to be suspicious of everybody--what?" Warwick said. "I'd better toddle along now, old and respected sir! I have to see Silvia again, hurry home, dress--all that sort of silly rot. 'Bye!"

"Good luck, Warwick!"

"Thanks, old sir and employer! I fancy that this will not be a very difficult job. Getting a silly locket that hangs on the end of a chain--my word!"

"Ten thousand in it for you, Warwick. That will pay for a honeymoon."

"Not for the sort that Silvia and I intend having, but it will help some," Warwick replied '"Bye!"

Warwick left the den of The Spider, and hurried down the stairs to where Silvia was waiting for him.

"Everything is jolly well all right, dear girl," he reported "I have a couple more tasks to perform for your uncle and then I am to be--er--free. Understand? And then--!"

"You'll be careful, John?"

"Of course! My word! Be jolly well careful when a mistake would mean my losing you! We are going to Mrs. Burton Barker's place tonight, remember!"

"Will you have work to do there, John?"

"Now, now! Little girls should not ask too many questions, you know!"

"But I am interested!" Silvia declared. "And perhaps I might be able to help you!"

"Heaven forbid!" Warwick exclaimed fervently. "Allow you to run into danger--what? My word!"

"Oh, perhaps you think that I am not clever enough to help you," she accused. "Please remember, sir,

that The Spider is my uncle, and some of the same strain of blood that is in his veins flows through mine!"

"Why, my dear girl!"

"And I'd like to help you," she coaxed.

"But I don't fancy that you can in this--er--particular case," Warwick told her. "Perhaps you may in the other--the last one--we'll see about it later. We can't afford to take any unnecessary risks, you know. I'll tell you a bit more about it tonight. Have to toddle along now--dinner, dress, all that sort of thing. 'Bye!"

Warwick kissed her again, and then he hurried out to the curb. But he shivered as he sprang into his roadster.

"Just fancy a girl as sweet as Silvia running the danger of arrest to help me steal a silly locket," he mused as he drove rapidly up the boulevard. "My word! It isn't being done! Not the proper sort of thing at all--what?"

III
Togo Shows Emotion

TOGO was the peer of all Japanese valets, as John Warwick often had said--and yet he was more than that. Though the world in general did not suspect, Togo himself was a valued member of The Spider's band, and had been for years before John Warwick was induced to join it.

Togo had worked for the supercriminal in the old days in Paris, and he knew many things about the band that even John Warwick did not know. The deeds of The Spider and his men and women were mild now to what they had been in those days before an accident made a cripple of the supercriminal and prevented his active physical participation in the band's doings. Though he could not get about except in an invalid's chair, yet The Spider remained the brains of the band.

Warwick and some of the others knew that in the den of the house on American Boulevard there were great filing cases that held many interesting documents. Some of these related to criminals, some were of such a nature that they could have been used against prominent men, and others were documents regarding police officers and detectives.

Whereas any well-regulated police department kept a rogues' gallery of crooks, The Spider maintained his rogues' gallery of peace officers, knew their peculiarities, their weak spots, and their strong points. But only Togo and few of the old-timers knew of other things that were in those secret archives--things that related to days gone by, little accounts that the supercriminal sought to settle from time to time, in some as the creditor and in some as a debtor.

Togo was also sincerely attached to John Warwick. Several times, he had given Warwick valuable aid, and on one occasion had saved him from exposure and arrest. When Warwick returned to his rooms this day, Togo opened the door for him, stepped back, and bowed, flashing his teeth in a smile.

"Honorable Togo, I am a bit late," Warwick said. "Kindly have dinner sent up from the restaurant downstairs just as soon as possible. There is a little social affair this evening at the home of Mrs. Burton Barker, and I am obliged to attend. Beastly bore, I suppose, and all that--but it happens to be necessary."

"Yes, sar!" Togo said.

"Togo, I was driving with Miss Silvia Rodney this afternoon, and chap betrayed particular interest in me."

"Sar?"

"He appeared rather anxious and eager to know all about my comings and goings, and all that sort of thing. I maneuvered to get a glimpse of him, finally. My word! Very common-looking chap at that--very common indeed!"

"Policeman, sar?"

"If he is, he is a new one on me, Togo, old top. I fancy that he is no policeman, or anything of that sort. I have a faint idea that the chap is one of those criminal fellows. The sort that always are poking their noses into the business of other folk--you know!"

"Yes, sar!"

"It might be well, old boy, if you kept your eyes and ears open a bit around here, what? We've been bothered before now by fellows who were inclined to cause us a bit of annoyance, haven't we? Getting rather sick of it!"

"I understand, sar."

"If anybody should come prowling about--"

"I shall attend to him, sar!" Togo promised.

"There you are--always bloodthirsty! My word! Assassinate the whole world if you could, what?"

"Only if the world was against you, sar!"

"Um! Thanks!" Warwick said. "Faithful chap, and all that! Well, keep eyes and ears open, old boy. And toddle right along now and order that dinner!"

* * *

Half an hour later, Warwick was eating dinner in the living room of his suite, Togo serving it. When he came to coffee, Warwick leaned back in his chair, puffed at a cigarette, and regarded Togo carefully.

"I've a bit of news for you, old top--astonishing news," he said, presently. "You are as much a comrade in arms as a valet, and so you should know."

"Thank you, sar!"

"You know our flabby-cheeked friend with whom we are associated now and then in a little enterprise? Quite so! Well, I have to tell you, honorable Japanese, that before very long I shall be leaving his band."

"Sar?" Togo cried.

A swift change came over Togo's face. For a moment the Japanese, who seldom showed emotion, revealed his feelings, and in no uncertain manner.

"Oh, everything will be quite regular, honorable Togo!" Warwick assured him. "I am not turning traitor, or bolting, or anything like that. My word, no! I'm thinking of getting married, old boy--understand?"

Togo grinned.

"I see that you do understand," John Warwick continued. "And a married man should not be doing things that might get him into trouble with the police, should he? So there you are! Our friend, whose name need not be mentioned here at this moment, has agreed to--er--release me after I accomplish two certain things. You gather that all in, honorable Togo?"

"Yes, sar!"

"Excellent! Your own future is provided for, of course. I'll need you with me as much as before, and all that. It's up to you to say whether you remain with me or go back to where you can--er--be more active in the service of our flabby-cheeked friend."

"I shall be glad to remain, sar," Togo replied.

"Good! I have to accomplish the first task of the two tonight, if I can, at the residence of Mrs. Button Barker."

"I am to help, sar?" Togo asked eagerly.

"Um! I fail to see at this moment just how you can help, old top. Sorry! Like to have you in those last two little games if I could, and all that. But this is a strictly society affair, you know--dress-suit stuff."

"I understand, sar."

"I've got to get a little locket--"

"A locket, sar?" Togo cried.

"My word! Whatever is the matter with you? Why shriek at me in that fashion?" Warwick demanded, putting down the coffee cup. "Are you beside yourself--what?"

"Your pardon, sar!"

"But I fail to understand, confound it! Never knew you to act so in the world! Have you been drinking?"

"No, sar!"

"Explain, then!"

"I--I was startled, sar."

"I should think you were! And you certainly startled me! Almost made me choke, confound it!" Warwick exclaimed. "What do you mean by such a thing?"

"You mentioned a locket, sar. I--I was wondering if it could be the locket."

"Honorable Japanese, it is merely a silly locket that a foolish woman wears on the end of a long, ridiculous chain. Why our flabby-cheeked friend wants it is more than I know--and I suppose that it is none of my business. He didn't happen to take me into his full confidence this time, confound it!"

"Then it must be the locket," Togo said.

"What locket?" Warwick demanded. "Am I always to be surrounded by riddles? My word! It's enough to make a man take to drink, and all that sort of thing!"

"I--I cannot tell you, sar, if The Spider will not," Togo said. "I am sure you will pardon me, sar."

"My word! What mystery is this? I had thought that it was just a silly locket that somebody wanted badly enough to pay for. Other chaps are after the thing, too, it appears. Jolly old Spider told me to watch out for them!"

"Then it must be the locket I mean," Togo said. "You must be very careful, sar."

"Do I happen to have a reputation for being reckless?" Warwick demanded. "My word! A man would think that I was about to abduct the sultan of Turkey, or some little thing like that."

"It seems to be only a very simple thing, sar, but, believe me, it is not!" Togo told him.

"How on Earth does it happen that a woman like Mrs. Burton Barker is wearing a locket there could be so much fuss about? Why, the woman has had the thing for years! It seems to be a sort of pet of hers. Everybody wonders why she wears the thing. Impression is abroad that she is superstitious, and all that, and thinks the fool locket brings her good luck. Can't fathom this thing at all!"

"I--I certainly wish that I could tell you, sar, but I dare not without the permission of the master," Togo declared. "But I beg of you to be most careful, sar, and to watch out for those others you have mentioned."

"It seems to me that I have accomplished tasks far more difficult than this," Warwick said. "Is the greatest diamond in the world concealed in the thing, or some silly rot like that?"

"I believe that the locket is not of very great value in itself, sar," Togo replied.

"I fancy not, since I am to receive only ten thousand if I succeed in getting the thing. Sure you can't tell me more about it?"

"I dare not, sar!"

"My word! How very disgusting! Never did like such mysteries--get on a man's nerves, what?"

"If I only could help you, sar!" Togo exclaimed. "At least, sar, please allow me to be in the neighborhood of the Barker residence this evening. You may have need of me, sar. And, if you expect to be married soon, you will want nothing bad to happen."

"I should think not!" Warwick said. "But, this is amazing! Thought it was just a silly locket!"

"It is called the Locket of Tragedy, sar!"

"My word!" Warwick exclaimed, staring at the valet. "What a perfectly silly name to give a locket--and a cheap one at that! Nothing very tragic about Mrs. Burton Barker, I'm sure. She is just a silly butterfly of a woman!"

"It is true that she may have that appearance, sar," said Togo. "But, if you will pardon me, she is nothing of the sort. She is a dangerous woman, sar!"

"You know her?"

"I know of her, sar," said Togo. "Be on your guard, sar, when you attempt this thing. She may be expecting somebody to make an attempt to get the locket. And if you are suspected--"

"I understand, honorable Togo. Thanks, too, for this surprising warning. I always considered the woman rather shallow myself. Sort of a little girl masquerading in a grown-up's costume, what? I've known her for a score of years, since she was a girl--"

"Pardon, sar!" Togo interrupted. "But, during all those years, were there no times, when you were traveling, when you did not see her and heard nothing of her for years?"

"Of course! She was in school--and then she came out and spent the usual time abroad--"

"Ah!" Togo said significantly.

"So that is it, eh? She got mixed up with The Spider while abroad--what? Why, it can't be possible! The girl had a mother who watched her like a hawk!"

"Nevertheless, sar, something happened at that time that influenced this woman's whole life."

"She never looked like a woman of tragedy to me!" Warwick declared. "Can't imagine old Barker marrying a woman of that sort--his fancy always ran to the other kind."

"Perhaps her husband knows nothing of it."

"Of what?" Warwick asked.

"Of the locket and what it means," Togo replied.

John Warwick got up and began pacing the room. Togo piled the dishes on the tray, carried them into the hall, and rang for the waiter in the restaurant below.

"Never heard of such a thing!" Warwick grumbled. "All this row about a locket and a foolish woman! I'll bet there's nothing to it after all! I'll get the thing as quickly as I can and take it to The Spider. If I can't get a locket from a woman like Mrs. Burton Barker, I must be getting old, slowing up--what? My word, yes!"

Warwick walked to a dark corner of the room, stepped to a window there, and looked down at the street. The lights were just being turned on. A stream of automobiles was passing, men of affairs going to their homes from their offices.

Warwick glanced across the street, where there was a drug store with windows brilliantly lighted. He stepped closer to the window--and looked again Standing before one of the store windows and looking at the apartment house was the man who had followed Warwick in the roadster.

"He's watching me rather closely--what?" Warwick told himself. "I'll have to look into this matter, I'm afraid. Always did detest a mystery!"

He stepped to his desk, got an automatic pistol from one of the drawers, and slipped it into the pocket of his overcoat. He put into his coat pocket a tiny pair of pincers so sharp that they would cut through strands of any ordinary metal--say, a gold chain. He called to Togo to order the chauffeur to have the limousine in front immediately and then put on his hat and coat--but not his gloves.

"You'll be careful, sar?" Togo asked.

"Naturally!" Warwick replied. "Can't understand this sudden idea that I may get reckless! Never knew me to be reckless before, did you? My word!"

"And I cannot help you, sar?" Togo implored.

"Oh, you may happen to be in the neighborhood, if that will appease you in the least," Warwick answered. "Fail to see how you can be of help to me, though."

"Thanks, sar!" Togo cried. "Perhaps I may be of service to you, sar! It will be a difficult task, I fear. It is not the easy one you seem to think, sar."

"Nonsense!" Warwick exclaimed. "Upon my word, I never heard such utter rot before! I'll have the silly old locket before midnight--make you a good wager on it! I never saw you quite like this before,

honorable Japanese! Makes me wonder what the old world is coming to, you know. Nonsense! A man would think, from your actions and words, that I was going into a battle, or something like that!"

Togo's answer rather startled him. "You are, sar!" Togo said.

IV
One Known Foe

JOHN WARWICK left the apartment house, stepped out into the street, and then walked briskly across it. He entered the drug store and purchased a package of cigarettes. There was no particular sense in that, since he had an ample supply in his rooms, and even some in his pocket, but it gave him a chance to pass within six feet of the man who had been watching him.

Warwick did not give him as much as a glance as he entered the store. The man moved down the street a dozen feet or so, and stood by the curb. Warwick walked from the drug store, stopped to light one of the cigarettes he had purchased, tossed away the burned match, and then whirled around and stepped up to the man at the curb.

"See here!" he exclaimed, in a low, tense voice. "I'd like very much to be informed just as to why you show such a remarkable and unusual interest in my affairs!"

"What's that?" the other snarled.

"I fancy that you both heard and understood me," Warwick said. "You followed me this afternoon, while I was out motoring, and now I find you loitering around the place where I live."

"Well, what about it?"

"Why, I don't fancy it at all!" Warwick told him. "I ought to have an explanation, and all that sort of thing. My word! A fellow hates to have somebody prowling around and watching him. It isn't quite the thing, you know!"

"I've no doubt that you do object to being watched," the other man said.

"Just what do you mean by that?" Warwick demanded.

"None of your business!"

"See here! I am in the habit of being addressed in a respectful manner, confound it!"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" the other asked, sneering once more.

"Why, confound it, sir, I can break you in two with my bare hands!" Warwick declared. "Do you imagine that I am a weakling just because I happen to be wearing evening clothes? Keep a civil tongue in your head when you are speaking to me!"

"I didn't say that I wanted to speak to you, did I? You began this conversation, didn't you?"

"I did--and probably shall end it!" said Warwick. "Why have you been following me, and all that?"

"I didn't say that I had been."

"Ah! Trying to evade the question, are you? What? My word! Do you fancy that you can indulge in repartÃ©e with me? Answer me straight now!"

"Attend to your own business! I'm getting sick of your talk!" the other told him.

"I have half a notion to hand you over immediately to the police chaps!"

"You try it, and we'll mix. I think you're crazy, if anybody wants to know!"

Warwick suddenly stepped closer to the man and grinned at him. Warwick understood now. He could handle this man physically, and with ease and he knew that the other knew it. Why, then, did this man taunt him to combat?

To cause a row, probably, and make it necessary for Warwick to go to police headquarters and settle it, or make charges--to delay John Warwick, in fact, and prevent him getting to the residence of Mrs. Burton Barker on time. The fellow might even hope to mar Warwick's face early in combat, in such a manner that Warwick would not be presentable and could not go to Mrs. Burton Barker's at all.

So Warwick grinned, and stepped closer and spoke in a tone somewhat lower.

"Your work, sir, is as coarse as your manners," he said. "You will observe that there is a patrolman just across the street. He is an old friend of mine. I give him a box of cigars now and then, and always speak to him when we pass in the street. If you start anything with me, sir, I shall knock you down, order him to take you to the station, simply announce that I shall appear in court in the morning--and go on my merry way. Your little plot would not work then, what? You'd fail and look jolly well silly, and all that sort of thing. Make a regular ass of yourself! My word!"

"You think you're smart, don't you?"

"Certainly not! Smart? Oh, I am a regular stupid ass!" Warwick said. "I don't know much of anything--but I can see through your little game!"

"I guess there are a few things that you don't know, all right!"

"Perhaps--and perhaps not!" Warwick told him. "But I do know this much--if I catch you prowling around me any more, I am going to handle you, and not in a delicate manner, either. And if you happen to have a couple of friends, I'll handle them, too."

"Quite a boy, ain't you?" the other sneered.

"Enough of one to do that," Warwick answered. "Going to tell me why you have been following me and prowling about?"

"Do you think that you can bluff me just because use happen to belong to The Spider's gang?"

"Spider's gang? My word! What on Earth are you talking about?" Warwick asked blankly.

"I suppose you've heard of The Spider!"

"Are you once of those nutty fellows, off your feed, bats in the belfry--all that sort of thing?" Warwick demanded. "I never heard such nonsense! Ought to be incarcerated and held for investigation! Liable to run amuck and slay women and children!"

"Oh, I guess we understand each other!" the other said. "That line of talk doesn't get any too far with me, you want to understand. I'm wise!"

"That is fortunate," Warwick observed. "There are but few wise men remaining on Earth, and we have desperate need of them all. I am under the impression that I have been wasting valuable time talking to a silly ass. Spider's gang! My word! Whatever can that mean? However, cease following me around. I

can't have a lunatic trailing me all the time--frighten my friends to death!"

"It probably will frighten some of them, all right!"

"Now you are talking in riddles again!" Warwick declared. "I see that my limousine is waiting, and so I cannot waste any more time on you. Just a friendly tip, my man--if I find you annoying me again, I shall feel compelled to deal with you personally!"

John Warwick's voice lost its light tone and became menacing as he spoke, and his eyes narrowed and glittered for an instant. The other man recoiled, but regained his composure again almost instantly and stepped nearer Warwick.

"Maybe you'd like to try to do that little thing right now!" he said.

"Ah! You'd like very much to have me, wouldn't you?" Warwick exclaimed. "But it happens that I have an engagement--a rather important engagement--"

"Yes, I know all about that!"

"You do, eh? It appears to me that you are a bit too much interested in my personal affairs. My word! You seem to know as much as my private secretary would--if I had one. I'd advise you to remember that little tip of mine!"

John Warwick glared at the man, and then hurried across the street to where his limousine was waiting. He told the chauffeur to drive him to the residence on American Boulevard, and there he picked up Silvia, who cuddled up beside him in the big car and seemed to be very happy in so doing.

"Are you going to tell me what you are going to do tonight?" she asked.

"Little girls should not ask too many questions," Warwick told her. "It isn't much of a task, really."

"I think you are mean if you don't tell me!"

"Promise to keep it a dark secret?"

"Of course!"

"And you must forget it as soon as I have told you, and keep your mind off it. You don't want me to fail, do you?"

"Certainly not, John!"

"Very well. Mrs. Burton Barker always wears a little locket on the end of a long, gold chain. I am to get that locket. Don't ask me why, for I do not know. Your jolly old uncle wants it for some purpose, and that is enough for me. Now, you forget it!"

"Very well, I'll try, only I'm not so sure that I can," Silvia said. "But I'll not bother you, John."

Warwick glanced through the window as the big car speeded toward that section of the city where pretentious residences predominated. The Burton Barkers had an imposing mansion surrounded by lawns that were fringed with big trees.

It was one of the show places of the city. Warwick knew it well, had been in almost every room of it. He often had inspected it while Burton Barker was having it constructed, and afterward he had been a guest there scores of times. That was when he had believed that Barker was his friend.

Barker still thought that he believed it. Barker was not aware that John Warwick knew he had conspired with other men to rob him in business deals. Warwick would not have known it, had not The Spider proved it to him. Warwick had no repugnance, therefore, in committing a crime in Burton Barker's residence while he was a guest there. He remembered that Barker had robbed him in his own house, while pretending deep friendship.

The limousine turned into the driveway and came to a stop before the house. Warwick helped Silvia out, and they entered. Many guests already had arrived, the orchestra was playing, and the scene was one of wealth and splendor.

They greeted their host and hostess, and for an instant Warwick's eyes rested on the locket he was to get. It still hung on the end of the long heavy gold chain, and Mrs. Burton Barker was twisting the chain around the fingers of her left hand, as she seemed always to be doing.

John Warwick danced once with Silvia Rodney, and then handed her over to another partner, and walked slowly through the rooms, nodding to his friends and acquaintances, acting as though he were searching for somebody, but, in reality, spotting any strangers who might happen to be present.

If it was to be his lot to face foes, he wanted to know their identities, if possible. From what had been told him, he did not know whether his antagonists would be strangers or persons with whom he was well acquainted.

One thought dominated his mind--that The Spider expected success and would not countenance failure. John Warwick had been ordered to get the locket worn by Mrs. Burton Barker, and the supercriminal expected him to get it.

Warwick passed on through the rooms, went to the veranda, strolled there and smoked a cigarette, and retraced his steps to the house again. Some belated guests were arriving. Warwick wandered toward the foot of the stairs to inspect these late-comers.

And then he almost lost his composure for a moment and stepped quickly aside, where he would not be observed. Greeting the hostess was the man who had followed him in the roadster in the afternoon, and with whom he had talked in the street before the apartment house just before starting for the Barker residence.

The man was in proper evening dress, and he greeted Mrs. Burton Barker in the approved manner.

John Warwick was puzzled to a certain extent. Mrs. Burton Barker was talking to the man as if she had been acquainted with him for some time. Was he in her employ, trying to protect the locket, and did he suspect John Warwick of planning to purloin it? The thought almost made Warwick shudder, especially when he remembered how the man had spoken regarding The Spider, for Warwick lived in continual fear of the day when suspicion would be cast upon him.

Or, was the man talking to Mrs. Burton Barker merely one of those others who were making an attempt to get possession of the locket before The Spider's people could?

While fussing around and pretending to be bored, Warwick watched the pair closely. To all appearances, the man was merely exchanging polite greetings with his hostess, but John Warwick knew that they might be speaking of important things that had to do with him. Mrs. Burton Barker was a clever woman in a way--she was able to smile and laugh, and at the same time speak of serious affairs and let those near think she was indulging in small talk, and Warwick knew it well. He had been trained in the same social school.

"Have to make sure of my ground--what?" Warwick told himself. "Must use strategy, and all that sort of thing! Can't be making some silly mistake and getting into trouble at this stage of the game. It wouldn't do at all! My word, no!"

He wandered down the corridor and approached them from another direction. He watched the man's face, made an ineffectual attempt to read his lips and ascertain what he was saying, regarded Mrs. Burton Barker carefully, and tried to imagine what she was replying.

Warwick noted that this man spent more time with his hostess than any of the other guests, and that increased his suspicions.

"No use working in the dark--what?" he told himself. "Have to ascertain a few things, I fancy!"

Warwick straightened his shoulders, managed to get a smile on his face, and then started walking directly toward Mrs. Burton Barker and the man with whom she was talking.

V
Into a Trap

MRS. BURTON BARKER smiled a welcome as John Warwick approached, for she always had admired him, but Warwick was not certain at the present time whether the welcome was sincere. The man standing beside her glared at Warwick for an instant, and then quickly regained his composure and got a blank expression into his countenance. Mrs. Burton Barker introduced him to Warwick as Mr. Marlowe, and the two men bowed coldly.

"This world is a queer old place--what?" Warwick said. "For instance, Mr. Marlowe is almost the exact image of a chap with whom I had a peculiar controversy today."

"Why, how was that, John?" Mrs. Barker asked.

"I was out motoring with Miss Rodney," Warwick explained. "A chap seemed to be following us. I managed to get a good look at him. And this evening, just before I started here, I caught the same chap watching the place where I live. Made me a bit angry, don't you know--went across the street and protested to him about it. Chap talked to me like a silly ass!"

"But why on Earth should he have been watching you, of all persons?" Mrs. Barker asked.

"Don't know, I'm sure."

"And you say that I resemble him?" Marlowe queried, a smile twitching his lips.

"Enough to be a twin of his," John Warwick replied. "I refer to looks, of course--face and form and all that. Voice somewhat similar, too."

"Of course it wasn't Mr. Marlowe?" Mrs. Barker said.

"My word! Never said that it was!" John Warwick protested. "I meant that it is peculiar how you'll meet a chap and think how much he looks like somebody else you have met. Only a certain number of types in the world, I fancy! Deuced peculiar, isn't it? Always seeing somebody who looks like somebody else!"

John Warwick grinned, and for an instant his eyes met those of Marlowe squarely.

Mrs. Burton Barker turned away then, to greet some of her other guests, and Warwick and Marlowe stepped to one side, and started walking toward the den that had been set aside as a lounging and smoking room for the male guests. There happened to be nobody in the den when they reached it.

"So you followed me here!" Warwick said, in a low voice, as soon as they were alone. "I'll have to ask you for some sort of an explanation, I fancy!"

"It happens that I am here as an invited guest," Marlowe told him. "Are you the social censor hereabouts?"

"My word, no!" Warwick exclaimed. "It is nothing in my life what sort of person Mrs. Barker wishes to invite to her residence. But you followed me--that's the point!"

"And why should I follow you?"

"That is precisely what I am eager to know," Warwick told him. "There's no confounded sense in it! It annoys me, really! I can't be having it, you know."

"And just how are you going to stop it?" Marlowe asked.

"Why, confound it, I'll simply handle you, if this thing continues! Don't you think you'd better give me some sort of an explanation?" Warwick said.

"Explanations are not necessary," replied Marlowe. "They'd be a waste of time and breath. I guess we understand each other, all right. Yes, I guess we do!"

"You are a very poor guesser," Warwick told him. "My word! Follow a chap around all day, and then refuse to tell him the reason for it! It isn't done, you know! It isn't right at all!"

"Stop trying to throw a bluff, Warwick! I happen to be wise, you know."

"I know nothing of the sort! You may be old man Wisdom himself, for all I know--or merely a silly ass! Come, now--give me an explanation. I think that I am entitled to it."

"Why not ask The Spider what you want to know?"

"There is some more of that Spider stuff!" said Warwick. "What on Earth does that mean? Are you dippy, and all that sort of thing? Bats in the belfry--what? My word!"

Marlowe stepped nearer to him and spoke in a lower voice. "Suppose, Mr. Warwick, that we walk out on the veranda, or around the lawn, where it will be possible for us to talk without running a chance of being overheard," he said. "We may be able to arrive at an understanding of some sort."

"Very well," Warwick replied. "I certainly must have some sort of an explanation!"

They made their way through the corridor and to the veranda, where there were several couples sitting around in the semi-gloom between dances, and Marlowe went slowly down the steps to the lawn and started following a walk that curved around the house toward the flower gardens at the back.

Warwick, smiling faintly, followed at his heels. Streaks of light came through the branches of the trees here and there, and yet there were plenty of dark and shadowy places where an assault could be staged without much trouble. John Warwick was alert and cautious. He did not intend to have this fellow, Marlowe, catch him off guard and eliminate him for the time being.

"Well, talk!" he said, after a time. "I fancy that we'll not be overheard around here--what?"

"Warwick, as I said, I am wise to you," Marlowe began. "I happen to know that you are The Spider's trusted right-hand man. Don't take the trouble to deny it--for I know! And I know, also, that you are under orders right now."

"Orders? My word!"

"Orders to get possession of a certain something that is at present in the residence of Mrs. Burton Barker."

"Oh, I say!"

"That is attached to the person of Mrs. Burton Barker. I'll go as far as to specify. So you see, I understand the affair perfectly, Warwick. I happen to be connected with certain persons who do not care to have you succeed in your little undertaking. In fact, it is my particular business to see that you do not succeed. Now you understand fully why I have been following and watching you."

"My word!" Warwick gasped. "I never heard such utter piffle in all my life before. Cannot understand it at all! Quite beyond me, and all that sort of thing!"

"Yeah? Well, that kind of talk doesn't fool me a bit, Warwick!" Marlowe told him. "You might as well save your breath. And you might as well give up all intention of trying to do as you have been ordered. For you are not going to succeed this time, Warwick, though you have done some clever things before."

John Warwick threw back his head and laughed.

"Most remarkable conversation!" he said. "It's all utter rot, of course; but allow me to tell you that, any time I set out to do a thing, that thing is done! I always succeed, old chap! Understand? There's no such word as failure in my personal vocabulary. My word, no! However, I am glad that you have told me this interesting little tale."

"Are you going to keep on trying to throw that bluff?" Marlowe demanded. "Maybe you think that I don't know a thing or two. The best thing for you to do is to forget your orders. You'll run into trouble if you try to carry them out!"

John Warwick laughed again, softly, as if at an excellent jest, and then turned back toward the house.

"I fancy that this conversation has been quite a waste of time," he said. "I might have been dancing, and all that sort of thing. Silly ass to listen to you--what?"

"You'll be a silly ass if you don't take the advice I gave you," Marlowe said. "You may not think that you are up against a tough game, but you are!"

Now they were passing a clump of brush that grew close to the walk and threw a deep shadow over it. Warwick had noticed it as they passed it before, had watched it searchingly for a moment or so, but had seen nothing that looked suspicious. He glanced at Marlowe now, but Marlowe was walking half a pace ahead of him and seemed to be giving the brush no attention at all.

"Well, Warwick, are you going to give it up?" Marlowe asked. "Are you going to take my advice?"

"Advice is something I rarely accept from a chance acquaintance," Warwick replied.

He chuckled again. And suddenly two men sprang from the dark near the clump of brush, and launched themselves upon him. At the same instant, Marlowe whirled around and sprang.

Warwick darted backward, and his chuckle died in his throat. He had been half expecting such an attack at first, but had grown to think that it would not materialize. Now he found himself fighting against overwhelming odds. He had an automatic in his pocket, but he had no chance to draw it, and, furthermore, he did not care to fire. He wanted publicity no more than these other men.

One of the men was throttling him now, preventing an outcry; another was trying to trip him and hurl him to the ground; Marlowe was gripping one of his arms, and also watching the walk ahead. Two more men came from the darkness and joined in the fray.

Warwick, his back against the clump of brush, fought as well as he could. He tried to hold off his antagonists, to clear a space through which he could dart to the walk and run down it toward the veranda. But he found that they were too many for him.

"Quiet as possible, men!" he heard Marlowe command. "We don't want a row that will attract any of the guests! Do your work quickly! Clever, is he? He walked right into the trap!"

The pungent odor of chloroform assailed Warwick's nostrils. He tried to fight furiously, to hold off unconsciousness, to keep from being a prisoner in the hands of these men, but they held him in such manner that he scarcely could put up a struggle.

Their voices seemed to come to him from a great distance. He felt his senses going, tried to strike and kick. He called himself a fool for not guarding against surprise better while taking that walk with Marlowe, when he might have known there would be some sort of a trap.

And then the drug had its way, and Warwick ceased to call himself anything.

*** * ***

As the limp form dropped to the ground, Marlowe issued his orders quickly and in a low voice.

"Get him across the lawn and into the machine! Take him away as quickly as you can--and for Heaven's sake, don't make any mistakes! Watch him carefully! I'll let you know when to release him--when my work is done!"

One of the men grunted in reply, and then two of them picked up the unconscious Warwick and carried him across the Barker lawn, from shadow to shadow, dark spot to dark spot, careful not to be observed. Close to the curb, on the side street, a limousine was waiting, its curtains drawn, its engine purring, a chauffeur sitting behind the wheel.

John Warwick was tossed into the limousine, and it left the curb and ran down the street, gathering speed. Two of the men had entered it with Warwick; the two others hurried down the street in the opposite direction.

And Marlowe, grinning like a fiend, walked slowly through the grounds and approached the veranda from the opposite direction. He went along the railing, tossed away a half-smoked cigarette, and passed through the open front door. Ten minutes later he was being introduced to a certain young woman guest and was asking her to dance with him.

The young woman was Silvia Rodney.

VI
Togo Takes a Hand

THAT particular brand of nausea which follows a dose of chloroform had been experienced by John Warwick before; and when he regained consciousness now, and experienced it again, he kept his eyes closed, pretending to be under the influence of the drug and waiting for his brain to clear, Warwick realized that he was stretched on a couch of some sort; and he heard the voices of two men in conversation. His wrists were lashed together in front of him, but his ankles were not bound and there was no gag in his mouth. After a time, he opened one eye and glanced around the room.

It was a medium-sized room furnished in quite an ordinary manner. There were half a dozen chairs, a table, and a buffet. Warwick could see a closed door and two windows at which the shades had been drawn. Two incandescent lights burned in a chandelier.

The men were still conversing. Warwick could not see them, for they were beyond his feet, and he did not want to turn his body yet and let them know that he was conscious.

"Ain't nothin' much to it," one of the men was saying. "We keep this bird here until Marlowe telephones that he's turned the trick, and then we give him another dose of chloroform, take him in the car out to the edge of the park, and drop him there. When he comes back to Earth, he can go home--and he won't know where we kept him. That's all."

"I thought he was one of these clever ones."

"He is--but he ain't as clever as Marlowe, I reckon. We haven't anything to worry about, anyway--we do as we're told and cash in on the coin."

"What's all this about a locket, anyway?" the other asked.

"You can search me! All I know is that Marlowe is crazy to get his hands on it--some secret, I suppose. None of our business! The big idea is to keep this man Warwick from getting it for The Spider--understand?"

"I don't believe there is any Spider!"

"Don't fool yourself! I guess Marlowe used to know all about him over in the old country. There's a Spider, all right, and he's a tough bird to go up against! I don't want him and his gang after me any--not any!"

Warwick groaned and turned his head, and then sat up weakly and held his lashed hands to his face. He heard the two men get out of their chairs and start toward him. So they were as much in the dark regarding the locket as he was, were they? They were merely engaged to detain him until Marlowe had obtained possession of the thing, and then were to release him.

"Alive again, are yuh?" one of the men asked.

"What--what is the meaning of this?" Warwick gasped. "Oh, yes--there was a fight--"

"It wasn't much of a fight, I guess--you didn't have a chance!" said the other, laughing.

"Where am I?"

"That's somethin' you ain't supposed to know, Mr. Warwick. Here you are, and here you stay for the time bein'--and if you try any funny tricks, you'll wish that you hadn't."

"But--what is the idea?" Warwick demanded.

"I guess you know all about that. Anyway, we ain't prepared to answer any questions," one of the men told him. "We're just here to see that you remain for a time."

"How long?"

"Until we get orders to let you go--and let that be an end of your questions," the other growled.

Warwick looked at them more carefully--and two precious thugs they were. He glanced rapidly around

the room. He had been in corners as close as this before, and had escaped. He realized that these men meant him no real harm physically--but they were interfering with his work. The Spider had told him to get that locket from Mrs. Burton Barker, and had warned him to be on guard against foes--and the supercriminal expected nothing except success.

"Better just take it easy, Mr. Warwick," one of the men told him. "We don't want to muss up a gent like you, as has done some nervy things in his time, but we'll have to do it, if you try any tricks. We got our orders."

"I don't fancy this at all, my men," Warwick said. "Confound it, I escorted a young lady to an affair this evening, and I should be there dancing with her now. What'll she think of me if I desert her in this manner?"

"It's hard luck, but it can't be helped."

"If you men aid me to get back there, I'll make it worth your while--and forget all about this."

"Well, we need the money, but it wouldn't be healthy for us to let you you go," one of his captors replied. "We'd get ours, if we did! So we can't talk along them lines, Mr. Warwick."

"I'll pay your own figure," Warwick said.

"Nothin' doin', sir!"

Warwick knew that the decision was final. He got slowly to his feet and paced around the room. But when he tried to get near the door or one of the windows, one of his captors always got in front of him. He tried the cords that lashed his wrists, and realized that they had been tied well. There seemed to be no present way of escape.

"Might as well take it easy," one of the men assured him. "A little wait won't hurt you any--and maybe you can get back there in time to take your young lady home. You can make up some whale of a story and be a hero." The man laughed raucously, and the other joined in.

"I suppose you realize," said Warwick, "that you could be sent to prison for doing such a thing as this."

"Oh, we ain't worryin' any about that, sir. This scrap is strictly between ourselves, and neither side is goin' to call in the police. If we go to prison, a certain gent of The Spider's gang will go right along with us!"

"What do you mean by speaking of The Spider's gang?" Warwick asked.

"I suppose you don't know--oh, no! You never heard of The Spider and his gang, you didn't. You ain't been workin' for him for more than a year--oh, no!"

"My word! Never heard such nonsense in my life!" Warwick gasped. "Can it be that you have made a mistake, got the wrong man, and all that sort of thing?"

"Not any, we ain't--and you might as well cut out the bluff!" came the reply.

Warwick continued walking around the room, and after a while he sat down on the couch again.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"A few minutes to eleven," one of his captors told him. "I guess you'll be turned loose about midnight--so you ain't got long to wait. Better just take it easy!"

Warwick engaged in no further conversation. He felt his bonds whenever he had a chance, and convinced himself that they could not be removed easily. He thought of dashing to a window, but he knew that the two men would be upon him before he could accomplish his purpose And the window might be in the second or third floor--he could not tell. This might be a cottage, or a cheap lodging house. Warwick did not even know in what part of the city it was located.

To all appearances, he had resigned himself to his fate. He yawned once or twice, and asked for a drink of water. One of the men went out of the room, and returned with the drink within a short time While he was gone the other watched Warwick closely, a revolver held ready in his hand.

Though he did not show it in his countenance, John Warwick was beginning to get frantic. He would fail--and from The Spider there would be no forgiveness. The supercriminal had warned him that he did not want failure this time. Warwick could not imagine why he had not been more careful. Here he was, a prisoner, and Marlowe and the others having every opportunity to achieve their desire.

He thought of Silvia Rodney, too, and knew that she was worrying because of his absence. Was he to lose Silvia because of failure to get the locket from Mrs. Burton Barker? Would The Spider, angry at his failure, keep him as a member of the band instead of granting him his release?

But there seemed to be no way of escape. The two men watched him closely, and if he got up to walk around the room, they left their chairs and remained close to him. A wrong move, a shriek for help, would cause them to spring upon him. They might even render him unconscious again--and then he would, indeed, be helpless and unable to carry out the orders of The Spider.

He wondered whether Marlowe had the locket already. For the hundredth time, he asked himself what that locket could be, and what secret it held.

"Well, are you going to keep me here all night?" he growled.

"Until we get orders to turn you loose."

"My word! This is disgusting--what? Liable to make you chaps pay for it in the end!"

"We ain't scared much!"

"Fancy I'll square accounts with you before we're done!" Warwick said.

He began pacing the floor again, walking from one corner of the room to the other, while they drew nearer and watched him carefully. He glanced toward the door--and saw that the knob was turning slowly!

Warwick's heart almost stood still. He guessed that the man on the other side of the door was a friend instead of a new foe, else he would not be so furtive about his entrance. He glanced at the door now and then, maintaining a conversation with the two men, at the same time edging toward the window, and acting as if he were about to make a break for liberty, thus causing them to watch him closely. Their attention was attracted from the door.

Warwick glanced that way again--and saw that the door had been opened a crack. Suddenly it was hurled wide open, and a form darted into the room. The door slammed shut.

"Hands up!" a stern voice commanded.

Warwick's captors whirled around. They found themselves menaced by an automatic. And they beheld the malevolent, glittering eyes of one Togo, John Warwick's Japanese valet.

VII
In the Conservatory

WARWICK gave a glad cry and darted to the wall, following it until he reached Togo's side, keeping from getting between Togo and the other two.

"You are all right, sar?" Togo asked.

"Quite all right, thanks," Warwick replied. "Hand me that weapon, old boy, and I'll keep these two thugs covered while you take these confounded cords off my wrists. And, if they lower their hands or make a move--"

He left the sentence unfinished. There was no need to finish it. The two men before him knew what he meant, and they did not relish the look in John Warwick's face.

He held the automatic, and Togo unfastened his wrists. Warwick motioned toward one of the men.

"He has a revolver, Togo--get it!" he ordered. "And then you may search the other. We can't be letting them retain weapons--what? My word, no!"

Togo carried out the command with alacrity, and returned to Warwick's side with two revolvers and one knife. The two men had backed against one of the walls of the room, and still held their hands above their heads.

"Sar, may I attend to them?" Togo asked.

"My word! Always bloodthirsty, aren't you?" Warwick said. "What would you do with them, old top?"

"I shall teach them never to annoy a gentleman again, sar!"

"This gentleman would not have been annoyed, Togo, old boy, if he had been thoroughly awake," Warwick said. "Serves me right--what? Teach me to keep my eyes open, and all that sort of thing!"

"But, sar--"

"Besides, Togo, we haven't time to play with these two precious thugs. And they treated me decently, at that. Just where are we, Togo, by the way?"

"In a little cottage, sar, at the edge of the city."

"Um! And how do you happen to be here?"

"I was about the grounds at the Barker residence, sar," Togo explained, "and saw the attack on you. I could not interfere at that time because there were so many, and because--it would not have done to create too much of a disturbance, sar."

"Quite correct!" Warwick said.

"When they took you away in the limousine, sar, I engaged a taxicab that happened to be passing the corner, and followed. I have the cab waiting near here, sar."

"Excellent, Togo, old top! We'll use that cab in short order. And these men--"

"Please let me handle them, sar."

"You may use that peculiar method of which you are a master and put them to sleep," Warwick said.

"Take the largest one first--he has the ugliest face. If the other makes a move, I'll indulge in a bit of target practice--what?"

Togo sprang to do Warwick's bidding. His hands found the man's throat, his thumbs pressed against certain spots in the back of the neck, there came a groan and a gasp--and one of their foes was unconscious on the floor.

The other had watched from the corners of his eyes. He gave a shriek of fear as Togo turned toward him--but the shriek died in his throat as Togo turned toward him--but the shriek died in his throat when Togo's thumbs pressed home. He, too, was allowed to sink to the floor.

"We must hurry, Togo!" Warwick exclaimed. "This delay may mean failure, you know."

Togo led the way through the front of the little cottage, and out into the open air. He ran down the walk to the street, Warwick at his heels, and came to the taxicab. Warwick commanded that they be driven to the Barker residence, and he promised rich reward if the journey was made in record time.

"Feel like an ass, Togo!" he said, as the taxicab lurched along the street. "Got caught napping--what?"

"I told you that this was a dangerous adventure, sar."

"So you did! Never imagined I'd run into such violence while trying to get a silly locket from a foolish woman!"

"But that locket is no common one, sar."

"Can't be! Other chaps seem determined to get it," Warwick said. "Mighty glad you were Johnnie-on-the-spot, old boy! Feel gratitude, and all that! Must reward you someday."

"I was glad to help, sar."

"Always glad to be of service when there is a promise of a row, eh?" Warwick said.

"Yes, sar," said Togo, grinning.

"Togo, old top, this night may be my Waterloo. Wouldn't be a bit surprised if I fail to carry out the orders of our flabby-cheeked old friend, what? Other chaps have had an hour or more to get away with that locket."

"It is possible, sar, that they will take ample time and work slowly, thinking you are being held a prisoner," Togo said.

"Hope you're a good prophet! Dislike very much to fail at this juncture--might cause me all sorts of troubles and disappointments, old top."

"Pardon me, sar, but you have not failed yet. Even if they have it by the time we reach the Barker place, sar, we may be able to recover it."

"How's that?"

"That man Marlowe--I know of him sar."

"You do, eh? What about the chap?"

"He is an old foe of The Spider's, sar."

"Is, eh? Then the jolly old Spider will be more than angry if we do not succeed tonight. My word! Have to make every possible effort, and all that sort of thing!"

"If this Marlowe gets away with the locket, sar, we might follow him and get it ourselves."

"Might, certainly. Rather get it from Mrs. Barker, however. Like to outwit the chap instead of using violence. Silly ass of a thing--that locket! Can't imagine what The Spider wants with it. Buy all you want for fifty dollars each. Locket of Tragedy, eh? Rot! Utter rot, I say!"

The taxicab stopped on the corner nearest the residence of Burton Barker, and John Warwick and Togo got out, and the former rewarded the chauffeur handsomely. And then he led the way across the velvety lawn, keeping well in the shadows.

"I'll have to make it appear that I've been wandering around the grounds and smoking--what?" Warwick whispered. "I'm going inside immediately, old top. Can't endure the uncertainty, and all that sort of thing."

"I'll remain in the neighborhood, sar," Togo said. "You may have some need of me."

"Good enough!" Warwick replied. "Be somewhere along this walk, so I can locale you quickly, if it is necessary. Luckily, those chaps didn't muss me up much. 'Bye!"

Warwick went into the residence of Burton Barker through a side entrance, dodged the others, went to the room that had been set aside for the gentlemen guests, and there brushed his clothing. His linen had not been soiled, he was glad to observe. He was still fairly presentable.

And then he made his way slowly down the broad stairs and came to the hall below. The orchestra was playing, couples were in the mazes of a dance, others were chatting in the conservatory and in the refreshment rooms.

Warwick stood at the entrance of the ballroom as if bored by the scene, and watched the dancers. His eye caught Silvia's; he nodded, and she flushed with pleasure. Then his eyes moved on--and presently he had located Mrs. Burton Barker.

He was glad to find that she still wore the locket at the end of the long chain. So Marlowe had not had the opportunity to get it yet--else he was waiting for an appropriate moment. John Warwick felt hope bubbling in his breast again. There still was a chance of carrying out The Spider's orders.

Another dance began, and Warwick noticed that Marlowe was dancing it with Mrs. Burton Barker. He stood back a short distance from the door, so that he could watch them without being observed. Silvia also was dancing, so Warwick did not have to give her his present attention, and was free to attend to The Spider's business.

"Must get that silly locket!" Warwick told himself. "Never do to fail now--what? Marlowe chap had his chance and didn't make the most of it. Have a try at it myself now, I fancy. Have to keep my eye on him, though. Wonder if he has any more assistants about? Must be alert, and all that sort of thing!"

The dance came to an end, and Marlowe and Mrs. Burton Barker passed within a short distance of Warwick as they walked into the hall. Warwick watched closely as Marlowe took his hostess to the refreshment room. It was evident that the man was trying to flirt with her--and she was the sort of woman who always is ready for a flirtation with any presentable man.

They went toward the conservatory. John Warwick guessed that Marlowe might make an attempt to get the locket there. He could engage Mrs. Burton Barker's attention and snip the thing from the end of its chain easily. Perhaps he would be able to make her believe that she had dropped it while they were

walking through the hall and thus escape suspicion.

Warwick followed them into the conservatory, where there were many couples walking about. He dodged those he knew, and made his way behind a bank of foliage and bloom. Marlowe and Mrs. Burton Barker were on the other side of it, just sitting down. From where he stood, Warwick could watch them closely without being seen by them. They were indulging in small talk that meant nothing, and Warwick sensed that Marlowe was merely waiting for an opportunity.

Suddenly Marlowe bent closer to Mrs. Burton Barker, and the tone of his voice changed.

"Do you know, you are the sort of woman that fascinates me," he said.

Mrs. Burton Barker laughed lightly and bent away from him, and once more Marlowe moved closer to her.

"I mean it!" he said. "You are a wonderful sort of woman--quite beyond the ordinary a man meets every day."

"You are good at flattery," Mrs. Barker observed, thus asking for more of it.

"It is not flattery, but the truth!" Marlowe declared. "Didn't you notice that I was interested more than usual? Trust a woman to know when a man is interested!"

Warwick saw him bend toward her again--and smiled. He knew what Marlowe was doing. In a moment, he would become too enthusiastic, Mrs. Barker would put up her hands to ward him off, and then Marlowe would--

"Don't be foolish, please!" Mrs. Barker was saying, but in a tone that said she liked to have him foolish.

"I'd rather spend five minutes with you than hours with a silly, flighty girl," Marlowe went on. "When a man finds a woman who combines beauty with intelligence, he has found a treasure. Your husband is a very lucky man."

"I fear that there are times when he does not believe that," Mrs. Burton Barker said.

Marlowe suddenly bent nearer to her--and she did exactly what John Warwick had known she would do, she put up her hands, and turned her face away, trying to act the timid, modest, half-frightened girl, making an attempt to avoid a caress.

Warwick watched more closely now. He saw Marlowe lean forward again, put his face close to hers and whisper some foolishness--and while he did it, his left hand went forward, a bit of metal flashed in the uncertain light of the conservatory as the gold chain was snipped, and the locket was in Marlowe's hand and being conveyed to his pocket.

VIII
Another Attempt

JOHN WARWICK stepped back silently, walked around the bank of foliage and bloom, and confronted them.

"Pardon," he said, "but I believe I have a dance with our charming hostess."

Marlowe already was upon his feet, his eyes bulging, regarding Warwick as he might have looked at a man from the grave. Warwick smiled at him peculiarly.

"Must not monopolize Mrs. Barker," he said "My word! Haven't danced with her for quite some time! Pleasure I cannot miss this evening--what? Must assert my rights, and all that sort of thing!"

"Of course I'll dance with you, John," Mrs. Barker said.

"My word! You've lost your precious locket!" Warwick exclaimed.

Mrs. Burton Barker gave a gasp of dismay and felt at the end of the chain. Instantly, she was in a panic.

"Oh! I must find it!" she cried. "See--the chain is broken!"

"Probably caught it against something and snapped it," Warwick said lightly.

But he gave Marlowe another look, and Marlowe realized that Warwick knew what had happened.

"Imagine you'll find it without much difficulty," Warwick went on to his hostess. "Saw you come in here--and you had the locket on the chain then."

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely!" Warwick replied. "Probably dropped it around here some place. Easy to find, what? Just close the conservatory door--and then we know the locket is somewhere inside."

Marlowe glared at him, and Warwick chuckled. Mrs. Burton Barker was looking around the floor, her hands clasped before her.

"I must find it--must find it!" she repeated.

"Good-luck locket--what?"

"Yes--a talisman," the woman replied. "Why don't you help me find it?"

"No doubt it'll be found almost instantly," John Warwick observed, meeting Marlowe's eyes again. "Locket can't run away--what? My word, no! Have to be right around here some place! Let's look!"

They pretended to search. Warwick watched Marlowe closely horn the corners of his eyes. He saw Marlowe drop the locket against the bank of flowers and then pretend to stoop and recover it.

"Here it is, Mrs. Barker," he announced.

"Oh, thank you!"

"Chain probably worn through," Warwick observed. "Fine gold, you know--little jerk would break it. Better have it repaired, dear lady--what?"

"I shall have it repaired in the morning," she said.

A servant approached with the intelligence that some guest wished to see the hostess, and Mrs. Burton Barker, promising to dance with Warwick later, took her leave. The two men were left alone.

Warwick stood before Marlowe, his hands upon his hips, and chuckled at the other man, whose face depicted his rage.

"Coarse work, what?" Warwick said.

"Think you're smart, don't you?"

"Why didn't you bluff it out, old chap? Didn't have the nerve? My word! I was standing behind the plants, you know, and saw you snip the thing."

"This isn't the end, Warwick!"

"Trying to threaten me now? Oh, I say! Doesn't ruffle a single feather of mine, really! My word, no! Calm in the face of danger, and all that sort of thing. By the way, better engage a new crowd of thugs. Those you have at present aren't quite up to the standard. Managed to get away from them, you see."

"I see!" Marlowe exclaimed. "May I ask how you did it?"

"Quite simple. Friend of mine saw me being abducted, followed, got into the cottage, overpowered the chaps, and rescued me."

"That damned Jap, I suppose."

"Wouldn't curse him, if I were you!"

Warwick warned. "He's quite the man, you know--been no end of help to me on several occasions. Don't like to hear him spoken of in that tone."

"Suppose we just put aside this high-falutin' talk," Marlowe said. "We understand each other--it's war between us. We're both after that locket. And I'm going to get it!"

"You had it a moment since and didn't retain it," Warwick reminded him. "My turn now, what?"

"Not if I know it! If you get that locket, Warwick, you'll be a very clever man!"

"Oh, I say! Not that, surely! Well, can't stand here talking to you all evening. Have to toddle along!"

"And I'll toddle right along in your wake," Marlowe informed him, angrily.

"Still following and watching me--what?"

"You can bet that I am!"

"And a lot of good it will do you!" John Warwick said. "Making a regular ass of yourself--you are! Have to toddle! 'Bye!"

He whirled around, walked through the conservatory and entered the wide hall. He saw Mrs. Burton Barker at the foot of the stairs, talking to a couple of guests forced to take leave early, and went toward her.

"Sure you have your locket?" he asked, when the others had gone.

"I have it in my hand," she answered. "It gave me quite a start to find it missing. I'm glad that you noticed it, John."

"You make quite a fuss over that locket, what?"

"It--it is a good-luck thing, John. I'm a bit superstitious, you know--always was, in fact."

"Don't seem to remember anything of the sort," Warwick told her. "Always regarded you as an ultramodern young woman who didn't believe in rot."

"It is just a fad of mine," she said.

"Let's see the locket a moment--maybe I can fix it."

"I'll have it repaired in the morning, John; you needn't bother now."

"You'll be dropping it somewhere, and then you surely will lose it," he told her. "Better let me tie it on the end of the chain."

He lifted the chain and looked at it closely. She handed the locket to him, and he started fastening it to the end of the chain. He knew that was the only way. If she took the locket upstairs, she probably would hide it some place where it could not be found easily. There was a chance of getting it while she was wearing it.

Silvia Rodney approached at that moment with a man with whom she had been dancing, and stopped to speak to Mrs. Burton Barker.

"Dear hostess almost lost a locket," Warwick said. "Found it again, however. Trying to fasten it to the chain again."

His eyes met Silvia's for an instant, and the girl smiled at him. Marlowe approached and joined the group.

Warwick finished attaching the locket to the chain, and stood back. Mrs. Barker was making an attempt to show that she was not agitated, that she had almost forgotten about the locket. But she was watching it closely, Warwick knew. Her fingers played with the chain continually, and now and then ran down it and touched the locket at the bottom.

"Shall we dance?" Warwick asked.

They entered the ballroom and danced. He had no chance to get the locket. He wished he might detach it in such a manner that he could kick it into a corner and pick it up afterward. But he knew that he would have to wait until Mrs. Burton Barker's mind was centered on something else. It might be disastrous to make an attempt to get the locket now.

They finished the dance, and walked into the wide hall again. Marlowe was talking to Silvia and the man who had been dancing with her, and Warwick led Mrs. Barker toward them.

"Why not the veranda and smokes?" Marlowe asked lightly.

Warwick flashed a look at him, but agreed. They all moved out to the veranda, walked toward one end of it where there were easy chairs. They seated themselves and lighted cigarettes, and indulged in some more small talk. Warwick and Marlowe were watching each other carefully, each fearing that the other would make an unexpected move.

Warwick began wondering how the thing was to be accomplished. It had seemed so simple compared to some things he had done--merely snipping a locket from a chain and getting away with it without arousing suspicion. He began to tell himself that he must be slowing up, to let such a man as Marlowe prevent him from carrying out the orders of The Spider. He would have to be doubly careful about it now. He wasn't quite sure that Mrs. Barker believed the locket had been lost accidentally in the conservatory. He couldn't afford to run any grave risk, when his future happiness and that of Silvia Rodney depended upon his success.

Mrs. Barker addressed a remark to him, and he bent forward to reply. At that instant, the lights in the house went out.

There came a chorus of exclamations from the ballroom. Chairs scraped on the veranda as guests got to

their feet. Mrs. Burton Barker started to say something, and the sentence was broken off in the middle.

John Warwick sprang to his feet, for he suspected a trap of some sort. It would be like Marlowe to have a confederate snap off the lights so that he could work in the dark.

Then there came a sudden rush of men over the railing. Warwick felt himself hurled to one side. He heard an exclamation of fear, and Marlowe's whispered commands.

Warwick realized what was taking place, then. They were kidnaping Mrs. Burton Barker. They probably would carry her a short distance across the lawn, tear the locket from the chain and get away with it. Marlowe would remain behind, and probably take part in the search for the assailants, thus freeing himself of any suspicion.

It all occurred in a short space of time. Warwick sensed that Marlowe would have him attended to, also. And so he darted noiselessly to the railing and vaulted over it to the ground. He brushed against another man, who instantly grappled with him. Warwick started to fight. He felt his throat gripped, felt a peculiar pressure--

"Togo!" he whispered hoarsely.

"That you, sar? I thought it was one of the others," Togo gasped. "Did I hurt you, sar?"

"No! Silence, old top! Let's see what's going on here!"

Those inside the house were crying for lights. Servants were calling to one another, and Warwick heard something said about a fuse burning out.

He crouched at the end of the veranda with Togo He realized that Mrs. Burton Barker was being lifted over the railing, and a whiff of chloroform came to his nostrils. Marlowe was talking loudly now, as if to cover the confusion. Warwick heard Silvia's voice, asking what had happened.

And then he gripped Togo by the arm and led the way around the end of the veranda. He knew that Marlowe's men were ahead of them. He watched and saw them cross a space between two dark spots--four of them carrying a woman.

He darted forward again, with Togo at his heels, whispering explanations and orders.

"Taxi still at corner, sar," Togo whispered in reply.

Across the lawn they followed the men, careful to avoid being seen. The odds were great, and Warwick did not care to attempt a combat and come from it vanquished. The men ahead were running now. They dropped the unconscious form of Mrs. Burton Barker beside a clump of brush.

Warwick stopped there just an instant. It was as he had expected--the locket was gone.

IX
A Lost Locket

AGAIN, John Warwick darted forward, Togo close behind. Warwick was in a rage now. He did not believe in using violence toward women. He always had prided himself on avoiding the use of it whenever the orders of The Spider compelled him to deal with those of the gentler sex. And he did not intend to let four thugs assault a woman in that manner, chloroform her, and steal something that he himself wished to get into his possession.

He stopped behind a tree. The four men were at the curb, mumbling among themselves. It was evident

that they were waiting for a motor car, and that the driver had missed his calculations.

"Let us get at them, sar," Togo whispered.

Warwick was just angry enough to agree. He gave the signal and, with Togo, rushed forward.

They hurled themselves upon the four like twin hurricanes. John Warwick went into action like a battleship, showering blows on all sides, but he worked silently, conserving his breath and strength as well as he could.

Togo sprang for the throat of the nearest man, and had him stretched unconscious on the ground in an instant. Then he reached for the second. But the others were putting up a fight, now that the first shock of surprise was over. Warwick and Togo found that the three of them were a match, a little more than a match. With his back against a tree, Warwick fought as well as he could, and Togo tried in vain to clutch one of his antagonists by the throat and put him out of the combat.

Warwick sent a second man lurching to the ground with a well-directed blow. The odds were even now. Togo screeched once and hurled himself at one of the thugs, and the man turned and ran. Warwick made short work of the other.

It took Warwick only a few seconds to search the three men on the ground--and he did not find the locket. Lights were blazing up in the house again, and male guests were rushing toward him. They crowded about him, demanding to know what had happened.

Warwick explained in a few words. Some men had attacked Mrs. Burton Barker on the veranda as the lights went out. She was beside the clump of brush now, unconscious from chloroform. He had taken after the men. Here were three of them--and another had got away. Togo, the Japanese valet, was after that fourth man.

The male guests made short work of the three on the ground. They were picked up and taken to the house, to be held there until the polite could be called. Mrs. Burton Barker was carried inside, too, where the frantic guests were huddling together and talking in whispers of what had occurred. They supposed it was an attempt at robbery; they felt of their necklaces and rings, to be sure that they had not suffered loss.

Warwick remained on the lawn for a quarter of an hour, and at the end of that time Togo returned.

"He got away from me, sar," Togo reported.

"Well, it can't be helped, old chap."

"They--they got it, sar?"

"I imagine that they did, Togo, honorable chap. That was the scheme of course. The man who escaped evidently had it."

"And now, sar--"

"Now, old top, I shall be compelled, for the first time in my life, to report to The Spider that I have failed. And he was particular to tell me, too, that he didn't care to have me fail in this case. He will rave and roar, I doubt not--almost have a fit, and all that sort of thing."

"You are not going to give up, sar?"

"I am not, honorable Jap. Marlowe is the head of this gang, and you can wager that Marlowe remains in the house so that nobody will suspect him. Sooner or later, Marlowe will get that locket from the man who has it."

"Then we watch this Marlowe, sar?"

"We do," Warwick said. "I have to go into the house now, of course. You may remain outside, Togo, and use your own judgment."

"I understand, sar."

"Never heard of such a fuss--all this row over a silly locket! Wonder what the thing is, anyway!"

"I feared there would be trouble, sar,"

"Spider told me as much, but I scarcely believed him," Warwick said. "Imagine I look a pretty specimen now. One of those beggars caught me a clip under the eye--be black in the morning. I'll go into the house now, old top!"

Warwick made his way to the veranda. He discovered that he was a hero. The male guests had told their fair companions that John Warwick had followed the four men who had assaulted and robbed Mrs. Button Barker and accounted for three of them.

Warwick pushed his way to the stairs and up them to the second floor. Servants rushed to his aid. In a bathroom he inspected himself. There was a cut beneath one eye. His collar was torn, his tie soiled, and there was dust on his clothes.

"Pretty sight!" he complained as he bathed his bruised knuckles. "My word, yes! A bit of a row, and all that, but one of the chaps got away!"

Burton Barker rushed into the room, bubbling his thanks and reporting that his wife was all right again--and would descend and order the dance continued.

Then Marlowe stepped into the room.

"Good boy, Warwick!" he said, grinning. "You certainly handled those fellows!"

"Where were you?" Warwick asked nastily.

"It happened so quickly, I didn't realize what was taking place," Marlowe lied. "One of the fellows hurled me back along the railing, and by the time I could get to my feet, they were gone with Mrs. Barker--and you were gone, too. Miss Rodney was nervous--I escorted her inside as soon as the lights came on again."

"Very kind of you--thanks," Warwick said.

"You certainly battered up those three prisoners. They are saying that half a dozen men jumped on them."

"Silly asses! Ought to go to jail!" Warwick said.

"They'll go to jail, all right!" Barker declared.

A servant pushed in and called him, and Barker hurried away. The others could hear a woman wailing in one of the other rooms--Mrs. Burton Barker had discovered that her locket was missing. They could hear her shriek that it must be recovered, could hear Barker giving orders to his servants.

Warwick dismissed the servants who had been helping him, and began putting on a fresh collar one of them had brought. The cut beneath his eye had been bathed and court-plaster applied, but Warwick knew that it would be a bad sight in the morning. He turned from the mirror and saw Marlowe watching him.

"Well?" Marlowe asked.

"Three of your men are going to jail," Warwick said in a low tone.

"That's their fault."

"They are liable to talk, aren't they?"

"I'm not a bit afraid of that," Marlowe said. "They'll take their medicine, and they'll be paid for doing it. They did their work well, you know."

"I suppose so."

"You didn't have a chance, Warwick! It was a good fight while it lasted, but it didn't last long. It might have been different if you had been given plenty of help. I don't understand why The Spider didn't give you help."

"There goes that Spider stuff again!"

"Oh, stop the bluff, Warwick! I'm wise, and you know that I am wise! I say it is a wonder that he didn't give you help."

Warwick stepped close to him. "Very well--since you know so much!" he said. "If I am working for some chap you call The Spider, let it be known that I never need much help!"

"This was the time you needed it, Warwick!"

"Got three of your men, at any rate!"

"But one got away, eh? And so you didn't get the locket!" Marlowe laughed, sneered, and turned toward the door.

"Lots of time yet to get that," Warwick hurled after him.

"Not a chance, Warwick--not a chance in the world! You've had your last look at that little trinket. And what you'll get from that boss of yours will be plenty--don't forget that for a moment. He could not have taken you into his confidence, or you'd have made a better attempt to win out. This was a mighty important deal."

"Don't know what you're talking about, I'm sure!" Warwick said.

"Well, you've lost, Warwick!"

"Game isn't over yet!" John Warwick observed. "Seen lots of them won in the last half of the ninth inning, you know. Rally--all that sort of thing!"

He passed Marlowe and went down the stairs. He intended to keep his eyes on Marlowe, even if he had to send Silvia Rodney home in the limousine alone. Marlowe, he knew, would get possession of that locket sometime. He would find Togo out on the lawn and tell him to hold the taxicab in readiness.

But Togo had disappeared for the time being. Servants with electric torches were searching the lawn for Mrs. Burton Barker's locket. That lady was trying to force herself to believe that it had been torn from her while she was being carried across the lawn--when, in reality, she knew that the assault had been for the purpose of getting the locket.

Mrs. Barker was on the veranda herself, almost hysterical, directing the search, refusing to go to her room. Some of the guests were taking their departure. The orchestra was still playing, and some of the couples were dancing as if nothing had happened. It was a tribute to their hostess.

Warwick went down among the others and pretended to join in the search. For the first time since he had joined The Spider's band, he felt a dread of the supercriminal. He almost feared the interview that he knew he would be forced to hold with him. The Spider did not countenance failure. He had instructed Warwick to get that locket, and he expected success.

It would be like The Spider to refuse to release him from the band and allow him to marry Silvia, and Warwick told himself that he never would marry her unless he was released. He would get the locket yet, he told himself. He would follow Marlowe day and night, with only Togo to help him--he'd get that locket if he was forced to use violence against Marlowe and his men, if he had to turn burglar or highwayman! He never had failed The Spider before, and he did not intend to fail now!

The search came to an end--and the locket had not been found. Warwick went back into the house, and received thanks from a pale Mrs. Burton Barker. He saw that she was making a brave fight to retain her composure, and he wondered again what the locket meant to her, what it meant to others. Locket of Tragedy, Togo had called it, but John Warwick didn't see any sense in that.

He met Silvia in the hall, and they stepped to one side.

"You'll be a handsome man in the morning," she said, laughing a little.

"Do not rub it in, dear lady!" Warwick told her.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, getting into a brawl while acting as my escort?"

"It is a serious matter!" Warwick whispered. "Dear lady, I have failed for the time being--they got away with the locket."

"How did it happen, John?"

"Marlowe--that chap you danced with--is at the bottom of it. He got Mrs. Barker to the veranda purposely. Those chaps sprang over the railing when the lights went out, grasped her and chloroformed her, rushed across the lawn with her, took the locket and left her there. My luck, I suppose, that the man who had the locket in his possession escaped.

"Then there is no chance of getting it, John?"

"I haven't quite given up yet. Going to watch this Marlowe chap. Old Togo's about, ready to help. Have to get the thing, or your jolly old uncle will be furious. Might force me to remain in--er--his employ, and all that."

"Perhaps it will all come out right, John."

"Let us hope so!" Warwick said.

Marlowe stepped up to them. "Pardon me, but I believe that I have this dance with Miss Rodney," he

said pleasantly. "Our hostess wishes the ball to continue, despite the annoyance she has experienced. As a compliment to her--"

"Of course! Naturally!" Warwick said.

He surrendered Silvia and watched them as they started dancing. He felt a twinge of jealousy, but told himself it was because Marlowe was the man and because Marlowe had bested him for the time being.

He could not help admiring Marlowe's courage. The fellow was carrying it off well. He was an excellent foe, John Warwick thought. And he became more determined to get the locket, if it took him weeks!

X
A Surprise

SILVIA RODNEY danced the encore with Marlowe, while Warwick walked up and down the hall and now and then stopped to speak to some acquaintance and dodge hero worship.

Warwick was wondering just who Marlowe might be and how Mrs. Burton Barker had become acquainted with him. He intended to get a line on Marlowe and keep in touch with the man. He simply had to get the locket! Everything depended upon it--his future standing with The Spider, his own happiness, and that of Silvia.

He wondered why Silvia was dancing with Marlowe so much, since she knew now that Marlowe was a foe to them all. Her face was radiant when Marlowe returned with her and handed her over to Warwick.

"Now I'll dance with you, John, and then, I think, we'd better go," Silvia said.

Warwick could do nothing but go out upon the floor with her, but he managed a whisper.

"Please make it short, Silvia. I want to watch Marlowe and follow him. A great deal depends on it, you know. Simply must get that locket, what? He'll lead me to it, and all that sort of thing. Have to triumph in the end, or your jolly old uncle will walk around my collar. My word, yes!"

"Aren't you going to take me home, John?"

"Will it make you very angry if I send you alone?" Warwick asked.

"Of course!"

"But, in such a case--"

"I'll be angry, nevertheless. And how will it look to the others, John? Will they not suspect something?"

"Have to cover it up in some manner," Warwick said. "Might get out at the first corner and return."

"Oh, let the old locket go!"

"Dear girl! Your jolly old uncle will be enraged."

"I'll smooth it over for you, John."

"Afraid it would be a difficult task in such a case. Uncle seemed very keen on getting the thing, remember. Some sort of a secret connected with it, and all that. Appears to be vastly important, though for the life of me I cannot understand why."

"Well, you let it go and take me home!"

"Just as you say, dear girl, but I fear that we are making a mistake," Warwick told her, sighing. "Take all the blame myself, of course, and all that. My word! Jolly old uncle probably will roar like a lion. May refuse to--well, you know, dear girl!"

"You leave it to me, John. You've never failed before, have you?"

"Never!"

"Well, uncle cannot raise so very much of a row, then."

"Can't he? I've seen him angry!" Warwick said. "Rather face a tiger unarmed. My word!"

They finished the dance and went toward the hall. Marlowe was just taking leave of Mrs. Burton Barker, and he grinned at John Warwick as he approached. Silvia went for her wraps, and Warwick stepped out on the veranda for an instant.

He walked along the railing, until there came to him from the darkness a peculiar hiss that he recognized.

"That you, Togo?" he asked.

"Yes, sar."

"Follow our man when he leaves--I cannot."

"Yes, sar."

Warwick walked back to the doorway, entered, and continued along the hall toward the stairs.

"Better luck next time," Marlowe whispered as he passed.

"Hope so!" Warwick growled.

"Should have had help, you know. You were up against a tough proposition."

"A proposition of toughs, you mean."

Marlowe's face flushed. "Bad loser, are you?" he sneered.

"Haven't lost yet, you know," Warwick retorted.

"You haven't? Don't fool yourself!"

"Lots of time yet--game's young."

"Not this particular game!" Marlowe said.

"May find out different," Warwick told him. "Rally, you know--all that sort of thing. Seen it lots of times. Advise you to keep your eyes and ears open."

"Oh, I'll be watching out for you!"

"That's an excellent idea," Warwick observed.

He went on up the stairs for his things. He met Silvia; they spoke to Mrs. Burton Barker, and went out to the limousine. Soon they were speeding down the avenue and across the city.

"Oh, cheer up, John!" the girl said.

"Don't feel like it, dear lady. Not used to failure--what? Rather gets me, you know, and all that. My word, yes!"

"It will be all right, John."

"Not so sure about that. Have to report to your jolly old uncle as soon as we reach the house, I suppose, and take what is coming to me."

"Why not put it off?" she asked.

"Never do in the world. Make a full report, and maybe he can get the silly locket by sending somebody else after it--somebody who is not a bungler,"

"But you were fighting against odds!"

"Makes no difference," he declared, "Always fought against odds before and won. Makes no difference at all!"

They rode for a time in silence, Silvia snuggling close to his side.

"When we get home," she said presently, "you wait until I talk to uncle."

"Afraid it'll do no good," Warwick replied.

"Nevertheless, John Warwick, you wait until I have talked to him, and then you can go up and--er--take what is coming to you."

"Very well. Put off the evil hour a few minutes, at any rate," he said. "Imagine I'll get an awful wigging! My word, yes! Probably be told I'm a worthless beggar, and all that sort of thing. First time I've failed, you know--not used to it!"

"Perhaps there'll be a chance yet."

"A slight one," Warwick admitted. "I gave Togo orders to follow that Marlowe chap. By the way, you seemed to like to dance with him."

"John Warwick, are you jealous?"

"My word--no! Just remarked it!" Warwick said.

"Well, you'd better not be jealous, sir! That is something I'll not endure! Here we are at home!"

Warwick told the chauffeur to wait and escorted Silvia inside the house. She left him in the big living room and went up the stairs to The Spider's den. She knew that he would not have retired, that he would wait to tell her good-night.

John Warwick spent a bad quarter of an hour. He paced back and forth across the room, fearful one moment, defiant the next, wondering what he could say to The Spider to justify himself. He decided that he could only explain and ask the supercriminal to be merciful.

And then Silvia came back down the stairs.

"How did he take it?" Warwick asked.

"Oh, I scarcely think he will have you shot John."

"Angry, I suppose?"

"You'll find out soon enough--you are to go right up and see him," she replied.

"Hope the old chap isn't too hard on me," Warwick said. "Can't dare to think of losing you, little lady."

He held her in his arms for an instant, kissed her, and then started slowly up the stairs.

Outside the door of the supercriminal's den, he paused for a moment to gather his courage. Warwick was a man who did not like to confess failure. He knew that The Spider probably had spoken kindly to Silvia, but he would not let that affect the manner in which he received John Warwick.

Finally, he opened the door, entered, closed and bolted it behind him as was the custom, and then whirled around to find The Spider in his usual place behind the big mahogany desk.

"Sit down, Warwick!" The Spider said. "And give me your close attention while I explain something about that locket."

"I regret--"

"Silence--and listen! It is getting late, and I am a tired man. I just want to tell you, Warwick, of the importance of that locket. Several years ago, the woman you know as Mrs. Burton Barker was spending her first season abroad. Her mother was with her. In a peculiar manner, the girl saw a crime committed. She was young and romantic, and she took a fancy to the man who committed it--one of my men."

"I understand, sir."

"Without her mother's knowledge, she kept engagements with this man. He saw in her only a foolish and romantic girl, and he kept up the acquaintance to get information. Her mother was rich, as you know. This man of mine intended to get all the information he could and probably lift the mother's jewels,"

"I understand."

"He let the girl know that he belonged to a famous band of criminals. He let her know too much. The Locket of Tragedy was the property of a famous Parisian, and this man of mine got it one night while looting an apartment. It was called that because it had been owned by persons who met violent ends. It had quite a history, and many a collector stood ready to pay a handsome price for it.

"I see," said Warwick.

"A queen who poisoned herself owned it once, and then a famous courtesan who was tried for murder and executed. Almost every owner of the locket met with violence. My man got it as I have said, and he showed some of the loot to the girl who now is Mrs. Barker. She wanted the locket, and he let her have it, thinking he could steal it from her later. He didn't dare refuse at the time, for he needed more information before attempting to rob her mother of a fortune in jewels.

"Before he could regain the locket her mother took a sudden notion to return to the States, bringing her daughter with her, of course. The night before they departed, this slip of a girl got possession of a bit of tissue paper. That paper is still in existence, and is enough to send me to prison for the rest of my life, and to send other men there. The authorities of Paris would pay a fortune for it.

"She returned to the States, and I sent my man after her with instructions to get the locket and the paper,

which she kept in it. He failed, and returned, and I sent two other men. She did not wear the locket in those days--she had it hidden somewhere. I sent her word that, unless she returned the locket and the bit of tissue, I'd have her criminal sweetheart slain. She had spunk--replied that if I did she would hand the paper over to the police.

"She had us there--understand? She threatened to hand the things over the first month she did not receive a letter from this man she admired. We were safe as long as he wrote those letters--and I saw that he did write them.

"Then she got married, and began wearing the locket. It had grown to be a sort of duel between us by that time. She did not surrender the things even after being married, I tried a score of times to get the locket and what it contained, and I failed. I let the thing slide, as the saying is, let her hold the sword over my head.

"Last month, Warwick, she got no communication, for the simple reason that this man of mine had died. I ascertained that she was making investigation--she thought that I had made away with him, understand? She was ready to hand that locket to the police and tell her story."

"And the others--" Warwick asked.

"Members of a band antagonistic to me. They learned of the locket and its secret. They wanted to get it and send it to the authorities of Paris themselves--wanted to see me and some others sent to prison. Do you understand what that locket meant to me, Warwick? If those others got it, if Mrs. Barker retained it, I was doomed. That is how important that locket was to me!"

Warwick gave an exclamation of horror. So he, by his failure, had doomed The Spider--and perhaps himself. For, if an investigation were made, it might lead to Warwick and other new members of the band, too. And, as for Silvia--why, her life would be ruined! She would be pointed out as the niece of a supercriminal.

"It would be a case of chickens coming home to roost!" The Spider continued. "My crimes the last few years, since that accident that made me a cripple, have not been what the world would call extra bad. I have reformed to an extent, as you know. But in the old days, I did many things for which I still could be punished."

"Sir, I--" Warwick began.

The Spider silenced him with a gesture.

"So you can see the importance of that locket," the supercriminal went on, "And when you sent it to me just now, by Silvia--"

"Sir?" Warwick gasped.

"It was a great relief to me. It meant everything. It meant that I shall not have to spend my last days in some prison. And I am so thankful, Warwick, that I am going to quit. I have one thing more to do, and then I am going to disband my people. That one thing is good instead of evil--I'll explain it to you later. And I'm going to give my ill-gotten gains to certain charities and retain just enough to live on. Silvia will marry you--and be happy. Go to her now, John Warwick, and leave me alone with my happiness."

Warwick unbolted the door and hurried out. He almost rushed down the stairs, to where Silvia was waiting for him in the big living room. She laughed as she saw the expression in his face.

"Was it all right?" she asked saucily.

"Dear lady, suppose that you give me some sort of an explanation," he said.

"Regarding what?"

"Your jolly old uncle has just told me that I sent the locket up to him by you--thanked me for it. Knew nothing about it, I assure you! Imagined that thug fellow had it--sent Togo chasing after Marlowe to watch the chap--"

Silvia's laugh interrupted him.

"I told you that perhaps I could help, John," she said.

"My word! Can't understand it at all!"

"Why, John Warwick! When the lights went out and those men came over the railing, I suspected that it was a trick to get the locket. I slipped to one side and finally got right behind that man Marlowe I heard him whispering to the other men as they were using the chloroform. He took the locket himself, John, at that moment. There was a hit of light from the arc on the corner, and I could see by crouching against the wall. He took the locket and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket."

"But that was dangerous--"

"Silly! If there had been a search, he would have pretended that he had just picked it up."

"I suppose so. But how did *you* get the locket?"

"I got it while I was dancing with him, John--picked his pocket, you see."

"My word!" Warwick gasped. "You picked a chap's pocket?"

"Yes. It wasn't at all difficult, John. Remember, you foolish boy, I have a strain of The Spider's blood in my veins. It was that Spider strain that called upon me to do it. I wanted to help you--and it was a sort of adventure--"

"See here!" Warwick exclaimed. "You were deuced lucky, and you must never do such a thing again. Suppose he had felt in his pocket afterward and found the thing gone? He would have suspected you at once."

"Oh, he did feel in his pocket!"

"But--"

"But, you see, John, when I took the locket. I slipped in its place a small portiere ring that I had taken from the draperies in the hall. He merely felt the ring and thought that it was the locket. See?"

"My word!"

"And then, John--"

But she did not finish the sentence. She could not with his lips pressed against hers.