

Temperature, F. Scott Fitzgerald

This is one of those stories that ought to begin by calling the hero "X" or "H-B-", because there were so many people drawn into it that at least one will read this and claim to have been a leading character. And as for that current dodge "No reference to any living character is intended"—no use even trying it.

We come out and state that the man in the case is Emmet Monsen, because that is (or almost is) his real name. Three months ago you could consult the pictorials and news magazines and discover that he was just returning from the Omigis on the S.S. Fumataki Nagursha and landing at the port of Los Angeles with notable information on tropical tides and fungi. He was in the pictorials because he was notably photogenic, being thirty-one, slender and darkly handsome, with the sort of expression that made photographers say: "Mr. Monsen—could you manage to smile once more?"

But, to take the modern privilege of starting a story twice, this tale should begin at another place—a medical laboratory in downtown Los Angeles, forty-eight hours after Emmet Monsen left the dock.

I

A rather pretty girl was talking to a young man whose business was developing electrocardiograph or heart charts—automatic recordings of that organ which has never been famed as an instrument of precision.

"Eddie hasn't phoned today," she said.

"Excuse these tears," he answered. "It's my old sinus. And these are the charts for your candid album."

"Thanks—but don't you think when a girl is going to be married in a month, or at least before Christmas, he could phone her every morning."

"Listen—if he loses that job at Wadford Dunn Sons, you won't be able to afford a Mexican marriage."

The laboratory girl carefully wrote the name "Wadford Dunn Sons" at the top of the first heart chart, swore in a short but vicious California idiom, erased it and substituted the name of the patient.

"Those cardiographs," added the laboratory man, "are supposed to go out by—"

Telephones interrupted him—but it was by no means Eddie; it was two doctors, both very angry at once. The young lady was galvanized into frantic activity which landed her a few minutes later in a 1931 model, bound for one of those suburbs which make Los Angeles the most far-flung city in the world.

Her first destination was exciting, for it was the country estate of young Carlos Davis, whom, so far, she had seen only in flicker form and once in Technicolor. Not that there was anything the matter with Carlos Davis' heart—it worked the other way—but she was delivering the cardiograph to the tenant of a smaller house on his estate, originally built for his mother—and if Davis happened not to be at the studio she might glimpse him in passing.

She didn't, and for the present—after she delivered the cardiograph at the proper door—she passes out of the story.

And at this point, as they say in picture making, the camera goes into the

house, and we go with it.

The tenant was Emmet Monsen. At the moment he sat in an easy chair looking out into the sunny May-time garden, while Doctor Henry Cardiff opened the envelope with his huge hands to examine the chart and the report that went with it.

"I stayed out there one year too long," said Emmet, "and like a fool I drank water! Man I worked with had the idea—he hadn't touched water in twenty years, only whiskey. He was a little dried up—skin like parchment—but no more than the average Englishman."

The maid flashed darkly in the dining-room doorway and Emmet called to her.

"Margerilla? Have I got that name right?"

"Yes, Mist Monsen."

"Margerilla, if Miss Elsa Halliday calls up, I'm at home to her but to nobody else. Remember that name—Miss Elsa Halliday."

"Yes suh, I seen her in the moving picture. Frank and I—"

"All right, Margerilla," he interrupted politely.

Dr. Cardiff, having finished his reading, arose in half a dozen gigantic sections and paced; his gaze seeking the chandelier, as if his years of training were lurking there like guardian angels.

"So what?" Emmet asked. "Maybe it's a growth? I swallowed a piece of fungi once—I thought it was a shrimp. Maybe it's attached itself to me. You know—like women. I mean like women are supposed to do."

"These," said Dr. Cardiff in a rather too kind voice, "are not radio plates. This is the cardiograph. When I made you lie down yesterday and attached the wires to you?"

"Oh, yes," Emmet said. "Let's open some windows."

He started to rise, but instantly the doctor's great bulk loomed over him and forced him down.

"Mr. Monsen, I want you to sit absolutely in place. Later we'll arrange a means of transportation."

He gave a quick glance about, as if expecting a subway entrance, or at least a small personal derrick, to be in a corner of the room. Emmet sat waiting for him to speak, the expression in his handsome eyes was now very alert and wide awake.

"I knew on the boat I was running a fever—that's why I'm laying up in California, but if this chart proves something serious I want to know about that too."

Dr. Cardiff decided to tell all.

"Your heart is enlarged to a... to a..."

He hesitated.

"To a dangerous degree?" Emmet asked.

"But not to a fatal degree," answered Dr. Cardiff.

"Come on, Doctor," said Emmet, "what is it? Is the heart quitting?"

"Oh, now!" protested Cardiff. "That's no way to look at it. I've seen cases where I wouldn't have given the man two hours—"

"Come to the point," Emmet exclaimed. "I'm sorry, Doctor, but I'm no child—I've taken people through typhoid and dysentery myself. What's my chance—ten percent? One percent? When and under what conditions am I leaving this very beautiful scenery?"

"It depends, Mr. Monsen, to a great extent on yourself."

"All right. I'll do anything you say. Not much exercise I suppose, no highballs, stick around the house till we see what nature—"

The maid was in the doorway.

"Mist Monsen, Elsa Halliday's on the phone and it sure did thrill me down to my marrow—"

Emmet was up before the doctor could hoist himself from his chair, and on the phone in the butler's pantry.

"I've thought of you all morning, Emmet," a voice declared, "and I'm coming out this afternoon. What did the doctor say?"

"He says I'm fine—little run down, wants me to take it easy a few days. Elsa, do you know that except for those minutes at the dock I haven't seen you for two years?"

"Two years is a long time, Emmet."

"Don't say it quite that way," he objected. "Anyhow come as soon as you can."

As he hung up the phone he realized that he was not alone in the pantry. There was the face of Margerilla and at her shoulder quite a different face that he stared at absently and abstractedly for a moment, as if it had no more reality than a magazine cover. It belonged to a girl whose face was roundish and whose eyes were round—after all, not so astonishing—but the expression with which she regarded him was so full of a sort of beautiful attention, a fascinated and amused surprise that he wanted to say something back to it. It did not quite ask, "Can it be you?" like some girls' faces do; rather it asked: "Are you having fun out of all this nonsense?" Or else it said, "We seem to be partners for this dance," adding: "—and this is the dance I've been waiting for all my life."

To these questions or statements hinted at in the girl's smile, Emmet responded with a stare.

"What can I do for you?" he asked finally.

"It's the other way, Mr. Monsen." She had a somewhat breathless voice. "What can I do for you! I was sent here by Rusty's Secretarial Bureau. I'm Miss Trainor and I have a reference from Mr. Rachoff, the musician, who went to Europe last week—"

She held a letter toward him—but Emmet was in a mood.

"Never heard of him," he announced, then corrected himself. "Yes, I have. But I never believe in references." He looked at her closely, even accusingly, but her smile had come back—and seemed to agree with him that all references were nonsense and she'd thought so for years—only she was glad to hear it said at last.

Emmet got up.

"That downstairs room will be your typing office. Margerilla will show you."

He nodded and returned to the living room where he found that Dr. Cardiff was not alone but was engaged in secret conference with a lady in starched white. So intense was their confluence that Emmet's entrance did not interrupt it—it flowed on in a sort of sustained mumble for some time after he settled in his chair.

"This is Miss Hapgood, your day nurse," said Dr. Cardiff finally.

An unconfident bell-shaped lady smiled appraisingly at Emmet.

"I've told her everything—" continued the doctor.

The nurse confirmed this by holding up a pad covered with writing.

"—and I've asked her to call me several times during the day. So you can be sure you're being well looked after. Huh-huh."

The nurse echoed his laugh. Emmet wondered if he had missed a joke.

The doctor then "ran along"—a process which consisted of picking up his bag several times, setting it down, writing a last-minute prescription, sending the nurse on a goose-chase for his stethoscope— and eventually blocking out the living room door with his bulky figure. But by this time, Emmet who had no stopwatch had concluded that "running along" was merely a figure of sick-room speech.

"Mr. Moppet," said the nurse, "I suppose we ought to begin by getting acquainted."

Emmet was about to commence by supplying his real name when she added:

"One thing I think you ought to know is I happen to be a little clumsy. Know what I mean?"

Having travelled widely Emmet had been asked questions in languages he did not understand and often been able to answer by signs—but this time he was stumped. "I'm sorry" did not seem to have the right ring, nor did "What a pity!" The quandary was avoided by the appearance of young Carlos Davis in the doorway with the Trainor girl beside him. Davis was a Dakota small-town boy, with none of the affectations ascribed to him—it was no fault of his that he had been born with a small gift of mimicry and an extraordinary personal beauty.

Emmet stood up.

"Greetings!" said Davis. "It happened I ran into the Doc and I wanted to ask if there's anything I can do."

"That's very kind—"

"I just want you to know I'm at your service, and that I'll leave my private phone number with your... your..." His eyes contemplated the Trainor girl with visible appreciation— "your secretary. It's not in the book, but she's got it." He paused. "I mean she's got the number. Then I'll go along—one of these broadcasts! Cripes!"

He did a short melancholy headshake, bade farewell in a wave-salute vaguely reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth, and departed with what developed, as he reached the hall, into a series of long athletes' leaps.

Emmet looked at Miss Trainor.

"I don't see your lips moving," he said, "and there goes the maiden's prayer."

"I tried to keep him out," she answered coolly. "It was physically impossible. Is there anything special you want from me at this moment?"

"Yes. Sit down and I'll give you an idea of what the job will be."

She reminded him of a girl for whom he had suffered deeply at the age of seven; he kept wanting to ask her if she could possibly be the girl, with a different age and name.

"I've written a sort of scientific book. There's some copies in a package in the kitchen. It's being published tomorrow and nobody's going to read it." He looked at her suddenly, "Do you get all flustered about the genesis of tidal waves? I mean, would you buy a book about that?"

"Well..." A pause "...under certain circumstances I would."

"Diplomat, eh?"

"Frankly I wouldn't if I thought I had a chance for an autographed copy."

"Diplomat," he grunted. "I should have said 'Ambassador.' Anyhow this book will disappear into the geographic sections of several hundred libraries. Meanwhile I've got a hunch for an adventure book and I've taken thousands of notes—will you see if there's a briefcase in the hall?"

"Mr. Mop—" began his nurse in a tone of disapproval but Emmet said:

"Just a minute, Miss Hapgood." When the Trainor girl brought in the briefcase he continued: "The stuff checked with a red crayon ought to be typed up so I can take a look at it."

"Very well."

"Are you from somewhere near Boston?" he asked.

"Why—yes. I guess I still talk like it."

"I was born in New Hampshire."

They looked at each other, both at ease, their minds far away across the republic.

Perhaps Miss Hapgood misinterpreted their expressions, for she firmly interrupted the conversation.

"Mr. Moppet—I have these instructions and we want to begin the treatment before anything."

She threw a glance at the door and the Trainor girl, realizing that she stood for "anything", picked up the briefcase and withdrew.

"First we'll get to bed," said Miss Hapgood.

In spite of the wording of this sentence, Emmet's thoughts could have been printed in *The Youth's Companion* as he followed her toward the stairs.

"I'm not going to try to help you Mr. Mop—because of this clumsiness—but the doctor would like you to walk up slowly, clasping the bannister rail like this."

Emmet once on the stairs did not look around but he was conscious of a sudden screech of wood followed by a short deprecatory laugh.

"They build these things so jerry in California, don't they," she tittered. "Not

like in the East."

"Are you from the East?" he asked from the top of the stairs.

"Oh, yes. Born and raised in Idaho."

He sat down on the side of the bed and untied a shoe, annoyed that his sickness didn't make him feel sicker.

"All diseases ought to be sudden," he said aloud, "like the bubonic plague."

"I've never taken bubonic plague cases," said Miss Hapgood smugly.

Emmet looked up.

"Never taken—"

He decided to go on with his shoes but now she was on her knees, converting the laces expertly into a cat's cradle.

"I can take care of the trousers myself," he said quickly. "Pajamas are in my suitcase—I'm not quite unpacked."

After a search Miss Hapgood handed him a full dress shirt and a pair of corduroy slacks—luckily Emmet caught the glint of the studs before the shirt was entirely on.

When he was finally in bed with two pills down him and a thermometer in his mouth Miss Hapgood spoke from the mirror—where she stood drawing his comb through her neatly matted hair.

"You have nice things," she suggested. "I've worked in homes lately where I wouldn't spit on the things they had. But I asked Dr. Cardiff to find me a case with a real gentleman—because I'm a lady."

Emmet sat up in bed, taking out the thermometer.

"Say—I didn't intend to go to bed until after Miss Elsa Halliday called."

"I gave you two sleeping pills, Mr. Mop."

He swung his legs out of bed.

"Couldn't you give me an emetic—or something to get rid of the pills?"

"We can't bring on a convulsion in a heart case."

"Well, I'll sleep for a while," Emmet decided desperately. "Miss Halliday probably won't be here for a couple of hours."

"You can't sleep in that position."

"I always go to sleep on my elbow."

She collapsed him with the most adroit movement she had made during their acquaintance.

II

When he awoke again it was into another morning that even as he opened his eyes seemed vaguely threatening. It was still May, and the gardens of the Davis estate had erupted almost overnight into a wild rash of roses, which threw a tangle of sweet contagion up over his porch and across the window screen; but he

felt a reaction from the impotent acquiescence of the day before.

He rang twice—a signal arranged with the secretary. As she appeared he hunched up on his pillow—then he followed her infectious glance toward the window.

"Lot of them, aren't there?"

"I'd just let them grow right into this room," the Trainor girl suggested.

"Did Miss Halliday come yesterday?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, but you were asleep. She sent flowers this morning."

"What kind?"

"American Beauties."

"What are these on the porch?"

"Talismans—with a few Cecile Brunners."

"Well, the most important thing is to see that I'm awake when Miss Halliday comes. Apparently I'm getting sick man's psychology in a rush—I feel as if there's a conspiracy between the doctor and nurse to keep me sort of frozen up."

She opened the screen window, pinched off a rose, and tossed it to the pillow beside him.

"There's something you can trust," she said; then briskly, "You have mail downstairs. Some men like to start a day with the mail—but Mr. Rachoff always liked to get through his planned work even before his newspaper."

Emmet, conceiving a faint hostility toward Mr. Rachoff, weighed the possibilities.

"Well, I wish you could find out when she's coming without appearing too anxious. About the work—well, I don't feel like anything till I know what this doctor's planned. Give me that nurse's pad, will you?"

"I'll ring for Miss Hapgood. She's at breakfast."

"Oh no," he said firmly.

He was half out of bed when Miss Trainor yielded. In possession of the chart Emmet read steadily for several minutes; then he was out of bed in earnest, reaching for his dressing gown with one hand and ringing three times for the nurse. There were words also—words that he merely hoped Miss Trainor didn't understand.

"Read it yourself! I lie on my right side three hours—then I ask the nurse to turn me gently to the left! These are instructions for an undertaker, only Cardiff forgot the embalming fluid! Get him on the phone!"

It was from the moment that the Trainor girl handed Emmet the chart that the complexion of the case changed. Later she confessed that she could have seized it and darted from the room but this suggested the possibility of a chase, perhaps the greater of the two evils.

An hour later he was in the living room saying to Dr. Cardiff, "I looked at that chart, and I just can't live like that six months."

"I've heard that before," said Dr. Cardiff scathingly. "Dozens of men say: 'If you think I'm going to stay in this — bed you must be crazy!' And a few days later when they get scared they're meek as—"

"I can't stare at the ceiling all day—and there's those soapy baths in bed and the bedpan and the mush diet—why, you'd have a nut on your hands!"

"Since you insisted on reading the chart, Mr. Monsen, you should have read it all. There's provision for the nurse reading to you—and half an hour in the morning when you can see your mail, sign checks and all that. Personally I think you're lucky to be sick out here in this beautiful—"

"So do I," Emmet broke in, "but that's beside the point. I can't do it—I ran away from home when I was twelve and beat my way to Texas—"

The doctor arose.

"You're not twelve now. You're a grown man." He slipped off Emmet's dressing gown. "Now, sir—"

He adjusted a blood-pressure apparatus to his arm and its clock sighed down depressingly. Dr. Cardiff looked at the gauge and unwound the flap; then Miss Hapgood was at her patient's side and Emmet felt a stab in his arm.

"Well get Mr. Monsen upstairs," said Dr. Cardiff

"I'm quite able to get upstairs..."

Miss Trainor, who was a grave, slow-thinking girl, notwithstanding the very special delights that showed in her face, seldom yielded to intuition. But she could not dismiss a persistent doubt as to whether Dr. Cardiff had his fingers on the pulse of this business. She felt this even more strongly next day as she hesitated outside the kitchen door.

It was Margerilla's day off and she heard Miss Hapgood's increasingly ineffectual voice.

"Mr. Monsen, you can't cook with a temperature of 103 degrees."

"Think of the Huns," Emmet suggested irrelevantly, chopping at a steak. "They used raw meat for their saddles all day—that broke down the fibres."

"Mr. Monsen!"

Miss Trainor sighed—he had seemed such an attractive man—and went in with her news.

"Miss Halliday's secretary phoned. Miss Halliday started out here half an hour ago."

"Hold her downstairs," he exclaimed, dropping the meat-chopper.

In his bedroom he had Miss Hapgood sponge him with a wet towel, and by attaching himself to her like a pilot fish to a shark, collected some clothes to wear.

This was a moment in his life. It had been Elsa's face on a screen in Ceylon that told him he was a fool to leave her—Elsa's expression as she met him on the dock three days ago that made him sure. Now he must face her only to stall, conceal, evade—because he did not know what was in the dark next day, next hour.

"We haven't had a temperature," said Miss Hapgood—and as if the announcement were a signal, Emmet and all his immaculate clothes were instantaneously drenched with sweat.

"Try to match everything I've got on," he ordered. "She'll be here any minute."

Miss Trainor knocked with the announcement that the guest was below and Emmet pressed her into service to collect another outfit. He redressed gingerly in the bathroom and went downstairs.

Elsa Halliday was a brunette with a high warm flush that photographed, and long sleepy eyes full of hush and promise. With the exception of Hedy Lamarr, she had made the swiftest rise in pictures of the past two years. Emmet did not kiss her, only stood beside her chair, took her hand and looked at her—then retreated to a chair opposite, momentarily thinking less of her than of his ability to control the damp on brow and chest.

"How are you?" Elsa asked.

"Much better. Let's not even talk about it—I'll be up and around in no time."

"That's not what Dr. Cardiff said."

At this Emmet's undershirt was suddenly wet.

"Did that ass talk about me?"

"He didn't say much. He told me you ought to take care of yourself."

Emmet managed to tack away from the subject.

"You've done some grand work lately, Elsa. I know that—though I'm a couple of pictures behind. I've seen you in movie houses where only a few people could read the dubbed titles—but I've watched their eyes and their lips move with yours—and seen you hold them."

She stared into an imperceptible distance.

"That's the romantic part," she said. "How much real good you can do to people you will never meet."

"Yes," he answered.

She must not make remarks like that, he thought, recalling the plots of Port Said Woman and Party Girl.

"You have the gift of vividness," he said after a minute. "Like the fifteenth century painters who discovered motion where there was no motion—"

He realized he was beyond her and retreated quickly:

"At the time when you and I were very close your beauty used to frighten me."

"When I dreamed about us getting married," Elsa supplied, coming awake.

He nodded.

"I used to feel like those bankers who try to be seen with opera singers—as if they'd bought the voice like a phonograph record."

"You did a lot for my voice," Elsa said. "I still have the phonograph and all the records, and I may sing in my next picture. And the Picasso prints—I still tell people they're real—though I've developed a lot of taste now: I get inside information about which paintings are going to be worth anything. I remember when you told me a painting could be a better investment than a bracelet—"

She broke off suddenly.

"Look Emmet—that isn't why I came out here—to talk about all those old things. We may be shooting again tomorrow and I wanted to see you while I could. You know—catch up? Really talk about everything—you know?"

This time it was Emmet who was scarcely listening. His shirt was now drenched and, wondering when there would be dark evidence on his shirt collar; he buttoned up his light coat. Then he was listening sharply.

"Two years is two years, Emmet, and we might as well get to the point. I know you did help me and I certainly did lean on you for advice. But two years—"

"Are you married?" he asked suddenly.

"No. I am not."

Emmet relaxed.

"That's all I wanted to know. I'm not a child. You've probably been in love with half the leading men in Hollywood since I've been gone."

"That's what I haven't done," she answered, almost tartly. "It shows how little you know about me, really. It shows how far people can drift apart."

Emmet's world was rocking as he answered.

"That could mean either there's been nobody—or else that there's somebody in particular."

"Very much in particular." As if ashamed of the emphasis her voice became less brisk. "It's awful telling you this, when you're sick and maybe going—I mean, it's an awful hard position for a girl. But I've been so busy: in pictures you're just an ottoman—you've got no more control of your time than if you were a shop girl type or—"

"You going to marry this man?" Emmet interrupted.

"Yes," she said defiantly. "But I don't know how soon—and don't ask me his name, because you might be delirious sometime—and these columnists would drive a girl crazy."

"This isn't something you decided within the last week?"

"Oh, I decided a year ago," she assured him, almost impatiently. "Couple of times we planned to go to Nevada. You have to wait four days here—"

"Is he a solid man—will you tell me that?"

"Solid is his middle name," said Elsa. "Catch me tying myself to some shyster or drunk. Next January I move into the big money myself."

Emmet stood up—he could now time the moment when the damp would arrive at the lining of his coat.

"Excuse me," he said.

In the pantry he steadied himself at the sink, then tapped on the secretary's door.

"Get rid of Miss Halliday!" he said, catching a glimpse of his face—white, hard, and haggard in a mirror. "Tell her I'm sick—anything—get her out of the house."

Hating compassion from anyone, he hated the face of the Trainor girl as she rose from her desk.

"Do it quickly!" he added unnecessarily.

"I understand, Mr. Monsen."

He went on out, feeling for the pantry sink, then for the swinging door, the back of a kitchen chair. A speech of contempt ran through his head in savage rhythm: "I never think much of a man who reaches for a glass of whiskey every time anything goes wrong."

But he turned to the closet where there stood a brandy bottle.

III

A rash youth taking down his first few gulps of spirits is moved to a blatant expressionism: an Englishman climbs, an Irishman fights, a Frenchman dances, an American "commotes"—though the word is not to be found in the dictionary.

Thus it happened to Emmet—he commoted. It was in the bag from the instant that the cognac tumbled into contact with his burning fever—and it gathered momentum while he sat on the side of his bed with Miss Hapgood trying to extricate him from his soaking clothes. He suddenly vanished—and almost as suddenly reappeared from the clothes-closet, clad in a sort of sarong surmounted by an opera hat.

"I am a Cannibal King," he said. "I am going down into the kitchen and eat Margerilla."

"This is her day off, Mr. Monsen."

"Then I am going to eat Carlos Davis."

In a moment he was on the telephone in the hall asking Mr. Davis' butler if his employer could please come right over.

Hanging up the receiver Emmet leaped nimbly aside to avoid a jab of Miss Hapgood's syringe.

"No, you don't!" he wiggled a finger at her. "I'm going to act in full control of all faculties. Need all my strength."

To test this last quality he suddenly bent down and plucked out a spoke of the bannister railing.

The ease of the operation fascinated him. He leaned over and plucked out another—and then another. It was like a nightmare where one detaches one's own teeth with uneasy awe.

The course of the operation led him downstairs. He kept in his hand one single spoke with which he intended to render Mr. Davis unconscious as he entered the door—in anticipation of preparing and eating him.

However he made a single miscalculation. When in the vicinity of the kitchen he remembered the brandy bottle and had some short swift traffic with it—almost immediately he found, or lost, himself upon a sack of potatoes under the kitchen sink, his bludgeon beside him, his black silk crown awry.

Fortunately he was not conscious of the events of the next few minutes—of how Miss Trainor looked into the twilight garden and saw Carlos Davis making a shortcut across it with the intention of entering his tenant's house through the rear door—nor of how Miss Trainor stepped outside the kitchen screen to intercept him.

"Hello there! Cheerio! And all that. Monsen wanted to see me, and I always say visit the sick."

"Oh, Mr. Davis, just after Mr. Monsen called you, his brother phoned from New York. Mr. Monsen wants to know if he can get in touch with you later—or tomorrow."

As she prayed for silence from the kitchen she heard the slow bounce of a potato across the floor.

"Cripes yes!" said Davis heartily. "Script's held up. My writer's on a bat!"

He whistled—and then looked admiringly at Miss Trainor.

"Like to see the swimming pool sometime? I mean—"

"I'd love it," Miss Trainor said—then covered up a species of groan from inside with the remarkable statement: "There's his buzzer now."

A puzzled look crossed Davis' face—faded. She sighed with relief.

"Well, cheerio and keep your chin up, and all that sort of thing," he advised her.

When he had broken into his athlete's run she stepped back into the kitchen. Emmet Monsen was no longer beneath the sink but there was not any doubt as to where he was, for she heard the sound of more spokes leaving the bannister, of window glass splintering—and then:

"I know what it is—it's chloral hydrate—it's a 'Mickey Finn'—I can smell it! Why don't you drink it yourself?"

Miss Hapgood stood on the stairs and smiled ineffectually as she held out the glass.

"Bottoms up!" Emmet suggested, not even pausing in his wrecking task, which now included throwing the extracted spokes through the broken window into the garden. "When that Cardiff comes I want to have you all passed out in rows before he drinks his! Cant a man die in peace!"

Miss Trainor turned on the hall light against the darkening day—and Emmet Monsen looked ungratefully at her.

"And you with your California smile!"

The words were accompanied by a long-drawn splintering of the top stair rail.

"I'm from New England, Mr. Monsen."

"Never mind! Write yourself a check anyhow. And write Miss Hapgood a check."

Miss Hapgood rose to the occasion—perhaps she heard a ghostly whisper from Florence Nightingale in her ear.

"Mr. Monsen—if I do drink this, will you go to bed?"

Hopefully she raised the glass of chloral.

"Yes!" agreed Emmet.

But as she lifted it to her lips the Trainor girl darted up the stairs, tilted her arm, and spilt the liquid.

"Somebody's got to watch!" she protested.

The hall below seemed suddenly crowded with people—but it was only the massive

Dr. Cardiff and a gardener from the Davis estate with a letter in his hand.

"Get out of here, Dr. Hippocrates!" Emmet shouted.

His arms were full of broken wood as he backed up a few steps and braced himself against what remained of the toothless bannister.

"I'm going to have you disbarred at the next port. Write him a check, Miss Hapgood. You're off the case. I'm treating myself. Write checks! Get away!"

Dr. Cardiff made a step up the stairs and Emmet weighed a chunk, snarling happily. "Right at those spectacles. No curve—just a fast one. I hope you got insurance on the sockets!"

While the doctor hesitated Emmet tried his aim by clipping off the light of the upper hall with a minor fragment.

Then the gardener, a man of seventy, started slowly up the stairs, holding out an envelope toward Emmet. Emmet's hand tightened on the big chunk but the fearless old face reminded him of his own father.

"From Mr. Davis," the gardener said, expressionless. He put the envelope through the gap in the balcony and started down.

The world was spinning around Emmet in cyclorama—and then suddenly he knew that the hall was empty. There was no sound in the house. With a last resurgence of tension he crutched himself down the stairs—and listened. He heard a door shut far away—motors starting.

Leaning over so that he touched his hands to the steps he crept back up. At the head of the stairs his fingers touched an envelope; lying on his back on the floor he ripped it open.

My Dear Mr. Monsen:

I had no idea of your condition. I saw the spokes come out the window—one of them hit me. I must ask you to vacate by nine o'clock tomorrow.

Sincerely,
Carlos Davis

Emmet sat up, accidentally flinging his legs out over space, where the spokes had been. The house was absolutely quiet now—there was even an echo as he experimentally dropped a last chip down into the stairwell. Presently, he told himself, he would get into bed. There were no people in the house. He had won.

IV

When Emmet awoke there seemed to be no light save in the lower hall, and only a dreamy memory of a sound far away in the dark house. He lay silent, seeing from the circlet moon in a window that it was late—between midnight and two.

The faint sound came again, with a suggestion of caution in its pitch, and Emmet sat up carefully. He tiptoed into his bedroom, put on his dressing gown, and tiptoed down the stairs.

In the door of the dark living room he listened again—then listened outside the kitchen and the secretary's office—hearing the sound once more, as if from somewhere behind him. He crept back to the door of the living room—

A voice spoke suddenly from a corner.

"It's Miss Trainor, Mr. Monsen. The light switch is beside your hand."

Blinking at the glare he saw her curled in the big armchair, as if she herself had just awakened.

"I couldn't get on relief at night," she said. "So I just stayed."

"I hear somebody," Emmet said. "Sh!"

He flipped out the light. After a moment she whispered:

"I went through the house myself a little while ago."

Emmet was unconvinced—either his nerves were still in collapse or there were intermittent creaks that might be footsteps.

"It isn't that doctor or nurse? Tell me frankly."

"They've left, Mr. Monsen." She hesitated. "There has been a carpenter here—and he's coming back at six-thirty with new spokes for the bannister, and a new window frame. We found all the spokes."

Emmet considered this.

"Mr. Davis wrote me that one of them hit him," he said. "He told me to get out."

"Well, it didn't stick to him, because they were all there in the garden."

"How did you get a carpenter at this time of night?"

"My father," she said. "He used to be a shipwright."

Again he said "Sh!" and they listened—but she shook her head negatively; her smile was sad as if she wanted to agree that there had been a noise, but conscientiously couldn't.

"The place is haunted," he decided suddenly. "I'm going outside. If I can smell a field growing—"

He was in the hall when Miss Trainor suggested: "Do you mind if I walk along with you?"

"You won't give me any orders?"

Ashamed, he changed his tone:

"No—I don't mind."

Together they struck out across a dirt road and off Carlos Davis' property. It was a downhill path; presently, with no particular fatigue, he sprawled on one of the mounds of new-mown hay that dotted the field.

"You settle for the next pile," Emmet suggested. "After all you still have a reputation—which is now one up on me."

Presently she spoke from a rustle ten feet away.

"This is something I always wanted to do."

"Me too—what's the technique? Do you pull the hay over you, or do you burrow down into it?" He hesitated. "You don't suppose I'd find Miss Hapgood!"

No answer. He stared at the waning moon, then murmured drowsily, "It all smells good. Are you dreaming about Boston?"

"No—I'm wide awake."

"I feel saner myself, minute by minute."

"You were never very bad."

Emmet sat up indignantly wiping the glossy bristles from his ears.

"I was told to vacate, wasn't I?"

"We've got to vacate this hay," said the Trainer girl. "There's a heavy dew."

"I thought you asked to come along."

"But maybe that burglar will be frightened in the house alone."

He sighed.

"And I used to be a good host."

The path was uphill now and they stopped every few minutes while he rested.

"We'll have trouble explaining this to the burglar," he said, as they approached the house. "Maybe we better brush each other off."

At the door they looked back at the moon, and at the silver-spotted field below them—then they stepped into the kitchen and she flipped on the light. Her smile seemed brighter than anything outside or in.

That was the earth and the fields, it said. They were just as advertised, but without you I wouldn't have known. Unfortunately she made it all harder to leave than before.

V

We shift the camera angle to Carlos Davis, arising in a dream bedroom. It is morning; he is still upset by the events of the night before and has scarcely begun his exercises when a Filipino comes in.

"The doctor who takes care Mr. Monsen wants to talk on phone."

Carlos Davis removed the encyclopedia from his abdomen while the phone was plugged in. A few sentences between himself and Dr. Cardiff established the facts of Emmet Monsen's conduct as known to them both.

Then the doctor's voice sank confidentially.

"Has it occurred to you, Mister Davis, that there may be another factor in this coronary thrombosis?"

"Is that what you call it when they beat you with banister spokes?"

"We know there was only that one bottle of brandy—"continued Dr. Cardiff slowly, "—and he drank less than half. Let me put it another way: when a doctor leaves the case at the mere whim of a patient—"

"Whim!" protested Davis. "If that's his idea of whim!"

"—the doctor wants to know all the facts—so he can inform the next doctor".

Carlos Davis was thoroughly mystified as Dr. Cardiff asked bluntly: "What do you know about Monsen, Mr. Davis?"

"Nothing—except he's a sort of well-known man—"

"I mean about his private life. Has it occurred to you that there are articles which can be concealed in a smaller space than alcohol?"

Carlos Davis found this too difficult for such an hour of the morning.

"You mean like stilettos—and dynamite?" he suggested, and then: "Why don't you come out this afternoon and talk to me?"

He dressed in a state of some agitation, deciding in the middle of breakfast to collect a posse of gardeners and see if his tenant had cleared out. It was past nine—the hour he had set. However, he wanted, above all things, to avoid a scandal, so he left his followers outside and went in alone by the kitchen door.

The house was silent. He peered into the secretary's office, then stopped short in the doorway of the living room. Stretched on the sofa, apparently alive, but lost in the softest sleep, lay Miss Trainor. He stared momentarily, frowned, uttered a sigh, was half tempted to wake her and ask the address, but gallantly forced himself to turn away and mount the stairs.

In the master's bedroom he stared at Emmet Monsen, also in peaceful reverie.

A little puzzled he retraced his steps, when suddenly he remembered the spoke that had flown from the window—and then stared transfixed at the bannisters: the spokes were all there. Lightly he bounded up and down several times and, with a slight feeling of nausea, tried his eyes on several other objects. He retreated hastily to the kitchen.

Here he recovered his aplomb—certainly a half empty bottle stood in plain sight on a closet shelf—and with his relief a portion of Dr. Cardiff's conversation came back to him—this time with meaning.

"...articles that can be concealed in a smaller space than alcohol."

Carlos Davis dashed outside and in front of the garage took deep breaths of the pure California air.

Cripes! That was it—dope! Emmet Monsen was a secret dope fiend! The subject was somehow confused in his mind with Fu Manchu but it seemed to explain everything—only a dope fiend would have had the diabolical cleverness to wrench out bannister spokes and then replace them without a flaw before morning.

And the girl asleep on the sofa—Carlos Davis groaned—she had probably led a decent life before this Monsen, full of tropical devices, had tricked her into a first whiff of the opium pipe a few days before...

He walked with the head gardener toward his house, and, since he was not apt at phrases, quoted from Dr. Cardiff.

"There are articles that can be hidden in a smaller space than alcohol," he said darkly.

The gardener got it—glanced back wonderingly.

"My golly! One of them hopheads!"

"And American womanhood!" Davis added cryptically.

The gardener did not make a connection—but his mind jumped to another: "Mr. Davis, I should've spoke to you—maybe you know, down around the old stable—"

Davis was hardly listening—he was headed toward the telephone and Dr. Cardiff.

"—them weeds growing there is hemp, and ought to be cut down and burned—the paper says the G-Men are cutting it down, because guys sell it to junior high school children. I had to chase some guys out of there one day—"

Davis stopped.

"What are you talking about?"

"This now marijuana, Mr. Davis. They make them reefers out of it and it drives all them junior high school children crazy. If it got out that it grew on your estate—"

Carlos Davis stood in place and uttered a long mournful cry.

VI

The Trainor girl awoke about noon feeling that there were people in the room staring at her. She stood up with useless, indispensable dabs at her hair.

The party that had entered consisted of Dr. Cardiff and two husky younger men whose civilian clothes did not conceal that they were of the bulldog species. Hovering in the background was that celebrated shadow, Carlos Davis.

Dr. Cardiff said Good Morning grimly and continued a conversation with the two young men.

"The County Hospital has given you your instructions; I am simply here at the request of Mr. Davis. You know the ingenuity of these people—and how small outfit can be."

The young men nodded and one of them said: "We understand, Doctor. I've found plenty of 'junk' under mattresses and down drains, and inside books—"

"Behind their ears," supplemented the other young man. "Sometimes they keep it there."

"Better examine those bannister spokes," proposed Dr. Cardiff. "Monsen may have been trying to get at the stuff". He brooded momentarily. "I wish we had one of those broken ones."

Carlos Davis spoke up uncertainly.

"I don't want any violence; don't start looking behind his ears till you get him off the place."

A new voice sounded strange from the doorway.

"What's this about my ears?"

Emmet, fatigued from the effort of shaving, found his way to a chair and looked at the doctor for an explanation, but he found none, nor on any other face till he met the eyes of the Trainor girl—who winked solemnly. But behind the wink, he divined a warning.

Other signals were in the air. The two young men exchanged cryptic glances, whereupon one departed the room while the other drew a chair close to Emmet and sat down.

"My name is Pettigrew, Mr. Monsen."

"How-do," said Emmet. "Sit down, Davis—you must be tired. I saw you from my window an hour ago—reaping that weed patch behind your stable. And you were pitching in!"

There was a sudden sweat upon the young actor's forehead.

"Mr. Monsen," said Pettigrew, patting Emmet's knee, "I understand you have been sick, and sick people don't always take the right medicine. Ain't that true, Doctor?" Dr. Cardiff nodded encouragement. "I'm a deputized commissioner of the county police—and I'm also a male nurse—"

At this point the doorbell rang. Since the other people in the room concentrated upon the chair where Emmet sat, the Trainor girl went into the hall.

Upon the doorstep stood a rather pretty girl in a state of agitation with a package under her arm.

"Are you the lady here?" she asked.

"I'm Mr. Monsen's secretary."

The new arrival looked relieved.

"If you're a working girl you'll understand. I'm from the Johanes Laboratories—and there was a mix-up due to a hurry call and... and they sent the wrong cardiograph here, the wrong heart chart."

Miss Trainor nodded—so intent upon what was going on inside the house that she gave the girl only half her attention.

"It was almost serious," quavered the girl. "The invalid who got Mr. Monsen's chart started to take up polo yesterday and fell off his horse—"

She ran out of breath, but by this time the Trainor girl understood—promptly she took over.

"Is Mr. Monsen's correct chart in this package?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll take care of it—you needn't worry. Dr. Cardiff isn't on the case anymore."

After the girl had hastily departed Miss Trainor unwrapped the big envelope. The cardiograph meant little to her—but she was so presumptuous as to read the explanatory letter before she went back into the living room.

The situation there was somewhat more tense than before. The second young man had returned from his search of the house and stood over Emmet, weighing half a dozen capsules of different colors in his hand.

"Those are pills that Dr. Cardiff gave me," Emmet said. He broke off at a new interruption—this time a weary voice from the doorway.

"Hello Charlie."

Pettigrew looked up with recognition at a third young man who stood there.

"Hello Jim!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Here 'on call'," he said. He indicated Miss Trainor with reproach: "The lady got me out here last evening—but I guess she must've forgot about me. I've been asleep in a car."

Miss Trainor explained.

"This man's a nurse too," she said. "I was afraid Mr. Monsen might injure

himself so I had him come here last night."

"She made me keep out of the way," complained the nurse called Jim. "She had me dodging around from room to room—then they went out for a walk! I didn't get to sleep till seven!"

"Find any 'junk'?" demanded Pettigrew eagerly.

"Any junk? That's what I slept in—a 1932—"

"That's my car," objected Miss Trainor.

She stepped forward with a smile that only Emmet recognized as such and handed the revised cardiograph to Dr. Cardiff.

You big stiff, it seemed to say, I always thought you were and now I know.

There were still roses around the door a week later—Pernetts and Cherokees and Cecile Brunners in the yard, and Talismans and Black Boys climbing over the porches in a multi-colored rash. They seemed to have a curious herbal effect not usually attributed to roses, for Emmet did not even need a half box of quinine to cure his malaria.

On the contrary, he dictated—and, as that word has come to have a harsh sound, let it be amended to say that there were long times when no words at all were necessary—when the two merely communicated. And though the roses were quitting for the year pretty soon, this other business might possibly go on forever.