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To the Secretaries in the House

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"IT IS YUE-LAOU, THE MAKER OF MOONS!"

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THE MAKER OF MOONS

BY

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Author of "The King in Yellow," "The Red Republic"
"A King and a Few Dukes," etc.

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TO MY FATHER

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THE MAKER OF MOONS

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" I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation
is—And I say there is in fact no evil ;
(Or if there is, I say it is just as important to you, to
the land, or to me, as anything else.

* * * * * *

Each is not for its own sake ;
I say the whole earth, and all the stars in the sky, are
for Religion's sake.
I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough ;
None has ever yet adored or worshipped half enough ;
None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and
how certain the future is."

WALT WHITMAN.

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THE MAKER OF MOONS.

" I have heard what the Talkers were talking,—the talk
Of the beginning and the end ;
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end."

I.

CONCERNING Yue-Laou and the Xin I know nothing more than you shall know. I am miserably anxious to clear the matter up. Perhaps what I write may save the United States Government money and lives, perhaps it may arouse the scientific world to action ; at any rate it will put an end to the terrible suspense of two people. Certainty is better than suspense.

If the Government dares to disregard this warning and refuses to send a thoroughly equipped expedition at once, the people of the State may take swift vengeance on the whole region and leave a blackened devastated waste where to-day forest and flowering meadow land border the lake in the Cardinal Woods.

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You already know part of the story ; the New York papers have been full of alleged details. This much is true : Barris caught the "Shiner," red handed, or rather yellow handed, for his pockets and boots and dirty fists were stuffed with lumps of gold. I say gold, advisedly. You may call it what you please. You also know how Barris was—but unless I begin at the beginning of my own experiences you will be none the wiser after all.

On the third of August of this present year I was standing in Tiffany's, chatting with George Godfrey of the designing department. On the glass counter between us lay a coiled serpent, an exquisite specimen of chiselled gold.

"No," replied Godfrey to my question, "it is n't my work ; I wish it was. Why, man, it 's a masterpiece !"

"Whose ?" I asked.

"Now I should be very glad to know also," said Godfrey. "We bought it from an old jay who says he lives in the country somewhere about the Cardinal Woods. That 's near Starlit Lake, I believe——"

"Lake of the Stars ?" I suggested.

"Some call it Starlit Lake,—it 's all the same. Well, my rustic Reuben says that he represents the sculptor of this snake for all practical and business purposes. He got his price too. We hope he 'll bring us something more. We have sold this already to the Metropolitan Museum."

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I was leaning idly on the glass case, watching the keen eyes of the artist in precious metals as he stooped over the gold serpent.

"A masterpiece!" he muttered to himself, fondling the glittering coil; "look at the texture! whew!" But I was not looking at the serpent. Something was moving,—crawling out of Godfrey's coat pocket,—the pocket nearest to me,—something soft and yellow with crab-like legs all covered with coarse yellow hair.

"What in Heaven's name," said I, "have you got in your pocket? It 's crawling out—it 's trying to creep up your coat, Godfrey!"

He turned quickly and dragged the creature out with his left hand.

I shrank back as he held the repulsive object dangling before me, and he laughed and placed it on the counter.

"Did you ever see anything like that?" he demanded.

"No," said I truthfully, "and I hope I never shall again. What is it?"

"I don't know. Ask them at the Natural History Museum—they can't tell you. The Smithsonian is all at sea too. It is, I believe, the connecting link between a sea-urchin, a spider, and the devil. It looks venomous but I can't find either fangs or mouth. Is it blind? These things may be eyes but they look as if they were painted. A Japanese sculptor might have produced such an impossible beast, but it is hard

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to believe that God did. It looks unfinished too. I have a mad idea that this creature is only one of the parts of some larger and more grotesque organism,—it looks so lonely, so hopelessly dependent, so cursedly unfinished. I 'm going to use it as a model. If I don't out-Japanese the Japs my name is n't Godfrey."

The creature was moving slowly across the glass case towards me. I drew back.

"Godfrey," I said, "I would execute a man who executed any such work as you propose. What do you want to perpetuate such a reptile for? I can stand the Japanese grotesque but I can't stand that—spider—"

"It 's a crab."

"Crab or spider or blind-worm—ugh! What do you want to do it for? It 's a nightmare—it 's unclean!"

I hated the thing. It was the first living creature that I had ever hated.

For some time I had noticed a damp acrid odour in the air, and Godfrey said it came from the reptile.

"Then kill it and bury it," I said; "and by the way, where did it come from?"

"I don't know that either," laughed Godfrey; "I found it clinging to the box that this gold serpent was brought in. I suppose my old Reuben is responsible."

"If the Cardinal Woods are the lurking places for things like this," said I, "I am sorry that I am going to the Cardinal Woods."

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"Are you?" asked Godfrey; "for the shooting?"

"Yes, with Barris and Pierpont. Why don't you kill that creature?"

"Go off on your shooting trip, and let me alone," laughed Godfrey.

I shuddered at the "crab," and bade Godfrey good-bye until December.

That night, Pierpont, Barris, and I sat chatting in the smoking-car of the Quebec Express when the long train pulled out of the Grand Central Depot. Old David had gone forward with the dogs; poor things, they hated to ride in the baggage car, but the Quebec and Northern road provides no sportsman's cars, and David and the three Gordon setters were in for an uncomfortable night.

Except for Pierpont, Barris, and myself, the car was empty. Barris, trim, stout, ruddy, and bronzed, sat drumming on the window ledge, puffing a short fragrant pipe. His gun-case lay beside him on the floor.

"When *I* have white hair and years of discretion," said Pierpont languidly, "I'll not flirt with pretty serving-maids; will you, Roy?"

"No," said I, looking at Barris.

"You mean the maid with the cap in the Pullman car?" asked Barris.

"Yes," said Pierpont.

I smiled, for I had seen it also.

Barris twisted his crisp grey moustache, and yawned.

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"You children had better be toddling off to bed," he said. "That lady's-maid is a member of the Secret Service."

"Oh," said Pierpont, "one of your colleagues?"

"You might present us, you know," I said; "the journey is monotonous."

Barris had drawn a telegram from his pocket, and as he sat turning it over and over between his fingers he smiled. After a moment or two he handed it to Pierpont who read it with slightly raised eyebrows.

"It's rot,—I suppose it's cipher," he said; "I see it's signed by General Drummond——"

"Drummond, Chief of the Government Secret Service," said Barris.

"Something interesting?" I enquired, lighting a cigarette.

"Something so interesting," replied Barris, "that I'm going to look into it myself——"

"And break up our shooting trio——"

"No. Do you want to hear about it? Do you Billy Pierpont?"

"Yes," replied that immaculate young man.

Barris rubbed the amber mouth-piece of his pipe on his handkerchief, cleared the stem with a bit of wire, puffed once or twice, and leaned back in his chair.

"Pierpont," he said, "do you remember that evening at the United States Club when General Miles, General Drummond, and I were examining

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that gold nugget that Captain Mahan had? You examined it also, I believe."

"I did," said Pierpont.

"Was it gold?" asked Barris, drumming on the window.

"It was," replied Pierpont.

"I saw it too," said I; "of course, it was gold."

"Professor La Grange saw it also," said Barris; "he said it was gold."

"Well?" said Pierpont.

"Well," said Barris, "it was not gold."

After a silence Pierpont asked what tests had been made.

"The usual tests," replied Barris. "The United States Mint is satisfied that it is gold, so is every jeweller who has seen it. But it is not gold,—and yet—it is gold."

Pierpont and I exchanged glances.

"Now," said I, "for Barris' usual coup-de-théâtre: what was the nugget?"

"Practically it was pure gold; but," said Barris, enjoying the situation intensely, "really it was not gold. Pierpont, what is gold?"

"Gold 's an element, a metal——"

"Wrong! Billy Pierpont," said Barris coolly.

"Gold was an element when I went to school," said I.

"It has not been an element for two weeks," said Barris; "and, except General Drummond, Professor La Grange, and myself, you two young-

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sters are the only people, except one, in the world who know it,—or have known it."

"Do you mean to say that gold is a composite metal?" said Pierpont slowly.

"I do. La Grange has made it. He produced a scale of pure gold day before yesterday. That nugget was manufactured gold."

Could Barris be joking? Was this a colossal hoax? I looked at Pierpont. He muttered something about that settling the silver question, and turned his head to Barris, but there was that in Barris' face which forbade jesting, and Pierpont and I sat silently pondering.

"Don't ask me how it 's made," said Barris, quietly; "I don't know. But I do know that somewhere in the region of the Cardinal Woods there is a gang of people who do know how gold is made, and who make it. You understand the danger this is to every civilized nation. It 's got to be stopped of course. Drummond and I have decided that I am the man to stop it. Wherever and whoever these people are—these gold makers, —they must be caught, every one of them,—caught or shot."

"Or shot," repeated Pierpont, who was owner of the Cross-Cut Gold Mine and found his income too small; "Professor La Grange will of course be prudent;—science need not know things that would upset the world!"

"Little Willy," said Barris laughing, "your income is safe."

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"I suppose," said I, "some flaw in the nugget gave Professor La Grange the tip."

"Exactly. He cut the flaw out before sending the nugget to be tested. He worked on the flaw and separated gold into its three elements."

"He is a great man," said Pierpont, "but he will be the greatest man in the world if he can keep his discovery to himself."

"Who?" said Barris.

"Professor La Grange."

"Professor La Grange was shot through the heart two hours ago," replied Barris slowly.

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II.

WE had been at the shooting box in the Cardinal Woods five days when a telegram was brought to Barris by a mounted messenger from the nearest telegraph station, Cardinal Springs, a hamlet on the lumber railroad which joins the Quebec and Northern at Three Rivers Junction, thirty miles below.

Pierpont and I were sitting out under the trees, loading some special shells as experiments ; Barris stood beside us, bronzed, erect, holding his pipe carefully so that no sparks should drift into our powder box. The beat of hoofs over the grass aroused us, and when the lank messenger drew bridle before the door, Barris stepped forward and took the sealed telegram. When he had torn it open he went into the house and presently reappeared, reading something that he had written.

"This should go at once," he said, looking the messenger full in the face.

"At once, Colonel Barris," replied the shabby countryman.

Pierpont glanced up and I smiled at the messenger who was gathering his bridle and settling

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himself in his stirrups. Barris handed him the written reply and nodded good-bye: there was a thud of hoofs on the greensward, a jingle of bit and spur across the gravel, and the messenger was gone. Barris' pipe went out and he stepped to windward to relight it.

"It is queer," said I, "that your messenger—a battered native,—should speak like a Harvard man."

"He is a Harvard man," said Barris.

"And the plot thickens," said Pierpont; "are the Cardinal Woods full of your Secret Service men, Barris?"

"No," replied Barris, "but the telegraph stations are. How many ounces of shot are you using, Roy?"

I told him, holding up the adjustable steel measuring cup. He nodded. After a moment or two he sat down on a camp-stool beside us and picked up a crimper.

"That telegram was from Drummond," he said; "the messenger was one of my men as you two bright little boys divined. Pooh! If he had spoken the Cardinal County dialect you would n't have known."

"His make-up was good," said Pierpont.

Barris twirled the crimper and looked at the pile of loaded shells. Then he picked up one and crimped it.

"Let 'em alone," said Pierpont, "you crimp too tight."

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"Does his little gun kick when the shells are crimped too tight?" enquired Barris tenderly; "well, he shall crimp his own shells then,—where 's his little man?"

"His little man," was a weird English importation, stiff, very carefully scrubbed, tangled in his aspirates, named Howlett. As valet, gilly, gun-bearer, and crimper, he aided Pierpont to endure the ennui of existence, by doing for him everything except breathing. Lately, however, Barris' taunts had driven Pierpont to do a few things for himself. To his astonishment he found that cleaning his own gun was not a bore, so he timidly loaded a shell or two, was much pleased with himself, loaded some more, crimped them, and went to breakfast with an appetite. So when Barris asked where "his little man" was, Pierpont did not reply but dug a cupful of shot from the bag and poured it solemnly into the half filled shell.

Old David came out with the dogs and of course there was a pow-wow when "Voyou," my Gordon, wagged his splendid tail across the loading table and sent a dozen unstopped cartridges rolling over the grass, vomiting powder and shot.

"Give the dogs a mile or two," said I; "we will shoot over the Sweet Fern Covert about four o'clock, David."

"Two guns, David," added Barris.

"Are you not going?" asked Pierpont, looking up, as David disappeared with the dogs.

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"Bigger game," said Barris shortly. He picked up a mug of ale from the tray which Howlett had just set down beside us and took a long pull. We did the same, silently. Pierpont set his mug on the turf beside him and returned to his loading.

We spoke of the murder of Professor La Grange, of how it had been concealed by the authorities in New York at Drummond's request, of the certainty that it was one of the gang of gold-makers who had done it, and of the possible alertness of the gang.

"Oh, they know that Drummond will be after them sooner or later," said Barris, "but they don't know that the mills of the gods have already begun to grind. Those smart New York papers builded better than they knew when their ferret-eyed reporter poked his red nose into the house on 58th Street and sneaked off with a column on his cuffs about the 'suicide' of Professor La Grange. Billy Pierpont, my revolver is hanging in your room; I'll take yours too——"

"Help yourself," said Pierpont.

"I shall be gone over night," continued Barris; "my poncho and some bread and meat are all I shall take except the 'barkers.'"

"Will they bark to-night?" I asked.

"No, I trust not for several weeks yet. I shall nose about a bit. Roy, did it ever strike you how queer it is that this wonderfully beautiful country should contain no inhabitants?"

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"It 's like those splendid stretches of pools and rapids which one finds on every trout river and in which one never finds a fish," suggested Pierpont.

"Exactly,—and Heaven alone knows why," said Barris; "I suppose this country is shunned by human beings for the same mysterious reasons."

"The shooting is the better for it," I observed.

"The shooting is good," said Barris, "have you noticed the snipe on the meadow by the lake? Why it 's brown with them! That 's a wonderful meadow."

"It 's a natural one," said Pierpont, "no human being ever cleared that land."

"Then it 's supernatural," said Barris; "Pierpont, do you want to come with me?"

Pierpont's handsome face flushed as he answered slowly, "It 's awfully good of you,—if I may."

"Bosh," said I, piqued because he had asked Pierpont, "what use is little Willy without his man?"

"True," said Barris gravely, "you can't take Howlett you know."

Pierpont muttered something which ended in "d—n."

"Then," said I, "there will be but one gun on the Sweet Fern Covert this afternoon. Very well, I wish you joy of your cold supper and colder bed. Take your night-gown, Willy, and don't sleep on the damp ground."

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"Let Pierpont alone," retorted Barris, "you shall go next time, Roy."

"Oh, all right,—you mean when there 's shooting going on?"

"And I?" demanded Pierpont, grieved.

"You too, my son; stop quarelling! Will you ask Howlett to pack our kits—lightly mind you, —no bottles,—they clink."

"My flask does n't," said Pierpont, and went off to get ready for a night's stalking of dangerous men.

"It is strange," said I, "that nobody ever settles in this region. How many people live in Cardinal Springs, Barris?"

"Twenty counting the telegraph operator and not counting the lumbermen; they are always changing and shifting. I have six men among them."

"Where have you no men? In the Four Hundred?"

"I have men there also,—chums of Billy's only he does n't know it. David tells me that there was a strong flight of woodcock last night. You ought to pick up some this afternoon."

Then we chatted about alder-cover and swamp until Pierpont came out of the house and it was time to part.

"Au revoir," said Barris, buckling on his kit, "come along, Pierpont, and don't walk in the damp grass."

"If you are not back by to-morrow noon," said

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I, "I will take Howlett and David and hunt you up. You say your course is due north?"

"Due north," replied Barris, consulting his compass.

"There is a trail for two miles and a spotted lead for two more," said Pierpont.

"Which we won't use for various reasons," added Barris pleasantly; "don't worry, Roy, and keep your confounded expedition out of the way; there 's no danger."

He knew, of course, what he was talking about and I held my peace.

When the tip end of Pierpont's shooting coat had disappeared in the Long Covert, I found myself standing alone with Howlett. He bore my gaze for a moment and then politely lowered his eyes.

"Howlett," said I, "take these shells and implements to the gun room, and drop nothing. Did Voyou come to any harm in the briers this morning?"

"No 'arm, Mr. Cardenhe, sir," said Howlett.

"Then be careful not to drop anything else," said I, and walked away leaving him decorously puzzled. For he had dropped no cartridges. Poor Howlett!

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III.

ABOUT four o'clock that afternoon I met David and the dogs at the spinney which leads into the Sweet Fern Covert. The three setters, Voyou, Gamin, and Mioche were in fine feather,—David had killed a woodcock and a brace of grouse over them that morning,—and they were thrashing about the spinney at short range when I came up, gun under arm and pipe lighted.

"What 's the prospect, David," I asked, trying to keep my feet in the tangle of wagging, whining dogs; "hello, what 's amiss with Mioche?"

"A brier in his foot sir; I drew it and stopped the wound but I guess the gravel 's got in. If you have no objection, sir, I might take him back with me."

"It 's safer," I said; "take Gamin too, I only want one dog this afternoon. What is the situation?"

"Fair sir; the grouse lie within a quarter of a mile of the oak second-growth. The woodcock are mostly on the alders. I saw any number of

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snipe on the meadows. There 's something else in by the lake,—I can't just tell what, but the wood-duck set up a clatter when I was in the thicket and they come dashing through the wood as if a dozen foxes was snappin' at their tail feathers."

"Probably a fox," I said; "leash those dogs, —they must learn to stand it. I 'll be back by dinner time."

"There is one more thing sir," said David, lingering with his gun under his arm.

"Well," said I.

"I saw a man in the woods by the Oak Covert, —at least I think I did."

"A lumberman?"

"I think not sir—at least,—do they have Chinamen among them?"

"Chinese? No. You did n't see a Chinaman in the woods here?"

"I—I think I did sir,—I can't say positively. He was gone when I ran into the covert."

"Did the dogs notice it?"

"I can't say—exactly. They acted queer like. Gamin here lay down an whined—it may have been colic—and Mioche whimpered,—perhaps it was the brier."

"And Voyou?"

"Voyou, he was most remarkable sir, and the hair on his back stood up. I did see a ground-hog makin' for a tree near by."

"Then no wonder Voyou bristled. David,

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your Chinaman was a stump or tussock. Take the dogs now."

"I guess it was sir; good afternoon sir," said David, and walked away with the Gordons leaving me alone with Voyou in the spinney.

I looked at the dog and he looked at me.

"Voyou!"

The dog sat down and danced with his fore feet, his beautiful brown eyes sparkling.

"You 're a fraud," I said; "which shall it be, the alders or the upland? Upland? Good!—now for the grouse,—heel, my friend, and show your miraculous self-restraint."

Voyou wheeled into my tracks and followed close, nobly refusing to notice the impudent chipmunks and the thousand and one alluring and important smells which an ordinary dog would have lost no time in investigating.

The brown and yellow autumn woods were crisp with drifting heaps of leaves and twigs that crackled under foot as we turned from the spinney into the forest. Every silent little stream, hurrying toward the lake was gay with painted leaves afloat, scarlet maple or yellow oak. Spots of sunlight fell upon the pools, searching the brown depths, illuminating the gravel bottom where shoals of minnows swam to and fro, and to and fro again, busy with the purpose of their little lives. The crickets were chirping in the long brittle grass on the edge of the woods, but we left them far behind in the silence of the deeper forest.

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"Now!" said I to Voyou.

The dog sprang to the front, circled once, zig-zagged through the ferns around us and, all in a moment, stiffened stock still, rigid as sculptured bronze. I stepped forward, raising my gun, two paces, three paces, ten perhaps, before a great cock-grouse blundered up from the brake and burst through the thicket fringe toward the deeper growth. There was a flash and puff from my gun, a crash of echoes among the low wooded cliffs, and through the faint veil of smoke something dark dropped from mid-air amid a cloud of feathers, brown as the brown leaves under foot.

"Fetch!"

Up from the ground sprang Voyou, and in a moment he came galloping back, neck arched, tail stiff but waving, holding tenderly in his pink mouth a mass of mottled bronzed feathers. Very gravely he laid the bird at my feet and crouched close beside it, his silky ears across his paws, his muzzle on the ground.

I dropped the grouse into my pocket, held for a moment a silent caressing communion with Voyou, then swung my gun under my arm and motioned the dog on.

It must have been five o'clock when I walked into a little opening in the woods and sat down to breathe. Voyou came and sat down in front of me.

"Well?" I enquired.

Voyou gravely presented one paw which I took.

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"We will never get back in time for dinner," said I, "so we might as well take it easy. It 's all your fault, you know. Is there a brier in your foot?—let 's see,—there ! it 's out my friend and you are free to nose about and lick it. If you loll your tongue out you'll get it all over twigs and moss. Can't you lie down and try to pant less? No, there is no use in sniffing and looking at that fern patch, for we are going to smoke a little, doze a little, and go home by moonlight. Think what a big dinner we will have ! Think of Howlett's despair when we are not in time ! Think of all the stories you will have to tell to Gamin and Mioche ! Think what a good dog you have been ! There—you are tired old chap ; take forty winks with me."

Voyou was a little tired. He stretched out on the leaves at my feet but whether or not he really slept I could not be certain, until his hind legs twitched and I knew he was dreaming of mighty deeds.

Now I may have taken forty winks, but the sun seemed to be no lower when I sat up and unclosed my lids. Voyou raised his head, saw in my eyes that I was not going yet, thumped his tail half a dozen times on the dried leaves, and settled back with a sigh.

I looked lazily around, and for the first time noticed what a wonderfully beautiful spot I had chosen for a nap. It was an oval glade in the heart of the forest, level and carpeted with green

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grass. The trees that surrounded it were gigantic; they formed one towering circular wall of verdure, blotting out all except the turquoise blue of the sky-oval above. And now I noticed that in the centre of the greensward lay a pool of water, crystal clear, glimmering like a mirror in the meadow grass, beside a block of granite. It scarcely seemed possible that the symmetry of tree and lawn and lucent pool could have been one of nature's accidents. I had never before seen this glade nor had I ever heard it spoken of by either Pierpont or Barris. It was a marvel, this diamond clear basin, regular and graceful as a Roman fountain, set in the gem of turf. And these great trees,—they also belonged, not in America but in some legend-haunted forest of France, where moss-grown marbles stand neglected in dim glades, and the twilight of the forest shelters fairies and slender shapes from shadow-land.

I lay and watched the sunlight showering the tangled thicket where masses of crimson Cardinal-flowers glowed, or where one long dusty sunbeam tipped the edge of the floating leaves in the pool, turning them to palest gilt. There were birds too, passing through the dim avenues of trees like jets of flame,—the gorgeous Cardinal-Bird in his deep stained crimson robe,—the bird that gave to the woods, to the village fifteen miles away, to the whole county, the name of Cardinal.

I rolled over on my back and looked up at the

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sky. How pale,—paler than a robin's egg,—it was. I seemed to be lying at the bottom of a well, walled with verdure, high towering on every side. And, as I lay, all about me the air became sweet scented. Sweeter and sweeter and more penetrating grew the perfume, and I wondered what stray breeze, blowing over acres of lilies could have brought it. But there was no breeze; the air was still. A gilded fly alighted on my hand,—a honey-fly. It was as troubled as I by the scented silence.

Then, behind me, my dog growled.

I sat quite still at first, hardly breathing, but my eyes were fixed on a shape that moved along the edge of the pool among the meadow grasses. The dog had ceased growling and was now standing, alert and trembling.

At last I rose and walked rapidly down to the pool, my dog following close to heel.

The figure, a woman's, turned slowly toward us.

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IV.

SHE was standing still when I approached the pool. The forest around us was so silent that when I spoke the sound of my own voice startled me.

"No," she said,—and her voice was smooth as flowing water, "I have not lost my way. Will he come to me, your beautiful dog?"

Before I could speak, Voyou crept to her and laid his silky head against her knees.

"But surely," said I, "you did not come here alone."

"Alone? I did come alone."

"But the nearest settlement is Cardinal, probably nineteen miles from where we are standing."

"I do not know Cardinal," she said.

"Ste. Croix in Canada is forty miles at least,—how did you come into the Cardinal Woods?" I asked amazed.

"Into the woods?" she repeated a little impatiently.

"Yes."

She did not answer at first but stood caressing Voyou with gentle phrase and gesture.

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"Your beautiful dog I am fond of, but I am not fond of being questioned," she said quietly. "My name is Ysonde and I came to the fountain here to see your dog."

I was properly quenched. After a moment or two I did say that in another hour it would be growing dusky, but she neither replied nor looked at me.

"This," I ventured, "is a beautiful pool,—you call it a fountain,—a delicious fountain: I have never before seen it. It is hard to imagine that nature did all this."

"Is it?" she said.

"Don't you think so?" I asked.

"I have n't thought; I wish when you go you would leave me your dog."

"My—my dog?"

"If you don't mind," she said sweetly, and looked at me for the first time in the face.

For an instant our glances met, then she grew grave, and I saw that her eyes were fixed on my forehead. Suddenly she rose and drew nearer, looking intently at my forehead. There was a faint mark there, a tiny crescent, just over my eyebrow. It was a birthmark.

"Is that a scar?" she demanded drawing nearer.

"That crescent shaped mark? No."

"No? Are you sure?" she insisted.

"Perfectly," I replied, astonished.

"A—a birthmark?"

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"Yes,—may I ask why?"

As she drew away from me, I saw that the color had fled from her cheeks. For a second she clasped both hands over her eyes as if to shut out my face, then slowly dropping her hands, she sat down on a long square block of stone which half encircled the basin, and on which to my amazement I saw carving. Voyou went to her again and laid his head in her lap.

"What is your name?" she asked at length.

"Roy Cardenhe."

"Mine is Ysonde. I carved these dragon-flies on the stone, these fishes and shells and butterflies you see."

"You! They are wonderfully delicate,—but those are not American dragon-flies—"

"No—they are more beautiful. See, I have my hammer and chisel with me."

She drew from a queer pouch at her side a small hammer and chisel and held them toward me.

"You are very talented," I said, "where did you study?"

"I? I never studied,—I knew how. I saw things and cut them out of stone. Do you like them? Some time I will show you other things that I have done. If I had a great lump of bronze I could make your dog, beautiful as he is."

Her hammer fell into the fountain and I leaned over and plunged my arm into the water to find it.

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"It is there, shining on the sand," she said, leaning over the pool with me.

"Where," said I, looking at our reflected faces in the water. For it was only in the water that I had dared, as yet, to look her long in the face.

The pool mirrored the exquisite oval of her head, the heavy hair, the eyes. I heard the silken rustle of her girdle, I caught the flash of a white arm, and the hammer was drawn up dripping with spray.

The troubled surface of the pool grew calm and again I saw her eyes reflected.

"Listen," she said in a low voice, "do you think you will come again to my fountain?"

"I will come," I said. My voice was dull; the noise of water filled my ears.

Then a swift shadow sped across the pool; I rubbed my eyes. Where her reflected face had bent beside mine there was nothing mirrored but the rosy evening sky with one pale star glimmering. I drew myself up and turned. She was gone. I saw the faint star twinkling above me in the afterglow, I saw the tall trees motionless in the still evening air, I saw my dog slumbering at my feet.

The sweet scent in the air had faded, leaving in my nostrils the heavy odor of fern and forest mould. A blind fear seized me, and I caught up my gun and and sprang into the darkening woods. The dog followed me, crashing through the undergrowth at my side. Duller and duller grew the

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light, but I strode on, the sweat pouring from my face and hair, my mind a chaos. How I reached the spinney I can hardly tell. As I turned up the path I caught a glimpse of a human face peering at me from the darkening thicket,—a horrible human face, yellow and drawn with high-boned cheeks and narrow eyes.

Involuntarily I halted; the dog at my heels snarled. Then I sprang straight at it, floundering blindly through the thicket, but the night had fallen swiftly and I found myself panting and struggling in a maze of twisted shrubbery and twining vines, unable to see the very undergrowth that ensnared me.

It was a pale face, and a scratched one that I carried to a late dinner that night. Howlett served me, dumb reproach in his eyes, for the soup had been standing and the grouse was juiceless.

David brought the dogs in after they had had their supper, and I drew my chair before the blaze and set my ale on a table beside me. The dogs curled up at my feet, blinking gravely at the sparks that snapped and flew in eddying showers from the heavy birch logs.

"David," said I, "did you say you saw a Chinaman today?"

"I did sir."

"What do you think about it now?"

"I may have been mistaken sir——"

"But you think not. What sort of whiskey did you put in my flask today?"

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"The usual sir."

"Is there much gone?"

"About three swallows sir, as usual."

"You don't suppose there could have been any mistake about that whiskey,—no medicine could have gotten into it for instance."

David smiled and said, "No sir."

"Well," said I, "I have had an extraordinary dream."

When I said "dream," I felt comforted and reassured. I had scarcely dared to say it before, even to myself.

"An extraordinary dream," I repeated; "I fell asleep in the woods about five o'clock, in that pretty glade where the fountain—I mean the pool is. You know the place?"

"I do not sir."

I described it minutely, twice, but David shook his head.

"Carved stone did you say sir? I never chanced on it. You don't mean the New Spring——"

"No, no! This glade is way beyond that. Is it possible that any people inhabit the forest between here and the Canada line?"

"Nobody short of Ste. Croix; at least I have no knowledge of any."

"Of course," said I, "when I thought I saw a Chinaman, it was imagination. Of course I had been more impressed than I was aware of by your adventure. Of course you saw no Chinaman, David."

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"Probably not sir," replied David dubiously.

I sent him off to bed, saying I should keep the dogs with me all night; and when he was gone, I took a good long draught of ale, "just to shame the devil," as Pierpont said, and lighted a cigar. Then I thought of Barris and Pierpont, and their cold bed, for I knew they would not dare build a fire, and, in spite of the hot chimney corner and the crackling blaze, I shivered in sympathy.

"I 'll tell Barris and Pierpont the whole story and take them to see the carved stone and the fountain," I thought to myself; what a marvellous dream it was—Ysonde,—if it was a dream."

Then I went to the mirror and examined the faint white mark above my eyebrow.

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V.

ABOUT eight o'clock next morning, as I sat listlessly eyeing my coffee cup which Howlett was filling, Gamin and Mioche set up a howl, and in a moment more I heard Barris' step on the porch.

"Hello, Roy," said Pierpont, stamping into the dining room, "I want my breakfast by jingo! Where 's Howlett,—none of your *café au lait* for me,—I want a chop and some eggs. Look at that dog, he 'll wag the hinge off his tail in a moment——"

"Pierpont," said I, "this loquacity is astonishing but welcome. Where 's Barris? You are soaked from neck to ankle."

Pierpont sat down and tore off his stiff muddy leggings.

"Barris is telephoning to Cardinal Springs,—I believe he wants some of his men,—down! Gamin, you idiot! Howlett, three eggs poached and more toast,—what was I saying? Oh, about Barris; he 's struck something or other which he hopes will locate these gold-making fellows. I had a jolly time,—he 'll tell you about it."

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"Billy! Billy!" I said in pleased amazement, "you are learning to talk! Dear me! You load your own shells and you carry your own gun and you fire it yourself—hello! here 's Barris all over mud. You fellows really ought to change your rig—whew! what a frightful odor!"

"It 's probably this," said Barris tossing something onto the hearth where it shuddered for a moment and then began to writhe; "I found it in the woods by the lake. Do you know what it can be, Roy?"

To my disgust I saw it was another of those spidery wormy crablike creatures that Godfrey had in Tiffany's.

"I thought I recognized that acrid odor," I said; "for the love of the Saints take it away from the breakfast table, Barris!"

"But what is it?" he persisted, unslinging his field-glass and revolver.

"I 'll tell you what I know after breakfast," I replied firmly, "Howlett, get a broom and sweep that thing into the road.—what are you laughing at, Pierpont?"

Howlett swept the repulsive creature out and Barris and Pierpont went to change their dew-soaked clothes for dryer raiment. David came to take the dogs for an airing and in a few minutes Barris reappeared and sat down in his place at the head of the table.

"Well," said I, "is there a story to tell?"

"Yes, not much. They are near the lake on

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the other side of the woods,—I mean these gold-makers. I shall collar one of them this evening. I have n't located the main gang with any certainty,—shove the toast rack this way will you, Roy,—no, I am not at all certain, but I 've nailed one anyway. Pierpont was a great help, really,—and, what do you think, Roy? He wants to join the Secret Service!"

"Little Willy!"

"Exactly. Oh I 'll dissuade him. What sort of a reptile was that I brought in? Did Howlett sweep it away?"

"He can sweep it back again for all I care," I said indifferently, "I 've finished my breakfast."

"No," said Barris, hastily swallowing his coffee, "it 's of no importance; you can tell me about the beast——"

"Serve you right if I had it brought in on toast," I returned.

Pierpont came in radiant, fresh from the bath.

"Go on with your story, Roy," he said; and I told them about Godfrey and his reptile pet.

"Now what in the name of common sense can Godfrey find interesting in that creature?" I ended, tossing my cigarette into the fireplace.

"It's Japanese, don't you think?" said Pierpont.

"No," said Barris, "it is not artistically grotesque, it 's vulgar and horrible,—it looks cheap and unfinished——"

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"Unfinished,—exactly," said I, "like an American humorist——"

"Yes," said Pierpont, "cheap. What about that gold serpent?"

"Oh, the Metropolitan Museum bought it; you must see it, it 's marvellous."

Barris and Pierpont had lighted their cigarettes and, after a moment, we all rose and strolled out to the lawn, where chairs and hammocks were placed under the maple trees.

David passed, gun under arm, dogs heeling.

"Three guns on the meadows at four this afternoon," said Pierpont.

"Roy," said Barris as David bowed and started on, "what did you do yesterday?"

This was the question that I had been expecting. All night long I had dreamed of Ysonde and the glade in the woods, where, at the bottom of the crystal fountain, I saw the reflection of her eyes. All the morning while bathing and dressing I had been persuading myself that the dream was not worth recounting and that a search for the glade and the imaginary stone carving would be ridiculous. But now, as Barris asked the question, I suddenly decided to tell him the whole story.

"See here, you fellows," I said abruptly, "I am going to tell you something queer. You can laugh as much as you please too, but first I want to ask Barris a question or two. You have been in China, Barris?"

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"Yes," said Barris, looking straight into my eyes.

"Would a Chinaman be likely to turn lumberman?"

"Have you seen a Chinaman?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"I don't know; David and I both imagined we did."

Barris and Pierpont exchanged glances.

"Have you seen one also?" I demanded, turning to include Pierpont.

"No," said Barris slowly; "but I know that there is, or has been, a Chinaman in these woods."

"The devil!" said I.

"Yes," said Barris gravely; "the devil, if you like,—a devil,—a member of the Kuen-Yuin."

I drew my chair close to the hammock where Pierpont lay at full length, holding out to me a ball of pure gold.

"Well?" said I, examining the engraving on its surface, which represented a mass of twisted creatures,—dragons, I supposed.

"Well," repeated Barris, extending his hand to take the golden ball, "this globe of gold engraved with reptiles and Chinese hieroglyphics is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin."

"Where did you get it?" I asked, feeling that something startling was impending.

"Pierpont found it by the lake at sunrise this

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morning. It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," he repeated, "the terrible Kuen-Yuin, the sorcerers of China, and the most murderously diabolical sect on earth."

We puffed our cigarettes in silence until Barris rose, and began to pace backward and forward among the trees, twisting his grey moustache.

"The Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers," he said, pausing before the hammock where Pierpont lay watching him; "I mean exactly what I say,—sorcerers. I've seen them,—I've seen them at their devilish business, and I repeat to you solemnly, that as there are angels above, there is a race of devils on earth, and they are sorcerers. Bah!" he cried, "talk to me of Indian magic and Yogis and all that clap-trap! Why, Roy, I tell you that the Kuen-Yuin have absolute control of a hundred millions of people, mind and body, body and soul. Do you know what goes on in the interior of China? Does Europe know,—could any human being conceive of the condition of that gigantic hell-pit? You read the papers, you hear diplomatic twaddle about Li Hung Chang and the Emperor, you see accounts of battles on sea and land, and you know that Japan has raised a toy tempest along the jagged edge of the great unknown. But you never before heard of the Kuen-Yuin; no, nor has any European except a stray missionary or two, and yet I tell you that when the fires from this pit of hell have eaten through the continent to the coast, the ex-

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plosion will inundate half a world,—and God help the other half.''

Pierpont's cigarette went out; he lighted another, and looked hard at Barris.

"But," resumed Barris quietly, "'sufficient unto the day,' you know,—I did n't intend to say as much as I did,—it would do no good,—even you and Pierpont will forget it,—it seems so impossible and so far away,—like the burning out of the sun. What I want to discuss is the possibility or probability of a Chinaman,—a member of the Kuen-Yuin, being here, at this moment, in the forest.''

"If he is," said Pierpont, "possibly the gold-makers owe their discovery to him.''

"I do not doubt it for a second," said Barris earnestly.

I took the little golden globe in my hand, and examined the characters engraved upon it.

"Barris," said Pierpont, "I can't believe in sorcery while I am wearing one of Sanford's shooting suits in the pocket of which rests an uncut volume of the 'Duchess.'"

"Neither can I," I said, "for I read the *Evening Post*, and I know Mr. Godkin would not allow it. Hello! What 's the matter with this gold ball?''

"What is the matter?" said Barris grimly.

"Why—why—it 's changing color—purple, no, crimson—no, it 's green I mean—good Heavens! these dragons are twisting under my fingers——''

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"Impossible!" muttered Pierpont, leaning over me; "those are not dragons——"

"No!" I cried excitedly; "they are pictures of that reptile that Barris brought back—see—see how they crawl and turn——"

"Drop it!" commanded Barris; and I threw the ball on the turf. In an instant we had all knelt down on the grass beside it, but the globe was again golden, grotesquely wrought with dragons and strange signs.

Pierpont, a little red in the face, picked it up, and handed it to Barris. He placed it on a chair, and sat down beside me.

"Whew!" said I, wiping the perspiration from my face, "how did you play us that trick, Barris?"

"Trick?" said Barris contemptuously.

I looked at Pierpont, and my heart sank. If this was not a trick, what was it? Pierpont returned my glance and colored, but all he said was, "It's devilish queer," and Barris answered, "Yes, devilish." Then Barris asked me again to tell my story, and I did, beginning from the time I met David in the spinney to the moment when I sprang into the darkening thicket where that yellow mask had grinned like a phantom skull.

"Shall we try to find the fountain?" I asked after a pause.

"Yes,—and—er—the lady," suggested Pierpont vaguely.

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"Don't be an ass," I said a little impatiently, "you need not come, you know."

"Oh, I 'll come," said Pierpont, "unless you think I am indiscreet——"

"Shut up, Pierpont," said Barris, "this thing is serious; I never heard of such a glade or such a fountain, but it 's true that nobody knows this forest thoroughly. It 's worth while trying for; Roy, can you find your way back to it?"

"Easily," I answered; "when shall we go?"

"It will knock our snipe shooting on the head," said Pierpont, "but then when one has the opportunity of finding a live dream-lady——"

I rose, deeply offended, but Pierpont was not very penitent and his laughter was irresistible.

"The lady 's yours by right of discovery," he said, "I 'll promise not to infringe on your dreams,—I 'll dream about other ladies——"

"Come, come," said I, "I 'll have Howlett put you to bed in a minute. Barris, if you are ready, —we can get back to dinner——"

Barris had risen and was gazing at me earnestly.

"What 's the matter?" I asked nervously, for I saw that his eyes were fixed on my forehead, and I thought of Ysonde and the white crescent scar.

"Is that a birthmark?" said Barris.

"Yes—why, Barris?"

"Nothing,—an interesting coincidence——"

"What!—for Heaven's sake!"

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"The scar,—or rather the birthmark. It is the print of the dragon's claw,—the crescent symbol of Yue-Laou——"

"And who the devil is Yue-Laou?" I said crossly.

"Yue-Laou,—the Moon Maker, Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin;—it 's Chinese Mythology, but it is believed that Yue-Laou has returned to rule the Kuen-Yuin——"

"The conversation," interrupted Pierpont, "smacks of peacocks feathers and yellow-jackets. The chicken-pox has left its card on Roy, and Barris is guying us. Come on, you fellows, and make your call on the dream-lady. Barris, I hear galloping; here come your men."

Two mud splashed riders clattered up to the porch and dismounted at a motion from Barris. I noticed that both of them carried repeating rifles and heavy Colt's revolvers.

They followed Barris, deferentially, into the dining-room, and presently we heard the tinkle of plates and bottles and the low hum of Barris' musical voice.

Half an hour later they came out again, saluted Pierpont and me, and galloped away in the direction of the Canadian frontier. Ten minutes passed, and, as Barris did not appear, we rose and went into the house, to find him. He was sitting silently before the table, watching the small golden globe, now glowing with scarlet and orange fire, brilliant as a live coal. Howlett,

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mouth ajar, and eyes starting from the sockets, stood petrified behind him.

"Are you coming," asked Pierpont, a little startled. Barris did not answer. The globe slowly turned to pale gold again,—but the face that Barris raised to ours was white as a sheet. Then he stood up, and smiled with an effort which was painful to us all.

"Give me a pencil and a bit of paper," he said.

Howlett brought it. Barris went to the window and wrote rapidly. He folded the paper, placed it in the top drawer of his desk, locked the drawer, handed me the key, and motioned us to precede him.

When again we stood under the maples, he turned to me with an impenetrable expression. "You will know when to use the key," he said: "Come, Pierpont, we must try to find Roy's fountain."

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VI.

AT two o'clock that afternoon, at Barris' suggestion, we gave up the search for the fountain in the glade and cut across the forest to the spinney where David and Howlett were waiting with our guns and the three dogs.

Pierpont guyed me unmercifully about the "dream-lady" as he called her, and, but for the significant coincidence of Ysonde's and Barris' questions concerning the white scar on my forehead, I should long ago have been perfectly persuaded that I had dreamed the whole thing. As it was, I had no explanation to offer. We had not been able to find the glade although fifty times I came to landmarks which convinced me that we were just about to enter it. Barris was quiet, scarcely uttering a word to either of us during the entire search. I had never before seen him depressed in spirits. However, when we came in sight of the spinney where a cold bit of grouse and a bottle of Burgundy awaited each, Barris seemed to recover his habitual good humor.

"Here 's to the dream-lady!" said Pierpont, raising his glass and standing up.

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I did not like it. Even if she was only a dream, it irritated me to hear Pierpont's mocking voice. Perhaps Barris understood,—I don't know, but he bade Pierpont drink his wine without further noise, and that young man obeyed with a child-like confidence which almost made Barris smile.

"What about the snipe, David," I asked; "the meadows should be in good condition."

"There is not a snipe on the meadows, sir," said David solemnly.

"Impossible," exclaimed Barris, "they can't have left."

"They have, sir," said David in a sepulchral voice which I hardly recognized.

We all three looked at the old man curiously, waiting for his explanation of this disappointing but sensational report.

David looked at Howlett and Howlett examined the sky.

"I was going," began the old man, with his eyes fastened on Howlett, "I was going along by the spinney with the dogs when I heard a noise in the covert and I seen Howlett come walkin' very fast toward me. In fact," continued David, "I may say he was runnin'. Was you runnin', Howlett?"

Howlett said "Yes," with a decorous cough.

"I beg pardon," said David, "but I 'd rather Howlett told the rest. He saw things which I did not."

"Go on, Howlett," commanded Pierpont, much interested.

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Howlett coughed again behind his large red hand.

"What David says is true sir," he began; "I h'observed the dogs at a distance 'ow they was a workin' sir, and David stood a lightin' of 's pipe be'ind the spotted beech when I see a 'ead pop up in the covert 'oldin a stick like 'e was h'aimin' at the dogs sir"—

"A head holding a stick?" said Pierpont severely.

"The 'ead 'ad 'ands, sir," explained Howlett, "'ands that 'eld a painted stick,—like that, sir. 'Owlett, thinks I to meself, this 'ere 's queer, so I jumps in an' runs, but the beggar 'e seen me an' w'en I comes alongside of David, 'e was gone. ''Ello 'Owlett,' sez David, 'what the 'ell'—I beg pardon, sir,—'' 'ow did you come 'ere,' sez 'e very loud. 'Run!' sez I, 'the Chinaman is harryin' the dawgs!' 'For Gawd's sake wot Chinaman?' sez David, h'aimin' 'is gun at every bush. Then I thinks I see 'im an' we run an' run, the dawgs a boundin' close to heel sir, but we don't see no Chinaman."

"I 'll tell the rest," said David, as Howlett coughed and stepped in a modest corner behind the dogs.

"Go on," said Barris in a strange voice.

"Well sir, when Howlett and I stopped chasin', we was on the cliff overlooking the south meadow. I noticed that there was hundreds of birds there, mostly yellow-legs and plover, and Howlett seen

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them too. Then before I could say a word to Howlett, something out in the lake gave a splash —a splash as if the whole cliff had fallen into the water. I was that scared that I jumped straight into the bush and Howlett he sat down quick, and all those snipe wheeled up—there was hundreds,—all a squeelin' with fright, and the wood-duck came bowlin' over the meadows as if the old Nick was behind."

David paused and glanced meditatively at the dogs.

"Go on," said Barris in the same strained voice.

"Nothing more sir. The snipe did not come back."

"But that splash in the lake?"

"I don't know what it was sir."

"A salmon? A salmon could n't have frightened the duck and the snipe that way?"

"No—oh no, sir. If fifty salmon had jumped they could n't have made that splash. Could n't they, Howlett?"

"No 'ow," said Howlett.

"Roy," said Barris at length, "what David tells us settles the snipe shooting for to-day. I am going to take Pierpont up to the house. Howlett and David will follow with the dogs,—I have something to say to them. If you care to come, come along; if not, go and shoot a brace of grouse for dinner and be back by eight if you want to see what Pierpont and I discovered last night."

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David whistled Gamin and Mioche to heel and followed Howlett and his hamper toward the house. I called Voyou to my side, picked up my gun and turned to Barris.

"I will be back by eight," I said; "you are expecting to catch one of the gold-makers are you not?"

"Yes," said Barris listlessly.

Pierpont began to speak about the Chinaman but Barris motioned him to follow, and, nodding to me, took the path that Howlett and David had followed toward the house. When they disappeared I tucked my gun under my arm and turned sharply into the forest, Voyou trotting close to my heels.

In spite of myself the continued apparition of the Chinaman made me nervous. If he troubled me again I had fully decided to get the drop on him and find out what he was doing in the Cardinal Woods. If he could give no satisfactory account of himself I would march him in to Barris as a gold-making suspect,—I would march him in anyway, I thought, and rid the forest of his ugly face. I wondered what it was that David had heard in the lake. It must have been a big fish, a salmon, I thought; probably David's and Howlett's nerves were overwrought after their Celestial chase.

A whine from the dog broke the thread of my meditation and I raised my head. Then I stopped short in my tracks.

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The lost glade lay straight before me.

Already the dog had bounded into it, across the velvet turf to the carved stone where a slim figure sat. I saw my dog lay his silky head lovingly against her silken kirtle; I saw her face bend above him, and I caught my breath and slowly entered the sun-lit glade.

Half timidly she held out one white hand.

"Now that you have come," she said, "I can show you more of my work. I told you that I could do other things besides these dragon-flies and moths carved here in stone. Why do you stare at me so? Are you ill?"

"Ysonde," I stammered.

"Yes," she said, with a faint color under her eyes.

"I—I never expected to see you again," I blurted out, "—you—I—I—thought I had dreamed——"

"Dreamed, of me? Perhaps you did, is that strange?"

"Strange? N—no—but—where did you go when—when we were leaning over the fountain together? I saw your face,—your face reflected beside mine and then—then suddenly I saw the blue sky and only a star twinkling."

"It was because you fell asleep," she said, "was it not?"

"I—asleep?"

"You slept—I thought you were very tired and I went back——"

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"Back?—where?"

"Back to my home where I carve my beautiful images; see, here is one I brought to show you to-day."

I took the sculptured creature that she held toward me, a massive golden lizard with frail claw-spread wings of gold so thin that the sunlight burned through and fell on the ground in flaming gilded patches.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, "this is astounding! Where did you learn to do such work? Ysonde, such a thing is beyond price!"

"Oh, I hope so," she said earnestly, "I can't bear to sell my work, but my step-father takes it and sends it away. This is the second thing I have done and yesterday he said I must give it to him. I suppose he is poor."

"I don't see how he can be poor if he gives you gold to model in," I said, astonished.

"Gold!" she exclaimed, "gold! He has a room full of gold! He makes it."

I sat down on the turf at her feet completely unnerved.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked, a little troubled.

"Where does your step-father live?" I said at last.

"Here."

"Here!"

"In the woods near the lake. You could never find our house."

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"A house!"

"Of course. Did you think I lived in a tree? How silly. I live with my step-father in a beautiful house,—a small house, but very beautiful. He makes his gold there but the men who carry it away never come to the house, for they don't know where it is and if they did they could not get in. My step-father carries the gold in lumps to a canvas satchel. When the satchel is full he takes it out into the woods where the men live and I don't know what they do with it. I wish he could sell the gold and become rich for then I could go back to Yian where all the gardens are sweet and the river flows under the thousand bridges."

"Where is this city?" I asked faintly.

"Yian? I don't know. It is sweet with perfume and the sound of silver bells all day long. Yesterday I carried a blossom of dried lotus buds from Yian, in my breast, and all the woods were fragrant. Did you smell it?"

"Yes."

"I wondered, last night, whether you did. How beautiful your dog is; I love him. Yesterday I thought most about your dog but last night——"

"Last night," I repeated below my breath.

"I thought of you. Why do you wear the dragon-claw?"

I raised my hand impulsively to my forehead, covering the scar.

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"What do you know of the dragon-claw?" I muttered.

"It is the symbol of Yue-Laou, and Yue-Laou rules the Kuen-Yuin, my step-father says. My step-father tells me everything that I know. We lived in Yian until I was sixteen years old. I am eighteen now; that is two years we have lived in the forest. Look!—see those scarlet birds! What are they? There are birds of the same color in Yian."

"Where is Yian, Ysonde?" I asked with deadly calmness.

"Yian? I don't know."

"But you have lived there?"

"Yes, a very long time."

"Is it across the ocean, Ysonde?"

"It is across seven oceans and the great river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."

"Who told you that?"

"Who? My step-father; he tells me everything."

"Will you tell me his name, Ysonde?"

"I don't know it, he is my step-father, that is all."

"And what is your name?"

"You know it, Ysonde."

"Yes, but what other name."

"That is all, Ysonde. Have you two names? Why do you look at me so impatiently?"

"Does your step-father make gold? Have you seen him make it?"

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"Oh yes. He made it also in Yian and I loved to watch the sparks at night whirling like golden bees. Yian is lovely,—if it is all like our garden and the gardens around. I can see the thousand bridges from my garden and the white mountain beyond—"

"And the people—tell me of the people, Ysonde!" I urged gently.

"The people of Yian? I could see them in swarms like ants—oh! many, many millions crossing and recrossing the thousand bridges."

"But how did they look? Did they dress as I do?"

"I don't know. They were very far away, moving specks on the thousand bridges. For sixteen years I saw them every day from my garden but I never went out of my garden into the streets of Yian, for my step-father forbade me."

"You never saw a living creature near by in Yian?" I asked in despair.

"My birds, oh such tall, wise-looking birds, all over grey and rose color."

She leaned over the gleaming water and drew her polished hand across the surface.

"Why do you ask me these questions," she murmured; "are you displeased?"

"Tell me about your step-father," I insisted.

"Does he look as I do? Does he dress, does he speak as I do? Is he American?"

"American? I don't know. He does not dress as you do and he does not look as you do.

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He is old, very, very old. He speaks sometimes as you do, sometimes as they do in Yian. I speak also in both manners."

"Then speak as they do in Yian," I urged impatiently, "speak as—why, Ysonde! why are you crying? Have I hurt you?—I did not intend,—I did not dream of your caring! There Ysonde, forgive me,—see, I beg you on my knees here at your feet."

I stopped, my eyes fastened on a small golden ball which hung from her waist by a golden chain. I saw it trembling against her thigh, I saw it change color, now crimson, now purple, now flaming scarlet. It was the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.

She bent over me and laid her fingers gently on my arm.

"Why do you ask me such things?" she said, while the tears glistened on her lashes. "It hurts me here,—" she pressed her hand to her breast,—"it pains.—I don't know why. Ah, now your eyes are hard and cold again; you are looking at the golden globe which hangs from my waist. Do you wish to know also what that is?"

"Yes," I muttered, my eyes fixed on the infernal color flames which subsided as I spoke, leaving the ball a pale gilt again.

"It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," she said in a trembing voice; "why do you ask?"

"Is it yours?"

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"Y—yes."

"Where did you get it?" I cried harshly.

"My—my step-fa——"

Then she pushed me away from her with all the strength of her slender wrists and covered her face.

If I slipped my arm about her and drew her to me,—if I kissed away the tears that fell slowly between her fingers,—if I told her how I loved her —how it cut me to the heart to see her unhappy, —after all that is my own business. When she smiled through her tears, the pure love and sweetness in her eyes lifted my soul higher than the high moon vaguely glimmering through the sun-lit blue above. My happiness was so sudden, so fierce and overwhelming that I only knelt there, her fingers clasped in mine, my eyes raised to the blue vault and the glimmering moon. Then something in the long grass beside me moved close to my knees and a damp acrid odor filled my nostrils.

"Ysonde!" I cried, but the touch of her hand was already gone and my two clenched fists were cold and damp with dew.

"Ysonde!" I called again, my tongue stiff with fright;—but I called as one awaking from a dream—a horrid dream, for my nostrils quivered with the damp acrid odor and I felt the crab-reptile clinging to my knee. Why had the night fallen so swiftly,—and where was I—where?—stiff, chilled, torn, and bleeding, lying flung like a

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corpse over my own threshold with Voyou licking my face and Barris stooping above me in the light of a lamp that flared and smoked in the night breeze like a torch. Faugh ! the choking stench of the lamp aroused me and I cried out :

"Ysonde !"

"What the devil 's the matter with him ?" muttered Pierpont, lifting me in his arms like a child, "has he been stabbed, Barris ?"

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VII.

IN a few minutes I was able to stand and walk stiffly into my bedroom where Howlett had a hot bath ready and a hotter tumbler of Scotch. Pierpont sponged the blood from my throat where it had coagulated. The cut was slight, almost invisible, a mere puncture from a thorn. A shampoo cleared my mind, and a cold plunge and alcohol friction did the rest.

"Now," said Pierpont, "swallow your hot Scotch and lie down. Do you want a broiled woodcock? Good, I fancy you are coming about."

Barris and Pierpont watched me as I sat on the edge of the bed, solemnly chewing on the woodcock's wishbone and sipping my Bordeaux, very much at my ease.

Pierpont sighed his relief.

"So," he said pleasantly, "it was a mere case of ten dollars or ten days. I thought you had been stabbed——"

"I was not intoxicated," I replied, serenely picking up a bit of celery.

"Only jagged?" enquired Pierpont, full of sympathy.

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"Nonsense," said Barris, "let him alone. Want some more celery, Roy?—it will make you sleep."

"I don't want to sleep," I answered; "when are you and Pierpont going to catch your Goldmaker?"

Barris looked at his watch and closed it with a snap.

"In an hour; you don't propose to go with us?"

"But I do,—toss me a cup of coffee, Pierpont, will you,—that 's just what I propose to do. Howlett, bring the new box of Panatella's,—the mild imported;—and leave the decanter. Now Barris, I 'll be dressing, and you and Pierpont keep still and listen to what I have to say. Is that door shut tight?"

Barris locked it and sat down.

"Thanks," said I, "Barris, where is the city of Yian?"

An expression akin to terror flashed into Barris' eyes and I saw him stop breathing for a moment.

"There is no such city," he said at length, "have I been talking in my sleep?"

"It is a city," I continued, calmly, "where the river winds under the thousand bridges, where the gardens are sweet scented and the air is filled with the music of silver bells——"

"Stop!" gasped Barris, and rose trembling from his chair. He had grown ten years cider.

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"Roy," interposed Pierpont coolly, "what the deuce are you harrying Barris for?"

I looked at Barris and he looked at me. After a second or two he sat down again.

"Go on, Roy," he said.

"I must," I answered, "for now I am certain that I have not dreamed."

I told them everything; but, even as I told it, the whole thing seemed so vague, so unreal, that at times I stopped with the hot blood tingling in my ears, for it seemed impossible that sensible men, in the year of our Lord 1896 could seriously discuss such matters.

I feared Pierpont, but he did not even smile. As for Barris, he sat with his handsome head sunk on his breast, his unlighted pipe clasped tight in both hands.

When I had finished, Pierpont turned slowly and looked at Barris. Twice he moved his lips as if about to ask something and then remained mute.

"Yian is a city," said Barris, speaking dreamily; "was that what you wished to know, Pierpont?"

We nodded silently.

"Yian is a city," repeated Barris, "where the great river winds under the thousand bridges, —where the gardens are sweet scented, and the air is filled with the music of silver bells."

My lips formed the question, "Where is this city?"

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"It lies," said Barris, almost querulously, "across the seven oceans and the river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."

"What do you mean?" said Pierpont.

"Ah," said Barris, rousing himself with an effort and raising his sunken eyes, "I am using the allegories of another land; let it pass. Have I not told you of the Kuen-Yuin? Yian is the centre of the Kuen-Yuin. It lies hidden in that gigantic shadow called China, vague and vast as the midnight Heavens,—a continent unknown, impenetrable."

"Impenetrable," repeated Pierpont below his breath.

"I have seen it," said Barris dreamily. "I have seen the dead plains of Black Cathay and I have crossed the mountains of Death, whose summits are above the atmosphere. I have seen the shadow of Xangi cast across Abaddon. Better to die a million miles from Yezd and Ater Quedah than to have seen the white water-lotus close in the shadow of Xangi! I have slept among the ruins of Xaindu where the winds never cease and the Wulwulleh is wailed by the dead."

"And Yian," I urged gently.

There was an unearthly look on his face as he turned slowly toward me.

"Yian,—I have lived there—and loved there. When the breath of my body shall cease, when the dragon's claw shall fade from my arm,"—he

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tore up his sleeve, and we saw a white crescent shining above his elbow,—"when the light of my eyes has faded forever, then, even then I shall not forget the city of Yian. Why, it is my home, —mine! The river and the thousand bridges, the white peak beyond, the sweet-scented gardens, the lilies, the pleasant noise of the summer wind laden with bee music and the music of bells, —all these are mine. Do you think because the Kuen-Yuin feared the dragon's claw on my arm that my work with them is ended? Do you think that because Yue-Laou could give, that I acknowledge his right to take away? Is he Xangi in whose shadow the white water-lotus dares not raise its head? No! No!" he cried violently, "it was not from Yue-Laou, the sorcerer, the Maker of Moons, that my happiness came! It was real, it was not a shadow to vanish like a tinted bubble! Can a sorcerer create and give a man the woman he loves? Is Yue-Laou as great as Xangi then? Xangi is God. In His own time, in His infinite goodness and mercy He will bring me again to the woman I love. And I know she waits for me at God's feet."

In the strained silence that followed I could hear my heart's double beat and I saw Pierpont's face, blanched and pitiful. Barris shook himself and raised his head. The change in his ruddy face frightened me.

"Heed!" he said, with a terrible glance at me; "the print of the dragon's claw is on your fore-

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head and Yue-Laou knows it. If you must love, then love like a man, for you will suffer like a soul in hell, in the end. What is her name again?"

"Ysonde," I answered simply.

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VIII.

AT nine o'clock that night we caught one of the Goldmakers. I do not know how Barris had laid his trap; all I saw of the affair can be told in a minute or two.

We were posted on the Cardinal road about a mile below the house, Pierpont and I with drawn revolvers on one side, under a butternut tree, Barris on the other, a Winchester across his knees.

I had just asked Pierpont the hour, and he was feeling for his watch when far up the road we heard the sound of a galloping horse, nearer, nearer, clattering, thundering past. Then Barris' rifle spat flame and the dark mass, horse and rider, crashed into the dust. Pierpont had the half stunned horseman by the collar in a second, —the horse was stone dead,—and, as we lighted a pine knot to examine the fellow, Barris' two riders galloped up and drew bridle beside us.

"Hm!" said Barris with a scowl, "it's the 'Shiner,' or I'm a moonshiner."

We crowded curiously around to see the "Shiner." He was red-headed, fat and filthy,

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and his little red eyes burned in his head like the eyes of an angry pig.

Barris went through his pockets methodically while Pierpont held him and I held the torch. The Shiner was a gold mine; pockets, shirt, boot-legs, hat, even his dirty fists, clutched tight and bleeding, were bursting with lumps of soft yellow gold. Barris dropped this "moonshine gold," as we had come to call it, into the pockets of his shooting-coat, and withdrew to question the prisoner. He came back again in a few minutes and motioned his mounted men to take the Shiner in charge. We watched them, rifle on thigh, walking their horses slowly away into the darkness, the Shiner, tightly bound, shuffling sullenly between them.

"Who is the Shiner?" asked Pierpont, slipping the revolver into his pocket again.

"A moonshiner, counterfeiter, forger, and highwayman," said Barris, "and probably a murderer. Drummond will be glad to see him, and I think it likely he will be persuaded to confess to him what he refuses to confess to me."

"Would n't he talk?" I asked.

"Not a syllable. Pierpont, there is nothing more for you to do."

"For me to do? Are you not coming back with us, Barris?"

"No," said Barris.

We walked along the dark road in silence for a while, I wondering what Barris intended to do,

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but he said nothing more until we reached our own verandah. Here he held out his hand, first to Pierpont, then to me, saying good-bye as though he were going on a long journey.

"How soon will you be back?" I called out to him as he turned away toward the gate. He came across the lawn again and again took our hands with a quiet affection that I had never imagined him capable of.

"I am going," he said, "to put an end to his gold-making to-night. I know that you fellows have never suspected what I was about on my little solitary evening strolls after dinner. I will tell you. Already I have unobtrusively killed four of these gold-makers,—my men put them under ground just below the new wash-out at the four mile stone. There are three left alive,—the Shiner whom we have, another criminal named 'Yellow,' or 'Yaller' in the vernacular, and the third——"

"The third," repeated Pierpont, excitedly.

"The third I have never yet seen. But I know who and what he is,—I know; and if he is of human flesh and blood, his blood will flow to-night."

As he spoke a slight noise across the turf attracted my attention. A mounted man was advancing silently in the starlight over the spongy meadowland. When he came nearer Barris struck a match, and we saw that he bore a corpse across his saddle bow.

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"Yaller, Colonel Barris," said the man, touching his slouched hat in salute.

This grim introduction to the corpse made me shudder, and, after a moment's examination of the stiff, wide-eyed dead man, I drew back.

"Identified," said Barris, "take him to the four mile post and carry his effects to Washington,—under seal, mind, Johnstone."

Away cantered the rider with his ghastly burden, and Barris took our hands once more for the last time. Then he went away, gaily, with a jest on his lips, and Pierpont and I turned back into the house.

For an hour we sat moodily smoking in the hall before the fire, saying little until Pierpont burst out with: "I wish Barris had taken one of us with him to-night!"

The same thought had been running in my mind, but I said: "Barris knows what he 's about."

This observation neither comforted us nor opened the lane to further conversation, and after a few minutes Pierpont said good night and called for Howlett and hot water. When he had been warmly tucked away by Howlett, I turned out all but one lamp, sent the dogs away with David and dismissed Howlett for the night.

I was not inclined to retire for I knew I could not sleep. There was a book lying open on the table beside the fire and I opened it and read a page or two, but my mind was fixed on other things.

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The window shades were raised and I looked out at the star-set firmament. There was no moon that night but the sky was dusted all over with sparkling stars and a pale radiance, brighter even than moonlight, fell over meadow and wood. Far away in the forest I heard the voice of the wind, a soft warm wind that whispered a name, Ysonde.

"Listen," sighed the voice of the wind, and "listen" echoed the swaying trees with every little leaf a-quiver. I listened.

Where the long grasses trembled with the cricket's cadence I heard her name, Ysonde; I heard it in the rustling woodbine where grey moths hovered; I heard it in the drip, drip, drip of the dew from the porch. The silent meadow brook whispered her name, the rippling woodland streams repeated it, Ysonde, Ysonde, until all earth and sky were filled with the soft thrill, Ysonde, Ysonde, Ysonde.

A night-thrush sang in a thicket by the porch and I stole to the verandah to listen. After a while it began again, a little further on. I ventured out into the road. Again I heard it far away in the forest and I followed it, for I knew it was singing of Ysonde.

When I came to the path that leaves the main road and enters the Sweet-Fern Covert below the spinney, I hesitated; but the beauty of the night lured me on and the night-thrushes called me from every thicket. In the starry radiance,

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shrubs, grasses, field flowers, stood out distinctly, for there was no moon to cast shadows. Meadow and brook, grove and stream, were illuminated by the pale glow. Like great lamps lighted the planets hung from the high domed sky and through their mysterious rays the fixed stars, calm, serene, stared from the heavens like eyes.

I waded on waist deep through fields of dewy golden-rod, through late clover and wild-oat wastes, through crimson fruited sweetbrier, blueberry, and wild plum, until the low whisper of the Wier Brook warned me that the path had ended.

But I would not stop, for the night air was heavy with the perfume of water-lilies and far away, across the low wooded cliffs and the wet meadowland beyond, there was a distant gleam of silver, and I heard the murmur of sleepy waterfowl. I would go to the lake. The way was clear except for the dense young growth and the snares of the moose-bush.

The night-thrushes had ceased but I did not want for the company of living creatures. Slender, quick darting forms crossed my path at intervals, sleek mink, that fled like shadows at my step, wiry weasels and fat musk-rats, hurrying onward to some tryst or killing.

I never had seen so many little woodland creatures on the move at night. I began to wonder where they all were going so fast, why they all hurried on in the same direction. Now

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I passed a hare hopping through the brushwood, now a rabbit scurrying by, flag hoisted. As I entered the beech second-growth two foxes glided by me; a little further on a doe crashed out of the underbrush, and close behind her stole a lynx, eyes shining like coals.

He neither paid attention to the doe nor to me, but loped away toward the north.

The lynx was in flight.

"From what?" I asked myself, wondering. There was no forest fire, no cyclone, no flood.

If Barris had passed that way could he have stirred up this sudden exodus? Impossible; even a regiment in the forest could scarcely have put to rout these frightened creatures.

"What on earth," thought I, turning to watch the headlong flight of a fisher-cat, "what on earth has started the beasts out at this time of night."

I looked up into the sky. The placid glow of the fixed stars comforted me and I stepped on through the narrow spruce belt that leads down to the borders of the Lake of the Stars.

Wild cranberry and moose-bush entwined my feet, dewy branches spattered me with moisture, and the thick spruce needles scraped my face as I threaded my way over mossy logs and deep spongy tussocks down to the level gravel of the lake shore.

Although there was no wind the little waves were hurrying in from the lake and I heard them

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splashing among the pebbles. In the pale star glow thousands of water-lilies lifted their half-closed chalices toward the sky.

I threw myself full length upon the shore, and, chin on hand, looked out across the lake.

Splash, splash, came the waves along the shore, higher, nearer, until a film of water, thin and glittering as a knife blade, crept up to my elbows. I could not understand it; the lake was rising, but there had been no rain. All along the shore the water was running up; I heard the waves among the sedge grass; the weeds at my side were awash in the ripples. The lilies rocked on the tiny waves, every wet pad rising on the swells, sinking, rising again until the whole lake was glimmering with undulating blossoms. How sweet and deep was the fragrance from the lilies. And now the water was ebbing, slowly, and the waves receded, shrinking from the shore rim until the white pebbles appeared again, shining like froth on a brimming glass.

No animal swimming out in the darkness along the shore, no heavy salmon surging, could have set the whole shore aflood as though the wash from a great boat were rolling in. Could it have been the overflow, through the Weir Brook, of some cloud-burst far back in the forest? This was the only way I could account for it, and yet when I had crossed the Wier Brook I had not noticed that it was swollen.

And as I lay there thinking, a faint breeze

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sprang up and I saw the surface of the lake whiten with lifted lily pads.

All around me the alders were sighing; I heard the forest behind me stir; the crossed branches rubbing softly, bark against bark. Something—it may have been an owl—sailed out of the night, dipped, soared, and was again engulfed, and far across the water I heard its faint cry, Ysonde.

Then first, for my heart was full, I cast myself down upon my face, calling on her name. My eyes were wet when I raised my head,—for the spray from the shore was drifting in again,—and my heart beat heavily; "No more, no more." But my heart lied, for even as I raised my face to the calm stars, I saw her standing still, close beside me; and very gently I spoke her name, Ysonde. She held out both hands.

"I was lonely," she said, "and I went to the glade, but the forest is full of frightened creatures and they frightened me. Has anything happened in the woods? The deer are running toward the heights."

Her hand still lay in mine as we moved along the shore, and the lapping of the water on rock and shallow was no lower than our voices.

"Why did you leave me without a word, there at the fountain in the glade?" she said.

"I leave you!——"

"Indeed you did, running swiftly with your dog, plunging through thickets and brush,—oh —you frightened me."

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"Did I leave you so?"

"Yes—after——"

"After?"

"You had kissed me——"

Then we leaned down together and looked into the black water set with stars, just as we had bent together over the fountain in the glade.

"Do you remember?" I asked.

"Yes. See, the water is inlaid with silver stars,—everywhere white lilies floating and the stars below, deep, deep down."

"What is the flower you hold in your hand?"

"White water-lotus."

"Tell me about Yue-Laou, Dzil Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin," I whispered, lifting her head so I could see her eyes.

"Would it please you to hear?"

"Yes, Ysonde."

"All that I know is yours, now, as I am yours, all that I am. Bend closer. Is it of Yue-Laou you would know? Yue-Laou is Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin. He lived in the Moon. He is old—very, very old, and once, before he came to rule the Kuen-Yuin, he was the old man who unites with a silken cord all predestined couples, after which nothing can prevent their union. But all that is changed since he came to rule the Kuen-Yuin. Now he has perverted the Xin,—the good genii of China,—and has fashioned from their warped bodies a monster which he calls the Xin. This monster is horrible, for it not only lives in its

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own body, but it has thousands of loathsome satellites,—living creatures without mouths, blind, that move when the Xin moves, like a mandarin and his escort. They are part of the Xin although they are not attached. Yet if one of these satellites is injured the Xin writhes with agony. It is fearful—this huge living bulk and these creatures spread out like severed fingers that wriggle around a hideous hand."

"Who told you this?"

"My step-father."

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes. I have seen one of the Xin's creatures."

"Where, Ysonde?"

"Here in these woods."

"Then you believe there is a Xin here?"

"There must be,—perhaps in the lake——"

"Oh, Xins inhabit lakes?"

"Yes, and the seven seas. I am not afraid here."

"Why?"

"Because I wear the symbol ot the Kuen-Yuin."

"Then I am not safe," I smiled.

"Yes you are, for I hold you in my arms. Shall I tell you more about the Xin? When the Xin is about to do to death a man, the Yeth-hounds gallop through the night——"

"What are the Yeth-hounds, Ysonde?"

"The Yeth-hounds are dogs without heads. They are the spirits of murdered children, which

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pass through the woods at night, making a wailing noise."

"Do you believe this?"

"Yes, for I have worn the yellow lotus——"

"The yellow lotus——"

"Yellow is the symbol of faith——"

"Where?"

"In Yian," she said faintly.

After a while I said, "Ysonde, you know there is a God?"

"God and Xangi are one."

"Have you ever heard of Christ?"

"No," she answered softly.

The wind began again among the tree tops. I felt her hands closing in mine.

"Ysonde," I asked again, "do you believe in sorcerers?"

"Yes, the Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers; Yue-Laou is a sorcerer."

"Have you seen sorcery?"

"Yes, the reptile satellite of the Xin——"

"Anything else?"

"My charm,—the golden ball, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin. Have you seen it change,—have you seen the reptiles writhe——?"

"Yes," said I shortly, and then remained silent, for a sudden shiver of apprehension had seized me. Barris also had spoken gravely, ominously of the sorcerers, the Kuen-Yuin, and I had seen with my own eyes the graven reptiles turning and twisting on the glowing globe.

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"Still," said I aloud, "God lives and sorcery is but a name."

"Ah," murmured Ysonde, drawing closer to me, "they say, in Yian, the Kuen-Yuin live; God is but a name."

"They lie," I whispered fiercely.

"Be careful," she pleaded, "they may hear you. Remember that you have the mark of the dragon's claw on your brow."

"What of it?" I asked, thinking also of the white mark on Barris' arm.

"Ah don't you know that those who are marked with the dragon's claw are followed by Yue-Laou, for good or for evil,—and the evil means death if you offend him?"

"Do you believe that!" I asked impatiently.

"I know it," she sighed.

"Who told you all this? Your step-father? What in Heaven's name is he then,—a Chinaman!"

"I don't know; he is not like you."

"Have—have you told him anything about me?"

"He knows about you—no, I have told him nothing,—ah, what is this—see—it is a cord, a cord of silk about your neck—and about mine!"

"Where did that come from?" I asked astonished.

"It must be—it must be Yue-Laou who binds me to you,—it is as my step-father said—he said Yue-Laou would bind us——"

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"Nonsense," I said almost roughly, and seized the silken cord, but to my amazement it melted in my hand like smoke.

"What is all this damnable jugglery!" I whispered angrily, but my anger vanished as the words were spoken, and a convulsive shudder shook me to the feet. Standing on the shore of the lake, a stone's throw away, was a figure, twisted and bent,—a little old man, blowing sparks from a live coal which he held in his naked hand. The coal glowed with increasing radiance, lighting up the skull-like face above it, and threw a red glow over the sands at his feet. But the face!—the ghastly Chinese face on which the light flickered,—and the snaky slitted eyes, sparkling as the coal glowed hotter. Coal! It was not a coal but a golden globe staining the night with crimson flames,—it was the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.

"See! See!" gasped Ysonde, trembling violently, "see the moon rising from between his fingers! Oh I thought it was my step-father and it is Yue-Laou the Maker of Moons—no! no! it is my step-father—ah God! they are the same!"

Frozen with terror I stumbled to my knees, groping for my revolver which bulged in my coat pocket; but something held me—something which bound me like a web in a thousand strong silky meshes. I struggled and turned but the web grew tighter; it was over us—all around us, drawing, pressing us into each other's arms

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until we lay side by side, bound hand and body and foot, palpitating, panting like a pair of netted pigeons.

And the creature on the shore below! What was my horror to see a moon, huge, silvery, rise like a bubble from between his fingers, mount higher, higher into the still air and hang aloft in the midnight sky, while another moon rose from his fingers, and another and yet another until the vast span of Heaven was set with moons and the earth sparkled like a diamond in the white glare.

A great wind began to blow from the east and it bore to our ears a long mournful howl,—a cry so unearthly that for a moment our hearts stopped.

"The Yeth-hounds!" sobbed Ysonde, "do you hear!—they are passing through the forest! The Xin is near!"

Then all around us in the dry sedge grasses came a rustle as if some small animals were creeping, and a damp acrid odor filled the air. I knew the smell, I saw the spidery crab-like creatures swarm out around me and drag their soft yellow hairy bodies across the shrinking grasses. They passed, hundreds of them, poisoning the air, tumbling, writhing, crawling with their blind mouthless heads raised. Birds, half asleep and confused by the darkness fluttered away before them in helpless fright, rabbits sprang from their forms, weasels glided away

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like flying shadows. What remained of the forest creatures rose and fled from the loathsome invasion ; I heard the squeak of a terrified hare, the snort of stampeding deer, and the lumbering gallop of a bear ; and all the time I was choking, half suffocated by the poisoned air.

Then, as I struggled to free myself from the silken snare about me, I cast a glance of deadly fear at the sorcerer below, and at the same moment I saw him turn in his tracks.

"Halt!" cried a voice from the bushes.

"Barris!" I shouted, half leaping up in my agony.

I saw the sorcerer spring forward, I heard the bang! bang! bang! of a revolver, and, as the sorcerer fell on the water's edge, I saw Barris jump out into the white glare and fire again, once, twice, three times, into the writhing figure at his feet.

Then an awful thing occurred. Up out of the black lake reared a shadow, a nameless shapeless mass, headless, sightless, gigantic, gaping from end to end.

A great wave struck Barris and he fell, another washed him up on the pebbles, another whirled him back into the water and then,—and then the thing fell over him,—and I fainted.

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This, then, is all that I know concerning Yue-Laou and the Xin. I do not fear the ridicule of scientists or of the press for I have told the truth. Barris is gone and the thing that killed him is alive to-day in the Lake of the Stars while the spider-like satellites roam through the Cardinal Woods. The game has fled, the forests around the lake are empty of any living creatures save the reptiles that creep when the Xin moves in the depths of the lake.

General Drummond knows what he has lost in Barris, and we, Pierpont and I, know what we have lost also. His will we found in the drawer, the key of which he had handed me. It was wrapped in a bit of paper on which was written;

"Yue-Laou the sorcerer is here in the Cardinal Woods. I must kill him or he will kill me. He made and gave to me the woman I loved,—he made her,—I saw him,—he made her out of a white water-lotus bud. When our child was born, he came again before me and demanded from me the woman I loved. Then, when I refused, he went away, and that night my wife and child vanished from my side, and I found upon her pillow a white lotus bud. Roy, the woman of your dream, Ysonde, may be my child. God help you if you love her for Yue-Laou will give,—and take away, as though he were Xangi, which is God. I will kill Yue-Laou before I leave this forest,—or he will kill me.

"FRANKLYN BARRIS."

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Now the world knows what Barris thought of the Kuen-Yuin and of Yue-Laou. I see that the newspapers are just becoming excited over the glimpses that Li-Hung-Chang has afforded them of Black Cathay and the demons of the Kuen-Yuin. The Kuen-Yuin are on the move.

Pierpont and I have dismantled the shooting-box in the Cardinal Woods. We hold ourselves ready at a moment's notice to join and lead the first Government party to drag the Lake of the Stars and cleanse the forest of the crab reptiles. But it will be necessary that a large force assembles, and a well-armed force, for we never have found the body of Yue-Laou, and, living or dead, I fear him. Is he living?

Pierpont, who found Ysonde and myself lying unconscious on the lake shore, the morning after, saw no trace of corpse or blood on the sands. He may have fallen into the lake, but I fear and Ysonde fears that he is alive. We never were able to find either her dwelling place or the glade and the fountain again. The only thing that remains to her of her former life is the gold serpent in the Metropolitan Museum and her golden globe, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin; but the latter no longer changes color.

David and the dogs are waiting for me in the court yard as I write. Pierpont is in the gun room loading shells, and Howlet brings him mug after mug of my ale from the wood. Ysonde bends over my desk,—I feel her hand on my arm,

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and she is saying, "Don't you think you have done enough to-day, dear? How can you write such silly nonsense without a shadow of truth or foundation?"

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THE SILENT LAND.

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" There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now;
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is how."

WALT WHITMAN.

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THE SILENT LAND.

"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God."

I.

FERRIS and I had had a dispute, a bitter one, and, as usual, Ferris had pushed his cap over his eyes until the hair on the back of his head stuck out.

"You can't do it," he said, shoving both hands up to the wrists iu his canvas fishing-coat.

"I 'll prove it," said I. "What a stubborn mule you are, Ferris!"

"Stubborn nothing," he retorted, "you and your theories must have your little airing, I suppose, but I don't intend to assist."

"I 'm right sometimes," I said.

"Sometimes you 're wrong, too," said Ferris.

Then he walked off toward the cliffs, whistling, uncompromising, untidy.

"There 's a hole in your leggings!" I called after him, but he did not deign to answer me.

"Obstinate ass," I thought, for we were very

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fond of each other, "if he wastes his time with the Silver Doctor he 'll rue it." Then I looked at Solomon and lighted a cigarette.

Solomon was a bird, an enervating bird of the Ibis species, wrinkled and wizened, like the mummies of his native land, which was Egypt. The bird was mine, a sarcastic tribute from Ferris, and the bird and the sarcasm both bore directly on the only disputes which ever arose between Ferris and myself. The cause of these disputes was a trout-fly, an innocent toy of scarlet and tinsel, known to anglers as the "Red Ibis." I swore by it, Ferris swore at it. In the long winter nights when the streams gurgled under the frozen forests and the lake was a sheet of soggy snow, Ferris and I loafed before the fire pulling tangled masses of leaders and flies about and dragging the silken lines over the rugs to hear the reels click. Every fly known to the brethren of the angle was discussed—every fly except the Red Ibis. We both honestly tried to avoid this bone of contention. We talked of Duns and Hackles, and Spinners and Gnats, but in spite of every precaution the Red Ibis would occasionally rise like a fiery spectre between us, and then we disputed vehemently.

"No angler with a rag of self-respect would use the Ibis," said Ferris, with that obstinate shrug which added gall to the insult, and I—well, the crowning insult came when Ferris sent to Cairo and imported a live Egyptian Ibis for me.

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"Pull out his tail feathers when you 're short of Red Ibis," gasped Ferris, weak with laughter, as I stood silently inspecting the bird in my studio.

"I 'll send him to Central Park," said I, swallowing my wrath; but I thought better of it, and Solomon, the wizened, became an important member of my household.

The bird was a mystery. I never cared to encounter his filmy eyes. Centuries seemed to roll away when he unclosed them, visions of tombs and obelisks filled my mind—glimpses of desert sunsets and the warm waters of lazy rivers. His black shrivelled head, bare as a skull, lay like a withered gourd among the garish flame-coloured feathers on his breast.

"Solly," said I, when Ferris disappeared below the cliff, "do you want a frog?"

The bird unclosed one eye. I went to a pail of water in which I kept minnows, and Solomon followed me, solemnly hopping.

"Help yourself, Solly," said I, uncovering the pail.

I called him Solly because I wished to put myself at ease with this relic of Egyptian Royalty. The splendour of Pharo's court had not dimmed this hoary prophet's eye, which was piercing when the sleepy film left it—piercing enough to make me feel thousands of years young, and very bourgeois. In vain I addressed him as Solly, in vain I gave him chocolate creams,—he was the aristocrat, the venerable high-priest of

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an Empire dead—and I was his man-servant, his ass, and his ox.

Solomon dabbed once or twice at a sportive minnow, pecked pensively at the handle of the pail, swallowed a pebble or two, and then, ruffling his scarlet feathers, sidled aimlessly back into the sedge by the frog-pond. I watched him for awhile, brooding dreamily among the rushes, but he paid no further attention either to me or to the small green frogs that squatted on the lily-pads or floated half submerged, watching him with enormous eyes.

A noisy blue-jay flitted through the orchard and alighted on a crab-apple tree solely to insult Solomon. He of course was unsuccessful, and his language became so utterly unfit for publication that I moved away, shocked and annoyed.

The sun was very hot. It glittered with a blinding light across the rippling pond, where dragon-flies darted and sailed and chased each other over the water, or flitted among the clouds of dancing midges, searching for prey.

A sweet smell came to me from orchard and sedge; there was an odour of scented rushes in the air, and the lingering summer wind bore puffs of perfume from clover-fields and meadows fragrant with flowering mint. I looked again toward the cliffs. Ferris was not in sight.

"Obstinate mule," I thought, and, picking up my rod and fly-book, I sauntered toward the forest.

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"Ferris," said I to myself, "is after that big trout by the Red Rock Rapids, but he 'll never raise him with a Silver Doctor, and he 'll come home in a devil of a temper."

I sat down in a clump of sweet fern and joined my rod. When I had run the silk through the guides and had fastened the nine-foot leader, I opened my fly-book and sought for a Red Ibis fly. There was not one in the book.

"I must send to New York to-morrow," I thought, turning the aluminum leaves impatiently; "fancy my being out of Red Ibis!" I selected a yellow Oak fly for the dropper and a nameless Gnat for the hand-fly, and, drawing the leader down to the reel, started on again, carrying my rod with the tip behind me.

The forest was dim and moist and silent. Where the sunshine fell among the ferns a few flies buzzed in the gilded warmth; but except for this and a strange grey bird which flitted before me silently as I walked, there was no sign of life, nothing stirring, not a rustle among the leaves, not a movement, not a bird-note.

Over moss and dead leaves aglisten in the pale forest light I passed,—over crumbling logs, damp and lichen-covered, half submerged in little pools; and the musty fragrance of the forest mould set me dreaming of dryads, and fauns, and lost altars, whose marbles, stained with tender green, glimmer in ancient forests.

This belt of woods was always silent; I often

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wondered why. There were no birds—none except this strange grey creature which kept flitting ahead of me, uttering no note. It was the first bird I had ever seen in the western forest belt—the first bird except Solomon, who occasionally accompanied me on my trips to the long pool in the river which borders the wooded belt on the west.

It was an unknown bird to me,—I could catch fleeting glimpses of it,—and its long slender wings and dark eyes brought no recollections to my mind.

To the north, south, and east the woods were full of thrushes and wood-peckers; full of game, too—grouse, deer, foxes, and an occasional mink and otter, but the shy wood creatures left the western forest belt alone, and even the trout seemed to shun the dark pools where the river swept the edges of the wood until it curved out again by Lynx Peak. I say the trout shunned it, but there was one, a monstrous fish, wily and subtile, that lived in the long amber pool below. Early in the season Ferris had raised him with a Silver Doctor, and Ferris's madness on the Silver Doctor dated from that moment. His mania for this fly lead him to use it in season and out, and no amount of persuasion or of ridicule moved him.

"Because," said I, "you had a Silver Doctor snapped off by a big fish, do you imagine it 's the only fly in the world?"

"It's good enough for me," he said.

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There were two things which Ferris used to say that maddened me. One was, "The Silver Doctor 's good enough for me ;" the other was, "New York 's good enough for me."

We never discussed the latter question after Ferris had alluded to me as a "Latin Quarter Nondescript," but the battle still raged over the merits of the Silver Doctor and the Red Ibis.

When I came to the wooded slope which overhung the river I buttoned my shooting coat and began a cautious descent, trailing my rod carefully. I headed for the foot of the pool, for one of my theories, which ruffled Ferris, was that certain pools should be fished up stream. This was one of those pools, according to my theory ; and when I had reached the rocks and had waded into the rushing water, I faced up stream and cast straight out into the rapids which curled among the boulders at the foot of the pool.

At the second cast I hooked a snag and waded out to disengage it. Fumbling about under the foaming water I found my fly imbedded in something which refused to give way. I tugged cautiously and gently ; it was useless. Then I rolled up my sleeve and plunged my arm into the water up to the shoulder. This time it did give way ; I drew out my arm and held up something glistening and dripping, in which my hook was firmly imbedded. It was a shoe, small, pointed, high-heeled, and buckled with a silver buckle.

"This," said I, "is most extraordinary," and

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I sat down on a flat rock, holding the shoe close to my eyes.

"Besnard—Paris," I read stamped on the lining over the heel. And the buckle was of sterling silver. I sat for a moment, thinking.

Our cottage, Ferris's and mine, was the only house in the whole region that I knew of, except the old house in the glade by the White Moss Spring. That was unoccupied and had been for years—a crumbling, abandoned farm, tottering among the young growth of an advancing forest. But as I sat thinking I remembered early in the season having seen smoke above the trees once when we were in the neighbourhood of the White Moss Spring, and I recollected that Ferris had spoken of poachers. We had been too lazy to investigate, too lazy even to remember it until, as I sat there holding the small shoe, the incident came back to me, and I wondered whether anybody had taken up an abode in the abandoned farm.

I did n't like it. The forests and streams belonged to Ferris and me, and although up to the present moment it had not been necessary to employ many keepers, I began to fear that our woods were being invaded and that we should soon be obliged to find protection.

I looked at the shoe, turning it over carefully in my hands. It was new—had scarcely been worn at all.

"Pooh," I thought, "the owner of this could scarcely do much damage among the game, but

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of course there may be bigger shoes in company with this, and those bigger shoes had better look out!"

My first impulse was to throw the shoe into the underbrush. I started to do this, and then carefully laid it down on a sun-warmed rock.

"Let it dry," I muttered; "it's evidence for Ferris." But as it happened, Ferris was not destined to see the shoe.

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II.

I FISHED the pool twice, once up and once down, and heaven knows I fished it conscientiously ; but no trout rose to the flies, although I changed the cast half a dozen times and even violated my feelings by tying a Silver Doctor. It was true I glanced up and down the river to see whether Ferris was in sight before I did so.

"The wily old devil won't come up," said I to myself, meaning the trout ; " I'll give him a rest for a while." And I sat down on the rock where the pointed shoe was drying in the sun, laying my rod beside me.

" What's the use of speculating about this shoe," I thought, and straightway began to speculate.

The strange grey bird with the slender wings and dark eyes slipped through the undergrowth along the opposite side of the pool, but it uttered no call, and I caught only fleeting glimpses of it at intervals. Once, for a moment, it flitted quite near, and a sudden sense of having seen it before came over me, but after a little thinking I found myself associating it with a rare bird I had once

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noticed in Northern France, and of course it was impossible that this could be a French bird.

"It was an association of ideas," said I to myself, looking at the mark in the slim shoe. "Besnard—Paris." And I began speculating upon the owner of the shoe.

"Young? Probably. Slender? Probably. Pretty? The deuce take the shoe," I muttered, picking up my rod. Presently I laid it down again, softly.

"Now, perhaps," said I to myself, "this little shoe has tapped the gravel of the Luxembourg, patted the asphalt of the Boulevard des Italiens, brushed the lawns of the Bois—ah me! ah me! —the devil take the shoe!"

The sun beat down upon the rock; the little shoe in my hand was nearly dry.

"No," said I to myself, "I'll not show it to Ferris. And I'll not shove it into my pocket—no—for if Ferris finds it he'll rag me to death. I'll throw it away." I stood up.

"I'll just throw it away," I repeated aloud to encourage myself, for I didn't want to throw it away.

"One, two, three," said I, with an attempt at carelessness which changed to astonishment as I raised my eyes to the bank above whither I had intended to hurl the shoe.

For an instant I stood rigid, my right hand clutching the shoe, arrested in mid air. Then I placed the shoe very carefully upon the rock beside me and took off my shooting-cap.

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"I beg your pardon," said I, "I did not see you."

I stood silent, politely holding my shooting-cap against my stomach. But I was confused, for she had answered me in French, pure Parisian French, and my ideas were considerably unbalanced.

I am afraid I stared a little. I tried not to. She was slender and very young. Her dark eyes, half shadowed under black lashes, made me think of the strange, dark-eyed bird that had followed me. She sat on the crooked trunk of a tree overhanging the bank, her feet negligently crossed, her hands in the pockets of a leather shooting-jacket. I 'm afraid to say how short her skirts were,—but of course this is the age of bicycles and shooting-kilts.

"Madame," I said, trying to keep my eyes from one small stockinged foot, "I have found a shoe—"

"My shoe, Monsieur," she said, serenely.

"Permit me, madame," said I—

"Mademoiselle—" said she—

"Permit me,—a thousand pardons, Mademoiselle,—to return to you your shoe."

"It was very stupid of me to lose it," said she.

"It is nearly dry," said I; "will Mademoiselle pardon the uncommitted stupidity of which I was nearly guilty."

"You were going to throw it away," said she.

"I almost perpetrated that unpardonable crime—"

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"Give it to me," she said, with a gracious gesture.

Now when she smiled I smiled too, and picking up the shoe waded across the pool to the bank under her.

"May I come up?" I asked.

"Pardi, Monsieur, how else am I to get my shoe?"

I clambered up, hanging to limbs and branches. It was a miracle I did not break my neck.

"Why do you not take the path?" she asked. "Do you not know you might fall—and all for a shoe?"

"But such a shoe—"

"True, the buckle is silver—"

"Which I claim the privilege of buckling," said I, dragging myself up beside her.

She deliberately held out her slim stockinged foot, and I slipped the shoe on it.

The silver buckle was not easily buckled. There were difficulties—for the tongue had become bent and needed straightening.

"You might take the shoe off again to arrange the buckle," she said.

"I can straighten it without that," said I.

When at last the buckle was clasped we had been talking so long that I had told her my name, my residence, my profession, and more or less about Ferris. I don't know why I told her all this. She seemed to be interested. Then I asked her if she lived at the "Brambles."

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"The Brambles?" she repeated, looking at her shoes.

"The deserted Farm by the White Moss Spring—"

"Yes—not alone; I have a housekeeper."

"Aged?"

"Very—and fierce. But I shall do as I please."

"Did you buy the house?"

"No. It was empty, and I walked in. Next day they sent my twelve trunks from Lynne Centre. The furniture was good."

"And you have been there for two months?"

"Yes. I have a horse and dog cart too. Rose drives to Lynne Centre twice a week for the marketing. I think I shall keep a cow—I generally do what I please. I choose to amuse myself with you just now."

"This," said I, "is a very strange history; did you know that Mr. Ferris and myself—existed?"

"It is not a strange history,—no, I once saw your house as I passed through the forest belt, but there was nobody there on the lawn except an ordinary person with little side whiskers."

"Howlett!" I exclaimed.

"Comment?" she asked.

"A servant, an Englishman."

"Probably," said she, looking dreamily at me.

Then I told her all about Ferris and myself; how we came every spring to the Clover Cottage

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with Howlett, a cook, and three dogs as retinue, how we fished in summer and shot in the autumn, how twice a year men came all the way from Lynne Center to house our hay and repair damages, how the game-keepers lurked at the mouth of the valley, miles to the south, to prevent poachers from entering, but we concluded it was not necessary for keepers to patrol the woods inside the valley.

"Now," I said, "the poachers are in our very midst—here established—and such dangerous poachers, too! What shall we do with them, Mademoiselle?"

"You mean me," she said, with wide open eyes.

"No," said I, "I do not mean you—you are very welcome in our valley."

"But I am sure you do mean me," she said, smiling.

Then we talked of other things, of Paris and France; of trout, and flies, and Ferris, of Normandy, and the beauty of the world; but it was nearly five o'clock before we spoke of love.

"I have never loved," she said, looking at me calmly.

"Oh, how unnecessary!" I thought, for I had believed her clever.

"But," she continued, gravely, "I think it is time that I did."

"I think so too," said I.

"I should like to fall in love," said she; "I have nothing else to do."

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"I also am very idle," I said.

"Then," said she, "the opportunity only is lacking."

I think I muttered something about poachers —I was not perfectly cool.

"Now," said she, "I know you mean me!"

"Ah," said I, "I mean a keener poacher than you or I, a free rover more to be dreaded than an army of riflemen."

"Then you don't mean me," she said.

I shook my head.

"Do you know," said she, "I should very much like to be the heroine of a romance."

"I will aid you to be one!" I said, hastily. We had known each other nearly three hours.

"Let us," said she, "pretend that this is the forest of Versailles in the time of Louis Quinze."

"Let us indeed!" I cried, enthusiastically."

"And you are a Count——"

"And you a Marquise——"

"Named Diane; it is my real name."

"Diane."

"And you——"

"My real name is Louis——"

"It will do; you may kiss my hand."

I wondered just where she was going to draw the line. Then, the devil prompting, I entered recklessly into this most extraordinary adventure.

And what an adventure! Words, thoughts even failed me as I looked at her. This wood-

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land maid with the wonderful eyes! There was no mistaking the challenge in her eyes, the half-innocent smile, the utter disregard for every human conventionality.

"How," thought I—"how can such a woman wear a childlike face!" I had known coquettes, —many,—but the depth of this strange girl's recklessness I feared to sound—I dreaded almost to understand.

"She is too deep," said I to myself—"too deep for me," and I looked her questioningly in the eyes.

I don't know why or how,—I never shall know probably, but a sudden conviction seized me that she was as innocent as she looked. Imagine a man coming to such a conclusion! I felt inclined to laugh, and yet I was as firmly convinced as though I had known her all my life.

"You may kiss my hand," she said, and held it out to me.

I did. I wished I had n't a moment later, for I tumbled head over heels in love with her and fairly gasped at the idea.

"Lovers in the Court of Louis Quinze resembled us, I think," she said, after a long silence.

"We will try to make the resemblance perfect," said I, taking both her hands in mine.

She bent her head a little,—there was just a shadow of resistance,—then I kissed her on the lips.

There are moments in a man's life when he

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does not know whether he is a-foot or a-horseback. I remember that I sat down on the bank and carefully uprooted several ferns. When I had regained control of my voice,—the little maid was very silent,—I asked her to tell me of herself, if it might please her to do so.

"I was born," said the little maid, resting her small head on one hand, "in Rouen. Do you know Rouen?"

"Yes."

"Papa was an officer, and he killed his general when I was seven years old. It was something about Mama; I never saw her again. Then we went to Canada very quickly; Papa died there. I had been in a convent school; I ran away, and went to New York. I am nineteen, and very reckless."

"Yes, Diane."

"I have a great deal of money in banknotes. It was Papa's. I have never counted it—it is in a big trunk. I understand English, but do not care to speak it. I do not care what becomes of me; I wish it were over—this life. You are the first man who ever kissed me. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, Diane.

"I wonder you do. Let us go down to the river where the sunlight falls. The descent is easy——"

"Diane—you must not go——"

"With you— will you give me your hand?"

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"Come."

"Did you see that shy grey bird?" said the little maid, hesitating on the slope, her hand in in mine.

I could not see it, for we had already begun the descent.

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III.

"WHERE the mischief have you been all day?" demanded Ferris that evening as we sat on the veranda after dinner.

"Well," said I lighting a pipe, "when you had your fit of sulks I went off for a brace of trout."

"Did you see anything worth seeing?"

"I saw no trout," said I.

"Unfortunate, eh?"

"Oh not very," I said, looking at Solomon.

"Not very?"

"Look at that ridiculous bird, Ferris."

"Swallowed a frog the wrong way," said Ferris, watching the solemn contortions of Solomon; "he looks like a little Jew in a crimson overcoat with a stomach ache. What fly did you use, Louis?"

"Everything; could n't raise a fin."

"Oh, you 've been trying that old devil down by the west woods! I should think you 'd let him alone; it 's useless," yawned Ferris.

"I 'm going to try for him every day till I get him," said I, trying not to lie more than necessary: "Of course you 'll not infringe?"

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"Infringe! Not much! You can have the whole west woods to your own sweet self; but you 're an idiot!"

"Not at all," said I, thankfully; and in a burst of confidence I confessed that I had used a Silver Doctor.

There was a momentary gleam of triumph in Ferris's eyes, but he was very decent about it and asked me most politely for the loan of a Red Ibis. Oh men of the busy world, learn courtesy from the angler! There are other things you need not learn from anglers.

"My dear fellow," said I, more touched than I had been for a long time, "I have n't a Red Ibis left. I shall write Conroy to-night before I retire. If you really do want an Ibis I will catch Solomon and pluck a plume from his tail feathers."

"I don't want it enough to inconvenience you or hurt Solomon's feelings," said Ferris, laughing.

After a long interval of silent smoking Ferris rose and yawned at the moon.

"Do you know what a Spirit-bird is, Ferris?" I asked, rapping my pipe on the arm of my chair.

"Spirit-bird—the French one—the Oiseau Saint-Esprit? Yes, I 've seen one—in the Vosges."

"Grey—with slim wings and big dark eyes?"

"That 's the bird," said Ferris; "why?"

"Well, I thought I saw one to-day. Of course that 's impossible."

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"Of course," said Ferris, yawning again! "I'm going to turn in; good-night, old chap."

"Good-night," said I, tapping nervously on the veranda with my pipe.

Howlett came out a few moments later with my wading-shoes which he had been oiling.

"Well," said I, "are the hob-nails all right?"

"Seving 'ob nails is h'out, sir," replied Howlett, holding up the shoes for my inspection.

"Put them in as soon as they're dry. Did you oil the bamboo? Good. Is my lamp lighted? Put it out—and you need not sit up, Howlett; I'm going for a stroll."

"Thank you sir," said Howlett,—"and Solomon, sir?"

Now it was one of my delights to see Howlett house Solomon. The wily Ibis loved to snoop about in the moonlight, and he was always ready for Howlett when that dignified servant came to round him up.

I looked at Solomon, who stood gloomily brooding among the water-lilies.

"He ought to be in bed," said I.

Howlett descended the veranda steps with arms extended, but Solomon sidled out into the pond. Howlett pleaded earnestly. He flattered and cajoled, but Solomon was obdurate.

"Nothink I say do move 'im, sir!" said Howlett, stiffly; "he is vicious to-night, sir."

"Then take the boat," I said.

Howlett in a boat chasing a sulky Ibis was

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one of those rare spectacles that few are permitted to witness. Once a week Solomon turned "vicious" and then, at Ferris's and my suggestion, Howlett took to the boat. A terrestrial Howlett was solemnly ludicrous, but an aquatic Howlett was impossible. Of course Ferris and I never laughed—that is, aloud, but we usually felt rather weak after it was over.

In the course of half an hour Solomon, mad, wet, and rumpled was cornered by Howlett and clasped to his stiff shirt front, muddy, bedraggled, and kicking.

"Are you not mortified, you bad bird?" said I, as Howlett passed toward the kitchen where Kitty the cook was airing his straw-thatched house.

"A vicious bird, sir, good-night, sir," murmured Howlett.

"Good-night, Howlett; breakfast at seven to-morrow," said I, and sauntered out into the moonlit valley.

I had been walking almost half an hour when it occurred to me that I should be in bed.

"What the deuce am I sprinting about the valley at this hour for?" I thought, looking around.

Over the shadowy meadows the night mist hung, silvered by the moonlight, and I heard the meadow-brook rippling through the sedge. Slender birches glimmered among the alders, and all the little poplar leaves were quivering, but I felt no breath of air.

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Where the dark forest fringed the meadow I saw the moonbeams sparkling on lonely pools, but the depths of the woodland were black and impenetrable, and the forest itself was vague as the mist that shrouded it.

For a long time I stood, looking at the stars and the mist, and little by little I came to understand why I was there alone.

I knew I should go on, I wished to, but I lingered in the moonlight staring at earth and sky until something moved in the thicket beside me, and I followed it, knowing it was the Spirit-bird.

When I entered the forest I could scarcely see my hand, but I felt a trodden path beneath my feet, and I heard before me the whisper of soft wings, and presently I heard the river, rushing through rocks of the western forest, and when I came to the wooded bank the moonlight fell all around me.

There was a narrow strip in the forest, overgrown with silver birch and poplar and lighted by the moon, but I searched it in vain, up and down, up and down, always with the whisper of soft wings in my ears.

At last I called, "Diane," and before I called again, her hands lay close in mine.

* * * * * *

"I came," said the little maid, "because you were coming."

"Who told you I was coming?"

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"Told me? No one told me. Rose is asleep. Why did you come?"

"Why did you, Diane?"

"I? Because you came. How did you find my bower?"

"Your bower, Diane?"

"It is yours I know; I call it mine; I call it the Silent Land."

"It is very silent," I said.

"It is always silent—no birds, not even the noise of the water. Do you think it is sad? There are times when sounds,—the song of living creatures and the countless movements of things that live, trouble me. Then I come here. There are flowers."

"The air is very sweet, too sweet. What is the perfume? The trees are heavy with fragrance. Ah!—are you tired, Diane?"

"No—it is the odour of blossoms; I sleep here sometimes."

"Your hair is loose—how long it is! Is it the perfume from your hair—is it your breath—"

"The blossoms are very sweet; the moon has gone."

"There is a star,—how soft your breath is."

"I do not see the star; where, Louis?"

"It is there;—clouds are veiling it;—there is a mist over all—"

"It is my hair—over your eyes."

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IV.

"HOWLETT," said I, one warm afternoon, "Solomon is unendurable: he follows me everywhere, and I wish you to see that he minds his own business."

"A hobstinate bird, sir," said Howett, "and vicious when crossed,—which I scorn 'is h'anger,—beg pardon sir,—for 'e's took to biting wen 'is vittles disagrees."

"Has he bitten you?"

"Twice, sir,—which 'appily my h'eyes is hun-injured, though h'aimed at by 'is beak."

"This is intolerable," said I; "you must punish him, Howlett."

"'Ow, sir?"

"Tie him up when he bites. Have those flies come from Conroy's?"

"Nothink 'as came, sir."

"Where is Mr. Ferris?"

"Mr. Ferris is a whipping of the h'Amber Pool sir, with three sea-trout to the good and a brace of square tails. Solomon followed 'im, sir, and is h'observing the sport."

"Then I can get away without that red feath-

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ered Paul Pry tiptoeing after me," I thought, and sent Howlett for my rod-case.

"Tell Mr. Ferris, when he returns, that I may not be back until dinner," I said, when Howlett brought the case.

I selected a four-ounce split bamboo, pocketed my fly-book and a tin box of floating flies for dry fishing, picked up a landing-net, and walked away toward the western woodland, whistling. I had not fished for three weeks, although every day I went away into the western woods with rod and creel. Ferris laughed at my infatuation for the long pool where the great fish lay and jeered at me when I returned evening after evening with no trout, although the river, except the western stretch, was full of trout. He had never come to the pool,—I should have seen him from the Silent Land if he had,—but Solomon sneaked after me on several occasions. Once I caught him craning his neck and peering into the bower,—our bower —and as I did not care to have him pilot Ferris thither, I hustled him off.

The woods were fragrant and warm, stained by the afternoon sun; the quiet murmur of the brook came to me from leafy thickets as I walked, and I heard the river rushing in the distance and the summer wind among the pines. White clouds shimmered in the blue above, sailing, sailing God knows where, but they passed across the azure, one by one, drifting to the south, and I watched them with the vague longing that comes to men who watch white sails at sea.

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I had turned my steps toward the long pool, for I had decided to fish that afternoon, wishing to redeem my words to Ferris—at least in part; but as I stepped across the trail I heard the sound of wings, and a shadow glided in front of me toward the forest. It was always so from the first, and now, as always, I turned away, following unquestioningly the Spirit-bird. The noise of the river ceased as I entered the Silent Land. For an instant the grey bird hovered high in the sunshine, then left me alone.

I threw myself full length upon the blossoming bank and waited, chin on hand. And as I waited, she came noiselessly across the moss, so quietly, so silently that I saw her only when her fingers touched mine.

"It has been a long time," we said; and; "Did you sleep?" and; "When did you awake?"

Then we asked each other a thousand little questions which are asked when lovers meet, and we answered as lovers answer. We spoke of the Spirit-bird as we always did, wondering, and she told me how that morning it had tapped upon her window as the day broke.

"Rose did not hear it," she said, "but I was already awake and thinking."

"I awoke at sunrise too," I said; "for a moment I thought it was a swallow in the chimney that fluttered so—"

"The Spirit-bird flies swiftly when Love is dreaming,"—that is a very old proverb of Nor-

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maudy. What shall we do, Louis—there is so much to do and so little time in life !—I brought my lute—ah ! you are laughing !"

"The lute is such an old-fashioned toy ; I did n't know you played. Will you sing too, Diane ? Something very old, older than the lute."

"I learned a song this morning because I thought you would care for it. That is why I dared to bring my lute into the Silent Land. The song is called, "Tristesse."

Then the little maid sat up among the blossoms and touched the soft strings, singing :

" J'ai perdu ma force et ma vie,
Et mes amis et ma gaité ;
J'ai perdu jusqu' à la fierté
Qui faisait croire à mon génie.

. . . . .

Quand j'ai connu la Vérité
J'ai cru que c'était une amie ;
Quand je l'ai comprise et sentie,
J'en etais déjà dégoûté.

. . . . .

Et pourtant elle est éternelle
Et ceux qui se sont passés d'elle
Ici-bas ont tout ignoré.

. . . . .

Dieu parle, il faut qu'on lui réponde ;
Le seul bien qui me reste au monde
Est d'avoir quelquefois pleuré.

. . . . .

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"That is all," said the little maid.

"Sing, Diane," I said, but I scarcely heard my own voice.

She laughed and bent above me with a graceful gesture. "Not that," she said, "for you at least are not sad. There is a chansonnette,—shall I sing again?—then be very still, here at my feet. Do you not think my lute is sweet?"

"Je voudrais pour moi qu'il fut toujours fête
Et tourner la tête
Aux plus orgueilleux;
Être en même temps de glace et de flamme,
La haine dans l'âme,
L'amour dans les yeux."

. . . . .

"You, Diane?" I whispered; but she smiled, and the mystery of love veiled her dark eyes; and she sang:

"Je ne voudrais pas à la contredanse,
Sans quelque prudence
Livrer mon bras nu
Puis, au cotillion, laisser ma main blanche
Trainer sur la manche
Du premier venu."

. . . . .

"Si mon fin corset, si souple et si juste,
D'un bras trop robuste
Se sentait serré,
J'aurais, je l'avoue, une peur mortelle
Qu'un bout de dentelle
N'en fut déchiré."

. . . . .

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She looked at me with soft, unfathomable eyes and touched the lute. When I moved she started from her reverie with a gay little nod to me :

" Quand on est coquette, il faut être sage,
L'oiseau de passage
Qui vole à plein cœur
Ne dort pas en l'air comme une hirondelle,
Et peut, d'un coup d'aile
Briser une fleur ! "

" Sing," I said in a changed voice.

" I have sung," she said, and laid her lute in my hands. But I knew nothing of minstrelsy and lay silent, idly touching the strings.

She had fashioned for her fair head a wreath of sweet-fern twined with clustered buds, white as snow and faintly perfumed.

" So I am crowned," she said, " a princess in the Silent Land. Where I step, all things green shall flourish ; where I turn my eyes, blossoms shall open in the summer wind ;—am I not queen ? "

" Will you not sing again, Diane ? "

" No, it pleases me to hear a legend now. You may begin, Louis."

" Which—the Were-wolf or the Man in Purple Tatters or the—"

" No, no—something new."

" The Seventh Seal ? "

" Begin it."

" And when he opened the Seventh Seal there was silence in Heaven—"

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"Dear Saints, have we not silence enough in the Silent Land? Tell me about battles."

"'And the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.' I could tell you about battles, Diane."

"Tell me,—don't move your arm,—tell me of battles, Louis."

"There was once a King in Carcosa," I began. But the little maid was already asleep.

I thought I heard a step in the undergrowth and listened.

The forest was silent.

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V.

WHEN we awoke it was night. Down from the dark heavens a great star fell, burning like a lamp. Above the low-hanging branches, sombre, drooping, heavy with fragrance, a misty darkness lay like a vast veil spread.

In the stillness I heard her quiet breathing, but we did not speak.

Silence is a Prophet, unveiling mysteries.

Then, through the forest, we heard the sound of wings, and as we moved, stepping together into the shadows, the moon rose above Lynx Peak, gigantic, golden, splendid.

So we passed out of the forest into the star-lit night.

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VI.

THE skies were leaden, the watery clouds hung low over the valley, and a wet wind blew from the west, ruffling the long pool where Diane stood. Kilted and capped in tweeds, creel swinging with every movement of the rod which swayed and bent with her bending wrist, she moved from ripple to shallow, wading noiselessly while the silken line whistled and the gay flies chased each other across the wind-lashed pool.

We spoke in a low voice, glancing at each other when the light cast struck the water.

"Under the alders Diane—" I said; "have you changed the Grey Dun for the Royal?"

"No, what is your new cast?"

"Emerald and Orange Miller—I shall tie an Alder-fly in place of the Miller. Do you think the water warrants a cast of three?"

"It is rough; I don't know,—Louis, was that an offer?"

"I think it was the spray from the rapids. Shall we move up a little? Do you feel the chill of the water?"

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"I am cold to my knees," said the little maid, "the river is rising I think—ah, what was that?"

"Nothing,—you touched a floating leaf in the swirl."

"Splash!" A great fish flopped over in the pool, a trout, lazy, unwieldy, monstrous.

"Oh! he missed it!" cried Diane, turning a little white.

"Cast again," I whispered, tossing my rod onto the sandy beach and unslinging my landing-net.

Trembling a little with excitement she cast across the swirl, once, twice, twenty times, but the monster was invisible. Somewhere in the dusky depths of that amber well the fierce fish lay watching the lightly dropping flies, unmoved. Then we changed the cast; I emptied my fly-book, but nothing stirred except the hurrying water, curling, gurgling, tumbling through the rocks. Finally I broke the silence.

"Diane, it was the spinner that he rose to. He's after something redder. Have you a Scarlet Ibis?"

"No—have you?"

I almost groaned, for Conroy's flies had not arrived, and I had n't an Ibis in the world.

After a while she reeled in her silken line, and we waded to the sandy beach and sat down.

"Oh, the pity of it," sighed Diane; "never have I seen such a trout before. I suppose it is useless, Louis."

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I sat moodily poking holes in the sand with the butt of my landing-net.

We spoke of other things for a time, sinking our voices below the roar of the river. Presently a sunbeam stole through the vapour above, lighting the depths of the dark pool. And all at once we saw the trout, hanging just above the pebbly bottom; we saw the scarlet fins move, the great square tail waving gently in the current, the mottled spotted back, the round staring eyes. The swelling of the gills was scarcely perceptible, the broad mouth hardly moved.

For a long time we sat silent, fascinated; then something stirred behind us on the beach and we slowly turned. It was Solomon.

"Ciel!" faltered Diane, "what is that?"

"My bird—an Egyptian Ibis," I whispered, laughing silently; "he has followed me, after all."

Solomon ruffled his scarlet plumes, blinked at me, scratched his head with his broad foot, pecked at a bit of mica, and took two solemn steps nearer.

"Diane," said I, suddenly, "I 'll get a red fly for you; don't move—the bird will come close to us."

But Solomon was in no hurry. Inch by inch he sidled nearer, dallying with bits of moss and shining pebbles, often pausing to reflect, but gradually approaching, for his curiosity concerning Diane was great.

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"He looks as if he had stepped off an obelisk," murmured Diane; "I have seen hieroglyphics that resembled him. Oh, what a prehistoric head —so old, so old!"

"His name is Solomon," I whispered. "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. I 'm going to have a small bit of Solomon's glory—sh—h! ah! I 've got him!"

It was over in a second, and I do not believe it was painful. There was a flurry of sand, a furious flapping of flame-coloured wings, a squawk! a smothered laugh—nothing more.

Mortified, furious, Solomon marched off, shaking the river sand from wing and foot, and Diane and I, with tears of laughter in our eyes, wound the scarlet feather about a spare hook, tied it close with a thread from my coat, and whipped it firmly to the shank. I looped the improvised fly to Diane's leader, and she shook the line free. The reel sang a sweet tune as she drew the silk through the guides, and presently she motioned me to follow her out into the rippling shallows, and I went, swinging my landing-net to my shoulder. She cast once. The fly struck the swirl and sank a little, but she drew it to the surface and the current swept it under the alders. For a moment it sank again; then the ripples parted, and a broad crimson-flecked side rolled just below the surface of the water. At the same moment the light rod curved, deeply quivering, the reel screamed like the wind in the chimney,

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and the straining line cut through the water, moving up the pool with lightning speed.

"Strike!" I cried, and she struck heavily, but the reel sang out like a whistling buoy, and the fish tumbled into the churning water under the falls at the head of the pool.

"Now," said Diane, with a strange quiet in her voice, "I suppose he is gone, Louis."

But the vicious tug and long, fierce strain contradicted her, and I stepped back a pace or two to let her fight the battle to the bitter end.

The struggle was splendid. Once I believe she became a little frightened,—the rod was staggering under the furious fish,—and she spoke in a queer, small voice: "Are you there, Louis?"

"I am here, Diane."

"Close behind?"

"Close behind."

She said nothing more until the great fish lay floating within reach of my net.

"Now!" she gasped.

It was done in a second; and, as I bore the deep-laden net to the beach, I caught a fleeting glimpse of a figure among the trees on the bank above. Diane was kneeling breathlessly on a rock beside me; she did not see the figure. I did, for an instant. It was Ferris.

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VII.

DINNER was over. Ferris and I lingered silently over the Burgundy, and Howlett hovered in the corner with a decanter of port until Ferris shook his head.

It had been a silent dinner. Ferris tried to be cordial, and failed. Then he tried to be indifferent, with better success. We exchanged a word or two concerning a new keeper who was to be stationed at the notch in the north, and I spoke to Howlett about cleaning the lamps.

Neither of us mentioned rods or trout, although Howlett had served us a delicious sea-trout that evening which had fallen to Ferris's rod, over which we ordinarily should have exulted.

Ferris of course knew that I had seen him among the trees on the bank above the long pool. It was my place to speak; we both understood that, but I did not. What was there to say? Suppose I should go back to the beginning and tell him—not all, but all that I was bound in honour to tell him. What would he think if I spoke of the Spirit-bird, of the Silent Land, of my long deception? An explanation was due him—I felt that with a

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vague sense of anger and humiliation. For weeks I had abandoned him ; I never thought about his being lonely, but I knew now that he had felt it deeply. Oh, it was the underhand part of the business that sickened me, the daily deceit, the double dealing. Ferris was no infant. A word would have been enough. I had never by sign or speech spoken that word which would at least have set me right with him, and which I could have spoken honourably. And moreover, if I had spoken that word,—no, not a word even, a look would have been enough,—Ferris would never have entered the western forest belt.

We sat dawdling over our wine in the glow of the long candles while the fire crackled in the chimney place ; for the evening was chilly, and Solomon brooded sullenly before the blaze. Howlett, noiseless and pompous, glided from side-board to table, decorously avoiding the evil jabs from Solomon's curved bill, until Ferris woke up and told him he might retire, which he did with a modest " good-night, sir," and a haughty glance at Solomon. A half hour of strained silence followed. I leaned on the table, my head on my hands, watching the candle light reflected on the fragile wine glasses. Myriads of little flames glistened on the crystal bowls, deep stained with the red wine's glow. The fire snapped and sparkled on the hearth, and Solomon slept, his wizened head buried in the depths of his flaming plumage.

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And as we sat there, there came a faint tapping at the curtained window. Ferris did not hear it I did, for it was the Spirit-bird.

"I must go," said I, rising suddenly.

"Where?" said Ferris.

I looked at him stupidly for a moment, then sank back into my chair.

Solomon stirred in his slumber and I heard the wind rising in the chimney.

Ferris leaned across the table and touched my sleeve.

I looked at him silently.

"I must speak," he said; "are you ready?"

I did not reply.

"Sadness and silence have no place here, between you and me. Shall I tell you a story I once read?"

"I am half asleep," I muttered.

"This is the story," he said, unheeding my words. "There was once a King in Carcosa——"

My hand fell heavily upon the table.

"——And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies——"

"For God's sake, Ferris——"

"Yes," he said, "for God's sake."

We sat staring at each other across the table, and if my face was as white as his I do not know, but my hand trembled among the glasses till they tinkled.

"I was born in France," he said at last. "You did not know it, for I never told you. What do

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you know about me after all? Nothing. What have years of friendship taught you about my past? Nothing. Now learn. My father was shot dead by an inferior officer in Rouen. The assassin escaped to Canada where—I found him. He died by his own hand—from choice. I did not know he had a child."

The dull fear at my heart must have looked from my eyes. Ferris nodded.

"Yes, you know the rest," he said; "the shame and disgrace of the suicide drove the child away—anywhere to escape it—anywhere—here, into the wilderness the woman fled where she hath a place prepared of God."

The Spirit-bird was tapping on the window, I heard the noise of wings beating against the pane.

"I must go," I said, and my voice sounded within me as from a great distance.

"Vengeance is God's," said Ferris, quietly: "I am guilty."

"I must go," I repeated, steadying myself with my hand on the table.

The noise of wings filled my ears. I knew the summons.

"Do you not hear?" I cried.

"The wind," said Ferris.

Then the door slowly opened from without, the long candles flared in the wind, and the ashes stirred and drifted among the embers on the hearth. And out of the night came a slender

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figure, with dark eyes wide, and timid hands outstretched—outstretched until they fell into my own and lay there.

"I came from the Silent Land," she said; "the bird lead me; see, it has entered with me, Louis."

"It is my wife who has entered," I said quietly to Ferris, and the little maid clung close to me, holding out one slim hand to Ferris.

There was an interval of silence.

"Father Gregory will breakfast with us to-morrow," said Ferris to me.

"A Priest?"

"Open the window," smiled Ferris; "there is a small grey bird here."

So I opened the window and it flew away.

"Good-night," whispered the little maid, and kissed her hand to the open window.

"Diane!"

She came to me quietly. Ferris had vanished; Solomon peered dreamily at us with filmy eyes.

"The Spirit-bird has gone," she said.

Then, with her arms about my neck, I raised her head, touching her white brow with my lips.

* * * * * *

When my wife read as far as you have read, she picked up the embroidery which she had dropped beside her on the table.

"Do you like my story?" I asked.

But she only smiled at me from under her straight eyebrows.

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The next morning I received her ultimatum; I am to cease writing about beautiful women of doubtful antecedents who inhabit forest glades, I am to stop making fun of Howlett, I am to curb my passion for rod and gun, and, if I insist on writing about my wife, I am to tell the truth concerning her. This I have promised Ysonde to do, and I shall try to, in "The Black Water."

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THE BLACK WATER.

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" Lorsque la coquette Espérance
Nous pousse le coude en passant,
Puis a tire-d'aile s'élance,
Et se retourne en souriant ;

" Où va l'homme ! Où son coeur l'appelle !
L'hirondelle suit le zephyr,
Et moins légère est l'hirondelle
Que l'homme qui suit son désir."

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THE BLACK WATER.

"Oh! could you view the melodie
Of ev'ry grace,
And musick of her face,
You'd drop a teare,
Seeing more harmonie
In her bright eye,
Then now you heare."

LOVELACE.

I.

YSONDE swung her racquet. Her laughter was very sweet. A robin on the tip of a balsam-tree cocked his head to listen; a shy snow-bird peered at her through the meadow grass.

"What are you laughing at?" I asked, uneasily. I spoke sharply—I had not intended to. The porcupine on the porch lifted his head, his rising quills grating on the piazza; a drab-coloured cow, knee deep in the sedge, stared at me in stupid disapproval.

"I beg your pardon, Ysonde," I said, sulkily, for I felt the rebuke of the cow. Then Ysonde

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laughed again; the robin chirped in sympathy, and the snow-bird crept to the edge of the tennis-court.

"Deuce," I said, picking up a ball, "are you ready?"

She stepped back, making me a mocking reverence. Her eyes were bluer than the flowering flax behind her.

I had intended to send her a swift service, and I should have done so had I not noticed her eyes.

"Deuce," I repeated, pausing to recover the composure necessary for good tennis. She made a gesture with her racquet. The service was a miserable failure. I drove the second ball into the net, and then, placing the butt of my racquet on the turf, sat down on the rim.

"Vantage out," said I, gritting my teeth; "what were you laughing at, Ysonde?"

"Vantage out," she repeated; "I am not laughing."

"You were," I said; "you are now."

She went to the boxwood hedge, picked out one ball and sent it back; then she drove the other over the net and retired to her corner swinging her racquet. I did not move.

"You are spoiling your racquet," she said.

I was sitting on it. I knew better.

"And your temper," she said, sweetly.

"Vantage out," I repeated, and raised my tennis-bat for a smashing service. The ball whisted close to the net, and the white dust flew from her

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court, but her racquet caught it fair and square and I heard the ring of the strings as the ball shot along my left alley and dropped exactly on the service line. How I got it I don't know, but the next moment a puff of dust rose in her vantage court, there was a rustle of skirts, a twinkle of small tennis shoes, and the ball rocketed, higher, higher, into the misty sunshine.

"Oh," gasped Ysonde, and bit her lip.

The ball began to come down. I had time to laugh before it struck,—to laugh quietly and twirl my short mustache.

"I shall place that ball," said I, "where you will not find it easily"; and I did, deliberately.

For a second Ysonde was disappointed, I could see that, but I imagined there was the slightest tremour of relief in her voice when she said:

"Brute force is useless, Bobby; listen to the voice of the Prophetess."

"I hear," I said, "the echo of your voice in the throat of every bird."

"Which is very pretty but unfair," said Ysonde, looking at the snow-birds beside her. "It is unfair," she repeated.

"Yes," said I, "it is unfair; are you ready?"

"Let us finish the game this afternoon," she suggested; "look at these snow-birds, Bobby; if I raise my racquet it will frighten them."

"And you imagine," said I, "that these snow-birds are going to interrupt the game—this game?"

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"What a pity to frighten them; see—look how close they come to me? Do you think the little things are tamed by hunger?"

"Some creatures are not tamed by anything," I said.

"Are you hungry?" she asked, innocently.

I was glad that I suppressed my anger.

"Ysonde," I said, "you know what this game means to me—to us."

"I know nothing about it," she said, hastily, retreating to her corner; "play—it's deuce you know."

"I know," I replied, and sent a merciless ball shooting across her deuce court.

"Vantage in," I observed, trying not to smile.

A swift glance from her wide eyes, a perceptible tremble of the long lashes—that was all; but I knew what I knew, for I have hunted wild creatures.

The porcupine on the piazza rose, sniffed, blinked in the sunlight, and lumbered down the steps, every quill erect.

"Billy! Go back this minute!" said Ysonde.

The quills on Billy's back flattened.

"Billy," I repeated, "go and climb a tree."

"If you speak to him he will bristle again," said Ysonde, walking over to the porcupine.

"Billy, my child, climb this pretty balsam tree for the gentleman; come—you are interrupting the game, and the gentleman is impatient."

"The gentleman is very impatient, Billy," I said.

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I saw Ysonde colour—a soft faint tint, nothing more; I saw Billy receive a gentle impulse—oh, very gentle indeed, from the point of her slender tennis shoes. So the porcupine was hustled up the balsam-tree, where he lay like an old mat, untidy, mortified, nursing his wrath, while two blue-birds tittered among the branches above him.

Ysonde came back and stood in the game court.

"It is vantage, I believe," she said, indifferently.

"Out," said I, with significance. Ysonde looked at me.

"Out," I repeated.

"Play," she said, desperately.

"No," I replied, sitting down upon the edge of my racquet again—I knew better—"let us clearly understand the consequences first."

She swung her racquet and looked me full in the eyes.

"What consequences?" she said.

"The consequences incident upon my winning this set."

"What consequences?" she insisted, defiantly.

"The forfeit," said I.

"When you win the set we will discuss that," she said. "Do you imagine you will win?"

She was a better player than I; she could give me thirty on each game.

"Yes," I said, and I believe the misery in my voice would have moved a tigress to pity.

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Now perhaps it was because there is nothing of the tigress about Ysonde, perhaps because I showed my fear of her—I don't know which—but I saw her scarlet lips press one upon the other, and I saw her eyes darken like violet velvet at night.

"Play," she said; "I am ready."

The first ball struck the net; the racquet turned in my nerveless hand, and she smiled.

"Play!" I cried, and the second ball bit the lime dust at her feet. I saw the flash of her racquet, I saw a streak of gray lightning, and I lifted my racquet, but something struck me in the face,—the tennis-balls were heavy and wet,—and I staggered about blindly, faint with pain.

"Oh, Bobby!" cried Ysonde, and stood quite still.

"I 'm a duffer," I muttered, trying to open my eye, but the pain sickened me. I placed my hand over it and looked out upon the world with one eye. The drab-coloured cow was watching me; she was chewing her cud; the porcupine had one sardonic eye fixed upon me; the robin, balanced on the tip of the balsam, mocked me. It was plain that the creatures were all on her side. The wild snow-birds scarcely moved as Ysonde hastened across the court to my side. I heard the blue-birds tittering over head, but I did not care; I had heard the tones of Ysonde's voice, and I was glad that I had been banged in the

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eye. It was true she had only said, "Oh, Bobby!"

"Is it very painful?" she asked, standing close beside me.

"Yes," I replied, seriously.

"Let me look," she said, laying one hand on the sleeve of my cricket shirt.

"Billy will rejoice at this," said I, removing my handkerchief so she could see the eyes. The pain was becoming intense. With my uninjured eye I could see how white her hand was.

She stood still a moment; my arm grew warm beneath her hand.

"It will cheer Billy," I suggested; "did I tell you that he bit me yesterday and I whacked him? No? Well, he did, and I did."

"How can you!" she murmured; "how can you speak of that ridiculous Billy when you may have—have to be blind?"

"Nonsense," I said, with a shiver.

She crossed the turf to the spring and brought her handkerchief back soaking and cold as ice. I felt her palm on my cheek as she adjusted it. It was smooth, like an apricot.

"Hold it there," I said, bribing my conscience; "it is very pleasant." She thought I meant the wet handkerchief.

"If—if I have ruined your sight": she began.

Now it was on the tip of my tongue to add—"and yet you are going to ruin my life by beating me at tennis," but my conscience revolted.

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"Do you think it is serious?" she asked, in a voice so low that I bent my head involuntarily. She mistook the gesture for one of silent acquiescence. A tear—a large warm one—fell on my wrist; I thought it was a drop of water from the handkerchief at first. Then I opened my uninjured eye and saw her mistake.

"You misunderstood," I said, wearily. "I don't believe what the oculist told me; the eye will be all right."

"But he warned you that a sudden blow would——"

"Might——"

"Oh—did he say might?"

"Yes—but it won't. I 'm all right—don't take away your hand; are you tired?"

"No, no," she said, "shall I get some fresh water?"

"Not yet—don't go. The game was at deuce, was n't it?"

Ysonde was silent.

"Was it deuce? Does that point count against me?" I insisted.

"How can you think of the game now?" said Ysonde, in a queer voice—like the note of a very young bird.

I sat down on the turf, and the handkerchief fell from my eye. Ysonde hastened to the spring and returned carrying the heavy stone jar full of water. It must have strained her delicate wrist—she said it did not; and, kneeling beside me,

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she placed the cold bit of cambric over my eye.

"Thank you," I said; "will you sit beside me on the turf?" Both of my eyes were aching and closed, but I heard her skirts rustle and felt the momentary pressure of her palm on my cheek.

"Are you seated?" I asked.

"Yes, Bobby."

"Then tell me whether I lost that point."

"How can I tell," she answered; "I would willingly concede it if it were not——"

"For the forfeit," I added; "then you think I did lose the point?"

"Does your eye pain very much?" she asked.

"Yes," said I, truthfully. Perhaps it was ungenerous, but I dared not reject such an ally as truth. I opened one eye and looked at Ysonde. She was examining a buttercup.

"All buttercups look as though they had been carefully varnished," said she, touching one with the tip of her middle finger.

"Did I win the set?" I began again.

"Oh—no—not the set!" she protested.

"Then I lost that point?"

"Oh! why will you dwell upon tennis at such a moment!"

"Because," said I, "it means so much to me."

I suppose there was something in my voice that frightened her.

"Forgive me," I said, bitterly ashamed, for I had broken our compact, not directly, but in sub-

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stance. "Forgive me, Ysonde," I said, looking at the porcupine with my left eye.

"Ridiculous Billy," for that was his name, stared at me with the insolence born of safety, and his white whiskers twitched in derision.

"You old devil," I thought, remembering the scar on my ankle.

"Where did he bite you?" asked Ysonde unconsciously reading my thoughts. It was a trick of hers.

"In the ankle,—it was nothing. I would rather have him bite the other ankle than get any more of his quills into me!" I replied. "See how the snow-birds have followed you. They are there among the wild strawberries."

She turned her head.

"Hush!" she whispered, raising one palm. It was pinker than the unripe berries. There was an ache in my heart as well as in my eyes, so I said something silly; "There was an old man who said, Hush! I perceive a young bird in this bush——"

"When they said, Is it small? he replied, Not at all! It is four times as big as the bush!" repeated Ysonde, solemnly. We both laughed, but I read a gratitude in her eyes which annoyed me.

"We digress," I said, "speaking of the game——"

"Oh, but we were not speaking of the game!" she said, half-alarmed, half-smiling; "there! I thought you were going to be sensible, Bobby."

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"I am. I only wish to know whether I lost that game."

"You know the rules," she said.

"Yes—I know the rules."

"If it were not for the forfeit, I should not insist," she continued, returning to her buttercup. "It seems unfair to take the point;—does the eye pain, Bobby?"

"Not so much," I replied, sticking to the truth to the bitter end. My ally was becoming a nuisance.

"Let me see it," she said, gently removing the handkerchief. The eye must have looked bad, for her face changed.

"Oh, you poor fellow," she said, and I fairly revelled in the delight of my own misery.

"Then I lost that point," said I, stifling conscience.

She replaced the handkerchief. Her hand had become suddenly steady.

"No," she said, "you did not lose the point,—I concede it."

I wondered whether my ears were tricking me.

"Then—if I won the point—I won the set," I said.

"Yes."

"And the forfeit——"

"The forfeit was that I should kiss you," said Ysonde, gravely.

"That was not all——"

"No,—you are to be allowed to tell me that

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you love me," continued Ysonde in calm, even tones.

"Then," said I, flushing uncomfortably, "when will you pay the forfeit?"

"Now, if you wish it. Shall I kiss you?"

She leaned on the turf, one hand hidden by the buttercups. She had dropped the handkerchief, and I picked it up and held it to my eye with my left hand. Then, with my right hand, I took her right hand, listlessly drooping beside her, and I looked her full in the eyes.

"When we made the wager," I said, "we were boy and girl. That was almost twenty-four hours ago. You need not kiss me, Ysonde."

"A kiss means more at our age," she said.

"We were very silly," said I.

"It should mean love," she said, faintly.

"Indeed it should," I said.

Ysonde sat straight up among the field flowers.

"I do not love," she said.

"I know it," I replied gaily, and I let the bandage drop from my eye. "The pain is all gone," I said, closing my left eye to see whether my vision was impaired.

I was totally blind in my right eye.

For an instant the shock staggered me. I don't know how long I sat, mouth open, staring at the sun with one sound, one sightless eye. Ysonde, her chin on her hands, lay with her face turned toward the White Lady, a towering peak in the east.

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"Come," I said, rising, "your aunt will be impatient; dinner has been served this half hour."

She sprang to her feet,—she had been in a reverie,—and gave me a long look which I could not define.

"And your eye does n't pain?" she asked, after a moment.

"No," I said, for the pain had disappeared with the sight; "I am all right except a headache."

"And you can see perfectly well?"

"Perfectly."

It was at this point that truth and I parted; for what was a lost eye that it should cause her a moment's regret?

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II.

IT was about this time that the oculist came to Holderness and visited me at the Rosebud Inn. I was in a dark room; Ysonde thought it better, believing darkness a cure for headache.

When the oculist walked in—his name was Keen, —he said, "What the devil are you doing here?"

"I am blind in one eye—will it be noticeable?" I asked.

"Banged in the eye?" he enquired, opening the shutters.

"Banged in the eye," I repeated, as he bent over me.

His examination lasted scarcely ten seconds. After a moment he rose and closed the shutters, and I stood up in the darkness.

"Will it disfigure me?" I asked again.

"No,—an oculist could tell the difference perhaps. You may go out in three weeks."

"Blind?"

"Nonsense," growled Keen, "you have another eye yet."

"But I am an artist," I said in a low voice, "is there hope?"

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I heard Keen sit down in the room, and his rocking-chair squeaked through five minutes of the bitterest darkness I ever knew. I could stand it no longer, so I rose and felt my way towards the rocking-chair,—I wanted to touch him—I was terrified. Well, it only lasted a few moments—most men pass through crises—I was glad he did not attempt to pity me.

"It was Miss——" he began.

"Hush!" I whispered. "Who told you, Keen?"

"She did," he replied. "Of course, she need never know you are——"

"Blind," I said,—"No, she need not know it."

I heard him feeling for the door.

"Turn your back," he said.

I did so.

"Three weeks?" I enquired over my shoulder.

"Yes—don't smoke."

"What the devil shall I do?" I said, savagely.

"Think on your sins, old chap,"—we had studied together in the Latin Quarter—"think of Pepita——"

"I won't," I cried. Keen hummed in a mischievous voice,

"Quand le sommeil sur ta famille
Autour de toi s'est repondu,
O Pépita, charmante fille,
Mon amour, à quoi penses-tu?"

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"Keen," I said, "I 'll break your head, if I am one-eyed."

"I 'm a married man," he replied, "and I refuse your offer; that 's better, I like to hear the old ring in your voice, Bobby—keep a stiff upper lip. Surgery and painting are not the only things we learned in the Quarter."

I heard the door close behind him, then turned and groped my way toward the bed.

* * * * * *

How I ever lived through those three weeks !—Well, I did, and every fresh pipe of Bird's-eye tasted sweeter for my disobedience.

"Write him," I dictated through the closed door to Ysonde,—"write him that I am smoking six pipes a day as he directed." After all, if I was going to be blind in one eye, I did not care whether tobacco hastened the blow, and I was glad to poke a little fun at Keen.

Ysonde could not imagine why the doctor had recommended smoking—she had heard that it weakened the sight, but she wrote as I directed, merely expressing her distrust in Keen, which amused me, for he is now one of the most famous oculists in the world.

"Yes," said I, through the key-hole, "Keen is young, and has much to learn, but I dare not disobey orders. How is your aunt ?"

"My aunt is well, thank you, Bobby; did you like the sherbet she made ?"

"Yes—that 's six times you have asked me."

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I was wearying of lying. The sherbet reposed among the soapsuds of my toilet jar. .

Ysonde's aunt, a tall aristocratic beauty, whose perfectly arched eye-brows betrayed the complacent vacancy of her mind, had actually prepared, with her own fair hands, a sherbet for me. I cannot bear sweets of any kind.

"Aunt Lynda will make another to-morrow," cooed Ysonde through the key-hole.

"Thank her for me," said I faintly; "Ysonde, I am coming out to-night."

"It is not yet three weeks!" cried Ysonde.

"It will be three weeks to-morrow at 1 p.m. My eyes won't suffer at night. I should like to smell the woods a little. Will you walk with me this evening?"

"If Aunt Lynda will allow me," said Ysonde. After a moment she added: "I will ask her now"; and I heard her rise from her chair outside my door.

When she came back, I was lying face downwards on my bed, miserable, dreading the hour when I should first face my own reflection in a mirror. I heard her step on the stairs, and I jumped up and groped my way toward the door.

"Bobby," she called softly.

"Ysonde," I answered, with my mouth close to the key-hole. She started—I heard her—for she did not know I was so near. I bent my head to listen.

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"Aunt Lynda says you are foolish to go out before to-morrow——"

"The evening won't hurt me."

"But suppose—only suppose your disobedience should cost you the sight of your eye?"

"It won't," said I.

"Think how I should feel?"

"It won't," I repeated. The perspiration suddenly dampened my forehead, and I wiped it away.

"Can't you wait?" she pleaded.

"No. Have you your aunt's permission to walk with me this evening?"

"Yes," she said. "Shall I read to you a little while?"

For an hour I listened to her voice, and if it was Lovelace or Herrick or Isaac Walton, I do not know upon my soul, but I do know that my dark room was filled with the delicious murmur; and I heard the trees moving in the evening wind and the twitter of sleepy birds from the hedge. It might have been the perfume from the roses under my window—perhaps it was the fragrance of her hair—she bent so close to my door outside—but a sweet smell tinctured the darkness about me, stealing into my senses; and I rose and opened my blinds a little way.

It was night. I heard the rocky river rushing through the alders and the pines swaying on the ridge. The ray from the moon which silvered the windows caused my eyes no pain.

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I listened. Through the low music of her voice crept the song of a night-thrush. A breeze stirred the roses under my window; the music of voice and thrush was stilled. Then, in the silence, some wild creature cried out from the mountain side.

"Âme damnée!" I muttered; for my soul was heavy with the dread of the coming morning.

"What are you murmuring in there by yourself?" whispered Ysonde, through the door.

"Nothing—was it a lynx on Noon Peak?"

"I heard nothing," she said.

"Nor I," said I, opening the door.

The light from the lamp dazzled but did not hurt me. She laid down the book and came swiftly toward me.

"Now," said I, "we will walk under the stars —with your aunt's permission."

I heard her sigh as she took my arm; "Bobby, I am so glad your eye is well. What could you have done if you had lost the sight of an eye?"

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III.

THE morning was magnificent. A gentleman with symmetrical whiskers named Blylock, and I were standing on the verandah of the Rosebud Inn. Blylock's mind was neutral. His lineage was long, his voice modulated, his every action acutely impersonal. The subdued polish of Harvard was reflected from his shoes to his collar. When he smoked he smoked judiciously, joylessly.

"And you lost the fish?" said I.

"Yes," said Blylock, with colourless enthusiasm.

"In the West Branch?"

"Near the Forks," said Blylock. "Do you know the pool?"

I regretted that I did not. He had once asked me whether I knew the Stryngbenes of Beacon Street, and I had replied with the same regret. Now he learned that I was culpably ignorant of the pool at the West Branch Forks.

Blylock looked at the mountains. The White Lady was capped with mist, but except for that there was not a cloud in the sky. The Gilded

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Dome towered, clear cut as a cameo, against the pure azure of the northern horizon; Lynx Peak, jagged and cold, shot up above the pines of Crested Hawk, whose sweeping base was washed by the icy river.

"Do you think he might weigh five pounds?" I asked.

"Possibly," replied Blylock; "I regret exceedingly that I lost him."

"But, thank God, Plymouth Rock still stands!" was what I felt he expected me to say. I did not; I merely asked him if he had ever experienced emotion. "Why, of course," he answered seriously, but when I begged him to tell me when, he suspected a joke and smiled. If I had a son who smiled like that I would send him to Tony Pastor's. Oh, that smile!—gentle, vacant, blank as the verses of a Brook Farm Bard, bleaker than Bunker Hill.

"For sweet charity's sake," said I, "tell me why you do it, Blylock."

"Do what?" he asked.

"Oh," said I wearily, "nothing—lose a five-pound trout, for instance."

"I had on a brown hackle," said Blylock; "it was defective."

"It bust," said I, brutally, "did you curse?"

"No," replied Blylock. Ysonde came out and we took off our shooting-caps.

"Put them on again directly," said Ysonde, nestling deep into the collar of her jacket;

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"is it too cold for the trout to rise, Mr. Blylock?"

Blylock looked at the sky and then at his finger tips. There was a seal ring on one of his fingers which I was tired of seeing.

I listened to his even voice, I noticed his graceful carriage—I even noticed the momentary flush on his cold cheeks. Oh, how tired I was of looking at him; it wearied me as it wearies me to read advertisements in the cars of the elevated railroad. But I liked him.

"Blylock," said I, "get a gait on you, and we 'll whip the stream to the Intervale before dinner."

"The water will be cold," said Ysonde. "You ought to have waders."

Now Ysonde knew that I had no waders. I loathed them. Blylock always wore waders.

"Thank you," said Blylock, "I will not neglect to wear them."

I looked at Ysonde and met her eyes.

"Oh," said I, spoiling everything with intentional obstinacy, "Mr. Blylock never forgets his waders." For a moment the colour touched her cheek, but she treated me much better than I deserved.

"Bobby," said Ysonde, "remember that you have been ill, and if you wade the river in knickerbockers you will be obliged to eat sherbert again."

So she knew the mystery of the soapsuds.

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"I have no waders, Ysonde," I said humbly, "do you think I had better not go?"

"You know best," she said indifferently; and I got my deserts to the placid satisfaction of Blylock.

Ysonde walked away to join her aunt and I loafed about, sniffing the breeze, sulky, undecided, until Blylock appeared with rod and creel.

"Going?" enquired Blylock.

"No, I shall paint," I said, after a moment's silence.

He joined Ysonde and her aunt, and I saw them all walking toward the trail that crosses the river by the White Cascade. Blylock had undertaken to teach Ysonde to cast. I was surprised when she accepted, for I myself had taught her to cast. However I never asked any explanation and she never offered any—to my secret annoyance.

It was just two weeks that I had been out of the dark room. I was totally blind in my right eye, but nobody except Keen and myself knew it. I was becoming used to it—I was only too thankful that the eye, to all appearances, was as perfect as the other eye. ·But I dreaded to begin painting again. I feared that everything might be colourless and lop-sided, that I should be a ruined man as far as my profession was concerned. I had put off the beginning of work from sheer cowardice. Nobody but an artist can appreciate my mental suffering;—nobody but an artist knows

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that two eyes are little enough to see with. Had the accident destroyed the balance of my sight? Would my drawing be exaggerated, unstable, badly constructed, out of proportion? Would my colour be weak or brutally crude? I decided to find out without further delay, so when Ysonde and her aunt and Blylock had disappeared, I went to my room, gathered up my well-worn sketching kit, screwed two canvases into the holder, and marched manfully out the door into the sunlit forest.

Ridiculous Billy followed me. This capricious porcupine had taken a violent fancy to me, from the moment I emerged from the dark room. Of course I preferred his friendship to his enmity—I still bore a red scar on my ankle—but what soothed me most was his undisguised hatred of Blylock. Billy bit him whenever he could, and the blood of Bunker Hill appealed to Heaven from the piazza of the Rosebud Inn!

Blylock took it very decently—the porcupine was Ysonde's property—but although he himself suffered in silence, and Ysonde darned his golf-stockings as partial reparation, I always fancied that his blood was importuning Heaven, and, remembering George III, I trembled for Ridiculous Billy.

Sometimes I was sorry for Blylock, sometimes I was not, especially when Ysonde darned his golf-stockings. Blylock was Lynda Sutherland's cousin, but I demonstrated to Ysonde that this

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did not concern her. Sometimes I wished that Blylock would go back to Beacon Street, and yet I had grown fond of him in a way.

The porcupine followed me into the forest, poking his rat-like muzzle into every soft rotten stump, twitching his white whiskers. A red squirrel followed him from tree to tree, chattering and squealing with rage, but Billy lumbered along, stolid, blasé, entirely wrapped up in his own business. What that business was I dared not enquire, for Billy's malicious eyes boded evil for interlopers, and I respected his privacy.

Walking along the fragrant brown trail, barred with sunlight, I recalled that cold gray morning in camp when Sutherland—Lynda's late lamented—waking from the troubled dreams incident on an overdose of hot whiskey and water, called to me, to take "that thing away!" "That thing" was Billy. From his nest among the pine-clad ridges, he had smelled our pork, and being a free-born American, he had descended to appropriate it. In the gray of the morning, through the smouldering camp-fire smoke, I saw Billy in the act of removing the pork from the crotches of a spruce tree.

"What is it? Take it away for God's sake!" bellowed Sutherland, associating Billy with other grotesque phantoms incident on overdoses.

"It 's a porcupine," said I.

"Pink?" faltered Sutherland.

"Go to sleep, you brute," I muttered, not ad-

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dressing the porcupine. I took a poncho, a thick one, and ran the porcupine down. Then I enveloped him in the blanket, and got a rope about his neck, tied him to a tree and examined my wounds. One of our guides helped me pull the spines from my person, and that night the other guide led Ridiculous Billy into the settlement which consists of the Rosebud Inn and three barns.

The taking of Billy preceded Sutherland's death by twenty-four hours; he was mauled by a panther whose cubs he was investigating. His wife, Lynda, who had secured a few month's reprieve from his presence, and who first heard of his death at Fortress Monroe, came north with Ysonde. Sutherland was buried in New York, and two weeks later Lynda and Ysonde came to the Rosebud Inn. All this happened three years ago, and during those three years, Billy, gorgeous with a silver collar, had never forgiven me for removing him from his native wilds. His attitude toward the household was unmistakable. Lynda he avoided, Ysonde he followed with every mark of approbation, Blylock he loathed, and now, he had taken this sudden shine to me.

Billy and I followed the trail, solemnly, deliberately. The trail was a blind one, now plain, brown and gold with trampled wet leaves, now invisible, a labyrinth of twisted moose-bush and hemlock, badly blazed. But we knew our business, Billy and I, for presently we crossed a swift

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