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Sanded in San Diego

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(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

JOKE, OR NO JOKE?

STANDING back against the wall, the end of his red Mephistopheles cloak thrown over his right shoulder, and his arms folded beneath it, Roger Catlin watched the girl in Spanish costume approach.

He knew by the way she acted that she intended speaking to him; and he wondered why she appeared to be so timid about it, since this was a masquerade ball of the invitation sort where every one was supposed to know every one else,

and both he and the girl were masked. Yet she had started in his direction twice, and both times had turned aside as others came near. Perhaps, Catlin thought, she didn't want any one else to hear what she had to say to him. And now, when she was but half a dozen paces away, a tall cavalier came by with a Dutch girl on his arm, and the Spanish girl disappeared in the crowd again.

It was a brilliant sight that the casino of the Hotel del Coronado presented: masked and costumed men and women were in the maze of the dance; thousands of electric bulbs glowed through the decorations; naval officers in dress uniforms, and society women who had retained

their evening gowns instead of donning masquerade clothes mingled in the throng.

Outside the great windows was the broad walk, with its promenading lovers, and beyond was the wide beach, the Pacific Ocean dancing in the moonlight, and, in the distance, two giant cruisers of the Pacific fleet. One of them flashed a searchlight now across the tumbling sea toward Point Loma and the lighthouse, Fort Rosecrans, and the entrance to San Diego Bay, and now over the hotel gardens and the boulevards surrounding them. It was a picturesque scene outside and a brilliant one within, and it was all new to Roger Catlin, for this was his first visit to San Diego. Talk and laughter and merrymaking and the music of the excellent orchestra struck his ears. Yet he was not enjoying himself.

"I've got important business," McHugh had said that afternoon over at his own hotel in the city. "Here's a card for the great season-end masquerade at Hotel del Coronado. You get a costume and go, Catlin, and I'll meet you there and see you are introduced to some nice people."

So here he was, standing against a wall, impatient and exasperated with Donald McHugh, who had not appeared. He wanted to dance, but he was afraid he'd not be able to find McHugh by unmasking time, and he didn't want the San Diego beauties and the women guests of the resort hotel to learn, then, that they had been dancing with a stranger.

He looked for the Spanish girl again, but could not see her. The cavalier came back, however, and paused before Catlin. "You're not dancing much," the cavalier said.

"No; I'm trying to find a friend."

"May you fail to find your—friend," said the other, and moved on.

Catlin was staggered a bit; then chuckled, thinking he had been mistaken for another. He walked along the wall until he stood beneath the balcony, his back to a mass of foliage and bloom, behind which there was a divan. To his ears came a whisper:

"Mephisto! Listen, but do not turn around! You are attracting attention because you do not dance. They may suspect you. Go ahead and dance; we'll find you if we want you. There is no news yet, but we have hope." The whispering ceased. Catlin whirled around and stepped to the

end of the mass of plants. He was in time to see a woman dressed in white going back into the crowd. . .

Her words puzzled him. Again he decided he had been mistaken for another. Yet, even so, what he had heard smacked of mystery. "Something up!" he thought. "No news yet, but we have hope, eh? Yep—something going on! Unless—Great Scott! Why didn't I think of it before? So McHugh is up to his practical jokes again, is he? He'll remain in hiding and send his friends around with peculiar messages and try to get me to fall for it, will he? Still the same old boy he was at college! Well, two can play at that game! When the next one——"

The near approach of another woman interrupted his train of thought. She was walking along the wall, as far from the edge of the crowd as possible. At a window within half a dozen paces of Roger Catlin, she stopped. For a moment she stood looking out at the sea, then turned her head slightly. Her eyes met Catlin's, and her head moved slightly again, motioning him to approach.

Here was another of the jokers, Catlin thought. He walked forward slowly until he stood beside her. "Fairy Princess, suppose we enjoy this waltz?" he said.

She answered in a whisper: "What is it? You have discovered something? What do you wish me to do? I just wanted to tell you that I'm afraid you are being watched."

"Yes, I have discovered something," replied Catlin, laughing. "I've discovered your little game. Fairy Princess. And I wish you to dance with me, because the music is great, and your appearance pleases me, and I'll bet we'll make such a pretty couple every one will be watching us."

"Why do you talk that way? I don't understand," she whispered.

"Let's drop the game and enjoy ourselves," he insisted. "I can't keep my feet still with that music going."

She drew away from him quickly, and her eyes seemed to flash behind the mask. "Drop the game? Enjoy yourselves?" she said. "How—how can you talk that way? How can you talk of music and dancing, when—when you——"

"When what?" asked Catlin, laughing again. He would nail this joke now, he promised himself,

and turn the laugh on McHugh.

"Oh! What sort of man: are you?" she said. "Perhaps—perhaps I've made a mistake."

She almost ran from him, to lose herself in the crowd. Catlin noticed that several near had witnessed the scene, and were laughing now, and his face grew hot. He inspected the gentlemen standing near, but none of them had the height or breadth of shoulder of his friend, Donald McHugh.

Catlin turned away from the window and started to walk toward the balcony again. Then, almost before he realized it, she was facing him—the girl in Spanish costume. "Quick!" she whispered. "Take me in your arms and whirl me out on the floor. Get into the crowd with me, and dance toward the entrance."

"I'm only too glad!" cried Catlin, and did as she asked.

She danced as well as he had imagined she could, but he no sooner had begun to feel the joyous thrill of the waltz, than she called him back to earth. "To the entrance!" she was whispering. "I think I've got it! Oh, if we can outwit him now, at almost the last hour!"

"Very interesting," commented Catlin. "If you'll please tell me what 'it' is—"

"It isn't necessary to play a part now," she interrupted. "It is in his apartment, here at the hotel."

"Whose apartment?"

"Hargrove's, stupid! Now do you know I'm not an impostor? He has his rooms open, and is serving refreshments and showing his curios. I watched him as much as I dared with out making him suspicious. He went into a rear room, and I looked through the crack of the half-opened door. I think we can get it—we must get it! Oh, if we should fail——"

"Failure is bad business at any time," said her partner vaguely. He was smiling behind his mask. She was going to lead him to McHugh, he supposed—they were near the climax of the joke. Well, she wouldn't thrill him with her mysterious statements.

"Swing toward the door—there," she went on. "We'll step out, and I'll take your arm and we'll walk up the stairs. That's the best way, and will cause the least comment. Almost every apartment in the hotel is keeping 'open house' to-

night, of course. I'll tell you more up the stairs."

They had reached the entrance. Determined to see the joke to its conclusion, Catlin bowed and offered his arm, and she took it, and they walked down the broad corridor, hung with famous paintings and curios of old mission days, to the main lobby. Here were scores of masqueraders in fantastic costumes, and their sudden appearance from the casino excited no comment. They started up the wide stairs, walking slowly.

She began whispering to him again: "I have the automobile on the boulevard at the edge of the gardens. When we get it, we'll get down the stairs as quickly as we can, and hurry out of the door at the rear of the office—the one that opens directly into the gardens. Then a dash along the walk to the machine—and we're away! Heaven grant we do not fail!"

"Very pretty plot," he commented: "And just where does Donald McHugh come in?"

She stopped and faced him, and her answer almost took his breath away: "Donald McHugh! You're a man, aren't you? If Donald McHugh interferes, drive your fist between his eyes—he deserves it! And remember this—Hargrove is the man to fear!"

CHAPTER II

FOUGHT FOR A PIGEON.

THE two masqueraders reached the second floor. Four or five persons, masked, laughing and chatting, came down the hall toward them, and the Spanish girl turned from Catlin and led the way, half a pace ahead of him.

It was fortunate for him that his face was hidden behind a mask, for there was a peculiar expression on it. What did the girl mean? Why had she spoken that way of Donald McHugh? Who on earth was this Hargrove she mentioned? And what, in the name of Heaven, was "it"? Was it a joke, or had he stumbled upon some other man's business, been taken for another man? He remembered what the cavalier had said: "May you fail to find your friend." He remembered the girl behind the mass of foliage and bloom, and the one by the window, and remembered how this one had approached him and asked him to dance and leave

the casino with her, and told himself it could be nothing except a joke. The idea that it could be a serious matter, at such a place and at such a time, was absurd.

She led the way until they had passed the others, then stepped back and took his arm again. "Considering how important this is, I suppose you are prepared to fight, if necessary?" she asked.

"Oh, yes—yes," answered Catlin.

"We'll walk into his apartments, get a sandwich and a glass of punch, and mingle with the crowd just as if we were Hargrove's friends. Hargrove himself is unmasked, but he does not expect that of his guests, so we'll be safe. We'll try to walk out in an ordinary manner after we have it, but be ready to make a dash if we are discovered. We must not fail!"

"Certainly not! Failure is an unknown word this evening," responded Catlin.

"Careful now! Here we are!" She began talking of other things then, and laughed a bit. They came to a suite with its doors wide open, where the rooms were crowded with maskers, where there was a buffet heaped with sandwiches, and a great punch bowl at which a man was serving.

"Hargrove is at the punch bowl," the girl whispered. "We'll have to take punch to appear natural, but be careful he doesn't recognize you."

Behind his mask, Catlin smiled again. It would be highly unusual for Hargrove to recognize him, since they never had met before. This must be a great game McHugh was playing! He stepped up to the punch bowl, the Spanish girl still clinging to his arm. Hargrove, a cup of punch in one hand, looked up and saw them, and handed the cup to the girl. He served another, and, as he extended it toward Catlin, his eyes met those of the masquerader squarely. "What particular devil are you?" he asked, laughing, but with a peculiar expression in his face.

"I'm the personal devil you hear and read so much about," Catlin answered. "You'd better be on your good behavior; I might be your personal devil."

The expression in Hargrove's face changed; he appeared relieved. "'Get thee behind me, Satan,'" he quoted. "You'll find the sandwiches there."

Catlin laughed again, and led the girl toward

the buffet. With their backs to the others, they raised their masks enough to eat and drink. "That was splendid—splendid," the girl murmured. "Follow me slowly now, and try to act in a natural manner."

They turned away from the buffet, bowed to another couple approaching, and went into the adjoining room. It was a sort of den, with books and restful corners, and tall cases filled with curios gathered from all parts of the world. Hargrove was famous as a collector of curios. Catlin had not known that, but one glance at the cases told him as much.

He followed the girl slowly, looking into the cases, and they talked of ordinary things as they brushed elbows with others. In time they were at the other end of the room, near a half-open door. "Appear to be looking at this case," she whispered. "Now, glance through the door without lifting your head. That is Hargrove's bedroom. That case against the wall—see it?"

"Yes," he answered.

"On the top shelf—there it is."

"I see nothing."

"In the pigeon—the iron pigeon," she whispered, speaking swiftly. "I watched him through the door. The iron pigeon is hollow, and he has put it in there. I saw him take it out, look at it, then put it back. Oh, the irony of it! To have it there, when we have hunted every place else—in his office, in his safe, even in his safety-deposit box by the aid of our friends. In an iron pigeon!"

"What manner of man keeps an iron pigeon in his room?"

"Oh, it's a small curio he has picked up in some corner of the world. It has a history, I suppose. It was clever of him to put it in the pigeon, of course. Nobody would have thought of looking there for it. I just happened to be watching him, or I'd never have suspected. And at almost the last hour, too!"

"Pardon me, but you appear to be talking in circles," he told her.

"I beg your pardon. There is no time to waste, you are right. I'll stand here. You slip inside quickly, open the case, and get it."

"The iron pigeon?" he asked.

"Of course. There's some trick about opening it—we'll have to take the pigeon and break it open afterward. Hurry, for Heaven's sake! Oh, if

we should fail! Get it—put it under your cloak—”

“Steal it?” asked Catlin.

“Hasn’t he stolen it? Please—please hurry! Oh, if we should fail!”

Her hand rested on his arm and he turned to look into her eyes. He could read no expression there, but there had been a new note in her voice—something that told of a nearness to despair. Catlin hesitated for a moment; perhaps, thought he, this was some serious business in which he had no right to meddle. Yet, if this were the case, he had come thus far under false colors, and he had no right to quit now.

The next moment he was telling himself that it all was a part of the joke. This girl was a consummate actress evidently, and that explained the tone of her voice. McHugh knew he always was helping maidens in distress, and he had fixed up this little game. And there was the pigeon—the replica of a bird done in iron, not even bronzed or painted, a clumsy curio in a case. There could be nothing serious about an iron pigeon. Did not the word “pigeon” mean simpleton? It did, according to the best dictionaries. That explained it, didn’t it?

So Catlin determined to go his friend McHugh one better, to carry out the girl’s orders, and, when the denouement came, to refuse to accept the joke, but to take things seriously. That would turn the trick on McHugh. Perhaps he would even get a chance to “rough up” his friend in payment for the joke.

He turned slowly and glanced around the room. At the other end of it, two women were inspecting the contents of a case that held Indian relics. “Now,” the girl beside him whispered.

He stepped inside the other room and walked swiftly to the case. There, on the top-shelf, was the clumsy iron pigeon. The case was locked, but the key was in the lock. He turned it, threw back the glass door, and reached up and clutched the foolish iron pigeon by its neck.

The door behind him slammed. He heard a gasp of fear. He whirled quickly—and before him stood Hargrove, clutching the Spanish girl by the arm.

“So—caught, eh?” Hargrove cried. “I’ll deal with you—confound you!”

He whirled the girl halfway across the room, and she crashed against the wall and moaned with

pain and fear. That act was the undoing of Hargrove. Catlin was the sort of man who goes into action when he sees a woman abused. He did not stop to question now whether it was a joke or not.

Hargrove was rushing toward him. Still clutching the iron pigeon by the neck, Catlin stepped swiftly to one side. Hargrove’s face told him this was no joke. The man was purple with passion. A man of, perhaps, forty-five he was, a man with the strength that comes from close application to outdoor sports—no mean antagonist for even Roger Catlin, who was something of an athlete himself.

“So you’ll steal it, will you?” Hargrove sneered, walking nearer.

“You stole it yourself!” came from the girl in a hoarse whisper.

“Hush—you! Yes, I stole it, and I’m going to keep it! I don’t know how you learned where it was hidden, and I don’t care. But don’t think I’ll let you get away with it. You—in the devil’s garb—put it back where you found it, then sneak away!”

“Oh! No—no! We can’t fail now! It is the last chance!” There was agony in the girl’s voice as she appealed to Catlin. The thing suddenly had passed out of the realm of jokes. What the iron pigeon contained, Catlin did not know. But he had heard this man admit that he had stolen it, and he knew that the girl wanted it back and was desperate about it. He didn’t like Hargrove’s words and actions. He decided to help the girl and stand the consequences.

“I’ve taken quite a fancy to this pigeon, and I intend to keep it,” he said firmly.

Hargrove’s face grew purple with wrath again. He dashed across the room, to where various weapons were fastened against the wall. He tore down a long rapier, one that had come from France and had been used by a famous duelist, and rushed at Catlin.

Catlin acted quickly. He couldn’t come to close quarters with the other man while he held that rapier in his hand. Beneath his cloak was his Mephisto sword. It was short, and made of inferior material, being intended for masquerade purposes, and not for combat, but he felt it would serve as a guard. So, as Hargrove rushed toward him, he clutched the pigeon in his left hand, and,

with his right, drew the sword and stood on guard.

The girl crept along the wall to the door, and turned the key in the lock. Hargrove had friends who might interfere, and she knew that her defender would have his hands full with Hargrove alone. "Don't—kill him!" she was gasping. "Just—just fix him—so we can get away!"

The weapons clashed. Hargrove could fence. Rage was in his face, but he handled his weapon cautiously. Roger Catlin, too, knew how to handle a sword. And so they fought, in an apartment of a great resort hotel, with merrymakers in the adjoining rooms and hundreds of maskers in the casino below—Hargrove in correct evening attire, and Catlin in his devil's garb—fought silently and fiercely, Hargrove enraged, Catlin calm and devoting all his energy to warding off the other's blade.

It would be difficult to say what had caused Hargrove to tear the rapier from the wall—perhaps because it was the first thing that he had noticed when he flew into a rage. No sooner had the blades crossed than Hargrove realized what he was doing, and where he was; and knew he did not dare slay this man. He wanted the iron pigeon safe again, that was all. Knowing what Catlin did not know, he realized that he could run his adversary through the shoulder, make him helpless for an instant, recover the pigeon, then tell every one that an accident had occurred during a friendly bout with the foils. Hargrove thought Catlin other than what he was. He believed that the truth of this matter would not be given to the public—that Catlin, if wounded, would agree to the story. But Catlin did not know in what cause he fought, save that he was helping a girl who had appealed to him.

They circled about the room, the blades ringing. The girl crouched against the wall, her eyes wide, waiting. Catlin gave way continually, for he was afraid that his poor weapon would be broken off at the hilt. Back and back Hargrove pressed him, until the look of rage began to leave his face, and an expression of triumph came in its place.

Catlin found himself at a great disadvantage. He sensed that the other meant to wound him and render him helpless. But he felt that he could not fight to wound. What could he say if he struck

down this man in his own rooms? What excuse could he give? He never had seen the face of the girl for whom he fought; he did not know what the iron pigeon held, whether he was doing right or wrong to help the girl purloin it. But he remembered the entreaty in her voice, and that Hargrove had admitted that he stole the pigeon. "Just fix him so we can get away," the girl had said. There was but one way to do that—disarm Hargrove without wounding him, seize him, keep him from crying out, bind and gag him, then slip away. Once outside, he would give the iron pigeon to the girl and then disappear. Hargrove had not seen his face, and neither had the girl, and, therefore, there could be no bad consequences for him.

He ceased retreating and became the aggressor. Hargrove would not give ground. Foot to foot they fought it out, the blades flashing and ringing. Catlin knew that the girl was slipping around the room, following the wall, but dared not look to see what she was doing. He was tiring, his wrist was getting lame. He had fenced considerably in college days, but not recently, and his lack of practice was beginning to tell.

Before Hargrove's furious onslaught he gave way again. He avoided a lunge aimed at his shoulder, and tripped on the end of his long cloak. The iron pigeon fell to the floor as he tried to recover his balance. He heard the girl cry out, and realized she had run forward and picked up the pigeon. Hargrove drove him back without mercy. On one knee, Catlin fought him off, trying to rise.

And then the thing happened which he had feared—his cheap Mephistopheles sword snapped off at the hilt and left him defenseless.

Hargrove started to recover as Catlin sprang to his feet. In an instant, Catlin knew, the rapier would pierce his flesh. Hargrove, apparently, was not the man to show courtesy to an adversary, to carry out the ideas of chivalry, and offer his foe the mate to his own weapon, which hung on the wall. He bent forward, a sneering smile on his face.

"A few days in bed—to teach you not to clash with me," Hargrove taunted, and stepped forward swiftly. And, as swiftly, the girl moved behind him, her arm swung through the air, and the heavy iron pigeon she held crashed against Hargrove's head behind his left ear.

“Quick! The door to the hall!” she cried.
Roger Catlin sprang after her.

CHAPTER III

UNMASKED.

THE girl in the Spanish costume handed Catlin the pigeon as she wrenched the door open, and he put it beneath his cloak. They were in the broad corridor in an instant, and hurrying toward the stairs. But there was excitement behind them. Hargrove, in falling, had given a cry for help. Guests had burst open the door and poured into the bedchamber from the adjoining room.

“Man dressed like devil—girl—after them!” Hargrove stammered; and, as friends aided him, others took up the chase. .

Catlin and the girl turned into a cross hall, and began to run. They reached the head of the stairs, and started to descend, slowing up a little so as not to attract too much attention. On the stairs they met the cavalier.

He stepped to one side and watched them pass; then, hearing the commotion above, started to follow them. Catlin rushed the girl through the lobby and out the rear door into the gardens. “Hurry—hurry!” she gasped.

In the hotel behind them they could hear calls and cries, a general alarm. Pursuit was almost at their heels. Catlin was unable to desert the girl now. It would be better, he decided, to go with her in the automobile until they had made good their escape, and then to give her the pigeon and let her go. He could return to his hotel in the city, remove his costume, and, perhaps, escape any consequences of his theft of the pigeon and his clash with Hargrove. There was a multitude of questions he felt he had the right to ask the girl, but there was no time now.

The machine was panting at the curb. As he helped her in, the cavalier came dashing after them. “No, you don’t!” he cried, and made for Catlin.

Catlin’s fighting blood was up now. He tossed the pigeon into the auto at the girl’s feet, and whirled to meet his new foe. The combat was short and furious; the cavalier measured his length on the sidewalk, and Catlin sprang into the car. The girl was in the driver’s seat. As the others

came running through the gardens, the machine started to move.

“We’ll have to go around the bay,” she said to Catlin. “Can’t risk the ferry; we might be held up there, and they’d catch us.”

She swung the car around the gardens. Behind them were cries, shouts, advice to seize other machines and start in pursuit. In an instant, almost, they were out upon the road, running between the sea and the bay through the heavy sand. The car skidded, lurched, the sand stung their faces, the sea wind whipped them, now and then spray blew on them.

Far across the bay, Catlin could see the lights of the city. He knew little of San Diego, but he did know that this road around the end of the bay was some miles in length, and that the shortest cut from Coronado to San Diego proper was by ferry. The girl was right, he decided; it would have been folly to attempt the ferry, for they would have been caught if they had had to wait for the boat.

“They’ll take the ferry and try to head us off,” the girl was saying. “Once around the bay, we’ll have to take the back streets and watch for them. Here we are by the salt works, and the road is harder and better the rest of the way in. I’m going to stop. You take the wheel and drive, please.”

She stopped the auto as she finished speaking, and they changed seats. Then she took a long auto cloak from the rear and put it on, buttoning it up over her costume, tore off her mask, and reached for a hat and veil. Catlin got a good look at her face in the moonlight. She was as pretty as he had imagined, with her dark hair falling about her face, and her dark eyes flashing.

“Your mask,” she said. “You’d better take it off now.” Catlin removed it quickly, and she looked at his face in turn. “Why, you’re not bad looking!” she said. “I had imagined you would have a—er—brutal face.”

“Why on earth should you imagine that?”

“You were supposed to be a fighting man, you know. I supposed all fighting men had sort of bulldog faces.”

“I beg your pardon! I was supposed to be a fighting man, eh? I wish you’d tell me——”

“There’s no time to talk now. Drive on. Where are your clothes? Haven’t you a coat and hat? You can’t go through with it dressed like

this.”

“My clothes are at the U. S. Grant Hotel.”

“We’ll have to stop while you change. I’ll stay in the car. You can stop it on the side of the plaza opposite the hotel. And you keep the pigeon, so that if they find me they’ll not get it. They’ll scarcely dare attack either of us on the plaza. We’ll have to run the risk of getting away from them again, but there’s no other way. Hurry—start the car!”

“I’m afraid you’ve made a mistake,” he said, speaking rapidly. “When you first attracted my attention, I thought it was all a joke. I found out it wasn’t when we were in Hargrove’s apartments. I do not know you, or what you are doing, or what the pigeon contains, or what this all means——”

Her cry made him stop. “You—you were not sent?”

“My name is Roger Catlin, and I arrived from New York only this morning. I had a card for the ball——”

“But your Mephistopheles costume and——”

“The first thing I found when I went to the costumer’s,” he said.

“Oh! Oh!” There was despair in her voice.

“Tell me what it means,” he said gently.

“I can’t—I can’t!” she moaned. “But as you are a true man, do not take advantage of my mistake and desert me now. I swear to you what I am doing is righting a wrong—overcoming a scoundrel. I cannot explain now. Won’t you trust me, help me? So much depends on it. Ah, if you knew——”

“Answer one question. I am not participating in a crime?”

“I swear you are not! You are aiding me, and other women, and other men—honest women and men. You are helping right a wrong!”

“Yet I’ve already committed a theft.”

“You have helped regain what was stolen. You heard Hargrove admit it was stolen.”

“Can’t you tell me what is in the pigeon?”

“No, I cannot—now. Just trust me—won’t you do that? And help me, please. It is all for the right. A man was to be at the ball—one of our men—dressed as Mephistopheles. If any of us located what we sought, we were to call on him for aid to recover it.”

“That’s how you made the mistake?”

“Yes.”

“And what is it you wish to do now?”

“Drive to the city, dodge the people who are after us, and go to the hotel so that you can change your clothes; then drive to La Jolla, fifteen miles down the coast, to a house there, and deliver the pigeon—that is all. Help me do that, and your reward will be great. If I dared explain, you’d help me in a moment—that is, if you are the man I think you are.”

Catlin looked at her, and she met his eyes squarely. He felt that this girl could not be taking part in any enterprise outside the law. It was so absurd—stealing an iron pigeon and dashing away with it with a pack at his heels. But there was something in her voice and manner that told him it was not absurd. “I am going to trust you,” Catlin said. “And I am going to help you. I do not think I am making a mistake.”

“Thank you—thank you! And you are not—making a mistake! Oh,” she added; “I forgot to say that my name is Myra Randolph.”

He bowed, and started the car, and they flew over the road, past the great pools of the salt works, and around the bend, toward the distant city. Far behind they could see the lights of another car, but it was a question whether that car held pursuers or persons returning to the town from the hotel. Catlin got all the power possible out of the machine he was driving, and it was far from being a toy. He knew by the way the engine sang that it would take a good car to overhaul them.

They reached the outskirts of the town. “Show me which streets to take,” he said.

“We can’t take any of the main boulevards. If they crossed by the ferry, they’ll hurry through town and come out to try to meet us. Out here they might put up a fight, but they’ll scarcely dare do it in the heart of the city. Only two or three men knew and will take part. Hargrove is the scoundrel—and I’m sure he has fooled the other men, lied to them.”

They took a side street and rushed down the long hill. No other machines were in sight. They slipped along swiftly, under huge pepper trees whose branches made arches over the road. Now they were on the paved streets, and the going was better. “I’ve a better plan,” she said. “We’ll stop at the Spreckels Theater. There is a good show to-night, and it’s about time for it to be letting out.

There'll be a jumble of machines there. Drive into the curb and leave me, and hurry to the hotel and change. The hotel is but a block and a half away, and you can go in the side door. Only you must hurry."

"I understand," he said.

"Turn down this street. If they're searching for us, we've probably dodged them for the time being. They have perhaps hurried along the La Jolla Road and expect to stop us there. That will be the danger. But I know a back road by which we can get around them."

He made another turning. They were on Third Street now, two blocks from D Street, where the theater was. They watched for their foes as they hurried along, the girl sitting low in the seat. They made the turning and passed the Union Building, and slowed down at the corner before the Elks' Building and the Chamber of Commerce. The girl had guessed correctly; here was a mass of automobiles, and it was almost time for the show to be out. A minute later the scene would be one of confusion, and the girl would have a chance to escape notice.

Catlin pulled in at the curb and stopped the car. "I'm trusting you," the girl said, as he got out.

"You may, Miss Randolph."

"Then you take the pigeon. It will be safer with you. And, remember, if you lose it to them you are making it possible for a scoundrel to gain unlimited power for evil."

He put the pigeon beneath his coat again, and she sat low in her seat as he turned to hurry to the hotel. The theater doors had been thrown open, and the audience was beginning to pour out.

"Look!" she cried. An automobile slipped along the street within twenty feet of them. At the wheel was Hargrove and in the other seat a man whose face Catlin could not see. Hargrove was driving toward the hotel. "They'll see you," she said.

"I'll watch them, and slip in the side entrance. Don't worry!"

"I'm trusting you," she said again. Their hands clasped, and then Catlin was hurrying up the street.

CHAPTER IV.

MEPHISTO REPEATS HIMSELF.

CATLIN hurried up to Fourth Street and to the hotel's side entrance. At the corner he noticed that Hargrove had stopped his machine and, with his companion, stood on the sidewalk beside it, as if waiting for some one. As he hurried through the hall to the elevator, Catlin caught himself wondering whether Donald McHugh would put in an appearance before he could get away. He remembered suddenly how Myra Randolph had spoken of McHugh, and found himself wondering just how his friend was concerned in this business. Perhaps, he thought, he was making a fool of himself to help the girl. He couldn't convince himself, however, that the girl was in the wrong. Her manner was too sincere.

The elevator stopped, and he got out and hurried down the hall. He put the key in the lock, but it would not turn. The door already was unlocked. That was peculiar, since he had got the key at the desk, but he supposed that McHugh, in his hurry, had neglected to lock the door.

He threw it open and entered, and reached for the light button. As he pressed it and the lights flashed on, some one crashed against him. He knew instinctively that some man in the room had been waiting to make the assault. He threw his assailant to one side and whirled toward him, retaining his grip on the iron pigeon.

Before him was a man about his size, and dressed exactly as he was dressed—in a Mephistopheles costume. The man was a stranger. "You—you're not McHugh!" the other gasped.

"And neither are you, so what are you doing in this room?" Catlin demanded.

"You know McHugh, do you?"

"I happen to be his friend."

"Then you know why I'm here," replied the other. "McHugh's friend, eh? He was afraid to play the game himself, was he?"

"That's the first time I ever heard Donald McHugh was afraid of anything. Come—tell me what you are doing here in my friend's apartment!"

"You know! And, since you're here, and doing his work, hand it over!"

"Hand what over?"

"The iron pigeon. Hand it over!"

"I'll hand you over to the police for a burglar and a thief!"

Catlin stepped toward the telephone on the wall. The other man sprang toward him. "Then I'll take it!" he cried.

Catlin stopped his first rush with a blow, but here was an adversary worthy of attention. There was no time to stop and reason things out. Here was another man after the iron pigeon, and evidently a foe of the girl. That was enough.

The other man rushed again. Catlin stepped to one side and used the method the girl had used on Hargrove. The iron pigeon crashed against the man's head, not once, but twice, and the second Mephistopheles crashed to the floor.

There was no time to waste. Catlin sprang to the bed and tore off the covers. He ripped a sheet into strips. Working swiftly, he bound and gagged his fallen adversary, carried him to the bathroom, put him on the floor, and closed the door behind him. Then he began taking off his costume to put on his proper clothes.

He dressed quickly. Groans from the bathroom told him that the man had regained consciousness. The groans ceased in time, and Catlin looked in upon him. The man's eyes blazed into Catlin's. "I'll leave you here for McHugh, my friend," said the latter. "I haven't time to deal with you now. Learn never to antagonize me when I'm helping a woman." The man on the floor moaned, and tried to turn, lifted his head once or twice, then let it fall back. "Want to talk to me, eh?"

The man nodded.

"Sorry I haven't time to accommodate you. I have important business elsewhere. If you're still here when I return, there'll be plenty of talking to do."

Catlin went out and shut the door, and hurried across to the closet for his hat. He picked up the iron pigeon from the bed and started toward the door that opened into the hall. The man in the bathroom groaned again, and Catlin stopped to go back and speak to him. "I fancy you'd better keep quiet," he said. "If your groans attract the attention of some of the hotel employees, they may investigate and ask questions about how you happened to be here. It'll be better for you to wait and deal with McHugh. Never mind shaking your

head—I haven't time to talk to you."

He went out and shut the door again. He felt that he didn't have time to write a note for McHugh, explaining things. Once more he started across the room. The door was flung open.

McHugh stood before him—McHugh, dressed in a Mephistopheles costume.

"Great Scott! Three of us!" gasped Roger Catlin.

CHAPTER V

BY RIGHT OF MIGHT.

"CATLIN! So you didn't go to the ball?" The third Mephistopheles spoke in a tone of consternation.

"Oh; I went to the ball, all right, and had a lovely time. Yes, as the country editors have it, a lovely time was had. I was mistaken for somebody else, tried to help a young girl, fought a duel with—"

"You—you?"

"Even so—and now—"

"Wait! Was it you fought Hargrove?"

"Guilty!"

"And—" He saw the iron pigeon in Catlin's hand. "And you got *that!* Thank Heaven! We thought—"

"Just a moment. When I returned here there was a gentleman waiting for me. He is in the bathroom."

McHugh shut the door and hurried across the room to throw open the other. "Scott, eh?" he said. "You did him up?"

"Brown," said Catlin.

McHugh stopped before him, hands on hips, and his face assumed a serious expression. "Do you know what you've been mixing in?" he asked.

"I do not. And, pardon me, but there is a young woman waiting—"

"She must wait for a few minutes, then. Catlin, take it from an old friend that this is a serious business. I'm sorry I cannot explain it to you. Tell me what happened."

"Well, I didn't find you at the ball. A couple of girls spoke to me peculiarly. I thought it was one of your confounded jokes. Then a girl in

Spanish costume came up to me, told me to dance with her, and asked me to go up the stairs and help her to get 'it.' Of course, I didn't know what 'it' was, and I still thought some one was playing a joke. I thought she was taking me to you. So we went to Hargrove's rooms. She showed me the iron pigeon in the curio case and told me to steal it, and said that then we'd cut and run to an auto and drive away. I still thought it a joke—and took the pigeon. Hargrove came in and caught us. He handled the girl roughly, tore a rapier off the wall, and went for me. I defended myself with my Mephistopheles sword. The girl's manner impressed me, and Hargrove admitted that he had stolen the pigeon in the first place. He broke my sword and was going to run me through when the girl struck him down."

"I know about that. Then—"

"On the way around the bay, the girl discovered I was not the man she thought. She threw herself on my mercy and I promised to help her. That's all."

"Thank Heaven you stopped to change your clothes, and the pigeon is here—safe! I cannot explain much of this, Catlin. I'll say, however, that there are two factions in a certain organization, and each wants what that pigeon contains. Hargrove had it. He did steal it from the other faction, but he had the right to do that. It is a business deal, in a way. The other faction have been trying to get it back for weeks. To-night was about their last chance. They were searching for it in Hargrove's rooms—women doing the work. We discovered what they were doing. One of their men was to be at the ball dressed as Mephistopheles. If the girls found that for which they were looking, he was to help them to get away with it."

"The young woman explained that much," said Catlin.

"I, of the other faction, dressed up as Mephisto, hoping that some of them would speak to me and give me a clue as to what they were doing. I was upstairs most of the time, and that's why I didn't meet you. This fellow in the bathroom was there, and I was there, both of us dressed alike. You, by accident, got a similar costume. They took you for this fellow on the floor. Understand?"

"I get that part of it, all right."

"It was fortunate. Here we have the pigeon, and Hargrove and I feared they'd gotten away with it. Hargrove thought you were this chap when he fought you. He'll forgive that bump on the head readily enough when, he learns that the girl trusted my friend, and we have the pigeon safe. Now we'll attend to this chap."

Catlin did some tall thinking as McHugh unbound the man on the floor and helped him to his feet.

"You see, Scott," said McHugh, "you've lost. I'm not denying you made a good attempt. Where is that girl, Catlin?"

"In her auto in front of the theater."

"You'll find her there, Scott. My compliments to her, and say to her it is the fortunes of war. Now—get out!"

"I came here for that pigeon," said Scott stubbornly.

"And you got it—on the head," replied Catlin. "But wait a moment. You've been my friend for years, McHugh, and I don't understand this business. I hate to disappoint the young girl. Am I doing right in handing the pigeon over to you?"

"On my word of honor, Catlin."

"Then, Scott," said Catlin, turning to the other, man, "you may explain to Miss Randolph for me that I am sorry, but that I must take the word of my friend. The entire thing is an awful mess, and it's too mysterious to suit me. I wash my hands of it—you people fight it out!"

"So it was Miss Randolph?" asked McHugh. "She's got nerve, that girl. Tell her I'm sorry she lost, Scott, but it is the fortune of war."

"She hasn't lost—yet!"

The voice came from the door. It had been opened softly. Myra Randolph stood just inside it. With one hand she was closing the door behind her, and in the other she held an automatic pistol. The expression in her face was one of determination. "You—who gave me your word to help me!" she said, looking toward Catlin. "This man has but to speak, and you take his word before mine."

"He has been my friend for years, Miss Randolph."

"But he is in the wrong now. Hargrove has deluded him. If Donald McHugh knew the truth, he'd be the first to help me."

"I know what has been said about Hargrove and this business," responded McHugh, "and I do not believe it. His motives are not what some people think.

"He is protecting himself—"

"I know better; I know the truth," the girl interrupted. "I appeal to you again, Mr. Catlin, as a man of honor. Hand me the iron pigeon."

"I have washed my hands of the entire business."

"Then hand me the pigeon, and I'll fight it out without you."

"Give the pigeon to me!" cried McHugh. "We've got it again, and this time we'll keep it!"

"Wait!" Something in the girl's voice caused Catlin and the others to look at her quickly. "I do not intend to lose now," she went on. "I'm ready to wound—to kill, if necessary! Scott, we missed you to-night; we played into the hands of another man. You failed us once—don't fail us now. Bind Donald McHugh, and gag him. Keep him prisoner here. Turn out the lights, and do not answer the door or telephone. Keep Hargrove from joining him."

"But you—"

"Don't ask questions! Be quick! There is no time to lose—it's almost midnight. And you, Donald McHugh, and you, Mr. Catlin, don't move! I'll fire at the first move either of you makes!"

She meant it. Catlin could tell that by looking at her. He began wondering if McHugh was wrong; surely a girl like this would not be so determined, could not be, unless fighting for the right. But perhaps she had been deluded by others, as she said McHugh had been.

Scott picked up the strips from the floor, and advanced toward McHugh. The girl, standing before the door, her weapon raised, her eyes glittering, presented an ominous aspect. Both Catlin and McHugh watched her like hawks. But there was no wavering. Once McHugh took a step forward, and her eyes narrowed.

"She'd shoot! I know the breed!" Catlin warned.

Scott bent McHugh's arms behind him, lashed them together, then pushed him toward the bed, and forced him to lie down upon it, moving in such manner that Catlin could not get between the bed and the girl. He bound McHugh's feet,

and started to make a gag. McHugh opened his mouth, but before he could cry out, Scott choked the cry back in his throat. The gagging process was accomplished, and McHugh was helpless.

"Now—" Scott questioned.

"Take the pigeon from Mr. Catlin, and hand it to me." Scott did it. Catlin was powerless to prevent him. He never took his eyes from the girl, always waited for her to relax vigilance, when he might make a spring. It might all seem absurd on the face of it, but Catlin, who had had experiences in many strange lands, knew it was not. The girl took the pigeon and put it under the cloak she wore.

"Shall I bind and gag him, too?" asked Scott, pointing to Catlin.

"No, I need him."

"What you going to do, Miss Randolph?" the man asked.

"You remain here and do as I said. Put out the lights and don't answer the door or telephone. I don't want Hargrove to join Donald McHugh. Hargrove is waiting below for McHugh to change his clothes. I saw McHugh enter the hotel, and I followed. I remembered that, over at Coronado, Mr. Catlin had spoken of his friend. I feared something like this. You keep McHugh here, quiet, for an hour. See that he doesn't slip off his bonds. At the end of an hour, you may go home, if our plans have not miscarried."

"But you—"

"I'll finish the journey with the pigeon."

"Alone?"

"No. Mr. Catlin will drive the car."

"What? You'll trust him?" Scott asked.

"Certainly I'll not trust him," she said; "but I'll make use of him. I must have some one along to drive the car. There may be pursuit, there may be a struggle. I can't drive the car and fight, too."

"Don't try it, Miss Randolph. He'll get the pigeon—"

"He'll sit in the driver's seat. I'll be behind him, with my weapon ready. He'll carry out my orders—drive where I say—"

"Don't do it, Miss Randolph; don't, risk it! Let me bind and gag him and leave him here. Let me drive your car."

"I have decided, Scott. Please do as I direct. Mr. Catlin, you have heard. We'll leave this room now, and walk to the elevator, go down to the first

floor, and pass out to the auto. You'll walk a pace ahead of me. I put my hand, holding the pistol, in my cloak pocket—so. I can fire through cloth, you understand."

"Suppose I stopped in the lobby and refused to take another step?" asked Catlin, smiling in spite of the situation. "What would you do then?"

"I don't know—shoot you, perhaps. Mr. Catlin, I told you before that in helping me you would be righting a wrong. In spite of what Donald McHugh has said, I still tell you the same."

"The whole thing is silly! I've washed my hands of it!"

"Silly! If you only knew!"

"Tell me, and if I decide you're in the right, I'm with you, McHugh or no McHugh."

"I can tell you nothing."

"Perhaps it would help more than you think, if you did."

"I cannot tell you. Ready, Mr. Catlin? No tricks, mind, for we are at the crisis!"

Scott held open the door, Catlin stepped out, smiling now at the absurdity of it, and Miss Myra Randolph followed one pace behind him.

CHAPTER VI.

HE MIGHT HAVE STOPPED.

THE man and the girl stepped from the elevator, and Catlin led the way across the wide lobby, Miss Randolph at his heels. As he had said, he might have stopped and refused to take another step, and it is doubtful whether the girl would have had the courage to attack him. But he did not. He didn't want to create a scene, in the first place, for the press wires are long, and he was well known in New York and other cities of the East. Again, he half wanted to see the thing through, for it promised more adventure, and already he had experienced enough to acquire a taste for it.

The lobby was filled with after-the-theater hungry folk and hotel guests. Catlin made his way slowly through the crowd, and Myra kept pace with him. He turned to look at her once, and found that she was watching him carefully. "The side entrance," she said, and he turned off into the hall.

Here they were almost alone, and Catlin walked faster. He held the door open, but she motioned for him to step out first, then followed him, and they hurried to the corner.

There they came face to face with Hargrove and another man. Hargrove never had seen Catlin's face before, but he knew Myra Randolph. Because of the cloak which covered her Spanish costume, he could not tell whether she was the girl who had helped to take the pigeon from his rooms; but he knew that she was identified with his opponents, and he saw her coat bulging on one side, as if she carried something beneath it—and he guessed the rest. He turned quickly and spoke to the other man, who ran to the main entrance of the hotel and dashed inside.

Myra's face was white as she stepped up beside Catlin. "He guesses—Hargrove guesses," she gasped. "Am I going to fail? Oh, if I only had help—help I could depend on! If you only knew, Mr. Catlin, you'd help me, gladly and willingly."

"I'll help you outwit Hargrove, at any rate," Catlin responded. "I don't like the man. I'll do that honestly, and you may trust me. After we've outwitted him, things will be the same as now.

She met his eyes again. "I believe you, Mr. Catlin" she said. She looked back. Hargrove was still on the corner, watching them. He hesitated a moment, then sprang into his motor car, started the engine, swung the car around, and crept down toward them. They had reached their own car by this time, and Myra got in the back, while Catlin took the driver's seat. "If Hargrove is here, waiting for Donald McHugh, it means that some one else is watching La Jolla Road," she went on. "We'll have to dodge Hargrove first. Turn back and pass him."

Catlin turned the machine and started slowly up D Street. Hargrove swerved his car to avoid them. He merely glanced at Catlin, but he gave Myra Randolph a searching look. And as soon as they had passed, Hargrove turned his car and followed at their own pace. "Run to Fifth Street and turn to your left," said the girl. "This is Fourth Street we are crossing." As Catlin complied, Myra turned and looked back. Hargrove had stopped the car before the hotel entrance, and, as she watched, two men ran out and sprang in it. One was the man who had been talking to Hargrove at the corner. The other was Donald McHugh!

"McHugh! Scott has failed again!" she whispered to Catlin. "That other man must have suspected and broken in the door, and overcome Scott. You promised to help me—until Hargrove was outwitted."

"I did," said Catlin.

"Turn up Fifth Street—go as fast as you can!"

Catlin turned the corner. Here were a score of machines, and street cars, and pedestrians crowding the crossings. He took the car through them with the skill of a metropolitan taxicab driver. One block up the street, he put on more speed. Hargrove's car was behind them.

"Straight ahead. Take the long hill as fast as you can," the girl said. "I know Hargrove's car. If we have ordinary luck, he can't catch us."

Up the long hill they raced, past apartment houses and mansions and residences, past flower gardens and groves of palms. One moment the lights of Hotel Robinson blazed in Catlin's face, the next they were in the semigloom again. Two blocks behind road them burned the headlights of Hargrove's car.

"The next street—turn to your right—to the Park Boulevard," she directed again. The turn was a sharp one; Catlin had to reduce the speed of the car. Then they were on the long, winding asphalt boulevard that is San Diego's pride, the one that follows the crest of the hill behind the city, that turns and winds through the City Park. Here was a place for speed, where there were but few cars at this hour of the night and no obstacles in the road.

On the right were the gardens, on the left the canon and just ahead the great bulk of the high school blotted out the moon. "They're not gaining!" the girl cried. "Keep going until we run into a cross street, then turn to the right again."

They dashed down a hill, and narrowly missed collision with a car running in the opposite direction. Catlin made the turning on two wheels, and they were running swiftly down toward the city proper again.

"Straight ahead—as fast as you can!" said Myra Randolph. The spirit of the chase was getting into Catlin's blood; it was sport to try to shake off an antagonist like Hargrove. They had not lost him yet. Myra could see the lights of his car following.

They left the paved street and dashed down a

hill toward the bay through the thick, red dust, sending clouds of it against the palms that lined the driveway. "The next corner—turn," she directed.

Catlin made the turning. He did it at such a time that Hargrove's machine was hidden by the trees. He went a block down the street again, and, under Myra's orders, turned off and stopped. They looked back. They saw Hargrove's car shoot across the street and go on toward the bay.

"He thinks we've gone on to La Jolla Road," the girl explained. "The road twists like a snake, and he'll not be sure for some time that we're not ahead of him."

"But that'll put him on the road again ahead of us," said Catlin.

"Some of his men are there already, perhaps; that makes no difference. I know another way for part of the distance. Turn back now, and drive on the way we were going. There will be small danger from here, to Old Town, but from Old Town to La Jolla we may meet them at any time." Catlin began backing the car. "You've kept your promise," she went on. "You've helped me dodge Hargrove, and I release you from your promise now. We stand now as we did when we left the hotel, Mr. Catlin. You carry out my orders. I am behind you, ready to shoot if you show treachery. You understand?"

"I understand," he replied.

CHAPTER VII

HER SHANGHAIED CHAUFFEUR.

MYRA made the young man drive through back streets where there were great ruts, or where the dust was deep, along country roads at the edge of town where the going had to be slow. Once they crossed barren land where there was no trail, until they came to another road a quarter of a mile farther.

They were approaching Old Town, that part of San Diego that all her good citizens worship. There the flag was first planted, and there, long ago, Father Junipero Serra knelt and prayed against the famine and death that threatened—prayed until the relief ship sailed into San Diego Bay and the mission colony was saved. There,

too, is the home of Ramona, its patio, its wishing well, its museum filled with relics and curios of the far-gone age when the Spanish fathers carved an existence and founded an empire in the desert among hostile natives. The ancient mission bells, the old cross, the ruins of the fort where the soldiers of Old Spain once ate and drank and gambled and fought—on a few acres in that little corner of San Diego is to be found more of the historic and picturesque than most states possess entire.

Roger Catlin had been thinking hard as they rode. Dodging Hargrove was mere amusement, but now that the chase was over he began to wonder whether he was doing right. Had it not been for McHugh, Catlin would have trusted his judgment and helped Myra Randolph at all costs. But Donald McHugh, a friend of years' standing, was on the other side, and he had given his word of honor that his side was right. He didn't feel like overpowering the girl, getting possession of the iron pigeon, and handing it over to McHugh. And he didn't feel like helping Myra Randolph to get the pigeon to the destination she desired. He wanted to be neutral to separate from Miss Randolph at some point along the road and let her take her chances of getting to her destination at La Jolla.

Yet, on the other hand, he didn't want to leave her at the mercy of Hargrove and his men. He found himself in a difficult position. They were creeping down a hill now. In the distance lights twinkled in some of the houses at Old Town. On the main road below them there was no trace of an automobile.

"We must go down to the road here," she said. "After we pass Old Town we can leave it again. Here is where the danger begins for me. As for you, you had better not attempt treachery. I am watching you always—and am ready. You understand, don't you, that I shouldn't do this if it wasn't necessary—if so much did not depend on it?"

"I suppose so," said Catlin.

"If I dared explain, I'm sure you'd help me voluntarily."

"How am I to know which side is in the right?" he asked. "I feel I may trust and believe you, Miss Randolph, but there is my old friend on the other side."

"He'd not be there if he knew the truth. Hargrove has lied to him."

"Possibly so. Hargrove looks like a man who could lie. But Donald McHugh, to the best of my belief, is not a man to swallow a lie."

"He has been fooled this time," she insisted.

"Why not look at the other side of it?" he asked. "Perhaps some one has fooled you, and made you believe you are working for the right when you are not."

"The man opposed to Hargrove is my father, Mr. Catlin."

"I beg your pardon."

"I know he is working for the right. Oh, I wish I could explain!"

They had reached the main road, and run along it speedily, for here it was good going. Catlin had certain suspicions, and they gave him reasons of his own for wanting to be neutral in this matter. He didn't want to help the girl, and he didn't want to help Hargrove and McHugh. He wanted them to fight it out between themselves; only he hated to see the odds so against the girl. If what he suspected was true, Hargrove's victory, if he won, would be of short duration. Catlin knew a few things that neither the girl, McHugh, nor Hargrove suspected he knew. The thing to do, he decided, was to leave Myra at Old Town and return to San Diego proper on the electric car or the gasoline car that runs through to La Jolla.

They passed the ruins of the old jail and approached Ramona's home. Save for the moonlight and the lights that twinkled here and there in Mexican houses, the world about them was in darkness. There was no automobile on the road behind them as far as they could see. And there were no lights in the road ahead; but they could see but a short distance that way because of the little hill, on the summit of which were the ruins of the fort of olden times.

In the shadow of a clump of palms at the corner of Ramona's home, where the road forked, Catlin, with an exclamation, shut off power and applied the brakes.

"What is it?" asked Myra.

"Something wrong. Engine doesn't sound right."

"You are not trying to fool me?"

"I'll go ahead if you say so, but don't blame me if we break down within a hundred yards."

"Get out and look!" she commanded. Catlin got out and walked around to the front of the machine. The girl, standing in the back, watched as he opened the hood.

There was nothing wrong; Catlin was working a ruse. He had driven the girl thus far—he would desert her and let her go the remainder of the distance alone. She had an excellent car and knew how to drive; she had a weapon and could protect herself; as for getting to her destination, she would have to take her chance, for Catlin determined to remain neutral as long as he knew no more than he did. "Is it anything serious?" she asked.

"I can tell in a moment." He bent forward as if to examine the engine.

"I'll hold a light," she said. "We must hurry. They may be along at any time."

She bent to open the door. It was the movement for which Catlin had been waiting. He sprang back into the darkness of the trees, and, with a laugh, dashed around the corner of Ramona's home.

He had escaped her without resorting to violence, without being forced to take the gun from her. In a way, it seemed a cowardly thing to do, he told himself, yet it was the best under the circumstances. At the corner of the building he stopped in the shadow and looked back. She had made no effort to follow him. He could see the trolley-car station; there was no car there. He would have to wait for the next from the city.

He slipped along the wall, completed the circuit of the building, and peered around the corner. The auto was where he had left it, the hood still open. The girl was standing beside the machine, her head resting on her arms, her arms on the end of a seat. Catlin could hear her sobs. They made him feel very much like a brute. She was a plucky girl, he told himself, and she had been through a great deal this night. Now she seemed in the depths of despair.

She was making no effort to get into the machine and continue her journey, and there was the possibility that her foes would come up at any time.

Catlin went through a mental struggle standing there at the building's end. After a time he straightened his shoulders and walked forward. "Miss Randolph," he called. She raised her head

and turned toward him, and did not move or speak as he approached. "I'm sorry—really," he said. "I thought it was the only thing to do—escape and remain neutral. Can't you understand? But you mustn't take it this way, please."

"I'm only trying to fight for the right!" Her words came brokenly, charged with emotion. "It seems every, one I look to for help fails me."

"You must try to understand my position in the matter. I thought it a joke of my friend's at first, and developments came so rapidly—"

"Look at me!" she commanded. "Do you think I'd be concerned in some unworthy enterprise? Do you think I'm not the right sort of girl? I *know*, I tell you—but I dare not explain. Why can't you trust me and help me, even against your friend? Donald McHugh is an honest man, but Hargrove has deluded him. He'll be glad, afterward, if Hargrove loses."

"If I only knew—" said Catlin, watching her closely.

"I am helping my father fight this battle, and I know he is the soul of honesty and honor. It is no ordinary battle, Mr. Catlin. It is not one business clique outwitting another, or anything like that. Oh, if you knew! See—see! Come here, Roger Catlin!" She ran to the wall of Ramona's home, and he followed. There, beside the wall, was the ancient cross. "Here is where Father Serra prayed ages ago," she said; "why, this is sacred ground! Here is where they fought to start an empire—here, in the depths of despair; but never giving up hope and faith, Father Serra prayed for help—and help came at the last minute, when all other men were against him! And here beside this cross, Roger Catlin, I stand in the depths of despair, but not giving up hope nor faith, and I am praying for help—praying to you! All other men are against me. Will help come—at the last minute—as it did to Father Serra?"

"Miss Randolph—"

"Without knowing more than you now know, will you swear to help me? It's only a little thing—help me to get safely to a certain house in La Jolla, and to take the iron pigeon with me. A little thing—but how much it means!"

"Miss Randolph—" he began again.

"And I swear to you, Roger Catlin, here by Ramona's cross, that you will be helping the right, will be preventing a great wrong that will be far-

reaching. I swear it!"

She threw her hands against the wall, stooped, kissed the cross. Roger Catlin stepped forward and took her by the shoulders and turned her so that she faced him. "You've won, Miss Randolph," he said. "I'll help you—" and I pray that I am doing right. Come!" He led her back to the machine.

"The engine—" she asked.

"Is all right. It was but a poor ruse of mine."

"I felt at the first that I could trust you, if only I could make you understand."

"I give you my word I'll help you through," he said. An automobile dashed around the hill as he spoke. Before he could close the hood of the machine he had been driving, the other car stopped beside them.

"Caught you again, eh?" cried Hargrove's voice. "Well, you'll not get away this time!"

Already Catlin had thrown off coat and waistcoat and called to the girl to get into the machine. Myra Randolph understood. He would keep them from trying to get to her. Hargrove rushed upon him. It was not a case of rapier and masquerade sword this time. It was a case of old-fashioned fisticuffs, and the best man win. Catlin had taken in the situation at a glance. Hargrove and Donald McHugh were the only men in the machine. They had left the other along the road somewhere, apparently.

He stopped Hargrove's rush with a blow that did not injure, but enraged. Hargrove came at him again. This time Catlin broke through the other man's guard, and followed up his advantage. Four more blows he struck before he reached the point of the chin and Hargrove went down.

Catlin sprang back toward the machine. He wanted to avoid a clash with his friend, McHugh. He closed the hood quickly, and started to get in.

"Wait!" McHugh called. "I want that pigeon! You've downed Hargrove, but I'm here yet!"

"Stand back, McHugh! I don't want any trouble with you, old man!"

"Then hand over that pigeon."

"I can't do it. This young lady is under my protection, and the pigeon and what it contains is hers."

"You've taken sides because of a pretty face, have you?"

"Stand back, McHugh!"

"I'm coming!"

Catlin avoided his rush, but as his friend turned and came back he realized he could not avoid the combat. He had no heart for this fight. He had known and loved McHugh for years; he knew him for a hot-headed man who acted first and regretted his actions afterward. McHugh was no weakling; he could fight and would fight.

"Stand off!" Catlin cried again. "I have no quarrel with you!"

But McHugh did not answer. He came on, full of rage, and there was nothing for Roger Catlin to do except enter the fray. This man was not as easy to handle as Hargrove; he was younger, stronger, more active. In a moment Catlin knew he had a real fight on his hands. McHugh's fist struck him between the eyes, and he reeled backward. And then, because he fought out of necessity and not through anger or passion, he settled down to business and did battle calmly, watching for openings, getting in telling blows when he could.

With two men so evenly matched such a fight could have but one ending when one of them was careless through anger. Slowly but surely Catlin beat his adversary down, and a final blow gave him the victory.

He looked at McHugh for an instant, then turned toward the auto. Hargrove was getting up from the road on the other side. Catlin sprang into the seat, started the engine, drove the machine around the bend in the road and on toward La Jolla, past the old fort that had looked down on many sights such as this night had brought forth.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. "Your friend—I'm sorry," said Myra Randolph.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE PIGEON'S BREAST.

CATLIN and his pretty companion were on the straight road beyond Old Town, and behind them were the headlights of a pursuing automobile. It had not taken Hargrove long to get McHugh in the rear of his car and take up the pursuit. He had been getting up when the machine drove away, and now, still weak and dazed, he was driving like a maniac, the car swerving from

side to side of the road, while McHugh, in the rear, held his head in his hands and tried to come back to the full consciousness of what was happening.

Catlin's blood was up now. He gave all his attention to the driving of the car, took curves at a fearful rate of speed, watched the flying road in the path of light.

Myra bent over the back of the seat and screeched in, his ear: "Straight ahead; cross the car tracks and follow the road!" she cried.

The house she wanted to reach was a pretentious mansion north of La Jolla, setting back on the hill, surrounded by a garden. Victory seemed in her grasp now, thanks to Roger Catlin. She clutched at the iron pigeon beneath her coat. She touched a hidden spring, and felt the pigeon's breast fly open. In an instant she had taken the iron image from beneath her cloak, and from the breast of it took a small object. She put the object in her pocket, and closed the pigeon's breast again.

They crossed the railroad tracks, the car bounding high as it struck them, and drove along on a smooth, oiled road, flying between lines of trees and rows of pretty bungalows. They skirted the edge of the park on the cliffs above the sea. They were in La Jolla, the famous seaside resort, the village of millionaires, with its noted marine garden and sea caves.

Behind them Hargrove followed, not reducing the speed of his car. And now Catlin gave an exclamation in earnest. The ruse he had worked at Old Town became reality now. The engine gasped, missed, was still. The car lost momentum, and he applied the brakes. "No joke this time!" he cried, springing out. "Quick, Miss Randolph! I pulled to the side of the road, and Hargrove won't crash into it! We can't stop to investigate."

She sprang out, and he grasped her hand. Hargrove had made the last turning, and they could see the headlight of his car again. There was but one thing to do—abandon the car and flee. And there was but one place to flee—to the tiny park along the ocean.

They sprang across the road, hand in hand, and dashed to the welcome shadow of a row of palms. They ran swiftly along the gravel walk. "Straight to the cliffs," the girl gasped. "We'll

jump down and follow the water line; the tide is out."

They heard Hargrove's cry as he dashed past their stalled car. They heard the brakes shriek as he stopped, and his voice and McHugh's when they ran back to the car and found their quarry gone.

They had reached the end of the row of palms, and found it necessary to cross open ground bathed in moonlight. As they ran they heard Hargrove shouting behind them, and knew that they had been seen. It was a question of foot-racing now.

At the edge of the cliff they found a trail to the beach. Catlin sprang forward and helped the girl down. They reached the hard sand above the water line, turned and ran. Here the always working sea had burrowed into the hillside. They ran under the ledge thus formed, in the darkness. They knew that Hargrove and McHugh had reached the edge of the cliff and were speculating on which way the fugitives had gone. Catlin wasn't anxious to have them come up. He had had a hard enough time winning before, when McHugh hung back, and this time McHugh would not hang back—he'd rush with Hargrove!

"Wait!" Myra said; and Catlin stopped. "Quick, before they come! I opened the pigeon and took this out. You take it. You have struck your friend in my cause, and I can trust you now. You don't know how much depends on it! I'll keep the pigeon. If they catch us, I'll drop it. It might serve to stop them."

"They'll not catch us—now!" said Catlin. He held in his hand an ebony handle three inches long, and on the end of it was a seal. This was the cause of the night's adventures. Roger Catlin had suspected—now he knew! "Come!" he whispered; and took her hand, and they ran on.

They heard footsteps behind them, and knew that Hargrove and McHugh were on the right track. Catlin half lifted the girl along as he ran. "We've got to get up," he said.

"We can't—here. They'll catch us, sure!"

"They'll not! Courage!"

Glancing back, he saw Hargrove less than a hundred yards away, and McHugh close behind him. He tried to run faster. They were in the shadow again. They had passed the biological laboratory. Now they were on the shore of a small

cove, but beyond this the cliffs ran down into the sea, and there was no way to escape. There were steps leading up to the street and the hotel, steps used by bathers who enjoy the water of the cove. But to ascend the steps would be to run into the arms of one of their pursuers. They could hear Hargrove shrieking for McHugh to run past the laboratory and head them off at the steps, while he came on, following them.

"We're caught!" gasped Catlin. "We'll have to fight for it again!"

"No—no! You're too tired—there are two of them. I've just thought—the sea caves!"

"What?"

"Come—come!"

He followed her along the shore. He never had heard of La Jolla's famous sea caves. At low tide guides take visitors back in them, and there are wonders to be seen there. Myra Randolph had been in them a score of times. She came to the mouth of the cave, took Catlin by the hand, and they entered. It was dark, and wet. He walked as she indicated, trying to make as little noise as possible. On and on they went in the dense darkness. Now and then they splashed in tiny pools, and always water dripped upon them from the roof. Once they heard Hargrove shouting for McHugh, then heard him no more.

"He'll probably never think of the caves," Myra said. "If he does, and comes in, we'll outwit him. I know every foot of them, and. I'll venture to say he does not. Watch out! Don't stumble! We must climb a little here." They went up for quite a distance, then came to another gallery and followed that. Catlin was trusting to the girl's knowledge. He could see nothing, had lost all sense of direction, could hear nothing but the dripping of water. "We are at a place now where we can go either way," she told him, as they stopped. "If they enter the cave, we can hear which way they come and go in the opposite direction. If they have a light—"

"They'd scarcely dare venture in here without a light, if they thought we'd be waiting for them," Catlin said. "In such a case I could spring upon them without warning, and they know it."

"I don't think they'll come," she said. "They'll think we dodged up the bank by the laboratory. We'll wait a few minutes, then go to

the entrance."

"You'll be cold," he said, "after your run. You'd better have my coat on." He had taken it from the car when they left it, and had been carrying it on his arm. Now he put it over her shoulders.

"You keep it, please—you'll need it!" she said.

"I can do without better than you." Their hands touched as he adjusted the coat, and for a moment he held hers. "It has been a wonderful night," he said. "It isn't more than two o'clock, and think what has happened since ten."

"I dare say that when you went to the masquerade at the Hotel del Coronado, you scarcely expected all this."

"I confess I did not—but I'm not sorry."

"After it is all over, we must be properly introduced."

"We must, indeed!" he agreed. And to himself he was wondering: "Suppose, after all my experiences in all the civilized countries of the world, I have met *the* girl here in San Diego!"

"I think we might make our way back slowly to the entrance now," she said.

"We'll be careful not to make any noise. I must get to the house before daybreak."

"Before daybreak," he echoed; and she never wondered why.

They started back along the gallery, walking slowly, she leading him by the hand. They came to the top of the slope, and started to descend. Halfway to the bottom the girl's feet splashed in water. "That's peculiar," she said, more to herself than to him.

They went on—the water deepened. . Then she turned to him in terror.

"Hurry—oh, hurry!" she gasped.

"What is it?"

"The tide—"

"Well?"

"It is coming in. It was turning when we reached the shore, and I forgot to think of that! We'll be caught—drowned like rats!"

Her terror communicated itself to him. "Explain—quickly!" he said breathlessly.

"This pit is deeper. It fills as the tide begins to wash in. We may have to swim across it in the dark. And then—then we must reach the entrance before the tide fills it—"

He realized at once what she meant. He grasped her hand, again, and side by side they plunged forward through the flood. The cave was echoing the roaring of the breakers now. The water reached their knees—their waists.

“Swim—straight ahead,” she cried.

They struck out, side by side, following either wall of the cave. Now and then their heads almost touched the roof. He called to her and she answered, and he knew that she was keeping pace with him. “Now—stand!” she commanded.

The water was at his waist again, but they had reached the level of the cave that ran to the entrance. Again their hands were clasped and they plunged forward through the water in the darkness. Now and then a wave rolled in and broke over them. The water was entering rapidly. Inch by inch it crept up on them.

“How much longer?” he cried.

“A hundred feet, or more, to go,” she answered.

“We’ll make it!”

“I don’t—know!”

“We shall make it! You haven’t won against every obstacle to-night to lose now. Courage!”

“Yes—I’ll have courage!”

No wonder she was frightened, he thought; he was frightened himself. The surging water, the pitch blackness of the dark, the hollow echoes in the cave, the uncertainty of getting out alive was enough to frighten them. They plunged on, but could see no light. The water was deeper—it was across his breast—it was up to her chin. He put his arm around her, and tried to lift her as they fought against the tide that tried to sweep them back.

He thought he heard her moan once, and told her again to have courage. And then, far ahead, he saw moonlight. He bade her look, and she cried out with gladness when she saw it. But they had not won yet. The tide was its strongest now. Between the surface of the water and the roof of the cave was a space of less than four feet.

“Swim!” he commanded.

They began swimming; there was just room enough for them to swim side by side. Catlin fought against the strength of the water, and at the same time tried to help the girl. He knew her strength was going, for his own was. Once the water swept them back, but slowly they gained

again toward the bright moonlight. Often the water choked them; often they struck their heads against the roof when the waves rolled in.

“Just a few more—feet,” Catlin gasped.

With one last effort—an effort that took his remaining strength—they swept from the cave out into the cove. The running water caught them and almost hurled them back. One arm about the girl, Catlin clutched a point of rock with his other hand, and held on grimly, sinking his teeth in his lower lip, gasping for breath.

The wave broke at the mouth of the cave, the water fell back. Before the next wave came, Catlin, holding Myra Randolph with one arm, crossed before the cave’s mouth and made for the steps that led to the street level. He reached them—and there they both collapsed.

CHAPTER IX.

FROM THE SHADOWS.

LITTLE girl! Little girl!” Catlin whispered the words, on his knees beside her, watching for her eyes to open. And presently they did, and she looked up at him. “We’re all right now,” he said.

“Thanks—thanks to you!”

“Thanks to your own pluck,” he told her.

She tried to sit up, and he helped her, and after a few minutes she was able to stand. Then she turned toward him, half afraid to ask the question that was on her lips. Finally: “You didn’t lose it?” she asked.

He felt in his pocket quickly. He had forgotten what she had given him, the cause of all the night’s adventures. “I still have it,” he said, smiling.

“It’s fortunate we took it out of the pigeon. I lost the pigeon, and my revolver—and my cloak.”

“It is fortunate you didn’t lose your life. And now—”

“We must go on,” she replied. “But we must still be on our guard.”

He led her slowly up the steps. There was no one in sight. They crossed the road and walked rapidly along the walk on the other side, in the shadow of the trees. Exhausted as he was, Catlin felt prepared for trouble. He had passed through too much, he felt, to be conquered now. Myra was

clinging to his arm. Catlin knew she would collapse again as soon as they were safe. Before crossing the next street, they stopped in the shadows and looked in both directions. Nobody was to be seen.

"They haven't given up—don't think they have," the girl whispered. "They have too much at stake. We are not done with them yet."

"I think there is still one fight left in me," Catlin answered, trying to smile. He knew that the fight would have to be a short one if he won it. "How far is it?"

"Two blocks this way, then we turn to the right and go up the hill a block and a half. There are no trees there, nor houses, and the moonlight is bright."

"I understand. That is where they may see us."

"Yes. And the house is in the midst of a garden. The walk to it is bordered with trees. It is almost solid shadow there."

"Where our foes may be waiting?"

"Yes," she said.

"There is no other way?"

"We could go around and approach from the back. But that would take an hour, and they'll be expecting it since we haven't shown up for so long. In the end it would be the same, for we'd be seen at the back. For a hundred yards, there, there's not a tree."

"Straight forward, then, and trust to luck," said Catlin.

"Hargrove and McHugh may be there," she told him, "and one other man."

"And in the house—" he asked.

"Are men who will come to our rescue if they hear us call. I hope we are not conquered before we can make them hear. It is quite a distance from the gate to the house."

"But aren't the men in the house expecting your arrival?" he asked. "Won't they be watching?"

"I can't tell that—they may. Oh, if you understood!"

He said nothing more, but took her arm and hurried her across the street and along the walk beneath the trees. For once in his life he regretted moonlight. They covered the two blocks and came to the corner where they had to turn. Catlin stopped there, and the girl crouched behind him

while he peered around the corner. Nobody was in sight. A block and a half away he could see the house dark against the sky and the trees surrounding it; and from the corner to the house there was not a bit of shadow.

Myra watched as Catlin rolled up his shirt sleeves. In the bright moonlight she saw the look that came into his face, and thanked heaven for such a champion; she knew that he would fight as long as he could stand. If fortune favored them, they might win yet.

Then Catlin squared his shoulders, took her by the hand, and walked swiftly through the moonlight toward the enemies lurking in the dark garden. They did not speak as they covered the first block. But when they started on that last half block, the girl broke the silence. "If—if they attack you, I'll cry for help," she said. "I'll try to make those in the house hear. They may be watching—if Scott got loose and was able to reach a telephone."

"I hope he did," said Catlin.

They hurried on across that stretch of moonlight. They reached the gate, and Myra unlatched it. The walk ran straight to the front door of the house, and they could see there was a light in the front hall.

Catlin stepped into the edge of the nearest shadow and pulled the girl to him. "You start, and run as fast as you can," he whispered. "I'll be watching. We'll draw their fire that way, and they'll reveal where they are hidden: They'll think, of course, that you have the—what you gave me."

"And you—"

"Leave the rest to me," he said. "You can trust me."

"I know I can." She clasped his hand, turned, and was gone. He heard her feet beating the cement walk, caught a glimpse of the yellow in her costume. And then men crashed through the underbrush to get at her, as he had thought they would. "Help! Help!" he heard her scream.

Catlin sprang from the walk and ran forward, over the soft ground. There were three men—McHugh, Hargrove, and another. Catlin was upon them like a whirlwind. He realized that it would have to be done quickly. He noticed, as he rushed in, that the front door had been thrown open, that a streak of light struck the walk, that men were

coming.

He crashed into Hargrove like a thunderbolt, and with one blow drove him back. McHugh was next, but McHugh did not fall; he reeled backward, gathered himself together, and rushed in again. Another man dashed from the trees and took care of McHugh. Catlin whirled to meet the third one of the party—and met a crashing blow that sent him backward. The girl's glad cry, a bedlam of voices, imprecations—that much he heard, then knew no more.

CHAPTER X.

EXPLANATIONS WANTED.

WHEN Catlin regained consciousness he was in the house on a divan. Myra Randolph was kneeling beside him, and a man was holding a glass to his lips. Catlin pushed the glass away and sat up.

It was a peculiar scene that met his eyes. Before him were twelve men dressed in red gowns, the hoods pulled up over their heads. They stood in a semicircle, regarding him. On one side was Hargrove, his face discolored and full of wrath, standing with folded arms. Beside him were Donald McHugh and another, the third man of the party. And behind them, still in his Mephistopheles costume, with the exception of the cloak, stood Scott. Catlin remembered—Scott had dashed from the trees to his aid during the fight in the garden.

One of the red-gowned men stepped forward. "I am William Randolph, sir," he said. "I want to thank you for the aid you have given us. My daughter has told me a part of what you have done. You went to her assistance in a good cause, taking her word for it that it was a good cause; you fought for her, you even saved her life—"

The man's voice broke. The hood fell from his head, and Catlin saw a man of perhaps sixty, noble looking, with white hair. "I am glad to have been of service," Catlin said.

"I regret exceedingly that I am unable to explain to you just what you have done," Randolph continued. "But I want to assure you that it'll never be forgotten. I'll have you taken to a room upstairs and given attention, and in the

morning we'll talk."

"Perhaps, sir," replied Catlin, "you may explain without fear. I, too, am a member of the Red Brotherhood."

"You?" cried Myra Randolph.

"You?" gasped Donald McHugh and William Randolph in a breath.

"Even so—of the Eastern District," said Catlin. "I have been a member for years, almost since the brotherhood was first organized. If you doubt—" William Randolph bent forward, and Catlin whispered something in his ear.

"I am doubly glad that one of the brothers has done this," said Randolph, clasping him by the hand.

Catlin fumbled in his pocket. "And here is the seal," he said, handing it to Randolph.

"The seal!" Randolph cried the words happily. Hargrove turned his back.

"The seal!" Randolph said again. "And it is more than two hours until sunrise. We have ample time." He turned and motioned to the red-gowned men behind him. They surrounded Hargrove, McHugh, and their companion, and led the way to an adjoining room. Randolph took one of Catlin's arms and Myra the other, and they followed. Scott walked behind them.

The other room was large, and the shades were fitted to the windows so that no light could show through. At one end of the room was a dais, with a huge chair upon it, and a table beside the chair. Randolph ascended the dais and sat down. Before him were rows of other chairs, and the eleven red-gowned men took their places, and the others sat behind them. Randolph touched a button, and a gong struck.

From the distance came the sound of closing doors. Presently another brother entered and advanced to the dais.

"The sentries are posted, master," he said, and backed to the door again.

"The council of the Pacific Coast District is in session," Randolph declared.

Again the gong struck. The brothers adjusted their hoods. Catlin was looking at Donald McHugh, who would not meet his eyes. McHugh's face was swelling and discolored, and Catlin realized that he had done it. His friend had not had time at the hotel to change clothing; he had torn off the Mephistopheles cloak and drawn

on coat and trousers over the remainder of the costume. Now he hung his head, as if ashamed.

“At the rise of the sun this morning a new brotherhood year begins,” Randolph was saying. “At the rise of sun, I, your master, give up my office to another. On this night every year a new vice master is chosen, and of the brotherhood a member is chosen to take seat in the council, so that the number may be maintained when the master becomes past master.”

He paused. “Aye!” cried the brothers, and Catlin joined them.

“Brother Hargrove is vice master of this council,” Randolph went on. “He is a member of many years’ standing, and should know the principles that govern the brotherhood. There are charges against this brother that must be heard now, before the rising of the sun,”

Randolph paused again, but Hargrove did not answer. He glared at the master on the dais, and waited.

“The Red Brotherhood was organized fifteen years ago,” he went on. “It is so secret that scarcely anyone outside the membership knows of its existence. The brotherhood works for good. It was founded by a score of earnest, sincere men of wealth who wanted to do all in their power for the worthy ones of humanity. They planned to work in silence, to aid those worthy of aid, to forward those projects that were best for mankind.

“The brotherhood spread, and to-day we have districts and councils throughout the civilized world. A word is passed from brother to brother, after anyone of the masters has spoken, and some worthy man in despair finds that his enterprise suddenly has become successful. The brotherhood has elected good men to office without letting them know. It has furnished capital for affairs that were on the verge of ruin. It has helped build character. And, as we all know, it has raised its hand against men unworthy and defeated them, though they knew not the reason for their defeat. But the foremost rule and principle has been—*no member or members should use the power of the brotherhood to aid himself or themselves.*”

He stopped and looked down at Hargrove again, then let his eyes fall to the seal Catlin had helped to rescue; it had been placed in the center of a table at the foot of the dais, where all could see it.

“The master of a council,” he went on, “is supreme in carrying out the orders of that council. An order is written, and the council master, and he only, affixes the seal of the division. A copy of that order, with the seal attached, is sent to the master of every other council, and those masters, by word of mouth, give the order to the local members. The seal, the only thing recognized as power, is always to be in the hands of the master. It is supposed, of course, that he will not use it unworthily.

“Brother Hargrove is vice master of this council, and, following the usual method, he should become master at sunrise this morning, when my term of office expires. Some three months ago it became known to this council that Brother Hargrove was unworthy. He was plotting to use the power of the brotherhood, once he became master of the council, to further his own enterprises. In fact, he had planned a gigantic swindle, and, by affixing the seal of the order to a document, expected to get every member of the brotherhood in the world to aid a project that would pour millions into Brother Hargrove’s safe and bring despair and poverty to countless men and women.

“At first we could scarcely believe that a brother would stoop to such a thing. But the temptation was great, and Brother Hargrove could not resist it. The matter was put before the council, and, after due deliberation and a fair hearing, it decided that Brother Hargrove should be expelled from the order at once, and that he should be made known to every member of the brotherhood as an unworthy man. It was a dreadful sentence, for it meant that thousands of reputable men in all walks of life would shun him thereafter.

“The order of expulsion had but to be written, and the great seal affixed. Before that could be done, Brother Hargrove, by using violence, stole the seal of the order and put it in a hiding place. Without it, the order of expulsion could not be put out. He had but to keep the seal until this morning at sunrise, and at that time, becoming master by virtue of his rank of vice master, and because the expulsion had not been carried out, he could proceed with his unworthy plan.”

There was a sound from Hargrove; but,

though Randolph waited, the accused man spoke no word. All in the room were looking at him in scorn, though it was an old story to all except Catlin.

“We tried to regain the seal,” Randolph continued, “but could not. We called upon the entire membership of the local council to help. His office was searched, his safe opened, his safety-deposit box, even, inspected. His apartments at Hotel del Coronado were searched, but to no avail.

“We had reason to believe that the seal was hidden at the hotel. We called in the members of the Women’s Auxiliary to help. Last night, our last night of grace, there was a masquerade at the hotel, and Hargrove was entertaining. It was a chance for masked persons to invade his apartments. He had two members, whom he had won over to his side, to aid him; they knew all our men. But the women might be able to pass unnoticed, so we depended upon the women. One man was to be there, dressed in a certain manner, to aid any of the women who discovered the whereabouts of the seal. Thank heaven, it was recovered. Gentlemen of the council, we have now but to affix the seal to the order of expulsion, and this man Hargrove goes from our midst as unworthy, to be scorned by worthy men and women—and the brotherhood is free of the stain he would have put upon it!”

Hargrove sprang to his feet, his swollen face purple with passion. “Then affix your seal!” he cried. “What do I care if the brotherhood expels me? I entered it fifteen years ago when it was organized—entered it more for a lark than anything else. As it grew, I saw its possibilities. I played you for fools, did your work, seemed to enter heart and soul into that work, and you made me a member of the council. I kept on, until I was vice master, and knew that I would be master at the end of the year. Once master, with that seal in my hands, I could make the brotherhood do my bidding, force its members to help me win a gigantic fortune.

“You got wise—yes! You tried to expel me, and I stole the seal so the order could not be properly signed. I got two men to help me, promising them reward. I laughed as I watched you trying to get the seal back. I knew you had ransacked my office and apartment. And I know

what you contemplated doing last night. I knew of the man to be in the devil’s garb. One of my men assumed the same garb, and we tried to outwit you. And this—this stranger, who happened to assume a similar costume, mixed in. I lost! It was a pretty fight, but, I lost! Well, you have your seal—make the most of it!”

He glared around at the others. Donald McHugh, with a cry of anger, sprang to his feet and confronted Hargrove. “You—you!” he cried. “And you lied to me! You told me Randolph wanted to use his power and expel you because you had become aware of something unworthy he contemplated! You convinced me with clever proof. And I joined you because I thought I was fighting for the brotherhood and the right. You crook—you thief!”

“No man can talk to me like that and—”

“I can talk to you like that! You’d make me a scoundrel and an outcast, would you, to further your own devilish schemes?”

He sprang at Hargrove’s throat, and in an instant they were locked in each other’s arms. The brothers sprang forward to separate them; the master left the dais and stepped down, crying his protests. Myra Randolph stepped back to the other end of the room and turned her face away.

There was confusion for a moment, then Hargrove was forced into a chair, and Donald McHugh was led to another, and brothers held them there, apart.

The master went to his chair again. “It is almost sunrise,” he said, taking a document from beneath his robe. “We must choose a vice master to take my office at that hour. But first we must expel this man, the present vice master. The secretary will hand me the seal.” The secretary’s cry startled them:

“The seal! It is gone again!”

CHAPTER XI.

A QUESTION OF MINUTES.

GONE! The seal—gone!” In the silence that followed this cry, the brothers looked at one another, then Hargrove’s harsh laugh broke in.

“I haven’t lost yet, it seems,” he said.

Randolph left the dais again, and stepped

down to his daughter's side. "Please go to your room on the second floor," he said, "and get on some dry clothing."

She understood what he meant; there might be a scene which her eyes should not see. So she hurried away, and Randolph raised his hand. The brothers seized Hargrove and subjected him to a close search, but the seal could not be found. Next, they searched Donald McHugh, who made no resistance. McHugh was an object of self-condemnation and despair. The third man of Hargrove's party, whose name Catlin had not heard, followed McHugh's lead and made no resistance. Then the room was searched carefully, for it was thought the seal might have been knocked off the table when the brothers rushed to separate Hargrove and McHugh.

"It is gone—gone!" said Randolph.

A search of everyone in the room followed, and still the seal was not found. Randolph went back to the dais, and Hargrove taunted them. "I haven't lost yet," he said. "Another hour, and I'll be master of the council. I'll make you pay for this then. I'll use the seal whenever I wish, and the council cannot stop me. Only an expulsion by the grand council, after a long hearing, can stop me, and that would take months and months. I've got you—got you!"

"The grand council!" Randolph exclaimed. "We appealed to the grand council, brothers, and received word that they would send the grand secretary to us from New York. He was to bring the grand seal, and if, after an examination, he was convinced we were in the right, he was to sign the order for Hargrove's expulsion himself.

"Early yesterday morning I received a telephone message from Los Angeles. It was the grand secretary. We do not know him by name, of course, but he gave me the proper countersign. He said he would arrive in San Diego yesterday some time, and I arranged to have an automobile meet him at one o'clock this morning in front of the U. S. Grant Hotel. The automobile is there yet. The brother who was driving it telephoned me twice that the grand secretary had not put in an appearance. It was the only thing that could save us, unless we regained our own seal, and that has failed. Perhaps"—he looked at Hargrove with quick suspicion—"perhaps the grand secretary has been cared for by certain persons—"

"Well, suppose I did 'care for' him?" Hargrove sneered. "I'm in this fight to win, remember?"

"If such a man as you can win in such a cause—" Randolph began, then stopped and bent his head on his hands.

The clock on the wall ticked away the minutes. It was half an hour, now, until sunrise. Half an hour more—and Hargrove would be triumphant.

Catlin got up and walked slowly toward the dais. He staggered a bit for he was still weak from the experiences of the night. His wet clothes still clung to him—he had not thought of changing. His face was haggard, but his eyes blazed. "Master," he said, and bowed low before the dais.

"Brother?"

"I am the grand secretary!" Catlin said.

"You? You?" All in the room took up the cry. Rage was in Hargrove's face again. Donald McHugh looked up, aghast. Randolph and the brothers crowded forward, around him.

"The questions, master?" he requested.

Randolph put them; Catlin answered them. Then he unbuttoned his shirt at the throat, and the underwear beneath it. In a bag of silk, suspended around his neck by a gold chain, was a round disk. He took it out and held it up.

"The grand seal!" he exclaimed, and the others echoed his cry. "Give me a handle, master. Heat the wax. Prepare the order for the expulsion of this man, and I'll sign it and affix the grand seal!"

They ran to do his bidding. Hargrove started to get up from his chair, but two of the brothers hurled him back into it and held him there.

"Because I was not to meet your automobile until one o'clock in the morning, I went to the masquerade at Coronado," Catlin explained. "I did not know the parties to this controversy, of course. I knew only the telephone number of the local master, and could identify him by the countersigns. My orders were to hold an investigation and use the seal if I thought it right. Through an accident, I was drawn into this matter at the ball. I began to suspect the truth in Donald McHugh's rooms at the Hotel U. S. Grant, when he said I was participating in a controversy between two factions of an organization.

"After Miss Randolph compelled me to aid

her, I made up my mind to desert her at Old Town and return to the city, there to wait the automobile, because I did not want to take sides. I wanted to be fair and honest. But I read truth and sincerity in her manner at Old Town, and gave her my help. She took the seal from the pigeon, and handed it to me, and then I knew for certain that I was playing a part in the trouble. Still, I did not take sides, only helped Miss Randolph, determined to decide against her father if, after an investigation, I believed him to be in the wrong.

"But here in this council room I have heard this man you call Hargrove admit his perfidy. I have heard him boast of what he intended to do. As for your own seal, I took it from the table during the trouble a few minutes ago. I tossed it through the door into the hall, and you'll find it there, I think, among the rugs in the corner."

"But why—why?" Randolph gasped.

"Because I want to stamp the order for his expulsion with the grand seal. I want to condemn this man with that instead of with the seal of a local council. There'll be no question then—and every brother throughout the world will know it is not a mere local matter, but that the grand council itself has acted. Master, the wax!"

Catlin ascended the dais. He picked up a pen, dipped it in the red ink there, and scrawled at the foot of the order the character of his rank. Then he sanded the signature—for writings of the secret brotherhood must never be duplicated, even on a piece of blotting paper, and the fine sand of colonial times was always used—smearing the wax on the corner, pressed the seal upon it, held it there for a moment, and withdrew it.

"And now," he said, turning upon them, "cast this man out, for hereafter he is not to be recognized by men of honor. He has broken a sacred vow, he has attempted to use the brotherhood for his own ends. Cast him out!"

Several of the brothers stepped forward. Hargrove made no resistance this time. With bowed head, he walked to the door, and stepped into the hall. A moment later the front door slammed.

"As for Donald McHugh," Catlin went on, "I have known him for years, and have called him my friend. Last night I was compelled to rain blows upon him. He was misled by Hargrove. I suggest, master, that he be retained in the

brotherhood, put on probation for one year, and that during that time be not admitted to the inner circle and its deliberations."

"It is so ordered," said Randolph. "We will but sand the slippery downward path for him, so that he may not slip again." He smiled kindly at the young man.

Catlin stepped down from the dais. McHugh's eyes were shining into his, and in McHugh's face was a look of joy. Catlin extended his hand. "If you want to take it, my friend—" he said.

"I do, Roger; I do!"

Their hands met and clung, and Catlin faced the dais again. "This other man who was identified with Hargrove—we'll have a hearing in his case one week from to-day; I'll remain for it. You must proceed now, to the election of a new vice master, who will become master within a few minutes, for it is almost time for the rising of the sun. If you can give me a change of clothes, master, I'll withdraw with my friend, Donald McHugh, and return to San Diego to rest."

"There is dry clothing in my son's room on the second floor," said Randolph. "My son is in Los Angeles now, because the council is meeting here. He is a brother. Let McHugh direct you, for I must supervise the election."

Catlin followed McHugh up the stairs. In the room of the younger Randolph he found clothing that would do, and changed quickly. McHugh left him for a time. "I've telephoned to the La Jolla garage for an auto," he said, when he returned.

"I'm ready, Don."

"That was some thrashing you gave me last night," said McHugh, as they descended the stairs.

"It was in a good cause!"

"It did me good, all right."

In the front hall they came across a young lady dressed in white, whose hair was now properly and becomingly dressed, whose eyes were shining brightly, whose face was flushed. She stepped forward and clasped Roger Catlin by the hand. "I've heard," she said. "And I am so glad! I haven't had a chance to thank you—"

"Do not try," said Catlin, laughing a little.

"I'll see you again before you return to your home? You'll dine with us—say, to-morrow?"

"With pleasure," he said. "I'm in no hurry to return home, Miss Randolph. I must preside at a

trial of one of the brothers a week from to-day. I set the date myself. I could have set it for tomorrow, but—I didn't!"

She met his look squarely, and her face flushed. They shook hands again as Donald

McHugh threw open the door. The sun was just rising, and the distant sea was bathed in its reflected glory. Behind them arose the chant of the brothers as they installed the new master.