# PAST MASTERS 156

Emile Zola
H. Bedford-Jones
Alice Hegan Rice
Vernon Ralston
Arthur Leo Zagat
Oscar Wilde
Ethel Lina White
Cuthbert Bede

*and more*

# PAST MASTERS 156

*Produced and Edited by Terry Walker from short stories in magazines, newspapers and other sources, and all in the Life + 70 years public domain.*

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## 1: The Ghosts of Glenlussa

***Cuthbert Bede***

(Edward Bradley) 1827-1889

*Belgravia* July 1869

*Quaint tales from Kintyre*

*Edward Bradley*

IN ONE OF the most romantic parts of the picturesque peninsula of Cantire, South Argyllshire, where the hills rise to a height of eight hundred feet, and command on either side panoramic views of the Atlantic-washed southern Hebrides, and of the ragged peaks of Arran rising up from beyond Kilbrannan Sound, are a series of glens, the haunt not only of wild loveliness, but of wilder traditions. Of one of these glens, named in *Gaelic Alt-na-dubhneach*, or "the Glen of the Black One"— i.e. the Devil— I published, in 1865, a story called "The Ghost of the Devil's Glen," which was printed in that volume of romantic, supernatural, and legendary Western-Highland stories, to which I gave the name of *The White Wife*. In the interval that has elapsed since its publication, I have been enabled to collect many other similar legends and traditions, which have been carefully treasured by the Gaelic-speaking natives of Cantire, but which have not as yet been put into print. If they are not now preserved, they would probably expire together with the old manners and customs of the people, and (as it would seem) that ancient language in which they have been orally delivered from generation to generation. In asking for the preservation in the pages of Belgravia of some of these legends and tales, I would first crave a small space for the Ghosts of Glenlussa.

The before-named Devil's Glen, which possessed a ghost of its own, was connected with Straduigh Glen, otherwise called *Gleann Strath Duthaich*, or

"the Country Glen," where dwelt a certain] charmer— of the male sex— who exercised power over fiends, fairies, witches, and warlocks, and whose story I narrated in *The White Wife*. Where this Country Glen makes a sudden bend eastward to the sea, it takes the name of Glenlussa, and is watered by a salmon-stream that flows into Kilbrannan Sound at Ardnacross.

In the last century, when it was not necessary to "recruit with the colley dog," and when men, as well as sheep, were plentiful in those glens, Glenlussa furnished its foil quota to the volunteer company who fought for "King George upon his throne." It also supplied two local poets, Donald Kelly and Donald M'Lean; and it possessed for an inhabitant that ingenious old lady, who, when her sailor son brought her a pound of tea, in default of knowing what else to do with it, soaked it, pounded it with the potato 'beetle,' mixed it up with milk, butter, and meal, and, when she had eaten it, pronounced it to be "nane sae gude as kale."

And there was also another inhabitant of Glenlussa, its laird, Mr. Hector Macallister, who had married the sister of the Marquis of Argyll. And the story is told of him, that when he refused to help Argyll against his neighbours the Macdonalds, he had to fly from Argyll's threat of vengeance, but was captured with his three sons near to Campbelton. Whereupon his wife rode with great speed to beseech her brother to spare her husband and lads; but Argyll spied her coming, and ordered his men to hang Macallister and his sons on the Whinny Hill.

"Which of them shall we put up first?" asked the men.

"The whelps; and afterwards the old fox," replied Argyll.

And when his sister reached the spot she found the four bodies swinging dead from the gallows, to haunt her from thenceforth as ghosts of Glenlussa.

Some popular stories are still told by the people of Glenlussa in connection with their great festival of Hallowe'en (All Hallow's Eve, October 31); and as that festival is the very time for spells and invocations of spirits, the supernatural, as a matter of course, plays an important part in such stories. I here give two specimens of them, which include the leading customs and superstitions of that WesternHighland district.

The ducking for apples, which is so common a custom on Hallowe'en night in Ireland and the north of England— and which forms a leading theme in Maclise's picture— is not mentioned here, nor is it alluded to by Burns in his poem on the subject. He mentions, however, the nut-cracking; as does Gay in his "Spell and in the north of England this pastime has given to the festival the name of " Nut-cracking Night." I may also observe that on Hallowe'en the streets o f Campbelton are paraded by boys flourishing kail-stocks.

And now to my story.

It was Hallowe'e n; and the young people in Glenlussa had met to amuse themselves. They had been at the kail-pulling, and worked it in this fashion: when the lads and lassies had been blindfolded, they were made to take each other by the hand and go into the kail-yard and pull out a stock of kail. If the stock was straight or crooked, or sour or sweet in its *custoc* (heart), so would be the shape and temper of the future husband or wife; and if the stock was light or heavy with earth, so would be the money in the purse of the partner. They had played, too, at cracking and burning nuts, to see which pairs of lovers would bide together or start asunder; and the girls had got the oat-stalks to pull for their families, not minding if there were a dozen grains, but taking care to keep the top one on the stalk, lest anyone should say they had tripped. And they had winnowed their three *wechts* of nothing; and eaten the apple before the looking-glass; and held the blue clew-line; and tried in every way to discover their future partners.

When they had tried these and several other games, and had used charms and words in order that they might dream or see something by which they might know their fortune, they got to egg-dropping. Then one of the girls filled her mouth with the water in which the eggs had been dropped, and went out quickly to run round the house. As she did so, she suddenly met a stranger who was dressed in a soldier's uniform, who said to her "*Am facadh thu Iain*?— did you see John?"

The girl was terrified, for she well knew that there was no soldier at that time in Glenlussa; and she darted back into the house, and told what she had seen. Then they all ran out to see the stranger; but no soldier was there; and although they searched everywhere, they were unable to find the person who had spoken to the girl. They then knew it to have been a ghost; and it filled them with such fear that nothing else was talked of in Glenlussa for some weeks to come.

But the winter passed away, and they had other things to think of, and even the young girl had almost forgotten the soldier's ghost, when one day that she had been to town (Campbelton) to market, she saw some soldiers just landing from a ship. They had come all the way from the East Indies, where they had served for some years; and, as they marched up Main-street from the quay, who should be at their head but the very soldier whose ghost had appeared to her on Hallowe'en. He proved to be a cousin of a friend of hers, and so she soon got to know him ; and when she found that his name was John, she knew that it was not for nothing that the apparition had appeared to her. He made his proposals to her, and, as he had saved some money, they did not long keep company, but were married and had settled in Glenlussa before the next Hallowe'en. So ends that story.

Here follows a very short one, which also makes the ghosts of Glenlussa to appear on Hallowe'en with matrimonial intentions. There were two brothers in Glenlussa, and on Hallowe'en they dipped their shirts in a dead-and-living ford (that is, the ford of a stream that had been crossed by a funeral); and, when they went to bed, they left their shirts to dry before a large fire, and kept watch to see who would come. And after they had watched for some time, they saw the figures of two girls coming in and going up to the fire, and apparently turning their shirts, and then vanishing. And before next Hallowe'en the two brothers married those two girls whose apparitions they had seen turning their shirts.

Burns refers to this charm in his song of "Tam Glen," but limits the turning to the sleeve of the shirt, and the wetting of it does not appear to have been done in any special water. In the appendix to Pennant's *Tour* the charm is mentioned as being confined to the sleeve of the left arm, and the dipping of the shirt is ordered to be done in "a burn where three lairds' lands meet" at a "south-running spring or rivulet."

The people in Glenlussa would seem to have suffered from a chronic attack of the supernatural. The three following brief ghost-stories— in which, however, there is little or no point— are still popular in that locality.

Upwards of seventy years ago there lived in Glenlussa a worthy couple named MacKellar. The wife was exceedingly thrifty, and wrought early and late at her spinning-wheel. All the clothes at that time were made at home; and everything that was on her own and her husband's back was made by her own industry. Long after her husband had gone to bed she would sit at her spinning; and as he could not prevail upon her to lie down, he hated the hum of her wheel.

One night that she had continued at her work longer than usual, and had been spinning into the early morning, she observed a strange man, dressed in the Highland garb, standing on the floor. She said to him,

"*Cea as a thaine thu*?— where did you come from?"

He replied, "*Thainig mise a Thireacadan*— I came from the town of Tireacadan."

And looking earnestly at her, he vanished, although the door was shut and fastened. Then she knew him to be a ghost; so the thrifty wife flew into bed behind her husband (i.e. next to the wall), and never more troubled him by sitting up late and disturbing him with the hum of her wheel. This ghost was evidently of much service to Mr. MacKellar, although its conversation was brief and far from terrible.

The next ghost of Glenlussa is that of a girl.

There was a certain young man who lived in Glenlussa; and one night, after he had gone to bed, he saw a neighbouring girl, who was well known to him, come to the window and place her face against the glass. He at once got up and ran out to her; but not being able to find her, went back to bed again. No sooner was he in bed than her face again appeared at the glass. He ran out directly; but could not see her. Again he went to bed, and her face appeared at the glass for the third time. Once more he ran out; but no girl could be seen. The next morning he met the girl, and asked her for what she was so late out of bed the last night? Whereupon she affirmed that she had gone early to her bed; and her parents gave him proof that she had done so. Everyone in Glenlussa believed that the young man had seen the girl's spirit.

This story ought to have ended with the marriage or death of the girl, or something equally conclusive; but it is surpassed in pointlessness and lack of dramatic action by the following brief story, which is as popular in Glenlussa as "Jack and Gill" is elsewhere.

There is a well in Glenlussa, and two lads went there at nightfall to draw water. They had finished drawing, and were about to return home, when, of a sudden, something black and awful rose up out of the well, splashing the water and spreading it to a great distance. The two lads ran home greatly alarmed, and gave information to the people in the glen, who at once came and searched the well, but found nothing peculiar about it. It was therefore concluded that the lads had seen something supernatural.

This last ghost of Glenlussa is o f the common bogey species, I have yet one more story to tell of this locality, in which, however, the supernatural portion deals with a dream instead of a ghost.

Between two and three miles north of Kilcouslan, on the eastern coast o f Cantire, is a spot called Pinnivers or Peninver, where stood a large block of stone, which was conjectured to have been erected many centuries ago, either in memory of some hero who had been slain in battle, or else for purposes of Druidical worship.

Now, there was an Irishman who lived in the northern part of Ireland, and he dreamed a dream, in which was revealed to him this very stone or cairn; and it was shown to him in the vision that there was a great treasure buried underneath the stone. So he left Ireland, and came across the Channel to Southend, and made his way to Campbelton, and on to Peninver, until he had found the place of his dream. It was almost dark when he reached the spot; but he immediately recognised the stone, and found the precise part of it underneath which the treasure was hidden. But as he had no implements with him wherewith he could raise the stone, he betook himself to a smith who lived at the foot of Cnocscalopil, where it slides down into Glenlussa. There he

begged for a night's lodging; and the smith, seeing that he was a stranger, furnished him with supper and a bed, and also with a glass or two of moonlight (smuggled) whisky.

They got very comfortable together over the whisky, and talked now of this thing, now of that. The smith was very desirous to know what had brought the Irishman to Cantire; and although the other had intended to have kept his own counsel, yet the whisky and the canny Scotsman were too many for him, and he told the smith the whole secret from first to last.

"O," says the smith, as though he made nothing of the news, "and is that all? only a dream! Why, I have often and often dreamed about a many fine things, and I always found them nothing more than a delusion and a snare. I do wonder that a sensible man like you should have come so far on such an errand."

"I was thinking, as I came along, that I was a bit of a fool," says the Irishman; "but having come so far, and finding the stone just as it was in my dream, I should not like to go back without digging for the treasure."

"Certainly not, if it will ease your mind," says the smith. "But you may depend upon it, it will not put any siller in your pouch. I have dreamed of buried treasures a score of times; but, with all my digging and dreaming, I never turned up anything but hard stones. But, as you are bent upon it, I will take my tools in the morning and help you in your search."

But no sooner was the Irishman in bed and fast asleep than the smith got up, and rousing his son, they quietly stole off to the cairn, where they dug in the spot that the Irishman had told him of; and there, sure enough, was the hidden treasure. They secured it safely, and filled up the hole that they had made, so that everything looked undisturbed. Then they got back to their beds, without the Irishman being any the wiser for their proceeding. In the morning he challenged the smith to go with him to look for the treasure; and they went; the smith joking him as they went along, and telling him that he would find nothing but stones and dirt. And, of course, the Irishman found that the smith's words were true; for although they dug and dug, yet not the ghost of any treasure could they find; and the disappointed man returned to Ireland poorer than when he had left his home.

But after he was gone, it was noticed in Glenlussa that the smith and his family, who had been very poor, now began to be prosperous, and were well fed and clad; and when everyone was wondering what could be the reason of the change, the smith took all his family away to America; and nothing more has ever been heard of them.

But how the Glenlussa people came to know of the dream and the hidden treasure was in this way: the smith told the secret to his wife, and the wife,

just before sailing, told it to a friend, who told it to all in Glenlussa; so that their saying is a true one, “Tell it to a woman, tell it to the town."

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## 2: Piracies

***Elinor Mordaunt***

1872-1942

*The Popular Magazine* 20 April 1927

*Evelyn May Clowes*

*English author, widely travelled in Australia and south-east Asia, and resident in Melbourne for 8 years. Numerous novels and short stories.*

THE main room of the Laboean Roemamaken— Harbor Eating House— was crammed to suffocation, though the last meal of the day was practically over; the greater number of tables were occupied by men playing cards.

In the smaller room, leading out of the large room, a thick posse of Chinese gathered round a fan-tan table; while at another and smaller table a half-caste, with oblique eyes sliding down his long nose, twirled a small roulette wheel, set round with little horses, to the loud delight of a group of Dutch sailors; and a half Malay, half Portuguese, thrummed a guitar and sang a love song with the haunting refrain:

*"Oh, to be happy,*
*To be happy,*
*To be happy.*
*Neither with thee nor without thee have I— have I any peace— "*

to an almost unbelievably gross main theme.

The sea— that pellucid, pale-gold sea of moonlit Makassar— was by now as smooth as glass, dotted with its thousand *praus*, its many islands. Filson, the English skipper, who had run across in the teeth of a gale from Timor, was worn by the storms hanging about that port of storms— Koepang. He still wore his long sea boots, sitting with his legs stretched out in front of him, so that the three other men with whom he played poker, a Dutch skipper and a couple of traders, whose mothers had undoubtedly drunk too much coffee, were forced to keep theirs tucked up under their chairs. Not that they complained. For, though no one could be more good-natured and jovial than Filson— a magnanimous winner, a laughing loser— other men were afraid of angering him. No one in his senses was prepared to court the indignity of being lifted up by the seat of his pants and flung out of the door into the gutter— a Makassar gutter, at that!

The two half-castes drank little. But the voices of the Dutch and English skippers were continually raised:

"*Dijongos— djongos— saioe bier— satoe bier*! *Kom hier— mari sini*! Damn your eyes! *Bier— bier— bier*!"

These demands were keeping the unfortunate Malays ceaselessly on the run.

Such a crowd! One would have imagined that any sort of space was out of the question, and it was a miracle to see how quickly the center of the large room was cleared— with men still crowding into it from the other— when Almira Silva appeared on the scenes. But Filson's great boots helped here. For this was what he had been waiting for— thinking of all the way up from Timor. And it was partly to fill in the time that he had played as he had done, lost more money than he could afford, drunk more beer than was good for him. Moreover, he had an inflated idea as to what it would cost to keep a wife— such a wife as Almira would be— so pretty, so smart.

The crowd packed closer and closer against the walls, as she danced, flying round, driving it outward, like a whirlpool, her full-skirted, black-silk frock swirling out like the fringed petals of a black poppy. Red shoes and white stockings; a foam of short, white-lace petticoats; red lips and coal-black hair, smooth as satin, round a tiny head; black eyes as bright as diamonds. The twang of the guitar and the frenzied rattle of the ancient piano were racing against her feet. Pomegranate blossom and the cream-white of Stephanotis— fire and snow— the black of the night and the brightness of the day, thought Filson, his mind flowing in similes as it had never done before.

During the first pause in the dance she chose to perch herself on his knee, while she sipped her *angor merah*— sweet sirup-and soda. "To bring you luck," was what she said.

Never before had she distinguished any man in the Laboean Roemamaken with such marks of favor, and the others stared jealously. The touch of the soft arm about his neck stirred the English captain to madness.

He must have her— he must! He'd blow out his brains if any other fellow got her! To have her and keep her forever, like a jewel in a box. His own home fire next to his own heart.

His play grew wilder and wilder. At first Almira egged him on, excited as he was, delighting in risks, bidding Affan Ling— in that easy Malay which is the common tongue of the place— to be off.

"*Apa kwee giela* (are you mad?) To dare to touch me, you swine, you! *Pigi, pigi*!'— as though he were a dog, when he touched her shoulder and asked her to go on dancing. Asking, mind you— no ordering about it— though he paid her by the evening.

At last, however, even she grew scared. She tweaked at Filson's sleeve, put her hand under his chin, tried to turn his eyes to hers, away from the cards:

"Enough, enough! Stop it, you great stupid, you!"

WHEN she found it impossible to divert his mind that way— for, though he turned his head sidewise and kissed her lips, his eyes and mind still swung upon the cards— she started to dance again. She was pathetically certain this must draw him, for she had never yet met any man who could keep his attention upon anything else, while she chose to dance, like thistledown before the wind. But every dominating woman meets at last with that exception which dominates her. And Almira's heart was heavy— though full of sweetness and a queer sort of pride in her own failure— as she realized that the long-faced Englishman, bending over the table, with his long legs thrust out in front of him— perfectly indifferent to the fact that the legs of the others were forced up like frogs beneath them— did not so much as turn an eye in her direction.

Just as she reached the end of her dance, however, and stood swaying a little, with her hand upon her heart, feeling oddly lost and vague, Filson rose with a strange loud laugh, devoid of all merriment, and fanned out his remaining cards upon the table.

"Well, that's that!" he cried hoarsely.

Then laughed again and stood swaying, as she had swayed— with a queer dazed look upon his sunburned face, as though some one had struck him a heavy blow upon the head.

And a blow it was, indeed, the realization that he had lost every penny he was worth, or ever stood to be worth— all the private part of the cargo of sandalwood and coffee that he had brought up from Timor with him, fruit of

that hard voyage; every stick he had aboard the schooner, rifles and all; the schooner herself, his altogether best beloved, up to that first day when he had run across Almira in the Laboean Roemamaken. The one thing, indeed, still remaining to him — and what thread of sanity had led him to hold on to this?— being the right of taking one more voyage in her— a voyage lasting no more than three months at the most.

One of the half-castes had pulled back his chair, and turned it sidewise, so that he also could thrust out his feet. He leaned back in it, with his head sunk upon his chest, his shoulders above his ears, his hands deep in his empty pockets, his narrow face the color of moldy cheese. This half-caste, too, had lost.

But Filson, as he sat pressed up against the Dutch captain, whispering, penciling figures upon a dirty-scrap of paper, threw a bright, challenging, sidelong glance, more than half a wink, toward Almira Silva; while the Dutchman, raising his great red face for a moment, fixed her with his slow gaze, wondering how far she had belonged to the fool Englishman— whether there was any chance of taking her over with the rest. To this gaze the dancer responded with a stare of slow disdain, the one word, "Koetoe," flung across the table, right in his face.

"Well, what about another drink?" roared Filson. "Look here! What's wrong with another little drink? And if Ling likes ter come down to hell to dun me for it, he's welcome."

"No, no, my friend, this to me," broke in Almira, slipping her arm through his, pressing her cheek— bright carnation now— against his shoulder. "We will not drink like common people— you three gentlemen an' me an' *the kepala jangprenta* (the commander)— Filson, but like ladies and gentlemen, in port *wijn* for our betrothal."

It was out without a thought— bred from a decision as swift as her movements. For she had scarcely realized she cared a quarter guilder for the English skipper. But the sight of his misery and his indifference to her dancing had set a passionate flame of love alight in her heart. What if the man was ruined? she would have asked you, with fine irony— was there not all the more need of her love?

Half an hour later, and— apart from a couple of white-coated Chinamen, who sat whispering upon one of the benches— they were alone together at the end of the tiny pier.

THE calm was complete, the moon full— an immense, pale, silver-green plate in a pale, blue-green sky; the water black and silver and green, with the green of willow catkins. Save for the whispering of the Chinese— like the soft

gurgling of water being poured out of a bottle— and the gentle pat— pat— pat of water against the supports of the pier, it was absolutely silent. Here and there, the glow of a small fire showed aboard one of the many praus, apparently untended, for not a soul stirred. If an occasional canoe slid past, with a fisherman and his seine, there was no rattle of ruddocks— nothing more than the small suck of water around a paddle soundlessly dipped, soundlessly raised. The air was like the scented touch of a dew-drenched flower against Filson's cheek— that cheek which was not pressed against the smooth, black head lying so quietly against his breast.

To have her there like that, and yet to feel himself soaked through and through, worn out and weakened with despair. Fool— fool that he was! He had wished to give her the most beautiful house— carved beds and suites of furniture in crimson brocade— the finest in the whole of the Dutch Indies— silver coffee sets, inlaid tables— while all she wanted, all the while, was a quiet life in a little house set in a nutmeg grove at the edge of the sea in Ternate, that dark pearl among islands.

"A pretty fix I've got myself into— a pretty sort of a fix, darling— darling! An' when I love you as I do, an' not a thing to offer you— you with your beauty, you with every man in Makassar to choose from. God only knows what made you fix on me! It's beyond me. How satin smooth your lips are— warm and fresh and smooth as a geranium flower. Darling one, lovely one! God! But it just breaks my heart, loving you as I do, having you love me the way you do— and me the fool I am to have lost everything, the way I have done, to those— those—"

"The fat *koetoe* and the lean *koetoe*," put in Almira.

"Lord! It drives me wild to think of it! There's nothing for me but to blow out my brains and clear myself out of your way. That's clear, heart's delight. TIl scuttle the schooner and go down with her, or else join up with Fanaldo— good old Fanaldo! Lord, but there's no one like him. It beats me, sweetheart, that it does, why you can never find an honest man unless he's a scoundrel— but it's truth for all that."

"Fanaldo!"

Filson felt Almira stiffen within his arms, as though an electric wire had been run through her at the name. She put him a little away from her and pressed both hands against his broad chest. Then she raised one hand and tweaked at the lock of dark hair which hung across his forehead, moist with the damp heat of the Laboean Roemamaken.

"No, I don't want to be kissed— not now, anyway. 'This is business. See here, you are good friends with Fanaldo?"

"By God, yes. There's a man for you, and no mistake about it, either. If there ever was a gentleman!" burst out Filson.

"But, of course!" put in the dancer primly, awe and respect in her voice. "Is he not of the family of the Rajahs of Tidore— the oldest, proudest family, the swiftest, surest pirates, the noblest men in all these seas? Beside, 'e like you! 'E speak to me of you; close upon a year back we speak together— 'e and me. It is that which first led me to observe you, love of my life. Believe me, there is nothing that 'e would not do for you. As for me— see 'ere, great stupid it is like this with Fanaldo— "

She held up one small finger in the moonlight— a finger as white as if there were no single drop of Javanese blood in her veins— and gave a quick, twirling gesture, as though she were twisting a hair around it.

"Oh, well, he's a damned good-looking old chap," said Filson rather ruefully. "Almira, you don't— "

"No, I don't," said Almira, kissing him full on the lips and then drawing back. She gazed at him seriously and spoke lingeringly: "You will not run yourself into any danger, will you, my best beloved?"

"What do you mean?"

"Fanaldo— where do you now think that 'e may be?"

"Let me see. Pearlin's started, hasn't it? Oh, somewhere up about Batjan way, likely enough. If I was to run across him—"

HE broke off suddenly, as Almira pressed herself closer against him with a shrill cry:

"Take care, my dear one, take care! One time Fanaldo 'e like me verri— oh, verri much. Maybe 'e 'be jealous now. Think of the so big ransom which 'e demand for those whom 'e takes prisoner. Who would pay that— come now, who would pay that if anything happened to you?"

She must have shot a glance upward at this; for, though she did not raise her small face, close pressed against Filson's breast, there was a gleam of white, as though from a glancing eye; while the skipper himself gave a harsh, none-toopleasant laugh.

"Come to that, I reckon my precious country 'u'd do that much for me. Clean forget about a man, so long as he's trying his damnedest to be a credit ter it an' himself. That's the way o' them— spend all their time an' money puttin' blacks inter pants an' draggin' all sorts o' rapscallion— business missionaries an' such-like— outer the holes they've gone an' got 'emselves into— more particular if they stands ter aggrivate any other nation by kicking up the deuce o' a dust.

"But that's the way of the English government— that's what pleases 'em! 'The Crying Scandal o' Piracy in the Moluccas'-— The Pirates o' the Malabar!' Lord, don't I know their squarkin', supposin? a gallant sea captain like me— 'Our Heroic Merchant Service'— haven't I heard it all before?— went missin' that sorter way. Supposin' Fanaldo— that good old cock Fanaldo— took me prisoner! You ask me what they'd do? Kick up one hell o a row— pay up like gents— that's what they'd do."

Filson had by now pretty well forgotten his troubles, and his dark eyes were glowing, his sallow Cornish cheek flushed.

"A hell o' a row— a hell o' a great ransom. Make an infernal ass o' yourself, an' your country will stand by you, right enough."

"To be the wife of an English kepala jangprenta! Ah, verri good that/ But ter be 'is widow— pouf! Any sorter a man, black or yellow, would do for being the widow of," remarked Almira darkly, with tight lips. 'All same— might be?"

"Widow! You mean ter marry me afore I go?" Filson caught her to him, and it was long before she could draw herself a trifle apart and find any other use than that which he chose for her lips. Now she plumed herself, patting her hair delicately, her eyes brighter than ever in the moonlight.

"It may be better, supposing anything should— should 'appen— and one never knows— that I should have what it is you call that ticket, which is the right of all women who are married by your priest— ticket of leave? No, eh? A certificate, you say. Ah, well, it is all the same to me." She shrugged her white shoulders and then gave him a quick warm hug, as one gives a sweet to keep a child quiet.

"So long as we love each other, is not that enough? An' if we cease to love, where, after all, is the sense of remaining married, seeing it is all for love? Life and love, are they not, indeed, both alike short?" She went on sapiently: "And is there not, in both, much to make a girl— what are the funny words that you Engleesh 'ave to that?— put 'er tongue in 'er cheek— no, between her teeth?

"But now, 'arken you 'ere, my angel one," she continued, driving home her word with a tap of her finger upon Filson's cheek. Then she spoke to him seriously and long— and not altogether of love, either. For, though to be left a widow might or might not be bad— it all depended— to be left a widow without any sort of means was sheer stupid waste of time, and no other words for it.

YOU must remember it, that affair of Captain Filson, of the schooner, *Maid of Fowey*, held to ransom by one of the most notorious and powerful rajah pirates of the Molucca. The real excitement began in a small way in Makassar, with a stricken wife weeping, weeping, weeping upon the long flight of not

very clean stairs leading to the offices of the British consul— weeping and wringing slim hands up and dewn the cool wide verandas of the Dutch Residency. Then the affair went on to a cyclone of furious letters in the local papers from Dutch residents trading with England, asking what they were taxed for, if it were not that their interest might be protected, the honor of their country upheld. More furious letters followed from those who received no benefit from the English, urging that these universal adventurers should be forced to cure themselves of their habit of poking their noses in where they were not wanted. The storm boiled up and up and up in Makassar: in the clubs, where there is surely more loud talking than in any other clubs in the world; in the papers, Dutch, Chinese, Malay. There was something about Almira Filson, née Silva, which rather specially appealed to the spectacular tastes of young reporters and editors. For even Almira's marriage, secret and hasty, held in it that element of excitement and suspense which goes to the blowing of any bubble— so frail and charming, so easily broken. Supposing Fanaldo resorted to extreme measures with his prisoner, supposing the English government really did refuse to pay the ransom— what a widow— what a peach of a widow!

The whole affair began by being very exciting, almost joyous. But when the English papers started to put their backs into it, it took on a more lowering aspect. The most serious weekly declared the very possibility of the capture of "one of our most distinguished merchant captains by pirates, in the open sea in broad daylight"— queer how they all insisted upon this, as though the moonlight of the Moluccas was not bright enough for any one— to be "a blot upon civilization." And the most serious of all the dailies spoke of the perilous strain cast upon international good will by such an untoward event. A less serious, but a more fervid, daily inquired as to whether we were meekly to submit to so prehistoric a state of affairs; pointing out that, after all, the English are, all boasting apart, the only nation with any real knowledge of how to govern savage or semicivilized peoples.

Then came a Sunday paper with a heading: "Heroic British Skipper. Cruel Indifference of the British government. Gallant Merchant Captain, Hero of the Great War, Left to Languish in Dark Hold of a Pirate Hulk."

It might have been funny, if any one had thought of it that way. For there was a fancy drawing of Filson, with a long beard, his hair falling into his eyes, bent double in a sort of rabbit hutch; another fancy drawing of the pirate ship looking like a Thames barge; a photo of Filson's mother and grandmother; of Filson himself as a little boy of four, in very long drawers.

"Is it no one's business to make any sort of move? Can it be that we are indeed so completely hardened?" was what all the papers asked; went on

asking, until the whole affair was swollen to a matter of international importance by Fanaldo, apparently out of all patience, sending in his absolute ultimatum: "One more week." At the end of that time, unless the five thousand pounds demanded were forthcoming, it would be too late. Captain Filson would cease to exist, and the honor of two nations would remain indelibly smirched.

EVERY cable and wireless station in the world hummed with Filson's name; an American millionaire was racing to the scene of the tragedy in his yacht; or, at least, as near as may be. For the strange wild creatures who brought the insistent, the monotonous demands from Fanaldo— creeping up to the quay or pier at nightfall, in catamaran or canoe, materializing miraculously from out the east or west, north or south— spoke no specified language, knew, or apparently knew, nothing whatever, 'beyond the fact that they carried closely wrapped within the folds of their loin cloths, certain letters, already worn by innumerable hands, for the tuan governor, the British consul, or the chief of police.

"What about Filson?" In England the members of Parliament shouted each other down, asking the same question, over and over again. The wraith of a famous capitalist-journalist appeared to the wife of the prime minister, criticizing and condemning such fatal inertia; and Ireland took it up, contending that the Irish and the Cornish were of the same blood.

But it was the people of the Welsh Church who at last tipped the scale, with more than one by-election in sight. And in a sudden panic the authorities gave orders for the dispatch of a wireless out to Makassar: "Get in touch with pirates. His majesty's government guarantees payment for instant release of James Filson." In an amazingly short time— so short that there were people who declared that half the more adventurous souls in the Maluccas must have known of the English skipper's whereabouts— signed papers and agreements which might almost have been counted as deeds of gift passed between Fanaldo and the authorities, and the captain was free, but exactly from what or from where, no one ever quite knew.

The schooner was, of course, lost forever, sunk to the bottom of a peculiarly uncharted sea. The skipper himself, however, made his way back to Makassar by a long series of strange craft, staggering up the steps of the little pier— where he and Almira had sat together so happily three months earlier— almost in rags, with the long hair and beard so aptly guessed at in the illustrated papers and common to castaways. Here he found almost every soul in Makassar gathered to meet him, in the blazing sun of a blazing midday— brilliant blue and white and sheer glare— with the town band to play him up

the pier, along the wide quarter of a mile of dusty road, and into the white dining room of the Oranji Hotel, hung with British and Dutch flags, where he sat, feasted and féted, with Almira at his side; Almira waving away the overready boys with the bottles; Almira with that jewel of a parrot, green and scarlet and royal blue— brought to her by one of Fanaldo's minions and dramatically tutored by her imprisoned spouse to the one English word "Help"— upon her shoulder.

DO you know the island of Ternate, with its outpost of volcanic islands, its own volcanic mountain— so wonderfully and deeply blue— its ancient forts, its many thatch-roofed houses, its palm-shaded road, its odorous nutmeg groves?

No? Well, you have missed the one place on earth in which to make a home with a beloved and loving woman. Ten acres of nutmeg trees and a long, low cottage close upon the white sands; what more could 'be left for Filson to wish for, to lament? Unless it might be the loss of his schooner, and to take your true seaman's ship away from him is as good as taking the heart out of his body.

Almira felt this and made other people feel it, too, bringing all possible pressure to bear upon the governor of Ternate, so that he might fill this need. Then, as he could do nothing, she made her way back to Makassar, flowing in upon the stream of her own tears upon the governor, at the very moment when he had some of the most important men in the country about him. She drew such a heartbreaking picture of her husband's despair and misery, with so artful a use of this constant fear that the English might be led to imagine no one could possibly run any colony but themselves— " An' what shame would that make for me, a Dutch lady!" said Almira— that the people of Makassar raised a sum sufficiently substantial to purchase a new schooner for the unfortunate captain.

The money was put into Filson's own hands, and he himself made the purchase. The old boat had been a simple, threemasted fore-and-aft schooner, painted brown and white, with a flush deck. The new vessel had a small poop deck and fo'c's'le head, as is the way with many island schooners; she carried yards on her foremast, with an auxiliary motor; she was painted white and deep red, and named the *Poeti Poetri*, which means *The White Princess*— the fancy of that Yankee skipper for whom, it was understood, she had been purchased, somewhere up among the Yapen Isles.

Filson was as pleased as a child with his new possession, showing every one over her, breaking many a bottle upon her. Among his visitors there happened to be a beach comber of mixed nationalities, who had once in many years held

a job, having been shipped as a deck hand aboard the Maid of Fowey, when he was in no state to know what was being done with him.

As it happened, this man, still cherishing a sentimental feeling for those few rare weeks of toil, took it into his head to wander over the new boat for no other reason than to draw odious comparison between her and her predecessors. He took particular exception to the fo'c's'le head, for no other reason than that it covered the heel of that bowsprit upon which, lying in the sun upon the open deck of the *Maid of Fowey*, he had once cut his own name.

"As might be there,' he said and pointed. Then he drew back his hand with a sharp, indrawn breath, while one of the other two men with him ejaculated "Lordy!" in a hoarse whisper.

"So it's that, is it?"

No single one of them would, of set intention, have said anything. But the fact remains that they toasted Filson, "An' this darnation fine new boat o' yours," too often and too knowingly, with too many digs in the ribs— "You sly dog, you!" People began to sit up and take notice.

Some weeks later Filson himself made a bad slip. He was playing poker with four other men, Dutchmen, when the supply of beer ran out.

"I will say this for old Fanaldo, the beer flowed; it did that, iced an' all. Though it didn't never do him no harm— never knew any man play a better game— keep a cooler head."

Filson was dealing as he spoke, and the words came in short jerks, without thought.

"So you played cards with Fanaldo, *hein*?" drawled one of his companions, so meaningly that Filson, roused from his dreams, swung round upon him and asked what the devil it mattered to him.

"Little enough to me, my friend," the Dutchman said and shrugged his great shoulders. "A good deal to that fool government of yours, which wasted so many thousand in getting you back from your holiday; and a good deal to the poor fools in Makassar, who raised up so great a sum for you to spend in putting steam into your own—"

He was unable to finish what he had to say, at least coherently, with Filson's fist taking up the greater part of his face space; but, for all that, the whisper got about. Filson and his wife knew it and talked of it in their veranda at nights, Filson in a long-sleeved planter's chair, his coat off, his feet up, gin and seltzer at one elbow, the plaint of a deeply misunderstood man in his voice, Almira upon his knee, her smooth little head tucked in under his chin.

"The darnation cheek of the swine to think as how I'd go an' do the likes o' that," was what he said. "I only hope ter God the authorities don't start on kickin' up a row about what's over an' done with, an' us so snug an' all."

"If they not nice, they find it this way," said Almira, raising her small hand up against the clear moonlight sky, the first finger and thumb closely pressed, "that I, Almira Filson, wife of the English *kepala jangprenta*"— she rolled the words with pride upon her palate— " 'old them 'ere— 'ere."

MONTH later Filson's wife— alone, save for her maid, for the skipper was off on his first voyage with his beautiful boat— was swinging to and fro in her rocking-chair, hemming the one small square garment that the heir of all the Filsons would be expected to wear, when the governor of Ternate, a stout man to be about in the heat of the day, came puffing along the deep soft sands, with a taller, leaner man by his side. The two men stopped in front of the veranda, blue with morning-glories, to inquire whether a man named Filson lived there.

Without rising, Almira folded her infinitesimal piece of sewing in her lap, took her feet off the rail of the opposite chair, and gazed at the two men coldly.

"This is the 'ouse of the *Kepala Jangprenta* Filson, Breetish subject, if that is what you want to know," she said; then she added mildly: "An' if you've got any 'air on your 'ead, you'll take off your 'at when yer speaking ter an Engleesh lady. If you ain't got no 'air, no more said. I'll 'scuse you."

Under the influence of those fixed and bright eyes,.the governor took off his hat, and his companion did likewise.

"This," said the governor, "is the secretary of the governor of Celebes, who has come up from Makassar to question your husband in regard to that Fanaldo affair."

"My 'usband knows but one language, and that verri bad," said Almira, with a dimpling smile. "Me— I know four languages— German, Engleesh, Malay, Dutch. I talk to you better than my 'usband. Much to say, me, if you will be so good both sit down." She indicated the chair upon which she had been resting her feet and another, both low.

"What we want to know," began the governor, a little flustered by her beauty and her coolness— "I mean what I want to know— what we want to know is—"

"But it is what I want to know, *Tuan Panglima-perang Darat* and *Tuan* Controlleer— what I want to know is what matters. And it is this, this'— Almira bent forward and, raising her forefinger, tapped it gently against the pellucid air, just as close upon a year ago she had tapped it against Filson's lean brown cheek— "What is it you will geeve to me not to tell the Engleesh government, all the Engleesh sea captains and Engleesh consuls who love 'im so— an' love me, also— the young man of the newspaper in Makassar with whom I can do

this"— once again she made that gesture of twisting something so pliable as a hair round her finger— 'and who so delights in writing laugh news to the so funny Engleesh papers, all that so great fool my 'usband make of you? What now? Should 'e write so that all the great Engleesh nation do at you laugh— you Dutch, so admi-ra-a-ble and so 'onest, though so stu-u-t-pide, if you will 'scuse me— stuu-u-pide— stu-u-u-pide, but good, oh, yes, good."

It was in the full heat of the afternoon that the two dignities had made their way through the heavy sands to the little house which stood by the sea. It was in the blaze of a purple-and-gold sunset that they left it, with Almira waving and smiling, even going so far as to kiss her little hand, as they glanced back, sheepishly and unwillingly smiling. And it was nothing more nor less than the difference in national temperaments which made the interview of the next day, when the English consul paid his call, shorter, in the mere matter of time.

A COUPLE OF MONTHS later when Captain Filson pushed on shore in his dinghy, leaner and browner than ever, fresh from his first trip with his new boat, he held in his hand a parcel wrapped in peeled, yellow-orchid leaves. This parcel he took straight into his wife's room and laid upon her bed, by the side of his firstborn, as he stooped to kiss her. Then, the first transports of reunion past, he stretched his long limbs out in a low chair at her side, taking his glass of gin and lime juice from the hand of her serving maid, as he watched her open the parcel, with soft coos of delight, laying bare a white dress of the finest silk, flounced to the waist, embroidered over with trails and posies of fine, small flowers.

"From Fanaldo," remarked Filson. Then he stared and pointed his finger at two other silk dresses, a rose pink and pale green, which had just caught his attention, hanging in shimmering folds over two separate chairs at the foot of the bed.

"What the devil—"he began and stopped, with his mouth a little open, like a man entirely at a loss; while his wife's eyes rested lovingly, first upon one, then upon the other shimmering beauty; and at last returning to that which lay across her knees. A small, tight, and secret smile was upon her red lips.

"The pink, beloved one, from the Dutch *tuan* controller-er; the green from the Engleesh consul, who said: 'An' 'ow much?'— like that, no more, just like that— 'Ow much?' "

"An? that ain't all, either, not with me," said Filson boastingly, as he pulled from his pocket a long chain of magnificent, but unevenly matched, pearls. "From Fanaldo, with his love," he added, while a slow grin grew upon his long face, as he released Almira's hand beneath her pillow and watched her draw out two more strings of pearls. She held them up.

"They will look well round my neck — the three. That of the Dutchman the thickest." She handled them delicately. "That of the Engleeshman, the best matched; but that of the— what is it you call 'em?— the 'Scoo-oundrel— worth many hundred more guilder than the two of them put together. It is a pity, but is it not ever so, my best beloved?" she added. Then she laid the three strings out upon the embroidered silk and fell to counting upon her fingers.

"Two thousand five 'undred Engleesh for the 'alf of the ransom; two thousand five 'undred for you, an' two thousand five 'undred for our good Fanaldo; and is it not like 'im to have sent me these so beautiful presents, also— 'e who 'as nothing to fear. Then the so beau-u-u-tiful fitting up of your so beau-u-u-tiful ship, and some five hundred guilder over from that out of the money given to you by the kind people of Makassar. Three new silk dresses, such as befit the wife of a *pnanglima-perang laot*"— without so much as a thought she had raised his title to admiral— "and three pearl necklaces of great price!

"Without doubt, love of my life, your God is well pleased that I have made marriage with you according to your faith. But 'E also is good," she added, with smiling condescension, "and to-morrow I myself will offer to 'im one great candle. Not too great, for 'ave we not our family to think of?"

Filson nodded, his eyes dreamy, as he drew luxuriously at his pipe, leaning back in his chair, and gazing out into the lagoon, where the milk-white Poeti-Poetri swung at anchor, backed by those deepblue peaks of Tidore— the breeding place of pirates.

"Lord," he said at last, dragging out his words with slow relish, "ter think o' the years an' years as I waited for a chance o' clapping an engine into her! She's as fine a boat as you'd ever see, though no finer nor Fanaldo's, with its white deck, smooth and fine as silk, where he and I laid out upon mattresses covered with that patterned silk stuff. What do you call it? Brocade? Yep, that's it. There we used to play poker and drink fizz and iced beer from morning ter night. Did me proud did old Fanaldo; but, then, he could afford it. Wasn't it me as put the whole thing in his way?" he boasted largely, as Almira smiled— her small secret smile.

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## 3: Special Delivery

***Roy Hinds***

(Roy Wesley Hinds) 1887-1930

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*Prolific US short story writer for the pulps.*

BETWEEN the cultivated ridges of the Waring homestead and the Grenn homestead, lay a cedar swamp. There were no fences on either place; the property line ran through the gloomy swale, filled thickly with cedars. These trees constituted salvable timber, but neither of the homesteaders intended to take much of it out until more of their ridge land was cleared and stumped. Each had taken up one hundred and sixty acres during the same month, four years previously, but Ted Waring had cleared more land than Cale Grenn.

It was October, late, and their crops were harvested. There were ways of making money on the homesteads in fall and winter. There were rock maples and beeches which went straight into the air for upward of sixty feet, and heavy cedars grew along the edges of the swamp, trees comparatively easy to get out and to sled to the Tittabaw River, which flowed past the west boundaries of the two places. As long as the river was open, a man could handle a raft of cedars, alone, and such an offering brought a good price at the Wellington mill, fourteen miles down the Tittabaw. On several occasions Ted Waring and Cale Grenn had tied their rafts of maples and beeches together and floated them fifty two miles down the river to Sackinee, to the big mills. Both Waring and Grenn had worked in the woods when pine was being cut in the region, and they had worked on the big drives. They knew the business and both were big, strong men; between them they could handle a big raft— a small drive, in fact— and these trips brought handsome profits.

But each man had his own way of handling the profits. Ted Waring usually reached the homestead the second day after the logs were sold in Sackinee. Cale Grenn remained in Sackinee sometimes a week. There were numerous unlawful drinking places there; also, a clique of gamblers who liked to see men like Cale Grenn come to town. Ted Waring, now about thirty-five, had had his fling at that sort of thing in his days as a lumberjack, but he had taken up his homestead with serious intentions. He meant to have a farm and a home. Cale Grenn often announced the same intentions, but he was somewhat slower in carrying them out. He, too, was about thirty-five, and he seemed to think he had plenty of time.

Neither man had married, but at Bradley's store, four miles down the river, there was talk in which the names of both Ted and Cale were linked with that of Annie Sanford, who lived on her father's farm over on the Chippewa. It was the opinion at Bradley's store that it was nip and tuck between Ted Waring and Cale Grenn. Annie had heightened interest in the affair by keeping her preference strictly to herself. In a region so sparsely settled and so woefully shy of marriageable women, the situation assumed extraordinary importance.

Cale Grenn studied the frosted panes of his windows, rubbed off a patch of hoar, and looked out, shivering. His iron stove was cold, despite the fact that the morning was far advanced. He looked across the bleak clearing, toward the river, and saw nothing to engage his attention. Then he scowled darkly at an empty whisky bottle and set about building a fire with trembling hands. He grumbled considerably, thinking thick-headedly of his troubles. The fire, starting off with a crackling roar, warmed his body, but did not dispel the chill of his spirit. The depression induced by alcoholic excesses, and bad alcohol, at that, was heightened by the grim knowledge that the pressure of his debts was approaching the insupportable stage.

Time and again he went back to the empty bottle, and once he tilted it to his lips, as though he hoped to inveigle a last lingering drop of the fiery liquor out of the liquorless flask. But no drop remained. His greedy thirst of the night before had precluded that possibility. He more than once cursed "Buck" Dryfoot, the overdue half-breed bootlegger who used the Tittabaw River as an avenue of trade. Buck, according to their previous arrangement, should have put in an appearance the evening before, and here it was morning, melancholy morning, and nothing to drink and no Buck Dryfoot in sight. Cale mumbled maledictions on the head of the Indian. As the warmth from the stove dispelled the frost, he peered out the front windows almost incessantly. That Buck would eventually come, there was small doubt. He would come not only for fresh trade, but also to collect a considerable amount due him from previous sales.

That is to say, he would come with the intention of collecting, but he would get nothing, except another notation of debt to jot down in his greasy little memorandum book. Cale had arrived home the previous noon, drunk and "broke," from Sackinee. He had promised Buck payment out of the money he meant to fetch with him, the proceeds from his last raft of maples in Sackinee. Maples were bringing big money just now; furniture factories were taking all the logs they could get. Cale had got a big sum of money for the raft, but the bootleggers and the gamblers of Sackinee had got theirs before Cale could get away.

YET Cale did not worry much about his indebtedness to Dryfoot. He would make his excuses to Buck and talk him out of another bottle. Buck would not refuse; at least, he had never refused under similar circumstances. Cale assured himself that he wanted only one more bottle; he simply had to get sober somehow, and the best way to accomplish that job, he guessed, was to stop drinking. Yet he hadn't the strength to quit at this identical moment. He deluded himself into the belief that it would be much easier after just one more bottle. He wouldn't make such a pig of himself with the next bottle. That was to be the last. He would stretch it out, drink it sparingly, taper off, as it were. Then he would be thoroughly sober, with a head clear enough to face the troubles that confronted him. Those troubles he chose to brush aside at the moment. He did brush them aside, thinking almost altogether of Buck Dryfoot.

He had slept with most of his clothes on. He postponed breakfast, craving a drink first. He wandered back and forth between the shack and the river. The sun was bright, and the woods were filled with the fading browns and reds of leaves withering to a fall. It wasn't so very cold in the sun, but the water of the river looked icy and bleak. He studied the turn up the river and the turn down the river, but the stream was unbroken as yet by Buck Dryfoot's boat. He often looked, too, toward the shack of Ted Waring, but he understood the absence of smoke around Ted's stovepipe and the general air of lifelessness about the Waring place. Ted was down the river with a raft. But, unlike himself, Ted would put his profits in the bank in Sackinee. He would come back with an additional notation in his bank book, come back sober and with a zest for further labor. Buck Dryfoot did not number Ted Waring among his customers. The gamblers of Sackinee never got their fingers on Ted's money.

Cale's face was forbiddingly dark and scowling. Why was it that he couldn't seem to get going as Ted had done? He knew, yet he shunned the truth. It seemed that he was always falling in with roisterous companions in Sackinee. With every raft, he went down the river with the best intentions, only to succumb to the old lures. Well, he had to quit it— had to quit it all, after just one more bottle. He would straighten up and scrape together money to pay his debts— the debts that threatened to engulf him. He would work like a beaver to get his land in order. If he frittered away much more time, Ted Waring would be marrying Annie Sanford. But there was time yet, if he stopped drinking—after one more bottle, of course. He'd get thoroughly sober, all shaved, and cleaned up; then he'd call at the Sanford farm over on the Chippewa. Annie would not marry him unless he did.

Well, he still had his oaks—five oak trees, straight as a pike pole, every one of them, as clean a set of trees as there was to be found in all that region. The

five of them, logged, were worth five hundred dollars in Sackinee. They were fine trees. Oak was fetching big money.

The year previously they were worth eighty dollars apiece. They were worth a hundred apiece now. Next year they would be worth at least ten dollars more apiece, but Cale Grenn did not see how he could wait, how he could spare them. Yes, he would have to log the oaks, raft them and float them down to Sackinee. He studied them.

Not only studied his own oaks, but took a look at Ted Waring's oaks, five trees in a clump, too, close to the river, easy to fell in such a way that they would tumble down to the river. Why, one man could cut the ten trees, trim and log them, dog them into a raft, and drive the whole lot to Sackinee. If he owned the- ten trees—one thousand dollars, easy. Quick money, for the two clumps of oaks stood handiest of all to the river. The fall of the bank, if the trees were brought down just so, would carry them right down to the water, and, once in the water, they would be easy to handle. A job for one man.

BUT of those ten trees, Cale Grenn owned five. Five hundred dollars, a mere drop in the bucket. A thousand dollars was money worth thinking about. It would not pull Cale out of the hole, but at least it would substantially placate his creditors, get them into a frame of mind out of which would come leniency, further credit. Sober and industrious, with one thousand dollars in hand, he could pull out in time, get himself in shape to tie, if not beat, Ted Waring in a financial way, and offer as much in worldly inducements to Annie Sanford. Cale had a sneaking idea that Annie preferred him to Ted; but, of course, Annie wasn't a fool. Indeed, she was a remarkably bright young woman, and no girl in her right senses would marry a man who had let his homestead go to wrack and ruin, while he was off carousing. Well, he had Ted's stock to feed, and he had better be about it. He could hear Ted's cow bawling now. Ted had cared for Cale's stock and chickens, while Cale was down the river, and he expected the same of Cale. It was an arrangement long in force between the two. Ted, his raft in the river, had left a half hour after Cale got home.

Cale went over to the Waring place, fed and watered the cow, the horse and the chickens, took a befuddled look around, to see that everything was all right. Ted's dog was there, and Cale fed him with scraps of meat brought from his own place. Cale's head was heavy, and his thoughts were addled. If only he had a drink, if Buck Dryfoot—

A movement on the road below caught his eye— a road that ran past the far limit of the Waring place. It was a horse and buggy. The road was a spur off the main highway two miles away, and it led only to the two homesteads. Visitors coming down that road could be bound only for Cale's place or Ted's.

The buggy stopped, near the corner formed by the road and the river. There was a gleam of a bright-colored cloak in the road, later on the hillside. Annie Sanford? Yes, sure enough, it was Annie Sanford.

Well, that was a new one— Annie Sanford calling on Ted Waring. Had she been bound for Cale's place, she would have driven around the corner of Ted's homestead and along the river road. There was some one in the buggy, a man— Annie's father. He waited there for the girl to perform whatever errand brought her.

Cale got under cover, expecting that Annie would come straight on to Ted's shack. He certainly did not want her to see him. He needed a shave—had needed one for two or three days, in fact— and he had the generally rumpled look of a man who had been drinking heavily, red faced, bleary-eyed. He hid behind Ted's stable, yet peered out, his heart thumping. Jealousy was filling him with rage, and the knowledge of his own disreputable appearance and his slim chances with pretty Annie Sanford was throwing him into the utmost gloom. Ted Waring had been making hay while Cale was off carousing. Cale had not imagined that Ted had progressed far enough with Annie to have her call at his place. They must be engaged— must, at least, have an understanding in which her father had a part, if the old man would consent to drive off the main road long enough to enable Annie to drop into Ted's place to say hello. Despair and jealousy filled Cale's heart, as he peered out with blazing eyes from behind the stable.

But Annie Sanford did not come to Ted's shack. Instead, she disappeared among the clump of oak trees near the bank of the river— Ted's oaks. She remained among them for only a few seconds, then reappeared, running down the hillside, toward the buggy

"Looked up here," Cale growled. "Didn't see no smoke from the stovepipe, and knows he's away."

That idea did not soothe his jealousy nor abate his rage. He continued to watch until the buggy, bearing the girl and her father, disappeared in the direction of the main highway. Then he walked with leaden feet back to his own place. An hour or so later, the grinning face of Buck Dryfoot appeared above the sharp bank of the river.

CALE was in a savage frame of mind by that time, roaming about his place, striking at weeds and trees with a stick. But he advanced on the bootlegger, with a grin on his face—a grin of hope. Whisky was the balm he sought, and he sent Buck Dryfoot back down the bank to his boat.

"A quart," he commanded. "Double quick time!"

Buck complied, grinning— always grinning in his sly, mousy way. He came back with the quart. Cale seized it and strode into his shack. In just a jiffy he had the cork out, and a tremendous drink went down his throat.

"That's the stuff," he said, with a long sigh of satisfaction; but his brow grew dark again. "I ain't got no money for you to-day, Buck," he added. He thoughtfully intruded his big form between the bootlegger and the bottle. He certainly would not stand for a seizure of the unpaid-for goods. "I'm broke."

Buck's grin performed an unusually sly variation.

"No got money?" the half-breed rejoined. "How you go then for to buy wedding present for your friend?"

Cale Grenn emitted a startled cry of rage, a growl, which he strangled in his throat.

"Wedding present?" he demanded, though he had a premonitory feeling of the import of Buck's words. "What d'you mean by that— you kettle-faced baboon?"

Buck backed up a step or two. Cale had the manner of a man who might be befuddled enough by drink to blame the Indian himself for the forthcoming nuptials which caused him such agony of spirit.

But the grin still wreathed itself on Buck's fleshy countenance. He rubbed his paunch nervously.

"Ted Waring," he pursued, "is going for to marry the big-eyed Sanford girl. A fella down by Bradley's store, he say that to me this morning."

Cale Grenn's brow broke into a perspiration.

"This morning?" he repeated stupidly, groping for the bottle and finding it. He took his drink and continued to glare at the bearer of bad tidings. "What d'you mean, coming here with your gossip?"

Cale hardly knew what he was saying. Buck Dryfoot was tolerant and inexpressibly sly, moving soft-footedly about the shack until Cale had absorbed still another drink.

"I just go for to happen along," Buck proceeded, "down there by Bradley's store, and it come up just so-so— like that. That fella he just mentioned it, like he wanted for me to be around for the wedding. Maybe so somebody will want to celebrate? Whisky— eh? Well, that fella he say maybe so I can do some business around the wedding."

Cale's addled head moved up and down, with slow understanding. A wedding in that backwoods country meant a celebration, always had, always would. The bootlegger was as necessary as the saloon had once been, if a wedding were to be celebrated properly.

"When is the wedding?" the homesteader finally inquired.

"Maybe so Thanksgiving— maybe so Christmas— I dunno. Some time soon, unless—"

He paused, averted his eyes from the penetrating scrutiny of Cale Grenn, and looked out the window toward Ted Waring's shack.

"Unless what?" Cale demanded thickly.

Buck grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's you and me go for to take a walk, eh?" he suggested.

CALE shoved the bottle into a pocket of his Mackinaw jacket. They went outdoors, wandered quietly over to the Waring place, and looked around without saying much. The neatness of Ted's place, as compared to his own, again impressed Cale Grenn. Everything was shipshape there— the home and property of a man who attended to business. The shack, inside and out, was tidy and well fortified against the weather. The stable was a real stable— snug. Ted's dog followed closely: at Cale's heels, friendly, nosing around for a pat on the head, which he occasionally got. Yet the dog eyed the Indian askance and could not be coaxed up to him.

But Buck Dryfoot heeded the dog only incidentally. He was thinking of more important matters. Cale had to silence the dog with an admonishing command when Buck entered the shack.

"It's all right, Prince," he said. "He's with me."

Inside Ted's shack, Cale took another drink. They looked around.

"Nice place, eh?" Buck commented.

"Yeh. He's got things fixed all right."

"Maybe so you like um, eh?"

Cale stared at the half-breed— stared and swallowed dryly, feeling a constriction in the throat at the thoughts which filled his mind. His gaze wandered through the window at the front and across the clearing to Ted's oaks. Buck caught the look. They went outside, sizing up the big stretches of cleared land — soil ready for cultivation in the spring. The cleared acres of Ted's place dwarfed Cale's into insignificance; everything by comparison swelled his jealousy of his neighbor, a jealousy swiftly growing to hate. The last straw was the thought that Ted would presently lead into this snug little home, as a wife, pretty Annie Sanford. Cale stared at the oaks among which, that very forenoon, he had seen Annie.

"Them oaks," Buck suggested; "maybe you like um, too, eh?"

Cale Grenn nodded, meditated, nodded again with firmer decision.

"Yeh," he admitted presently, "I could use 'em."

One of Buck Dryfoot's pudgy hands described a comprehensive gesture.

"And this place, eh?" he supplemented. "You like um, too, eh?"

Cale's brow wore a puzzled frown.

"What d'you mean?" he demanded of the grinning Indian.

"I fix it so you get um," Buck replied. "Oaks, farm, everything— maybe so Annie Sanford, too— if you like um."

Cale hauled forth the bottle and tilted it to his lips with shaking hands. Despite the crispness of the air, he again felt moisture on his brow. It was a terrible thing to put up to a man— an awful temptation. The drink seemed to steady him a little, as liquor does when one is too agitated to get drunk. It filled him with inflated strength and tore down what little moral resistance he had left; yet he did not at this moment appear intoxicated. His eyes sparkled with extraordinary brightness at the inducements suggested by the scheming half-breed.

"What 'a' you got on your mind, Buck?" he asked.

They were talking earnestly when they got back to Cale Grenn's shack across the cedar swale.

THREE days later Cale Grenn again crossed the swale on a visit to Ted Waring's place. Ted was at home now, eating his midday meal at the moment. He was a man fully as big as Cale Grenn, but in much better shape physically. His eyes were clear, and he had the rugged look of a man who worked hard, ate wholesomely and regularly, and slept the usual quota of hours, undisturbed by nerves torn with liquor. He sized Cale up and frowned.

"Cale," he said, "when are you going to get sober?"

So far as Ted Waring knew, they were friends. Ted had arrived home the previous evening. He found Cale under the influence of liquor, but could offer no complaint, as Cale had taken care of his stock in good shape. They had not mentioned Annie Sanford.

"Sober?" Cale repeated airily, at the moment about three sheets in the wind. "Oh, some day, maybe."

"Had your dinner?"

"Yeh."

Cale stroked Ted's dog. He sat unsteadily in the chair across Ted's table, watching the other eat.

"Listen here, Ted," he said after a while; "I'm gonna cut my oaks."

Ted nodded and buttered a slice of bread.

"Thought you'd be coming to that, Cale," he rejoined, "hitting the booze like you be. Longer you hold them oaks, more money they'll fetch."

"I know, but I need money now."

"Why don't you get to work— get out some more maples or cedars?"

"Its too long a job," Cale replied, "getting out five hundred dollars' worth of maples or cedars. I need money quick— five hundred dollars."

"Well, I guess the oaks'll fetch that much."

"That's what I say. I can cut and log them oaks in two days, and have the money for 'em inside a week. Five hundred dollars inside a week— not so bad, eh?"

"Not so bad, no; if you get drunk in Sackinee and blow in the five hundred dollars—"

"I ain't going to Sackinee," Cale told his neighbor. "I was fixing to ask you to sell 'em for me— take 'em to Sackinee and fetch me back the money. Ill pay you sumpin—"

Ted Waring tilted his chair backward, reached for his pipe, and smiled at Cale in a friendly way.

"Cale," he said, "you won't pay me a cent. I wouldn't take no pay. If you're trying to get straightened out, guess I can o that much. Good idea, Cale, for you to keep away from Sackinee. Now, PUH be glad to float your oaks to Sackinee, sell 'em, and bank the money for you, and—"

"No; don't bank it. Fetch it back in cash. I'll take the cash down to Bradley's store, where I'm to meet some of the folks I owe, next Wednesday. And, listen here, Ted— don't say nothing in Sackinee about the oaks being mine. Understand?"

Ted nodded thoughtfully. He understood.

" 'Fraid some of the other fellows you owe will demand it, eh?"

"That's it, Ted. Just sell the oaks and fetch me back the money. I'll appreciate it."

"Yeh, sure— I know you will; but, Cale, you ain't forgot I've got a raft of my own to get down, have you— maples?"

"No; I ain't forgot that, Ted. But what I was thinking, you aim to get started with your maples on Friday morning. That'll let you get clear at the mill Saturday noon, all paid off and ready to start back. All right. If it ain't asking too much, couldn't I meet you along the river some place, with my oaks, turn the raft over to you, and let you take it on down? That way, you'd get 'em to the mill Monday morning, and be back here Tuesday evening. That'd give me the cash to show up with at Bradley's store Wednesday."

Ted meditated. His head moved up and down slowly in assent.

"That could be done," he agreed, "if you don't get drunk and neglect my stock, and yourn, too, while I'm away. Way you got it schemed out, I'll be away from Friday morning till Tuesday night and—"

"I'll be sober to-morrow morning, Ted. I aim to begin on the oaks to-morrow morning. I only got a little booze left."

"All right. Thats a bargain, then. Now you'll time it, eh, so you won't be away only from morning to night the day I met you with the raft down the river?"

"Only from morning to night. Say Sunday noon I'll meet you."

"All right. Where?"

"I was thinking of Turkey Bend as handiest for you, since you'll be coming up from Sackinee on the river road."

"That suits me. It'll be handy— Turkey Bend. I'll look for you Sunday noon at Turkey Bend, with your raft."

"I'll be there, Ted."

IN one respect, at least, Cale Glenn kepi his word. He did start to cut his oaks next morning, but he worked in a listless manner, as Ted could see from the ridge on which he was trimming maples into logs. But Ted was too busy with his own affairs to pay much attention to Cale. He meant to have his drive of maples in the water, rafted, by nightfall, so that he could start down the river early next morning. As he saw it, Cale had until Sunday noon to cut his oaks, raft them, and get them down to Turkey Bend. Plenty of time— loads of time— so it wasn't important that Cale work hard this day. Ted foresaw that Cale would be "doggy." A man could not set to work with a vim after a prolonged bout with whisky. He saw Cale resting often, but what he did not know was that Cale still had a plentiful supply of liquor, left with him by the conniving Buck Dryfoot. Neither did he know that Cale took a nip occasionally; that it was impossible for him to stop drinking in face of the things he had in mind.

The contrast between the operations of the two men was an open record of their manner of life and their hopes. Ted Waring knew what liquor was, for he had taken his share of it in his days as a lumberjack. He had roistered with the wildest of them; even now he had a slightly flattened nose which had come to him out of a rough-and-tumble encounter in a river saloon. But he had a body as straight and sturdy as the trees among which he labored. His face was good-humored; his eyes clear and full of the vigor of life. He was looking ahead, and the prospect he saw was rosy enough to keep a man straight, as he often told himself. He saw a face among the trees, in the sky, everywhere he looked— one face, and it was pretty, too. He knew the time was not far distant when that face would assume reality on this very homestead; when Annie Sanford, from over on the Chippewa, would be there as his wife.

At least, he had every reason to believe it— that is to say, every reason except the girl's "Yes." All the indications pointed that way. He believed strongly, and he was sure that when he returned from his next trip down the

river he would get the desired answer. He had received word since he returned the last time, and that message was sufficient to bolster up his hope to the topmost. He had sent a message in reply, asking a positive answer. This answer would be his when he got back from Sackinee.

A man does not always need the "Yes" of a woman to assure him that all is well. He comes to read signs, and the signs were favorable to Ted Waring. He meant to get over to the Sanford farm, on the Chippewa, just as quickly as possible— perhaps a week from the next Sunday. He needed money now, lots of it; for, after Annie Sanford said the word, he would want a speedy marriage. That meant to get over to the Sanford farm, and new furniture for the house. This expectation accounts for Ted Waring's industry in getting his raft in shape this day, as well as for the fact that his personal visits to the Sanford farm had become less frequent. He worked with the zeal of two men.

On the other homestead, Cale Grenn labored doggedly, resting often, short of breath. Yet his brain worked incessantly, nervously— the brain that had been soothed only by fitful sleep for many nights. Thoughts— thoughts— thoughts! Furtive glances toward the ridge on which Ted Waring worked— a drink out of a flask. By noon Cale Grenn had only one oak felled and partly trimmed, but he had succeeded in dropping it in such fashion that, with a peavey, he could easily roll the trimmed log down to the water.

CALE had not been off his place since Dryfoot departed. Neither had he had a visitor other than Ted Waring. He had received no confirmation of Buck's announcement that it was commonly known that Ted and Annie Sanford were engaged. Yet Cale believed what the half-breed had told him. Whatever qualms he might have had were silenced by the thoughts of the impending wedding. They strengthened the hatred he had developed for Ted Waring and kept him straight to his purpose.

Cale drank sparingly, or, at least, he drank as little as possible, that day, for he knew that he would have to hold further talk with Ted; perhaps that evening. Ted did come over to Cale's shack, and they talked over their little deal in greater detail. Ted seemed to be satisfied that Cale was getting "off the booze." He wasn't exactly sober, but his condition did show an improvement over the night before. When Ted left, it was with the understanding that they would meet at Turkey Bend Sunday noon. Ted was to start at daylight with his raft of maples, and each understood the meeting place and the time.

Next morning Cale Grenn took a look at the river and saw that the raft of maples had disappeared. Well, the coast was clear. Ted Waring had gone. Cale stood on his own ridge. His eyes wandered up from the river to the clump of oaks on Ted's homestead and gazed with greediness, reflected in their depths.

He had slept late, and the morning was very cold. He looked up and down the river again. Buck Dryfoot should be showing up almost any minute now, and one never knew from which direction he would come, plying his liquor traffic from his boat. The tightening up of the weather was a good omen. All the less likelihood of stray visitors in the bitter cold.

Yet, as Cale's eyes wandered again to Ted Waring's oaks, he realized with amazement that a visitor was on hand— amazement, then a blaze of renewed rage. For the form in motion among the oaks was none other than Annie Sanford, betrothed, as Cale believed, to Ted Waring, and back to his place for another call. Jealousy of Ted and his love for Annie struck Cale at that moment with redoubled force and clinched his purpose. Absolutely there was no turning back now.

From the spot at which he now lurked, Cale could not see the road below the hillside, on the other edge of the Waring homestead; but he had no doubt that the Sanford horse and buggy were down there, waiting as before, with old man Sanford holding the reins. It was a little early in the morning, Cale thought, for such a visit, but Sanford often took his daughter with him on business trips throughout the region. It seemed that Annie had formed the habit of dropping in on Ted Waring every time they found themselves in that vicinity. Cale never doubted that they were engaged to wed, perhaps had already set the date, though Ted had not mentioned it to him. Ted— well, he might find it embarrassing to mention such a thing to a man whom he knew had courted Annie. Cale ground his teeth, then grinned a horrible grin. He watched the girl as closely as he could from that distance.

She would never know. She would be grief-stricken and horrified no doubt, but would presently find comfort in the arms of Cale Grenn—a new Cale Grenn— a Cale who had straightened up, as Ted Waring had straightened up. His purpose seemed justified to Cale at that moment, for he had been at his bottle again. Life to him just then seemed to be wrapped up in the girl among the oaks. With her and Ted's homestead in his possession— well, it would be easy to stay sober then—sober and industrious. Without Annie Sanford He could not endure the thought.

"I'll have her!" he muttered and stood there, clasping and unclasping his big hands. "Have her— everything!"

She had vanished, without making a single move to approach Ted's shack, which stood on a rise of ground a considerable distance back of the oaks. It seemed that Annie, noticing the absence of smoke from Ted's stovepipe, had again decided that he was not at home, and had returned to the buggy without climbing all the way up the hill. They probably had a secret sign by which Annie

would know, getting as far as the oaks, whether Ted was at home or not— something hung in a window.

At any rate, she had been there, and that was enough to clinch Cale Grenn's compact with the half-breed bootlegger. Jealousy is a painter which presents innumerable pictures to the eyes of a tortured man, and Cale Grenn suffered miserably. He went back to his shack, with his head down. But his head came up quickly and his lips drew into a grim line.

He hastened to the labors of the day, this time among the oaks on Ted Waring's place. His own oaks he left as they were, two felled and trimmed, near the water's edge. Under the spur of his purpose, he worked at a furious pace, breathless at times, then sinking down to rest out of sheer exhaustion; but he never lost sight now of the end he had in mind. His thoughts no longer wandered to the possibility of his turning back. He meant to go through with it now.

Buck Dryfoot, his fat, grinning face peeping out of a woollen frame formed by his cap and muffler, found Cale Grenn working like a man possessed.

"Hi! Hi, there, Buck!" Cale cried when he espied the half-breed. "We've got him. He swallowed the whole thing— hook, line and sinker— and down the river he's gone!"

Buck chortled with delight. The Indian blood in his veins kept him from making any great outward display of his exuberance, merely a series of throaty clucks and gurgles; his white blood convinced him of the necessity of grinning, if he were to hold his confederate straight to the line— grinning, as though the thing he contemplated were not so terrible after all. He produced a fresh bottle of moonshine and offered it to Cale.

ON Sunday night the moon came up, full and strong. Ted Waring, riding the raft of oaks which had been turned over to him at Turkey Bend by Cale Grenn, was very tired, and he was riverman enough and sufficiently as acquainted with that stream to be enabled to catch naps of considerable duration. Many a raft had he floated down the Tittabaw, and he knew that these heavy oaks, headed straight on and dogged tightly together, would follow the channel with little variation. So, bundied up in heavy clothing, he slept for several minutes at a time, rousing himself for brief intervals, then falling asleep again.

He was glad to do this favor for Cale Grenn. In the past Cale had done innumerable favors for him. If it meant that Cale was to get five hundred dollars delivered to him on his homestead, far from the bootleggers and gamblers of Sackinee, and if Cale would apply the money on his debts, to keep his creditors from selling him out, the trouble was worth it to Ted Waring. He would have the satisfaction of having performed a neighborly deed for a man

he liked ever since they were camp buddies in the lumber woods. And he had rigidly kept Cale's injunction not to say a word about the deal, to sell the logs as his own, in order to keep Cale's creditors from seizing the money before Cale could pay it out where it would do the most good. Ted Waring was not thoroughly aware of Buck Dryfoot's rum-selling business. Somehow, he felt that Cale, if he could be kept on his place, would be out of temptation. The river would soon freeze, and no one would be coming down with more rafts. Cale, given this lift, might straighten up and by spring be in a mood to keep sober permanently. Yes, it was good all around.

The logs, being dogged side by side, did not roll. The top sides of them were dry. Ted slept with his head pillowed on his arm, cap hauled down over his ears, mittens on his hands. His pike pole was speared into one of the oaks and stood upright like a mast.

He dreamed of Annie Sanford— dreamed asleep and awake. He smiled often to himself.

"Tuesday evening I'll be home," he said. "I ought to know by then— sure. Tuesday evening!"

Perhaps if he were home now he would have his answer. That thought made him' nervous, impatient— gave him an impulse to go ashore and make for the homestead. But, no; he had a friendly favor to perform. Tuesday wasn't so far away, he kept telling himself; yet, when he thought of the answer due him from Annie Sanford, it seemed an eternity.

In one of his waking intervals, sitting up on the raft, studying the banks of the river and the floating logs, his gaze was attracted by something white gleaming in the moonlight, down toward the butt end of one of the oaks. For a long time he watched the white thing, mildly interested; then it occurred to him that it might be a paper he had dropped out of his pocket. He got up and moved toward it.

It was a piece of paper, folded, and so soggy with water that it clung to the log even in the light breeze. He picked it up, started with sudden interest, and bent down. Finally, he got down on his knees and conducted a close examination of the log.

The clean fiber of the oak shone where a section of the thick bark had been peeled off. Ted's heel might have peeled the bark off, if a piece of it had been loose at that point; but— but—

"Why— why," he found himself saying aloud, "it's—"

He studied the log very carefully, taking off his mittens, and treasuring that folded piece of paper in one trembling hand.

"It's— it's our post-office tree, Annie!" he said aloud, as though the girl stood at his side. "He's cut our post-office tree! Cale's cut—"

He sat down, shaking— shaking, because somehow he felt that in his hand he had his answer from Annie Sanford. Very carefully he unfolded the paper. Then he lit some matches and searched it. The water had done its work. Match after match he lit. Some of them burned out, some were puffed out by the wind. The words ran together. Finally he picked out a few of them, one of which he thought was "Yes."

But he could not be sure— not sure enough to be contented. Instead, he was thrown into great excitement. So nerve-racking was it, with a message in hand, he could not read, that he poled the raft to the bank of the river, tied it up, and struck out across country for the Chippewa, to get the answer from Annie Sanford herself. On that tramp of fourteen miles he exhausted all his matches in several attempts to read the note, all without avail, but, face to face with Annie, just at daylight, it did not take her long— indeed. she did it with a look— to convince Ted Waring that her note had contained a three-letter word meaning, "I will."

YET Mrs. Ted Waring, née Sanford, was not taken wholly into the confidence of her husband. Cale Grenn's memory in those parts was spared that humility. Facing Cale— a sober Cale, who had just returned from down the river, where he had sent Buck Dryfoot on his way with a series of kicks designed to lend impetus to a man in the act of running off— Ted got the miserable truth.

"Yes," he said, "it's that booze, Cale. Nothing but that booze would make a man like you think of such a thing. Course you didn't think of it. Buck Dryfoot thought of it, and, you being drunk, it listened good. Now let me get this straight, Cale. Buck Dryfoot was to lay for me when I come back with the five hundred dollars— lay for me down below my place, before I could see you'd cut my oaks. He was to finish me, take the five hundred, and get away. I was supposed to sell them oaks like they was mine, only I didn't know they was mine. That would leave you your oaks, and nobody could say I thought I was selling yours. Me having no kin, and no will made out, my place would be put up for sale— place and everything on it. Buck Dryfoot was to bid it in. Later on you and him was to trade places. You'd get my place, and he'd get yours for a moonshine joint, him wanting a place to run some stills. He was to pull you out of debt, slow, so's no one would suspect you of having got hold of much money at one time. It was all leading up for you to get my place, and, I suppose—"

"Don't mention her name," Cale begged. "I'm fixing to go away now— clean out of the country. I could never live here, side by side, with you folks.

Don't talk to me about staying, Ted. Only if you'd just keep it to yourself about—"

"I will, Cale."

"Thanks, Ted. The only excuse I can make— No, I can't make no excuse. It just happened. But I did kinda come to, and I went down the river to keep Buck from carrying out his end of it. I didn't beat him up— just gave him a couple of swift kicks. I don't think he'll infest this country much more. He's scared and don't know how much I'll tell. Well, I'm going, too. I'm going to leave the whole thing and let the creditors whack up among theirselves. It's all I can do. I can't hang on here. New country for me; some place. It makes me shiver, Ted, to think what would 'a' happened if— I don't know if I could 'a' stopped Buck Dryfoot if you'd 'a' come his way. I might not 'a' seen him in time, if you'd come up the river on schedule."

"I didn't do nothing on schedule," Ted Waring rejoined, "after I got that note. Not being able to read it, I had to hunt up the lady that wrote it. That put me out of Buck Dryfoot's hands, Cale. Just in time."

"And I'm sure glad you got that note, Ted."

———————————

## 4: Jenkins's Garden

***Vernon Ralston***

*fl. 1900-1920*

*The Bathurst Times* (NSW), 18, 19, 21 Oct 1912

ALBANY AVENUE was a peaceful bywater in peaceful Kensington till Jenkins came. Of course, there were Eves in the Eden. Of course, Mrs. Hadden at No. 1 coveted the casement curtains of Mrs Morrow at No. 3, who, in return coveted the stair carpets of No. 1. No 3 in turn envied both the curtains of No. 5 and the carpets of No. 1 and was in turn envied for her motor garage. Yet on the whole there was peace. The husbands m the Avenue were all friendly, and at sale and other times where the feminine mind is filled with a kind of spending insanity, were united in a sort of financial blood-brotherhood.

Then Jenkins came— the serpent in that Eden. He was a little, squat, black whiskered man, who was a first-class clerk in the Board of Agriculture, and consequently had abundant leisure. He was also a confirmed gardener. Now it was the universal custom in Albany Avenue to confide their gardens to the care of an alcoholic subject named Dobson. The ladies liked him because in his few sober moments he would be gloriously confidential about his past glories.

'Think o' me when I was at Lord Gobstein's, I 'ad twenty men under me not countin' boys, mark you, or extra 'ands in busy times. Twenty men under me regular, and now I'm hear dead with thirst cuttin' privet 'edges with my own ands.'

They felt that in employing Dobson they were really in touch with the aristocracy. The men endured Dobson because he was cheap, and never worried them about instructions. However, if they had wanted to give instructions Dobson would have ignored them. Deep in the recesses of his somewhat muzzy brain he had a gardening ideal which, roughly stated, amounted to this— that anything the owner of the garden wished to be done was horticulturally wrong. Still they had bulbs, and wallflowers, and geraniums in season— and if Dobson was reputed to steal all his plants from other gardens in the neighbourhood, at any rate he took very good care that no other jobbing gardener stole them back again.

The very day that Jenkins moved in Dobson put in an appearance.

'Good morning, Colonel. Come to clip the 'edge as usual. Done it for the party as was 'ere before you. All the gentlemen round 'ere employs me. I was 'ead gardener tor Lord Gobstein. Three bob a week in summer and two in winter, throwing the plants in— them's my terms.'

'Thank you, I intend to do my gardening myself,' said Mr. Jenkins.

'When I. was at Lord Gobstein's— not mind you at 'is 'unting box in Leicestershire, but at 'is family seat at Cookham,' began Mr. Dobson, setting cheerily to work on the hedge.

'Here, leave that hedge alone,' said Mr. Jenkins sternly.

'I tell you, General, I'm the regular man,' replied Mr. Dobson, raising Mr. Jenkins' military grade in order to conciliate him.

'I won't have a jobbing gardener round my place,' continued Mr. Dobson. 'None of you know anything about gardening.'

'Ah, Lord Gobstein loved 'is joke just like you, sir. I mind 'e says to me one . day, "Dobson, them peaches you've got there cost me a pound apiece. I can't afford 'em." I says to 'im straight, "There ain't another gardener in England as could 'ave got you them by this time for a fiver apiece." '

'Go out of my garden at once or I'll get a policeman.'

'D'ye mean to say, General, you ain't goin' to employ me!'

'Not if you'd come free. I'm going to do my work myself.'

Mr. Dobson staggered out of the garden. Then he visited all the houses in the Avenue to inform the ladies how the new gentleman had treated him, that his heart was broken, and would they mind paying him this week on Tuesday instead of on Saturday. Then Mr. Dobson vanished, only to return on Saturday morning in a state of intoxication to collect the money he had already drawn on Tuesday.

'Very thoughtless of those new people,' said the ladies of the Avenue to their husbands. 'Just when Dobson was settling down to be really steady. If he hadn't been unsettled by that Jenkins I'm sure he wouldn't have taken to drink again.'

The Avenue looked on with some curiosity to see what the newcomer would do with his garden. Happily it was September, and not much could be done that year. But it was obvious from the digging, and trenching, and pathmaking, and rockery building, that there would be something tremendous in the way of a garden next year. Mr. Dobson whenever he passed would lean over the railings and sniff contemptuously at all these preparations.

'He's like that fool 'oo came after me at 'is Lordships,' he explained to his other clients, 'a lot o' messing aboot and nothin' to show for it all.'

But when spring arrived it was obvious that Dobson was mistaken. In the first place his show of bulbs was so marvellous that the very butchers' boys who visited the Avenue stopped to look at it. It needs a fine, striking pictorial effect to impress a butcher's boy. Then Mr. Jenkins added a waterlily pond eight feet in diameter, with a real fountain in the centre. Then came a pergola and what he called a bower of ease. On the first balmy spring day Mrs. Jenkins

sat in the bower of ease doing fancy-work to the uncontrollable envy of all the other lady residents. She followed this up by giving afternoon tea in the bower to her neighbors. Whilst they drank the tea Mr. Jenkins, who returned from business three hours earlier than any of his neighbors, told them how easily and inexpensive their gardens could be transformed into 'delightful pleasances,'

One evening when Mr. Morrow arrived at his home his wife was so amiable and made so many inquiries about the strain of business that he instantly wondered what bills she had been running up behind his back. For once in his married life he was mistaken. Mrs. Morrow owned nothing more than was normal.

'You do look worn to-day, Herbert. I don't like that tired look on your face.'

'It's that infernal Jenkins— waking me with his lawn-mower at six in the morning. In a decently civilised country he would be lynched for that.'

'It's that early morning exercise which keeps him in such good health. He always has three hours' gardening before breakfast.'

'You see, my dear, I've got to work for my living. Unfortunately I'm not in a Government office.'

'What you need, Herbert,' said Mrs. Morrow tenderly, 'is a sweet garden like that of Mr. Jenkins to rest in when you come home.'

'If he'd let me rest in bed that's all I ask.'

'Mr. Jenkins was so kind, about it to-day. He volunteered to come round and plan out what could be made of our garden. He drew such a charming design. I've got it here. You see we'd have a water-lily pond with a fountain just where that big flower-bed is. A pergola on the east side, a sun-dial close to the gate, a rockery for Alpine plants by the window, and over on this side what he calls a sweet-scented corner. That would be sweet for you to rest in, and if I entertained my friends there in the summer, what a wear and tear of carpets it would save. Mr. Jenkins says that if you did it all yourself it would not cost you more than twenty pounds. Now, if we did not have the billiard table re-covered this year, and if you gave up your Continental trip and went to Worthing with me and the children, we should save more than that. In fact, we should get a better garden than the Jenkins' for nothing. Besides, we should have money in hand, and with all the calls there are on you, Herbert, I feel that I should try and save whenever it is possible.'

'Confound Jenkins! What business has he to come interfering with my garden!'

'Oh, Herbert, he did it in the kindliest way, and said he'd be delighted to give you all the advice you needed. He offered to write to a friend of his who has an antique sun-dial for sale. It is his idea that all the gardens in the Avenue

should be brought into a kind of delicious harmony. I felt so ashamed to-day when he looked at our few paltry wallflowers.'

'Just tell him if he wants it to pay for it. I'm not spending twenty pounds to please any confounded neighbor.'

'Well, I don't want to talk to you about it now. I've got rather a headache, and I'm going to bed early. I suppose you'll be happy playing billiards.'

Now Mr. Morrow knew from sad experience that his wife's headache would become chronic till she had her way about the garden. Sooner or later common humanity would compel him to spend twenty pounds on his garden. He felt that if he could but get hold of Jenkins' throat there would be a vacancy in the Board of Agriculture's office.

When two or three of his neighbors came round for billiards that evening he looked at them curiously. He could see at once that Hadden had got something on his mind. He struck viciously at the balls, and when they declined to go into the pockets remarked with more acerbity than civility, 'How can a fellow score on this table. It's more like a ploughed field.'

'All right, Hadden, don't mind my feelings,' said his host. 'It's probably the worst table in England. You see you've been playing on it for five years. But I shan't have it re-covered this year. I've got to buy a pergola.'

Hadden dropped his cue on the floor with a resounding bang.

'Has that infernal ass been planning your garden for you. He's drawn out a plan for me. My wife's gone mad about it. She's talking about pergolas and sundials in her sleep.'

Stevens grunted disgustedly on the other side of the table.

'I've had it too. Instead of peace and drunken old Dobson I'm to work like a slave and spend a pot of money. It isn't the money I mind so much, though that's bad enough; But he's been telling my wife that it would be the making of me if I got up at half-past five to garden. It was my birthday to-day. She bought me an alarm, clock as a present.'

'We must .all stand out against it,' suggested Morrow. 'If we all sign a solemn pledge to stick to Dobson we can defy Jenkins and all his works.'

'If we all could,' said Hadden, 'but there's our. friend Clifford here. He's only been married six months. I'll lay any money his fair bride has made him promise her to let her have a garden just like Jenkins's.'

Mr. Clifford flushed somewhat.

'You see my wife made rather a point of it. Mr. Jenkins had drawn up such a neat plan for her. I did not want to go to the expense, of course, but I simply couldn't refuse her.'

'Gentlemen,' said Morrow, 'this is simply unendurable. How dare this person from the Board of Agriculture violate the peace of all the residents in

this Avenue, and incidentally deprive our attached retainer, Dobson, of all alcoholic refreshment! Why, next year he may set up a Chinese pagoda or a waterfall or a whirlpool! We must squelch this movement at. once. I have an idea: Will all people who loathe Jenkins, and his interference put down half a crown.'

'Look here,' protested Hadden, 'you are not going to bribe old Dobson to make hay of the place?'

'My dear fellow, do you think 'hat if I had such an idea I would entrust its execution to Dobson? He would give the game away the instant , he got drunk.'

'Well, what is it?' said Stevens.

It is my secret. Some of you might be unable to conceal an excellent joke from your wives. I shall tell nobody anything. Trust me and put down our half-crowns.'

They knew Morrow, and they put down their money.

ON THE FOLLOWING Saturday morning this advertisement appeared in the agony columns of the most widely circulated London newspapers.

*'If the courteous gentleman who last summer helped an old lady to her motor-car in Bond Street, will apply at 9 Albany Avenue, at three o'clock precisely today, he will hear something to his advantage.'*

Mr. Morrow chuckled as he read it going to business.

'I think that will do,' he thought. 'Every man above eighteen and below eighty who's on the make will spot that.'

When he returned home to lunch that clay he announced his intention of sitting in the garden that afternoon.

'I wonder you can bear it,' said his wife. 'I really can't sit in our bare patch and look at that lovely garden of Mrs. Jenkins. Oh, he came round this morning. He's had a letter from that friend of his about that sundial. It's only four pounds ten, carriage forward. Mr. Jenkins thought it most reasonable. He marked a place on the turf where it ought to be set up in case you decide to have it.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Morrow sweetly, 'I bought a gardening paper to day. I am going to study it and get horticultural ideas. I see in its advertising columns that one can get rockeries and pergolas set up at inclusive rates, and I want to see if there are any cheap lines in fountains going.'

Mrs. Morrow kissed her husband. He beamed amiably on her, annexed a deck chair, and settled himself in the garden.

'Half-past two,' he thought. 'It's nearly time. Bless me, there are already one or two wily birds having a look round.'

He went down to the hedge at the foot of his garden, and looking over it was amazed to hear a youth rehearsing a little speech to himself.

'Any service I rendered to you, Madam, was because of the deep respect I had for your sex. My mother trained me too—'

Here the youth caught Mr. Morrow's eye, and walked quickly away, leaving the point of his maternal training unsettled. As the minutes wore on, more and more people came into the road. At a quarter to three the pavement was thronged— at five to the roadway. They were men of all sorts and sizes— thin men, fat men— rich men, poor men— men in frock-coats and top-hats, and men in overalls and caps— chauffeurs and cab drivers— financiers and pickpockets— costermongers and curates.

'All of them,' meditated Mr. Morrow; 'all of them helped old ladies into motor-cars in Bond Street last summer. Why, Bond Street must have been choked with cars and old ladies all the time. Still, it's very pleasant to find out how many kindly disposed people there are in the world. Talk about London being a hard place! Why, the milk of human kindness floods its streets.'

The crowd grew thicker and thicker. One or two fights took place between persons who doubted the right of each other to be there. Suddenly a neighboring church clock chimed out the hour, and with one wild rush the crowd swerved into No. 9 Albany Avenue.

The gate and railings went at the first onset. The crowd swept over the beds and rockeries and through the bower of ease to the front door. In amazement Mr. Jenkins opened it, and the hundred or so men who could get a sight of him, including half-a-dozen who had climbed on a somewhat rickety, creeper covered archway, shouted in chorus, 'I've called about that advertisement. I remember helping an old lady to her motor-car in Bond Street last year.'

'Are you all mad?' cried Mr. Jenkins.

'Look 'ere,' said a very stout gentleman in the front. 'These others are all frauds. Send 'em away. I want to see the ole girl. She'll remember me. I always did think my perlitness to wimmen 'd pay me some day. I'll just come in and see 'er.'

Happily Mr. Jenkins contrived to slam the door as the stout gentleman was tumbling in for his reward. Then he hurried to an upper window to explain to the crowd that there was some mistake, and that they must not trespass in his garden.

'I'm not going away without my railway fare,' roared the stout gentleman.

'No, cab fare it was. It cost me ten bob to come 'ere in a taxi.'

The rockery crashed down beneath the weight of the crowd as he spoke. A number of people were pushed into the water-lily pond, and in their efforts to save themselves dragged over the fountain.

Mr. Morrow waited till all was clear, and then went round to his neighbor's.

'Pardon me, Mr. Jenkins, I should not think of interfering with any of my neighbors' concerns myself, but I hope you do not intend to make these Saturday afternoon gatherings of your friends a regular thing.'

'My friends,' roared Mr. Jenkins. 'My friends! Look at my garden!'

Mr. Morrow looked carefully at it. It was something between a brickfield and a desert. Mr. Dobson chanced to pass at that moment, and saw his opportunity.

'Hey, General,' he cried, 'shall I step in and straighten her up a bit? These gardens needs a perfessional 'and to keep 'em right.''

'Do what you like with it!' cried Jenkins. 'I'll never touch the thing again.'

Mr. Morrow walked away happily, conscious that he and other husbands would now have to purchase neither pergolas nor sun-dials.

Mr. Jenkins's show the next summer consisted of a centre of geraniums, surrounded by white marguerites, and edged with blue lobelias.

'Red, white and blue— English colors— my own idea,' explained Mr. Dobson. 'I did that just for Lord Gobstein.'

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## 5: The Advertisement Baby

***Ethel Lina White***

1879-1944

*The Royal Magazine*, May 1906

*A very early story, before she began writing such thriller novels as "The Lady Vanishes"*

*Ethel Lina White*

SYLVIA REED longed for a vocation, and accordingly selected hospital work. She was drawn to this particular branch of usefulness by a genuine desire to alleviate pain, and the potent attraction of the uniform.

If her pretty blue eyes noted her picturesque reflection in the mirror with complacency, the girl's satisfaction was tempered with an absolving leaven of high-born resolutions. These she cradled in hope, and as she unfortunately failed to add perseverance, it sang the usual lullaby to her aspirations.

Sylvia missed her star, but gained an earthly paradise.

When the pretty probationer was flirting round with her duster, she was incidentally slipping into the good graces of one of the medical staff of the hospital. So she finally left the hospital before her time of probation was over, and vanished in a cloud of rice into private life.

Never did a matrimonial venture start more brilliantly.

Jayne saw only sunshine in Sylvia's volatile nature, and basked in its rays, unconscious of gathering storms.

ONE fine day, about three months after their marriage, he descended to the breakfast-room in a particularly amiable mood.

The room was flooded with sunshine, and Sylvia looked daintily pretty in her fresh white dress. The canary sang in the window, and a pot of snowdrops on the table suggested Spring. Sylvia broke off one to fasten in her husband's buttonhole before she attended to his wants.

Jayne studied the charming face, half of which was hidden from his gaze by a tea-cosy possessed of an alarming sense of propriety. There was a pleased air of excitement lurking in her smile, and a sparkle in the pretty eyes.

Every man knows the symptoms. She was enthralled in the joys of a secret.

Jayne's grave features relaxed as he noted her evident enjoyment.

"Now, I wonder," he observed indulgently, "what is the reason of this sudden excitement?"

"Excitement! What reason! I'm not a bit excited." Jayne laughed.

"Is it an idea for a sweet dress, or a dream of a hat? Or, stay— have you heard of a new cook?"

"No, dear, don't be silly. I didn't mean to tell you, but I suppose I must, just to stop your nonsense. I was thinking how nice it is to see one's name in print."

Jayne roared outright.

"Why, it's never been trying to write?"

"Yes, it has, and," defiantly, "it has *succeeded*!"

"Oh," she went on, enjoying her husband's amazement, "it was not a scrap difficult either— only took about three minutes, and— oh, you poor dear, you do look astonished. Here it is!"

His astonishment increased as he took the page she showed him. It was an advertisement for some patent soap. In black letters above was printed:

***A Doctor's Wife Writes:***
*I have much pleasure in testifying to the excellence of your soap.*
*Signed.*
*Sylvia Jayne,*
*Harley Street, London.*

Jayne stiffened with displeasure, but Sylvia did not notice it as she prattled on dreamily:

"Of course, it's only a little thing, but it gives me such a funny sort of pleasure. When I look through the *Sketch* and all those papers, I just long to have my photo in, and know everyone is looking at it. But, of course," she added wistfully, "there's no chance of that."

No answer came to destroy her reverie, and she continued in ungrammatical eloquence:

"But this is something the same. Just fancy, perhaps I shall see people in 'buses and trains reading this, and they will never think that the person who wrote it is sitting by them. And doesn't it look nice— 'A doctor's wife writes'?"

"Sylvia!"

"Why, Leslie!"

"*Never* let me hear any nonsense of this kind again. It shows a senseless vanity and a lack of stability that I am ashamed to see in you. I had no idea you were so petty!"

Sylvia looked up. "It's not my character that's at fault. It's you. You don't understand me."

She ran out of the room, and banged the door.

ALL the morning Sylvia indulged in the luxury of playing the misunderstood. After lunch she sallied forth to see a friend, a rich spinster, with a comfortable love for humanity, only excluding the animal man.

"My dear," she said solemnly, "I see a sad significance in this morning's episode. When a man fails to understand the hidden springs of your nature it shows something is missing. It's men, my dear, who make creation miserable, nothing else. Why, even the martyrs at the stake did not suffer a bit once the nerve tissues were destroyed. It is always such a blessed comfort to me to remember that."

Sylvia walked home in a rebellious frame of mind, but was surprised to find that Leslie, though graver than usual at dinner, made no allusion to the morning.

"He did not mean what he said," was her final deduction.

SHE was passing through a phase of disease which attacks most women of her temperament, and as she had no means of an outlet, it was a dangerous malady. Had she been rich or influential her society functions would have graced the columns of the fashionable papers, or she would cheerfully have been torn to pieces on the staircase at a fashionable crush for the pleasure of seeing her name next morning in print.

After the first outburst the course of events flowed on as smoothly as before. The only difference was that each had discovered at least one clay toe in the feet of their idol. Jayne deplored a tendency to vanity on his wife's part, and she sadly felt Leslie's temper was defective. Sylvia's final conclusion was that her husband did not like to be *told* of her small recreations, which were otherwise legitimate, so she broke out from time to time in elegantly-worded testimonials, from which she derived a seraphic happiness worthy of a better cause.

These she carefully concealed from Leslie, so there was no renewal of the scene until a month later.

Breakfast was again the fateful meal. Jayne was reading a newspaper article which wrestled with the theory as to whether matrimony was an economy.

"It depends on the wives we choose, my dear," he said approvingly. "Everyone may not be so fortunate as I."

Sylvia coloured with pleasure. "And you don't even know how very economical I am. Why I get some things for *nothing*!"

"My dear, the bills come in regularly."

"But I tell you it's a fact. That tin of oatmeal— you are eating some at present— is a sample tin."

"But I understood samples were rather diminutive."

Discretion had a brief but desperate struggle with Sylvia's thirst for appreciation. Then, unhappily, it was overthrown. The girl lowered her voice.

"If," she asserted, "you want to get a big tin, you just write an advertisement— Oh, Leslie, what's the matter?"

Jayne suddenly rose from the table, and strode into the kitchen, followed in trembling apprehension by the culprit, who vaguely wondered if he contemplated suicide, or intended ordering a fresh consignment of porridge.

"Mary," he said, addressing the awe-struck domestic, "bring that packet of patent oatmeal."

He received it from the girl's fingers with a tragic mien, stepped to the kitchen range, and flung it on the fire. Without a word he left the kitchen, feeling pleased at the way in which he had disposed of the matter. Actions, he argued, spoke louder than words.

"Well," gasped Mary, "what a wicked waste!"

But Sylvia flew upstairs in a perfect passion of tears. "Only too late I've discovered it," she sobbed; "tied to a man with a temper. But I won't be bullied, or give in. I'll continue to assert my individuality."

AN acute observer might have noticed an unusually hard look about Sylvia's mouth after that episode. But not one would have guessed that the corroding word written in her heart, of which the look was the outward and visible sign, was— Oatmeal.

Leslie Jayne's friends described him as the essence of refinement, while his enemies stigmatised him as "mean." As a matter cf fact, he had a marvelous sense of the fitness of things, with a microscopic eye for details. His mental retina was at present occupied with the letters "M.D." after his name, and a visionary doctor's brougham. Anything that came between him and these cherished objects disconcerted him greatly. It was with a shock of positive horror that a few mornings afterwards he saw on a hoarding in Charing Cross Road a huge poster of a pretty woman, whose rippling curls hanging down to her waist were due, according to the wording underneath, to a world-famed hair-restorer. No need of the name to tell the original! It was Sylvia, his Sylvia!

During the rounds at the hospital, one of his colleagues mentioned the poster, which had caught his eye.

"I wanted to ask you," he began, "is that your wife?"

But Jayne had already gone. He reached home that night in a white heat of rage. His wife was silting by the drawing-room fire, book in hand. She raised her eyes, and they looked at each other, defiance meeting with anger.

Jayne glanced round the pretty apartment, which was destined to be the scene of another sordid strife between outraged sensibilities and domestic relations. Their wedding presents strewn around them, mute witnesses of the day when their married life began, failed to draw them from the fray, while a few streets away the wretched poster flapped in the wind, the inadequate cause of another matrimonial shipwreck.

Jayne went up to the fire, and kicked a piece of coal.

"I've seen that poster," he said icily.

"Most people have by now," was the triumphant reply.

"Have you lost all sense of decency?"

"Have you lost all pride in your wife's appearance?"

"Don't be absurd! That's not the point."

"But it is. You don't care about me now. You don't admire my hair. *Once* you said it was the prettiest hair in London; now everybody admires it but you."

"Apparently everyone will have a chance of admiring it now," groaned Jayne.

"You haven't a scrap of pride in me. Mr. Adrian Rose, the artist, said he would love to paint me; he admires me, and *he's* an artist."

"Don't be hysterical."

"It's a comfort to think *someone* appreciates you, if your husband does not," and Sylvia subsided into tears, while Jayne hastily went out, banging the door.

TEARS and bangings were the keynote of the next few days; but about the fourth morning Sylvia appeared with a bright face. She was cheerfully ready to eat her own words. Her hilarity positively grated on Jayne, who was suffering from a bad attack of toothache.

"Leslie," she said bravely, "I've determined never to send another testimonial— never, if it displeases you, though I don't see why it should."

"That's right," was the somewhat grudging reply.

"So no harm's done, dear."

"That poster?"

"Too flattering! No one will recognise it."

The effort which it cost Sylvia to make this assertion was greatly to her credit.

"Have you been sending any more of these beastly things away?" asked Jayne, preparing to issue pardon.

"Only one. But the funny part is, I was writing about a cure for stammering for Aunt Lena, and sending a testimonial for the cough medicine which did you so much good, and I muddled them up, and the testimonial reads: 'You've cured my husband of stammering!' Isn't it funny? Especially as you do stammer a little."

Jayne rose to his feet. "Do you know what you've done?" he demanded. "This time you've made me an object of ridicule. You've degraded the medical profession. And you crown your confession with duplicity; you feign sorrow and repentance. I cannot find a home here, and if I go outside every wind blows these wretched advertisements to me. I'm heartily sorry for the day I met you."

In his eloquence, Jayne had forgotten the primary cause of his displeasure. He only realised that he was a long-suffering individual with a grievance, who was goaded to fury by a disobedient wife. A good measure of his anger melted during the day, but he dreaded the evening interview with the tearful Sylvia. So, accordingly, he sent a telegram to say he would be detained in town that night.

It put the finishing stroke to the girl's misery. Her husband's hasty words had filtered through a nature already riddled with emotions. She had intended to put everything right, and banish the clouds that had settled on the household, but had only received the knowledge that she was an undesirable superfluity.

She fled in tears to her spinster friend, who gave her good advice—"to go to bed, and sleep on it." Unfortunately, she only followed half, for she wooed sleep in vain. She tossed and turned, and exhausted herself by violent fits of crying. As she had eaten nothing all day, the strain presently reacted on the overwrought brain. She was sure her husband hated her, and wished he had never seen her. She felt these words whirring through her brain, till she was conscious of nothing else.

AT six next morning, a miserable, white-faced girl crept down the steps into the fog without. She made no plans, and had but one fixed resolution, namely, that she must leave her husband.

At the door, as she paused for breath for a moment, a broad form hurried through the gloom, and, with a feeling of gratitude, she recognised the face of Adrian Rose, the artist.

"What! Going off so early?" he inquired.

"Yes, but," looking helplessly at the *Bradshaw* she carried, "I'm not sure about the trains."

"Ah! You've had bad news, I'm afraid?"

"Yes," was the faltering reply.

The two heads bent over the railway guide, and Sylvia indiscriminately sorted a name out of the tangle. Any kind of refuge would do.

"Here you are, the 7.45. We had better take a cab. I'm going off by the early train myself."

So a hansom soon rattled away with the two travelers, and Sylvia thanked Fate for the cavalier who had come to her rescue, unwitting of the fact that this incident would prove an effectual barrier against her reentering her Paradise for many a long day.

WHEN Jayne reached home the next night, he encountered the curious gaze of a frightened-looking maid.

"Missus went away this morning, but I think she left you a message."

Yes, there was the inevitable note, pinned in time-honoured fashion to the cushion, incoherent, scarcely legible: "After your cruel words, I can no longer stay with you. I am leaving you, for ever!"

Jayne laughed uneasily. "Hysteria again. She will be back to-morrow."

Then he rang for the housemaid.

"Did your mistress take any luggage?" he inquired.

"No, sir; I didn't know she was going. She didn't have even a cup of tea. I'm sure I was surprised when I saw her outside talking to Mr. Rose."

Jayne's face grew white, but he made no sign, and the servant warmed to her tale.

"There they were, sir, looking out trains in a *Bradshaw*, and they went off in a cab together."

Then Jayne shut the erring Sylvia from his heart.

IN a week's time she had repented, and she wrote a letter of apology, begging forgiveness. Her husband tore it up unopened. A second letter shared a similar fate, and when the prodigal wife hurriedly returned to town, she found the house shut up.

All they could tell her was that the doctor had taken abroad a globetrotting patient, and left no address.

Thrown on her own resources, and deserted by her husband, Sylvia hardly knew what to do. Her pride prevented her from appealing to her relatives, but she had a friend to whom she turned— the rich spinster. She gathered the

poor girl into her fold, like a brand snatched from the burning, until the time when Sylvia was again able to take up her part in life's struggle.

WHEN Jayne returned to England, after a year's absence, he was astonished to find that no one seemed to be conscious of his domestic troubles, and it was popularly supposed that his wife was still abroad. He also heard casually that Rose had married a pretty American two days after Sylvia had left him. Ostrich-like, he had thought to escape his trouble by burying himself; but now, in the face of the doubts which persisted in rising, he wished he had not so hastily destroyed all communication. For appearance' sake, it would be as well to investigate the story. His cautiously-worded advertisements failed to discover his missing wife. Sylvia had completely effaced herself.

ONE cold, grey morning Jayne wended his way Citywards. London was wrapped in a cold, grey fog, and the chill bit into his bones, and made his face blue. At the Marble Arch he took the Twopenny Tube, and as they rumbled swiftly on, he glanced at a girl opposite.

She was reading a popular magazine, and as she turned over the paper cover, the inner leaf was exposed to his view. A flood of bitter memories swept over his mind; then suddenly— from the tangled shadows of the past— he awoke to consciousness.

His own name was staring him in the face!

Jayne strained his eyes incredulously.

It was the picture of a baby, clad in its own birthday suit from Nature, and underneath was printed:

*Leslie Jayne, aged fifteen months, brought up on — Food since the age of three months.*

Above was the inscription. How proud Sylvia had been of the phrase, "A Doctors Wife writes"!

Anyone glancing at the man sitting motionless, staring out at the curved walls that sloped in front, would never have guessed at the storm of chaotic feelings that raged behind the rigid face.

It was atrocious! Hateful! The woman was past all shame! To break out again— to defy all decent feelings of reticence, to expose her son— his son— to the gaze of every Tom, Dick, and Harry— and without a rag to cover him. His fingers itched to tear the paper from the unconscious reader's hands. When she looked up inadvertently, and saw a strange man glaring at her, the poor girl was quite alarmed.

At last the Bank was reached. Jayne could hardly wait until the lift transported him to the higher regions again. Oblivious of his business, he rushed to the nearest newsagent's, where he feverishly turned over the papers. His search was unavailing— no similar advertisement could he find.

The boy's sarcasm began at last to penetrate his consciousness, and, as he groped, he was hardly aware of the changes, which turned his anger to impatience, which in turn melted again into anxiety.

"Like the whole shop, sir? *Nothing* to pay!" quoth the youth, but Jayne took no notice. With a cry of triumph he swooped upon a number, and hurriedly throwing down half-a-crown, he departed, leaving change and reputation behind.

Once outside, he hailed a cab; he felt he dared not trust himself to look at the thing while curious faces surrounded him.

At St. Paul's Churchyard he got out, and, obeying an impulse, walked up the steps into the Cathedral. With the exception of a few scattered groups, the great building was empty. The pillared heights, the light filtering through the stained-glass windows, and the solemn quiet took the last shreds of fever out of the man's mind. He opened the page calmly.

Yes, it was a baby of which anyone might be proud. What a bonny little fellow it was, with its rounded limbs and laughing mouth, showing the dear little teeth. Just such a son as he could have wished for, and with his name, too! So she had called him after his father!

As he again scanned the tiny features, a strong sense of familiarity quickened the doctor's recollection. Where had he seen this portrait before?

Memory showed him an old, faded photograph of another baby, which was cherished by a mother with tender eyes. A deep feeling of shame swamped his thoughts, as he realised how he had slipped, through countless acts of pettiness, from his childhood's throne of innocency.

The grave eyes of the other baby looked at him in reproachful wonder. Only *this* one, his son, had curly hair, a golden halo of curls, such as he had never possessed. For the first time in many months, a feeling of tenderness crept into Jayne's heart, as he thought of Sylvia's golden tresses, of which he had been so proud.

The baby looked as if he had come straight from the Garden of Eden. The thought struck Jayne that if, like another Eve, Sylvia had clothed the child only in its halo of curls, she had no Adam to work for her. He had never bought a single garment for that wee atom. Then came the question— where was she living? What was she doing? He remembered the unopened letters, with anguish. Might there not have been some grave mistake? He had refused all explanations, but now, how to find her?

Suddenly, with a gasp of relief, he peered again at the page. Yes, there was the address, in little black letters, in the corner. Oh, the blessed advertisement paragraph!

The black type swam before his eyes, and then blurred into a white mist. Mechanically, he took out his note-book— a somewhat superfluous act considering the address was branded into his brain. As his eye traveled over the list of engagements, he gave a start. In half-an-hour he had an appointment with one of the greatest authorities in the medical world— an appointment that he had deemed himself both proud and happy to obtain.

Jayne frowned. Sylvia was always getting in between him and his profession, ever since the days when, as a pretty probationer, she had wooed his thoughts from fractures and temperatures. And now she was exerting the same baleful influence through his boy!

He stopped from force of habit to calculate. It would make but little difference whether he sought out his missing wife now or a couple of hours later. He looked again at the portrait, and then, as though illuminated by a flash of lightning, the wasted years stood sharply before him. For the first time a glimmering suspicion asserted itself that he might have offered other sacrifices up to his profession than time and labour. Was not Sylvia included in the category?

Suddenly, little baby fingers seemed to pass over the cherished appointment, wiping it out, and though Leslie knew it not, some of the old, selfish nature died at that moment. A few minutes later Leslie was in the train, speeding out towards Sydenham, chafing at every stop. He had a nightmare feeling of oppression as he walked along the dreary suburban roads. At length he stopped before a small semi-detached villa. The door was open, and an untidy servant wrangled with a tardy errand-boy. Pushing aside the astonished pair, he burst into the small sitting-room. Kneeling on the rug was Sylvia. The golden hair, her pride, hung in tangled curls over her black dress; the firelight kissed it into a copper glory, and she was laughing as the fingers of a beloved little tyrant pulled down the tresses. At the sound of footsteps, she looked up hurriedly, clasping the baby to her heart.

He saw her face, sweeter than of yore, with the lines of care and resolution marring the empty prettiness of feature.

Suddenly Sylvia raised her eyes and saw her husband looking at her in the old, fond manner. Instantly the past three years were wiped out. With outstretched hands and the red staining her face, she ran towards him.

"How did you find me?" she cried.

A cloud suddenly blotted out the sunshine on Jayne's face.

"By this," he said grimly, throwing the paper on the table.

Their hands never met. The moment had passed and the wretched advertisement still lay between them.

Sylvia started back. With a hunted movement she seized the boy and strained him to her.

"You want baby!" she cried. "You have come to take him away from me. You never shall— there!"

It was the old Sylvia breathing defiance, and Jayne's heart hardened. From the shelter of his mother's arms the baby looked at the intruder with the ineffable *hauteur* which is the exclusive property of infants under the age of two.

Jayne cleared his throat. "Listen!" he said. "When you left me I had, perforce, to come to certain monstrous conclusions. It was not my fault"— the old Jayne struggled hard to assert himself— "you thrust it upon me. Now, I was wrong. I await your explanation, and if— as I believe— it will be satisfactory, my home is waiting for you and— baby. There is only one obstacle." He paused, and both looked at the piece of paper. He struck it violently. "This! This wrecked our lives for three years. I see, in spite of all you have gone through, the old craving for cheap notoriety remains. Now, where will it end?

"It has ended!"

Sylvia drew herself up, her eyes shining.

"Leslie, have I ever lied to you?"

"Never!" he admitted.

"Then listen. When I left you I saw everything in its true light It *was* vanity— all vanity! And I was sorry. I *never* wrote another advertisement. But—" she strove to hide her tears— "things grew so bad lately. I was penniless, so I remembered and wrote this. They sent me £5 for it. But I've written my last advertisement. I swear it— my very last!"

Then suddenly Jayne snatched up the paper and threw it on the fire.

And, a minute later, they had forgotten all their troubles in one long embrace.

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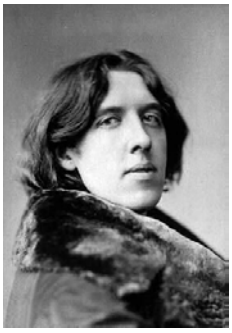
## 6: The Sphinx Without a Secret

***Oscar Wilde***

1854-1900

*The World,* 25 May 1887, as "Lady Alroy".



*Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde*

ONE AFTERNOON I was sitting outside the Café de la Paix, watching the splendour and shabbiness of Parisian life, and wondering over my vermouth at the strange panorama of pride and poverty that was passing before me, when I heard some one call my name. I turned round, and saw Lord Murchison. We had not met since we had been at college together, nearly ten years before, so I was delighted to come across him again, and we shook hands warmly. At Oxford we had been great friends. I had liked him immensely, he was so handsome, so high-spirited, and so honourable. We used to say of him that he would be the best of fellows, if he did not always speak the truth, but I think we really admired him all the more for his frankness. I found him a good deal changed. He looked anxious and puzzled, and seemed to be in doubt about something. I felt it could not be modern scepticism, for Murchison was the stoutest of Tories, and believed in the Pentateuch as firmly as he believed in the House of Peers; so I concluded that it was a woman, and asked him if he was married yet.

"I don't understand women well enough," he answered.

"My dear Gerald," I said, "women are meant to be loved, not to be understood."

"I cannot love where I cannot trust," he replied.

"I believe you have a mystery in your life, Gerald," I exclaimed; "tell me about it."

"Let us go for a drive," he answered, "it is too crowded here. No, not a yellow carriage, any other colour— there, that dark-green one will do"; and in a few moments we were trotting down the boulevard in the direction of the Madeleine.

"Where shall we go to?" I said.

"Oh, anywhere you like!" he answered— "to the restaurant in the Bois; we will dine there, and you shall tell me all about yourself."

"I want to hear about you first," I said. "Tell me your mystery."

He took from his pocket a little silver-clasped morocco case, and handed it to me. I opened it. Inside there was the photograph of a woman. She was tall and slight, and strangely picturesque with her large vague eyes and loosened hair. She looked like a clairvoyante, and was wrapped in rich furs.

"What do you think of that face?" he said; "is it truthful?"

I examined it carefully. It seemed to me the face of some one who had a secret, but whether that secret was good or evil I could not say. Its beauty was a beauty moulded out of many mysteries— the beauty, in fact, which is psychological, not plastic— and the faint smile that just played across the lips was far too subtle to be really sweet.

"Well," he cried impatiently, "what do you say?"

"She is the Gioconda in sables," I answered. "Let me know all about her."

"Not now," he said; "after dinner"; and began to talk of other things.

When the waiter brought us our coffee and cigarettes I reminded Gerald of his promise. He rose from his seat, walked two or three times up and down the room, and, sinking into an armchair, told me the following story:—

"One evening," he said, "I was walking down Bond Street about five o'clock. There was a terrific crush of carriages, and the traffic was almost stopped. Close to the pavement was standing a little yellow brougham, which, for some reason or other, attracted my attention. As I passed by there looked out from it the face I showed you this afternoon. It fascinated me immediately. All that night I kept thinking of it, and all the next day. I wandered up and down that wretched Row, peering into every carriage, and waiting for the yellow brougham; but I could not find *ma belle inconnue*, and at last I began to think she was merely a dream. About a week afterwards I was dining with Madame de Rastail. Dinner was for eight o'clock; but at half-past eight we were still waiting in the drawing-room. Finally the servant threw open the door, and announced Lady Alroy. It was the woman I had been looking for. She came in very slowly, looking like a moon-beam in grey lace, and, to my intense delight, I was asked to take her in to dinner. After we had sat down I remarked quite innocently, 'I think I caught sight of you in Bond Street some time ago, Lady Alroy.' She grew very pale, and said to me in a low voice, 'Pray do not talk so loud; you may be overheard.' I felt miserable at having made such a bad beginning, and plunged recklessly into the subject of the French plays. She spoke very little, always in the same low musical voice, and seemed as if she was afraid of some one listening. I fell passionately, stupidly in love, and the

indefinable atmosphere of mystery that surrounded her excited my most ardent curiosity. When she was going away, which she did very soon after dinner, I asked her if I might call and see her. She hesitated a moment, glanced round to see if any one was near us, and then said, 'Yes; to-morrow at a quarter to five.' I begged Madame de Rastail to tell me about her; but all that I could learn was that she was a widow with a beautiful house in Park Lane, and as some scientific bore began a dissertation on widows, as exemplifying the survival of the matrimonially fittest, I left and went home.

"The next day I arrived at Park Lane punctual to the moment, but was told by the butler that Lady Alroy had just gone out. I went down to the club quite unhappy and very much puzzled, and after long consideration wrote her a letter, asking if I might be allowed to try my chance some other afternoon. I had no answer for several days, but at last I got a little note saying she would be at home on Sunday at four, and with this extraordinary postscript: 'Please do not write to me here again; I will explain when I see you.' On Sunday she received me, and was perfectly charming; but when I was going away she begged of me, if I ever had occasion to write to her again, to address my letter to 'Mrs. Knox, care of Whittaker's Library, Green Street.' 'There are reasons,' she said, 'why I cannot receive letters in my own house.'

"All through the season I saw a great deal of her, and the atmosphere of mystery never left her. Sometimes I thought that she was in the power of some man, but she looked so unapproachable that I could not believe it. It was really very difficult for me to come to any conclusion, for she was like one of those strange crystals that one sees in museums, which are at one moment clear, and at another clouded. At last I determined to ask her to be my wife: I was sick and tired of the incessant secrecy that she imposed on all my visits, and on the few letters I sent her. I wrote to her at the library to ask her if she could see me the following Monday at six. She answered yes, and I was in the seventh heaven of delight. I was infatuated with her: in spite of the mystery, I thought then—in consequence of it, I see now. No; it was the woman herself I loved. The mystery troubled me, maddened me. Why did chance put me in its track?"

"You discovered it, then?" I cried.

"I fear so," he answered. "You can judge for yourself."

"When Monday came round I went to lunch with my uncle, and about four o'clock found myself in the Marylebone Road. My uncle, you know, lives in Regent's Park. I wanted to get to Piccadilly, and took a short cut through a lot of shabby little streets. Suddenly I saw in front of me Lady Alroy, deeply veiled and walking very fast. On coming to the last house in the street, she went up the steps, took out a latch-key, and let herself in. "Here is the mystery," I said

to myself; and I hurried on and examined the house. It seemed a sort of place for letting lodgings. On the doorstep lay her handkerchief, which she had dropped. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. Then I began to consider what I should do. I came to the conclusion that I had no right to spy on her, and I drove down to the club. At six I called to see her. She was lying on a sofa, in a tea-gown of silver tissue looped up by some strange moonstones that she always wore. She was looking quite lovely. 'I am so glad to see you,' she said; 'I have not been out all day.' I stared at her in amazement, and pulling the handkerchief out of my pocket, handed it to her. 'You dropped this in Cumnor Street this afternoon, Lady Alroy,' I said very calmly. She looked at me in terror, but made no attempt to take the handkerchief. 'What were you doing there?' I asked. 'What right have you to question me?' she answered. 'The right of a man who loves you,' I replied; 'I came here to ask you to be my wife.' She hid her face in her hands, and burst into floods of tears. 'You must tell me,' I continued. She stood up, and, looking me straight in the face, said, 'Lord Murchison, there is nothing to tell you.'—'You went to meet some one,' I cried; 'this is your mystery.' She grew dreadfully white, and said, 'I went to meet no one.'—'Can't you tell the truth?' I exclaimed. 'I have told it,' she replied. I was mad, frantic; I don't know what I said, but I said terrible things to her. Finally I rushed out of the house. She wrote me a letter the next day; I sent it back unopened, and started for Norway with Alan Colville. After a month I came back, and the first thing I saw in the Morning Post was the death of Lady Alroy. She had caught a chill at the Opera, and had died in five days of congestion of the lungs. I shut myself up and saw no one. I had loved her so much, I had loved her so madly. Good God! how I had loved that woman!"

"You went to the street, to the house in it?" I said.

"Yes," he answered.

"One day I went to Cumnor Street. I could not help it, I was tortured with doubt. I knocked at the door, and a respectable-looking woman opened it to me. I asked her if she had any rooms to let. 'Well, sir,' she replied, 'the drawing-rooms are supposed to be let; but I have not seen the lady for three months, and as rent is owing on them, you can have them.'— 'Is this the lady?' I said, showing the photograph. 'That's her, sure enough,' she exclaimed; 'and when is she coming back, sir?'— 'The lady is dead,' I replied. 'Oh, sir, I hope not!' said the woman; 'she was my best lodger. She paid me three guineas a week merely to sit in my drawing-rooms now and then.'— 'She met some one here?' I said; but the woman assured me that it was not so, that she always came alone, and saw no one. 'What on earth did she do here?' I cried. 'She simply sat in the drawing-room, sir, reading books, and sometimes had tea,' the woman answered. I did not know what to say, so I gave her a sovereign

and went away. Now, what do you think it all meant? You don't believe the woman was telling the truth?"

"I do."

"Then why did Lady Alroy go there?"

"My dear Gerald," I answered, "Lady Alroy was simply a woman with a mania for mystery. She took these rooms for the pleasure of going there with her veil down, and imagining she was a heroine. She had a passion for secrecy, but she herself was merely a Sphinx without a secret."

"Do you really think so?"

"I am sure of it," I replied.

He took out the morocco case, opened it, and looked at the photograph.

"I wonder?" he said at last.

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## 7: Chains of the Living Dead

***Arthur Leo Zagat***

1895-1949

*Terror Tales*, May 1935

*Arthur Leo Zagat was one of the mainstays of magazines such as "Terror Tales", and a prolific writer in SF and crime genres as well.*

### *1: Home Invasion*

LAURA STANDISH blurted out her husband's name before she was fully awake. "Frank!" But there was no answer. Even before she realized just what it was that had awakened her, a chill, little quiver of dread brushed her spine.

The fire on the hearth, before which she had fallen asleep, was low and there was no other light in the huge, dark-ceilinged parlor. Good Lord! It was already night and Frank wasn't back yet! He was to have been gone only an hour, ample time to go down the hill to the General Store in the village and get some food for supper. She had been too tired after their long trip from the city to go with him, and he had seemed worried about leaving her here alone. Something must have...

A sound at the door brought Laura startled to her feet. He was here at last! Returning circulation needled her cramped legs so that she could not move. Frank had a key, but...

The rasp of flesh against wood, out there in the gloomy foyer, was somehow furtive. Heat beat out from the glowing logs in the fireplace, yet Laura shivered with queasy cold. Suddenly she knew it was the very stealthiness of that groping hand— the menace implicit in its quietness— that had awakened her. And suddenly, she knew also that she was afraid.

Someone was trying to get in! And it was *not* Frank! For a moment, panic swept over her, and she cowered back against the fireplace, so close that the

hem of her dress began to scorch. She was alone in this musty, old country house, and the deep pine woods separated her by a good mile from the village. From any ordinary prowler, she was comparatively safe. Frank had insisted on making sure, before he went, that all windows were safely locked. He had made her promise to shoot home the two heavy bolts on the big, front door.

But there was something eerie about the way whatever it was outside fumbled at the barrier, a strange quality of blindness, of mindlessness. If only Frank was here, with his capable shoulders and easy confident smile! But he was gone, had been, for hours. Overwhelming dread seized Laura Standish as she listened to the aimless groping, the queer slithering sounds, along the stout pine of the door.

Had the Thing outside caught Frank unawares as he was hurrying back to her? Was his dear body even now a cold and mutilated corpse somewhere in the depths of the woods? Did the intruder know that she was alone, a helpless, unprotected, lovely morsel?

She fought herself back to a semblance of sanity. She must not think such thoughts! She forced her trembling voice into just the right mold of casual inquiry. Perhaps, if the prowler knew she were not afraid, if he thought there were others with her in the house...

"Who is there?" she called.

Still there was no answer. The latch! Oh God, the latch! It was rising in its cradle, slowly, with infinite stealth. She stared at its inexorable movement with eyes that were frozen with terror. A new sound came— a snuffling, whining eagerness. It held no human quality in its muffled breathing; it was more like the whimper of an animal to whom human doors are insoluble puzzles.

Laura exhaled slowly. She had forgotten; the bolts in their sockets would hold. The Thing outside seemed to realize that too. The whimper became an angry snarl that pierced the double thickness of the porch. Then silence reigned for an instant, silence during which Laura, still backed against the fire, felt the blood pound madly in her veins. Had the snuffling monster given up the attempt, gone away to its lair?

*CR-R-RASH!* The heavy door quivered and bent inward. The stout iron bolts strained against their sockets. A screw started from its spiral bed, and sawdust fell in a tiny cloud to the floor.

Smash! Crack! Crash!

Again and again came the terrific thumps. The great, pine door groaned and sagged under the impact of the repeated blows. Each thud was a sledgehammer smashing home against Laura's skull. She could not move, she could not breathe in her terror. No human being could break down that heavy, reinforced barrier. Slam! Her stiffened lips worked soundlessly. A screw, inches

long, clattered to the floor. One iron socket dangled uselessly on the precarious thread of a single fastening.

A choked scream tore at her throat "Help! Frank! Help!" she cried in an agony of fear. Then dreadful realization clamored in her brain, sagged her limbs to a feral crouch. Frank, her husband, could not hear. Perhaps never again would he?!

She glared around with mounting madness. There was no hope, no escape for her. It was a small, summer cabin they had rented for the season, intent only on primitive seclusion and the cozy warmth of the two together alone. The ground floor was all one room— a timbered parlor with a gigantic native-stone fireplace for its kitchen. Overhead were two bedrooms, now empty and forlorn. There was no rear door through which she could flee, and her fingers twisting frantically at the window latches would bring the mysterious attacker down upon her.

Thick, ominous silence succeeded the smash of a heavy body against a weakening portal. The Thing had heard her cry for help, was waiting stealthily, flesh flattened against the rough pine. She could hear the slobbering wheeze of its breath, the whimpering sound in its throat.

Oh God! What dreadful monster was crouching out there, waiting for her to cry out again, resting before the final attempt that would bring the door and hinges and all crashing to the ground?

In the very extremity of her fear, Laura found new strength. She must *see* what it was that had come out of the night, that sought terrible entrance into the lonely cabin. She must see— before it was too late. Her limbs were no longer part of her. They moved her away from the dull-red embers of the hearth, across a long, interminable expanse of flooring, where the shadows ebbed and flowed with each flicker of the dying flames, toward the thick-curtained window that gave on the porch. One dreadful thought swelled and swelled inside her skull until the thin bone ached and reeled under its impact.

*Why* was the attacker slamming with unhuman strength against the door; *why* had he not forced an easier entrance through a window?

She shrank desperately from the sinister implications of that thought; she spewed it out like an unclean thing. Outside, the whimper grew to an eager, slavering whine. It had heard her slow, tortured progress across the floor. *It was waiting for her to open the door!*

The thought rocked her consciousness, made her senses reel and swim. She tore at the heavy stuff of the curtain with terror-strong hands. It swung back to disclose a long, narrow panel of corpse-white luminance. A cold, dead moon struggled to pierce the dense, black shadows of the pines, the taller gloom of the hemlocks. A little beyond, where the old lumber road bent in an

arc past the house, the victorious beams bunched in an irregular patch of leprous white.

But Laura saw only the crouching Thing on the porch. It was flattened against the tottering door as if it were listening, waiting. A slanting dart of moonlight spread shudderingly over its massive frame, bathed it in an eerie glow that paralyzed her limbs, exploded red horror in her brain.

And as if it had heard the moan that tore involuntarily from her pallid lips, the monster sprang away from the door, turned its head.

For one, long, terrible moment their eyes met, locked. Dear God, it was a man! But a man such as Laura had never seen before. No light of human reason showed in those glaring eyeballs, or softened the bestial madness of that ape-like face. Yellow froth dripped from the corners of the slobbering mouth, and the thick spume gurgled audibly in the throat. Worn, tattered pants and an even more tattered shirt of indistinguishable hue covered the barrel-thickness of the body. Long, hairy arms dangled almost to the ground.

Laura tried to shrink back, but could not. Her hand gripped the curtain as if glued. Her muscles were beyond control. She knew now that the man outside was mad; stark, irretrievably mad. Prayers, pleas for mercy, could not penetrate that distorted brain. She was beyond all help, all human aid.

The madman whirled on bare, misshapen feet like a cat. His right hand, hidden in the shadows, swung into view. Great God in Heaven! The moon glinted with unholy glee on a broad band of greyish metal that encircled his powerful wrist, and sprayed in a shower of frozen light on the chain that dangled therefrom. The last link showed jagged, broken edges of metal where it had been snapped in two.

Laura felt herself fainting, yet she did not fall. She tried to tear her hand away from the revealing curtain, to run madly, anywhere, away from that awful sight. But a nightmare paralysis held her in icy embrace. The madman had been chained, like a wild beast, like a slave! He had broken away with superhuman strength to roam the wild woods, to find her, a hapless victim for his maniacal will!

The creature thrust his manacled hand toward the window in a strange gesture. The links rattled hideously. He opened his thick lips and a curious whimpering, like that of a beaten dog, spewed from his mouth. As if— almost as if he were imploring her to open the door, to let him in.

Terror flared in Laura's eyes. She dared not, she must not. It was the cunning born of a diseased mind, luring her to destruction. The maniac seemed to sense her loathing, to read her great fear aright. A change came over his bestial face. His lips snarled back to show yellowed teeth; he lunged against the already battered portal. There was a great rending sound. The loosened

bolt flew with a doomful thud to the floor. Only one shaky bolt remained between her and his raging lust.

He heaved back again, shoulder arched for the final blow. Laura came to desperate life. Little sobs whimpered in her throat, cataracts of ceaseless blood made turbulent noise in her ears. Her unlocked fingers flew to the catch on the window, tugged frantically at its rusty iron. If only she could twist the stubborn metal, swing up the window in one swift heave, and catapult her slender body through the opening just as the madman rushed in the door, perhaps...

The maniac hunched forward, heedless of her puny efforts. His darkened mind could not associate the window with entrance or exit. In seconds, he would be through, upon her shrinking body. And still the window catch, imbedded with all of Frank's lean strength, refused to give. With sudden, awful clarity she knew it would not open.

The flame of hideous triumph glowed on the madman's brute face. His shoulder bent against the portal. It tottered, split. The night air swirled through the crack with beating wings. Laura shrieked, and lifted her small white fist to smash out the pane of glass.

*Clank! Thud— thud! Clank!*

Wild hope swept like a consuming blaze through Laura's shaking form. She was saved! That thudding noise was from the old lumber road. It was the sound of many men, slogging along through the rutted dirt. She would shout, she would shriek, she would pour all her desperate terror into one last cry. They would come running, those unseen, blessed men; they would rescue her from this obscene Thing outside. Perhaps even— her bursting heart bounded even more madly than before— Frank was with them, hurrying them back to save his Laura.

See, already the monster had heard, was afraid! He whirled away from the sagging, half-open door. He darted back into the shadows, a crouched, dim-seen animal. Whimpers of fear rumbled in his hairy throat.

Fierce joy surged through her veins. She thrust back the heavy shrouded curtain. She raised her clenched fist to slam against the glass; she opened her mouth to cry for help.

But the cry choked back in her throat with a sudden tautness of muscles; her hand fell like a leaden weight to her side. A horrible thought had seared her brain and clogged her veins with ice. *Clank! Clank!* Much louder now, nearer, coming down the mountain. *Clank! Clank!* Beating out a steady, slogging rhythm, a strange, Satanic music. One— two— one— two! March, march. Clash of metal on metal. One foot up; other foot down! *Clank— clank!*

Laura caught at the window sill to keep from falling. Her scalp was a squeezing cap of horror; her lungs fought for breath. She knew now what

caused that eerie sound. It was the chains of manacled men, marching Things coming down the mountain after her. Coming to help their fellow monster, coming to cut off all hope of her escape!

On and on they came, still invisible, still shrouded by the dark-massed pines, chains clanking, metal ringing in horrible unison. The madman in the shadows stirred, whined, and was gone into the night like a ghost called back to its grave. But she knew why he went. He was joining that hideous Tout of his fellows, summoning them with slobbering whimpers to the attack.

She stood at the window like immovable stone, left hand still frozen to the curtain hem. Her brain shrieked madly: "Run, while there is yet time. Out the door, into the woods, anywhere before *they* come for you!" But her muscles were tight knots of flesh, and her skin, a leaded coffin.

Now it was too late. The ominous clank of the chains burst upon her frozen senses with a wild, triumphant chant. Out there, where the road bent in an arc, and the moonlight lay in a splotch of scabby, leprous white on the grey dirt, a figure moved. For one moment it stopped and lifted its head, laved in the cold, dead spotlight of Hell's own theater.

Great God in Heaven! The face that turned toward the house, as if it saw her fear-rigid at the window, was the face similar to that of the madman who had just slunk away from her porch. The glare was gone from this one's eyes, the snarl from his flabby lips. His huge, knotted shoulders bowed forward in abject servitude, as if crushed under unutterable weights. The links of the manacle encircling his wrist stretched back into the blackness from which he had stepped. A new band of metal enclosed the thickness of his ankle.

For a moment he hesitated, brutish face vacant with the quenched embers of madness. Then, a strange hissing sound from the rear, and he jerked forward his head, hunched shoulders, and stepped into the blackness of eternity.

Clank— thud— clank! Laura's heart was pounding so she had not sensed the momentary cessation of that Devil's march. The dual chains writhed across the dead white patch of moon like disembodied serpents, endless, gleaming with unholy luster. All her faculties were concentrated on that small spot of light. What was coming next, what dreadful portent to snap the bonds of her reason?

The links jerked taut. Another figure lurched forward into the moon, blinked, raised his head. Black, mindless eyes bored into her very soul, shriveled it to nothingness. Mad, mad, every one of them! Madmen, chained to each other like wild beasts, marching along the road like slaves to some dreadful auction block! Hate distorted his stubbled countenance; mad lust leered at her from under a mop of uncut hair. His chains clanked startlingly, he

lurched toward the house with sudden motion. He had seen the terrified girl at the window.

Again that sinister, hissing sound. He jerked backward, the links stiff as ramrods. Unutterable terror flared like sheet lightning over his hideous, lecherous face. His head bent low, his shaggy form strained forward. The chains resumed their rhythmic clanking, and darkness swallowed him whole.

Clank, clink, clank! Oh God, was there no end? More chains writhing through the moon-flooded spot; another bowed and mindless figure, stumbling through the patch, blind and weary, not pausing in his staggering pace, not lifting his head. Black night enfolded him too. And still another figure moved into the light, shaking his head from side to side, leaping upward with little grotesque hops, jerked downward by the restraining metal, mouth wide in horrible, soundless chuckle. He was even more dreadful in his mindless mirth than the others.

And still the double chains writhed backward into the night. An endless, marching army of the damned, hell's creatures clanking their way from blackness to blackness. Laura could stand it no longer. Her throat was a strangling fire, her body a shivering lump of ice. Madness plucked at her own brain, leered at her with eyes like those of the manacled Things, invited her with loathsome whispers to join that procession of the doomed.

With the last grim shreds of her reason she held back the shrieks, held back from rushing out into the night. The road bent in a sharp curve around the house. The clanking madmen now enfolded her, hemmed her in on three sides. Behind was the grim, precipitous up-thrust of Superstition Mountain. Soon they would turn, creep forward through the murk, spring upon her with horrid slaverings.

Her heart rapped out a last desperate tattoo, then stopped altogether. Everything stopped; every process of her being. The room, the night, the earth, the universe, froze like a run-down clock. This was death, or worse...

### *2: Terror That Walked By Night!*

OUT in that little spotlight of the damned, another figure had moved—another unit in that endless, terrible procession. He was thinner than the others, and his clothes, ripped and torn though they were, held still a semblance of civilization. His lean, etched head was lowered, and the chains clanked dismally from his wrist and ankle.

The moonlight gloated over his form, slithered over every slender line. He jerked his head upward, dug his heel in the dirt for a sudden stop. The chains tightened and clashed with harsh, metallic noises. His eyes, wide, dark, blank-

seeming, were fixed on the house, on the very window where Laura stood, turned to nightmare marble.

The universe stopped, then crashed into headlong ruin. That staring face— smeared with filth, hollow with the sagging stupor of the idiot— was the face of Frank, her husband!

For one long second, her heart was a small, still ball; for one eternal second, her mind was blank and dark as the faces of the madmen, as even Frank's was. Then heart and lungs and brain seethed and roared with whelming floods. She whimpered in her throat like an animal in pain. It was impossible; it was not true! It was a delusion, a frightful dream come to torment her! What was Frank, her adored Frank, doing in that dreadful company? No! No! He was still down in the village, buying supplies. Something had happened to delay him; he had met someone he knew. They were talking, unmindful of the time.

That was it. Certainly this was all a bad dream from which she would wake soon— shuddering and gasping with strange, remembered terrors— and Frank, his dear face aglow as ever with live intelligence and with tenderness for his wife, would be shaking her gently by the shoulder.

She hugged that thought, turned it and twisted it in her half-mad mind. Madness, madness! *She* was mad; not them outside. It was all only a trick of the fiendish moon, done to plague her. Oh Lord, please don't let them torment me like this; please drive them away!

But the figure of Frank refused to fade into mist as had the others; his sightless eyes clutched at the window, yet did not seem to see. Then she knew it was true, that it was real. The curtain ripped away in her down-gripping hands; she lunged against the window, eyes wide, mouth grim with a force beyond all fear. Her husband was out there, chained like a wild beast, broken to a mindless wretch. But he was hers, *hers!* She must get to him, she must rescue him, tend him carefully. Nothing else mattered. The window was the quickest, shortest way.

Glass crashed under her beating fist. The jagged shards pierced her delicate fingers, gashed them cruelly. But she did not even feel the pain. She raised her bleeding hand to smash out the rest.

Frank's head came higher. Was that a flicker of light, a mere spark of moon in his eyes, or was it warning? She had no chance to know.

Out of the blackness of the road behind leaped a figure. His form was shrouded in a mantle of swirling black; his head was a startling mask of white. The moon beat in vain against the grey baldness of his head, the white bushiness of his eyebrows, the snarl that contorted his bloodless features. His

right arm was uplifted, and a long, snaky whip swept downward with a hissing sound.

The lash whistled on Frank's bent back, bit deep in shuddering agony. A quiver raced across his dirt-encrusted countenance; then it was wiped clean of all expression, vacuous with the dreadful emptiness of the mad.

Frank stumbled, lurched forward, head bowed down like the others. He moved out from the ghastly spotlight, into the hellish darkness of the trees, with never a backward glance. After him strode the jailer, whip hissing and writhing, his face, turned momentarily toward Laura, a leering object of evil. Then he too vanished into the murk.

Laura must have shrieked then. Woods and shattered window and the moon above joined in a devil's dance. Round and round and round— blur of whips and mouthing maniacs and insistent rhythm of clanking chains. Farther and farther— fading away; then closer— closer, strangely transmuted into a hissing and crackling like...

She opened her eyes, looked wildly around. Where was she? The room was a thing of groping shadows. The logs on the hearth were dull, red embers. At one end, a last charred stick had fallen, flared into fantastic flame, crackled, and died again. It was that which had brought her out of her faint.

Faint? Laura struggled unsteadily to her feet, looked with dull wonder at her bleeding arm, pressed it to her aching head. What had happened, why had she fallen down? The night wind blew across her cheek. Good Lord, she must have left the door open, or Frank...

"Frank!" The name forced its way out in a tearing crescendo of remembered terror. "Frank!" It all came back in a nightmare sweat that drenched her limbs. "Frank! Frank!" she screamed again, and plunged for the sagging door. With undreamt-of strength she ripped open the last, loose bolt, sent the crazy barrier crashing to the ground. Out on the porch she ran, calling again and again: "Frank!"

But the anguished name was lost in the muttering forest, in the unrelieved blackness of the night. The moon had dropped behind Superstition Mountain, and the glacial stars mocked her desperation. The road was a dim thread of darkling stuff, and the leprous patch was gone.

Silence pressed down upon her with weighted shrouds. No sound of chains, of thudding feet, of hissing whip. The chained madmen had gone their clanking way, and with them, Frank. Frank, who had seemed mad as they, bound to them in hideous life and death!

Oh God, she mustn't go mad. That was what they wanted, that hellish crew and still more hellish jailer. Perhaps, out there, in the Stygian gloom, they still

lurked, moving forward with each rustle of the masking night breeze, coming to drag her down with them.

Her eyes were balls of fire, her ears a straining tension. The night closed in on her with stealthy whispers. Alone in a forest of evil, where mindless Things gloated and lusted for her. If only Frank... She sobbed aloud, and the sound was like plunging knives. *Frank was out there too!*

*She must save her husband.* Fear dropped from her like an outworn garment. Her brain cleared. She must get help to rescue him, to rid Squam Village of the marching horror. One mile down the winding dirt road lay the village, one long mile of unrelieved darkness and shapes and sounds and Things in chains.

The skin crawled over her flesh, but she forced herself down the steps, across the little clearing, into the road. If only she had a flashlight! But the batteries had gone dead in the old one, and Frank had expected to buy new ones in the village.

On and on she went, groping her way along, smashing into trees, tripping over unseen roots, hearing the loud thud of blood in her ears, hearkening to the scuttering noises of the woods, panting, gasping for breath, jerking with unimaginable terror when a ghostly branch whipped across her face. She must have been delirious half the time; her blurred senses gave no clear impression of that dreadful flight. But indomitable will, the flame of her love for her husband, forced her on and on.

The invisible road dipped sharply. Below her, nesting in a hollow, was the tiny village of Squam. It was an oasis in a wide-flung desert of pine and towering hemlocks. A single light glowed ahead, in the very center of a clump of huddled shapes. Its feeble, yellow flame struggled wanly through an oblong of dirt-encrusted window; its tiny flicker died in hopeless struggle with the encroaching darkness.

But the glare of a thousand arcs, the brilliant illumination of the Great White Way, could not have been more welcome to Laura just then. Tears streamed down her pallid cheeks as she flogged her tottering limbs toward that glimmer of hope.

She swayed uncertainly across the threshold of the General Store, Squam's only business mart and focal center. Here, amid boxes of crackers and open barrels of sugar, between fly-specked counter and shelves bulging with faded calico bolts and unsold axes, hugging the pot-bellied stove in winter and spitting dexterous gobs of tobacco juice against its cold, grey sides in summer, congregated nightly the men folk of Squam.

Here, under the rheumy eyes of old Matt Kroll, owner and tutelary genius, were settled the profoundest political problems of the nation as well as the proper bait to use for pickerel in the nearby lakes.

A single lantern swayed drunkenly from a cobwebbed rafter. The air was drowsy with cheap tobacco and the odor of much-worn clothes. A half-dozen men sprawled negligently over as many boxes, their forms indistinct in the wavering yellow smoke.

Old Matt was saying in his high, querulous voice, edged with anger at some unexpected opposition: "I tell you, Lem. I seen 'em with my own eyes, down in the Holler, a-marchin' under the moon an'— "

Laura caught at the door jamb and fought for breath. These men would help her, they would find Frank for her. They were natives, born and raised in the woods; they would track down the man with the whip and his hellish rout.

Lem saw her first. He clucked out a warning that made Matt break off abruptly. Lem was the town cobbler and village atheist. He and Matt were forever arguing over the old wives' tales that clustered around Superstition Mountain. But now the sneer wiped off his dark, bony face, and fear leaped into his snapping, black eyes. Matt suspended his last word in midair, and his jaw gaped as if he had seen a ghost.

The other men, workers in the lumber camps, turned negligent, stubbly faces toward the girl framed in the doorway, and froze as they were.

"Miss' Standish, *heh, heh!*" Matt cackled with obvious effort. "Why, it sure is good tuh see yuh. I wuz jes' telling the boys..."

Some inner reserve of strength pushed Laura into the center of the room. Matt wavered and stopped. No one noticed. All eyes were intent on the panting girl. A deathlike silence enveloped her.

"My husband, Mr. Standish," she gasped. "He— he's...!"

There was secret terror in the furtive glances they gave each other. Lem averted his eyes, broke in hastily: "Why sure, Missus Standish. He was here 'bout three hours ago. Got hisself some groceries and went on home. Didn't he now, Matt?"

Matt's shrunken face was suddenly more shrunken than before. He mumbled over toothless gums what might have been confirmation.

"But he never reached home!" Laura cried desperately. "He— never— reached home!" she repeated with a dreadful sob.

No one moved; no one stirred. Even the lifting layers of smoke seemed frozen in the air. Eye sought eye stealthily, thin lips licked secretively. Silence eddied about Laura like a hostile sea.

Lem's swarthy face was a dirty grey. "Heh, heh!" he chuckled with forced heartiness. "Mister Standish musta taken the long way back. P'raps he stopped

at Bottomless Pond t' catch hisself a mess o' bass fer supper. Bought hisself a fishin' rod from old Matt, didn't he now?"

There was a chorus of eager grunts. Laura looked wildly around at their dim-seen faces. They knew something; something dreadful. They were hiding it from her.

"You don't understand!" she cried imploringly. "I— saw Frank. He was— " She fought against rigid throat muscles at the memory. "He was in chains, manacled— with madmen. Oh God!" she hid her eyes shudderingly. "They marched and clanked, and a Thing with a whip beat them on." She took her hands away and screamed out. "Frank will go mad! They will kill him! You must— you *must* save him."

A box fell over with a startling crash. They jittered to their feet, babbling hoarsely. Their hands trembled and their jaws twitched with uncontrollable nerves. Their stubbly faces were grey with fear.

"You're crazy, gal," Lem snarled through stiffened lips. "You've been dreaming, an' seein' things in yuhr sleep. Bet Mister Standish is home right now, wonderin' whut's become of yuh."

Two lumberjacks in the rear, great hulking fellows, shuffled furtively toward the rear of the store, where a door led out to the back road. Shoulders hunched, they slunk out into the night.

Old Matt, the storekeeper, opened his mouth, gulped, but no words issued. "Lem's right," a lanky woodsman muttered, and eased unobtrusively toward the door.

Scorn, searing anger, effaced all other emotions in Laura. These men were afraid, that was it, deathly afraid of something. They would not help— they dared not help! They were trying to make her out as mad, subject to hallucinations. *She had not seen?* God, if only she hadn't! See how they were scattering like chaff, slinking away into the night, like cowardly rabbits.

"I did *not* dream," she blazed, "and you— and you— and you— " she stabbed an accusing finger at each cowering man in turn, "know it as well as I. You are afraid— cowards, all of you!" Then her scorn broke down, and she was a frightened, sobbing girl again. "Please," she implored, and choked over the words, "help my Frank! They have made a mad Thing out of him; they are whipping him with terrible whips. Please!"

They looked at each other uneasily. Terror was bright in their eyes. The gangling woodsman had already edged toward the entrance, and he moved suddenly into the blackness. There was an oath, an exclamation, a squeal of terror from the escaping man as he rebounded back into the room. Feet clumped angrily.

"Good Lord, Wally, what's the matter with you?" someone said gruffly. Wally shrank against the shelves, trembling like a leaf. Two men entered with hearty, banging strides, like a breath of fresh air into that brooding, fetid room. Laura gave vent to a gasp of relief. Here were men who would understand, who would believe. More, they would act; they would force these others into shamed movement.

"Thank God you've come, Sheriff!" she cried.

"Hello!" The tall, spare man with the greying hair and grim, weathered face stopped short with an air of surprise. "What are you doing out this time o' the night, Mrs. Standish?"

His companion, a stout, rubicund individual with a bright gold watch chain across his ample stomach, and a shabby stethoscope peeping out of his vest pocket, looked quickly at Laura's drawn, bloodless face, then at the staring, silent men in the store. He was the village physician, Dr. Alva Carey. He had stopped several times at their cottage to pass the time of the day.

"What's happened, Laura?" he asked sharply.

Everything was a haze to her. Precious minutes were passing, while Frank... She sobbed out: "You— you *must* believe me. Madmen, with a monster who whips them on, have caught my husband. They have chained him; they are driving him mad. Doctor, Sheriff, you *must*— *must* save him!"

Split second of hesitation in which time seemed to stand still. Would they think her mad too, as those others pretended; would they...?

Dr. Alva Carey cleared his throat. That little sound crashed upon Laura with the dreadful effect of a thousand tons. Oh God, he did not believe!

"I'd suggest." be said with careful casualness, "a little sleeping draught tonight, Laura." He fished in his capacious pocket, pulled out a fold of brown paper, extended it to her.

She dashed it violently out of his hand. It dropped to the floor, burst open, and white, crystalline powder sprinkled over the dirty, pine boards. Fools, fools, all of them! She caught hold of the Sheriff's rusty black coat with a desperate, imploring gesture.

"Sheriff, I demand you do your duty. I tell you I saw them with my own eyes, marching in chains right in front of my own house. I saw— Frank. He stopped, looked at me. Then that frightful monster whipped him on. If you don't hurry, it'll be too late. Too late!"

Sheriff Tom Beasley looked down at the panting, swaying girl. His lips tightened. There was perceptible hesitation in his manner.

"Well, Mrs. Standish," he drawled, "if you put it that way, I s'ppose there's nothing else for me to do, but go hunting through the woods. But that there tale o' yours, as Dr. Carey kin tell you, is one of the oldest stories we got round

these here parts. That's how Superstition Mountain, back of your place, got its name."

Dr. Carey nodded absently. "That's right, Laura," he muttered. But his manner was fidgety, as if he were anxious to get away.

"But you'll go, won't you, Sheriff?" she implored.

Sheriff Beasley sighed audibly, tightened his belt, looked with longing eyes at the ancient stove, plentifully decorated with tobacco juice, spat, and said:

"Right this minute, ma'am. I'll get out right now an' comb the woods. My advice to you, though, is tuh go back home, and see if maybe your husband's there by this time." The Sheriff turned to the silent few who were left in the store. "Any o' you boys want tuh help me?" he inquired genially. "I'll swear ye in as deputies."

No one answered. As one man, the lumberjacks drifted to the door, vanished hastily into the night. Lem brought up the rear. His dark, glowing eyes were full on Laura as he passed, then he too was gone.

Dr. Carey fidgeted, looked at his watch. "Good Lord!" he muttered. "I've got a call to make. 'Bye, Laura, and don't worry. Frank'll be all right. Bet he's waiting for you now." Then he was out, hastily. The next moment the rattle-bang of his Ford made thundering echoes along the road.

Sheriff Beasley looked at Matt Kroll, the storekeeper, who seemed as if frozen behind his counter, and chuckled morosely.

"Lots o' help a peace officer gets in Squam, eh, Matt?" He turned to Laura. "Now don't you go worryin'," he advised. "I know these woods like a book. An' if they's any bunch like you say in there, I'll get 'em." His grim lips were a straight, compressed line, and his lean, sinewy hand patted the holster that protruded underneath the rusty black of his coat. A tarnished star gleamed dully on his shirt. But Laura detected skepticism in his frosty, blue eye, saw the imperceptible wink he tipped old Matt.

Then he clumped through the door, down the sagging steps. His boots made dull, thudding noise in the night and died away to a faint shuffle.

### *3: Handprints of Horror*

LAURA pressed her hand to burning temples. No one believed her, not even the Sheriff. Yet— faint hope— he had promised help. He was efficient, he knew the woods. Perhaps...

A dull ache pervaded her being. Somehow, she knew that Beasley would never find Frank. That skull-faced man with the whip, driving his chained maniacs along— no human being could find him. A little moan parted her gelid lips.

Old Matt Kroll stirred. His shrunken visage was a faint blur behind the counter. "What ye aim to do now, Miss' Standish?" His voice was high and querulous.

Laura started. She had forgotten he was still there. Suddenly she was afraid of this store of flickering, yellow shadows, of the weazened storekeeper whose rheumy eyes blinked like those of a cat.

"I— I am going back home," she gasped. "Perhaps my husband has returned. Perhaps it was all— " She was near the door, poised for flight. She stopped, lifted a bewildered hand to her forehead. Was it possible that it was all a dreadful dream; that she had never seen...?

Matt pressed the counter with stiff fingers. Driving terror cracked his voice. "Don't ye do that, Miss Standish! Fer God's sake, don't ye go back t' that place. Stay here in the village. I'll put ye up in my place, only don't go back. If it's— "

He broke off, clamped his trembling lips tight. He had said too much. But Laura shook her head wearily. "I must," she said very low. "If Frank is there, he'll need me. I— thanks— "

She fled out into the cool air, driving her aching limbs through the murky dark again. Matt's quavering accents followed her, hoarse with warning, with fear. "Don't go! Wait, I want to— "

But the dense, marching trees swallowed his words. Up and up she climbed, up to the base of Superstition Mountain where their cottage nestled— the secluded, lonely house in which they had planned to spend such a lovely summer. Laura's lips drew back in a bitter groan even as she flogged her way through the impenetrable darkness. Each tree was a thing of menace, behind which lurked a maniac with glaring eyes; each whisper of wind in the branches the crackling hiss of the whip; each rock that loosened beneath her pounding feet clashed with the sound of chains.

But one driving purpose held her from going mad, from falling headlong, a gibbering, screaming thing, in the crowding forest. Frank was home— waiting for her, wondering where she was, worrying! All the men in the store had said so. Dr. Carey was sure of it. They ought to know; they knew this place and all its tales. She must have imagined it, of course. Something that she had heard in the village and forgotten, had troubled her dreams in front of the waning fire. She had slept, hadn't she? She pumped air into her gasping lungs. It was all very natural. She hadn't awakened until much later, with the dream thick upon her, and she had rushed out like a madman. How Frank would laugh and scold her in that gentle way of his! How the village folk would gossip and whisper about her nerves behind her back. She could never face them again. But— and dread cramped her limbs again— they had *known.* She had seen it in their faces, in the way they had slunk from her presence as if she were a

plague. She lashed on in the Stygian gloom, heedless of ripping branches, and stumbling feet. What terrible conspiracy of silence had been wrapped around her; what awful thing was being hidden from her?

They *knew* what had happened to her husband. They knew, and the blood had drained from their faces, had locked their lips in frozen fear!

The faint starshine disclosed the clearing ahead, the place where the chained madmen— and Frank— had clanked on their way to Hell. Nothing was there now, nothing but slinking shadows and a blob of trees. She turned up the path, with feet that suddenly dragged. Her heart was a pounding trip hammer. Anticipation squeezed her skull. Soon she would know...

The house loomed like an unquiet shadow. A faint flicker of red peeped out at her, died into the merest glimmer. Her heart stopped pumping; she swayed, forced herself erect again. It was true then. She had not dreamt. The door lay on the porch just as it had fallen, and that little whisper of flame was the dying hearth-fire in the living room.

She moved forward like an automaton. Nothing mattered now. Frank was in chains, a maniac, held in thrall for some frightful purpose. There was nothing for her to live for— nothing!

Without knowing what she did, she entered the living room. A dim glow of red stained the bottom of the fireplace. Soon it would be gone, and the advancing shadows would claim the place for their own. She shivered and life flooded her veins again.

Oh God, what would she do, alone here, surrounded by creeping shapes, encompassed in darkness? She must have a fire, a great, roaring, blazing fire, to chase the grinning maniacs back to their lairs, to keep her from going mad through the long, dreadful hours before daylight. There was a stack of wood in the alcove recess the other side of the hearth. Frank had chopped it, and sawn it into neat lengths only that morning. How faint and far away it all seemed!

Good Lord? What was that? She stopped dead in her tracks, whirled around to face the door. She wanted to scream and could not; icy fingers slithered along her spine.

Something was coming up the path, dragging, shuffling, as if... Dread encased her in a gelid sheath, held her in a death-like grip. Up the stairs to the porch the Thing dragged leaden feet, its breath, loud in the stillness, was like a whine. For a moment it hesitated, and the panting grew heavier. Then, slowly, very slowly, it dragged across the creeping boards. Laura felt as if she were in a press that ground her bones to powder and crushed her frozen flesh into a million splinters. Shrieks tore her throat yet could not issue.

Something dim and shadowy bulked in the doorway. It swayed, straightened, turned its blurry head from side to side. Then, pad— pad... it was coming in!

The bonds of terror broke. Her body flooded with roaring flame. Shriek after shriek burst from her throat. The figure jerked to a halt, then raced forward.

"Laura!"

Laura shrank away. Had terror turned her brain, made her insane? But there was nothing unreal about the arms that gripped her tight, the tremulous flow of endearing expressions, tenderness known only to the two of them. It was Frank who held her close, so close that the thumping of her heart was one with the equally loud pounding of his own; it was Frank whose mouth sought hungrily for hers. The ecstacy, the reaction, was too much for her. With a little moan she sank limp in his arms.

It must have been only a minute after that she awoke dizzily. Fresh wood on the hearth had just caught, and the yellow-blue flames were licking greedily up the sizzling pitch that exuded from the pine. Frank was bending over her, his face in the shadows.

"Frank darling, what a dreadful nightmare I had. Can you imagine— I thought you were chained to madmen, that you too were...? But it's all over now. You're back, you're really back!" She extended aching arms. "Kiss me, dearest."

Why did he stiffen against her questing arms? Why did he keep his face averted in the shadows? A terrible fear flared through her bursting veins. She lashed upward to her feet from the couch on which she had been extended; she caught the hand that hung limply at his side. The contact sent a chill to her heart; it was so icy cold.

Terror seized her again. She dragged him by main force to the fire, kicked with backward heel at the logs on the grate. They flared into a blaze of sparks. The shadows ebbed away from her, from her husband. He tried to disengage himself, to jump back into the fleeing darkness, but she gripped him with desperate strength.

"Frank!" The anguish of her voice beat about him like surf on a rocky shore. His face! Oh God, *his face!*

It was blank and grey in the stormy red of the fire. It was cold and hard and bruised, but the bruises had been washed with painstaking care. In that first moment, his eyes, those eyes that had always glowed with tender love at the sight of his wife, had held a secret glare, a wild, fearful light she had never seen before.

But even as she shrieked, something else struggled in their depths; something excited, that tried to mask itself into a poor replica of that former tenderness. A wan smile flitted over his grey countenance that chilled her blood even more than the earlier blankness. Frank was trying to conceal himself from her, to mask from her wifely eyes the hell that raged beneath.

"Laura," he muttered, "don't be afraid. Everything— will— be all right!" How terribly strange and stiff his voice sounded; with what effort he spoke!

She shrank away from him. "Then it was true, all of it!" she gasped.

"I don't know what you mean," he said thickly. "Nothing's true. You've been dreaming."

Oh God, he too thought that! Or was he pretending, as he would if he were really— mad? For the first time in her life, she felt fear in the presence of her husband. What had those monsters done to him?

She stared frenziedly at his clothes. They were no longer in disarray, as they had been— out there. They had been brushed, smoothed out; but a sleeve was rent— a tear showed on trouser leg. His coat was close about him, as if to hide some dreadful thing beneath.

"Tell me the truth!" She came close, caught his shoulders, glared into his eyes. He tried to pull away, but she held him fiercely. "Tell me— everything! I am your wife. I won't desert you, Frank. I'll care for you, I'll nurse you— " her voice broke, "back to health. Only tell me!"

"There's nothing to tell," he said vaguely, and his gaze slithered past her. "But I must be getting back; there are things I must do. But you," and for the first time the warmth of human emotion crept into his voice, "you must not stay here, Laura. You must go to the village at once, to Dr. Carey. Stay there until you hear from me again. And for God's sake, in the name of our love, of all that we meant to each other, do not ask me any more questions now, and do not stir from Dr. Carey's house until you hear from me. Do you understand? No matter what else you hear or see!"

His voice was urgent, imploring now. He gripped her slender arms with fingers that were chilled with cold. His eyes swung to hers; in their depths was driving desperation, but— thank God!— no trace of madness. Laura swayed happily. Her husband was sane, sane as she was! The whole thing had been a confused nightmare! She had mistaken someone else who resembled him in that furtive, shimmering moonlight. He wanted to protect her; he knew there were unclean Things on the mountain. She would not ask questions.

"All right, Frank," she murmured, "I'll do as you say."

Again she saw that strange gleam in his eyes. He dropped his hold, tugged at his coat pocket. His arm came out, holding a small flashlight.

"Here!" he said with queer, strained voice once more. "I got it in the village for you. You'll need it to show you the road."

She reached for it dully. His long, lean hand was out, extended, holding the black cylinder with scrubbed fingers. The sleeve of his coat fell back a bit. No shirt cuff showed. His wrist protruded, bare and white. *Bare and...!*

The flashlight dropped with a clatter to the floor. She had seen! Oh God, she had seen! Everything was true, everything! The house rocked before her fainting vision, her husband's face swung in a hideous, distorted arc. A whimper of fear wheezed in her throat.

Frank caught her haunted gaze, followed it stupidly to its focus on his exposed wrist. A broad red mark encircled his flesh, a sinister band against the dead-white pallor of his arm. A metal manacle had dug deep into that skin and shrinking flesh; *a manacle which had been recently removed*.

His eyes came up smoldering, then flared with strange lights. His lips worked madly; he mouthed thick, indistinguishable words. Laura shrank back from the man who was her husband. Terror fought with the great love she had borne him. In a delirious flash, she saw everything. Frank had come back to her— a madman! He was no longer the man she had loved. He had come back, transformed, bestial, crafty with the perverted cunning of the insane, to entice her into the woods, where his fellow creatures could pounce upon her, could...!

She flung up a warding hand. Her horror-warped mind burst into a flare of rocketing lights. Toneless shrieks tore her frame to shreds.

Her husband too!— a step forward, hands clawing out. She stumbled back, back until her heel thudded against solid wall. Then, suddenly, he stopped, listened with tense fixity. Outside, from far away, came a faint, terrible sound. The unmistakable hiss of a whip slashing through the night.

Frank seemed to hesitate. His clouded gaze swung irresolutely from his whimpering wife to the door. The whip cracked again, nearer, louder. One quick, startled glance and he was racing toward the door, racing as if— oh God!— his master was calling him!

The bonds of fear fell from Laura. One desperate thought hammered at her brain. He was going back, back to that troupe of the damned, back to the Hell from which he had come. He was leaving her forever!

She started away from the wall; she stumbled across the expanse of floor. Tears blinded her eyes, weariness locked her limbs to nightmare slowness.

"Frank, come back to me! Frank, don't go; don't leave me!" she wailed. But he did not hear; he could not hear. Out there in the woods, black with the blackness of Hell, came swift, rustling sounds. Then a sudden crash, followed by a silence thick with unknown terror.

Laura stumbled out on the porch, tripped, fell headlong to hard, unyielding boards. Somewhere, far off, before she drifted into oblivion, a Thing raised its voice in an eerie, gloating chuckle?

An ape-like maniac pressed close over her rigid body. Laura could feel the glare in his red-rimmed eyes, the fetor of his breath. His hands slithered clammily under her shoulder; something hard and unutterably cold pressed against her ribs. A chain rattled loud in her ear.

With a faint shriek, she opened her eyes. Dim in the starlight, a figure bulked heavily over her. Even as fear parted her lips, it moved away; the small, hard object lifted. The chain gleamed yellow against a rounded background.

Dr. Alva Carey clucked soothingly as he crammed his stethoscope back into his vest pocket, jingled his watch chain. "You gave me quite a turn, Laura— finding you stretched out unconscious like that. But you're all right."

Slowly Laura's fuddled senses focused on reality again. For a moment she stared upward at the rubicund, kindly-seeming face of the rotund doctor. There was something in his eyes that he tried to hide; something that belied the cheerfulness of his smile. She tottered to her feet. Fear beat with thudding wings against her ribs. What was masked behind that smile? What had he been about to do before she wakened?

Dr. Carey moved toward her. How carefully casual was his voice. "Frank Come back yet?" he asked.

Frank! Laura glared wildly around. Great God, had she forgotten? The broken door leered vacantly back at her; the woods were a darkling, sinister stretch; Superstition Mountain reared its vast, inaccessible bulk directly to the rear— a gigantic, truncated mass of stone against a frost-blue sky.

She wrung her bleeding hands. "He— he's gone again," she wailed. "He was here, mad, like the rest. Then— then, the whip cracked, calling for him, and he went. I must have fainted." All former fears were forgotten in the agony of that terrible recital. Frank, her husband, was gone forever— a maniac! She caught hold of the doctor's sleeve with imploring, desperate gesture. "Dr. Carey," she cried, "you must find him; you must save him."

The doctor pulled away. His eyes were hard, blue pebbles and they refused to meet her anguished ones. They stole surreptitiously to the flattened top of the mountain, flicked away again. "I'll see what I can do," he muttered evasively. "In the meantime," he continued, and for the first time he stared directly at the girl, "I want you— "

She shrank away as he moved closer. She was suddenly afraid of this doctor who had mocked at her story in the village, who had appeared without explanation at this place in the heart of the woods, and who looked at her so strangely...

He reached out to lay his hand on her arm. Laura jerked blindly away, whirled to run, when both froze in their tracks as if turned to stone. Far off— so far it seemed to emanate from the distant sky— came a long-drawn-out howl. It was the howl of a man in the last agony of pain; it was the bitter cry of a human being whom torture had bereft of reason. It was the voice of Frank Standish!

Close on its heels came a fainter sound, muffled but unmistakable and sinister in its implications. The sharp hiss of a whip lashing across a bared, slashed back. Hiss, crack, swish! But no further answering noise from a tortured throat. Then all was silence again, as if the shuddering sky had closed its portals against such dreadful deeds.

Laura's flesh crawled on her skeleton; red lightning thundered in her skull. With an inarticulate moan she tottered forward, stumbled, and fell. Dr. Carey stood momentarily motionless on the porch. The starshine shimmered with ghastly pallor on his rounded form. His ruddy smoothness had become grim and hard and grey. His eyes were fuliginous flares. His lips writhed in grey distortion. "So they've started!" he snarled.

The next instant, he was pounding down the steps, over the clearing, up the rutted lumber road toward the mountain. Over his shoulder he yelled in a queer, harsh voice: "Stay where you are, Laura! Don't you dare leave the place!" Then all sound ceased, and the woods became alive with stealth and the noiseless groping of eerie Things.

Laura rose unsteadily to her feet. Her limbs were water-weak; her skin, a prickling sheath of horror. But one consuming thought blazed in her brain. It seared all fears— all dread for her own safety— to shriveled, tenuous wisps.

Frank had cried out like a mindless animal; Frank was in the clutch of a Devil who drove the creatures he had made mad with whip and clanking chains. She, and she alone, must save her husband!

But where was he? From what distant lair in that ominous, far-spreading forest had that tortured wail emanated? She clenched her lips until the blood came. Despair overwhelmed her. The woods billowed like a waveless ocean, vast, interminable. No further sound drifted to her straining ears. That strange, roaring noise she heard was the pounding of her own blood.

Suddenly she stiffened. Superstition Mountain! The great, truncated block of primeval stone slashed the star-studded brambles, scrambling through rubble and sky like a grotesque Titan. Its treeless, granite flanks scowled down upon her with lowering laughter. Dr. Carey had flicked his surreptitious glance at its ominous bulk, had looked hastily away when he thought she saw. At Frank's last anguished shriek, he had raced up the old lumber road— the twin,

dirt tracks that dwindled to a trail and died abruptly at the grim up-thrust of the barrier wall.

Dim, half heard stories swarmed her fevered brain, crawled into every nook and cranny of her mind. Stories she had heard on the few occasions she had gone with Frank to the village to get their mail, to buy supplies. Stories that had been mumbled around the inevitable pot-bellied stove in the General Store, of strange lights that gleamed on certain moonless nights on the sawed-off top of Superstition Mountain, where no human being had ever climbed. In the dim, long past, hardier men than those who now inhabited the faded village of Squam had tried to scale those sheer, granite walls. None had ever returned; no trace of their bodies had ever been found.

It was they, claimed the villagers with bated breath, who, neither dead nor alive, were doomed to a dreadful eternity on the inaccessible top of the mountain. Their thin shrieks were heard on still nights as they bent under the lash of the Devil who drove them on his hellish business. They— and others who had gone into the woods since then and never returned. Death came from causes unknown, from drowning in Bottomless Pond, from the wildcats that still lurked in the farther forest, from accidental discharge of their own guns. But the natives of Squam knew better, and cowered at night under blankets when the lightnings played over that grim, stony mass and the crackling thunders were dreadfully like the crack of a snaking whip.

Frank had laughed at those stories raucously, and she herself, intent on her purchases from old Matt Kroll, had smiled at with half-absent thoughts. Only Lem, the cobbler atheist, and Dr. Carey, of the village folk, had not believed, and Lem alone had aired his opinions with harsh contempt.

### *4: Trail of Despair*

LAURA'S body became rigid with sudden driving purpose. She clattered over the fallen door into the parlor. The fire in the hearth had died to dull, grey ashes; the boards creaked loudly underneath. But her seeking foot crunched against the flashlight Frank had dropped. She groped for it, found it. A flick of a frozen finger and a thin pencil of white light stabbed through the murk.

Out into the moonless night again, flogging her numbed limbs along under the whip of her will. Hurry! Hurry! The elongated oval of luminance pierced like a pointing sword before her. She raced across the open patch, thudded with slim, high-heeled shoes over the rough, uneven ruts of the road.

The woods raced with her. The trees bent down over the trail, plucked at her with slithering branches. The ground heaved and rocked unevenly with her insane flight. Unseen shapes padded stealthily through the black masses on

either side, closing in on her with furtive gait. The stars gleamed wanly overhead and shed no radiance. The beam bored a tunnel of whiteness through the solid blackness, and tilted up and up. The road was climbing.

The road became the trail and then a thread of forgotten hooves. The trees were giving way to stunted firs, to tangled underbrush. Superstition Mountain hulked ominously above.

On and on she drove, the breath wheezing in her lungs, her heart a squeezing gout of blood. She held her eyes desperately ahead, focused on the beam that bobbed before her. She dared not look behind. That insistent sound was merely the thump of her own heart, the pounding in her own ears. But even as she clamored it to herself, she knew that it was not true.

*Someone, something, was following her up the trail, was even now increasing its pace!*

God, they were coming for her! The Things that were chained, the horde which had claimed her husband! They were coming to drag her, shrieking insanely, to their Master— he of the lash and horrible, white head.

Faster and faster she fled, heedless of twining saplings up the first slope of the mountain. Behind her, loud with doom, were pantings that were not her own— gusty sounds that did not issue from her throat. It seemed as if they were calling her, trying to slow down her pistoning limbs.

Her fingers froze to the flash. Her lungs were bellows without any air. The Thing behind was gaining. Soon it would be upon her, would...!

Insanity poured its gibbering turmoil into her brain. Laura did not know she was running and sobbing wildly now, did not know that even the trail was gone, that the mountain was a sky-climbing wall just ahead. One maniacal desire hammered at the confines of her skull. She must see this Thing that pursued her through the night, she must laugh shrill and loud in its face. Face? Perhaps it had no face; perhaps it was an insubstantial horror, an excrescence out of Hell. No matter. The desire to laugh, to shrill out her answering mockery, became an overwhelming madness.

She thrust her corpse-rigid head back over her shoulder. Her features glared with impending insanity. In her delirium, she did not realize that her back was against granite now, pressing into it with numb, icy flesh. She did not see the silent shape that rose like mist of the underworld out of the solid blackness of the mountain that moved toward her without a sound, with shadowy tentacles outspread...

ALL her shattering faculties were strained on the Thing behind, still clambering and puffing up the grade. She whipped her electric torch suddenly downward, back over the trackless waste she had just climbed.

The white pencil of flame flashed on a scrambling figure that jerked backward in startled fear. It held for a split instant on a swarthy, bony face, on eyes that gleamed like live, dark coals. The pursuer opened his mouth, and hoarse, strangled sounds spewed forth. Then his eyes flicked to one side of her. They went wide with desperate, grinding terror. With a great bound, he heaved out of the oval of radiance, into the blackness of the encompassing bushes. Shrill cries accompanied his sliding, plunging retreat down the rubble-covered mountainside.

Laura thrust back her head and laughed. There was madness in that laughter; there were fiery worms seething in her brain. But her limbs shook and her teeth unlocked.

It had been Lem— the cobbler of Squam, the village atheist— who had followed her, who had fled before the slash of the electric torch! She was safe now, safe to seek her husband, to get him away from the devils of the mountain.

The thought of Frank chased the crawling things from her skull, brought her back to sanity. She turned to force her way upward again. As she swung around, a shadowy shape flowed over her.

Suddenly she was enveloped in clinging, clammy folds. Her screams strangled in her throat, her flailing hands beat vainly against insubstantial softness. Something sickeningly sweet seeped into her consciousness. Her thoughts drifted slowly away. She tried to reach out for them, to hold them tight. Her mind tottered, fell into a bottomless pit of blackness. From far up, almost from the sky itself, came a low, snarling chuckle.

There was something wrong with this place. It was true it was night and her eyes were still closed in sleep. But this was not her bedroom on the upper floor of the summer cottage. Laura stirred uneasily, moaned in her drugged daze. She thrust out a lethargic arm, as she always did when she dreamt and the things she dreamed were frightening. The feel of Frank's firm, warm flesh, the little ridge of muscle along his shoulder blade, always comforted her, always soothed her trembling nightmare fears back to the sweet drowse of untroubled sleep.

But now nothing met her questing fingers, nothing but chill, dank air and hard, damp stone. The dull ache in her head exploded into hurtling shards; the clinging, sickening embrace fled from her limbs. Her pain-heavy lids swung open; her bewildered eyes fluttered like frightened birds. A scream ached in her throat, jittered thinly through her lips. She pulled leaden limbs upright from the rocky floor on which she had been sprawled.

She had not been dreaming! It was no nightmare that vanished with a touch, with the first level streamer of light through the east-facing window.

Terror flooded her being anew, locked her throat tight. She glared wildly around. Where was she? Where had that shapeless Thing which rose out of the depths of Hell transported her? Was she dead and buried beneath whelming earth in a vaulted grave?

All around, enclosing her like a living tomb, was rock and solid, curving stone. Shiny black it was, spangled with innumerable pinpoints of fire that lit up the whole round of the chamber with a ghastly, eerie light. Alive and gloating they seemed, those pinpoints, like baleful eyes mocking her whichever way she turned. The strange radiance bathed her shrinking form in a yellowish aura of flame. It seemed to flow through her silken dress, to tingle with prickling fingers against her skin. It seemed to slither into her quaking flesh, to munch with greedy, invisible mouths at her very bones.

Suddenly she was afraid; unreasoningly, instinctively afraid of the ghastly, probing light which emanated from the walls. More afraid even than she had been of the madman who had heaved against her door, of the stumbling, manacled Things who had been whipped through the woods. Her whole body felt unclean, her skin crawled under the impact of those strange, unholy flares. The strength seemed to ebb from her body, from her bones. They could not longer support her.

Laura swayed blindly toward the nearer wall. Her smarting eyes lowered, blinking against the weird luminance. She jerked backward with a choked cry. Horror stiffened her spine, held her rigid and unmoving.

There, at her very feet, lay a row of ghastly, frightful Things. Things that had once been men, and now were unmentionable decay. Nude corpses from which the clothes had long since rotted, glowing in the pale, yellow glare with a terrible greenish putrescence of their own.

The hard, virescent flesh was pitted and gouged— as if fanged, unhuman monsters had munched their hideous meals; the eyes were holes, that yawned in flesh-less, grinning skulls; the jaw bones were crusted with dull, grey powder.

Corpses of men, dead for years, on whom the flesh had grown green and hard and pitted; corpses who had been carefully laid out in a grinning, dreadful row for her to see!

Laura's skull squeezed like the metal cap on a condemned man's head; rivers of ice pounded through her veins, crashed sickeningly within her heart. Merciful Heaven! These were the men of long ago who had dared scale the prohibited heights of Superstition Mountain, who had paid for their temerity with their lives. What demons out of Hell had done this to them? What fiends had thrust them in this gruesome chamber where the very walls flayed them

with unholy light? Light that pitted and burned and seared— and held from natural decay...

Suddenly Laura knew that this was to be her fate; that she too was doomed to scrutiny from the myriad, baleful eyes hidden in the shiny, black walls. She knew that she too would soon be a gouged and green-glowing Thing, immured for all eternity with these others.

Great, tearing shrieks ripped from her pallid lips, shrieks that mounted and soared to the bursting point of madness. She dashed insanely from side to side, beating on the light-studded walls with bleeding hands. Her stumbling feet kicked against a phosphorescent corpse. They sank deep into moldy powder; ghastly dust that rose in a suffocating cloud. The solid-seeming Thing her shoe had touched had disintegrated into nothingness.

She jumped back, pressed her burning eyeballs with frantic fingers. Insanity knocked with peremptory summons at her brain. Her limbs twitched and her lips were a frozen orifice through which terror and madness went rocketing.

A thump penetrated somehow to her shrieking senses. What was that? She whirled just in time to see a yawning hole in the wall, to see two figures come clumping through.

Now surely, she was mad, even as Frank had been. Shrill laughter, more terrible than any scream, burbled from her lips. An insane husband and a maniac wife! What a perfect couple to roam the world together! She must find Frank and tell him of the jest. It rocked her sides and tore at her bones. Frank! She must go to him, tell him...!

If she were not mad, how could she have imagined these figures who stood motionless before her? First, a tomb of rock with a million glaring eyes; then corpses that flamed with a cold green fire, and crumbled into powder at her touch. Now these...!

They were huge, shapeless Things with grey, amorphous sides and fingerless appendages— monstrous beasts that stared at her unblinkingly out of round, glassy eyes set in grey globes that served for heads. Motionless, sinister, appalling! Like metal monsters they seemed to Laura's half-mad mind, spawned in the bowels of the earth; soulless beings obedient only to the will of Satan.

They stirred simultaneously into clanking movement. Their huge, hoof-like feet lifted, thumped down with metallic sound. Their dangling arms, grey and scaly, spread wide to engulf her.

The screeching laughter died in Laura's throat. A cold wind stirred her hot, dry skin, shivered down her spine. The madness fled and terror took its place. The monsters were coming for her!

Whimpering, she shrank back from their gelid embrace. On and on they came, with doomful, inexorable tread, the thump of their grey-shod feet loud in her ears. Back, ever back, forcing her closer and closer to the chrome-spangled rock, while the row of silent, green-tinged corpses grinned up at her with pockmarked laughter. Back, back, while her yielding feet stumbled and slid, and whimpers of fear grew to hopeless shrieks.

The monsters did not seem to hear; their glazed eyes did not waver. Laura felt smooth rock press against her back. She had reached the limits of the cavern. Pain lanced suddenly through her flesh; a thousand stinging arrows of fire. She swerved desperately away, just as a grey-skinned monster plucked with fingerless, shapeless hand for her body.

She stopped short, whirled again. The other loomed in her path, blocking with metal body and terrifying head all escape. Moaning, she darted back and forth in short, frenzied runs while the gruesome pair slowly and undeniably closed in, as if intent to crush her frail body between their unyielding forms.

An arm extended clumsily, swung around her slender waist. A baleful, unwinking sphere bent over her. Within that glassy eye, Laura sensed malignant hate, destroying lust. The touch of that whipping arm was icy hard to her quivering body...

With a last despairing scream Laura rebounded from the gelid contact. Blind, mad with terror, she lunged forward, low, like a wrestler. Her soft flesh smashed against a steel-hard leg, caromed off in a sprawling dive that carried her under a down-clutching arm. She was free for the moment.

But the monsters were already turning, slowly, clumsily. Strangled snarls of rage sounded in what might have been throats. They were coming for her again...

Laura pushed her trembling limbs erect. Where, in this place of horror, was there safety from the underworld Things? She shrank again from their thudding approach. This time they would get her; this time she could not escape!

The breath seemed frozen in her lungs, her legs were flowing water. She could not continue to fight. For the last time, she glared wildly around at the circumscribing rock with its unholy sparkle.

A grey monster lunged forward, just missing Laura as she leaped. But she had seen, and hope flared like a beacon light in her brain. Off to one side yawned round blackness. It was the opening in the stony wall through which the subterranean denizens had penetrated. What lay beyond she did not know; what dreadful horrors awaited her she did not pause to think. It was her only chance; and even now, as she hesitated, the farther creature seemed to

read her thoughts. He quickened his clumsy gait; in another second, his metal form would be between her and the beckoning cavity.

She pivoted on her heel and ran madly for the opening. Muffled howls crashed in her ear drums; then blackness swallowed her whole. Her feet raced across the stony ground, forced her panting form up and up what seemed an endless tunnel. Behind her, the thick murk was loud with the pounding noise of pursuit. Laura sped on, caroming off invisible walls, bruising her tender flesh against sudden projections, slipping, stumbling, sobbing, squeezing her tortured lungs for the last reserve ounce of energy.

Then suddenly, the pursuing sounds ceased, and she was alone, in solid darkness. She leaned against a damp, cold wall, all strength gone. For what seemed hours, she swayed against the supporting rock, waiting for her pounding heart to slow to normal action; for her blood to stop its mad mill-race through her veins.

And all the while, her every sense was straining, listening for sounds or signs that the monsters had caught up to her. But the strange, breathless silence continued...

Were those grey denizens lurking back in the tunnel, blocking escape in that direction? Were they chuckling, even now, in those muffled, snarling tones of theirs, knowing that worse lay ahead for her; that soon she would rebound, desperately, madly, to welcome even their horror rather than what was at the end of the tunnel? But mercifully, she did not know...

Slowly her limbs resumed their functioning; slowly her brain clicked back to a semblance of coherent thought. She must think clearly if she were ever to get out of this frightful place.

Where was she? The enshrouding rock returned no answer, but she knew. The shadowy Thing had attacked her at the base of Superstition Mountain; when she awoke from her drugged unconsciousness, she was in a cavern; now she was in a tunnel of solid stone. That meant that somehow she had been carried into the very bowels of the granite upthrust; that even now, millions of tons of solid rock pressed down upon her.

Laura repressed the shudder of fear that rippled over her. Evil things were happening within Superstition Mountain, macabre beings swarmed in its womb who seemed not of earth or its denizens. And Frank, her husband? A pang pierced her heart. Where was he; what was being done to him in his mind-clouded state? What dreadful use was being made of him— of those other chained, bestial madmen who had clanked with bowed, brutish heads down the lumber path?

She started up again, aching for her husband. She must find him. Somewhere ahead, in the darkling upward swing of this mountain bore, lay the

secret— and Frank! She must be brave; she must not give way to that shrieking madness again. Either she would win, or— well— life meant nothing without the man she loved...

*5: Temple of Torment*

LAURA put out her hand to find the wall. Its icy cold sent a shiver up her arm. She moved carefully along, feeling her way, trying to make no noise. But her heels clicked terrifyingly loud on the stone. For what seemed endless hours, she stumbled ever up and round and round in an ascending spiral.

In God's name when would this end? Suddenly she froze to the supporting wall. She pressed against its frosty surface as if she would push herself through the very rock. Nightmare terror encased her in a moveless shroud; retching nausea heaved at her stomach.

Somewhere, far ahead, came a dread, familiar sound. The clank, clank of chains dragging against stone. The manacled maniacs were coming for her!

Oh God, she could not stand this any longer! Behind her were the metal creatures, waiting for her in the cave of a thousand horrors. In front were madmen with brutish faces and gloating, red-lusting eyes. She was trapped, she had no way to turn, to run.

The clanking grew louder. The rock magnified the sound, the tunnel air caught it and threw it with unholy glee from wall to wall. *Pad, pad* went the naked feet.

Laura pressed tighter to the rock. A tiny flicker of hope pierced her frenzy. The steady, padding march was that of a single pair of misshapen feet. Perhaps, in the blanketing dark, he would not see her; perhaps he would pass her by unknowing.

She steeled herself for the supreme effort. He was closer now. She could hear the sharp rattle of chains, the banging sound they made as they struck against the rock. Bare feet pressed the stone with a sinister, sucking sound. Low, snuffling whimpers preceded him as he shuffled ceaselessly along, closer and closer. Already she could smell the peculiar fetor of the bestial mad, an effluvia that turned her stomach and made her faint with its foulness.

Here he was, snuffling and whining like an ailing dog. The noise of his groping approach was overwhelming. Laura bit her lips to keep back the terror that welled within her; she bruised her flesh in a mad attempt to make herself one with the wall. She held her breath until her lungs were suffocating and bright lights danced before her eyes.

Oh God, please make him go on; please make him miss me! He was almost abreast now; his fetid breath was a foul exhalation. Thank God, he was moving ahead! Thank God!

Laura gulped in air and froze again. He had stopped. In the pitchy blackness, nothing could be seen. But all sound had ceased, even the whimpering noises in his throat. The silence pressed down on Laura's skull with unbearable weights. He had heard that sudden intake of breath.

She dared not move, dared not make the faintest noise. Somewhere in the tar-barrel murk crouched the madman, waiting with perverted cunning for her to betray herself. A hideous game of hide and seek in which she was the mouse.

Death-like stillness, more terrible than any noise, grew hideously. An enveloping glare of unseen eyes; the stale, rank odor of an animal's den tainted the air. Laura swayed faintly. She fought to hold herself erect, to control the shuddering of her body.

A grim, premonitory clank came to her. The maniac was tired of waiting. His chains dragged, and his bare feet made shuffling sound. Along the wall came the slithering noise of a sliding, pressing hand. *He was coming back for her!*

Every nerve shrieked madly for her to run. But he knew this tunnel and she did not. She could never escape. Her only chance was to stay— motionless, soundless, hoping. Oh God! Flashes of burning heat and unutterable cold swept over her quivering form. She was suffocating, bursting with an agony of fear. The slobbering of his brutish lips was loud in her ears.

Something brushed against her side. A long, choked scream tore from her throat at that contact; she flogged her fainting body away; she tried to run. Too late! A great, hairy arm whipped out, caught her in a grip of steel. A hoarse, avid cackle came out of the darkness. The next instant, her thrashing form was lifted into the air. An overpowering stench enfolded her, and she was being carried swiftly— where...?

How long that dreadful journey took Laura was never able to tell. Mercifully, her mind was misted, unraveled by the very horror of her situation. It was the sudden cessation of movement— the murmur of strange voices— that roused her from her torpor.

Her captor had crouched against the wall; the thick gurgling in his throat had ceased. His filthy fingers dug deep into her form. Feet were moving up the tunnel.

A harsh voice raised in anger. The echoes made it hollow, artificial. "You damned fools!" it said. "You let her get away. If she finds her way out"

"It wasn't our fault, Boss," someone else whined placatingly. "It's those suits what did it. A fellow can't even turn properly in one o' them there things."

"Don't be worryin'," a third coarse voice spoke up. "She ain't got a chance t' get out. We'll find her fast enough, and then— " He chuckled, but there was no mirth in that chuckle.

"God help you if you don't," growled the one they called the Boss. He sounded nervous.

They were passing close by now, feet thudding in unison. Laura opened her mouth to scream, to cry out for help. They were at least human beings; perhaps there was mercy in their souls. There could be none in her captor.

But the madman sensed her movement. A great paw clamped down on her mouth, stifling the sound in her throat, choking her with vile odors.

Then the noise was further up, fainter and fainter, until it blanked out. Not until then did the maniac move. The retching noise in his throat was horribly like a paean of triumph. He moved swiftly again, heedless of clanking ends of chains, as if he knew he had nothing now to fear.

Laura gave herself up wholly for lost. The escaped madman was taking her to his secret lair, and then...?

Light glimmered ahead. It was yellow and dim, but it grew stronger as they progressed. Laura opened her pain-haunted eyes. The tunnel was widening. Then they were in a great, irregular cavern. Blinding lights flashed into her face, lights that stabbed and burned her body. Once more, she felt as if the bones were rotting within her shriveling flesh.

The jagged walls were alive with a million yellow sparkles, just as the smaller cave beneath. The black, gleaming rock was cut and hewn, and mounds of fragments and broken chunks flamed with a wild, unholy luster at regularly spaced intervals. It was a place of evil, of stifling, almost unbreathable atmosphere.

Her captor growled like a wolf whose hackles bristled against an unknown enemy. He seemed to sense the frightful burden of this blazing cavern, and hastened his shambling walk almost to a run. The chains clanked dismally behind him. Once more, his paw clamped over Laura's mouth, shutting off all sound.

Again the cavern narrowed, became another tunnel. The terrible luminescence was left behind, but another and ruddier radiance cast its flare ahead. Cool, night air flowed with reviving vigor over her pain-wracked body; helped mitigate the stupefying effluvia of the beast-man who pressed her close to his filth-stiffened shirt.

Somehow, she knew that here was the end of the journey; here would come the tremendous denouement to this night of terror and horror. What dreadful scene was she, a captive to a mindless beast, about to witness?

He was going slowly, cautiously now. His chains made barely perceptible noise. The tunnel took a bend. A rude, plank door blocked the opening to the outer world, but the planks were rough and so nailed as to leave wide gaps between.

The mindless being crouched before a crack. His hairy paw tightened on Laura so that her breath was a choking gasp. The growl in his throat was a low rumble of hate. Fighting for air to fill her lungs, helpless in a grip of iron, Laura nevertheless peered out into the night with him.

Before her stretched level rock, the truncated top of Superstition Mountain. The night pressed down with cold, dead stars on the desolate stone. The winds swept in from the sinister emptiness of space.

A blood-red fire leaped and mouthed tongues of flame at the whistling blast. Shadowy figures silhouetted blackly against its ruddiness, vanished into encompassing darkness, and reappeared again like disembodied creatures of the void.

But it was not this that held Laura's wide, horror-filled gaze, and brought the shrieks gurgling against the broad, restraining paw. It was the smooth, round pit that yawned in the solid rock, almost beneath her very eyes.

Flames spilled gory shadows into that dreadful hole, and tossed in a bloody scarlet on the upraised faces that swirled within. Faces loomed there: snarling and bestial, more animal than the ape, more cruel in their mindlessness than the wolf. Foam dripped from their protruding, slobbering lips; howls of rage mingled with gruesome cackling and horrible laughter. Great hairy arms swung threateningly up at the figures who moved restlessly about the fire. The blood-red light glinted on manacled wrists and long, pendant chains. One up-thrust, naked arm held a long white bone, horribly like the thigh bone of a human being. The creature who brandished it was chuckling, and as he snarled his eerie laughter, he thrust the gruesome relic into his mouth, and crunched on it with sickening sound.

Laura moaned and gagged. Her stomach churned with queasy motion. These were the maniacs who had been driven down the lumber road in chains. These, and others like them. From this pit had her captor somehow twice escaped. From this pit, in which they were manacled and staked like bears for some dreadful sport.

Suddenly she twisted with superhuman strength in the madman's arms. She flung free for a moment, and a great shriek of desperation burst from her lips before the smothering hand could grip her down again.

She had seen— in that leaping, twisting, rattling, howling mob of the living dead— Frank, her husband! His lean face was stubbled with dirt and unshaven beard, his cheeks were hollow with straining madness— and he leaped and danced and howled wilder and louder than all the rest.

"Frank!" She screamed in the last extremity of agony at the sight of him.

Instantly, the platform of rock was a swirl of movement. The shadowed figures around the fire leaped toward the sound. The madmen whipped up their clamor to a hideous pitch. Frank, the man who only that morning had kissed her with understanding affection, seemed to hesitate a split second. Then he too went on with his interminable leaping and howling. He had not even turned his head.

Laura's captor whipped his great arm about her throat with a bestial snarl. She gasped and tried to struggle, but the cruel pressure cut off all air. Searing pain lanced her neck; blackness enveloped her.

Then, suddenly, the pressure relaxed. The maniac whimpered with fear, threw her crashing to the ground, and ran with a huge clangor of chains back the way he had come.

"Get the girl!" a hollow voice ordered. "Never mind the other. He will keep."

She was being lifted, carried out into the open. The cool night air cut across her fainting senses, the rushing wind stung her back to life. She opened her eyes slowly, closed them again with a long, shuddering moan. Three men stood over her, etched in the flare of the whipping flames.

Three men! Two she had never seen before, though vaguely she sensed that they had been the monsters of metal in the cave of yellow horror beneath. Now they were clad in white, shapeless pants and semi-sleeve shirts. They grinned at her with evil mockery and the little worms of lust crawled in their narrowed eyes. One was broad and thick and heavy-set, with the bullet head and brutal look of a battered pugilist. The other was like a swooping vulture, with huge, enormous nose, black, bent brows, and misshapen, flapping ears.

But it was the third man who had forced the moan from her pallid lips and thrust icy fingers down her spine. Yet he seemed more kindly— as he was more ancient— than his brutish companions. A black shroud swathed his spare form. A wrinkled, bony mask of white emerged in startling contrast from the midnight robe. The top of his skull was a hairless, grey expanse. White, bushy eyebrows projected incredibly over shadowed eyes. His mouth was thin and bloodless and his cheeks were of a queer, grey pallor.

This was the man with the whip, who had driven his manacled slaves along the road, who had slashed Frank across the back when he had stopped in

dumb vacuity before the house where his wife had crouched, shivering with terror.

The Boss motioned with his head. At once his two companions sprang to Laura, jerked her roughly to her feet. She swayed and could not stand. That bony face before her seemed alive with the wisdom of age, but something in those deep, shadowed eyes sent her heart hammering madly against her ribs. There was more of mercy in those drivelling maniacs in the pit than in this tall, spare, benevolent-seeming creature!

"What do you want of me?" she gasped. "What have you done to my— husband?" The word almost choked her. Frank in that pit of mindless men, dancing and leaping and shrieking... Oh God!

For a moment, the Boss stared motionlessly at the frightened girl. She tried to face him bravely but the thought of Frank made her wilt into a human pendulum, swung on the powerful arms of his minions.

"Ah, yes, your husband!" he said finally. His thin lips writhed into a fleshless smile, but the rest of his face did not move. His voice was like a rumbling echo, deep and hollow. "He will be useful to me. Already he is more a madman than the others. It took very little of the precious serum to blast his reason loose from his mind. Look at him, my dear, and see how he recognizes you!"

They swung her around on dragging feet to face the pit. The smooth, funnel-like depression became a bedlam of noise and clamor. The maniacs leaped high against their chains at the sight of her; raging lust inflamed their bestial countenances, dragged delirious howls from their maddened throats. And— "Dear God in Heaven, let me die now," she prayed— her husband leaped and yelled with the rest. His eyes glared at her without recognition, and his chains were a frenzy of clangor as they dragged him back from his jumpings.

"There you are, my dear," the Boss cackled. "He is indeed a prize. I'm sure he'll be the best worker I have."

Something snapped within Laura. She tore loose from the restraining arms, she jumped screaming and clawing for the beast who taunted her.

"You vile, filthy creature!" she shrieked. "You've made animals of men; you've made a living Hell for my husband. But you— you shall die!"

Her clawing fingers raked for his face. He jumped back with an oath of rage. His lean fingers plucked under his shroud, came out with a short, scimitar-like blade. She hurled herself forward again, ready to transfix herself upon the knife, if only she could reach that devilish countenance.

But the two henchmen were upon her. They caught her plunging form by the arms, wrenched backward until they almost tore them out of their sockets. Sobbing, gasping, whimpering, Laura glared with half-mad eyes at the Boss.

There was unutterable evil about his lips and in the blazing depths of his eyes. He fingered his blade meaningly. For one moment, it seemed as if he would drive it into her loud-clamoring heart. Then his eyes flicked past her to the pit, where the madmen were yammering more horribly than ever. His lips curled sinisterly.

"That would be the cream of the jest," he said thinly. He thrust back his head and laughed. That bloodless laugh sent chills down Laura's back, shriveled her heart to a small, motionless ball.

"Exactly," he nodded with self-satisfaction. "It will be great sport. I should have thought of that before. Now, listen to me, you little she-devil. Listen and faint with very terror. Know what I am doing before you— *die!*"

The significant pause before that final word, dreadful enough by itself, whipped the madness from her brain, brought in its place crawling maggots of fear.

"I have found in the depths of Superstition Mountain rich deposits of radium ore, the richest in the world. It was I who discovered the tunnels and caverns that lead all the way to the top where we now are standing. But the mountain belongs to some one else. He would not sell. So I am mining the ore in spite of him." He laughed horribly.

"Radium is terribly dangerous," he continued. "It burns the flesh away, it rots the bones. My men and myself use leaden helmets and lead-impregnated clothes when we descend into the caverns where the pitchblende lode is to be found. But they are clumsy, and it is impossible to work in them. Besides, I needed more hands for the work, and I dared not trust any one else. So I thought of a scheme."

He paused while Laura almost fainted with loathing, with dread of what he was going to say.

"If I could make men into maniacs, mindless creatures to obey my will, it would serve a double purpose. They would not know the danger and would mine the ore for me. Nor could they betray the secret, if they broke away and escaped. I obtained a certain serum, known only to an ancient Indian medicine man that was guaranteed to drive men mad if given in doses at definite intervals. It worked!" How the beast gloated over his fiendish scheme!

"Already they have mined enough to make me a millionaire. But I want more. I want to be the richest, most powerful man in the world. And I shall!" An insane light glared in his eyes. "Another month of toil with this fresh supply of wretches and there will be enough."

"But the poor creatures you have tortured," Laura burst out. "What happens to them?"

He was unutterably evil now. "They— die! A month of toil in the mine and they gangrene and rot away, flesh and bones and all, from the radium emanations. It is not a pleasant death. They scream and beg for death to come, but it delays." He thrust his snarling lips close to the panting girl. "Your husband will scream louder than the rest."

Iron bands compressed around Laura's skull. "You damnable fiend!" she panted, struggling in the iron grip of the thugs.

The Boss leered down at her. "But you haven't heard the rest of my plan. It concerns *you!"*

"Kill me!" she gasped. "I— don't— care— any more."

*"I* shall not kill you," he said slowly, leaning forward to observe the full effect of his dreadful words! "Your *husband* shall kill you— he and his lovely mates. *I shall throw you into the pit with them!"*

### *6: Slaves of Madness*

FOR a moment, her squeezing brain did not understand. Then red ruin exploded in her skull. It could not be, it was impossible! No human being— not even the Foul Fiend himself— could have conceived such a frightful torture. To be torn apart, limb from limb, by howling, slobbering maniacs; to be broken and twisted and wrenched into blood-soaked shreds of flesh by Frank, no longer the man of her love, but a ravening, lusting madman! Almighty God! Can You allow such things to be?

She felt herself jerked forward. Her feet dragged desperately against the bare, flat rock, seeking footholds. Her head lolled to one side. The thugs were forcing her to the pit.

There, at the very edge, they paused. Behind them towered the Boss, his grey baldness bloody with the light of the fire. He pointed downward toward the mad crew with his knife.

"Throw her in!"

For one desperate moment, she hung on the brink. She screamed, she begged, she implored for mercy. But Hell itself was not more cold, more merciless, than these fiends in human form, than those lusting, mindless creatures of the pit.

They leaped like slavering dogs against their manacles, tongues lolling from drooling lips at the sight of her. And Frank leaped higher than the rest. His eyes were blank and staring; his voice was a senseless screech.

"Look how her husband welcomes her," the Boss chuckled hideously. "Let us not stand in the way of such true love. Throw her down into his arms."

"No! No!" Laura moaned in frenzy. She threw back her head and the scream of snapping reason tore her throat to pieces. Her feet slid along the smooth rock. She was being forced inexorably over. A last desperate attempt at a toehold, and she was going... going...!

The last thing she saw was the eager clutch of her husband's unmanacled arm, and then she went down the smooth side, sliding and tumbling.

Hands gripped at her, tore with frenzied claws at her clothes, ripped them into fluttering strips. Mad fingers raked down her smooth, soft sides, wrenched at arms and legs. Pain lanced through every nerve and quivering muscle. Hot, snarling breaths beat with fetid effluvia about her face; unhuman faces leered into hers and dropped suddenly out of sight.

Fists and arms and legs and clanking chains whirled round and round her tortured form in a kaleidoscope of distributing parts. Shrieks of pain rose from the mindless wretches, yells of rage, and howls of agony. Suddenly she was alone, crouched, fainting and bleeding, at the farther end of the pit.

In front of her was a mass of heaving, flailing maniacs. Fists lashed out and crunched home against bone and smearing flesh. Oh God, she moaned to herself, they are fighting over me! Soon it will be over and the victors will come...!

But there was something wrong. The Boss, who had grinned fiendishly down upon the struggle, now shouted orders. His henchmen moved carefully around the edge, trying to get to her. The Boss ran to the fire, raced back with his huge, black whip. He snaked it crackling through the air. But the madmen paid no heed.

With a snarl, he aimed the lashing leather at the head of one who seemed the very head and center of the riot. He ducked, and it wound itself like a coiling python around the neck of a maniac who was in the very act of striking him down with manacled arm. He screamed horribly, gurgled, and dropped out of sight under the trampling mass.

The madman who had ducked, lashed out again with two unencumbered fists. A brutish face disappeared, and bone cracked audibly on another. He turned his sweaty, thin-etched features toward Laura.

She jumped from her terrified crouch. It was Frank, and he was grinning. That old-time grin she knew so well. His eyes flicked understanding warning; then a rush of infuriated maniacs bore down upon him. He submerged like a racing boat under tons of water. There was a violent, swirling commotion, over which the Boss teetered vainly, holding his whip poised. His face was hideous with rage, yet he dared not strike indiscriminately. Already had he killed one of his precious, mindless workers.

Laura shrieked high above the uproar. Frank was not mad! He was sane, sane as she was! But it was no use. The others were upon him, they would tear him to pieces even as they would her when they were through. She jumped madly forward, just as a straining hand reached for her shoulder from above—and missed!

She clawed, kicked, pulled at the ravening throng. They were killing Frank, they were...!

The snarling, yelping pack heaved upward and outward in all directions. Frank's bloody head emerged like a yacht shouldering the waves apart. He was bleeding from innumerable gashes, but still he grinned. He caught sight of Laura, slammed his way to her side.

"Okay, darling!" he panted. "If only we can duck those fellows above— "

The Boss let out a blasting roar of rage. He slashed out with his great black whip, straight for Frank's head.

"Look out!" Laura screamed, dragging her husband down. The lash whistled sharply through the air, inches above his face. The scattered madmen bunched and came on, throwing themselves to the limits of their chains.

But the Boss was a snarling, raging beast, mad even as they. He smashed downward again, leaning far over the pit in his eagerness to catch this man who had pretended to be mad and was spoiling all his careful plans.

The heavy whip snaked out, caught him off balance. For a long moment, he teetered on the very brink, while his henchmen rushed with alarmed cries to catch him. But it was too late!

With a wild, eerie screech he slipped down the smooth rock sides, into the very midst of the blood-lusting men he had made into madmen. A huge, hairy arm reached out, grabbed him by the body, bore him under. His long, thin hand worked madly at his clumsy shroud. A pistol gleamed underneath; he had tugged it half out when the avalanche swept over him. Then nothing showed but a snarling, yelping eddy of brawny bodies.

The thugs on the edge of the pit drew back in horror. Guns appeared in their hands. Again and again they fired into the squirming, swarming mass.

Frank caught Laura, dragged her to the extreme end, where the fire-reflection did not penetrate. Desperately he tried to hoist himself up, but there was no purchase. He slipped and went down again.

"Sorry, Laura," he breathed heavily. "But I'm afraid it's no go. They'll finish off those poor devils and then come for us."

She smiled bravely back, trying not to let him see the ache in her heart. She had found her husband again, and now they were both lost.

The sharp crack of the guns punctured the screams of the dying. Then there were no further yells, and the firing ceased. For one dreadful moment, there was silence.

As they crouched deeper into the shadows, away from the flickering ruddiness of the flames, they saw the motionless mass of legs and arms and distorted torsos of those who had been driven to horrible madness, and who now were dead.

"They're better off, poor things," Laura whispered. "But we— ?"

"The Boss's men will get us," Frank said grimly. Laura clung to his dear, wounded body with aching love. Fear clutched her heart. There was no escape.

See, there they were, coming to look for them, to make sure everything was over. Feet boomed hollowly on the rock. "Seems like they're all dead," said one.

"Whew!" shuddered the other. "I seen terrible stuff in my day, but nothin' like this. An' the Boss— he's gone. What're we gonna do?"

"Do?" echoed the first thug sarcastically. "Man, it's a cinch! Now we got all that stuff fer ourselves. We'll slip it out tonight, and we'll get those thousand grands the Boss was always beefin' about."

"Say!" cried the other in alarm. "Nix. We dassn't touch it. Remember what it did t' the first batch o' loonies?"

"Su-ure, that's right! Mebbe some of those bozos in the pit ain't dead yet. We'll use 'em."

Two figures loomed over the hole, guns snouting. Frank and Laura pressed against the sides, held themselves moveless. But they had been seen.

"Come out, you there!" one shouted exultantly.

"No, no!" Laura whimpered. "I'd rather die now than— "

Frank cried defiantly. "We won't do your hellish work!"

"Okay, feller," the thug grinned. The fiery shadows made him a horned devil out of Hell. "Say yuhr prayers, then. I'll kill yuh and grab the girl." He raised his gun deliberately, took aim.

Laura shrieked and threw herself before her husband. "You'll have to kill me too!"

The thug licked his lips at the sight of her slenderness under the remaining shreds of garments. "Not on your life, girlie. Hey, Jerry!" he raised his voice. "You shoot him, but don't hit the girl. We need her."

"It's no use," Frank said gently. "Break away, Laura darling. Let them shoot. But get to the body of the Boss. He had a gun. Use it on yourself if necessary."

"Okay, let 'im have it."

Frank squared his shoulders, while Laura dropped in a faint. Two shots rang out. For a split second, he stood in a daze. Why hadn't those bullets torn

through his body? Then he saw the two gunmen totter and go crashing to the rock.

There were shouts, cries and the thudding of many feet. Then Frank too drifted into the black sea of oblivion.

When Laura awoke it was to find herself in Frank's arms, swathed in bandages. His face was pale and drawn, and one arm was in a sling, but his grin was warming. Dr. Carey was bending over her, busy with the last bandage.

"There, you're all right now," he said. His rubicund face was shiny and flushed in the firelight. Lem, the village cobbler, glowered at his side. Other men of the village crowded in the background, muttering and whispering excitedly.

"We'll split the cache of radium between us," Frank was insisting. "I've got your contract to sell the mountain, of course, but you didn't know at the time what it was worth."

The doctor hesitated, smiled. "All right, if you feel that way."

Laura snuggled closer. "I— I don't understand," she said, bewildered.

Frank grinned. "I closed the deal in the village. I didn't tell you, but that was why I made a flying trip to New York. I had a sample of ore I picked up at the base of the mountain that I wanted analyzed. Looked like pitchblende to me, and that was what the chemist said. Where there is pitchblende, there is sometimes radium. I took the chance. But someone else had discovered the secret before me, and tried to buy the place."

"I wouldn't sell to him," Dr. Carey interrupted. "He had cheated me in a deal years before and I swore then never to do business with him again."

Frank's jaw hardened. "So he concocted this scheme— the vilest, most devilish since the world began. He caught me with his drove of madmen as I was coming back from the village. Evidently some of them had died, and he needed new recruits. He jabbed the needle into me. I fought off the effect, but pretended I was just as mad as the rest. Up here, I learned his plans but then I could do nothing. I waited for my chance and it never came. I had slipped my manacles, but left them on with the spring open. Then, darling, you came." Frank's eyes clouded. "I'll never want to go through that again. We have Dr. Carey to thank for coming in the nick of time. How did you find out about this?"

The doctor smiled modestly. "I had been suspicious about disappearances around here for some time. I found a trampled trail that led to the rubbly base above the road. I watched there after Laura told me you were gone too, but saw nothing. I hurried over to your house, heard the rest of Laura's story, and went back for a more thorough search. Then I saw Laura running up the mountain, with Lem after her. I had warned Lem to watch her while I was

gone. Lem got scared and ran back, but from my hiding place I saw Laura seized by a shrouded being who was— *er*— the man called the Boss. He seemed to disappear into the ground."

Dr. Carey took a breath and went on. "I hurried back to the village, raised the folk, and came back as fast as I could. But tell me, Frank— if you managed to break away from the chain-gang once in the woods, why did you return?"

Frank grinned sheepishly. "I wanted to warn Laura away, and yet not get a posse on my trail. You see, I hadn't learned a thing then as to what it was all about. I was afraid they'd get away, so I stuck along."

Laura squeezed his arm reproachfully. "But who," she asked suddenly, "was the devil who called himself the Boss?"

"Come," Frank said, lifting her to her feet. They hobbled painfully to the fire.

On the ground were rows of bodies. The madmen stared peacefully up at the stars, all their induced insanity wiped clean from their faces. But the solitary figure that lay to one side was twisted in demoniac hate. The high, bald head was punctured and thrown to one side. The bushy brows were half-ripped off and reddened with blood. Beneath the disguise were the unmistakable features of Sheriff Tom Beasley!

Laura shiversed with cold as Frank led her gently away...

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## 8: Haunted

***Anonymous***

Arrow (Sydney, NSW) 13 April 1912

'I'VE GOT SOMETHING to tell you.'

Winter drew his chair close to the fire, and motioned us to do likewise.

'You look like a death's head,' said Lawton.

'I feel like one,' said Winter, in a gloomy voice, as he shivered slightly, and glanced uneasily at the door; 'It's November 20, the anniversary of the death of poor Clive Fleming.'

'I had forgotten that,' said Lawton quietly. 'Of course it is. Poor old chap!'

'You remember the occasion of his— his— death, don't you?' continued Winter after a moment's pause. 'We were all out shooting at Parkington's place, and— and—' he hesitated nervously.

'And,' said Spilsbury, taking up the story, 'he mysteriously disappeared, and was never heard of again.'

'Exactly. He disappeared, and was never heard of again. It's ten years ago to-day, and on the tenth anniversary of the curious affair I want to tell you something, something that's been on my mind, something that's eaten into my very soul during all that time.'

We all looked at Winter. He was ghastly pale, and he shivered despite the warmth of the blazing fire.

'To begin at the beginning.' he went, on calmly, puffing his cigar between whiles, 'Clive and I were both In love with Kitty Spencer. Closer pals could not have been until she came between us. She altered everything. You remember her, of course, a slim little thing with blue eyes and fair hair, who danced like an angel and sang like— well, no matter. I don't know what his feelings were. I only know my own. I loved her desperately, furiously, blindly, madly. Perhaps he did the same. Anyhow, my feelings got the better of me, and the mere idea that she should love him the better so worked on me that I became half-demented. Then came the shooting at Parkington's.

'Clive and I became separated from the rest and we found ourselves on the edge of that stagnant, dismal pool which lies on the edge of Marfleet Woods. I persuaded Clive to crops the little bridge which spans the water, and when in the centre, I— I— well. I pushed him over.'

Winter stopped suddenly and asked, 'Was that a knock?'

We were all too much horrified to answer.

'I suppose it was fancy,' he went on with a dry laugh. 'Anyhow, to get. back to the yarn, that is what happened. I shoved him in the water— it's awfully

deep, you know — saw him struggle a moment and sink, and then rejoined the rest of the party just as cool as you are now. You remember what a hue-and-cry there was after the missing man, how the police searched high and low, night and day, and the London papers sent down special representatives who wrote thrilling accounts of the incident. You may remember, too,' he added softly, 'how Kitty went off her head and was packed off to a nursing home, and how I went abroad to shoot big game.

'How was it Clive's body wasn't found?' Lawton asked.

'The lake was dragged, you know, and the water was run off, and nothing was discovered. How do you explain that?'

Winter looked round slyly.

'That's what I'm coming to,' he said slowly, 'that's what I wanted to tell you. Clive wasn't drowned. I thought he was, but I was fooled. Directly my back was turned, he managed to crawl out, and to make his way to a neighboring village, where he dried his clothes, and went to bed at a local inn. The ducking didn't do him any physical harm, but the curious thing was. it turned his brain and he became possessed of the idea that he was really dead, and ought not to show himself to his relations and friends. Mind you, there was a lot of method in his madness, for he was head over heels in debt, and it was a simple way of wiping the slate clean to remain a corpse. During these past ten years he is supposed to have been In his grave, but all the while he has been alive; yes, alive and fit and well as a man could be.'

'Alive?' said Spilsbury, awestruck. 'How do you know?'

'For the best of reasons,' said Winter, 'because for ten years Clive Fleming has haunted me clay and night. He has followed me about like a shadow wherever I went. Of course I could have given him away a thousand times, but if I had done so, he would have given me away, and it doesn't require any particular acuteness to see that I should have got the worst of it. You see I did try to kill him. There's no getting away from that! I tell you Clive Fleming is alive and well, and out of revenge for what I did he has sworn to dog my footsteps until I pass into the grave.'

We stared at each other.

'He may come here to-night,' said Winter, his eyes glued on the door. 'I don't think he has ever missed the Anniversary. If he comes,' he cried, starting from his chair and trembling, 'I won't see him. I don't want to see him. I'm sick to death of him. For ten years he has plagued me, sleeping and waking, and I won't stand it longer.'

At that moment we heard a step on the stairs leading to Winter's chambers, a heavy step as of one walking slowly and laboriously.

'That's his step,' Winter screamed, 'there can be no mistake. I know It only too well.'

The footsteps came closer.

Then someone rapped at the door impatiently. We all stood still. Were we about, to gaze upon a ghost, a thing of shadow, or Clive Fleming, solid flesh and blood?

Lawton opened the door. It was only the postman. He handed Lawton a letter and vanished into the darkness of the corridor.

'A letter for you, Winter,' he said, turning round, 'that's all.'

Instinctively Winter tore open the letter.

It was from a doctor at a town in the Midlands, announcing that Clive Fleming had died the night before, and with his dying breath had wished to be remembered to his old friends.

'Look at Winter,' cried Lawton, 'I always said he had heart disease.'

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## 9: "Pop."

***Alice Hegan Rice***

1870-1942

*The American Magazine,* Aug 1914

*World's News* (Sydney) 13 Oct 1917

*Alice Caldwell Hegan Rice*

*Best known as author of "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch". The Cabbage Patch was not some rural garden, as you might expect, but a Sunday school in a slum in Louisville, Kentucky, where Mrs Rice was a teacher.*

THE high, dark corridor in the big Baltimore hospital was still and deserted, save for a nurse who sat at a flat-topped desk under a green lamp mechanically transferring figures from one chart to another. It was the period of quiet that usually precedes the first restless stirring of the sick at the breaking of dawn. The silence was intense, as only a silence can be that waits momentarily for an interrupting sound.

Suddenly it came in a prolonged, imperative ring of the telephone bell. So insistent was the call that the nurse's hand closed over the transmitter long before the burr ceased. The office was notifying Ward B that an emergency case had been brought in, and an immediate operation was necessary.

With prompt efficiency, the well-ordered machinery for saving human life was put in motion. Soft-footed nurses moved quickly about, making necessary arrangements. A trim, comely woman, straight of feature and clear of eye, gave directions in low, decisive tones. When the telephone rang the second time she answered it.

"Yes, office," she said, "this is Miss Fletcher. They are not going to operate? Think it too late? I see. Very well. Send the patient up to No. 16. Everything is ready."

Even as she spoke the complaining creak of the elevator could be heard, and presently two orderlies appeared at the end of the corridor bearing a stretcher.

Beside it, with head erect and jaw, set, strode a strangely commanding figure. Six feet two he loomed in the shadows, a gaunt, raw-boned old mountaineer. On his head was a tall, wide-brimmed hat, and in this right hand he carried a bulky carpet sack. The left sleeve of his long-tailed coat hung empty to the elbow. The massive head with its white flowing beard and hawklike face, the beak nose, and fierce, deep-set eyes, might have served as a model for Michelangelo when he modelled his immortal Moses.

As the orderlies passed through the door of No. 16 and lowered the stretcher, the old man put down his carpet sack and grimly watched the nurse uncover the patient. Under the warm, home-spun coverlet, stained with the dull dyes of barks and berries, lay the emaciated figure, just as it had been brought into the hospital. One long coarse garment covered it, and the bare feet with their prominent ankle bones and the large, work-hardened hands might have belonged to either a boy or a girl.

"Take that there head wrappin' off!" ordered the old man peremptorily.

A nurse carefully unwound the rough woollen scarf, and as she did so a mass of red hair fell across the pillow— hair that in spite of its matted disorder showed flashes of gleaming gold.

"We'll get her on the bed," a night nurse said to an assistant. "Put your arm under her knees. Don't jar the stretcher."

Before the novice could obey another and a stronger arm was thrust forward.

"Stand back there, some of you," commanded a loud voice; "I'll help move Sal myself."

In vain were protests from nurses and orderlies alike; the old mountaineer seemed bent on making good use of his one arm, and with quick dexterity helped to lift her on the bed.

"Now, where's the doctor?" he demanded, standing with feet apart and head thrown back.

The doctor was at the desk in the corridor, speaking to Miss Fletcher in an undertone:—

"We only made a superficial examination downstairs," he was saying, "but it is evidently a ruptured appendix. If she's living in a couple of hours I may be able to operate. But it's ten to one she dies on the table."

"Who are they, and where did they come from?" Miss Fletcher asked curiously.

"Their name is Hawkins, and they are from somewhere in the Kentucky mountains. Think of his starting with her in that condition! He can't read or write; it's the first time he has ever been in a city. I am afraid he's going to prove troublesome. You'd better get him out of there as soon as possible."

But anyone, however mighty in authority, who proposed to move Jeb Hawkins when he did not choose to be moved reckoned unknowingly. All tactics were exhausted, from suggestion to positive command, and the rules of the hospital wore quoted in vain.

In the remote regions where Jeb lived there were no laws to break. Every man's house was his stronghold, to be protected at the point of the pistol. He was one of the three million people of good Anglo-Saxon stock who had been stranded in the highlands when the Cumberland mountains dammed the stream of humanity that swept westward through the level wilderness. Development had been arrested so long in Jeb and his ancestors that the outside world, its interests, and its mode of living, were matters of supreme and profound indifference. A sudden and unprecedented emergency had driven him to the "Settlements." His girl had developed an ailment that baffled the skill of the herb doctors; so, following one bit of advice after another, he had finally landed in Baltimore. And now that the terrible journey was ended, and Sal was in the hands of the doctor who was to work the cure, the wholly preposterous request was made of him that he abandon her to her fate!

With dogged determination he sat beside the bed, and chewed silently and stolidly through the argument.

"You gals might as well save your wind," he announced at last. "If Sal stays, I stay. If I go, Sal goes. We ain't axin' favors of nobody."

He was so much in the way during the necessary preparations, for the possible operation that finally Miss Fletcher was appealed to. She was a woman accustomed to giving orders and to having them obeyed; but she was also a woman of tact. Ten minutes of valuable time were spent in propitiating the old man before she suggested that he come with her into the corridor while the nurses straightened the room. A few minutes later she returned, smiling.

"I've corralled him in the linen closet," she whispered; "he is unpacking his carpet sack, as if he meant to take up his abode with us."

"I am afraid," said the special nurse glancing toward the bed, "he won't have long to stay. How do you suppose he ever got her here?"

"I asked him. He said he drove her for three days in an ox-cart along the creek bottom until they got to Jackson. Then he told the ticket agent to send them to the best hospital the train ran to. Neither of them had ever seen a train before. It's a miracle she's lived this long."

"Does he realise her condition?"

"I don't know. I suppose I ought to tell him. that the end may come at any time."

But telling him was not an easy matter, as Miss Fletcher found when she joined him later in the linen closet. He was busy spreading his varied possessions along the shelves on top of the piles of immaculate linen, stopping now and then to refresh him-self with a bite of salt pork and some corn pone that had been packed for days along with Sally's shoes and sun-bonnet and his own scanty wardrobe.

"I suppose you know," Miss Fletcher began gently, trying to show her chagrin at the state of the room, "that your daughter is in a very serious condition."

He looked at her sharply. "Shucks! Sal'll pull through," he said with mingled defiance and alarm. "You ain't saw her afore in one of them spells. Besides, it makes a difference when a gal's paw and grandpaw and great-grandpaw was feud-followers. A feud-follower takes more killin' than ordinary folks. Her maw was subject to cramp colic afore her."

"But this isn't cramp colic," Miss Fletcher urged; "it's her appendix, and it wasn't taken in time."

"Well, ain't they goin' to draw it?" he asked irritably. "Ain't that what we're here for?"

"Yes? but you don't understand. The doctor may decide not to operate."

The old man's face wore a puzzled look, then his lips hardened:—

"Maybe it's the money that's a-worryin' him. You go tell him that Jeb Hawkins pays as he goes! I got pension money sewed in my coat from the hem clean up to the collar. I ain't askin' none of you to cure my gal for nothin'!"

Miss Fletcher laid her hand on his arm. It was a shapely hand as well as a kindly one.

"It isn't a question of money,'' she said quietly; "it's a question of life or death. There is only a slight chance that your daughter will live through the day."

Someone tapped at the door, and Miss Fletcher, after a whispered consultation, turned again to the old man.

"They have decided to take the chance." she said hurriedly. "They are taking her up now. You stay here, and I will let you know as soon as it is over."

"Where they takin' her at?" he demanded savagely.

"To the operating-room."

"You take me there!"

"But you can't go, Mr. Hawkins. No one but the surgeons and nurses can go with her. Besides, the nurse who was here just now said she had regained consciousness, and it might excite her to see you."

She might as well have tried to stop a mountain torrent. He brushed past her, and was making his way to the elevator before she had ceased speaking. At the open door of the operating-room on the fourth floor he paused. On a long white table lay the patient, a white-clad doctor on either side of her, and a nurse in the background sorting a handful of gleaming instruments. With two strides the old man reached the girl's side.

"Sal!" he said fiercely, bending over her, "are you worse?"

Her dazed eyes cleared slightly.

"I dunno. Pop," she murmured feebly.

"You ain't fixin' to die, are you?" he persisted.

"I dunno, Pop."

"Don't you let them skeer you," he commanded sternly, "You keep on a-fightin'. Don't you dare give up. Sal, do you hear me?"

The girl's wavering consciousness steadied, and for a moment the challenge that the old man flung at death was valiantly answered in her pain-racked eyes.

For an hour and a half the surgeons worked. The case, critical enough at best, was greatly complicated by the long delay. Twice further effort seemed useless, and it was only by the prompt administration of oxygen that the end was averted.

During the nerve-racking suspense of the long operation Pop not only refused to leave the room, he even refused to stand back from the table. With keen, suspicious eyes he followed every movement of the surgeons' hands. Only once did he speak out, and that was in the beginning, to an interne who was administering the anaesthetic.

"Lift that funnel, you squash-headed fool!" he thundered. "Don't you see it's marking of her cheek?"

When the work was finished and the unconscious patient was wheeled down to her ward, Pop still kept his place beside her. With his hand on her pulse, he watched her breathing, watched the first faint quivering of her lids, the restlessness that grew into pain, and later into agony. Hour after hour he sat there and passed with her through that crucifixion that follows some capital operations.

On his refusal at luncheon time to leave the bedside. Miss Fletcher ignored the and sent him a tray; but when night came, and he still refused to go, she became impatient.

"You can't stay in here to-night, Mr. Hawkins," she said firmly. "I have asked one of the orderlies, who lives near by, to take you home with him. We can send for you if there is any change. I must insist that you go now."

"Ain't I made it clear from the start," cried, Pop angrily, "that I ain't a-goin' to be drove out? You can call me muley-headed or what-ever you've a mind to. Sal's always stood by me, and, by gracious, I'm a-goin' to stand by Sal!"

His raised voice roused the patient, and a feeble summons brought Miss Fletcher to the bedside.

"Say," pleaded the girl faintly, "don't rile Pop. He's the fightenest man— in— Breathitt— when his blood's— up."

"All right, dear," said Miss Fletcher, with a soothing hand on the hot brow; "he shall do as he likes."

During that long night the girl passed from one paroxysm of pain to another, with brief intervals of drug-induced sleep. During the quiet moments the nurse snatched what rest she could; but old Jeb Hawkins stuck to his post in the straight-backed chair, never nodding, never relaxing the vigilance of his watch. For Pop was doing sentry duty, much as be had done it in the old days of the Civil War, when he had answered Lincoln's first call for Volunteers, and given his left arm for his country.

But the enemy to-night was mysterious, crafty, one that might come in the twinkling of an eye, and a sentry at seventy is not what he was at twenty-two. When the doctor arrived in the morning he found the old man haggard with fatigue.

"This won't do, Mr. Hawkins," he said kindly; "you must get some rest."

"Be she goin' to die?" Pop demanded, steadying himself by a chair.

"It is too soon to tell," the doctor said evasively; "but I'll say this much, her pulse is better than I expected. Now, go get some sleep."

Half an hour later a strange, rumbling sound puzzled the nurses in Ward B. It came at regular intervals, rising from a monotonous growl to a staccato, then dying away in a plaintive diminuendo. It was not until one of the nurses needed clean sheets that the mystery was explained. On the floor of the linen closet, stretched on his back, with his carpet sack under his head, and his empty sleeve across his chest, lay Pop!

From that time on the old mountaineer became a daily problem to Ward B. It is true, he agreed in time to go home at night with the orderly; but by six in the morning he was sitting on the steps impatiently awaiting admission to the hospital. The linen closet was still regarded by him as his private apartment, to which he repaired at such times as he could not stay in Sally's room, and refreshed himself with the luncheon he brought along each day.

During the first week, when the girl's life hung in the balance, he was granted privileges which he afterwards refused to give up. The hospital confines, after the freedom of the hills, chafed him sorely. As the days grew warmer he discarded his coat, collar, and at times his shoes.

"I lay I'm goin' to take Sal home next, week!" became his daily threat.

But the days and weeks slipped by, and still the girl lay with a low, consuming fever, and still Pop watched by her side, showing her no affection by word or gesture, but serving her and anticipating her every want with a thoroughness that left little for the nurses to do.

In some way Miss Fletcher had gained his

confidence. To her he entrusted the bills which he ripped from his coat at the end of each week, with the instruction that she "pay off them boys down in the office fair an' square, but not to allow them to cheat her."

It may have been her growing interest in the invalid that won his favor, for she came in often to chat awhile with Sally, and some-times brought up a handful of flowers to help brighten the severe simplicity of the sick-room.

"She's getting better," she said one morning, as she held the girl's big, bony hand and looked down at the thin, bright face in its frame of shining hair. "We'll have her sitting up now before long."

Pop's whole aspect brightened. "If Sal once begins to get well, can't none of them best her," he said proudly.

"Have you any other children? Miss Fletcher asked.

"Lord, yes," said Pop, "heaps of them. There's Ted, an' Larkin' an' Gus— they was killed in feud fights. An' Bert an' Jim— They're in gaol in Jackson for moonshinin'. Four more died when they were babies. An they ain't never a one at home now but just Sal."

"How old is she!"

"Seventeen or eighteen, may be."

"And she tells me she has never been to school."

"There weren't no necessity," said Pop complacently, taking a long twist of tobacco from his pocket. "Sal don't need no learnin'. She's pearter than most gals that's got book sense. You show me any one of these gals round here that can spin an' weave the cloth to make their own dresses, that can mould candles, an' make soap, an' hoe tobacco, an' handle a rifle good as a man."

Mr. Hawkins," insisted Miss Fletcher, there are better things than those for us to learn. Haven't you ever felt the need of an education yourself?"

Pop looked at her suspiciously. "Look ahere, young woman. I'm nigh on to seventy. I never had a doctor but once in my life, an' then he chopped my arm off when it might have got well where it was. I can plough, an' fell trees, an' haul wood. There ain't a log-rollin' nor a house-raisin' in our neck of the woods

that Jeb Hawkins ain't sent for. I can hoist a barrel with the best of them, and shake up old Dan Tucker as peart as the next one. Now how about your scholards? This here horspittle is full of them. Pale-face, spindly-legged, nerve-jerking young fellows that has spent their first twenty years gettin' learnin', an' their next twenty gettin' over it. Me an' Sal will keep to the open!"

But Sally was not so confident. As her strength began to return she took a growing interest in all that went on around her, asking eager, intelligent questions, and noting with wistful curiosity the speech and manners of the nurses who served her. She was a raw recruit from nature, unsophisticated, illiterate. Under a bondage of poverty and drudgery she had led her starved life in the mountain fastnesses; but now she had opened her eyes on a new and unexpected world.

"How do you go about gettin' a learnin'?" she ventured at last to ask one of the friendly nurses. "Can't you fetch me up some of them there picture books?"

For hours after this she pored over her new treasures, until one day Miss Fletcher brought her a primer, and the seventeen-year-old girl grappled for the first time with the alphabet. After that she was loth to have the book out of her hand, going painfully and slowly over the lessons, mastering each in turn with patient perseverance.

Pop viewed this proceeding with disfavor.

He seemed to sense the entering wedge that was to separate her from him. His pride in her accomplishment was overshadowed by his jealousy, and when she was able to read a whole page, and attempted to explain the intricate process to him, he was distinctly cast down. He left the hospital that afternoon, and was gone until dusk. When he returned he carried a bunch of faded wild flowers that he had tramped two miles in the country to get for his girl.

May dragged into June, and still they were kept at the hospital. The old man became as restless as a caged animal; he paced the corridors for hours at a time, and his eyes grew furtive and defiant. He, who had lived out of sight of the smoke from his nearest neighbor's chimney, who had spent his life in the vast, still solitudes of the hills, was incredibly lonely here among his fellow-men.

"If Pop has to stay here much longer, I'm afraid he'll smash the furniture," said the night nurse who, like everybody else in the ward, had grown interested in the old man. "He packs his things every morning before the doctor comes, only to unpack them after he leaves."

"The confinement is telling on him," said Miss Fletcher. "I wish for his sake they could start home to-day. But I do hate to see Sally go! The girl is getting

her first taste of civilisation, and I've never seen anyone so eager to learn. We have to take the book away from her every day, and when she can't study she begs to be allowed to roll bandages. The third day she sat up she wanted to help nurse the other patients." "I am afraid we have spoiled her for hoeing tobacco and planting corn," said the night nurse.

"I hope so," Miss Fletcher answered fervently.

It was nearly the last of June when the doctor dismissed his patient. "This doesn't mean that she is well," he warned Pop. "You will have to be careful of her for a long time. She has worked too hard for a growing girl, and she's not as strong now as she was."

"She will be!" Pop responded confidently. "That there gal is made out of iron! Her maw was afore her. Liza was my third wife, an' she'd borned six or seven children when she died at thirty-five, an' by Joshuy, she'd never once had a doctor in all her life!"

Pop's joy over their dismissal was slightly dimmed by Sally's reception of the news. He saw her draw a long breath and bite her lips; then he saw what he had never seen since she was a baby, two large tears gather slowly in her eyes and roll down on the pillow. He watched them in amazement.

"Sal, what ails you?" he asked anxiously, after the doctor was gone.

"I want to get a learnin'!" she broke out. "I don't want to go back to the hills."

Instantly the old man's face, which had been tender, hardened to a mask of fury.

"That passel of fool women's been workin' on you," he cried hoarsely; "learnin," learnin, that's all they know. Ain't the Fork good enough for you? Ain't the cabin where your paw, an' your grandpaw, an' your great-grandpaw was borned, good enough for you?"

"Yes, Pop, yes!" she gasped, terrified at the storm she had raised. "I'm a-goin' back with you. Don't take on so, Pop, I'm a-goin'!"

But the tempest was raging, and the old man got up and strode angrily up and down the small room, filling the air with his indignation.

"I should say you was going back! I'd like to see any of them try to keep you. They'd like to make one of them dressed-up doll women out of you! You're goin' back with me to the Fork, an' if there's ever any more nussin' er doctorin' to do, I'm a goin' to do it. I've nussed three women on their death beds, an' when your time comes I lay I can handle you too."

Then his mood changed suddenly, and he sat down by the bed.

"Sal," he said almost persuasively, "you'll get over this here foolishness, Ag'in' fall you'll be a-cappin' corn, an' a-roastin' sweet pertatoes, an' singin' them old ballarts along with the Hicks gals, an' Cy West, an' Bub Holly. And I'll

tote you behind me on the beast over the Ridge to the Baptist meetin' house the very next feet-washin' they have. Just think how good it's goin' to be to see the sun a-risin' over old Baldy an' to have room to stretch an' breathe in. Seems as if I hadn't been able to get my lungs full of wind sence I left Jackson."

"I know it, Pop," Sally said miserably. "You growed old in the hills afore you ever seen the Settlements. But since I got a sight of what folks is adoin' down here, 'pears like I can't be reconciled to goin' back. 'Tain't the work back home, nor the lonesomeness, tho' the Lord knows the only folks that ever does pass is when they're totin' deads down the creek bottom. It's the feelin' of bein' shut off from my chance. If I could get a learnin' I wouldn't ask nothin' better than to go back an' pass it along. When I see these here gals a-learnin' how to help the sick, an' care for babies, an' doctor folks, I lay here an' steddy about all the good I could do back home if I only knowed how."

"You do know how," Pop declared vociferously; "ain't you been a-lookin' after folks that's ailin' around the Fork for a couple of years or more? As for these new-fangled doctorin's, they won't any one of them do the good yarbs will. I'd rather trust bitter goldenseal root to cure a ailment than all the durn physic in this here horspittle. I been a-studyin' these here doctors, an' I don't take much stock in them. Instead of workin' on a organ that gets twisted, they ups and draws it. Now the Lord Almighty put that air per-tickler thing in you for some good reason, an' there's bound to be a hitch in the machinery when it's took out. It's a marvel to me some of these here patients ain't a-amblin' round on all fours from what's been done to their insides!"

"But think what the doctor did for me," urged Sally.

"I ain't forgettin'," Pop said suddenly, "an' I've paid 'em for it. But if they calkerlate on your taking root here, they're treein' the wrong possum. You're' a-goin' home along o' me to-morrow."

That afternoon he left the hospital, and several hours later was seen walking up Monument Street with his arm full of bundles.

"I believe he's been buying clothes to take Sally home in!" said one of the nurses, who was watching him from an upper window. "He asked me this morning if I knew a place where he could buy women's togs."

"It's a shame he won't let the girl stay," said Miss Fletcher. "I have been talking to the superintendent, and she is quite willing to let her do light work around the hospital, and pick up what training she can. I should be glad enough to look after her, and there's a good night school two blocks over."

"Why don't you talk to the old man?" urged the nurse. "You are the only one who has ever been able to do anything with him. Perhaps you could make him see what an in-justice he is doing the girl."

"I believe I'll try," said Miss Fletcher.

The next morning, when she came on duty, she found Sally's bed the repository of a strange assortment of wearing apparel. A calico dress of pronounced hue, a large lace jabot, and a small pair of yellow kid gloves were spread out for inspection.

"I knowed they was too little," Pop was saying, as he carefully smoothed the kid fingers, "but I 'lowed you could carry them in your hand."

There was an unusual eagerness in his hard face, an evident desire to make up to Sally in one way for what he was depriving her of in another. He was more talkative than at any time since coming to the hospital, and he dilated with satisfaction on the joys that awaited their home-coming.

"May I have a little talk with you before you go?" asked Miss Fletcher.

He flashed on her a quick look of suspicion, but her calm, impassive face told him nothing. She was a pretty woman, and Pop had evidently Recognised the fact from the start.

"Well. I'll come now," he said, rising reluctantly; "but, Sal, you get your clothes on an' be ready to start time I get back. I ain't anxious to stay round these here dignin's no longer'n need be. Besides, that there railroad car might make a earlier start. You be ready again I get back."

For an hour and a quarter Miss Fletcher was shut up in the linen closet with the old man. What arguments and persuasions she brought to bear are not known. Occasionally his voice could be heard in loud and angry dissent, but when at last they emerged he

looked like some old king of the jungle that had been captured and tamed. His shoulders drooped, his one arm hung limply by his side, and his usually restless eyes were bent upon the floor.

Without a word he strode back to the room where Sally in her misfit clothes was waiting for him.

"Come along with, me, Sal," he commanded sternly, as he picked up his carpet sack. "Leave your things where they be."

Silently they passed out of the ward, down the stairway, through a long vaultlike corridor to the superintendent's room. Once there he flung back his rusty coat and ripped the last bill but one from its hiding place.

"That there is for my gal," he said defiantly to the superintendent. "She'll get one the first day of every month. Give her the learnin' she's so hell-bent on, stuff her plumb full on it. An' if you let anything happen to her"— his brows lowered threateningly— "I'll come back an' blow your whole blame horspittle into eternity!"

"Pop!" Sally pleaded. "Pop!"

But his emotions were at high tide, and he did not heed her. Pushing her roughly aside, he strode back to the entrance hall, and was about to pick up his

carpet sack when his gaze was suddenly arrested by the great marble figure that bends its thorn-crowned head in pity over the unhappy and the pain racked mortals that pass beneath its out-stretched hands.

"You ain't goin' to leave me like this, Pop?" begged Sally. "If you take it so hard, I'll go back, an' I'll go willin'. Just say the word, Pop, an' I'll go!"

The old mountaineer's one hand closed on the girl's bony arm in a tight clasp, his shoulders heaved, and his massive features worked, but his gaze never left the calm, pitying face of the Saviour overhead. He had followed his child without a tremor into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, "but at the entrance of this new life, where he must let her go alone, his courage failed and his spirit faltered. His dominant will, hitherto the only law he knew, was in mortal combat with a new and unknown force that for the first time had entered his life.

For several minutes he stood thus, his conflicting passions swaying him, as opposing gales shake a giant forest tree. Then he resolutely loosened his grip on the girl's arm, and, taking up his burden, without a word or a backward glance, set his face toward the hills, leaving an awkward, wistful girl watching him with her tears only half obscuring the vision that was already dawning for her.

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## 10: The Rat

***Anonymous***

*Port Lincoln Times* (SA) 12 June 1936

'THE TROUBLE that rat is to me,' said the village grocer, giving his white apron an angry hitch, 'you wouldn't believe. And catch 'im I can't. 'E won't touch anything in a trap, and 'e won't eat anything poisoned. All 'e makes 'is meals off of is my good stock.

'I've laid in wait for 'im with a stick, and sure enough 'is lordship comes snuffling out after a while, but the moment I make a move 'e spots me and goes like a flash. I never see such an aggravating rat in all my life!'

'I'll shoot him for you if you like, Mr. Rogers,' offered Mr. Peckwhistle, with his shy smile. Mr. Rogers stared incredulously.

'Shoot 'im?' he echoed. Like most people in the village, Mr. Rogers would unhesitatingly have said that Mr. Peckwhistle was the sort of man who wouldn't have killed a fly. That timid chin, those shy blue eyes, the whole modest nature of the man didn't suggest a knowledge of fire-arms.

'You shoot him?' repeated the grocer, so astonished that he sounded the aitch.

'You see,' explained Mr. Peckwhistle, 'I sometimes have to carry quite large sums of money for my firm, and I have a firearms permit. And I've practised at a range in London, and— well, really, I ought not to say, but I'm quite a good shot. Of course, this is between ourselves. I don't want it to get about, naturally.'

'Well, well!' exclaimed Mr. Rogers, regarding his customer with new respect, 'To think you can 'andle a revolver — and it what you aim at, too! Well, I must say it's 'andsome of you to offer, Mr. Peckwhistle, and I'll be very glad to accept. When would it come convenient for you to—'

'Now, if you like. No, it had better be after you close. Eight tonight, isn't it?'

'That's right,' said Mr. Rogers. 'In half an hour's time, that'll be.'

'Very well. I will come round soon after eight.'

He turned to go, but swung back again.

'Oh, by the way, Mr. Rogers!' He flushed slightly. 'It sounds ridiculous, I dare say, but the fact is, I — I find the noise of firearms rather unsettling— disturbing. So I put cotton-wool plugs in my ears. If you speak to me and I don't hear, you'll know I haven't gone deaf! I shall put them in at home before I come.'

'I see, Mr. Peckwhistle. By the way,' added the grocer, who heard a good deal of gossip and was very interested in his neighbors, 'nice young gentleman he looks — the one staying at the King's Head. Relative of Mrs. Peckwhistle, I suppose?'

Seeing Mr. Peckwhistle so pale, the grocer suddenly wished he had said nothing. Some trouble there, evidently.

'A relative— yes. Oh yes!' said Mr. Peckwhistle hastily. 'My wife's— er— cousin. We should have put him up at our place, but— but—' He faltered to a painful stop.

'Well, half an hour's time, then,' said the grocer tactfully. 'Thank you very much, Mr. Peckwhistle."

It was queer, Peckwhistle reflected bitterly as he made his way home. A husband ought to be able to deal with the man who comes to steal his wife away from him. In books it was easy. There was a fine scene, in which the husband came out strong, defeating the cad, and made his wife realise that he was the only possible man in the world for her. But in real life it was different.

What could you do, if you knew your wife's affections were slipping away from you to another man who was stronger— not just more muscular but also stronger in character? A tall, nicely built young man he was, too, just the sort that a romantic girl— and although his wife was twenty-nine, she had the mental make-up of a romantic schoolgirl— would lose her heart to. Besides, wasn't it natural that she should prefer womeone nearer her own age? Perhaps it had all been a ghastly mistake, twenty-eight marrying thirty-nine. And yet, eleven years hadn't seemed too much difference— in fact, no difference at all until now.

'I'm not strong enough to hold her love,' he told himself, walking along with bent head. If her heart told her that she needed a stronger man— well, he wouldn't attempt to stop her. Life would be horribly empty without Helen. But if it would make her happier to be with this other man, that was all that really mattered.

Meanwhile, in the little white house which was his house, his wife Helen was conversing urgently in undertones with a tall, shapely young man who had a beautiful profile and perfectly waved hair.

'We must tell him,' she was saying. 'We've done nothing wrong. And I couldn't just run away from him without a word, and leave him to hear from other people. That would be too horrible. After all, he is my husband.'

'In the eyes of the law,' conceded the young man. 'But, Helen, we loveone another. Our souls belong. And when two people's souls belong—'

But Helen broke in. In the ordinary way there was nothing that she enjoyed more than listening to Claude Wetherbrook describing souls and their habits. But there was no time for that now.

'Freddie,' she said firmly, ' has gone down to Rogers for his tobacco. He'll be back soon. That was why I called you in. We must tell him, as kindly and considerately as we can, that we love one another. It's the only fair way. He'll understand.'

Claude Wetherbrook shifted his feet uneasily. It crossed Helen's mind, not for the first time, that perhaps the sheer strong beauty of his face was just the teeniest bit marred by his eyes being too close together; and it was a pity they darted to and fro in a way which, in anyone less noble, would have seemed furtile. Then she thrust away this small criticism as disloyalty.

'But, darling—' he objected, frowning slightly.

'Besides,' pursued Helen, with a tender glance at his really marvellous profile, 'I want Freddie to understand— to appreciate— your character. I want him to realise that it's I because you're so strong, dear, that this is happening.'

'All right,' he said, 'we'll tell him. And if,' he added under his breath, with a tightening of the jaw, 'he wants to make objections, I fancy l shall be able to deal with him. Why,' he can't be much over five-foot-five, and small built at that.' He laughed. 'Oh, yes, let's tell him by all means,' he said aloud. 'I'm not afraid!'

'Come on, then,' said Helen, pulling him by the arm. ' You wait in there. Ill tell him first on my own, to prepare him, and then I'll call you out.'

Hearing the familiar sound of her husband's arrival in the porch, she thrust Claude into a tall cupboard in the corner d the room with such haste that he took a mouthful of castrakhan collar.

'Shush!' she cautioned, as he began to splutter unsoulfully. 'He's just coming in! Keep quite quiet till I call out!'

With a strong flavor of astrakhan in his mouth, Claude waited. Helen feeling suddenly agitated now that the nument for telling her husband of this idyll had at last arrived, decided that she must have a few minutes to calm herself. She slipped out and, vanished upstairs just as Mr. Peckwhistle stepped unhappily into the hall. The little man looked wistfully round the sittingroom as he entered it. Happy times he had had, sitting here with Helen. And soon that would all be broken and gone.

Bleakly he crossed the room to a small desk, took out a pad of cotton-wool, fashioned a couple of plugs, and inserted them in his ears. Then he remembered that the grocer kept open till eight. He glanced at the clock. Time for a pipe before he went.

He had settled in a chair before the fire, with his pipe going well, when Helen came in and sat down in the other easy-chair. He continued to stare into the fire.

She spoke in a low, gentle voice; a mere murmur. Claude Werherbrook, listening alertly in the cupboard, caught every sentence. But Mr. Peckwhistle, who could have heard a moderate shout, was completely murmur-proof. He heard not a single the situation.

'So you see, Freddie,' concluded Helen gently, 'we haven't any choice, Claude and I. We— we belong. Spiritually, I mean. I feel that I could only really love a man who was strong— like Claude. You do not understand Freddie, don't you?'

She studied him anxiously. Mr. Peckwhistle sighed and shot a glance at the clock. About time he went along to Rogers. He rose and, too unhappy about her to meet his wife's gaze, went once more to his desk. With eyes that gradually widened, the watching Helen saw him take out a revolver and load it from a small box of cartridges. The icy band of fear seemed to close round her heart, stopping it completely. For a few moments she was frozen to her chair. Then, with her heart suddenly released again and thumping terrifyingly, she ran to him.

'Freddie! Freddie, what are you going to do with that revolver? Freddie!'

In the cupboard Claude Wetherbrook started so violently that he nearly lest his balance and fell into the room. Revolver! Cold sweat leapt out on his upper lip.

'Freddie, what are you going to do?'

No ear-plugs could have withstood that frantic wail. Mr. Peckwhistle swung round and blinked at his wife.

'I'm going to shoot a rat,' he said simply.

Helen stared at him. Then the only possible meaning of his words, coming after her revelation, burst on her with stunning force.

'Freddie!' she cried, and in her tone, besides sheer horror, there was perhaps a tincture of admiration. 'But— but you can't kill him!'

'I can,' retorted Mr. Peckwhistle, peeved at this slur on his markmanship. 'And, what's more, I'm going to. I'll kill that rat,' he continued with pardonable vigor, 'if it's the last thing I do!'

'Oh!' said Helen, and now her big blue eyes were filled with a new light. 'Oh, Freddie!'

For the time being the detail of whether Claude was finally killed or not was unimportant. She was full of this new revelation— that her husband loved her as much as this— that he meant to hold her fast.

But if the question of Claude's decease was secondary in her mind, it was well to the fore in Claude's. He had heard Mr. Peckwhistle's grim assertion with incredulity which rapidly had given place to horror and alarm. Clearly he saw something must be done— and done quickly. Claude did it. He pushed open the cupboard door, and, without pausing to take farewell of Helen, or to explain why he had readjusted his views on the mutual requirements of their souls, tore across the room, pulled open the door, and was gone. At this unexpected eruption. Mr. Peckwhistle nearly let off his revolver through sheer nervous shock. Blinking dazedly, he plucked out an ear plug— unnoticed by Helen, who had turned to witness this latest exhibition of Claude's strength of character. There was a longish silence.

'I had no idea,' she murmured at length, humbly, still looking away from him, 'that you would want to kill Claude when I told you about him. It was—' she swung round, her eyes shining with adoration— 'wonderful at you, Freddie darling!'

Mr. Peckwhistle, as capable as the next man in putting two and two together, began to perceive the truth: ear-plugs— his wife in the other chair telling him about Claude— shoot the rat! It also flashed into his mind that he could easily go down a little later and settle that rat for Mr. Rogers, at the same time swearing the grocer to lifelong secrecy.

'I've— I've been a silly girl,' faltered Helen, standing before him in lovely penitence, her cheeks flushed. 'But I— I never dreamt you were so— so strong!"

Mr. Peckwhistle, with a glow at his heart, stepped forward and took hev masterfully in his arms.

'Never mind,' he said, and his voice had a new ring which it never wholly lost during the years that followed, 'you know now!'

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## 11: The Cat's Story

***Émile Zola***

1840-1902

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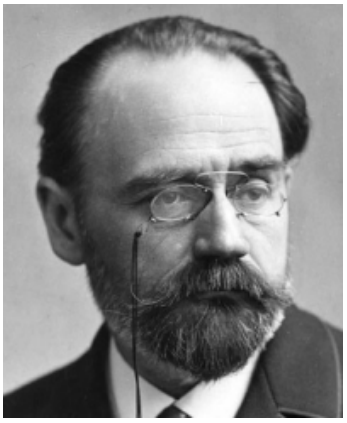

*Émile Édouard Charles Antoine Zola*

AN aunt has bequeathed me an Angora cat, which is the most foolish animal that I know. This cat told me the following story one winter evening as we were sitting together by the fire:

I WAS two years old at the time and the fattest and cutest cat that you can imagine. At that tender age I was full of conceit and despised all the quiet comforts of our home. Yet deeply indebted was I to the providence that had brought me to your aunt.

The good lady worshipped me. My bedroom, was in the bottom of a closet, and it was handsomely furnished with a feather pillow and a tricolored blanket. My food was equally excellent; never any bread or soup, but always meat— good, raw meat.

Yet amid all these joys and comforts I had only one desire. I knew only one dream— namely, to slip through the open window and escape over the roofs. I was tired of caresses; I was disgusted with the softness of my bed; I was so fat that I felt horrified whenever I caught sight of myself; hence it was that I felt bored all day long.

I ought to have said that I could see the opposite roof from our window whenever I stretched my neck out a little. There four cats had great fun every day prancing around with bristling hair and tails erect as they sang their joyous songs amid the sunlight on the blue tiles. Such a wonderful sight I had never

before seen. The very first day when I saw them I made up my mind what to do. True happiness was only to be found on that roof beyond that window which your aunt so carefully closed. I determined to escape. I felt that there must be something else in life besides raw meat. Yonder lay the unknown, the ideal world.

One day they forgot to close the kitchen window. I sprang out on a small roof below. How beautiful the roofs were! Broad gutters ran around them, and these I followed with unspeakable delight, my paws meanwhile, sinking deep in soft, warm mud. I seemed to be walking on velvet, and the sun shone warmly down on me, and its hot rays seemed to melt my fat. Yet I must admit that I was trembling in every limb. My joy was mingled with fear and anguish.

Especially do I remember a horrible occurrence, which almost made me fling myself down on the pavement. From the peaks of an adjoining house came three cats rushing toward me with fearful miaouws.

When they saw my terror, they laughed and said they only intended to scare me. When I heard that, I began to miaouw with them. Oh, it was great sport! The rascals were. by no means as fat as I was, and much fun they made of me as I rolled myself around like a ball on the sun-warmed zinc roof.

An old tomcat was one of the company, and he became very friendly . toward me. He even offered to train me properly for outdoor life, an offer which I gladly accepted.

Ah, how far away was your aunt's comfortable. home! I drank some water on the roof, and no sugared milk ever tasted as sweet to me. Everything, indeed, seemed beautiful. A very handsome young lady cat was strolling n$ar us, and at the mere sight of her I fell in love. Until that time these delightful smooth-skinned creatures had only appeared to me in dreams. So I approached the young lady and was about to pay her a compliment when one of my comrades bit me horribly in the neck. I uttered a fearful yell.

'Bah!' said the old tomcat soothingly as he drew me away. You'll soon see lots of others.'

After walking for an hour I felt terribly hungry.

'What do cats eat on the roof?' I asked my friend the tomcat.

'Whatever they can find,' he answered.

This reply filled me with despair, for I found no food anywhere, though I hunted very eagerly. Finally I saw a young working girl preparing her breakfast in an attic, and on the table in front of the window was a beautiful cutlet with a most appetising smell.

'There's a, chance for me,' I thought in all innocence, and I sprang on tihe table and grasped the cutlet. The moment, however, the working girl caught

sight of me she raised a broom and struck me a fearful blow on the back. I dropped the meat and rushed out of the attic.

'What are you about?' remarked the tomcat. 'When you see meat on a table, you must understand that you can only enjoy it from a distance. If you want food, you'll have to look oh the roofs.'

His statement that meat in kitchens does not belong to cats was incomprehensible to me. Now indeed my stomach began to clamor most earnestly for food. The tomcat filled me with, despair by his assurance that we could not expect to get much food before nightfall.

'When darkness, comes,' he said, 'we will go down into the street and search through the ash heaps. Wait till nightfall.'

How calmly he said that, the hardened old philosopher.

Very ugly the streets appeared to me. Here I found no more warmth, no more sunshine. Very different was it on the gleaming roofs, where one could frolic so comfortably. With bitter regret I thought of my warm blanket and. of my feather pillow.

Scarcely had we reached the street when my friend the tomcat began to tremble. He made himself small, very small; and sneaked past the houses, while he ordered me to follow him as quickly as possible. As soon as he came to a door he hid himself and began to purr contentedly. When I asked him why he had fled, he answered:

'Did you see the man with the big hook?'

'Yes.'

'Well, if he had caught sight of us, he would have cooked and eaten us.'

'Cooked and eaten us!' I cried. 'But doesn't the street belong to us? We don't get anything to eat, and yet we are to be eaten ourselves.'

Meanwhile the heaps of refuse in front of the houses had been ransacked, I found two or three bare bones buried in dirt and ashes. Then I appreciated the value of fresh meat. My friend. the tomcat examined the heaps with the skill of an artist. He let me run around until morning, and for ten hours I remained in the rain, shivering with cold in every limb. Infernal street, accursed liberty! How I longed for my prison!

When day came and he saw me almost powerless, he asked:

'Have you had enough of it?'

'Oh, yes!' I replied.

'Do you want to go back home?'

'Of course I do, bu.t how are we to find the house?'

'Come. When I saw you yesterday morning, I knew well that a fat cat like you would not appreciate the joys of liberty. I know your home, and will take you to the door.'

The worthy old tomcat said these words with the utmost composure. When we reached the door, he bade me farewell and did not seem in the least moved at parting from me.

'No,' I cried; 'we cannot part thus! You must come with me. We will share the same bed and the same meat. My mistress is a good woman.'

He interrupted me hastily.

'Silence!' he exclaimed. 'You are a fool! In your warm home I would soon go to pieces. Your quiet domestic life is good for pet' cats. Cats that love liberty will never surrender it for the sake of tidbits and a feather-bed. Goodbye!'

He returned to the roofs. I saw his large, lean body quiver with joy as it felt the caresses of the rising sun.

As I entered the house your aunt caught a rod and gave me a thrashing, which I received with deep joy. It was a real luxury for me to feel warm once more.

While she beat me I thought with rapture of the dainty meat which she would soon set before me.

'LET ME tell you,' said my cat as he stretched himself out at full length on the hearth, 'true happiness, paradise, my dear sir, consists in being locked up and getting a thrashing in a room where there is a piece of meat.'

I merely give this as my cat's opinion.

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## 12: The Frontier Below

***H. Bedford-Jones***

1887-1949

*Blue Book*, Sept 1925

*Henry Bedford-Jones*

BARNETT had not been in London quite forty minutes, and was glorying in his liberty. Since the war, he had worked hard and made money; his bronzed features, the alert and capable features of a mining engineer, had been thrust into every dark corner from. Montana to the Mexican border. And now, on an unimportant mission for his company to justify such a holiday, he had come abroad for six weeks of freedom. His mission could wait. His first thought was to get in touch with Chenoweth, who, so far as he knew, had no telephone. Since the war he had not seen his friend, who had been and still remained in the British Intelligence service. They had become fast friends in war days, and corresponded from time to time. It was very odd that Chenoweth had failed to meet the boat-train; he had radioed that he would do'so, and Lionel Chenoweth was not a man lightly to fail his word. . Forty minutes in London! Barnett had washed and dressed afresh, and now whistled blithely as he left his Northumberland Street hotel and paused at the door of the taxicab which swung in. The evening was foggy and chill. Barnett was hungry, for he had not yet dined.

"Thirty-nine B Pimlico Road— by Sloane Square," said Barnett to the chauffeur, and entered the taxi. In another moment he was skirting Trafalgar Square and heading down Whitehall. Passing the Cenotaph, he recognized it from pictures he had seen, and saluted; bait he observed that the chauffeur paid the memorial no attention. England, thought Barnett, was not what it had

been in other days. Perhaps it was only the folk from overseas who took thought for the dead, and for what names these other names brought to mind— how Samuel Pepys had threaded these streets, how those gray stones had felt the touch of Johnson's finger, how sly victorious Marlborough and grim Wellington had ridden down this road to the plaudits of trumpet and throat.

"Aye, Wellington brought peace— and now no man has brought peace, unless the bankers can bring it about," thought Barnett with some bitterness. "I wonder why the devil Chenoweth failed to meet that train? Not like him."

Busy, perhaps; Chenoweth was always busy, somewhere beneath the surface of affairs, for in these days any European government found itself involved in astonishing things, among which government was only an incident. Whether it were a murder mystery in Italy, a blackmail sensation in England, or a forgery case in Paris and Berlin— government of a country came second to intrigue and crime. Not statesmen made history, but criminals. Among such affairs moved Chenoweth, a master player in the dark game— a quiet man, unassuming, greeted with respectful attention by princes, and yet never appearing in the limelight of the press.

The chauffeur leaned over and jerked the door open with one hand.

"Looks a bit thick 'ere, sir— I'd best draw up 'ere."

BARNETT came to attention as the cab stopped. He descended, felt for coins in his pockets, looked at the darkened street. Just ahead, a small crowd was being dispersed by a number of policemen, and a glance at the house-numbers showed Barnett that the crowd was before the house in which Lionel Chenoweth had rooms.

"Two and six— thank you, sir."

Barnett turned. At this instant he found a man beside him, a man clad in nondescript garments, peering at him from oblique eyes— a Chinaman, apparently, and dark of skin.

"Mist Ba'nett? My have got one piecee chit fo' you—Mist' Shenwett send."

Barnett felt a paper thrust into his hand, and the Oriental disappeared. He stood staring, blankly amazed beyond words. How had the man known him? What on earth could such a message mean?

He was so astonished that he walked mechanically toward Number Thirty-nine, his hand clenched on the paper. Perhaps the message had been meant for him at the hotel, to explain Chenoweth's nonappearance, and the Chinaman had followed him here— No, that seemed rather impossible. But why bother about it, when he'd be in Chenoweth's rooms in a moment more?

Barnett turned into the entrance of Number Thirty-nine, and found himself confronted by a tall policeman who saluted.

"Beg pardon, sir— are you looking for some one here?"

"Eh?" Barnett stopped. "What do you mean? Yes, I'm looking for Mr. Chenoweth."

The policeman made a motion. Barnett found another towering figure suddenly at his elbow.

"May I ask, sir, if you're a friend of Mr. Chenoweth?"

Something was wrong, evidently.

"Yes. He was expecting me. What's all the commotion about?"

"An American gentleman, 'e is," said the bobby behind the visitor. The one in front stepped aside.

"Sorry to say, sir, Mr. Chenoweth has been murdered. Go right up, if you please —this officer will accompany you. I fancy the inspector will want to have a word with you, sir."

"Eh? Murdered, you say?" Barnett froze in his tracks. "Man, it's impossible! Why, I only just—"

He checked himself. Better not mention that note until he had read it!

"Yes sir," returned the officer. "The inspector is up there, sir."

Barnett found himself quietly but efficiently conducted to the rooms, one flight up, which Chenoweth had occupied for years. He collected himself with an effort, regained his poise, thrust the note into his pocket. It was obvious that any friend of Chenoweth's who arrived at such a moment would be questioned— but Chenoweth murdered! Such a thing was almost past belief, to one who knew the man.

A KNOCK. A door opened. Barnett stepped into a room where three men, two writing in notebooks, stood about a dead body that lay limply half across a table, where it had been writing a letter when slain. The odor of blood was sickeningly strong.

"Been dead two hours at least, but hardly more," said one, evidently a surgeon. "Rigor mortis has not reached the extremities yet."

Barnett ignored the surgeon, looked at the two officers who faced him and heard the explanation of the policeman. One of them, evidently in charge, dismissed the bobby and nodded to the visitor. The other was lighting a gas lamp.

"Very good, sir. I'm Inspector Davidson, from Scotland Yard. Your name?"

Barnett told who he was, why he was here, how long he had been in London. At mention of his name, the inspector's brows went up slightly.

"Your passport, sir?"

Barnett produced it. The two officers conferred. The inspector returned it gravely, "Quite all right; sorry we had to trouble you, sir, but one never knows. You're an old friend of Mr. Chenoweth, I believe?"

"During war days, yes; we worked together. I was in the American Intelligence. But this— this can't be true—"

He stared down at the body, a little sick, a little horrified. Chenoweth's forehead and upper face had been crushed by some frightful blow; his hands lay outflung on the table, a pen still between his fingers, which were not yet reached by the stiffness of death. Even at this instant, it struck Barnett as a trifle odd that those fingers, limp in death, should have clung to the pen.

On the table, partially reached by the dark tide of blood, was a half-written sheet of Chenoweth's note-paper. The inspector pointed to it.

"Its addressed to you, sir. I'll ask you not to touch anything, but you may read it."

"Do you know— who did this?" demanded Barnett jerkily.

"No sir," was the response. "We'll learn, though."

BARNETT went to the dead man's shoulder, and peered down. In the lamplight he could read what had been written there, evidently in the very moment of death:

*My dear Barnett:*

*Sorry I can't meet your train as I promised, but a matter of vital importance has just turned up. I'm scribbling this in a devilish hurry; shall try to reach you at the hotel tonight, either by telephone or*

There death had intervened, abruptly. Barnett glanced down at the fingers which had penned this message to him, sorrowfully. Chenoweth's hand— the old worn gold seal ring with its crest and motto deeply carven, the long and delicate fingers that had touched so many secrets of governments and peoples, the thumb, lightly scarred by a knife-slash; it was that knife-slash which had doomed the Czar to murder, and except for it, Chenoweth would have saved him— There was no scar on this thumb. Barnett looked again, started, checked the words that rose to his lips. No doubt about it. This thumb was not, never had been, scarred. Drawing back, Barnett looked down at the body. So far as one could tell, it was the body of Chenoweth. The profile of the lower face was that of Chenoweth, all below the red ruin. There was the half-written note, penned in the peculiar and unmistakable writing of Chenoweth.

Yet this dead man was not Lionel Chenoweth.

The two officers, as though respecting the emotion of the American, were talking with the surgeon. Barnett saw the moment opportune, and seized it

without hesitation. He drew from his pocket the crumpled note and held it in the light. One glance served to give him its message, and he quietly put it away again.

The inspector turned to him.

"You recognize him, sir? It's beyond any doubt, of course, yet as you knew him well, I'd be glad. of your recognition. We've had no time to summon his family—"

"Certainly," said Barnett. "There can be no mistake; this is poor Chenoweth beyond any question. He has no family, I believe, except a distant cousin whom he has mentioned once or twice, somewhere in Cornwall. Haven't you any idea who did it, or why it was done?"

NOTHING was known, it appeared, and Barnett took his departure unhindered. As he walked up the darkening street, he carefully tore the crumpled note into tiny fragments and tossed them aside; its brief, almost desperate message, pounded recurrently at his brain:

*"For heaven's sake, identify that body! I'll send. for you later. L. C."*

Why? The word throbbed in him, and had no answer. He could understand only that Lionel Chenoweth was alive and not dead at all—but why? As he walked, vainly searching the lights of a taxi, he heard a voice from somewhere, a maudlin voice rising shrill on the gloom:

*"Long time plenty work, sampan coolie,*
*Yangtse river way down Shanghai;*
*Makee love-pidgin, too muchee talkee,*
*Welly little ploper lady no likee my!"*

Barnett came to a halt, stared around, saw nothing. He felt like a man in dream. The lights of a taxi barged up through the darkness, and he signaled mechanically. He was alone in the dark street— yet that maudlin voice had been the voice of Lionel Chenoweth.

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BARNETT went straight back to his hotel. He reasoned that Chenoweth would either telephone him there, or in some way get a message through to him, as promised in the note that had been handed him.

In this surmise, apparently, he was wrong. It was late when he got back, so late that he ordered a special meal sent to his room. He waited up until two in

the morning, vainly, then gave it over and turned in. He was wakened in the morning to receive a stolid policeman, who delivered a formal notice that he must attend the inquest on Chenoweth's body that afternoon at the Bull and Gate Inn, five doors distant from Chenoweth's rooms in Pimlico Road, as the rooms would not accommodate the inquiry.

Three o'clock, said the policeman, and Barnett promised to attend. He reasoned that Chenoweth would now take his own time over getting in touch, and it was useless to keep indoors on the possibility. London awaited inspection; it was approaching the end of a mild winter, and Barnett was in need of underclothing. He remembered the Army and Navy Stores outfitting department, and decided .on a walk down Whitehall, round by the Abbey and along Victoria Street— exercise before lunch.

Barnett gained the hotel lobby. A largebuilt man was studying the notice of air services, and turned to glance at the American. Barnett's mind was alert for trifles; he looked at the big man, was positive he had never seen the person before, and went on his way. Leaving the hotel, he turned to the left, toward Trafalgar Square.

He did not observe that, as he emerged, a taxi suddenly turned out of the rank along the center of the street; the chauífeur pulled down his flag and hauled in toward the curb beside Barnett. Crawling along, the taxi caught up with him just opposite the bus-stop at the top of Whitehall. The driver leaned out toward him.

"American, sir? Taxi, sir? Shilling a mile, sir."

Barnett's heart thumped suddenly, rushed the hurried blood through his veins, as he looked the driver squarely in the eyes.

"Why, I reckon I might," he responded, with an exaggerated Yankee drawl. "I guess you know this burg pretty well, eh?"

"I do, sir," returned the driver, an unkempt, rough-skinned individual.

"Well, I reckon you might as well give me a spin. Sing out when we come to any monuments, and I'l take 'em in."

The driver leaned around to open the door for him, and Barnett caught a quick murmur:

"Watch behind!"

AS he got into the vehicle, from the corner of his eye Barnett saw the big man of the hotel lobby frantically signaling another taxicab to the curb. Barely was he inside when his own machine started off with a jerk and a swift click of gears, flinging him back on the cushions. Barnett looked for the usual speaking tube, found it, and pressed the bulb.

"Man from hotel following— he was keeping an eye on me there. A large man with heavy features," he said. The driver, ear to receiver, nodded comprehension.

Barnett looked around, saw that the taxi setting out in pursuit of them was a large red Renault, an easily recognized car amid fleets of smaller makes. Then a jerk flung him back once more as the machine swerved and turned on two wheels— the driver was losing no time. The taxi sped down Whitehall, just managing to get through as a policeman at the far end put up his hand to halt traffic. Looking back, Barnett saw that the Renault was held up.

On they went down Victoria Street and past the station, following the bus-route to Sloane Square. Here the driver turned into King's Road, threading in and out among the traffic with an uncanny and reckless skill; just before reaching Parsons Green, the taxi swerved to the right, into the Fulham Road. From here, Barnett was completely lost and on unfamiliar ground until suddenly he recognized Putney Bridge, whence he had once watched the boat-race start.

Now he was certain that their follower was shaken off, and small wonder, for his driver was taking long chances. He forgot the ten-mile limit in Putney High Street, took the crossing by the station in high gear, and by the way they rushed the hill, Barnett knew he was sitting behind no ordinary taxicab engine. Where the roads divide at the crest, the taxi swung to the right for Kingston; and then, out on the open of the common, pulled in to the side of the road. The driver alighted and opened a penknife.

Barnett opened the door and climbed out, just in time to see that penknife driven pitilessly into the off rear tire, and to get a rueful grin from the driver.

"I t's a sin," observed the latter, "but I'm taking no chances; if we're to stop for a talk, here's the reason." He went to the front of the car, lifted the driver's seat, and got out a jack and roll of tools. "Don't look anything but annoyed," he went on. "Nobody's in sight, bar nursemaids, but if you assume the proper air of disgusted futility it will at least appear—"

"Chuck it!" broke out Barnett, between impatience and amusement. "My Lord, what a sight you are! Rubbed a brick on your face, or is it plain make-up? I think you should be dead, since I'm attending your inquest this afternoon. What's the game?"

CHENOWETH uttered a curt laugh, and went on with his work of jacking up the car and lifting off the tire. They had lost the pursuers, but he took no risks.

"The deceased gentleman, whose name was Trebitsch, made a slight error, and so I'm still on deck. He was ahead of time, reaching my rooms at seven-

thirty. I got back for the appointment at seven-fortyfive and found him dead— and observed who killed him. They didn't see me, though."

Chenoweth lighted a cigarette, and his eyes bit out laughingly at Barnett. Under the chauffeur's hat and coat, his very square-cut shoulders lost outline, and his reddened features had lost all semblance to the keen-lined face Barnett knew. Only the eyes were the same, cold gray, keen, quizzical with deep humor, ready to harden like steel or soften with a frank kindliness that won men swiftly.

"There's a lot I don't see, either. What about that letter to me?"

"One of several" and Chenoweth laughed. "Trebitsch, like all of them, was hard up. There was a certain letter which he tried to sell me. Others knew of it, evidently. He was struck down on entering my rooms, as the position of the body showed."

"Yes, seated at the table," said Barnett caustically. "Blackmailing affair?" ` Chenoweth ignored the query and rubbed his nose with a greasy finger.

"Until the police have seen it, a body can be moved. I knew you'd be around after me, so I scribbled that half-note, arranged him in the chair, cleaned up the mess by the door— so! They had waited for me in the dark; Trebitsch was like me in build: there you have it."

"I'm no mind-reader," retorted Barnett. "If you know who killed him, why not let the police gather in your precious crowd?"

"Letter wasn't on him." Chenoweth bent to the tire, got the rim off the wheel, rolled it alongside the running board and detached the spare from its holder. "They got it back, thinking they'd killed me."

"How d'you know that?"

Chenoweth waved his wrench in protest at the catechism. "My dear chap, I saw 'em come down the stairs— three of the Queen Street group. Lasalle told the other two that having settled me, they now had to find Trebitsch and settle him. That gave me the idea of staying dead for my own security. I can get that letter far better dead than alive, you see— and getting it is a vital necessity."

Barnett watched his friend get the spare in place. Still he knew nothing of the behind all this, and he would not know it until Chenoweth got ready.

"Anything else youfneed to discover?" said Chenoweth, not without irony. "The owner of this taxi is my old batman over in France, Benson; you may recall him. I'm Benson now. Driver's license and all that sort of thing in case I get up against the speed-laws. The last man one looks at is a taxi-driver, unless it's a windowcleaner. By the way, ever hear that story about the window-cleaner who mumbled to himself—"

"Many times, thanks," said Barnett grimly. "But there's a lot to this present story I've not heard."

"Right. I've been in a devil of a rush, what with one thing and another— chiefly you. Had to get in touch with you. Managed that through Yen Lo, who saw your picture and was sure to know you again. I had to keep an eye out for Eloise, you know—"

"Confound it, I don't know!"

Chenoweth grinned, took a fresh cigarette, and relaxed.

"Eloise Venitsky brought the letter from— hm! Let's say, from a capital city a good many miles east of England. It contained instructions for a certain gentleman, a Cabinet Minister; whatever his intentions may be now, he's tied hand and foot by his past indiscretions. By the mercy of heaven, he's away down in the country, and Eloise knows she can't get at him until he comes back to London. Few people knew of the existence of that letter, but Trebitsch ferreted it out. The temptation was too much for the poor devil. He was to sell it to me for two thousand pounds and clear road to Rio, with passage paid. That was the bargain."

Chenoweth went back to work. Barnett watched the fixing of the spare and the placement of the damaged tire on the holder. An international affair, then— no mere blackmail business! Russia, perhaps, or some Balkan state, to judge by the names used; an intrigue of the old Czarist party, it might be, or it might be anything at all. Chenoweth straightened up and flung the American a swift, keen look.

"Well?" he demanded curtly.

"No reason against it," said Barnett.

QUESTION and prompt answer— these two men understood each other perfectly. A look of swift relief came into Chenoweth's eyes; that he would permit himself such a look, showed the tense strain under which he had been laboring.

"Risky," he observed.

Barnett shrugged. "Count me in, gladly, if you want me."

"Badly. I'm a bit on edge— can't risk an ear or an eye anywhere. Half my precaution may be silly rot; the other half may save my life a dozen times a day."

"I'd say, give the murderers to the police. They may slip away."

"They can't get out of England." Chenoweth shook his head. "They're marked, and if any one of the three tried, he'd be held on some minor charge. They're more useful to me as they are, till I can get at Eloise and recover the letter. I can't locate her, but one of them will certainly lead me to her in the next day or two. Then I'll put Parkston on to them and they can go inside."

"Parkston being Scotland Yard?"

"Not much," said Chenoweth. He got out a clean swab and removed some of the grease from his hands, if not from his face. "Its a proverb about having a friend at Vine Street, and Parkston is mine own especial friend at that station. I bribe him at times with things like this— when I get the chance. Since the war, particularly, we of the political branch don't love the ordinary Scotland Yard investigation people; I keep away from 'em. But I love Parkston."

Chenoweth put his tools away and straightened up.

"Now," he went on, "our semi-prohibition rules admit of refreshment— it's eleven forty-five— but our class distinctions don't admit my going into the bar with you. I feel beerish. Therefore, I suggest that you order me to stop at the pub at the top of the hill, on our way back, and you may bring me out a tall foaming glass. Thank you kindly, sir."

Barnett chuckled and climbed in, and the taxi started off. It drew up at the pub as planned, and Barnett brought out the drink to his driver.

"If ever you want taking out again, sir," said Chenoweth heartily, "just ring Streatham 11967 and ask for me— Benson is my name, and I know a lot about London sights. 'K'yew, sir!"

So they returned to Victoria, and there Chenoweth headed for the station, and drove into the yard. Barnett alighted and fumbled for coins.

"Get a paper at the station bookstall and go home, while I get away," said Chenoweth softly. "Ring up Benson directly after the inquest— I'll be there. Got the number?"

Barnett nodded, handed over a coin, and turned into the station.

Having bought his paper, he decided to omit his visit to the Stores for tbe present, and seek luncheon. Taking the first taxi he saw, he ordered the driver to Pagani's, in Great Portland street— but all the way there, he felt that the man was crawling rather than driving. After the way Chenoweth tooled a car, an ordinary ride was a tame affair.

## iii

BARNETT shook things down in his mind as he lunched. Obviously he was being watched and followed, and the enemy undoubtedly knew all about him if they held him suspect, so that he must be cautious. This was London, possibly the most law-abiding city in the world in a general way— but even in London such a game as this was played with life as a subsidiary stake.

The letter that Chenoweth sought, for example, counted far above life. It involved the honor of a Cabinet Minister, at the very least, and was undoubtedly pregnant with national or international consequences. The days had gone by when government was a matter of straight diplomacy; whatever

she had done in the war, England had lost the peace, and the cost was reflected in such absurdities as this, which permitted an unknown woman and a few unscrupulous ruffians to threaten the very center of government itself.

Barnett had heard enough of the Queen Street group to remember them as the mainspring of unconstitutional activities, a party that would go to any length. Most of them had served prison terms; in the circles where such things are discussed, it was pretty generally known that the group derived its cash balance from eastern Europe. Barnett nodded to himself, as he recalled the affair of the jewels in the chocolates,

At the same time, he reflected frowningly, this Eloise Venitsky could not belong to that group, else she had never got into the country, with or without that letter. British present-day methods are far more effective in some ways than appear, and no member of any suspect group could enter or leave the country without stringent investigation. Puzzle: find Eloise Venitsky!

"No, I can't afford to find her," reflected Barnett, repressing his own eagerness with a laugh. "Can't risk spoiling Chenoweth's game by a blunder. I must wait."

AFTER a leisurely luncheon, he took a bus down to Sloane Square for the inquest— his first experience of an English inquiry of this kind. A few words with the spectacled coroner assured him that he was required only for formal identification of the body. "Together with the jury, he adjourned from the tavern briefly to view the body, which had been laid out in Chenoweth's bedroom— a sight horrible enough, and from which all were glad to escape. Back in the bare, dusty room at the Bull and Gate, the evidence followed a regular rote.

Barnett testified to this body as that of Lionel Chenoweth, and was followed by Mrs. Woods, who cooked and "did for" the deceased. She stated that she had been struck all of a heap by finding the body. She had screamed and run out into the road, seizing on the first policeman she saw; no, she had touched nothing in the room.

The lady was amusing in her way of giving evidence, and Barnett settled himself on his very uncomfortable chair, resolved to see the thing through.

Mrs. Woods had not seen anybody come in— she hadn't a chance to see anyone come in. She knew there was a gentleman coming to see Mr. Chenoweth that evening; the lodger had told her so, but she didn't know if the gentleman had been. She had been cooking. She couldn't, she stated with some asperity, attend to her cooking and keep an eye on the stairs at the same time— she hadn't got only one pair of eyes.

The coroner bowed a bland admission of this fact, and murmured something about even this pair being of small use. At this point Mrs. Woods became suddenly quite confused, and mumbled something about a letter. She felt in a dingy black bag, which took a good deal of opening, and then produced and held out to the coroner a letter which must have been delivered by hand. It was unstamped. 'The coroner snapped out a brusque query.

"It was— it come just before I found "im— Mr. Chenoweth, sir," she stammered.

"Who brought it?" rapped the coroner curtly.

"A— a yeller man— a little yeller man, what I seen come before to see Mr. Chenoweth. "E didn't say nothin', just give it to me. An' then I puts it in me pocket, an' says to meself that when I goes up to Mr. Chenoweth's room, Il take it up to "im. An'— an' later on, when I goes up, why, I was struck all of a 'eap— clean forgot it, sir—"

CONVINCED of the lady's innocence of intent, the coroner tore open the letter, then shook his head. Barnett could see the sheet of paper plainly from his seat. It bore two brushed Chinese characters, nothing more.

"Chinese writing, eh? Must be translated," said the coroner. "I hope, Mrs. Woods, that you are not concealing anything else that might have a bearing on the case."

"S'elp me, sir, I wouldn't do the gentleman no 'arm, even if 'e is dead!" exclaimed the lady in agitation. "I'd 'elp if I could—"

Barnett frowned. There was no possible way of getting hold of that letter; he could only tell Chenoweth about it. Now he lost himself in calculation. Trebitsch had been due at seven forty-five, but had arrived early. Chenoweth had returned at the exact time. Barnett himself had arrived by eight-thirty. The police surgeon had declared the man two hours dead. That did not chime at all. Probably, however, the surgeon's estimate was inexact. Oddly enough, there flitted across Barnett's mind, just here, the remembrance of that voice in the street and the song in pigeon-English. Why had Chenoweth, since it must have been he, bawled out that old well-known doggerel?

Let it go; the crime itself was the thing, and Barnett found himself visualizing it from his knowledge of the spot. There would be a glimmer of gas on the landing, at the top of the stairs; once Trebitsch passed that, his face would be all in shadow. 'The three killers would wait in the dark, probably in Chenoweth's rooms, would wait until the door opened, and the tall figure loomed there dimly—

Barnett pulled himself back to realities; it was too ugly. A heavy iron bar, the police surgeon was saying, giving very technical namestovery

commonthings. The coroner had been asking if the dead man had enemies. Apparently robbery was not the motive. So the little farce went on, and only Barnett knew that it was a farce. They did these things nicely in England, he reflected. There was a dignified reticence about the police surgeon, about all the functionaries of the law; Mrs. Woods provided a touch of comic relief, though the coroner firmly repressed any laughter at her outbursts. When it came to the summing-up, no one knew more than at the beginning, and the spectators had heard less than they had read in the newspapers. The coroner reminded the jury that they were there to ascertain the cause of death; as to blame and punishment, these might safely be left to the police. A very meek foreman announced the verdict as "willful murder by some person or persons unknown," and so it was ended.

BARNETT had noted one of the reporters eying him determinedly. Now, as he left the place, he was accosted by the young man before he had lighted his cigarette. The resolute and keen air of the reporter gave Barnett full warning that something had been scented on this trail; his business, he knew well, was to draw a red herring across the scent, without delay.

"By the way, Mr. Barnett!" said the reporter. "Would you mind telling me what really is behind all this? I fancy you know. I represent the *Daily*—"

"Yes, yes, of course you do," broke in Barnett, assuming a hurried and nervous air. "I'm glad to tell you, of course. Mustn't get out. Poor Chenoweth was not murdered at all. He committed suicide."

"Eh? Sir— I—" Confused, the other stammered to a halt.

"What do you want to know?" demanded Barnett abruptly.

"This may be a big thing." The reporter collected himself. "There's something in it. I don't think you ought to joke about it, in the least—"

"My heavens, man, who's joking?" demanded Barnett, his eyes widening. "Death is always a big thing. Suicide is a bigger. This affair struck me as very respectful and neatly handled, though of course if you make any charge of suicide, you'll have to sustain it against the verdict of the coroner. Can't quote me, you know. Your London papers are so used to being given the lie on interviews that you wont dare quote me; we do things differently in the States, where the word of a reporter more than balances that of most politicians. Anyway, the corpse hasn't complained. I'll wish you good day, sir, and I'd be careful what I print about this, if I were you."

Barnett strode off, leaving behind him a sleuth who obviously doubted his sanity and was too nonplused for the moment to assume any offensive. Hailing the first taxi to come along, Barnett paid the man off at his hotel, turned abruptly and walked up to the Strand, and entered Charing Cross station.

Entering one of the telephone booths on the platform, he mastered the intricacies of the automatic coin-box and called up Streatham 11967.

"This you, Benson?" he inquired after getting his number.

"Yes sir," came the voice of Chenoweth respectfully. "Where are you speaking from, if I may ask?"

"Charing Cross station—"

The click of a replaced receiver cut in. When the exchange operator asked whether he had got his number, Barnett replied in the affirmative, repressed an oath, and hung up. Coin-boxes, evidently, were not safe— yet it seemed an absurdity. Well, he would try again from the hotel, since Chenoweth had definitely told him to ring up. So thinking, Barnett walked out to the platform. Then, as he passed the bookstall, his glance settled upon it with sudden and intent interest. There, inspecting the array of magazines, was the big man of the hotel vestibule.

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AS Barnett left the sation, he caught sight of a newspaper extra placard, and sensed the hand of the reporter who had accosted him. "Pimlico Mystery Thickens," it read; and buying a paper, he found a brief paragraph recording the inquest and stating that Mr. Barnett, the American friend of the deceased, had, declined any information whatever. His opinion of the London newspapers went up a notch— this was quick work.

When he got back to the hotel, he was yearning for a cigarette, and he opened his bag to get at a carton— only to forget about it next instant. Everything was in order, but not quite as he had left it; Barnett packed systematically, and the slightest displacement of any article would catch his eye. Now he found that some one had gone through that bag, and also through his trunk, as presently appeared. He found that nothing had been left untouched, yet nothing had been taken; even his personal jewelry had been examined, as the cases showed.

"Drew blank there," he reflected with a chuckle.

Probably they would leave him alone now. He was not concerned with the affair of the letter, so far as the Queen Street group could know; their suspicion must be directed at him merely because of his friendship for Chenoweth. The newspaper accounts of how Chenoweth's body had been found, in the very act of writing a note to him, would puzzle them and start their suspicions, and so it was natural that they should keep an eye on him. He remembered and obtained his cigarettes and had just lighted one when a knock came at the door. In response to his call, a bellboy entered and handed

him a note with a typed superscription. Barnett gave the boy a coin, and carelessly tossed the note on his table. The envelope proclaimed it to be from Liberty's, but Barnett had an idea that inside would be something else than a bill from the big London shop.

In this he was right. When alone again, he tore open the envelope and found a note in Chenoweth's writing, brief and to the point.

*Maison Lyons, basement floor, to left of the entrance, about 9:30. Sit tight until you've given your order, then get into conversation. Look casual. Get lost on the way there if you can. All news when we meet.*

It was already past five in the afternoon. Barnett bathed, dressed in ordinary day attire, and then descended to the hotel lounge, where he ordered a drink. The big man was not in evidence; he might have outlived his usefulness, or have gone off duty to be relieved by another trailer.

WHEN the drink came, Barnett swallowed it at one gulp, and had his coat on before the waiter was out of sight. This sudden activity rather flustered a small, bearded, foreign-appearing man, who so far forgot himself as to rise and leave immediately after Barnett. The American grinned as he hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to the Liverpool Street station.

Here, Barnett lingered enough to see the bearded foreigner descend from another taxi, and mentally complimented the man on his smartness. Having taken a ticket for Hackney Downs station, ten minutes away, Barnett now intently studied the notice board of the main line; thirty seconds before his suburban train was ready to start, he bolted for it. He darted into a first-class carriage, and looked back to see his trailer held up at the barrier, frantically arguing with the ticket-collector. The train started.

Barnett sat tight to Hackney Downs, where he got out and crossed to the up side, having a return ticket. He did not return to Liverpool Street, but alighted at London Fields, and here after some delay managed to secure a taxi.

"Gatti's in the Strand, back entrance," he ordered.

Having a couple of hours to spare before his appointment with Chenoweth, he intended to dine comfortably, and not at the Maison Lyons. It was well after seven when his taxi landed him at Gatti's, where he located a corner table in the red room and seated himself for an hour or so of comfortable relaxation.

At his request, the waiter brought him the final edition of an evening paper. It gave half a column to the Pimlico affair, padding out by recounting some of the late Major Chenoweth's exploits in France. It also stated that the police had the matter in hand, and the arrest of the murderer was to be expected within a few hours. With a sniff, Barnett laid aside the paper.

Fortunately there was no lack of other sensations, including a big murder trial; the newspapers would soon let the Pimlico murder die down— which was exactly what all the participants most desired.

At a quarter past nine, the smiling youth at the Strand entrance to Gatti's signaled up a taxi for a very satisfied Barnett; he was driven to the Bond Street subway station, reaching this at three minutes short of the half-hour. He was nearly five minutes late for his appointment, because the door attendant firmly refused.to let him enter while a lady vocalist was warbling; judging by the strains which he could catch, he was not missing much.

Chenoweth, very distinguished-looking, with snowy white hair, sat reading an evening paper— reading the account of his own inquest, undoubtedly. He had turned his eyebrows white, too, and made of his nosemat mustache an iron-gray affair. If Barnett had not been in search of him, he would have passed this man by without a thought that it was Chenoweth. The only other person at the table was a pasty-looking individual who seemed to be dining mainly off toothpicks, by the way he used them,

"This seat engaged?" asked Barnett in a general way, drawing a negative headshake from both. He pulled out the chair between them, facing toward the entrance. The toothpick man very politely handed him a large card bearing the word "Tariff," whereon he saw many things which he did not want to eat; so, when the waitress came hovering, Barnett smiled and ordered lobster mayonnaise, which would do to play with,

THE band ceased from its tumult. The pallid man of toothpicks applauded vigorously, took his hat from under his chair, got his bill, and departed. Chenoweth smiled at his friend.

"No need to say it. We're safe here as on Wimbledon Common, so long as we don't raise our voices. I got the stuff from Yen So; my hair will come out all right in a day or so. He's trailing Lasalle at the moment, trying to find Eloise Venitsky."

"And the game?" asked Barnett.

"Is playing itself." Chenoweth was the soul of calmness. "We can't and needn't hurry it, so long as our politician is down in the country playing golf, or whatever he does down there. The lady can't reach him until he comes back. Meantime— I'll find her."

"You sound confident."

"Bet you six to one, in what you like, I'll have her address by eight in the mornBarnett suddenly remembered his news. "By the way, at the inquest your housekeeper produced a letter that had arrived for you the day of the murder, It carried only two characters in Chinese—"

Chenoweth smiled. "A code message from Yen Lo, quite unimportant and not bearing on the present case at all. Thanks. ux put the police on no end of a false trail."

Barnett frowned a little. "I like the way you play the game here in England. It's so damned cheerfully irresponsible! You taught us how to work it in France, of course, but your system is different."

"Same old system, except that now the rules are a bit stricter and the penalties for breaking 'em are more certain to reach home. Those three who killed Trebitsch might have got away in other countries; they don't stand an earthly chance in this one, and yet they don't realize it. Two of them have been trailing you— I know all about it— ever since you came down to my flat. As a matter of fact, it's the safest thing they could do— diverts suspicion, looks more natural than dodging or hiding."

"And the lady? What about your confounded system of registering aliens?"

Chenoweth smiled. "What's to prevent Mademoiselle Eloise from leaving her registered address, and turning up elsewhere with a full English identity? She's not under supervision."

"Not clear to me," said Barnett. "Supervision?" Chenoweth glanced around. No one was close by, and between them they commanded both sides of the table against unseen approach. The orchestra was tuning up, for a special number announced by a card on the platform.

"Famous composer, that." Chenoweth nodded toward the card. "Barnett, there are two classes of people in the eyes of the English police— those who are 'known' and those who are not. Once you come under the eyes of our bobbies, commit any act which renders you liable to a criminal charge, you're pigeonholed, labeled for ever more and then some. Until you commit that act, they don't know you, and don't want to know you; they take it you're all right. And so far, Eloise Venitsky has been all right."

"And the letter?"

"Eight people in England know of its existence, including you. If the sender were known, and the name of the man addressed, the contents would next be known— then there'd be a bigger scandal than this country could afford."

"Hm! You put fine men in Cabinet jobs," commented Barnett.

"Yes? Your American politicians are all fine characters too, eh?" Chenoweth chuckled. "He's not bad— merely weak; and for that reason he's wanted where he is. The nominal heads of government are puppets, with two or three strong men pulling the strings. Like others, this chap got tied up just after the war, and now he has to obey his masters even if he lands his country in the mire."

"Ah!" said Barnett. "His name is—"

"If you say it, I'll douse you with mayonnaise! By the holy poker,"— and Chenoweth broke off to glance at the entrance,— "if here isn't Benson!"

A MAN, entering, looked around the place, and regarded Chenoweth doubtfully; then a flicker of a smile came and went on his face. He advanced to their table and took one of the two vacant seats in an abstracted manner. Chenoweth at once reached beneath his chair for his hat, and then spoke.

"Barnett, this is my very good friend Benson; and Benson, this is my very good friend Barnett— he was with me in France after you got your packet and were sent home, and he's with me now."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said Benson awkwardly.

Chenoweth, standing and waiting for his check, looked down at his one-time batman.

"Did you get it?" he demanded.

Benson nodded, took an evening paper from his pocket, and laid it on the table before him, in a casual way. Chenoweth glanced down at it. Above the heading was a penciled legend, occupying two short lines.

"I said before eight in the morning, Barnett." Chenoweth's eyes glinted suddenly. "You can pay up on that bet. Number Eighteen, Hanway Street, near Gloucester Road underground station."

"I never took the bet," retorted Barnett.

"Stingy blighter! It was a certainty for me."

"Which was why I ignored it."

Chenoweth took his slip from the waitress, and dismissed her with a shilling and a smile.

"You stop and talk with Benson," he said. "I'm going out alone. We'll meet at Gloucester Road underground station at four tomorrow afternoon. I don't think there'll be any liveliness, but anything's possible. Tra la!"

He departed. Barnett turned his attention to Benson; a short, sturdily built man, with graying hair and mustache, evidently a useful person in any emergency. There was intelligence in his steady gray eyes, reliability in every line of his face.

"Clever work," said Barnett. "How did you discover it so quickly?"

"Discover what, sir?" Benson regarded him with a wooden expression. Barnett looked at him a moment, then broke into a laugh.

"It's your call, Benson; the drinks are on me."

IT was close to half-past ten when Chenoweth emerged to the pavement, a big muffler about his chin, his hat pulled well down— the night being chilly enough to admit of these precautions. He achieved a realistic shiver, turned up the collar of his coat, and set off westward toward Marble Arch. He intended to get a taxi for Streatham at the top of Park Lane, and meantime a walk would be beneficial.

So, at least, he intended; but he forgot the one chance in a million which London carefully provides for its residents.

Chenoweth had crossed the street in order to avoid the brilliant lighting of Selfridge's windows, although he deprecated his precautions as rather absurd. He stepped from the street to the curb, just as two men came along past, heading eastward. He paid them no attention. Yet as he passed, he heard a sharp ejaculation come from one of them— a blend of incredulity, of sheer fright, of amazement. Chenoweth turned, and then cursed his lack of care. He knew them at once— Lasalle and Walter James, of the Queen Street group.

"And they spotted me," thought Chenoweth in dismay. He tried to lose himself in the throng turning out from the Marble Arch cinema palaces, yet felt that it was useless.

Those two would follow him, and they would get in touch with Eloise. He could appreciate the shock and alarm that must have filled them at catching a glimpse of him. In thought, he saw Lasalle in a telephone booth, with Eloise at the other end of the wire. Once convinced that Chenoweth still lived, once it was realized what man had actually been murdered in Pimlico Road, the woman would move heaven and earth to get that letter into the hands of its intended recipient at the earliest moment.

There were no spare taxies about, for the picture palace audiences had snapped up all crawlers. Chenoweth accelerated his pace, and at the corner of Park Lane secured a Fiat.

"The end of Hanway Street, by Gloucester Road station— make the best time you can."

There was haste, as he realized. While he rode, he scribbled a note to Barnett in the semigloom of the cab, and paused to address it legibly when the chauffeur had pulled up at the corner of Hanway Street. Then, alighting, he handed it to the man, together with a pound note above his fare.

"Deliver this at once. There's a word inside, telling Mr. Barnett to hand you another two pounds. If he's not back when you get there, wait for him. Get the note into his hands and no others. If it involves any extra expense, he'll pay you."

"Right, guv'nor—and thank you."

THE man drove off, and Chenoweth turned to look about him. The normal night traffic of Gloucester Road went on as usual; Hanway Street, gloomy by comparison with the brilliantly lighted thoroughfare, had but a couple of pedestrian occupants, a man and a girl conversing in the deeper gloom between two street lamps. Of the figure Chenoweth had hoped to see, there was no sign whatever.

"Which is very unlike Yen Lo," he soliloquized. "Still, even a Chinaman must eat at times, I fancy. I don't like it. Leaves me with but one thing to do— so here goes."

He set off briskly up the road, studying the numbers as he went. Eighteen was a long way up, well sheltered from the observation of Gloucester Road, and like its neighbors a staid, dignified house. Chenoweth saw that only frontal attack was possible here, and so he went boldly up the steps and rang the bell. Presently a maidservant opened, and regarded him in silent questioning.

"Miss Venitsky— is she in?" he inquired.

"I'll see, sir." She stood aside to let him enter the narrow hall. "What name, please?"

"None that she would recognize, I imagine. Tell her that I'm from Queen Street— a gentleman from Queen Street."

The girl left him waiting there, and went up to the floor above. There were letters on the hall stand, addressed to four or five different names; from this, Chenoweth's mind grew more at ease, since he judged the place an ordinary apartment house, let out in single rooms or perhaps floors. There would be little danger here.

Presently the maid returned. "Will you come this way, sir?"

Chenoweth followed- her up the stairs, and she opened the door immediately facing him at the top. There had been a complete turn halfway up the stairs, and Chenoweth, accustomed to noting such things, reflected that the room ahead must therefore open on the street. If, at need, he smashed out a window, would Yen Lo be on watch? He frowned, blaming himself for not having made certain of the Chinaman's presence— an indiscretion forced on him, however, that he had not a moment to lose in reaching Eloise.

Except for the knock given by the girl, he entered the room unannounced. And almost on the instant, he knew himself too late.

ABOUT the slim, dark girl who faced him there was, at first glance, nothing of the conspirator or secret agent; she was not the clever, oldish type of woman so frequently encountered in this guise, nor the far cleverer and unmoral type of siren . who has nothing particular to lose and shows it. Here was a girl of perhaps twenty-two, and the only indication of danger about her

was the perfect poise which enveloped her. She was quietly beautiful, and that is a rare thing in a woman; mere perfection of the body is easily found, but the other shows the quality of mind and thought as well, and is too seldom seen in the world. Standing before an open fire, she regarded Chenoweth with composure, and if he had not known her name and origin, he would have termed her English of the English. Her voice, beautifully modulated, clear, quite unaccented, bore out the illusion.

"Surely you have not come from Queen Street, Mr. Chenoweth?" she said.

Chenoweth was far too old a hand to betray his consternation. "I am here, mademoiselle," he said quietly.

"Perhaps you will sit down." She indicated a chair at one side of the fire. "It might be easier to indicate your— purpose, so." Was there anxiety in that brief pause? He could not tell, but he was sure enough of the mockery in her voice. Doubtless she had been warned, and was ready for him. So very fair she looked, standing here, so utterly desirable, that even hardeaded Chenoweth felt a little doubtful of his right to browbeat such a woman— for an instant. Her eyes questioned him, a little sadly, her whole pose was one of suppressed protest, as though she, not he, were in the right.

"My purpose can be stated in four words," he said, not moving. "I want that letter."

Her head went back with a certain challenging pride. Despite the cause she served, Eloise Venitsky was not of the people, but an aristocrat, and now her breed showed. "Monsieur!"

The one word only. It bore contempt for his bluntness, scorn of him, utter fearlessness. He had more than a suspicion that she was playing with him, that she held cards yet undisclosed, and he took a swift pace toward her. An imperious gesture bade him pause.

"I do not pretend to misunderstand," she said. "This thing is too great for us to admit any childish folly. Why should I give you what you ask?"

"For one reason," he said, and paused.

He had to master his own growing admiration for her, had to cast out the suggestion in his mind, that she was other than he had thought her. He must fling at her an accusation of which she and he only could know the full import— after all, she was an enemy, and a most deadly enemy.

"You are in England, mademoiselle," he said gravely, "and though we have faults in our haüdling of affairs, we watch our ports. Since a certain day at Ekaterinburg, when what you know took place in a cellar there, I have said no word— I was never sure, never quite sure! But— but now—"

PAUSES are deadly things, and Chenoweth knew the use of them. Now she did not move, yet she was leaning forward a little, and her face changed. He had brought fear to her, and for the moment he thought the game won.

"Yes, Mr. Chenoweth?" she breathed, her eyes steadily upon him.

"I want that letter— not the copy that Trebitsch made, but the original." He spoke coldly, steeling himself to the part; seen thus; her eyes wide upon him, lips parted as a flower, Eloise Venitsky was a thing of appealing loveliness. "You will give it to me, mademoiselle. Otherwise— there are Russians of the old régime here in England, with their own organizations. If I tell them what I know, if I give your name—"

Pause again. Now he had no need to steel himself; the memory of that bloodspattered cellar was upon him, and for the moment it seemed that he actually stood again in that dim and awful chamber of death. He glanced down at the scar on his thumb, that scar which had cost the Romanoffs their lives. Then he looked up, took another step toward her.

"And— if you give them my name?" she asked, still in that same hushed manner, as though she knew yet dreaded the response.

"You would die, although this is England," he said. "There are hundreds of your people who lost everything, yet who reckoned their loss as nothing when they heard of what was done on that day in Ekaterinburg—"

She held out her arms in swift, violent, appalled protest.

"Monsieur!" It was a cry of pain, rather than a word. "I had no hand in that! But you must know—I am innocent of that—"

Chenoweth shook his head, a man of stone, inflexible, pitiless.

"Your guilt or innocence is nothing to me. They would hear what I saw there— yes, I was there—and would hear your name; I would let them decide. You know what would happen. You can buy my silence only with that letter."

"We lose," she said. Her composure returned as swiftly as it had vanished, and she was again the slim, stately beauty who had first faced him.

"You must lose," he returned. "I must win."

It was evident, yet he did not fancy his victory. She made a little gesture of doubt, of despair; yet all the while her eyes gripped him steadily. "Is there anything I can offer you—refreshment—courtesy of vanquished to viztor?" she asked. "Your English whisky and soda, perhaps?"

Chenoweth smiled. "Is that a trap— or a hope? You think that Lasalle, or Walter James, may get here at any moment? Useless, I assure you. If I am not so courteous as a Latin, I can be as ruthless as a— Slav. I want that letter, within the minute."

SHE shrugged a little, realizing the uselessness of protest. Chenoweth, at the despairing droop of her lips, was even hurt by his own victory. His random shaft had gone home; it was only a guess that this girl had assisted at the Ekaterinburg killings, a bolt in the dark— but it had gone home to the gold.

She turned, and moved toward the communicating door which led to the back room of the suite. Chenoweth recalled that there had been another door giving directly onto the stairway, at right angles to his door of entry. He moved swiftly to intercept her, and she paused.

"The letter is in my bedroom," she said with calm disdain. "I must get it for you— let me pass, please."

Her pose, her voice, her eyes, would have ensnared and fooled a better man than Chenoweth— though there were few better. He was trapped on the instant.

"I will come with you," he said coldly.

She gave him an icy stare. "My bedroom, I said," she repeated.

"And I said— I will come with you." He was inflexible. There was a momentary conflict of eyes, and her gaze flickered.

Again she gave the little shrug of futility, and nodded assent. She went to the communicating door and flung it open into the other room, which was unlighted. Chenoweth, at her elbow, glimpsed dimly the outline of a bed, and the ordinary furnishings of a boudoir, and entered at her side.

A heavy rug fell over his head, stifling any outcry.

HANDS gripped his wrists, gripped them beyond appeal. His struggle was swift, desperate, vain. He managed to trip one assailant, the resulting pull flinging him to the floor as well; the surprise had been too sudden—it was hopeless. Lasalle and Walter James had been waiting here all the time, for he was certain that no one had entered the place after his arrival; all his senses had been at work, listening for just such an entry.

Even as those hands bound him firmly, Chenoweth reflected on the skill with which she had lured him into this trap; her apparent protest had been well done. He had learned something this night. Here was a woman who knew every move in the game, who had even bested him at his own work!

Now the voice of Walter James, smooth and oily, pierced through the muffling folds of the rug about his face.

"One shout, Mr. Chenoweth, and we'll put you past shouting. Better realize that you're out of the way until that letter is delivered."

"Longer," added the voice of Eloise. "In self-preservation! You heard his threat?"

"Heard it all." That was Lasalle speaking, throaty foreign words.

Some whispering ensued, which Chenoweth could not catch, but whose import he could well guess. He was to be quieted forever. It was their only chance.

"But not here," said the girl's voice, raised a trifle.

"The other raised enough row," said James, and Chenoweth guessed that the reference was to Trebitsch. These men were used to killings. Tied like this, he was no more to them than an impediment to be removed; they would make no bones about it. His own fault, too— he had shot too keen a bolt, which had glanced and come back to strike him.

"If you'll see that the coast is clear, and call a taxi, we'll take him down," said the throaty rasp of Lasalle. "Raslov's car is in the garage just off from South Kensington station— we can carry him in."

There followed a little silence, an interminable period of waiting. Then the voice of Eloise came to him softly:

"Mr. Chenoweth, remember that you forced this on me. I regret that it is the only way of salvation."

"Don't apologize," returned Chenoweth, through his muffling folds. "You've beaten me— that should be satisfaction enough, young lady!"

Silence again, then footsteps. He felt himself lifted, then carried down the stairs, and out into the open air. As they bore him down the steps of the house, Chenoweth wondered what had become of Yen Lo, who should have been there to warn him that Lasalle and James were ahead of him.

"I'll break that Chink's neck for him!" he promised himself hotly.

Which went to show that Lionel Chenoweth had no intention of giving up the game as lost— at least at this stage.

## vi

"H'M!" said Barnett in perplexity.

"Yes sir," returned the attendant in the hotel vestibule— no other than the lordly head porter in all his glory of war medals and gold braid and scarlet. "He said he'd come back in a quarter of an hour— it was most urgent, and you were to give him two pound notes for his trouble."

"It would be urgent, eh?" Barnett chuckled. "Expensive, almost."

"And, sir, there's a— a man waiting for ou."

"Eh? Then rush him along, quick!" said Barnett, with a change of manner. One man seeking him was explainable, but if two were in search of him at this hour, there must be something in it beyond the normal.

The 'man,' produced from some region of which Barnett had no knowledge, was shabbily dressed. He had sleek black hair and an indefinite something in his countenance which at once gave Barnett his cue.

"Name?" he demanded curtly.

"Yen Lo."

"Come with me."

Disregarding the curious stares of the attendants, Barnett led the way to the elevator, and so up to his own room, in silence. There, with the door closed and locked, he sat down on the bed and faced the yellow man.

"All right," he said, lighting a cigarette. "What news?"

"Plenty bobbery," was the response. "Mist' Shen'wett say my have tlouble, my go to Mist' Ba'nett, this hotel. My think mebbeso Mist' Shen'wett catchee plenty tlouble."

"So? Put it down on the floor and let's sort it out. Talk slow."

Yen Lo nodded, his countenance very serious.

"My find Missee Vanisky, send one piecee chit fo' tell Mist' Shen'wett, then stop and look-see. Bimeby come th'ee men, one big man— plenty choke, shove in cab. They thlow Yen Lo out of cab, MeckMeck-len-balk Place— my watchee sign. My go first-chop look-see Mist' Shen'wett, he gone, no can do; my catchee this place plenty quick, tell you."

Barnett sorted this out in his mind. "You were at the lady's address, waiting there, when the three men carried you off, eh? In the street, I suppose?"

The other nodded, hands folded in sleeves, feet close together, beady eyes glittering.

"And where's this Mecklenburg Place?"

"Little way off Euston."

"Him!" Barnett puffed at his cigarette, frowningly. "Looks bad. You sent the address to Chenoweth— I was with him when Benson brought the message. If by any chance he went there, they were laying for him; evidently they had you spotted. Hm! Afraid they've got him this time—"

HE had been talking to himself, rather than to the little yellow man before him. He broke off abruptly, leaned forward, and looked intently at the other.

"Hello, are you hurt?"

Yen Lo was keeping his pose with some difficulty, and now Barnett noted two large blackening patches under his lower jaw, where fingers had been cruelly pressed into the skin and flesh.

"Plenty bobbery," said Yen Lo, his beady eyes blinking.

Barnett leaped up, and was busy with his brandy flask and a glass when there came a knock at the door. He went to open it. A page boy told him that a

taxidriver wanted him below; Barnett had visions of Benson having arrived to aid in this new development, and felt swift relief.

"Good," he exclaimed. "Bring him up here— I'm busy."

He had the little man in a chair, recovering from his stoically borne faintness, when another knock sounded. "Come in," called Barnett. In answer, there entered not Benson, but an utter stranger, with a folded paper in his hand.

"Mr. Barnett, sir?" asked the man.

"Yes. A letter for me?"

"Arf a mo'," said the other, as. Barnett held out his hand. "The gent what give me this said you was to give me two quid, and I've lost nearly that time already, a'unting for you, sir."

Barnett put two pound notes into the man's hand and took the letter. He tore it open and glanced at it, saw Chenoweth's writing, then looked up to see the man still waiting, looking past him curiously at the Chinaman.

"What d'you want now?"

"The gent said if I was put to expense, sir, you'd pay it—"

"What expense have you been put to?"

"My time, sir," whined the man. " 'Ere I been waitin' around—"

"For two quid? You're well paid. Get out. I may be an American, but I'm no tourist. Get out!"

THE man departed abruptly. Barnett slammed the door, looked again at the note, and turned to the yellow man.

"You know Inspector Parkston, Vine Street station?"

Yen Lo nodded.

"Take him this letter. Tell him exactly what you've told me. If he's what Chenoweth says he is, that end of it is safe. Nobody bat Parkston, though, and get him if you have to raise him out of bed. Need any money?"

A mute denial. Barnett took out one of his own cards, and scribbled on it: "By courtesy of Mr. Chenoweth. Please interview bearer.' He handed this over, with the note, and Yen Lo calmly took his departure.

Barnett wrote down that address. He was not five minutes after the Chinaman in leaving the hotel, and beckoned forward the first taxi on the rank. He might be watched and followed, but he must risk that.

"Eighteen Hanway Street, near the Gloucester Road station."

Barnett had very little on which to go, and was on the face of things taking big chances—but behind his actions was the resolve to take no chances at all. Chenoweth's note had said that he was going to Eloise Venitsky at once, that he had been met and recognized by Lasalle; and in case of misadventure,

Barnett might look for him at Hung Tze's restaurant, in Catherine Street, Limehouse.

It was now clear enough that Yen Lo had been put out of the way to clear the ground for Chenoweth, who must have fallen into a trap. Barnett, however, knew that Chenoweth would far rather lose his life than lose that letter he was hunting; therefore his great task was to take Chenoweth's place and get the letter at all costs— all costs! If he left the letter and went to the rescue of his friend, Chenoweth would never forgive him; that was not playing the game. The best he could do was to put Parkston, surely an efficient ally, on the track of Chenoweth, and send him to that address in Catherine Street.

The taxi was a good one, though Barnett found himself longing for that vehicle in which Chenoweth had taken him out to Wimbledon— so short a while ago, if time were to count apart from events! It would be well to make sure of this vehicle, for he might have difficulty in getting another, and he slid open the window behind the chauffeur.

"Good for an all-night job?"

"Quite, sir."

"How about gas? I mean petrol." Barnett smiled as he translated the word.

"Tank full and two spare tins, sir."

"Good. Take it fast, now."

HE sat back again and pulled up the window, just as Big Ben chimed the quarter past eleven. The driver's going around by Westminster instead of heading straight through the park meant nothing to him— Chenoweth would have spotted the extrafare attempt at once, but Barnett's brain was leaping and racing ahead.

Calling on ladies at eleven-thirty was not exactly a habit of his, and it was not a London habit either. He foresaw difficulties; but now Barnett was on the job, in the game once more —and the game meant everything. Himself, the man, and what he did— all this was quite secondary. Nothing counted except that the game must be won at all and any cost. Intelligence! The old word leaped through him like a flame. He was no longer Barnett, the American abroad; he was a machine, a thing, driving forward to one end despite all that intervened.

"Here we are, sir."

The driver reached back and opened the door; his words brought Barnett out of his reflections with a jerk. Before him as he descended to the pavement loomed a row of tall houses, all unlighted, silent; except for the taxi, there was no sign of life in Hanway Street. Barnett struck a match to make certain that he had the right number, mounted the steps, and leaned against the bell-push. He

rang twice, heard the persistent tinkling somewhere inside, and presently caught the vibration of dragging footsteps that were in themselves a protest. The door opened, and an elderly woman peered out.

"Well?" she snapped unamiably. Barnett slid one foot between door and jamb.

"I want to see Miss Venitsky."

"She'll be in bed at this hour," said the elderly female in a voice of finality and decided ill humor.

"Then she'll get out of bed," retorted Barnett, pleasantly but firmly. He gave the door a quiet pressure, and by dint of personality forced himself inside. "You must understand, madam, that my. visit is official. If you do as you're told, all well and good. Otherwise, the consequences may be unpleasant for you."

The woman's manner changed at once, before this hint of officialdom. She cringed visibly, and stood back.

"I'm sure I don't want any unpleasantness, sir," she answered. "If you'll wait a moment, I'll see—"

"No," cut in Barnett. "You'll take me straight up to Miss Venitsky. Has she one room or two?"

"Two and bath, sir— on the first floor."

"Right." Barnett's air of brusque authority was perfect. "Lead the way, straight fo her sitting-room. If there's any damage you'll be paid."

His determination awed the woman into abject submission. Without a word, she turned, pulled down a switch which gave light beyond the full turn of the stairs, and led the way. At the landing she paused, gesturing to the door before her.

"Shall I knock, sir?"

"No."

Barnett stepped forward, turned the handle, and flung the door open. He looked into the barrel of an automatic pistol, held steadily in the hand of Eloise Venitsky. Barnett smiled.

"Put it down or shoot— as you like," he said. "The landlady brought me up and is just outside here."

The weapon vanished. Eloise Venitsky switched on her lights and then stood staring at him, her eyes shining with anger. She was fully dressed. Her beauty struck upon Barnett, but failed to pierce to him. There came into his head that bit of pigeon-English doggerel that Chenoweth had sung in the street—

"*A Welly little ploper lady no likee my*!"

Something behind that song— some fund of meaning in it, some warning, had he needed any; this was a woman in a thousand, and a "little proper lady" indeed. Eloise had on a fur toque and furtrimmed coat, as though she had just come in or had been about to leave; on a small occasional table beside her was an attaché case, open, displaying papers and a few slight articles of clothing. She turned and snapped it shut.

"Ten minutes more, and I'd have been too late, eh?" said Barnett, moving forward.

Like a flash, Eloise seized the case and darted for the door, still partly ajar. Barnett whirled swiftly, for he had half anticipated such a dash; his hand fell upon her arm, and his fingers sank deeply, halting her with a wince of pain.

"No, you don't!" he said.

He shoved her aside and went to the door, discovering the landlady still outside. He swung open the door and pointed down the stairs.

"No further need for you, thanks— I 'll see this thing through in a way that'll save you all trouble," he said. Then he closed the door, locked it, and put the key into his pocket. He turned.

"You— you—" Eloise choked on the angry word.

"Any choice of names you like," said Barnett cheerfully. "Let me relieve you of that bag."

She offered no resistance when he took it— so the letter was not inside! He quite ignored the weapon she had first displayed, tossed aside the case, and gently impelled the girl toward the couch. Then he halted and regarded her steadily.

"I want two things," he said, "and I want them both so badly that you and I don't part company till I get them. Understand?"

Chenoweth's song had understated the case— she more than disliked him. In her glance was sheer proud hatred, mingled with contempt, and it bit into Barnett. He had never seen such beautiful eyes as ` these, and only with an effort did he force himself to maintain his hard-boiled attitude. He flung the attaché-case into the corner, roughly.

"If I've got to strip the clothes off you and set fire to this place, I mean to have that letter," he went on with a cold ferocity that was well assumed. Time was short— he would reach Chenoweth if possible, as well as get the letter. "You're up against it— if you try to scream or make a fuss, Il tie you up. Your last card is lost, so come across."

She looked at him, now with an entire change of expression. Her eyes were soft, humid, appealing, and for a moment Bar nett was almost shaken by the richness of her voice.

"Have you no feeling? Is a cause nothing to you?" she demanded. "If I show you how you may still save him,— your friend,— will not that be worth everything? He is in danger—"

He smiled thinly at this play for time.

"My friend's cause is more to me than my friend," he said, then reached out and took her by the arm. "Come! In just one minute by that clock on the mantel, I begin to search."

THE purpose behind his menace could not be mistaken, but she remained motionless, her eyes defiant again and glittering angrily. When the minute-hand of the clock had moved its allotted span, Barett tightened his grip.

"Hat and furs off, please," he commanded. "The letter's on you— you were just ready to leave. I'll search you thoroughly, young lady."

His steady manner told her that the threat was no idle one. Negligently, almost contemptuously, she removed her fur and toque, and extended them to him. He looked at the shining silken masses of her dark hair.

"Down with your hair," he said curtly. It was an ugly part he was playing, yet he knew that she must surrender. As she hesitated, he went on, more roughly:

"If that letter isn't on you, you'll spend the night in a police cell while I search this place front to back— get that in your mind! And inside ten minutes you'll be on your way to the station."

She gave in, a tidal wave of crimson flooding into her face. She dropped her hands, took the little fur toque from him, and mutely held it up. Barnett caught atit. The outer band of fur, folded back against the crown of the hat, rustled in one spot; he found that it pulled up easily, and beneath it laid bare an ordinary envelope, folded once, sealed.

"Is this it?"

A smile touched her lips. "Would you believe me if I said not?"

"Hm! You may as well come along with me now and get Chenoweth, wherever he is— that's a sure way of discovering if we have the right letter."

She was taken aback by this, and stared at him in a puzzled, frightened way. "Who— who are you? You are not any man I have seen— who are you?"

"Chenoweth's friend," he responded. "That's why I'm forced to treat a lady in this fashion— to save him the trouble. Put on this fur and hat again."

He held the fur, and when she had adjusted it, picked up the attaché-case and took out the key he had pocketed.

"I've a taxi waiting," he said, "and you can tell the driver where to go, to make it look more natural. I know where he has to go; if you tell him

differently, we'll stop at a certain police station instead. There are to be no mistakes."

He ushered her out and conducted her down the stairs, keeping hold on her arm all the while. Thus they came out to the taxi, and she murmured the address to the chauffeur who held open the door. Barnett started slightly, then handed her into the cab and seated himself at her side, wondering if she had dared to attempt trickery, even now.

For the address she had just given to the driver was not the one Chenoweth had written down for him. Either he or Parkston was on a wild-goose chase.

## vii

"IF I give you my word that I'll make no move of any kind until the cab stops, will you let go my arm?" asked the girl at his side.

Barnett considered. "I'm taking no chances," he said at length. "However, I'll put you on your honor to be good until we're both out of the taxi."

"Agreed. 'That will be more— more reasonable."

Her voice sounded almost gay. Barnett released his hold, cursing the róle that he had been forced to play. This girl looked so young, so utterly unlike the conventional adventuress, so wholly different from the usual type of intrigante, that he was puzzled. Then he forced her from his mind and gave attention to their whereabouts, for the address given by her had been meaningless to him.

They came to the east end of Knightsbridge and Barnett recognized the Hyde Park Hotel. All the open space of Hyde Park was deserted, save for policemen and stragglers and an occasional taxi— heretofore Barnett had seen it as a bewildering complexity of traffic, and now even the street-lamps looked lonely.

He was aware of Park Lane and the Marble Arch, and knew that they were in Oxford Street until they reached Tottenham Court Road; beyond that point, the driver kept straight, then diverged from the main route, and Barnett saw tram-lines. Theobald's Road and Roseberry Avenue were new ground to him, and he quite failed to recognize the Angel at Islington.

The driver swung north, slowed, halted, and reached around to open the door and inquire his way. Eloise leaned out and gave the required direction; Barnett sat tensed, but she made no move to escape, and the door slammed again. Now they were in mean, silent streets, lighted so dimly as scarce to show the squalid houses; the occasional policemen regarded the taxi with curious stares, as though it were a rarity in these parts.

"You seem to be accepting the matter calmly," observed Barnett to his companion.

"I should like to get there in time to save him," she responded, and her grave voice impressed him with its sincerity. "You have the letter. I've lost my play. There's no use in sacrificing so fine a man as Mr. Chenoweth; he may be an enemy, but his life—"

She broke off; in her words was a finality, an intonation of certainty, which made Barnett's blood chill.

"Explain, please," he said gently. "I'm not quite sure of what's happened."

"He came tonight to get— what you have obtained," she replied quietly. "He put the alternative to us: the letter, or death. We were forced to master him. You see?"

"No," said Barnett.

"If we had let him go, he would have fulfilled his threat; he set the terms himself, without quarter. But now, since you have the letter and he will not carry out his threat, I do not want his death on my conscience. It is clear enough."

BARNETT was puzzled as he glimpsed her face in the passing glow of a street-lamp. She was smiling a little; they might have been two friends going home together from an evening's entertainment.

"You don't live up to your part," said Barnett after a moment. "A girl like you, to be carrying that letter—"

"Were not at the end yet," she said. "My word holds while we're in the taxi, only."

"Hm! I'd have thought that, and not said it."

"Perhaps I can afford to say it." She laughed slightly, a rippling utterance that was sheer melody. "We're nearly there."

Barnett thrilled to that laugh. "If it were not for Chenoweth," he said, "I think I'd be sorry to see the end of this ride."

"We're not playing *that* game tonight," she returned coldly.

The taxi rocketed over uneven cobbles, and again the driver had to ask directions. Eloise gave them concisely, unhesitantly; Barnett had a glimpse of water beyond the parapet of a low bridge.

"The Thames?"

"No, only a canal. I thought you knew where we were going?"

Barnett made no response. They swung abruptly to the right, the girl tapped on the window, and the driver pulled up. Barnett opened the door, and alighted. As Eloise followed, he once more took her arm.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but it's necessary."

The driver leaned over. "How long, sir?"

Barnett took out his pocketbook and handed it to the man. "Take a fiver from that," he said, "and then wait for me."

Having only one hand free, he could not well get at his money. The chauffeur extracted a large note and returned the pocketbook.

"Quite all right, sir."

"Lead on," said Barnett to the girl.

He accompanied her on ahead of the cab. Once they were beyond hearing of the man, he slowed momentarily.

"Your parole is up, and I'll have to remind you that you don't stand an earthly chance of getting clear. I've acquired a certain regard for you, Miss Venitsky, but until I shake hands with Chenoweth and see him free, your first attempt at escape will bring a bullet— and I shoot straight. Without you, Chenoweth is a dead man— in which case you're dead too."

Once more his voice sounded harsh and commanding. The girl nodded a little, made no other response, and kept on. Presently they came to a door in a board wall, before which she halted.

"Here."

The door had no visible fastening, was wide enough to admit vehicles, and in the light from a near-by street-lamp Barnett saw tire-tracks on the wet pavement. Then he spied a small door set in the center.of , the main barrier, with a handle. Turning this, it gave easily and he stepped through, keeping hold of the girl's arm as she followed.

The obscurity before them resolved itself into a large yard, piled with timbers for seasoning. Before them loomed the black mass of a long shed.

"In there?" he demanded.

"Yes."

BETWEEN two of the lumber piles he now made out the shape of a touring car, with its top up. He skirted the piles, seeking a means of entry to the shed; rounding its end, they came upon a door, about the edges of which showed a glimmer of light. Barnett drew the girl close to him, and even in this instant the faint fragrance of her hair struck upon his consciousness. An incongruous thing— so, for that matter, was her presence in this spot.

"Come."

He drew her back, swiftly, and led her to the automobile between the piles of timber. There he took the fur from about her neck.

"I'll be back in time to save you from catching cold," he said quietly. "Meantime, no chances! Turn your back and put your hands behind you."

She obeyed without question. He bound her wrists securely with the long fur, led her to the front of the car, and wedged the end of the fur into the headlight bracket so that it would grip. She was firmly fastened, and as he stepped back, Barnett wondered what the expression of her eyes was, just then.

"Hurting you?"

"You are very considerate," she said, a hint of acidity in the words.

Barnett swung away and left her, so. He had wasted no time, yet he felt that he had no time to waste in talk.

That door, betraying the light inside, might be locked; but since the outer entrance had been left open, it was rather unlikely that this would be locked. A voice came to him from the interior, but he could not hear what was said. With an abrupt shove of his body, he reached for the door handle and swung it open.

His big friend of the hotel was standing over Chenoweth's bound figure, pistol in hand; two others were standing by. Barnett fired, and the big man pitched forward; here was death, relentless and swift as the crack of doom. The two others realized it, and flung themselves forward. One hurtled into Barnett, spoiled his second shot, dragged down his pistol hand. The second caught him in a grip about the waist, to pull him to the floor; this bearded man had a grip like a steel trap, and Barnett, losing balance, went down with a crash.

In that crash, his pistol went.

Barnett and the bearded man lay struggling; across them the taller man leaned, trying to get in a blow. Both, it seemed, were unarmed. For a moment Barnett came on top of his antagonist, and saw the taller man just reaching for the fallen pistol. He lashed out frantically, and the heel of his boot took the man between the eyes, blood leaping as he fell sidewise. At the same instant, the bearded one drove in a cruel blow that stretched Barnett out, all but helpless, and followed it up with a terrific grip on the throat.

A strangling moment, a moment of suffocation, of iron fingers clamping into his windpipe, throttling him— then somehow he wrenched loose that madman's hold, gasped in air, rolled over and half came to his feet. The other was upon him at once, and he heard Chenoweth's voice shout a warning as the tall man came in from the side. For the first time, Barnett had a chance to use his fists. He met the tall one with a straight left to the heart, and followed it with a right to the mouth that sent the man reeling; before he could recover, the bearded man was upon him again with flailing arms— a wild, oath-venting frenzy of rage like the attack of a maddened animal. Caught in the furious grip,

Barnett tried to fight free, and then heard the voice of Chenoweth again, this time rising in shrill, sharp warning—

Too late! A stunning, staggering blow from behind took him across the head, dazed him; and as he turned, it was repeated. With the crash, everything went into darkness. In the very moment when he should have won— they had put him out. The rest was failure.

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THE taller of the two men, his face bloodied from Barnett's boot and fist, was speaking.

"—merely a matter of care that they are shot from a natural angle. Here Raslov is dead; leave their bodies with his, Lasalle! It will be evident that he killed one of them—"

"Then was killed by the other, after which he killed the other!" cut in the biting voice of the bearded Lasalle. "I do not make the mistake of taking the English police for fools, my dear James. Don't you think they know who Raslov is? Perfectly well."

Barnett opened his eyes. He felt rather battered about the head, but had been no more than stunned. Now he was trussed up with a length of rope, and very efficiently trussed, too. He lay across the shed from Chenoweth. He wondered dimly if those shots would bring any police— and he was not the only one wondering about that. The tall James wiped blood from his eyes, uttered an oath, glared down at Barnett with an aspect of vicious hatred, and snapped an impatient word at Lasalle.

"Well, what do you intend to do, then? It's wearing on toward morning. Those shots will draw attention—"

Lasalle, who was examining Barnett's pistol, pocketed it and made a gesture of derision. He, obviously, was the leader here.

"My dear James, this is Roxton; no police come down this road except in pairs— and only then if they are compelled. We may stay for breakfast, and it'll be all the same. Those shots have gone unheard and unnoticed."

"Well, we must settle these two."

"Evidently." Lasalle fingered his beard, and glanced at Chenoweth's figure. 'This cursed Chenoweth has left us no alternative. He missed his mark when he threatened Eloise; she, of course, had nothing to do with the affair at Ekaterinburg— she was in Italy at the time. How this American got here, I don't quite understand."

So, then, Eloise had not yet been found! Barnett moved in his bonds, and James kicked him.

"Be quiet! What about it, Lasalle? Into the canal?"

Lasalle reflected. "They would sink, if their skulls were smashed first. That would give us two days at least, perhaps more."

"But we must sink Raslov too."

"Naturally. Hm! Id very much like to know how this American got here—"

The voice of Chenoweth cut in with a lazy, irritable drawl.

"Oh, shut up! Talk, talk, talk—all you damned parlor reformers are alike. You talk like phonographs, and never reach the end of the record. Whatever it is, make up your minds and get along with it. Do something, for once."

IN that voice was such utter unconcern, such real acerbity at their lack of concerted purpose, that it accomplished its intent; Lasalle turned with a hearty curse, and was diverted from his consideration of Barnett's arrival.

Barnett smiled a little. He thought of Eloise, and warmed to the thought. Then he remembered—unless they searched him, which apparently they had not done, Chenoweth's mission was accomplished, for he had the letter on him. If they discovered Eloise, if she called to them, she would get the letter back. Her silence was reassuring. Probably she could not tell what had passed inside the shed, and would conclude that Barnett was the victor in the battle.

"Well," said Lasalle, coming back toward Barnett and staring down at him, "we may as well get the job over with, clear out of here with the car, and be gone. Hand me that billet of wood yonder."

"Get your own tools," retorted James in surly fashion, "and leave this American to me. It'll do my face good to—"

He broke off suddenly, and made a sweep to-pick up the pistol dropped by Raslov. Lasalle uttered a sharp cry, and whirled about—too late. The door heaved open with a crash, and into the shed burst an irruption of uniformed men.

"Hands up!"

James fired, fired again; pistols spat flame at him, and he dropped. Lasalle had no chance to fire, for two of the police had hurled themselves on him, and now they held his struggling figure while- his hands were ironed. All in an instant, the shed was in a whirlwind of life and death and motion. Two policemen knelt above one of their comrades, killed by James; another made certain that James was dead.

"Good old Parkston!" said the cool drawl of Chenoweth. 'Do you know, Inspector, this would make an excellent melodrama? Allow me to introduce my friend Barnett, over there, who very nearly got the murderers of Trebitsch. You've got 'em now."

Barnett was freed, helped to his feet. For all Chenoweth's air of unconcern, he could scarcely stand, for a few moments, and one eye was bruised and discolored; Barnett was in much better shape to outward seeming. Parkston pointed to the body of Raslov.

"Who shot that man?"

"Barnett did— I hadn't the chance, unfortunately," said Chenoweth.

"Dead, Sergeant?" To Parkston's question, the answer was a nod.

"It's a pity," observed Chenoweth, looking at the body of the dead policeman, "that our friend Lasalle didn't shoot your man there. In such case you might have charged him with the murder, so that the Trebitsch affair might drop out of everyone's mind. Lasalle is the man who actually killed Trebitsch, you know."

"So?" Parkston looked him in the eye for a moment. "But Lasalle did shoot him! This other chap missed completely," he said with quiet deliberation. '"How about it, Sergeant?"

The sergeant nodded, without a tremor of surprise.

"Right, sir. I saw the whole thing. That other chap fired and missed. Then Lasalle fired, and Smithson dropped."

Chenoweth turned to Barnett, a twinkle in his eye. "Don't you think our London police are up to your American brand? Shake hands with Parkston."

"They're too good to be true—seemed like it when you chaps showed up!" exclaimed Barnett, shaking hands with the inspector. "But how did you get here? I sent you a Limehouse address, which Chenoweth had given me—"

Parkston chuckled. "I landed a good two pounds of cocaine at that address— a big haul. Old Hung Tze thought that was what I was after, and hadn't time to put the stuff away. Then Yen Lo, Mr. Chenoweth's man, guided us straight up here. In time, too!"

Chenoweth shivered. "And just in time. I say, Parkston, if you've a nip of brandy—"

Parkston had. When Barnett had taken a swallow of the fiery stuff, he accepted the cigarette that Chenoweth thrust at him. Then he swung on Parkston.

"Inspector— did you look at the automobile in the yard, outside?"

"We looked it over, yes."

"Was there— was there anyone in it, or near it?"

"Not a soul."

"I wonder if that taxi of mine is still out in the road!"

Parkston smiled faintly. "A taxi passed us just the other side of the canal bridge, with a passenger. She was sitting well back, and we didn't see much of her. Never dreamed that—"

"Oh, it's quite all right, Parkston." Chenoweth slipped his hand into Barnett's arm. "Come on outside— too much smell of blood here. We'll wait for you, Parkston."

THE two friends passed out into the yard together. Barnett paused, and stooped, lifting one trouser-leg. From inside his sock he took the letter that had caused all the trouble, and held it out to Chenoweth. The latter took it as silently, tore it open, struck a match, and then held the match to the paper.

"The original," he said. "Thank heaven— and thank you, Barnett!"

But Barnett was prying about the automobile between the two lumber-piles. He found nothing, except a torn scrap of fur wedged into the headlight-bracket. Chenoweth strolled toward him, and he heard the soft, mocking words:

*"Makee love-pidgin, too muchee talkee,*
*Welly little ploper lady no likee my!"*

"Hm!" said Chenoweth. "She brought you here— and now the bird's flown, eh? You seem most confoundedly hipped about it! Too muchee talkee, perhaps—"

"Shut up," snapped Barnett.

"Oh, ho! And, by the way, it seems that I did the lady an injustice." Chenoweth's tone had sobered. "Lasalle let that slip. I'd like to apologize to her, and I believe I'll do it. D'you know, I believe there's a story behind her activity? She's not the usual sort—"

"Any fool could see that," said Barnett irritably.

Chenoweth chuckled. "Oh, you want to do some apologizing yourself, eh? Well, you may have the chance one of these days. At least, I hope so."

Barnett made no response. He was thinking of the girl's voice when she had said: "We're not playing *that* game tonight!" And then, as he pocketed the fragment of torn fur, he felt himself flushing in the darkness; for Chenoweth's voice once more lifted to him, singing, and now he could not mistake the malicious, mocking intonation:

*"Long time plenty work, sampan coolie,*
*Yangtse River way down Shanghai;*
*Makee love-pidgin, too muchee talkee,*
*Welly little ploper lady no likee my!"*

———————

## 13: The Vanishing Point

***Francis Lynde***

1856-1930

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### *Chapter 1: Phantasmagoric!*

PEOPLE frequently tell me that I'd forget my head and go off and leave it some time if it weren't securely fastened on, and perhaps the gibe isn't wholly unjustified; though Marcia, dear girl, stoutly asserts that it is. She says I am neither thoughtless nor particularly forgetful— at least, not more so than most men; that I merely have the habit of concentrating upon the important thing of the moment, disregarding the unimportant ones. Which saying of hers may be taken for what it, is worth. Marcia has the kind of friendly loyalty that goes with straight-shooting brown eyes and hair that shows copper tints in the sunlight, and she has always cherished a militant sympathy for the under dog— any under dog, that is.

Just the same, it was forgetfulness, pure and simple, and not concentration, which led up to an experience destined to usher in a series of events of vital importance to any number of people. And with the events a fairly infernal mystery.

The place was the campus of Western Tech, and the time an evening a few weeks prior to commencement. Maltby and I, doing postgraduate work in railroad engineering, had the night shift in a nonstop dynamometer test upon a new mountain-climbing locomotive— Western Tech being equipped with a locomotive-testing plant. After we had relieved the day men I remembered that I had left my slide rule in the Electro-Chemical laboratory, where I had been working during the afternoon; and, asking Maltby to take the instrument readings by himself for a few minutes, I went to recover my mechanical calculator.

Naturally, I hadn't any intention of pulling off a sleuthing stunt when I ran up the steps of the Electro-Chemical building, which was showing lighted windows only in the laboratory wing. But for foot ease on the night job I was wearing tennis shoes. Hence, I guess I didn't make any great amount of noise climbing the stairs and passing along the upper corridor. Anyway, the single occupant of the laboratory, a man working at the bench at the far end of the room, didn't hear me, for he did not look around as I entered.

Though his back was turned, I recognized the bench worker. His name was Varnell, and for a month or more he had been a campus mystery. From the little we had learned about him, he figured as an outsider who had obtained permission to do some experimental research work in the university laboratories. He had been given the freedom of the laboratories, and we had remarked that he always did his work in them alone, at night, and behind locked doors; though on this one occasion he seemed to have neglected the lock precaution.

The slight air of mystery surrounding this man, together with the fact that, quite evidently, he hadn't heard me come in, made me hesitate a moment before making my presence known. He had a contrivance of some sort of the bench— I couldn't see what it was because he stood in the way— and he appeared to be adjusting it.

While I looked, he reached for the switch controlling the ceiling lights and the laboratory went black. In the darkness I saw a cone of bluish-green light, so dim as to be almost invisible, projecting itself to the right along the bench toward a familiar object— a small icemaking machine with which a group of students had been experimenting during the afternoon.

Watching the progress of the faintly visible light beam, which seemed to originate in whatever apparatus it was that Varnell's figure was concealing, I saw it reach out like a ghostly tentacle toward the little refrigerating plant. For an instant it illuminated the motor and copper coils and condensing compressor; then, as if an invisible broom had suddenly swept it away, the ice-making machine disappeared, leaving the place it had occupied on the bench as bare as the back of an ungloved hand!

As I rubbed my eyes and stared, trying to tell myself that, of course, this was only a clever optical illusion, Varnell switched the ceiling circuit on again. At the flooding of the room with light from the powerful lamps overhead the bluish-green ray or emanation, or whatever it was, could no longer be distinguished. But the marvel remained.

The small ice-making machine was still invisible; it was gone as completely. as if it had never existed.

While one might have counted ten, Varnell stood motionless.. Then I saw his hand go out toward the thing on the bench. There was sound-like the click of an electric switch, and at that the little refrigerating machine leaped into view as suddenly and mysteriously as it had vanished a few moments earlier.

Without stopping to realize just why I did it, I stepped back into the corridor, closing the door softly behind me; and upon making a second entrance I took care to let it be noisy. Varnell was. startled, and. he showed it.

entered he was hastily adjusting an oilcloth typewriter cover over something on the bench.

"Oh— hello, Manning," he said gruffly. "I didn't know you had a key."

"I haven't," I replied. "The door wasn't locked. Did you think it was?"

"Meant to lock it," he growled. "Don't care to have a bunch of undergrads nosing around when I'm at work. Wouldn't have made any difference tonight, though; I was only doing a bit of repair work on my typewriter. What are you after?"

"My slide rule. I left it here somewhere this afternoon."

That was all that was said. I found the slide rule and ducked out, leaving him leaning against the bench, fingering his brown, pointed beard trimmed like a doctor's, his eyes, or so I fancied, watching my every movement. As I recrossed the campus, the full effect of what I had just seen began to get in its work. What devil's invention was it that Varnell had so hastily concealed under the typewriter cover when I made my 'second entrance? Had he, accidentally or purposefully, hit upon some hitherto undiscovered principle in lightwave research?

Later on, in an interval when we weren't checking steam pressures or tabulating horse powers delivered by the big freight puller on the testing pit, I asked Maltby what he knew about Varnell.

"Nothing more than the campus gossip," was his answer. "They say he is a research man for one of the big automotive companies, doing some special work here that he couldn't do in the company laboratory. Why do you ask?"

"I'm just wondering. Ever strike you that there is something a bit mysterious about him?"

Maltby laughed. "Not particularly mysterious, no; just grouchy— like a fellow who doesn't 'belong' and knows he doesn't. Did you run up against him in Electro-Chemical?"

"Yes; he was there, tinkering his typewriter, so he said. Which was a rather clumsy lie."

"What makes you think he lied about it?"

"I don't think; I *know*." Then I described the singular thing, I had seen, and explained how I came to witness it.

"Rats!" Maltby snorted. "Calls that research work, does he? Qualifying to do parlor magic stunts! Couldn't see how it was worked, could you?"

"No. He had an apparatus of some sort—which was covered up when I went in the second time; he'd blanketed it with a typewriter cover."

"But you didn't take the disappearing act seriously?"

"No; I guess not. Though it did impress me a bit, at the time."

Maltby chuckled and said something about the old superstitions handed on to us by our Stone Age ancestors dying hard. Then:

"You've washed the mystery out of it by this time, haven't you?"

"I'm not so sure that I have," I admitted.

"It's simple enough. The 'apparatus' he didn't want you to see was probably only intended to add atmosphere. So was the switching-off of the lights. An arrangement of adjustable mirrors would easily account for the disappearance of the ice machine. The trick is old enough to be gray bearded."

It was time to take another series of readings on the locomotive performance, and Varnell and his doings faded out of the picture. But he stepped into it again a week later when I was smoking an after-dinner pipe with Mackenzie, the Electro-Chemical head, on the porch of the Tau Beta house. We had been speaking of the later discoveries in applied science; the strides that had been made in the development of the radio, television and the like, and Mackenzie had said something about the way in which people of to-day accept, as matters of course, scientific and mechanical marvels which would have been classed as the wildest of impossibilities a few decades in the past.

"Yes," I agreed, "nobody nowadays dares to say that anything is impossible. For a few minutes one night last week this fellow Varnell, who has been tinkering around in the various laboratories, had me on the run in what seemed to be an entirely new field."

"How was that?" Mackenzie asked; and I told him, adding that, for the moment, at least, the cleverness of the thing had made me overlook the fact that it was only a bit of parlor magic.

The professor smoked in silence for a time before he said musingly:

"The neutralizing ray— the ray which will render a given object incapable of reflecting the light which conveys its image to the eye— has often been sought, and it may some time be discovered; but hardly by a Varnell, you'd say. What do you know of the man?"

"Nothing definite; nothing at all more than the campus talk."

Another little interval of silence; and then:

"I understand he has left us; gone back to wherever it was he came from. A rather singular individual, I thought. He brought letters purporting to be from one of the great automotive plants, and they were apparently accepted. without question. His habit of working nights in the laboratories and locking himself in made me a trifle curious; and, as I chanced to have a friend on the research staff of the plant from which he professed to come, I wrote my friend a note of inquiry."

"Well?" I prompted, after a longish pause that seemed as if it were going to put an end to the matter.

"My friend's reply came this morning. It seems that no one answering Varnell's description, or bearing his name, has ever been connected with the staff of which he claimed to be a member." Another pause, and then: "Which argues that we have been imposed upon; that Varnell's references were forgeries."

"In that case, oughtn't something to be done about it?" I asked.

"I have been considering," said Mackenzie, with characteristic Scottish canniness. "So far as we know, apart from offering forged credentials, the man has done no harm beyond using the laboratories, probably to perfect some sleight-of-hand tricks that he means to palm off upon vaudeville audiences. It is hardly a police matter for the university."

"Here, I decided, was a sufficient solution of whatever mystery there might have been, and once more Varnell and his doings retreated into the limbo of things forgettable. But a little later an occurrence was to bob up to bring him and the singular thing I had witnessed in the Electro-Chemical laboratory back with a shock. Leaving Mackenzie to smoke a second pipe of his favorite mixture, I went around: into the next street to see if Doctor Denton's front porch was unoccupied— the doctor being Marcia's father.

The porch was empty, as I hoped it might be— and feared it wouldn't be, since Marcia seldom lacked some sappy undergraduate to sit the evening out with her. But when Mrs. Denton answered my ring, I was told that Marcia had gone around the block to a neighbor's. Would I wait? She'd probably be back in a few minutes. Thanking the good lady for the implied invitation, I planted myself in a porch chair commanding a view of the sidewalk in both directions, meaning to intercept Marcia as she was returning and forestall other possible callers by asking her to take a stroll with me around the campus.

For a time nothing happened. The street was one of the quietest in the residence district of a quiet college town, and there was little passing. In front of the house diagonally across on the right— which, as I noted, was all dark, as if the occupants had gone out somewhere— an automobile was parked, and, from my point of view, the car seemed to be empty. The nearest street light was on the corner above, and though it cast long shadows of the sidewalk-edging trees and the shrubbery on the house lawns, it was sufficiently strong to illuminate the roadway and walks.

In due time I saw Marcia approaching on the opposite side of the street. The night was warm and she was bareheaded; I could see her small well shaped head with its boyish bob, and the little competent swing of her

shoulders as she walked. A moment later she passed out of my sight behind the parked auto, and I laid my pipe aside and got up to go and meet her.

When I got as far as the gate it struck me that she was taking a long time to pass the parked car, and the presumable reason for it nicked my Irish nerve. Some one of the sappy youngsters I was planning to forestall had beaten me to it and was trying to persuade her to take a spin with him in his car.

"No, you don't— not this time!" I gritted, apostrophizing the car sporter; and a moment later I was crossing the street to try what a little counter-persuasion might accomplish. Just before I reached the car, the motor purred and it rolled away, leaving me standing at the curb like a villain foiled. I saw, or thought I saw, how it was: the sappy one had seen me coming and had taken time by the forelock. Not a little chagrined at being so neatly sidetracked, I recrossed the street and let myself in at the doctor's gate to get the pipe I had left on the porch railing. As I stepped upon the porch I had my little start of shocked. surprise. For there, sitting in the chair I had lately been occupying, and looking as if she were. waiting for me, was Marcia.

*Chapter 2: "Shrouded In Mystery."*

BEFORE I could speak she was laughing at me and saying: "Since you'd left your pipe, I was pretty sure you'd come back."

"Say!— how did you get here?" I demanded.

"On my two little feet, of course. Don't say you didn't see me!"

"But I didn't. Where were you?"

"I was crossing the street at the same time you were, only I was coming straight across and you were going diagonally. I thought you were hurrying to catch somebody in that auto."

"You thought right. I was sitting here on the porch and saw you just before you passed behind the auto, and when you didn't come in sight again I concluded that one of your little undergrad playboys was asking you to take a spin with him. I couldn't stand for that— in the circumstances— so I was chasing to head him off."

"You say I didn't come in sight? But I did! I didn't stop at the auto, and I don't know whose car it was— or is. I can't understand why you didn't see me. I saw you plainly enough."

"Maybe I was blind," I answered rather lamely.

She laughed again.

"Haven't I always said you have a single-track mind— what the French call the *idée fixé*? All you could see at the moment was somebody about to take

me away in the auto— which you say you couldn't stand for, in the circumstances. What are the circumstances?"

"Just that I came around to tell you good-by. I'm leaving to-morrow."

"Leaving?" she echoed. "I thought you and Tommy Maltby were to stay until after commencement."

"We meant to. But we have an offer of a job and we can't afford to turn it down. I've told you we've been running some tests on a locomotive built for a road out West— the E. B. & P. It is the first of an order of ten of the same class, the order to be completed if the type comes up to specifications— does the work. Tommy and I have made the laboratory tests here, and now the railroad people ask us to make a series of road tests in actual service. As I say, we couldn't afford to turn the offer down."

"The E. B. & P.," she said half musingly. "Would that by any chance be the Eagle Butte & Pacific?"

"It would, indeed. Why do you ask?"

"This is a funny world, Eric, dear. Are you and Tommy leaving on the morning train?"

"We are."

"What would you say if I should tell you that I am going along with you?"

"What? You don't mean that!"

"But I do. Aunt Sarah's asthma is troubling her again, and Doctor Daddy thinks she ought to try the high altitudes— or should I say the dry altitudes? And, just as that has been decided upon, along comes Captain Lansing Weatherford, vice president of the E. B. & P., stopping off to spend a day with Dean Randall. And here the funny coincidences begin. Years ago Doctor Daddy used to be the Weatherford family physician up in the Michigan pineries. Besides being the vice president of a railroad, Captain Lansing owns a dude ranch somewhere back in the mountains; and when we tell him what we're going to do with Aunt Sarah— But I'm sure you've guessed the rest of it."

I nodded. "He opens his heart and home— otherwise the dude ranch— to your aunt and makes her his honored guest. But where do you come in?"

"At the front door, if you please! I'm to go along as nurse-in-ordinary, don't you see? And not only that; we are both to be his guests on the trip in his private car, the *Tyrian*, which is to be taken on the Limited in the morning."

"Um," said I, "the undergrads will miss you."

"Are you trying to tell me that I'm a college widow?"

"No, I'm only trying to keep from bursting into tears because I'm not included in the private-car invitation."

"You've met Captain Weatherford, haven't you?"

"No. It seems that he asked Dean Randall to recommend a couple of postgrads in railroad engineering to go out and make the road tests on the big Mountain type, and the dean picked on Tommy and me. Where is this dude ranch you speak of? Is it on the E. B. & P.?"

"No; it is some distance back from the railroad, he told us, in the Juniper foothills. Caliente is the station for it."

"Calien-tay," I corrected. "Don't you know that all the vowels are pronounced in the Spanish?"

But she merely made a face at me for this. "Where will you and Tommy be?" she asked.

"At Eagle Butte for our headquarters, I suppose. That is where the general office and shops are."

"Then we shan't see much of you. The captain said the ranch was sixty miles from Eagle Butte, and ten miles from the railroad."

"Don't comfort yourself too severely with that thought," I said. "I've been known to travel more than sixty miles for a sight of something that I wanted to see."

"How energetic!" she gibed. "And then: "If you should ever get as far as the Circle D— that's the ranch, you know— I'm sure Aunt Sarah will be delighted to see somebody from home."

In all-this chatter I had held my end up as well as I could, but it was entirely without prejudice to an undercurrent of speculation about the queer thing that had happened just before I had found Marcia sitting on the porch.

She had said that she was crossing the street at the same time that I was . crossing in the opposite direction. She had seen me. Why hadn't I seen her? All that business about the one-track mind and the fixed idea might satisfy her, but I would have sworn that I was the only human being loose in the street when I had crossed to the auto. And yet she had said, in effect, that the only reason we hadn't met face to face was because we were crossing at different angles.

When it came time to say good-by, we didn't say it— since we were both to be on the same train in the morning. But when she went to the gate with me I said:

"I suppose you'll high-hat Tommy and me on the road— you as a guest in the private car and hobnobbing with the vice president of a railroad."

She wrinkled her nose at me.

"In that case, perhaps we'd better say good-by, after all. Just for that, you may kiss me, Eric, dear."

I did it, of course, and it was just about as soul-satisfying as kissing a waxwork manikin of the kind you see in the show windows of the ready-to-

wear shops. Marcia could be warm hearted enough when she felt like it, but when she didn't, she could make a man wonder whether he had really kissed a girl, or had been slapped in the face with a cold dead fish.

The next morning Maltby and I were a trifle late getting down to the station, and in the hustle of ticket buying and baggage checking we saw nothing of Marcia or Aunt Sarah; had time only to swing aboard our Pullman before the train pulled down to back in on the station spur track and couple to a handsome brass-railed business car— otherwise, Captain Weatherford's traveling hotel. After we were settled in our section, Maltby went back to the club car to smoke and I opened the morning paper that I had picked up on the way to the station.

It was on the local page of the newspaper that I found an item with a blocktype heading. Some time between eight and nine o'clock the previous evening, Dean Randall's house in Beech Street had been burglarized while the family was absent at a college entertainment, and the affair— in the language of the newspaper reporter who had written it up— was "shrouded in mystery." So far as could be determined, no robbery had been committed; only one room— the one occupied by the dean's guest, Captain Lansing Weatherford— had been ransacked, and that only as to the guest's personal belongings. There was no clew to the identity of the burglar or burglars, save that the neighbors saw an auto parked before the Randall house for some little time in the evening between the hours named.

Quite naturally, the reading of this item gave me a small shock. Dean Randall's was the house diagonally across from Marcia's home, and the auto seen by the neighbors was the one I had tried to intercept, and behind which Marcia had disappeared— to reappear for me only after I had returned to find her sitting on the porch of her father's house. While I was trying to find the connection, if any, between Marcia's disappearance— for me— and the raid upon the dean's guest room, a good-looking young fellow came down the aisle to stop at our section and thrust out his hand.

"Mr. Manning?" he said; and when I nodded and took the proffered hand, he sat down in the opposite seat and introduced himself.

"My names Dorman— Billy, for short— and I'm Captain Weatherford's secretary. I've just been hobnobbing with Mr. Maltby in the club car, and he told me I'd find you here. Thought I'd horn in and get acquainted, since you and Mr. Maltby are going to be with us in the 'wild and woolly.' "

"Temporarily," I qualified. Then, natural curiosity coming to the front: "I was just reading the newspaper account of what happened at Dean Randall's last night, and I'm interested because I was one of the 'neighbors' who saw the auto. Did the captain lose anything?"

My new-found acquaintance smiled.

"You're beating me to it," he said. "Miss Denton— she and her aunt are our guests in the *Tyrian*— has been telling us that you and she both saw the auto, and I thought you might be able to tell us more than she was able to. Can you?"

"Sorry, but I don't think I can. Miss Marcia saw all that I did, and a bit more. You see, she passed the auto while it was standing in front of the dean's."

"So she has just told us. And she also mentioned one other circumstance upon which we thought you might be able to throw some light—about your not seeing her when she passed you in crossing the street."

I saw no reason why I shouldn't give the straight facts to this frank, pleasant- faced young man who stood next to Captain Weatherford, so I told him briefly just what had occurred.

"Something decidedly queer about that, don't you think?" he commented. "And it ties in with another thing that wears the same pair of shoes— which is the reason why I've taken the liberty of butting in on you. Our car was entered last night and the captain's desk was rifled."

"You don't tell me!" I exclaimed. "Any clews?"

"Not what you'd call clews. I was sleeping in the car, and the porter was supposed to be on watch. 'Pip' is a pretty reliable darky, but he may have been asleep— probably was."

"And the breaking and entering didn't waken you?"

He was silent for a moment; was looking aside and seemed to be watching the Indiana cornfields as they whirled in circling procession past the car windows. When he spoke again it was to say:

"I'm a confirmed tobacco addict, Mr. Manning. Shall we go to the smoking compartment where I can light up?"

I went with him to the little den at the forward end of the car which served the double purpose of the men's wash room and smoking room, and he seemed relieved to find it unoccupied.

"I did want to smoke," he said, as we sat together on the leather-upholstered seat, "but the real reason for the shift was the man sitting in the section next to yours. I fancied he was cocking an ear in our direction."

I had noticed the man he referred to— a man wearing tinted glasses in tortoise-shell frames big enough to figure as aviation goggles, and with a soft, felt traveling hat pulled down as if to protect further a pair of weak eyes. In the passing glance I had given him, so much of his face as wasn't hidden by the drooping hat brim and the goggles had seemed vaguely familiar, but the impression vanished almost as soon as it was made.

"You were asking if the breaking and entering didn't waken me," Dorman went on, after he had got his pipe going. "If I could answer that with a plain 'Yes' or 'No' I'd be easier in my mind. There are four staterooms in the *Tyrian*, and I was sleeping in one of the two next to the open compartment which takes up about half of the car. What I'm going to tell you was either a dream, or else it wasn't. I'm a pretty sound sleeper; got that way in the service overseas, where you caught your forty winks wherever and whenever you could."

"I know," I agreed. "Had a bit of that, myself."

"Some time in the night I was awakened, or dreamed I was awakened, by a noise in the open compartment. The night was warm and I had gone to sleep with the door of my room open, and from my berth I could look straight into the main room. There was only one small electric left turned on, so the big room. was only faintly lighted. The most prominent object in my line of view was, or should have been, Captain Weatherford's desk. Am I making it clear ?"

"Perfectly."

"All right; here's where the thing begins to figure as a crazy dream. I should have seen the desk— and I didn't see it; it wasn't there. I sort of half remember realizing that it was a dream, and turning over to go to sleep again. But when I got up this morning, I found that the captain's desk had been ransacked. I'm telling you this because Miss Denton told us of your experience last evening. You. weren't dreaming when you passed her without seeing her in crossing the street, were you?"

"Not in the least," I denied. And then: "I can match you. Last night wasn't the first time for me." And at this I told him what I had seen in the Electro-Chemical laboratory a week earlier, winding up with: "I've been calling it a bit of parlor magic, but now I'm not so sure about it. Perhaps what I saw in the university laboratory, and what you thought you dreamed last night, are two pups in the same litter."

"You say this man Varnell is a crook?"

"No, I didn't say that. What I said was that he had handed in forged credentials."

"Which is a distinction without a difference," Dorman returned with a grin. "What became of him?"

"I don't know. He disappeared— for us— some few days ago."

"You're a scientific person, and I'm not. Is the thing you're hinting at— a contrivance that will make a solid object invisible— a mechanical possibility?"

"I don't know that, either. But he is a cold man nowadays who will say that anything in the way of a mechanical marvel is impossible. Was anything stolen from Captain Weatherford's desk ?"

"That is another twist in the mystery. I'm a pretty methodical cuss— learned that in the army, too, where I was the captain's orderly— and the captain and I went over the contents of the desk with a fine-tooth comb, as you might say. There is nothing missing but a typewritten list of the E. B. & P. stockholders and bondholders."

"What would anybody want with that?" I asked. Then I thought better of it and said: "You needn't tell me; it's none of my business."

He looked me square in the eyes and said :

"You are on the E. B. & P. pay roll, aren't you?"

"Temporarily, as I have said."

"All right; I believe you are a square shooter, and we want you and your buddy, Maltby, on our side. Are you with us?"

I smiled at his boyish directness.

"You can rest assured that I shan't bite the hand that feeds me. And I can answer for Tom Maltby, as well."

"Good! You shall have the layout. Two years ago the E. B. & P. was a kite without a tail, two streaks of rust and a right of way; bankrupt and in the hands of a receiver whose appointees were letting it go to the dogs— for a purpose. Get the picture?"

"As far as it goes, yes. What was the purpose of the disloyal appointees?"

"It wasn't avowed, of course, but it was plain enough. Most of them were graduates of the T-C. O., which wanted to acquire the E. B. & P. franchises— meaning to make the kite without a tail a part of a through extension to the south. Buy it in for a song, you know, and have that much of their extension ready made. At that time the captain was running the Circle D Ranch; he was gassed in the war, and when the New York doctors said he must have an outdoor life in the dry altitudes, his father, the Honorable Peter, bought the Circle D for him and told him to go to it and get well. Give me the high sign if I'm getting too prolix and so on."

"You're not; I'm interested."

"The captain got well pretty soon and began to hanker for something bigger than a dude cattle ranch to play with. The Honorable Peter and some of his friends were bondholders in the E. B. & P. When the sheriff's sale came along under the receivership, they slipped in ahead of the T-C. O., bought the road, reorganized it, put the captain in as first vice president and general manager, and authorized him to go on and build it south to a connection with the P. S-W. over the Moquetas and through Eden Valley. There was a whale of a fight. Perhaps you heard about it."

I nodded. "I saw what was printed in the newspapers. The Eden Valley cattlemen tried to block the game, didn't they? Didn't want the valley opened to homesteaders?"

"That was what the public was led to believe. But the ranchmen were only pawns in the game, with the T-C. O. making the moves. We won out and got the extension through, and that was that. Then the big Transcontinental line went to work to bore from within. The E. B. & P. became a paying proposition, and they wanted it. For the past year a bunch of unknowns in New York have been buying our stock, a bit here and another there. After a while they got some memberships on the board and began to bring pressure to bear on the captain. Whenever there was a vacancy on his staff— and that happened pretty frequently because the T-C. O. and other big lines were persistently hiring our officials away from us— the captain would find himself virtually obliged to take on somebody he didn't know, some stranger from the East. The captain was obliged because, with the constantly shifting stock ownership, he didn't know how far he could go if he should rear up and read the riot act to the New Yorkers."

"And that is the situation now?" I asked.

"It is. The New Yorkers, aided and abetted by some of their strikers on our official staff, are turning heaven and earth over to discredit the captain's administration. The captain is a fighter from the word 'go,' and if he could get anything definite on the conspirators, he'd sure send some of them to the pen and blow the conspiracy sky high. But so far we haven't been able to get a shred of evidence that would stand in the courts. We've just been to New York to try to find out how far the 'boring from within' has gone. That's why we had the list of stockholders— which was the only thing that was stolen last night. Does that answer your question of a few minutes ago?"

"Fairly well" I said. "Somebody wanted to know how much you had learned in New York. Here's hoping that the captain knocks 'em cold."

Dorman got up to go.

"I'm scamping my job. The captain will be wanting to write some letters to be mailed in Chicago. I suppose I don't need to say that all this loose-tongued talk of mine won't stand broadcasting ?" He grinned as he said it.

"Don't worry. We'll be loyal to our salt— Maltby and I. If there is anything we can do to help—"

"As it happens, there is. You and your buddy have been making tests on this big new freight puller we've bought, haven't you?"

"We have."

"Is it up to specifications? Will it do the work?"

"The block tests were perfectly satisfactory, in all respects."

"Good! We need ten of those engines to cut the costs in the mountain haul over the Moquetas. Grider, our superintendent of motive power— he's one of the New York appointees— says we don't need 'em, and that if we do, we shouldn't have bought Baldwins. It will be up to you and Mr. Maltby to back the captain's judgment when you make the road tests. That's another reason why I've been putting you next." And with that he left me.

Naturally, after this frank talk on the part of Captain Weatherford's secretary, I had plenty to think about, and I smoked another pipe before I returned to our section in the body of the car. When I did so, I found the adjoining section, the one that had been occupied by the man with the goggle spectacles, empty; not only of the man himself, but also of all his numerous pieces of hand baggage. Since the train had made no stops, I asked the porter what had become of my neighbor.

"Done moved up into the Chicago local car, yessuh. Tol' the conductor he had some friends up there and he wanted to be with um," the negro replied.

And with that answer I had to be satisfied.

## *Chapter 3: Storm Rumblings.*

BECAUSE there are a number of routes from Chicago to the Missouri River, we lost the *Tyrian* at the de Michigan metropolis, and didn't see it again until we were twelve hours west of Denver, with our P. S-W. flyer halting at Moraine to drop off our through sleeper for Eagle Butte over the E. B. & P.

Since we were to make road tests with the new Mountain type, Maltby and I were sitting up to see as much as we could of the Weatherford road before we turned in, and this was how we came to see the captain's private car coupled in with our own sleeper at the rear of the waiting E. B. & P. night express.

What we might have seen from the windows of the Pullman probably wouldn't have amounted to much; on the station platform at Moraine we ran across Billy Dorman dropping out of the vestibule of the private car to file some telegrams for his chief. He took us forward to the big Pacific type and gave us an introduction in character as official experts to Chris Christiensen, the engineer, a huge viking in blue denim who was making his last-minute oiling round of the Pacific type.

"Aye bane glad to mit you yentlemen," said Chris, and we were waved up to seats on the fireman's side of the cab.

What we saw before we became too sleepy to see anything was, first, a fine piece of engineering as the extension wound its way through a series of canyons, around nicely compensated curves and up a succession of grades to a

pass over the Little Moquetas. Down the northern grades the gigantic Swede at the throttle whisked his train at timesaving speed to a broad upland valley lying stark in the moonlight— a level expanse dotted with ranches and sheltered at a wide distance on either hand by forested mountain ranges. "Eden Valley?" was Maltby's query shouted at the fireman; and the husky young shovel artist nodded an affirmative.

We had an hour or more of the valley before a water-tank stop gave us a chance to say good night to the two enginemen and drop off to go back to our Pullman. As we were getting ready to turn in, Maltby said:

"No wonder the Weatherfords wanted to stretch their railroad into this valley. From what we've seen, it seems to justify its name. Wouldn't mind owning a few acres of it, myself."

This was somewhere about midnight; but the morning had another story to tell.

When we ran up the window shades at sunrise, the train had climbed and crossed the main range of the Moquetas and was rocketing northward over a desert-like expanse, with mountains in the dim distance to the eastward and others much nearer at hand on the west.

"The Junipers, I take it," Maltby said— meaning the nearer mountains— while we were taking a basin bath and shaving. "Wonder if we've passed the captain's ranch station?"

I said I thought not— hoped not, anyway; and Maltby made a grinning mask of his lathered face.

"Want to kiss the little girl good-by before she disappears, do you? It stands you in hand. With the ranch ten miles off the railroad you won't have a chance to see her very often in the busy days to come, what? When is the wedding to be?"

I wished very heartily that I could tell him, but since I couldn't, I let the joshing question go without an answer.

I was barely presentable, and Maltby wasn't even that far along, when the train slowed to a stop at a desert siding marked by a cattle-loading corral and a single building, a diminutive station and telegraph office. At the platform a touring car and a small truck were waiting; and when I made the porter let me out of the vestibule, Captain Weatherford was coming up from the private car in the rear with his two guests.

It was my first sight of the captain, and he looked the fighting man, all right— a square-shouldered, well-set-up athlete, with the smiling eyes of a joyous Scrapper, but with a jaw that would take the edge off the smile for any antagonist foolish enough to mistake him for an easy mark. He had Aunt Sarah

on his arm and was leading her to the auto, and that gave me a chance to cut in on Marcia.

" 'Lo, Eric," she said. "Speaking of high hats and the exclusivenesses, where have you been all the time?"

I hastened to explain that the route over which our passes had read had made us lose the *Tyrian* at Chicago; that we had just caught up with it again at Moraine, late the previous evening.

"As if I didn't know," she gurgled, giving me the laugh again. "Are you and Tommy Maltby coming over to the ranch with us?"

"You've got us wrong; we're not dudes, we're workingmen. Will you stick at the ranch all summer? Or will you get up to Eagle Butte now and then?"

"Who knows? I'm sure I don't. Then to the captain, who had handed Aunt Sarah into the waiting auto: "We've had a perfectly lovely time, Captain Weatherford, but you've spoiled us. We'll never be satisfied to travel in a common, everyday Pullman again. Shall we see you at the ranch any time?"

The captain smiled. "Since Mrs. Weatherford is summering at the Circle D, it is very likely you'll see me as often as you care to. You must make yourselves entirely at home at the ranch. I have wired Mrs. Weatherford that you are coming, and I am sure she will try to make you comfortable."

I seemed to be out of it and I moved away. The baggage man was tumbling the women's trunks out of his car, and as I swung up to the steps of the Pullman the train began to move. The ranch auto was backing for a turn and Marcia was waving to somebody; but 'whether it was to the captain or to me, I couldn't tell.

Two hours later the train pulled through the yards and up to the headquarters-building station which served as the Eagle Butte terminal, and Dorman came to go with us and get us located. To reach the business streets we had to cross a gridironing of tracks, with another headquarters-station building on the town side of the big yard, and Dorman said:

"Our friends, the enemy; otherwise the T-C. O. division wickiup where they load the bombs for us."

"Not open warfare, is it?" I inquired.

"Oh, no; nothing like that. A decade or so in the past you might have seen something of that sort, but not nowadays. We exchange business with them and greet one another cordially when we meet; but if Bloodgood— he's their division head— could see a good chance to cut our throats, he'd do it without turning a hair."

"Nice, gentle sort of savage to have for your next-door neighbor," grinned Maltby. And then: "Eric's been telling me about your little war. We'll probably

not be with you very long, but while we're here you know you can count on us for anything we can do to tease the enemy."

"Thanks," said Billy Dorman; "that listens fine!" And within the next few minutes he had installed us comfortably in a hotel which seemed far too luxurious and modern for the size and importance of a town which, so far as we could see, owed its existence principally to the fact that it was the division point of one railroad and the terminus of another.

As he was about to leave us, Dorman said:

"Your business will be chiefly with the motive-power department, naturally, and after you're rested up from the trip you can report to Grider, superintendent of motive power. He has been wired that you were coming."

I remembered our introductory talk in the Westboro-Chicago Pullman.

"This Mr. Grider is one of the unwelcome New York appointees, isn't he?"

"Just that, and he'll probably give you the icy shoulder. But the captain is still the big boss, and Grider will have to let you do your do with the new fourteen wheeler— which he says we don't need."

When we reported at the headquarters building, which we did as soon as we had changed to working clothes, we found that Dorman hadn't overstated the fact as to our welcome in the office of the superintendent of motive power, Grider, a surly looking man driver, apparently having a contemptuous opinion of college men in general and of mechanical engineering postgraduates in particular.

"Uh-huh," he grunted, when we introduced ourselves; "the captain wired me. What do you think you can find out about this new 'hog'— more than we can find out for ourselves?"

"Perhaps nothing at all," I hastened to say— before Maltby could cut in with something as insulting as Grider's question. "But Captain Weatherford has employed us to make the road tests, and—"

"All right," he broke in crustily; "the hog is here, waiting for you. You'll find it in the back shop. Tell Bagley, the master mechanic, who you are, and he'll give you a gang to fit it for the road." Then, with a mean look out of his cold eyes: "Who are you working for— the railroad company, or the builders?"

Again I answered quickly, to keep Maltby from upsetting the fat in the fire, as I made sure he was ready to do.

"We are employed by the company, of course. We have nothing to do with the Baldwin Locomotive Works."

"Hah!" he said. And the way he said it made it sound very much as if he had said: "You're a damned liar." And that was that.

"Hell," Maltby remarked as we were crossing the tracks to the shops, "'speaking of hogs, there is one with both feet in the trough. If the captain has many more like Grider on his staff, it's easy to see what he's up against."

In the master mechanic's office we found a very different proposition. Bagley was a small man, with a quick, decisive manner, but with good nature written all over his rather homely face. And before we had talked with him many minutes we found that he knew his job from the ground up.

"The new engine is on the erecting pit," he told us. "We would have coupled it up, but Mr. Grider said he had a wire from Captain Weatherford, and we were to let the engine alone until you came along. If you'll come into the shops I'll give you some men and you can start them in. I hope the big brute does the work. We're losing business right along for the lack of heavy freight pullers; though Mr. Grider thinks we could get along without 'em if we'd work a little harder with what we have."

That was the beginning of our contact with Bagley, and it left us with a better taste in our mouths. And the taste remained after we had spent the day working with and directing the shop gang assigned to us. As Maltby put it that evening as we sat down to dinner in the hotel, it seemed evident that whatever disloyalty there might be among the E. B. & P. officials and department heads, the rank and file swore by Captain Weatherword to a man.

"Just the same, there's thunder on the left," Maltby added. "If you put your ear to the ground you can hear it plainly enough. Or, for that matter, you can feel it in the air." Then, as he attacked the outworks of the excellent dinner: "My prophetic soul is warning me to keep an eye on Friend Grider. It whispers that he's going to take a swipe at us— you and me, Eric— when he gets a chance."

And I had a feeling that way, myself.

## *Chapter 4: Conspiracy!*

AFTER dinner Maltby suggested a movie for pastime, and when I said I'd had hard labor enough for one day, he went alone, leaving me to draw up a comfortable sleepy-hollow chair in front of a window commanding a view of the street, the railroad plaza and the T-C. O. station and yard; to plant myself therein and to fill and light my pipe.

I had been taking it easy, with the stir and life of the lobby shut off by the high back and deeply recessed seat of my chair just enough to make it companionable without being intrusive, for some little time, when a T-C. O. passenger train pulled in from the East. In a few minutes the Eagle Butte contingent of travelers from it began to come stringing along past my window

to the lobby entrance, among them a figure that seemed vaguely familiar to me— a tall fellow, clean shaven, and wearing a pair of oversized spectacles in black frames.

When the new arrivals filed in and crossed to the registry desk, I got up to have another look at the spectacled man, and as I did so, the memory card index shoved up the identifying memoranda He was unmistakably the begoggled person who had been sitting in the section next to Maltby's and mine in the train leaving Westboro three days earlier; the one Billy Dorman had suspected of cocking a listening ear, and who had had himself transferred to another car after Dorman and I had retreated to the smoking compartment.

Moved more by curiosity than by anything else, I waited until after the man had registered and disappeared in the direction of the elevators, and then strolled over to the desk to ask the clerk what, if anything, he knew about the guest who had last registered.

"Not a thing in the world; never saw him before," was the answer. "Signs his name 'Vanderpool,' from New York. Do you know him?"

I said I didn't; and, returning to my deep-seated chair at the window, fell to musing a bit over the curious coincidences that occasionally happen along. Here was a man, whom I had last seen on a train more than a thousand miles away, turning up in Eagle Butte within a few hours of my own arrival. Of course, there was no reason why he shouldn't; but it seemed as if there were a thousand chances to one that he wouldn't.

Past this, another small matter bobbed up with a question mark attached. Why did this man's face suggest a memory antedating my seeing of it in the Westboro-Chicago sleeper? It had done so, and it was doing it again. The more I thought of it, the more the conviction grew upon me that he was not wholly the stranger he seemed to be; and yet I couldn't place him anywhere back of that other chance meeting three days in the past.

While I was still puzzling over the suggestion of familiarity which refused to materialize into anything definite, the street light in front of the hotel showed me two men coming diagonally across the plaza from the direction of the E. B. . & P. terminal. As they came nearer I saw that one of them was the grouchy superintendent of motive power, Grider, and the other a big man who looked as though he might be anything from a promoter of wildcat oil prospects to a politician out of a job.

A moment or two later, the two pushed through the revolving doors and came over toward the alcove where I was sitting. Inasmuch as I raised up to look at them as they came in, I supposed, naturally, that they must have seen me. But the first words that I heard, as they drew up a couple of chairs

somewhere behind me, made it evident that they hadn't seen me; that they believed the high-backed lounging chair near them was unoccupied.

"This is as good a place as any," Grider said, as they seated themselves. "If anybody butts in on us here, we can go up to my room. You were starting to tell. me your plan of campaign. |I don't want to know it, or know anything about it. If your foot slips and I'm called into court, I'm going in with an ironclad alibi. Do you get that?"

"Of course; that's understood," said the other man. "All we ask is a free hand. I've got my men on the ground— the last one, and he's the king-pin, came in on the T-C. O. this evening— and we're ready for business. Give us a couple of weeks or so, and I'll promise you you can buy what stock you need at your own price."

"All right; go to it. But, as I say, I don't want to know anything about what you're doing, or your methods. And I'm telling you again that if you get caught out, you'll have to stand on your own feet. Onderdonk wires me that you haven't the scratch of a pen to show that you are not working a stockjobbing scheme of. your own, so, if you make a miscue, you'll get no backing from our bunch."

"Don't worry about the miscues. We're not exactly apprentices at a job of this kind, and we shan't ask for any backing; all we'll ask will be a bit of inside information now and then. And that's what I'm after just now. Who are these two young fellows that Weatherford has brought in here with him from the East?"

At this, you can bet I was listening so hard that I could have heard a pin drop, and I crammed a finger into the bowl of my pipe to put the fire out, for fear the smoke of it should betray my presence.

"They are a couple of white-collar college mechanics brought here to show us that the new Baldwin Mountain type is just what we need for the Moqueta grades," Grider explained with heavy sarcasm in his tone.

"You are sure of that, are you?" questioned the other man.

"Why shouldn't I be? Do you know anything about 'em?"

"No; I haven't seen them, so far. But Weatherford is no fool. I wouldn't put it beyond him to run in a couple of fly "specials" on us if it occurred to him. Is this engine testing a usual thing on railroads?"

"By so-called experts, you mean? Not exactly. But I have taken the stand that we don't need these ten heavy freight pullers, and Weatherford is out to prove that we do. As I said in the office a little while ago, it's up to you to show that Fm right and Weatherford is wrong."

"Good enough. In that case, the show opens to-night. We can fix the two white collars, and maybe substantiate your claim to be a good judge of motive-

power requirements, in one and the same gesture. Which reminds me: don't forget to let me have those duplicate keys you spoke of."

"They are in my room; we'll go up and get 'em," said Grider.

As they moved away I nearly broke my neck trying to get a fair sight of the confident plotter who was going to make monkeys of Maltby and me— this without taking the chance of either of the two looking back and discovering me— but it was no good. All I got was a view of his broad back as he crossed to the elevators with Grider, and I was sharply disappointed. The brief glimpses I had had of his face as he was approaching the hotel and following Grider through .the revolving doors were so unsatisfactory that I couldn't be at all sure I'd recognize him when, or if, I should see him again.

Hoping that the precious pair would presently come down in one of the elevators, I bought a paper at the news stand and posted myself near the elevator alcove, meaning to use the spread newspaper as a mask if the need should arise. While I waited, I had a good chance to measure up the bigness of the plot that the overheard talk had partly revealed. Though the revealment was incomplete and lacking in details, it was plain that an organized assault was about to be made upon the Weatherford management with a view to breaking down the price of the stock; that Grider was the representative of the New York conspirators on the ground; and that the, man with whom he had talked was the directing head of some sort of a troublemaking organization whose methods wouldn't bear the light of day.

After I had waited long enough to make it practically certain that Grider's visitor had departed without using the elevators, I tried to determine what I ought to do; whether I should go at once in search of Captain Weatherford, or let things rock along until later on.

Holding the alternatives in suspense, I went to the desk and asked if the captain had rooms in the hotel. The answer was. that he had, but that he wasn't in them; that he had left Eagle Butte late in the afternoon to drive to his ranch sixty miles away in the Juniper foothills.

Since a report to the captain had to be delayed, I began to cast about for some other way of getting into action. At that, the unknown man's assertion that something was on the cards for the night, and his asking for certain duplicate keys, started me off on a new line— a line pointing to his promise to do up Maltby and me, and to demonstrate the correctness of Grider's attitude in regard to the purchase of the new Baldwins. I looked up at the lobby clock. Maltby had evidently found a movie; in which case he wouldn't be back for another hour or so. That put the action part of it squarely up to me, and I left the hotel to take a roundabout course which would bring me to the E. B. & P.

yards and shops without crossing the T-C. O. gridironing of tracks opposite the plaza.

When I reached the E. B. & P. yard the off-shift crew was making up a night freight, and I. had to watch my chance to dodge between the strings of cars. Once across the tracks, I found myself in the vicinity of the master mechanic's office, which was in an "L" built out from the main shop. The office was dark, and so was the shop, though when I looked through one of the windows I saw the watchman's lantern, as he went in and out of the machinery bays, making his round.

Since the repair equipment included a car shop and a paint shop, as well as the main machine shop, I concluded that the watchman would probably arrange his round so as to spend about an equal length of time in each of the buildings; and this conclusion verified itself when he didn't show up again in the main shop for something like forty minutes after, he had left it.

During this waiting interval I had kept my place at the window, which was directly opposite the erecting pit over which the new freight puller was standing, and 'more than once during the forty minutes I had been tempted to go back to the hotel and call it a day. But the temptation wasn't quite strong enough to get results; and after the flickering light of the watchman's lantern had disappeared for a second time, I determined to stick it out for another forty minutes.

I had scarcely made up my mind to this before I heard the footsteps of a number of men coming across the yards and stumbling over the rails. The nearest masthead electric was some distance down the sorting yard, and the window at which I was posted was in a shadow cast by a string of box cars standing on the nearest track.

Flattening myself in the shadow I saw three men make their way to the door of the master mechanic's office, and one of them turned a flash light upon the lock so that he could see to insert a key. As he did so, he muttered :

"You're sure you saw the watchman go north, Brumby?"

And the answer came promptly:

"Dead sure; not more'n five minutes ago. He's in the car shop now."

At that, the three disappeared inside, and now I had no desire to quit and go back to the hotel. In a minute or so there were more developments: the three men were in the big shop, and enough light from the distant masthead electric shone through the top sash of the dusty window to let me distinguish them as they stood beside the new engine. Next, I saw the beam of the flash light begin to play around, and two of the dim figures handed themselves down into the pit under the engine, while the third man held the light for them.

What the two men in the pit did took them fully half an hour. Of course, I couldn't see what it was, but that it was sabotage of some sort was plainly evident. A few minutes before the watchman might be expected to return, the two scrambled out of the pit, there was a clatter as of tools being thrown aside, and the three retreated as they had come— through the master mechanic's office.

At the click of the relocked outer door I sprang up to follow them, hoping to get near enough to be able to swear to their identities in court. But here the perversity of inanimate things got in the way. The switching crew was shoving up a cut-out of cars, and the three men darted through just ahead of the moving string an instant before the coupling crash came. Hence, I was forced to take a chance of being run over by scrambling under one of the cars in the breathless interval before the switching engine began to back out with the coupled section.

The duck-under delayed me for a few seconds, and when I was once more on my feet and giving chase, the three men were across the yard tracks and climbing into a waiting auto, to be driven rapidly away up the street leading to the town.

Chagrined over the failure of my first attempt to put a spoke in the wheel of these conspirators who were out to make it hard for the Weatherford management— and, incidentally, for Maltby and me— I returned to the hotel, where I found that Maltby had come in during my absence and had gone to his room. When I followed, I saw that his transom was dark, so I didn't disturb him.

At breakfast the next morning I told him what I had seen through the back shop window, and how I had fumbled the ball afterward.

"So!" he commented. "It seems that somebody has invented a new industry— wrecking railroads to order. Wouldn't it jar you to see a member of the captain's official staff calling in an organized gang of destructionists? What did they do to the Mountain type?"

"I don't know— couldn't see. But we'll find out presently."

As it came about, that prophecy wasn't fulfilled. Beginning the working day at the shops, the first thing we did was to crawl under the engine and make what we thought was a thorough inspection of the running gear. So far as could be determined there was nothing to show for the half hour two of the three men had spent in the pit.

"Well," said Maltby, when we had to give it up as an unsolved puzzle, "sure you weren't dreaming last night, Eric?"

"Nothing like it!" I retorted. "She's crippled in some way, you can bet on that. We'll find out when we get her steamed up."

An hour later we had the big freight puller hauled out, placed on a roundhouse pit, and put fire in her. While the steam pressure was mounting we went over her again, inch by inch, and still found nothing wrong; and again Maltby joshed me about having walked in my sleep.

"You'll see," I maintained. "It will show up, sooner or later."

But again I seemed to be a false prophet. With steam up, we ran the engine upon the turntable, took it to a long siding in the lower yard and ran it back and forth for an hour or more to limber it up; and still nothing untoward developed. In the afternoon we did more of the limbering; got the train dispatcher's authority to use a few miles of the main line between trains, and put the big machine through its paces on a longer runway than the yard track afforded. And still we couldn't discover what disabling thing, if any, had been done to it.

That evening after dinner Maltby went up to the mezzanine to write some letters, leaving me to smoke in the lobby. As I was filing a second pipe, Billy Dorman came in and, seeing me, came over to ask how the new engine was performing. I told him we couldn't tell much about it until it was put in service, and then asked him how long Captain Weatherford would be away. At his saying that he didn't know, I told him what I had overheard and seen the previous night, and asked if he didn't think the captain ought to be put in possession of the facts at once.

"You are right," he acceded quickly. "We have a private-line phone to the ranch, and I'll go over to the office and call him up after a bit. Did you get a fair sight at the man who was with Grider?"

I had to confess that I'd fallen down there.

"Was he one of the three who went to the shops?"

"I had no means of knowing.'

"What did they do to the new engine?"

"I can't tell you that, either. Maltby and I have had it out all day, and we haven't been able to find anything wrong with it, thus far."

He was silent for a time. Then he said:

"A nice state of affairs, isn't it?— with a member of the captain's own official family knifing him in the back."

"Can't Grider be fired?"

He shook his head slowly.

"He's a son-in-law of one of the new directors. Unless we could get evidence stout enough to haul him into court on a criminal charge, our hands are tied."

"I'm an outsider," I offered. "I'll willingly testify to what I overheard right here in this hotel last evening."

Again he shook his head.

"Not enough, I'm afraid; not definite enough, I mean. They'd swear you down."

"I guess you're right, at that," I admitted, adding: "The captain and his associates are not going to take this thing lying down, are they?"

"Not by a jugful. But the captain won't fire until he is sure of making a killing. If only they don't get us first; that's all I'm afraid of. I think I'll go now and call up the ranch. You'll keep your eyes open?"

"It's the surest thing you know," I said; and at that he left me.

### *Chapter 5: Fists Against Blackjacks.*

DORMAN had been gone for an hour or more when Maltby came down to mail his letters. While I was telling him about the talk I'd had with the captain's right-hand man, Billy blew in again to say:

"The new Mountain type is bulletined to go out to-night on No. 13. Had you heard about it?"

We said we hadn't; and he went on:

"I saw the notice on the board in the dispatcher's room a few minutes ago and I asked who had ordered the new engine into service. The answer was that the order had come from Grider's office."

"Just so," I nodded. Then, to Maltby: "How about it, Tommy? Does she go on her first road trip without us?"

"Not by a jugful— in the circumstances!" he snapped. "That would be too easy. How about the enginemen who are taking her out, Billy? Who are they? Where do they stand in this drive to do the captain up? Can you tell us that?"

"Bat McGraw's name is up as engineer; and his fireman is Bert Lester. The rank and file is loyal, as a whole, but if there are any exceptions, I'd say McGraw might be one of them."

"And Lester?"

"Bert is straight; used to be a line rider on the captain's ranch. But he won't have anything to do with making the report on the engine's performance."

"Naturally. When is No. 13 due to leave ?"

"At nine thirty; half an hour, yet."

"All right," Maltby said. "We'll wait a bit, and if we are not invited to go along, we'll invite ourselves."

Dorman nodded. "Hoped you'd feel that way. When I saw that McGraw was up for the run, I went back to the office and made these out." He handed each of us an employee's time pass, indorsed across the face: "Good on all

trains and engines." "I thought maybe Pat might say he didn't know you and stall about letting you ride with him."

The passes were good, as far as they went, but they didn't give us anything more than riding authority. I called Dorman's attention to this.

"I know," he replied, "but it's the best I can do in the captain's absence. It's McGraw's run; his engine and his train. If he doesn't want you to do any of the handling, he'll be within his rights."

After Dorman left us we waited for maybe fifteen minutes of the half hour, but no call boy came to summon us. Maltby pocketed his watch.

"No use waiting any longer, Eric; they're leaving us out of it—purposely. Let's go."

Leaving the hotel. we took the short cut to the E. B. & P. yards across the gridironing of tracks in the T-C. O. yard. As we were entering the "Y" connecting the two railroad systems for transferring purposes, I saw a T-C. O. switchman swinging his lantern in a circle, and wondered why he was doing it, since there was no switching crew or engine in sight. Looking back to see if he might be signaling to some one at a distance, I saw an auto start out of the shadow cast by the T-C. O. station building and disappear in the direction of the railroad street crossing to the westward.

Coming presently to the E. B. & P. yard we found that here, too, there was a cessation of the night industries. The switch engine was lying up on the freight-house spur track, and on one of the long sidings there was a caboose-tagged string of boxes, gondolas, flats and oil tanks— the make-up of No. 13. At the head of the string the light of a distant masthead electric showed us the Mountain type coupled in, ready for the start.

It was shortly after we had passed the switch shanty where the night crew was waiting, apparently, for No. 13 to clear the yard, that we had our notice to quit. As we came opposite the lower end of the freight house, the drumming of the motor, followed by a shrill screeching of auto brakes, cut into the silence and three men darted around the end of the building and rushed us. `

For a brief minute or so the battle thus precipitated was an excellent imitation of a Donnybrook Fair; fists and footwork against blackjacks, or sand bags, with the advantage of a total surprise on the side of the sandbaggers. Maltby took the brunt of it. Standing six feet in his socks, and built accordingly, he had held the boxing championship in the Tech in his undergraduate days; and before I could do much more than to sidestep the fellow who was trying to knock me in the head, Tommy : had laid out one of the others, and was giving the third an exhibition of fine ring points that could end only in one way.

At this, a fourth man, materializing from nowhere, as it seemed to me, jumped in, swinging something that looked like a short bar of iron.

"Look out, Tommy!" I yelled; and Maltby made a boxer's side swerve in time to miss the sweep of the iron bludgeon. While the fellow in front of me was trying to get in another crack at me with his clubbing weapon, shouts and a clatter of running footsteps made me spring aside and spin around to face what I supposed was a fresh attack from the rear. Instead, it was the night crew from the switch shanty sprinting in to our rescue.

Of course, that changed the complexion of things immediately. Maltby dodged a second sweep of the iron bar, countering with a left hook that smacked on the bar swinger's jaw like the slap of a wet towel, and about the same time I pulled a French savate trick on another, getting a foot into his bread basket. By this time the yard men were closing in and that ended it, with the four highbinders breaking away to duck to cover among the cars in the yard.

"Thim dommed hobos!" the yard foreman was panting. "They'd be scraggin' ye right here in the opin yar-rd, would they?" Then to Maltby: "Tis a swate wallop yed be carryin' in that left o' yours, me lad. The smack of ut was like a wet plank fallin' in the mud. "Tis layin' for No, 13 they was, waitin' to swing it when she pulls out, and they tuk ye f'r railroad specials pathrollin' the yar'rd."

"We are specials, though not exactly the kind you mean," said Maltby. "We're out here making tests on the new Mountain type for Captain Weatherford. Thanks for your cut-in. The odds were against us until you lent a welcome hand. Come on, Eric, or we'll be left."

As we hurried on to reach the forward end of the train and the engine, I had my own idea touching the identity and purpose of the sandbaggers, and it didn't quite jibe with the yard foreman's. I was remembering the man in the T-C. O. yard making lantern signals to nobody in sight, and the auto leaping out of the shadows to race for the railroad crossing. Also, I recalled the screech of auto brakes which we had heard on the other side of the freight house a fraction of a minute before we were set upon. The sandbaggers were not hobos—at least, not in the foreman's meaning of the word. They were strong-arm artists under orders to see to it that we didn't get a chance to go out with the new freight puller.

Reaching the engine, we found McGraw making a circuit of the big machine with his flare torch and oil can. Maltby, nursing skinned knuckles as a result of the late scrap, didn't mince matters.

"We are hired to make the road tests on this engine and we are going over the division with you," he shot out at McGraw.

"The hell you are!" was the growling retort. "Who says so?"

"This is what says it," Maltby snapped back, showing his employee's. pass with the "Good on all trains and engines" indorsement.

McGraw examined the card by the light of the smoking torch.

"All right, if that's the order," he returned sourly. "But we'll get it straight off the bat. You don't monkey with this hog, not while I'm runnin' it. I'm boss o' this end of the train. Snap into it if you're goin' along. We'll be pullin' in a minute."

With this crabbed welcome we climbed to the cab, and there I tried a bit of diplomacy with the ex-cowboy fireman.

"We are two of the captain's men, Lester," I said. "McGraw doesn't want us on here. How about you?"

"Anything the captain says goes with me," returned the young husky, his grin showing a mouthful of handsome teeth. And he told us to make ourselves at home on his side of the cab.

In due course McGraw came aboard, scowling like the villain in a play, and leaned out of the cab window to take the starting signal. When it was given he took some of his ill nature out on the new engine, jumping it half off the trails with a jerk at the throttle and taking the slack of the long train with a snap which must have tried every drawbar in the string.

"You see," I said to Maltby, when the deafening clamor of the exhaust gave me leave. "It's framed. If there is anything he can do to show this engine up for a false alarm, it's going to be done."

That saying of mine proved to be more than a prediction; it was a prophecy. Postulating as experts in railroad engineering, Maltby and I had ridden and driven quite a number of locomotives on test runs, but never before had we seen a new machine bullied and baited as the Mountain type was by McGraw that night. Net once in the eighty-mile run across the desert to the foothills of the Moquetas did he give the engine a chance to show what it could do under decent handling, and long before the grades where the real test would begin were reached, an ominous racking and thumping was telling us that the crippling thing— whatever it was— that had been done to the running gear two nights earlier was at last showing up.

McGraw, cursing the new machine for a junk heap, paid no attention to the ominous symptoms except to swear at them, and at the Lobo stop for water he didn't even take the trouble to get off to look for the cause or causes. But while Lester was filling the tank, Maltby and I dropped off on our side. The smell of overheated oil told us that the engine was running hot, and a few groping touches of the ends of the driving axles located the seat of the trouble in the main bearings. At this discovery Maltby did a bit of low-voiced swearing on his own account.

"Loose driver boxes," he said. "That is what those beggars did to her two nights ago, and it's showing up, now that she has a load hitched to her. Here's hoping she holds out till we get over the mountains. That damned McGraw doesn't seem to care whether she does or not."

At the clang of the upthrown tank spout we mounted again to our seat on Lester's box and the laboring run was resumed. Within the next fifteen minutes we were hitting the Moqueta grades and the big engine was straining and racking like a horse with the blind staggers. Again McGraw cursed and swore, yanking at the throttle until Lester's fire was broken up and practically ruined by the tearing exhaust blasts and the steam pressure began to run down. Maltby. was furious, and it was all I could do to keep him from mixing it with McGraw. Of course, that would only have made matters worse. As McGraw had taken pains to tell us, we were only passengers and unwelcome intruders.

As we both agreed, it was only the failing steam pressure, slowing the speed to little more than a crawl on the steepest of the grades, that kept the crippled machine on the rails in the long climb to Lobo Pass; and on the descent to the locomotive division station of Elco in Eden Valley, on which gravity would have given us more speed than we could use, I think it was only McGraw's regard for his own skin that made him keep the downhill flight from becoming a runaway. As it was, I know that I, for one, was mighty glad when the station lights at Elco swung into view at the foot of the-final grade. At the station McGraw got off without a word to us and went in to make his. "lost-time" report, which doubtless gave the new engine the blackest of black eyes, and after that we saw no more of him. Waiting until the valley-division engine had taken the train on to the southward, Maltby and I crossed to the roundhouse where the Mountain type had. been taken by the hostler, told the night foreman who we were, and borrowed a couple of suits of overclothes. While we were getting ready for business, young Lester came over and asked if he might butt in. "Sure you may," I told him. Then I asked what had become of McGraw.

"Gone over to the boardin' house to bunk down, mad as a wet hen. Swears he'll never pull throttle on this here hog again, not if he has to quit his job."

"But you don't feel that way, do you?" I said.

"Not any; but I'm sort o' curious to know what ails her."

"All right; come down in the pit with us and we'll show you," Maltby said; and when we had crawled under the engine with a torch for a light, the crippling thing that had been done to the engine was quickly located. The wedges which are designed to take up the wear between the driving boxes and the jaws of the frame, and which are adjustable up or down by means of a bolt and nuts at the bottom, had been slightly loosened on all eight of the main

bearings, allowing them to rack back and forth under the push and pull of the pistons. It was a skilful job of sabotage; one which would not "kill" the engine outright, and which would not be discoverable until the machine was working under a load.

"My gosh!" Lester exploded. "Did they send an engine out o' the factory in any such shape as this?"

"They did not," said Maltby shortly. Then: "Get the wrenches, Bert, and we'll do a patch job of adjustment that will hold us until we can get back to Eagle Butte and the proper tools."

We did the best we could with the appliances at hand, and, when the job was done, went over to the trainmen's boarding house to catch up on our lost sleep. While we were undressing, Maltby said:

"Now we know why the captain brought us out here. He knew what was likely to happen if the Baldwin should be turned over to somebody Grider would pick for the try-out. The engine would fall down on the job—as she has—and that would be another nail in the coffin of the present management."

"That's it," I acquiesced. "And to make a sure thing of it to-night, we were not to be allowed to go along; not if we had to be waylaid and knocked out to stop us."

Maltby had taken off one shoe, and now he dropped the other on the floor.

"Huh? You mean that those sandbaggers weren't just ordinary bums, mad because they took us for railroad cops out to keep them from stealing a ride?"

I told him what I had seen: the man signaling in the T-C. O. yard, and the auto racing for the freight-house crossing, and asked him if he hadn't heard the squeal of the auto brakes just before we were attacked.

"I do remember, now that you mention it," he said. Then: "The scoundrels! "There's one thing about it, Eric, my son. From this time on I'm in for the duration of the war. We'll get these highbinders in a hole before we quit, or I'll eat my hat! Call me when it's time to turn out: I'm dead to the world until the whistle blows. Good night."

## *Chapter 6. Bedevilings.*

HAVING left no order for a morning call with the boarding-house keeper, we slept late; so late that the noon meal had to answer for a missed breakfast. Crossing the tracks to the roundhouse after we had eaten, we found Lester mounting guard in the cab of the Mountain type. .

"Hello!" said Maltby. "Have you been here all day ?"

"I'm livin' here," said Lester with his easy grin. "Didn't know but what somebody might bust in and try some more o' the same."

"Where is McGraw?" I asked.

"Foreman was tellin' me a while back that he deadheaded into Eagle Butte on No. 2."

Maltby smiled. "Gone in to tell 'em hat the new engine's a frost, eh?" Then to me: "Let's go over to the station and do a bit of wiring, Eric."

Showing our passes to the operator at the station, we were accorded the use of the wires, and the "G. S.".call was answered, as we hoped it might be, by Billy Dorman.

"Glad to hear from you,". was the greeting that came clicking through the sounder. Then: "New engine reported disabled. What about it?"

Maltby, who was manipulating the key, replied briefly to the effect that the report was like that of Mark Twain's death— slightly exaggerated; that Lester was still with us, and we were ready to bring the Mountain type in—with a train, if so desired.

"Hold the wire," came from Dorman. And after a little interval: "Captain Weatherford is here and tells me to say that you will receive orders in regular course for train No. 12, leaving Elco at seven ten p.m. Lester can pilot for you. Congratulations."

This left us with the afternoon on our hands, and we put in the time going once more over the big engine's driver installation. It was impossible to adjust the eight axle bearings with exact accuracy, with only the equipment of a division station roundhouse; but we were at least able to assure ourselves that the Mountain type wouldn't pound itself to death on the home run to Eagle Butte.

Shortly after the early supper our orders came through, and we got the big engine out and ready for its second trial trip. Train No. 12 came in from Moraine promptly on time; and at seven ten we took the conductor's high sign and pulled out, with Maltby taking the first shift as engineer. To the drumming of the exhaust and the shrill song of the open cylinder cocks we hit the first of the Moqueta grades— with eleven more loads than any of the regular "jacks" had been pulling over the mountain— and at the Lobo Pass summit we had bettered the time-card schedule by seven minutes on the ascent— which, so Lester told us, was a record.

Maltby turned the right-hand seat over to me at the summit, and, with Lester at my elbow to give me the needful pointers as to the grades and curves on the coasting descent, I dropped the long string of freight wagons down the mountain on the brakes. Maltby, watch in hand, timed the flight by checking

the backward-flitting telegraph poles as we swung around the nicely compensated curves.

It was after we were off the mountain proper and on the easier grades in the foothills that the curious thing happened. Lester, who was still piloting for me, said:

"Round the next curve there's a gravel-pit track— no lamp on the switch standard. Look out for it!"

Accordingly, as we swung the curve, I checked the speed a bit and looked for an unlighted switch standard—looked and didn't see any.

"Where is it?" I yelped at Lester, and he leaned across me to peer out ahead.

"Gosh!" he broke out. "It's gone— there's the pit track, but I don't see the switch!"

Neither did I; nor could I see the points of the switch rails to determine whether or not they were set for the main line— this though the beam of the electric headlight was now falling directly upon the place where they ought to be. With a shout of warning to Maltby and the brakeman, I flung myself upon throttle, brakes and the sand lever, and the next instant came the swerve aside which told me we had left the main track and were shooting into the siding. The switch had been left open.

The gravel track wasn't very long, and for a few breathless seconds it was an open question whether or not the heavy train could be brought to a stop before its momentum would shove us and itself off the end rails and into the gravel pit. But, luckily, the train brakes and the driver jams held and the stop was made when we were within less than the engine's length short of a derailing plunge. While the wheels were still grinding, Barlow, the conductor, came running over the tops of the cars.

"What the hell!" he ripped out as he slid down over the coal in the bunker. "Sufferin' cats! was all four of you blind? Didn't you see that switch was open?"

I told him I hadn't been able to see it, and Lester and the head brakeman backed me up. Barlow, sharing in some measure the practical trainman's contempt for the college-bred product, blew off a bit, which was his privilege; but since there was no damage done, he was presently persuaded to be thankful rather than wrathful. With the rear brakeman to flag for us we backed to the main line, and I was hanging out of the open cab window when the engine clanked over the switch. It was an old-fashioned installation; two diamond-shaped targets on an actuating lever set to stand vertical when the switch was closed, and at an angle when— as now— the switch was open.

"It sure gets me!" Lester remarked, as the train came to a stand and the head brakeman got off to set the switch. "T reckon I've passed that switch a

hundred times, and half o' them in the night, and it never done a dodge-out on me before." Then: "What's that noise?"

Above the steam song of the standing locomotive rose the rapid-fire exhaust of an auto, and off to the left through the pines we saw the beam of the car's headlights.

"Is there a road over there?" I asked.

"Sure," said Lester; "the main north-and-south road over Lobo Pass and into Eden Valley."

Thirty minutes later, when we stopped at Lobo Junction to take water, the head brakeman got off to stretch his legs, and with Lester filling the tank, Maltby and I were left alone in the cab.

"What was the matter with your eyes back there, Eric?" he asked. "Or was it that you didn't know just where to look?"

"Lester knew where to look, and so did the brakeman," I countered. "And they are in the same boat with me."

"Queer," he commented. "What's the answer?"

"I'd feel a lot better if I knew," was all I could say.

Notwithstanding the delay at the gravel pit, the new engine, chiefly under Maltby's handling, made her time into Eagle Butte; and after seeing her housed and telling the night foreman at the roundhouse to keep an eye on her, we went to the hotel and turned in.

Early the next morning we hunted up Bagley, the master mechanic, and merely telling him that we wanted to make a few adjustments, asked him to have the Mountain type placed once more over the erection pit in the back shop, which he did.

Here, with better appliances and good help, a forenoon's work put the big freight puller once more in roadworthy shape. When the job was completed, we reported to Captain Weatherford in his office in the headquarters building, briefing for him our experiences of the night of the outward run, and telling him about the sabotage we had discovered.

"Those men who attacked you in the yard— you could not identify any of them if you were to see them again?" he asked.

We both said that we thought it unlikely; that the nearest masthead-yard light was some distance away.

He was silent for a moment, and then:

"Dorman tells me that he has given you some idea of the situation on the E. B. & P. at the present time; and what you, Mr. Manning, overheard in the lobby of the hotel the other night brings the situation up to date. An organized- effort is being made to discredit the present management, to the end that such weak-kneed stockholders as we may have will lose confidence

and throw their holdings on the market. I don't want you two gentlemen to think that we are taking all this lying down."

We assured him that we didn't think so, and he went on:

"In a situation of this kind it is difficult to get evidence of conspiracy—evidence that will stand in a court of law; and it is this evidence that we must have before we can strike back successfully. Thus far the conspirators have been careful not to show their hand save in perfectly lawful ways—hammering our stock on the Exchange and circulating rumors calculated to 'bear' the market. What you, Mr. Manning, overheard on the night of your arrival is the first really incriminating thing we have been able to get hold of; and at that, the talk to which you listened was incriminating only by inferences— an inference which is sufficiently convincing to us, but which wouldn't go far toward convincing a jury."

"Quite so," I said. "I couldn't even identify one of the two talkers if I should see him again. Unless and until you can catch these highbinders in some criminal act—"

"That's it," he broke in. "Dorman tells me you are with us. If you will keep your eyes open— We have specials on the job, but so far, their abilities, if they have any, haven't impressed me very greatly."

After this there was a little talk about the new engine's performance, and the captain said:

"I see Barlow reports that you found an open switch last night in the Moqueta foothills."

"Yes," I said; adding, to put the blame where it belonged: "I was running at the time and I didn't see the switch or the standard."

"Why didn't you see it?  It was on your side."

"That is something I can't explain. Lester was piloting for me, and he had just told me that there was a gravel track and a switch ahead. I was looking for it, and so was Lester, and neither of us saw it."

"How about you, Mr. Maltby?"

Maltby shook his head. "I wasn't looking out; I was timing the run: But the head brakeman was looking, and he didn't see it. He was on the left-hand side of the engine, but he insisted that he had seen the switch on many occasions before from the fireman's box."

"You examined the switch afterward? Was it locked open?"

"Barlow and the brakeman said it was," I replied.

A far-away look came into the captain's eyes and he said soberly:

"Rather singular, isn't it? The more so because, you see, that gravel track hasn't been used for many months." Then, after a bit more talk in which he

complimented me, in a way that made me blush, for my quick work in stopping the train before there was a wreck, he let us go.

### *Chapter 7: The Terror by Night*

FOR the next few days, the Mountain type was put on a regular run— this time with an engineer who promptly felt in love with the big, powerful engine. Maltby and I went up and down the division, doing what we had been hired to do; taking indicator diagrams, making fuel and water tests to determine the engine's economies, checking up on its pulling power and, in off hours, writing out detailed reports of its performance for the captain's information.

During this working period, an interval in which I had a feeling that I couldn't shake off— a sort of premonition that we were living on the edge of a volcano which was likely to let go at any minute— nothing happened. Then, all at once, the terror began.

First, John Wishart, one of the oldest and steadiest of the passenger engineers, slammed his train, the night southbound express, into a string of loaded ore cars at Lobo Junction, where he was taking the siding for the northbound fast mail, and both he and his fireman swore that the sidetrack was empty when they headed into it; which, of course, was absurd.

Two nights later the mail itself went headlong into a gravel pit just below Elco, butting into the bank at the end of the pit track so hard that the wrecking crane had to be sent to pull the imbedded engine out. Here there was a double mystery. Both the engineer and the fireman of the mail stoutly affirmed that they were on the lookout and hadn't seen that the switch was open until they were right upon it.

The other half of the mystery turned up later. When the switch was inspected after the smash it was found to be set for the main line, as it should have been. And yet the mail had taken the wrong turn.

Less than twenty-four hours after the mail crash there was a costly wreck on the Moqueta grades. The place was a side cutting on the mountain, with a steep upward slope on one hand and a gravity dump of a couple of hundred feet in depth on the other. A freight train coasting down the mountain left the track in the side cutting and there was a piling up of three fourths of the cars at the bottom of the dump in a wreck that left little of the equipment or its lading worth salvaging.

Investigation proved that the derailment had been caused by a boulder which had fallen upon the track, and the two enginemen, as well as the head brakeman who was riding on the engine, all told the same story; that the

obstruction hadn't been seen in time to make a stop, this though the accident occurred on one of the few straight pieces of track in the mountain grades.

Most naturally, these more or less mysterious accidents, coming, as they did, in swift succession, had their due and inevitable psychological effect. When everybody is keyed up and looking for trouble, conditions are ripe for more of the same.

On the second evening after the wreck in the Moquetas had been cleaned up Maltby and I were working in the small office room assigned to us in the Eagle Butte headquarters, tabulating the results for which the day's run on the new engine had given us the data. The summer evening was warm, and when I went to open the corridor door for better ventilation, 1 saw a group of clerks and trainmen apparently besieging the door of the dispatcher's room a little way down the corridor. I called to Maltby.

"What is it?" he asked, as he came to stand beside me. And when he saw the jam at the door of the wire office, he said: "More hell to pay, I suppose. Let's go see what it is, this time. A few seconds later we, too, were shouldering our way into the railed-off space in the dispatcher's room.

The drama which was enacting itself beyond the counter railing was ominously tragic. Bending over the train table, Captain Weatherford was rattling the key insistently in a call that was not given in the time-card list. At one of the telephones Dorman was making frantic efforts to put a long-distance call through to somewhere— without success. At the private-line railroad phone the car-record operator had the wrecking boss on the wire and was telling him to get the wrecking train out and to hold it for orders; and at the other city phone Bollard, the trainmaster, was talking to the company surgeon, asking him to call out all the doctors and nurses he could reach, to be assembled, as quickly as possible, at the headquarters building.

This was all portentous and unnerving enough; but the tragedy centered itself in the figure of a man slumped in a chair, with his arms hanging down in the attitude of one who had been suddenly stricken; his face, ghastly, drawn and distorted like the face of a victim of the rack who has died in convulsive agony. This man was Mark Bradford, the off-trick dispatcher whose place the captain had taken at the train table.

"What is it, Brent?" Maltby whispered to a trainman who stood near us.

"No. 3 is off time, and Bradford has let it get past the last wire station where he could give it a 'meet' with the fast mail. The two trains are due to try to pass on a single track within the next fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Whereabouts?"

"Somewhere along about Crowell's— the timber siding on Squaw Mountain. The siding ain't a card stop for either train."

Maltby whispered again to ask what the captain was trying to do.

"He's tryin' to raise the timber camp at Crowell's. There's a cut-in on one o' the wires, with a loop up to the camp, and the timekeeper is a sort of plug operator, so they say. It's only a chance that he'd be within hearin' of his call."

"Could he do anything if he should get the word?" I asked.

"Might; but it's a good half mile from the camp down to the sidin'."

Bollard had done his part in summoning the doctors, and he new spoke.

"I guess it ain't any use," we heard him say in low tones. "Benson, at the timber camp, hardly knows enough about the wires to recognize his own call when he hears it. The doctors and nurses will be down in a few minutes, and I suppose we may as well begin to clear for the relief special and the wreck wagons."

As quietly as this was said, the words and their import evidently reached the man slumped in a chair at the opposite side of the room. As if he had been brought to life by a galvanic shock he straightened up, whipped out his pocketknife and made a futile attempt to draw the blade across his throat— futile only because Billy Dorman, standing within arm's reach at the telephone, promptly flung himself upon the would-be suicide.

Bradford fought like a madman when Dorman, with Bollard to help, took the knife away from him. In the midst of the struggle the captain's voice cut in:

"Quiet him, if you have to hit him over the head! I've got Crowell's."

In a silence which the clicking of the instruments seemed only to intensify those of us who could read Morse heard what passed between the captain and the timekeeper at the timber camp. "Get this quick. Run to siding and flag trains in both directions. Hurry," was the message that clicked through the key under the captain's hand, and I think nobody in the room drew breath until the answer came stuttering back in the "writing" of an unskilled operator: Ore line gone."

After this there was an interval of suspense that was truly terrible. Allowing six or seven minutes for Benson's downhill race to the sidetrack, it would take him at least an equal length of time to turn the switch lights to red at both ends of the timber siding. Then, before he could communicate with Eagle Butte again, he would have to go back to the instrument in his shack at the mountain camp.

It was Bollard's half-whispered word to the captain that relieved the frightful tension— a little.

"It happens that Keller and his linemen are on No. 3, going over to run a third wire from Elco to Moraine. Keller will cut in with his portable set at Crowell's— if he gets there alive."

Fortunately for an entire railroad division in touch with the wires, and holding its breath in anticipation of a collision that would break all the disaster records, Bollard's prediction was presently verified. Ten leaden-winged, nerve-racking minutes after the time when we all knew that the two fast trains must have met somewhere, the sounder on the train-sheet table began tapping out the dispatcher's call. The captain answered and closed the circuit, and the tapping began again. It was Keller, on the line at Crowell's with his cut-in instruments. Both trains were at the timber siding, and a collision had been averted only by quick work on the part of young Benson.

There was a sigh of relief that was almost a sob to run through the group of which Maltby and I were a part, as the good news was passed from lip to ear. The captain called Dorman to the train-sheet table, telling him to straighten out the tangle— the paralysis of all business on the division caused by the threatened catastrophe— and sent the car-record man out to summon the relief dispatcher. Maltby turned to me.

"Nothing particularly mysterious about this one, at least," he said. "That's one comfort."

"It is," I agreed; and then I lost him. In the dispersal of the group of anxious listeners and watchers he got out of the room ahead of me; and when I stepped into the corridor I was confronted by Marcia and the handsome young woman who, some days earlier, had been pointed out to me at a stop of the new engine at Caliente as Mrs. Lansing Weatherford.

Before I could say anything the captain's wife pushed on into the dispatcher's room, but Marcia stopped to question me feverishly.

"What is it, Eric?" she gasped. "What's happened, this time?"

"Nothing, thank God," I said. "Two passenger trains were due to come together, but the captain's quick wit saved them."

"It was dreadful!" she said. "Mrs. Weatherford and I have been visiting at the army post, and we were waiting at the hotel for the captain to come for us. He is going to Madregosa in his business car, and he will take us as far as Caliente, where the ranch auto will meet us. We heard people in the hotel talking about a terrible accident that had happened, or was about to happen, on the E. B. & P. and we hurried over here at once."

"Well, fortunately, as I've said, there wasn't an accident. Will you come over to our room— Maltby's and mine— and say hello to Tommy while you wait for Mrs. Weatherford?"

"No; I want to talk to you, Eric. I was hoping I'd find you at the hotel, but the clerk said you and Tommy had gone out after dinner. I've something to tell you that will make you sit up. The captain's private-car train is standing down

at the platform ready to go out. Let's go down and take possession of the *Tyrian*. Captain Lansing and Harry will come when they are ready. We have nothing to go back to the hotel for."

Mystified a bit, I led her away. As we walked away I saw her look over her shoulder and give a little start.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Nothing, now," she replied quickly. "I'll tell you later. Let's hurry."

## *Chapter 8: Ways That Are Dark*

WHEN we reached the platform we found that the captain's business car and its engine had been moved to a siding some distance away in the yard— doubtless to make room for the doctors' special which was just backing in, and which, happily, wasn't needed. Since there hadn't been time, as yet, to countermand the call for help, the doctors and nurses were already arriving in taxis and autos, and I led Marcia out of the platform confusion and across to the *Tyrian*.

Boarding the business car, we found it unoccupied; even the porter was nowhere to be seen. I noticed also that there was nobody in the cab of the engine. This infraction of the rule that engines under steam are not to be left unattended was easily accounted for. News of the threatened disaster had been like a fire alarm to make everybody rush to the center of excitement.

"The captain will have something to say to the porter for leaving the car open this way and unguarded," I said, as I placed one of the wicker lounging chairs for Marcia and got another for myself. Then: "What was it you wanted to tell me?"

"You tell me something first, Eric— about this disaster that wasn't a disaster," she countered; and when I did it, her cementing question hit me like a slap in the face.

"This dispatcher person— Bradford; was he bribed?"

"Good heavens, no!" I exclaimed. "Haven't I just said that he tried to kill himself when it seemed that nothing could be done?"

"Yes; but—"

"I know what you are going to say. But there is nothing mysterious about it— this time," I said, repeating what Maltby had said to me. "With all the trouble we've been having, everybody is rattled, keyed up and on edge, and looking for more of the same. That's enough to account for Bradford's slip. What makes you think he might have been bribed to let a couple of fast passenger trains come together, with Heaven only knows what murderous loss of life?"

"You needn't try to hush-hush me,' she returned a bit snippily. "Harry Weatherford— her name is Harriet, but everybody calls her Harry— has told me all about it; how Big Business, or somebody, is trying to get the captain's railroad away from him. If you and Tommy Maltby don't know what is going on, you ought to."

"Possibly we do know. But where does that get us? Tommy and I are willing to help all we can, but all we know about the situation is the little that Billy Dorman has told us: that a struggle for control is going on in the New York stock market."

"Doesn't that cover it all? What do people do when they want to buy cheaply? Don't they do everything they can think of to make other people anxious to sell? And won't a lot of people be hurrying to sell when they find the railroad going all to pieces under its present management?"

"Where did you learn so much about high finance?" I asked; and she looked at me as if I had made a remark that had insulted her.

"I think a lot of you, Eric, dear, but there are times when you make me furious with your early-Victorian notions about women!" she snapped. "Why shouldn't I know something about business? I wasn't born just yesterday; I'm living in to-day, the same as you are. Come out of it!"

"I'm out," I laughed. what's on your. mind."

"I shall. Do you remember a man named Varnell who had permission to do some research work in the university laboratories a few weeks ago?"

"I do. What about him?"

"There is quite a lot about him. In the first place, he came to Westboro under false pretenses. Doctor Mackenzie told us that much."

"All right. What else?"

"He claimed to be doing research work for some automobile factory, but

"Tell me he wasn't. The thing he was working on had nothing to do with automobiles."

"How do you know it didn't?"

"Do you happen to remember a little sophomore named Jimmy Haswell?" she inquired innocently.

"Do I remember him? Didn't I find him sitting it out with you on your porch about nine times out of ten when I called upon you?" I retorted.

"Oh, it wasn't always Jimmy," she returned casually; "there were others. But never mind. Jimmy's a dear; and, since he is going in for journalism, he cultivates a nose for news. He was curious about the doings of the Varnell man, and one night he shadowed him and saw that the thing he was working on wasn't automobilish at all. It had something to do with optical illusion; Jimmy couldn't tell just what, only that it was very mysterious."

"A machine or contrivance that would make things vanish? Was that it?"

"Something like that, yes. How did you know?"

"I found out the same way Jimmy did— only not purposely. I stumbled in upon Varnell one evening when he thought he had the laboratory door locked— and hadn't."

"What did you see?" she demanded quickly.

"Something that made me sit up for the moment; until I realized that it was only a bit of juggling. He made, or seemed to make, a thing on the laboratory bench disappear and reappear at will."

"Ah!" she said. "Now we can go on. Do you remember what happened the last evening we were together in Westboro— the evening before we left for the West— how you said you didn't see me when I was crossing the street?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, the Varnell man was in the auto that was standing before Dean Randall's house. He had some sort of a box on his knees; I saw it and him as I passed and thought he was trying to take a picture of the house, and I wondered how it could be done— with no more light than there was at the time. Does that tell you anything?"

"It tells me something that is pretty hard to believe. Do you mean he had his magic machine, and turned it upon you as you crossed the street?"

"Maybe— just maybe, of course. You said you didn't see me, you know. Hasn't something of the same sort happened in each one of the accidents on the railroad? Harry Weatherford says it has. She says each time the men have missed seeing something they ought to have seen."

"Let's try to keep our feet on the ground, if we can," I said. "Maybe I am responsible for these attacks of temporary blindness. It hit me first."

"I know. Mrs. Weatherford said you failed to see a switch or something at some sidetrack in the mountains."

"I did. And two other men on the engine who were looking for it failed to see it. The story got out, of course, and went all up and down the line; and that is why I saw I may be responsible— by setting the pace for others who didn't see things, or thought they didn't."

"Don't be stupid, Eric, dear! There is no need to put the back load upon poor old overworked psychology that way."

"Why isn't there?"

"*Because this Varnell person is here, now, in Eagle Butte*!"

"What!" I ejaculated. "Are you sure of that?"

"I am," she returned quite coolly. "I saw him in the hotel just before Harry Weatherford and I came down here. He has shaved off his beard and wears huge, tinted tortoise-shell glasses, and he is registered under another name;

but he is the same man we knew in Westboro as Varnell. You needn't look so incredulous. I know what I am talking about."

It wasn't incredulity that she saw in my face; it was an expression of the emotions stirred up by a sudden riffling of the memory leaves. She was as right as rain! Hadn't I seen the man she described—once on the train leaving Westboro, and again, three days later, turning up here in Eagle Butte to register as "H. Vanderpool"? I had, indeed.

"I'm not doubting you at all," I hastened to say. "I've seen the man you mean, only, I'm ashamed to say, I didn't recognize him. I—"

I broke off in deference to a sudden look of shocked surprise that came into the straight-shooting brown eyes. As we sat in the open compartment of the car, she was facing toward the rear, and she seemed to be staring over my shoulder at the door which, as the night was warm, was standing open.

"What is it?" I asked quickly, as she put her hands to her eyes.

"A— a man— there at the door!" she stammered; and at the word I got up and went to investigate. There was nobody in sight when I stepped out upon the railed-in observation platform. Over at the station the taxis and autos which had brought the doctors and nurses were driving away ; but that was all.

"Tell me just what you saw," I said as I went back to her.

"I'm wondering now if I saw anything," she replied, with a twisted little smile. "But just as you spoke I thought I saw a man standing almost in the doorway— a big man in a checked suit and wearing a traveling cap. It lasted only a fraction of a second; before I could wink, the doorway was empty, just as it was the tiny fraction of a second before."

"All this mystery talk has got on your nerves?" I suggested.

"Maybe. But we were talking about this Varnell person. After I saw him in the hotel mezzanine, I went down to the lobby and asked the clerk who he was. He said he was a Mr. Vanderpool, from New York. It was just then that Mrs. Weatherford came running to tell me that there was another accident, and we rushed off down here. Then I saw him again. He was in that crowd of men in the station corridor when we started to go to the stairway— you and I."

"Say!" I exclaimed. "That's something different! Did he see you in the hotel?"

"I suppose he did, if he looked at me. We met almost face to face."

"Then I am glad you are going back to the ranch. You must stay there, and you mustn't tell anybody, not even Mrs. Weatherford, what you've just been telling me. I happen to know that there is a bunch of conspirators here, trying to down the captain, and most likely Varnell is one of them. He knows you have recognized him; he followed you down here from the hotel. If he even. suspects that you could give him away

She laughed. "Are you really trying to scare me, Eric? I'm not afraid."

"Perhaps you are not; but I am afraid for you. I've had a taste of the quality of these thugs who are trying to do the captain in, and

"Tell me," she said. "All I know is what the captain has told his wife, and that wasn't very much— Why, where are we going— without the Weatherfords?"

The query was a natural one, for her. While she was speaking, the business car began to move down the siding.

"It is nothing," I said. "They are merely going to shift us around to the station platform."

That is what I said, and it was what I thought until I realized that the speed was increasing, and that the one-car train was rapidly approaching the lower end of the yard. Even then I didn't full sense what was happening until we shot past the yard limits shanty and out upon the main line at thirty or thirty-five miles an hour.

But then I knew and jumped for the emergency brake cord. Our talk had been overheard, and we were being taken out of the picture!

## *Chapter 9: Rough Stuff*

THE jump for the emergency-brake cord didn't get me anything. The cord had been cut, and it came away loose in my hands. Being unfamiliar with the layout of the business car, it took me a few seconds to find the wash room and the bleeder valve to which the cord had been connected, and when I found the valve it was only to discover that the stem had been bent so it wouldn't operate.

Failing there, I chased into the front vestibule. Looking forward I saw two men in the engine cab— one hunched . upon the engineer's seat with his hand on the throttle lever; the other handling the fireman's scoop, which he dropped to spin around as if he had sensed my presence in the vestibule. Instantly there was a flash and a sharp report. I didn't know where the bullet struck, but that was negligible. The shot was an intimation of what I'd get if I should climb over the tender and try to start anything in the cab, so I hurried back through the car to see what could be done at the rear end of things.

On the railed-in observation platform, to which Marcia followed me, there was the usual air-brake installation. Inasmuch as railroad business cars are ordinarily placed at the rear of a train, they are provided with a rear-end brake controls pipe brought up from the train air line under the car to the handrail of the platform, terminating in a stopcock and a whistle— the whistle for signaling when the train is backing. To set the brakes it is only needful to open

the stopcock, letting the air escape from the train line. This I tried to do; but here, again, the obstructionists had-been busy. A tap with a hammer on the plug, or a twist with a wrench at the bottom nut, will render any stopcock immovable; and though Marcia and I together put our united strength upon it, there was nothing doing.

While we were tugging and twisting at the stopcock, the train was kicking the miles to the rear at racing speed and the lights of Eagle Butte had disappeared to the northward. In desperation I swung over the railing and, with a precarious foothold on the coupler head of the drawbar, sought to reach the air hose looped in its hook. This was the last resort, and when it failed, I climbed back to the platform and both of us, baffled, retreated to the interior of the car.

"It was beautifully quick work, wasn't it?" Marcia commented, as coolly as if the theft of the special were merely an incident in the day's work. "I wasn't just dreaming when I thought I saw somebody on the platform. There was somebody; he'd been there from the beginning and he probably heard everything we said. He ought to have been in plain sight from where I was sitting all the time, but he wasn't— which is one more little mystery to go along with the others. What are they going to do to us, Eric?"

"I don't know; stop our mouths, I guess, in whatever way seems easiest. I suppose the plot to do the captain up is about ready to climax, and the plotters are not going to stand for any interference."

"But they can't take us very far in a runaway train, can they? Won't this special of the captain's be missed right away?"

"Before long, of course; and something will be done to stop it— if the wires haven't been cut. But, even so, we won't be out of the woods. Those men on the engine are armed. One of them shot at me when I was out front."

"Can't we jump off and get away?"

"Not at any such speed as we are making now. But they can't run far without orders. We'll watch for our chance and take it when it comes. I wonder if the captain's desk is locked?"

The desk was locked, but I contrived to open it with the blade of my pocketknife. The right-hand drawer held what I hoped it might— a loaded automatic.

"This evens things up a bit," I offered. "I hate to be shot at without being able to shoot back. Now I'll go up ahead again and see if I can't persuade these train stealers to quit."

"No, no! Please don't do that!" she begged. "They'll see you when you open the door and you won't have a chance in the world!"

"Trust me for that. You sit on the floor, so if a bullet comes through, you'll be out of the way."

"They'll kill you!" she insisted. And then, quite calmly: "If they do, I shan't want to live any longer, Eric."

If I had needed a fighting word, here it was.

"Don't you worry a minute about me," I told her. "Just get down behind the desk where you'll be safe." And I hastened forward to get action.

With due caution I slipped into the forward vestibule and raised myself to look over the tender. There was now only one man in the cab— the one on the engineer's box. Before I could place the other— the one who had taken a shot at me— the train ground to a sudden jolting stop and I heard a crunching of footsteps in the gravel ballast, as of some one racing on ahead of the engine.

If I had only realized it quickly enough, this was our chance— to drop off while the train was at a stand. But while I hesitated, the wheels began to turn again, and, pistol in hand, I started to climb upon the tender— this because I couldn't quite work myself up to the point of shooting the man at the throttle in the back, and without warning. Almost immediately there was another brake-grinding stop, and at this repetition of the chance for escape I sprang back into the vestibule and dashed through the narrow corridor to get Marcia.

As I reached the open compartment I again heard the sprinting footsteps, and a second time the train started with a jerk, the speed accelerating so quickly that by the time I had helped Marcia to her feet, had run with her to the rear platform and had lifted the trap covering the steps, a swing-off with any promise of unbroken bones was out of the question.

It was a backward glance that told me what the two stops and the crunching footsteps had meant. We had left the main line and were on a branch track; and the stops laid been made to let the fireman drop off, set the switch, and reset it after we had passed over it. For the second time we sought the interior of the car, retreating from the shower of cinders pouring over the umbrella roof of the platform.

"Where are we now?" Marcia asked, realizing from the unevenness of the track that we had left the well-ballasted main line.

It was a mere happen-so that I was able to answer her intelligently. In passing back and forth over the division with the new Mountain type, I had noted this spur track pointing away toward the mountains, and, asking one of the enginemen what it was, had been told it was a branch to what was now an abandoned mining camp in the Junipers some few miles away; that there was no train service over it, and hadn't been for a number of years.

"Which means that, for a time, at least, nobody will know where to look for this stolen train; that we are lost to the world for the time being," I added. "For

that matter, nobody will know that we disappeared with the train unless— which is most unlikely— somebody in the Eagle Butte yards happened to see us when we got aboard."

"Never mind," she said. "We are still alive, and we've still got each other. That is the most that matters, isn't it?"

Having dropped the captain's pistol into my pocket when I picked her up to run with her to the door, I had both hands free, and the fact that we were being rushed off to nobody knew what desperate adventure was cutting a mighty small figure when I took her in my arms and said:

"Does your saying that mean all it seems to mean, Marcia, girl?"

"You know it does, Eric. There has never been anybody else— even if you did call me a college widow. If you hadn't been as blind as a bat—"

The interruption was a harsh command to, "Hold the clinch! Hold it just as you are!" and we looked up to see one of the two men from the engine cab— the one who had taken a shot at me— steadying himself against the lurching of the car over the rough track with a hand on the captain's desk and covering us with a pistol in the other hand. And the scoundrel was grinning his appreciation of the situation he had surprised.

Sharp as the crisis was, Marcia's sense of humor did not desert her.

"What a pity he hasn't a movie camera," she whispered. And then: "Does it embarrass you horribly, Eric, dear?"

Embarrassment wasn't quite the word. I was so mad that I couldn't see straight. It is one thing to hold the girl of your heart in your arms as, a precious privilege, and another to be obliged to go on holding her, on pain of being shot, or getting her shot, if you let go. It took just about half a minute of the enforced pose to turn me fairly berserk. The roar of confining cliff walls was telling me that the train had entered a mountain canyon, and the presence of the grinning pistol pointer was readily accounted for. We were nearing our destination, whatever it might be, and he had come back into the car to see to it that we didn't escape when the final stop should be made. With my lips at Marcia's ear, I whispered :

"Will you do exactly as I tell you to?" And at her prompt, "Yes," I went on: "When I let you go, duck down behind the chair and stay there. Do you understand ?"

"Yes; but he'll kill you."

"I'll try not to give him the chance. Are you ready?"

I could feel her tensing herself for the backward leap.

"I'm ready when you are," she breathed softly. And then: "Perhaps, if you were to kiss me, it might "

I guess maybe it did. As our lips met, the man with the gun gave a snorting guffaw, and before he could pull his face straight I had him, with the gun-grasping hand bent backward in a bone cracking twist— an attack that left him, for the fraction of a split second, defenseless and with his face unguarded.

I put all I had into the right uppercut that caught him fairly on the point of the jaw, hoping that the jolt might shock him into letting go of his weapon. To my surprise, it did more. As I swung to let him have it again, he rocked on his heels, his knees sagged, and he went down as if I had hit him with an ax.

It had been my intention, if I should succeed in getting the better of him, to lock him in one of the staterooms, but there was no time for that. As I stooped to pick up the dropped pistol, there was a short double blast from the locomotive whistle and the speed was checked. That meant that we were arriving somewhere, and there was no time to be lost. Spinning around, I pulled Marcia to her feet and we ran for the rear door. On the platform I opened the gate in the railing and lifted the floor trap to give access to the steps.

"Can you make it?" I asked anxiously, as the train slowed still more.

Her answer was to run down the steps, face herself in the direction the car was moving, and swing off handily; and the next moment we were standing together at the trackside watching the tail lights of the Tyrian as they withdrew around a curve and came to a stand.

As nearly as we could make out in the starlight, we were in a bowl-like basin in the mountains, a depression surrounded by wooded heights. Below the railroad embankment a quick-water stream splashed and gurgled over the boulders in its bed. On the other side of the stream, and opposite the place where the train had stopped, a collection of buildings was dimly visible, and in one of these there were lighted windows. As we looked, a door in the lighted building was opened and a bunch of men came out to cross to the standing train.

Marcia slipped an arm under mine.

"They are going after us— which shows that they got word somehow that we were coming," she said. "Which way shall we run?"

I was debating that question with myself. So far as we knew at the moment, there was only one way out of this mountain trap, and that was by following the railroad track. But over the cross-ties we could make but little speed, and we would be quickly overtaken if they should back the train to search for us. Nevertheless, I suggested it to Marcia as the only expedient I could think of.

"No," she objected promptly. "Now that we are here, let's see it through. The one place they won't look for us is over in that camp, or whatever it is."

"You are right," I agreed; and we scrambled down the embankment, sought and found a wading place in the stream, and made a quick detour which led us across a wagon road and around to the group of buildings, which we approached from the rear. Before we reached the buildings the business car's lights showed us a group of men coming out to stand on the rear platform of the Tyrian, flashing an electric torch. Then two of them dropped off and were lost to view as the car and engine began to back slowly down the grade. They were doubtless confident that they would be able to pick us up somewhere along the track.

Not knowing how many inhabitants of the camp had been left behind, we approached the collection of log buildings cautiously. Reconnoitring some of the outlying structures, we found them empty, roofless and in all stages of dilapidation. Only the largest, the one with the lighted windows, appeared to be habitable, and it, too, seemed to be deserted, though there was a big sport-model touring car drawn up before it.

"If you will stay back here, I'll go and see if they have left anybody behind," I suggested. But Marcia wouldn't have it that way.

"I have just as much curiosity as you have," she retorted; so we crept up to a spying window together.

What we saw when we peeped over the sill of a window in the less brightly lighted end of the building, was a long room which had evidently served as the commissary of the isolated mining camp. Strangely enough, it seemed to be still a storehouse of some sort. There was a ranking of packing cases in the end nearest our window; containers of a size and shape familiar enough everywhere and in the open before the passage of the Volstead act, but now shyly hiding themselves from all but the initiated.

"A bootlegging headquarters," I whispered. "There must be a road in here from the other State."

"And is that the bootlegger himself, sitting up there at the other end of the room?" Marcia asked.

I looked, and had to look again before I could quite credit the evidence of my own senses. For the big man sitting half hidden by what had once been the counter of the commissary store, tiling easily in his chair and smoking a cigar, was Grider, the E. B. & P. superintendent of motive power.

## *10: A Race Finished and One Begun.*

"HE may be a bootlegger," I said in answer to Marcia's query, "but he is also something a lot worse— a traitor to his salt. He is the captain's superintendent of motive power— a member of his official family."

"And who is the other man?" she asked.

I hadn't seen any other man, but that was because the counter structure was concealing him from my point of view. When I shifted a bit so that I could see him, the recollection machinery clicked into gear. He was the man, who had accompanied Grider to the hotel in Eagle Butte, in the evening when I had overheard too little of the plot to be able to go into court and swear that there was a plot.

"These are the two men who are pulling the strings in this business of smashing the Weatherford management," I said. Then: "That is probably Grider's auto around in front. If it isn't locked, we might grab it off and with a bit of luck make a get-away. Or shall we try first to find out what brings these - two boss plotters here to-night?"

Again she said, quite as coolly as Maltby would have said it, "Now that we are here, let's see it through," and at that we shifted to a window nearer the other end of the building where I pried up the sash the needful inch or two with my pocketknife.

"It's just as I'm telling you, Bonnard," were the first words that came to our ears, and they were Grider's. "You are raising altogether too much hell. We're not out to commit wholesale murder, as I've told you more than once. If that collision had come off to-night—"

"That was no skin off of us," the other man countered gruffly. "We didn't frame it with your half-witted dispatcher."

"Maybe not; but your heavy-handed work is responsible for the general demoralization that made Bradford lose his head. You are pushing it too hard— overdoing it. We don't want to inherit a railroad with a lot of its equipment smashed and the rank and file all shot to pieces!"

"You said you wanted action, and you're getting it. And it's getting your New York people what they are after, isn't it, scaring some of the die-hards into hurrying to get rid of their E. B. & P. stock?"

"That part of it is all right, if you don't work the rabbit's foot too hard. You let Weatherford and his crowd once get it into their heads that they're being framed, and you'll hear something drop. Take this business of copping off Weatherford's train, and Manning, and the girl, to-night— that's the main thing that brought me out here on the run when I heard of it. You ought to know you can't pull anything like that and get away with it."

"Weatherford may have his train back; we don't want it. But we had to have the man and the girl. That was a dead open and shut. They know too much."

"Too much about what?"

There was silence while the man called Bonnard was relighting his cigar. Then:

"You said, in the beginning, that you didn't want to know anything about our methods, Grider."

"Damn your methods! I want to know why you are fool enough to think that you can kidnap Manning and the girl without raising the very devil!"

"Keep your shirt on!" was the brusque retort. "Our bargain with you was that you were to give us a free hand, and, on our part, we were to give you results. You're getting the results. As for the college mechanic and the girl, we've only done what we had to do. 'They won't be hurt, unless they bring it on themselves; but they are going to be kept where they can't set the grass afire until after we are through. That goes as it lies."

"Make it plainer, if you can?'

"It was a piece of the devil's own luck. The girl was in a position to give Weatherford a pointer that would have let the cat out of the bag, right! And she passed the tip along to the college chap when they were together in Weatherford's car. I'll admit that swiping the train, with them on board, was a trifle raw, but we had to nip the thing in the bud, quick, and we did it."

"Partly, you mean. They've got away from you, after all."

"They won't get far. Brumby will pick 'em up and bring 'em in. They'd have to walk the track; wouldn't know any other way to get out of here."

There was another little interval of silence; then Grider began again:

"It's a hell of a mix-up, Bonnard, and I don't like it. You've taken a nod for a wink, and the chances are that the whole deal will blow up with a racket that will be heard all the way to the Atlantic coast. It's time to call a halt and let the air clear. Pull the pin on these 'demonstrations' of yours, until we see what comes of this equipment-and-body-snatching trick of yours tonight."

"Weatherford's special will be taken back to the main line before morning. As I've said, we have no use for it. But about the man and the girl: You heard what Brumby said when we went out to the car. Most likely nobody at the Eagle Butte terminal saw them get aboard of the special. So far as Weatherford or anybody else knows, Weatherford's car was empty when Brumby and Gatlin snatched it out of the Eagle Butte yards."

"Have it that way, if you like," was Grider's reply. "But I can tell you this much: Lansing Weatherford is nobody's fool. If he gets onto your game— well, in that case I shouldn't care to be in your shoes, Bonnard."

At this, the other man struck back smartly.

"Your shoes are just the same as mine, Grider; make no mistake about that. If the house falls down, you'll be under the timbers with the rest of us."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say— if you want to bring it to a show-down. State's evidence is what it's called, I believe. When you gave me that cold deal about keeping your own feet out of the mud, I fixed it so we could swear you down in court— three to one, if need. be. "There's mighty little you've said or done that can't be shown up if the occasion demands it. So that's that. As to stopping the 'demonstrations', as you call them, short off, you're a few minutes too late. There is one staged for tonight."

Grider's tilted chair righted itself with a crash.

"What's that? Good Lord! Didn't you have any better sense than to pull one off right on top of this near-collision of No, 3 and the mail?"

"You forget that we didn't know anything about the near-collision. As I have said, that was your dispatcher's show— not ours."

"But where is it? What is it this time?"

"It will figure as another miscue on the part of your trainmen, and it will show how the E. B. & P. continues to fall down under the Weatherford management. The time is midnight, or thereabouts, and the place a gravel track in the Moqueta foothills. You can name the train for yourself." s

Grider was on his feet and pulling out his watch.

"It's got to be stopped, Bonnard!" he rapped out. "How many of your strikers are in this? And can you reach them by wire if I get you to a telegraph office in my car?"

"There are only two of them, and they are out of reach of the wires. They are driving from Eagle Butte, and if they kept their schedule, they left at about the same time you did."

"Get a move!" Grider bellowed, struggling into his overcoat. "You're in for a long, hard ride! No, you needn't try to kick out. Hurry, man!"

It was just then that Marcia drew me away from the window.

"The train!" she said. "It's coming back!"

While we had been listening to the talk in the commissary, the back part of my brain had been busy with the notion of stealing Grider's auto when the time for more action should come. But the auto was on the other side of the building, and now it was too late. As the train pulled up to the end of track a hundred yards distant, four men jumped off to hasten across to the commissary. Keeping the lighted building between us and the approaching men, we beat a hasty retreat to the nearest of the shacks and took refuge in it.

"What now?" Marcia questioned eagerly, as we halted in the shack's doorway.

It was a moment for a bit of quick thinking. The four men were doubtless telling Grider and Bonnard of their failure to find us. In another minute or so the boss train wrecker and Grider would be starting on their long race to the

distant Moqueta foothills; a race which might get them to the hills in time to save the threatened train— or it might not. What was to be done? What could we do?

There was one possible answer to these vital questions. The one-car train was standing where it had been stopped at the track end, and it was deserted for the moment. Could we reach it before we should be overtaken? An instant's weighing and measuring of the chances tipped the scale. "Give me your hand!" I whispered; and together we ran, giving the commissary as wide a berth as we could without too greatly increasing the distance we would have to cover.

Thanks to the darkness, we were within a short sprint of the train before the report of a pistol and the simultaneous whine of a bullet overhead told us that we were discovered. With an arm around Marcia, I put the remaining few yards behind us in just about nothing, flat, and at the engine steps I fairly threw my running mate up into the gangway. By this time the pursuit was in full cry, and as I scrambled up after Marcia, another misdirected pistol bullet shattered a cab window.

Fortunately for us, the train was standing upon a slight grade, and at the release of the air brake it began to drift backward. But before I could do more than to snatch the reversing lever into the back gear and give a jerk at the throttle, one of the pursuers reached the engine steps.

A cry from Marcia warned me. The man had thrown himself into the gangway and was clutching at Marcia to drag her out of the cab. I could have shot him from where I stood on the running step, but the fact that I had a pistol in each coat pocket didn't once occur to me in the excitement of the moment. Grabbing the iron slice bar used for breaking up the fire, I shoved it under the fellow as he hung, half recumbent, in the gangway, and his panicky yell as a prying lift of the bar heaved him overboard rose shrilly above the drumming of the wheels and the rapid-fire of the exhaust.

Instantly I was back at the throttle and the brake. The canyon grade was steeper than I had realized, and the speed we were now making over the crooked and long-neglected track was a bid for disaster. Moreover, as we were backing, with the business car in the lead, I couldn't see where we were going or what we were coming to. Under such conditions I had to swallow my heart half a dozen times before we got out of the mountain gorge and shot away on the desert level. At the cessation of the dizzying plunges around the canyon curves, during which she had had to cling to whatever she could lay hold of to keep her feet, Marcia called out to ask if she shouldn't take the fireman's place.

"Too heavy work for you," I objected. "Climb up on that other seat and keep a lookout. They may try to chase us with the auto."

That gave her something to do while I was firing and looking to the water in the boiler; and when I reached across her feet to put on the left-hand injector, her warning cry, and my glimpse of a pair of auto headlights, came at the same instant.

At first, I thought this pursuit by the auto couldn't amount to much, but I was speedily undeceived. There was no road visible beside the track, but the dry, hard desert level, with no obstructions worse than a thin scattering of stunted sagebrush, presented no obstacle to a well-built car racing in any direction over it. Leaning out of the cab window on my side, I could see the oncoming head lamps; was made aware, also, of the grim fact that the flying car was steadily overtaking us.

On a good track, and with the train right-end to, so that I might have had the look ahead, we could have given them a run for their money; but as it was, every additional inching open of the throttle threatened derailment and a wreck. In a few minutes the auto had gained upon us so that I could no longer see the headlights from my side of the cab, and I shouted across to Marcia, telling her to get down on the deck. Instead, she staggered over to stand beside me.

"I saw them plainly as they came into the beam of the engine headlight," she told me. "There are only two of them in the car. The back seat is empty." Then: "Can't we go any faster?"

I shook my head. "Not backing— and over this bad track. As it is, we're taking hideous chances."

"Then they'll overtake us in a few minutes. What will they do then?"

The answer was a crack like the snapping of a dry twig, and a bullet tore into the cab roof. A glance out of the left-hand gangway showed us the beam of the car's headlights keeping even pace with us. Again the pistol cracked, futilely, of course, since the car was so much lower than the engine. But if they should gain a few feet more so they could shoot through the gangway between the engine and the tender. Again I begged Marcia to squat down on the deck on the fireman's side so she would be out of range, and this time she obeyed me.

For some time the one-sided, running fight was kept up, some of the shots coming through the cab windows on the left-hand side, but upon such a high angle as to be harmless. If I had dared to take my hands from throttle and brake I might have got back at these desperate villains who were doing their best to murder us. But my immediate job was to keep going, and to keep the business car and engine on the track if I could. Surely, I thought, the desert,

level as it was, would sooner or later interpose some obstacle which would make it impossible for the auto to cling almost within arm's reach of us, as it was doing.

But that time was not yet. Out of the tail of my eye I could see the double beam of the headlights creeping ahead inch by inch. Unless the hoped-for obstacle should bob up within the next few minutes, the gunman in the car would be able to get a line on me through the left-hand gangway, and that would mean that I'd have to let the flying train take its chance of staying on the rails, and shoot it out with him.

I was fumbling in my coat pocket for the captain's automatic when the unexpected climax came. In the lunging and surging of the train over the rough track the coal scoop had slid down off the coal in the bunker and was rattling and dancing around on the floor of the cab. As I looked I saw Marcia catch up the shovel, thrust it into the coal pile and pitch it and its lading out of the gangway upon the upcreeping auto.

There was a crash of breaking glass and a wild yell, and the menacing light beams shot backward as though the gear shift had been suddenly shoved into the reverse. When I leaned out of the window to look back, the auto seemed to have stopped; at any rate, we were leaving it behind so rapidly that it was soon out of sight. Coincident with the disappearance of the auto our backing train began to shrill around a curve, and a double line of telegraph poles signaled our approach to the main line. Shutting off the steam and applying the brakes, I wondered what I should do next, having no key wherewith to unlock the switch. Luckily, I didn't have to do anything. As our train came to a stand on the branch another one-car train came racing down the main line to bring up opposite us.

It was Captain Weatherford and the trainmaster, Bollard, out looking for the stolen special. Explanations followed and it was inspiring to see the captain's army training come to the front as he snapped into action.

"That's what I've been waiting for," he said, when we had hastily recounted our adventures, "something we could get our teeth into." Then to Bollard: "Let me have Burke and his fireman and I'll go on and round these killers up. You can take Miss Marcia and Manning back to Eagle Butte, unless"— turning to us— "you two would rather go on to Caliente and stop off for the ranch. There will be a car there to meet you."

Marcia, finding that the captain's wife was still in Eagle Butte, elected to go back with Bollard; and I told the captain I'd go on with him— all the way. In the circumstances, the leave-takings were cut mighty short. I put Marcia on Bollard's car, and in his care, and the two single-car trains sped apart in opposite directions— Bollard's backing away to the north and ours heading

southward. I looked at my watch. It was five minutes past ten, and we had something over sixty miles to go.

## *11: The Vanishing Point*

IT was a keen pleasure to see the captain snap into it. At the first night telegraph station we came to, a few miles south of our starting point, we halted long enough to let him get in a bit of rapid-fire telephoning. That done, we raced southward again, and as we sat together in the business car he questioned me more closely about our seeings and hearings— Marcia's and mine— at the abandoned mining camp, which he named for me as "Auraria."

"It has been intimated that there was a booze cache out there, and I'm not surprised to know that it belongs to 'Bat' Bonnard," he said. "He is well known to be the 'Big Ike' of the bootleggers in this section, but the dry people have never been able to hang anything definite on him. I don't care so much for him and his hired troublemakers; they'll get theirs in the shake-down. Grider is the man I want. You say Bonnard threatened to turn State's evidence if he got caught out. Do you think he meant it?"

"I think so," I ventured. "But in case he doesn't, Miss Denton and I will very willingly go into court for you."

"Thanks; that's mighty white of you. If we can once get a vise nip on Grider, we can push the fight to the men higher up, and a number of gentlemen in New York and elsewhere will most likely find it convenient to visit foreign countries for a time."

At this I went a bit deeper into the mystery matter, telling him about the man Varnell and what Marcia and I had seen and thought we knew— which was the reason for our abduction. He heard me through, but I could see that he was tolerantly incredulous, as he had a good right to be.

"That is pretty hard to believe," was his comment. "As you know, a discovery like the one you speak of would be worth a swollen fortune to the man who made it. He wouldn't be obliged to turn criminal for wages."

I admitted this, and then asked if he had seen anything of Maltby before he left Eagle Butte. He said he had; that Maltby had been inquiring if anybody knew what had become of me.

"Of course, we didn't know that you and Miss Denton had been kidnaped in the stolen special" he explained; "though Maltby did suggest that that might be the case."

While he was speaking, the train came to a stop at Caliente, and two of the Circle D cow-punchers came aboard, both of them armed; one a tall, loose-jointed, mournful-looking chap named to me as "Long Tom" Jower, and the

other introduced as "Curly" Wester. I guessed at once that this was the answer to one of the captain's telephone calls from the station up the line. He told them something of what was to the fore, adding that they might take it easy until the time came for action. Whereat they went to spread themselves upon the lounge at the rear of the compartment to roll smokes.

As we sped on I asked the captain if we had any legal authority, and he nodded, saying:

"That is why I phoned for Jower and Curly. They are both deputies and special officers for the railroad." Then he asked me how much of a start Grider and Bonnard had had. I said I couldn't tell, because I didn't know how much damage Marcia had done to them or to their car when she had heaved the shovelful of coal— and the shovel— at them.

"A right nervy thing for the little girl to do," was his comment on the shovel heaving. "Mrs. Weatherford has quite fallen in love with her," he added.

"So have I," I grinned.

"Any chance for you?" he smiled back.

"I didn't believe there was until tonight." And from that, I went on to tell him how the fellow Gatlin had caught us just before the stolen special had reached its destination at the abandoned mining camp.

He laughed heartily at the situation as I described it, and I didn't blame him. Then he said:

"I can match you, Manning. Harry— Mrs. Weatherford— is just such another. Only I think if it had been us instead of you two, she would have sneaked the automatic out of my pocket and taken a crack at the holdup."

"Oh, see here; I can't give you any odds on that," I countered. "I imagine the only reason Marcia didn't do that very thing was because it didn't occur to her soon enough." Then: "By the way, I still have your automatic." And I gave it to him, saying that I had the one I had picked up when Gatlin got his knock-out. Then I asked him what "train it was that Bonnard had planned to ditch.

"No. 17. It is due at the gravel pit in the hills about twelve."

"Think we can make it before that time?"

He looked at his watch and nodded.

"Burke is a good runner, and he knows what is wanted. However, there won't be any 'assisted' accident this time. No. 17's crew has been warned."

Irrespective of what he might know, the man who had taken my late place at the throttle of the special-train engine wasn't letting any grass grow under the wheels; and it was also evident that we had been given "regardless" orders, for everything was sidetracked for us. At Lobo, the junction where a branch led off to the mining towns in Madregosa Gulch, we stopped barely

long enough to take a tank of water before we shot on into the Moqueta foothills.

Though I had been over the main line on the new Mountain type quite a number of times, I was not yet familiar enough with it to know just where we were when we slowed to a stop.

The captain sprang up and signed to Jower and Wester.

"This is the place where we make a short cut," he said to me; and we all got off and hiked up ahead. As we were passing the engine, the captain spoke to the engineer who was hanging out of his cab window.

"Back down quietly, Burke, and take the siding at Walker's Switch. Wait there until No. 17 passes, and then pull on up to the gravel pit," was the order he gave; and as we went on, the one-car train slipped away down the grade, disappearing, for us, around the first curve.

Though, as I have said, I didn't. know just where we were, the captain did. He led off to the right around a small wooded hill, and a few minutes of tramping brought us to the highway leading over Lobo Pass to Eden Valley— a road, which, as I knew, paralleled the E. B. & P. grade a good part of the way over the range. After holding to the road for about half a mile, the captain halted us.

"We take to the woods here," he said, "single file and cat-footed. When we reach the railroad right of way there will be a switch just ahead, and we'll take cover and see what happens."

Falling into line again, we went winding in and out among the trees beside the road, the soft carpeting of pine needles underfoot making our march as silent as that of a procession of ghosts. It was the end of an unprecedented dry spell, even for the rainless altitudes, and the air was pungent with the pitchy fragrance of the sun-baked pines and firs. Within the last hour a gibbons moon had risen, so there was light enough to enable us to pick our way.

A couple of hundred yards from where we had taken to the wood, we came upon an auto parked in a grove beside the road. It was a single-seated roadster, with the motor dead and the lights turned off. At first I thought it was empty— I was still thinking so when the captain sprang upon the running board and lashed out at a slumped figure in the driving seat. Before any of us could cut in, he had opened the door and was dragging a half-stunned sleeper out of the car.

"Fix him," was the order given to Jower and Wester; and by the time the stunned man was awakening they had him hog-tied and gagged and were dragging him up under the trees to wait for whatever was awaiting him, the captain saying that we could pick him up later.

A little farther along we bore to the left again and soon came to the railroad track at a point where I quickly got my bearings. We were just below the gravel-pit spur where I had so nearly ditched the through freight on the night when Maltby and I were making our first trial run with the Mountain type. The captain flashed an electric torch upon the dial of his watch.

"Time enough, but not much to spare," he said; and then we crossed to the far side of the gravel track and made a cautious advance along a steep and thickly wooded hillside toward the switch at the upper end of the spur, in due time reaching a point from which the filtered light of the half moon showed us the switch stand. To my surprise, and to the captain's as well, I guess, the switch hadn't been tampered with. It was properly set for the main line.

For the moment I felt a little like the excitable citizen who has turned in a fire alarm when there was no fire. The silent surroundings, with nothing disturbed and no moving object in sight, made me wonder if I had brought the captain and his men on a fool's errand. But after a minute or so the air began to vibrate with the unmistakable hum of an auto driven at speed, and at that I felt a little less like a false alarm. If it were Grider's car, and not merely some late-at-night autoist driving over to Eden Valley We'd know shortly. If the drumming motor noise should stop—

It did stop presently and the stillness that succeeded was fairly deafening. I found myself trying to estimate from my memory of it the distance from the nearest point on the highway up to the railroad, and the length of time it would take to traverse it on foot. While we waited, all four of us, tense and expectant, I bent down a branch of the small fir under which we were crouching— a low-hanging branch which was obstructing my view up the track. As I did this I saw a thing that made me grasp the captain's arm and whisper:

"Look, quick! Do you see it?"

A little more than halfway to the switch a small gulch, thickly groved with sapling conifers, cut into the hillside. Out of the mouth of this gulch a beam of bluish-green light, faintly discernible under the pale moonbeams, was reaching out diagonally toward the railroad track. As we watched it the faint ray or emanation enveloped the switch standard, dimly illuminating it for a brief instant. Then, as if it had been touched by the finger of some mysterious agent of annihilation, the solid iron standard and target lever faded before our eyes— dissolved into nothingness and was gone!

"Say! by all the gods, Manning, you were right!" the captain gritted, and he was breathing hard. "Now for the next act in the play!"

It came promptly. At the disappearance of the switch standard a man stepped out of the tree shadows at the mouth of the little gulch and went quickly across to the junction of the two lines of rails. As he came to the

switch, or, as it seemed to us, to the place where the switch had been and now was not, he, too, faded into indistinctness and was blotted out.

Almost at once we heard the grating of a key in a rusted lock and the clank of the switch lever as it was pulled over in its quadrant, and we knew that the trap was set. With the switch-shifting mechanism invisible, the enginemen on the coming train, the rumbling of which could now be heard in the up-mountain distance, would have nothing to warn them until they should swing far enough around the curve of approach to see the rail points under the beam of their headlight. And then, under ordinary conditions, it would be too late to make the safety stop.

In a couple of heartbeats the trapper materialized for us, reappearing to retreat quickly to the small gulch out of which he had come, where we again lost sight of him. Wester would have gone after him, but the captain said: "No— wait; there's more to follow. We know where to find that one when we want him."

It was only a minute or so after the preparation of the trap and the retreat of the man. who had set it when we heard footsteps at our right, and two men came stumbling over the crossties of the gravel track, breathing heavily as though they had been running. At a point nearly opposite the thicket in which we were concealed they stopped.

"Where in hell is that switch stand?" came the demand in a voice that at least two of us recognized as Grider's.

The other man gave a low laugh.

"I told you it was too late, didn't I? The switch is gone. Don't you see it has?" Then: "We'd better get off this track. The freight will be diving in here in another minute or two."

For a brief instant Grider hesitated, as if what poor shreds and patches of common humanity there were in him were urging him to run ahead and try to flag the downcoming train, which could now be heard shrilling around the curves at ne great distance on the grades above. Then he turned aside, making the decision which put him squarely in the same class with the criminals he had employed. All four of us heard him quite distinctly when he said:

"I don't know what your strikers have done to that switch, but let it go for this one more time. Only don't pull any more of these 'accidents' until I tell you to. You're getting me in too deep!"

"Ah!" came in the sneering voice of the other man. "All you care for is your own hide, eh? You don't care a damn if these fellows that are coming get piled up under their engine in the gravel pit?"

"That's their lookout. If they haven't sense enough to jump and save their necks when they find themselves on the wrong track— Let's get over on our

own side of things. Wed better make a quick run for the car and get away from here."

But if this chief of all unhanged scoundrels had meant to dodge a climax, which he had every reason to believe would result in the loss of one or more human lives, he had lingered too long. As the pair started to cross to the mainline track and the wood beyond, the freight- train for which the trap had been set swung around the curve of approach. But instead of rushing on to wreck itself in the gravel pit, it came to a brake-shrilling stop a little distance short of the still-invisible switch stand, and its headlight playing full upon the two who were hastening to duck to cover.

At this, things came to a focus with a bang. As Wester and Jower sprang up to go after Bonnard and Grider, Wester's foot caught in a tree root and he went rolling down the steep hillside to land almost at the feet of the two who were standing momentarily dazed by the glare of the stopped engine's headlight.

As I heard the captain say to me, "Come on— let's get the miracle worker!" I saw a thrilling tableau struck out by the locomotive spotlight. Grider, knowing now that he had been caught red handed, and willing to save himself by a cold-blooded murder, whipped a pistol from his coat pocket and threw it down upon Wester. But Long Tom Jower's trigger squeeze was the quicker, and at the roar of his .45, Grider's aimed weapon flew from his hand; and as I ran to overtake the captain, I saw Jower covering the two conspirators while Wester handcuffed them.

It took us, the captain and I, but a few seconds to run to the mouth of the little gulch, but before we got there the mysteriously effaced switch stand had snapped into visibility again, and a whiff of pungent smoke was blowing down to us from the mouth of the small ravine. An instant farther along a tongue of yellow flame leaped up and two or three of the small trees in the gulch went up with a flash and a roar to herald the beginning of a forest fire. The worker of miracles was escaping up the gulch and he had. set the fire to cut off pursuit.

By this time the two enginemen and head brakeman of the freight were running down the track, followed by the other members of the crew; and with these to help we tried to stop the progress of the fire before it should gain sufficient headway to spread to the nearby mountains. Breaking living branches from the trees, we were successful in beating the flames back at the gulch edges and confining them to the steep little ravine; but within these limits the conflagration roared like a mighty furnace, leaving a blackened and smoking gulf behind it as it swept up the gorge.

After it became apparent that the fire would burn itself out in the gulch, the captain released the freight crew, telling the conductor and engineer to

proceed with their train. Just then Wester came up, having left Jower guarding the two prisoners; and as we stood on - the brink of the gorge the light of the burning trees below us showed us a most gruesome sight. Varnell— if that were his real name— had signed his own death warrant in lighting the fire at the gulch mouth. He had doubtless thought to escape up the ravine ahead of the blaze, but, as we could now see plainly, there was no exit from the place at its upper end; the gulch was a mere deep pocket in the hill with sides too steep to be climbed. On a bed of scorched leaves and smoking tree trunks that would probably burn for hours we saw the blackened body of a man, and beside it what we took to be the remains of the miracle-working thing with which he had tried to escape.

"He's out of it; and his secret, whatever it was, has gone with him," said the captain soberly; and even as he spoke, a dead tree, with the fire burning fiercely at its rotted base, fell with a crash and a shower of sparks to blot out the gruesome sight and add itself to the victim's funeral pyre.

For a little time the three of us stood looking down into the fiery gulf. Then, as a mellow whistle blast announced the upcoming of Burke with the business car special, the captain broke the spell of silence which had fallen upon us:

"The play's over and we may as well go. It will be a long while before anybody can go down there and come back alive, and by that time there will be nothing left of him or his devil's invention." And so we made our way down to the track and to the place where the special was halted and Jower was riding herd on the two who mattered most in the captain's fight to keep his railroad from: falling into the hands of the enemy.

It was when we were about to board the car that my part in the weird adventures of the night, inconsequent as it had been, ended abruptly: In the shuffle at the car steps Jower, chaperoning Grider, was just ahead of me. Suddenly the big superintendent of motive power jerked himself free and whirled upon me.

"Damn you!" he grated. "I owe this to you and that girl of yours!" And before I could dodge he swung his manacled hands like a flail, and with a fleeting impression that the business car had tumbled over on me, I went out.

WHEN I CAME back to earth it was broad daylight and I found myself lying, with a bandaged head, in bed, with Maltby sitting beside me.

"Well, old scout," he grinned, "you are not going to make a die of it, after all, as we were afraid you might. Feeling pretty groggy?"

"I feel as if I had a bushel basket for a head," I replied weakly. "What hit me?"

"Grider smacked you with his handcuffs in a pretty tender spot. The doctors thought for a while that there was a skull fracture."

"When was all this?" I demanded.

"Three days ago."

"Huh!" I grunted. "Grider said I owed him something; but now he owes me. No matter how long I may live, I'll always be three days shy of what belongs to me. What's been happening since I went off the deep end? Anything special?"

"Plenty. Grider is in the jail infirmary with an infected hand, got when Jower had to shoot to keep him from killing Curly Wester; and there are counts enough in his indictment to keep the lawyers talking through an entire court session. Bonnard turned State's evidence in the conspiracy case, as he threatened to, but he and his rum runners will have to face the music for bootlegging."

"How about the captain and his fight to keep his railroad?"

"The drive on the stock blew up with a loud noise when the news of Grider's arrest and indictment got to New York, and there was a flurry on the Exchange that ran the price up to where nobody could afford to play with it, with the Weatherford interests on top and the conspirators holding the bag."

"And Varnell, or Vanderpool, or whatever his name was?" I queried.

Maltby shook his head. "Nothing left but a few calcined bones." Then: "The captain has told me what you all saw, or thought you saw, at the gravel track switch. Are you sure all four of you were not hypnotized?"

"Still a bit incredulous, are you?" I said. "All right; let it go. If you won't accept the testimony of the four of us who were together, and the three men on No. 17's engine, you're hopeless. You've only our word for it. The fire wiped out the proof and the secret of it. Where's Marcia?"

At this he grinned again.

"I thought you'd get around to her after a while. She has been right here with you, losing sleep, for three days and nights. A couple of hours ago I made her go and lie down. Want me to go after her?"

"If you wake her I'll kill you when I get up," I told him. And then: "I suppose we are through here on the E. B. & P., now that the storm has blown over?"

"You've got another guess coming," he returned, with a third and much broader grin. "The captain was lacking a superintendent of motive power, and he said there was room, also, for an efficiency engineer in the same department. He added that we might settle it between ourselves as to which would be which. I told him—"

What it was that Tommy told the captain I don't know to this good day, for just then the door opened and my dear girl, looking as if she'd lost sleep for a week instead of three days, came to shoo him away; and Well, if you'll

remember, I said, at the first dash out of the box, that Marcia had her compassionate leanings, and now, if never before, I was figuring handsomely as the under dog.

"Oh, you poor, poor dear!" she said softly, as she came to sit on the edge of the bed. "I—"

But what more she said, and did, needn't be set down here.

**End**