

THE DOCTOR OF SOULS

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To
“BROTHER WOWWZ”

THE DOCTOR OF SOULS

CHAPTER I

THERE is some platitude, I believe, about genius being closely allied to madness. I do not dispute it. In fact, in my former capacity of medical student I was afforded perhaps more of an opportunity than the average man of proving its truth. Madness and sanity are, after all, largely questions of degree. What one man considers a sane action, another may condemn as an act of insanity.

For instance, that I, John Bellairs, then twenty-three and a bit—and commonly known to my disrespectful friends as “Bunny”—should have thrown over my prospects of a profession after three years of study and taken up the precarious cudgel of free-lance journalism, will possibly seem to many as flagrant an act of madness as any on record. But enough—since this story has really little to do with me, but centres around that peculiar gentleman who, in the last few years, has achieved such notoriety under the name of Dr. Sun.

“The Doctor of Souls,” as Sun loves to call himself—or did when I last met him—was actually twice entitled to the dignity of the “Dr.” in front of his name. He was a qualified doctor of medicine and an equally qualified doctor of science. (In parenthesis; many a “Doctor” practising in this England of ours has no more right to the handle to his name than old Sequoia—who used to hire a brass band to play while he “painlessly” extracted teeth.)

To return. As all the world knows—though I perhaps am best qualified to tell of it—Dr. Sun was a Eurasian. His Mother was a Chinese lady of rank. Heaven and the gods of China alone know who his father was—but that he was white of skin there can be no doubt. For Sun himself, apart from a slight sallowness, his slender build, a hardly noticeable slant of the eyes and his peculiar name, would have passed as a European almost anywhere—even in the East, where such things are noticed more readily.

He came to England as a youth—from the province of Yunnan in the upper Yangtse Valley. “Yunnan” (Chinese) means “South of the Clouds”—a phrase that, in the inherent poetry of the Chinese mind, is meant to describe a region as close to Heaven as it is possible to get without actually leaving the solid old earth. That, in point of fact, well describes the barren, lofty, mountainous country of that part of the world. And that was Dr. Sun’s home. He was already virtually a doctor when he landed in England. He had in his narrow yellow skull enough philosophy—and the philosophy of a part of the globe where for æons of time the people have lived more essentially in the mind than we do, or want to do—to fill a dozen volumes. His venerable mother, as a lady of wealth and rank, had procured for his instruction the most learned Lamas in the Province.

As for Sun, I suppose—no, more than that, I *know*—that his peculiar brain was able to absorb learning with something like three or four times the facility of an ordinary man’s brain—be that man a Chinaman or an Englishman. In proof of this, trouble yourself, if you will, to enquire into the records of his Faculties at the University—which prefers here to remain unnamed, but which everybody knows, from the newspapers—and note the percentage of marks Sun obtained—and at a time when he could speak less English than a Kowloon ricksha-coolie. Follow him on: medical degree (honours) and then the science degree with similar honours. There

seemed to be no end to his facility for imbibing and storing knowledge; no known means of satisfying his craving for learning. It was at the 'varsity that I first met this remarkable man.

I was a newcomer—more or less—and Sun had already taken his “medicals” and was well on the way to getting his B.Sc. I ran across him one afternoon in the meadows beyond the recreation grounds. I had of course heard about him, but I had never seen or noticed him before. He stood looking towards the rushes and willows near the river, a slight, studious-looking little fellow with the great spectacles he wore in those days—and later discarded—and a calm, slow smile that made me like him at once. As I came up I gave him a cheery “Good afternoon.”

He raised his cap!

“Peace be with you,” he said.

I stared at him. I mean “Peace be with you” is hardly the sort of introduction a University life accustoms one to, and I was rather astonished. I half suspected that he was “pulling my leg.”

“What’s the great game?” I demanded.

“The Game,” he answered slowly, “is something of a puzzle, I am afraid. We call it ‘Life.’ But if Peace is on your side, well, so much the better—as you people say.”

It dawned on me then for the first time that I must be talking to the curious Dr. Sun. A further glance at his face corroborated my discovery. I laughed. He smiled very pleasantly.

“You’re Sun, aren’t you?” I asked, more for something to say than that I needed any further proof.

He nodded.

“And is that the way you greet one another in China?” I enquired.

“Not quite,” said Sun, still smiling, “We say: ‘God be with you’—but I thought it wiser to substitute ‘Peace,’ because your God appears to be a god of both

Peace and War!" I followed his glance. He was looking across the river to the remains of an old Army camp—a desolate collection of débris and cement hut-foundations.

"Don't you fight—in China?" I asked.

"Very little—until you taught us to. As a matter of fact we invented gunpowder—but we were quite content to use it for crackers until you Westerners showed us how to make guns and cannons."

I laughed.

"I'd never have known *you* for a Chinaman," I observed, regarding him anew.

"I have the good fortune," said Sun, "to be a half-caste."

"Good fortune?" I echoed—almost before I realised that I was being very impolite. But Sun was quite unperturbed at my rudeness.

"Any farmer will tell you that," he said. "The sturdiest animals are always those infused with an entirely new strain. It is one of Nature's protective laws. Where there is inbreeding and over-population the stock loses stamina and ultimately becomes extinct."

"Oh," I murmured, "I've never thought of that."

"Haven't you, Bunny?" Sun rejoined with a twinkle in his colourless eyes.

I stared at him.

"How d'you know my name?" I demanded.

"The English," said my new acquaintance half apologetically, "are seldom very original in their choice of nicknames. I, for instance, am called in my own country 'The Love-child of the Lady of the Yellow Cloak and the Wanderer who sought the Lotus in the Morning Twilight.' Rather a mouthful, as you would say. Here you are less poetic, and behind my back you call me 'Chink.' One afternoon, having nothing better to do, I counted up the English nicknames and sorted them into their various sections and orders. There are, to be exact, one hundred and seventy-seven nick-

names in common use at this University—too many to be enumerated now. And you will forgive me, my dear Bunny, but with rather protuberant teeth like yours, I could not help but . . .”

“Thank you,” I interrupted stiffly.

“You have evidently not studied philosophy,” said Sun. It was a statement more than a question.

“I’m ‘medicine,’” I told him, rather abruptly.

“If you had done philosophy,” he went on, unperturbed, “you would know the futility of allowing yourself to become annoyed.” He broke off suddenly, pursed up his lips and emitted a low whistle. Now he did not whistle ordinarily. That is to say the noise he made was hardly audible to me—standing little more than three feet from him. I began to think he’d gone off his head, and was just about to ask him what he thought he was doing, when the rushes by the riverside parted and a little squat, white dog came running up to him. A bulldog, as I saw when the animal drew closer.

“Allow me,” said Sun to me. “My friend Sirius—my friend Bunny.”

“How d’you do?” I said to the bulldog.

“Wuff!” said that animal, for all the world as if he understood. This little business restored me to good humour—as I have little doubt, now that I know Sun better, it was intended to do.

“But,” I said, “how on earth did he hear your whistle? You hardly made a sound!”

“People forget,” my new acquaintance explained, “that in certain of their senses dogs are so much more highly developed than humans. Have you never observed a dog to be listening—listening—to something you can’t hear? You think very often that he is imagining things. He’s not; he’s hearing things—sounds—you can’t hear. Do you know that if you were to open a bottle of smelling-salts here—now—a dog a hundred yards away would smell it before a man two

yards away became aware of it? Seeing, too. Have you never watched a dog staring—at nothing . . . ?”

“Oh, rot!” I interrupted. “It’s a well-known fact that dogs can’t see any better than humans can.”

“No better, perhaps,” Sun agreed. “But who is there to tell us what they see—that we do *not* see. They cannot talk—to tell us what they see.”

“I suppose I’ll learn about that later,” I murmured, rather at a loss for a rejoinder. Then Sun said a surprising thing.

“I do not think,” said he, “that you will persist very long with your studies—here.”

“Why on earth . . . ?” I began.

“It is written in your face,” said Sun. He went on in a low soft monotone that nearly sent me to sleep: “You are restless, you are young, you want adventure, you have no real liking for your studies, the prospect of a life devoted to the healing of bodily ailments appals you, you regret secretly that you were not old enough to fight in the European War, you . . .”

“God!” I cried. “How, in the name of all that’s wonderful, do you know all that?”

The man had been calmly voicing my most secret thoughts!

He smiled.

“Come along to my room, Bunny,” he invited kindly. “I think we’ll like each other. Come along, Sirius.”

And that was how I first met the man whose name was later to be used to frighten children.

CHAPTER II

I WAS still at the University when Sun left, by which time he and I had become firm friends. I was granted many more privileges than the majority of his acquaintances, but there was something

about this quiet-spoken Chinese that baffled me and I never became familiar with him. I think I should more easily have permitted myself to take a liberty with the Pope or with the statue of Nelson in Trafalgar Square than with Sun. Whenever I was with him I had the feeling of being the veriest infant. His knowledge appalled me—or such small fragment of his knowledge as I was able to take in. He really liked me and used to spend hours trying to explain things to me. Some—a few of them, like one or two already described—I grasped, but the majority were far beyond the modest scope of my brain—and I just gave it up. I was genuinely sorry to say good-bye to him. Little did I dream what circumstances would bring us together again. Three months after he left, I abandoned my studies and took up writing. Sun's prophecy had come true!

I heard later that Sun had undergone a course in engineering at one of the big "shops"—after which he buried himself in some lonely part of Kent, and interested himself in aviation, mechanics, science, and other studies of which I was to learn later. But I was far too deeply immersed in my new struggles in the fields of journalism to think of much else just then, and two years went by before Dr. Sun's name came again to my notice. It was the time of that big scandal at Hythe—a reputable citizen found bound and chained stark naked to a dog-kennel on a windy, wintry night. (The poor devil nearly died of pneumonia!) The papers were full of the outrage. There were the usual police investigations, and it came out that the victim had lately owned a small pup and had thoughtlessly been the cause of its death through exposure—leaving it chained up in the open on cold winter nights. Then, about a week after the pup had died, "some person or persons unknown" entered the man's house, lugged him out on to the lawn, stripped him, bound him hand and foot, fastened that same dog-collar about his neck—and left him. The

milkman found him in the early morning—half frozen. And about a week later I saw the headlines in the paper :

CHINESE SCIENTIST THE PERPETRATOR
OF HYTHE OUTRAGE
and
DR. SUN ARRESTED FOR SOUTH
COAST CRIME.

To say that I was surprised would be to put it very mildly. My first impulse was to rush off to Kent, see old Sun, and find out what in the name of insanity had prompted him to do such an idiotic thing—if indeed he had done it. (And I was very doubtful about that.) Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately, I am never quite sure which—I was at that time engaged on a rather important case for my newspaper and could not get away. I had to be content to follow developments from day to day in the news columns. In good time came the trial. It amazed me—as it did many other people. Sun's defence was that he had done it as a measure of justice. The man had killed the dog, so he had meted out punishment to the man.

“But who,” the judge demanded, “who do you think you are—to administer ‘justice’ in this fashion?”

The report said Sun shrugged his narrow shoulders and replied that he was “an obscure Chinese with a smattering of general knowledge.”

The judge looked at him queerly.

“What are you engaged in—in your laboratory on that lonely farm?” he enquired.

“I am at present interesting myself in experiments connected with the discontinuity of matter,” Sun explained in a calm, deferential voice. “I am searching for a medium of separating matter—an agency through which any given quantity of matter can be dissolved, at a stroke, into its component protons and electrons.”

“Oh,” said the judge, looking learned. “Can you explain more fully?”

“Not without going into great detail, my lord,” Sun answered. “But . . .” He put a hand into a waistcoat pocket and produced an ordinary lead pencil. He broke off its point, laid down the little pellet of lead on the dock before him and replaced the pencil in his pocket. “My lord,” he resumed, “that little pellet of lead compound is composed of millions—myriads—of minute particles of a substance at present undetermined. My studies have centred largely around a means of suddenly separating those particles. My researches have, in small measure, been rewarded by success. I am able, by employing certain chemicals, to disintegrate instantaneously certain metals—or matter. Observe, my lord.” As he spoke Sun produced from another pocket a small phial, and, before anyone in the court-room had become aware of his intention, he had uncorked the little bottle and carefully spilled a drop of liquid on to the pellet of lead. The result was a loud blinding explosion that shook the great room and brought everybody—including the judge—to his feet in alarm! Dr. Sun continued his speech calmly, as if nothing unusual had happened. “These studies,” he said, “the studies of matter, are merely a part of a wider branch of knowledge that I seek to understand, my lord. I like to call myself ‘The Doctor of Souls’”

But by this time the judge had recovered his breath. His voice thundered across the room.

“Remove the prisoner! The court is adjourned, pending examination of the prisoner’s mental condition.”

There was no more for a week—apart from the inevitable controversy that the incident aroused in the daily newspapers. (Scientists writing to say that the fellow was no more than a common conjurer and a mountebank: Aunt Marias writing from Wigan to say that they’d like to kiss a man who they felt sure would be *so* sweet to their Fidos if he knew them: Uncle Teds writing from

Tooting to say that Sun ought at once to be incarcerated as a dangerous lunatic—and so forth). And then came the reports of the alienists who had examined Sun. They sounded distinctly worried! I chuckled to myself as I read the accounts of the jumbled diagnoses. I could quite imagine how Sun had tied them into knots—as he had often delighted to do the students, and even some of the professors, at the University. However, the general result was that Sun was declared to be sane—though a rather contradictory clause stated that his was a “case” in which personal egotism had been so over-developed as to constitute a possible danger to the public! (I quite agreed with them! But I could still retain my admiration of the man, all the same.) Then, since the laws of England make no provision for segregating a man suffering from over-developed egotism, and since he was, in the letter of the Law, sane, the case was resumed. To cut a long story short, Sun was fined a hundred pounds and sentenced to two months’ imprisonment—and *not* in the second Division either! At the conclusion of the passing of sentence, Sun rather disconcerted the court by thanking the judge most courteously.

About a month and a half later my chief sent for me and arranged that I should go down to Kent and interview Sun soon after his release. (I had of course told him that Sun and I were acquainted). So, as soon as I had read a rather belated notification of his release, I made arrangements for my ordinary work in the office to be done by someone else and set off for the South Coast in my little two-seater. It was evening when I got to Hythe—a warm summer twilight lay like a perfume over the beautiful countryside. Here I made enquiries and learnt that Dr. Sun occupied an old farmhouse somewhere beyond Lydd—which is on the low-lying, partly reclaimed land near Dungeness. At Lydd, when I got there, I had a real country supper in a local inn, heard all the gossip—including something about a Mrs. Frayne who had mysteriously disappeared from her

Washford home, and who, I gathered, was such a "tartar" that nobody wanted her back—then I enquired the direction and pushed on. It was ten o'clock when I got to the farmhouse. I left the car by the track—it was no more—and walked up to the farm gates through a flood of mellow moonlight. The house was situated close to the sea, I noticed, and down by the water's edge I could see, framed in the clear moonlight against the background of the Channel, the outline of some great shed. Momentarily I wondered what it might contain, then again I remembered reading somewhere—or being told by someone—of Sun's interest in aviation as a branch of mechanics he had studied. I was still wondering what sort of 'plane the shed housed and gradually nearing the massive gates, when a voice from beyond the gates rang out sharp and clear: "Who are you?"

"Hullo!" I exclaimed, involuntarily. (It *had* given me rather a start!)

"What you want?" the voice demanded.

"I want to see Dr. Sun," I said—abruptly. The unseen individual's truculence had rattled me.

"No can see!" muttered the voice, even more forbiddingly. "Too late—Doctor gone bed!"

"Who the deuce are you?" I demanded. I had come up to the gates and was peering through the iron bars. Some little way beyond, by the side of the wide drive, stood a small pigmy-like figure in the moonlight—the owner of the voice. At his feet was an object I recognised at once—Sirius, Sun's bulldog.

"Hallo, Sirius!" I called. The answer was a low growl. The dog had evidently forgotten me.

"What you want?" persisted the goblin individual—I could not make much of him at this distance, except that he seemed to be dressed in a sort of nightgown.

"I want to see Dr. Sun!" I reiterated. "I'm an old friend of his."

"Oh, fliend?"

"Yes. A very old friend. Go and tell him Bunny's come to see him, will you?"

"Oh, fiend. All light. I go. You wait," and the grotesque figure—it could not have been more than four feet high—turned and trotted off along the drive. The bulldog stood stolidly and suspiciously watching me, scorning my tentative cajolements. In a few moments the goblin returned and came up to the gate. "All light, fiend," he said, as he turned the key and shot back the bolt. "Master say come inside."

"Thank you," I replied, while I scrutinised him curiously. He was a Chinaman in Chinese costume, but he was a dwarf, and he had the most puckered-up, ugliest little face I'd ever seen. I reflected that Sun must have "collected" him since leaving the University, for I had never seen him before. The gates were opened and I stepped through, to be sniffed suspiciously by Sirius—who still ignored my advances. I followed the queer little figure towards the farmhouse, which was set among some trees about a hundred yards away. Sirius walked at my heels, surly and ready for treachery.

The hall into which I found myself ushered with very scant ceremony, was dimly lit and gloomy, but we did not wait very long here. By signs I was invited to follow the goblin steward along a corridor—also indifferently illuminated. We descended some steps and came to a pause in front of another door. Here my escort called out something in Chinese, the door swung open, apparently under its own volition, disclosing a large and well-lighted apartment. I was not unduly surprised at this antic on the part of an otherwise perfectly well-behaved door. Sun used to delight in astonishing his fellow-students with similar mechanical contrivances at the 'varsity. Besides, my attention was momentarily concentrated elsewhere. There, at a table in the very centre of the brilliantly illuminated room, sat my old friend, Dr. Sun!

CHAPTER III

THE room seemed to be a library-laboratory—if I may make use of such a compound word. Around it, in addition to several large bookcases, were tables and shelves supporting chemical and mechanical impedimenta and apparatus; on the walls, here and there, hung diagrams and maps, while in sundry glass-cases were certain specimens whose nature I could not yet conjecture. In a corner, behind the scientist and next to a door that led to some other room on this level, I supposed, was what my medical knowledge enabled me to recognise as a huge mechanical model of the human brain—but whether it was merely a thing of paint and modelling clay I could not immediately determine. Nor could I too obviously investigate it further at that moment, for Sun, exhibiting all his usual and somewhat exaggerated courtesy — that his servant so strangely lacked — had risen and was advancing towards me with hand outstretched and his calm, slow smile on his lips.

“My dear Bunny,” he greeted me in his faultless English, “this is really very good of you—and unexpected!”

“My dear Sun,” I replied, taking his small, delicate hand in mine and shaking it heartily, “why should it be? And how are you?”

“Very little the worse for my recent incarceration!” he rejoined with a wry smile. He added, half under his breath, “Brainless animals!” Then, recollecting my presence, he ushered me forward to an arm-chair at the table, helping me off with my coat and taking my hat. “Sit down, old fellow, and make yourself at home! Splendid of you to pay me a visit! What can I offer you? A cigar—a drink? You must forgive me, Bunny—I’m still a rabid T.T. and non-smoker. But perhaps after your travel. . . ?”

“I’d just love a whisky, Sun,” I said. “I’ve been

motoring since about four o'clock." I sat down. "You can keep your cigars," I added, and I pulled out my pipe and my pouch. Sun clapped his hands. Almost at once the door by which I had entered opened again and my friend of the farm gates and the moonlight shuffled into the room. Sun said something to him in Chinese—there was no mistaking the sing-song language—and the dwarf bowed and disappeared. I turned an inquisitive face to my host, now seated again in his chair opposite me.

"An old family servant," he supplied. "I got him over from China soon after I left the engineering works. He's rather startling, I'm afraid—but he's a good fellow. Wan-long is his honourable name."

"And what on earth," I asked, "are you doing—buried away here in the wilds of wildest Kent?"

Sun smiled. He seemed not to have changed one iota since I had last seen him. His smile was precisely the same—slow, inscrutable.

"Haven't you been following my recent clash with the long arm of the Law?" he enquired drily.

"I have," I admitted. "But it told me very little—except that it amused you to play pranks with those alienists! As I half suspected you would!" I added.

Sun was still smiling, but his words were serious.

"I did not deliberately deceive them," he averred. "Everything I said in the court and during the investigation 'into my mental condition' was in good faith." His smile faded as he used the expression "my mental condition." He frowned. "The imbeciles!" he muttered. "Presuming to decide whether *I* am sane or insane."

"But, Sun," I said curiously, "some of your remarks were—rather puzzling. Just what did you mean by saying that you called yourself 'The Doctor of Souls'—or something. . .?"

The door behind us opened again and the dwarf entered carrying a tray on which was a bottle, a glass and

a siphon. The servant deposited the tray on a corner of the table and withdrew. Sun waved me to help myself. I did—somewhat shakily, I fear, because I had in some peculiar way become aware that my old friend stared searchingly at me as if trying to decide whether I merited his confidence or not. Suddenly he said: “You’re down here on behalf of your paper, I suppose?”

“Well,” I replied, awkwardly replacing the siphon, “only with your permission, of course. I mean if you don’t like the idea I’ll simply go back and report that I couldn’t get anything out of you. That was distinctly understood between myself and the chief before I set out.”

“I see,” said my host. He appeared to be thinking. Suddenly he laughed. “What does it matter!” he exclaimed. “This last experiment has shown me very conclusively that I shall have to work clandestinely—outside the absurd Law. And by the time your report of the interview is in print . . .” He broke off. For a while he looked steadily at me. I did not flinch. Then: “Bunny,” he resumed, “I’ve been working so hard, ever since I can remember, that I suppose I’d rather forgotten that the main body of stupid humanity are herded together and kept in order by little conventions and petty laws. But this affair at Hythe has shown me so forcefully. . . .”

“You *did* do it, then?” I asked.

“But didn’t you read?” he replied. “I admitted it—in court.”

“Yes, but—what had *you* to do with it, Sun? It was really no concern of yours, was it?”

“Let’s begin at the beginning,” said Sun. “I can’t give you a direct answer. Let us ask, first, what we—human beings—are here on Earth for? Some think God has made us as puppets for His own entertainment. So that He can sit back, like a man in the stalls at a theatre, and watch us play and go through our absurd

little antics—and be thoroughly amused at us. Others, like myself, see something more in life than that. It seems to me that the mission of every one of us—the purpose in life—is the doing of good. . . .”

“Quite,” I interrupted, “but surely chaining that poor cove up on the lawn like that on a winter’s night is not doing good? I mean whatever he may have done to deserve it . . .”

Sun seemed to be looking through me. A fanatical light shone in his slant eyes. I dwindled into silence.

“I am the Doctor of Souls,” Sun pronounced in a deep, arresting tone. “We each do our good according to our enlightenment and our abilities. Some are content to do their good by growing vegetables and herding swine—for supplying the wants of the fellow-creatures’ stomachs. Others, a step higher, perhaps, do their good by healing the bodies of men with physics and the knife. I, higher still, I like to think, have set myself to a life-work of repairing the injured soul—the soul that has been broken—straightening the soul that has warped. That—the incident at Hythe—was by no means the first of my experiments. It was merely the first one to be discovered and made public.”

I summed up enough courage to interrupt him. Really it took some pluck, for there was something mystical about Sun’s queer fervour that almost frightened me.

“What had chaining that man up on his lawn to do with his soul?” I enquired.

“To reach the soul,” said my friend, “the pitiful, narrow, skew soul of that creature in God’s image, I had to deal with his body. His body is the one thing that individual considers or respects. He considers it first in everything—though, mind you, he doesn’t know it. He considered his body first when he chose his vocation; he considered it first when he chose his wife. He is so wrapped up with his regard for his own body that he has no room for the consideration of anyone—

or anything—else's. His little outing on the lawn"—Sun smiled grimly, in a way that almost made me shudder—"will make him think. His soul will broaden, improve—as a result of that little chastisement. . . ."

"And you mean to go on doing similar things?" I broke in incredulously.

"Hardly similar," answered Sun. "This case in particular is perhaps the simplest I have so far had. The subject was not so much a man whose soul needed improvement as a lout whose mentality needed raising—and that is a work for Olympus, not for me."

"But you'll do the same sort of thing, you mean?" I was staring at him now in frank amazement. I had hardly been prepared for this!

"Assuredly," said Sun with that quiet asseverance that carries conviction. "I have money, I have intellect—what would you have me do with my life? Sell pills? Or start a mission in China?"

"But, good night, Sun!" I remonstrated. It struck me all of a sudden that perhaps the man had been working so hard that he was temporarily deranged. Then I pushed aside the thought. What man could be out of his senses and yet talk so sanely? "But," I added, "you'll simply land yourself in gaol again—that's all! You can't take the law into your own hands like that—in England. This is a civilised country! In Heaven's name, if you have money and intellect—as I know you have—why not devote your energies and your gifts to the forming of some sort of institution for the betterment. . . ."

"There you go, Bunny!" laughed my host. "You and your institutions! Institutionalism is the curse of good work! A man can do more good—doing it quietly and 'off his own bat,' as you say—than by founding the mightiest philanthropical institution that ever marred the beautiful English landscape! An institution is a machine. Human beings don't want machines to correct

them—Civilisation has made them too much like machines themselves.”

“By the by,” I interrupted, to turn him off one of his favourite topics, “can I put all this in my ‘interview’?”

“Certainly!”

“You don’t seriously mean that, do you?” I asked. “Why, Great Guns, man, if your intention is published in my paper when I get back to town, you’ll be dumped into the nearest lunatic asylum! Don’t you realise that?”

“Another of your institutions!” smiled Sun. “You need not worry, Bunny,” he added. “By the time your article is in print I shall be in China.”

“China?” I exclaimed. “Are you going back?”

He nodded.

“Merely temporarily,” he said quietly. “I have a case in there”—he indicated the door behind him—“that I think I can deal with in China better than anywhere else, and it rather suits me since I have a very old friend to visit. . . .”

“What do you mean by a ‘case’?” I asked. My eyes were wide.

“A woman—whose soul has, as it were, become weed-constricted and overgrown through sloth and idleness. . . .”

“Good God!” I cried. “But—is she agreeable . . .?” As I spoke a dreadful suspicion dawned on me—the woman about whom I had heard that evening at Lydd—Mrs. Frayne, who had mysteriously disappeared from Washford a couple of days previously. I was putting two and two together—and staring in horror at my friend of former days. He sat still, smiling at me, and, I have not the least doubt, reading my every thought.

“But, great Heaven!” I muttered. “My dear Sun, have you taken leave of your senses? Supposing I rang up the police? Supposing I published this? And really . . . !”

"In three days' time," said Sun solemnly, "I shall be in China."

"China?" I echoed. "Three days—to China! Are you . . .?"

I stopped—suddenly. Idiot that I was not to have realised it before. It dawned on me with supreme horror now—and I trembled. Dr. Sun was a stark lunatic!

CHAPTER IV

AS the dreadful truth manifested itself, I racked my brains for some plan of action—conscious that my former friend stared at me across the table that separated us as if fully cognisant of my new realisation that he was insane. My first thought, I must admit, was of my own safety, for I had little doubt that a man who would kidnap a woman and hold her a prisoner would make no bones about dealing with me—friend or no friend. But I realised also that I must not show what I felt, if indeed I had not already shown too much. Inwardly I kicked myself for not having the forethought to come prepared. At least I might have been forewarned as to what to expect by reading between the lines of the curious evidence at Sun's trial. Any fool but me must have known that he was off his head. I wondered now that he had got off so lightly. Idiot I was not to have tumbled to the truth at his first mention of his preposterous scheme for "doctoring human souls."

China in three days! I thought to myself: If I can only manage to get back to my car, standing out there on the road, you'll make even a quicker journey than that, old man! You'll be in a mental institution before morning!

But mad as he was, Sun yet maintained all the outward appearance of sanity. He sat there looking whimsically

at me while I cogitated, a half-smile on his lips, his slant eyes fixed on me with a tolerant, slightly amused look, as he might have looked at a baby crawling about the floor.

“You don’t believe me, Bunny,” said Sun in his soft, quiet voice.

I started. It seemed to me incongruous that a man who was so obviously out of his senses should so control himself, should speak so calmly and reasonably. It frightened me. But it came to me that above all, if I valued my skin, I must humour him.

“Oh, yes, I do!” I lied promptly. “What makes you think I don’t, old fellow?”—and I summoned up a silly sort of cackle in an endeavour to give conviction to my lie.

Sun’s eyes narrowed in amusement. I saw that he was laughing at me.

“You’re an entertaining old stick, Bunny!” he remarked. “You do think I’m mad, don’t you? Candidly now, admit it?”

I rose hurriedly from my chair. I saw that it was quite useless pretending with this man—he saw too easily through my pretence. And yet he indubitably *was* mad! But he could sound so sane—and believe himself to be so sane! I did not know what to say or do. I felt that if I had much more of this, I myself would become unbalanced. Sun evidently read my thoughts.

“You think I’m mad, Bunny,” he repeated gently, “and you would rather not offend me by saying so. That’s it, isn’t it?”

I swung round towards him.

“Do you expect me to believe you’re sane,” I challenged, “after hearing this fantastic plan of yours? After telling me, seriously, that you expect to be in China in three days from now—here in Kent?”

“No,” he replied thoughtfully. “I suppose I can hardly expect you to believe me.” He sighed. Then,

slowly, and before I could put another question, he produced a queer-looking object from his hip-pocket and an ordinary penny from a pocket of his waistcoat. I watched him wonderingly while he rose, the same slight, scholarly figure that he always was, walked across the laboratory and carefully stood the penny against the wall, just above the wainscoting. Then he returned to the table, the other thing still held in his hand.

"Watch, Bunny," he invited. Nothing loath, I watched and saw him raise the thing in his hand and extend his arm towards the penny in the corner—as if he were about to fire a revolver. He stood so for a second or two and then—suddenly, and with no apparent cause—that penny leapt into the air and fell ringing to the floor! I jumped! Sun was looking at me and chuckling.

"Did you see anything?" he asked.

"I . . . I saw the penny jump!" I stuttered in lively alarm.

"Quite. But I mean did you see my arm give any indication of a bullet having been discharged from this firearm in my hand?"

"No," I replied. "I really hadn't any idea that that was a firearm."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nothing," I said.

"Go and inspect the penny," suggested my host. I did. There was a neat round bullet-hole through its centre!

"Gad!" I exclaimed.

Sun was laughing.

"Now, Bunny," he remarked amusedly, "let me ask you a question. If I had told you of this, would you have believed it? Or would you in your superior wisdom have concluded that I was mad?"

"Perhaps not," I murmured in self-defence. To tell the truth I was not a little afraid that I might say something that might prompt Sun to turn that infernal

invention on to me! A most lively caution held me! "If you'd told me that you'd discovered a silent explosive, I might not have doubted it. . . ."

"The noise of an explosion," Sun corrected, with the manner of a grandfather guiding a child, "is caused, not by the explosion itself, but by the air that rushes back into the place of the temporary vacuum created. The principle of this automatic is extremely simple. The main fact about it is that the propelling force is not gunpowder but air."

"Compressed air," I supplemented intelligently.

"No," said the scientist patiently. "Air at a normal pressure—but so treated as to cause, every time I press this trigger, a sudden separation of the multitudinous atoms that comprise it. A vastly more powerful force than that of any known explosive. I make use of the same principle in my aircraft. I'll show you the 'plane before you go, if you like. . . ."

"Oh, thanks awfully," I said nervously. "I'd be most interested—but another time. It's rather late, isn't it? I'd better be getting back to Lydd for the night, I suppose. . . ." (At the back of my head was the thought of that poor woman—Sun's "case." I shuddered.)

"Why trouble?" said Sun politely. "There's a telephone here, Bunny—if you feel you'd be more comfortable with a nice fat policeman on either side of you. You never know what a lunatic may be up to next, you know!"—and he laughed as sanely as I have ever heard a man laugh in my life. He added: "Where's the nearest police-station?"

"I suppose there's a local bobby at Lydd!" I replied facetiously, with an attempt at a disarming smile. "That is if *you* want one. I don't."

"One wouldn't be much good to you!" he remarked, as if giving the matter serious consideration. "I'd soon settle one. I'd set Sirius on him—or get Wan-long to deal with him. You'd be surprised at the muscle

under that little fellow's draperies! No, you want a whole squadron, Bunny, to deal with a raving mental defective like myself!"

"Sun!" I cried in desperation. "You sound sane enough—in all conscience! But if you seriously mean you intend carrying on with this hare-brained idea of 'improving souls' . . . and if the poor woman you've got in there . . ."

I stopped. Sun's face had changed its expression. Gone was the smile. He looked at me contemptuously.

"You ignorant fool!" he muttered. "How much you assume you know—and how little you know!"

He clapped his hands together. The door opened, and the dwarf, Wan-long, appeared, with a promptitude that told me he could never have been very far away from us. Some unintelligible instruction passed from Sun to him. He bowed and passed out through the other door. I followed him with my eyes. As the door swung to behind the fellow I caught a glimpse of a further corridor with doors on either side! This deserted, innocent-looking farmhouse in the marshes of Kent was a veritable rabbit-warren! I turned to Sun.

"I know that my intellect is not my strong point," I told him, "but at the same time I consider that you are misguided if you think you will successfully evade the law for any length of time in carrying out your extraordinary and heartless plans."

The door reopened. I looked—fascinated. Following the Chinese was a tall, handsome woman. The dwarf stood aside and the woman advanced into the room—slowly, calmly, as if she walked in her sleep.

"Allow me to present you, Bunny," said Sun with an ironical bow. "Mrs. Frayne, my next patient."

I was too startled, I suppose, to realise what Sun was saying, for I did not bow or do anything. Neither did the woman. My eyes were fixed on her face, noting the extraordinary, almost unnatural, set of her handsome features. Handsome is the word that best describes

Mrs. Frayne; hers is that stately, dignified, refined beauty that permits of no other word, except, possibly, the general adjective "beautiful." Beautiful she certainly was, and, manlike, I found myself drinking in her charm. She was no longer a girl, but she had all the attractions of girlhood; and that she was a lady I knew from the very moment she first stepped into the room. Sun observed my scrutiny of her—and smiled.

"I'll leave you and Mrs. Frayne to become better acquainted," he said, with another little mock bow. "I have some domestic matters to attend to. I will not disturb you for five minutes or so." He turned to the woman, and, walking up to her, made what I then thought to be some sort of sign before her glazed eyes. Her expression changed. Whereas a moment previously it had been doll-like in its lack of animation, now, it seemed, life suddenly returned to it! She stared in sudden bewilderment about her. Then she looked frankly indignant. Sun and his servant slid out of the room, leaving us alone. She turned to me.

"Where am I?" was her first question.

I told her to the best of my ability, and explained who I was and what I had to do with Sun. Her indignation was intense, and for some few moments I had to bear the full brunt of it. I saw then that she was a lady who had been used to having her way in most things. But under the influence of my loud protestations of innocence she quietened, and before very long we were conversing quite normally.

"The man is obviously mad," I whispered, trying to get her to think with me instead of against me, "but I don't believe he's dangerous. If we could only get out to my car. . . ." I ran towards the door, the one by which I had entered the room, and tried it. It was locked. I tried to force it only to find that it was barred securely on the outside. Desperately I glanced about. It was then that I noticed for the first time that there were no windows in the room.

"Try the other door!" suggested my fair companion. I did, but with no better result. We were both Sun's prisoners. We stood looking blankly across the room at each other. Tears filled Mrs. Frayne's beautiful blue eyes. Suddenly: "There's a telephone!" she cried, pointing. To my delight there *was* a telephone, half concealed behind one of the bookcases. I dashed towards it and took down the receiver.

"'Xchange," said a voice laconically.

"Police!" I breathed. "And as quickly as you can!"

"Per-lice?" echoed the voice with a lazy intonation for which I longed to kick its feminine owner. "All right. I'll call you."

I stood chafing with impatience. The wait seemed interminable. At any moment I expected to hear one or other of the doors opening, and to hear Sun's ironical laugh. At last I could stand it no longer. I replaced the receiver, depressed the arm furiously, listened again. Again the lazy voice: "'Xchange."

"Have you got me the Police yet?" I asked abruptly.

"Per-lice?" came the echo. "Hang on. I'll call you."

"I say!" I said angrily. "I called you five minutes ago and you said . . .!"

The voice suddenly assumed masculine characteristics.

"Steady on, Bunny!" it said. "Never lose your sense of humour, my boy!"

Sun!

I flung down the receiver in exasperation.

"I've been talking to Dr. Sun, who's probably in the next room!" I said disgustedly in reply to Mrs. Frayne's enquiring look.

We had no time for further conversation. The far door opened and Sun re-entered, clad in overcoat and cap and followed by the dwarf carrying a portmanteau. The woman turned on him like an angry tigress.

"You infernal little cad!" she cried. "How dare you lock me up in here! If you don't release me this instant . . .!"

She ceased, suddenly. I stared. All Sun had done was to hold up one of his slender, delicate-looking hands as if in deprecation—and she had stopped. Under the light of the strong ceiling-lamp her face showed doll-like, strangely unnatural in its lack of life. It dawned on me. She was hypnotised!

“Look here, Sun . . .” I began, half in anger, half in terror. But I stopped as quickly as the woman had when he looked at me. His eyes were like live coals. Something snake-like, venomous, *evil* stared at me out of those queerly-slanted, colourless orbs. I was—yes, I admit it—terrified. Sun’s temper passed and he smiled.

“Follow Wan-long out at that door, Bunny,” he drawled gently. “Put on your cap. We’re going down to the hangar, and you might catch cold. You said you’d like to see the ’plane, didn’t you?”—and I found myself obeying him with a kind of foreboding dread clutching at my heart. I had never seen Sun thus before and I was for the moment frankly cowed, as if at some powerful influence that emanated from him. Behind me, at a signed instruction from Sun, came Mrs. Frayne, then Sun himself, then Sirius, the unfriendly bulldog. A queer little procession.

The night air seemed to revive me. I turned, waited for my old college fellow to reach my side, then asked him point-blank: “What do you intend doing with me, Sun?”

“I have been giving the matter a little thought,” Sun admitted. “First, Bunny, I really must apologise for not being able to fall in with your little scheme for invoking the aid of the local Police. I had thought to let you put through your call, but, on second thoughts, that might be inconvenient for the excellent Wan-long and my domestic arrangements. There is a lot in the farmhouse”—he waved a hand towards the building in the gloom behind us—“that it would be injudicious for the Police to be poking their stupid noses about in.

You see, Sirius and Wan-long are remaining here for the time being. . . .”

“And I? And Mrs. Frayne?”

“I’m rather afraid I shall have to ask you to make the little trip with me, Bunny—to China.”

“China?” I cried. “But don’t be ridiculous! I’ve got to be back at the office to-morrow night at the latest! The weekly reports from the provinces. . . .”

“I have no doubt,” Sun interrupted with quiet sarcasm, “that you will find that London will manage to exist without you after all. Your paper will of course suffer a sad shock, but it may survive—particularly if you give Wan-long a postcard to your editor explaining that you’ve gone on a trip to China with me for six or seven days.”

We had arrived at the door of the hangar, a great, ugly corrugated-iron erection right on the sea-wall. But Sun’s sarcasm had nettled me. That soft, drawling voice. . . .

“Look here, Sun!” I cried, turning upon him. “I’ll see you d. . . !”

“Ssh, Bunny!” he adjured, as one would a child. “I should hate to do it, but. . . .” his calm, measured tones suddenly fled, and his voice rang out loud and threatening. “If you give me the least trouble, Bellairs, I’ll send you to your God with as little compunction as I would any fool who chooses to oppose me!”

For the moment I contemplated striking the man to the ground, and Sun must have read my intention. He extended a hand. I saw that it held something that I had seen before—in the laboratory—something shapeless and ominous. I am not commonly accounted a coward, but the recollection of Sun’s demonstration of his terrible silent automatic in the farmhouse was yet vividly with me. I found myself following the tiny Wan-long into that shed as humbly and as quietly as the somnolent Mrs. Frayne herself. The dwarf pressed a switch and the hangar was flooded with light. For the next few

minutes I was far too interested in what I saw lying there in the great shed to be seriously concerned with anything else.

CHAPTER V

DR. SUN'S aircraft, a monoplane I suppose it would technically be called, stood on launching stocks in the shed. But it was certainly like nothing in the way of heavier-than-air machines that I had ever seen before. It resembled nothing so much as a great, fat cigar, with two little wings sprouting out horizontally from the fattest part of the fuselage, and with here and there auxiliary fins and rudders, for all the world like those of some monster fish. The whole machine appeared to be made of solid metal; particularly I noted the solidarity of the wing construction. I marvelled that such a machine could ever fly—as I supposed it did—and indeed I would probably have been inclined at first glance to suppose it to be a submarine, had I not known that Sun's mechanical bent tended towards aviation. A substantial iron ladder ran from close to the floor of the hangar, up the side of the machine to a doorway cut in the fuselage.

“Up with you, Bunny,” came Sun's order, and I turned from an inspection of the strong fin construction just in time to see the form of Mrs Frayne, followed by Wan-long, disappear into the body of the 'plane. Nothing loath, for by this time I had quite forgotten my troubles—and possibly my danger—in my new interest in the aeroplane, I climbed up the ladder. Like a child inspecting a new toy engine, I wanted to see everything there was to be seen, to discover whether Sun's undoubted genius had led him to anything of note in the way of aeroplane designing. Certainly the outward appearance and, I found, the equipment of the interior, left nothing to be desired—at least by such a tyro as myself. The

main cabin, into which the door led, was wide and roomy, constructed, panelled and furnished exactly like a small first-class shipboard apartment. It contained among other things a table, a bookcase, several arm-chairs, a sofa, a few shelves, some wide, square windows and electrical fan and light equipment. Forward of this cabin an open door led to what appeared to be the control-room ; inasmuch as I saw a seat perched high in the air in a sort of glass-panelled turret in which there was a large switchboard with numbers of gauges, knobs, levers and little wheels, and other apparatus quite unintelligible to a mechanical greenhorn like myself. Further on was another door, closed. This I correctly guessed to be the entrance to the engine-cubby, situated in the extreme fore-part of the machine. But I had at the time no further opportunity of ascertaining this, for Sun called to me and I had perforce to turn and see what he wanted. He beckoned me ; I had no alternative but to obey. As I re-entered the main cabin I was just in time to observe Wan-long, the dwarf, move out on to the grating above the ladder and close the steel door behind him. Sun turned the key and placed it in his pocket. The incident was significant.

“Come along, Bunny,” he said cheerfully. “I’ll show you your cabin.” I noticed that he had already divested himself of his coat and cap. We passed through a doorway on the far side of the main cabin into a narrow corridor with doors on either side and a panel at the far end marked “Bath.” Sun opened the first door on the right and led the way into a small but compact and cosy single-berth cabin. I followed him in. Something of admiration showing in my face, I suppose, for I caught a quick, fleeting suspicion of pride in his sallow countenance.

“I hope you’ll find everything you want in here,” he murmured politely. “I’ve had Wan-long put you in a few things of mine to go on with. And now you must excuse me, Bunny, but I’ll have to leave you to your own devices for a few minutes. Not for long. Take off your

hat and coat and make yourself comfortable. And—listen to this—once we've started getting under way, don't on any account try to put your head out of the porthole—or you'll have it blown off. We move rather fast just to begin with. Good-bye."

I suppose that brought me back to earth. I had been so enraptured by my contemplation of this wonderful aeroplane and all it contained that I'd forgotten that Sun was taking me off against my will. It dawned on me now that I was not making the slightest attempt to resist this madman. I turned suddenly.

"Look here, Sun," I began hotly.

He was trying to close the door. I put my heavy boot in the door-frame.

"Stand back, Bunny!" Sun advised quietly.

"Stand back be hanged!" I cried. "I've been very interested in your flying-machine but I've seen enough now, thank you. I'm going down again. . . ."

"Stand back!" hissed Sun. He was looking fixedly at me. I don't know what it was, how the phenomenon can be scientifically accounted for; all I know is that Sun's eyes were glowing again, like hot coals, and that I had a sudden sensation of feeling weak, of the room swimming about me. I am popularly supposed by my friends to be a rather stubborn sort of chap—in spite of my rabbit-teeth!—but I felt then as weak and unassertive as a kitten. Sun gently pushed me back into the cabin and I made not the slightest resistance. He closed the door, turned the key, and was gone. I still felt queer. I flopped down on the bunk and passed a hand over my brow. It took me some minutes to recover.

I think what brought me fully to my normal senses again was the *feel*—rather than the noise—of the propeller, or tractor. It was no more than a low, pleasing purr accompanied by a gentle vibration—as if the whole craft had suddenly been given life. I rose to my feet and peered out the porthole. To my astonishment I discovered that we were slowly moving out of the shed.

The beginning of our movement had been so gradual as to have been quite imperceptible, but I caught, as I glanced out into the lighted interior of the hangar, a fleeting glimpse of the shed doorway, with Wan-long, the dwarf, standing there and Sirius squatting frog-like at his feet.

Then, and almost before the retina of my eye could record the image just described, we were out of the shed and into the night; and the sudden transition from brilliant light to darkness momentarily blotted everything out. I felt the machine begin to rise and fall with something of the motion of a ship. We were evidently on the water. By this time my eyes had accustomed themselves to the outer darkness and I began to see things, for it was, after all, a clear moonlight night. I noticed that we were forging through the water like a boat. This 'plane, apparently, did not have floats, but skimmed swan-like on the surface. I could make out, a little way astern, the strong flashes of the Dungeness lighthouse, traversing the horizon with a rapidity that seemed to indicate that we were moving at considerable speed. Then, suddenly, I felt the machine tilt, so that I had to shift my position quickly in order to maintain my balance. I glanced downwards again. Far below me I could make out the little flecks of white that dotted the sea-surface, that same surface we had but a few seconds ago been resting on! This machine certainly did not lack power! I recollected the incident of the small lead-compound pellet Sun had exploded in the court-room—and then the pistol. I remembered his remark: "I will be in China in three days' time." China—in three days! Was it possible!

I looked out. Nothing now but the moon and here and there some bright planet. The 'plane was now as steady as a motor-car running quietly along some country lane; the tilt was rigidly maintained. So, I suppose, some time must have sped by, when, without warning, as if the required altitude had been attained, the floor of

my cabin quickly resumed the horizontal plane. I tired of staring out into the nothingness and sat down on my bunk again. My brain was still awl with half-coherent thoughts. So much had happened in the last few hours, since I had called at that lonely little farmhouse in the marshes. The woman—Mrs. Frayne—why was Sun taking her to China? What fate had the madman in store for her? Why had *I* been included in the complement? Was Sun really insane? Had I anything to fear? I was half inclined to persist in my conjecture that he *was* mad, but his extraordinary lucidity at times puzzled me. If he were mad, then this talk of China in three days might be nothing more than so much babble. This machine, after all, was but an ordinary aeroplane. We would go on until we ran out of fuel—perhaps in mid-air—and next week there would be an account in the papers of a flying tragedy somewhere in France or Germany. But what strange power had Sun that gave me that helpless feeling, that sudden lack of assertiveness . . . ?

I was in the midst of these, and a thousand other, speculations, when I heard the key turn in my door. The door opened. Sun stood there, as amiable as ever.

“Well, Bunny?” said he quietly. “Wind up?”

The man’s conversational tone disarmed me. He was too much like the Sun I had known at the ’varsity for me to be always remembering that he was a lunatic.

“No,” I answered. Then, contradictorily, I became seized with a sudden lively alarm. “Who’s looking after the machine?” I demanded breathlessly. “Is there someone else in the engine-room?”

He shook his head and smiled.

“The machine is quite capable of looking after itself,” he replied calmly. He added whimsically: “Which is more than can be said for quite a few human beings, Bunny.”

“But,” I cried, “supposing something goes wrong . . . ?”

Sun spoke as if he addressed a child.

"We're twenty thousand feet up," he said, "and even if something were to go wrong I'd have plenty of time to put it right again before we crashed."

"But how's the thing looking after itself?" I persisted. "Who's steering it?"

"It's steering itself," Sun explained. "You and Mrs. Frayne and I are the only people aboard. I personally am honoured with your company and do not feel the need of anyone else." His ironical tone changed suddenly to one of tolerance. "Come along with me, Bunny, and I'll put your mind at rest."

I followed him. It was uncanny, when we got to the control room, to see those little levers and gauges moving and oscillating and rising and falling as if some ghost sat there in the control-seat operating them! Sun noted my awed glance and smiled. He pointed to a small mechanism set on a ledge to one side of the turret and entirely sheathed in glass—like one of those hundred-day clocks.

"There's the secret of our balance," he said. "The old principle of the pendulum. See that little rod with the weight suspended from it? Watch it moving—ever so gently—now one way, now another. It's free to move in any plane. See all those little wires—like nerves—all round it? See the rod touch one or another of them now and again? Well, those little cat's-whiskers are actually tiny electrical nerves. When the machine tilts to one side the pendulum swings up against one of them and makes a contact. The contact sets in operation a small mechanism that moves one of the ailerons and rights the 'plane. Understand?"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Did you invent that?"

"No," said Sun contemptuously. "I think Archimedes did—or someone equally ancient. I merely applied it."

He was about to elaborate, but I had meanwhile discovered another dread.

“Supposing that mechanism goes wrong!” I suggested. “Supposing we’re going closer to the ground all the while without your knowing it?”

Sun pointed to a gauge set in the aluminium control-board.

“That,” he explained, “is the elevation control. Simplicity itself. Just an altitude barometer, with a float on top of the column. Look—it’s set at twenty thousand feet. If you watch it closely now you’ll see that we’re dropping slightly—probably we’ve entered a rain mist. Now, see what happens. Did you feel that? As soon as the float drops, one of those little pointers attached to it touches the fixed button on the switch-board—look, there’s one above and one below—and again the electrical contact is made—and this time the elevating plane is raised and up we go again until the float is once more in its proper place. There—you’ll see it reads just twenty thousand feet again.”

The thing had happened while he spoke. I was far too amazed to make any remark. Sun went on.

“Your next question, Bunny, will probably be about direction. How, when I point the nose of the machine at China before I go to bed, can I be certain that I will not wake up in Spain or Lapland. Look at the compass here. Gyroscopic—there aren’t any more efficient compasses made. By the way, have you noticed how very steady the ‘plane is—altogether? Gyroscopes—under the floor boards. My idea. But this compass. See those little notches on either side of the needle? Exactly the same thing. When we swing too far South, the needle makes contact with the one and the rudder is electrically moved—ever so slightly, or we’d wobble—and back we go on our course. See? Now, Bunny! What else is there?”

“Supposing,” I gasped, suddenly struck by the horrible thought, “just supposing the engine failed!”

Sun laughed.

“There are four separate engines, my dear Bunny,”

he comforted. "At present we are running on one. But come in and look." He opened the door I had noticed and we passed into a small well-lighted little room in which were several large tanks, and, on a table in the centre, four small machines each about the size of a motor-cycle engine.

"Surely . . . ?" I began, staring at them incredulously.

"Those are the engines," said Sun. "You must not forget that the atomic engine is a much smaller affair than the clumsy petrol-engine." He touched one of them. "This is the one that we are running on at the moment. Silent, isn't she? Now watch when I press this little governor here." With his bare finger he depressed a small whirring pillar about the size of a two-inch pencil-stump. "There! I've stopped this engine. Look at its neighbour." I looked. It had suddenly sprung into activity; and at the same moment there arose from somewhere in the body of the 'plane behind us the loud clanging of a bell. Sun walked back into the control-room and did something. The bell ceased its raucous clatter.

"The warning-bell," he explained as he returned. "It rings in my cabin when anything goes wrong." He turned to the engines again. "You'd be amazed at the power these little fellows develop," he said.

"I suppose we're moving at a terrific pace?" I ventured.

"Not at the moment," Sun replied, rather surprising me. "Comparatively slowly, as a matter of fact. No more than a hundred miles an hour, the average speed of an ordinary air-liner. But we can 'touch' three hundred m.p.h. when I use all the engines together. I have to economise on oil, you see"—and he indicated the tanks.

"But you said you hoped to get to China in three days," I reminded him.

"It's five thousand five hundred miles to the part of

China we're going to," he rejoined. "Work it out for yourself."

"Fifty-five hours!" I said, after a pause.

"Splendid, Bunny!" mocked Sun. "Go up one! There now, you can go to bed in comfort, old man. And I can give you a further assurance, if you want it. If everything went wrong and we were to fall, we would land quite gently and decorously, and beyond a shaking-up none of us would be any the worse."

"But how?" I asked.

"That I'm not prepared to tell you—yet."

At that moment we both became aware of someone standing in the doorway looking at us. It was Mrs. Frayne—pale and distraught, but awake. Terror shone in her beautiful blue eyes. She shrunk away from Sun and looked imploringly at me. I felt the blood mount to my head.

"That bell...!" Sun muttered. He raised a slender, girl-like hand in front of Mrs. Frayne. I bounded forward.

"Stop that, Sun!" I yelled. "Stop that!"

Sun turned and confronted me. Mrs. Frayne dashed whimpering to my side and clutched me. I felt her warm, rounded arm clasped around my shoulders as if for support. And then I became aware of just one thing only. It obliterated everything else. It held me fixed, as if I had been suddenly changed to stone. It was that glitter in Sun's eyes. For an instant Sun had changed. Slant, wicked, Oriental eyes held me like the eyes of a deadly cobra—and froze me. Sun's hand went up again—making those mystic passes. I felt the woman's arm loosen from about me.

"Off to your rooms!" muttered Sun.

But I still resisted. I tried to raise my arm—to strike him.

"You beast...!" I croaked. And then I felt the strength ebb from me by I know not what agency. I only know that I swayed about in a thick, enveloping mist.

passing into a sort of coma. Perhaps this action was purely mental—however, I did not know. When I recovered again I was alone in my cabin, shaking and trembling as if I had fever!

CHAPTER VI

I WAS awakened by the sunlight streaming through my porthole. For a moment I did not realise where I was, then, as I felt the gentle swaying of the aeroplane and the dull, not unpleasant throb of the propeller, it all came back to me. I was on board Sun's craft, bound for China; and there, in an adjoining cabin, lay that beautiful woman who had sought my help on the previous night. It gave me a certain comfort to reflect that the mad Chinaman's hypnotic influence over the exquisite Mrs. Frayne seemed to have done her little harm so far. But it irked me to think of it. And then I began to wonder why I should be so concerned—over a stranger. After all, Mrs. Frayne was nothing to me. With something like surprise I realised that I was getting quite angry, thinking of the indignity of her lying there, waiting Sun's "justice." I shuddered to wonder what he intended doing with her! I ground my teeth when I remembered how futile and impotent had been my interference on the previous night. A sorry figure I must have cut! Secretly I hoped that she had not been conscious of it. Dr. Sun apparently had the power of hypnotism developed to a remarkable degree—to have so easily influenced me.

And then it came to me that perhaps I was being rather absurd. Sun was courtesy and consideration personified—so long as I made no attempt to oppose his will. And why should I desire to concern myself with this woman and so oppose him? He was obviously out of his senses, or he would never have dared to carry

me off as he had on this hare-brained expedition to China, but I had the gods to thank that he was kindly disposed towards me. I should long since have ceased to exist if he had not "cottoned on to me." I repressed a shudder as I recollected his demonstration of the atomic pistol. Death was there—death without a sound, without a movement! So long as I was careful to remain his friend and let him do what he cared with Mrs. Frayne, I would be safe. But I felt my consciousness rebel at the thought of not attempting to save her from him. I searched hard for a reason for my interest. It flashed suddenly across my excited brain: "Bunny, you're in love with her!" I laughed. Why, to begin with, she was someone else's wife—a "Mrs." Yes But I remembered two blue eyes filled to overflowing with gentle appeal. . . . I sprang to my feet. I realised that I must be in love with her, for the very thought of possible hurt to her was sufficient to set me "seeing red." And what did this fiend intend doing with her?

I dressed as hurriedly as I could. In a little while I left the state-room, passed down the short corridor and into the main cabin. It was deserted. Sun, assured that his pendulum mechanisms would look after the 'plane, had apparently not yet risen. I walked to a window and looked downwards. To the North, and far below us, was what appeared to be a great city, and I wondered which it could be. I was still at the window when Sun walked in, clad, for the first time in all the years I had known him, in Chinese garb. But his face, in spite of his sallowness and his slant eyes, was strangely European, in spite even of his garb. I marvelled again that this man, this misguided genius of medicine and mechanics, with his weird notion of "doctoring souls," could be a Chinese half-breed from some obscure part of the Celestial Empire.

"Good morning, Bunny," he greeted affably. "I trust you slept well?"

"Good morning, Sun," I said stiffly. "Yes, thank you."

“ Well, what do you say to some breakfast ? If you open that locker there I’ve no doubt you’ll find that the excellent Wan-long has paid ample attention to the possible wants of our inner men.” He glanced through the window. “ Berlin, I see. We’ll be crossing the Vistula in another hour or two.” He moved towards the locker, but I intercepted him.

“ Look here, Sun,” I began, “ I think we’d better have this out—here and now.”

He made a deprecating gesture.

“ My dear Bunny,” he said, “ what on earth do you mean ? ”

“ I mean about that woman,” I answered hotly. “ Mrs. Frayne.”

Sun smiled. His smile irritated me, but I held my temper well in hand.

“ So, Bunny,” he murmured softly. “ You’ve fallen in love, have you ? ”

“ Rot ! ” I replied rudely. “ It’s simply that I’m not going to stand by and watch you ill-treat a . . . ”

“ Ill-treat ? ” Sun echoed in mock concern. “ But, my good fellow, there’s no question of my ill-treating her ! I’m not a monster ! It is my mission to do good—not evil.”

As he said this I thought I saw again those fanatical lights creep into his colourless eyes.

“ What are you going to do with her ? ” I demanded.

“ Merely lend her to China for a while,” Sun answered enigmatically. He stood for a moment contemplating me and saying nothing, as if meditating whether to tell me more or not. At last : “ Listen, Bunny,” he said, quite calmly, “ and I’ll give you some facts. Mrs. Frayne is a spoiled, pampered darling who has never suffered one day’s sorrow or inconvenience in her life. She is one of those sheltered women who live, like fairy princesses, in a pleasant garden of superficialities. One of a million women who never see life—raw, naked, as it can be. She is ignorant, intolerant and self-opinionated : she considers nobody but herself . . . ”

“What has she to do with you?” I broke in, inclined to resent hotly all this tirade against the woman who had clung to me so piteously not so very long ago.

“My dear fellow,” Sun protested mildly, “what have any of us to do with others? Have you never heard the Buddhist theory that we are all one—Nature’s creatures, animate and inanimate, all part of one colossal, glorious whole? I have this to do with Mrs. Frayne: she and I are on the same world. I have dedicated my life to the doing of good in a certain particular manner—set myself to straighten warped souls—and she has been brought to my notice as a case where my healing is particularly needed. . . .”

“Good God, man!” I broke in. “Can you be sane? Can you talk of doing good to her—and at the same time hold her prisoner there in her cabin under the influence of mesmerism and hypnotism, or some other black art?”

“Steady, Bunny,” Sun adjured, much as if he spoke to a small child. “The ‘influence’ you refer to is no more than a subtle persuasion; and it’s not in the least injurious. On the contrary, a week of it would do Mrs. Frayne no end of good. Would you rather I used a drug? I must use something. Three days of that good lady’s unbridled, facile tongue might send me to a mental institution indeed!”

His callous tone shocked me.

“At least,” I said, “in our ’varsity days you used to be a gentleman!”

“I beg your pardon,” he rejoined, very politely. “To resume: Mrs. Frayne influences the lives of all with whom she comes in contact—and the influence, I regret, is not for the good. Her husband has been changed from a normal, life-loving man into a cynical, pessimistic creature who had better be dead. All Mrs. Frayne’s fault. With her sons and daughters and her friends her evil influence is the same. At present Mrs. Frayne—possibly through no fault of her own, Bunny—is a blight and a bane upon existence in the town of Washford, where

I had the good fortune to tumble upon this interesting case. Now, in order to change her, to readjust the peculiarly twisted and narrowed thews of her soul, Mrs. Frayne needs two things: work and suffering. No, don't gasp, Bunny. I have observed this precise process many times over, particularly during the late European War. You were rather young at the time, unfortunately. But many and many a woman of Mrs. Frayne's self-satisfied complex found her awakening and her salvation in the suffering occasioned by the loss of a husband or a son at the front. I propose nothing so drastic.

"I shall leave this patient with some very good friends of mine in a certain monastery on the borders of Tibet and China. These friends, good, intellectual men, knowing all about her complaint—as they will—will set her to work under some mandarin in one of the neighbouring villages. Mrs. Frayne will perhaps take six months to find her way back to civilisation. So-called, Bunny—so-called. But by that time she will have suffered some slight inconveniences and—er—disillusionments. And when she ultimately returns to her husband she will be a changed woman—and a woman changed for the better. She will suffer no bodily hurt, mark you; but her soul will have been purified. And I will have the satisfaction of being able to note another good work in the diary I keep to show Peter when some day I get to the Golden Gates."

"But, good God, Sun!" I cried, aghast. "You can't do this—not in the twentieth century! Why, man, they'd hang you for it—cheerfully! Besides . . ."

"I'll risk that!" he rejoined grimly.

My temper rose.

"I'm dashed if I'll let you do it!" I shouted.

Sun raised a slow, admonitive finger.

"Bunny, I've warned you!" he cautioned. "I could dispose of you, if I wanted to, as easily . . .!" He broke off on a note of contemptuous laughter. Then he seemed to calm, and he sighed. "I really never

foresaw the possibility of your falling in love with her," he murmured. "I might have known that a beautiful woman in a state of hypnosis . . ."

"It's not that at all!" I protested. "It's simply that she's a woman . . ."

"Allow me, politely, to contradict you," my host put in. He added: "You were always a susceptible sort, Bunny—even with the girls at the University! And my patient is attractive, I must admit. Besides there is a certain languor about a woman who is only half-conscious. I guessed, when I asked you to accompany me . . ."

"Asked me?" I echoed indignantly. "Fat lot of 'asking' there was about it! With that infernal pistol of yours clapped against the small of my back!" I turned on him angrily. "What *did* you bring me for?" I demanded.

"Ah!" smiled Sun, "I was beginning to wonder how long it would be before you inquired. Your mind-processes are rather slow, Bunny—even for an Englishman. I'll be frank with you. It occurred to me at the last moment. I might be able to broaden your outlook, Bunny."

"Fiddlesticks!" I interrupted.

"As you will," said he, resignedly. "But I have another reason. I want to show you to a very old friend of mine—in China."

"Who?"

"The Chief Lama of a monastery. A worthy man, once my instructor, whose title in the vernacular means 'Brother of the Seven Worlds.' He will be interested to see a well-preserved product of Western Civilisation."

"A Chinese, is he?"

"A Tibetan, really. But a man far above nationality. A man whose soul is only partly of this Earth. A man with more wisdom in his little finger than I have in my whole body."

"Why do you want to exhibit me?"

"Merely for his interest. He won't hurt you. And you know, Bunny, you may even learn something from him. In fact, if he is so minded, he could show you very simply just how much your infatuation for my patient amounts to."

"Please leave Mrs. Frayne's name out of this conversation!" I murmured.

"As you will," Sun assented. "Let us turn to the abstract. Human love, as we know it on this Earth, is a very imperfect thing. This Lama could send you to a world where . . ."

"Send me to a world?" I echoed, staring at him. "What are you talking about?"

"Poor Bunny!" laughed Sun. "Are you really sufficiently egotistical to imagine that this little planet, of all the myriads of planets in the Cosmos, is the only one inhabited?"

"I don't believe or disbelieve," I countered, "but I should hate to say that I *knew*!"

"If you were a Brother of the Worlds you would know," said Sun mysteriously.

"Explain," I suggested.

"Just this: this holy man is so far advanced in the celestial scale that he is free at will to visit—in spirit—any of seven different planets."

I gaped at him. Then I turned away and looked out the window again. Far below us a bank of clouds now intercepted vision-contact with Mother Earth. If I had needed any further proof of Sun's hopeless insanity, I had it now, in this last fantastic remark of his. I realised that there was little point in arguing with a man in his deplorable mental condition.

"Bunny," said a voice from behind me, "stop trying to calculate just how mad I am—and come and have some breakfast!"

We had been talking for quite a while, and as this seemed to be a very sane suggestion, I turned and helped Sun investigate the locker. In a very little while we

were enjoying a reviving repast culled from the store of "the excellent Wan-long." Here were more mysteries: tea and coffee out of urns that apparently would retain their heat until the end of time. Everything that we could possibly want. Afterwards—and at Sun's suggestion—we prepared a tray for Mrs. Frayne and I was deputed to take it into her cabin. She was awake but still under the peaceful influence of the trance. She smiled a little vaguely at my "Good morning," and, seeing her condition and knowing that Sun was in the corridor behind me, I quickly decided that this was not the time to attempt to rouse her out of the state of hypnosis. But I knew, as I gazed at her fair, fresh beauty, that, shrew or not, husband or no husband, I was in love with Mrs. Frayne!

The details of that trip were so very similar that they do not suffer to be recounted item by item. Several times during the course of the voyage we were able to check our position by bearings on some well-known mountain range, coastline or city. We crossed the Black Sea late that evening, and on the following morning found ourselves over the high, snow-swept plateaux of the Roof of the World. It is astonishing what distances an aeroplane going at the rate of a hundred miles an hour will cover—provided there are no breaks in the journey.

It was on the evening of the second day, while Sun busied himself over some little technical matter in the engine-cubby, that I found my first opportunity to see Mrs. Frayne alone. I might have saved myself the trouble. She had, under the strong hypnotic trance, no more intellect than a child. To see her so struck pity into my heart, and my teeth set grimly as I registered a resolution that, come what might, I would not see her ill-treated. In fact, so angry was I that I even contemplated stealing on Sun from behind, while he worked in the engine room, and "braining" him. I remembered his remark that even if we fell we would land in safety.

But it is one thing to plan theoretically, when one is

travelling through the upper air, twenty thousand feet above Mother Earth; and quite another to kill deliberately the only member of the crew who knows anything about the engines or the control of one's machine! And I did not particularly care for the idea of landing in that blasted, snow-swept wilderness we now traversed! I thought better of it, and fell to planning how best to assist Mrs. Frayne once we had set our feet on solid earth again. I gazed at her calm, sweet features—so childlike in her trance—and wondered whether I had ever before seen so beautiful a woman or one who could so move me.

On the morning of the third day I rose to see, right athwart the sunrise over China, on the summit of a lofty, snow-covered mountain, what appeared to me not unlike a mediæval castle—but roofed, and with a roof of glittering gold! It was an entrancing sight in the bright morning lights.

“My home,” Sun murmured, when I joined him at the window of the main cabin. “That, Bunny, is where I was born, that little village thousands of feet down there in the Mekong gorge. Do you see it?”

“And that palace—up there?” I asked by way of reply. I could hardly take my eyes off it.

I saw again the fanatical lights shining in Sun's eyes. He looked at that moment more of a Celestial than I had ever before seen him appear. It was as if the veneer of Western Civilisation fell from him, and the soul of China shone in his eyes. “That,” he said quietly and reverently, “is the House of the Brother of the Seven Worlds!”

“Where are we going to land?” I demanded, suddenly struck by the thought.

“In the snow, just outside the walls,” Sun replied.

“But we'll crash!” I cried, noting the rough character of the boulder-strewn ground. But Sun seemed not to hear. He gazed towards that glittering roof, shining now in the dawn as if alight with a thousand different little fires. I was dismayed at his abstracted, unearthly

expression. In his Chinese robes he looked like a ghost this morning—rather than like a being of earth. Altogether he frightened me. Then he seemed to become aware of my question.

“Wait,” he advised.

“But, Sun,” I protested, “how long do you intend keeping us here? And you don’t seriously mean to go on with your plan . . . ?”

He silenced me by making a sudden movement towards the control seat; and I saw the wisdom of not further interfering with him until we were safely on the ground. We dropped now towards the monastery and that grim-looking mountain range with what seemed to me a sickening velocity. Sun moved the lever he held and we were soon directly above that shining golden roof. I saw then that the building must cover acres in extent! And then: “Hold on to something!” he shouted, and at the same time the nose of the machine tilted upwards at a very steep angle. For an instant we seemed to stay poised in mid-air, and then we began a slow descent, tail first, towards the mountains. Until I realised what was happening I was almost petrified with fear. But I soon saw that there was sufficient power in the engines to give the ’plane the mechanical properties of a helicopter—and Sun was letting us descend with all the care of a mother depositing her baby in its cradle. Freed of this awful suspense, I turned to other thoughts—thoughts of Mrs. Frayne. And then, and almost before I realised that we had landed, there was a slight jar, and we lay in the deep snow just a few yards from the main gate to the great monastery.

I suppose the comforting sensation of being once more on solid earth must have given me a new courage, for what I did then, as I look back on it now, took quite a little pluck. I had been lying awake part of the last night trying to think out some means of escape before Sun could inflict his intolerable “justice” upon the woman I loved. I felt that I should never forgive myself if I did

not do something to frustrate Sun's deliberately placing her in the awful predicament of a white woman alone in wildest China. The contemplation turned me sick.

I had formed some vague notion of escaping from the monastery when we got there, but a glimpse of those grim, forbidding stone walls and the great studded gate was sufficient to dispel my optimism. And then, while I was racking my brains, came something that made me act. It was Mrs. Frayne herself—awake! I supposed the jar we had had on landing had been the cause of rousing her, ridding her of that restricting, obliterating influence Sun had put about her. The sight of her roused me to sudden action. Sun had descended from the control-seat and was now unlocking the outer door, his back towards me. I did not hesitate. He was in the act of opening the door when I jumped, landing full on his back and sending him to the floor like a ninepin! I twisted one of his arms behind his back and held him for a moment face downwards on the floor. I knew that above all else I must not allow the man to turn his eyes upon me—or I would soon find my strength leave my body, as it had previously done. I yelled to Mrs. Frayne to go back into her cabin, and had the reward of seeing her turn and obey.

I dragged the heavily-breathing and half-stunned Sun to his feet and frog-marched him down the corridor and into my own cabin. I did not dare use only one hand, or I might have deprived him of his pistol, if I could have located it among his queer draperies. But I suppose I was too excited; and next to the possibility of saving that lovely woman from his clutches the possession of the automatic seemed a small thing. I flung him sprawling into my cabin, banged the door, locked him in and flew to Mrs. Frayne's succour. Wide awake, she had already guessed the nature of my plan, for she was waiting for me ready clad in her overcoat. I shall never forget the look of gratitude in her dear eyes. I seized her hand, warm and tiny. It thrilled me—even then.

“Come!” I urged. “We daren’t waste a second! If we can get down the mountain-side to that river before Sun gets out of that cabin...! Down the ladder, as fast as you can!”

I half led, half dragged her across the cabin to the door as I spoke. She was down the strong iron ladder even more quickly than I had hoped. With one flying leap I joined her. We stood together in the snow. It was then that I observed, with horror, that the great monastery gates were being opened from within! I grasped her wrist and dragged her forward.

“Run!” I urged. “It’s our one chance!”—and we tore through the snow down the slope. One startled glance I threw backwards. I looked no more, but sped on like one possessed—for behind us, out of the gates, came half a dozen bronze-helmeted figures in hot pursuit. The plucky little woman did not falter. On, on we sped—down the rough, coated slopes—tripping, falling, rising again, helping each other—down the mountain-side towards sanctuary. And then, something seemed to hit me squarely on the back of the head! I heard Mrs. Frayne shriek—and then I heard no more.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN I woke it was to find that I had a splitting headache. I sat on a rude bench in a little cell—in the monastery, I supposed. The room was small and bare, the walls of rough stone and the floor of mud. Light trickled in through a solitary grated window. Then I realised what had woken me. In the open doorway stood—Dr. Sun. He smiled down at me.

“Well, Bunny?” he drawled. “Feeling better?”

“You fiend!” I cried, rising to my feet and swaying about. “Where is she? What have you done with her?”

Sun's equanimity was quite undisturbed. He spoke to me quietly, tolerantly, as if he understood my anger and made due allowance for my small understanding.

"My poor Bunny," he said, "do you seriously believe that your infatuation for that woman . . . ?"

"If you dare breathe another word against her," I shouted, "I'll hit you in the face!" And I must have looked as if I meant it, for Sun cautiously stepped backwards. "What have you done with her?" My tone changed to one of pleading. "For God's sake, Sun," I moaned, "put me out of my awful suspense! My head aches—aches . . .!"

Sun advanced towards me and almost before I had become aware of it had placed a hand on my throbbing brow.

"You have no headache, Bunny!" he averred contradictorily.

"Oh, haven't I!" I cried. "It's banging like a steam-engine! But where's Mrs. . . .?"

"But it's going!" he persisted. He looked at me as if he suspected me of not telling him the truth. "It is going, isn't it, Bunny?"

To my utter astonishment it *did* suddenly seem to have lessened. Indisputably!

"It feels better!" I admitted wonderingly.

"It's gone altogether!" said Sun triumphantly.

I stared at him—gaped. My headache *had* gone! Unbelievably I shook my head. There was not a sign of the racking pain that had a few seconds before been torturing me. Sun was smiling at me—almost fondly.

"Sun, is Mrs. Frayne . . . ?" I began.

"Be quiet about Mrs. Frayne," he advised gently. I do not know why, but I obeyed. His soft-spoken advice fell on me like some soothing narcotic. "You will understand soon," he added. "The Brother wishes to see you. Come, Bunny."

I followed him out of the cell into a wide passage, where we were joined by two men clad as had been my

pursuers of that morning—strong, eagle-faced individuals armed with swords and wearing some sort of close-fitting bronze helmets. We passed through what seemed to me a regular maze of corridors until at length we came to a halt before a great door inlaid with ivory and set with jewels, or semi-precious stones. We waited until the door swung open from within, when Sun signed me to enter. It was a long, narrow apartment, and on a dais at the far end was something that took all my attention, so that I saw very little else. At first I thought it to be a life-size figure of some Eastern god—and toward it Sun gently led me. It was not until I stood a few feet in front of the image, waiting, that I discerned it to be a living man!

A man wrinkled and old, who looked at me through two slits that were his eyes. His face fascinated me and I stared at him. He had the face of either a god or a devil—I was quite unable to decide which. I was aware that he looked at me curiously, aware also that his glance somehow burned into me and saw, as it were, into my thoughts. Neglecting this feeling, I remembered thinking, sarcastically: “So this is that Brother of the Seven Worlds, is it? Some old mountebank monk who deceives the superstitious peasants with conjuring tricks, I suppose! . . .”—and then I stopped thinking; for it seemed to me that I could *feel* his resentment of my thoughts! It was as if I had voiced my thoughts and he had made some sharp, cutting reply that had silenced me! As if he had said: “You poor, ignorant fool! Do you dare to dispute that I am a Brother of the Seven Worlds? See, then . . .!”—and before I could protest or do anything, I felt my senses reel, the room suddenly became unreal and I fell to the floor.

I awoke this time in very different circumstances. I felt extraordinarily light-hearted, as if I had never had a care in the world! I sat in the stern of a quaint, shapely craft that glided across the still waters of a moonlit lake.

About the waters beneath and by the sides of the boat glided and gleamed fishes of weird and beautiful shapes and iridescent colours. Across the still surface drifted slowly and seductively the sweet notes of some plaintive instrument. On the shore, towards which my queerly-clad boatman steered us, stood such stately marble palaces as had surely been wrought by the hand of no living architect. And strangely I accepted it all. I did not marvel or wonder at the incongruity of everything about me. My clothes were strange; my very body felt unreal, in a sense, and yet I accepted it all without question. It seemed curiosity was stilled, or did not exist.

We glided to the steps of a palace whence came the sweet music. The boatman brought my craft alongside. I stepped out, filled with a confidence such as I could not recollect ever having possessed before. I walked lightly up the steps towards the great open doors, gaily, gladly. I entered a brilliantly lighted hall whose ceiling seemed to be so high as to be almost out of sight. Strange, exotic plants bloomed in beds about alabaster fountains that played here and there in the stately apartment. The air was faintly scented with some erotic, subtle perfume. Beautiful draped women moved here and there between groups of people—and dignified-looking men, clad much as I was. I did not hesitate. I seemed to know why I had come.

A girl disentangled herself from among a little group and came gladly towards me. I stood, almost swooning at the sheer beauty of her. She was youth personified. She greeted me gaily—not in English, nor in any language of Earth that I knew, but in some soft, mellow articulation of full, pure vowels and clear consonants. I answered her in the same language, nor did I even wonder at being able to speak it.

We moved together towards the doors, in and out among the splashing fountains and the queerly-beautiful shrubbery,—my arm about her and her head resting

lightly on my shoulder. It seemed that shame did not exist—here. People turned to smile fondly at us as we passed—the smiles of others glad to know and share our love. My boatman waited at the steps. We entered the skiff and sat down side by side in the stern. We glided away. The boatman, out in the lake, laid aside his solitary oar and took up a shapely stringed instrument whose notes were the song-throbs of nightingales. I felt my loved one's heart against my side. I felt I might faint from sheer ecstasy. . . . I was fainting away. . . .

The cell—in the monastery. I was back in the cell. Sun stood in front of me, smiling.

“God!” I cried, leaping to my feet. “Why did you wake me? Why did you not let me sleep and dream my dream through?”

“You have not been dreaming,” said Sun gently. “That, Bunny, was one of the seven Worlds known to the Brother. It is a world once removed above bad old Earth.”

“But why didn't you let me stay?” I said angrily. “Where is that place? Who was she?”

Sun motioned me to be calm.

“Aren't you rather anxious to know what's happened to Mrs. Frayne, Bunny?” he asked softly.

“Mrs. Frayne!” I echoed contemptuously, suddenly recollecting the existence of the woman. Then I laughed—yes, coarsely and horribly laughed. The idea that I should have been concerned over anyone so uninteresting and—sordid—as Mrs. Frayne, amused me vastly. It seemed I had just heard the best joke in years. But I turned at once to my former subject. “Sun,” I said urgently, “was that really a *real* world? Does she actually exist—somewhere in this wonderful Cosmos? Or have you been hypnotising me again?”

“Make no mistake, my dear Bunny,” replied Sun soothingly. “Any man with a sufficiently strong intellect may develop the power of hypnotic influence;

but I have no more the power of sending you to that other World than I have of sending you direct to Heaven, if there is such a place. Only the Brother of the Seven Worlds can make you dream those dreams, Bunny. . . .”

“Is it some sensuous creation of his imagination? Or is it real?”

Sun again shook his head.

“If it is sensuous, Bunny,” he said gently, “let’s be honest with ourselves. We are made that way—by the Creator. There is no honest merit in virtue, Bunny. Excess, in a strong man, is strength. It is only excess in a weakling. Besides . . .”

“Sun,” I interrupted, “I must go back—if even for an hour! Take me to the Brother . . . Sun. . . . Her eyes, her lips, her voice!”

He had taken me gently by the arm.

“Come, Bunny,” he murmured. “That is quite out of the question. My mission is over. The Brother has seen you, and Mrs. Frayne is already installed in the kitchen of a certain mandarin—a friend of my honourable mother’s—and my work is over.”

How we got back to England I could never really describe in detail with any accuracy, for I lived, as it were, in a dream. My soul—or my heart—lingered in that other world of which I had been given so brief but ecstatic a glance. I lay night after night in my cabin wide awake, while we soared over the mountains of the Roof of the World, over Europe—thinking of *her*. Her exquisite loveliness had turned my head—had divorced me from peace for ever! I felt that I did not want to live, without her. I had tasted something so ethereally lovely that I was doomed to discontentment for the rest of my life. On the morning of the day we arrived back in Kent, I happened to look at my reflection in the mirror, and I started in astonishment. My cheeks were hollow, great black patches circled my tortured eyes. Sun took pity on me and sent me to sleep. I slept all through the

day and felt a queer peacefulness when I awoke towards evening. Sun had pity in that curious heart of his.

Mrs. Frayne held no more interest for me now than the girl who swept out my flat in London. The thought that I had once fancied myself in love with her was—frankly—repugnant. I forgot about her. It was not until the following Autumn that startling headlines in my paper made me remember her—and blush! I read the account of her trials and sufferings in the wilds of mountainous China with not so much as one iota of sympathy marring my judgment. In my opinion she was a shrew who richly deserved her punishment—and Sun was entirely justified!

CHAPTER VIII

IT sometimes amuses me to think that I was once branded “the biggest liar in the length and breadth of England!” I shall never forget, not if I live to celebrate my own centenary—which God forbid!—the furore of incredulity and derision that greeted the printed account of my first adventure with Dr. Sun, the half-Chinaman. It was not published in my own paper, I might mention. When I told the chief that in the short week during which I had absented myself from the office I had actually been to China in an aeroplane, he looked at me in a half-scared, half-concerned sort of way, and advised me to take a month’s holiday! He said I showed signs of overstrain—which, incidentally and unfortunately, I did. It was not until I persuaded him to get in touch with the police and investigate the disappearance of Mrs. Frayne, that his concern and alarm gradually changed to wonder. Even then he was not agreeable to publish my story.

The lonely farmhouse near Lydd was found to be deserted, and so afforded little if any proof of my story’s

veracity. I fancy my editor could not quite get rid of a suspicion that I had concocted the whole unlikely yarn with the object in view of winning a certain notoriety, and that I had made use of Mrs. Frayne's disappearance merely in order to add a little "interest." In the end, and with his ready permission, my written account of the adventure was sold—for a song—to an obscure little provincial newspaper, and the ridicule I had to put up with from my brother journalists in the metropolis in consequence of its subsequent publication was something very irksome at the time. (Though I can laugh at it now, of course!) Ananias and the Baron Munchausen could not hold a candle to me, I was told!

Well, two months later, as if to vindicate me, came a curious story from the Midlands. A young man-about-town, one Reginald Graham, motoring northwards in his "sporting" two-seater, when on the outskirts of Derby had the misfortune to knock down an old lady. However, after explanations to the authorities, offers of compensation (he was a youngster of some means, apparently), and an examination of his driver's licence—which was covered with police endorsements for speeding—he was permitted to proceed.

Then, at about nine o'clock that same night, just as a great limousine was overtaking him along a straight and level stretch of road, he had a puncture. He stated that he could conjecture no explanation for this preliminary mishap, since all the tyres of his car were new and the road surface as smooth as a bowling-green. (It was when I had read to this stage of the report of the outrage that I found myself smiling and remembering Dr. Sun's atomic pistol, that silent, deadly weapon he had once demonstrated to me in his laboratory in Kent!) Mr. Graham's car skidded—he admitted that he was driving rather faster than usual—but with great presence of mind and skill he was able to avert a more serious mishap and bring his racer to a standstill. To his astonishment, the other car pulled up with him, and just abreast of him ;

and as Mr. Graham jumped to the ground the door of the limousine opened and a man presented a revolver at his head! He could give no more coherent description of the man than that he was of slight stature, that he was dressed in faultless dinner-garb, and that he spoke perfect English. To Mr. Graham's further astonishment and dismay, the chauffeur of the limousine, a little figure no more than four feet tall—and whom I at once recognised as Sun's manservant, the "excellent" Wan-long—now approached and handcuffed him.

Graham says he had no idea why he did not then attempt any resistance, the revolver notwithstanding. He states that he just stupidly stood, fascinated by the queer glitter in the eyes of the man who held it. And then came the most extraordinary part of the whole business—an outrage that set all the linotypes in England printing quarter-inch headlines in a very few hours. Between them, Dr. Sun and Wan-long (for I personally had by this time not the least doubt that the taller of the two was indeed no other than my old college-fellow, the "Doctor of Souls") clasped about the unfortunate sporting motorist's one ankle a solid iron shackle to which was attached a fair length of chain. But it was not until the dwarf began driving a long steel mooring-pin into the very centre of the roadway with a heavy sledge-hammer, that the amazed Graham began to put two and two together and to think of offering opposition. He hurled himself towards the man with the pistol—or intended to. For he tried very earnestly and actually did not move an inch! In some mysterious way he seemed rooted. Something—a dull, stupid lethargy, heavy, like a drug—possessed his body and prevented him from making any movement! It was not until the whole affair was a thing of the past that Graham realised he had been hypnotised! Those lights, shining like live embers in his captor's slightly slant eyes, fascinated and held him, like the eyes of a snake will hold its prey!

When Graham gathered his wits again it was to find

that he was alone on a deserted road, both his own car and the larger one having disappeared. He was relieved, however, to find that he had recovered the use of his limbs, and he immediately set about an ineffectual attempt to free his leg from the shackle and to root up the iron pin that held him captive to the roadway on the end of a ten-foot length of chain!

He was still so occupied when he heard the sound of a car approaching in the distance. With horror it dawned on him that, chained to the road as he was, he might not be able to get out of the way of the car! Terrified, he straightened himself and with mounting alarm watched the headlights of the oncoming vehicle grow rapidly stronger! He began frantically waving his arms and shouting! Would the driver see him and pull up in time to swerve and avoid him? To his dismay the oncoming car seemed not to be slacking a whit in pace! On it came, relentlessly, like a juggernaut—and straight for him! Dazzled by the powerful headlights, and shrieking, he jumped—just as the fury was almost upon him! He sprawled on the roadway and the near wheels flashed by, over the chain, within a foot or two of his head! It was then that he recognised the car, from its peculiar, rakish design. It was his own "racer"!

He staggered to his feet, passed a hand over his moist brow, followed the car with his eyes. Wonderingly, he observed it to be slowing down, turning! Now, horror of horrors! it was headed towards him again, roaring—like an avenging monster! He caught one glimpse of the huddled figure of a man, a cramped-up, dwarf-like figure at the steering-wheel, and then he had to leap aside again—for dear life!

An early motorist found him in the morning, lying unconscious but unhurt on the roadway by the side of his abandoned car. Heaven alone knows how many times he had had to stand the nerve-racking ordeal of the night before—that last-second jump for life—but the strain to his system must have been considerable, for he

never thoroughly recovered from it. To the wheel of his racer they found pinned a little note :

“Now perhaps you will be more considerate of pedestrians.”

Just that—unsigned.

But even then, it was not until a thin, very nervous and humbled Mrs. Frayne made her reappearance from China with harrowing tales of her sufferings and humiliations in that heathen land, that I came into my own. Within a week of her arrival I achieved an importance that, flattering as it undoubtedly was at the commencement, soon began to make me wish that I had not been so intimately connected with the notorious “Doctor of Souls!” My work benefited, it is true: for soon after my first series of relevant articles I was given a subeditorial room.

It was at home that my new renown grew to be something of a nuisance. I had the biggest and most weirdly assorted variety of callers, I should think, of any man in London. Scientists, mystics, reformers, trick variety-turn “hypnotists”—everybody, down to the police. I was not supposed to know it, but I know it nevertheless for a fact: my flat in Coram Street was watched continuously for three months by the metropolitan police in the hope that Sun would give himself away by calling on me. All to no avail. For all I saw of my old friend, or knew of his whereabouts, he might have been a myth. But the possibility that he might indeed turn out to be a myth was very soon dispelled. One by one, new experiments of the “Doctor of Souls” came to the public ken, and by the time Sun and I made our second collaborative bow, headlines in the daily newspapers about “DR. SUN, THE MAD CHINESE SAVANT!” had become items of almost monthly regularity.

To confess the truth, I was not a little desirous of renewing my acquaintance with him—startling as were the majority of his weird “experiments.” I am popularly supposed to be “susceptible” to pretty faces, but,

be that as it may, I had never once forgotten that face of which I had had so brief a vision that now long-distant night in the House of the Brother of the Seven Worlds. The recollection of its sheer intoxicating beauty was with me day and night, though I will admit that it hardly obsessed me as it had done before Sun had given me blissful sleep. On earth I knew I should never find the equal of my "Lady of the Clouds," though once, in Florence, not very long after my return from China, I ran across in a curiosity shop an old print that reminded me something of her. I bought it and loved it ever afterwards. It stood on the mantelshelf in my living-room and I used sometimes after my day's work to sit gazing at it and dreaming of that fairy lake in the clouds. Again I sat in the stern of that swan-like craft, my loved one's glorious head resting on my shoulder, the sweet nightingale-notes of our boatman's stringed instrument falling dulcet on our ears . . . God! Is it to be wondered that I wanted to meet Sun again, when Sun alone of all men on earth might lead me again to her!

It was rather late one night. I had just returned from Fleet Street. A neglected novel lay on the rug by the side of my chair, and I sat staring into the fire. Suddenly there broke into the silence of the room a loud patter of morse from the loud-speaker standing on the top of my wireless set. I was very proud of my radio installation—a seven-valve "supersonic" I had constructed unaided.

"Dash!" I muttered aloud. The buzzing of morse meant that I had forgotten to switch off the accumulator on the previous evening, careless ass that I was! Inwardly I kicked myself, for that meant that the battery would be all but run down. I was about to rise and switch off the current when I was arrested by a voice, loud and distant, in the speaker.

"Mars calling!" boomed the voice. "The planet Mars calling the planet Earth!"

I stared at the thing, my mouth wide! I was so surprised that I suppose I quite forgot to wonder how the

Martians had acquired their very correct English accent!

"Mars calling!" repeated the loud-speaker.

I rose, still gazing incredulously at the set, and approached it with almost a reverence. I peered into the cabinet. All the valves were burning. I put my ear to the loud-speaker flare and listened. There were the usual quiet crackles and "mush," but for the nonce the voice was silent. I looked to see what station the dials were tuned-in to. They were just as I had left them on the previous night, after my last vague "twiddle" when the European broadcasting stations had closed down. The set was tuned-in to no place in particular. Great Guns! I wondered, could it really be Mars calling? I listened again. Suddenly a voice blasted out of the flare, so loud and strong as almost to deafen me.

"Hallo, Bunny!" said the voice.

I jumped! Indubitably the voice had come out of the loud-speaker! I glanced round the room to satisfy myself that I was alone. I was. There was no place of concealment in the room sufficiently big to accommodate a monkey—let alone an articulating human! Again I stared, open-mouthed, at my wireless set.

"Hallo, Bunny!" said the loud-speaker, but more softly this time. And this time I recognised the voice.

"Sun!" I gasped.

"Splendid, Bunny!" chuckled the loud-speaker. "Right first time!"

"But where *are* you?" I cried. Foolishly, I shouted my question into the loud-speaker—in my lack of a general bump of mechanics forgetting that the instrument was a receiver and not a microphone.

"Ah!" said the invisible Sun, having apparently heard my question. "What about guessing? Mars, do you think?"—and again he laughed.

"Where the deuce are you?" I shouted. "Where are you talking from?"

I swung round as I heard a faint creak behind me. The door leading to my dining-room was slowly being

opened from within. First I saw a hand, a long, girl-like member, and in the hand was an ordinary pair of headphones. The man followed.

“Sun!” I cried.

CHAPTER IX

HE came into the room, his quiet ready smile on his lips. It struck me anew, the marvel that this seemly-looking, kindly individual was caricatured in the illustrated papers as a great, evil-looking monstrosity of a Celestial! (No wonder the police could not lay their hands on him!)

“You, of all people!” I cried. “But how . . . ?”

“Simplicity itself, my dear Bunny,” laughed Sun in his quiet, unobtrusive way as he extended the 'phones he carried. “Your good servant told me that you were due back at any minute, so I took the liberty of waiting for you. And while I was waiting it occurred to me that I might give you a little stimulating surprise. A surprise, Bunny, provided it does not involve too great a shock, is as good a tonic as a cold shower. It livens up one's brain . . .”

I interrupted him with a nervous laugh.

“I might have known it!” I said. “My recollection of your self-opening doors and self-switching electric-light mechanisms might have warned me! But sit down, old man! I'm delighted to see you! Take your coat off and put down your hat. And explain that loud-speaker's behaviour . . . !”

Sun's queer, colourless, slightly slant eyes twinkled with amusement.

“Why, surely every schoolboy knows the trick!” he murmured. “I found these 'phones, with a nice long extension on them. I imposed them over the primary winding of your last low-frequency transformer, switched

on, and waited. Then, when I heard you on the landing I darted through into the next room with my improvised microphone in my hand. *Voilà!*"

"Well I'm blown!" I ejaculated. "But I didn't know one could do that!"

"My dear old Bunny," said Sun, with a return of the "paternal" manner that I knew so well, "as you go on in life you may find that there are just one or two *other* things you don't know!"—and he smiled charmingly, just to take the sting out of the words. I giggled rather fatuously.

To make no bones about the matter, Sun's unannounced re-entry into my more or less well-regulated life, much as I had wanted to meet him again, had disconcerted me not a little. I was far from being at my ease. I recollected with a lively concern that if he were to be discovered here—with me—I might find I had quite an embarrassing lot to explain to the sergeant at the nearest police-station. Not only that, but I was not quite certain in my own mind that I really knew *this* Sun. For the sheer brutality of some of his latter exploits had given me furiously to think. And I suppose some of my doubts must have shown in my face, for my uninvited guest, who had by this time made himself comfortable in the smaller of my two arm-chairs, suddenly looked up and said: "I wouldn't worry about that, Bunny."

"What?" I asked, surprised. I sat down with as careless a grace as I could summon.

Sun smiled tolerantly, as one might at the whimsicalities of a child.

"The incomparable Wan-long will see that we are not disturbed," he averred.

"Oh," I rejoined, not very brightly I'm afraid, but a little reassured nevertheless. It gave me not a little astonishment to realise that I felt comfort at the information that Wan-long hovered protectively somewhere in the vicinity. It was incongruous—but I did. I sud-

denly remembered that I was host. "Would you care for a drink?" I asked.

The Doctor of Souls waved aside the offer with a slender, well-manicured hand.

"I have not yet acquired the habit," he explained apologetically. "I cannot afford such luxuries."

Recollecting that Sun's "honourable" mother was admittedly one of the wealthiest ladies in the Province of Yunnan, I gave him a pretty incredulous stare. He enlarged.

"You take me too literally," he explained in his low, soothing voice. "Drinking spirits involves a waste of time. Time, my Bunny, when one comes to think of it, is the one commodity none of us can afford to waste. Money may be wasted and made again—but not time. And I have too much work to do—on this Earth. My time is all too short!" As he said this I thought I caught a sudden quick suspicion of those well-remembered fanatical lights that sometimes shone in his usually untroubled eyes, and made me wonder whether the Doctor of Souls could really be quite sane. I moved in my chair a little uneasily perhaps, and changed the topic. For a while we conversed on general events that had happened since we had last met, and at last I asked him where he was staying. Instead of replying Sun smiled at me and slowly shook his head.

"You don't trust me sufficiently, I suppose?" I chided.

"It's not that," he answered. "I do not believe that you would deliberately give me away to the police, Bunny. But you might inadvertently let drop . . ."

"You still have a very flattering opinion of my discretion and general integrity, I notice!" I interrupted sarcastically.

"My dear Bunny," he laughed, "it would be foolish of me to blame you for certain intellectual handicaps imposed on you by ancestors possibly a hundred years dead!"

“Thank you!” I rejoined, considerably nettled at his ready assumption. Angrily I added: “I might say, Sun, that I have once or twice seriously considered whether it would *not* be my duty to give you over to the police, if ever the opportunity came my way. Certain of your ‘experiments,’ and in particular that heartless, brutal ordeal you put young Graham to, that night near Derby . . .”

“He richly deserved it!” my guest contradicted. “The young barbarian! If the admirable Wan-long had continued the corrective for a week, Mr. Graham could hardly have been repaid the inconvenience and shock he had inflicted on long-suffering pedestrians in the five years he owned those mechanical abominations he called his ‘racers’!”

“It was inhuman!” I countered. “You broke his nerve!”

“Not at all!” said Sun. “He’s driving again. He passed me to-day, as it happens, in the Strand. But I noticed that he drove very slowly and cautiously!” Sun chuckled in a way that brought a sudden prickly sensation to my scalp. He resumed, before I could offer any comment: “But you are no doubt wondering why I have inflicted myself on you again—after this long separation.”

“You put it badly,” I observed. “In a sense, I’m delighted to see you.” My eyes strayed to the mantelshelf and the print I had bought in Florence. I waited eagerly for Sun to continue.

“Why?” he enquired, the suspicion of a smile about his thin, restless lips.

“Shall I be honest?” I asked by way of reply. “Sun, I’ve never forgotten *her*. I never will forget her—not if I were to have a dozen lives!”

“Poor Bunny!” Sun murmured. “What a tragedy—to be the slave of a phantom!”

“A phantom?” I cried. “But she was *real*, you told me! You swore to me that that other world does really exist . . .!”

He waved me to silence.

"She was real, I suppose," he declared, "in so far as any of us are real. You must remember, Bunny, that *we* are no more than ghosts. Our bodies are far from being the solid things they appear to be. There is nothing solid in the whole of the known universe. We are all no more than shades—real only to one another's minds. Actually, your body did not leave the monastery, if you recollect. It was your soul that journeyed through space. Thus your inamorata was no more than an idea—the more powerful because you were in a state of hypnosis, under the control of the Brother of the Seven Worlds. And one can forget—ideas." Sun paused, in search of a fuller means of explanation. He resumed: "Did I never demonstrate to you my large working model of the human brain? No? If I remember correctly you did see it, in my laboratory in Kent. I thought so. Well, if I'd shown it to you you'd have observed the mechanism of a human idea.

"Each new idea, or thought, forms a channel in the pliable brain matter—each its own little channel. If the same thought occurs again it goes naturally through the same channel, making that channel wider. Thus, if you think the same thought over and over again, the channel becomes wider still. Sometimes it grows too wide, and thoughts slide through it involuntarily. And then, my Bunny, you are certified insane and incarcerated in a lunatic asylum."

Sun broke off and laughed in a manner that made me shiver. "But, and this is why you are so infatuated with your lady of the other World, in children and persons under the influence of hypnotism the normally consistent brain matter of the adult is softened and easily moulded. Ever recollect having had a nasty fright as a child, Bunny? You'll never forget a solitary detail of it until you die, will you?"

Now while Sun had been speaking I had noticed him put a hand into a coat pocket and draw forth what I at

first took to be a little silver-encased pencil. He played with it carelessly as he resumed, and involuntarily I found my eyes straying towards it. I remember wondering, very vaguely, for I was extraordinarily interested in what he had to say, why it glittered so. And then I noticed that it was not a silver pencil at all but a small shining "gadget" with little highly polished and pivoted vanes that revolved, and that Sun continually flicked with a forefinger. And then, most astonishingly, I found myself growing drowsy. I heard Sun's soothing voice at a distance :

"And so, you see, Bunny, ideas—under certain conditions—may be forgotten. . . ."

I made a tremendous effort to pull myself together, but I must actually have fallen asleep! When I suddenly awoke again I realised with something akin to dismay that I must have dozed for quite a while, for Sun was in the middle of saying: "Oh, very well then, Bunny. Let's drop in at the Ambassadors' and have a little supper, shall we?"

CHAPTER X

I STARTED to my feet and tried to cover my confusion with a ready assent. I noticed, incidentally, that he no longer held that little glittering thing in his hand—having apparently replaced it in his pocket.

"Excellent idea!" I said brightly, as if I had courteously heard every word of his harangue. "I'll get my coat." I stole a glance at him and was relieved to see that his face was as impassive and unconcerned as ever. It was obvious that he had not noticed my rudeness, which I rather shamefully attributed to two glasses of stout I had imbibed before leaving Fleet Street that evening! At the door I paused. "Aren't you rather frightened that you may be recognised at a place like the Ambassadors'?" I enquired.

He shook his head reassuringly. Still a little dazed I walked on to the landing and put on my overcoat. Sun rose and followed. As we left the block I caught a glimpse of a large hooded touring-car on the far side of the street, at the wheel a little sinister-looking figure no bigger than a boy of eleven or twelve. But it occurred to me almost immediately that I must be mistaken in conjecturing the man to be none other than the "admirable" Wan-long, for at once the car moved off. We strolled through Russell Square and towards the West End. In a few minutes Sun and I faced each other across a corner table in the famous restaurant.

"And now," said Sun, after the waiter had seen to our wants, "I may as well tell you why I have sought you out again, Bunny."

I craned forward to listen, for he spoke in an undertone. I was fairly fortified against undue astonishment by my knowledge of the extraordinary man and his extraordinary methods, but I will admit that I was hardly prepared for his next statement.

"You may help me to avert the perpetration of a human sacrifice, Bunny," said Sun.

"What!" I gasped.

"Why look so surprised?" he asked.

"Well, good heavens!" I retorted. "After a remark like that, what do you expect me to look? Are you serious? Human sacrifice ceased centuries ago!"

Sun slowly shook his head and smiled. "No, my friend," he rejoined quietly. "That is where you are mistaken. Ostentatious human sacrifice, yes. Burning at the stake and that sort of thing, I grant you. We are a little more refined in our methods these latter days of enlightenment. But human sacrifice is practised in this England every day of our lives. In this room, Bunny, not ten yards from where we are sitting now, there is a woman who is slowly, insidiously being starved to death!"

I gaped at the man. The Ambassadors' Restaurant struck me as hardly the place where anyone would be in

danger of dying from starvation ! Again came the conviction that Sun must be mentally unbalanced. Such fantastic talk as this savoured too much of the madhouse to be quite to my liking, and I felt suddenly quite a little comfort in the fact that we sat in a crowded haunt of fashionable London. I recollected well how, at the time of our last association, the peculiar reasoning of the Doctor of Souls had quickly persuaded me that he was insane ; but with that recollection came the other, that when I parted from him I was convinced that no better balanced brain than Sun's existed in all Europe.

Until now his conversation this evening had been perfectly normal. But now—this slim faultlessly-dressed little man talking of “human sacrifice” ! Why, it was incongruous—ridiculous ! So it was, until I remembered again that this ostensibly innocent and harmless-looking individual was a man wanted by the police of at least four different European countries ! The recollection made me give more serious heed to what he had said. I followed his glance towards a near-by table at which were seated a somewhat ill-matched couple, whom I at first took to be father and daughter, or grand-daughter, in fact. I stared hard, I'm afraid. Was this the victim of the “human sacrifice ?”

This demure-looking young lady, was she being “insidiously starved to death ?” She certainly did not look it ! By the way she trifled with a plate of strawberries and cream she gave me every impression of having done full justice to the previous courses ! She appeared to be little more than a girl—twenty-two, perhaps—and she possessed the most perfect profile I had seen in many a long day.

As I gazed at her it occurred to me that I was indulging myself in a direction not explored by me for many months. Women had had remarkably little interest for me of late. To-night it was as if a veil had been torn from before my eyes, so that I observed their charms afresh. But I was too busy staring—not rudely, for she was not aware of

it—to give much time to thought just then, for I had seldom seen anyone more beautiful. By contrast her companion was pitiful—a gross, self-satisfied looking individual of about sixty years of age. I became aware before very long, from certain little unmistakably proprietary mannerisms, that they were man and wife!

“Starved to death?” I echoed, turning belatedly to the Doctor of Souls. “What are you talking about?”

Sun was quite unperturbed at my tone.

“There are different varieties of starvation, Bunny,” he explained, with the patient air of a parent addressing a child. “Imagine a man with the soul of a great artist condemned to an office-stool. Think of a caged bird, starving for lack of freedom . . .”

“Well, what’s she starving from?” I interrupted rather ironically and casting a sceptical glance at our unknown—as I thought—neighbours.

“Human love,” Sun murmured. “He gives her pleasure, comfort, entertainment, security—but not love. That girl will waste away—her soul will slowly be sacrificed—and she will not know it until it is too late!” Sun’s voice was low, passionate. I stared at him wide-eyed, realising that he was in deadly earnest. “Look, Bunny. That dame in the far corner. See the lady I mean . . . ?”

I followed his unobtrusive glance. It centred this time about a woman in late middle-age, dining alone. She was double-chinned and beneath her fashionably short skirts she displayed—well, a good deal more than was quite decorous in one at her time of life. She seemed to be looking enviously at the couples dancing in the cleared space between the tables.

“A case in point,” Sun observed. “Observe her wistfulness, Bunny. Yes, my friend, I have no doubt that to your young and somewhat brutal eyes she may appear to be no more than just the least little bit ridiculous. But she is rather pathetic, don’t you think—on second consideration? Like an old man standing by a

cricket-pitch, watching the youngsters, wanting to join in the game, and only getting in the way. No one wants her, you see. Nor would she crave the elusive joys of this queer Game we call Life if she had tasted those which are a woman's right in her time. But she did not. She was sacrificed. A human sacrifice, Bunny. Yes, don't look so shocked! She was the man's third wife and he had one foot in the grave when he married her—bought her from her parents when she was seventeen. God, Bunny! What pleasant atrocities were committed in the name of Civilisation in good Queen Victoria's reign! There you see the ashes of the sacrifice; and out of the ashes, wistfulness, hunger, envy, dissatisfaction, pathos. Do you wonder I turn my healing in the direction of Mrs. Dickson, while there is yet time?—and he nodded towards the nearer table.

“But what can *you* do about it?” I demanded. “After all, Sun, it's nothing to do with you! It's not *your* business!”

Sun's eyes suddenly flashed. I had a glimpse of burning lights and involuntarily I shrank back. In such occasional moments this man seemed to me to be slightly other than human. He frightened me.

“I am the Doctor of Souls!” Sun intoned, and for a few moments I said nothing. I had, however, sufficiently regained control of my *morale* to be about to ask him a further question, when a diversion occurred. The subjects of our discussion rose. The girl passed close by my chair. I was amazed by the dazzling beauty of her, a sheer loveliness that went to my head like cognac. Close by us she turned to say something to her gross, incongruous husband. I suppose turning must have made her lose her sense of direction, for she veered slightly towards me with the effort—and accidentally her hand brushed mine. Next instant she was smiling an apology down at me, and I had a fleeting glimpse of sparkling grey-blue eyes.

Then she recognised my companion and I saw that

they were acquainted. Sun rose and politely shook hands, during which formality I heard him addressed as "Mr. St. John." It came to my slow old brain suddenly that Sun was hardly likely to be known to many by his real name! I was introduced and for another heavenly instant her little warm hand rested lightly in my awkward palm. Polite inanities were exchanged and then Mr. and Mrs. Dickson passed on. I have seldom disliked a man more intensely at sight than I did the husband.

I watched the beautiful woman pass down between the rows of tables; noted the eyes that looked up and rested on her. Then I turned—with a sigh. Dr. Sun grinned at me sardonically from across the table.

"What do you intend doing with her?" I demanded, nettled at his obvious cynical amusement, and filled with all manner of horrible recollections of the fate of that unfortunate Mrs. Frayne.

"That," said Sun whimsically, "if I make use of your own abrupt but lucid phraseology, is *my* business!"

Anger suddenly flared up within me. This little woman was no more than a girl. It made me angrier yet when I reflected on my helplessness. What could I do? And then, in a flash, it came to me that I had only to summon a waiter and disclose my companion as the notorious Doctor of Souls, and Sun would be whisked away to a police-station! I hesitated. After all, the man had been my friend—and I was his guest. Besides, once captured and he might be locked up for ten years—more possibly, for the sum total of his illegal metaphysical "experiments" was far from being inconsiderable. He interrupted my train of thought.

"No, Bunny, I wouldn't do that," he advised quietly. "Who would believe you? Besides you might fall asleep while you were doing it. And think how very ridiculous you would appear. Everybody would think you were intoxicated!"

"Are you going to make her suffer?" I asked, hoarsely. "Because, by God! if you are . . .!"

"Ssh!" he admonished. "Now, Bunny, I'm not prepared to divulge all my plans to you at the moment, but I will at least tell you this. Mr. and Mrs. Dickson, together with a certain young man, will accompany me on a short cruise southwards in a day or two. Why not come yourself, to ensure that I do not ill-treat the young lady in question?"

"Don't talk rot!" I answered.

"But why?" he murmured in mild surprise. "I'd very much like you to, Bunny. And I'm sure Mrs. Dickson . . ."

"Look here, Sun!" I cried, rising. "You can sneer as much as you like; you won't annoy me. My interest in that girl is just that I'm not going to stand by and let you practice another of your hellish 'experiments'—if she's involved. I warn you that to-morrow morning I'll look up Dickson's address and 'phone him—and I'll tell him all about you! Who you really are and all about the way you treated Mrs. Frayne . . ."

"Did you notice, Bunny," Sun interrupted languidly, "what an amazing—charming—blue her eyes are?"

Angrily I pushed back my chair and strode away from the table. The fact that I had a lot to think out and that my brain seemed unaccountably sluggish this evening added, if anything, to my chagrin. Out of the corner of an eye, as I neared the exit, I saw Sun beckoning his waiter. I retrieved my hat and coat and passed out into the street. In a few minutes I was jostling my way through the home-bound theatre crowds in Shaftesbury Avenue. It was not, however, until I switched on the light in my little living-room that a new, disturbing fact blazoned forth across the screen of my consciousness. There, on the mantelpiece, accusingly looking down at me, was the print I had picked up in Florence. With growing bewilderment I realised that for the first time since my memorable trip to Central Asia I had been unfaithful to the memory of my "Lady of the Clouds!" For a few moments I stared at the little print, filled with

remorse and thinking furiously. Then I strode across the room to a corner and took the telephone receiver from its hook. If I had ever hesitated over informing the police, this last discovery had decided me. Sun would not make me forget! I did not want to forget! I would not forget!

"Give me Scotland Yard!" I said.

"I beg your pardon?" said the voice at the exchange.

"Give me . . ." I began again, and then I stopped. There was a cackling laugh behind me! I whirled around. There, in the open doorway, grinning satanically, stood Dr. Sun!

CHAPTER XI

THE receiver dropped from my hand. Sun's expression changed to one of polite concern. He still stood in the doorway.

"Well, Bunny," he drawled. "Please don't let me interrupt you."

"You're not," I said tersely. "I was just 'phoning a friend."

"You've come back to gather a few things together for our little trip, I suppose?" he resumed, taking no notice of my curt manner.

I ignored his pleasantry.

"How did you get in?" I demanded.

"Your good housekeeper let me in," Sun explained ingenuously. "I took a taxi and got here first. I told her I was your guest and, as she had already seen me earlier on, I suppose she took me at my word. I waited for you on the landing, Bunny. You passed me in the dark."

"Yes, but I haven't invited you!" I said savagely. "You used to be my friend, Sun, but I don't consider you that any longer. I have no wish to detain you."

"That is a pity, old man," he murmured, as if really concerned over my statement. "Particularly since

we're likely to be thrown together quite a lot in the next week or two."

"Are we?" I echoed sarcastically. "I'm of a different opinion!"

"You don't quite understand . . ." Sun began.

"And I don't want to!" I cried. "I don't want to have anything more to do with you! Please go!"

Not the least of the reasons for my urgent concern was that I knew myself to be absolutely in his power. Previous experiences had shown me that he had the occult art of hypnotic influence developed to a remarkable degree. And quite apart from that there was the disconcerting knowledge that Sun, by some means only vaguely conjectured by myself, had the faculty of *knowing what I was thinking!* I had had it demonstrated only half an hour ago, in the restaurant. As if to remind me that he had me at his mercy, Sun at this point stepped into the room and held a slender hand in front of me. Before I could move I felt my eyes riveting on that little tinselled instrument that glittered. I tried to look away. I couldn't! A drowsiness stole over me . . . Suddenly Sun withdrew his hand, replaced the little mechanism in his pocket and laughed. I recovered, feeling like a man rudely aroused from slumber.

"An amusing little toy!" laughed the Doctor of Souls. "Quite unnecessary, really—as you probably recollect. I mean it is a simple enough art to induce sleep upon suitable subjects without the aid of any such bauble—provided, of course, as in your case, you have permitted a 'foundation' by previous acceptance of certain suggestions. But this little thing acts differently. You must have noticed, Bunny, how when you try to think of two or three things at once you grow confused? Well, here you have an illustration of the same principle. Your sluggardly eye, attracted by the brightness of these silvered vanes, is confused by their swift revolving. Similarly confused series of messages are thus transmitted to the brain. The inevitable result is a gradual suspen-

sion of the mental faculties—and sleep. The Indian fakir will roll his eyes in order to produce precisely the same phenomena, the subjects being attracted in the first place exactly as a moth is attracted by brightness . . .”

“I’m not particularly interested in your scientific quackery,” I interrupted. “I know I’m absolutely in your power, Sun, but at the same time I know you to have some finer feeling about you somewhere. May I appeal to you, as an old friend and a gentleman, to let me alone ?”

“An old friend and a gentleman!” mocked Sun. “Phoning the police to give me away !”

“You’ve driven me to it !” I cried.

Sun’s manner changed. He looked for an instant really concerned. He advanced and laid a hand gently on my shoulder. He was in that moment the quiet, easy-going Sun I had known at the university.

“Don’t try to judge me,” he warned. “You would only misjudge me. Sit down, Bunny, and let me explain.”

Unable to resist his manner I indicated an arm-chair and took one myself. I even lit a pipe to appear more at ease.

“I understand,” I said, “that you propose to interfere between Mr. and Mrs. Dickson merely because the man is old and the woman is being starved of love. I do not clearly see how such a case comes under the general category of your ‘healing.’ There is nothing wrong with Mrs. Dickson’s soul, I take it ?”

“There is,” the scientist contradicted quietly. “It is being suppressed and stunted, instead of being permitted to develop normally.”

“Oh,” I rejoined. “And what, precisely, do you intend to do to remedy that ? If you hope to elicit my voluntary help I trust you’ll be frank with me, Sun ?”

“I will,” he answered. “Bunny, Mrs. Dickson is the victim of this civilisation. Nowhere, except in this

civilisation would such a *mésalliance* be permitted. If, for instance, the Dicksons were savages living in Central Africa, Mr. Dickson would be killed in single combat by a younger man, who would appropriate his wife. In any case, in a state appertaining more closely to Nature, no young woman would have attached herself to so old a man in the first place. Here she is in love, not with him, but with his country seats, his town house, his diamonds and his motor-cars. Closer to Nature, a man's physical attraction, strength and youth would be all that could appeal to her."

"And you suggest . . . ?"

"I suggest," said Sun, "temporarily to remove Mr. and Mrs. Dickson, together with a certain comely young gentleman I have in mind, away from this anæmic civilisation to an environment considerably nearer to Nature."

"Where ?" I gasped.

"Central Africa," murmured my friend. "A little uninhabited island just off the Congo Free State."

I sat dumb, staring at him. It had just dawned on me why he so urgently wanted *me* to accompany them.

"Great Guns!" I cried, starting to my feet. "And I, I suppose, am to be that 'certain comely young gentleman,' am I ?"

"Hardly, Bunny," Sun murmured in mock-deprecation. "I mean, with slightly protuberant teeth like yours . . ."

"I have no pretensions to beauty!" I muttered, nettled at his sarcasm. "At the same time I do not consider myself ill-looking!"

"Oh," said Sun. "And on what grounds precisely, Bunny ?"

"I have been told so!" I said hotly.

"By ladies desirous of being well reported in your newspaper ?" he queried sweetly.

"Not at all!" I muttered angrily. I was about to enlarge on the point when I was suddenly struck by the

utter futility of talking to a man who has no more natural feeling towards women than a block of wood. I comforted myself with the reflection that anyone but a scientific fool would have noticed the obvious attraction I had offered to Mrs. Dickson in the restaurant a short hour before! I broke off as I became aware that Sun looked at me in an amused way, as if I had actually spoken all my thoughts. It irritated me.

"Who is the young man, then?" I asked abruptly.

"You do not know him," replied Sun.

"And why do you want me to come with you?"

"That in good time, Bunny," he said.

"But we might have to wait months," I protested.

"Even if your experiment succeeds you hardly expect Mrs. Dickson to fall into that young man's arms after an acquaintance of a day or two."

"There are certain—er—influences that will considerably expedite the psychological process," Sun explained.

"What sort of influences?"

"Danger, for instance."

"Danger?" I echoed. "What kind of danger?"

"Well," murmured the Doctor of Souls softly, "there are wild animals and certain other nameless horrors that will cause her, I think, to fly quickly to the stronger man for protection."

"But, good God!" I cried, staring at him in horror.

"And I must ask you to decide soon, Bunny," the madman resumed, quite unperturbed, "because I have made arrangements to kidnap Mr. and Mrs. Dickson to-night."

"To-night?" I echoed. I was about to break out into a loud and furious tirade when I am glad to say my sounder sense prevailed. There was little use in arguing with a lunatic, and that Sun was a lunatic I was now quite convinced. No one but a madman would be capable of planning so fiendish a scheme. That beautiful girl to be left at the mercy of beasts on a tropical island! It was inhuman! The Doctor of Soul's slant eyes narrowed

and he watched me contemplatively, as if not quite decided as to what course to pursue. I did not flinch. I strained my wits for some plan by means of which I could get away from him before he could frustrate me by exerting his abominable hypnotic influence over me again. I knew that it would be absolutely useless to make any attempt to overpower him. He had only to hold up a snake-like hand to cause things about to seem to swim in a mist—and to set me dreaming. Then I had an inspiration.

“Excuse me,” I said casually, though to be sure my heart thumped like a traction-engine, “I’ve left my tobacco-pouch in my overcoat.”

I rose, carelessly, and moved towards the open door behind him.

“Certainly,” he murmured—and I breathed again. Once beyond the door, I turned in a flash, banging it to and locking it behind me.

If only I could get to a telephone in time!

CHAPTER XII

I GRABBED hat and overcoat from the rack on the landing and tore downstairs, three steps at a time. Very much to my relief, for I really feared that I might run across Wan-long, the dwarf, concealed somewhere on the stairs, I attained to the front door and let myself out into the murky night. I paused only long enough to bang the door to behind me, then I fled on towards the deserted square, putting on my overcoat as I ran. I intended using a telephone and informing Scotland Yard, but as chance would have it, right on the corner of the square I ran into a policeman, and my excitement outbalanced my usual discretion. I seized the officer by the arm.

“If you want to lay hands on Dr. Sun,” I panted, “run

along to Number xx. ! He's there—and he's as mad as a hatter ! ”

The limb of the Law eyed me suspiciously.

“ The Doctor of Souls ? ” he enquired incredulously.

“ Yes ! ” I cried.

“ What's he doin' there ? ”

“ He used to be a friend of mine ! ” I explained, shaking the man in my excitement. “ I'm Bellairs, the journalist. . . . ”

“ Oh, ” said the constable. “ You're Mr. Bellairs, are you, sir, ”—and he scanned me curiously, as if to satisfy himself as to what sort of creature I actually was. From his manner I knew that he, like perhaps half the population of the metropolis, had read of my adventure with Sun. “ Well, you better come along with me, sir, ” he resumed, but I shook myself free.

“ I can't ! ” I cried. “ But I am really Bellairs. Here's my card ! ” I did no more than fling it at him, then I turned and dashed on.

There is a certain little hotel just off the Square where I am tolerably well known, and here I ran in. An obliging, but very sleepy, office attendant gave me the directory and 'phoned a taxi for me. I was a little taken aback to discover that Mr. and Mrs. Dickson lived so far out of town as somewhere in the vicinity of Guildford. However, after Sun's declaration of his intention to kidnap them that night, I felt that the least I could do would be to warn them. Truth to tell, my knowledge of the extraordinary resources of that misguided genius of science gave me full well to know that I must warn them soon, if my warning was to be of any use. And, incidentally, I was not at all averse to the idea of seeing that beautiful woman so soon again, perhaps becoming better acquainted, possibly being warmly thanked for my timely assistance.

I had, now that my excitement had cooled somewhat, scant hope that Sun would permit himself to be caught by a solitary policeman. Indeed, my ill-considered action seemed to me to have been no more than so much

waste of energy and breath. But—I was out of Sun's clutches! That was the main point. I was out of the range of those terrible eyes! I must see that my work was done before I met Sun again—if ever.

The details of the journey to the mansion set in the woodlands a few miles from Guildford are hardly worthy of recounting. There was the inevitable argument with the taxi-man about the "radius of London," and notes had to be passed to overcome his natural disinclination to undertake so long a jaunt at this unheard-of hour. But at length we were under way, and we had not got very far before a fine drizzle began to fall, making the going perilous on the greasy roads. But at the end of a somewhat long and tedious drive we pulled up in front of an old Georgian house, the radiator-cap of the outraged taxi belching forth steam like a railway-engine.

"Wait," I told the man. I ran through the darkness to the steps, passed up them and rang the front-door bell. After a long interval a sleepy footman opened the door.

"I wish to see Mr. Dickson immediately!" I said. This was more courtesy than truth. All the while I was thinking of the girl who had sat near to us in the restaurant earlier on. Her beauty had bewitched me.

"He's asleep, sir!" growled the man. "Can't it wait until the morning?"

"No, it can't!" I cried. "I must see him at once! I've come all the way from London, specially! It's a matter of life and death!"

To cut a long story short I saw Mr. Dickson, after a wait of about ten minutes. I was ushered into a reception-room and there he joined me—a very unwholesome spectacle in his pyjamas and dressing-gown. He was distinctly irritable.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "I've never heard of you! What's all this about Dr. Sun? What d'you want?"

I explained, keeping my temper as best I could. It was

obvious that he did not believe a solitary word of what I told him, but suspected some underhand and other motive. In fact he cut me short.

"Fiddlesticks!" he muttered. "I've never heard such rot! Dr. Sun? He's got nothing to do with me! What d'you mean—wild beasts and Central Africa? Have you escaped from a lunatic asylum? Get out, sir! I don't know what you're after—but you've come to the wrong shop! If you come worrying us in the middle of the night again I'll hand you over to the police!"

How I still managed to keep my temper I don't know. But I did.

"But I met you, sir," I expostulated, "this evening at the Ambassadors'. I was with him at the time!"

"Ugh!" he grunted, and turned on his heel. "Roberts!" he called. "Show this man out—and don't let him in again!" He lumbered towards the door—and just then a telephone-bell rang in the hall. Roberts, the footman, was about to show me to the door when Mr. Dickson signed him to answer the ring.

I was already in the hall, thoroughly disgusted at my reception and determined to wash my hands of the whole affair, when the footman's next remark stayed me.

"Police at Guildford wish to speak to you, sir," he said to his master.

"Police?" the magnate echoed blankly. Then, his bleary glance falling again on me, he seemed to find some explanation for the call, for he moved towards the telephone.

"What?" I heard. "What? Breaking into the house? To-night? Who's speaking? Well, if there is anything in it, Inspector, can't I have your protection? Yes, some darned young idiot here's just come and told me the same yarn! What? Come in to Guildford at this hour of the night? Mrs. Dickson? Really? But is it necessary? Really? All right, then, if we must. All right, Inspector. As soon as I can wake her!"

He replaced the receiver, and I saw suddenly that he

was trembling. He did not waste time upon me, however, but turned at once to the bewildered footman.

“Run along and rouse Eileen,” he ordered, “and tell her to wake Mrs. Dickson and say she must dress at once! At once, understand?”

The man nodded and ran off. The master turned to me.

“Something in it, apparently!” he jerked out. “That was the police inspector at Guildford!”

It was characteristic of Mr. Francis Dickson that he made no apology to me for his former boorishness. But I was more than compensated by observing his obvious terror.

“I wonder how they got to know?” I muttered. Even then it struck me that it was not a bit like Sun to permit the police to be forewarned in any matters that concerned him.

“I’d better ’phone the garage and tell ’em to send a car,” chattered my rude host. “The inspector says it’s not safe for Mrs. Dickson and myself to stay the night here; we’ve got to go into Guildford at once.”

He moved towards the telephone again but I stayed him.

“Don’t trouble,” I said with frigid politeness. “I have a taxi outside. We can use that. It’ll save time.”

I do not imagine that in ordinary circumstances Mr. Dickson would have cared to ride in anything less pretentious than a limousine, but my “It’ll save time” evidently decided him. I was made aware that whatever the inspector had told him had filled him with a very urgent desire to leave his domestic premises and hearth for the comfort of a police-station.

“Er—thanks,” he said. “Perhaps it will.”

I immediately concluded that politeness did not suit him. I liked his former manner better. Just then there appeared at the head of the stairs a most ravishing spectacle. It was young Mrs. Dickson—Sylvia, as I later found her name to be—with a wrap loosely thrown

over her night attire. I heard little of the breathless, gabbled instructions her husband hurled at her, for I was enrapt in a contemplation of her fresh, intoxicating beauty. It occurred to me suddenly, as I stood there gazing up at her, that Sun was right. Mad as the Doctor of Souls indubitably was, he was at least justified in his theory that this beautiful young woman, shackled to this fat, coarse old pagan for life, was wasting for human love. For a moment I was even tempted to wonder whether Sun was not perhaps justified in attempting to right matters, but this notion I quickly pushed aside. What young man, I wondered, had the Doctor of Souls selected to play fast and loose with so young, innocent and lovely a creature? And what was to be her ultimate fate, if Sun's plans were not frustrated? Would she be flung aside, after he had worked his hellish "healing" upon her?

She recognised me at once and came down to greet me. Every pulse in my body beat faster in response to her little handclasp as she thanked me. I felt suddenly grateful to Sun for having provided me with the opportunity of meeting her; resentment against his "comely young man" suddenly and illogically obsessed me. Hurriedly I explained the motive behind Sun's scheme. Her reply disconcerted me—just a little.

"But what nonsense!" she laughed. "What an idiotic idea! I'm devoted to my husband! And all the while Mr. St. John's really been the notorious Dr. Sun! How positively thrilling!"

"Hurry up and get some clothes on!" ordered her husband, cutting her short. "Take a chair, Bellairs. We won't keep you long."

I watched them link arms and mount the stairs, youth and age, beauty and the beast, and it struck me as so incongruous as to almost make me angry. Was it possible that she genuinely loved him?

Very soon afterwards they rejoined me and together we moved down the steps through the murky drizzle to

the waiting taxi. Mr. Dickson headed the procession with a large revolver ostentatiously presented in his right hand. It was not too dark for me to notice that the hand shook considerably. He was taking it badly. The taxi-man opened the door for us and we climbed in, all three of us squeezing into the back seat. Mr. Dickson was obviously very anxious to be under way.

"Know the way to Guildford?" he bawled at the driver, before I could instruct the man.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, police-station, Guildford, then—and get a move on!"

"Very good, sir," my man muttered. He moved to the front of the car and cranked it. The footman standing in the stately doorway of the mansion withdrew, closing the doors and bolting them behind him. We were left in Stygian darkness. The taxi-man jumped back into his seat, glad to be out of the drizzle, let in the clutch, and we moved off, down the drive. I could sense Mr. Dickson's relief as he replaced the heavy revolver in a pocket of his check overcoat. I settled back in my seat, pleasantly aware of being pressed very tightly against that disturbing lady whose acquaintance I had so lately made. For a while we sped over the greasy road in silence and then my fair companion suddenly laughed—a laugh that made me think of bells tinkled in distant fields.

"An island with wild beasts on it!" she murmured. "How very amusing! Would you mind opening your window ever so little, Mr. Bellairs? I find it a little stuffy, don't you?"

Curiously, I *had* noticed it. It was not exactly an unpleasant stuffiness, rather that cosy fireside atmosphere so very conducive of sleep. I had as a matter of fact twice smothered a yawn under cover of my hand and the darkness, but I suppose I attributed my drowsiness to the lateness of the hour and the general excitement rather than to the closeness of the air. I hurried to comply, but Mr. Dickson pulled me up.

“Leave it closed!” he cut in. “She’ll get wet if you open it. Won’t do us any harm to have a little snooze.”

I was at something of a loss. One thing, however, I was decided upon : and that was that I had never before had the bad fortune to meet a man of Mr. Dickson’s grossness and general uncouthness. I itched to smite him for his surly tone. And then, overcome by that insidious drowsiness, I lay farther back in my seat. Almost immediately I was aroused by a shriek from Mrs. Dickson, and I started. She stared into the mirror that faced us from the back of the driver’s partition at something reflected from behind our heads. Simultaneously we turned. There, framed in the small window behind us, was the evil, grinning face of the Chinese dwarf, Wan-long! He was somehow perched on the back of the moving car, holding to a neatly drilled hole in the woodwork what looked to me to be the nozzle of a fire-extinguisher!

“Wan-long!” I cried, aghast. “Sun’s servant!”

I made a great effort to rise and in doing so I must have brought my nostrils a trifle too close to that projecting nozzle. I remember smelling a sweet, sickly smell, feeling the car slow down, seeing the beautiful woman by my side sink back against the cushions—and then I slept.

CHAPTER XIII

I MUST have slept for some hours, for when I awoke again it was to find myself in unexpected circumstances. Night had gone, and overhead was a clear and rapidly lightening sky. For the moment I could not decide where I was, but gradually I realised that I sat in the back of a large open automobile and that a most refreshing breeze blew about my brow and wiped the cobwebs from my thinking apparatus. The next

thing that immediately impressed itself upon my consciousness was that some woman unknown nestled close against me—fast asleep—and that my left arm was about her. I stirred restlessly—and discovered that my feet were bound together with a length of rope! I peered past my fair companion, whom I knew almost by instinct to be Mrs. Dickson, to discern another man on her far side—a man I had not hitherto seen. At first I very naturally supposed him to be Mr. Dickson, but a glance at him showed that he lacked that decrepit individual's bulky contour. And beyond this figure I could make out, in the distance, the still blue waters of the sea. Then my feet brushed against something lying on the floor of the car. It was Dickson—bound hand and foot! And then a familiar voice broke in on my investigations.

“Good morning, Bunny!” it remarked pleasantly. “It promises to be a lovely day, I think!”

Sun—sitting on the front seat! And by his side, driving, and looking like a stuffed monkey, the “incomparable” Wan-long! Our trip had begun indeed!

“Well, how the devil . . . !” I began.

“Poor Bunny!” drawled the Doctor of Souls in his gentle voice, that was now no more than a whisper above the purr of the car. “Is it very puzzling? Well, to begin with, you made a big mistake by desiring me to believe that it was tobacco you so urgently required—while you had a pipe in your mouth, puffing away like a steam-engine!”

“Then why did you let me go?” I demanded.

“I wanted you to go,” he murmured. “You see, once before I had to embark on a weary series of futile explanations through being discovered with an unconscious man in the back of my car. The police can be very tedious sometimes! So I decided that the wisest course to pursue would be to annoy you sufficiently to set you on the road to Guildford to warn Mr. and Mrs. Dickson, and then leisurely overtake you by car.”

“How did you get out of my flat?” I cried.

"Oh, Bunny!" smiled Sun, shaking his head from side to side. "I walked into your dining-room, through your kitchen and out that way! You only locked the one door!"

I was too chagrined to make any reply. Idiot I had been!

"The rest was simple," Sun resumed quietly. "Wan-long had already tapped the wire to the Dicksons' house when I arrived. We watched you drive up about half an hour later. And then I 'phoned. . . ."

"You were the 'inspector'?" I gasped.

"And then," said Sun, nodding a negligent "yes" to my question, "we tried my new gas on your taxi-driver. Oh, don't worry!" he added as I started. "There are no ill-effects, I believe. You don't feel at all off-colour yourself, do you, Bunny? He'll wake up in the barn where we laid him—with a five-pound note in his pocket. And he'll get his car back. I drove you myself, I might mention."

"Gad!" I muttered, more to myself than aloud. My utter powerlessness added not a little to my anger. But I felt a curious comfort with my arm about that glorious form pressed to my side, and I fear I made but small attempt at resisting the impulse that suddenly came to me to go with this fantastic expedition, if only for the sake of this woman. God only knew what horrors she might be made to face, and I felt that it was the least any gentleman would do under the circumstances.

"You haven't met Mr. Holland, Bunny?" Sun interrupted the train of my thoughts.

"No," I said vaguely.

"He's still asleep, I see," Sun resumed with a glance at the figure beyond Mrs. Dickson. "Wan-long brought him to the party—and I fear the excellent Wan-long's methods are perhaps not quite so gentle as they might be. I see that his head is bandaged."

It had lightened perceptibly in the last few minutes and I observed that we now approached, along a winding, seldom-used track, a little cove in whose calm waters I

could make out, darker than the rest of the scene, the black outline of Sun's aeroplane floating at her moorings. At the last remark of the "Doctor of Souls" I threw a curious glance at "Mr. Holland." His handsome features were now clearly outlined against the background of morning sky. He *was* handsome, let me admit that straight away—for it constitutes about all the good I can faithfully record of him. But his good-looks were of the *matinée-idol* variety, a type I have always abominated. He appeared to be little more than a boy—twenty-one or twenty-two—and he possessed the protruding chin of the conventional stage hero. I could distinguish no redeeming blemish in the whole of his well-defined, somnolent countenance. It may, of course, be mere prejudice, but I always think a man is much improved if he admits to one little humanising facial defect. A *retroussé* nose, perhaps; or—and here I run the risk of being misunderstood—ever so slightly protuberant teeth. I disliked the cut of the fellow at once.

My companions in misfortune were all of them still asleep when at last we pulled up on the beach. I roused Mrs. Dickson by gently shaking her. She opened her sky-blue eyes and gazed bewilderedly about her, modestly disconcerted to find herself with my arm around her. While I comforted her as best I could, Sun and Wan-long between them brought the other "patients" back to life by the rude process of splashing cold sea-water in their faces. Dickson, once awake, fumed and raged at the top of his voice, but young Holland appeared to be still far from recovered from the gentle Wan-long's "methods" and took no more than a very superficial interest in what was happening. As for myself, even if I had not already decided to accompany Mrs. Dickson, I would quickly have seen the futility of attempting any sort of opposition now that we waited actually by the dinghy that was to convey us to the floating 'plane. Bound as we were, Wan-long alone would have been more than a match for us.

It came to me with something like dismay that in a few hours the whole of London would be a-buzz with conjectures as to my disappearance and this latest "experiment" of the "Doctor of Souls." But that, I comforted myself, was in no wise my fault. Leaving the others of us still bound, Sun and the dwarf between them carried the loudly protesting Mr. Dickson to the dinghy, after which I witnessed an impromptu exhibition of Wan-long's extraordinary strength. He lifted the heavy Mr. Holland, who was a tall and thick-set young man, in his arms and carried him off to the dinghy as easily as he might have a babe! Sun returned to Mrs. Dickson and myself.

"Word of honour, Bunny," he said, "I'll undo you if you promise not to run or resist."

There was nothing for it, and, as I did not particularly hanker after Mrs. Dickson's seeing me carried off like a trussed goat, I gave him my word. Sun bent down and undid our respective lashings. He waited while Wan-long rowed the dinghy to the iron ladder that led down from the fuselage of the 'plane, bundled his passengers in and returned. Just before Mrs. Dickson and I climbed into the little skiff, she turned to Sun. Dazed and exhausted as she was, she was still the embodiment of pluck.

"I can't think what possesses you, Mr. St. John," she protested weakly, "to be perpetrating this outrage . . ."

"Madam," Sun interrupted with frigid politeness, "you must permit me to be the judge of what is best for my patients."

She made no further protest but wearily passed a hand across her brow, and, when we got to the front of the short ladder, permitted me to assist her into the 'plane. Shortly afterwards Sun and his indefatigable assistant raised the skiff out of the water by means of a small davit and somehow clamped it to the roof of the fuselage. In a few moments, from our chairs in the main cabin, we felt the throb of the powerful atomic engines. I rose and peered out of a window. Already we were soaring high

above the water. I saw the little cove and the deserted touring-car, and wondered, in my futile way, whether Sun had made arrangements for it to be fetched. Behind us the sun was rising over the rim of the sea. So I stood, while Mr. Dickson swore and raved and Mrs. Dickson wept, until the last of the English coastline merged into the misty distance.

Perhaps it is not necessary to enlarge on the details of our flight southwards in Sun's aeroplane beyond stating that, what with Mr. Dickson's almost ceaseless mouthings and young Holland's unfortunate, and quickly revealed, tendency to consider himself an authority upon everything under God's heaven, Mrs. Dickson and I were almost inclined to be glad when it neared its end. Young Holland quickly recovered from the ill-effects of the blow Wan-long had dealt him—would that it had been a little harder!—and from that moment onwards he became a positive pest.

He was at that unfortunate stage of development that is neither boyhood nor manhood, and there was literally no subject, mighty or small, of which he did not profess and air a vast and profound knowledge! It appeared he was still a student at a university. I felt immediately very sorry for that university, for I had never met a youth with so little in his cranium and so much to say about it. I longed sometimes to seize him by the scruff of his beautiful neck and pitch him overboard. To make matters worse he was abnormally sensitive and therefore the more difficult to quell. An awkward specimen. So great was his opinion of himself that I really believe he considered he would be able to quell Dr. Sun with the sheer force of his logic and strength of his personality, and was inclined to look upon his temporary imprisonment and our wholesale abduction as no more than a joke. (I would have liked to have met him after he had been disillusioned—but I never did!) And this light-heartedness gave him added inclination to talk. And, ye gods! he talked. There was but one saving grace about this

immaculate creature : he appeared to repel Mrs. Dickson rather than attract her. A matter for which, curiously, I felt grateful to providence.

From the moment of our leaving our moorings, Sun and Wan-long kept themselves on the far side of the solid partition that divided the main cabin from the control room. We saw nothing of them and were left entirely to our own devices.

There is surely no more effective means of insuring against a man's escape than that of putting ten thousand feet between himself and mother Earth !

The short thirty hours on board we spent either sleeping, listening to Mr. Dickson hurling threats through the partition, hearing aired Mr. Holland's egotistical opinions, or trying to make peace between the two when they squabbled, which was frequently. Mrs. Dickson was admirable throughout, a little distraught, perhaps, but calmness and dignity personified. For one brief spell during the afternoon I had an opportunity of talking to her alone. She whispered :

" If Mr. St. John—or Dr. Sun, as you call him—imagines that I shall fall in love with that self-opinionated brat, he can know very little about women in general ! "

" I had no idea he was such a fool ! " I agreed vehemently. The look she gave me, just before her husband re-entered the cabin, swearing and vowing vengeance anew, was sufficient reward, I felt, for all the inconvenience this latest of Dr. Sun's " treatments " had given me. I thought I read in that look : " Now if, on the contrary, he had selected *you* . . . "

Strangely, at this stage of the affair, I do not think that anyone but myself realised the seriousness of the Doctor of Souls' purpose. I could hardly wonder at this, I reflected, when I remembered how incredulous I had been until Sun's fanatical ideals had first startlingly been disclosed to me, now nearly a year ago. The man was, at least in some respects, hopelessly mad and would stick at nothing.

Towards midday on the second day we were drawn to the windows by the noise of the engines being shut off. We looked out, and there, far below us, was a cluster of small islands set in a cobalt sea.

"It can't be the coast of Africa!" pronounced our "know-all," after a brief glance.

"Why not?" I enquired.

"Because we've only been travelling since yesterday morning, and if we're going at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, as you say . . ."

"Well, isn't that fast enough?" snapped Mr. Dickson irately. His temper had hardly been improved by his enforced captivity.

"My dear old boy," drawled Holland, "I've been nearly twice as fast as that on a London to Paris airliner!"

"Don't call me your dear old boy!" grunted the old man, red showing in his eye.

"Oh, don't squabble again, darling!" protested his wife. "Aren't things bad enough without it?"

"We may be going two hundred miles an hour," I remarked. "I know the 'plane can do it, because Sun told me that himself—the last time I was in it."

"Wait until I get back to England . . .!" growled Mr. Dickson ominously.

"I should say . . ." began the youth with his usual air of finality, but he did not finish his statement. I should think it was the one thing in all his life that he did *not* say. He was interrupted by the 'plane suddenly diving for the earth-surface and tilting the gyroscopically-steadied floor at an alarming angle. There was no further speech until we were resting lightly on the water in a little palm-fringed, landlocked bay. And then came a long and weary wait, for Sun had apparently determined not to put his victims ashore until the evening.

During this time a brooding disquiet settled upon both Mr. Dickson and young Holland, as if the sight of the exotic shrubs on the land had at last convinced them that

Sun's declared scheme was no mere joke. It was after sunset that we heard the lock of the door in the partition being turned and watched the door open from within. Sun entered the cabin, clad as I had only once before seen him, in his queer Oriental draperies and looking very different from the polite "Mr. St. John" of Mr. and Mrs. Dickson's acquaintance. At sight of him the old man broke out into a flood of abuse. Sun merely looked at him and the flow of invective ceased. In a moment Mr. Dickson stood glowering and sullen, but silent, in a corner of the little apartment, as though he were bound to the spot.

"Look here, Dr. Sun——!" began young Holland indignantly, but he said no more. Mrs. Dickson alone of the "patients" showed fortitude. She stood for a while silent, and then, her splendid reserve breaking down in a way pitiful to see, she fell on her knees before him. The sight of that lovely woman supplicating to this half-Chinaman sent the blood to my head, and I moved forward. I have no very clear recollection of what I hoped to do, but whatever it was I very soon realised the futility of doing anything. Violence would have been worse than useless. Sun's face was relentlessly set, his thin lips compressed in a straight, unwavering line. The mercilessness of the Orient shone in his slant eyes—occult, evil. Mrs. Dickson's sweet pleadings diminished and then ceased altogether beneath the uncompromising hardness of those eyes—and I had to bite my lip to hold back what I would have liked to hurl at Sun.

In a very little while Sun and Wan-long had unclamped the dinghy and lowered it into the water. After some sacks and boxes, presumably containing stores, were lowered into the skiff Mrs. Dickson was led unresisting to the ladder and helped down. I waited, breathless and tense with excitement, undecided what to do. Holland, who was the next indicated, made a farcical play of resistance and I saw Sun wave a thin, wand-like hand for an instant before his eyes, after which he climbed into the

dinghy without further ado. A repetition of this latter procedure saw the last of the "patients" into the boat. Sun jumped in, followed by Wan-long, the painter was cast off, and the dinghy with its heavy load moved towards the beach.

I suppose it was then that my conscience smote me and I realised I had been found wanting. For a few moments I cursed myself roundly, wrung my hands and paced to and fro well nigh distracted at my impotence. What, after all, could I have done? Ask to be taken with them? Well I knew that if that did not suit Sun's plans it would have been so much wasted breath! But should not I at least have offered to share their exile? And why had Sun brought me? Again and again I pondered the question.

I knew all too soon why Sun had brought me!

CHAPTER XIV

IT was dark when the dinghy returned to the ladder, for night had been fast falling when they cast off. To my astonishment Sun was alone in the little craft, having apparently left Wan-long ashore. As the prow scraped alongside, an entirely unlooked-for occurrence drove me almost frantic with a new terrible anxiety. A woman's shriek rang out through the still evening air—blood-curdling, horrifying! Mrs. Dickson's—Sylvia's!

"God!" I cried. "What can be happening? Back to the beach, Sun—for the love of mercy!" I took a flying leap from the narrow doorway to the centre of the frail dinghy, very nearly scuttling her. Sun, much to my relief, bent immediately to the oars. His face showed a concern almost as grave as mine.

"Wan-long!" he muttered. "I might have known he'd be up to no good—with Mrs. Dickson!"

From the stern of the craft I urged him on with

frantic whispers. Fortunately the 'plane had dropped anchor at no very great distance from the beach, and, although it seemed years to me, it could not have been many minutes before we grounded. But during those few minutes I suffered tortures. As our keel touched I jumped and in an instant I was on the dry sand above the soft-lapping surf.

"Mrs. Dickson! Sylvia!" I shouted. "Where are you?"

To my infinite relief there came a faint response from somewhere to the right, and I tore off in that direction. Thank God she still lived! I don't know what prompted me to look round, but I did throw just one glance backward, and I was astonished to make out against the light sky behind the figures of two men wading to the dinghy. Three altogether, for Sun's silhouette showed him still to be in the boat. But I did not pause. I dashed on and almost at once came upon Mr. and Mrs. Dickson, both entirely unharmed, standing disconsolate beside a pile of stores in the sand. I was so amazed that I just gaped at them. And then, before I could put a question, there rang out across the still, sub-tropical waters a low, ironical laugh.

"Good-bye, Bunny!" we heard. "You and the Dicksons will decide the matter!"

I gasped. So *I*—was "the comely young man!"

"He's leaving us!" I cried, as the last weird echoes of that sinister laugh died away.

Neither of my companions answered me. Mr. Dickson seemed stupefied, bemused. Mrs. Dickson clung to him and wept.

"But didn't you scream, a few minutes ago?" I demanded a trifle abruptly.

She shook her beautiful head.

"We heard the scream," she said, shivering, as if the recollection of it unnerved her. And then I thought I saw the whole explanation of that uncanny, blood-curdling cry. Wan-long it must have been who uttered

it, and it had been uttered expressly in order to entice me ashore. Sun's expression of concern had been simulated. I, poor fool, was the one Sun had all the while intended to leave behind on this deserted island with the Dicksons! Of course! Hence his anxiety to have me accompany the expedition! Little had Sun dreamt that I would voluntarily have stayed and braved the exile—for the sake of the sweet young woman by my side. And then it occurred to me to wonder why Sun had brought that youngster, Holland. Why had he brought both of us, only leaving the one? I was at a loss. I soon realised that that was something I might learn in good time—if I lived—but had no means of ascertaining now.

If I lived! A sudden lively recollection of Sun's "wild beasts and nameless horrors" mentioned as inhabiting this lonely African islet made me add that "if"! I looked up through the gloom to the palms and the shrubbery on the hills behind us, dark and evil in the tropic night. What manner of beast lurked there, I wondered? What were the "nameless" things?

"And how are we going to get out of this?" growled old Mr. Dickson, finding voice at last. I could not quite decide whether it was a growl or a whisper. It seemed curiously like a blend of both.

"God knows!" I answered.

"But surely," cried Mrs. Dickson, trembling, "he can't be so fiendish as to leave us here if there's any *real* danger?"

"That remains to be seen," I replied with unintentional brutality. "A man who will abduct a woman and leave her in the uttermost ends of heathen China to starve or endure unheard of hardship, is hardly likely to be troubled by too keen a sense of pity!"

The girl's sudden shudder brought me quickly to the realisation that I was being needlessly cruel.

"Did he tell you," she murmured shakily, "just what sort of things we had to fear here?"

I shook my head.

“What’s the good of talking about them!” growled her husband. But I noticed that he edged closer to the little provision pile, shrinking away from that gloomy fringe of foliage as if in fear. “What I want to know is how long we’re going to be left here!”

“I’m afraid I can’t oblige you with that information!” I answered stiffly. Even in this predicament the man’s boorishness grated horribly on me.

“But we may be here for months!” sobbed Mrs. Dickson, her blue eyes wide and troubled.

“Well, at any rate,” I said, “we can make ourselves comfortable for the night. These sacks here look to me rather as if they may contain tents.” I bent down and inspected that nearest me. “They do,” I pronounced.

“Well, put ’em up,” Mr. Dickson ordered.

“I beg your pardon?” I exclaimed, staring at him.

“All right! All right!” he muttered. “I’ll pay you for it! I suppose Mrs. Dickson and myself have got to have someone to look after us. I’ll engage you for the time we’re here. Make your own price.”

“My services are not available!” I answered when I had sufficiently recovered.

“Darling!” rebuked his wife. “Mr. Bellairs is a gentleman! How can you be so thoughtless, you silly boy!”

“Oh, is he?” growled the magnate as if aware of that fact for the first time. “Oh!”

The woman sent me a quick, eloquent appeal from her eyes; I managed to smile my reassurance back through the gloom, my temper held well in hand. Then I turned to the husband.

“Now look here, Mr. Dickson,” I began quietly, “none of us knows how long we’ll be here, and we’ll all have to set to together. I know a little about camping-out, and my knowledge may be the means of saving the situation. But . . .” I paused. “Bend down and undo one of those tents!” I ended loudly and firmly.

The old man did not move a muscle. Instead, Mrs. Dickson came forward to help me.

“Don’t trouble him, poor darling!” she implored. “Francis isn’t used to exertion, and I’m sure it’s bad for him. I’ll help you.”

I was about to make a violent protest, but she cut me short with another look that absolutely made me her slave. We investigated the contents of the sacks and found them to be two small patent bell-tents with sectional poles, fortunately without guy-ropes and extremely simple to erect. In a very short while the tents stood up side by side in the darkness, a little further up the beach. Among the remaining stores we discovered a roll of blankets and a lantern, and, the blankets having been distributed and the lantern lighted, we repaired to our respective tents. Just before she followed her lumbering husband into hers, Mrs. Dickson turned to me. For a heavenly instant her hand rested on my arm.

“Do you think there is anything to really fear, Mr. Bellairs?” she whispered. “I’m just terrified!”

“Dear lady,” I murmured, choking back the tender expression that forced itself to my lips, “while I am still alive I do not think you need fear.”

I did not mean to sound heroic, but those words expressed exactly what I felt, and I wanted her to know in just what regard I held her—particularly since her loutish husband showed so little consideration. I was rewarded by a slight pressure of her fingers on my arm; and then she had left me. I stood for a moment in the darkness—just thinking. What had that little caress meant? I could hardly repress a shout of joy. Had she been trying to show me that she felt—as I did? That all her ostentatious endearments towards her aged husband were so much acting? I rolled myself in my blankets at length and lay down on the dry, warm sand that floored the tent, still thinking of her and wondering what hideous agency had brought about their incongruous mating. I was still speculating over what might happen

on the island and wondering if—no, hoping that—Sun's experiment would turn out as prophesied by him, when sleep overtook me and I did not wake until a grey light about me told me that day was dawning.

Early as I was, I was not too early for Mrs. Dickson. I emerged from my tent to see her beautiful form outlined on a little rocky promontory that ran into the surf. She was bathing her face and hands with the tepid water when I joined her.

"Good morning," I said. "We don't seem to have had anything to fear during the night after all!"

She greeted me with a charming smile.

"What a heavenly place!" she murmured, gazing at the wild, tree-clad hills, clean-washed by the mists of the morning. She turned suddenly very serious. "The 'plane's gone," she observed.

I looked. The Doctor of Souls had left us to our fate. Nothing but the restless sea on that side as far as vision stretched. Strangely, I was quite undismayed. I felt it was right that I should be here—with the woman. She broke in on my thoughts. "My poor boy's still sleeping," she informed me, and again I marvelled that she could think so tenderly of that aged, uncouth brute snoring in her tent.

"Let's investigate the stores," I suggested, to change a distasteful subject.

We found that Sun had left us well-provided with tinned and bottled provisions, and when at length a bleary and very crotchety Mr. Dickson joined us, we made a hearty breakfast, after which Sylvia and I set the camp in shape. For the most part we did the work, while her husband lay on the sand reading a newspaper that had been wrapped about something or other in the stores!

So passed a very pleasant day. Indeed, life went along merrily enough for the next three days. Sylvia and I invariably found ourselves thrown together in the performance of the camp duties, and so, through that

inexplicable mechanism called love, I suppose, grew rapidly to know each other's hearts. I was a little troubled, on the third day, by signs of an obviously growing suspicion on the part of old Mr. Dickson (now a repulsive sight with a stubble of beard covering his flabby face!) but Sylvia very prettily laughed off each little contretemps as it came or quelled it with a caress that made me look away and grind my teeth. Of Sun's "wild beasts" we saw nothing—until during the third night!

I have no idea what hour it may have been; it must have been very late, for the moon had risen, but I was aroused from my sleep by frantic shrieks from Sylvia in the adjoining tent! I flung the blankets from me, leapt to my feet, dashed out and then—stood, frozen with horror!

Before the entrance to the Dicksons' tent, holding aside the flap with one hairy paw and peering into the interior, crouched an animal the like of which I pray Heaven I may never see again, even in a nightmare! A huge man-ape—a gorilla! His mouth hung open in a hideous leer, disclosing enormous fangs, the sight of which sent the blood rushing to my brain and set my hair rising on my head! I suppose the beast must have heard me or seen my movement out of the corner of an eye, for, as I parted the flap and saw him—he turned and faced me! For a moment—a brief moment during which I suffered the agonies of the damned—he contemplated me, his jaws slavering and his little eyes glittering with malice! Then, with a sudden sideways spring, he disappeared, gibbering and grunting, into the moonlit forest.

My heart thumped with the resonance of a drum. I dashed into the neighbouring tent. This, I reflected, if indeed it occurred to me, was no time for ceremony. Sylvia lay in a swoon on the floor of the tent; her husband croaked and shivered under a blanket, as far away from the entrance as he could get! I bent down and put my

arm about the soft, warm form of the woman I loved. I had the satisfaction of feeling her come to. I felt her arms tighten about me. Hardly realising what I was doing I bent my head down and kissed her.

CHAPTER XV

DURING the whole of the following day we laboured at carrying stones from the forest and piling them about one of the tents in a species of rampart. There was a short wood chopper in the equipment Sun had left us, and this I carried with me wherever we went. Notwithstanding the dreadful experience of the night, Mr. Dickson was at first averse to assisting us in the hard work. But I lost patience with the fellow. In front of his wife I seized him by his throat and brandished my axe on high.

“Either you’ll do your share,” I yelled, “or I’ll finish you!”

I saw Sylvia close her eyes, heard her moan, but for the first time since our arrival she made no effort to protect her useless husband. In that instant I realised that Sun’s experiment had been successful. *I* was her man!

I stayed awake all that night, close to the flap of the tent, chopper in hand. Strangely, I was not nearly so alarmed at the prospect of a second visit from that horror of the forest as I had been at the actuality on the previous night. I felt now that I had my woman to defend, and I knew that I would defend her to my dying gasp. She lay on the sand behind me, her glorious head resting lightly against me. Mr. Dickson, oblivious to everything but his own terror, huddled against the far side of the tent with a blanket drawn completely over him. My vigil was in vain. The night passed—it seemed to take centuries to do it—and the man-ape did not pay us the anticipated visit. When it was

light I roused Sylvia, and together we walked down the beach towards the surf in the soft lights of the dawn. I passed an arm about her. She made no attempt at resistance.

“Sylvia!” I cried passionately. “I have very little to offer you, darling, but if we ever get away from this dreadful place . . .”

I said no more. There was no need for more to be said. She turned and pressed her sweet cheek to mine. I knew that—morally—she was mine, all mine! Both my arms were wrapped tightly round her and I smothered her face with kisses. How wise old Sun was! Short-sighted ass I had been to have ever supposed him mad! Was it not, after all, the most natural thing in the world that a beautiful, innocent girl and a healthy, passably good-looking young man with something of an attraction for the opposite sex, thrown together . . .

My thoughts were interrupted by a low laugh from somewhere behind us. We sprang apart. I pivoted round. There, ten yards away, a mocking smile on his face, stood—the Doctor of Souls!

“Sun!” I gasped incredulously.

“Well, Bunny,” he greeted. “My theory has proved tolerably well-founded, I see!”

“When did you return?” I cried. “How long . . .?”

“Why, look!” Sylvia interrupted me. “There’s the aeroplane!”

I stared. There, just where it had come to rest to disembark us, lay the familiar black cigar-shaped ‘plane! Sun had come up to us as we looked. Sylvia turned on him furiously.

“You inhuman monster!” she cried. “If we ever get back to civilisation, I’ll use every penny of my husband’s money to hound you down! To leave us on an island like this with those ghastly apes . . .!”

“At least, Madam, I spared you a second ordeal,” Sun observed gently.

“Spared us?” we both echoed.

"Yes," he murmured. "I did not consider it necessary to send Wan-long again last night. And I see I was right. . . ."

"Wan-long?" I cried.

"The excellent Wan-long," reiterated the half-Chinaman, "clad in the mask and skin of a long-extinct gorilla. He is much of the build, you see."

"God!" I ejaculated, too amazed to say much more.

"Then the ape-man was not real?" gasped Sylvia, staring at Sun.

"Hardly," he laughed. "This happens to be a rocky islet of the Azores, Madam. The nearest gorilla I should imagine to be several thousands of miles away!"

We were in the 'plane again, speeding homewards. Mr. Dickson, refreshed with spirits, slept in one of the cabins; Sun and Wan-long were in the control-room; Sylvia and I faced each other across the table in the main cabin.

"But five hundred a year!" Sylvia echoed. "Why, that would hardly pay for my two maids!"

"Darling," I murmured, "surely if you love me. . . ."

"But I'm not so sure that I do," the woman rejoined, eyeing me critically. "I mean, if we had been left alone on that island, I might have. But now that there's the whole of Europe to choose from again—why, Bunny, I'd have to think about it a lot first. You see, unfortunately you haven't any money, as you say; and then, in addition, you're not the sort of man a woman loses her head about, if you follow what I mean. . . ."

I was staring at her in incredulous amazement.

"But, Sylvia!" I cried hollowly.

"So I think we'll call it off, old dear," she ended. "After all, I'm not so certain that I wouldn't choose Francis again—even if I had the choice a second time. Sixteen thousand a year is nothing to be sneezed at, you know. And Francis is rather an old dear, when he's not frightened or woken up in the middle of the night,

and he absolutely dotes on me—really.” She rose. “I think I’ll go and see if he’s woken up. Poor boy, he’s had rather a strenuous time in the last few days!”

I just sat gaping at her as she passed down the corridor. I was still sitting quiet and half-bemused when the control-room door opened and Sun entered. He had discarded his “experimental” robes and was dressed again like a civilised human being. He took Mrs. Dickson’s vacated seat and smiled whimsically across the table at me.

“My dear Bunny,” he murmured, “don’t let it depress you. She’s not worth it.”

“How do you know about it?” I cried, startled out of my lethargy.

“I knew it as long ago as the night she deliberately thrilled you in the Ambassadors’ Restaurant!” the Doctor of Souls declared. “I realised then that she was hardly a subject worthy of my serious attention, but as I had arranged everything and particularly wanted to see young Holland’s case dealt with, I let things run their course. You see, Bunny, a woman who will designedly brush her hand against that of a very susceptible young man in order to thrill him, is hardly the sort of woman . . .”

“But was it deliberate?” I asked, astonished.

“As deliberate as anything I’ve seen!” said Sun. “I’d have abandoned the case then but for young Holland and the fact that I was rather interested to see whether Nature would have the effect of bringing you and Mrs. Dickson together.”

“Where does young Holland come in?” I asked curiously.

“Did it not occur to you,” the Doctor replied, “that he suffered from a species of mental ailment?”

“Perhaps not quite,” I said. “But he certainly was the most bumptious young bounder I’ve ever come across!”

“It was not his fault,” Sun explained patiently.

“That self-assertiveness, hypersensitiveness and general ‘bumptiousness’—as you put it—are the symptoms of a temporary ailment of the soul that attacks young men in the period of transition from boyhood to manhood. The savages—so they are called, Bunny!—of Central Africa understand these matters better than we do. They have proper healing institutions in which cases, immediately they manifest symptoms of the complaint, are segregated from the rest of the tribe. There they undergo a rigorous hardening and ‘straightening’ process under the gentle hands of the witch-doctors—not a very pleasant ordeal, from what my poor investigations have shown! When they emerge at length the soul-constriction has passed, and the tribe has been spared the brunt of what you call their ‘bumptiousness.’ Well, I thought it rather an interesting experiment to take a civilised youth suffering from that same complaint . . .”

“And you took him!” I cried. “You mean you’ve left him with savages in Central Africa—after you’d left us here?”

Sun nodded.

“And when,” I demanded aghast, “do you think the poor devil will find his way back to England?”

“I understand that the period varies,” Sun explained with the air of a lecturing professor, “from three months to three years. Of course, he may not come through. I am told that the treatment takes its toll of victims. . . .”

“Have you no heart?” I cried. “Do you never consider the sufferings you inflict on your patients?”

“Sufferings?” Sun echoed in a puzzled voice. “But, my dear Bunny, surely suffering is good? The whole of Nature is based on suffering—and Nature is good. We are born in suffering; we inflict suffering, we kill, in order to live. . . .”

“Don’t you realise,” I groaned, “how you’ve made *me* suffer?”

He showed astonishment at my vehemence.

“But surely I’ve taught you something?” he murmured. “At least I’ve tried to remove your delusion that you possess an irresistible attraction for women.”

I flushed painfully. Sun resumed very quietly:

“Come, cheer up, Bunny. The experiment has been highly successful. Given a state of nature, age goes to the wall and the young mate with the young. That at least we have proved. Given a highly embellished and false civilisation, and women of that civilisation mate with country-seats and motor-cars and fat incomes. That, too, we have proved. . . .”

“You made me believe she loved me!” I interposed accusingly.

“Love?” echoed Sun. “What is love, Bunny, as we on this planet know it? Stripped of all its fripperies and romantic glamour, what is it but a very natural sexual reciprocation? You, Bunny, who of all persons I know have been favoured with a glimpse of a more highly organised life, a nearer perfection, when your soul rested for a brief instant in that other world. . . .”

“God!” I cried. “You made me forget her!” I broke off suddenly startled by the way he looked at me. But even as I interrupted I was not aware, except very vaguely, of who the “her” might be. My brain was awl with a hundred different thoughts and conjectures. My consciousness seemed to be striving, fighting towards—something forgotten. There was something peculiar about Sun. His eyes glittered curiously, drawing mine towards them. He raised a slender, wand-like hand before me.

“You are beginning to remember!” I heard him say, and I noticed only that his voice was queerly compassionate and full of understanding. Slowly, like the clearing away of a thick mist, I began thinking again—and I was thinking of a certain little print that adorned my mantelshelf in Coram Street!

CHAPTER XVI

MY last contact with Dr. Sun had left me again in considerable doubt about his mental condition. Was my old college-fellow sane and genuinely humanitarian at heart? Was he merely a reformer attaining his altruistic ends by means that, however much condemned by a short-sighted "civilisation," were in their very originality no small proof of his undoubted genius? Or, on the other hand, were the newspaper conceptions of Sun's character true? Was he indeed no better than a charlatan, a mad mystic, a trick hypnotist, a monster with no charitable thought or kindred human feeling to redeem the blemishes of his hideous monstrosity? Sometimes, as I thought back on the brutal nature of some of his "experiments," I was more than a little inclined to accept the latter as the nearer-correct conjecture. And, as if to strengthen this trend of reasoning, Sun's very next misdemeanour—or the next reported in the papers—involved a theme of such inhuman conception as actually to shock me! Yes, me, part of whose duty, six days out of the seven, was to sift the more artistic and "interesting" murders from the weekly toll of crime for republication in our Sunday edition! I should be inured, I think! But I had better begin at the beginning.

Mr. Niven, a well-to-do, retired business-man (cotton, I think) was the victim. He lived on the Yorkshire wolds and fulfilled to the best of his ability the amiable rôle of country squire. Above all he was a sportsman, though it must be recorded that he had cultivated sport only since his retirement. He shot, hunted, distributed gold cups for wrestling bouts and boxing matches, and generally devoted himself to the excellent endeavour of promoting, encouraging and patronising the sport of his neighbourhood.

He was tolerably happy, it seems, owning only to one fly in all the ointment—his son, aged eight. For Mr.

Niven had married since his retirement, and his only son, as bad luck would have it, was a nervous weakling. At sport this youngster showed little promise; in fact, he had all the unmistakable characteristics of what a well-known sportsman has designated "a supreme rabbit." And paramount among the child's many dreads was a fear of deep water, a horror of drowning. In consequence of this terror young Niven had not learnt to swim, much to the paternal disgust. Not all the travail of the sports-master at the expensive preparatory school the child attended could induce that timid young man to believe that merely kicking his thin legs and moving his equally thin arms would have the effect of keeping him above water. At the end of term he returned home to confess once more to his irate father that he still could not swim, and that he still dreaded deep water.

Mr. Niven, his sportsmanship outraged and his contempt thoroughly aroused, undertook to do the necessary teaching—at home. This he immediately began carrying out by the simple process of throwing his son into a deep part of the river bounding the Niven estate and bidding him swim out if he could. This first lesson very nearly resulted in a drowning fatality, but Mr. Niven was nothing deterred. Having lugged his son out of the river he was heard by the gaping onlookers to say: "I'll make a man of you yet! Dashed if I won't! I'll do it—if I have to pitch you in once a day every day of your holidays!" Three times the experiment was repeated, once on each of three successive mornings. Actually how long the course of instruction would have continued is a matter for conjecture, for on the night of the third "lesson" Mr. Niven disappeared!

He was away from Yorkshire for three weeks. Of course there was the usual hue and cry when he disappeared—broadcast "S.O.S.'s," advertisements, and offers of reward—but all efforts to trace him were unsuccessful. He had vanished seemingly off the face of the earth! It was not until a haggard, wild-eyed

and utterly unnerved man dragged himself to the mansion gates one night and declared himself to be Mr. Niven that the world learnt of the reason for his absence and of the terrible ordeal he had been through. His story was almost fantastic. He had awoken, that night of his disappearance, to a suspicion that someone else was in his bedroom. Thinking that he had perhaps been dreaming, he lay still for a few moments in the darkness and listened.

Again he heard the movement. Someone seemed to be stealing cautiously across the floor towards his bed, from the direction of the window! Mr. Niven stretched out an arm to reach for the light switch, but just as he did so a hand shot out of the dark, gripped his throat and tightened about it like a steel vice! He struggled, but ineffectually, for he was at a double disadvantage; he was on the broad of his back, and his unseen adversary was evidently a man of herculean strength! He felt his senses reel as that merciless grip tightened and tightened, until it seemed to Mr. Niven that his throat must surely be crushed into a pulp. . . .

He awoke bound and gagged in the back seat of a speeding motor-car. Driving the car was the man who, it later transpired, had entered his bedroom, that queer little figure Wan-long. By the pigmy's side sat a slim, scholarly-looking individual with slightly slant eyes. Though Niven did not then know it, he was soon to learn that this quiet, seemly-looking gentleman was none other than that sinister master of grotesque crime, Dr. Sun!

Niven states that his recollection of the earlier events of that night is far from clear, for already he was suffering. His throat felt as if it had lately been freed from the crushing of a boa-constrictor, and the gag restricted his breathing and made his hurt the more painful. He had yet to learn that the inconvenience he had already undergone was child's play to the ordeal Sun had in store for him! He was sufficiently conscious to observe that the speeding car approached a little moonlit sea-cove in

which was moored something that looked like a fairly large motor-boat. (It was Niven's rather vague description of this cove that gave me the clue that helped me in my later investigations. I recognised it at once as that same starting-point of my last "expedition" with the Celestial. But that in good time.)

Niven must have slept again, either that or been hypnotised, for the very next thing he remembers is finding himself in a most unexpected environment, apparently the interior of a cave! Rough-hewn out of the solid rock, it was yet obviously a place of human habitation, for the edges of the wall-surface had been chipped smooth, and wooden doors were here and there let into the rock. Also the place was well-lighted—and with electric light! He gazed about him in some bewilderment, half expecting to see one or other of the men who had abducted him. In this he was disappointed for, although a wide screen concealed the far end of the queer room, the stillness of everything quickly informed him that he was alone.

He then became aware of a certain curious, persistent sound—a trickling sound coming from behind the screen. It was like the soft gurgle of a little stream emptying its burden into a large tank or cistern. He was still wondering what the water-noise might mean when he made a startling discovery. He was naked! It was curious that he had not noticed it before, he reflected, but the warmth of the air about him soon told him why he had not. The apartment was evidently artificially warmed. He moved, and, to his growing wonderment and dismay, discovered himself to be shackled by a waistbelt and a chain to the stone wall! He dragged himself to his feet and stood swaying about and trying to think clearly, and puzzle out what all this curious and unaccountable business of his abduction, and now his imprisonment, might mean. And just then one of the doors opened and there entered a man clad in the flowing draperies of a mandarin of the mountain districts of China,

immediately followed by Niven's assailant of the previous night.

Niven at once broke out into a loud protestation, but Sun—for the mandarin was, of course, the notorious Doctor of Souls in his "experimental robes"—waved him to silence. Niven says he has no idea why he so readily obeyed—but he did. The half-Celestial's eyes gleamed and glittered malignantly, like the eyes of a snake, and in spite of himself Niven felt his indignation subside. Sun came up to him and bade him a courteous good morning, but there was a sibilant under-current of mockery in his tone that made Niven shudder. Meanwhile the dwarf, Wan-long, had trotted to the far end of the compartment and was folding and carrying aside the wide dividing screen. Beyond, Niven caught a glimpse of a large, still swimming-bath.

"Well, Mr. Niven," Sun resumed in his quiet, gentle voice, but still staring fixedly at the unfortunately situated ex-merchant, "I am sure a sportsman of your fibre can have no objection to being taught to swim. Swimming, Mr. Niven, is one of the healthiest pastimes."

Niven found his voice again.

"But I *can* swim!" he protested.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Doctor of Souls, as if in surprise. "I had no idea. In that case it will not be necessary to detain you for long. My intention was merely to keep you here until we had taught you that manly accomplishment."

"Do you mean you'll let me free," Niven burst out, "if I can swim? At once?"

"Assuredly," Sun murmured with a polite bow. "I'm sorry to think that we have perhaps put you to the inconvenience of bringing you here for nothing! For the moment you show me that you can swim—why, you may go." Sun turned and addressed some instruction in Chinese to Wan-long. Meanwhile Niven's pluck returned together with his curiosity.

"But what's the meaning of all this?" he cried,

furiously. "I don't know who you are, but if it's money you're after . . .!"

"I am the Doctor of Souls!" Sun intoned in his faultless English, but in a voice that somehow made Niven's protest dwindle to nothing. "My honourable mother has money beyond the dreams of avarice. It is not money I require, Mr. Niven." His tone changed to one of disgust. "Bah!" he exclaimed. "How should you understand! There is no need for speech. Jump in, and swim—and go!"

The dwarf had meantime unlocked Niven's waistshackle with a small key and set him free. Realising the futility of further remonstrance with a man who was obviously insane, Niven strode shakily to the edge of the bath and peered in. The water was crystal-clear and deep enough to satisfy an aquatic champion, so, hesitating no longer, Niven poised and dived.

Now came his awakening! He went through that water almost as rapidly as if it had been so much air, finishing up against the hard cement floor with a crack that all but broke his neck—and actually stunned him! He revived at length to find the minute but muscular Wan-long hauling him out of the bath with a long boat-hook!

"But I understood you to say that you could swim?" Sun mocked, when his victim had been dragged to the wall and propped up against it in order that he might recover.

"You fiend!" gasped Niven. "Is—that—water? Oh! My head!"

"Water?" echoed the Doctor of Souls, chuckling. "Oh, no, it's not water! No, it's a little preparation of my own, specially mixed for the occasion. Quite harmless, but of not half the density of water. You'll find learning to swim in this mixture considerably more difficult than in water, I'm afraid—perhaps almost as difficult as your little son finds it in the deep river next to your estate. You must learn, Mr. Niven! Come on,

Wan-long, throw him in again! We'll make a man of him yet—if it takes us six months!"

Realising with horror the fiendish ingenuity of his torturer's scheme, Niven fought and struggled like a madman, but in the hands of the grotesque Wan-long he was as helpless as an infant. Almost before he had fairly begun his impotent resistance he was lifted bodily into the air and hurled like a great ball into the very centre of the terrible bath. He sank with the velocity of a stone sinking through water. But this time he landed on his feet and beyond a slight jar suffered no ill-effects. Immediately he struck out in the peculiar mixture for the surface, using every ounce of strength in his powerful body. To his dismay he made so little headway that he realised he must drown long before he could attain to the air and relieve his labouring lungs! He struggled like a drowning man will struggle—and moved upwards *another six inches!* Unable to hold his breath any longer he gave up the unequal battle and resigned himself to his fate. Just then he felt the blunt end of the boat-hook prod him, and then consciousness departed.

When he came to again he was alone in the apartment, shackled to the wall as before. The screen was drawn once more, shutting out the horror that was behind it; but, ominous and low, he heard the trickling of that terrible liquid into the tank! By his side stood a jug of drinking water and a platter of plain but wholesome food. So he remained, for how long he has not the least idea. At length came a second "lesson," then, some time afterwards, a third. And then Mr. Niven's memory seems to have failed him.

He could not have spent many days in that chamber, really, for he remembers vaguely lying in a bed in a sort of hospital-ward for what seemed to him an age. But, as before stated, he was away from the comforts and amenities of civilisation for three full weeks! He was a very different man when he at length staggered to the mansion gates from the roadway where a car had left

him one misty morning at about four o'clock. He was much thinner—and only half-coherent for a time. He had in his brief absence conceived so real a horror of water in quantity that he could not bear the sight of the river bounding his estate, and shortly after his return he sold the mansion and moved elsewhere. He saw things differently, somehow. He had lost all interest in his small son's swimming-lessons, and was content to leave that nerve-ridden youngster to pursue his pastimes according to the limitations of his constitution. And so, once again, out of horror and brutality, ultimate good!

I found it very puzzling.

CHAPTER XVII

BEFORE the report of Mr. Niven's "swimming-lesson" appeared in startling headlines and a couple of columns one morning, the chief sent for me and made me read the proofs. Immediately I attained to the part in which the victim of Sun's latest "experiment" attempted to describe the little land-locked cove, I pulled up short and turned to my editor.

"That cove was where we started from last time," I exclaimed, "on the occasion Sun kidnapped the Dicksons!"

The chief nodded, as if he had been waiting for me to make some such remark. He was, of course, well acquainted with all the details of that weird adventure.

"Precisely," he said. "Now, Bellairs, do you think there's any possible chance of your being able to find the place again?" He sounded quite eager. I thought for a moment.

"I might," I answered at last. "I haven't very much to go on, sir, but I might find it in time. I know, for instance, that it's somewhere in the South, because

we started from Guildford, and it couldn't have taken us more than two or three hours to get there; because it must have been pretty late when we started, and it was light, or nearly light, when we got to the cove. Anyhow, I'm sure I'd recognise it at once if I saw it. But why, sir . . . ?”

The chief seemed to anticipate my question.

“This is my plan,” he answered, leaning forward across his table. “The police are bound to put men on the same job now, after your story of that cove has been corroborated by this new yarn of Niven's. Now if you could get a little ahead of the Law, Bellairs, and send us in some sort of story about this cave he talks about”

“I see, sir,” I interrupted. “Of course I may look for a week before I find the place. Although,” I added meditatively, “I have a pretty shrewd idea that we were travelling about due south-west; and I might be lucky and find it almost at once.”

“It doesn't matter if you're away for a week,” my editor rejoined. “If you can send in anything interesting about these cave-places—if they really exist—before everybody else gets hold of the ‘story,’ it doesn't matter how long you're away. Fix up with Barnes to do your work and start off this morning. And mind,” he added, as I neared the door, thinking very hard, “don't get yourself mixed-up in another ‘experiment’ if you can help it! We can't have you talking to yourself by the hour and having hallucinations for a fortnight after you come back—like last time!”

I went, but I must admit that it was with rather mixed feelings. In a way nothing suited me better than this new commission, however doubtful I felt in my heart of its leading anywhere. I was as intrigued as anyone else, I suppose, about the hiding-place of the now famous (or infamous) Dr. Sun. More, indeed. I had many times during the past month or so wished that I had some means of communicating with Sun. If only, I

felt, he were on the telephone, or had some address to which I could post a letter, so that I might learn something about the original of that print that stood on my mantelshelf—a lovely being to whom Sun alone had the power to lead me. But strangely, much as I wanted to see my “Lady of the Clouds” again, I had not once felt any desire to re-encounter Sun in person—never once since our last humiliating meeting, when I had cut so sorry a figure. My recollections of the sheer terror the man inspired me with were such that I actually dreaded the thought of meeting him again.

Besides, he was changed. He was not the quiet, well-mannered student I had known. His brutality, his callousness to human suffering, shocked me. The inevitable consequent good, following upon each of his known experiments, making them so baffling, so hard to categorise in “good” or “evil,” to applaud or to condemn, this weighed little with me, being perhaps beyond the modest scope of my reasoning. He was not a man, I sometimes felt, but some half-supernatural, reincarnated Celestial *soul*, his small cranium crammed with all the lore of China and Time. Surely one to whom we mortals must seem the veriest children.

Unashamedly, I was frightened to meet him again. And I had in no wise forgotten this when, a few hours after being sent for to the chief’s room that morning, I was spinning out of London, south-westwards, at a steady twenty. Indeed, so far from forgetting, I had so earnestly remembered, that, for the first time in my life, a newly-acquired and fully loaded automatic-pistol went with me in my hip-pocket!

There is perhaps no necessity to describe how I sought the coast of south-west England for that cove. Luck was with me, I suppose, because, as it happened, it was by the merest chance that I did find it, for it was so situated that I might have driven by it a dozen times without recognising it as the place I sought.

It was towards evening that same day. I had just passed

through a little fishing village and was bowling along merrily, straight into the sunset, and keeping an eye open for any familiar landmark, when a man stopped me by waving from the side of the road. He was a rustic, a farm-labourer returning to the village for the night, and he had the cheek to make me stop in order to provide him with a light for his pipe. As he puffed away, rubbing earth all over my matchbox, it occurred to me that he might know the lie of the coastline hereabouts, and I asked him. He was a little bit vague at first, but, to my vast surprise and delight, when I more fully described the little cove he appeared to recognise it at once. There was no mistaking it, for he described the little-used cart-track that ran down to the beach and the small wooden jetty with an accuracy that left no room for doubt. I thanked him very affably, and, following his instructions, came about half an hour later upon the very place.

I had never before seen it in daylight, except from the air and in the very early morning, and I was astonished, in a way, to discover that just above it, and well hidden behind fir-trees, stood a well-appointed modern bungalow. I did not follow the track down into the bay, but left my car on the road, jumped out and proceeded to confirm my discovery with further investigations on foot. It occurred to me to wonder again, as I paced about in the heather that clad the steep-sloping sides of the pretty cove with its minute jetty, how I hoped that lighting upon this place would help me to find out anything about Sun and the supposed cave. The Doctor of Souls, even supposing he were so indiscreet as ever again to make use of this same starting-point to embark upon another of his fantastic "expeditions," might not put in an appearance for a month, or more. I might hang about the cove for a week and find and see nothing that would justify a half-inch in my newspaper.

There was certainly little enough in the cove to demand my staying now, for beyond a few ends of tarred rope

hanging from the rotting jetty-railings and a weather-greened buoy in the quiet waters, there was nothing. The bungalow, too, was apparently deserted. I thought to make certain, however, before I drove back to the village to find an inn for the night and to make one or two enquiries, so I walked up to the gate. There was no response to my knock at the front-door, so I took the liberty of peering in through a loose-shuttered window. The room I saw was desolate and bare of furniture ; the place was obviously not in use.

I retraced my steps towards the road and my car. And then—and I have no idea what prompted me—I conceived the objectless notion of first walking down into the bay. I had no purpose in view that I can recollect. The idea came to me suddenly, like a telepathic instruction: “Walk down into the cove and have a last look round before you go.” Almost unreasoningly I found myself strolling down the cart-track. There, on the sea-lichen-slimed planks of the jetty, I suppose I must have let about ten minutes slip by. Meanwhile night was fast falling. When at length I turned my face shorewards and began the upward climb, the stars were peeping out above the fir-trees. Then I saw something that made me stand stock-still and stare.

A light shone in the deserted bungalow .

I looked incredulously at the window through which the feeble light flickered. It was the same window through which I had peered but a few minutes ago. My first conclusion was that the bungalow must be occupied after all. The tenants, I supposed, had not heard my knock. My second thoughts demanded a reason for the room's being unfurnished ! And why was there no smoke coming out at either of the two chimneys ? It looked distinctly “fishy” ! I pushed aside my hastily-conceived intention of striding up to the front-door and repeating my knock. Supposing Dr. Sun was the tenant ! And what more likely, when he had so lately made use of this cove as a base, than that he should rent the bungalow

—if only for the sake of keeping prying eyes away from the bay ?

I bent low down so as not to be seen above the gorse against the background of sea, and I doubled my caution. When I was less than half-way up the slope I left the track, climbing the rest of the way over prickly heather and gorse and approaching the bungalow from the side. When I had at last attained to the level ground, I paused to regain my breath, then very slowly and cautiously I made my way towards the wooden building. Inch by inch I edged round the side of the structure until I stood by that window through which the feeble light shone so balefully upon the fading landscape. I moved my head nearer the pane and peeped into the room.

There, in the centre of the floor, stood the light, a candle-lantern. Otherwise the room was as I had seen it before, deserted, empty. I felt a queer sense of mis-giving steal over me as I looked. Who would place a lantern on the floor of an empty room, and for what purpose ? And then I felt fear sweep over me in a sudden enlightening wave. What else could the light be but a decoy beacon for somebody ? Me ? I was about to turn and hurriedly leave the premises, strangely overawed by these reasonings, when a familiar voice greeted me from behind my shoulder !

“Master say, velly glad see you. Please come inside.”

I swung round on my heel. There, behind me, on the edge of the rough, uncut lawn, stood that quaint but sinister figure, Wan-long ! At his feet, crouching, ready to spring, was—Sirius ! I had stumbled upon a hornets' nest indeed ! But I did not pause to regret my folly. I dashed forward, my right hand flying to my hip.

“Stand aside !” I yelled. “Stand aside, I tell you, or . . . !”

I had no further time or breath to waste in useless threats. I was actually at the gate when something, striking me with the impact of a large sledge-hammer,

fair on the back of my neck, sent me hurtling face forward to the ground. And when I had recovered from the shock of my headlong fall, I was on my back, and Sirius, the bulldog, his jaws slavering and hideously working, waited ready to bury his fangs in my throat should I dare to make any attempt to rise! I could feel his hot breath on my neck! So I lay very still, hardly daring to breathe, until the dwarf leisurely reached my side. He bowed.

"Master say, please to come inside," he repeated suavely.

"Call your dog off, confound you!" I muttered.

"All light," said Wan-long. He addressed something in Chinese to that evil-looking beast of Sun's and Sirius backed away from me, grumbling as if in protest at being denied his prey.

I think that if I had had my new automatic in my hand I should even then have made one last desperate bid for freedom, even at the risk of killing the "incomparable" Wan-long (as Dr. Sun referred to him). But such had been my haste to get free of the bungalow that I had not had the time even to fumble my way under my jacket to my pocket, let alone draw the pistol. And I soon saw that my chances of doing so unobserved were now very scant indeed, for, once I had suffered Wan-long to drag me to my feet, he did not permit so much as a yard to separate us. There was nothing for it but to do as I was bidden.

Not lessening the distance between us, Wan-long and Sirius—the latter growling about a foot behind my heels—escorted me to the front door, which I now observed to be partly ajar. We passed down a short hall, and then the dwarf halted before a door on the left. He flung it open.

"Aha, Bunny!" greeted a well-remembered voice, a voice low-modulated and pleasant, gentle and gentlemanly. "This is a pleasure indeed!"

There, in the centre of the floor, his slender hand

outstretched in friendly welcome, but a mocking smile playing about the corners of his thin-lipped, restless mouth, stood that madman-genius, the Doctor of Souls!

CHAPTER XVIII

BUT for a table and two or three chairs the room was bare. And I noticed, as I hesitatingly advanced towards that slim, gentle and yet somehow terrifying figure, that Sun was dressed for travel and that a portmanteau rested on the bare boards at his feet. He still held his hand extended, but—and let my pluck be recorded—I disregarded it. Sun affected surprise.

“Why, Bunny!” he chided. “Won’t you shake hands?”

“Not with a man who sets his servant and his dog on me, no!” I retorted, still panting a little from my recent exertions. “And I might add . . .”

“My dear Bunny,” he interrupted me gently, “why is it that you always greet me in a state of violent excitement? Excitement is a waste of time. There is nothing so utterly useless as an excited man; he is always sub-normal, and if he does or says anything he’s almost sure to regret it. Calm yourself! You have nothing to fear!”

“Thank you!” I muttered. “I am not aware that I do fear anything at the moment. But I warn you, Sun, that the first chance I get I’ll plug that bulldog of yours!”

“I wouldn’t, if I were you, Bunny,” he advised quietly. “He was only doing his duty—a good deal more efficiently than many a man might have done it. As for setting Sirius on you, am I not following the hallowed custom of you Englishmen? A tramp peers through your window—set the dogs on him! For according to your logic a poor man may not take from a wealthy man, however much the wealthy man must,

necessarily, have taken from the poor in order to become wealthy. Eh, Bunny? Isn't that the way of it? The distribution of property being sacred. . . ."

But I was in no mood to listen to Sun expounding one of his favourite sophistries.

"Will you please order your servant to let me go—at once!" I cut in vigorously.

"Oh, but Bunny!" he reproached. "Surely not yet? Why, you've only just arrived, and yours is a most opportune visit, I assure you! You're just in time to come with me. I'm only waiting myself for it to get a little darker. You see, since I foresaw the possibility of Niven describing this vicinity in the newspapers, I had to make arrangements to abandon it as a base. It is rather a nuisance having to waste time avoiding the attentions of the police—while there is so much work waiting to be done and so little time in which to do it!" He spoke very solemnly now and sighed, as might sigh a learned professor troubled by the pranks of small boys. I was staring at him in puzzlement, my momentary anger rapidly diminishing. He sounded so very reasonable, so sane. I suppose something of what I was thinking must have shown in my face, for again he extended his hand. This time I took it.

"Sit down, Bunny," he invited, pulling forward one of the hardwood chairs, "and tell me what you're doing in this part of the country."

"Thanks," I said, and I busied myself taking the seat, turning my head so that he might not see my face. I might indeed have spared myself the trouble, for the room was but poorly lighted by a small candle-lantern similar to the one I had seen in that other apartment. But I had no wish to have him know that I had come with the express intention of spying on him! To compose myself further I made great play of filling and lighting my pipe. I was disconcertingly aware, however, that while I so occupied myself, Sun, now in a chair opposite mine, looked at me with a twinkle in those

colourless, slant eyes of his. To rid myself of an intolerable inward awkwardness I broke into speech.

“You talk of the work you have to do, and of police interference,” I said. “The police would not interfere with you if your work was legitimate, Sun. Why must you persist in these horrible outrages against society?”

I had half expected a flare of temper—indeed by the time I had finished putting my question, I dreaded it. Sheer nervousness had given me the courage to say what I had. But instead of the smoulder I had expected to see gather and kindle to flame in those queer eyes, there was nothing but the kindly twinkle.

“You’re thinking of Niven’s case, I suppose?” he suggested quietly.

“Not only Niven,” I answered, “though God knows you made him suffer enough! *All* your ‘cases,’ Sun! Your name has become a byword for terror and brutality!”

The Doctor of Souls looked away for a while before making his reply. I could see that he strove to find that simplicity that was necessary when he discussed his advanced metaphysics with me. His answer took the form of a question.

“When you want to correct a child,” he murmured, “what do you do?”

I said nothing, so, after a pause, he went on: “First you reason with it, and then, failing all else, you beat the child. You make it suffer, to do it good. These men with the warped and shrunken souls, what are they but children!”

Sun was intoning now. His voice fell queerly on my ears, the voice, not of a man, but of some occult, uncanny being from outside the bounds of the natural. In spite of his faultless European clothing he looked now, in the flickering light of the lantern in that bare desolate room, like some weird Celestial practitioner of the black arts. Involuntarily I shrank back into my chair.

“I am the Doctor of Souls!” the voice persisted.

“ I am called to mend the broken soul, to straighten the twisted ! They must suffer to be healed ! ” I watched the fanatical lights flame in his eyes, sink, and at length die. When he spoke again it was in quite a normal manner. “ Your coming is most fortunate, ” he said. “ I called at your flat this morning because I rather wanted to see you, Bunny. I was informed that you were out—looking for me. ”

“ What ! ” I exclaimed. “ She told you *that* ? ”

“ She did not mean to ! ” Sun apologised with a laugh. “ But that, nevertheless, was what I gathered in the course of my short conversation with your amiable housekeeper. I left the good lady shrieking for the police ! ”

“ So you really expected me down here ? ” I cried.

Sun’s eyes twinkled with merriment.

“ Didn’t you meet a yokel who directed you to this neighbourhood, late this afternoon ? ” he asked.

I stared at him.

“ So you put him there to guide me ? ”

Sun smiled.

“ How very simple and unsuspecting you can be sometimes, Bunny ! ” he murmured.

But I was now in by far too lively a concern to see the humour of the incident, funny as it probably was.

“ What do you want with me ? ” I demanded, leaning forward in my chair and striving as best I could to conceal my alarm. Sun tapped his long, slender fingers on the rough table-surface for a moment.

“ You desire, ” he said, “ to learn a little about the caves Niven mentioned—copy for a news column in your paper. I am prepared to gladly give you that copy. You will come with me, Bunny, and see my European home yourself. There is much that will interest you. ”

“ Oh, thanks awfully ! ” I babbled. “ But couldn’t you quite easily tell me about it instead ? I mean, I ought not to be away too long, you know ! ”

“ You will not be long away, ” he rejoined. “ Besides there is another reason why it is necessary that you should

visit my home in person." (I was aware that my eyes were wide. Inwardly I was cursing myself for ever having been so agreeable to undertake this job. Sun went on.) "I am engaged in an experiment of a particularly interesting nature. It is a case this time, not of the mending of a soul, but almost of the reclamation of a soul—the soul of a young man to whom I will introduce you. He is a youngster who, as it were, has been weighed by Life and has fallen short of the required mass.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Bunny, how very many men and women go through life without once being invited by Fate to render a certified statement of the weight of their psychical constitution? You're looking a little vague, Bunny. Let me put it more colloquially if I can. Quite a number of humans in this effete civilisation go through Life on well-greased rollers; Life does not trouble them to render account of their true worth. Thus, many a man finds a respectable grave without knowing what a weakling he is, what a poltroon he would have been had circumstances conspired to attack him in a vulnerable spot. With this young man is another, an older man, a man who has never so been tested by Life. True, the two were together when the younger man was tried and ignominiously failed—they were brother engineers on a lonely railway-construction in the Assam jungle—but, while the ordeal was such that the younger succumbed, it was in no way so terrible an ordeal for the elder, who came out with flying colours. Well, we shall weigh them again, but in different scales. And, if my theory proves to be well-founded, it may be that we will reclaim the soul of the younger and bare that of the elder, so that he may in future be less assured of his own invulnerability. Do you see, Bunny?"

"Yes," I said wonderingly. "But what has all this to do with me, Sun? I have my work, you know. Of course I'm very interested, but you can hardly expect me to leave the office . . ."

I broke off, conscious that Sun gazed fixedly at me, as if to see further into my personality.

"Have you never wondered," he mused, "how you yourself would fare in certain circumstances? You, Bunny, whose humdrum routine asks that you shall run no greater risk than take a 'bus to your office every morning; do you never wonder how you would fare if Life suddenly commanded you to make a vital choice?"

I gaped at him.

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Let me put it more plainly," he resumed quietly. "We will assume a concrete case. There is a girl. You are given the choice of saving the girl's life at the cost of losing your own, or watching her lose hers—and preserving your own. Which would you choose?"

"But, good God!" I ejaculated. "What on earth are you driving at, Sun?" I was thinking furiously. "I hope I should choose the gentlemanly course!" I added at last, a little breathlessly, for it had been gradually dawning on me that there was some hidden meaning behind all this supposition and theory. I rose to my feet. "Sun!" I cried, "You don't mean that . . .?"

The Doctor of Souls was softly laughing.

"I wonder!" he murmured. "I wonder which you *would* choose, Bunny! Of course, given certain circumstances, and I already know your choice. If the girl were beautiful and your audience sufficiently large, I have not the least doubt that you would gladly sacrifice yourself. You would expire a victim of human worship of the dramatic and the sentimental!" He stopped, chuckling. When he resumed his voice was low, invidious. "But if you were alone, Bunny?" he whispered. "And if the girl were ugly and you did not care for her—and there was no one watching you—nobody to know! Life is very good, Bunny!"

For an instant I stood staring at him in horror. Then, making up my mind in a flash, I turned and dashed towards the door. I was about to grasp the handle

when the door opened from the far side. There, filling the lower half of it, stood Wan-long, the dwarf! With all the force of my right arm I struck at that wrinkled face with my clenched fist. He ducked very neatly, caught my wrist and twisted it until I cried out aloud in pain. His hand felt like a steel vice. Holding me as easily as he might have held a refractory child, Wan-long addressed some remark in Chinese to his master. Sun leisurely rose.

"The boat is waiting," he informed me. "Come, Bunny, it is not the least use your making a fuss. You really want to go with me, you know. Now don't you?"

"No!" I cried. "I want to have nothing to do with you! You're mad! I want you to leave me alone..."

With a thin, wand-like hand Sun was making passes in front of my eyes. I knew what was happening but I had long since learnt the futility of resisting. His voice went on, persuasively, soothingly: "You do want to see the caves, don't you, Bunny?"

"Yes," I heard myself answering. (My brain was shouting indignantly: "No! No!")

"You're really quite keen on coming, aren't you?"

"Yes," I heard again. And this time the protesting inner "Noes" were faint and feeble, as though the being who voiced them were many miles distant. I saw some sign pass between the half-Chinaman and his monstrosity of a manservant, and Wan-long released his grip on my wrist. Sun brushed past me and led the way out into the night. I followed. The dwarf walked back to pick up the portmanteau and the lantern, Sirius trotting at his heels. No one took much notice of me. At one time, on the track that led down into the cove, as much as twenty yards separated me from the others. There, in the moonlight, I could make out the blurred outline of my little two-seater. It would have been the simplest matter in the world to make a dash for it, tread on the self-starter pedal and make off into the surrounding night. And I was sufficiently urged to do this, God

knows, for my mind was filled with a thousand contemplative horrors of what lay before me. I dreaded to go with Sun.

And yet, I could not have made an attempt to run away had my very life hung in the balance. That terrible influence he had over me held me bound to him, bound for the time being to follow him whithersoever he cared to go. I could not have been persuaded more effectively to go down to the waiting boat had I been dragged on the end of a length of chain! I knew that I was under the influence of hypnotism, and I told myself so. I tried to fight the spell, but it was like trying to fight a giant. My reason said: "Turn and run!"—but my legs carried me on. I climbed into the stern-sheets of the waiting launch Wan-long had mysteriously produced from some hiding-place, and I remember that I did it with all the unconcern of a summer tripper embarking on a half-hour cruise round the bay!

CHAPTER XIX

IT was by no means an ordinary motor-launch. I discovered that almost at once. It was not very big, being, I should think, no more than twenty-five feet over-all, but it was solidly constructed of thin sheet-steel. It had puzzled me, even on the walk down from the bungalow, to wonder where Sun hid the craft during the day, for when I looked down into the cove earlier in the evening there had been no sign of any boat, nor was the coastline hereabouts of the nature to afford concealment for so curious a craft. But I did not have long to wonder, for the only part of the boat that was not decked over with the same steel-sheeting was the small cockpit in which we sat, and that had a roof that slid forward over the fore part of the craft, when not in use,

and that could be hermetically clamped down over the cockpit when required. The boat was a submarine!

How had Wan-long raised it from its resting-place on the sandy bottom of the little cove, I wondered? Then I saw him coiling a peculiar looking steel-tubing and stowing it away in a locker, and I bent forward inquisitively, my dreads temporarily ousted by curiosity. Sun, seated at a steering-wheel and guiding us out of the still waters of the cove, noticed my interest and smiled.

"A pneumatic pump, Bunny," he explained. "Exactly like a bicycle-pump, only much more powerful and with a long steel extension down to the resting craft. There's no harm in my telling you because I won't use this place again. You see, when we want to sink her, we simply batten her down, open the sea-cocks and down she goes. (She has large tanks on either side and over her bilge.) But we're always very careful to leave the air-tube extension connected to the tanks and to carry the end ashore with us and bury it in the sand. Then, when we want to raise her, we dig up the end of the tube and apply air-pressure from an ordinary compressed-air cylinder, or with an atomic pump. Out goes the seawater, out of the tanks, and up comes the boat."

"Oh," I said. "And can she cruise under water?"

"Yes. As you'll see for yourself, later. We slide back the cover, clamp it down, fill the tanks until she's just buoyant enough, and balance and steer with the submarine elevating-fins and rudders." We had cleared the head of the cove as Sun explained. I saw him press his foot on an accelerator and we literally shot forward, the boat seeming to rise up out of the water like a fluttering sea-bird! The wind, which had been so gentle as to have been almost inconspicuous, suddenly stung my face until it smarted. I ducked behind the low protecting glass screen.

"A hydroplane," Sun resumed, hardly talking above a whisper, for here was none of the roar and racket of

racing engines. "She can do a hundred miles an hour. Same engines as in the aeroplane—atomic."

I said nothing. I was too interested trying to take in all I saw about the control-board, through a little door that led into what was obviously a cabin immediately in front of the scientist's bucket-seat, and almost everywhere. It was a calm, moonlight night, and the exhilarating sensation of speeding over the Irish Channel—for we seemed to be going westwards—at this terrific pace did much to make me forget the curious and repellent object of this nocturnal journey. Then, just as I was beginning to think again of Sun's "test" and to wonder what fiendish ingenuity of his misapplied genius would be made manifest to me this time, I saw a dark shape loom up over the skyline straight beyond our bows. At first I could not make out what constituted the blur, but I soon saw that we were headed straight towards a high wall of jagged cliffs! As we rapidly neared them and Sun made no pretence at slowing down our sickening speed, I began to feel a very natural alarm, and then, just as I was on the point of hurling an excited query at him, he brought our bows round in a graceful sweep and we tore along under the shadow of the cliffs.

"I am a little way out in my reckoning to-night," he mused aloud. "I suppose I've struck an unusual tide." He nodded to Wan-long, and the dwarf, who with the surly Sirius had been sitting behind me all this while, rose and began turning a wheel fixed near his seat to the hull of the boat. The roof slid slowly back from its resting-place until it completely covered us. Wan-long set about clamping it down by means of tightening little pressure-wheels here and there in the hull.

"How will we breathe?" I demanded in sudden alarm.

Sun moved a little lever set in the switch-board.

"An air-purifying mechanism," he explained. "Chemical action. It's just as well you reminded me, Bunny. I had forgotten!"

"Good God!" I cried, alarmed at his carelessness.

"Oh, don't be alarmed!" he chuckled. "We won't be under water for more than a few minutes."

"But where are we going to?" I asked, not altogether pacified.

"Look through the screen, here, Bunny," Sun invited, indicating the small oval-shaped glass window set immediately above the control-board. "I'm sinking her now."

As I looked out through the glass, Sun did something (I did not notice exactly what), and I watched the bows of the boat gradually sink until the prow was almost level with the water-surface. A most disconcerting sight, too, I am ready to affirm! Then I staggered back in alarm. We were again headed straight towards the cliffs! We were less than a hundred yards from that jagged wall of rock, and rapidly ploughing our way towards it!

"What are you doing!" I yelled.

"Steady!" Sun remonstrated sharply, "or I might miss the channel—and then there *would* be serious consequences!"

We had dived! Water streamed over the bows, cascading along the hull and dividing into two currents as it struck a cunningly-designed V-shaped contrivance set on the deck immediately in front of the control-window. We slid through the black depths with all the grace of a shark, and, I have little doubt, something of its speed. Black it was, so black that the water might have been ink for all we could see ahead. Sun pressed a switch-button and a powerful beam of white light illuminated a path for us, and I saw dark shapes in the blue-green twilight scuttle to either side for sanctuary from the invading monster. I was too entranced at the wonderful sight and the strange sensation to voice my secret alarm just then.

Suddenly the water ahead of us seemed to grow darker, and a second later I saw the cause. We were approaching the submarine base of those same terrible

cliffs ! Closer and closer, now in clear water, now forging through tall repulsive-looking deep-sea weeds, whose long, slimy, waving tentacles seemed to try to twine and grip about our bows ! And then, just as I felt I could no longer contain my mounting alarm, I thought I saw our objective. For set in the face of the cliff-wall was the entrance to a large submarine cavern, its interior black and forbidding. Sun moved the wheel slightly and we headed straight towards it !

In less time than it takes to recount we were moving, very slowly and cautiously now, along the winding course of that sea-tunnel, Heaven alone knows how many feet below the surface. For the most part of the way it was fairly broad, but in certain sections it narrowed until I began to fear that our boat must surely wedge itself half-way in trying to pass through. Our fate in such circumstances I found too horrible even for contemplation ! But always, under Sun's skilful handling of our craft, we slid through into wider passages beyond, not once scraping any of the rocky projections with our hull.

The banks, ceiling and floor of this sea-alley were alive with vast numbers of submarine animals and fish, for the most part of the repugnant crustacean species. They clung here to rock projections, there scrambled upside-down across the ceiling, elsewhere scuttled in terror at our approach from little sandy patches on the floor to the darkness of the multitudes of smaller caves that lined the passage. Weeds thickly covered the rock-surface on all sides, like a foul lichen in some Brobdingnagian sewer of a nightmare or an overwrought imagination. I think the dangers of the negotiation of that under-sea channel, real as they undoubtedly were, affected me less than the sheer horror of that slime—and the creeping and crawling things our searchlight disturbed. I had never before realised how very much we mortals have to be thankful for in being permitted to live in the sunlight and to breathe the fragrant air !

We rounded another of the interminable bends and

without any warning left the tunnel and entered the waters of a broad and luminous submarine sea. The unexpectedness and the dazzling brilliance of the light startled me not a little—more particularly, when I realised that this phenomenon could not be the result of sunlight shining on the water surface, since the hour must be somewhere in the vicinity of midnight! I turned an enquiring face towards the Doctor of Souls, who had switched off the searchlight immediately on entering this new water. He now moved the elevating-fin lever so that the floor tilted slightly and our bows glided upwards.

“Electric light,” he said, replying to my unspoken question. “Welcome to my European home, Bunny!”

As we glided swiftly upwards the water about us became brighter and more bright, and then the foam splashed about our prow as we emerged to the still mirror surface of a large cave-lake to be almost dazzled by the brilliant lights in the rock-roof overhead and the natural beauty of the formation about us. The cave was fairylike—unreal. Organ-pipe formations, and needle-like columns rose from the sides of the still water and depended from the cavern’s snowy roof. Goblin grottoes, curtained with rock so delicate and thin as to be almost transparent, led from the lake’s edge to deeper recesses in the sides of the huge vault. It was so glorious, this masterpiece of Nature, as to make me gasp. When Wan-long unclamped our sliding roof, re-converting our craft from a submarine into an ordinary launch, I stood, saying nothing, just drinking in the sheer beauty of the place! (I had altogether forgotten that I was Sun’s captive!) I was surprised to discover that the air in the cave was fresh and pure. Wonderingly I turned to Sun.

“There is a natural fissure in the rock,” he explained, reading my unspoken question. “If I switched off those electric-lights in the ceiling you would trace it by a thin luminous line right across the face of the roof.”

“Are those lights always burning?” I asked.

“Electricity is cheap enough—here,” he smiled. “I have installed hydraulic rams in certain narrower sections of the tunnel, and my current is manufactured for me by the tides, day and night.”

As he spoke he steered the boat towards one of the aforementioned grottoes, and I now saw, as we drew closer, that leading up to the recesses of the one we approached were steps cut in the solid rock. I looked hard, and, far in the grotto, I made out the rough outline of a door. I was still peering at this when we grated gently alongside the steps and Wan-long busied himself tying up our prow to an iron mooring-ring let into the rock. Sirius jumped ashore and stood, for the first time in all my acquaintance with that canine oddity, actually wagging his tail! Sun followed.

“Come, Bunny,” he invited.

I climbed out after him and followed him along a narrow, smooth-worn pathway towards the door set in the cave-wall. As Sun neared it it swung open, apparently under its own volition, but I had known the man too long to be astonished at anything so simple as a trick mechanism and a switch operated somehow by our weight. I made no comment. In the doorway Sun turned and bowed.

“Welcome, Bunny,” he said. “Come inside and make yourself comfortable. Later you will make the acquaintance of your fellow-patients.”

I came back to earth then with considerable shock. The excitement of the trip in the submarine-launch, and then the sheer beauty of this place, had bemused me, I suppose; had made me forget why I had come with Sun. Now it suddenly came back to me. There in the doorway of this subterranean retreat stood that fanatic, that madman, that genius (I knew not which), the Doctor of Souls. What lay beyond the door? I cast a quick glance around, over my shoulder. My chance of escaping now was hopeless! I turned again and approached my one-time friend. His eyes mocked me.

It seemed he read my thoughts, comprehended my dreads. I set my teeth and entered—determined at least not to openly show my secret cowardice.

CHAPTER XX

THE house of the Doctor of Souls, there, hundreds of feet below the ground surface, afforded me as much astonishment as had anything in all the time I had known the half-Chinaman. I had looked for a rough cave; actually I walked into a beautiful mansion, carved in the rock, it is true, but tastefully decorated and so cunningly squared and levelled that nobody would have suspected that it was anything but the interior of some palatial London residence! Rugs thickly covered the floor of the room we first entered; comfortable arm-chairs and antique furniture graced it; paintings hung on the panelled walls. I was so surprised that I forgot all my reawakened fears and turned curiously to my host.

“How on earth,” I cried, “did you manage to get all this stuff here? It must have taken you years to cut and build a room like this!”

Sun smiled.

“The caves are natural ones,” he explained. “I suppose it would have taken us years if we had had to cut them out of the rock. But all we had to do to make them habitable was to cement them and level them—and of course install a heating apparatus. I had two hundred workmen quartered down here for over a month.”

“English workmen?”

“Yes, the best I could procure.”

“But how is it, then, that no one until quite lately knew of the existence of this place?” I asked curiously. “Surely some of those workmen must have told of having been down here working.”

“They forgot—all of them,” Sun murmured. “They suffered a sudden lapse of memory.” I suddenly understood. Sun resumed: “The caves are very extensive. The first few rooms are merely the dwelling section. Beyond, Bunny, are my experimental laboratories. They include many rooms. The brain-department alone occupies eight.”

“Brain-department?” I echoed. “And what is the brain-department?”

Sun was divesting himself of his overcoat and his cap. Wan-long and Sirius came in and passed through a far door to regions beyond, the dog nearly wagging his tail off. The Doctor of Souls walked to a sideboard and carried a decanter, a siphon and a glass to a little table in the centre of the room.

“Sit down, Bunny,” he invited, “and help yourself to a drink while I explain.”

“Thank you,” I said, and, nothing loath, I did.

Sun seated himself opposite me.

“You saw my model of the human brain, I believe—in Kent,” he remarked. I nodded. “Well, that little instrument—a bulk of perhaps no more than a yard square, if you recollect—is merely the indicating gauge of my brain-machine. The machine itself occupies, as I say, eight large rooms—eight rooms crowded with the most intricate and delicate mechanical, electrical and chemical apparatus. As you can readily imagine, Bunny, to reproduce mechanically the varied processes of the brain involves a greatly complicated machinery. I will show you, perhaps, later. Some of the key mechanisms have taken me years to achieve, and I may spend my lifetime in improving their present rude efficiency. Indeed, my time will probably be exhausted long before they are anywhere near perfect. All these rooms and all they contain are connected by electric-wires to the gauge or indicator—the thing you saw. There are over three thousand separate wires to carry the resolvent impulses . . .”

“ But do you mean,” I interrupted, “ that you have constructed a machine that functions—that works—like the human brain works ? ”

“ Hardly yet,” he murmured. “ But I have at least been able to reproduce certain brain-processes with my machine. I am able, for instance, by interposing certain prejudicial control-slides in the ‘ nerve-centre ’ of my apparatus, to observe and demonstrate the effects of varying degrees of mentality. As an example: if I retard and restrict the mechanisms that operate the imaginative faculties of my machine, I can clearly show that the machine—which we may theoretically now regard as a living entity—exhibits no sense of fear. Follow ? Thus I demonstrate, you see, that fear—cowardice—in a human being is no more than proof of a developed imagination. On the other hand, if I insert a control-slide designed to anger my machine and set it . . . ”

I was staring at my old friend in incredulous amazement.

“ Make a machine angry ? ” I echoed. “ A machine ? Sun, what are you talking about ! You can’t expect me to believe that you have made a thing of wires and bolts and nuts that can think ! Are you joking ? ”

I had laid aside my empty glass. Sun rose.

“ Come, Bunny,” he said patiently, as if suddenly tired of trying to convince me. “ Experience should have made me remember that you believe nothing until you have seen it ! Come, there is an infinitely simpler apparatus of ‘ wires and bolts and nuts ’ that may persuade you—no more than a toy, really, but I think it will suffice.”

He moved towards the door through which Wan-long and the bulldog had passed. With my curiosity thoroughly aroused—for I had never known Sun to talk idly—I followed. We walked down a long, carpeted and well-lighted passage with doors on either side, passing at length into a wide, well-equipped apartment that even a tyro could not possibly have mistaken for anything but

a savant's laboratory. Through this we passed, between low work-tables supporting contrivances whose functions were, if possible, a bigger mystery to me than the riddle of the Sphinx, by shelves and cupboards stacked with bottles, jars and retorts, under walls hung with diagrams and designs and tabulated formulæ, until we stood before one of the several doors at the far end of the great chamber.

I noticed in a corner of the laboratory, on a raised dais, that same reproduction of a great skull that I had seen in the lonely farmhouse in the marshes of Kent—the indicator of the brain-machine! I observed it now to be a mass of little delicate wires, from where I stood staring at it no thicker than cobwebs. Then my attention was detracted from the skull towards the door in front of which we waited, and I noticed that, unlike the others, it was solidly constructed of steel and was securely bolted. Sun moved the bolt and flung the door open. He turned and signed me to be silent, then he tiptoed in and stood aside for me to enter. With my eyes wide I did as I was bidden.

The room was a large arena, its cement floor as level as that of a roller skating-rink, its walls high, vertical and polished. At first glance I assumed it to be empty, and then I discerned, huddled against the far side, a low, squat, shapeless thing of whose nature I had yet no idea. Lying on the floor beside the door was a little pile of short four-by-four inch timber, each beam possibly six feet in length, and I wondered what these appurtenances of the builder and plasterer were doing there. Indeed I was about to ask Sun, who had just closed and carefully bolted the iron door behind us, when I was alarmed to observe the mass that had been resting against the far wall to move and—*crawl towards us!*

“What the deuce . . . ?” I began in a high falsetto.

“Be careful, Bunny!” hissed Sun. “Don't let it get anywhere near you, whatever you do!”

The thing had now separated itself from the far wall

and was wriggling across the floor—straight towards us! I saw with a sudden sickening horror that I am quite unable to describe in writing, that it was *alive*—and that it was a *monster spider*! I shrieked! It came on the faster! I could see the gleam in two small, bright eyes fixed on Sun and myself—diabolical, evil! I saw its furry legs sliding and slipping about the polished floor! Two pincer-like claws, sharp, powerful and hideous, worked and wobbled in front of it! I felt I must be going mad! The thing could not be true! There was no such ghastly thing in all creation as a spider standing four feet from the ground and very nearly as wide as an elephant!

It was within a few yards of us when Sun stepped forward and *said something to it* in Chinese, a low and distinct articulation. The thing stopped, stood still, eyed us and moved its terrible claws! The Doctor of Souls turned to me.

“Stand perfectly still, Bunny,” he whispered, “and whatever you do don’t shriek again!”

“But it’s alive!” I croaked hoarsely.

“I am very proud of it,” Sun murmured. “It took me two years to construct. It is the nearest reproduction of animal life I have so far achieved. . . .”

“But isn’t it real?” I gasped, staring at it in horror.

“Oh, it’s perfectly real,” smiled my host. “It can hear and see and walk and fight, exactly like a living spider. And it can think—in a very, very limited way. But it is *living*, in a sense. I estimate that it will live ten years, provided I occasionally feed its accumulators with new acids.”

My eyes, blinded at first by sheer terror, now affirmed Sun’s startling statement. The thing was not of flesh and blood! It was of metal! I could see now the steel spring-spirals that constituted its legs, structures that my inflamed imagination had distorted into the furry appendages of a living spider! I could distinguish the ball-sockets and pivots upon which its solid-steel, two-foot claws ceaselessly worked; on the hard smooth

shell-like back of the thing I now discerned the heads of bolts and screws.

"But it stopped when you told it!" I muttered, still inclined to disbelieve my eyes. "It seemed to understand!"

"It did," Sun answered. "Though it knows no more Chinese than you do. My tone conveyed the instruction to it. Quite a simple principle, really—centring about the oscillation of a very sensitive electrical valve. I have so arranged the lenses—or the eyes, Bunny, if you prefer it—that anything moving is sufficient to set the master-valve in oscillation. And once the master-valve oscillates, the creature is mechanically animated—or angered—and will not be appeased until its claws have exerted their full strength upon the point of origin of that movement. It is the same with the aural equipment. A shout or a cry sets the valve oscillating. An admonitive exhortation, made in precisely the peculiar low tone you heard me use a moment ago, has the effect of restoring the valve to its nicely-balanced equilibrium—and calming the machine. It took me quite a time to cultivate just the requisite note. I would guarantee, for instance, that if you were to shout again and disturb the balance, and then try to restore the machine to equilibrium with a low-voiced remark, you would not succeed. But it might be rather interesting to try . . ."

"For God's sake, no!" I muttered, edging my way further back and not once taking my eyes off that mechanical nightmare.

Sun chuckled in a way that made my hair stand on end.

"As you will, Bunny!" he smiled.

"But it can see!" I croaked. "It's looking at me! Sun, it's alive!"

"It *can* see," he affirmed quietly. "That is to say that the lenses, reflecting the object on the sensitive screens behind them, act as eyes, and have the mechanical power of steering the machine towards that object. And it is the same with the aural apparatus. But look, Bunny,

I sometimes make use of these, when I want to watch my machine grow angry." Sun had turned very cautiously and picked up a length of timber from the stack behind him. He turned towards the spider-machine again and now he was waving the beam ostentatiously before those ghastly eyes. I saw the eyes fix themselves on the moving beam, the spiral legs slid about the floor, gripped—and the monster was advancing!

I am not ashamed to say that I took great care to edge to a position immediately behind Sun, my heart palpitating wildly, my eyes nearly starting from my head! Sun stood firm, the beam now held vertically before him at arm's length. Straight for it came that awful *thing*, its steel pincers clashing furiously together as it neared! I saw them close about the thick beam, watched it splinter like a match under what must have been a tremendous pressure, then, unable to contain myself longer, I had shrieked again and run for it!

When I recovered my *morale* it was to hear Sun addressing the awful thing in a low sing-song voice that seemed to quieten it. It stood before him for all the world like some monster purring cat, its claws, that but a few seconds since had been wildly, ferociously lacerating the air, now gently waving to and fro, like twigs in a summer air. Sun left it, walking very slowly and quietly, and joined me where I stood trembling against the wall.

"What a problem in theology!" he murmured with a smile.

"Theology?" I echoed.

"Yes," said he. "Look at it this way. *I* have created that thing. It is to all intents and purposes alive. Supposing I let it loose upon the world, Bunny. If I willed that it should live in the world it has no power to dispute my will; it cannot protest or refuse. I have, so to speak, the power of life and death over it. For if I remove its accumulators or its valve it becomes at once a thing of bolts and scrap-iron—as much dead as we are when the breath leaves our bodies. Well, let us assume

that I let it loose—in England. Left alone it would do no harm. It would live its ten years in peace, at the end of which time some more delicate part of its machinery would wear out—when the machine would lie until it rusted away. Like we do in the ground, Bunny. On the other hand, angered by shout or movement it could do a considerable amount of harm. It could, for instance, easily kill human beings. Supposing it did kill a human, Bunny—a man who had angered it. Here is the theological point: who would be responsible for the man's death? That thing I have created—or I myself?"

"You, of course!" I muttered, shuddering at his disturbing fantasy.

"Oh!" smiled the Doctor of Souls. "Then that settles an age-old theological problem! Thank you very much, Bunny!"

I saw that he was laughing at me, but I was in no mood to be resentful over trifles or to enter into profound discussions.

"Sun!" I urged in a frantic whisper. "For God's sake, let's get out of this place! My nerves won't stand it much longer!"

Again he smiled. Then he turned and slowly led the way towards the door. I followed, so close that I actually felt him, hardly daring to breathe and keeping my eyes fixed the while on that awful *thing*, so as to be warned in time of any movement on its part. I looked back for an instant as Sun let me out, and I was immediately sorry that I did, for the thing still watched me with those little, glittering, malignant eyes, and the conviction came to me that, bolt and spring contraption as it was, it was *alive!* Hideously, hellishly alive!

My brow was wet with perspiration when at last Sun had closed and bolted the door behind us. The noise so made must have roused the mechanical horror we had just left, for I at once heard the now familiar scraping noise of those ghastly spiral legs trying to grip the smooth floor—a sound that sent the blood coursing to my head

—and a moment later we heard its pincers furiously clawing and battering at the door! Sun chuckled like a ghoul!

“Playful little chap!” he murmured. “He’d be rather a handful if he ever did get out and I was nowhere about to quieten him! Hence the steel door!” He turned suddenly serious. “Now, Bunny, reverting to that test. Would you face *that*”—he nodded towards the door that protected us from the loathsome thing within—“if it meant saving a woman’s life?”

I stared at him—my eyes wild.

“No!” I cried. “No! I’d run! I tell you now! Sun, you can’t mean . . .? You can’t intend . . .?”—and I broke off, inarticulate with horror!

“Quiet, Bunny,” he admonished. “It is useless to rave. Raving is a waste of time. Time, remember, is the most precious possession we have. Come, we will inspect your fellow-patients.”

He had crossed the laboratory and was opening another door as he spoke. Realising the futility of protest, and not a little moved by a certain morbid curiosity, I obeyed his beckoning sign for me to follow him.

CHAPTER XXI

IT had never occurred to me that Sun might have anybody else in captivity but those persons immediately concerned with this latest of his grotesque “experiments.” I was therefore the more astonished when we entered the long dormitory—for so the room proved to be—to discover the forms of at least half a dozen human beings of both sexes in hypnotic repose on the low cots that stood in a long line against one wall! Even as I wonderingly saw them I wondered how Sun arranged that they should be looked after during his absences, since there were apparently no attendants. And then I

reflected that none of Sun's experiments involved much waste of time—most of them, indeed, occupied no more than two or three days—and I remembered that persons in a trance were hardly troubled by bodily wants.

The room was curiously reminiscent of a hospital-ward, everything in it being white-enamelled and scrupulously clean. But there was something sinister about it, nevertheless; an absence of that "atmosphere" of wholesomeness that is generally associated with hospitals; something startlingly remindful of a morgue in the still, untroubled sleep of the fully-clothed "patients." There were a few chairs in a corner and Sun waved me to take one of them. Unnerved and exhausted after my recent experience, I gratefully complied.

Meanwhile Sun approached the occupant of the nearest cot and began gently stroking his face with a slender, infinitely careful hand. I watched the sleeper awaken; watched him open puzzled eyes. He sat up and looked bewilderedly about him. He was a young man—twenty-two, perhaps—but I could see that he was far from being a normal young man. Suffering had set its seal on his sallow, hollow-cheeked face, and his eyes had that troubled look one may sometimes see in the eyes of a dog.

"Why?" he began in a weak, thin voice. "Why, where am I?"

"You're among friends," said Sun soothingly. "Get up, Mr. Manderson, and let me introduce you to an old friend of mine."

The young man turned his head and stared at me. I saw his evident alarm change to relief as his eyes lit on me. It was evident that he had feared I might be someone else, someone he dreaded to meet. He turned again to Sun.

"But what I can't understand," he resumed fretfully, "is what *you* have to do with me! You say you're a doctor, but I'm not ill! And you won't let me out! You make me sleep—sleep . . .!" He had risen as he spoke, and I saw that his clothes hung loosely about an

emaciated body in a way that at once stirred my pity and, absurdly enough, brought to my mind visions of clothes hanging on clothes-props. I saw Sun make a pass in front of his face, and his feeble protestations died away.

“Manderson?” I said curiously. “Are you perhaps the young Manderson who was concerned in that Assam Hills scandal a few months ago?”

He appeared not to be aware that I had addressed him, but remained standing abstractedly before Sun as if in a deep sleep.

“He does not hear you,” the Doctor of Souls explained. “Yes, Bunny, he *is* that unfortunate youth. I have brought him here to cure him. It is a curious case, and his complaint—cowardice—finds scant sympathy in this fuddle-headed civilisation of brawn and bluster. I have the other man—Cosgreve—here as well. I shall wake him now.”

While I followed the slim figure of the hypnotist with my eyes, I was turning over in my mind the affair of the Assam Hills that had some time past brought a blush to the cheek of many an Englishman. So this pitiable youth was the man who had deserted a friend in his hour of need—to make his name a stench in the nostrils of all decent mortals! I was still recollecting the details when Sun led the other man, Cosgreve, towards the somnolent Manderson.

Cosgreve was as different from Manderson in appearance as it is possible for any two men to be different. Manderson, younger, was fair, slight and delicate looking; Cosgreve, the man who had been his fellow-engineer on the railway-construction in Assam, was large, dark, burly and obviously of robust constitution, and possibly ten years the senior. He was still asleep, I could see from the inanimate set of his face, when Sun bade the two men follow him to a clear space at the far end of the room. He left them standing there, like two sightless deaf mutes, neither aware of the other's presence, and returned to my side.

"We will let them tell us the story themselves," he informed me in an undertone. He addressed himself to them. "Manderson! Cosgreve!" he commanded. Both men looked towards him. He resumed in a low voice. "You are in the Assam Hills," he told them. "It is the night the hillmen attacked. You, Cosgreve, and you, Manderson, are talking together in your bungalow, immediately before the attack. You are wondering whether the hillmen will make the attack before day-break." Sun's voice became more and more agitated as he proceeded, nor was the agitation his alone. I saw Manderson cast a terrified look to one side, as if through a window. He had become suddenly, startlingly awake! Then, and not very long afterwards, I watched the passivity pass out of Cosgreve's countenance and a gradual and very real alarm take its place. Sun broke off.

"*You* are talking, Manderson!" he said, a moment later, and almost immediately Manderson spoke, his voice hoarse with terror.

"Do you really think they will attack, Cosgreve?" he appealed earnestly to the older man.

"How do I know?" growled Cosgreve. He had a loud, harsh voice. "They've done for Mossop, haven't they? What's to prevent them trying to kill us while they're about it? You can't hang a man twice for killing two men!" He paused for a moment, during which I heard Manderson's laboured breathing. "But you can never know what the beggars'll do, that's the trouble!" Cosgreve resumed. "In all the fifteen years I've been out in this god-forsaken place I've never learnt to know what goes on behind their dirty faces!"

"But Cosgreve," Manderson protested, "we can't sit here waiting for ever—waiting for them to attack! We've been waiting now for over twenty hours! Twenty hours! And I can't stand it much longer. . . !"

"Well, turn in, can't you! Who's stopping you? I'll keep watch. Keep your elephant-gun handy to the bed and lie down and go to sleep. I'll wake you if I hear

anything." Cosgreve laughed harshly. "You'll wake of your own accord, boy, if they do attack!"

"What's the use of turning in!" the younger man cried hysterically. "I can't sleep! I see them, Cosgreve—as soon as I close my eyes! I see them scrambling up the hill, hundreds of them, their naked little bodies shining in the moonlight, their long knives glittering in and out of the scrub! I hear the beating of their infernal tom-toms. . . . Hark! What was that?"

Both men appeared to listen intently. At length Cosgreve laughed again.

"Nerves, I should say!" he muttered. "I don't hear a sound except that blasted dog whining somewhere in the jungle! And if you can't sleep, and you growl about having to sit up awake, what do you want to do, I'd like to know? Go out and meet 'em in the dark?"

"At least we'd get it over! It's the suspense that's breaking me, Cosgreve! The awful suspense! If we went . . ."

"We wouldn't get ten yards, boy!" Cosgreve growled. "Why, there'd be a knife in each of our backs before we got to the serang's cottage at the bend! And if you went alone, so would you! They can't tell which is me and you in the dark!" He chuckled. "Oh, I know it's *me* they're after, all right! *Me* the little black devils want to stretch out and skewer until I yell—like they did Mossop! Don't I know their playful little tricks! The black . . .!"—Cosgreve broke off laughing boisterously.

"Oh, don't, please!" prayed Manderson. "That's what unmans me, Cosgreve! I wouldn't mind it so much if it only meant a knife in the back, and done with—so help me God, I wouldn't! It's the hellish things they do—afterwards! Things only the fiends in Hades would think of! Oh, Mossop's face—Cosgreve!"

"Shut up!" muttered the senior. "Have a drink and forget about it! You can't do any good trying to remember it! Here, where's that bottle got to?"

"I can't understand you," Manderson resumed in a tired voice. "You've had enough to drink since yesterday to put a dozen men under the table, and you're still quite sober! Why, if I had one drink now—I'd be drunk—raving mad!"

"You'll get acclimatised yet!" grunted Cosgreve, smacking his lips as if after enjoying a drink. (I sat as still as death, thrilled to my very core by this realistic acting. Sun stood by my side, an inscrutable smile playing about his thin lips.) Cosgreve resumed: "Bear up, Manderson! You can only die once!"

"You seem to talk so easily of dying!" Manderson whined. "Cosgreve, isn't there someone—some woman, perhaps—that you'd be sorry to leave? You speak of death as if it were a mere nothing! Isn't there one human being in all the world who'd miss you? Like—Bessie—will me?" (His voice was racked with torture.)

Cosgreve laughed.

"There used to be—once!" he said, thoughtfully. Then he chuckled. "Now—oh, well, I suppose there's a nigger-woman somewhere in the low-country'll be weeping over the loss of a couple of hundred chips I owe her!" He broke off and scowled. When he resumed his voice was low and contemptuous. "As to talking easily about dying—well, what's the use of howling? That's guts, my boy! G-U-T-S—guts!" (He was shouting.) "And that's what you haven't got! And I knew you hadn't got it, from the very first day you came up to the work-shanty to report to me—with a brand new white topi on your beautiful head and a posh walking-stick in your lily-white hand! I knew you'd crumple up if we ever had any trouble! You're not the breed, somehow! You, and your fiancée's at home, and your fine manners—you spunkless little whippersnapper!"

"Don't, don't!" pleaded Manderson, his face white and strained. "I won't fail you, if they do attack! I swear that, Cosgreve! You mustn't mind my being a bit—nervous beforehand. God! If they were only

white men—men who fought cleanly! One could fight, then—but with these little devils! Cosgreve, you're a funny mixture! Why are you not frightened, when you can be so frightened of other things? Why? I've seen you shake and tremble in the jungle when you heard an elephant trumpet!"

"That's different," muttered Cosgreve. "You wait until you're up against an elephant, son, like I've been—and then you won't ask silly questions! You can't always kill elephants with bullets, you know! You've got to hit 'em in the right place, and it's a darn small place, too, I might mention! On the other hand, with these little beggars . . ."

"That's just it—just what I don't understand!" Manderson protested. "You've got eighteen cartridges and I've got five—twenty-three between us!" He laughed hysterically. "Twenty-three bullets against two or three hundred howling fanatics with eight-inch knives! Don't you see? They're bound to overpower us in the end—and then?" His voice developed into a shriek. "And then, Cosgreve?"

"Shut up, damn you!" mouthed the senior. "For all we know someone may have run down-river and told Samson; he may be within a couple of miles of us now, with his Bengalis and machine-guns! Get that into your head! God, you're enough to sicken a decent white man, Manderson! Of all the little skunks I've ever run across . . ."

"I can't help it! Oh, Cosgreve, I just can't help it!" It was a cry of torture.

"Falling to bits!" sneered Cosgreve. "As I knew you would! You, with all your fine talk of keeping straight with women and . . ." He ended abruptly, his eyes wide with alarm. Manderson's tortured face was a sight I shall never forget.

"Tom-toms!" hissed Cosgreve. "We're in for it! Get your gun ready and stand by that window there, Manderson! The first thing you see moving—let day-

light into it! Go on! Well, if you want to funk it, you darned spunkless little squirt, hop out and tell 'em you've left me in the lurch! It's *me* they want! They won't hurt you, if you don't help me! Only I warn you, I'll plug you in the back as you go out that door—as sure as God made apples! There, take your choice!”

The excitement was terrible to witness. Both men jumped about the far end of the room, moving imaginary pieces of furniture, making imaginary barricades, inspecting imaginary rifles! I heard—more than saw—the Doctor of Souls move as if about to put an end to the drama.

“The drums are getting louder!” cried Manderson, the sweat streaming down his thin face, his whole body shaking as with ague. “They're coming, Cosgreve! They're coming!”

“Shut your confounded row!” shouted Cosgreve hoarsely.

“But I feel faint!” Manderson's voice was a tired feeble protest. “I feel sick, Cosgreve. . . !”

“Here!” bellowed the senior, and I saw him grab something from Manderson—his rifle we supposed it to be—and next instant he had seized the younger man and was propelling him forcefully across the floor.

“No, no!” yelled Manderson. “Let me stay! I'll fight, Cosgreve! I'll . . . !”

“You are dreaming!”

Sun's voice, sharp and compelling, rapped the words out, and the struggle immediately ceased. He went on: “You are sleeping again! You have been dreaming about Assam—no more!”

The two men stood like men heavily drugged. It was obvious that they had already forgotten all the terrors that had beset them a short minute since. Sun turned to me.

“The rest of the story you know, Bunny,” he said quietly. “Cosgreve, inured to the rough life, fever-hardened, and with no vestige of imagination in his whole

mental equipment, thoroughly disgusted at the younger man's exhibition of cowardice, threw him, defenceless, out of the bungalow. Into the night and the oncoming fiends of the hills. Cosgreve says, of course, that he knew the hillmen would not hurt Manderson, and there is probably some truth in that because you heard him say it himself. He says that he threw Manderson out in order to save his life by leaving him to the hillmen's mercy. But there are some who say that Cosgreve did it in order to obtain possession of Manderson's elephant-gun and his five cartridges—since that meant five more bullets' worth of life. And life can be very good, Bunny!" Sun chuckled in a manner that made me shiver.

"But he apparently did not fear death!" I observed with a curious glance at the thick-set man who still panted a little from the exertion of his dream-acting.

"That is the interesting part of it," Sun resumed. "He had a very lively fear of death—in other forms. He was, for instance, an arrant coward where a snake was concerned. Whereas young Manderson, nerve-wrecked, fever-ridden, and alight with an imagination run amok, had plenty of nerve for most things, excepting only the contemplation of the grizzly and fiendish tortures and maimings the hillmen inflicted on the prisoners they caught alive. It seems to amount to this, Bunny: certain influences will make a hero of one man and a coward of another. Another influence may reverse the result; make the first man the coward and the latter the hero!"

"But what happened then? When Manderson found himself outside the bungalow?"

"Didn't you read? The hillmen were climbing towards the bungalow, their naked bodies greased, their knives glittering in their hands and their tom-toms putting the fear of devils into poor Manderson! He was raving—mad, for the time being—when the vanguard of the natives came on him. And just then, just at the

crucial moment, a machine-gun began to spit death from the roadway below. Samson, the officer in charge of the district garrison detachment, had arrived, in the nick of time ! ”

“ I remember now ! ” I cried. “ Manderson, poor chap, was hounded out of Assam ! ”

“ He was,” said Sun. “ But that was only the beginning of his troubles. Men sneered and walked away whenever he put in an appearance even here in England. He has been completely ostracised. But even that is not his biggest misfortune, Bunny. He could easily change his name and start afresh somewhere else. The real harm is that his own opinion of himself has sunk so low that unless he is healed he can never hope to achieve anything. His self-respect is gone. He is here, under my treatment, to have it restored. Once it is restored, his soul will be normal again—and he can go out and look men in the face again.”

“ And Cosgreve,” I asked. “ Why is he here ? ”

“ Cosgreve’s complaint is different,” Sun explained. “ He has, perhaps, too much self-respect—which is almost as bad for a man as having too little.” Sun smiled in a queer, inscrutable way. “ I might tell you, Bunny,” he added gently, “ that one of Cosgreve’s secret dreads is of ordinary spiders.”

I started to my feet.

“ God ! ” I cried. I had been so enthralled in watching the dream-drama that I had temporarily and completely forgotten that horror in the other room—the arena with the smooth walls and the polished floor ! Now, as the hideous scheme slowly dawned on me, I felt suddenly physically sick ! Sun must be mad—must be himself a fiend to contemplate such a thing !

“ What do you intend doing ? ” I gasped.

The Doctor of Souls moved a hand in front of my eyes and at once the room became only half-real. A wave of sudden somnolence swept me from head to foot—nor did it lift. I stood powerless, and for the time

being unconcerned, while he walked to a third cot and proceeded to awaken yet another character in this fantastic drama, this time a young woman. (I remembered suddenly his hypothesis: "There is a girl. Suppose you had to choose, Bunny . . ."—and I shuddered.) I had never before set eyes on her and I must say that there was very little about her to command my ardent attention now. Not that she was ill-looking, simply that she was a type that has never held any appeal for me—a mannish-looking young lady. She appeared to be in excellent health, physically, and I wondered why she was here, for I knew that Sun must have some definite purpose in having her concerned in this "experiment." There was a certain masculine resoluteness about her small straight mouth and her little rounded chin that gave me to suppose, even on sight, that she must be one of the New Women. (There are "New Women" every decade or so.) Her costume, apeing where it could the habiliments of the male, corroborated my supposition. She did not actually awaken from her hypnotic sleep but merely rose and followed Sun towards the two men, who still stood, like two dolls, hearing and seeing nothing, where they had enacted their sombre little play.

Then I observed Sun to do a somewhat curious thing. He led the girl up to young Manderson and guided her hand into his. I saw him clasp Manderson's thin hand about the girl's and then whisper something to them and make certain passes in the air before them. This done and he turned, bidding them follow him. All four moved towards the door by which Sun and I had entered. As he neared me, the Doctor of Souls beckoned me to join the queer procession, which I did without the slightest attempt at question or protest. I moved as it were in a dream.

It was not until we had half crossed the laboratory floor and were approaching that sinister steel door that I realised that my worst fears were about to be confirmed. The supreme ordeal was about to begin—and I, for some

reason, constituted one of the party! Then I seemed to fade deeper into the dream—and then, for a while, no more.

CHAPTER XXII

I CONCLUDE that, fearing our resistance, Sun had made us all sleep, so that we walked in our sleep into that dreadful arena. However it may have been, when I next became aware that I existed it was to hear that quiet, calm voice addressing the four of us after the manner of a lecturer speaking to his class. I was still half in my dream, I think, for the voice seemed to come from afar off. And yet, when I looked, I saw as in a nightmare the unearthly figure of the Doctor of Souls, clad now in his Celestial draperies, in the very centre of the arena. Beside him, and being pacified and held in leash only by the touch of the scientist's hand upon some vital part of its infernal mechanism, was that gargantuan horror—the mechanical spider!

“You will wake,” Sun's voice told us, “when the door closes behind me. Be careful then, for the noise the door makes in closing will set the instrument oscillating and if any of you moves or screams the mechanism's attentions may centre about that one of you. Remember that only after his pincers have fastened about and broken something will he be restored to his usual equilibrium. Thus, one of you four beings will have to be sacrificed in order that the others may live. I leave you to decide which one.”

Sun moved slowly and cautiously away from that mechanical horror, whose claws I observed even now to be moving slowly to and fro as if it were indeed alive! The Doctor of Souls—madman or genius, Heaven alone knows!—walked close by the four of us where we sat huddled close together against the vertical wall, but

none of us made a movement or ventured any protest or plea. I tried to talk, I know—and so, I suppose, did the others—but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth and I made no sound. I could see that my companions were all as conscious of what was happening as I was myself, and equally powerless. Sleepily we watched him approach and unfasten the door. It was not until he slammed it behind him that all four of us jumped to our feet with a start—wide awake. And in that same instant the horror standing there in the centre of the arena seemed to galvanise into life and slithered towards the vibrating door, its pincers working like the claws of some infuriated beast!

There is another thing I shall never forget about that momentous adventure. That I saw now. It was the look of horror that came into Cosgreve's face as he woke to see that appalling *thing* slither across the floor! That look was more compelling, in its sheer intensity, even at that moment, than was the horror itself! I saw every vestige of colour ebb from his face, leaving it white as parchment! He opened his mouth to scream, but at that moment my wits revived and before he could divert that awful mechanical death with a fatal cry I had clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Be quiet!" I chattered. "For God's sake, don't attract it to us!"

The mannish young woman looked suspiciously like breaking into tears, and I saw her shrink towards young Manderson as if for his comfort. His thin arm went about her and it was manifest that she made no objection. I fancy her ideas about the New Womanhood underwent a radical change in that very moment. Young Manderson shook slightly and looked distinctly pale, but so, I suppose, did I. But it was Cosgreve who succumbed to terror, and, remembering what I had witnessed in Sun's "hospital-ward," I marvelled. We stood together, awestruck, while that awful contraption of steel and iron battered and clawed impotently at the face of the door.

“It’s alive!” came Cosgreve’s hoarse croaking. “It’s alive! God in heaven! It’s turning!”

And it *was* turning, attracted I have no doubt by the sound-waves of his croakings echoing through the air of that lofty, empty room. With mounting horror we watched the spiral legs move crabwise, sideways, and then the *thing* seemed to see us! With his claws working like a pair of gigantic scissors he bore down on us!

“Run!” I yelled. “Run, for your lives!”

Cosgreve, for one, needed no invitation. Gibbering and shrieking he turned and ran across the smooth floor. Uncannily the mechanical spider changed its direction and followed him, slithering and sliding across the slippery floor with a truly loathsome and spider-like gait! Cosgreve gave one ghastly look backward and rent the air with his shrieks! And then . . .

The *thing* was just abreast of us when the girl’s already overwrought nerve gave way. She shrieked, broke away from the protective clasp of young Manderson and ran in the direction of the steel door. The horror in the centre of the room pulled up short, new-attracted by this last cry. It began wheeling completely around, Cosgreve now altogether forgotten. It moved towards the shrieking girl! She saw it! Battering with her little fists against the surface of the hard-steel door she gave one last despairing cry—and fell to the floor in a faint!

“God!” I heard Manderson mutter.

And then I think I did the bravest thing I have ever done in my life. I shouted aloud to attract the crawling thing back and away from the unconscious girl. To my horror it went on, straight for its victim. I suddenly remembered the new automatic in my hip-pocket. It was the work of an instant to draw it, aim, and press the trigger. The few shots of the nine in the magazine that hit that mechanical-death went ricocheting and shrieking round the room! It came to me that there was only one thing to be done that could save the girl, and that

was to put myself deliberately in the way of that gnashing fury. All this happened in an instant. It takes ten times as long to tell. And in that instant I realised that this was that test of which Sun had spoken! I was being tested—and so was young Manderson! Cosgreve had already failed. Should I . . . ?

I saw the glitter of those terrible scissor-like claws—and I closed my eyes in agony! A loud shout made me re-open them. Young Manderson, berserk, had leapt towards the crawling abomination, had overtaken it, was placing himself directly in its path! Away across the room, on his knees, gibbering like a man demented, was Cosgreve! I saw those slashing claws draw nearer to Manderson! He stood without flinching. I remember wondering—yes, then—what mortal power could make a man do so courageous a thing, so deliberately and cold-bloodedly relinquish his hold on life.

And then I saw a meaning in Sun's curious act in placing that mannish-looking young woman's hand in Manderson's and whispering to them and making passes before them. Love was that power! Sun had made these two love each other—and the one was willingly giving his life for the other! Young Manderson, the coward of the Assam Hills, was winning back his self-respect—in death! I remember thinking that, and then I saw those terrible claws close about his emaciated form! I shrieked—and I too, Bunny Bellairs, all but six feet of me, fainted!

Sun's voice whispered in my ear. I discovered that I lay back in a chair in what was evidently the cabin of the launch. Moonlight streamed in from the cockpit above the low companion-way. The voice of the Doctor of Souls mocked me good-humouredly, and yet with something of accusing reality in his tone.

"So you failed, Bunny!" he said. "Wake up, Bunny, we're only a few hundred yards off the shore!"

"God!" I cried, starting out of the chair and clutching at him. He was in European clothes again—a very

different Sun from that Celestial who had stood in that terrible arena. "Was he killed?" I demanded. "And the girl—is she all right?"

He waved me to silence. He looked at me solicitously.

"No one was bodily injured, Bunny," he told me comfortingly. His tone was just that a man will use to convince a child.

"But those claws!" I cried, driven to a state bordering on hysteria by a sudden vivid recollection of the awful sight. "I saw them grip him. . . .!"

"Very lightly, Bunny!" Sun smiled. "No harm was done. My mechanical insect was rendered perfectly harmless—for the occasion. There was not sufficient power behind those claws, when you saw them close on Manderson, to crush a beetle. Manderson was not even bruised."

I gaped at him.

"If you still harbour any doubt," he continued, "trouble yourself to climb up the ladder to the cockpit. Young Manderson is there, holding his head higher than he has done for months, and feeling strong enough to conquer a world! The young lady is there, too. When I first made her acquaintance she was always airing her views on the Emancipation of Women. When she next converses with young Manderson I would not be in the least surprised if the topic is not a cheap means of furnishing a small flat for two! Really, they are both in excellent health—and both, I think, much improved psychically. The only persons who seem at all inclined to be indisposed—bodily—as a result of our little experiment are yourself and Mr. Cosgreve. Look, he's still shaking—even in his sleep!"

CHAPTER XXIII

I WAS sitting one afternoon in my sub-editor's room overlooking Fleet Street, and, most unusually for me, I was at rather a loose end. I had before me the prospect of a full night's work, and it irked me not a little to think that I had perforce to waste the afternoon, while in a downstairs room the chief tinkered with the proofs that would later set my avalanche of work in motion. He had been engaged all morning—hence the delay.

My eyes wandered to an invitation card, propped up against the pigeon-holes of my desk, in front of me. I had found it in the afternoon mail. Somebody "requested the pleasure of Mr. Bellairs' company at a Dance commencing at 10 p.m. on Friday 17th . . ." I smiled wryly. I wanted rather badly to go to that dance, but how could I accept Friday night invitations when this sort of thing was liable to happen! I had lately begun to reflect that a journalist's life was not all "roses, roses"—by any means! I envied the men whose professions left them free to do what they cared after 5 p.m.! Truth to tell, I had lately been keeping my eyes open on the off-chance of spotting some cosy little business opening, where I might learn to earn money as easily as some fellows seemed to do! I rose irritably, put on my cap and wandered towards the lift. In a few moments I was strolling along the busy street.

I had at first no very fixed notion where I was going. Let me make that quite clear. I was naturally restless, because of what lay before me that night, but I was out merely to waste a little time. Thus I cannot hope to explain what whim suddenly prompted me to board an East-bound 'bus, climb up to the top and take the only vacant seat, one next an elderly charlady. For a while I sat still and gloomy. The conductor came along clicking his ticket machine and I mechanically found and extended two pennies. My fare paid, I sat morose and

inert, observing nothing that I was aware of, not even thinking.

I suppose it was the sight of the ships lying in the river that brought to me a sudden realisation of how far I had allowed the 'bus to take me. I quickly rose, a half-voiced apology to the charlady on my lips, just to make her get her fat limbs out of the way; and then I saw with astonishment that she was not there. I had certainly not noticed her go. Moreover the top of the 'bus was almost deserted! I realised that I must actually have been dozing!

I ran quickly down the steps and jumped off to the pavement. The 'bus happened to be slowing down. I was filled with apprehension at a contemplation of my chief's annoyance if he should finish his addenda to the proofs and ring for me before I was able to get back to the office! Reasoning thus, it is all the more extraordinary that I should have allowed a West-bound 'bus to go by without making the least effort to stop it!

I stood on the pavement trying to make out what possessed me. Then, as if prompted by some invisible companion, I walked along a little way, turned down a narrow alley, and in a few moments found myself on the busy river-front. For no reason at all that I was aware of, I dodged my way between the electric trolleys and the clattering cranes until I stood actually on the quay. Here I found myself at some steps leading down to the water, a little free bit of the Thames, between the bows of some grimy Scandinavian tramp and the stern of a river paddleboat. I passed down the steps.

Though I did not know it at the time—I know it now, of course—I was in a truly remarkable mental condition. I knew only that I looked for something, but what that something was I could not then have explained, had I been offered the Crown Jewels! Whatever it was, it was not at the foot of those steps. All that I saw there was a small, rickety-looking row-boat, tugging feebly at its painter as the tide pulled it. As if satisfied that what

I sought was not there, I ascended the steps again and strode along the wharf.

Though I am unable to vouch for the exact number, I am fairly certain that I must have explored at least half a dozen such Thames-side landing-places before I ultimately discovered what I looked for. In the search I came upon all manner of small craft—dinghies, skiffs, motor-boats and whatnot—but always I climbed up the steps again and went on. At length I came to some steps at which was moored a small, nondescript motor-boat with a solitary man lolling in the stern. There was nothing peculiar or distinctive about this boat. It was exactly like a dozen others I had come across that afternoon. But—at once I knew that it was what I had been looking for!

As I approached, the man lumbered to his feet and carelessly touched his cap.

“Mr. Bellairs, sir?” he asked.

“Yes,” I told him—just that. And I climbed into the boat!

It was as if I moved in a dream. At first it had been a very vague sort of dream, as when I boarded the 'bus, but it had gradually assumed characteristics of a strong realism. I knew only that in my dream I was entering a boat. I could no more have got back on to the wharf again than I could have hoped to alter the course of a peculiarly vivid dream!

The man cast off and backed the launch away from the quay. In a minute or two we were in mid-stream and making our way with the tide between the lighters, ferries and anchored steamers that dotted the river. I sat where I was, close to the noisy engine, saying nothing—enquiring no reason for anything.

I suppose it was the beauty of the craft that first attracted my attention. That, possibly, together with the fact that we were headed towards her. Whatever it was, I felt a strong interest aroused in me—and I am a landsman, if there ever was one—by the sight of the long,

rakish steam-yacht we now approached. She bent low down over the water, a posture that immediately made me think of whippets and greyhounds. She was painted grey. It was not the dirty, grimy grey of the freighters, but the grey of an Autumn evening, or an early morning in the Highlands. We rounded her bows in order to approach the starboard side, where the gangway was rigged, and I observed them to be sharp and slender-lined, like the bows of a fast destroyer. Then we were at the gangway and a sailor was assisting me out of the launch.

In some curious way I realised that I was expected, and without any parley whatsoever I followed the man along a snow-white deck towards a door in a teak deck-house. Here we entered and passed down a broad stairway into a small but cosy saloon.

“Will you take a seat, sir,” the sailor invited.

I sat down. He turned and ran up the stairs again.

I can no more attempt to describe my feelings just then than I could hope to set about writing a second *Odyssey*. It was like that instant in a dream before one hurls over a precipice into—wakefulness. Tense expectation was in the very air about me, but I could not conjecture the wildest reason for it. My eyes were on a little closed door that led from the saloon towards the stern. Why I should have been more interested in this door than, for instance, the stairs, I cannot say. But evidently my interest was not misplaced, for almost at once I thought I heard footsteps on the far side. Then I knew for certain, for the door began to open. It widened, and there appeared, very slowly, a slim little man who stood smiling pleasantly in the doorway. He was a small man, as I say, but in some incredible way he seemed to fill the whole of that doorway! More: I had an extraordinary sense of his filling the whole room! And I did not need to wonder why. One sight of the tiny, well-shaped face with the ever so slightly slant eyes; one glimpse of those white woman-like hands—and I knew!

It was the Doctor of Souls!

I sprang to my feet, an articulate cry on my lips! My heart beat wildly! This man, this mad genius of science, had come to assume in my brain the proportions of some nightmare bogey of childhood. The unnerving experience of having assisted him in certain of his previous blood-curdling "experiments" on the human soul, had left me with an indelible horror of him stamped deep on my consciousness. Though he was the one man on earth who had the power to guide me to the woman I loved—to that lovely unreality I had met in the House of the Brother on the snow-swept mountains of Yunnan—he was also the very last man in the world I wanted to meet. And here I was, facing him!

Dr. Sun advanced quietly into the cabin.

"My dear Bunny," he began in his well-remembered low, soothing tone. "Well met! It is really most thoughtful and kind of you to have troubled to look me up."

"Look you up!" I cried. "But I didn't know you were here! Why, what on earth made me come here! I don't seem to remember how—or why——"

I broke off as I felt his colourless eyes fix for an instant on mine. He indicated my chair. Well knowing the futility of attempting to oppose any suggestion of his while I was in such close proximity to those terrible eyes, I sank back into the chair, every nerve in my body alive with dread anticipation. I began wondering now almost feverishly, what fantastic terror this unaccountable meeting portended, but almost at once he interrupted my thought.

"Let me assure you that you need have no fear," he resumed quietly. In all my long association with the man I have never once heard him raise his voice.

"No fear of what?" I demanded with a show of fortitude I was far from feeling.

He smiled.

"You were wondering what ordeal I have in store for you," he remarked.

"How do you know?" I parried.

"Oh, Bunny," he protested playfully, "is it really necessary for me to explain in words?" He sat down in an arm-chair opposite mine. It was a large, cosy chair, and it engulfed his slim, meagre form, making him remind me of nothing so much as some weird goblin out of a fairy-tale. And yet, never for an instant did the impression of psychical largeness leave me. I sat a little bewildered, waiting.

He stretched a thin, willow-like hand towards me in an arresting gesture, and resumed.

"You ask me how I read your thoughts," he said whimsically. "I might as reasonably ask you how you read your railway time-table. The dates, days, times and numbers are printed in your time-table plainly. Your thoughts, Bunny, and the thoughts of the majority of your fellow-Westerners, are written almost as plainly on your faces. You have merely to learn your alphabet in order to read your time-table; I have merely to learn my alphabet—a slightly more complicated one, perhaps—and I am able to read your thoughts. There is nothing occult or supernatural about it at all, you see."

The argument interested me—as Sun's so often did. I found myself forgetting my dreads.

"But surely not everybody shows his thoughts in his face!" I observed.

"Not everybody," he agreed. "On the contrary, certain sects of mankind make a special cult of facial inscrutability—my own race, for instance, the Chinese. Even I find it difficult to tell what a Chinaman is thinking about, and I learnt the alphabet when I was still a humble under-novice at the monastery of the Brother. But in a race of Western stock, such as you English, men are usually quite unable to conceal their thoughts, because, if you will forgive me, Bunny, there is so remarkably little thought to conceal! In such races it is only the individuals devoted to serious introspective contemplation who automatically cultivate inscrutability. Observe

such thinkers as Wells, Bennett, Hardy, Kipling—just to name a few—and you will at once agree that there is something in their aggregate physiognomy that is distinctly exotic—extraneous to England. Perhaps something even reminiscent of what you would call the ‘Celestial.’ When the race mentality has risen above the level of cup-tie finals and boxing matches, you will find that theirs will become the race physiognomy; and it will no longer be so very simple a matter for a member of an older, more highly cultured civilisation to elucidate your secrets with such illuminating facility. There, Bunny, you have the explanation.”

He ended, fixing on me a half-amused glance while he waited for my comment. I was about to make one, when I fancied I felt the yacht list ever so gently to one side, and this immediately put my remark out of my head. This was no time to be discussing physiognomy and thought-reading! Why was I here? How had I come? Was the yacht moving, or had that been imagination? Again the Celestial made the reply before I had time to voice the question.

“I sent for you,” he informed me.

“Sent for me?” I echoed. “You didn’t! I was not thinking of you at all! I don’t know what made me come!”

“I made you come,” he reiterated, quietly but with conviction. “You must not forget, Bunny, that I have many times had your mental mechanism in complete subjection to mine. Your memory must remind you that, as time has gone on, I have been able to superimpose my will on yours with greater and still greater ease. Our respective minds have, as it were, grown accustomed to interlocking; they are more used to each other, like two well-worn cog-wheels in a piece of machinery. This afternoon, for purposes with which I will later acquaint you, I tried a little experiment in telepathic mesmerism. (It is nothing new, let me assure you. Savages have practised it for generations. You have

heard, no doubt, of a man being 'prayed to death.') My experiment with you was rather premature, perhaps, and I was at first a little doubtful of its result. But the outcome has been highly successful—as witness your presence on my yacht, Bunny."

I stared at him.

"You mean you put the idea into my head—to leave the office and come here?" I cried incredulously.

Dr. Sun nodded. He was smiling happily, like a child well-pleased with a new-acquired toy. He chuckled, as if at a contemplation that amused him.

"Your head must have been very empty of thought," he added, "in order to have received my instructions so soon—over so great a distance!"

"I was not busy this afternoon, as it happens," I informed him tartly, ruffled at his ready assumption, though still a little bemused at the startling disclosure that Sun had actually forced me to come.

"I gathered as much," he remarked drily.

"Had I only known, I would not have troubled to make duplicate arrangements. So far from being sanguine about your receiving my will-message across half crowded London, I actually sent the excellent Wan-long in a taxi to fetch you. When he returned with the news that you were already on your way, I will confess, Bunny, that I indulged myself in a little foolish pride! Did it not occur to you to wonder *why* you were prowling about the wharveside?"

I suppose this mention of Sun's unspeakable Chinese dwarf manservant must have brought me to a real sense of the danger I was in. I sprang out of my chair.

"Sun!" I cried hoarsely. "What do you want with me? I want to go ashore at once! I want nothing more to do with you, please!"

He made a little queerly-soothing movement of his hand.

"My dear Bunny," he protested mildly, "have you ever known me injure anyone?"

I had no need to think to answer the question. I knew very well that he had not permanently injured anybody. That was the baffling part of all his "experiments."

"No, you haven't!" I cried. "But at the same time you've got nothing whatsoever to do with me! I don't care if I never see My Lady of the Clouds again!" I was lying, but just could not stop myself. My terror was too real. "Leave me alone, that's all I ask!"

"I gather," he rejoined, again in that dry tone, "that you have lately become a little discontented with your work, that, in fact, you aspire to something a little more financially remunerative."

"How on earth . . . ?" I began, bewilderingly. I broke off almost at once. "What do you intend doing with me?" I demanded, my eyes wide.

He made a deprecating gesture.

"Merely taking you for a little cruise to the Cape Verde Islands," he murmured. "I have other patients on board, Bunny, and I rather think you may find them—one of them in particular—most entertaining and satisfying companions. Surely you will not object to a pleasant week in the glorious sunshine?"

"But what nonsense!" I remonstrated. "My chief will be yelling his head off for me—at any time now! If he isn't doing it already! I'll lose my job! Sun, I'm going at once! Is that motor-launch still alongside?"

I moved towards the stairway as I spoke. To my infinite astonishment and relief, Sun made no effort to interfere with me. I had reached the foot of the stairs when he addressed me again, quietly, as if he pleaded with me. It struck me at once as suspicious.

"Do stay, Bunny," he said. "I'm sure you would enjoy the trip."

"Stay be dashed!" I replied, and, seizing my chance, and not a little alarmed at his unnatural placidity about my going, I turned and dashed up the stairs. A sudden lurch as I attained to the landing brought to me a new, discomfiting doubt. Out on the clean deck my suspi-

cions were at once confirmed, and I suddenly knew why Sun had been so unconcerned about my hurried and unceremonious exit! We were tearing out of the estuary of the Thames at a terrific speed! Far away on either side I could see the low outline of the rapidly widening banks! Escape was now hopeless—unless I wanted to drown! I was “in for it!”

CHAPTER XXIV

MY natural impulse, after I had gathered my wits together again, was to return and confront Sun in the saloon. Not pausing to think further, I dashed back into the deck-house and down the stairs. To my astonishment the Celestial was no longer there, but in the arm-chair he had lately occupied, sat—a most comely young woman! At sight of her I stopped short, breathless.

“Oh!” I exclaimed. “Where is Dr. Sun, d’you know?”

“I beg your pardon?” she drawled, contemplating me with slightly raised eyebrows.

“Dr. Sun,” I repeated more calmly, realising that I must perhaps have sounded a little rude. “Could you please tell me where he’s gone?”

She looked at me queerly, as if a little uncertain whether to be surprised or afraid.

“Dr. Sun?” she queried. “I’m sure *I* don’t know! How should I? I don’t know him!” She added, curiously: “I suppose you’re Mr. Bellairs, the journalist?”

“Yes,” I admitted, a trifle astonished.

She saw my surprise.

“M’sieur Éralos told us about you,” she explained. “He said he hoped you’d be able to make one of the party. I’m Lady Pamela Bourne.”

"How d'you do?" I babbled. "But who is M'sieur Eralos?"

"M'sieur Eralos?" she added incredulously. "Why, he's the owner of the yacht—our host!"

I watched the look of gentle alarm creep into her lovely eyes again.

"I should rest, if I were you, Mr. Bellairs," she advised. "M'sieur Eralos told us you had been over-working."

"Overworking!" I muttered angrily. "What rubbish! And I've never heard of M'sieur Eralos—whoever he may be! What I want to know is, where is Dr. Sun, please? I know he's on the yacht, because I was talking to him two minutes ago—in here!"

She rose, hurriedly, a beautiful young woman in every way, and moved a little towards the door.

"I'm sure you're mistaken, Mr. Bellairs," she said in a tone that was a curious mixture of hauteur and fear. "When I came in here there was no one in the cabin except M'sieur Eralos himself."

It dawned on me!

"A little man?" I enquired breathlessly. "With eyes that slant a little?"

"Why, yes!" she admitted. She still moved towards the door—quietly, unobtrusively, as if she feared that quicker movement might anger me.

"That's not M'sieur Eralos—or any other m'sieur!" I yelled. "That's Dr. Sun! The Doctor of Souls! What are you doing with him? How has he got hold of you? Who...?"

I moved towards her, vehemently gesticulating in my anxiety to be convincing. But I might have saved my breath and energy, for with a little, infinitely well-bred cry of terror, Lady Pamela Bourne, whoever she was, had turned and dashed out of the saloom!

At this *impasse* I stood for a few moments thinking confusedly. Then I made my way on deck again. Forward of the deck-house was a small bridge on which I

could see the forms of a ship's officer and the quartermaster at the wheel. I ran to the ladder and clambered up. The officer, a typical, well-built sturdy-looking specimen of the British Merchant Marine, turned enquiringly towards me. I addressed him without ceremony.

"Whose yacht is this?" I demanded.

I received a repetition of the queer, furtive look the woman in the saloon had given me.

"Mr. Eralos is the owner, sir," the officer answered.

"And who is Mr. Eralos?"

"He's a retired merchant. A Greek gentleman. I believe he comes from Alexandretta in Asia Minor. But I only signed on this trip—with a new crew."

"He's not a Greek gentleman at all!" I contradicted excitedly. "He's the notorious Doctor of Souls! He's wanted by the police all over Europe! He's a madman!"

The officer's weather-tanned face relaxed into an irritating grin.

"There, there, sir!" he abjured quieteningly. "Don't you go worrying yourself about that! The owner's all right. You go down below and have a bit of sleep. You'll feel better afterwards. It looks to me it might be blowing a little past the Goodwins. That's all right, sir."

"It's not all right, confound you!" I cried, stepping on to the bridge and facing the man. "I've been taken off the shore against my will . . . !"

The officer's grin vanished.

"That's as maybe," he rasped, "but I'm the captain of this packet! Down you get—off my bridge, sir! Lively's the word! Passenger or no passenger, you don't come here confounding *me*! Down with you, sir, or I'll have a couple of hands manhandle you to your room!"

He had laid a weather-scarred paw on my shoulder and was roughly and very determinedly pushing me back towards the head of the companion. Seeing that there was little

else for it, I allowed myself to be ignominiously helped down, and strode angrily back to the main deck-house. One glance I threw back at the idiot on the bridge. He stood looking after me, shaking his head from side to side, as if something about me had aroused his deepest sympathy!

In the cabin I found a steward laying one of the tables. I decided on new tactics.

"Where's—er—Mr. Eralos?" I demanded.

"In his cabin, sir," the man answered civilly enough.

"Where's his cabin?"

"The last one, sir—just past yours."

"Well, where's mine?" I asked exasperatedly.

The steward looked at me in astonishment. Then:

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, "I thought you'd been in it—seeing as your things are in it."

"My things?" I echoed.

But the man had evidently formed his own conclusions about the futility of carrying on the conversation.

"This way, sir," he said, and I followed him through the door by which Sun had entered the saloon. To my surprise, when I was shown into "my" state-room, I found there two suit-cases of mine and everything I could possibly have required for an absence from my flat of any period from a week to a month! A letter on top of the one suit-case, addressed in the unfamiliar scrawl of my worthy housekeeper, gave me enlightenment. I opened it.

"Mr. Bellairs, Sir" (I read),

"In reply to your instructions from the office this morning I have packed up everything you will want I think, you will find your dinner-jacket in the light-brown bag . . ."

There followed a long list of various articles of clothing, and other things, with a detailed and somewhat involved description—for punctuations were scarce!—of where each was to be found. Bless her!

". . . and I close with hopes that you will have a

joyful holiday, sir, and I can be trusted to take care of the flat as you know. I remain yours obediently,

“EMMA.”

I threw down the note and stared about me.

“Well, I’m dashed!” I ejaculated.

The mystery was not hard to solve. Sun had obviously sent her instructions purporting to come from me. She, poor unsuspecting soul, knowing that I was frequently sent on hurried trips to the provinces, had never so much as doubted!

But I did not waste time in useless retrospection. I was determined to get to the bottom of Sun’s reason for abducting me, a lively recollection of the ghastliness of other “experiments” urging me to speed. I flung open the cabin door and looked about. There was only one door past mine. Apparently this was well in the yacht’s stern. I strode up to it and knocked loudly on the panel surface. Almost at once I heard a familiar voice murmur something that I took to be “Come in.” But I was too excited to be particular. I turned the handle and entered.

It was a large and beautifully-appointed state-room, and in the centre of the carpeted floor stood Dr. Sun! I was so concentrated upon having this thing out with the scientist that I did not immediately notice the other man in the cabin, a thick-set, grey-haired individual seated smoking a cigar on a comfortable divan to my left.

“Look here, Sun!” I cried. “I’d like to know when you’re going to stop this game and put me ashore!”

The Doctor of Souls looked at me with a disarming simulation of grieved surprise. As if in explanation, he turned at once to the other man.

“Delusions, you observe, my dear Bailey,” he remarked. The grey-haired man puffed out a cloud of smoke, nodded and fixed his hard blue eyes quizzically on me. The half-Chinaman turned to me again. “Come, Bunny,” he rebuked gently, “you must not talk like that! My friends will begin to think I’ve brought you against your wish!” I noticed that he affected a slight foreign

accent. Usually his English was faultless. "Sit down, Bunny. You have been overworking and you must let this trip do you all possible good."

"I—I—" I began expostulating, but I got no farther. I wanted to contradict him—to give him the lie—but my tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of my mouth! I was aware only that he looked at me out of those queer colourless eyes, seeing into my soul, as it were; superimposing on my brain the weight of his colossal mind!

"This is Mr. Bailey," Sun resumed quietly. "Bailey, this is Bellairs." Bailey nodded; I just looked vacantly at him. Sun turned to me again. "You *have* been overworking, haven't you, Bunny?" he suggested sympathetically.

"Yes," I heard myself answering. I could have bitten my tongue for saying it, but I just had to say it. Some irresistible force *made* me articulate that one syllable: "Yes."

Bailey's head nodded compassionately. Inwardly cursing my impotence, I realised in that instant that, if Dr. Sun willed it, I might be destined to endure the whole of the voyage as I had begun it—the ship's prize idiot!

In response to Sun's invitation I sank wearily into a chair, momentarily resigned to whatever fate might have in store for me. It is an unenviable experience to know that one is regarded by one's fellows as a mental defective, and I suffered it then to the full. But my activities since I boarded the yacht had only gone to show me the futility of trying to convince them that I was as sane as they were, so I said nothing, listening instead to a conversation between Bailey and Sun. My entry had evidently interrupted it.

To my surprise I soon learnt that Bailey was none other than the well-known Bertram Bailey, the motor-car manufacturer—several times over a millionaire! I looked hard at this man, who, in spite of his greyness, could not have been much more than forty! I had imagined *the* Bailey to be a much older man. It seemed

almost absurd that a man so young should have achieved such phenomenal financial success! I found myself contemplating my own insignificant earning capacity with frank dissatisfaction.

The car-millionaire was a striking individual. Everything about him, from the set of his well-defined features to the very cut of his broad, strong limbs, suggested firmness and resolution. I wondered what on earth had brought such a man into Sun's clutches. From their talk I gathered that the millionaire had met "Mr. Eralos" at the Grand Mustapha Hotel in Algiers.

They discussed finance, a subject of which I knew very little indeed. But I was pleased when I was able, a moment later, to venture a correction on a certain stock-exchange quotation. This was the merest luck. I had that morning happened to see the figure in connection with the stock—a stock that had been much before the public notice of late. I am sure that this solitary remark of mine raised me at least ninety per centum in the car-manufacturer's esteem. This I concluded because he seemed to be unable to converse for so long as a single minute on any topic but—money. He glanced at me in agreeable surprise.

"Aha!" he exclaimed. "Feeling better already, Bellairs? Splendid!"

Shortly afterwards, rather to my relief, he left us. I at once turned to Sun.

"So you've made them believe I'm mad!" I accused.

"My dear Bunny," Sun remonstrated with a twinkle in his eyes, "if you *will* be so indiscreet as to try to persuade my guests that I, a simple Greek called Eralos, am that monstrous ogre, the Doctor of Souls, I am forced to take steps to protect my character, I think!"

"But you *are* the Doctor of Souls!" I protested. "I know you are! I'm not mad!"

Sun chuckled.

"Need I deny that to you—alone?" he murmured. "But for the time being, Bunny, I desire these good

people—whom I met in Algiers some months ago—to believe that I am M'sieur Eralos. You would be wiser not to try to convince them to the contrary!"

"Who are they?" I demanded. "And what are you going to do with them?"

"There are three of them," he answered good-humouredly. "One, by far the most interesting of the trio to me, is a sculptor. You will make his acquaintance in good time. Another I believe you have already met—and scared almost out of her gentlewomanly wits! I mean Lady Pamela Bourne. The third is our friend Bailey."

Sun paused, looked at me for a moment, and then resumed.

"I was spending a week at the Grand Mustapha when I met them. The three of them suggested certain possibilities in psychical research; and those possibilities I am at present engaged in investigating. I had better warn you, Bunny, that you should be careful to remain Bunny Bellairs and not to permit any personality of the three to override your own." I saw his strange eyes sparkle as if at some joyful anticipation. "Ah," he murmured, "*what* an experiment!"

I suppose it was the sound of that dread word "experiment" that made me take a sharp breath and stare at my old college-fellow in dismay.

"Sun," I said hoarsely, "what do you mean? What is this 'experiment'?"

"You ask me to anticipate," he rebuked. "Why, Bunny, even if I told you what I purpose doing, you would hardly grasp it—if indeed you did not spoil it. First you must study each of the three individually. Lest you should miss anything of its psychical importance, let me help you. Let us first study the man Bailey, whom you have seen and heard."

Sun was talking now for the reason that he, like every other human being, longed, I suppose, for someone with whom he could discuss his work.

“Bailey,” he went on, “is bluff and honest—assuming, of course, that one does not include ordinary business sharpness in the general term ‘dishonesty.’ One reads him easily. Did you observe any marked characteristics?”

“Yes!” I answered hotly. “I observed a ‘marked’ darn silly tendency to put me down as a lunatic!”

“Nothing else?” Sun laughed. “Then let me enlarge. You observe a man dedicated to the service of Mammon, a man soul-enwrapped in the pursuit of money. A decent chap, as you would say. Incidentally, a man with far more money than he needs. Yet he goes on making more. Why, Bunny? Let us seek the reason. A hundredth part of his wealth would buy him more than enough to eat and to drink and to wear, were he to live for ever. Why does he go on making more money? I will tell you. Because of a certain overworked, exhausted and therefore uncontrolled reason-process in his brain. You recollect my demonstration of the brain-machine? The thought channel growing wider as each repetition of the same thought occurs? Until the thoughts slide through the channel involuntarily? Here, Bunny, is a living example. That man is a man drugged. He has lost his sense of values in everything except money—and he is not yet fifty! He is a living death. There is only one thing in the world that may cure him.”

“Depriving him of his money,” I suggested brightly.

“Depriving him of his money would be like depriving the Atlantic of a bucketful of water!” Sun exclaimed. “In a moment the space is filled; in a year that man would be worth thousands again!”

“What, then?” I asked.

“You will see—in good time,” my host replied thoughtfully. He moved towards the cabin door and opened it. “You had better resign yourself to the inevitable, Bunny,” he advised, as he observed me to be about to make some protest. “Come, dinner will soon be served. You had better set about changing. At table I will introduce you to the third angle of my little triangle in

metaphysics. His is a most interesting case. I discovered him in a tumble-down shack in Lincolnshire—a week ago. I'd met him before, of course, in Algiers. And, Bunny, you will be well advised to remember that I am not 'Dr. Sun,' but 'M'sieur Eralos.' Don't forget. It must be such an annoyance to be considered a half-wit by one's friends ! ”

I was about to break out into a vigorous tirade, but it died on my lips. Sun stood by the door, holding it open, and looking me straight between the eyes. There was nothing ostensibly fierce or compelling in his gaze ; indeed he even smiled a little. But I rose from the chair without so much as a murmur, slunk out of the room, and in a few moments I was meekly changing into a dinner-jacket in my own cabin. There, my justified indignation curiously subdued by my recollection of those terrible eyes, I even found myself stirred by a mild curiosity to meet the “interesting third angle in the little triangle in metaphysics.” I felt suddenly a very real desire to know more of this latest “experiment” of that mad mystic, the “Doctor of Souls.”

CHAPTER XXV

THAT first meal on the yacht afforded me quite a pleasant surprise. Sun, as host, sat at the head of the table ; Lady Pamela and Bailey shared one side ; I and the sculptor, Holmden, occupied the other. Growls and rumbles from under the table as I entered the saloon at once acquainted me that Sirius, Sun's bulldog—the one canine in all England with whom I could not make friends—had not been left out of the ship's complement.

My entry in response to the gong's summons was the signal for the cessation of the chatter I heard as I came along the corridor. There was obviously no awkward

restraint between Sun and his "patients." I was the curbing influence. All three of the guests were just a little dubious of me at first, and, putting myself in their position, I did not wonder at it. They had been told that I was suffering from acute brain-fag, and my behaviour during the earlier part of the evening must surely have seemed corroboration enough! I resolved to be careful to address Sun as "Mr. Eralos" and otherwise to show them that I was not quite so mad as they thought!

Holmden, the sculptor—I had never before heard of him—proved to be a remarkable individual. Taller than the millionaire, he was as thin as a pole and the very personification of asceticism. He had fine, sensitive features, classic almost to the degree of suggesting unreality. He seemed melancholy by nature and spoke less than did any of the others. When he did, however, I was charmed by the deep mellowness of his voice. The odd thing about him was his dress. He was clad in a positive travesty of evening-dress that had obviously come over some cheap-jack shop-counter abroad. The jacket hung loosely about his thin, broad shoulders, and his great, long arms protruded far beyond the limits of its sleeves! Before the first course was set before us, his tie had veered a couple of points off its course, and his starched shirt-front had sprung its anchor-stud and bellied out like the mains'l of a brig!

For a while the four of them, host and guests, chatted pleasantly of their meeting in Algiers, and during this conversation I gleaned a good deal of information. Being, for the time, the odd man out, I saw perhaps a little more than I might otherwise have done. It was at once obvious to me that the sculptor, Holmden, was head over heels in love with the woman, Lady Pam, as they all called her. It was almost as obvious that she held him in very scant regard. Indeed her bearing gave me the impression that she wondered a little at "Mr. Eralos" having included so inconsequent a nonentity

among his guests! Lady Pamela Bourne was a fair specimen of that fast waning survival of feudalism—the snob.

Moreover, it was also evident, from her little well-bred familiarities with Bailey, that Lady Pam's friendship with him was well developed and distinctly promising. I cannot affirm to what extent her advances were reciprocated. It seemed to me difficult to believe that the car-millionaire could seriously contemplate anything so unremunerative as love; from every word he uttered it was apparent that his god—money—was never very far from his thoughts. But in this I may be doing him injustice. Certainly Lady Pam herself found encouragement, and plied her seductive art merrily enough. I missed none of it. Nor did Sun. Nor, from his little wry smiles as if at sudden spasms of pain, did the unfortunate Holmden.

The dinner itself would have satisfied an epicure, and under its influence I found myself gradually drawn into the talk. As my more or less sane remarks reassured the company, the atmosphere became more congenial, and I was glad to notice a lessening in the dubious glances that had at first been my unenviable lot! The talk drifted to journalism and I aired my growing dissatisfaction with that precarious trade. Bailey, who of all had perhaps shown most surprise at my "recovery," enquired why I did not offer my services to some commercial house, and in the end was good enough to say that he would bear me in mind when he returned to England. I was profuse in my thanks, but he waved them aside. Then I became aware that the Doctor of Souls looked amusedly at me, as if he had foreseen the last turn the conversation had taken. Holmden, the sculptor, sat moodily staring over the millionaire's head, into space, as it were. Suddenly he looked me straight in the eyes and said: "Pity!"

"Pity?" Lady Pam echoed in her affected drawl. She stared at the unfortunate Holmden and then broke

into a peal of laughter. "What in the world makes you say that, you queer man?"

Holmden looked foolish.

"Oh, I don't know," he murmured. "I suppose in my heart I reason that there is a certain sameness about business—a sameness, for instance, about reproducing thousands of motor-cars from a set standard pattern. Whereas there is at least a quantum of creative work in journalism. I think I should prefer to spend my life creating, rather than merely reproducing!"

All of us were immediately indignant, and very naturally, none more so than Bailey.

"If you can keep your shirt from sticking out at your elbows—yes!" he growled.

I protested next. I reflected that Fleet Street had long ago cured me of Holmden's way of thinking. I did not care overmuch how I made money, nowadays, provided I made the money. For a while we argued on, and I observed that Sun said nothing, but sat watching us with that tolerant, amused good-humour that a fond parent will show when children squabble. I was suddenly very thoughtful. What did all this mean? I alone, of all on board the yacht, apparently, knew "Mr. Eralos" for that misguided genius whose fiendish ingenuity knew no limits of pity or mercy when its originator made investigations into the processes of the human soul!

Late that night I learnt a little more! I learnt enough, indeed, seriously to contemplate jumping overboard and swimming about until some passing vessel rescued me—or until I drowned—rather than face the terrible ordeal the Doctor of Souls planned to institute for all of us!

I was restless. It was an unusually calm, warm night—at the speed we made we must already have been well out of the Channel—and there was nothing, indeed, to deny me repose, except perhaps the excited state of my brain. After tossing about restlessly for half the night, I rose, drew on a dressing-gown over my pyjamas,

put on some deck-shoes and passed out into the dark corridor.

I had meant to go straight on deck, but the sound of voices made me pause in the passage and listen. Someone was talking in Sun's cabin. It was no ordinary conversation, for the tones rose and fell as if the speaker suffered delirium! I tiptoed to the door and listened. The door must evidently have been constructed to deaden the escape of sound, for I could hear no more than just that irritating little that made me want to hear more. It was the voice of Holmden, the melancholy sculptor!

My curiosity thoroughly aroused, I made my way on to the warm, deserted deck. The night was black as Styx. I stumbled aft in search of a skylight or a ventilator shaft that might assist me in my eavesdropping. I had no scruples of conscience at all. I knew Sun too well to be troubled with that. To my regret I found that the solitary wide skylight over the after end of the yacht—just above Sun's stateroom—was well battened down and heavily curtained. For a while I stood, thinking. A coil of two-inch rope lying on a locker just at hand, put the idea into my head. That, possibly, and the sight of the beams of light from the cabin portholes shining across the smooth sea.

In a moment I had uncoiled a length of rope and fixed it securely to an iron stanchion of the taffrail, at a point just slightly to one side of one of the portholes. I was doubly immune from observation. A lifeboat screened me from the bridge, and the night was far too dark for my movements to have attracted attention in any case. About six or seven feet along the end of the rope I constructed a loop large enough to take my feet. Then I threw the end over, so that it trailed in the air just a few feet above the water. By peering hard through the darkness I was able to see that I had not miscalculated the height of the scuttles above the waterline. The loop was in just about the right position.

For a few moments I hesitated. My glance over the

side had shown me two alarming facts not hitherto considered. The one was the speed at which the oily, dark water raced past the sides of the yacht, and the other was the strength of the wind we made. By some well-designed screen construction in the bows the decks were protected, and the still air, when away from the side of the yacht, gave little indication of the terrific speed at which we must be moving. The sight of the water gliding by at a truly sickening velocity, and the heavy hempen rope blown far out of plumb by the wind, told me that my project wanted courage!

Somehow—I don't know how—I screwed up the necessary pluck, climbed over the taffrail, twined my legs about the rope, gripped it with my hands, and gently slid down towards the water!

For a ghastly moment, as I felt the wind grip me and swing me towards the stern, dread overcame me—the dread of falling and being swept away into the blackness astern, to drown in the night!—and I almost loosed my hold of the rope in sheer terror! Then, unexpectedly and illogically, my courage returned. I felt my feet touch the knot above the loop. For a little while I wriggled about, and then I had one foot in the loop. To insert the other was a comparatively simple matter. Feeling my weight supported once more by my legs, and growing accustomed to the pressure of the rushing air, I was aware that my waning pluck revived. By sheer luck I hung suspended with my head more or less level with the line of portholes—less than six inches from one of them.

Cautiously I leaned to one side and peered in. I had made no mistake—it was Sun's stateroom! I could hear nothing, for the port was closed and the wind filled my ears, but there, seated in a chair and with his back towards me, was the Doctor of Souls! Before him, striding about the large cabin, wildly gesticulating and talking—in his ill-fitting clothes looking like a scarecrow suddenly come to life—was Holmden, the sculptor!

Once more sheer luck favoured me. As the yacht

gently rolled to starboard, my face touched the glass surface of the scuttle, and, to my intense surprise and momentary alarm, the glass moved inwards! The port had merely been swung to; not screwed down at all! For one ghastly moment I watched Sun stir in his chair as if he had heard the sudden noise of the sea and the wind. But he did not turn, and I breathed again. He had probably concluded that the roll of the yacht had opened the scuttle. I summed up my courage again and moved my ear closer. At once Holmden's tortured tones assumed coherent articulation! I clung almost breathless to my precarious perch, my other terrors forgotten. Steadying myself by inserting my fingers between the rim of the porthole and the glass window, I watched and listened.

Holmden was obviously under the influence of hypnotism, for I am sure no one could so bare his soul to a comparative stranger who was not. His voice was vibrant with passion.

"Humanity has despised me!" I heard. "I want to give myself to humanity——" he thumped his chest "——and I am denied! I go from place to place, like the Wandering Jew—restless, discontented, seeking simple, unpretentious people to give myself to—and they do not exist! They *do not exist!*"

"Why simple people?" Sun put the question in that peculiarly low, insistent voice I had heard him use before—when he addressed certain of his "patients" whom he had placed under that terrible spell. I shuddered. Holmden's cry—the cry from that naked soul of the artist—rang in my ears like an accusation! The whole thing was so uncanny as to make me tremble, the physical dangers of my uncomfortable position entirely forgotten.

"I have no use for the other sort—the people who pretend and aspire!" the sculptor cried contemptuously. "I seek honest men—like Diogenes of old! God! Show me an honest man!"

“But,” Sun protested, “surely you have only yourself to blame? You—Denholm, the famous sculptor—”

I started! Was this true! For everybody knew of Denholm. I stared harder!

“—you, Denholm, masquerading as a nonentity! Dressed like a raggamuffin and living in a tumble-down shack! Do you wonder that people show contempt for you?”

Holmden—or Denholm—flared up angrily, like a flame suddenly revived.

“Do you think,” he cried, “that I would demean my art by using it to make *me* acceptable? I know as well as you do that if I cared to conform to the laws of polite society and blathered to all the fools that I was Denholm I would have everybody bowing to me and calling me ‘friend’! But it’s not that kind of friendship I want! I want sincere, unpretentious human beings to love me for what *I* am!”

“It seems to amount to this,” Sun observed quietly. “You live too deeply. You see so far into the core of life that you find suffering. You should cultivate superficiality.”

Holmden snorted. Then he recommenced his tirade, a man utterly uncontrolled—and a sight I shall never forget.

“So *little* are they,” he cried, “so *narrow*, so *sordid*, so *ignorant*, that they cannot conceive of a fellow human being rising superior to fame and wealth! If those little Tin Gods came their way they would fall down flat on their silly faces—and worship them! They sicken me! If Christ came barefooted among them, they would suspect that he lacked the industry to supply himself with a pair of shoes! And I have to find friends among such people!”

He ended, gazing wildly about the room—a sweep of tortured eyes that took in nothing at all.

“Their sense of values is all wrong,” Sun suggested, very gently. Holmden seized on the thought.

“That is what it is!” he shouted. “That is what is wrong with humanity! It worships false gods! The true gods pass unrecognised! Consider that money-grubbing madman, Bailey! Consider this young idiot, Bellairs! Money! And at the sight of it Bellairs fell flat down on his face and cried: ‘Here is the true god!’ And the woman! Can’t you see the money leering at her, drawing her away from her own soul!”

“You love her very dearly,” Sun put in quietly.

“I would die for her!” the sculptor moaned passionately.

“If you died you would lose her, my friend,” the Doctor of Souls remarked meditatively. “But if you and she were *nearly* to die—that, I think, might provide the solution. Death is the solvent of the riddle you ask me, friend Denholm. Death is all-informing. Each one of us will suddenly develop a very real sense of values when the time comes for us to take Brother Death by the hand! The millionaire, Bailey, for instance; the woman, Lady Pamela; even my hare-brained young friend Bunny, eh?”

Sun cackled like a ghoul. With widening eyes I watched him rise slowly from the chair and extend a slender hand towards the passionate Holmden. Almost at once the sculptor’s eyes glazed over, and I knew that Sun had heard enough and had restored his patient to sleep. Holmden walked like a somnambulist towards the door, and I withdrew quickly from the porthole and began clambering and clawing up the rope. I had heard enough to strike a numb terror into my heart! In some way—hideous by reason of its very obscurity—the Doctor of Souls planned to bring us face to face with—Death!

CHAPTER XXVI

I SLEPT no more that night. When day dawned, I dressed and went on deck. I had determined that as soon as Sun was available I would confront him with what I had overheard during the night, and demand—or plead—to be left out of this “experiment.” The clear blue sky overhead, the figures of the officer and the helmsman on the bridge, the very substantial yacht skimming over the translucent waters with all the grace and speed of a flying-fish, all these things helped to bring to me a new courage. It was difficult to believe that I had actually seen and heard what I had during the night.

I was astonished, when I first came on deck, to discover that we had already apparently crossed the Bay of Biscay and were running along the Portuguese coast. On that side, as far as the eye could see, stretched the hinterland of the Spanish Peninsula. My reflection that the yacht must be capable of a truly splendid speed found confirmation in the deck-high wave of surf made by our bows as they cut, knife-like, through the unusually still Atlantic.

For a while I paced about the after end of the yacht, enjoying the cool morning breeze and the healing sunshine. Then the noise of hammering attracted me to the bows and I strolled towards the bridge. The same officer, the captain, watched me approach.

“Good morning,” I greeted.

He replied politely enough, but I could see that our clash of yesterday still rankled in his memory. Beyond the wind-screen that fronted the bridge, through a glass aperture in the steel-work, I saw that several men were engaged in removing a tarpaulin from some large object on the deck, something that looked like a great packing-case. I watched. When the tarpaulin had been removed I saw that the object was indeed what I had conjectured it to be, and I began wondering what it

might contain. It looked large enough to contain a motor-car. But if a motor-car—perhaps of Bailey's—why were they attending to its removal now, here on the fringe of the Gates of Hercules? To my further puzzlement I saw that the whole thing was mounted upon what was evidently a raft. Curiously I turned to the captain.

“What's in the case, Captain?” I enquired politely.

“Some sort of meteorological instrument, I believe,” he answered.

“Really?” I rejoined with a show of interest. “And what are you doing with it?”

“I don't know,” he replied. “Owner's orders are to get it ready for discharging to-night. That's all I know.”

I saw that it would be folly to insist on what I had sought to tell the man the day before. I decided to humour him instead.

“Oh,” I said. “Is Mr. Eralos interested in meteorology?”

“I believe he is, sir,” the captain replied, more affably than hitherto. “He tells me it's about all he's found to do since his retirement from business. He's going to rig this thing up somewhere on the African coast and leave it for six months or so. It registers rainfall, winds, and photographs the sky at night—and so on. Sort of automatic observatory.”

“How interesting! And where is it being put ashore?”

“I forget the latitude for the moment—but it'll be sometime to-night. 'Bout nine o'clock, I figure, if this weather holds.”

“You'll wait for the morning before you land it, I suppose?” I suggested.

He shook his head.

“Photographing apparatus's got to be set going at night.”

He nodded again, much reassured, I have no doubt, that I was in one of my saner moments, and passed to the middle of the bridge to say something to the man at the

wheel. I stood watching operations for a while longer, but since all the sailors did was to neatly fold the tarpaulin and stow it away, leaving me looking at an unsatisfying packing-case, I soon tired and resumed my pacing about the deck until breakfast-time.

But that packing-case puzzled me !

Holmden—or Denholm, as I now knew him to be—appeared to be none the worse for his hypnotic ordeal of the small hours, being very much his quiet, melancholy self. Lady Pamela and Bailey, both of them in white, made the table ring with their laughter when I informed them that I had not slept very well. They all said that they were sure I had imagined it, since I had made so remarkable a recovery from my overstrain since coming on board !

During breakfast I learnt more of the automatic meteorological station, Sun giving us a clear and interesting description of its machinery and informing us that this would make the sixth he had installed in various desolate parts of the globe. When breakfast was over I sought him and found him in his cabin, leaving the others on deck discussing what they would do when we got to Las Palmas, our alleged destination.

“Well, Bunny,” the scientist greeted smilingly as I entered. “And have you learnt very much from all you heard and saw last night ?”

“So you know ?” I exclaimed, gaping at him.

He laughed scornfully.

“Within ten seconds of meeting you this morning. In fact I rather suspected it last night, when I heard the porthole open, but I did not think it worth the trouble of getting out of my chair.”

Before I could make any comment on this, he had advanced towards me and was moving a wand-like hand to and fro before my eyes. I stood rooted to the spot, suddenly unable to articulate a protest, though well I knew what was happening ! The room began to swim about me. Through a thick mist, as it were, I saw two

glittering eyes—eyes that burned like flames! The voice of the Doctor of Souls fell low but compelling on my ears, the words seeming to penetrate into the very core of my brain!

“You fool!” murmured that awful voice. “You ignorant, brainless, cultureless puppy! Do you think to interfere with my healing?” The voice suddenly seared like the voice of some prophet of old! “I am the Doctor of Souls! I straighten the twisted, warped soul—I mend the broken!” I felt a hand lightly brush my brow. “Forget!”—I heard—“Forget! I am no longer the Doctor of Souls. I am Eralos, a Greek merchant from Alexandretta! I am Eralos—do you hear? Tell me, Bunny, who am I?”

I heard my own voice, so weak that it seemed to come over a great distance: “You are Eralos, a Greek merchant.”

“Until to-night, when I give you permission to remember, you will forget!” Sun’s voice went on. “Forget. . . !” It trailed off into silence. The room still swam about me. Things were unreal. Suddenly I saw the misty figure clap his hands together and point at me. I seemed to awaken. I blinked at the little man standing there before me. He smiled.

“The air on deck would do you the world of good, Bellairs,” he was saying conversationally, with just that trace of accent. “There is nothing so efficacious as fresh air—after a breakdown.”

“No,” I agreed. “I’ll get up on deck now. Thank you, Eralos—it’s awfully decent of you to have asked me to come for the voyage.” I smiled back at him, turned and made my way on deck. I had entirely forgotten that I had ever known a half-Oriental called “Dr. Sun”—or indeed that such an individual had ever existed!

On deck the first person I ran into was Lady Pamela. We strolled up and down, conversing. She mentioned that I had given her rather a fright by my unceremonious demand to see “Dr. Sun”—on my arrival yesterday. I stared at her apologetically. I had absolutely no

recollection of the incident. She laughed at my dismay.

"You *have* made a wonderful recovery, Mr. Bellairs!" she said.

It puzzled me to think that I had been ill, and I asked her to explain but she only smiled. It occurred to me for perhaps the first time that she was indeed a singularly charming and attractive young lady.

That day passed for me like a day in a pleasant dream. During the morning we left the Peninsula coast astern and at about midday the mighty peaks of the Atlas Mountains loomed up over the port bow and we turned inshore, nearer to Africa. The mountains dwindled as the day advanced, and a low-lying, sandy shore took their place—beyond which a sea of white sand-hummocks stretched to the horizon. But it was not until nine o'clock that night—a dark night, with the stars pricking the firmament like a myriad goblin bull's-eye lanterns—that the "feel" of the engines slowing down told us that we had arrived at the future meteorological station.

At dinner, an excellent repast with choicest wines, Eralos had entertained us with his plans for landing and setting into operation his machine. He had suggested casually that if we cared to accompany him we were welcome. We might amuse ourselves strolling along the beach while he adjusted the mechanism—after the sailors had hauled the machine on to the higher ground. We looked forward to the project with all the elation of a party of school-children.

Hardly a ripple stirred the water as the yacht glided closer inshore, feeling her way cautiously between the sandbanks by the musical count of the man swinging the lead in the bows. That sea of sandhills, the fringe of the mighty Sahara, crept closer out of the blackness—awe-inspiring in its grand desolation. We heard the order rapped from the bridge, the rattle of the chain and the splash of the anchor as it took the water.

While some men in the bows slung overboard the

heavy packing-case and its raft—with the help of a steam-winch and a boom of the foremast—others lowered a small launch to take the party ashore. Mr. Eralos took sole control of the boat, and we helped Lady Pam down and followed, Bailey, Holmden and I—all without overcoats, for the night was gloriously warm. By the time we left the side of the yacht a larger launch had already towed the great raft half-way across the stretch of water that separated us from the shore, and when our boat beached and we laughingly sprang out into the warm, knee-deep water, the larger launch and the raft were close on our heels.

The great raft grounding in the gently plashing surf, the sailors set about freeing the wooden case and levering it up the smooth beach on rollers. Amid many a laugh, we assisted, getting in the way, I am afraid, more than anything else. In a very short time the big case stood in the soft sand well above the high-water mark, and Mr. Eralos superintended the men in the removal of the bolts that held together the roof and the stout wooden sides.

We all stood by in keen anticipation, eager to see the machine. But once the first side had been removed and carried back to the raft, we saw that we would have to contain our curiosity a while longer, for the instrument was hidden under a great dust-sheet. At length all the sections had been removed, and Eralos gave the sailors instructions to return to the yacht, bidding them inform the captain that they would not be needed again that night, as he might be late and would personally see to the securing of our little launch on our return; and that it could lie alongside and be raised into the davits in the morning.

The launch chugged off into the darkness, dragging behind it the lightened raft. With great willingness we turned towards the meteorological machine and assisted in the removal of the dust-sheet—and then we suffered our disappointment! There was nothing to see! The thing appeared to be simply a huge metal box, about the

size of a large motor-car, and mounted on what seemed a solid, highly-polished sheet of steel!

At once we began to ask questions and Eralos enlightened us. He showed us the little glass panel in the roof through which the heavens would be photographed at regular, recorded intervals; a little square, black box, riveted on to the roof near the panel, was the rain-gauge (he would raise the lid later); he explained the mechanical process whereby a large, substantial-looking propeller, affixed to one side of the machine, would register the exact strength of the terrific storms that swept this part of the coast; he showed us a peculiar-looking, glassed-in compass that would automatically note and record wind-directions.

He talked on, vastly interesting the mechanically inclined Bailey, but undeniably boring such tyros as Lady Pam, Holmden and myself. At last we prevailed on the car-millionaire to leave Eralos and his automatic meteorological instrument to their own devices, and the four of us strolled along the foreshore, three of us at least as light-hearted as school-children and prattling merrily of finding nuggets of ambergris! I say "three of us" for the reason that Holmden was obviously a little out of it. Lady Pam and the millionaire seemed to pair off, leaving the melancholy sculptor to me. He ventured some remark to her as we set out, and I was rather annoyed with her for the cuttingly snobbish way in which she negligently threw him an answer before she ignored him altogether.

I suppose we were away no more than half an hour. When we returned to the machine—which we would never have found had not the sea been there to guide us, for the night was as dark as only a moonless desert night can be—we were all astonished to find Eralos differently clad! He appeared to have drawn on, over his ordinary European clothes, the voluminous trousers and the loose jacket of a Chinaman! He saw our surprise and smiled.

"I use these garments as overalls!" he explained.
"This is greasy work!"

Lady Pam laughed.

"You look most picturesque, Mr. Eralos!" she remarked with that unnatural affectation that seemed inseparable from her. "Indeed, if Mr. Bellairs has seen you in those clothes before, I don't wonder he enquired for 'Dr. Sun'!"

Something in her remarks set me thinking furiously. Something seemed fighting to find its way to the surface of my consciousness. But almost immediately Eralos distracted me.

"The instrument's more or less ready now," he informed us. "Would you care to see the machinery inside it?" He moved to the side of the thing, grasped a little projecting knob, and in a moment a small, narrow door swung open, disclosing a black interior. Eralos stooped and entered the box. He flashed a torch, and one by one we followed him in. He stood by the door in the semi-darkness, and as I entered behind the others he touched my forehead lightly with a hand. In that instant I awoke from the trance of forgetfulness he had that morning put about me! I remembered that he was—Dr. Sun!

For a second I stood too bewildered to say anything, or to move, and in that second, Eralos—or Sun—slipped out through the door and slammed it behind him!

"Sun!" I gasped. "Sun!" I could think of nothing else to say. My heart beat frantically with excitement!

Bailey laughed loudly.

"What's the game, Eralos?" he enquired.

"Don't stand up too straight," Holmden's mellow voice warned us out of the darkness. "I've just given my head an awful whack!"

A chuckle came from somewhere outside our steel prison.

"He's not Eralos!" I cried excitedly into the blackness,

jostling Lady Pamela in my eagerness. "He's Dr. Sun, I tell you! The Doctor of Souls!"

"Poor Mr. Bellairs!" murmured that lady.

"Oh lor'!" Bailey muttered exasperatedly. "I say, Eralos, you thoughtless beggar! You've sent Bellairs off the deep end again! Come on, man, let us out!"

Again came the chuckle! Lady Pam gave a little nervous laugh. Then, low but penetrating, a voice—strange to the others, though dreadfully familiar to me, and now without the slightest trace of that accent "Mr Eralos" had affected—came to us out of the darkness! The voice of that fanatic, that madman—the Doctor of Souls!

"I am the Doctor of Souls!" it intoned. "I will heal your poor, pitiful, narrow souls——"

There was a chorus of amazed, incredulous ejaculations; a cry from the woman. Bailey's voice broke out angrily:

"What the devil d'you think you're up to, Eralos!"

Silence! Then:

"Death will bring to you all a true sense of values, my friends!" that terrible, droning voice went on. "Your pitifully warped souls—Death will straighten them! When your conveyance runs out of fuel you will be five—six—hundred miles from the nearest Toureg village—lost in the sand-wastes of the great Sahara Desert! Ah, you will learn, my poor, ignorant citizens of 'Civilisation'! Thirst and starvation will quickly right your twisted souls. You will see things as they are—before you see them no more!" (Again the unnerving cackle of hellish laughter.) "Death will weigh you and pass judgment on those who are weak; only the strongest will greet him unafraid! You, Bailey, with your wasteful, nonsensical pursuit of money! You, Lady Pamela Bourne, with your ugly, stupid snobbery! You, my young friend Bunny, with your worship of affluence . . .!" The awful voice trailed off into silence. We broke out into a furious babble of protests, threats, supplications—and then we were suddenly silenced by something utterly unexpected!

There was a last chuckle from the ghoul outside our cage, a click as of his finally securing the door, and then we heard the whirr of the powerful propeller biting the air—and we were thrown bodily back in a sprawling heap against the wall of the compartment! The thing was moving! It was sliding across the sand, into the Sahara! We were being sent to our death!

CHAPTER XXVII

SHALL I ever forget that ghastly night! Jostled from side to side, flung bodily through the air to land in a mass of yelling, clawing humanity, as the machine glissaded across the uneven sand-ripples near the coast, I thought at first that we would not live the night through! Before we had progressed very far I began to feel in imminent danger of being physically sick! The motion was exactly that one may experience if one ever has the misfortune, as I have had, to be in a lifeboat in a very rough sea! To add to the general terror was the fact that none of us could hear the shouts of the others. The revolutions of the powerful propeller—or tractor—maintained a continual obliterating roar!

I say that I felt sick. I did. I came very near to it when, fortunately, I felt, or imagined I felt, the machine's cavortings become a little less eccentric. Almost at once I knew that it had not been imagination, for the side lurchings and bumpings of our queer chariot were noticeably lessening, and the motion became by degrees a simple "up and down" sensation, like that experienced on a switchback railway! I was at something of a loss to account for this—though I may say that I was infinitely grateful for it!—and then it occurred to me that we must have left the more serrated and irregular sandhills of the coastal area and have entered the region of long, swelling

dunes of the Sahara proper. I had once, by a different route and under slightly different circumstances, been to Biskra with a party of tourists, and I recollected our guide indicating that same phenomenon on the edge of the desert. This new motion restored me to comparative bodily comfort, and, speech being quite impossible, I groped round in the darkness to find what had happened to my companions.

Bailey and Lady Pam clutched each other on my left. In front of me, I discovered that Holmden had philosophically wedged himself in a corner, using his long, awkward limbs as props. I shouted to each in turn, but so far from making them hear I found that I could not hear my own voice—so I desisted!

As the machine gradually settled into its less disconcerting “up and down” movement, some bright idea prompted Bailey to strike a match and we had a flickering glimpse of one another’s white, strained faces. He struck another. We burst simultaneously into speech, but that all-obliterating roar made us sound like a cluster of mutes, so we gave it up. The light of the match showed us to be in a small, square compartment, hardly large enough to contain the four of us without inconvenience, and, but for us, quite empty. The second match died out, leaving us to our thoughts.

My own thoughts were none too reassuring! I had never once heard Sun say anything he did not mean, and what he had said just before our abrupt departure still rang predominantly through my consciousness. We were on our way to be tested—by Death! It was none too pleasant a contemplation!

I cursed myself for being so great a fool, knowing the mad scientist as I did, as not to recognise at once that this hellish contraption of a disordered mind was anything but an “automatic meteorological instrument!” Surely Bailey, with his knowledge of motor-car manufacture, should have discovered that—even before me! Then I recollected that, compared to Bailey’s—or any

other ordinary mechanic's—knowledge of machinery, Sun's learning was literally overwhelming! A mind that could originate so marvellous and intricate a mechanism as Sun's machine for demonstrating the thought-movements of the human brain, would surely find it a simple matter to mislead even a motor-vehicle manufacturer! Compared to Sun, Bailey was a child possessing a slight acquaintance with the springs and cog-wheels of a toy engine!

I recollected my suspicions when I had first seen the packing-case that morning, and this led me on to remember how I had been hypnotised in order that I might not interfere with the smooth working of this newest of Sun's insane "experiments!" I had tried to warn the others—as soon as I knew. My conscience felt lighter when I remembered how I had tried, indeed, on the commencement of the voyage. And they had thought me mad! I laughed—grimly. I had no doubt, now, that they were at last convinced of my sanity!

But I did not laugh very merrily. The horror of what lay before us was too real! I sat racking my tired brain for some plan of escape that I could execute before we were too deeply involved in the meshes of this fantastic scheme to hope to extricate ourselves. All this may sound as if I sat quiet and resigned for a long while. Nothing, I am sure, could be more inaccurate. I do not believe we spent more than a few minutes in traversing the rougher hills of the coastal area, and I should think very little time went by before it occurred to me to try the handle of the door!

Holmden must have been thinking my way, too, for as I stretched out my hand in the darkness and began groping for the small door-knob, it came into contact with his. His great artistic fingers were already closed about the knob, and I could feel that he exerted every ounce of his strength in an attempt to turn it. Breathlessly, I waited, every now and then touching him to discover whether he had made any progress. At length

he withdrew his hand, and, as it brushed against my jacket, I felt him to be wringing it—as one does after putting one's hand to a strain. Immediately I fastened my own about the knob—and twisted. Alas! I might as well have tried with my bare hands to open the vaults of the Bank of England! We were imprisoned for good and all, unless some miracle freed us! This little square interior of the machine was to be our tomb!

The thought was such as to send me starting to my feet, clawing at the smooth sides of the swaying vehicle! I had forgotten Holmden's caution, but I suddenly remembered it as my head made violent contact with the low, solid metal roof in a manner that all but sent me to sleep! I sat down again—abruptly.

There was one solitary glimmer of light in the whole of our moving prison, and that came through the little glass panel set in the roof, the aperture through which the instrument had been purported to take its "night-photographs"! The glimmer that trickled in from the starry world outside was such that it added, if anything, to the darkness about us! It, however, set me thinking of the taradiddle Sun had seen fit to tell Bailey, and I scorned myself anew to think that I had not seen more in that propeller than a mere means of registering the strength of the wind! The polished steel sled on which the machine stood was in itself enough to have told anybody but a fool that it was more than a mere base for supporting the instrument! And the compass, too! How absurdly like the automatic steering-compass on the aeroplane! But my hypnotic forgetfulness exonerated me, at least. It was Bailey that I blamed!

The night went by like a long-drawn-out nightmare! Never for a second of it did my tortured mind know peace, and, to judge by the state my companions were in when at last morning found us, I have little doubt that they suffered equally. I was filled with all manner of dreadful contemplations! What if the machine were to strike some cul-de-sac, such as a rock—if there were rocks in this

wilderness—or the bole of a palm! That would surely settle our problems for us very expeditiously—though hardly in a manner to be desired! What speed were we travelling at? Sun was far too busy a man to have anything to do with a machine that wasted time, and from the regular, quick rise and sag as we slid over the dunes pulled by that herculean tractor, I decided that our speed must be considerable. It was perhaps as well, I reflected, that we had not been able to open the door, or we might each in turn have stepped out into a premature death!

Then came an illuminating thought. If this little square box was to be our tomb, why had Sun gone to the trouble of constructing a complicated and expensive machine to take us into the Sahara? It might quite as easily have served for our tomb on the deserted coast as in the empty desert! No, there was more in it than that—something that time alone could show!

We had each of us in turn become filled with a futile resentment of our circumstances as the night progressed, and when a gradual lightening of the sky in the little panel overhead told us that day was at last dawning, we had all gone through periods of an ineffectual clawing around our prison in the dark, searching for some means of escape—in the process falling over each other and bruising ourselves against the steel walls.

The gradually strengthening light of day showed us one another's faces, drawn and haggard. Only Holmden, the sculptor, seemed to have resigned himself to the inevitable. The sight of his infinitely calm, classic features made me wonder why Sun had made no mention of *him* in his last tirade on the previous evening. It puzzled me.

As soon as it was light enough, Bailey rose to his haunches and scrambled across the heaving floor towards the door, where he commenced a furious and entirely fruitless attack on the handle! He kicked at it until, in the end, he hurt his foot, when he desisted and sagged

back into a sitting posture against the wall. I noticed that this ordeal had the apparent effect of not only frightening him, but angering him as well. Strangely, I, myself, was not angered, merely frightened. So was Lady Pam. I wondered that the same thing should affect us each so differently. Holmden appeared to be neither frightened nor angered. Indeed he seemed to be his normal melancholy self!

And then, all of a sudden, and with such total unexpectedness as to leave us gasping and staring at each other, the whirr of the propeller ceased, very nearly as abruptly as it had started! Its loud, deafening roar changed to a high drone, gradually falling in pitch, like the moaning of a dying man—and then it had stopped altogether! At that same moment we heard a curious clicking noise somewhere in the body of the machine—and the door swung open!

With a simultaneous cry we all hurled ourselves towards the aperture! I was nearest the door. I tumbled out—holus-bolus—too intent about getting out of that infernal death-trap to care much whether I hurt myself by so precipitate a descent! I need not have worried. I landed in soft drift-sand—sand as deep, surely, as the ocean is deep!

I staggered to my feet and stared wildly about, hardly noticing the others tumbling out of their prison in much the same manner as I had done. So far as my eyes could see was—sand—nothing but sand!

We were marooned in the desert—with a vengeance!

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE millionaire was the first to recover his speech. “Well, I’m damned!” he exclaimed, staring over that waste of sand. “Not a dashed thing in sight!” He turned, half-incredulously, to me.

“So you were not so mad after all, Bellairs!” he added.

I laughed mirthlessly.

“So Mr. Eralos,” Lady Pamela tremulously put in, “really is that lunatic, the Doctor of Souls! But how dreadful! Why, it seems absurd! He was such a perfect gentleman!”

Holmden apparently saw humour in her last remark. He smiled his peculiar twisted smile.

“A criminal—all the while!” Bailey gasped.

“Hardly a criminal,” Holmden corrected. “He considers himself some sort of reformer, doesn’t he, Bellairs?”

I nodded.

“He’s mad, nevertheless!” I added. “He’s done some ghastly things. I could tell you of . . .”

A meaningful frown from Holmden suddenly silenced me. I saw the reason. Lady Pamela, already considerably overwrought by her experience of the night, stared at me in horror, eager to know the worst. I saw then that all through the night these good people had still nourished the conviction that Mr. Eralos *was* Mr. Eralos, and this thing no more than some fantastic practical joke. *I* was disillusioning them.

“I must say I’ve never known him kill anybody,” I averred quickly to set Lady Pam more at ease. It occurred to me to wonder, at the same time, how I could ever have been thrilled by this woman, as I had been that morning on the deck of the yacht. Almost at once I knew the reason. Whenever Sun bade me forget, I very naturally forgot also my recollection of that glorious being I had once met at the House of the Brother, the monastery on the borders of Tibet. In such circumstances I forgot my Lady of the Clouds, and became my ordinary susceptible self. Now I was remembering again, and subconsciously my beloved of the distant mountains stood between me and the contemplation of any other woman.

I was glad to observe that my information had evidently solaced Lady Pam to some extent.

"But he causes suffering, you say?" she persisted nervously.

Bailey saw fit to interrupt.

"Don't you trouble your little head about that, Pam!" he advised. I noticed that he had dropped the "Lady," and I wondered. Also there was an unmistakably proprietary ring in his tone. I saw that Holmden noticed it, too—from a funny little writhing movement of his lips. Bailey went on, confidently. "We'll soon be out of this! Can't afford to burn money, hanging about out here! And, by George! It'll be Mr. blinking Sun's turn to suffer when we do get back! Trust me for that! I'll sue him for ten thousand, damages! And I'll break him if it costs me a million! Come on, Holmden—Bellairs! What shall we do? Let's examine this thing to begin with!"

I could not help reflecting that, even in this predicament, Bailey never once forgot his everlasting MONEY. His very talk reeked of it!

We turned with one accord towards the machine, daylight giving us our first opportunity for a thorough inspection of it. Almost at once we knew that salvation did not lie in its direction. The thing had evidently been constructed by the mad savant expressly for this occasion, for there was no steering-wheel or other control-mechanism to suggest that it might have been intended for further usefulness. (Save the word!) In front of the box-like room in which we had spent the awful night was a projection to which the tractor was affixed. Bailey concluded this to contain the engine.

"It's not a petrol-engine, I'm certain," he remarked, peering at the thing. "It sounded to me rather like an electric motor driven from accumulators."

"Could it be atomic?" I suggested, humbly.

"Atomic?" he echoed. "What are you talking about? There isn't any such thing!"

I knew better, but as I had neither the pistol, nor the plane, nor the submarine with which to demonstrate to Mr. Bailey that the atomic engine actually *did* exist, I thought it wiser to say nothing.

"The whole of the thing's encased ; that's the trouble," the millionaire pronounced. "Look about and see if you can find a tool-box somewhere."

Our search was in vain. Boxes there were none, excepting only the small one on the roof—the alleged "rain-gauge"—and as this was securely riveted down, and we could make not the slightest impression on the hard rivet-heads with our pocket-knives, it was of little help to us. There seemed to be nothing movable about the whole machine, if one excepted only the small, glass-topped compass with its ingenious electric control-slide, in the centre of which the direction-needle still faithfully rested, having diligently guided us until our motive power ran out. So, after wasting perhaps half an hour in examining every possible inch of the machine, we gave it up in disgust and blankly faced one another.

"I wonder how far we are from the nearest village or oasis ?" Bailey mused, wiping the perspiration from his brow. The sun was already high, and the atmosphere was growing almost unbearably hot. "I'd give a hundred pounds for the sight of a camel !"

Money, again, I noticed.

Lady Pam consulted a delicate gold wrist-watch.

"It's only nine o'clock !" she murmured, surprised.

"Oh, I am so thirsty !"

"Say we started at ten last night," Bailey said, ignoring her. "Ten to eight—ten hours. Give this thing—say—twenty miles an hour . . ."

"Fifty, I should say," I interrupted. "Look at the distance between the crests of these sandhills and remember how quickly we rose and fell as we slid across them."

Holmden said nothing.

"Call it forty," conceded the millionaire. "That makes us four hundred miles from the coast ! Heavens !"

We were all silent. Comment was obviously useless. Our eyes were a little wider, I think.

"Let's get on the roof and see if there's anything to be seen," I suggested. I suited my action to the words and clambered up. I was surprised to find the metal roof-plates already almost unbearable to the touch. I realised then, I think, what our enemy was.

I searched every quarter of the horizon, but to no purpose. Once I gave a glad cry as I thought I saw trees and green shrubbery far in the distance. But a moment later I realised that it was nothing more than the effect of the sunlight shimmering on the surface of the white sand. In silence I rejoined the others.

"Nothing?" Holmden queried hopefully.

I shook my head.

Bailey swore under his breath. Then, suddenly he staggered, clapped a hand to his head and hurriedly sat down in the shade of the machine.

"Sun's hot!" he muttered. "I felt quite queer! Silly!"

In a little while we sat cramped together in the small patch of shade, the heat making exertion a thing not to be seriously contemplated. Lady Pamela frequently looked at her watch and complained that her throat felt parched. I was rather surprised to detect a new naturalness—a little less of the loud affectation—in her voice, and immediately I fell to thinking of what Sun had said to us last night. Holmden's dark, melancholy eyes scanned her compassionately as she complained.

Bailey sat sulky, hardly aware of any of us.

As the day advanced, and the sun drew nearer the zenith, stealing inch by inch from our meagre shade, we were forced closer against the steel side. At length the sun shone directly down on us, and to sit still with those fierce rays beating on our scantily protected heads became unbearable!

Holmden was the first to suggest and try the interior of the box-prison as a shelter from the scorching heat,

but he came out much more quickly than he had gone in. I tried next. The inside of the vehicle was a veritable oven! We found some relief, soon afterwards, by partly disrobing and holding our clothes above our heads to make shade. And so, groaning and complaining, we sat until the sun had traversed the zenith and given us a little shade on the other side of the machine.

By this time Lady Pam had been reduced to tears. Bailey made dry noises in his throat and complained frequently of a racking headache, and I, myself, by continuously moving my parched tongue, began to suspect that all the moisture in my body must be evaporated! Only Holmden sat still, uncomplaining, a troubled look in his eyes.

As the heat gradually lessened, leaving us each with a feeling of having been starved for a week, and not having tasted water for even longer, we revived a very little and began to exercise our cracking throats in a verbal contemplation of what lay before us. Bailey was for setting out towards the coast, but Lady Pam declared herself, weakly, to be too exhausted to move. Holmden offered no suggestion. I, curiously, began to grope round for faith in the man who had caused us this suffering. Sun believed himself to be a healer of the soul, I had that to work on. I had never known him irreparably injure anyone. Mad as he indubitably was, he was all I had to cling to—and I clung to him!

“I can’t last another day in this heat!” Lady Pam moaned, so weakly that we hardly heard.

“If we wait here until we’re too exhausted to walk—we’ll die!” Bailey remarked hoarsely. “God! I’d give a year’s profit for a glass of water!”

I saw Holmden’s face relax into the twisted smile.

“Well?” he said, gently. “Dying is at least one solution of our difficulty!”

“Well, if you’re such a fool as to want to die . . . !” Bailey rejoined. He dwindled into a surly silence. Once or twice I saw Lady Pam looking at him as if in

astonishment, as if she had never before properly observed him. Then, a little while later, I felt her troubled eyes search *my* face, and then turn to Holmden's. Whatever it was she sought, I can affirm that she found it suddenly in Holmden. I saw him smile—and the twist seemed to have gone right out of it! His big, long-fingered hand reached out and touched hers. Her face filled with gratitude. As for Holmden, he looked suddenly radiant.

Was this "giving himself," I wondered?

I need not describe the remainder of our discussions, bickerings and conjectures. There were many that day, before the molten African sun sank below that scorched, parched horizon. Then, though we had had nothing to eat since dinner on the previous night, and our throats felt so dry that I, for one, feared mine to be on the point of blistering, we lay down in the warm sand and went to sleep.

The second day of ordeal began. It is to me no more than a vague dream-memory.

Lady Pam succumbed early, and Holmden and I laid her gently in the shade. Bailey seemed to have lost all interest in her. As the day advanced and the heat began to worry us to desperation again, the argument about death was resumed. Again it was the millionaire's pleading to us to accompany him in search of some habitation that started it. Exasperated seemingly out of control, he turned furiously on Holmden.

"We'll rot if we stay here!" he bellowed. "We'll die—I tell you!"

Holmden quietly nodded. What he answered came to me in the nature of a sudden enlightenment. I think I learnt more in those next few moments than I had in the whole of my previous life. I learnt incidentally why *I* had been included in the "experiment."

"Die?" said Holmden, slowly. He spoke slowly on account of his throat. My own was by this time so parched and swollen that I could barely articulate.

“Die ? And why shouldn't we die ? I'm not afraid of death ! No man is afraid of death who has *lived his life !* No man fears death who has sought Truth in life—and suffered ! It is only the men who have wasted their lives—who have bitten no deeper than its sickly-sweet crust of superficialities—who quake when death is mentioned ! Yourself, Bailey. You dread death because you have starved yourself of life ! In your mad, misguided pursuit of money you have shut out—life ! I have lived, loved, given myself—and suffered ! Why should I fear death ? ”

Both Lady Pam and I stared at the sculptor's unnaturally calm, drawn face in wonderment. But there was more than wonder shining in her tortured eyes. I don't think it mattered very much to her, then, that Holmden—as she thought—was an unpedigreed nonentity. Holmden saw her look, and I glanced away as he bent his head down towards hers. Lady Pam's snobbishness no longer existed. Death, the leveller, had opened her eyes.

Towards midday Bailey became delirious. He staggered up to Holmden, thrust a hand out towards him and there descended to the sand before the sculptor a little cascade of loose silver and a great flutter of bank-notes ! The millionaire muttered inarticulately. We could make nothing of it, but his gestures were unmistakable. He was offering Holmden all the money he had on his person, in the delusion that the sculptor could help him and rid him of his torture ! The little comedy was significant !

Holmden sat still, saying nothing, doing nothing. I do not for a moment suppose that his physical tortures were any more bearable than ours.

I thought I heard Bailey shout : “ Be damned to you ! ” —and then he had turned and staggered out into that blistering waste. Afternoon deepened to evening. We sat still, moaning a little. Not very far away a small black speck floundered and struggled in the deep sand !

Bailey! During the afternoon he had made a complete circle about us! On he staggered, with the strength of his despair and his delirium!

I sat marvelling at the curious courage of a man like Holmden—when I was not suffering too much to think at all—pondering out what he had said; wondering at the strange force that made a man so master of his own soul.

I think we were all too far sunk in suffering to experience to the full the surprise we should ordinarily have felt, when we heard a bell ringing somewhere in that infernal vehicle of the Doctor of Souls! Holmden and I stared at each other in stupid astonishment. Holmden it was who managed to stagger to his feet. Hardly turning my head I saw him lurch towards the machine and reach a hand to its low roof. But next instant I was on my feet! Holmden held something to his lips—and was drinking!

I don't know where I got the strength from, but after I had had a drink of some reviving liquid from the flask Holmden had found—having snatched it rudely from his lips—I clambered on to the roof. There, while the sculptor succoured the woman, I saw where the flask had come from!

The lid of the little box on the roof was raised! A simple mechanism with many of the features of an ordinary alarm-clock had released a spring catch, and the lid had flown open! There, inside the box, were the frosted pipes of a miniature refrigerator, and inside that little parcels of provisions, tabloid-medicines, cool—heavenly cool!—bottles of spirits and mineral waters, and—a note!

It was addressed to “Denholm,” but I tore it open.

“MY DEAR DENHOLM (I read),

“If you raise the lid of the direction compass, set the needle-indicator exactly opposite its present position, move the switch which you will find in this box from the figure 1. to the figure 2., thus switching on to the

spare atomic accumulator, then set the tractor in motion by the simple process of closing the door, you will be very close to the yacht within ten hours of opening this note. I trust the experience has been beneficial to all of you.

“ERALOS.”

My throat was too swollen to permit of my shouting. I just gasped!

Perhaps I need add no more. Lady Pam and the sculptor are married. Bailey, the ex-car-millionaire—whom we rescued ten minutes after finding the letter that day, and rendered into submissiveness with bromide tabloids, after a struggle!—Bailey is no longer a millionaire. If you ever chance upon a certain little village in the Fen country you may run across him, living very quietly and very happily, for he has at last found time to marry

He gives extensively to charities and I believe has twice been offered a peerage, but he prefers to spend his time writing little pamphlets that advocate—to a cynical world—the retirement of successful business men as soon as they have made £10,000!

CHAPTER XXIX

IN these days of rapidly enlarging knowledge, of purposeful investigation and real progress in matters scientific, psychic and metaphysical, it is almost platitudinous to say that “truth is stranger than fiction.” On every hand we see marvels that, properly appreciated, turn the stuff of the imaginative fictionist into the stodgiest drivel! Hence it is all the more remarkable, to me, that there should have been a large number of Englishmen (and women) ever ready to discredit the existence of Dr. Sun outside the realms of fiction.

That I should several times actually have sworn to the veracity of my detailed accounts of previous adventures with him apparently counted for little !

The reason for this ready doubt is not, I venture, far to seek. It is commonly accepted that the primary qualification for eligibility in journalism is one of two things : a title, or a ready faculty for manufacturing what sounds a great deal out of what is really a very little ! I am, of course, innocent of title ; hence I perforce fulfil the latter requirement. I suppose it was reasoned, then, that, possessing this faculty, I might with very little extra trouble contrive to produce a certain quantity out of nothing at all ! Baldly, it was believed that I was a liar !

And then, as if to convince those who still doubted, came the curious affair of Mr. Hillett, M.P., and his illuminating disclosures to a shocked and amazed House of Assembly.

Mr. Hillett, it will be remembered, held high office in the Government during a certain national emergency of the distant past. His name will doubtless go down to posterity as "The Maker of Wars," for Mr. Hillett at that time made minor wars with the easy nonchalance and facile aptitude of a carpet-slipped householder potting small geraniums on a Sunday morning !

During that dark period of English History, he had indeed so successfully exercised his hobby as to have been the chief instigator in Britain's involvement in at least half a dozen bloody, purposeless little bickerings in as many different lands ! He possessed that accursed thing, a honeyed tongue, and in those days could move the House to a bloodthirsty hysteria with all the ease—and a portion of the manner—of a revivalist gaining converts. *Vox populi*—cold, sober British reason—squashed him in the end. For some years he lay low, while England thrived in peace, and then, like an evil genius, he rose again, at a time of crisis !

It was all over some question affecting "Policy" in the

Near East. Had Mr. Hillett had his way, an expeditionary force would have left these shores within twenty-four hours, to set fools a-flagwagging and a-cheering until later they sat dumb and stupid, contemplating the cost.

(DEBTOR TO NEMESIS :

Human beings	(killed)	..	.....
”	”		
	(maimed)	..	.....
Hearts	(broken)	..	.....
Goods	(wasted)	..	.....
Progress	(retarded)	..	.....
Total			
	

Received with thanks,
Nemesis.)

During the first half of Mr. Hillett's now famous address it really began to look as if he *would* have his way ! He had to fight the harder because his person no longer graced the Cabinet, and fight he did. "The British Lion," the "Boys of the Bulldog Breed," all the old sentimental catchwords and clichés found their way into the speech, and in Mr. Hillett's mouth reassumed a deal of their half-forgotten, flamboyant, intoxicating splendour. When the house adjourned for luncheon he was cheered to the echo !

After luncheon came the miracle.

The orator gave the impression, on his re-entry, of being a trifle abstracted. But, considering the gravity of the debate and its issue, this air of absent-mindedness was hardly to be wondered at, and it was not until Mr. Hillett was called upon to resume his speech that the thunderbolt fell.

His very first remarks set the members staring at him in amazement !

"Mr. Speaker," he said, in tones that rang through

the building, "I rise now to put forward for your consideration my very simple but vital reasons why I consider it most necessary that this motion should be passed and an ultimatum immediately dispatched. My first, and undoubtedly my strongest reason, is that I have become a little weary of my enforced relegation to comparative obscurity in the last few years. I have found it irksome—I may say almost impossible—to resign myself to unimportance. Thus, I have gratefully seized on this opportunity to bring my name once again into glorious prominence before the British Public. I am glad to observe that already the newspapers have printed my name in large eye-satisfying headlines, and I have no doubt that by to-morrow, when, with my unequalled oratorical powers, I have persuaded you to adopt this measure . . ."

But by this time the House was in a roar of amazed incredulity! Members of all parties had started to their feet, were standing on the benches, yelling or gaping open-mouthed at him!

It was quickly surmised that something very serious must have happened to Mr Hillett's brain during the luncheon interval, and the speaker immediately suspended him and ordered his removal. Loudly protesting, the member was taken into the lobby and there subjected to certain questions by fellow-members who happened to be of the medical profession. Here he very soon persuaded the investigators that he had gone mad, and he was conveyed forthwith to a mental hospital. There, after further enquiry, he was declared to be suffering from something with a long Latin name—and there he languished for exactly a week!

(In the meantime some bright elocutionist of the opposing party had seized upon the opportunity to destroy, in one crisp, well-calculated speech, all Mr. Hillett's machinations. The motion, put to the vote, suffered a most ignominious defeat. Britain sent a "note" instead of an ultimatum, and in a month or two

the matter at issue was amicably settled by the nations concerned.)

But it was when Mr. Hillett was finally discharged from the mental institution as "cured" that the really puzzling part of the affair was made public. The member had entirely lost his memory during that time that had embraced what the Press called the "*débâcle*" in Parliament! He could offer no explanation for what he termed his "extraordinary, misleading and utterly unsubstantiated remarks"—those quoted and others of a similar nature. It seemed he had not lunched in the building, having a long-standing appointment to lunch in the West End that day. It was there, in a well-known and fashionable restaurant, that he first lost his grip of things!

The case at the time excited considerable interest and speculation, but there were few explanations offered to merit serious consideration. (It was conclusively proved that Mr. Hillett had not been intoxicated, and this at once discounted by far the majority of the public's surmises!) The alienists had their theories, of course—almost ready made. They simply affixed to the mystery that same tag with the long Latin name on it—that nobody could hope to understand—and declared the matter to have been fully explained! But this hardly satisfied that canny individual, the man in the street, and when it became known that a certain Czecho-Slovak waiter employed at the restaurant had suddenly gone off his head in exactly the same way as had Mr. Hillett—and, moreover, at precisely the same time!—public interest in the case intensified.

The waiter, it appeared, had suddenly manifested symptoms of that identical extreme and embarrassing candour that had characterised Mr. Hillett's speech in the House that day! He had been so candid as to have been violently rude to a distinguished patron of the restaurant who had had the temerity to order a third helping of dessert. He had, in fact, informed that

portly and somewhat important personage that he was in a restaurant—not in a pig-sty!

Very naturally, the infuriated luncher had immediately summoned the head-waiter, and then the manager, and the Czecho-Slovak was soon on the pavement outside the building—minus employment. Here, through certain too-frank comments on the appearance and deportment of passers-by, he had quickly come into contact with the Law. The Law had handed him over to the Prison Medical Ward, and he, too, lived for a week in a lunatic asylum!

On the same day as Mr. Hillett emerged from his incarceration as a mental defective, to read bewilderedly the reports of his staggering statements in the House, the Czecho-Slovak was pronounced sane and released!

The coincidence was remarkable!

The case took on a new significance when it was discovered that the Czecho-Slovak waiter was the identical man who had served at Mr. Hillett's table at luncheon on that memorable day!

Things had now begun to assume some sort of shape, and theories sprang up like mushrooms. Had something in the food been the cause of the amazingly parallel cases of temporary insanity? The obvious answer was "no," for then surely more persons would have been affected. Both Mr. Hillett and the waiter were very closely questioned by the investigating authorities as to the circumstances surrounding the luncheon, the time Mr. Hillett's guest had left the table, and anything that might shed light on the mystery. So it was that a new and remarkable fact was disclosed.

Shortly after the guest had left the M.P. alone to finish his glass of port—the guest had been pressed for time—a little, nondescript, well-dressed man had risen from an adjacent table and passed along towards the entrance. As he approached, he fumbled with a little golden box in his hand, and just next to Mr. Hillett's chair he paused to take snuff from the box! Both the M.P.

and the waiter recollected the incident perfectly, once they had reminded each other of it, for it was so unexpected a procedure in a modern and fashionable restaurant! Incidentally, the waiter had been in the act of presenting Mr. Hillett's bill. The man, moving towards the door, had blown the residue of the snuff from his finger-tips into the air. They were both emphatic on the point, for the snuff had been of a peculiar pungency and they had both distinctly smelt it in the air about them—even after the little man had passed on.

Then came oblivion. Both the waiter and the M.P. were aware that they did and said things after the incident, but they seemed in retrospect like things said and done in a half-forgotten dream!

One thing gave me, and certain other persons, a clue to the whole mystery. The waiter was very insistent on the point. He had noticed the little man's eyes, and he described them as having been without colour and set slightly aslant in a small, inoffensive face!

I needed no more information. The little man had been the notorious Doctor of Souls!

Mr. Hillett's career as a politician was finished. True, he took his usual seat in the House; but whenever he rose to speak, there was that fatal titter among his audience that any accomplished orator will affirm he fears more than the ticking of a death-watch. He had become a figure of ridicule. Hotly as he denied substance in the remarks he had made during his "unfortunate aberrational period," there had been something about the naïve candour of those same remarks to irresistibly tickle the public funny-bone. Mr. Hillett was done. He made no more minor wars, and at length threw up the sponge and set himself to the writing of his reminiscences.

In the meantime the public had taken up the threads of the curious story and set about weaving them together, so as to make an intelligible pattern. (A nation that finds time to "do" crossword puzzles will surely find time for anything!) Fierce controversies raged in the

medical and psychical journals as to the nature and purpose of the startling phenomenon. On three points alone were they all agreed. The perpetrator of the outrage was that mysterious figure of fantastic "soul-healing," the medico-scientist who called himself the "Doctor of Souls"; the poison accounting for the phenomenon had been administered in the snuff; and the effect of the poison, which was not entirely unknown to medical science, was temporarily to deprive the subject of all self-control, or sense of discretion, so that for the time the drug acted he was a being utterly natural!

This conclusion hardly reflected to Mr. Hillett's credit, and the M.P. was himself one of the parties who most warmly contested it in the papers. Rather to add to his confusion, the ex-waiter gave corroboration of the theory! In his "story" it came out that he was a man of singular egoism, and had often before been tempted to voice his indignation at the servility of his calling when chance set him serving at the table of some person he disliked on sight. He admitted quite frankly that what he had said to the corpulent luncher, soon after the administration of the subtle drug, had indeed been no more than what he had longed to say on many previous occasions. He had behaved, in fact, as he would have behaved had he been free to say what he thought.

It was shortly after this disclosure that Mr. Hillett accepted the Chiltern Hundreds "on the grounds of failing health."

As can readily be imagined, there was no one in the metropolis more interested in this strange case than I was. My intimate association with Dr. Sun stood me now in good stead, and while the matter was still vividly before the reading-public's eye, I was set to write my second series of articles descriptive of my enforced collaboration, from time to time, with that misguided genius who believed himself to be "called" to mend the broken human soul. My articles brought me immediately a certain fame—to make no mention of the very

welcome special remuneration I received for them—but I must say that had I had any idea what their ultimate outcome would be, I should most certainly have refused to write them!

I had better relate the story, incident by incident, as it happened.

I had a habit, on Tuesday nights, of getting into a dinner-jacket and strolling towards some theatre or concert-hall in the West End. I invariably neglected to book a seat in advance, for the reason that I often met some Fleet Street acquaintance on the way through theatre-land, and it was not seldom that he had a more attractive way of spending the evening to suggest. But when I found myself outside the booking-office without so having encumbered myself, it was my custom to spend ten to fifteen shillings on a stall. I had done it for years. Then, one night, I was stopped, right at the top of Shaftesbury Avenue, by a shabby little man who laid a thin, obviously unwashed hand on the sleeve of my jacket!

“Spare us a bob, guvner!” he pleaded. “A bob ud git me a feed and a bed fer the noight, guvner!”

Angrily I shook him off. I resented his touching me, and his cringing tone had certainly not made me love him any the more. The fact that his face showed wan and haggard under the glare of the electric light weighed nothing with me in his favour—after his presumption. In a moment I had left him standing disconsolate on the wet pavement, gazing resentfully after me. In two minutes I had forgotten all about him.

About a week later I was surprised to be accosted by the same individual at about the same place. Again the whine:

“What abaht a bob, guvner? I ain’t ’ad nothink to eat since yesterd’y! Strewth, I ain’t, guvner!”

“Take your paw off my sleeve, confound you!” I cried, exasperated. “Get out of my way! I can’t feed every beggar in London! I’m not a millionaire! I work damn hard for what *I* get!”

This time I did not forget the fellow quite so easily. The vision of his dirty, drawn face persisted before my mind even after the curtain had been raised. I determined irritably that the next time he troubled me I would give him in charge of the nearest constable ; I could not allow myself to be plagued by a vagrant of the streets ! It was not, I reflected, that I minded so much the thought of parting with a shilling. I might well do that without inconvenience to myself. But it would be breaking a rule. I never gave to charity. I had the suspicion that giving money to such persons only served to encourage them in a life of idleness and dissipation. Besides, there were many thousands of men in London who could well afford to do that sort of thing—and did not. Why then should I ?

A third time I was stopped.

I turned on the man angrily and told him that if he did not immediately “ clear off ” I would summon a policeman. (There was a fat, healthy specimen standing on the corner where the Avenue merges into Oxford Street.) To my astonishment the shabby little man stood fast.

“ You could easy spare a bob, guvner,” he whined. “ If you was to sit in the circle, sir, instead o’ them front horchestra-stalls, you’d save more’n a bob ! Now wouldn’t you ? ”

I suppose my surprise momentarily made me forget my annoyance.

“ How the devil do you know I sit in the stalls ? ” I demanded.

The shabby individual smiled.

“ Ah ! ” he said, ambiguously.

“ If you want a shilling,” I muttered, “ you’d better answer me ! ”

His reply made me stare the harder.

“ I don’t want a shillin’, sir, thank yer ! ” he murmured. “ Not now, I don’t ! It’s a bit too late now, Mr. Bellairs ! I done my job—now ! Ere ! ’Ere’s yer letter. Good night, guvner ! ”

He had thrust a grimy-looking envelope into my hand, turned, and was moving along the pavement.

"I say!" I called. "Here!"—but he did not turn, and I thought it too undignified to chase him. In a moment he had rounded the corner, under the very nose of the fat policeman, and was out of sight. Moving closer to a lamp-light I read the address on the envelope in my hand.

"—Bellairs, Esq."—just that.

I tore it open.

Inside was an ordinary invitation-card. With growing bewilderment, I read :

"Professor Summerlee requests the pleasure of Mr. Bellairs' company at a dance to be held at 'Andries House,' on Tuesday, 7th. Dancing will begin at ten o'clock."

I stood stock-still, staring at the thing!

I knew Summerlee by repute—as who did not—for the American Professor of Psychology who had lately taken up his residence in London and quickly established his popularity—and surprised more staid scientists—by his lavish and unprofessorial entertaining! But I had never met the man!

Then I began to form conclusions. Summerlee must have read my recent articles about "Dr. Sun" and been thereby made desirous of meeting me personally. (The thing very often happened.) But why this extraordinary method of delivering the invitation?

I stood debating the thing over in my mind, and then I thought I saw a glimmer of a reason for the shabby little man, and the mystery that surrounded the delivery of the envelope. Summerlee was well known for the eccentricity of his psychological investigations. Could this not have been in the nature of a test—for me? I smiled. I could picture the bearded Professor greeting me with a long homily on my parsimony and my lack of

a spirit of charity! That was it, I had no doubt! How very amusing!

I glanced again at the date on the card. "7th." Why, to-day—this—was the seventh! The suggestion was out of the question. "Andries House" was away and beyond Wimbledon. I could not be bothered to return to my flat, change into tails and then waste a lot of money on a taxi. I was about to thrust the card into my pocket, when I idly turned it over. There was writing on the back of it!

"I particularly desire to meet so talented a journalist as yourself. Please come. You will find a maroon-coloured car at the top of Shaftesbury Avenue. The man has been engaged to wait for you and bring you to 'Andries House.' If you are not in evening dress please do not trouble to change.

SUMMERLEE."

I looked across the street. There, sure enough, close to the far pavement, stood a maroon-coloured limousine! Then, before I could decide, and as if circumstances conspired to persuade me to go, the fat policeman approached from his corner.

"That your car, sir?" he enquired.

"Er—yes, in a way," I answered.

"Well, it can't hang about here any longer, sir," he resumed. "You'll have to find a proper parking-place."

"Oh, right," I said—and, still thinking, I moved towards the car. The chauffeur saw me approach and opened the door for me. I stepped in, making up my mind only a second before. We moved off.

I need not describe how we got to "Andries House," a great, old-fashioned mansion set at the end of a dark drive. I was at once shown into the Professor's study and in a little while he entered from the ballroom to welcome me. I recognised him at once from certain photographs of himself in the illustrated newspapers—

a slight, small man with a grey, goatee beard. He came across the room—hand outstretched.

“Mr. Bell-airs?” he began with a very pleasant drawl. “I’m vurry pleased to make your acquaintance, sirr!”

I said “How d’you do,” and shook his hand. Then, as though I had touched a live high-tension cable, I released it, recoiled, and gaped at him! His little colourless eyes twinkled!

“Well, Bunny?” he murmured, without a trace of accent. “So you recognise me!”

Professor Summerlee was—Dr. Sun!

CHAPTER XXX

REMOVE the beard, allow the eyebrows to grow where they had been carefully shaved to give the impression of being level, and you had—the half-Chinaman, the “Doctor of Souls”!

“Sun!” I gasped.

“Sit down,” he invited, indicating an arm-chair. “Welcome! I haven’t seen you since we had that little experiment in ‘values’—in north-west Africa! I’m charmed to meet you again, Bunny!”

He stood quietly pointing at a chair. My inclination was anything but to stay, now that I had made the alarming discovery that the man who had so well ingratiated himself with smarter London in the last month or two, was none other than that mad mystic, Dr. Sun! But I felt as certain as I had ever been about anything, that there was more in his quiet, mild gesture than a mere polite invitation! I knew the man too well! It was hardly likely that he would allow me to depart, now that I had stumbled upon the knowledge of his real identity! I sank into the chair, trembling in every limb.

Curiously, this man, who held my happiness in the hollow of his hand—as it were—was the last man I wanted to meet. The sheer horror of some of his “experiments” in which I had found myself involved, filled me with a dread that far outweighed my desire to meet again that lovely woman I had known in the House of the Brother of the Seven Worlds—in distant China. (And my longing to meet again “My Lady of Clouds” was as real as only a lover’s longing can be!) Certain of Sun’s “tests” had left me enervated, unnerved, for weeks afterwards. The man had assumed with me the proportions of some nightmare monster. I longed sometimes to hear that he had disappeared for good, perhaps to his native China—his home amid the snows on the Borderland of Heaven. Sometimes, as in the period immediately preceding the affair of Mr. Hillett and this startling renewal of our acquaintance, I had been tempted to hope that he *had* betaken himself out of my life. And now . . . Here he was, facing me; his quiet, ready smile playing about his thin, restless lips!

“You’re not very communicative, Bunny!” he observed, taking a seat opposite mine, and inclining his small head slightly to one side.

“What do you want with me?” I demanded, a trifle hoarsely.

“Surely the invitation-card must have told you?” he remarked with an air of playfulness.

From some adjoining wing of the building I could hear the faint strains of an orchestra. In my new terror I had altogether forgotten about “Professor Summerlee’s” dance!

“You didn’t send for me in order to give me the pleasure of dancing!” I protested. “You’ve often told me I’m a fool, Sun—but I’m not so big a fool as all that!”

“I observe, Bunny, that you appear to be improving!” he commented dryly. Then the mocking lights in his eyes died down and he looked suddenly serious. “You

are right, my friend," he said, "I did not send for you for the purpose of encouraging you to cavort senselessly about a slippery floor with someone else's wife in your arms! I am afraid my morals are perhaps a little too old-fashioned—and stringent! Besides, I have a more serious end in view. But, if you recollect, Bunny, you came of your own choice."

"Not at all!" I protested. "I didn't know I was to be welcomed by—you!"

"That is fairly obvious!" he rejoined, again with that irritating dryness in his tone. "I must apologise for what we may call the 'unexpectedness' of your welcome. But you see, Bunny, it has lately become necessary for me to have more than one retreat. The police become increasingly troublesome! Besides, it rather suits my immediate purpose to pretend to social aspirations, and to organise the entertainments and dances that so astonish you. It is among these persons that I seek patients for my next experiment. Your coming, as you have done, delights me. You are welcome to my healing. . . ."

"Your healing!" I burst out, seized with an intensification of horror. "But I don't require your 'healing!' For God's sake, Sun! . . ."

I had made to rise out of my chair, but he signed me back with a wave of a slender, persuasive hand. I knew full well that he could send me to sleep in an instant, and at any moment he wanted to, and I have little doubt that this dread knowledge urged me to take things more calmly and to try to reason with him. Before I could resume, however, he was speaking.

"You will forgive me," he murmured, "but you *do* require my healing. I gave you three chances, Bunny—and you failed in all of them."

"You mean—that beggar?" I gasped.

He nodded.

"But, dammit, I'm not a capitalist!" I cried. "The chap may have been in need of a meal, but

you can't expect me to feed all the hungry in London!"

Curiously, I recollected how I had anticipated this argument with "Professor Summerlee." I cursed myself roundly for never suspecting that the "test" might well have something to do with that master of the psychological test—Dr. Sun. The invitation-card had put that reasoning out of my mind, as, doubtless, it had been calculated to do! I could not associate the Doctor of Souls with anything so utterly incongruous and foreign to his personality as—a dance!

"You are selfish," he resumed quietly now. "In the last three months, Bunny, I have been instituting a thorough and exhaustive investigation into the causes of selfishness—and the cure. To a certain extent selfishness is inherent in the mental constitution of the average human being, but this is not to say that human beings could not be improved." Sun was speaking now in the manner of a lecturer addressing his class; halting as he sought words to convey his thought to one infinitely less gifted—intellectually—than he himself was. "I have lately made several minor experiments," he resumed. "You may, perhaps, have heard of the case. . . ."

"Hillett?" I interrupted, "the M.P.?"

"Of Hillett," Sun corroborated. "His was the first case to attract public attention. You may have observed, Bunny, how that man, once he had been influenced to perfect frankness, naïvely admitted his selfishness. He advocated war, not because war was necessary—though it may be that he believed it was—but principally because the declaration of war would have brought him into a certain flattering prominence. He is regarded, I have no doubt, by the gentlemen in booted and spurred magnificence who prance about your countryside on review-days, as an excellent statesman. But again, mark, Bunny, for purely selfish reasons. Selfishness, the child of Ignorance, which is the curse of humanity, pervades

to a certain extent everybody and everything. My experiment concerns its cure."

By this time, incongruous as it may seem, my interest in Sun's harangue had far outweighed my fear.

"But how did you make Hillett say what he did?" I asked, curiously.

"There are several methods of removing a man's self-control," the scientist explained. "The one I employed in Hillett's case was a very well known drug," Sun smiled as he saw me stare. "Could anything have been simpler?" he continued. "It is a drug somewhat similar in its effect to alcohol. You are aware, of course, that a man under the influence of whisky is liable to be indiscreet—to babble—to forget to exercise his customary restraint in ordinary conversation. But alcohol hardly suffices for my purpose. With spirits, oblivion occurs in the subject just *before* that stage of utter mental ingenuousness is reached. Besides, alcohol is also a stimulant. As it takes effect a man's conversation will become fantastic, and then degenerate into drivel. So, for the purpose of the test, alcohol is practically useless. But the drug, Bunny, happens to possess all the virtues of whisky—I mean the real virtues—without any of its ills. The drug simply and effectively removes a man's control of himself. He becomes for the time being an entity enwrapped in himself; for him other people exist only vaguely and are of no consequence at all. Thus, if the spirit move him to talk, he will say precisely what comes into his head—as we say. If he be asked a question, he will answer what he really thinks—and without respect for persons."

Sun paused.

"I have brought you here to-night," he resumed, leaning forward, encouraged by my very obvious interest, "in order that you may have an opportunity of observing the effect of the drug on certain of my guests."

That brought me back to earth again!

"You mean you're going to drug others?" I demanded,

staring at him wide-eyed. In those mild, colourless eyes of his, so unexpected in a man to whom most of the mysteries of the human mind are as clearly defined as the workings of a simple addition sum, I read now nothing but candour and sanity.

“Hardly anything quite so sinister as you make it sound!” he answered with a laugh. “None of the subjects will be aware that they have been drugged, since the effect will almost immediately be dissipated, and I have so arranged matters that they will not even suspect the drug’s presence. In a little alcove, Bunny, just off the dancing floor—where, by the way, I shall shortly be required to put in another appearance, or his guests will conclude that Professor Summerlee is a singularly ill-mannered host!—in that little alcove I have installed a spray to keep the atmosphere sufficiently permeated with the drug to affect whoever may chance to enter between the dances. (The spray is concealed behind a rose-bowl.) The result will not be immediately noticeable, I had better warn you, for of course this drug, like any other, takes time to work its effect. But very soon after the subjects’ entrance you will become aware of a subtle change in their manner of conversation. . . .”

“But how are we to hear?” I interrupted. “Do you mean us to hide somewhere?”

For answer Sun slowly rose and crossed the carpeted floor to a table that stood at one end of the room. The apartment had various little appliances and mechanisms, here and there, indicative that it served sometimes as a laboratory as well as “the Professor’s” study. There he picked up two ordinary pairs of head-telephones, connected to a long lead that disappeared under the table towards the wall.

“I have installed a small microphone in the alcove,” he explained. “All we have to do is to listen.”

He returned, handed me a pair of ’phones, and by a gesture invited me to put them on. Feeling curiously guilty, but quite unable to resist the temptation, I put

them on. He clamped the other pair about his head and resumed his seat. Almost at once I began to hear sounds in the 'phones : the noise of the jazz band in the ballroom, the shuffle of the dancers' feet. Then I heard the unmistakable sounds of approaching footsteps ; and then a voice, a man's voice, loud and clear.

"My dear Galloway," I heard, "I don't think there's been an investment to equal 'Blauwfontein Centrals in the last twenty years!"

"Really!" came the reply, in a milder, altogether less imposing voice.

"If everybody in the city knew as much as I do about 'Blauwfontein,'" the first voice resumed, "there wouldn't be a share left on the prospectus by eleven o'clock to-morrow morning! I assure you there wouldn't."

It was astonishing to me what a vivid impression I immediately formed of the speaker. I had the picture of a large, round, smug-looking man with diamond rings on his fingers and a fat cigar between his lips. How accurate I was I was later to discover.

"Queer smell in here--d'you notice?" voice number two observed.

"Those flowers, I should think," the first speaker conjectured. I heard him cross the room—obviously to smell the flowers. In the chair opposite mine the Doctor of Souls chuckled ghoulishly. Almost immediately the reason for his delight became apparent.

"Yes," number one resumed, "it's these flowers, next to the roses here. But as I was saying, Galloway, about 'Blauwfonteins.' Of course you know I'm being given ten per cent. on anything I can get rid of for the company. I don't suppose we'll ever sell all. The bust-up's bound to come long before that. But I count on getting rid of quite a parcel before the police start their investigations and we have to wind up. . . ."

"What!" I heard voice number two ejaculate incredulously. "Jardine! Do you know what you're saying?"

"Plenty of fools knocking about!" said Jardine, contemptuously.

I stared at Sun. He was quizzically watching my face.

"Did you notice the change?" he enquired.

"Yes!" I cried. "But how extraordinary!"

"Jardine!" Sun murmured. "He's a notorious bad hat. Company promoter, undischarged bankrupt—and so forth. And that, Bunny, is the effect of a very, very mild mixture of the drug!"

I just gasped!

CHAPTER XXXI

JARDINE and Galloway had finished their little *tête-à-tête*—as astounding a conversation as I had ever heard—and Sun and I were left again to the raucous music of the dance-band and the shif-shif of the shoes. My host leaned towards me.

"Of course," he said, "the potency of the drug, in the case of Hillett and that Czecho-Slovak, was considerably stronger. That is where I alone am able to make use of its properties; I am not aware that anyone else knows how to tone it down or to strengthen it." His eyes twinkled proudly. "I could strengthen it so as to protract its influence to close on a year, Bunny, without in the least injuring the patient. There you have the reason why medical science has for so long ignored the drug's possibilities. In its normal, natural strength, a grain of the substance, placed on a fingernail and smelt, just once, is sufficient to affect a man for an hour. And . . . But I think I hear someone else approaching our alcove. Listen!"

He was right, and I had no need to be bidden to listen, for a most unholy curiosity held me in thrall. I will not describe the next three or four parties we listened to, for, entertaining as they were, they have little to do with

my story. That night was a night of revelations indeed! I pass over, then, until, after a most amusing interim, we heard a man's voice, faint at first and then becoming louder, as he and his partner approached the alcove.

"Ah, here's a nice cosy corner!" said the man. "Shall we take this, Mrs. Croftash?"

I glanced enquiringly at Sun. The name "Mrs. Croftash," as everybody knows, is the latest private acquisition of a celebrated leading lady of revue. Could this possibly be that engaging siren of the footlights? Sun's nod informed me that it was she.

"Let's, Teddy!"

It was a low, pleasant voice, but I fancied, as I had often before fancied, in theatres, that its every intonation was meticulously studied for effect.

"And now, Teddy," the woman resumed, "what is it that you want to talk to me about? You're not going to propose to me again, are you? Because if you are I'll have to call my husband! He's only had me four months, you know, and he's simply frightfully jealous of me still—the dear silly! Funny scent in here? Do you notice?"

Teddy sniffed impolitely. His next words were a rude enlightenment. The drug had worked swiftly!

"I wish you could see yourself!" he jeered. "Your eyes half closed; asking to be made love to, and looking like an indisposed owl! Oh, well, I suppose it must be done, if I'm to get anything out of you. And you're not so bad-looking—when one remembers your age. Do you want to be kissed?"

The woman's rejoinder was no less nauseating!

"Yes, I suppose I was thinking that way!"

The voice was curiously flat and insipid now, as if utterly unstudied. Obviously the drug had affected her almost as soon as the man.

"I had meant you to wait until just before we went back to the ballroom, you know!" she laughed. It was a dry, ugly noise, more accurately to be described as

a "guffaw." "We must have our little 'curtain' in the right place, you know, Teddy! As to my looks: did you see that photograph of me in this week's *Gossip*? It's fifteen years old, of course! Thank God for a credulous public! And now, Teddy, what is it you want?"

"I want to know whether you'll attend one of my howling slum-kid bun-worries again, old dear. As the Secretary of the Society I have to do that sort of thing. I mean it's my living."

"Um. I know. Oh, I suppose so. Yes. I'll turn up. I hate the fag of doing it, but it's so awfully good for my 'theatre'. Ugh! Their grubby little paws all over me, I suppose—like last time!"

"I know," the man—or youth—sympathised. "It is pretty filthy! But, you, see it means rather a lot to me. I mean you know perfectly well that I'm not Teddy Barrington at all really. All this 'money' business is pure bunkum. My mater keeps a small shop in the Mile End Road. Only I rather dislike work of any sort. And this secretarial work is about all that keeps the bally wolf from the door!"

I listened no more. Pulling the head-'phones from my ears I turned in utter disgust to Sun.

"You seem to have collected a precious party of humanity at your ball!" I sneered. "These are not ordinary people! They're enough to sicken a decent-minded man! God! Imagine living in a world peopled with individuals like those we've just heard!"

The Doctor of Souls sat still, smiling inscrutably. Then he slowly removed his head-'phones. He threw them aside, sighed and rose.

"Let's forget about them, Bunny!" he advised in a normal, sympathetic voice. "Light your pipe, and let's talk over old times instead. My guests can wait."

Relieved to find that he evidently shared something of my disgust, I smiled back at him, my former dreads

entirely forgotten. I thrust my hand into my pocket. He stayed me.

“ I had some cigars given me,” he said. “ Try one of them, will you ? ”

He moved towards that same table and returned shortly with a box of cigars. Nothing loath, I chose one. I hoped to get the taste of those people out of my mouth !

“ Peculiar smell they have ! ” I remarked, putting the tip to my lips to indulge a vulgar weakness I have for biting off the ends of my cigars instead of cutting them. Then I started !

I suppose it was the phrase I used that made me recollect with such urgency all we had just heard over the head-phones, and what had made that hearing possible. Whatever it may have been, it caused me suddenly to fling that cigar far across the room, so that it landed with a loud thwack against the wall, cracked and fell to the floor ! In that same instant I was on my feet—but it was too late ! A curious numb sensation seemed to be stealing over my brain. Bemusedly I contemplated some brown substance that had transferred itself from the cigar to my finger-tips ! I became aware that the peculiar smell I had noticed originated from that matter.

“ Wipe your fingers on the carpet ! ” Sun advised.

I leisurely did as I was bidden.

“ Now, Bunny,” he resumed, “ let us revert to the subject of your beggar. Why would you not comply with his request to give him a shilling for a bed ? ”

“ Why should I give him a shilling ? ” I protested.

“ A shilling would have paid for a drink—for me. A shilling would buy me all sorts of pleasant things ! ”

“ He was hungry ! ” Sun reminded.

“ I know,” I answered tonelessly. “ But I have learnt to close my eyes and ears to that sort of thing. You can’t possibly shoulder everybody’s worries. You can’t possibly feed and clothe the whole destitute world. So

why concern yourself ? I don't—haven't done for years. It's the only way."

"You object on principle, do you not ?" the question came, insidiously.

"No!" I said, surprised. "Nothing of the sort. That is merely a camouflage for my conscience. That's how I console myself. No, quite frankly, I'm too greedy to give away shillings. I have too much thought for my own comfort. Only, of course, you are the first person I've ever admitted it to. I can't tell you why, I'm sure. But you are."

Sun was softly laughing.

"There's another little point, Bunny," he continued. "In your recent series of articles in which I had the honour to figure frequently, what, may I ask, was your main object in adopting the peculiar style in which the series is written ?"

"Why not ?" I replied. "My chief object, in employing that style, was a desire to tell the public, not so much about you, but about myself, Bellairs, the journalist. You see . . ."

"I see," Sun interrupted. "It was fairly obvious, Bunny." His eyes took on a far-away look. "Self!" he murmured. "Self! Self! And again, Self! There is no god but God—and his name is Self! Everybody else is to pay him homage! Every man for himself, and if there is anything over—well—then it may go to somebody else, and be called 'love' or 'charity' or what not! You declare yourself to be disgusted with the persons I have shown to you to-night, naked, as they really are. My good, ignorant Bunny, if you could but look into your own soul!"

I suppose it must have been in the middle of this little homily that the effect of the potent drug began to clear from my brain. Anyway, I seemed to waken—I had no recollection of what I had been saying—and there before me I saw that madman, the Doctor of Souls! I suffered the shock, as it were, all over again! Summerlee,

the American professor—Sun, the Doctor of Souls! The thin, ever-moving lips; the bright lights that danced now like flames in those colourless eyes—these brought me with overwhelming intensity recollections of the ghastliness of previous “experiments”! I suddenly realised to the full the danger in which I stood!

Not pausing to think further, I turned with a cry and dashed towards the door! Sun read my intention, and before I actually moved his hand went up before my eyes, but for the first time in all my acquaintance with the man his attempt to hypnotise me was unsuccessful! I conclude that the drug, lingering still in the deeper crevices of my brain, must have been accountable.

Next instant I had flung open the door, dashed out into the passage, and in a moment I was tearing down the dark drive as though all the fiends of hell were after me! It was at the end of the drive that something darted out from the shrubbery—a little, impish figure! Before I could stop, or swerve, it had launched itself through the air and landed about my neck, clawing at me like a monkey! The impact sent me down like a ninepin!

When I next became aware of things I was on the flat of my back. Seated on my chest, his tiny, vice-like hands fastened about my throat, was that goblin monstrosity of a Chinese manservant!

“Ah!” croaked Wan-long, grinning down at me. “Master say no let Mr. Bell-bell lun away! I catchee him! Master velly glad! Ah!”

As I have elsewhere explained, Wan-long, though standing little more than four feet from the ground, had, beneath the Oriental clothes he always wore, the muscles of a veritable Hercules! Once he had put his arms about me, I was like a small child! So it was now; I wriggled and kicked and punched at him, but all to no effect! He sat stolidly goblin-like until I had worn myself out. Then he rolled me over as he might have a sack of flour, put a twist on one of my arms—behind my back—lugged

me to my feet, and proceeded to frog-march me most ignominiously towards the house !

Each time I struggled—and I did, at first, frequently—he gave my arm a sharp little twist that made me bite my lip to stop myself from crying out aloud. I soon gave it up.

“ Let me go, damn you ! ” I muttered.

“ Plomise no lun away ? ” he enquired politely in his curious pidgin-English.

“ Yes, ” I gasped.

“ Plomise go stlaight back and see Master ? ”

“ Yes, confound you ! ” I cried.

He slightly relaxed the twist, and, when we were come to within a few yards of the mansion, released me altogether and disappeared below a high hedge that fringed the lawn.

I stood for a moment unrestricted, desperately thinking. Came a whispered hiss from behind the hedge :

“ Please not forget, you plomise ! ”

Realising that any attempt at making a dash for it now must surely end as had my previous one, and being thus reminded that I had given my word, I saw nothing for it but to enter the house again by the side door through which I had so precipitately fled. In a moment I stood in the passage, wondering what to do next. Again I recollected that I had given my word to go “ stlaight back and see Master. ” Breaking one’s word to an Englishman was bad enough, but breaking one’s word to a Chink was infinitely worse, I decided. I walked up to the study door and tapped on its surface.

“ Come in, ” a well-known voice invited, and I entered, still panting a little from my exertions.

“ Ah ! ” said Sun, smiling at me from the centre of the carpet. “ I hope you enjoyed your little stroll in the moonlight, Bunny. I myself seized the opportunity to show myself in the ballroom for a minute or two. It is so rude, leaving my guests to look after themselves. But sit down, and let us resume our discussion where we left off. ”

"Look here, Sun!" I muttered, facing him and looking him straight in the eyes. "Will you kindly let me go, and give that infernal heathen dwarf instructions not to interfere with me again! I give you my word I will not communicate with the police. I'll do nothing. Only let me go!"

He affected dismay.

"My dear Bunny!" he cried. "Anybody hearing you talk would think I was about to torture you! On the contrary, I wish to help you. I wish to demonstrate to you a certain means of ridding yourself of selfishness."

"I know I'm selfish!" I admitted. "I can't help it! I suppose it's my nature. . . ."

"Oh, no!" he contradicted. "You cannot incriminate Nature quite so easily! Your selfishness is almost entirely the result of your ignorance! That ignorance, Bunny, I shall endeavour to enlighten. By reducing you—and certain others who need my attention—to circumstances wherein everything you do will perforce be done not only for yourself but for the common good, you will learn the meaning of unselfishness. The beneficial effect will follow."

As I stood staring at the scientist there came to me again, as it had often before come, the conviction that his studies had sent my old college-fellow mad! Surely he must be insane to talk as he did—as mad as any lunatic in an asylum! I resolved then, I think, that if I managed to free myself from this latest embarrassment and escape from the grounds, my first step would be to summon the police and give Sun in charge!

He broke off in the middle of his harangue to smile at me and acquaint me that he had read my thoughts as if I had spoken them aloud!

"That is only natural, Bunny!" he remarked.

"What is?" I asked.

"That you should think me mad," he resumed, dryly. I started!

"You must have observed," he continued, "that when

children are confronted with something they do not understand, they invariably begin their investigations by *laughing* at it. Fools do the same thing, Bunny—for what are fools but grown-up children? In much the same way, it is only to be expected that a man of poor intellect, when introduced to a thinker, will in defence of his own self-respect presume the thinker to be mad! You say to yourself about me: 'He is mad!' But you say that, not because you have evidence that I am insane, but merely because that same allegation, transposed in your own mind, would run: 'I, Bunny Bellairs, am a clever fellow! I cannot understand this man's reasoning. Therefore he is mad; because I am still and always a clever fellow!'

"Nothing of the sort!" I cried indignantly—the more so because it happened to be true! "I have sufficient evidence that you are mad! The Law thinks so, too! Your heartless 'experiments' could not be evolved in the brain of a normal man. . . ."

Sun frowned.

"You mean," he said curtly, "that *your* brain is incapable of evolving them!"

"Yes!" I agreed heartily. "And so is the brain of any normal human being!"

I broke off, shaking a little at my temerity, for well I knew that this man, with all his mastery of occult arts, could do with me what he pleased. The recollection was hardly reassuring. But I went on, heedless of the consequences, suddenly reckless.

"I warn you!" I cried. "Once I am free I will do what I can to bring you to justice! I do not believe that you know you are not normal. But mad or sane, you have nothing whatever to do with me!"

He held out a hand in a mild gesture of protest. But I knew it to be more than that. For his eyes glittered like live coals and he fixed his gaze on mine. Summoning courage I know not from where, I fought!

"I will not allow you to influence me!" I said to

myself, over and over again. "I will not allow you to hypnotise me!"

For the second time in all the while I had known the man, he failed. His hand dropped before him and I thought I saw a look of genuine alarm creep into his eyes. Inside my body I felt my heart surge with the triumph of my victory. Sun, the Doctor of Souls, had failed to hypnotise me!

"The effect of the drug lingers!" he murmured. He seemed unusually thoughtful. For an instant I contemplated making another "bolt" for it, but the thought of Wan-long lurking near that hedge in the moonlight stayed me.

"There is a telephone at the other end of the passage," Sun informed me tonelessly.

"Yes, with the wire disconnected!" I sneered.

"I assure you that the wire is not disconnected," he said. He paused. "I shall not require you until about midnight," he resumed. "Let me entreat you to do nothing rash, Bunny. Wan-long may not be quite so gentle a second time. Besides, I can assure you that you will not be detained overlong. You must excuse me now."

He bowed, a quaint, elaborate, mock-deference that angered me not a little, and then he had passed out through another door and closed it behind him.

My first impulse, and I suppose a very natural one, was to rush out into the passage through which I had so recklessly fled a few minutes ago and discover the telephone of which I had been informed. Then, controlling my triumph as best I could—for it still lingered very pleasantly with me, spurring me to other ventures—I flung myself into a chair and sat rapidly thinking.

I knew the man too well to imagine that, if he really desired my "assistance" in this newest of his infernal "experiments," he would leave so obvious a loophole for my escape—and inform me of it! There was a catch in that somewhere, I felt sure! What should I

do instead? It was useless contemplating escape through the side door. Wan-long was a very real barrier! It occurred to me to rush into the ballroom and shout aloud to the assembled dancers that Professor Summerlee was Dr. Sun. I laughed the notion aside. Who would believe me?

And then it came to me that I might quite easily make my way along the passage, slip out of the building through some window or other door—and elude Wan-long! The thought had hardly flashed through my brain when I jumped to my feet, walked to the door and cautiously opened it. That was the plan!

The well-lighted passage was deserted, the outer door now closed, and there, fixed to the wall at the end of the corridor, was the telephone! It certainly looked a most orthodox specimen! As I cautiously approached it, I was of two minds whether to carry out the plan I had just formed or to try the telephone. I had still not decided which, and had got to within about four feet of the thing, I should estimate, when to my horror the floor seemed to collapse beneath my feet, and I felt myself falling!

I let out a yell of terror and clawed at the air about me as I descended—into blackness and God knew what else! It was like that dream of falling over the face of a precipice, only infinitely worse! Then, before I could think or indeed realise clearly just what had happened, I landed with a resounding thump on some soft resilient matter that rocked gently under the impact!

When I got back my breath I extended a tentative hand into the darkness about me. It came into contact with something warm and—alive!

I shrieked again!

CHAPTER XXXII

“HALLO!” said a human voice.
The thing I had touched was a man!
“Who are you?” I cried, not a little relieved. “Where are we?”

“God knows!” came the reply. “I’ve been yelling myself hoarse for the last half-hour—trying to find that out! It seems to be some sort of pit. The floor gave way! You must have fallen through the same hole! I was just leaving when one of the servants came with a message that I was wanted on the ’phone. I came along and fell down here! My name’s Jardine. Who are you?”

“Mine’s Bellairs,” I told him. I had of course already recognised the man from his voice as being that opulent individual I had heard converse with Galloway in the alcove. Strangely I wondered even then whether the reality would be anything like my mental picture of the fellow—gross, piggish. I had no means of ascertaining for the moment—nor was my curiosity very earnestly aroused. I was far too concerned over other things!

“Bellairs?” he mused. “Have I met you?”

“Not that I am aware of,” I said.

“But I wonder what all this means,” he resumed. “I had a business appointment for ten-thirty! I was just going home. I’d put my coat on—and all!”

It dawned on me suddenly. Idiot that I had been. Sun had left me purposely so that I should go exploring the house and fall into this trap. Undoubtedly he had made arrangements to detain Jardine in the same way! The ’phone call had been mythical!

“God!” I muttered. “I see everything!”

“Well I can’t say I do!” Jardine rejoined dryly. “Perhaps you’ll let me into the secret. If Summerlee calls this a joke . . .”

“It’s no joke!” I interrupted. “You had declared

your intention of going, and Sun didn't want you to go. That's what it amounts to!"

"Sun?" he echoed blankly.

"Dr. Sun," I repeated. "'Professor Summerlee' is really Dr. Sun—the mad scientist!"

"Are you joking?" came the reply, in a hushed voice.

"I was never more serious!" I assured him. "I know him too well to have made any mistake about that! What's troubling me is what he intends doing with us!"

"But surely you're on the wrong track!" the company promoter protested. "He's *not* Dr. Sun, he's Summerlee! He gave me a cheque—'J. F. Summerlee'—for some of those 'Blauwfonteins' everybody's after. Heard of them? London's just snapping them up like wildfire! They're the best thing I've struck in twenty . . ."

"Yes," I interrupted sarcastically. "They'll do very well, I've no doubt—until the whole show busts-up and you clear out with your ten per cent! That is unless the police start their investigations and make you wind up earlier!"

I heard him gasp.

"I say!" he whispered. "Who *are* you?"

But I ignored him. Instead, I felt for, produced and struck a match. The light showed us to be in the bottom of a small, thickly-padded pit, about the size of a lift-shaft. In front of me was the outline of a steel door! But the most amazing thing the flickering light disclosed had nothing at all to do with Sun's little trap. It was the man Jardine!

I have already stated what I expected to see. The actuality was a small, meek-looking individual with the face of an evangelical curate! I was so astonished that I allowed the end of the match to burn my finger-tips! So much for impressions formed on the strength of hearing a voice over the telephone!

"Try the door!" he suggested.

I scrambled over the thick, springy padding and

tried the handle. The result was no more than I had expected. It would not move.

“What’s the meaning of it all?” Jardine enquired, after I had informed him that the door was locked.

“The meaning, I think,” I told him, “is that you and I—and possibly some other persons—are to be used by the Doctor of Souls as subjects in his next ‘experiment!’”

He seemed still inclined to be a little incredulous.

“But I thought the Doctor of Souls was a sort of myth!” he rejoined. “You mean he really exists?”

I laughed. I suddenly saw the futility of trying to convince a man that a friend of his was that eccentric scientist whose “tests” from time to time startled the whole of the civilised world. The darkness made it even more difficult, so I abandoned the idea. Instead:

“I wonder why he’s gone to the trouble of constructing this padded cell?” I said. “It’s not a bit like Sun, really. His methods are usually those of sheer will-force.”

“He was telling me,” Jardine rejoined, “that before he took this place over it was in use as a private lunatic asylum. Perhaps this was one of the special cells.”

“Oh,” I said thoughtfully. The information accounted to me for much.

It must have been after midnight that Jardine learnt that the Doctor of Souls indeed existed, if he still had any doubt. We had been sitting in silence for some time when we heard footsteps approaching our cell from behind the steel door, and a moment later a thin line of light gave us to hope that it was about to be opened. Breathlessly we waited. We heard the key being turned in the lock. The door swung slowly open, letting in a flood of light that momentarily dazzled us.

When my eyes grew accustomed to the strong light I became aware that Sun, clad once again in his celestial garments, peered at us from the doorway.

“Here, Professor!” cried Jardine, with a great show of indignation. “If this is a joke, I must say I consider

it in pretty bad taste! I had an important appointment for half-past ten. . . .”

Jardine broke off, and I suddenly knew why.

Standing in the doorway, his curious clothes outlined against the light, Sun looked absurdly unreal—a fantastic figure, as he moved a thin, willow-like hand gently to and fro before our eyes. I knew in that instant what he was doing, and why Jardine had so suddenly failed to complete his protest. The padded room began to sway about me! I fought. “You will not influence me!” I told myself, over and over again. But alas! the last vapours of that protective drug must have left my brain. The room swam—and I reeled! My protests died away like echoes in my consciousness.

“You will follow me!”

It was an instruction voiced in that peculiarly low, insistent tone I had heard the Doctor of Souls use, under curiously similar circumstances, once or twice before. He turned and moved along a sort of basement passageway cut under the foundations of the house. We staggered after him, unable to disobey!

What happened in the next hour or two is extremely vague and unreal in my memory. The passage ended in a door, beyond which was a long flight of steps leading out into the moonlit night. Here, by the side of the lawn, we found a motor-car waiting for us, the familiar figure of the Chinese dwarf seated at the wheel. Two sleepy persons, muffled up to the ears in the back seat, were the other “patients,” I had no doubt. As meekly as lambs, demanding no reason, seeming to care or fear nothing, Jardine and I climbed into the vehicle.

As soon as I had donned my overcoat, which was handed to me by the “excellent” Wan-long, and Jardine and I had seated ourselves where we found room beside our somnolent fellow-passengers, Sun climbed in next his repulsive manservant and the car moved off, down the dark drive and out of the grounds.

I had, I suppose, as little interest in the proceedings as

any of the others. It was obvious that we had all been reduced to the same semi-comatose state by Sun's powerful hypnosis. None of us, I feel sure, has any very distinct recollection of the direction we followed. I do, however, remember what happened at the end of the journey.

We had pulled up in a desolate-looking spot close to what appeared to be a disused mine-shaft. There was the familiar lattice-work tower above the pit, though I could see, even in the moonlight, that it was destitute of the usual machinery. Here Sun and Wan-long climbed out of the car and busied themselves in the semi-darkness about us. From certain jolts I felt I gathered them to be jacking up the back wheels! Then we were bidden to stir ourselves. Sleepily we climbed down from the vehicle to the ground—and at once I saw what had been happening.

Suspended from a pulley in the apex of the tower was a small, wickerwork cage. It was not the heavy steel cage of the English mines, but a contrivance similar to that used in certain parts of the East for the disembarkation of passengers from the deck of a liner to a tugboat dancing in the swell below. The end of the rope was wound about a spindle; affixed with clamps to the back axle of the car. Sun and the dwarf had constructed an impromptu lowering apparatus!

The wickerwork cage stood balanced on the very edge of the deserted shaft. The Doctor of Souls, a veritable apparition in the moonlit unreality about us, moved towards it, opened its flimsy door and bade us enter. One by one we moved towards it and jostled ourselves in. It was then that I first closely observed our companions. One was a callow-looking youth in clothes of an exaggerated modern cut. The other was a woman whose face I at once recognised. She was none other than Mrs. Croftash, the well-known revue actress!

Without the least attempt at protest we huddled together in the narrow, flimsy basket. Sun followed us

in, carefully closing and securing the shaky-looking door behind him. We heard the noise of the car-engine being accelerated, there came a sudden tautening of the rope, a tug, and we swung into the air above the pit-shaft! Then we had begun to descend, very slowly, into the mine!

CHAPTER XXXIII

THAT deserted mine, the place of our ordeal, could not have been very deep, for soon the cage came to rest on the bottom of the pit, and Sun began disengaging the door-fastener.

The place was as black as pitch, but shortly after Sun left the basket, the shaft became suddenly light; and I observed him to be carrying a large electric lantern in his hand. We were in the bowels of the earth far down in the damp interior of a mine! On all sides rose the rocky walls of the pit-shaft, slippery, glistening with moisture in the light! Before us yawned the entrance to a gallery, along which ran the rails of a little narrow-gauge tramway, now all overgrown in fungus and half eaten away with rust.

Sun moved along the tunnel and signed us to come on. Like a quartet of somnambulists, we followed.

Stumbling over rotting props, slipping on moss-covered rock-slabs, skinning our elbows and knees against projections from the rough-hewn sides, tripping over fallen boulders—we progressed. We must have walked a considerable distance, now taking some turning to the right, now to the left; then scrambling up some slope, then glissading down the gravel-loose surface of some steep decline. But how far, and in what direction, I have not the remotest idea. It troubled me nothing, thanks to Sun's merciful hypnosis, or I might have felt my alarm mount as I realised that to find our way unaided

out of this subterranean labyrinth would be quite impossible!

At length the gallery suddenly widened and we entered a roomy grotto. The Doctor of Souls moved to some suspiciously new-looking boxes arranged close together on one side, made some connection with wires and immediately the whole cavern became deluged with bright light! We stared about us.

The cave, which seemed to have no other entrance or exit other than that by which we had come, was long and narrow in shape—as large, I should think, as the average underground railway-station. The floor was more or less level, muddy in places, and thickly strewn with boulders and smaller stones. On the side opposite the lighting apparatus, were dumped three or four smaller boxes, also unusually new in appearance, suggesting that they had only recently been placed there. We stared sleepily around the huge vault, and then, as Sun clapped his hands together—we awoke!

The Doctor of Souls stood in the mouth of the gallery through which we had come. With the blackness behind him, the strong light outlining his weird garments and showing up his part-shadowed features, he looked strangely like some forgotten kobold of the mine!

“My friends,” he said, speaking softly and yet very distinctly, “you will suffer no hurt—provided that you are prepared to forget yourselves and work only for the good of your little community of four. The light in here is rich with the health-giving rays of sunshine; in the boxes you will find food ample for your requirements. Air there will be in abundance, entering along a dry watercourse at the far end of your new communal home. I have selected three of you, because those three gave evidence of being the most selfishly inclined of all my guests this evening—and thus most urgently needed my healing. The other, my friend ‘Bunny,’ I have included in order that he may learn the true meaning of unselfish-

ness—before it is too late. The cave, my friends, will show you that meaning!”

By this time the sheer horror of the madman's scheme had become apparent to our newly-resuscitated intelligences, and I—for one—started forward with a yell of terror!

He meant to entomb us!

The mad scientist turned and ran lightly along the gallery, disappearing almost at once from view! I dashed after him, tripped over a rock and fell headlong to the ground! Before I could get to my feet again, there came a blinding flash from the mouth of the gallery, a report that made my eardrums ring—and the roof of the passage fell in, effectively shutting out our one hope of life!

We had realised too late!

I shall make no attempt to recount the bedlam that immediately seized upon us unfortunate “patients.” Mrs. Croftash was at once reduced to hysterics, and it was not until an investigation of the stores disclosed a small supply of a certain mildly-soothing drug, that we were able to restore her—in order that we might keep our own reason! I draw the curtain over that interim during which we alternately raved, screamed, sobbed and cursed, and raise it again when we found ourselves seated, quite exhausted, about the boxes of provisions—our faces drawn with our realisation of the horror of our fate!

“But we can't be murdered—like this!” cried the actress. I observed that she spoke no longer in her “stage” voice, but in that singularly unprepossessing tone I had heard her use only once before—over the telephones.

No one ventured any comment.

“Surely he can't be so fiendish—as to leave us here to die!” she burst out.

“I don't think he'll do that,” I comforted, with considerably more conviction than I felt. “That's not

the way Sun works. I'm more concerned to know what he meant by our 'working for the good of our little community of four.' ”

“What can we do down here ? ” Jardine demanded. “There's no work for us down here that I can see ! ”

“Thank God for that ! ” commented the youth, Teddy Barrington, as I had heard Mrs. Croftash address him. (I was reminded of his remark about his mother keeping a small shop in the Mile End Road—and I felt a sudden, real contempt for him, his faultless clothes, his knightly drawl, and everything connected with him !)

We were still discussing the fantastic predicament in which we found ourselves, when I became aware of the sound of running water. Jardine heard it at the same time—I could see by the way he started.

“Hallo ! ” he exclaimed. “Hear that ? ”

We all listened.

Unmistakably it was the noise of rushing water, and it was momentarily growing louder ! Our faces scanned one another's blankly !

“That watercourse Sun spoke of ! ” I cried, suddenly recollecting. “Where is it, I wonder ? ”

We all leapt to our feet and began a frantic exploration of the far end of the cave. Almost at once a yell from the company-promoter told us that he had discovered the place. We dashed towards him—eager to know the worst !

There, cunningly hidden by Nature behind a large projecting rock, was a wide rent in the face, down which a draught of cool, fresh air blew straight into our faces. Out of this mouth, loud and ominous, and growing momentarily stronger, came the noise of bubbling, cascading water !

“God ! ” cried Mrs. Croftash. “He means to drown us ! ”

I think we all experienced the full horror of the same thought at about the same time, for we all broke out into a volley of exclamations, cries and suggestions !

“Quick!” I shouted, “let’s block up the mouth of the hole! It’s our only chance!”—and myself giving a lead, I seized the nearest boulder—a stone about as big as my head—and rolled it far into the vent.

In a moment we were all feverishly working. Stones, gravel, mud—all went to avert that threatening death that gurgled and trickled ever nearer! By the time the water reached the mouth of the vent, we had built up a little wall about a foot high—and the flood was temporarily stayed!

We were all infinitely relieved to note that the invading stream was no more than a trickle. The loud noises suggestive of a large flow had doubtless been caused by the acoustic properties of the natural shape of the subterranean watercourse. But our relief was short-lived. With mounting dismay we watched the invading waters on the far side of our wall, rise and rise—slowly, it is true, but with an inevitable sureness that told us we were confronted with an enemy indeed!

We must do something soon—or drown!

CHAPTER XXXIV

OUR first concern, once we had carefully observed the rate at which the water mounted, was further to block up the mouth of the watercourse so effectively that no water at all could find its way into the cave. We set to with a will, and, after a solid couple of hours of the most back-breaking work, had accomplished our end. All by this time thoroughly exhausted, we lay down in the gravel near the supply-boxes and sought to forget the overwhelming horror of our situation in sleep. But sleep was not for me. As I flung myself down on my hard bed, the thought came to me: had we not, in shutting the mouth of the vent, also shut out our air? I suddenly imagined that I

already felt the air in the cave to be thin and unsatisfying!

But that was hardly my chief concern. I knew just enough of my subject to keep me awake—apart from that. Water had weight, and we were far below the surface of the ground! If the water was being released by Sun or Wan-long from some reservoir on the ground—or even at some higher level than that on which our cavern was situated—I knew full well that the pressure behind our flimsy barricade in the vent would gradually mount as the water rose, and soon, doubtless, become really terrific! It would need a stop-gap of the strongest concrete or cement to withstand the tremendous weight of the water piled behind it! I had serious doubts about our wall, and so, instead of sleeping, I began an exploration of the levels and engineering conveniences of our prison.

I was rather glad to notice that the floor of the long cave—which I had at first sight concluded to be level—sloped very gently towards that end at which the water-course was situated—its mouth some five feet from the floor level in the rocky wall. This meant that if our wall did give way we would at least not immediately be drowned, for the accumulation of water would first have to fill the lower levels of the cave. It seemed to me infinitely desirable to set about constructing a massive wall right across the middle of the cavern, in case our hastily made plug of stones and rubble were to give way.

I determined to discuss this matter with my companions as soon as they awoke—for they had all succumbed to their weariness and were fast asleep—but I need hardly have made these plans. For, hardly had I formed the decision, when there was a resounding reverberation from the neighbourhood of the watercourse—and our rampart fell! Stones, rubble and water crashed in a great cascade to the floor—the imprisoned flood deluging the lower half of the cave!

All were on their feet in an instant, staring at the swirling water in horror! It was indeed an ominous

reminder of the perils of our situation and the most dreadful death that awaited us, if we did not immediately find a means of coping with the flow!

It occurred to me to inspect the fallen-in mouth of the gallery, but a cursory glance at that pile of boulders was enough. We might labour there for a month—to progress a few yards. And then it was more than likely that we would lose ourselves in the maze of tunnels and galleries between us and freedom! The others agreed with me.

“Let’s build a wall, right across the cave!” I suggested.

“Come on, then!” cried Jardine, with a ready pluck for which I longed to shake him by the hand; and forthwith the construction of our second rampart commenced.

Hither and thither we moved, gathering material. Stones, mud, rubble, gravel—and the wall began to grow. I think we were all secretly vastly glad to note that it grew with considerably greater rapidity than the water rose! When at last, thoroughly fatigued after our unwonted exertions, we flung ourselves down and slept, we were quite content that our rampart would keep us dry at least until we awoke again. We were all so tired that that was all that seemed to matter! The graver dangers of our predicament forgotten, we slept.

My dismay can easily be judged, then, when I awoke—after what my wrist-watch informed me I had been a sleep of a solid ten hours—to find myself lying in from two to three inches of water! With a yell I sprang to my feet—in that instant wide awake! My cry roused the others. We stared about us in dismay!

Half the remainder of the cave—our end—was already under water! Beyond the barrier we had so laboriously constructed—perhaps two feet high—was a lake whose surface had already levelled itself with the top of our wall. Here and there little cascades ran down the stonework on the near side, threatening to flood us out if we did not immediately set to!

Jardine, Mrs. Croftash and myself were soon hard at it—but not so young Barrington. He sat nursing his knees and complained of pains all over his body. I do not know how, precisely, I communicated the idea to Jardine, the bogus company-promoter, for I certainly did not say it. But I had strong suspicions that what ailed young Barrington was nothing more serious than laziness, and somehow a glance between Jardine and myself seemed to dispense with the necessity for speech. We left our work and turned, in one accord, towards the younger man.

“I’m ill!” Barrington protested. “Leave me alone!”

What happened then is perhaps too undignified to be described. But a man who will “lord it” about the West End, scorning to turn his hand to anything useful, and existing for the larger part on the bounty of a mother who keeps a small shop in the Mile End Road, struck both Jardine and myself as hardly the sort of fellow to argue with! Let it suffice to say that very shortly young Barrington was working with us—not perhaps quite so vigorously, for it was obvious that our chastisement had injured his pride, but at least working.

The wall began to grow. The trickle of water over the rampart into our side of the division gradually lessened, and then ceased altogether.

It was while I laboured with the rest, stripped to the waist and sweating as I had never before done, that it came to me in a curious, illuminating flash what Sun had meant by his remark about our “working for the good of our little community of four!” This was communal work indeed! Three of us, unaided by the fourth, could not have hoped to long keep pace with the mounting water. It needed the honest toil of all four. (Hence the short shrift Mr. Barrington’s idleness had run!) I had calculated the thing to a nicety. The water had risen two feet in ten hours—roughly four feet a day. We would thus be required each day to add four feet—and a bit—to our wall, if we hoped to live. Otherwise

we must surely drown in the next day or two. It was easy to see that our time would be fully occupied!

To add to the rampart a sufficient increase in height, from day to day, and to see that it was stout enough to withstand the force of the accumulated water, seemed to me to require that our energies be constantly devoted to the construction-work for at least twelve hours out of the twenty-four! One man alone in that cave could have done nothing. Two could have done very little more. Three would perhaps have put up a fight, but would probably soon have succumbed from exhaustion. It needed just four. Dr. Sun had measured the flow of water with all the accuracy of a physician meting out a phial of medicine!

We were thus interdependent on each other for our very existence! Quite a new state of affairs for any of us, I have no doubt—with the sole possible exception of Barrington. Hitherto I had been dependent—more or less—upon the goodwill of my editor. One man. Mrs. Croftash had her public, and Jardine had his gullible fools. Barrington, of course, subsisted on the bounty of his hard-working mother. If Barrington had hoped to load himself on to the energies of the rest of us, now, in this queer environment, he had been sadly mistaken! But this was the point; here we strove for a common good. Together we stood or fell—lived or died! It was puzzling.

I shall never forget the sight of that once bewitching leading lady of revue, as she looked working at that wall with the rest of us! Her skirts hitched up above her knees, mud-smearred from her ankles to her face, she did a share equal to any of ours! All through the day we toiled, walking now and then to the provision-boxes, taking up a biscuit or whatnot, eating while we worked! The horror of what would happen if we desisted lent us a queer, frantic energy!

But it was not until that afternoon, when we had carefully measured the rise in the lake-surface, and as

carefully calculated the added height to our wall, and decided that our day's work was done, that I saw, as in an inspiration, how Dr. Sun's plan to cure us of selfishness was to work!

Jardine had withdrawn to a dry spot near the provisions and was sitting with his narrow back propped up against the cave wall—too weary to talk or to do anything else. His face was streaked with mud, and perspiration still trickled in little rivulets down his flabby, pampered skin. I was similarly seated—a picture of dejection, slightly to one side.

I saw Jardine wearily reach for his jacket, fumble for a moment in a pocket, and produce a pipe. Next came some matches, and then a tobacco-pouch. Idly I watched him open the pouch, insert the bowl of his pipe—and then throw both aside with a gesture of patient resignation.

The pouch was empty.

I suppose it was watching him that reminded me that I felt rather like a smoke myself. I am an inveterate pipe-smoker. My own jacket was close by me, and I reached for it and found my pouch. To my dismay I found it to be almost empty too. It contained a few grains of loose tobacco—perhaps a modest pipeful in all. I was now dying for a smoke. But . . . Something about that little man, sitting there so patiently after he had laboured so pertinaciously by my side all through the long, heartbreaking day, made me do what I can only describe as something unprecedented—considering the circumstances.

I grinned and handed him my pouch. Gratefully he took it and poured the grains into his pipe-bowl, evidently under the delusion that I had already filled my own.

He smiled his thanks as he handed back my pouch. The smile was my reward!

Sun's cure for selfishness was working!

It was the third day of our entombment.

Work, I think, was what saved us from going mad! I

can conceive no more horrible, soul-chilling contemplation than that that was ours, when, as day followed day, we realised that soon our wall must reach the ceiling of the cave! There was also the ever-present possibility that it might burst, when we would all have been drowned in a few minutes! At best, even were we spared this death, our provisions must soon run short—leaving us to die of starvation!

Every night, tired out as I was, I had to live through the hell of these dreads before merciful sleep rid me of them!

We calculated that two more days of work would see our wall level with the roof of the cave. (Already we had steps constructed at one side so that we might carry the heavy stones to its surface, high above our heads.) Beyond that two days we did not dare to look. But on the evening of the third day of our imprisonment, when work on the wall had been finished, and we were all so tired that we ached in every limb, so real had this nearing horror become, that we voluntarily set to a new task of attempting to clear away the debris at the gallery mouth—a task that would surely have taken us weeks to complete!

Our fate did not bear contemplation—and we drugged ourselves with work, and more work! But deep in my heart I had the conviction that Sun would not desert us; that this was merely a test—not a sentence. Unless he were indeed mad! Another thought that was wiser left to lie!

Jardine sat by my side, utterly wearied after the double toil. He scanned my face, as a dog will scan another's.

“It's funny,” he said, meditatively, “I seem to have got to know you extraordinarily well in these last few days, Bellairs! I mean, there are fellows in the city I've known for years, and I'd hardly call them—friends. And I feel I know you so well—all in a day or two!”

Strangely enough, this same line of thought had been frequently recurring through my own brain—during that

day. I cannot hope to describe it logically—life is so different from cold logic!—but I can at least say that after three days of heartbreaking work among those three persons in that deserted mine, I felt as if there were very little indeed I would not be prepared to do for them—regardless of possible inconvenience to myself! I had a new, curious interest in them! They were my fellow-creatures—it was as if I had only just discovered the fact!—and I liked them all, even down to Barrington!

Much to my astonishment, I discovered that Barrington himself had experienced the same phenomenon. He gave evidence of it in the very next remark.

“I feel that way too!” he averred. “I’ve sort of got awfully fond of you people in the time we’ve been together! I wonder why? Perhaps . . .” his voice fell “. . . perhaps one feels like that when one realises that one’s got to die—sometime or other!”

Mrs. Croftash shuddered. I think I did, too!

“Don’t, Teddy!” she pleaded. The work had told most of all on her. All the art that had so prettily concealed her age had long since disappeared. She looked what she was—a matronly body and the mother of children.

“I’ve heard something of the sort,” I broke in, more to turn our thoughts away from that horrible contemplation than for any other reason, “from soldiers who fought together during the War. Chaps who were in the same platoon or the same battery. It seems that what they went through—fighting and working together—pulled them closer, as it were!”

“That’s it!” Jardine broke in, animatedly. “That’s what it is! Having to fight this water in here, together, as we have . . .”

“But it doesn’t only make us fond of each other,” Mrs. Croftash interrupted thoughtfully. “I declare it makes one fond—of everybody! Why, I positively look forward to paying a visit to those slum-kiddies, Teddy! Honestly—I do, really!” Her voice was strained, in her

desire to be believed—utterly free, now, from that artificiality that had formerly characterised it.

Teddy Barrington muttered something below his breath and looked away. But not before he had glanced at her, and told her that she had been believed—that I was certain of, from the look in her eyes!

“I’m finished with all that!” he said gruffly. “If we ever get out of this show I’m going to give the mater a hand with her bally old shop! I’ve rather neglected the old dear!”

And then came something bewildering in its unexpectedness! Something that set all of us, weary as we were, on our feet in an instant!

A voice! The voice of the Doctor of Souls!

“In that case, my friends”—it rang through the cavern—“I may as well relieve you of further anxiety. You have learnt your lesson!”

“Sun!” I cried, staring about the empty cave.

“Professor!” Mrs. Croftash shrieked hysterically.

“Where are you?” Jardine demanded in a hoarse stage-whisper.

There was a click—and the cave was plunged into darkness!

“Oh God!” cried Barrington. “Is he going to leave us again?”

“Sun!” I yelled frantically. “Sun, for God’s sake, don’t . . . !”

The answer was a cackling laugh! Then, before any of us could move, there came a repetition of that blinding flash, that ear-splitting explosion, that had marked our entry into the cavern!

When we looked again it was to see the glimmer of a lantern from somewhere in the re-cleared gallery-mouth! We stumbled towards it!

The lantern stood on a sheet of notepaper. Wonderingly, I picked it up. It was a written message from the Doctor of Souls—this time in his undisguised handwriting.

“ My dear Bunny,

“ The activities of those idiots the police, in raiding my Wimbledon house, have made it necessary that I return at once to my other laboratories. (You are welcome to guide them there—if you can !) I trust your incarceration has been beneficial. From time to time I have been pleased to take note of the experiment’s development by means of a microphone concealed in the lighting-apparatus boxes. The process has been most interesting to observe.

“ If you follow the dotted line marked on the roughly-drawn plan on the obverse side you will soon emerge into daylight.

“ SUN.”

I seized the lantern. I needed no second invitation. “ Come ! ” I urged.

We staggered forward

There is little more to relate.

It took us the better part of an hour to negotiate the interminable turns and twistings of that underground maze, before we found our way—by a different and more circuitous route—into the broad daylight !

I need not describe our feelings at that moment !

Perhaps the villagers of the little house-cluster we found on the edge of the common have seldom seen a stranger and less prepossessing sight than that provided by the four of us as we straggled into the High Street—just as the sun was setting.

“ Gypsies ! ” we heard a nurse-girl murmur to a companion as we shuffled by her along the pavement.

After a long argument with the local policeman, who was rather inclined to arrest us as vagrants, we at last got through a telephone call to London and were rescued.

I will not follow the subsequent careers of my friends of the ordeal. I am no reformer. But I might, just in passing, mention that Jardine no longer sells bogus shares !

Sun had not lied about the raiding of his Wimbledon

home. Someone at the dance that night—an American who had once met the real Professor Summerlee, an entirely inoffensive old gentleman residing in Long Island—had had his suspicions aroused and had communicated with the authorities. But I fancy that this contretemps did not seriously interfere with that misguided genius. His “experiment” was over—and had doubtless been recorded a great success! I saw him no more for some time.

About a fortnight later I was strolling theatrewards one evening, when I was again accosted by that same, shabby-looking little man who had been the bearer of the curious message from “Professor Summerlee.” My instinct was to run—but he had already buttonholed me!

“Spare us a bob, guvner!” he whined. “A bob ’ud git me a meal and a bed for the noight”

But I let him say no more.

Hastily I shoved a bright new shilling into his hand!

“There you are, my good fellow!” I said—and I hurried on!

“Thank yer, guvner!” I heard—it was a rather astonished sort of voice. “Blimy, if you ain’t a toff o’ the right sort!”

CHAPTER XXXV

IT is not without some misgivings that I sit down to write the account of my last adventure with the Doctor of Souls. I doubt the wisdom of so doing, for I fear that it is not at all unlikely that the details of this last grotesque “experiment” may impose too severe a tax upon the credulity of some who read.

Once again the renewal of my acquaintance with the Celestial came about through no desire on my part to meet him, but was rather the outcome of an unhappy chance. It was some time after our last meeting, and I

had almost begun to reconcile myself to a prospect of never again seeing the original of that certain little print that stood on the mantelshelf in my London flat. After all, I consoled myself, that lovely little lady was no more than a shade—a dream—conjured up by that Buddhist mountebank in the monastery to which Sun had once taken me—that lonely, golden-roofed edifice on the border-mountains of the Celestial Empire. I had been hypnotised and they had made me dream, and then, when I had awoken, they had sought to impress me with an account of my soul's miraculous passage to another planet. A likely story it sounded—now that time had given me a clearer vision! I would be a fool, I felt, if I deliberately sought to involve myself in another hazardous and unnerving adventure with the sinister Doctor of Souls in the hope of being given that dream to dream over again. I had better forget, I reasoned. But I found the resolve easier to make than to carry out. It was difficult to forget. In my heart of hearts I was not quite sure that I wanted to forget—her.

But for the sake of brevity I had better skip further preliminaries and begin my account at that point when I found myself sitting in an arm-chair in a room that I at once recognised, from recollections of our last encounter, as the reception-room in Dr. Sun's submarine-cave European home. There is no need for me to explain how I got there, beyond to say that Sun had needed me (for reasons which will shortly become apparent) and that he had that morning seen fit to call at my flat. I remember rising to greet my unexpected and unannounced visitor, and Sun must have been in a hurry for it was the last thing I do remember—except perhaps the curious glitter in his slightly slant eyes, at sight of which I immediately felt drowsy! I conclude that, fast asleep, and yet to all appearances wide awake, I must have followed him out to a waiting car—and his submarine-launch possibly explained the rest.

However it happened, when I came to my senses again

it was to find myself many miles from the metropolis in that well-appointed room of his cave ; and opposite me, slim, slight, immaculate, and looking as respectable and conventional as an archbishop, was my friend the Doctor of Souls !

“ Well, Bunny,” he began, with his tolerant, paternal smile, “ let me apologise for showing you such scant courtesy this morning. But I had little alternative. It appears that my chauffeur—the excellent Wan-long—was recognised, and as your short-sighted police seem to find objection to his presence in England . . . ”

But I had by this time recovered and started to my feet. I stood, rather shakily, gathering my wits and staring down at him. Then :

“ Sun ! ” I cried bewilderedly.

The little man chuckled.

“ Why, yes, Bunny,” he resumed soothingly. “ It is no one else ! There is nothing to be alarmed about. Sit down and compose yourself.”

“ But why have you brought me here ? ” I demanded, glancing about the familiar room and suddenly filled with a lively recollection of the horrors of my last visit to this labyrinth. “ What do you want with *me*, Sun ? Why won't you let me alone ? I haven't sought you out ; I had no wish to see you again ! ” I glared at him resentfully, my indignation momentarily stronger than both my surprise and the dread of what ordeal might be in store for me at the hands of this eccentric and merciless master of occultism.

“ Then you should have been more circumspect,” the Doctor of Souls reprimanded in his quiet, gentle voice. “ Sit down, Bunny, and let me explain why you are here. You devised your own fate.”

“ How ? ” I demanded. “ I did nothing of the sort ! The last thing in the world I wanted was to come here again—or to meet you ! And that's straight from the shoulder, Sun ! ”

“ I am perfectly aware of that , ” he murmured dryly.

He motioned me gently but determinedly back to my arm-chair and waited until I sat down before he made any effort to resume. Then he stretched out a slender hand, took up a newspaper that lay on a polished table near his chair, opened it and held it accusingly before me. It was the weekly edition of the journal on which I was at that time employed in a sub-editorial capacity. "Now, Bunny," Sun continued, "perhaps you understand?"

"I don't," I replied truthfully.

"I am informed," said he, "that you are personally responsible for this résumé of the crime, the trial and the sentence of Roger Quinner, the murderer."

"As it happens," I wonderingly admitted, "yes, I did write that. Is there anything offensive in it?"

Sun was looking curiously at me, as if in mild astonishment.

"I knew," he replied, "that you were not very well favoured intellectually, Bunny. At the same time I hardly expected this balderdash of you!"—and he slowly shook his head from side to side.

"Balderdash?" I echoed indignantly.

"My dear Bunny," he rejoined, "as a sheer, naïve exposition of ignorance, I have seldom seen the equal of your short article on the crime of Roger Quinner."

I suppose I had entirely forgotten my fears in the heat of my rapidly mounting anger. That very description had been the subject of a compliment from my editor, and to have this unjustified accusation of incompetence thrust at me by a mere layman nettled me not a little. Doctor of both Science and Medicine Sun might be, but his knowledge of the niceties of journalism would not have filled a page in a small boy's notebook. However, I maintained my dignity, concealing my annoyance under a laugh.

"Excuse me, Sun," I said, "but perhaps it hasn't occurred to you that you are hardly qualified to judge my article on its literary merits," I added, witheringly: "It is extraordinary how much you laymen presume

about the craft of journalism. What would you, as a Doctor of Medicine, say if an unqualified student were to set up a brass plate in Harley Street ? ”

“ I should say he would not get many patients ! ” the half-Chinaman smiled good-naturedly.

“ Precisely ! ” I agreed. “ He’d get about as many patients as you—or any layman—would get articles published ! So you see, you presume . . . ”

“ I was not referring,” he interrupted, “ to the technical merits of your article. My objection is confined to the flaws in its logic.”

“ Oh,” I ejaculated. “ I was not aware that there was anything amiss. At least my editor certainly noticed nothing.”

“ Obviously,” he rejoined—again with that irritating dryness in his tone. “ But let me read you just one short concluding passage, Bunny.” He folded the paper in two, held it before him and read :

“ ‘ This monster, this vile, cold-blooded slaughterer of his fiancée’s old and trusted adviser and friend for his worldly ends, this Roger Quinner goes to the scaffold to meet a fate he most richly deserves ! ’ ”

Sun threw aside the newspaper and turned to me.

“ Well ? ” I enquired. “ Doesn’t he ? ”

My host smiled annoyingly.

“ So you assume, Bunny,” he murmured, “ that the logical means of setting to rights a deplorable matter of this sort is to hang the man ? ”

“ Great Guns ! ” I cried derisively, “ and what would *you* do ? Present him with a medal for it ? If a man does that sort of thing he must be punished, must’nt he ? We must have justice ! ”

“ Justice,” Sun echoed very thoughtfully. “ And the justice brought to bear to compensate humanity for a life lost is to cause another life to be lost, eh ? ” He smiled. “ Has it never occurred to you, Bunny, that there is something fundamentally wrong in that reasoning ? ”

Does it not sound just a little—childish ? Tommie throws away Dicky's bag of sweets, so Dicky rights matters—save the expression—by breaking Tommie's toy bat !”

“ But there must be punishment—for crime !” I retaliated.

“ The murderer finds his own punishment,” Sun averred, “ in his conscience. It is only when the conscience is not there that he needs our attention, and then he is what your learned alienists call ‘ a mental case,’ Bunny.” Sun was speaking in that well-remembered “ professorial ” voice. I knew better than to interrupt him now, but a moment later he goaded me to it. He went on : “ Besides, my friend, you invariably hang the wrong man.”

“ He confessed !” I contradicted hotly ; but my host ignored the interruption.

“ You hang Roger Quinner,” he said, “ when the really guilty parties are Mentality and Circumstances. My dear Bunny, given that man's mentality, the provocation he experienced and the circumstances that surrounded the crime, and you, Bunny Bellairs, would yourself have committed that murder in precisely the same way !”

“ Absolute rot !” I cried rudely.

The Doctor of Souls took on an icy politeness.

“ I shall show you—in good time,” he informed me in a curiously low tone. I suppose it came home to me then that I had been a little unwise in so freely arguing with this half-Celestial who acknowledged no law of God or man that I could recollect. I inwardly cursed my indiscretion, and the vanity that had prompted it. A little shudder ran down my back, as I found myself suddenly wondering why Sun had brought me to this subterranean home of his ! In all my association with the man I had never once known him to waste time in doing anything without a definite—and usually a rather ghastly—purpose in view. I was remembering my experience—the nerve-racking ordeal with that mechanical horror in a certain room of this same underground

palace—and I shuddered anew. Sun had risen and was looking down at me, a whimsical smile on his thin, ever-moving lips.

“Sun,” I babbled, “I’m sorry I spoke as I did. I admit that there is logic and reason on your side. The real trouble is, I suppose, that we have progressed only to a certain point in human progress, and so these barbaric correctives and punishments must be upheld. . . .”

I broke off, conscious that the Doctor of Souls saw through my pretence, knew me to be babbling words and phrases that I did not really mean.

“Come, Bunny,” he invited gently, “and we will begin my last European experiment by demonstrating to you the peculiar effects of mentality on a man’s outlook or point of view. This time, my friend, my work concerns you—primarily. You are my patient. . . .”

“Sun, no!” I broke in, aghast at the suggestion. I stared at him in horror. My exclamation had hardly broken the thread of his statements. He went on in the same low, sing-song voice he was now, for some occult reason, affecting.

“You should rejoice, Bunny,” he continued, “in being permitted an opportunity of offering yourself to the excellent cause of metaphysical research and progress. And as a reward, my young friend, I may perhaps be able to arrange that you will again meet. . . .”

“My Lady of the Clouds?” I cried, my horror for the moment overcome by my eagerness at this new, radiant hope. The Doctor of Souls nodded.

“You will again meet your Lady of the Clouds,” he intoned, “and then you will bid me farewell. I have been summoned back to my home amid the mountain-snows of Yunnan. The Brother of the Seven Worlds has called me.”

My temporary elation melted. What horror had he in store for me? His mysterious tone awed me; I was afraid of the little fires that had kindled in his queer colourless eyes.

“But, Sun,” I croaked, “what have I done? Why should you want me of all people for this experiment? Surely there are thousands of others who need to learn about the effect of mentality—more urgently than I do?”

His answer made me wonder.

“I am fond of you, Bunny. Before I say good-bye to you, I want you to see things as they should be seen—as we of the mountains see them, who devote the whole of our lives to meditation. The yoke of Ignorance sits heavily on your young shoulders, Bunny. Come, I will lift it.”

“But I don’t want to!” I protested, horror-struck. But the Doctor of Souls had extended a slim, willow-like hand and beckoned me to follow. Hardly aware that I moved, I found myself walking towards him, following him out of the room and down the passage that led to his curious laboratories!

CHAPTER XXXVI

SUN led me straight through the well-remembered, extensive laboratory with its many queer appliances, its charts and diagrams, the big model of a skull grinning at me from its days in a corner, past that sinister steel door that awoke such vivid recollections as to make me shudder, towards another door through which I had not before passed. He flung it open, entered and bade me follow.

It was a room very nearly as large as the other, but it was literally filled with a mass of fine wires covered with silk of all colours, little wheels, gauges, levers and other mechanisms quite unintelligible to me. I recognised—it was pretty obvious—that the whole constituted some sort of machine, but what its purpose might be I had then not the vaguest notion. One side of the room was littered with huge glass retorts, each connected by tubes

and wires to a switch-board that, apparently, controlled the machine—an instrument occupying the whole of one wall and not at all unlike the switch-board at a large telephone exchange.

I followed the scientist to where, in a space in front of this switch-board, was set on a mounting a large and peculiar-looking chair, a chair rather significantly similar to the torture-seat in a dentist's surgery. Here Sun turned, noted my obvious wonder and smiled.

"This is one of the rooms of which I spoke to you," he explained in quite an ordinary tone. "The rooms that contain the mechanism of my brain machine. This one I call 'The Mentality Room.' As I think I explained to you on the last occasion you honoured me with a visit, Bunny, I am able to reproduce mechanically certain governing mental conditions as they exist here and there in the varied scale of human brain-efficiency. To reproduce, mark you—and no more. This contrivance, after all, is only a thing of clockwork and electricity. But—and here I must strive to contain my foolish pride!—I am able to impart temporarily to a normal human being any resolvent that I can develop in my machine. Mark again, Bunny, I said 'temporarily.' The imparted influence lasts no longer than from, say, a week to a month, according to the strength of the resistance from the subject's own and real personality. But since you are looking a little vague, Bunny, it would perhaps be better if I were to demonstrate—instead of trying to explain. If you will sit down in that chair . . ."

"No!" I cried in very real alarm. The thing looked too absurdly like the average artist's conception of an American electrocuting-chair to be anything else than an object of horror! I backed away. "No!" I mouthed. "For God's sake, Sun, let me go! Let me . . .!"

But Sun had turned, with a shrug of his thin boyish shoulders, and I suddenly recovered my *morale*. Fascinatedly I watched him approach a small wicker basket that stood on the floor a little beyond him. He picked it

up—it was evidently quite light—and returned to my side. When he spoke it was in most matter-of-fact tones that somehow reassured me a little.

“Now, Bunny,” he said, “let me tell you that you will not suffer the least inconvenience in this little experiment to demonstrate the effect of mentality. Please examine the occupant of this basket. Wait. Before you raise the lid, let me further give you my word that the occupant aforesaid is perfectly harmless. Remember that, Bunny—quite harmless. Now.”

Wondering what on earth the man could be driving at I tentatively extended a hand gently and raised the light wicker lid. I had raised it perhaps an inch and nothing had happened, so I became bolder and raised it more. Then I let out a yell of horror, pulled back my hand more quickly I think than I have ever moved it before or since, and backed hurriedly, my heart pounding like a war-drum. For neatly coiled in the bottom of the basket, and now with its evil-looking head protruding and swaying gently to and fro above the edge, was a loathsome, speckled yellow snake!

“God!” I gasped.

“My dear Bunny,” Sun murmured, “do you not believe me? I have assured you that this reptile is perfectly innocuous. As a matter of fact, in addition to being an entirely inoffensive species, it has had its fangs removed. It could not even prick your skin!”

“Yes!” I yelled. “But put it away! It’s horrible! Loathsome! I hate them! Put it away—please!” I might say I have always hated snakes.

Sun smiled inscrutably.

“Observe, Bunny,” he said, “the curiously illogical effects of mentality. There is no reason why you should fear this harmless creature, and yet, purely because of some perverted mechanism in your mind, you do fear it. Now, my friend, I will remove that senseless dread for you—if you will permit me. Will you kindly be seated in this chair?”

I stood, doing nothing, dread still holding me in thrall. Sun pointed to the chair on the mounting. In the same way that I knew I could not have run away if I'd wanted to—once those queer lights had kindled in his eyes and he had looked at me—I now knew that it would be useless to resist his command. He stood pointing to the chair and I slunk towards it, my eyes still riveted on that loathsome yellow head. When I had taken the seat, Sun closed the lid of the basket, shutting down that disgusting thing. When he turned to me again he was smiling.

“Have you ever realised, Bunny,” he enquired, “that children, very young children, have no such fears? Fear is something that comes afterwards—with the development of our mental faculties. Now just in order to show you . . .”

As Sun spoke he had been removing from a bracket on the wall behind the chair a curious steel band, connected, I could see, by many silk-covered wires to certain portions of that same great switch-board. For a moment, before he placed the thing about my brow, I had a glimpse of its inner surface, and it seemed to be composed of dozens of little rubber, cup-like things, that, when the band was finally tightened about my head, pressed hard on my temples.

I sat still and unprotesting throughout the whole of this operation, for the little lights that danced in the half-Chinaman's eyes seemed to burn up every faggot of my powers of resistance. It was only when he moved away from me that I realised what had happened, and then, when I tried to move, I discovered that rubber-lined metal clamps held my trunk, arms and legs rigid to the chair! I was powerless! Sun was at the switch-board, pulling out certain large, red-coloured plugs that here and there stood out from among the myriad black ones and white ones, and pushing them in elsewhere. At length he turned to me, his slim, white hand resting on the ivory handle of a great switch.

“Now, Bunny,” he said, “do not be alarmed. It

will only be for an instant—because I do not want the effect to last more than a few moments. Ready ? ”—and before I could utter the cry of protest that came to my lips, he had moved the switch and I was lost.

There are certain experiences—sensations—that defy description. The nearest I can hope to achieve to an accurate description of the effect of Sun’s infernal brain-machine on me, is to state baldly that it felt as if a thousand different little wind-currents and eddies had suddenly been introduced into my cranium ! There was no pain. Indeed there was hardly any feeling at all ; for feeling was dead while that terrible conception of a misguided genius worked its influence on me. Noise there was—hence, I suppose, the wind-similes—but I can hardly truthfully describe them as being unpleasant. My thought-mechanisms seemed to be in a state of almost complete suspension—or suppression—while that ivory switch was depressed. And then—suddenly—this I assume, for I have no recollection of seeing it—the switch was pushed upwards again and the disturbing noises in my head ceased.

And what happened in the next few moments, happened, as it were, in the mind of a small child. I have only a very childish, vague and unsubstantial impression of it in my memory. But I *do* remember it, and nobody could convince me that it did not actually happen. I saw Sun leave the switch-board and pick up that basket. He held it before my face and threw back the lid. Immediately the snake protruded its head and swayed before my eyes. Curiously I did not flinch. I looked at it as an infant will look at something new and interesting—in a species of wonderment. Sun unclamped one of my arms and I at once reached out for that swaying reptile and gripped it firmly by the throat. It did not occur to me to be afraid of it. So, I suppose, I must have sat for some few moments, while the extraordinary influence of Sun’s machine was still on me.

Then, like mists before a sunrise, the vapours of his

ghastly mentality-machine cleared from my brain and I awoke to find myself holding a writhing, loathsome serpent within an inch or two of my face! I shrieked in terror and flung the thing from me! Sun stood before me, smiling at the outcome of his "little experiment."

"Convinced, Bunny?" he enquired. He walked towards that writhing horror on the cement floor, carelessly picked it up and replaced it in the basket.

"Sun!" I prayed hoarsely. "Let me go! For God's sake, Sun, undo this thing . . .!"

He calmed me with a sudden flash of his eyes. I subsided into silence.

"It would hardly be worth the trouble of undoing you now, Bunny," he informed me, still looking at me. "You must remain in that chair for a while. You will suffer no hurt by the machine, be assured. And the process will soon be completed, since I have arranged to have the mechanism working at pressure. I had no more than a quarter of its power in operation during our recent little experiment. Highly successful, I think!" He chuckled—and then he was suddenly serious again. "A short twenty hours will be enough—for the greater experiment—with the full pressure."

He had moved towards the switchboard again and was replacing the red plugs in their original places. While he worked in front of that monster mechanism—a curiously unearthly little figure—he talked continuously, so that I might not awaken from the spell his low, gentle voice put about me.

"It took me the larger part of a week," he went on, "to analyse the mentality of our friend Roger Quinner, the murderer, from the statements he made at the trial and from the circumstances surrounding his life and the actual crime. But I flatter myself I have arrived at a passably accurate diagnosis, and I have fairly faithfully reproduced it here—on the switch-board. No little undertaking, Bunny, as you would realise if you were deputed to count the number of the connections. Of

course, I cannot hope to reproduce his exact mentality in detail. Such a task might well involve the devotion of the whole of my life to one particular branch of knowledge—and there is so much healing yet to be done!”

Sun was drifting away into his fantastic day-dreams now. His voice was fervent, fanatical.

“The broken soul, the twisted soul—I mend them, I straighten them. I am the Doctor of Souls. Ah, we shall smooth out the wrinkles in your soul, Bunny—the ugly, silly little wrinkles of Ignorance. Soon, my friend! In a very little while!” He came back to earth—or as near to earth as Sun ever got. “No. I can do no more than impose on you a part—a shade—of the mentality of our gentle friend, Roger Quinner. You will change, Bunny. You, quiet, lethargic, plodding Bunny Bellairs will take the passion of the man Quinner. He was of interesting composition, Bunny. He revelled in horseplay—just as you dislike it. His fibre was tempered steel—and you would hang such a man! Very roughly, but quite sufficiently for our purpose, our lately deceased friend’s temperament will oust and usurp yours. Aha! How quaint the results may be! And so, Bunny, you may come to understand better than to write for the edification of your unthinking public of ‘vile, cold-blooded slaughterers who go to the scaffold to meet a fate they richly deserve!’ Oh, no, Bunny, when we have made our experiment you will be kinder, more tolerant, wider of understanding—experience will have sharpened your outlook, broadened your mentality. And so, Bunny . . .!”—and then I remember no more, for Sun had depressed the ivory switch, and those infernal winds swept away my consciousness.

Sun must have kept me in a state of hypnotic unconsciousness for some considerable time after the machine had done its work, for when I next remembered things it was to find myself in a most unexpected environment—a cabin on board the great aeroplane in which I had twice before made journeys. Astonishingly enough it was not

this fact that gave me greater surprise, but something entirely different. For quite a few minutes I could not remember who I was! Then, very gradually, and only after considerable thought, it came back to me that I was Bunny Bellairs, a journalist of London, and that I was a prisoner of the notorious Doctor of Souls.

Then came further bewilderment. I hardly recognised myself! Not in outward appearance, of course, for a hasty glance into the mirror opposite my comfortable bunk assured me that physically at least I was the same. It was something about *me*—the real, inside, *me*—that seemed different, but just what it was I could not determine, for, as I was only later to realise, I had entirely forgotten my curious experience in the Doctor of Soul's subterranean laboratories—as, of course, it was designed that I should.

All I remembered was that I had met Sun in the hall of his underworld mansion and I had a vague idea—no more than a hope—that he had promised to take me once again to that mysterious but lovely being I had once met in my dreams while I had visited the House of the Brother of the Seven Worlds. This was immediately enough for me, for I longed now with a new sudden intensity that I had never suspected myself of possessing to meet my Lady of the Clouds again. I felt that should worlds stand between us I would find the strength to push them aside. It seemed strange to me to think that I had been content—lethargically resigned—to exist for such a wilderness of time without her! What had possessed me to have been so indifferent!

I rose from the bunk and stretched myself on the steady floor of the cabin. (Sun's 'plane had gyroscopes built into the fuselage below the floorboards and was as steady, almost, as the solid earth.) I felt, as I stood there, a strange new vitality within me—a liveliness that was the more puzzling because it was so entirely at variance with my true nature. The upper air must be invigorating, I reflected. But it seemed to me even then that there

was more than the influence of the new air behind my unusual well-being, for as I looked back I began to wonder why I had been content to stay so long at a sub-editorial desk in London. It seemed to me now that I had always lacked energy and "go"—and I knew that I had in some curious way suddenly become possessed of those estimable qualities. How? The matter was utterly inexplicable! It was as though I viewed my old careless, easy-going self for the first time through a pair of livelier, more energetic eyes. Why, I had been a fool! when I got back I would soon show the "boss" that I merited a better position. I would write . . .

The trend of my thoughts broke abruptly. Hadn't I written something about a murderer called—yes—Roger Quinner? Why did that seem vaguely connected with this trip with the Doctor of Souls? Whither were we bound? Why had Sun persuaded me to accompany him this time? And how? I moved towards the door. I must see Sun at once, and ask him. I had reached the door when it opened from the outside. There in the doorway, clad once more in his Oriental robes, stood the Doctor of Souls. He stared at me eagerly as I stepped quickly back.

"Are you well?" he asked in a hushed voice.

"Very well," I answered. I saw a look of relief come into his face. Then he smiled.

"That is excellent," he murmured. "The effect of the pure air at these altitudes is sometimes very marked on human beings—especially those who breathe the polluted air of smoky towns. You feel a new vigour, do you not? A curious strength?"

"Why, yes," I said. "That describes it exactly."

"It is good to feel so full of life, my friend," he rejoined with a queer trace of mockery in his tone that frankly puzzled me. "Good—but dangerous. The men who do things, the good men, the successful men—they are always men of passion!"

"Sun," I said curiously, "what am I doing with

you ? How did I come to meet you this time ? I don't seem to remember. I haven't any recollection of our setting out at all. Where are we going to ? ”

“ You ask many questions,” he remarked. “ You slept. That is why you remember nothing. It is better sometimes not to remember.”

“ Where are we going to ? ” I demanded.

“ You shall learn in good time,” he replied. He fixed me with his curious eyes as he spoke. My desire to insist on an answer to the question suddenly melted. I did, however, sum up sufficient courage for another question. I felt I must know the answer to that—did he make me sleep for my audacity to the end of my days.

“ Sun,” I demanded hoarsely, “ have I been dreaming or did you really promise me that I should meet my Lady of the Clouds again ? ” I hung on his reply, my brow puckered, my fists clenched with the intensity of my longing.

“ I did promise,” he murmured—and I gasped from sheer relief. “ I will keep my promise, Bunny. Look,”—he pointed towards the porthole slant-set in the hull of the 'plane—“ we are nearing our destination.” I strode to the porthole and peered out. There, far below us, dazzling white in the bright light of Asia's day, were the well-remembered snow-covered peaks of the Roof of the World.

“ Oh ! ” I exclaimed, astonished and delighted, now that I had heard his reiterated promise, to find that we had already made so much progress. “ Then when will we get to the monastery ? ”

Sun's reply surprised me.

“ You will not visit the House of the Brother of the Seven Worlds,” he told me.

“ Not visit it ? ” I cried. “ Then how . . . ? ”

“ We have a message, you and I,” Sun interrupted, “ from the Brother of the Seven Worlds to a certain ex-nobleman whose home is in Siberia. We are bound thither—to deliver the message.”

“But how long shall I have to wait?” I demanded. “Why couldn’t you leave me at the House of the Brother . . . ?”

Sun had extended a hand towards me and was pointing—one long forefinger gently moving to and fro—at my face.

“You will know,” he intoned. “Do not try to think—now.”

I disobeyed the injunction. It came to me that this man had done something to me—something dreadful. I passed a hand across my brow, closed my eyes, forced my brain into action. Inside my brain something seemed to be struggling, fighting to come to the surface of my consciousness. I made the fatal mistake of opening my eyes again. A look of genuine alarm had come into his pale, slender-chiselled face. He had advanced towards me and was making passes in front of my eyes.

“You must not try to think,” he advised in a curiously low persuasive voice. “It is better to forget. You are not thinking, Bunny. You are forgetting . . . forgetting . . .”

CHAPTER XXXVII

SUN’S brief visit to my cabin left me in a lethargy that was a curious contrast to my exhilarated feelings upon awakening that morning. I spent part of the remainder of the day sleeping and part in pacing about the little cabin and looking out upon the white landscape far below the soaring ’plane.

Towards evening the machine veered from its easterly course to a north-easterly direction—as near as I could judge—thereby bringing me confirmation of Sun’s statement that we were not bound for the monastery, which I knew to lie in the mountains further towards China. I had previously tried the handle of my cabin

door only to find it locked, but at length, tiring of my restricted cabin, I made a loud noise on its surface and had the reward of hearing someone approach along the corridor.

The door opened and Wan-long looked askance at me from the doorway. Ominous growls from the direction of the main cabin informed me that Sirius was a passenger too, and had become aware of my objectionable presence.

"Can't I come into the cabin?" I demanded of the Chinese monstrosity.

"You wait," said Wan-long with customary rudeness. "I go ask Master."

There was nothing else for it, so I waited. Wan-long at length returned with permission and I left the confines of the small cabin and entered the larger main cabin to be greeted with menacing growls and bristlings from Sirius, in one of the arm-chairs. I ignored him and passed through the cabin towards the door in the partition that I knew to divide this apartment from the control-chamber. I knocked.

"Come in," said Sun's voice, and I entered.

Though this was my third voyage in the aeroplane I had by no means come to accept its marvellous mechanisms as commonplaces. Sun sat in the bucket-seat of steel in the high control-turret. Before him, on the control-board, were the well-remembered levers and gauges and wheels controlling the gyroscopic compass that with its two electrical contacts on either side of the needle steered the plane and held it to its set course, and the pendulum-balancing contrivances and all the other mechanisms that helped to make the aeroplane independent of a pilot's control. I saw the little alarm-bell indicator and I recollected how, if anything were to go wrong with one of the four atomic engines, the machine automatically switched on to another motor—and at the same time rang the warning alarm-bell. And then I remembered something Sun had told me, long months ago. That if everything were to go wrong and the 'plane

were suddenly to crash, there would be no serious consequence to the passengers. I was interrupted by a laugh from the man himself. He looked at me as if I had spoken my thoughts—asked him the question.

“My dear Bunny,” he murmured, “you must forgive me, but there are certain mechanical secrets about this vehicle that it would be indiscreet of me to divulge. My reasons, I think, must be obvious. If, during any flight I may make, one of my patients knew for certain that we would land safely if we ‘crashed,’ he might deliberately wreck the ‘plane in mid-air.”

“I said nothing,” I remarked.

“But you thought it,” smiled the Doctor of Souls. He hastened to make me more at ease, thoughtfully enough, by immediately embarking on an explanation of the intricate details of the automatic-control—the theory of which I had in the long interim forgotten—and I was soon thoroughly interested.

When at length he came down from the control-seat leaving the ‘plane to take care of itself and we passed into the main cabin and looked through on the fading landscape, the sun was fast sinking over the snow-covered wastes on our left. Many miles astern, hazy now against the gathering night, I could make out the grey bulk of the mighty mountains on the Roof of the World. I looked ahead over those drab wastes.

“What part of Siberia are we going to?” I asked.

“To the far North,” said the scientist. “To-morrow evening, all being well, we will sight a large white mountain-range. The people we are visiting live in a settlement set in the midst of the jagged peaks on its summit—for miles around there is no landing ground for the ‘plane, even when I have the helicopters working. Besides I would not care to test the engines in the intense cold of that latitude at any great altitude. I have therefore arranged for us to be met at a lonely hut at the foot of the mountains and we will complete our journey in dog-sleds.”

“But who is this nobleman, Sun? And what is he doing—living in the north of Siberia?”

“He is a refugee,” Sun explained. “The settlement was instituted as a refuge from the Bolsheviks.”

I had to be satisfied with that. I was; partly, I think, because Sun had in some occult way subdued my keener curiosity of the morning, and partly, perhaps, because I knew the futility of questioning him when he was uncommunicative.

That night passed uneventfully, and the next day, after spending the greater part of it traversing as desolate and unvaried a country as I pray I may never again see, the monotony was relieved by a low, dark line on the skyline—a thin, misty outline that grew, before night fell, into the shape of a rugged snow-covered mountain range. And as we neared the mountains I observed nestling amid the foothills a little solitary building, the one touch of black (its sheltered walls) in all that world of whiteness.

Sun—now in the control-room—must have seen this objective at the same moment as I did, for even as my eyes fixed on the little speck I felt the steadying gyroscopes beneath the floorboards cease their whirring, the nose of the great machine went down, and we dived straight for it. We came to rest very gently in the soft snow less than a hundred yards from the lonely hut, in whose solitary, frost-encrusted window I now discerned a light to be burning. We were expected!

Very shortly Sun emerged from the control-room and bade me follow him to his cabin. There I was given a set of heavy furs and instructed to don them over my ordinary clothes. Glad to have come to the end of the monotonous journey and a little curious, perhaps, about what constituted the “message” we carried, I did as I was bidden and shortly rejoined Sun in the main cabin. He and the minute Wan-long, looking now even more incongruous, were, like myself, swathed in furs from head to foot. Even the surly Sirius had been accommodated with a species of special protection against the cold—

a covering buttoned about him like the blanket of a race-horse.

Sun unlocked the outer door and flung it open. An icy air swept into the 'plane from the outer world, and I realised that our elaborate preparations to meet the cold had been far from unnecessary. He climbed down the iron ladder into the soft snow, and we followed, Wan-long turning and lifting the ungainly bulldog down from the fuselage. In silence we made our way through the knee-deep snowdrift towards the sombre building with its solitary gleam of watery light. As we neared the hut Sirius began a deep growling—a noise that awoke a loud concatenation of savage barks and whines from a shelter behind the hut. (The sled-dogs, I concluded.) Sun himself approached the door and made a peculiar double knock on its frosted surface. It opened, and there appeared a large somnolent-looking, bearded man who gave no greeting but stood immediately aside for Wan-long and Sirius to enter. This those worthies did with an air that informed me that they, at least, were well acquainted with this singular dwelling on the very edge of desolation.

Lantern in hand, the bearded man led Sun and myself immediately around the house to where, ready waiting for us, were two light dog-sleds, each with a driver muffled up to his ears, and a team of from eight to ten hungry-looking dogs of the wolf species. Sun waved me to the foremost sled and I seated myself as best I could on the hard boards behind the driver. He moved towards the other and took his seat, made a sign to my driver, there was a crack of the latter's long, cruel-looking whip, a muttered instruction to the dogs, and we moved off through the snow—little flecks of it flying from the hind-pads of the dogs to sting our freezing faces.

Shall I ever forget that drive up the winding track to the summit of those mountains? With the stars above us shining crisp and sharp-defined through the clear, frosty air. With nothing but the moonlit whiteness

about us, the laboured breathing of the dogs, the s-s-h of the runners and the urges of the swarthy Mongol drivers ! All through the night. Slapping our faces now and then with a furred hand to keep the circulation in play as a particularly icy wind met us when we rounded some spur or crag ; now swaying this way or that to maintain our balance in the narrow sleds as the panting dogs dragged us over some steep-banked curve of the track. All through the night.

Dawn, rising like an angel out of the spectral wastes of that great hinterland, found us on a long, narrow plateau, where the track wriggled its way in and out among colossal boulders. I reflected that Sun had not been unduly timid about not wishing to risk landing the 'plane here ! And straight ahead of us—at no very great distance—were the sloping sides of a great circular flat-topped mountain, standing in the centre of the plateau we traversed. An hour later we pulled up at its base before what I first took to be the entrance to a cave. No sooner had we halted than a challenge rang out sharp and loud from some place of concealment among the boulders about the cave entrance. The driver of my sled called out some reply, there came what was evidently verbal permission from the unseen custodian of the cave, our dogs were urged on and we moved forward—straight into the cavernous mouth of what I now saw to be a narrow, winding cleft in the face of the mountain.

Icicles covered the bare, rugged stone sides of the chasm and the light of the outer day soon faded to a murky twilight as the dogs sped over the frozen surface of the track, further into the heart of the mountain. So we progressed for perhaps twenty minutes, during which time I reflected that one man with a machine-gun carefully concealed in this defile might hold up an army with ease. Then—and almost as suddenly as we had entered the gorge—we emerged into the scintillating daylight again. About us was a scene of fairylike beauty !

We had entered the level, snow-covered floor of a great extinct volcano! On all sides rose precipitously the rugged, encircling mountain-rim, a sheer five or six hundred feet of stone wall shutting out the community from the world beyond. But, whereas outside were sterility and desolation, here—in spite of the snow—was arcadian beauty. Little red-and-green-roofed houses nestled cosily here and there in the whiteness—goblin structures surrounded by orchards and meadows white now under the hand of the Northern Winter, but in Summer, I had little doubt, as green and refreshing as the meadows of England.

Straight, well-made snow-roads ran hither and thither between the properties, converging in the centre of the crater towards a larger building set on a slight eminence among stately, ghost-like trees. The whole place looked too lovely to be real; I could not be done feasting my eyes on the fairylike prettiness about me, tired as I was from the effects of the long night-journey. But it was when we pulled up by the side of the road, in order to give our heavily-breathing dogs a rest, that I experienced my greater surprise—and knew suddenly why the Doctor of Souls had brought me to this lost community. I was hardly prepared for it—and it left me gasping.

I heard the tinkle of sleigh-bells and looked down the long, straight road to see coming towards us from the stately building amid the tall trees an equipage that might surely have come straight out of the pages of a fairy-tale-book. A large and graceful sleigh, drawn by two finely-groomed and jet-black horses, their glistening coats as black as the snow was white. Their harness, burnished silver, flashed and glittered in the bright sunlight. By the side of the heavy, befurred figure of the driver, I could make out a smaller form—a girl in white furs. As the sleigh drew closer I seemed to become bewitched by the tinkling music of the sleigh-bells—and I stared hard at the girl. Out of the corner of an eye, however, I saw my driver jump from his seat

and make a low obeisance—and even then I wondered what the reason for it could be.

As the sleigh glided nearer and I was able to make out more clearly the faces of the occupants, I looked harder still. The driver was a man in late middle-age, eagle-eyed and hard of feature—an aristocrat, if there ever was one. But it was the girl by his side that made me stare. There was something familiar about her—hidden as she was behind her warm white furs. And then, as the sleigh jingled by, I leapt to my feet with a cry of astonishment and incredulity. She had turned her little head and I had had one brief glimpse of two heavenly blue eyes—eyes that alone were enough to tell me. She was my Lady of the Clouds!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE sleigh tinkled away along the frozen road. I stood gasping, and staring incredulously after it. Sun had left his sled and was approaching me, a whimsical smile playing about his thin lips.

“My Lady of the Clouds!” I cried. “But you told me she was a dream . . . !”

The Doctor of Souls held up a protesting hand.

“Listen, Bunny,” he said, gently. “Your Lady of the Clouds was no creature of your fancy. That, in fact, is the same lady you met in the House of the Brother of the Seven Worlds. You were sleeping when you met her, and in your state of hypnosis you believed . . .”

“Then she is real!” I cried. “And that other planet—the place my soul was supposed to have visited—did not really exist at all?”

Sun shook his head as a sign to me to curb my excitement.

“You should not throw such a slur upon the veracity and the integrity of the Brother,” he rebuked. “That

planet exists and your soul wandered to it. This lady underwent treatment at the monastery at the time, and during your sleep she was shown to you. Thus, Bunny, her charm and her appearance made an indelible impression on your plastic brain. . . .”

“But who is she?” I interrupted. “What is her name—and where does she live?”

He smiled at my impatience.

“She is called the Princess Natashka,” he murmured, “and she lives in that palace set among the pine and silver-birch trees yonder. She is the reigning Princess of this settlement. After the Great Revolution, when those of the nobility of Russia who were not immediately massacred managed to escape from the gentle Bolshevik, her father, the Grand Duke Stanislaus, together with some few hundreds of his retainers, migrated across Siberia and founded this colony. Stanislaus died in the monastery on the border of Tibet—shortly before you visited it, Bunny—and Natashka, his only child, has taken his place.”

“Then who was that man with her?” I demanded, urgently, for I was still filled with a vivid recollection of that eagle-eye, that hawk-like, supercilious, somewhat cruel face.

“That is the Duke Mischel—her father’s cousin. He acts as regent.”

“But how do they live—here?” I asked, casting a glance around at the snow-bound landscape.

“The crater is extremely fertile,” Sun explained. “In summer they work hard and set by for the long winter. They are also great hunters. During the winter their men explore the surrounding country in bands and hunt the very plentiful game. Then they barter for provisions and comforts. And by the way, Bunny, it is hardly discreet to shout as you did when in the presence of the Princess or her cousin the Duke. They follow the old régime here, you know, and such impoliteness might quite easily be rewarded by a summary incarceration.

I am glad for your sake that Mischel did not hear you."

"But—she is mine!" I cried. "My Lady of the Clouds!"

"Unfortunately," the half-Chinaman murmured dryly, "the Princess may not regard you in any such familiar esteem."

"You mean," I muttered, aghast at the thought, "that she may not remember me?"

"She may have some recollection of you," he answered, "but hardly the same ardent image you have of her."

"But, surely . . .!" I protested, dismayed.

"Besides," Sun resumed, "it is more than likely that the Duke may sternly resist any such presumption on the part of a commoner. They are proud men—Russia's nobility."

I was aware that the Doctor of Souls looked curiously at me—as if to observe the effect of his suggestion.

"Damn the Duke!" I cried. "No one shall stand in our way!"

I was peculiarly conscious that I was talking not in the least like my friend Bunny Bellairs. I seemed to have much less self-control than that easy-going individual. Again I was aware of a strange new vitality coursing through me—making my every fibre tingle with life.

"Suppose,"—Sun leaned closer and insisted in a low, suggestive voice—"suppose he did stand in your way?"

"Pah!" I muttered contemptuously. "I'd kill him."

The Doctor of Souls chuckled like a ghoul.

In spite of my new-found strength I felt a chill, eerie sensation assail my spine.

"Excellent!" laughed Sun. "But you must be careful, Bunny, or you may have some enterprising, far-sighted journalist describing you as a 'vile, cold-blooded slaughterer'—and rejoicing over your being sent to the scaffold!"

"What on earth are you talking about?" I asked—rather surprised at such melodramatic rhetoric from so dignified a personage as Sun. But before he had time to

reply—if indeed he had intended replying—I had lost all interest in my question and gone on to matters more urgent. “How soon will I meet her—to talk to her?” I inquired.

“Very soon, Bunny,” smiled Sun. “We are invited to stay at the palace and will be honoured guests—on account of the late Duke Stanislaus’s friendship with the Brother of the Seven Worlds. There we will deliver our message to the Duke Mischel—and you may meet the Princess. But I entreat you to remember that they are a ruling house—and to take no democratic liberties. They have established proud traditions in the short dozen years of the existence of this minute monarchy.”

“What do they call it?” I asked.

“The Kingdom of the Khan Mountains,” he told me. “Come, Bunny, back to your sled. We must present our credentials and make our bows. Our furs must be efficient disguises, for obviously we were not recognised.”

Nothing loath, I stepped towards my vehicle and its patient driver and a moment later we were gliding on through the crisp, sunny air, an air that went to my head like the finest champagne. Towards the centre of the plateau we met here and there picturesque, fur-clad pedestrians who exchanged banter with our drivers, and at the end of a long avenue of silver-birch trees—the approach to the palace—we were halted by stalwart, heavily-armed guards mounted on shaggy, wiry horses, and Sun was questioned before we were permitted to proceed.

Along the drive we sped, pulling up with a wide sweep in front of a stately white porch, where a fur-uniformed major-domo, fitting into the picture as I have never seen a major-domo fit before or since, came down the white steps to welcome us. He conversed with Sun, for I knew no Russian; and I have yet to learn of an Asiatic or European language in which that extraordinary personality, the Doctor of Souls, was unable to make himself

understood. We were immediately shown into a spacious and well-appointed suite of rooms that had been allotted to us. Here, in a sumptuous bedroom, I found everything that I could possibly require, and in a very short while I had shaved and bathed and generally made myself more presentable than I had been since the day of my removal from my London flat.

During the middle of the day an excellent luncheon was served us in an adjoining dining-room, and shortly afterwards the major-domo entered the apartment with the welcome news that the Princess Natashka and the Duke Mischel would receive us. Hardly able to contain my excitement and my impatience to see my beloved again, I followed Sun and the emissary with my heart wildly thumping.

The room in which I again met my Lady of the Clouds—as I could not help thinking of her—was a stately apartment evidently reserved for such functions as I was dismayed to find the present to be. We were ushered in, properly announced, Sun first. I heard him make his formal greetings, and then, my heart still wildly palpitating, I followed him.

Seated on a small throne at the far end of the room was my Lady of the Clouds—looking now even a thousand times more beautiful and desirable than when I had first seen her. Her little exquisitely-chiselled chin rested lightly in the cup of a small white hand as she looked up to greet me. For one wild, mad moment I hoped—for I thought I saw a sudden, startling, glad light animate the lovely blue eyes. Then it had passed, and my spirits sank, for she scanned me with an impersonal passivity that I could not misunderstand. Biting my lip to conceal my dismay, and fighting to master myself, I advanced and bowed before her. Rigid and erect, a little to one side of her chair, stood the Duke Mischel, the very embodiment of the proud spirit of Imperial Russia's forgotten nobility. But I hardly saw him. My eyes were fixed on the face of the girl—she was no more—

in the great chair-throne. She was speaking—in a low, soft voice that fell about my ears like beautiful music. I thrilled as I recognised it!

“We are honoured to be visited by friends of the Lama,” she said. (She had the faintest trace of a foreign accent.) She extended a small hand. As I took it an irresistible impulse seized me.

“But, Princess,” I muttered in a voice that I hardly recognised as being my own, “surely you remember me?”

She withdrew her hand. I felt—rather than saw—the Duke Mischel stiffen to an even more erect position. Even then I sensed his hostility. Sun coughed discreetly to remind me of his advice.

“I have no recollection,” the Princess murmured coldly. And then, with sinking heart, and hardly knowing, or caring, what happened, I found myself listening to a sing-song account of the Duke Mischel’s rank and titles—and perforce I was bowing to that superannuated chimney-stack of a man, with what scant ceremony I could summon for the introduction. I had little interest in the conversation that ensued between Sun and my Lady of the Clouds—for one reason because it was in Russian—but I could tell from her deferential tone that she held the Doctor of Souls in high regard—a fact that gave me little cause for wonder. Since the Duke Mischel, speaking no English, concerned himself primarily with this conversation, turning only now and then to me to give me a perfunctory smile that was as false as it was brief, I was left very much to my own devices.

I stood to one side, my eyes riveted on the Princess Natashka’s sweet face. I was aware that my interest in the girl was steadily but effectively arousing the ire of her aquiline-countenanced regent—indeed, before Sun and I left the reception-room, the short, false smiles had become positive glares!—but this troubled me nothing at all. In some peculiar way my new strength—that passion that seemed to possess me—made such potential opposition as his bearing suggested look very insignificant

and contemptuous indeed. I felt I could crush such a man as I might crush a beetle underfoot—and think nothing of it. And so, after more bows and polite nothings, back to our apartments—myself with the knowledge that I had already made an enemy in the Kingdom of the Khan Mountains.

It was that same evening. I paced about the fragrant shrubbery of a great conservatory that adjoined our suite and jutted far out into the snow-clad gardens, trying to puzzle things out and to plan a line of action. I had in no way lost heart. Hope, like that new radiant vitality, pulsated through my being. I felt big enough and powerful enough to overthrow a world—if that world stood between myself and the Princess Natashka.

But first, I realised, she must be wooed. Scant hope or benefit from my planning, if my Lady of the Clouds did not first reciprocate my love for her. And she had forgotten me! It was hardly conceivable! I had urgently questioned Sun on the point, but the Doctor of Souls had been monosyllabic, uncommunicative—though always there had been that slow, inscrutable smile on his lips, as if he could have told me much had he cared. I had hardly had time to persist, for very shortly after our return to our suite the Duke Mischel had been announced, and he and Sun had retired to the seclusion of Sun's rooms, for the purpose of discussing the mysterious message from the Brother, I assumed.

And so, left to myself, and hardly able to rest for impatience to know when I would have an opportunity of private conversation with the Princess, I paced the great conservatory. I suppose I must have been lost in the ardour of my meditations, for I have no recollection of hearing a footfall, when suddenly I felt a hand touch me lightly on my arm from behind. I swung around—expecting I know not what.

There, in the shadow of the great ferns under which I stood, close by my side, was—the Princess! Her face gave me a sudden enlightenment. Her expression was

different—somehow more sweet and sympathetic than it had been during our formal interviews in the throne-room. I stared, joy clutching at my heart; I felt my self-control ebb as I saw again that look of recognition—this time quite unmistakable—in her beautiful blue eyes!

“Princess!” I muttered hoarsely—but she quickly signed me to be silent. She drew closer to me.

“Softly!” she urged. “They will hear! There are spies everywhere! Oh, M’sieur! How glad I am you have come! I remember you—very, very well! Only it is not wise that Mischel, my cousin, should know! You must wait!”

I moved towards her, a dozen unspoken questions surging to my lips. But she had turned and run back along the path. In a moment there was nothing of her—save only the fading pitter-patter of her little shoes as she hurried across the gravel towards the palace.

CHAPTER XXXIX

FOR the ensuing twenty-four hours I lived in a turmoil of excited anticipation such as I thrill even now to recollect. Hope ran high—high, like the strange strong passion in my veins—the hope that there had been meaning in those few words Natashka had so hurriedly whispered to me in the fern-bower of the great conservatory. She remembered me—very well! Did she know of my love for her? Did she, too—delicious thought!—perhaps share my ardour? Her manner, the look in her eyes, her “Oh! How glad I am you have come!”—what did they mean if not that she loved me? But why the mystery? Because of Mischel? How soon would I know all? How and when would I meet her next? “You must wait!” she had said, but the waiting was hard! I had to exert every iota of my

self-control to restrain myself from summoning the major-domo and demanding to see the Princess at once, fatal as such a precipitous course would probably have been. There had been no mistaking the malicious glint in her cousin's cold-blue eyes. Contemptuously as I had regarded the warning in them, I knew that it would be extreme folly to ignore it—in spite of my curious new vitality. Then there had been her warning—"It is not wise that Mischel should know!"

To add to my general restlessness, the Doctor of Souls—whom I even then suspected to be the real controlling-figure behind all this mystery; since that mystic was intellectually too big to be anything else—had gone into seclusion since our return from the interview with the Princess and her cousin on the previous afternoon. A guard stood by the door to his section of the suite and would not permit me to pass. I was informed by the major-domo that His Highness held conclave with the emissary of the Brother of the Seven Worlds and must on no account be disturbed. My meals were served me alone—and I had nothing but my own disturbing thoughts for company. Early that evening, unable any longer to bear my suspense, I determined to investigate what kept Sun so occupied—a procedure curiously alien to the nature of Bunny Bellairs and one attended with surprising results.

The rooms allotted the scientist for the period of our stay in the palace, like those I occupied, fronted partly on the large conservatory I have already described. I made my way through the thick foliage of ferns and palms until I stood directly under one of the windows of Sun's apartments.

Here I listened for a while, but I could detect no sound coming from within. This gave me some satisfaction, for it told me that Sun and the Duke Mischel conversed in some inner room—so that I might force the window and obtain entry without risk of being heard. Very cautiously I inserted the blade of my penknife between

the frames and, exerting pressure, I had the satisfaction of feeling the catch slip back. It was the work of a moment to raise the lower frame, listen, and climb into the room. The apartment was in darkness, so I paused and struck a match.

The room was a small library and I observed a door between the bookcases in the wall facing me. My match extinguished, I crept silently towards this door, bent down to the keyhole and listened again. At once I had my reward. Sun was in the next room. His voice was low, compelling—with that peculiar ring in the tone that told me at once what he was doing! I found the keyhole, applied my eye to it—and there, framed in the quaint-shaped outline of the keyhole, I saw a picture that added to my bewilderment! The Doctor of Souls was hypnotising His Highness the Duke Mischel!

The Duke sat back in an arm-chair, his aquiline face passive and inanimate, his eyes dull with that peculiar dullness I had seen in the eyes of other of Sun's "patients"! The Doctor of Souls—a weird, unearthly figure in his Chinese robes—stood before his patient, gazing down into that impassive face, making curious passes with his hand before those dull eyes, speaking—incessantly speaking in that low, vibrating voice! I stared in wonderment. What could it all mean? What Sun actually said told me nothing, for his words were, of course, Russian, but I must have stood there for some few minutes in the vain hope that something else might give me a clue to the portent of this extraordinary and unexpected spectacle. And then Sun moved out of the sphere of my vision, and I suddenly recollected my danger. What if he were moving towards the door behind which I stood concealed? A sudden panic seized me and I made my way hurriedly across the floor to the window again.

I was intensely relieved to attain to the sanctuary of the conservatory without mishap, and having carefully closed the window behind me again, I made my way back to my own rooms through more legitimate ways, puzzling

over what I had just witnessed and trying to connect it with our purpose here in the Kingdom of the Khan Mountains. Outside the door to my own apartments the major-domo awaited me.

"The Princess will receive M'sieur," he informed me. In a moment I was following him—joy, anticipation, excitement almost making me run.

Natashka met me at the door of the cosy little room to which I was conducted. She gave some hasty, whispered injunction to the departing servant that gave me a sudden enlightenment. This meeting was clandestine! She closed the door and turned to me, a little shyly.

"He can be trusted," she explained. She indicated a chair with a pretty gesture and a sideways inclination of her head. Hardly knowing what I was doing, I murmured thanks and accepted it.

"Princess," I began, striving to conceal my ardent longings by assuming a conversational tone, "you said you were glad to see me. Will you tell me why you are glad?"

She moved from the closed door and took a chair near mine by the fireside. Her head was averted but when at length she looked up and met my glance her little features were composed and self-possessed.

"You are my guest," she murmured politely. "Should I not be pleased to see my guests?"

But my ardour was such that I was no longer to be restrained. I rose and approached her. "Princess—my Lady of the Clouds!" I cried, "you have never been out of my thoughts ever since that day in the monastery . . .!"

She was staring at me in joyous amazement.

"Your Lady of the Clouds?" she echoed. "Why do you call me that? Did you, too—dream—at the House of the Brother of the Seven Worlds?"

I put a hand out and touched her.

"Do you mean," I whispered, "that *you* shared my dream? You remember?"

She had risen and stood quivering before me—a look of sweet, joyous amazement in her beautiful face. Next instant I had clasped her in my arms and smothered her face with burning kisses.

“I have thought of nothing else but my dream,” she murmured, “all these long years.” She laughed—a little laugh that to me was the ringing of silver bells in heaven. “And you are real!” she cried. “Real!”—and I felt her small hands play about my shoulders as if she were still in some doubt.

“Natashka,” I whispered, “you must come with me—to England—away from this exile—now—as soon as we can arrange it.”

A troubled look crept into her glorious eyes.

“I will come with you to the end of the world,” she murmured, “but I fear my cousin. He will object. Already I observe that he looks crossly at you. He has forbidden me to see you. That is why I have had to wait all this while—and trust Nicholas, the servant, not to tell the Duke that I summoned you here, to my boudoir.”

“But you are mine!” I cried, “we belong to each other. We have done ever since that day the Brother brought us together. No one shall stand in our way. Natashka, will you come with me if I find a way?”

For answer she turned her face to mine. We were close in an embrace, too enrapt, I suppose to hear the sounds of approaching footsteps, and then, suddenly—we sprang apart. There in the open doorway, fury shining in his cold blue eyes, stood the Duke Mischel!

For a moment none of us made a movement, and in that time I had opportunity to observe that in the corridor behind the Duke was the familiar figure of Dr. Sun. I caught a glimpse of his face. He grinned sardonically.

The Duke strode into the room, fury blazing in his eyes. He came straight up to me and launched at once into a fierce tirade in Russian—of which I understood, of course, not a solitary word—clenching his fist and holding it close to my face and ending with a dramatic gesture

wards the door. I stood fast, strangely unmoved and quite unperturbed at his obvious command.

"Sun," I said quietly, "will you please inform this animated ramrod in his own language that Princess Natashka and I intend to be married."

The Doctor of Souls advanced into the room, the slightly amused smile still playing about his lips. Both the Duke and I had turned to him—in appeal. For a few moments I waited while the stern nobleman hurled words and phrases at my old college-fellow. When Sun at length turned to me the smile had left his face.

"His Highness gives us twenty-four hours in which to take ourselves off the Khan Mountains," he informed me.

Natashka gave a little moan of dismay, and I suppose it was that that decided me. Furiously I turned on the Russian.

"The deuce you do!" I shouted angrily. "Well, you can tell him this, Sun. When I leave this place my Lady of the Clouds goes with me—otherwise I go as a corpse! She is more to me than my life! Tell him that!"

But Sun never got as far as the translation of my threat, for the Duke read in my bearing and in the fury of my speech that whatever I had said was hardly in accordance with his august wishes. He flung to the door and clapped his hands loudly together. Almost immediately we heard the sounds of men running along the corridor and next instant the room was invaded by the stalwart, bearded figures of the armed bodyguard. Before I could do anything two of them—at a sign from the nobleman—had gripped me by the arms and were propelling me with scant ceremony towards the door.

I heard Natashka's indignant protest and I cried out aloud: "I will not leave this place without you, my darling!"—and then I was beyond the door and it had been slammed behind me. I was taken straight to my apartments, led inside and left to cool my indignation as best I could under lock and key. About ten minutes

later, I heard the key turn in the lock, the door opened and the Doctor of Souls entered the room.

"Well, Bunny," he began in his usually quiet way, "I fear your childish impulsiveness has curtailed our stay."

I faced him angrily.

"Why did you never tell me," I cried, "that she felt about me just as I have always felt about her? Why did you lie to me?"

"My dear Bunny," he protested mildly, "I do not know everything. Besides that is hardly the point—now. You do not seem to realise. Arrangements are being made for our return early to-morrow morning. It would not be safe to remain in the mountains after the Duke has warned us to be gone. For me, perhaps, it would not matter so much—for I have resources. But for you, Bunny, it would have very unpleasant consequences. Come, I have delivered my message from the Brother, our work is done. Be resigned to go."

"Without her?" I cried. "Never!"

He smiled.

"Sun," I appealed, fervently, "won't you help me? It would be so easy for you to influence the Duke . . ."

He waved me to silence with a quick, commanding gesture. "My influence is used only for good," he informed me. "I cannot interfere in this—your private affair." His face showed suddenly concerned. "But do nothing rash, Bunny," he advised. "And now, I will leave you to reflect. Be assured it is better that we go. There are a thousand men at the Duke's beck and call. If you were to be indiscreet our chances would be slim. Think it over."

With that he was gone—leaving me alone. I paced about the room trying to decide on a plan of action. And then my foot kicked against something lying on the carpet near where Sun had been standing—something hard. I bent down and picked up—an automatic pistol! I stared at the weapon curiously. How had it come there?

Had Sun left it ? Surely not. For one thing I had never known him to be in possession of a firearm of any sort—if one excepts the atomic pistol he had once demonstrated to me in the lonely farmhouse in Kent. I quickly pushed aside the idea. It had been dropped, I supposed, by one or other of the guards. Hastily I examined the magazine. The pistol was loaded ! What a find—at a time like this ! Hardly able to credit my good fortune I slipped it into a pocket of my jacket.

CHAPTER XL

I WAS relieved, during the serving of my dinner that evening by the major-domo, to find that no mention was made about the loss of a pistol. And then, as I sat smoking a cheroot after dinner and staring moodily at the floor, having apparently been left to my own curtailed devices for the night, something very extraordinary took place. There was a scratching sound from the direction of the door and I turned my head and looked. For a while I saw nothing, then something white appeared between the polished floorboards and the lower edge of the door. Someone was forcing a small sheet of paper into the room. I rose, walked towards it, bent down, took hold of the end of it and pulled it through. Immediately I heard the sound of someone on the far side of the door hurrying away. I held the paper to the light. Written on it in a small neat hand was the following :

“The Duke Mischel and the Princess drive every morning after breakfast along the Novo Prospect—the road by which one approaches the palace from the pass. At midnight to-night the locks will be removed from your window shutters. It is your last chance. The stallions in His Highness’s sleigh are acknowledged to

be the fleetest in the Kingdom of the Khan Mountains. Do not fail."

That was all. There was no signature or mark—nothing about it to tell me whence it had come or who had written it. At first I concluded it to be from my beloved herself, but I very soon amended this conjecture—for surely she would have included in it some term of endearment. And then I remembered her fear of the Duke's spies. Perhaps she had expressly refrained in case the note should fall into their hands.

I read it again—and again. The more I read it the more it fascinated me—as if the hand that had written it had written there a command. Before midnight that night I had decided. If Sun would not help me—why then I must help myself. I would at least make a desperate bid for the freedom of the Princess and myself. If I could manage to escape from the palace I was convinced the rest would be simple. I could surely deal with personal resistance on the part of His Highness. Why, two of him would not stand between me and Natasha—now! My self-confidence was such that I almost marvelled at it.

I sat down in my arm-chair again and waited. I had not been waiting very long when I heard sounds of movement in the conservatory outside the window, whose iron shutters had been padlocked together as a precaution against my escape shortly after the scene of the afternoon. Thrilling, but remaining very still, I waited until all noise had vanished, then I rose, walked to the window, opened it, and pushed the shutters. They swung open!

I returned and quickly donned the furs that hung on a rack near the door. Very shortly afterwards I was in the conservatory and moving towards the side door I had several times previously noticed to have its key on its inner side. In a minute I was under the canopy of frosty heaven, in the palace gardens. By a detour and a scramble through a frozen thicket I avoided the sentries at the gates and when dawn broke over the crater some

hours later I was far from the palace and pacing up and down, to keep warm, on that same road on which I had first seen the Princess of the Khan Mountains.

It was a long and irksome wait. Several times I had to scramble through the frozen hedge and take refuge behind it while pedestrians or horsemen went by towards the centre of the settlement. Once there passed along the road a dog-sled exactly similar to the one that had conveyed me from the plains. The sight of it made me wonder, recollecting the narrowness of the road down the pass, whether it would not be a very arduous task to drive the large ducal sleigh without mishap to that lonely hut below the mountains where Sun had left the aeroplane.

But this was not time for doubts and cavillings. It was now a matter of life and death. More: it meant Natashka—if I succeeded. And why should I not succeed? I was armed. I had strength and resolution. I did not fear opposition. If the Duke made serious resistance I should shoot him—like a dog! This contemplation gave me, strangely, not the least concern. Curious—I thought a moment later—how I seemed to have changed. I pictured old Bunny Bellairs, the fellow I used to be, sitting at his desk in London. How would he have viewed such a possibility? I laughed at the thought. Why, he would have succumbed with horror at the very suggestion!

My thoughts were brought to an abrupt cessation, a little while later, by my becoming aware that something approached along the road from the direction of the distant palace, a little speck that crawled over the snow-track fully a mile and a half away. I kept well under the shelter of the hedge and strained my eyes. So I waited for perhaps five minutes, my excitement gradually mounting. By that time the speck had become larger and I thought I could make out the bulk of black horses and the spidery outline of a sleigh. A moment later I felt my heart beat faster. It was the sleigh for which I waited.

I can never hope to accurately describe my feelings as that sleigh drew closer, until at length it was sufficiently near for me to hear the musical jingling of the little bells and to make out the forms of the Duke Mischel and my adored one on the high seat behind the prancing stallions. On they glided—ever nearer. I kept well concealed, planning to take His Highness by surprise, and so, if it were possible, to avoid bloodshed. (I remembered that Natashka would see.) But I must admit that the contemplation of this last possibility gave me even then very little concern.

One resolve alone stood predominantly before my consciousness. My Lady of the Clouds should be mine, did the whole Universe conspire to forbid it! Nearer came the jingling sleigh—nearer! Now I could clearly distinguish the stern, hawk-like features of the Regent. Now—and I felt my heart-beats quicken—I could see Natashka's sweet face half-hid behind the soft white furs that were wrapped about her. Closer, nearer! Twenty yards away, ten, they were almost abreast of me—and then I leapt!

I took a running jump from the frozen hedge straight for the driver of the sleigh. The near horse shied and reared on high. I saw the Duke pull hard on the reins, angry astonishment blazing in his eyes as he recognised me. I heard Natashka shriek. Mischel's right hand dropped the reins and flew to his girdle. As I descended on him I caught the flash of a jewelled dagger in the air above my head. I dodged just in time to avoid the slashing downward stroke. I backed; my hand flew to my pocket; gripped the butt of my automatic. The Duke leapt from his seat straight towards me—his dagger drawn back to strike. I aimed straight for his chest—and pressed the trigger. There was a loud report—and he stopped in his tracks. He gave one gurgling cry—a peculiar, horrible cry, as of a man being garotted—spun round and fell face foremost into the snow.

The horses, alarmed by the report of my shot and by

the screams of the Princess, who had watched the encounter, her eyes wide with horror, plunged forward, dragging the sleigh with them. But even as they plunged I jumped, landed neatly in the sleigh by my beloved's side, seized the reins and held the maddened animals to the road. I had not been premature. The lurch, as the terrified stallions leapt forward, sent me reeling into the seat behind me—and then we were flying over the frozen road, our runners scarce seeming to touch the ground at all!

With a rein in either hand, I exerted all the strength in my body in an attempt to check that mad, headlong stampede. I might have spared myself the effort! On we flew, the sleigh swaying and lurching from side to side with the sickening motion of a boat in a rough sea—the snow flying from the horses hoofs to our faces, blinding us! On, on, towards that narrow, ice-bound defile through the mountain that lay between us and freedom—and where, should the runaways not be subdued into a saner pace, I knew we would not proceed a dozen yards without disaster! Fortunately—it was sheer fortune, for my unskilled control of the reins had nothing to do with it—exhaustion overcame the horses when within a short quarter mile or so of the place where the road entered the gorge, and their mad, uncontrolled gallop gradually subsided into a steady, infinitely safer and more comfortable canter. Then for the first time did I venture to take my eyes off the road before me and glance at the little lady by my side. Her face frightened me!

She sat huddled against the far rail, rigid and still, an unspeakable horror shining in her eyes. When she became aware that I looked at her she shuddered and made as if to draw further away from me!

“Why, darling!” I began incredulously.

“You—killed—Mischel!” she said in a curiously low, toneless voice. “You killed him—in cold blood! You are a murderer! Oh!” and she buried her face in her hands.

I laughed aloud. Ass that I was! Of course the things she had witnessed would upset her for a little while! It was only natural. Women were not constituted to stand the sight of bloodshed. So I looked at my front again and occupied myself in guiding the horses—but I smiled happily, very pleased at the success of my little plan, very secure in the conviction that she would soon overcome her qualms and regard me, not as a murderer, but as her rescuer.

I don't know what caused me to look round, down the road along which we had just come at such breakneck speed, but I did, just before we took the turning that led into the narrow chasm. What I saw made me swing to my front again and urge on the panting stallions! Far towards the palace the white road surface was black with little specks that followed with disturbing rapidity in our wake! Someone from the palace gates—the sentries, possibly—must have witnessed my attack on the sleigh and given the alarm! A possibility I had overlooked! We were being pursued!

I did not look again. I was far too busy urging the horses through the tortuous bends of that dark, ice-bound defile through the rim of the Khan Mountains. Several times I had to reduce their gait from a canter to a trot—in some places even to a walk—to avoid accident at particularly slippery and dangerous sections of the track. Meanwhile, unrestricted on the open white road in the crater, our pursuers would be gaining on us! There was that in the thought that set me urging on the horses with a new sudden disregard of the dangers of the road! On we sped, swaying now on a solitary runner round some sharp bend in the defile, now brushing the lichen on the icicle-hung wall—on, on, the risks uncalculated!

The light of day at the end of the defile, showing suddenly in the twilight before us, brought me to a sudden contemplation of other dangers to be braved—the sentry at the mouth of the gorge! But I did not for a moment slow down. Out we dashed, out of the chasm

into the crisp, sparkling daylight. A voice from somewhere among the loose rocks fringing the defile on the steep mountain-side yelled out an injunction that was unmistakably a command to us to stop, but I took no heed. Instead I bent low down in my seat and whispered to the Princess to do the same. The precaution was not too soon, for hardly had I leaned forward when the crack of a rifle split the silence about us and a splinter flew from the dashboard in front of me high into the air! There followed another shot, and then another, but the first was the only one that took effect—and that one had done no more than urge the horses to more speed. Then we had rounded a bend in the track and were out of immediate danger.

Oddly enough, I laughed! I, Bunny Bellairs, placid, easy-going, danger-disliking, violence-hating—laughed! It was astonishing! I chuckled as I guided the sleigh in and out among the monster boulders of that narrow plateau, along which we had something like an hour's journey to make before we began the descent down the rugged mountain-side to the plains of snow-bound Siberia. I was enjoying this adventure! I found it exhilarating! There was only one discordant note in all my new intoxicating happiness. Whenever I laughed I became aware of it. I saw Natashka shudder. I observed her to look at me as if she did not quite believe that I was—I. She looked bewildered.

I will not describe in detail the whole of our breakneck journey down the Khan mountainside, for throughout the larger part of that day there was much of a sameness about our going. All the while we had traversed the high plateau I had been relieved, whenever I had glanced back, to discern no sign of our pursuers. I began, in fact, to hope that the chase had been abandoned.

Thus, towards midday, when perhaps the half of our journey had been completed and we were already well down the pass, I considered myself justified in giving the horses a well deserved spell. It was during this brief

respite that, glancing upwards over the snow-covered slopes, I was alarmed to see, coming down a steep, narrow footpath that intersected the many hairpin-bends of the sleigh-road with a fine contempt for gradients, the figures of about twenty mounted men—less than a mile distant! With a cry I urged on the horses. Our pursuers, apart from abandoning the race, had stolen upon us unawares by choosing a short-cut route! As I frantically drove on down the winding, dizzy road, I began trying to calculate who would first attain to the foothill—ourselves or the horsemen! For as I looked it seemed to me that of the two parties we had infinitely more ground to cover—since I dared not take the sleigh off the road. On the other hand, their progress was necessarily the slower, since their horses found scant foothold on those rough, steep slopes. It was largely, I saw, a matter of chance. My only course was to go on—and on we went, with what speed the slope of the road and the weary horses could give us.

As the afternoon advanced and we neared the foothills, the horsemen rapidly gained on us. The last couple of miles, from the point where the footpath joined the road to that lonely hut nestling in the snows—near which I was not a little relieved to distinguish the black, cigar-shaped bulk of the aeroplane, our hope of salvation—were almost a neck-and-neck race for life!

Less than half a mile behind our swaying sleigh came the men from the Kingdom of the Mountains, their sabres flashing in the afternoon sun! Natashka sat still and white by my side, her little fists tight clenched with excitement. For myself, rather strangely, perhaps—for I am by nature inclined to be rather easily overcome by any excitement—I felt a curious confidence in my ability to meet and resist any mortal force that might oppose me. I felt strong enough to turn, if need be, and meet those soldiers hand to hand! Vitality surged like a flame within me, and I almost enjoyed that last ten minutes of our race for freedom! But the gods were on our side and

there was no such necessity, for we pulled up in the snow less than twenty yards from the resting 'plane with yet a good quarter mile separating us from the leading horsemen of the oncoming band. I flung the reins aside, sprang from the sleigh, grasped Natashka firmly about her waist and lifted her down.

"Run!" I urged. "We haven't a moment to waste! To the 'plane—and as hard as you can!" Already the need for haste was more than apparent, for certain of the pursuers had dismounted and were firing at us. Even as I spoke a bullet screeched by, a mere yard or so above our heads. Natashka, that certain horror still lurking in her heavenly eyes, seemed undecided, so I seized her by a wrist and together we struggled through the knee-deep snow-drift towards the 'plane. I had actually reached the ladder when a hoarse shout from behind me caused me to wheel round. There, a couple of yards away in the snow, stood Wan-long, the dwarf—a malignant look in his ugly, misshapen face.

"Master no come back?" he queried sibilantly.

I paid no heed but began hurriedly to help Natashka up the ladder. A bullet pattered against the steel side of the fuselage and went ricochetting and screaming into the frozen air. Wan-long leapt forward and gripped me by an arm. I don't know where I got the strength from, for the dwarf was an abnormally powerful man and had several times ere this held me powerless in his iron grasp, but I shook him off as easily as I might have a small boy! He advanced, crouching, his arms held ready for one of those peculiar grips that, had he fastened one about me, would, I knew, have rendered me as impotent as a sack of wheat. Summoning all the strength in my body I struck out at that hideous face with my right fist. My blow went home, and Wan-long went reeling back into the soft snow and lay groaning.

And then, hurtling through the air with an inarticulate snarl of rage, came another shape—straight for my throat! Sirius—the bulldog! White like the snow,

I had not seen him come through the drift. I dodged, and Sirius crashed headlong against the hard side of the steep ladder. And then, before he could get back his breath, I had seized him by his short hind legs and was swinging him round and round in the air above my head! I let go. Sirius went flying through the air to land with a yelp in the soft snow some distance away—and before he could return to a renewal of the attack I had mounted the ladder, flung open the door, pushed Natashka inside, scrambled in after her, slammed and locked the door behind me.

Leaving the Princess to her own devices, I flew straight towards the control-room. A bullet spattered through the thin steel hull within a foot of my body as I climbed into the bucket-seat and pressed the starting-switch. To my intense relief I heard the answering purr of the atomic engines and the drone of the steady gyroscopes under the floor-boards! I moved a lever on the right that I knew, from previous flights in the 'plane, to control the helicopter tractors. They were my only hope, since we could never have left our deep snow bed with the ordinary lateral propellers. I felt the machine sway under me—and I gasped with relief. This dread—the fear that I might not be able to start the machine unaided—had been constantly with me ever since I had first formed my plan of escape from the mountains. I opened wide the throttle and observed the effect through the turret windows. We were ascending vertically into the air; already the surface of the snow was many feet below us.

Far along the road towards the mountains I could see the figures of our pursuers gathered together as if to debate forlornly some further plan of action—and I laughed. Almost immediately under us I saw Wan-long and Sirius, side by side, staring upwards—the bulldog jumping in the air and furiously barking! I laughed again—as good a laugh as I had had for weeks!

CHAPTER XLI

WHEN we had ascended to an altitude of a thousand feet—from the height-registering barometer on the board in front of me—I decided that I might risk my skill in engaging the ordinary propellers and shutting off the helicopters. This I proceeded to do, carrying out the action as I had often watched Sun do it—with a hand on each lever, so as to set the propellers into motion gradually, and as gradually reduce the speed of the helicopters. The result was eminently satisfactory. In the speed-gauge on the board I watched the little indicator mount quickly from zero to ninety-eight—and stay quivering at that figure. A glance at the attitude-gauge showed a steady 1,000 feet of elevation. I slightly moved the lateral tail-planes and watched the height-register mount, slowly and steadily, in the gauge. I set the automatic height control-slide at 10,000 feet and then turned my attention to the compass. Here I set the contacts of the electrical control-apparatus so that the needle-indicator swung about with a few degrees of latitude towards the south-west. (I could later set our course more accurately I decided.)

I waited awhile in the seat to see that all was working as it should be, and I chuckled to think that I had achieved all this without the help of the inventor. I was not in the least concerned about having left Dr. Sun on the Mountains. On the contrary, having failed me as he had, I was rather glad. I pictured him making his slow and monotonous way with some Mongol caravan across those snow-swept wastes to that distant monastery whither he would be bound. It would be a considerably less comfortable journey than this of ours in the luxurious 'plane! For once the notorious Doctor of Souls would be made to experience hardship such as he loved to impose on others! And again I laughed. Satisfied at

length that all was well, I left the control-room and returned to the main-cabin in search of the Princess. She sat in one of the arm-chairs—her face buried in her hands.

“Why, darling!” I began, astonished. “Surely this is no time for regret!”—and I advanced and placed an arm about her for comfort. To my intense surprise she rose hurriedly to her feet and backed away—in her beautiful eyes a look of unconcealed terror and disgust.

“Don’t touch me—please!” she sobbed. “Oh, why did I not throw myself from the sleigh!”

“But,” I cried, dismayed, “what on earth do you mean, Natashka? Sweetheart, doesn’t your love for me count above everything else?”

“Oh, I don’t know!” she moaned. “I don’t know! You are so different—so cruel—so brutal! You are not the man I met in my dream—at the House of the Brother! And yet I think—I love you. Otherwise I should not have stayed—after I watched you”—her voice broke—“murder Mischel!”

I stared at her—amazed.

“But what nonsense!” I protested. “If I had not shot the Duke in self-defence he would most certainly have skewered me with that dagger he held! Would you rather have had that happen?”

“But his cry!” she sobbed, her eyes wide with horror. “When you shot him—his awful cry! Oh, can’t you hear it?”

I lost my temper.

“Well,” I said harshly, “if you’re going to take it that way, let me remind you that I’m not the only guilty party. *You* put the idea into my head—with that note!”

“I?” she cried. “Note? What note?”

“Didn’t you send me a note. . . ?”

“No.” She looked at me in indignant astonishment for a moment, and then she was sobbing again. I gave up trying to puzzle the thing out.

“Come,” I said. “You lie down and sleep for a while, darling. You’re all unnerved—that’s what’s the matter with you.” I led her unprotesting to the nearest cabin and then I returned to the control-room, too tired out after my strenuous day to be much concerned with my new bewilderment. I looked out the glass-lined turret over the fading landscape astern. A speed of a steady hundred miles an hour soon makes little of great distances and the Khan Mountains were already no more than a faint blur on the darkening horizon. Again I thought of Sun, and wondered what he would be doing—there on that grim snow-covered range.

And then I was suddenly and most disconcertingly made aware of something more immediately concerning myself and my sweet companion. The drone of the engines had ceased! There was a splutter, a choking gurgle—and then no more noise, not a sound! Then, abruptly, from the main-cabin, the furious clanging of the alarm-bell broke the deathly silence—that bell that rang when anything went wrong with the mechanism. I heard the Princess shriek. Frantically I began moving levers on the switch-board—all to no avail. I experienced a sudden sickening sensation of the floor vanishing from beneath my feet—and I knew then that we were falling, falling straight for the ground ten thousand feet below us!

One does not think coherently in such emergencies. One thinks multitudes of thoughts, it is true, but none of them are of much tangibility or duration, and I was far too busy hanging on to the legs of the control-seat to save myself from being dashed to pieces by the giddy cavortings of the falling machine to think very distinctly just then. But something happened inside my brain nevertheless; something that was precipitated, I have no doubt, by the ghastly shock to my mental faculties of realising that we hurled to our death. And in that instant of this realisation, I changed—and remembered! I remembered everything!

I remembered Sun taking me into that infernal brain-machine room of his underground home in Europe; I remembered the incident of the snake, the awful chair, and his information that he intended, by means of his terrible apparatus, to impose upon me the mentality of the hanged murderer—Roger Quinner! I saw suddenly the reason for everything!

I, Bunny Bellairs, had that morning shot a man in cold blood—yes, murdered him in order to rob him! I shuddered! I heard the gurgling cry; saw the face of the dead Duke Mischel before me now as I had seen it that terrible moment before he had fallen dead at my feet! I screamed aloud! A new, ghastly, unnerving fear had me in thrall! Once again I was faint-hearted Bunny Bellairs—the vitality, the passion, the strength of the man Roger Quinner had deserted me!

I was brought to a saner frame of mind by feeling the machine cease its sickening twirlings—and right, under my feet! True, it was by no means the rock-steady vehicle it had been before the engines choked and stopped, but at least some curious force had quietened its mad twistings and somersaults. The control-room stood, as it were, on end, so that I found myself sprawling on the control-board and the proper floor reared vertically upwards on my right hand side. The aeroplane's headlong downward rush to destruction had been miraculously checked—and we were slowly descending, now, nose-first! Summoning my waning courage I clawed my way between the levers and wheels and dials towards the now laterally-projecting turret and looked out.

At first I thought we were in a cloud, and then I suddenly saw the reason for what had happened. I also recollected Sun's statement that had so often puzzled me. That if the 'plane were to fall its occupants would be unhurt. A large, sliding metal band had detached itself from the tail-structure of the fuselage, and swung out clear behind the descending 'plane. Unfolded and ballooned out by the terrific wind-pressure caused by our

downward rush, a huge fabric parachute checked our descent—a parachute so large that I could see no sky. And then, while I looked, there came a sudden shock—an impact that dislodged me from the turret and dashed me against the switch-board with such force that I all but lost consciousness! We had landed!

I shall not describe in detail the further happenings of that awful night. Let it be enough to say that my first concern, once I had recovered from the shock of our landing, was to make my way along the now steep-tilted floors towards Natashka's cabin. To my infinite relief I found she was unhurt. Sandwiched in her narrow bunk she had been luckier than I, and had experienced no more than a severe shaking.

The next hour or two I spent explaining as best I could the evil influence that madman the Doctor of Souls had put about me. I was rewarded by seeing the light of love re-kindle in her eyes, when she understood—just such a soft tenderness as she had shown me in her apartments of the palace. But when I spoke of her cousin she shuddered and her horror came back. I knew then that the death of Mischel would be a bar between us that I could never hope to completely eliminate.

As for myself, all the while I spoke of it, there was that dreadful vision before me—that contorted face of the man I had killed! In the whining of the ice-laden wind about the projections of the disabled 'plane, I thought I heard, now and then, that choking, gurgling cry! I knew then that I should never forget—and I shuddered! I seemed to hear Sun saying: "The murderer finds his own punishment—in his conscience!"—and I shuddered anew.

But was I a murderer, I wondered a little while later? I had been in a trance—under the dread influence of that human ghoul, the Doctor of Souls! Chilling, like an icy hand on my heart, the answer came to me: "You, Bunny Bellairs, committed that murder! Your

mentality was changed, but you were still a human being able to think and decide for yourself! You had more vitality, more strength, more passion, more *life* in you; you were a bigger, nobler creature than that poltroon Bellairs; but you were still a human being—and you committed the murder! Suffer for it! Think of it always! Never once in all the years you have to live will you be able to forget it!”

It was a terrible night—that first night of my awakening! A night of horror! And dawn, creeping out of the wide Siberian wastes and shedding light over that barren wilderness, brought little relief. For if the ghoul of imagination were dispelled by the clean radiance of day, that same day only served to show us how hopeless was our plight. The 'plane had fallen on the snow-covered summit of a little hill. So far as I could ascertain, after a short examination, there was little damage. But that was scant consolation to me, for I knew nothing at all about engines—and had no means of tracing the cause of the trouble and setting it to rights.

There seemed to be two courses to pursue. The first to stay in the 'plane, living on the provisions with which it was amply stocked until some wandering trappers found us and guided us to freedom. The other course would be to pack some provisions and make our way back across the snows to the distant Khan Mountains. It was an unenviable contemplation. On the one hand the possibility of starving and dying unknown in this wide wilderness; on the other the certainty of punishment.

We were still debating as to which would be the wiser plan to follow—we were in the cabin—when suddenly Natashka broke off and I watched her eyes widen. She stared through the window. I followed her glance. There, coming over the crest of the hill, were the horsemen who had pursued us on the previous day! I clutched my sweetheart to my side! Breathless we waited! They must have ridden all through the night, I reflected! And then I uttered a cry of astonishment.

The man seated on the leading steed was that arch-fiend, the Doctor of Souls!

Sun entered the cabin, swathed from head to foot in heavy furs. He smiled inscrutably.

"What do you want with us?" I demanded hoarsely. "Hell-hound, fiend, will you not let us alone!"

My hand was tightly clenched about the butt of the automatic. Sun stood at the head of the ladder—still smiling. My fury mounted. I was already a murderer—what did it matter? I raised my right hand, presented the pistol at the chest of this ghoul in human guise, and pressed the trigger. There was the same loud report—but Sun still stood there, smiling. Again and again I fired.

"They're blank cartridges, Bunny," smiled Sun.

"Blanks!" I echoed, gaping at him. Natashka clung to me, shaking.

"Yes. Your shot did not harm His Highness in the least."

"What!" the girl and I exclaimed simultaneously. "But I saw him fall!" I cried. "I heard him cry! God! Will I ever forget it!"

"Mischel is unhurt, you say?" demanded Natashka in a curiously low, tremulous voice.

"Quite unhurt, I assure you, Princess," said Sun. He advanced into the room. "But let me tell you all. As you know, Princess—and Bunny does not—the Brother of the Seven Worlds assisted your father and his family to escape from Russia at the time of the Revolution. As you also know, your cousin Mischel has long wanted to make you his wife. He wrote to the Brother entreating his permission. I was sent with the Brother's reply. He forbade the marriage and desired that you should be taken to Europe and given a chance to live your life, if you preferred it, away from the exile of the Khan Mountains—leaving Mischel to rule that community. When Mischel heard the Brother's wish he was at once agreeable to your returning to

Europe with your fiancé, but I had a little experiment to complete first. I persuaded the Duke Mischel to play a certain part—and, under the influence of hypnotism, admirably he played it! It was all for the sake of enlightening my very old friend, Mr. Bellairs. A little experiment in mentality, resulting, I venture to hope, in a slightly wider outlook on life! Eh, Bunny?”

There has never been a more unpleasant task than that that falls now to my lot to perform! Would that I could write, like the author of a beautiful fairy-tale: “And they lived happily ever afterwards!” But alas! that would not be true, and I have striven to observe truth before all else in these narratives.

Natashka and I never married!

We were taken to that golden-roofed monastery on the borders of the Forbidden Land, and there, before we were permitted to depart, we were perforce rid of the occult influence that had drawn us so firmly together. At the very suggestion we were both loud in our protestations, but we were given no choice, and subsequent happenings only too quickly showed us how very much hypnosis had accounted for our mutual ardours! By the time we had reached the shores of England our passionate regard for each other had already perceptibly cooled!

Sun himself took us back to “civilisation.” (I make sparing and dubious use of that word nowadays!) There had been little wrong with the aeroplane—which had lately been used to convey us to the monastery. Our crash had been the outcome of an aircock having been closed, for the dual purpose of preventing the frost from harming the cold engines, and ensuring that Natashka and I would not get so far that Sun would have had difficulty in overtaking us! Once the parachute had been folded and replaced, and the aircock opened, we had easily taken the air again!

I shall always remember standing with Natashka on a deserted Kentish beach, early in the dawn, gazing over

the Channel at the departing 'plane. Sun stood on the platform above the fuselage, a tiny figure—microscopic by comparison with the greatness of Nature in the reddening dawn, whither he was bound !

I thought I saw his form, strangely unreal and unearthly as it merged into the reds and yellows of the sunrise, enlarge and expand before my very eyes ! I suppose it must have been some optical phenomenon due to the 'plane's altitude and the half-lights beyond, but it seemed he grew bigger and bigger, until he towered high above the structure of the aeroplane—a veritable giant against the soft, multi-coloured lights !

I thought I saw his face— pure imagination, of course—and he was smiling. It was the same smile—baffling, inscrutable. But there was infinite understanding in it, and looking at it my heart was warmed. So he stood for a few moments and I thought I heard a distant voice murmur : “ Good-bye, Bunny ! ”—and then the dawn had broken over the distant Borderland of Heaven, dazzling my eyes, and I saw my friend the Doctor of Souls no more.

THE END

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